

LAS4935-6938/LAH3931: Brazilian History Through Literature and Film

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Office hours (Grinter 378): TBD

<https://calendly.com/mcweeks>

Spring 2026

Wednesdays, 11:45-2:45

Location: TBD



A Lua, Tarsila do Amaral, 1928

Course Description:

This course examines the history of Brazil from the mid-19th century to the present through novels, memoirs, short stories, and films. We will consider literature and film as historical sources, through which we can gain insights not only about shifting trends in art and aesthetics, but also about historical events and cultural dynamics. We will critically examine themes such as race, gender, class, nation, loss, violence, and memory through the work of some of Brazil's greatest artistic luminaries, placing their oeuvres in conversation with relevant historiography and literary and film criticism. Though we will devote considerable time to thinking about the particular authors of our texts and directors of our films, we will work to situate them with their broader artistic and historical context. While some of the assigned novels and films are considered canonical, others will challenge the notion of a Brazilian canon altogether. We will ask: in what ways do these cultural products reflect the Brazil in which they were created? What political, social, and aesthetic forces, both in Brazil and from abroad, influenced Brazilian cultural production in the 19th and 20th centuries? What are some of the unique properties of literature and film as historical sources? And finally, what is the nature of the relationship between art and politics?

Over the course of the semester, we will have several of the translators of our assigned texts appear as guest speakers, and with them we will discuss the work of literary translation, thinking critically about artistic license, cross-cultural communication, historical context, and the role of the translator. **While the reading load is sizable, this course will be fun! Novels are generally quicker to read and more entertaining than academic sources, and classroom discussions will be lively, colorful, and wide-ranging.**

No previous coursework on Brazil or knowledge of Portuguese is required. Students who can are encouraged to read the texts in the original language, but classroom discussions will focus on the English translations.

Course Learning Objectives:

- Learn about broad trends and important events in Brazilian history from the mid-19th century to the present, including slavery, abolition, urbanization, republicanism, migration, dictatorship, regional disparities, state violence, and social movements
- Gain new analytic lenses to discuss themes of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and memory in literature, film, and historical documents
- Learn about how the literary genres of realism, modernism, naturalism, surrealism, and autofiction relate to historical developments in the 19th and 20th centuries
- Develop skills of historical analysis and argumentation through literary and film criticism, thinking about cultural products as primary historical sources
- Think critically about the work of literary translation and cross-cultural communication
- Improve public speaking and communication skills through an oral presentation
- Develop research and analytic skills through a research paper

Course Materials:

The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas, by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, translated by Flora Thomson-Deveaux. Penguin Classics (2020)
- *Memórias póstumas de Brás Cubas*, 1881.

The Slum, by Aluísio Azevedo, translated by David H. Rosenthal (2000)
- *O cortiço*, 1890

Macunaíma: The Hero with No Character, by Mário de Andrade, translated by Katrina Dodson (2023)
- *Macunaíma: O herói sem nenhum caráter* (1938)

Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus, by Carolina Maria de Jesus, translated by David St. Clair (1962)
- *Quarto de despejo* (1960)

The Hour of the Star, by Clarice Lispector, translated by Giovanni Pontiero (1992)
- *A hora da estrela* (1977)

I Didn't Talk, by Beatriz Bracher, translated by Adam Morris (2018)

- *Eu não falei* (2004)

Moldy Strawberries, by Caio Fernando Abreu, translated by Bruna Dantas Lobato (2022)

- *Morangos mofados* (1982)

Optional textbook: **Brazil: Five Centuries of Change**, by James N. Green and Thomas E. Skidmore (PDF on Canvas)

Assignments:

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance: 15%

Participation: 15%

Short Paper: 20%

Journal Entries: 15%

Oral Presentation: 10%

Final Paper: 25%

NOTE: This course fulfills the UF 4000-word writing requirement

Attendance (15%) and participation in discussion (15%): Please come to class having read the assigned texts and ready to participate in group discussions. If you are unable to read a particular text in a comprehensive manner, try to at least distill its main arguments. If helpful to you, prepare a list of questions in advance of each class so that our discussion will proceed dynamically. I encourage lively, rigorous debate but I ask that you engage with your peers and with me in a respectful manner. Unexcused absences will negatively affect your participation grade.

- Attendance and absence policy: If you have to miss class, I ask that you email me to notify me of your absence and make every effort to come to office hours to make up the missed material. Multiple unexcused absences will adversely affect your participation grade. Otherwise, requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>
- I ask that you make every effort to arrive on time to class, so we can take full advantage of the limited time we have together as a course. Regular tardiness will adversely affect your participation grade
- I ask that you refrain from texting, chatting, or using your computers for tasks not related to our course during class time. Phones should be kept out of sight for the duration of the class.

Journal Entries (15%): Each week, students must write one to two paragraphs (200-250 words max) reflecting on the assigned materials. This is intended to give space to ask questions, express impressions of the texts, and prepare the students to participate in classroom discussions. The tone can remain fairly informal, but students should not merely summarize the assigned texts and films; rather, they should critically engage with them. Please post your journal entry by 10am each Wednesday morning (can skip two over the course of the semester).

Short Paper (20%): The short paper (5-6 pages/1300-1500 words) will be a comparative analysis of two works assigned for the course. They could be two films, two novels, or a novel and a film. Papers should not only provide complementary or critical commentary on the works of art, but they should introduce their creators, situate them within their historical and artistic context, and speak to the political and cultural dynamics that may have informed their production. You can compare artistic styles and mediums, political commentary, depiction of characters, and central themes. Students must draw upon at least **two** secondary sources.

Oral Presentation (10%): Each student will give one 20-30-minute oral presentation during the semester, in which they will present one of our secondary assigned readings, intended to give further context and interpretive possibilities to our novels and films. The presentations should summarize the author's arguments, indicate the relevant connections to our course materials, and facilitate discussion among fellow students. A short slideshow is required to ensure that presentations are organized and effective (no more than 5 slides).

Final Paper (25%): For the final paper (10-12 pages/3000-3800 words for undergrads, 12-15 pages/3800-5000 words for grads) students must choose one (or more) additional work(s) (a film, short story, or novel NOT already on our syllabus) by one of our authors/directors and place the work in conversation with our assigned materials and secondary sources, both literary criticism and historiography. Students must formulate historical arguments based on the author/director's context, drawing upon at least **five** additional secondary sources, three of which cannot be on our syllabus.

- Paper proposal due April 4
- Final paper due date TBD

Policies and Additional Information

Note: This course will count towards the minor/certificate in Latin American Studies.

For more information about enrollment in the **undergraduate** programs offered by the Center for Latin American Studies, contact the undergraduate coordinator Luis Felipe Gómez Lomelí. If you are a **graduate student**, contact the graduate coordinator, Clate Korsant at ckorsant@latam.ufl.edu.

Extension policy: I will grant extensions of up to three days if requested in writing. If extenuating circumstances require a lengthier extension, please contact me and we can work out an alternate submission date.

Late papers: If a student has not requested an extension, I will deduct five points from the final grade each day that the paper is late. Please communicate with me if you are facing circumstances that may challenge your ability to turn an assignment in on time!

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center (DRC): <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/> I ask that students share their accommodation letter with me and reach out to discuss access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Evaluations: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals at the end of

the semester. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>.

Library Use: UF has a world-class library, and I strongly encourage you to make good use of it. The Latin American and Caribbean Collection at Smathers Library has extensive secondary sources in addition to many fascinating collections of primary documents. I suggest you reach out to LACC chief librarian Margarita Vargas-Betancourt (mvargasb@ufl.edu) or one of the other excellent librarians to learn more about the collection and see what possibilities exist for accessing sources either on campus or online. For more information: <https://lacc.uflib.ufl.edu/> or stop by the third floor of Smathers Library. Remember to plan ahead! Start thinking about your research topic in October.

UF Honesty Policy: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. For more information: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

ChatGPT and Plagiarism Policy:

The use of ChatGPT or other AI programs is not appropriate for written contributions to this course. These assignments are meant to foster creative, critical, and synthetic thinking through evaluation and integration of course materials, personal experiences, discussion, and reflection. TURN IT IN program will be used to confirm that written work is original. **Please do not use AI software to write your papers! This course provides opportunities to develop your writing and analytic skills (as I will provide extensive feedback), and it would be a shame to waste them! AI usage can be easy to detect, and if it is detected, I will take measures that could include significantly docking grades and/or reporting students to the appropriate university authorities.**

Grades will be calculated as follows:

A	100 pts to	93 pts
A-	<93 pts to	90 pts
B+	<90 pts to	87 pts
B	<87 pts to	83 pts
B-	<83 pts to	80 pts
C+	<80 pts to	77 pts
C	<77 pts to	73 pts
C-	<73 pts to	70 pts
D+	<70 pts to	67 pts
D	<67 pts to	63 pts
D-	<63 pts to	60 pts
F	<60 pts to	0 pts

Please consult the UF website for further information on grades and grading policies:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Rubric for final paper

/100

	Great	Good	Average	Poor	Absent
	19-20	16-18	9-15	2-8	0-1
Analysis	The thesis is original. Compelling ideas throughout.	The thesis is interesting. At least one original perspective in one of the points.	The essay is focused on a single thesis or idea.	The thesis is split or unclear; the paper wanders off-topic.	No thesis or focus. Or seems AI-generated.
Evidence	27-30	23-26	15-22	11-14	0-10
	A variety of support for every claim, and it is strong, concrete, and appropriate.	Supporting evidence for all claims, but it is not as strong or complete in some areas.	Supporting evidence for most of the claims, but some evidence may be unrelated or vague.	Some evidence, but in key places evidence is vague or missing.	Almost no detailed evidence to support the thesis.
Organization	19-20	16-18	13-15	7-12	0-6
	Each paragraph is focused and in the proper order. Introduction and conclusion are complementary. Excellent transitions. In the main, content and not vocabulary, achieves the transition.	Each part of the paper is engaging, but better transitions, more/fewer paragraphs, stronger conclusion are needed.	Clear introduction, body, and conclusion, but some paragraphs may need to be focused or moved.	Some organization, but the paper is “jumpy” without a clear introduction and conclusion. Paragraphs are not focused or out of order.	Little or no organization.
Language	10	8-9	6-7	4-5	0-3
	Creative word choice and sentence structure enhance the meaning and focus of the paper. Special attention to precise verbs. Avoids cliché.	The language is clear with complex sentence structure but contains minor grammatical errors.	Writing is clear, but sentence structures are simple or repetitive; or repeated grammatical errors.	Grammatical mistakes slightly interfere with the meaning of the paper. Basic and imprecise verbs. Or excessively informal expression.	Frequent and serious grammatical mistakes make the meaning unclear.
Style/Voice	9-10	8-9	6-7	4-5	0-3

	A keen sense of the intended audience. The author's voice and the writing convey passion.	The paper addresses the audience appropriately and is engaging with a strong sense of voice.	Essay addresses the audience appropriately with some examples of creative expression.	Writing is general with little sense of the audience or communication of the writer's voice or passion.	Writing is general with no sense of either the writer or audience. Robotic.
Citations	10	9	7-8	4-6	0-3
	All evidence is well cited in appropriate format.	All evidence is cited, but with minor format errors.	Good citations but not enough of them.	Some citations but either incomplete or inappropriate.	Almost entirely without citations. Or AI-generated content.

IMPORTANT: If I notice that a student's writing is in need of improvement prior to the final assignment, I may refer them to the UF Writing Studio. This is not meant as a punishment, and it is not a requirement, just a recommendation. On-campus resources are available so that we can all continue to improve our skills; there is no shame in needing a little extra help. Working with the Writing Studio will allow you to workshop drafts, improve sentence structure, clarify grammatical issues, and get a handle on organization. I strongly suggest availing yourself of this FREE resource to get your writing in top shape!

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138, <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

Course Schedule:

***Note:** I have included excerpts of a textbook on Brazilian history to accompany each week's required readings. The textbook excerpts are **optional**, but they will undoubtedly help you better understand the political and social context in which our assigned materials were created.

Week 1, January 14: Introduction

- Mark Polizzotti, *Sympathy for the Traitor: A Translation Manifesto*, “Is Translation Possible (and What Is It, Anyway?” p. 1-17
- Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, “O caso da vara,”/ “The Cane” from *The Collected Stories of Machado de Assis*, translated by Margaret Jull Costa and Robin Patterson, p. 765-772

Week 2, January 21:

- Machado de Assis, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (p. x-140)
- Sidney Chalhoub, “Rediscovering a Masterpiece in a New Translation,” *Transition*, p. 222-231
- *Optional: James Green and Thomas Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 59-80

Week 3, January 28:

- *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* (p. 141-291)
- Roberto Schwarz, *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*, Ch. 1 (p. 7-39)
- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 81-105
- **Guest Speaker: Translator Flora Thomson-DeVeaux**

Week 4, February 4:

- Aluísio Azevedo, *The Slum* (p. 1-105)
- Ana Baltazar, "Inequality in Aluísio Azevedo's *O cortiço*," *The Routledge Companion on Architecture, Literature, and the City*, p. 82-95
- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 107-112

Week 5, February 11:

- *The Slum* (p. 106-208)
- Film: *Orfeu Negro* (dir. Marcel Camus, 1959):
<https://www.kanopy.com/en/ufl/video/127172>
- Patrice D. Rankine, "Orpheus and the Racialized Body in Brazilian Film and Literature of the Twentieth Century," *Forum for World Literature Studies*, p. 420-433

Week 6, February 18:

- Mário de Andrade, *Macunaíma* (p. 13-112)
- José Luiz Passos, "Macunaíma," 896-905
- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 112-134

Week 7, February 25:

- *Macunaíma* (p. 113-212)
- Film: *Macunaíma* (film, dir. Pedro Joaquim de Andrade, 1969):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3JwS2_A5rGk
- Oswald de Andrade, "Manifesto Antropófago"
- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 134-139
- **Guest Speaker: Translator Katrina Dodson**

Week 8, March 4:

- Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Child of the Dark* (p. 1-90)
- Eva Paulino Bueno, "Carolina Maria de Jesus in the Context of 'Testimonios': Race, Sexuality and Exclusion," *Criticism*, p. 257-284
- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 141-162
- **First Paper Due: March 7**

Week 9, March 11:

- *Child of the Dark* (p. 91-159)
- Film: *Cabra marcada para morrer/Man Marked for Death, Twenty Years Later* (dir. Eduardo Coutinho, 1984): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-HBPSqqonU&t=3920s>
- Will Noah, "Eduardo Coutinho's *Man Marked for Death/Twenty Years Later*," *Bomb*: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2017/09/22/eduardo-coutinhos-man-marked-for-death-twenty-years-later/>
- José Carlos Avellar, "The Emptiness of the Backyard: An interview with Eduardo Coutinho," *Film Quarterly*, p. 44-55

- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 163-196

March 15-23: SPRING BREAK

Week 10, March 25:

- Clarice Lispector, *The Hour of the Star* (p. 1-44)
- Film: *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol/ Black God, White Devil* (dir. Glauber Rocha, 1964):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzL6xDCoagQ&t=1894s>
- Hannah Gilman, “Reading Hunger and Exhaustion in Clarice Lispector’s *A hora da estrela*,” *Journal of World-Systems Research*, p. 151-170

Week 11, April 1:

- *The Hour of the Star* (p. 45-86)
- Film: *Terra em transe/ Entranced Earth* (dir. Glauber Rocha, 1967):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqgnXHvy9L0&t=5166s>
- Benjamin Child, “The Magical Real and the Rural Modern in Cinema Novo,” *South Central Review*, p. 55-73
- **Final Paper Proposal due April 4 (2-3 pages)**

Week 12, April 8:

- Beatriz Bracher, *I Didn't Talk* (p. 1-75)
- Film: *Marighella* (film, dir. Wagner Moura, 2019):
<https://www.kanopy.com/en/ufl/watch/video/12294918>
- Andrew C. Rajca, “Alogical Memory: Thinking Beyond (counter)hegemonic Postdictatorial Discourse in Beatriz Bracher’s ‘Não falei,’” *Hispanic Review*, p. 89-111
- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 197-211

Week 13, April 15:

- *I Didn't Talk* (p. 75-149)
- James Green, “Kidnappings of Diplomats and Revolutionary Politics in Authoritarian Brazil: The Tale of Two Films, *Four Days in September* and *Marighella*,” in *Latin American History at the Movies: The Sequel*, ed. by Donald Stevens, p. 171-191
- *Optional film: *Four Days in September/O que é isso, companheiro?* (dir. Bruno Barreto, 1997, DVD at Library West)
- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 211-230
- **Guest Speakers: Author Beatriz Bracher and translator Adam Morris**

Week 14, April 22:

- Caio Fernando Abreu, *Moldy Strawberries* (“The Survivors”/“Os sobreviventes,” “Fat Tuesday”/“Terça-feira gorda,” “Sargeant Garcia”/“Sargento Garcia,” “Aqueles dois”/“Those Two” (p.16-22, 58-62, 89-110, 158-170)
- Film: *Iracema: uma transa amazônica* (dir. Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna, 1974):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3u4rlXPM1ds>
- Carolina Castellanos Gonella, “Beautiful Male Bodies: Gay and Male Homoerotic Relationships in Caio Fernando Abreu’s *Morangos Mofados*,” *Chasqui*, p. 272-284

- *Optional: *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, p. 231-264
- **Guest speaker: Translator Bruna Dantas Lobato**

Final paper due date TBD