

CHAOTIC ADVENTURE & CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS: LATIN AMERICAN TRAVEL LITERATURE, 1800-PRESENT

Prof. Leila Gomez

Thursdays 3:30-6

Office hours: F 12-2



This seminar explores a new way of understanding travel literature. Postcolonial theory, from the Edward Said's classic *Orientalism* (1978), offers a critique of the asymmetric gaze of metropolitan travelers who visit other cultures, according to which the travelers find themselves in a position of imperial superiority with respect to what they see in the places visited. Travelers who make the journey in the opposite direction, i.e. from the periphery to the metropolis, are also conditioned by such asymmetries and conflicts of cultural encounter. Adapting the contributions of postcolonial criticism to the study of travel literature, this seminar intends to integrate them into the debate of queer and decolonial studies, focusing on the theory of objects. Critics such as Bruno Latour, Bill Brown and Martin F. Manalansan IV propose that the objects with which the travelers find themselves in their itineraries have a "quasi-human" ability to destabilize clichés and asymmetric categories, that is, to question conventional language. In particular, Manalansan speaks of the disruptive potentiality of chaos and the disorder of things in the travel experience. This course offers a reading of the theory of cultural encounter and travelers' stories where this problematic becomes evident: in Alexander von Humboldt (1799-1804) and the boxes of specimens and archaeological "treasures" that he moved through South America, Mexico and from Cuba to Europe; in the photographs of Mayan ruins taken by Desiré Charnay (1857-1860, 1880-1882); in the experimentation of hallucinogenic drugs such as peyote in the Tarahumara region by Antonin Artaud (1936) or the ayahuasca for the beats William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg (1963); through the motorcycle of Ernesto Che Guevara in his travel diary (1952); in

the Bible as a literary object for Gabriela Mistral in Mexico (1922-1925); in the paintings of Frida Kahlo in the surrealist exhibition "Mexique" by André Breton in Paris (1939); through medical instruments in the work of Lina Meruane; and in a host of other literary and visual texts. The manner in which objects relate to travel reveals a new way of interpreting travelers' experience, destabilizing preconceived categories and showing the porosity of a genre always open to adventure.

Grade:

Participation (reaction paper, 1 page each session): 30%

2 oral presentations: 20% (Theoretical Text 15% + Prospectus 5%)

Final paper: 50%

Calendar and Readings:

August 29th

Ricardo Salvatore, "The Enterprise of Knowledge" (Canvas)

Gómez Peña y Coco Fusco, *The Couple in a Cage* (Canvas)

Sept 5th

Alexander von Humboldt, *Views of Nature* (selections) (Canvas)

Film *The Embrace of the Serpent*, *Ciro Guerra* (Canvas)

Sept 12th

Alexander von Humboldt, *Diario de viaje en México* (Canvas)

Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (selections) (Canvas)

Manalansan IV "The Stuff in the Archives" (Canvas)

Sept 19th

Charles Darwin, *Diario del Beagle* (selections) (Canvas)

Lucio V. Mansilla, *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* (selections) (Canvas)

Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (selections) (Canvas)

Leila Gómez, *La Piedra del escándalo: Darwin en Argentina* (selections) (Canvas)

Sept 26th

Juan León Mera, *Cumandá*

Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions* (selections) (Canvas)

Oct 3rd

William Henry Hudson, *The Purple Land*

Jorge Luis Borges, cuentos (selections) (Canvas)

Oct 10th

Jack Reed, *Insurgent Mexico*, (selections) (Canvas)

Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*

Oct 17th

Gabriela Mistral, *Gabriela y México* (selections) (Canvas)

Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin* (selections) (Canvas)

Oct 24th

Antonin Artaud, *Viaje al país de los Tarahumaras* (selections) Canvas

Andre Breton, “Mexique” and “Frida Khalo de Rivera” (Canvas)

Oct 31st

Alexander von Humboldt symposium week and workshop

Nov 7th

William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters* (Canvas)

Michel Foucault, *Las palabras y las cosas* (selections) (Canvas)

Nov 21st

Ernesto Guevara, *Diarios de motocicleta* (selections) (Canvas)

Lucrecia Martel, *Nueva Argirópolis* YouTube

Aníbal Quijano, *Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina* (Canvas)

Dec 5th

Roberto Bolaño, *Los detectives salvajes*

Dec 12th

Lina Meruane, *Volverse Palestina*

Presentación de prospecto de trabajo final