

# Notes on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literature

(1910-present)

## Prose Fiction (Novel and Short Story)

### 1910-1949 Regionalism, Nationalism, Novel of the Mexican Revolution

Starting around 1910, the basis of Latin American regionalism is set up as a combination of various elements; namely, the triumph of earlier aspects of social realism, the innovative language and style of *modernismo*, and the poetical revolutions that occurred after World War I. What is most notable in the prose of this period is a stronger sense of Latin American identity. Writers perceive objective reality without economic or political abstractionism. Gone, however, is the 19<sup>th</sup> century emphasis on the detailed depiction of local customs that were thought of as picturesque, typical, quaint. In the place of *costumbrismo*, we find an increased awareness of the uniqueness and power of Latin American nature. For example, one of the major writers of this period, Ciro Alegría (Perú, 1909-1967; *El mundo es ancho y ajeno / Broad and Alien is the World*, 1941), called attention to the "acción monstruosa de la naturaleza salvaje frente a los conatos civilizadores del hombre" (monstrous action of wild nature opposing the civilizing efforts of man). This *regionalista* approach to nature lacks the idealization of Nature found in the humanities of the Romantic Period at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the humanistic movement of regionalismo, however, nature is seen as an uncontrollable force which requires humans to be integrated with the countryside on the one hand, and with the artistic or humanistic structure of the humanistic artifact, whether it be a novel, a short story, a play, or a painting.

Some prominent Latin American writers of prose fiction in this period are:

**José Eustacio Rivera** (Colombia, 1889-1928) published his masterpiece, *La vorágine*, in 1924. Rivera was very active and accomplished man: he taught in public high school (Escuela Normal Superior); he was a lawyer with a law degree from the National University in Colombia; he held several public prosecutor positions; he traveled to Perú and México as a diplomat; he served on an international commission concerning border disputes between Colombia and Venezuela; he was an inspector for Colombian oil fields; he explored the interior regions (*los llanos*) and the Orinoco River; and he died in New York City. Rivera's humanistic prose expression, which comes out of the *modernista* tradition, displays a marked tendency toward melodrama and

exoticism, in which he blurs the dividing line between fantasy and reality. In *La vorágine*, we are presented with a portrait of man (humans) overwhelmed by the weight of nature in terms that show humans defeated in their ferocious and epic struggle against nature. The atmosphere is that of collective madness because the human characters are in direct contact with uncontrollable forces of destruction.

**Rómulo Gallegos** (**Venezuela**, 1884-1960) began literary writing after 1910, and his novels were all written after 1920. His masterpiece, *Doña Bárbara* (1929), is perhaps the most emblematic of the early twentieth century writers in Latin America who fought against tyranny. He was a native of Caracas; the Director of the Colegio Federal Barcelona, the Director of the Escuela Normal in Caracas, and the Director of the Liceo (high school) Andrés Bello. (For a brief portrait of Andrés Bello in HUM 2461, see: => **Andrés Bello**.) Active in both literature and politics, he was a humanist in every sense of the word. After living in voluntary exile in Spain, he returned to Venezuela at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, when he became President of the Consejo Municipal of Caracas. Later, he was in the Venezuelan Congress, Secretary of Education, and, in 1948, President of Venezuela. Overthrown by the dictator Pérez Jiménez in 1948, Gallegos went into exile again to the United States, Cuba, and México. His writing features a depiction, description, exposé of Venezuelan national roots with universal signification and themes such as injustice, abuse of power, and exploitation of the poor. Gallegos searches for essential human solidarity, democratic principles, and individual liberty. Like much international prose literature in the 1920s and 1930s, there is a classical cast to his works in that he sees man as beings in conflict who search for personal and social balance and for whom nature and collective society are the great obstacles. Gallegos literary approach is to use objective realism based on binary antinomies like civilization vs. barbarism, men vs. women, and oppositions between blacks, whites, Indians, Occidentals, etc. In Gallegos themes and characters are often treated allegorically, as in, for example, the notion of man destined to dominate the primitive forces of nature in order to achieve interior harmony. Country scenes, human characters, social conflicts, Latin American legends and myths, Gallegos conjugates all these in his works. *Doña Bárbara* deploys obvious symbols and a preconceived thesis, which Gallegos elevates by privileging what is autochthonously Latin American, by showing faith in the heroism of both peasants and the intelligentsia. Gallegos' style is a fusion of *modernismo* and regionalism, which he fuses with not a little aesthetic harmony and a solid analysis of Venezuelan history.

**Ricardo Güiraldes** (Argentina, 1886-1927) was a well-to-do writer with a European cultural background who turned his attention to regional Latin American traditions and scenes. He sought to create an

authentic Argentinian literary style and identity (i.e., *una argentinidad*). In this pursuit he depicted rural people from the Pampas (*campesinos*), and he did so with lyrical and emotional tones. In his first novels, which were produced from 1915 to 1923, we see that his use of language is dominant: he blends his affinity with the early aspects of *ultraísmo* (see below) with Gaucho terminology and slang. Güiraldes most important novel, perhaps his masterpiece, is *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), which was published one year before he died. This novel's centerpiece is the myth of the stoical, brave, and noble gaucho is the centerpiece, whom the narrator defines as a man in his direct living contact with nature and who is required to conquer every moment of his life. This struggle is framed within an epic code of the individual surrounded by vast solitude. For the narrator, a gaucho is quintessentially solitary being hemmed in by modern civilization. This theme parallels to no small degree, the binary theme of his countryman Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: i.e., civilization vs. barbarism. To some degree, it has been said that Güiraldes treats the gaucho somewhat like the idealized American cowboy. Concerning the novel's structure, it is shaped by a series of portraits of local customs united mainly by the action of the plot. The main unifying principle, in addition to the gaucho theme, is then novel's style, which features a rich use of local language from turn-of-the century rural Argentina. In this sense, one senses a poetical tone in this work.

**Benito Lynch** (Argentina, 1885-1951) wrote about Argentinian gauchos not in a mythical vein but rather as flesh and blood, three dimensional people; indeed, he tended to view them as criminals. One of Lynch's most prominent works is *El inglés de los huesos* (The Englishman of the Bones; 1924). In this novel Lynch, who himself had been immersed in rural Argentinian life, achieves a kind of photographic realism via aesthetic balance and a rather faithful reproduction of the authentic dialect and style of the gauchos themselves. Whereas Güiraldes seems to wax nostalgic about gauchos, Lynch projects his own first-hand knowledge of them. In Lynch's art, there is, however, no vanguardism or impressionism because he followed directly in the tradition of Spanish regionalism.

**Eduardo Barrios** (Chile, 1884-1963) worked in the humanities areas of the novel, short story, and theater. He was born in Valparaíso, Chile, and he spent part of his youth in Perú. After high school he attended a military school for boys, but he fled before getting an officer's commission. Before returning to Chile, he traveled throughout Latin America while participating in a variety of adventures and all sorts of odd jobs. He finally returned to the capital, Santiago de Chile, where he was a journalist, bureaucrat, a government minister, and head of the national library. He was even a farmer. He was also elected to the academies of writers in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. In 1946 he was given the Chilean National Prize for Literature. Two of his most

prominent novels are *El hermano asno* (1922) and *Gran Señor y Rajadiablos* (1948). In these works he features carefully detailed observation of the physical milieu in which he sets the action, and he deploys penetrating psychological analyses of his Chilean middle class characters, analyses that include abnormal spirituality and a variety of eccentricities. *El hermano asno*, for example, explores abnormal religiosity. Like the novel of the Spanish Generation of 98, Barrios' expression is oriented more toward realism than toward Chilean regionalism.

**Miguel Ángel Asturias** Rosales (Guatemala, 1899-1974). He studied anthropology, history, and indigenous cultures in France in the 1920s. These studies and his own view of life gave him a notably social outlook. He began publishing in 1930 (*Leyendas de Guatemala*; Legends of Guatemala). In this first work he refers to the *Popol Vuh* (see lecture notes on this work: => *Popol Vuh*). From 1933 to 1954, he worked as a journalist and diplomat, all the while writing in his spare time. Although he wrote his most important and most well known work, *El Señor Presidente*, in the 1920s and 1930s, it was not published until 1946. This novel, about life under a generic and unnamed Latin American dictator, is an epic of fear, which was a new emotional note in Latin American literature a half century ago. Asturias depicts a typical Central-American city, but without much local color stereotyping (i.e., without *costumbrismo*) by focusing on a famous (and real) local café in Guatemala City, the presidential palace—neither of which are described in detail—and some of the Guatemalan countryside. The work's characters, who center on two star-crossed young lovers, an old general, and the dictatorial president, are depicted on three levels: (1) those who belong to true Guatemalan politics, such as the likely model for the president, Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920); (2) prototypes; and (3) universal myths of humanity including especially Mayan mythology. The novel projects an overall sense of Guatemalan national consciousness and political duty along with an anti-imperialism that can be read as anti-Americanism. The novel is based on the historical duality of pre-contact elements and contemporary mid-twentieth-century reality. In 1949, Asturias published *Hombres de maíz* (Men of Corn), a novel about revenge, fertility, death including elements of Central-American history, economics, politics, and society. About this novel, Asturias said: "It was inspired by the struggle between, on the one hand, indigenous rural people who understand that corn must be sown only for sustenance, and, on the other hand, *criollos* who grow it as a business, burning forests filled with precious wood while impoverishing the land in order to become rich." In addition to the sociopolitical element in *Hombres de maíz*, this novel also includes mythical and marvelous elements found in the *Popol Vuh*. These elements are depicted as residing in the unconscious of Guatemalan peasants. From 1954 to 1966, Asturias was deprived of his Guatemalan citizenship due to

his strong support of the democratically elected present, Jacobo Arbenz. In 1967, he won the Nobel Prize for literature. He lived most of his last years in Buenos Aires, Santiago, and Madrid, in which last city he died. He is buried in the famous Parisian cemetery of Père Lachaise. Asturias is acclaimed as a precursor of Magical Realism and the Latin American Boom (see below). For two brief passages from *El Señor Presidente*, see: => [Asturias](#).

**Agustín Yáñez** (México, 1904 - 1980). In addition to being a governor of the Mexican state of Jalisco and a college professor, he was a major mid-century novelist. A product of the Latin American middle-class intelligentsia, his philosophical outlook was consonant with the enlightened European views following both World Wars. In other words, in his works he adopted a new metaphysical style that he applied to a world that had lost a sense of its organizational place in history. In the Mexican cultural milieu he paints elegant narrative portraits of the conflict between Western civilization and what has traditionally been seen as Latin American "primitivism". This conflict plays out in terms of individual consciousnesses. Yáñez' major novel is *Al filo del agua* (The Water's Edge; 1947). It deploys a style reminiscent of that of James Joyce with stream-of-consciousness, some Surrealistic elements, and the depiction of the unconscious mind of a personified small provincial Mexican town. This novel displays both the absence of logical order and spontaneous lyricism including obsessions, terrors, madness, failures, death. The narrative voice does not distance himself from such an atmosphere but rather he identifies with and fuses with what he narrates. In this way, he neither judges it nor analyzes it; instead, we follow a seemingly endless series of details, thoughts, nightmares in which virtually nothing happens that traditionally would be considered an ordered plot. As in other twentieth-century Mexican humanistic products, this novel shows an accepting familiarity with the presence of death.

There are, of course, many important Latin American writers during this period of the first half of the twentieth century. Two more that should be mentioned in order to complete this brief survey of the entire continent are **Jorge Icaza** (Ecuador, 1906-1978) and **Ciro Alegría** (Perú, 1909-1967). These two authors narrate characters and societies from the Andean regions. Icaza's most notable novel is *Huasiungo* (1934), which features realistic language used to present social criticism from a Marxist revolutionary ideological perspective. Like other works (prose narratives, essays, theater), this novel sheds brutal light on the tragedy of Ecuatorian indigenous peoples (Indians) by focusing on a native family that is forced to accept its animal-like destiny. Characters include Indians stripped of their land, cruel Occidental (i.e., Criollo, Spanish) exploiters. Icaza's goal is to shock readers out of their apathy by means of literature that borders on propaganda. Meanwhile, in Perú, **Ciro Alegría** was a

member of the leftist Peruvian political party APRA. He was exiled to Chile, the United States, and Puerto Rico for his revolutionary activities and writings. His most significant novel is *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (1941). In this work, Alegría attempts to include Perú's indigenous peoples in the history of their nation. The novel's manner is to paint an epic picture of the action on the background of folkloric elements of local customs and myths. Alegría presents an Indian community as a model of liberty, which he sees as representative of the entire indigenous nation in the Andes. The Indians' idyllic peacefulness is set in direct opposition to the landowners' hostility. This novel is a model of lyricism and sentimentalism.

**Mariano Azuela** (México): see essay about Azuela in: => [Notes on the Humanities in the Mexican Revolution](#).

**José Rubén Romero** (México): see essay about Romero in: => [Notes on the Humanities in the Mexican Revolution](#).

**Martín Luis Guzmán** (México): : see essay about Guzmán in: => [Notes on the Humanities in the Mexican Revolution](#).

**Gregorio López y Fuentes** (México): see essay about López y Fuentes in: => [Notes on the Humanities in the Mexican Revolution](#).

## **1949-1999**    **Magical Realism (*lo real maravilloso*), the Latin American Boom, and Beyond**

**Alejo Carpentier** (Cuba, 1904-1980). He was a major Latin American and, of course, Cuban, musicologist, journalist, pianist, ambassador, and writer, and most notably and lastingly, novelist. Although Carpentier was born in La Habana of French and Russian parents at the beginning of the twentieth century, his humanistic influence becomes truly significant at mid-century. In 1921 he studied music and architecture, but he did not finish those studies; the following year he published his first essays. From 1924 to 1928 he was the editor of the Cuban magazine *Carteles*. In 1927, as the founder of a minority anti-government political party, he was jailed for his political activities against the dictator Machado (=> [Cuba](#)). For the following eleven years he lived in exile in France, which is where he can in contact with the great French Surrealists such as André Breton, Louis Aragon, and Tristan Tzara. Writing the lyrics for the composer Amadeo Roldán (1900-1939; Cuban musician born in Paris), he was involved in concerts in France for the "new music". At the same time, he was the editor for *Imán*, a Spanish-language journal published in Paris. In 1932, he published a collection of his poetry titled *Poemas de las Antillas* (Poems from the Antilles). The following year, Carpentier published his first novel, *¡Ecue-Yamba-O!*, which is a regionalista novel that privileges folkloric "authenticity" and Afro-Cuban mythologies over against rationalism and institutional standards of behavior and belief. In this work, he makes what Latin

American critics consider narrative, stylistic, and documentary, "advances". In 1939, he returned briefly to Cuba but for most of the 1940s and 1950s he lived in Europe and Venezuela, and, in 1959, at the start of the Cuban Revolution, he returned briefly to Cuba. Starting in 1946, he began a series of major publications: *La música en Cuba* (1946); *El reino de este mundo* (1949); *Los pasos perdidos* (1953); *El acoso* (1956); *Guerra del tiempo* (1958); *El siglo de las luces* (1962); *Tientos y diferencias* (essays, 1964); *Los convidados de plata* (1972); *Concierto barroco* (1974); and *Las razones de estado*, which is a history of the Cuban Revolution (1976). In 1977, he received Spain's prestigious prize, the Premio Cervantes, and in 1979, he was awarded France's prize, the Prix Médici. He died in Paris in 1980 while serving as Cuba's ambassador to France. Carpentier is generally recognized as the first Latin American humanist to state that Latin American baroque style and content apply naturally to literary works that feature Latin American reality, history, myths, etc. The term he employed to identify this fusion of Spanish and Latin American baroque qualities, on the one hand, and contemporary Latin American reality, is *lo real maravilloso*, (= > **lo real maravilloso**) known incorrectly in English as Magical Realism. (The term is incorrect because the Spanish word *maravilloso* does not mean "magic", but rather what is marvelous, full of wonder, causing amazement.)

The 1949 introduction to *El reino de este mundo* (The Kingdom of this World), a novel about the Haitian revolution, the desire for freedom and justice, history, and imagination, is titled "Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana" (Questions about the current Latin American novel), Carpentier discusses the challenges to producing a novel in developing regions of the world such as Asia and Latin America. In the essay he says this:

"In a period characterized by a great interest in the Afro-Cuban folklore that was "recently discovered" by my generation's intellectuals, I wrote a novel—*¡Ecue-Yamba-O!*—whose characters were blacks from the rural class of that period. I ought to point out that I was raised in the Cuban countryside in contact with Black peasants and the children of Black peasants. Later, I became very interested in the practices of *santería* and *ñañiguismo* [secret Afro-Cuban religious beliefs], and I attended a lot of their rituals and ceremonies. By means of such "documentary research" I wrote a novel that was published in Madrid in 1933, which was during the crest of European "nativist" enthusiasm. So then, after twenty years of further research into the syncretistic realities of Cuba, I realized that everything that is deeply profound, true, universal in the world that I had attempted to depict in my novel had

remained beyond the reach of my powers of observation. [...] Since then, I do not trust, with ever increasing reason, the entire literature that we were accustomed to being given, up until recently, as Latin America's most authentic literature" (Montevideo: Editorial Arca, 1967: 14-15).

Later in this essay he says, in creating their works, Latin American humanists must take into consideration a broad spectrum of what he calls contexts: racial, ethnic, economic, political, culinary, musical, ideological, historical, cultural, and stylistic. Furthermore, these humanists must account for *lo ctónico* (atemporal or inter-temporal universality; chronological dislocations; see: => HUM 2461 Terms List), *lo autóctono* (what is autochthonous, uniquely authentic in Latin America), and the context of illumination (i.e., special qualities of light):

"Light, certain peculiarities of light, modify perspectives, values of distance, placement of planes, in terms of the angle of observation taken by the Latin American novelist. Light in Havana is not the same as Mexico's (there's an enormous difference between both of them: in Mexico the light brings far distances closer, but in Havana it makes what is nearer seem evanescent); nor is light then same in Rio de Janeiro or Santiago de Chile, or even in Port-au-Prince, where the presence of mountains that block the wind and the clouds changes the values of illumination. To speak about the haze in Rio de Janeiro, which is heavy at certain times, almost black at noon, is not the same as speaking about the fog in Caracas, which, soft and fleeting, comes down from the hills as if by accident. In Havana there exists a summer illumination and a winter illumination. What's prodigious is that the light can change in a single day. And when winter light arrives, everything, all the buildings take on a new, unencumbered, geometric, precise aspect. The values of distance, perspective are modified. And for those who move about in a car, the buildings begin *to swivel around each other* due to the fact that the perspectives receive, either in the foreground or the background, an equal illumination in *an atmosphere without air*, apparently, that makes one think about the backgrounds in paintings by Balthus or certain German expressionists. Every Latin American novelist must carefully study *the surface light density in their cities*. It's an element to be identified and defined." (Montevideo: Editorial Arca, 1967: 22-23).



Now we take a look at his essay on *lo real maravilloso* published in *Tientos y diferencias*. You can see this essay in either of these two formats:

HTM format: => "[About the Latin American \*real maravilloso\*](#)".

PDF format: => "[About the Latin American \*real maravilloso\*](#)".

### **Jorge Luis Borges** (1899-1986; Argentina)

**Juan Rulfo** (1917-1986; México) was born in Jalisco, México as Juan Nepomuceno Carlos Pérez Rulfo Vizcaíno, but he is universally known simply as Juan Rulfo. Until he was ten years old he lived in a small pueblo with his grandfather, after which he lived in an orphanage. In 1934, he planned to attend the Universidad de Guadalajara, the great university in the capital of Jalisco State, but he did not attend classes due to a student strike. From 1935 until his death in 1986, he lived in the national capital, Mexico, D.F. At first, he earned his living as an immigration agent, a job that required him to travel throughout Mexico searching for illegal foreigners. With this work experience he learned a lot about the immense variety of Mexican languages and Spanish dialects in addition to the rich variety of Mexican customs and lifestyles. This information forms the basis of his literary production. Later, he worked for an automobile tire company and the editorial department of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista. In terms of Rulfo's humanities' production, amazingly, he is known principally for only two works, the collection of short stories, *El llano en llamas* (1953) and the masterpiece novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955)

**Gabriel García Márquez** (1927 - 2014; Colombia): for an introductory chronology of his life and works, see: => [García Márquez](#)

**Mario Vargas Llosa** (b. 1936; Perú) is one of the original prose fiction writers and essayists of the famed "Generación del Boom," which began roughly in 1962 and spread throughout Latin America and which became perhaps the most internationally renowned literary movement of all time. Among his most famous novels are: *La ciudad y los perros* (1962); *La casa verde* (1965); *Conversación en la Catedral* (1970); *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973); *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1985); *El paraíso en la otra esquina* (2003); *Travesuras de la niña mala* (2006). In 1990, he ran for the presidency of Perú, but he lost to the winner, the presidential dictator, Alberto Fujimori. Among his many national and international awards is the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2010 and the (USA) Library of Congress's Living Legend award. In 2015 he published

a book-length book titled *Notes on the Death of Culture*, and in 2016 he published the novel *Cinco esquinas*. His Brazilian war novel *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1985) is acclaimed by many as his masterpiece. It is based in part on the magnum opus by the Brazilian writer Euclides da Cunha, *Os Sertões* (1902), which is about the brutal civil war in the NE Brazilian backlands of Canudos. For an article on Vargas Llosa's appearance in Washington, D.C. on the occasion of his acceptance of the Library of Congress award, see: => [New York Times article "Love in the Time of Spectacle"](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/14/books/mario-vargas-llosa-on-love-spectacle-and-becoming-a-legend.html?ref=arts) (<  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/14/books/mario-vargas-llosa-on-love-spectacle-and-becoming-a-legend.html?ref=arts>>).

**Other prominent Latin American writers of prose fiction in this period are:**

José Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967; Brazil): *Grande Sertão: veredas* (1956; they greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian novel)  
 José Lezama Lima (1910-1976; Cuba)  
 María Luis Bombal (1910-1980; Chile)  
 José María Arguedas (1911-1969; Perú): *Los ríos profundos* (1962)  
 Ernesto Sábato (b. 1911; Argentina): *El túnel* (1948)  
 Jorge Amado (1912-2001; Brazil): *Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands* (1962)  
 Julio Cortázar (1914-1984; Argentina)  
 Elena Garro (1916-1998; México)  
 Clarece Lispector (1920-1977; Brazil)  
 Marco Denevi (1922-1998; Argentina)  
 José Donoso (1924-1996; Chile)  
 Rosario Castellanos (1925-1974; México): *Trayectoria del polvo* (1948); *Balún Canán* (1957); *Oficio de tinieblas* (1962)  
 Carmen Naranjo (b. 1928; Costa Rica)  
 Carlos Fuentes (b. 1928; México)  
 Guillermo Cabrera Infante (b. 1929; Cuba)  
 Elena Poniatowska (b. 1932; México)  
 Mario Vargas Llosa (b. 1936; Perú): *La ciudad y los perros* (1962); *La casa verde* (1965); *Conversación en la Catedral* (1970); *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (1973); *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1985); *El paraíso en la otra esquina* (2003); *Travesuras de la niña mala* (2006).  
 Luis Rafael Sánchez (b. 1936; Puerto Rico): *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*  
 Rudolfo Anaya (b. 1937; Aztlán)  
 Hernán Castellano-Girón 1937-2016; Chile): *Calducho o las serpientes de la calle Ahumada* (1998)  
 Marie-Claire Blais (b. 1939; Québec)  
 Antonio Skármeta (b. 1940; Chile): *El cartero de Neruda* (1985)

## 2001-present      Post-Magical Realism and Twenty-first Century Prose Narrative

Some prominent Latin American writers of prose fiction in this period are:

Julia Álvarez (b. 1950; Dominican Republic/New York): *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994); *In the Name of Salomé* (2000)

Laura Restrepo (b. 1950; Colombia): *Delirio* (2004)

Pedro Ángel Palou (b. 1966; Mexico): *Zapata* (2006)

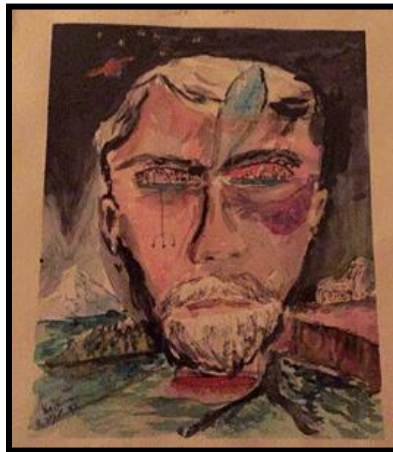
Jorge Volpi (b. 1968; Mexico): *A pesar del oscuro silencio* (1992); *En busca de Klingsor* (1999); *La paz de los sepulcros* (2006)

Junot Díaz (b.1968; Dominican American; New York): *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)

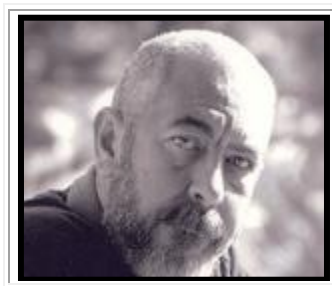
**Hernán Castellano-Girón** (1937-2016; Chile): *Kraal* (short stories, 1965); *El bosque de vidrio* (short stories, 1969); *Nosferatu* (film, 1973-1986); *El automóvil celestial* (poetry, 1977); *Teoría del cuerpo pobre* (poetry, 1978); *Los crepúsculos de Anthony Wayne Drive* (poetry, bilingual, 1983); *Otro cielo* (poetry, 1985); *El ilegible: las nubes y los años* (novella, 1988); *Calducho o las serpientes de la calle Ahumada* (novel, 1998); *Un Orfeo del Pacífico* (Rosamel del Valle anthology, 2000); *El huevo de Dios y otras historias* (short stories, 2002); *Nosferatu, una escenito criolla* (film script, 2009); *Las palabras disperas* (essay, 2010); *Llamaradas de nafta* (novel, 2012); *Espectros* (semi-autobiographical novel, 2007-2012); *El invernadero* (novel, 2013); *Coral de invierno* (poetry, bilingual edition, 2015);

Hernán Castellano was born in Coquimbo, Chile. He earned a doctorate at the University of Chile in Santiago de Chile (in 1961 in Chile: *título de profesor*) in chemistry and pharmacy. In 1967 he taught his specialization (agronomical chemistry) at the University of Chile. At the time coup d'état by Chile's military under the command of Gen. Augusto Pinochet in September 1973 (dictator 1973-1990), Hernán Castellano-Girón was expelled from his position and forced into exile. First he went to Italy, where he earned a graduate degree (*laurea*) in Latin American literature with a thesis (1981) on the Chilean writer Rosamel del Valle (1901-1965). With a doctoral fellowship in hand, he went to Wayne State University in Detroit where he earned a doctorate (1985). Next he got a full-time teaching position at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo), which hiring led to tenure and promotion as a professor of Spanish, Italian, and Latin American literature and humanities. He worked closely with the department chair, William Little, and the major Chicana poet, Gloria Velásquez. He was named the poet laureate of this city. In 2007 he retired and returned to Chile, where he bought a house (2008) on Isla Negra, where Pablo Neruda had his famous seaside home. In addition to being a poet, he was a writer of prose

fiction (short stories, micro-stories, and novels), an award-winning essayist, winning a Chilean national prize for an essay on Neruda, film maker, and painter. His film, *Nosferatu*, is a Dracula-like story based on Bram Stoker's original novel and featuring an insane priest. Dr. Ana Balakian, professor of French and comparative literature at New York University, in her 1978 book on surrealism, said that Hernán Castellano was "the last of the surrealists." His paintings, which have a world-wide circulation and which have been used as the illustration on many Spanish-language book covers, certainly support Balakian's assessment. About himself Hernán Castellano said that his nearly unrecognized presence in Latin American literature was "pretty secret" ("*un escritor casi secreto*") which was due to his "greatest sin, that he was original:" "*ser original, llevar adelante un discurso que no calza con ninguna de las líneas aceptadas y aceptables sobre todo in narrativa*" [to be original, to undertake a discourse style that does not accord with any of the acceptable or accepted patterns, above all in narrative]. As an example of his art here is one of his self-portraits:



**Leonardo Padura** (b. 1955; Cuba): *Pasado perfecto* (1991; trans. 2007: *Havana Blue*); *Vientos de cuaresma* (1994; trans. *Havana Gold*, 2008); *Máscaras* (1997; trans. *Havana Red*, 2005); *Paisaje de otoño* 1998; trans. *Havana Black*, 2006); *La novela de mi vida* (2002); *Adiós, Hemingway* (2006); *El hombre que amaba los perros* (2009); *Herejes* (2014).



Padura is one of the most prominent and talented of Latin America's novelists since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He is an essayist, short story writer, literary critic, and novelist. He came to prominence with the first for novels, published from 1991 to 1998; they are known collectively as the Four Seasons. These are sophisticated literature written fully within the classical conventions of detective novels; that is the *roman noir*. Their protagonist is a Havana tireless and cynical police detective, Mario Conde, who investigates murders in Havana, murders that touch on some of the most explosive issues in communist Cuba, crimes that involve corruption in the government and in the police department. Since Padura never mentions the Cuban leadership by name, and since he never explicitly denounced the regime, he has been able to explore the gritty realities of Cuban life under the Castro regime without suffering—except for a two-year period in the 1970's—the ostracism, imprisonment, or exile that hundreds of other Cuban members of the intelligentsia have suffered since 1959. Padura continues to live in the home in which he was born in the suburbs of Havana with his wife and two dogs.

**Roberto Bolaño** (1953 – 2003; Chile) is perhaps the most dynamic Latin American writer at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Throughout his life he lived variously in Chile, Mexico, El Salvador, France, and Spain. He was born in Santiago, Chile. A dyslexic young man who had trouble in school, his family moved to Mexico City in 1968; he then dropped out of school taking jobs as a reporter and moving in activist left-wing political movements, which, in Mexico at the time were nearly revolutionary (see: Generation of '68). According to his own account—which several commentators have called into question—he returned to Chile in 1973 during the time of Augusto Pinochet's military coup against the democratic government of president Salvador Allende (1970-1973). Bolaño said that he was arrested and spent a week in jail, from whence he was rescued by friends who were prison guards. He narrates this semi-autobiographical episode in his short story "Dance Card." During the 1970s he became an avowed Trotskyite, founded a minor literary movement he called *infrarrealismo* (sub-realism), but in his novel *Los detectives salvajes* (*The Savage Detectives*; 1998) he parodied his own literary movement. For a time he worked with the left-wing

guerrilleros in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in during the civil war in El Salvador. Afterwards he returned to Mexico, where he was a misfit poet—what some have called a “literary *enfant terrible*.” It is possible, at least according to his own account, that he was addicted to heroin. In 1977, he moved to Spain, settled in the Catalan village of Blanes, married, and had a son, who was born in 1990. In Blanes, he had various odd jobs in cafés, campgrounds, hotels, and garbage collection agencies. After his son was born he switched from poetry to narrative fiction because, as he explained, he could earn a living publishing fiction and he felt he could live more responsibly as a novelist than as a bohemian poet. Nevertheless, in 2000, his collected poetry was published in a volume titled *Los perros románticos: Poemas 1980-1998* (The Romantic Dogs).

In 1989, living on the Catalan coast in Spain, he wrote the novel *El tercer Reich* (published posthumously in 2010 (Editorial Anagrama, Barcelona). In Bolaño’s unique combination of content and style—which we shall call post-post-modern—he evokes the desultory late summer feel in a small tourist town on the Spanish Mediterranean region of the Costa Brava. The contemporary plot centers on a young German (Ugo Berger) who is the German national champion player of a complex board game called, in English, “The Third Reich.” The protagonist spend his German vacation in a seaside hotel owned by a German couple where, ten years earlier his family had stayed in the same hotel. His vacation project in the unnamed coastal town is to write an expert article on new strategies for the game, strategies designed for the Nazi side in World War II to win the game. The novel’s almost painfully slow-paced and obsessive narrative features the use of quasi-realistic psychological and physical detail that inverts traditional realism in such a way that the reader simultaneously understands and is puzzled by what is described. The over-all result points to one of Bolaño’s signal contributions to Latin American prose fiction at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: his grand theme of the perverse attraction of Nazism, gaming, and the sense that the elusive quality of literature (fiction, narrative) is the only grounded reality.

Bolaño died in 2003 of a protracted struggle with liver failure. His monumental work, the five-part novel *2666*, was published posthumously the following year. Bolaño’s literary prominence rests on his work from 1989 to his death. His main works are *Los detectives salvajes* (1999), *Nocturno de Chile* (a short novel; the Rómulo Gallegos Prize in 1999), *2666*, and two short story collections, *Llamadas telefónicas* and *Putas asesinas*. In 2009, more unpublished novels and other works were discovered, among which was *El tercer Reich*. It is rumored in the literary world that a sixth and final section of *2666* may be published.

Bolaño’s masterpiece, *2666*, is a massive novel divided in five sections. The plot moves toward the historically true serial murders of prostitutes in Ciudad Juárez, a teeming Mexican city across the Río Bravo del Norte (Río Grande) from El Paso, Texas. The English translation by Natasha Wimmer won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction in 2008. In his article in *The New York Review of Books*, the critic Francisco Goldman says this

about 2666: “[It is an] often shockingly raunchy and violent tour de force (though the phrase seems hardly adequate to describe the novel’s narrative velocity, polyphonic range, inventiveness, and bravery) based in part on the still unsolved murders of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juárez, in the Sonora Desert of Mexico.”

If anything, 2666 is a work of protean proportions. One of Bolaño’s friends, Rodrigo Fresán, has called it a *novela cósmica* (El País, Madrid). Another critic says that it combines vaudeville, academic fiction, pulp fiction, science fiction, and even war literature (Minh Tran Huy, in *Le Magazine Littéraire*, Paris). As dark and disturbing as much of the material in it is—and it is truly so—it is also a pleasure to read because of Bolaño’s mastery of the creative expanse of the contemporary Spanish language and its dialects. The style leaps from cryptic to periodic in the extreme, and the tone ranges, often within single sentences, from deadly serious to wildly comical. Since this novel is set in Italy, England, France, Spain, Chile, the United States, and, finally, Mexico, a question arises concerning its place and Bolaño’s place in Latin American humanities. Clearly, Bolaño’s oeuvre grows out of the movements of the Generation of the Boom and *lo real maravilloso* (Magical Realism). And because the author lived most of his adult life outside his home country, his works have international settings and they appeal to a vast international audience. In this regard, then, he belongs to the humanistic and political generation of the Chilean diasporic exile that began in 1973. Even so, his works are significant because they are paradoxically Latin American in a traditional sense while at the same time they remain, as he himself would have it, so it seems, heterodox and eccentric. In his article on “Roberto Bolaño’s Ascent” in *The Chronicle Review* (December 19, 2008), Professor Ilan Stavans concludes with these two paragraphs:

“Bolaño didn’t hold academic life in any esteem. Knowledge, his work suggests, comes to us in chaotic ways, when we least expect it. Whenever he portrays academics, they are dissatisfied types, looking for signs of intelligence everywhere but in their own profession. The model student for Bolaño is irreverent, intolerant, and self-taught.

Indeed, I doubt that a novel like 2666 can be taught, for it begs to be found by readers in an accidental fashion, without instruction. Therein may lie the lesson to be learned from Bolaño: Rebellion and success do not rest easily with each other (21).

For a discussion of the cover of the first editions of the Spanish and English versions and for a passage from 2666, click on the following image:



Among recent English translations of his works are: *By Night in Chile*, trans. Chris Andrews (2003); *Distant Star*, trans. Chris Andrews (2004); *Last Evenings on Earth*, trans. Chris Andrews (2006); *The Savage Detectives*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (2007); *Nazi Literatures in the Americas*, trans. Chris Andrews (2008); *The Romantic Dogs: 1980-1998*, trans. Laura Healy (2008); *2666*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (2008); *The Skating Rink* (2009).

In 2010, an English translation by Chris Andres of Bolaño's 1999 Spanish-language short novel *Monsieur Pain* was published by New Directions. In his New York Times (February 7, 2010), Will Blythe concludes by saying this about *Monsieur Pain*: "By contrast, the evil in "Monsieur Pain" feels ominously real, despite the fact that Bolaño hardly enunciates its presence. The novel melds existential anxiety to political terror in a measure peculiar to Bolaño—imagine the protagonist of Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" if he were being interrogated by the secret police on suspicion of having hidden subversives behind his wall. Readers know, as the characters of "Monsieur Pain" do not, that Paris in 1938 is a city of sleepwalkers, that a darkness soon comes its way. It is Bolaño's great gift to make us feel the dimensions of this darkness even when we cannot see exactly what it hides" (Book Review, 7).

**Daniel Alarcón** (b. 1977; Lima, Perú) is one of a new generation of bi-cultural, bi-national (Perú and U.S.A.) Latino / Latin American writers. In this sense he is fully representative of a 21<sup>st</sup> century turn (*cambio de coyuntura*) in Latin American literature (and the humanities in general). His Peruvian parents moved to the United States when he was three years old where he grew up Birmingham, Alabama, in a middle class setting. He has a B.A. degree in Anthropology from Columbia University and an M.A. from the Iowa Writers Workshop. He now lives in San Francisco where he lives with his wife Carolina. He has been a visiting writer at several American colleges including the University of California at Berkeley. In addition, he is the editor of the Peruvian magazine *Etiqueta Negra*.





Principally, he is an American writer of prose fiction (novel and short story) and essays, who writes in English. Among these English-language works are *War by Candlelight: Stories* (2005; finalist for the 2006 PEN/Hemingway Award), *Lost City Radio* (2007: translated into 10 languages), and *At Night We Walk in Circles* (2013). In addition, he has published English-language short stories in periodicals such as *The New Yorker*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Granta*. Issue no. 97 of *Granta*, which was dedicated to the best young American novelists, he published “The King is Always Above the People” (2007). In the June, 2003 issue of *The New Yorker*, he published “City of Clowns,” which he translated and partially rewrote in a Spanish-language graphic novel, titled *Ciudad de payasos* (2010), with graphic artwork by the award-winning Peruvian artist Sheila Alvarado. In 2011 he founded a bilingual pan-Latin-American podcast in Spanish and English, *Radio Ambulante* (<http://radioambulante.org/en/>), which is dedicated to telling Latin American stories. In Spanish he published the novel by the same (translated) title as the 2007 story in *Granta*: *El rey está por encima del pueblo* (2009). Most of his other works have also been published by major Spanish language publishing houses.

Written and published originally in English as *At Night We Walk in Circles*, it was translated by Jorge Cornejo Calle and published by the Spanish publishing house of Seix Barral in 2014 as *De noche andamos en círculos*. In structure, style, content, an aesthetic style, which we could call post-post-modern in the manner of the Chilean—yet, international Spanish language writer—Roberto Bolaño (see above), this novel is a first-person narrative by a ever-present narrator who does not become a character in his own narration until the plot nears its dénouement. Ostensibly, the work we are reading is the product of the narrator’s research into a young Peruvian actor, Nelson, who becomes entangled in the kind of everyday events and inadvertent missteps that eventually lead him to end in a maximum security Peruvian prison for a murder he did not commit. The setting moves from actors in Lima to deep Andean provincial towns and back to the capital. The action moves from an itinerant theater troupe to the triangle of the jealousies of two young men in love with the same woman, to a Nelson’s impersonation of a dead son in a rural home in the Andes, to the violent death of Nelson’s rival at the hands of anonymous bullies in the dark streets of Lima, to Nelson’s trial and imprisonment. The narration centers on the “slippage” between the narrator’s objective description of events and places and the interspersed speech of various people whom the narrator interviews in an attempt to compose a resemblance of the character of the ill-fated actor whose psychology is easily recognized by 21<sup>st</sup> century readers anywhere in the world.

In the June, 2003 issue of *The New Yorker*, he published “City of Clowns,” which he translated and partially rewrote in a Spanish-language graphic novel, titled *Ciudad de payasos* (2010), with graphic

artwork by the award-winning Peruvian artist Sheila Alvarado. In this novel a young urban Peruvian journalist copes with the death of his father while researching street clowns in Lima. While the main characters are the journalist, his mother, and one particular clown who introduces the journalist first-hand into the sad-happy life of being a street clown, the city of Lima is at the same time backdrop and character in the work. For a few more details about this graphic novel, click on the following image:



## Poetry

### 1916-1949 *Vanguardismo, creacionismo, and various avant-garde movements such as ultraísmo*

After the death of the great *modernista* poet Rubén Darío in 1916, many Latin American writers, and most notably the poets, reacted against *modernismo*, a vein of writing that for them had run out of creativity and that no longer reflected the social, political, psychological, and artistic realities of the early twentieth century. Most notably, this new generation of poets felt the influence of the new currents of art and poetry that had begun in Europe—movements such as Modernism, Cubism, Fauvism, and Futurism—before, during, and immediately after World War I.

In general, the term Vanguard refers to a number of so-called "isms", each of which often sprang from a dogmatic manifesto or declaration of principles, and each of these movements had manifestations throughout the humanities (theater, art, literature, movies, music, architecture, etc.). This is especially true because one of the prime aspects of vanguardist movements is the mutual inspiration and fertilization across the traditional disciplinary boundaries of various humanistic disciplines.

Several factors cause Latin American *vanguardismo* to be distinguished from other similar movements in European and the United States are (1) a specific reaction against Latin American *modernismo* and (2) the geographical, cultural, social, and political elements unique to Latin America. These factors include race, colonization, poverty, isolation, religion, dictatorship, and geographic diversity. However, like their European and American counterparts, Latin American *vanguardistas*

promoted extreme innovation, freedom from traditional rules of mode and content, exploration of the humanist's psyche including previously taboo subjects, the fusing or confusing of various media, and the use of often anti-logical or a-logical metaphors.

Some prominent Latin American poets in this period are:

Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957, a *posmodernista* from Chile)

César Vallejo (1892-1938, Perú)

Juana de Ibarbourou (1892-1979, Uruguay)

Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948, Chile)

Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959, Puerto Rico)

### **Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989, Cuba)**

Poet, journalist, political liberal, Nicolás Guillén (Nicolás Cristóbal Guillén Batista) is generally considered, after José Martí, Cuba's national poet. His father and mother were both Afro-Hispanic Cubans. Much of his writing, especially his poetry, focuses on blacks in Cuba and Afro-Cuban culture and the hybrid Cuban religion of Santería, which is a fusion of Roman Catholicism and the Yoruba religion. His early poetry was influenced by the black American poet, Langston Hughes, whom he met in 1930. His poetry was also heavily influenced by Cuban *son* music. He was jailed in 1936 for his political activism following the overthrow of Cuba's dictator Gen. Gerardo Machado (1933). Thereafter, Guillén joined the Cuban Communist Party. As a journalist, he covered the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) as a support of Spain's democratic Republic. From 1940 to 1959 he travelled widely in South America, and China. In 1954, he was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize. From 1961 to 1986 he was the president of Cuba's Unión Nacional de Escritores (UNEAC). In 1983, he was the first winner of Cuba's National Prize for Literature. Among his major works are *Motivos de son* (1930), *Sóngoro cosongo* (1931), *Elegías* (1948-1958), *Poemas de amor* (1964), and *El diario que a diario* (1972). For one of his finest poems, see: => [Sensemayá](#).

### **Pablo Neruda (1904-1973, Chile)**



Born in Parral, Chile, in 1904 as Neftalí Ricardo Eliecer Reyes Basoalto, he used the pseudonym Pablo Neruda from 1920 until his death in 1973. In addition to his fame as a vanguardist (*vanguardista*) poet, he was a senator, a member of the Chilean Communist Party, ambassador, and, in 1971, the recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature. One could say, perhaps, that he is the poet in the chronological middle among the three most prominent Latin American poets of the twentieth century. Rubén Darío preceded him, and Ernesto Cardenal has followed him. In 1924, Neruda published his first famous book of poetry, *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (Twenty Love Poems and One Hopeless Song). As one would expect in a young poet, this book shows influence from *modernismo*, but there are also signs of the new poetry to come. In the three chapbooks he published in 1926, we see clear signs of *vanguardismo*. His next great works are two collections of poems written between 1925 and 1935: *Residencia en la tierra* I and II. Following these ground-breaking works are *Tercera Residencia* (1947), *Canto general* (1950), *Odas elementales* (1954), and *Estravagario* (1958). In *Veinte poemas de amor*, the verses (lines) are more or less regular, simple, and contemplative, and we do not see many of the kind of extravagant metaphors one finds in *modernista* poetry. This book is personal and sincere rather than "literary" for literature's sake. After *Veinte poemas*, Neruda finds his definitive, mature voice. His mature poetry displays a "volcanic imagination." Some of his poetry from this middle period is rather hard to decipher logically. The syntax seems chaotic. In the three volumes of *Residencia* he confronts his own existence in the sense of the philosophy of existentialism (i.e., existence precedes essence, etc.), and his personal emotional state remains hidden, hermetic. The tone runs from sadness to anguish and desolation with themes relating to death, decay, failure, chaos, irrationality, degradation. Neruda seems to be searching for depth in life, rather than the bourgeois surfaces of things and life. He searches for absolute spontaneity and the unrepressed qualities of his unconscious psyche. In essence, Neruda's poetry in his middle period is more process than finished result, and this notion parallels the very

content of the poetry itself. To read these poems is to participate in the process of profound human self-discovery and creativity themselves. In addition, Neruda deploys a thorough-going social conscience in his poetry from *España en el corazón* (1937) onward. This last book recreates his activity in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in support of the democratic forces that were attempting in vain to fight against the nationalist forces of General Francisco Franco and his political and religious supporters. Neruda's political poetry culminates in *Canto general* in 1950 when he was a more or less militant communist. In this poetry, Neruda is less hermetical and more didactic. Instead of spectacular and seemingly illogical metaphors and syntactic leaps, Neruda's voice is tied to universal concepts and feelings. His monumental poem in the *Canto general*, "Alturas de Machu Picchu" (Heights of Machu Picchu), however, combines both his intensely progressive political views with a direct and personal emotional charge. The result is perhaps his masterpiece. In his last poetry, however, Neruda abandons his anguished tone and methods, and he returns to a voice that tries to reach a broad range of the reading public. We see this last new voice in the love poetry of *Los versos del capitán* (1952), *Odas elementales* (1954), and *Nueva odas elementales* (1957). In *Cien sonetos de amor* (One Hundred Love Sonnets, 1959) there is true lyricism along with a lover's tenderness and melancholy. In one of his last works, *Memorial de Isla Negra*, published in 1964 in five volumes, he reaches his peak of personal autobiography. In 1966, he published a book of poems titled *Arte de pájaros*, which is a collection of most of the poems he wrote until that year dedicated entirely to evocations and descriptions of birds. In a beautiful publication bilingual edition by Lynx Editions (Barcelona, 2002) with translations by Jack Schmitt, with illustrations by Aldo Chiappe, Toni Llobet, and Jorge Rodríguez Mata, we find the following illustration of an Andean Condor (pp. 53-55):



For a year-by-year chronology of major events in Neruda's life, click here: => [Neruda Chronology](#).

For an on-line PowerPoint program of "Heights of Machu Picchu" (Alturas de Machu Picchu) in Spanish, click here: => [Alturas de Machu Picchu](#).

**Jorge Amado (1912-present, Brazil)**

**Ernesto Cardenal (1925-present, Nicaragua)**



Born in the city of Granada, Nicaragua, in 1925, in an upper class family, Ernesto Cardenal is a Catholic priest, a proponent of liberation theology (*la teología de la liberación*), and one of the most important Latin American poets of the last half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. From 1946 through 1950 he traveled to Mexico, New York City, Spain, Switzerland, and Italy. He returned to Nicaragua in 1950, and in 1954 he joined the failed April Revolution against Nicaragua's dictator at that time, Anastasio Somoza García. Many of his companions were killed by this Somoza regime. After suffering through an unrequited love affair in the middle 50's, in 1957 through 1959 underwent a dramatic spiritual conversion and he went to live as a novitiate monk in the Trappist Monastery of Gethsemany, Kentucky, under the spiritual direction of Thomas Merton, the famous American monk-priest. From Gethsemany, he moved to a Benedictine monastery in Cuernavaca, Mexico. He studied for the priesthood in Colombia, and he was ordained a Catholic priest in 1965 in his home city of Granada. He then founded a kind of left-leaning monastic-style artists' colony on Mancarrón Island in the Solentiname archipelago in Lake Nicaragua, but it was destroyed by armed forces under orders of the next Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, because Cardenal was closely associated with the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Spanish: FSLN), which was in open revolt against the dictator. Cardenal wrote his famous book *El evangelio de Solentiname* (The Solentiname Gospel) on the island; he escaped while many others were killed there. When the FSLN won the guerrilla war against Somoza's regime in 1979, Cardenal became the new Minister of Culture, a position he held until 1987. An event relating to Cardenal's two positions (i.e., priest and leftist politician) made international news in 1983 when Pope John Paul II visited Nicaragua. At the airport reception line for the Pope, the Sandinista

government was there to greet him, from President Daniel Ortega to Ernesto Cardenal. The poet-priest-politician Cardenal knelt down before the Pope ready to kiss the Pope's ring, but rather than allow him to make such a traditional Catholic obeisance, John Paul II pulled his hand away, waved his finger at him, scolded him, and, while the world's press cameras were recording the event, said in Spanish: "Regularize your position with the Church". In 1994, Cardenal publicly protested Daniel Ortega's authoritarian methods and the governing party's corruption, and he resigned from the FSLN. He then joined the MRS (Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista), which had been formed by former Sandinistas including Sergio Ramírez, who himself is an important Nicaraguan writer. In 2005, Cardenal was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature. In 2007, he returned to Mexico, where he showed his support for the leader of the activist Zapatista rebel group (Spanish: EZLA for Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) and its mysterious leader, *Subcomandante* Marcos. Cardenal continues to write poetry, make public appearances, receive awards, and give poetry recitals.

The first phase of Cardenal's work is love poetry in the modes of romanticism and bitterness. In his second phase, he writes very modern verse in which he moves freely among themes of political protest, social injustice, popular culture, pre-Columbian mythology, current events, humanitarian causes, advanced scientific knowledge, and the new Latin American Catholic movement of liberation theology. Among his most notable works are *Gethsemany, KY* (1960), *Epigramas: poemas* (1961), *Hora cero* (1965), *Oración por Marilyn Monroe* (1965), *Salmos* (1967), and *Cántico cósmico* (1989).

Enrique Lihn (1929-1988, Chile)

Alurista (1947-present, Aztlán)

Raúl Zurita (1950-present, Chile)

**Major Women Poets:**

Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-1994, Aztlán)

Sandra Cisneros (1954-present, Aztlán)

**Nancy Morejón (1944-present, Cuba)**



This major Cuban writer and poet was born and educated in Havana, and she has prospered and remained in Cuba throughout the Cuban Revolution. Her self-acknowledged ethnic mix or blending of an African father and Chinese-European mother figures prominently in her identity and her works; however, her primary identity is that of an Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Cuban woman. She graduated from the University of Havana in European, Caribbean, and Cuban literature, and she is fluent in Spanish, English, and French. In fact, she is a talented translator from French and English to Spanish. In addition to poetry, her primary genre, she also writes in the fields of journalism, literary criticism, and theater. Significantly, some critics regard her as the inheritor of the Nicolás Guillén, a famous post-Surrealist Afro-Cuban poet. She has won a number of prizes, and she has travelled fairly extensively through Europe and the United States.

For an important critical look at the sexual life of Cuban women from 1959 to 2012, see: Carrie Hamilton, *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba; Passion, Politics, and Memory* (2012).

For perhaps her most famous work, an eloquent statement about the trajectory of a Cuban black African slave experience from captivity to communism, see her poem: => **“Mujer negra” / “Black Woman.”** ([Spanish version](#)) ([English translation](#)).

## **Drama**

### **1920-2007 Theater**

Some prominent Latin American playwrights in this period are:

Osvaldo Dragún (Argentina)

Emilio Carballido (México)



Luis Valdés (Aztlán)  
René Marqués (Puerto Rico)

*WTL Home*

*20th Century*

*Hum 2461*