The figure of the dictator is one of the recurrent tropes in 20th century Latin American literature. The dictator in his fiefdom—the “Banana Republic”—is also one of the classic stereotypes about “dysfunctional” and “unstable” Latin American states. In this seminar we will study some of the canonical Spanish American novels about dictators along with documentary films, primary sources, and selected historiography. We discuss how it is that oppression and seduction so frequently combine to sustain tyrannical regimes. What kinds of fantasies and hopes do tyrants draw on? How do these fantasies compare to what we know from historical sources? Are dictators “primitive” or are they modernizers? What is the role of gender and race in these fantasies about “patriarchs,” “benefactors,” and “liberators”? How do writers, journalists, and artists understand their role in relation to tyrannical regimes? How do they narrate stories of resistance and tyrannicide, and why are these stories so rarely happy ones?

Writing Assignments.
In addition to a final paper assignment, this seminar has numerous shorter assignments. I will ask students to do some kind of academic writing each week. The major assignments (listed on the syllabus) focus on different writing skills. Please compose your texts carefully. My feedback will only be as good as the effort you put into the writing.

Current affairs.
Depending on political developments in the region, there will be working groups of 3-4 students who will follow current events in a country or region of their choice and report to the seminar every week. Brazil, Venezuela, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua are options, as are the 2020 elections in the Dominican Republic, where Rafael Trujillo’s grandson, Ramfis Trujillo, is running for president (“I promised to Build a Border Wall Before Trump Did”). Depending on the number of students with Spanish/Portuguese language skills, every group should have at least one student who can report on local newspapers, twitter feeds, television coverage, and the like. Only final reports of the groups are included on the syllabus. The groups should
have a designated speaker each week, and every student needs to present at least once in the course of the semester.

Logistics
I take attendance at the start of each class. You may miss ONE class during the course of the semester without excuse without penalty. If you miss more than one class without excuse it will affect your participation grade by one step per missed class. Since we meet only once a week, absences are particularly grave. The only acceptable excuses for absences are religious holidays, medical emergencies (please bring a doctor’s note) and death in the family (bring documentation).

It is the students’ responsibility to check the NYU Classes site regularly for updates and read emails from me.

Please turn off your cell phones before class. Texting, checking emails, and searches on Google are not permitted during class time. The use of laptops and other devices are strongly discouraged. In my experience longhand notes are far more useful than notes taken on the computer. Even more importantly, having a screen between you and your fellow students is not conducive for discussion. Please bring a notebook and paper copies of the texts to class whenever possible. It is a serious handicap to maneuver digital readers in class, even if you use versions that allow annotation. If you have any concerns regarding this policy, please come to talk to me.

Breakdown of final grade:
Attendance (required) and active, enthusiastic participation (20%)
Four short writing assignments (10% each)
Participation in current affairs working group (10%)
Final essay (breakdown at the end of the syllabus) (30%)

Books available for purchase at the NYU Bookstore:
Gabriel García Márquez, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975)
Rómulo Gallegos, *Doña Bárbara* (1929)

It is important that you bring your own paper copy of the books to class. These are trade books, not academic textbooks, so they are quite inexpensive. Reading the texts on a screen interferes with your ability to follow the lecture, track down quotes, and participate in discussion. The NYU Bookstore sells used books at a fraction of the price of a new book. It also offers the option to rent the book. Bobst Library has many copies of all the texts as well. If possible, please purchase your own copy. Reading with a pencil—i.e. underlining and scribbling notes on the margin—really helps.

Guidelines
Please see attached outline of expected classroom decorum, attendance, and a
statement on academic integrity. Please see me if you have questions or concerns about any of these general guidelines.

Link: http://cas.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyuas/casCore/documents/AcademicGuidelines.pdf

Important guidelines on academic integrity:
http://cas.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu-as/casCore/documents/AcademicIntegrity.pdf

Accommodation
If you feel you need an accommodation to assist you in learning or fulfilling assignments for this class, please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) and then notify me. Website for CSD:
http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-withdisabilities.html

A Note about Readings
Some of the assignments are novels, some are works of scholarly analysis, and some are journalistic pieces. The novels are all great reads, but they are long. Know yourself. If you are a slow reader of novels, start early. Give yourself time. When preparing reading assignments, you should be ready to analyze and discuss the texts. The reading assignments should be read in their entirety by the date assigned. Because many of the readings are posted digitally you may choose to download and read your texts from your computer, tablet, etc. or print them out; referring to short scholarly texts on tablets is acceptable. But searching for a specific page in a 300-page novel on-screen during class time does not work.

Please read in advance of the first class meeting:
Gabriel García Márquez, The Autumn of the Patriarch (1975; 255 pages)

Weekly Readings and Assignments

I. Archetypes?

Week One. Introduction/preview

Primary Text: García Márquez, The Autumn of the Patriarch (1975)


First Research assignment (group work):
Juan Vicente Gomez (Venezuela)
The Somoza dynasty (Nicaragua)
Fulgencio Batista (Cuba)
Rafael Trujillo (DR)
Find at least two scholarly sources (not Wikipedia!) and write-up a two-page report; bring the report to class for discussion the following week

Week Two.
**Primary Text:** cont. *The Autumn of the Patriarch*
Discussion of research reports

Choose a region/group for current affairs reporting!

**Writing Assignment:** Revise research report; address questions raised in class discussion; submit to instructor by [date]

**Week Three.**
Regional focus: Cuba/Argentina
**Primary Text:** Virgilio Piñera, “The Dummy” (1946; short story; in *Cold Tales*, 27 p.)

On Fulgencio Batista: tba

**Week Four.**
Regional focus: Venezuela
**Primary Source:** Rómulo Gallegos, *Doña Bárbara* (350 pages) (novel; part I)
**Secondary Source:** Fernando Coronil, “The Nation’s Two Bodies” in *The Magical State*, pp. 67-118

**Week Five.**
Regional focus: Venezuela
**Primary Source:** *Doña Bárbara* (part II)
**Secondary Source:** Coronil, “Magical Illusions or Revolutionary Magic? Chavez in Historical Context” (NACLA 10.1080/10714839.2000.11725611)

**Writing Assignment:**
One-page précis of Coronil’s “Magical Illusions”

**Week Six.**
Regional focus: Venezuela
**Primary Source:** *Doña Bárbara* (part III)

Report of the Venezuela current affairs group

**In-class practice:** close reading of a literary text

**Writing assignment:**
A close reading of a paragraph or section for your choice (3 pages)

II. Resistance and Revolution
Week Seven.
Regional focus: Haiti
**Primary Sources:** Edwidge Danticat, "Create Dangerously" (p. 1-20) (essay)
“The Agronomist” (documentary film, dir. J. Demme, 90 mins.)

**Secondary Source:** Trouillot, “The Transition to Duvalierism” and “State Against Nation” in *State Against Nation*, pp. 139-185

Week Eight.
Regional focus: Dominican Republic
**Primary Source:** Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (chapters tba)
**Secondary Source:** Richard Turits, “Introduction”

Week Nine.
Regional focus: Dominican Republic
**Primary Source:** *In the Time of the Butterflies* (chapters tba)
**Secondary Source:** Robin Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction*, chapt. 4 (pp. 135-172)

**Writing Assignment:** one-page précit of Derby’s argument

Week Ten.
Regional focus: Dominican Republic
**Primary Source:** *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (part I, pp. 1-201)

Week Eleven.
Regional focus: Dominican Republic
**Primary Source:** *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (part II and III, pp. 205-335)

Final Report of the Dominican Republic current affairs group

Week Twelve.
Regional focus: Nicaragua
**Primary Source:** Margret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* (1995; interview with Dora María Téllez; pp. )
**Secondary Source:** Courtney Desiree Morris, “Unexpected Uprising: The Crisis of Democracy in Nicaragua. How did recent protests over social security cuts in Nicaragua turn into a nationwide grassroots mobilization against President Daniel Ortega?” NACLA May 14, 2018

Final report of the Nicaragua current affairs group
Week Thirteen.
Presentation of final papers.

Hand in final paper one week after final class meeting

Writing schedule:

1. Assignment
[Date] draft for in-class presentation of 2-page research report on 20th century dictators
[Date] revised research report, submit to instructor

2. Assignment:
[Date] one-page précis of Coronil’s “Magical Illusions”

3. Assignment
[Date] a close reading of a paragraph or section for your choice (3 pages)

4. Assignment
[Date] one-page précis of Derby’s argument

5. Assignment
10 page final essay (30%)