

Possible Future Selections of the Spanish Club's Book Club

Havana Nocturne by T.J. English

[Discussion scheduled for October 2020]

To underworld kingpins Meyer Lansky and Charles “Lucky” Luciano, Cuba was the greatest hope for the future of American organized crime in the post-Prohibition years. In the 1950s, the Mob with the corrupt, repressive government of brutal Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in its pocket owned Havana’s biggest luxury hotels and casinos, launching an unprecedented tourism boom complete with the most lavish entertainment, top-drawer celebrities, gorgeous women, and gambling galore. But Mob dreams collided with those of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and others who would lead an uprising of the country’s disenfranchised against Batista’s hated government and its foreign partner; an epic cultural battle that bestselling author T. J. English captures here in all its sexy, decadent, ugly glory.

Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830 by John Elliott

An enthralling account of the entwined histories of Britain, Spain, and their empires in the Americas. This epic history compares the empires built by Spain and Britain in the Americas, from Columbus’ arrival in the New World to the end of Spanish colonial rule in the early nineteenth century.

The Devil’s Highway by Luis Alberto Urrea

As timely today as when it was first published 16 years ago, *The Devil’s Highway* recounts the true story of 26 Mexican men whose dangerous journey to the United States passed through an especially inhospitable stretch of the Arizona desert. Only 12 of them survived. With compassion for the men, the smugglers who led them into danger, and the Border Patrol agents who found the survivors, Urrea tells the story with a “lyrical, passionately political voice,” wrote reviewer Cameron Scott.

Bang by Daniel Peña

Environmental justice, cartel violence, and the abuses endured by farmworkers are among the big questions that Peña addresses in his page-turning debut novel. Reviewer Juan Palomo compared the book—which tells the story of one South Texas family trying to stay together—to a boxer: “Lean and compact, it is packed with energy, ready to land blow after punch after jab on any reader who dares to underestimate it.”

The Boy Kings of Texas by Domingo Martinez

The Boy Kings of Texas, a finalist for the National Book Award, is a gritty memoir that details the author’s childhood in Brownsville. Reflecting on the culture of machismo and the joys and miseries of life in South Texas, Martinez never loses his sense of humor. Reviewer Roberto Ontiveros called it “a spirited confession in the tradition of smart, self-deprecating comedies.”

Barrio America: How Latino Immigrants Saved the American City by A.K. Sandoval-Strausz

Sandoval-Strausz draws on years of research to show how immigrants have revitalized American cities in Barrio America. The historian hones in on two neighborhoods that were transformed by Latinx immigration: Oak Cliff in Dallas and South Lawndale in Chicago. In both communities, migrants opened businesses, built new housing, and created jobs—yet they struggled to gain political power. “As the country grapples with a resurgence of anti-immigrant hatred, this fascinating history couldn’t be more timely,” wrote reviewer Anis Shivani.

All the Agents and Saints by Stephanie Elizondo Griest

A Corpus Christi native and globetrotting travel writer, Griest draws intriguing parallels and contrasts between the United States’ southern and northern borders. This work of creative nonfiction proves she can strike up a conversation with, and convey the humanity of, people of all backgrounds: “activists, artists, saints, bail bondswomen who moonlight as French restaurateurs, refinery workers and young men who sell weed from the back room of a taco shop.”

Yo-Yo Boing by Giannini Braschi

The first novel written in Spanglish, this novel shifts between two both tongues, making it an accessible read for students studying Spanish language and literature. Energetic, full of pop culture references and relatable, readers will find this book a fun and engaging read. Acclaimed Puerto Rican author Giannini Braschi has crafted this creative and insightful examination of the Hispanic-American experience, taking on the voices of a variety of characters – painters, poets, sculptors, singers, writers, filmmakers, actors, directors, set designers, editors, and philosophers – to draw on their various cultural, economic, and geopolitical backgrounds to engage in lively cultural dialogue. Their topics include love, sex, food, music, books, inspiration, despair, infidelity, jobs, debt, war, and world news. Braschi’s discourse winds throughout the city’s public, corporate, and domestic settings, offering an inside look at the cultural conflicts that can occur when Anglo Americans and Latin Americans live, work, and play together.

Rayuela by Julio Cortez (Spanish version) – **Hopscotch** (English translation) by Horacio Oliveira

The author is an Argentinian writer who lives in Paris with his mistress, La Maga, surrounded by a loose-knit circle of bohemian friends who call themselves “the Club.” A child’s death and la Maga’s disappearance put an end to his life of empty pleasures and intellectual acrobatics, and prompt Oliveira to return to Buenos Aires, where he works by turns as a salesman, a keeper of a circus cat which can truly count, and an attendant in an insane asylum. Hopscotch is the dazzling freewheeling account of Oliveira’s astonishing adventures.

A Manuscript of Ashes by Antonio Munoz Molina

[Discussion scheduled for March 2021]

Part history, part mystery and part love story, A Manuscript of Ashes follows a young man who goes into hiding in his uncle’s country home to escape Franco’s police. There, he discovers a steamy love triangle, a murder and, potentially, a literary masterpiece.

The Old Gringo by Carlos Fuentes

The author Ambrose Beirce joined Pancho Villa’s forces in 1914, never to be seen again. In this book, Fuentes imagines the story of what happened, dealing beautifully with subject matter like colonialism, love, death, war and culture clashes.

Fruit of the Drunken Tree by Ingrid Rojas Contreras

[Discussion scheduled for November 2020]

A mesmerizing debut set in Colombia at the height of Pablo Escobar’s violent reign about a sheltered young girl and a teenage maid who strike an unlikely friendship that threatens to undo them both.

On the Plain of Snakes by Paul Theroux

Legendary travel writer Paul Theroux drives the entire length of the US-Mexico border, then goes deep into the hinterland, on the back roads of Chiapas and Oaxaca, to uncover, the rich, layered world behind today’s brutal headlines.

The Day It Snowed Tortillas by Joe Hayes

Kids of all ages are always asking Joe Hayes, “How can it snow tortillas?” Well, now they’ll know where to find the answer. Readers of all ages will delight in these magical tales. In the title story, for instance, a very clever woman saves her silly husband from a band of robbers. She makes the old man believe it snowed tortillas during the night!

The Conquest of the Incas by John Hemming

Rivers of Gold by Hugh Thomas

Both this and the preceding book are very highly rated histories of the Spanish in the New World.

In Patagonia by Bruce Chatwin

An exhilarating look at a place that still retains the exotic mystery of a far-off, unseen land, Bruce Chatwin’s exquisite account of his journey through Patagonia teems with evocative descriptions, remarkable bit of history, and unforgettable anecdotes.

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza by Gloria Anzaldúa

It's hard to overstate the influence of queer Chicana literary scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. Before her death in 2004, the Rio Grande Valley native pushed the boundaries of feminism and social justice activism, powerfully articulating what it means to be from the border. Her most famous book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, blends prose and poetry, Spanish and English, literary theory and memoir into a true tour de force.

Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions by Valeria Luiselli

Our review of this 2017 extended essay dubbed it “the first must-read book of the Trump era.” Loosely based on the author’s experiences as a volunteer interpreter in a New York City immigration court, *Tell Me How It Ends* stares unflinchingly at the cruelty of the U.S. immigration system.

Homelands: Four Friends, Two Countries, and the Fate of the Great Mexican-American Migration by Alfredo Corchado

A longtime reporter for the Dallas Morning News, Corchado tells a riveting tale that’s part memoir, part history. He shares his own immigration story and those of three close friends along with a sharp analysis of the geopolitics of immigration, from the bracero work program of the 1940s and ’50s to the challenges facing Mexico today.

Signs Preceding the End of the World by Yuri Herrera

Signs Preceding the End of the World is a short and stark 128 pages. The otherworldly novel, the first of Herrera’s six books to be translated into English, tells the story of a woman named Makina, who works as a switchboard operator in Mexico before leaving to search for her missing brother in the United States. The Rumpus called it “haunting like a dream.”

Everyone Knows You Go Home by Natalia Sylvester

Sylvester’s absorbing novel starts with a couple named Martin and Isabel, who are visited on their wedding day by the spirit of the groom’s dead father. Over the years, this spirit returns to share family secrets as Martin and Isabel build their own lives while caring for an undocumented nephew. It’s a wide-ranging family saga that explores trauma, joy, and redemption.

Where We Come From by Oscar Cásares

Set in Cásares’ native Brownsville, this book uses an unlikely friendship between two Chicano boys—one a privileged kid from the Houston suburbs, the other a migrant trapped in a stash house—to explore themes of class and identity. Observer reviewer Anis Shivani wrote, “Where We Come From shows how ‘family unification,’ the supposed foundation of our immigration policy, has become little more than lip service.”

Unaccompanied by Javier Zamora

Javier Zamora was just 9 years old when he traveled alone from El Salvador to the United States to reunite with his parents, who had already fled violence. He’s now a poet living in New York City. The poems in *Unaccompanied* are based on his harrowing journey here, but they also interrogate the United States’ role in funding and supporting the Salvadoran Civil War.

The Gringo Champion by Aura Xilonen

This novel’s protagonist is Liborio, an undocumented young man from Mexico who gets a job at a bookstore and eventually finds success as a boxer. But the plot is secondary to Xilonen’s inventive use of language and form; one reviewer described her unusual style as “a mixture of vernacular words from different Mexican regions and Chicano Spanglish, peppered with words and expressions from popular genres of literatures from the 16th and 17th century.”

Virgin by Analicia Sotelo

Sotelo, who grew up in San Antonio and Laredo and now lives in Houston, explores what it means to be a young, urban Latinx woman in this funny and incisive book of poems. “In her world, Latinos can name-check French social theorists and allude to Greek mythology, making themselves into Ariadne but still finding themselves lost in a labyrinth,” wrote reviewer Aaron Sanchez.

So Far From God by Ana Castillo

This landmark coming-of-age story, published in 1993, focuses on a Chicano family in the small town of Tome, New Mexico. With a touch of magical realism and a narrative structure that jumps back and forth across time, the book tells the stories of four sisters who grow up to meet wildly different ends.

Tears of the Trufflepig by Francisco Flores

Border policy has become so inhumane, so unbelievable, that depicting it through the genre of science fiction makes a lot of sense. Flores' weird, wonderful dystopian vision imagines a near-future South Texas overrun with cartels and bioengineered animals, including the titular green trufflepig. "Flores' observations about the insatiable greed of the ruling class and the cruelty inherent in a system that prizes wealth above all else" feel more like fact than fantasy, wrote reviewer Michael Schaub.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez

Fifteen-year-old Julia Reyes struggles to live up to her family's—and her own—unreasonable expectations in the wake of her sister's death. She dreams of moving to New York and becoming a writer, but her parents want her to stay home in Chicago. Smart, snarky, and struggling with depression, Julia is a complex character and a rare, nuanced literary portrait of a Chicana woman living with mental health issues.