

The University of Chicago
Romance Languages and Literatures

SPAN 21619 / LACS 21619 / TAPS 25219 / GNSE 21619

From Lorca to Lin-Manuel Miranda: Staging Latinidad

Tuesdays – Thursdays, 11 am – 12.20 pm

Cobb 101

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Visiting hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1-2.30 pm (or by appointment)

Course description

In this course, we will delve into eight significant theatre plays written in the last century by Spanish, Latin American and Latinx playwrights. We will examine how *latinidad*, with its multiple definitions and contradictions, emerges in these plays; and also, which questions these works pose regarding the different historic and cultural contexts in which they were written. As a discipline that aims to explore and embody social practices and identities, theatre has become a place where these questions articulate themselves in a critical manner; a physical space where bodies and languages explore, sometimes through its mere unfolding on the page and the stage, unforeseen limits of class, identity, and ethnicity.

The course has two primary goals. The first one is to explore the nuances of a complex and contradictory concept such as *latinidad*, and to reflect upon the inquiries and ideas that circulate between the Spanish, Latin American and Latinx theatre traditions. The goal is to reflect upon the cultures and the communities that are embedded within the idea of *latinidad*, that have a crucial presence in our society, and whose powerful imaginary might symbolize the global, postmodern and transversal era we live in. The second goal is to become familiar with an array of plays that have been pertinent in the shaping of these traditions. Thus, we will address the plays in an almost chronological order, aiming to draw a map of historical events, although attention will be paid to how these works dialogue with each other through space and time.

Each week, we will discuss one play and one or two significant critical essays, and the discussion will be conducted through a set of questions and intersected references. For example: to what extent does the domestic exploration and the all-woman cast of Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* resonate in Fornés' *Fefu and Her Friends*? How does the experience of immigration affect the characters of Marqués' *La carreta*, and how do Chiara Alegría Hudes and Lin-Manuel Miranda echo this foundational fiction in *In the Heights*? How was the success of plays such as Valdez's *Zoot Suit* or Cruz's *Anna in The Tropics* received within the Latino community, how did it affect the general reception of Latino plays, and in which ways have these works negotiated their presence between alternative stages and more mainstream venues? These are some of the questions we will be dealing with as we read the plays.

Additionally, we will analyze different productions of the plays – thus using both literary and theatrical tools of analysis in order to do a close and critical reading of these works through different perspectives, disciplines and paradigms. Overall, the idea is to explore what we talk about when we talk about teatro de la *latinidad*.

Course taught in English. Readings in both English and Spanish.

Focus on the Chicago Latino Theatre Scene

We are fortunate to be in Chicago, a city with a remarkable theatre scene. There are several companies that regularly offer Spanish and Latinx plays (such as Aguijón Theatre, Teatro Luna and Teatro Vista). Also, Fall is the season of Destinos, Chicago's Latino Theatre Festival. Thus, we will attend one of the performances of the play [*Hope \(Part II of A Mexican Trilogy\)*](#), by Evelina Fernández, which is a part of the festival. In a course about theatre, being able to see the live performance, see how a text is staged and performed, feel the energy surrounding the production, is essential to fully understand the potential of performing arts.

Also, since we are dealing mostly with contemporary texts and productions, during the course we will meet several important actors in the Latinx scene, such as Cruz Gonzalez Cadel (actress) or Guillem Clua (playwright), either physically in class or via Skype.

Other suggested productions that are taking place in Chicago during the Fall season:

[Marissa Chibas, *Daughter of a Cuban Revolutionary*](#). Goodman Theatre, October 8-13

[Nilo Cruz, *Exquisita agonía*](#). Aguijón Theatre, October 17-27

[Makuyeika Colectivo Teatral, *Andares*](#). Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, October 23-27

[John Leguizamo, *Latin History for Morons*](#), Cadillac Palace Theater, October 29-November 3

[Sandra Delgado, *\(the\) FAIR*](#), Goodman Theatre (part of New Stages Festival), November 5
(Some events might be added to this list during the course)



Calendar

Week 1: Introduction. Latinidades

October 1st

Introduction. What can we expect of this course? Pertinent questions, and practical answers.

October 3rd

Alberto Sandoval, "Introduction", *José Can You See*.

Ilan Stavans, "The Search for Wholeness", *The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*.

Week 2: Women on the verge of a Civil War

October 8th

Federico García Lorca, *The House of Bernarda Alba*. Spain, 1936.

October 10th

Juana María Rodríguez, "Divas, Atrevidas, y Entendidas: An Introduction to Identities", *Queer Latinidad*.

October 10th (Special session)

Play: [Hope \(Part II of A Mexican Trilogy\)](#), by Evelina Fernández

Part of Destinos: Chicago International Latino Theater Festival

The Den Theatre, 7.30 pm

Week 3: American dreams (and American nightmares)

October 15th

Meeting with Cruz Gonzalez Cadel (actress in *Hope*).

October 17th

René Marqués, *The Oxcart / La carreta*. Puerto Rico, 1953.

René Marqués, "The Docile Puerto Rican"

Week 4: Domestic estrangements and immersive theatre

October 22nd

María Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends*. Cuba/USA, 1977.

October 24th

Steven Drukman, "Notes on Fornes"

Susan Sontag, "A Preface to The Plays of Maria Irene Fornes"

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation"

Week 5: A Chicano play goes to Broadway

October 29th

Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit*. Chicano, 1979.

October 31st

Cherrie Moraga, "A XicanaDyke Codex of Changing Consciousness"

Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer The Writer – Loca, escritora y chicana”

Week 6: XicanaDyke writing

November 5th

Cherríe Moraga, *Heroes and Saints*. USA/Chicana, 1992.

November 7th

Presentation of the Creative Projects.

Week 7: Crossed identities. Other Latinidades?

November 12th

Guillem Clua, *La golondrina / The Swallow*. Spain, 2018.

November 14th

Online talk with Guillem Clua

Interview with Ramon Rivera-Servera

Ramon Rivera-Servera, “Choreographies of Resistance: Latina/o Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative”

Secondary reading: Tim Lawrence, “Life and Death on the Pulse Dance Floor”

Week 8: Entering the mainstream (through 19th century Russia)

November 19th

Nilo Cruz, *Anna In The Tropics*. USA, 2003.

November 21st

Alberto Sandoval, “An Octopus with Many Legs”

Weeks 9-10: A musical for the Obama administration. Final remarks

November 26th

Chiara Alegria Hudes and Lin-Manuel Miranda, *In The Heights*. USA, 2008.

November 28th

Thanksgiving (no class).

December 3rd

Lin-Manuel Miranda, “Your Stories Are Essential”

Final remarks.

Course Evaluation

All students will be graded according to their level of commitment, participation, discipline, growth/progress and attendance. In this class students are encouraged to take risks and maintain a willingness to fail because only through risk-taking and failure can a student truly learn and grow. Attendance is strictly enforced and is a representation of your commitment to learning.

Attendance and participation (25%)

Students will be expected to attend all class meetings, to complete all the required readings, and to be prepared to actively participate in the discussions. Active participation requires not only to articulate meaningful comments and questions, but also to respectfully listen to the contributions made by other classmates. It also requires to deliver the tasks on time. Thus, after more than two absences, the final grade will be dropped by 10%. After more than five, the student will be asked to withdraw from the course.

Presentations (25%)

Students will sign up on the first day of class to prepare a detailed presentation on a specific topic or theme in one of the plays for the class. Students will make an 8-10 minute presentation in class about the topic or theme in their chosen play. The student is also required to lead the class discussion about the play for that day.

Creative Project (25%)

As a midterm assignment, students will be required to prepare a creative project in groups. Each group will take one of the plays covered during the first five weeks of the course, and will take it one (or more) steps further. Use your imagination and your creativity! For example, you can write an extra scene for one of our plays, write a letter to one of the characters, recreate one of the plays and place it in another location, or another era, etc. The intention for this creative projects is to explore how the plays have the potential to explore a different array of questions and of situations related with latinidad.

During the second session of week 6, every group will present their work to the rest of the class. Each presentation should last about 15-minutes.

Final essay (25%)

Students will submit a 1-2 paragraph description of their final project during week 9, so it can be discussed in the last week of the course. For the final essay, students will be required to do a close reading of an aspect of one of the plays covered in class, to compare two or more of them, or to present a close reading of another relevant play that we did not cover in class. The final essay should be around 5 pages long. Be original and take some risks!

An alternative to the final essay would be to attend at least two different events in Chicago and to submit a 2-page review of each event and a personal analysis of a point of interest.

Final essay rubric

A: Excellent in all aspects. The student's overall narrative is clear and compelling. There is a strong and clear thesis statement, and the paper is structured coherently to produce an organized argument. The student exhibits serious engagement with the examples, rather than simply offering descriptions or unexamined emotional responses.

B: Generally good in all aspects. The student's narrative is clear, if not compelling. The thematic or cultural link between the ideas exposed in the paper is unclear or not fully examined. The thesis does not pose a critical claim. An acceptable level of engagement is evident, although there may be too much description. The ideas are solid but impaired by unconnected evidence, and the paper may fall outside of the specified page range.

C: A competent piece of work yet inadequate as a piece of critical writing. The student does not link their ideas into an overall narrative or engage with them on a meaningful level.

D: Work that demonstrates minimal to unsatisfactory effort on the student's part. The paper lacks a thesis, an overall narrative, and serious engagement with the examples, of which perhaps fewer than required are present.

F: The student has largely disregarded the assignment and demonstrates no engagement with the material.

Final grade scale

93-100	A
88-92	A-
83-87	B+
79-82	B
75-78	B-
71-74	C+
68-70	C
65-67	C-
62-64	D+
60-61	D
Below 60	F

Academic honesty

Please see general college guidelines on plagiarism. Preparing for the group presentations might be done in groups, but you are expected to complete all of your writing, reading, and listening assignments on your own. You may use dictionaries to help you but not online translators, which do not work especially well due to idiomatic constraints from one language to another. You may ask a friend who is more advanced in Spanish to help you figure out how to phrase an idea. You may not, however, have them proofread your work or write it for you. You may study with other students but you may not complete homework together. Evidence of cheating may result in your failing the assignment or the whole course and your adviser at UChicago will be notified. For more information on these policies please consult the following Web site:
<http://www.uchicago.edu/uchi/policies.html#provost>.

On diversity and inclusion

Some of the topics that we will be covering in class (especially those regarding gender or ethnic identity, race and sexuality) can be challenging for some students, not just intellectually, but also in an emotional level. While rigorous discussion is expected and honest disagreement will be encouraged, students will be asked to engage in discussion with care and empathy for the other members in the classroom. Every student, no matter the race, gender, sexual orientation or religion, has the right to be seen, respected and acknowledged both in and out of the classroom. Critically assessing some of our most basic assumptions and values is a lesson the students need to learn during this course. Authenticity towards ourselves and the others, as well as being politically and socially aware, are not only valued qualities within an academic environment, but also features that can have a positive impact in our daily lives.