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Radost Rangelova, Assistant Professor of Spanish

Abstract

In our newest Next Page column, featured reader Radost Rangelova, Assistant Professor of Spanish, shares with us what she reads for fun and the course it inspired (she had to warn the students NOT to read ahead!); one of the influential works that solidified her passion for the study of gender and the cultural construction of space; and her recommendation of a contemporary Colombian author to read next – perhaps something to add to your holiday wish list?

Keywords

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November 25, 2014

In our newest Next Page column, featured reader Radost Rangelova, Assistant Professor of Spanish, shares with us what she reads for fun and the course it inspired (she had to warn the students NOT to read ahead!); one of the influential works that solidified her passion for the study of gender and the cultural construction of space; and her recommendation of a contemporary Colombian author to read next – perhaps something to add to your holiday wish list?

What are you reading now (or have read recently) that you would recommend and why?

As a Caribbean literary and cultural scholar I read a lot of contemporary Hispanic Caribbean literature and criticism. I just finished *El ruido de las cosas al caer*, translated to English as [The Sound of Things Falling](#), by Colombian author Juan Gabriel Vázquez. This is a novel about Bogotá in the aftermath of Pablo Escobar's grip over Colombia, a novel in which violence is personal, political, and lyrical, a novel that camouflages as a mystery in order to explore how fear and terror construct common pasts and collective memories. I recommend it for its sense of location and for its crude yet touching realism, which constitutes a genre of Latin American literature that contrasts sharply with the magic realism of Gabriel García Márquez and other writers of the Latin American Boom.

What book/article/blog have you recently recommended to a student to read? Why?

I recently recommended [Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader](#), edited by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez, to a student working on Latin American literary representations of trans identities for her capstone. This book offers a great overview of the theoretical and of the analytical approaches to sexuality studies in the field of Latino Studies, and includes work by some of the most important scholars in this area.

Students in Spanish who want to practice the language sometimes ask me for summer reading recommendations. I often suggest Gabriel García Márquez's [Chronicle of a Death Foretold](#), Juan Rulfo's [Pedro Páramo](#), or Rosario Ferré's short stories -- all classic texts that are also very accessible.

How do you keep track of what you have already read, are reading currently, or want to read in the future? Do you prefer print or ebooks?



Looking for a contemporary Colombian author to read next? Radost Rangelova has the answer!

For my research I keep lists organized by general topic (Caribbean literary criticism, gender studies, cultural geography, film theory, Latin American film criticism, etc.). For books that I want to read for fun I have a list on my phone, at which I take a look when I am in a bookstore or when I am looking for an ebook. I read texts both in print and in electronic format. I enjoy the feeling of holding a book in my hands, and I also appreciate the convenience of uploading several books on one electronic device for longer trips. I have not listened to an audio book yet, but I will try that soon.

What book or article has inspired you to take action? (i.e., books/articles that might have inspired change in career path, travel to a new place, activism, etc.)

I remember reading *The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson several weeks before my first trip to Chicago. That novel tells the intertwining stories of a serial killer and of the architectural remaking of Chicago ahead of the 1893 World's Fair. It inspired me to explore the city in a different way, to go to places that I may not have visited, to imagine the space as it might have been at the end of the 19th century, and to think about the constant transformations that cities undergo. In retrospect, this book is also one of many that reaffirmed my academic interest in the relationship between gender and the cultural construction of space.

What do you read for fun?

For fun I read a lot of detective novels: Latin American political mysteries, Nordic noir, crime novels written by Caribbean women authors. I enjoy them so much that a few years ago I taught a course on Latin American detective literature. It was the first class in which I had to tell students that they could absolutely not read ahead (and some of them still did!)

What is your favorite book to give as a gift?

That depends on the person, but recently I gave *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to two different people and both of them loved it. It is a complex, yet accessible novel, cosmopolitan and engaging, deeply concerned with the construction of race, with cultural "otherness" and belonging -- realities that we all face, whether through our own experiences or through those of people that surround us.

Who is your favorite writer of all time?

I don't have a single favorite author, but among those that I enjoy the most are Italo Calvino, Oscar Wilde, Toni Morrison, John Steinbeck, Marta Aponte Alsina, Wilfredo Mattos Cintrón and now Juan Gabriel Vázquez. The list is constantly growing and changing.

Do you have a favorite book or literary character from your childhood?

A book that I remember fondly from my childhood is a collection of folk tales from different countries around the world. I remember reading stories from Peru, India, Hungary and China, among many others. What I loved was that there were so many fascinating characters and faraway places to imagine!

What are you planning to read next?

The Sound of Things Falling inspired me to read more Colombian literature, so I have a short list that includes authors like Laura Restrepo, Efraim Medina Reyes and more by Juan Gabriel Vázquez.

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