

LATIN AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Course Description

This course examines Latin American autobiographical writings principally from the twentieth century. Accounts are from often-overlooked and marginalized voices, including miners, escaped slaves, dissidents, and survivors of traumatic events.

Instructor

Georg M. Gugelberger is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Riverside and Director of the University of California's Education Abroad Program at U.N.A.M. in Mexico City.

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Theory of the Testimonio

Latin American Testimonial Literature

Since the Latin American literary "boom" of the sixties (involving writers such as Pablo Neruda, Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and others) and by what simplistically could be termed Latin American Modernism, Latin American testimonial literature (testimonio) has become a kind of game changer within Latin American Studies. While prior to this genre the outlook was for works in the Modernist experimental tradition, suddenly a return to a more realistically inclined literature has been hailed. In other words, we can look at this genre instigating a kind of realistic counter-modernist turn. This genre of testimonio relates to but significantly differs from what commonly has been understood by autobiography. It is not the telling of one person's story, usually of a self-proclaimed if not "self-obsessed" and cultured person, but – in most cases - the story of an illiterate person who does not write but only speaks while a second person (literate) records. It is reminiscent at times of the anthropologist field worker going out and recording with his tape recorder. This recording literally with a tape recorder gives this genre an anthropologic relevance. The oral narrating of facts reminds us of oral epic literature or what has been called orature. Literature and Anthropology could be the subtitle of this course. Introduction to Latin America(n) (studies) could be another subtitle. The emphasis here is not on the canon, not on the masterpieces. In other words the testimonio gives us information about people who commonly in literature classes have been ignored. Testimonio narrators have been called the "Voice of the

Voiceless.” In other words we are given testimonies of events that do not enter official history. We are emphasizing here the differences between official history and non-official history. As someone said: “History has a voice, but it is not the voice of historians.”

This course covers some of the major testimonial texts of Central and South America. Students will analyze primary texts in translation and will discuss them from different critical stances. They will demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the works by responding to questions focusing on the works, authors, countries involved, themes, and motifs. In addition, they will discuss the historical, social, cultural, or biographical contexts of the works’ production. .

KEY Words and Concepts:

Literature and History; Latin American Studies; Latin American Literature; Genre and gender issues; Autobiography; Biography; Memoir; Diary; Documentary literature; Literature and politics; Modernism; Realism; Human Rights issues; Fiction versus fact; “Our America;” Life Stories; Orature; Dual narrator; Voice of the voiceless; Revolution in Latin America; Literature and the Cuban Revolution; Cinema in Latin America; Literature and anthropology; US involvement in Central and South America; Post-boom literature; Women and narration; Translation; Testimonio and cinema; Testimonio and Latin American “protest “music; etcetera.

Required Readings: Most of the primary works required for this course cannot be accessed online. They may be found (at times used and cheaper) through websites such as Half.com and Amazon.com
Secondary materials and their web sites shall be announced during the particular sections discussing specific testimonial texts.

Selected Secondary Sources:

Galeano, Eduardo. Open Veins of Latin America:Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent. Monthly review Press, New York, 1973

Galeano, Eduardo. Memory of Fire Pantheon Books.Random House, New York.
3 vols: 1) Genesis (1985); 2) Faces and Masks (1987); 3) Century of the Wind (1988)

Gugelberger, Georg M., ed. The Real Thing. Testimonial Discourse and Latin America. Duke University Press. Durham and London, 1996

Didion, Joan. El Salvador. Vintage, 1994

Randall, Margaret. Sandinós’s Daughters. Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle. New Star Books, Vancouver/Toronto, Canada, 1981

Course Objectives:

- O1.To acquire a broad perspective of the genre of Latin American testimonial literature as well as of the countries involved in the production of such works.
- O2. To identify core themes that pervade the genre of testimonial literature.
- O3. To consider the relation between testimonio and the country from where the work comes.
- O4. To develop the fundamental differences between autobiography and testimonio.
- O5. To consider the nature of translation and the reliability of translation for presenting one literature in another one’s language as well as the nature of the reception of testimonios especially in the United States.

General Program Objectives

1. To provide students with a broad perspective of approaches to so-called Third World Literature and an understanding of the various ways in which they manifest themselves and to assess students' ability to express their perspectives through various papers.
2. To provide students with a deeper understanding of diverse and different literary traditions in non-US countries and to express this deepened understanding in written tests and a critical essay.
3. To provide an overview of literary analysis and interpretation methods at a graduate level and help students apply these skills in writing critical papers.
4. To read widely and critically in a variety of literary forms found in different genre studies and to demonstrate the depth and breadth of this reading in a critical essay.
5. To conduct graduate-level library research on a particular work of literature, an individual writer, or an issue.

Instructions for the Study Guide: Please use the questions to develop a deeper understanding of the text and to review the concepts. As you read, consider the questions. Keeping careful notes or a journal will help you prepare to write the required papers by the end of sections 5, 10, and 16 (final paper). Your required and supplemental readings can be found in the "Readings" file.

Instructions for Essays: Please write 3 essays, a 1,000- word paper after weeks 5 and 10, and a 3,000- word one after week 15. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished papers. Paper suggestions can be found after the above indicated sections.

Required Texts:

Alegria, Claribel. They Won't Take Me Alive:

Salvadorean Women in Struggle for National Liberation. Translated by Amanda Hopkinson. The Women's Press. London 1987

Alvarado, Elvia. Don't Be Afraid, Gringo. A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart. The Story of Elvia Alvarado. Translated and edited by Medea Benjamin. A Food First Book. San Francisco, CVA 1987

Argueta, Manlio. One Day of Life. Translated by Bill Brow. Vintage Books, 1995

Argueta, Manlio. Cuzcatlán. Where the Southern Sea Beats. Translated by Clark Hansen. Random House, New York, 1987

Barnett, Miguel, ed. The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave: Esteban Montejo. Translated by Jocasta Innes. Vintage Books. Random House, New York, 1973

Cabezas, Omar. Fire From the Mountain. The Making of a Sandinista. Foreword by Carlos Fuentes. Crown Publishers, Inc. New York, 1985

Carolina Maria de Jesus, Child of the Dark, New American Library, A Mentor Book, 1963

Domitila Barrios de Chungara, Let Me Speak! Testimonio of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines with Moema Viezzer. The Leo Huberman People's Library, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1978

Menchú, Rigoberta. I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala. Edited and Introduced by Elisabeth Burgo-Debray. Translated by Ann Wright. London:Verso, 1984

Neruda, Pablo. Memoirs. Translated by Hardie St. Martin. Penguin Books, 1978

Poniatowska, Elena. Massacre in Mexico. Translated by Helen R. Lane. Introduction by Octavio Paz. Viking Press, 1975

Poniatowska, Elena. Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Mexico City Earthquake. Translated by Aurora Camacho de Schmidt and Artur Schmidt. Temple University Press, 1995.

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Week 1: **The genre of the Testimonio and Latin America**

1) If autobiography is essentially Western, the testimonio is essentially – as we shall clearly see during this course – Latin American. This implies an obvious question that is not so easy to answer: what is Latin America? For these two questions regarding the genre and its geographic location we shall turn to a few important introductory texts in this our first week. Starting with the question of Latin America we shall study a famous trilogy entitled Memory of Fire by the Uruguayan writer and epic “chronicler” Eduardo Galeano. The form of this trilogy has little comparable and as its author states: “The author does not know to what literary form the book belongs: narrative, essay, epic poem, chronicle, testimony...” The trilogy in date-line form has the following three parts: Genesis (1982), Faces and Masks (1984), and Century of the Wind (1986).

The first book chronicles Latin America from 1492 to 1700. Volume two chronicles Latin America from 1701-1900. Volume three continues the dates from 1900-1986.

We shall have reason to return to this epic encyclopedia various times during our course. As an initial assignment, however, students are asked to check what Galeano is saying about some of our testimonio writers. Their presence permeates volume three like a leitmotif, especially Miguel Marmol, Domitila, Elena Poniatowska, Omar Cabezas, and Rigoberta Menchú. Rigoberta Menchú is the last one entering the stage of volume three. Please observe the frequency of the cinematographic metaphor of the “newsreel” being used frequently. And please observe the number 79 with which Miguel Marmol is presented (the last entry on him reads “Miguel Marmol at seventy-nine.” What could this have to do with our Cuban section during the third week of our course? There is a valuable index of sources to each volume. The author Eduardo Galeano informs us about how to read his trilogy: “At the head of each text is indicated the year and place of occurrence of the episode. The numbers in parentheses below show the principal works consulted by the author in his search for information and points of reference.” There is no better bibliography for our course than these listed sources.

2) To better understand the difference between autobiography and testimonio, we shall begin with a well known essay by a Yale critic dealing with the question of autobiography, is it actually a separate genre or not. This text by Paul de Man entitled “Autobiography and De-facement” can be found in:
<http://www.google.com.mx/search?q=paul+de+man+autobiography&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>

3) We now shall turn to some definitional texts in the collection of essays by Georg M. Gugelberger, The Real Thing. Testimonial Discourse and Latin America. Students are asked to read the Introduction to this collection and the essay by John Beverly, “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio.”

Week 2: **I, Rigoberta Menchú**

We shall begin our discussion of testimonios proper with a powerful first person statement and with the classic of our genre, I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala, edited and introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. Translated by Ann Wright (1984, original 1983).

The testimonio of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Rigoberta Menchú (1992), in the meantime a “classic” of the genre, shall be discussed in the context of other testimonios that will be read during specific class meetings designated for each testimonio and country. But it will also be discussed with a view to what we can learn about Guatemala at a particular point in history. Often testimonial literature speaks more realistically about its place of origin than other literary genres. At the same time the reception of Rigoberta’s book in Europe and the United States at a particular historical moment shall be discussed.

Who speaks in this narrative? Implication of the title in Spanish? What is the title’s and the book’s relation to consciousness raising. What do we find out about Guatemala? What do we learn about the Maya? What is the Popol Vuh? Where today are Maya speaking areas? How is the work structured and why is it structured as it is? Who is its editor, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray? What was her relation to Regis Debray and how does this bring us to

Cuba and Venezuela ? What were the doubts about Rigoberta Menchú expressed in the so-called Stoll Debate? What other testimonios come from Guatemala and what is their difference from our text? Why was this book as successful as it was at the time it was published in various translations? By now we have an increasing debate about torture. This book is an important text for this debate as is a book recently published by a US nun, Sister Dianne Ortiz, tortured in Guatemala in 1987. Please read the review of her book by Marjorie Cohn in Truthout:
http://truth-out.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=7227:us-nun-tortured-in-central-america-recalls-the-nightmare

Rigoberta, who originally spoke neither Spanish nor a word of English but only her native Quechua, a specific Guatemalan dialect of Maya, can easily be found on YouTube in numerous of her addresses. Her presence in the US was and still is extensive. Please watch some of her presentations and interviews in English.

Additional reading assignment: 1) Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney, "Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America"

<http://lap.sagepub.com/content/18/3/3.extract>

2) Marc Zimmerman, "Testimonio in Guatemala: Payeras, Rigoberta, and Beyond," essay to be found in Gugelberger, The Real Thing

3) Attempts to delegitimize the value of the book by David Stoll shall be discussed via texts provided online and from Latin American Perspectives. Additionally it is highly recommended to watch the C-Span Video on History by Oliver Stone and Tariq Ali:

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/304599-1>

Week 3: Miguel Barnett, Esteban Montejo, The Runaway Slave

One of possibly three major cultural events of the early years of the Cuban Revolution was the testimonio of an illiterate slave hiding in the mountains of this largest Caribbean island and being fully unaware of what had been going on around him. But suddenly this former slave, Esteban Montejo, a so-called Cimarron, no longer had to hide. Things had changed. Miguel Barnett, a student of the famous Spanish Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz founded UNEAC, the Cuban Artists and Writers Union whose present president he is. Barnett was able to listen to the voice of Esteban Montejo and to record his thoughts, structuring them into a surprising narrative that gives us an insight into the Cuban past and especially the sixties. The translation of the original title of this book would be The biography of a Cimarron. What is a Cimarron? What are the Maroons? Galeano has an entry for the year 1711 in his second volume of the trilogy Memory of Fire. He refers to specific arrows and calls them cimarrones, "in the Antillean phrase meaning arrow that seeks freedom. Used by Spaniards for the bull that takes off for the woods, it passes into the languages as Chimarrao, maroon, marron to designate the slave who in every part of America seeks the protection of forests and swamps....The maroon is the gangrene o colonial society."

Aside from a discussion of Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnett as a key figure of the Cuban Literary Scene we shall also focus on the Spanish Cuban anthropologist/ethno-sociologist Fernando Ortiz and his pathbreaking works on life in Cuba, on the African presence in Cuba and his famous study Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar.

Week 4: Newsreel Remade: 79 Springtimes

We shall continue the discussion of our testimonio in the context of two additional visual works, two films – cinema and ICAIC (the creation of the Cuban film institute) was another of the new phenomena accompanying the Cuban revolution. Film and testimonial literature were privileged voices of Cuba at the time as were testimonial literature and nueva trova music. We shall watch the superb film made without a camera - how do you make films without a movie camera? - i.e. only borrowing newsreel – by Santiago Alvarez, 79 Primaveras, 79 Springtimes, which is about the 79 years of the life of HoChiMinh, a documentary of only 20 minutes that encompasses a lifetime of epic proportions. This film connects Cuba's revolution with a founding figure, José Martí, whose texts from poems are used like subtitles in silent films. The film interconnects with US student antiwar demonstrations of the sixties in the USA and especially in California in response to the war in Vietnam. We shall further connect

this film and our testimonial text with a long epic film in three parts, the famous Lucia, which gives us a view of Cuba's history, its independence from Spain, its connection to the United States, its particular development during the first years of the revolution with an emphasis on the so-called literacy debate. The literacy debate provides us with a specific link to our testimonio. What do these three cultural products teach us about us (US), about Cuba, about Latin America, about Vietnam? How is it possible that a relatively short slave narrative opens so many new dimensions of seeing history and geography? How do you relate the testimony of a runaway slave from Cuba to one of the most famous slave-narratives, the 1845 autobiography Narrative of the Life of Fredric Douglas, an American Slave? In Volume 2 of the Galeano Trilogy we shall look for references on José Martí without whom a discussion of the film as well as Cuba would not be possible. Texts from José Martí poems function in 79 Springtimes like texts in a silent movie. Additionally famous Omara Portuondo (Buena Vista Social Club) sings the famous song "La era esta pariendo un corazón" by Silvio Rodríguez at a high point of the film.

Week 5: **Don't Be Afraid, Gringo**

A Honduran Woman Speaks From the Heart. What has protagonist Elvia to say about gringos? Why are we called gringos in the first place in Mexico and other Latin American countries? Why should a gringo be afraid or not be afraid (in the case of Elvia)? Isn't it rather the other way, that they should be afraid of us? We shall discuss the well known literary topos in Third World literary studies called "Them and us in Literature," literary texts usually emphasizing the colonized "other" speaking out about the colonizer.

Honduras: Our Continuing Catastrophe reads a recent article, see http://truth-out.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=6770:honduras-our-continuing-catastrophe

Honduras has been quite a bit in our news. These days. A government fell and another one was replacing it. What was/is going on in this Central American country? We shall discuss Alvarado's view of education, her view of the United States, and the many Human Rights violations of this country.

Mark Engler, in "Dissent Magazine:" "Honduras has become a human rights disaster. The country now has the world's highest murder rate. And impunity for political violence is the norm. For all this, the United States deserves a good deal of the blame.... Lest anyone in this country think that things in Honduras have settled into a peaceable, post-coup normality, [due to a] chain of events - a coup that the United States didn't stop, a fraudulent election that it accepted - [that] has now allowed corruption to mushroom."

Read the Engler article: <http://dissentmagazine.org/atw.php?id=675>

Can events narrated by Elvia in our testimonio be seen as anticipating recent events? Literature and fact. Fiction and reality. The genre of the testimonio is a treasure trove for such discussions.

By week five a 1000 word paper is expected. The topic should be announced to the instructor for approval by week three. Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Discuss the function of texts by José Martí in the film 79 Springtimes and relate both, Martí and the film, to Cuba's foremost testimonial text.
- 2) I, Rigoberta Menchú frequently has been singled out as "the classic" of the genre of testimonial literature. Why do you think this evaluation applies? And how can a text designed against the concept of a classic in literature be called a classic?
- 3) Compare the three testimonios read and discussed so far in this class: I, Rigoberta Menchú, Esteban Montejo: The Runaway Slave, and Don't Be Afraid, Gringo. What do the three texts have in common? What are differences between these three testimonios?

Week 6: **El Salvador: richest source of the testimonio**

El Salvador, smallest and most densely populated country of Latin America? Salve like in salvation, savior, salve Maria and salvatrucha. Paradoxical juxtapositions? Or maybe we remember two names and groups: the killing of archbishop Romero and the word for a famous gang Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13? This gang of immigrants from El Salvador began in Los Angeles and spread like wildfire.

We shall begin our study of Salvadorean testimonies with a famous book on El Salvador by Juan Didion, Salvador (1983). "Terror is the given of the place," she said about this smallest and most densely populated Central American country that also is a main producer of our genre, the testimonio. We shall follow a reading and discussion of this book by three additional texts, Claribel Alegria's They Won't Take Me Alive. Alegria is a very special case in the history of the testimonio. She is part of the two countries that were very much involved in testimonio writing: born in Nicaragua and writing about El Salvador. A well educated prose writer and poet she teaches in the USA. They Won't Take Me Alive is the testimonio of and on Ana Maria Castillo Rivas, a guerrilla commander named "Eugenia" who was killed during the "final offensive" of the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) in January 1981. Eugenia was only 31 years old.

A powerful song version about Eugenia by Adrián Goizueta e Grupo experimental can be found on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-7n_dVhwj0

It is part of the famous Peace Concert in Managua in the year 1983 that we shall discuss in our Nicaragua section.

In addition we shall briefly look at one of the best known Salvadorean writers, Manlio Argueta, his famous A Day in Life, a testimonial novel that Modern Library has selected as one of the ten most important books on Latin America, and Argueta's other book Cuzcatlán. Cuzcatlán was the name of El Salvador before the Spaniards arrived. We shall read an online interview with Manlio Arguetas expressing his belief that his novels are closely related to testimonial literature.

Week 7: Roque Dalton and Miguel Marmol

We have said that one of the smallest countries of Latin America has produced so many testimonios. What could be the reason for this development. We shall begin with Roque Dalton's famous Miguel Marmol. Miguel Marmol shows up again and again in Eduardo Galeano's dateline epic on Latin America. Who was he and why did a writer of the stature of Roque Dalton become interested in Miguel Marmol?

A testimonio by a shoemaker? What is going on? What do we know about this country, El Salvador, smallest and most densely populated country of Latin America? Salve like in salve Maria and salvatrucha. Paradoxical juxtapositions?

Maybe we remember two names and groups: the killing of archbishop Romero and the word for a famous gang Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13? This gang of immigrants from El Salvador began in Los Angeles and spread like wildfire.

Or maybe we associate the country with one coup d'état after the other? But what has all this to do with our course and with our shoemaker, Miguel Marmol? Why are there so many testimonios coming out of this small country of less than 6 million inhabitants? And who really was the author of our testimonio named after a person, Miguel Marmol? Since he has become one if not the most important poet of El Salvador, we will have to discuss some of his poetry. The question will arise: what are the relations of the testimonio, a supposedly quite realistic genre, to poetry? Reading and discussion of some of Roque Dalton's poetry in translation (texts online)

I shall circulate an Interview with Miguel Marmol from Latin American Perspectives.

And I want you to watch footage of the assassination of archbishop Romero and his funeral (YouTube). Secondary readings: Barbara Harlow, "Testimonio and Survival: Roque Dalton's Miguel Marmol," in Gugelberger, The Real Thing.

Weeks 8: "Massacres in Mexico/La Noche de Tlatelolco"

Just South of our Border. "Going Beyond Borders," CNN admonishes daily. South of the border. Where we all should have been at one point in our life. South of the Border, where everything is so different. South of the Border where we mostly know beach places like Cancun and Acapulco. The Spring Breakers. South of the Border

where we are afraid to go. South of the Border where during the last sexenio (the 6 year duration of a Mexican president's rule) supposedly over 50,000 people were killed during what has been called a narco war. What has led to the present situation?

Again, the sixties have a lot to tell us. The sixties in Mexico. Elena Poniatowska is one of the legendary Mexican writers who together with Carlos Monsiváis, Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz, and Carlos Fuentes put Mexico on the literary map. One of the more prolific contributors to our genre and who is known not only for one but for three testimonios. In the case of Elena Poniatowska we have the exception to the rule of basic illiteracy and story telling. In her case we encounter a learned "journalist" who writes by incorporating the voiceless.

Suggested additional reading: John Ross, El Monstruo.

Margaret Randall, "Reclaiming Voices: Notes on a Female Practice in Journalism" in Gugelberger, The Real Thing.

John Ross who accompanied Beat Poets and writers such as Ginsberg and Burroughs to Mexico but decided to stay to live over 20 years in a small Hotel room in the Centro historico of Mexico City has given us in this book a rare glimpse at this monstrous city some have called the world's largest. Fabulous background reading to understand not only this city but as well the reasons that led to some of our testimonial texts.

Week 9: **The Earthquake**

1985 The year that is not recorded in Galeano's Century of the Wind that ends with a single entry in 1986, a letter to the translator Cedric Belfrage. The year in which a tremendous magnitude 8.0 earthquake shakes the capital of Mexico the morning of September 19. It caused the death of between 10,000 and 40,000 people and over 450 buildings collapsed. It took until the year 2000 before large parts of the center of the city were rebuilt. Help by the government during the first hours and days was scarce. Large self-help groups of citizens were formed and a sheer incredible moment of solidarity was seen in this complicated and chaotic city. Daily La Jornada, one of the main papers of the city, reports on damages and death during and after what has been called "el macrosismo," the mother of all earthquakes. Elena Poniatowska is in the streets talking to survivors. Her accounts are regularly published in La Jornada. A few years later (1988) they appear in book form titled Nada, nadie. Las voces del temblor and later in an English translation entitled Nothing, Nobody: The Voices of the Earthquake. After the game changer of the Mexican revolution it safely can be said that the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 and the 1985 earthquake were the two events that have affected Mexico for years to come and all the way into the present. It is virtually impossible to understand Contemporary Mexico without these two events. And it is virtually impossible to reconstruct these events without the help of these two fundamental testimonial texts by Elena Poniatowska.

Week 10: **Memories of Chile**

A brief detour to autobiography: Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda's memoirs I Confess I Have Lived, edited after his death in 1973 by his wife. This text will help us to see the difference between autobiography and testimonio in the case of Latin America. Here we have an autobiography conceived by and written at the latter part of the life of a famous writer that was completed by a second person, his wife. But again it is a work that forcefully reflects the circumstances of a particular country, Chile. And it links our texts to major writers from Latin America involved in what has been termed Modernism: Borges, Cortázar, Vargas-Llosa. Chile as a major place for a burgeoning literary scene, for films and so-called protest music. Via YouTube we shall listen to samples of music by: Victor Jarra, Inti-Illimani, Quilapayún. These songs shall be related to the genre of the testimonio, to the poetry of Pablo Neruda as well as to his last work, I Confess I Have Lived. Actually this book is neither testimonio nor autobiography. A memoir is less precise than either one of the mentioned genres. It is recalling things almost poetically. It is in a way closer to Proust's famous novel Remembrance of Things Past. By discussing this particular genre we may gain a fuller appreciation of the non-fictitious qualities of testimonial literature. Neruda's life was a fascinating one. Neftalí Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, as he adopted his name, was a prolific poet, highly respected, active in consular duties in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Member of the Communist Party, running for the Chilean Senate, close friend of Salvador Allende. He knew the major writers of his time, Garcia Lorca, Vallejo, Huidobro, Asturias. A consul in Spain he experienced the Spanish Civil War. He

received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971 “for a poetry that with the action of an elemental force brings alive a continent's destiny and dreams”. And he died a few weeks after Salvador Allende died when his government was overthrown by Pinochet in 1973.

Very few books give us such a realistic Chile, rainy, dreamy, revolutionary, as this book of almost Proustian recollections. The other one may be In Patagonia by the famous British writer Bruce Chatwin.

But speaking of Neruda is not possible without taking into consideration the birth of the New Song Movement (Nueva canción latinoamericana) for which Mercedes Sosa, also called La Negra Sosa or La Voz de América has written a manifesto, “Movimiento del Nuevo Cancionero.” We shall conclude with a few samples of songs from Mercedes Sosa, related to Chile, songs that in principle accompanied testimonial literature. We shall conclude with the most famous “Gracias a la vida” dedicated to Violeta Parra and Víctor Jara. An entire époque ends here.

For this, our tenth week, a paper of 1000 word length is required. Discussion and previous approval is required by the end of week eight. Here are some suggestions for topics:

- 1) Compare and contrast El Salvador as presented by the American author Joan Didion with the “testimonio” of Nicaraguan-Salvadorean writer Claribel Alegria.
- 2) One of the foremost Salvadorean poets has been Roque Dalton. Why would a poet of his stature write a testimonio about shoemaker Miguel Marmol?
- 3) Discuss the “leitmotif” of Miguel Marmol in Eduardo Galeano’s “dateline epic” on Latin America. Please be as specific as possible.
- 4) Select and discuss one of the testimonial texts by Elena Poniatowska. Please reason about your selection and then explain what you may have learned about Mexico that you would not have been aware of without her texts.
- 5) Pablo Neruda’s I Confess I have Lived obviously is a memoir and not a testimonio. But possibly it can be seen as having a relevance similar to Eduardo Galeano’s three volumes for an understanding of significant Latin American testimonial texts.

Week 11 : **The Making of a Sandinista**

What was the Sandinista Revolution and why did it fail? Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes claims that “The Spanish language has given few words to the international vocabulary of politics. Our main contributions are *junta*, *pronunciamiento*, and *guerilla*.” Cabeza’s Fire From the Mountain tells us about the last of those three concepts, the making of a guerillero, the making of a Sandinista. Through this book we shall study the long relation of the United States to this Central American Nation, both place of revolutions, dictatorships, and modernism. Latin American modernismo is different albeit influenced from/by Euro-American Modernism. Nicaragua is the birth place of famous Nicaraguan poet Rúben Dario. We shall discuss the relation of Modernism to Realism via the so-called three Marxist esthetic debates involving such famous figures as George Lukács, Bertold Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Th.W. Adorno. What has German thinking and especially esthetics to do with our topic, the testimonio and Nicaragua? Is the testimonio a genre characterized by a surplus of realism? This shall be –aside from a close reading of the text for these two weeks – our theme here. We shall relate the Sandinista Revolution to an outburst of cultural activity seldom experienced in a country. We shall look at a few poems by Ernesto Cardenal, who recently gained the famous poetry prize Reina Sofia (2012), translator of a major US modernist poet, Ezra Pound. What is the relation between a “revolutionary poet” (Ernesto Cardenal) and a “proto-fascist” poet (Ezra Pound)? What is Cardenal’s relation to the US literary scene, his religious practice in Solentiname? Reverend Father Ernesto Cardenal Martinez is a Catholic Priest and a liberation theologian. What has this to do with our testimonio about the making of a Sandinista? Who were Somoza, Sandino, and Carlos Fonseca? We also shall see parts of the film Alsino and the Condor by Miguel Littin (YouTube)

Week 12: **Nicaragua , Nicaraguita: Interlude with music**

We emphasized the strong connection between our genre of the testimonio and certain films having been produced in Latin America. A similar development occurs with the Latin American Song Movement. It was

mentioned in connection with Neruda and Chile that Mercedes Sosa wrote that manifesto “Movimiento del Nuevo Cancionero” closely related to the intentions of the testimonio. During this week we shall focus on the enormous production of songs connected to the events in Nicaragua and connected to Sandino and other heroes of Nicaragua’s past. We shall listen to the famous “April in Managua. Concierto de la paz “ of 1983. It involves most of the great singers of the Latin America’s song movement such as Mercedes Sosa, the Mejia Godoy brothers, the main figure of the famous Nueva Trova Cubana, Silvio Rodriguez, Adrián Goizueta, Amparo Ochoa, Gabino Palomares, Daniel Viglietti, and others. This concert is a veritable Latin American “Woodstock.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT2e4ynZYWY>

Weeks 13: **Down in the Mines of Bolivia:**

Let Me Speak : Testimony of Domitila , a Woman of the Bolivian Mines. With Moema Viezzer. The last few years saw numerous mining disasters: in Peru in 2012, approximately a year after the mining disaster in Chile. In both cases the miners were saved. Not so in Mexican mining disasters and the press in Mexico has become very critical of its country’s failure.

Here we shall examine the life experiences of Bolivian mining activist Domitila Barrios de Chungara. But we shall also learn about the people of Bolivia, Quechua and Aymara, mestizos, Europeans, and Africans, the National Revolution of 1952, the failed guerrilla insurgency in Bolivia led by Che Guevara and which led to his death (discussed by Domitila), the country’s brutal experience in the Cold War, and the frequent coups, dictatorial crackdowns and popular uprisings.

What do you know about Bolivia now, some 35 years later? Has new President Evo Morales brought a change? Where do our lithium batteries come from? We shall view the short film “Revolución” by Jorge Sanjinés, famous director of the Grupo Ukamau (1963) and shall read and discuss Javier Sanjinés, “Beyond Testimonial Discourse: New Popular Trends in Bolivia,” in Gugelberger, The Real Thing.

“The idea for this testimony” we learn in the introduction, “arose out of the presence of Domitila Barrios de Chungara at the International Women’s Year Tribunal, organized by the United Nations and held in Mexico in 1975.” Who is this Domitila? She is the courageous wife of a Bolivian miner. The Spanish title of this testimonio – as in the case of the one by Rigoberta Menchú – is a bit different from what we get in the translation: “Si me permiten habla...”, a very modest “if you permit me to speak.” Our text includes an important interview between Domitila and Moema Viezzer. As is the case with Rigoberta and her co-author Elisabeth Burgos, here we have as a co-author Moema Viezzer, a Brazilian sociologist. She was the founder and president of the Rede Mulher de Educação in the early 1980’s. I recommend the interview of 2011 with this active Brazilian woman on “sustainability learners:” <http://aworldworthlivingin.se/sustainability-learners-interview-with-moema-viezzer/>

We emphasized the first person narrative style of many testimonial texts. But in this one right from the beginning Domitila makes it very clear that the first person singular actually is a first person plural: “I don’t want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I’m about to tell as something that is only personal. Because I think that my life is related to my people.” The testimonio is the people’s story, the people’s history.

Week 14: **Life in a Brazilian Favela**

From the Brazilian sociologist Moema Viezzer’s text on the Bolivian miner’s wife Domitila Barrios we move to Brazil: Child of the Dark. The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus (1960). Life in the favelas (slums) of Sao Paulo, in

particular the Canindé favela is its theme. This is a hybrid between testimonio and diary. Its original title is stark and simple and again quite different from the English title: “Quarto de despejo” (Garbage Room). David St. Clair who wrote the Translator’s Preface concludes with the words:

“Today I had lunch in a wonderful restaurant and a photographer took my picture. I told him: “write under the photo that Carolina who used to eat from trash cans now eats in restaurants. That she has come back into the human race and out of the Garbage Dump.”

What set Carolina apart from other “favelados” and especially from the above discussed testimonio narrators was her interest in spending several hours a day writing after educating herself. She literally wrote herself out of misery. As diary this book obviously is conscious of dates and ends with the very simple and powerful entry: “January 1, 1960: I got up at 5 and went to get water.” And it begins with a date: “July 15, 1955. The birthday of my daughter Vera Eunice. I wanted to buy a pair of shoes for her, but the price of food keeps us from realizing our desires.” In between are only five years, 1955-1960 which make this text our earliest in terms of a Latin American testimonio. Carolina is not a motivated political activist and testimonial narrator like Rigoberta Menchú or Domitila Barrios, both of whom joined unions. Carolina Maria de Jesus remains isolated dreaming of a better life. But her powerful haunting and simplistic depictions of life in the favela force us to draw our own political conclusions. Of all the discussed testimonio writers in this class her text is possibly the most poetic and literary without giving up the genre’s necessary emphasis on realism. She sends her son Joao to buy soap and two aspirins. Coming back he had lost the two tiny pills “I went back with him to look. We did not find them.” Someone suggested that the right word for this book is “raw,” and testimonial literature precisely is that: raw literature. I also suggest you go to the following website:

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/449170.Child_of_the_Dark

This site has 269 ratings and 46 reviews, many by Students like you.

Week 15: **City of God**

After reading and discussing this impressive account of misery in the favelas I want you to view an even more impressive film by Brazilian Fernando Meirelles, (City of God 2002). You may rent the film from Netflix or at least see parts on YouTube.

This film deals powerfully with life in a Brazilian favela, again demonstrating the closeness of testimonio, cinema, music in Latin America.

Week 16: **Theory of the Testimonio**

After our lengthy debate on a large number of Latin American testimonies it is time to go back to our first meeting and expand on the theoretical implications of our genre. When and why it originated and why it had a tremendous impact especially in circles of Latin American studies in the United States. The discussion of the theory of the testimonio is designed to further stimulate a debate that will lead to the students’ research papers.

By this week a long paper of approximately three thousand words shall be expected. The topic should have been discussed by week 10 between individual student and instructor. Approval of the topic by the instructor is required. Here follow some suggested topics:

1) Parts of this course proposed some kind of affinity between the genre of testimonial literature, Latin American cinema, and the powerful new song movement of the sub-continent. Should you agree with this assessment, please write an extensive and detailed paper on this relation, being as specific as possible with your selected examples.

2) If El Salvador has been the major nourishing ground for our genre of testimonial literature, Nicaragua must take second place. Both countries at first appeared as almost insignificant places in the minds of many people, “banana republics.” How has your image and understanding of these two Central American countries been affected by the study of some of the testimonios originating there?

- 3) Select 2 (TWO) of the testimonial texts discussed during this semester. Provide a rationale for your selection and then “use” the two selected texts to try to arrive at a (YOUR) definition of what constitutes a “proper” testimonio in Latin America.
- 4) Aside from the increasing number of books and essays that have been written on testimonial literature and Latin America there always remains that powerful “epic” in three volumes by Eduardo Galeano. Discuss the relation between testimonial literature and this very particular text. Please be as specific as possible.
- 5) Discuss the “theory” of testimonial literature in Latin America. What sets the genre apart from autobiography? Why did this genre have such a success in Latin America? Why not elsewhere? Discuss from your reading some of the theoreticians of the genre.

Syllabus

General Course Objectives: For Specific Learning Objectives, Refer to the Study Guide

- O1. Identify major works and to analyze them from different critical stances.
- O2. Demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the works by responding to questions focusing on the context, authors, themes, and motifs.
- O3. Compare works and documents from different periods, traditions, and sub-genres.
- O4. Apply critical reading strategies to determine alternative interpretive possibilities, as well as motifs, figurative language, and potential interpretive possibilities,
- O5. Discuss the historical, social, cultural, or biographical contexts of the works’ production
- O6. Compare and contrast themes, genres, and movements.

General Program Objectives

1. To provide students with a broad perspective of approaches to world humanities and an understanding of the various ways in which they manifest themselves and to assess students’ ability to express their perspectives through exams and essays.
2. To provide students with a deeper understanding of diverse traditions in the humanities the course focus and to express this deepened understanding in written tests and a critical essay.
3. To provide an overview of textual analysis and interpretation methods at a graduate level and help students apply these skills in writing essay examinations and a critical essay.
4. To read widely and critically in a variety of literary forms found in different genre studies and to demonstrate the depth and breadth of this reading in a critical essay.
5. To conduct graduate-level library research on a particular text or body of work, an individual writer, or an issue in the area of genre studies and to write a critical essay which incorporates their research.

Course Content:

1. Texts that have been designated as being produced within the category of the course topic.
2. Discussion of the historical, social, cultural and biographical contexts in which those works were produced.
3. Literary movements in various periods.
4. Discussion of the theoretical issues and questions related to historical, social, cultural, and biographical approaches to the study of the course topic.
5. Historical contexts.
6. Criticism and reflection upon political and economic systems as reflected in literature.
7. Discussion of the relevance of course readings to the understanding of contemporary global issues.
8. Critical analysis and interpretation.
9. Scholarly research on and off-line.

Course Outline:

For the detailed course outline, please see the Study Guide.

Course Readings:

For a list of course readings, please see the Readings page on the Study Guide

Course Preparedness:

This course is a graduate-level literature course. It assumes the mastery of prerequisite college-level skills in spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing, and essay writing. It also assumes the ability to read and analyze literary texts. This course provides instruction in world literature and does not address remedial writing issues at the sentence, paragraph, or essay level.

This course focuses on literary texts and analysis and requires college-level writing skills that exceed those required at the secondary level.

However, in some cases, students who have not yet completed a bachelor's degree may be allowed to take the course.

Course Workload:

For a sixteen-week course, students can expect to devote a minimum of 6 hours of independent study per week in order to complete the coursework. If students are taking the course in an accelerated 8-week mode, they can expect to devote a minimum of 12 hours per week of study.

Assessment Strategy

Learners will demonstrate their knowledge of the subject and their ability to engage in critical thinking and problem solving activities.

- *Journal Entries/Discussion Questions.* Designed to help students identify authors, their works, literary terms, and concepts. Students will also analyze texts, connect the authors, texts, and critical concepts. Finally, students look at texts from multiple perspectives in order to evaluate their own thought processes.
- *Synchronous Online Activities.* Designed to help learners apply the concepts in the course to texts, and to share their insights.
- *Essay / Research Paper.* Designed to help students write scholarly papers and engage in literary analysis. Students will develop a clear thesis which they support with literary citations, a close reading of the text, application of critical theories and perspectives. Students will focus on developing multiple interpretations of a single text, or will look at multiple texts within a movement, genre, or author's oeuvre.