



SPAN322: “North of the Río Grande” US Latino/Chicano Literature

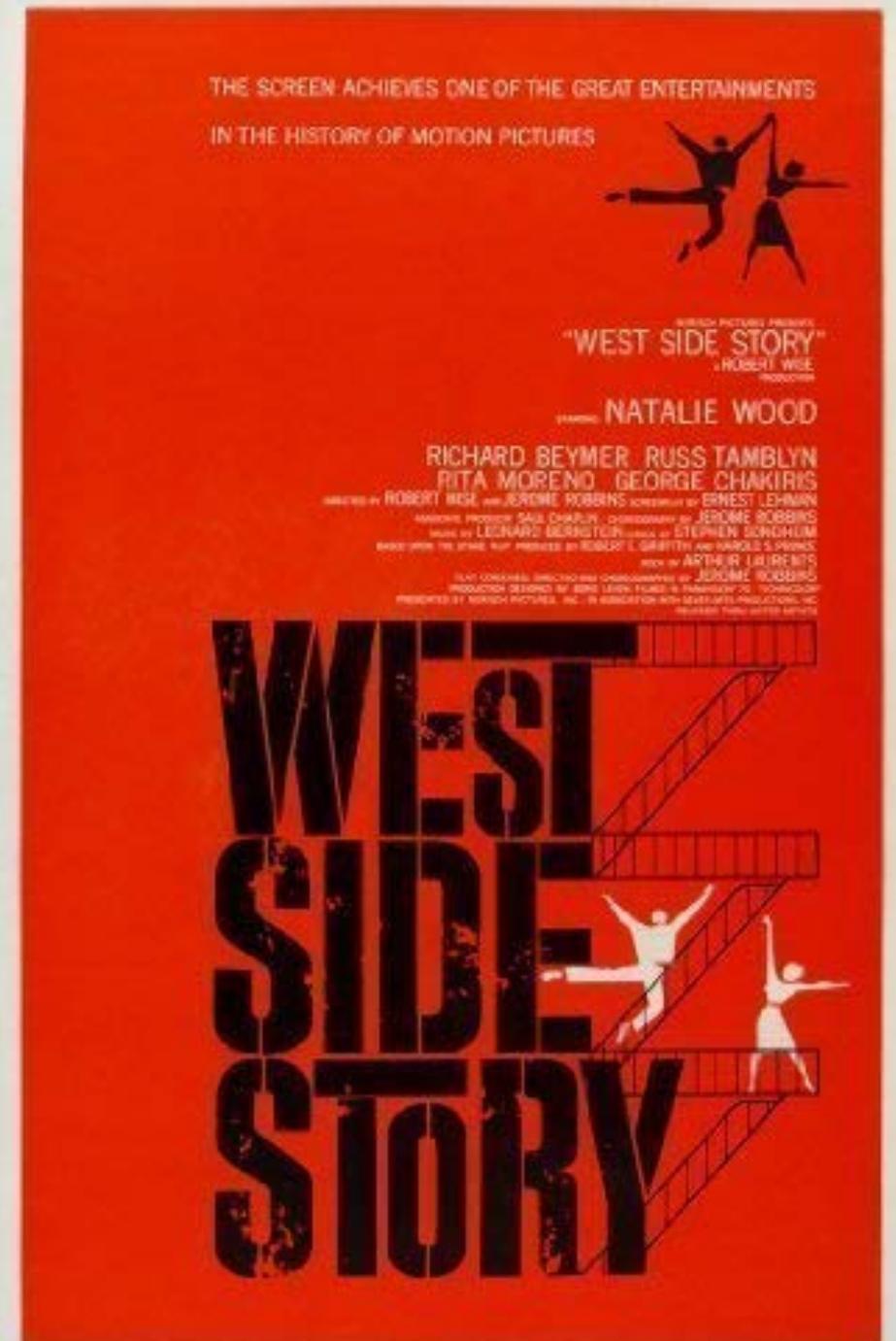
Introductions

January 7, 2020

PROLOGUE

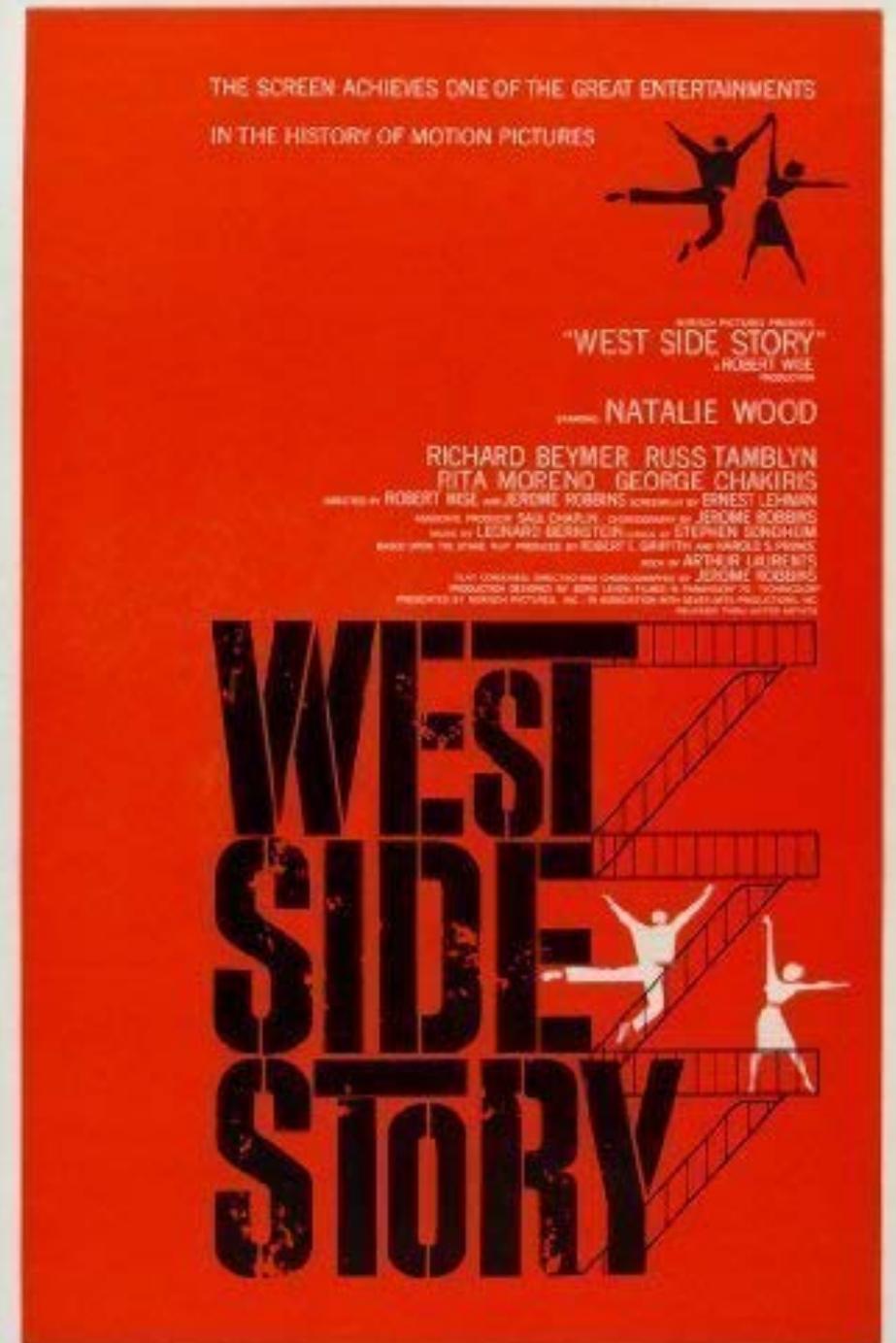
West Side Story

- A musical, based on a Shakespeare play
- Written by two New York Jews
- A Broadway hit in 1957; the 1961 film version won 10 Oscars
- Lead actress in the film version is child of Russian immigrants, though she plays another ethnicity (and some else sings her numbers)
- Was originally to be entitled “East Side Story”



West Side Story

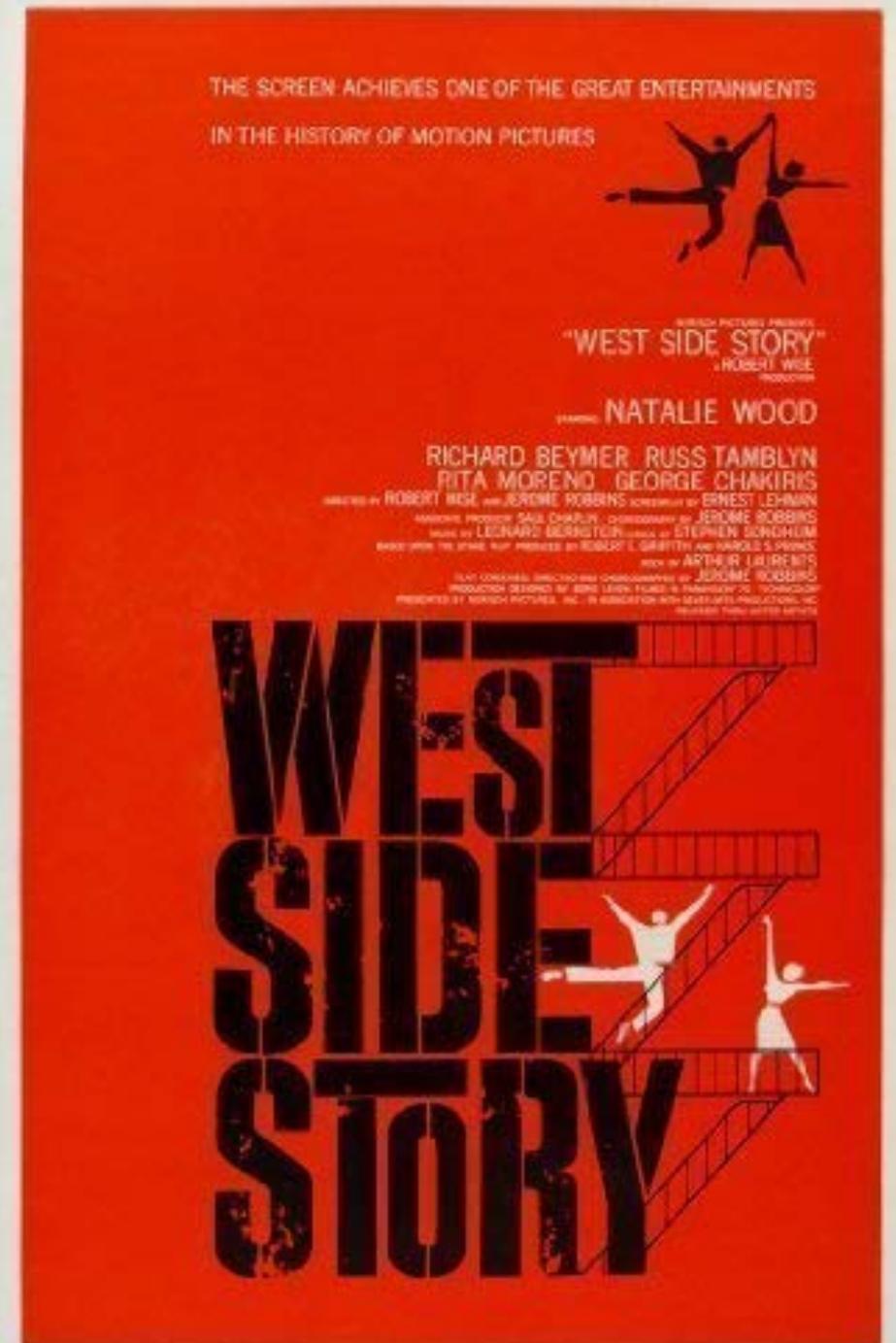
- Based on *Romeo and Juliet*, replacing (white) Jets and (Puerto Rican) Sharks for Montagues and Capulets
- Music by Leonard Bernstein, Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Broadway production by Jerome Robbins.
- Film directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, starring Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer (neither of whom sing)
- Also starring George Chakiris (Greek, playing Puerto Rican) and Rita Moreno (Puerto Rican, playing Puerto Rican)
- Musical film with most Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Supporting Actor (Chakiris) and Best Supporting Actress (Moreno)



West Side Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4B1Ijq1MQJ0> (with subtitles)

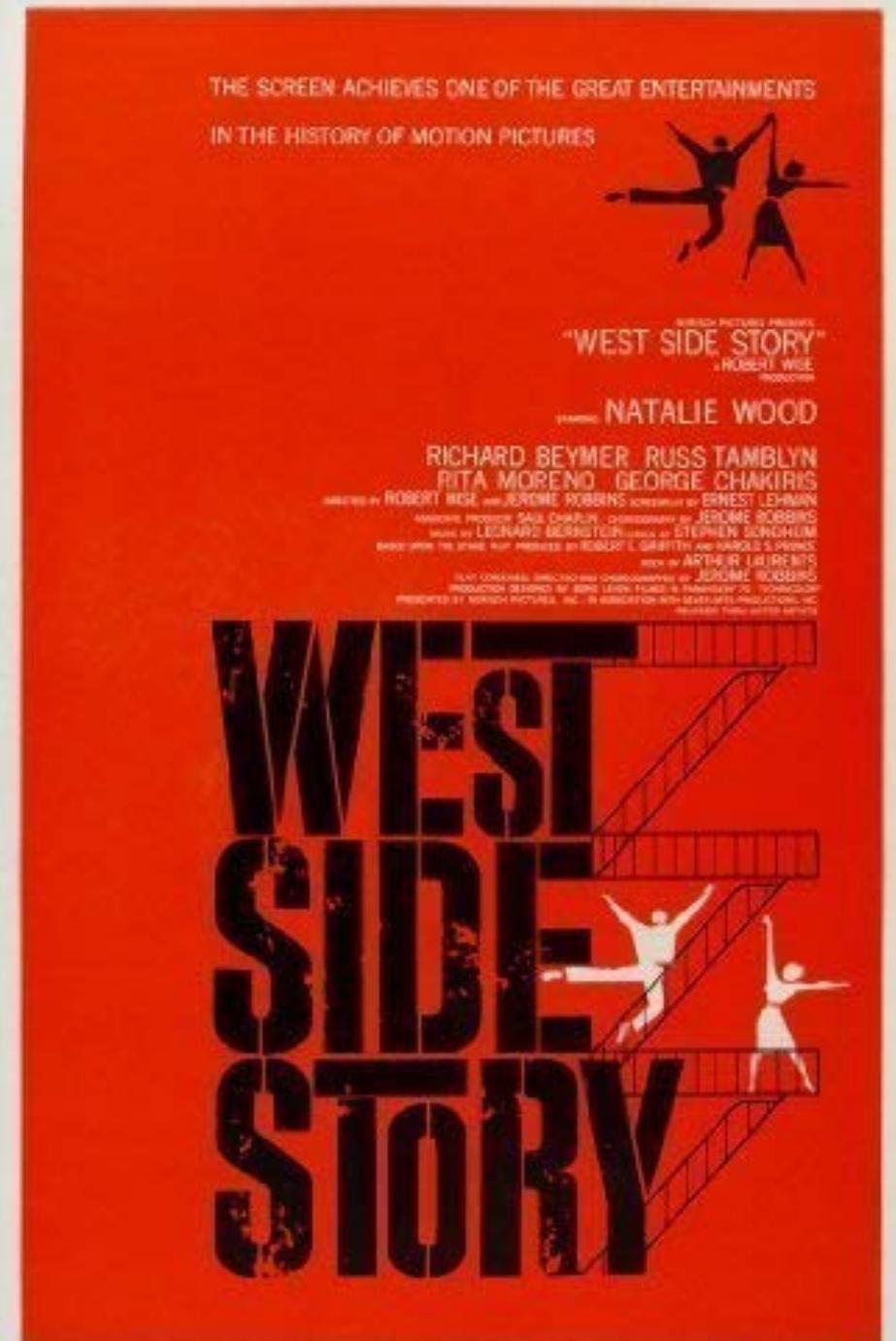
- A song about the ambivalence and uncertainty of belonging
- Is assimilation possible? Is it desirable?
- Counterposing nostalgia to modernization
- Here, divergent views also correspond to gender differences
- What are the promises and the disappointments of “America”?
- How to be an immigrant?



West Side Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2igZexpMs> (HD)

- Is this cultural appropriation? Does it matter if the composer, author, director, and (most of the) actors are not Puerto Rican?
- What is the balance here between realism and fantasy? To what extent does the form echo the content?
- How are the universal and the particular counterposed? Does it matter that this is New York, rather than Verona, the West Side rather than the East Side?



Tato Laviera, "My Graduation Speech"

i think in spanish
i write in english

i want to go back to puerto rico,
but i wonder if my kink could live
in ponce, mayagüez and carolina

tengo las venas aculturadas
escribo en spanglish
abraham in español
abraham in english
tato in spanish
"taro" in english
tonto in both languages

how are you?
¿cómo estás?
i don't know if I'm coming
or si me fui ya

si me dicen barranquitas, yo reply,
"¿con qué se come eso?"
si me dicen caviar, i digo,
"a new pair of converse sneakers."

ahí supe que estoy jodío
ahí supe que estamos jodíos

english or spanish
spanish or english
spanenglish
now, dig this:

hablo lo inglés matao
hablo lo español matao
no sé leer ninguno bien

so it is, spanglish to matao
what i digo

¡ay, virgen, yo no sé hablar!

Tato Laviera, “My Graduation Speech”

- Come up with *two* observations and *two* questions.
- Compare these with other members of your group.
- Here’s an observation to get you going (and so you don’t repeat it): the poem is written in both English and Spanish (or neither English nor Spanish).
- And here’s a question: why is it titled “My Graduation Speech”?

AGENDA

- Definitions
- Objectives and Skills
- Key Texts
- Concepts and Questions
- Administratrivia
- Next Steps

DEFINITIONS

All the terms in this course's title are contested and uncertain...

What, for instance, *is* the United States? What are its characteristics, and who gets to decide? Who belongs there and who should get to enter and live there? Is it a place or is it as much an idea (a dream)? Why would "building a wall" make it "great" again?

As we will see, even the country's borders have changed over time, with consequences that linger into the present.

US (United States)

2a. With the. More fully, United States of America. The North American states collectively forming a federal republic or (formerly) a confederation; the country consisting of such states; the government or inhabitants of this country.

Latino

A Latin-American inhabitant of the United States.

Chicano

A. *n.* A person of Mexican origin or descent living in the United States (particularly in those areas annexed from Mexico in 1848); esp. one who is proud of his or her Mexican heritage and concerned with improving the position of Mexicans in the United States; a Mexican-American. In the singular form the word Chicano is chiefly applied to men; cf. Chicana *n.* In plural, the word is applied to both men and women. Although in early use frequently derogatory (and still sometimes considered offensive), from the late 1960s Chicano began to be used as a neutral or positive term, and was used as a self-designation by people of Mexican origin involved in the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s; see Chicano movement *n.*

B. *adj.* Of, relating to, or designating Mexican-Americans or the varieties of English and Spanish spoken by them.

Latin@

“Latina and/or Latino” when spoken aloud. The pronunciations ending with /aʊ/ seek to combine the sounds of the -o and -a endings into one diphthong. Origin: Formed within English, by compounding. Etymology: < Latin- (in Latino *n.* or Latina *n.*) + @, the at sign (see at sign *n.*), used because of its resemblance to a combination of the lower-case letters a and o. Compare Latinx *n.*, Latinx *adj.*

A. *n.* A person of Latin American origin or descent. Cf. Latinx *n.* Used to refer to a person or group without specifying a gender. Cf. Latina *n.*, Latino *n.*

B. *adj.* Of or relating to people of Latin American origin or descent; designating a person of Latin American origin or descent.

Latinx

A. *n.* A person of Latin American origin or descent. Cf. Latin@ *n.* Latinx was originally used as a gender-neutral alternative to using Latino or Latina, but in later use has also been adopted by or for individuals who do not identify themselves as either male or female, but rather as another or no gender, or as a combination of genders.

B. *adj.* Designating a person from Latin America; of or relating to Latinxs (see sense A.) collectively.

Hispanic A. *adj.* 1. Pertaining to Spain or its people; esp. pertaining to ancient Spain. 2. Spanish-speaking, esp. applied to someone of Latin-American descent living in the United States. B. *n.* A Spanish-speaking person, esp. one of Latin-American descent, living in the U.S. Chiefly in plural.

Mexican-American *n.* and *adj.* (a) *n.* a Mexican settler or person of Mexican descent in the United States; (b) *adj.* of or relating to Mexican settlers or their descendants in the United States.

Dominican-American

Cuban-American etc.

Newyoricán, *n.* and *adj.* Forms: New Yorican, Newyoricán, New Yorricán, Newyorrícan, Nu Yorican, Nuyoricán. Etymology: Blend of the name of New York (see New York *n.*) and Puerto Rican, perhaps partly after Spanish *neoyorquino* New Yorker. A. *n.* = Neoricán *n.* B. *adj.* = Neoricán *adj.*

Neoricán A. *n.* A Puerto Rican native to or inhabiting the U.S., esp. New York City; (also) a Puerto Rican inhabitant formerly resident in the United States. Cf. Newyoricán *n.* B. *adj.* Of or relating to Neoricans; that is a Neoricán.

Literature

Etymology: < classical Latin *litterātūra* (also *literātūra*) use of letters, writing, system of letters, alphabet, instruction in reading and writing, writings, scholarship.

1. Familiarity with letters or books; knowledge acquired from reading or studying books. *Now historical.*
2. The action or process of writing a book or literary work; literary ability or output; the activity or profession of an author or scholar; the realm of letters or books.
- 3a. The result or product of literary activity; written works considered collectively; a body of literary works produced in a particular country or period, or of a particular genre. Also: such a body of works as a subject of study or examination (frequently with modifying word specifying the language, period, etc., of literature studied).
- 3b. Without defining word: written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit.
4. (A body of) non-fictional books and writings published on a particular subject.
5. Printed matter of any kind; esp. leaflets, brochures, etc., used to advertise products or provide information and advice.

OBJECTIVES AND SKILLS

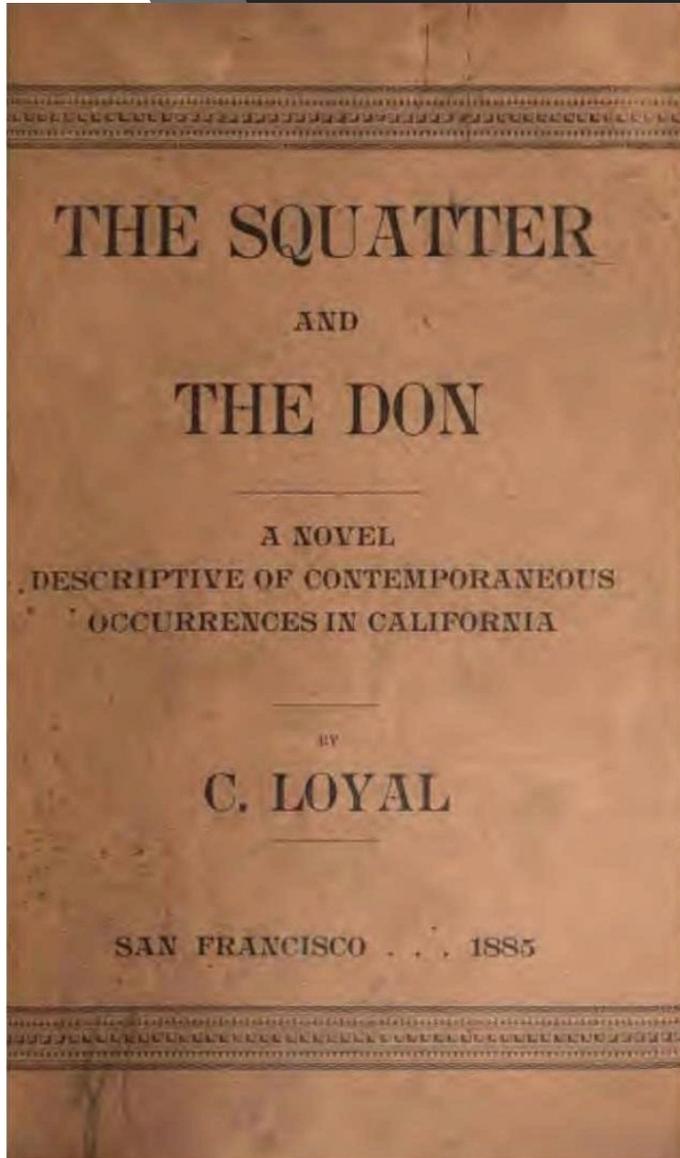
Objectives

- Read and discuss key texts of US Latino and Chicano fiction
- Study the US Latino/Chicano literary canon
- Consider its relationship to the mainstream canon
- Contextualize literature in C20th and C21st political history
- Address core issues of identity politics and culture
- Theorize the notion of representation in its multiple meanings
- Rethink the role of the author in literature and politics

Transferable Skills

- Close reading
- Literary analysis and reflection
- Literary history
- Literary, cultural, and political theory
- Critical thinking
- Research
- Writing for the public

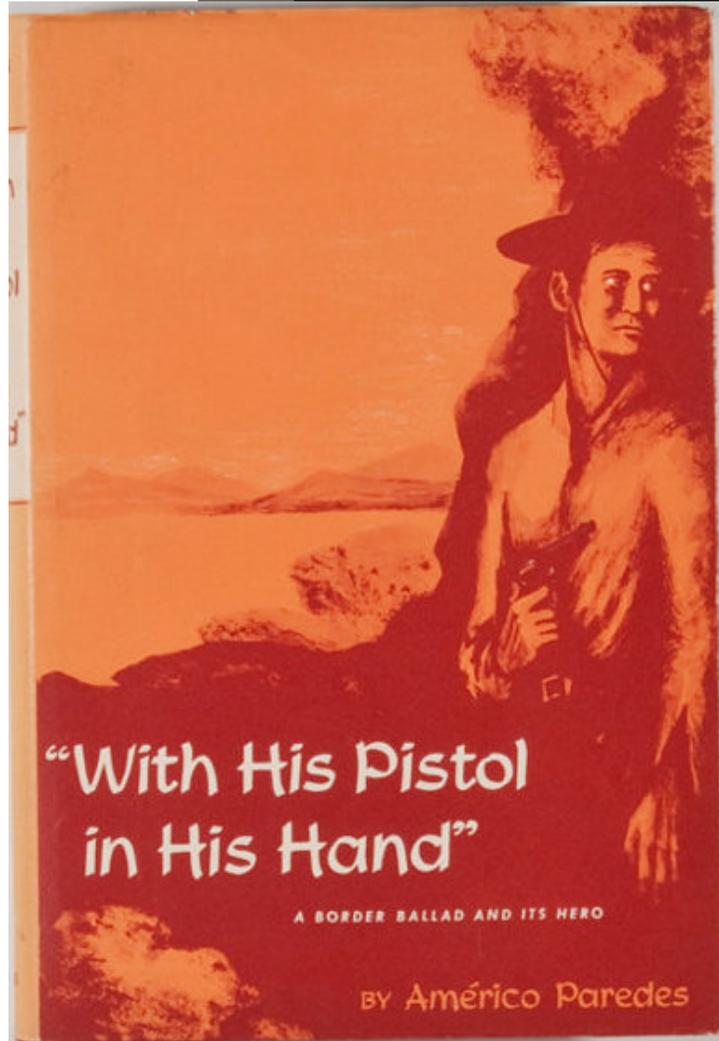
KEY TEXTS



The Squatter and the Don

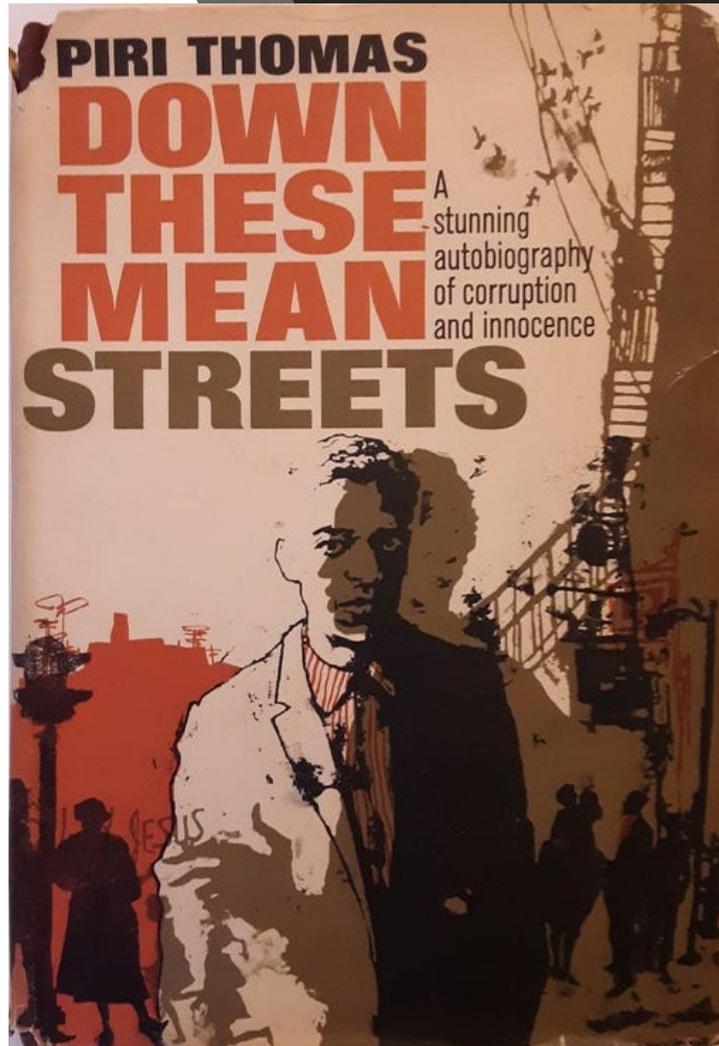
- By María Amparo Ruiz de Burton (1832-1895), under pen-name C Loyal
- First Mexican-American writer published in English
- Her second novel (1885)
- Narrates the consequences of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848)
- “A book all 21st century Americans should read”

“With His Pistol in His Hand”



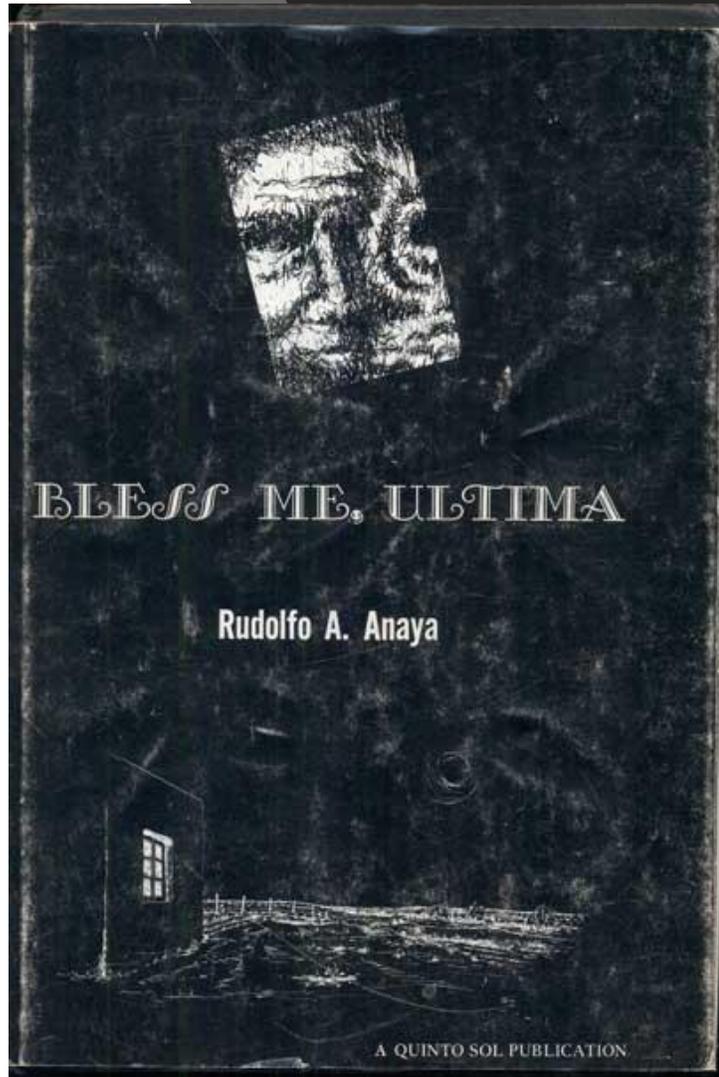
- By Américo Paredes (1915-1999), one of first scholars of Chicano culture
- Based on his PhD dissertation
- A study of a *corrido* or border ballad
- The ballad (and the book) is about Gregorio Cortez, who shoots a sherriff and flees the Texas Rangers.
- “Dissect[s] the roots, the impact, and the significance of border struggle”

Down These Mean Streets



- By Piri Thomas (1928-2011), a key figure in the “Nuyorican” movements of 1960s and 1970s
- A memoir / autobiography, published 1967
- Deals, among other things, with Thomas’s racial ambiguity: perceived as black, he identifies as Latino
- “A classic portrait of ghetto life”

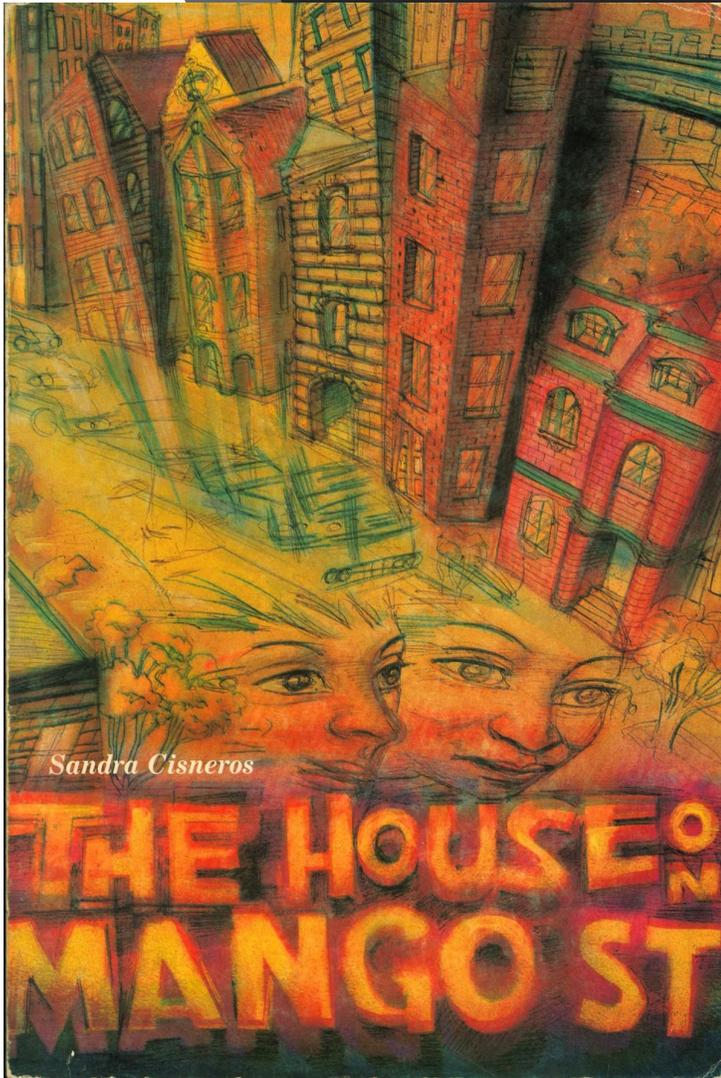
Bless Me, Ultima



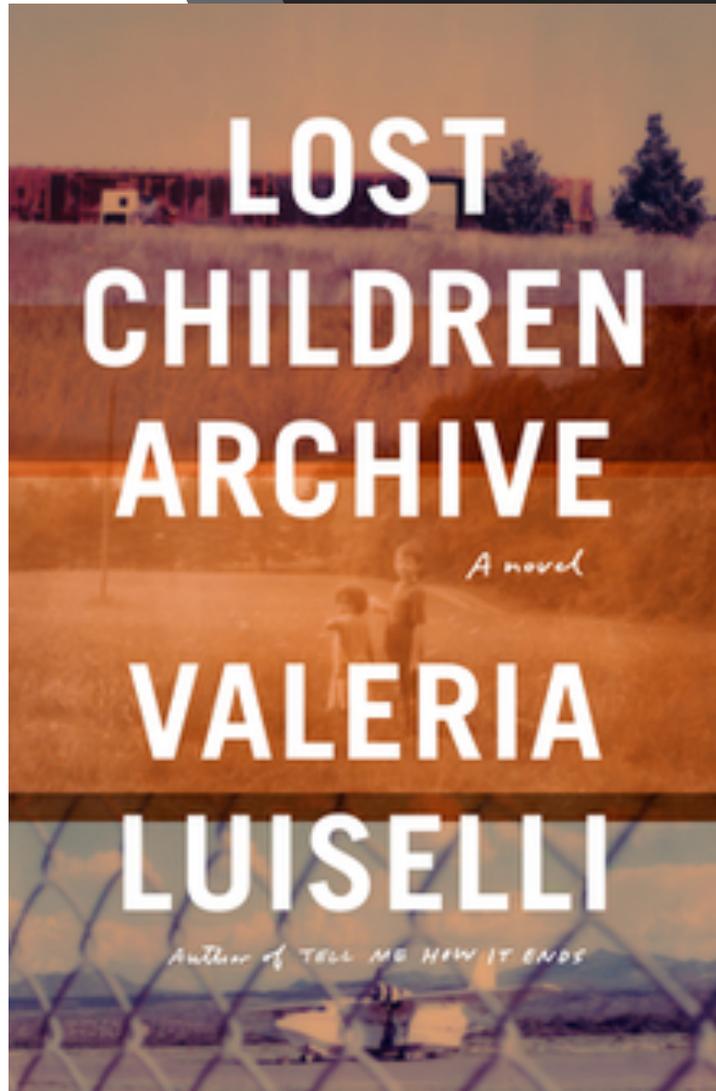
- By Rudolfo Anaya (1937-)
- An autobiographical coming-of-age novel set in rural New Mexico in the 1940s; published 1972
- The best-selling Chicano novel of all time, but also controversial and subject to censorship
- An “eloquent presentation of Chicano consciousness in all its intriguing complexity”

The House on Mango Street

- By Sandra Cisneros (1954-),
- A(nother) autobiographical coming-of-age novel, but from a girl's perspective and set in Chicago; published 1983
- Structured as a loosely-connected series of vignettes
- “A classic story of childhood and self-discovery”



Lost Children Archive



- By Valeria Luiselli (1983-)
- Based on Luiselli's experience as a translator for migrant children in the US court system; published 2019
- Also a road novel, and the tale of a dysfunctional family
- "A fascinating demonstration of the interplay between fiction and nonfiction"

CONCEPTS AND QUESTIONS

Concepts

- Identity
- Language
- Canon
- Autobiography
- Representation
- Minor Literature

Questions

- What overlaps or patterns do we see in the books we are reading?
- Is there sufficient commonality to talk of “Latino literature” or should we refer to “Latino literatures” in the plural?
- Does “Latino” constitute an identity, and to what extent does literature help to produce that sense of identity?
- If the role of literature is to help construct an idea of group identity, does autobiography play a special role?
- Does autobiography negate or enhance a work’s literariness?
- Does it matter who writes Latino literature, or what they write about? What is the role of style as well as genre?
- Should Latino literature be part of the US canon? Is this category a “cultural ghetto” and/or special pleading?

ADMINISTRATIVA

- Course website: <http://blogs.ubc.ca/latino/>
- Attendance is vital. Miss more than three classes, and your grade will be affected.
- Participation is key. No phones. Laptops only on Wikipedia days.
- Assessment: One mid-term examination (25%) and one 4-6 page paper near the end of the semester (25%). Your Wikipedia article will count for 30%, and blog entries and comments, plus attendance and participation, will constitute the final 20% of your grade.

NEXT STEPS

For Thursday

- Make an account on Wikipedia. I recommend you use a pseudonym.
 - Write “I am a student with a project on US Latino / Chicano literature” on your userpage.
 - Send me your account name.
- Open a blog. I recommend blogs.ubc.ca, wordpress.com, or blogger.ca.
 - Write an introductory post, telling us a little about yourself.
 - Disable comment moderation.
 - Send me the URL of the blog.
- Buy the books at the bookstore, but *not* Tato Laviera. Order *Lost Children Archive* online or from your local bookseller.

For Tuesday

- Read the first half of *The Squatter and the Don* (to chapter XX).
- Write a 400-word blog post with your thoughts, reactions, questions, comments.
- Before the following Thursday, you will write brief comments on two of your classmates' blog posts.