

Human Rights in Latin America: Spotlight on Argentina
Unit 3 The Repressed and the Repressors

I Century of the Wind

Essential Questions

- How does literature help us understand the human spirit?
- How do writers express their most important sociopolitical views?
- How does a writer’s style impact our understanding of sociopolitical events?
- How can literature inspire social change?

Eduardo Galeano chronicles the history of the Americas from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska in the trilogy *Memory of Fire*, a collection of vignettes that are often riddled with sarcasm and irony. Readings in volume three, *Century of the Wind*, teach us about the turmoil of the 20th century. Some of Galeano’s messages are obvious, but often he teases us to figure out whom he is talking about and what he is saying. Read the assigned selection, then complete the information organizer and evaluate how literature can help us understand the sociopolitical context of Argentina during *El Proceso*.

1975: Buenos Aires- Against the Children of Evita and Marx

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano’s message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1976: Buenos Aires- The Choice

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano’s message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1976: La Plata-Bent over the Ruins, a Woman Looks

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1976: La Perla-The Third World War

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1977: Buenos Aires- Walsh

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1977: Río Cuarto-The Burned Books of Walsh and other Authors are Declared Nonexistent	
Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?
1977: Buenos Aires- the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo	
Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?
1977 Buenos Aires-Portrait of a Croupier	
Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1979 Madrid- Intruders Disturb the Quiet Ingestion of the Body of God

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1979: New York- Banker Rockefeller Congratulates Dictator Videla

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1982: Malvinas Islands- The Malvinas War

Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

1982 South Georgia Islands-Portrait of a Brave Fellow	
Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?
1983: Buenos Aires: The Granny Detectives	
Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?
1983: Buenos Aires: What if the Desert Were Ocean and the Earth Were Sky?	
Key actors	What is happening in the vignette?
	What is Eduardo Galeano's message?
Words that express tone	What information do you need to understand the selection better?

Reflections

How have these readings supported what you have already learned about Argentina (1976-1983)?

What new insights have the vignettes give you into the Dirty War?

Do you think that Galeano's style is effective? Explain. (Consider the vignette format, tone, tense, person, etc.)

1975: Buenos Aires

Against the Children of Evita and Marx

But for Argentines the dangerous wind of change refuses to die down. The military see the threat of social revolution peeking out of every door and prepare to save the nation. They have been saving the nation for nearly half a century; and more recently, in courses in Panama, have found support in the Doctrine of National Security, which confirms for them that the enemy is within. Certain finishing touches are added to the next coup d'état. The program of national purification will be applied *by every means*: This is a war, a war against the children of Evita and Marx, and in war the only sin is inefficiency.

(106, 107, and 134)

Meanwhile, on the River Plata's other bank, the Argentine military make their own coup d'état. One of the heads of the new dictatorship, General Ibérico Saint-Jean, clarifies things: "*First we'll kill all the subversives. Then we'll kill the collaborators. Then the sympathizers. Then the undecided. And finally, we'll kill the indifferent.*"

(13 and 106)

1976: *La Plata*

Bent over the Ruins, a Woman Looks

for something in her home that has not been destroyed. The forces of order have shattered María Isabel de Mariani's home, and she pokes through the remains in vain. What they have not stolen, they have pulverized. Only one record, Verdi's *Requiem*, is intact.

María Isabel would like to find in the litter some memento of her children and of her granddaughter, a photo or toy, book, ashtray, anything. Her children, suspected of running a clandestine press, have been gunned down. Her three-month-old granddaughter has been given away or sold as war booty by the officers.

It is summer, and the smell of gunpowder mixes with the aroma of flowering lindens. That aroma will forever be unbearable. María Isabel has no one to be with. She is the mother of subversives. Seeing her coming, her friends cross the street or avert their eyes. Her telephone is silent. No one tells her anything, even lies. Without help she proceeds to put the shreds of her destroyed home in boxes. Well after nightfall she pulls the boxes onto the sidewalk. Very early in the morning the garbage men collect the boxes, one by one, gently, without knocking them over. The garbage men treat the boxes with great care, as if aware they are full of the bits of a broken life. Silently peering through the remains of a venetian blind, María Isabel thanks them for this caress, the only one she has had since the sorrow began.

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1976: *Buenos Aires*

The Choice

One prisoner, pregnant, is offered the choice between rape or the electric prod. She chooses the prod, but after an hour can no longer endure the pain. They all rape her. As they rape her, they sing the Wedding March.

"Well, this is war," says Monseñor Gracelli.

The men who burn breasts with blowtorches in the barracks wear scapulars and take communion every Sunday.

"Above us all is God," says General Videla.

Monseñor Tortolo, president of the Episcopate, compares General Videla with Jesus Christ, and the military dictatorship with the Easter Resurrection. In the name of the Holy Father, nuncio Pío Laghi visits the extermination camps, exalts the military's love of God, Fatherland, and Family, and justifies state terrorism on the grounds that civilization has the right to defend itself.

(106, 107, and 134)

1976: *La Perla*

The Third World War

From the top of a hill, on a chestnut mount, an Argentine gaucho looks on. José Julián Solanille sees a long military caravan approaching. He recognizes General Menéndez dismounting from a Ford Falcon. Out of trucks, shoved by clubs, tumble men and women, hoods over their heads, hands tied behind their backs. The gaucho sees one of the hooded ones make a break for it. He hears the shots. The fugitive falls, gets up, and falls, several times before falling for the last time. When the fusillade begins, men and women collapse like rag dolls. The gaucho spurs his horse and takes off. Behind him black smoke rises.

This valley, in the first undulations of the Córdoba sierra, is one of the many dumps for corpses. When it rains, smoke drifts up from the pits because of the quicklime they throw on the bodies.

In this holy war, the victims *disappear*. Those not swallowed by the earth are devoured by fish at the bottoms of rivers or the sea. Many have committed no greater crimes than appearing on a list of phone numbers. They march into nothingness, into the fog, into death, after torture in the barracks. *No one is innocent*, says Monseñor Plaza, bishop of La Plata, and General Camps says it is right to liquidate a hundred suspects if only five of them turn out to be guilty. Guilty of terrorism.

Terrorists, explains General Videla, *are not only those who plant bombs, but also those who act with ideas contrary to our Western and Christian civilization*. This is vengeance for the defeat of the West in Vietnam:

"We are winning the Third World War," crows General Menéndez.

(100, 107, and 134)

1977: Buenos Aires

Walsh

He mails a letter and several copies. The original letter, to the military junta that rules Argentina. The copies, to foreign press agencies. On the first anniversary of the coup d'état, he is sending a sort of statement of grievances, a record of the infamies committed by a regime that can only stagger in its dance of death. At the bottom he puts his signature and number (Rodolfo Walsh, I.D. 2845022). He is only steps from the post office when their bullets cut him down; and he is carried off wounded, not to be seen again.

His naked words were scandalous where such fear reigns, dangerous while the great masked ball continues.

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1977: Río Cuarto

The Burned Books of Walsh and Other
Authors Are Declared Nonexistent

IN VIEW OF the measure taken by the ex-Military Intervention of this National University in fulfillment of express superior orders, with respect to withdrawing from the Library Area all reading material of an antisocial nature and whose contents exuded ideologies alien to the Argentine National Being, constituting a source of extreme Marxist and subversive indoctrination, and

WHEREAS: Said literature having been opportunely incinerated, it is fitting to strike it from the patrimony of this House of Advanced Studies, the Rector of the National University of Río Cuarto

RESOLVES: To strike from the patrimony of the National University of Río Cuarto (Library Area) all the bibliography listed below: [Long list follows of books by Rodolfo Walsh, Bertrand Russell, Wilhelm Dilthey, Maurice Dobb, Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, and others].

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1977: Buenos Aires

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,

women born of their children, are the Greek chorus of this tragedy. Brandishing photos of their disappeared ones, they circle round and round the obelisk, before the Pink House of the government, as obstinately as they make pilgrimages to barracks, police stations, and sacristies, dried up from so much weeping, desperate from so much waiting for those who were and are no longer, or perhaps still are . . . who knows?

"I wake up believing he's alive," says one, say all. "I begin to disbelieve as the morning goes on. He dies on me again at noon. He revives in the evening, I begin to believe he'll come soon, and I set a place for him at the table, but he dies again and at night I fall asleep without hope. When I wake up, I feel he's alive . . ."

They call them *madwomen*. Normally no one speaks of them. With the situation normalized, the dollar is cheap and certain people, too. Mad poets go to their deaths, and normal poets kiss the sword while praising silence. With total normality the Minister of Finance hunts lions and giraffes in Africa and the generals hunt workers in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. New language rules make it compulsory to call the military dictatorship *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*.

(106 and 107)

1977: Buenos Aires

Portrait of a Croupier

The Minister of Finance of the Argentine dictatorship is a pious devotee of private enterprise. He thinks about it on Sundays, when he kneels at the Mass, and also on weekdays, when he gives courses at the Military School. Nevertheless, the minister correctly withdraws from the company he directs, generously ceding it to the state for ten times its worth.

The generals turn the country into a barracks. The minister turns it into a casino. Argentina is deluged with dollars and consumer goods. It is the time of the hangman, but also of the conman and the conjurer. The generals order the country to shut up and obey, while the minister orders it to speculate and consume. Anyone who works is a sucker, anyone who protests, a corpse. To cut wages in half and reduce rebellious workers to nothing, the minister slips sweet silver bribes to the middle class, who fly to Miami and return loaded with mountains of gadgets and gimmickry. In the face of the daily massacre, people shrug their shoulders: "*They must have done something. It's for a good reason.*"

Or they whistle and look the other way: "*Don't get involved.*"

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1979: *Madrid*

Intruders Disturb the Quiet Ingestion of the
Body of God

In a big church in Madrid, a special Mass celebrates the anniversary of Argentine independence. Diplomats, business executives, and military men have been invited by General Leandro Anaya, ambassador of the dictatorship which is so busy across the sea protecting the Argentine heritage of fatherland, faith, and other proprieties.

Through the stained-glass windows rich lights illumine the faces

and fashions of the ladies and gentlemen. On Sundays like this, God is worthy of confidence. Very occasionally a timid cough decorates the silence, as the priest performs the rite: imperturbable silence of eternity, eternity of the Lord's elect.

The moment of communion comes. Ringed by bodyguards, the Argentine ambassador approaches the altar. He kneels, closes his eyes, opens his mouth. Instantly the flutter of white handkerchiefs unfurling, covering the heads of the women who walk up the aisles, all the aisles. The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo advance softly, cottony rustle, until they surround the bodyguards who surround the ambassador. Then they stare at him. Simply stare. The ambassador opens his eyes, looks at all these women looking at him without blinking, and swallows his saliva, while the priest's hand remains paralyzed in midair, the Host between his fingers.

The whole church is filled with these women. Suddenly there are no longer saints or merchants in this temple, nothing more than a multitude of uninvited women: black dresses, white handkerchiefs, all silent, all on their feet.

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1979: *New York*

Banker Rockefeller Congratulates
Dictator Videla

*His Excellency Jorge Rafael Videla
President of Argentina
Buenos Aires, Argentina*

Dear Mr. President,

I am very grateful to you for taking time to receive me during my recent visit to Argentina. Not having been there for seven years, it was encouraging to see what progress your government has made during the past three years, both in controlling terrorism and strengthening the economy. I congratulate you on what you have achieved and wish you every success for the future . . .

With warm good wishes,

Sincerely,

David Rockefeller

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1982: *Malvinas Islands*

The Malvinas War,

patriotic war that for a moment united trampled and trampers, ends with the victory of Great Britain's colonial army.

The Argentine generals and colonels who promised to shed their last drops of blood have not so much as cut a finger. Those who declared war haven't even put in a guest appearance. So that the Argentine flag might fly over these ice cubes, a just cause in unjust hands, the high command sent to the slaughterhouse youngsters roped into compulsory service, who died more of cold than of bullets.

Their pulses do not flicker. With firm hands, these rapers of bound women, hangmen of disarmed workers, sign the surrender.

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1982: *South Georgia Islands*

Portrait of a Brave Fellow

The mothers of the Plaza de Mayo called him *the Angel*, because of his pink baby face. He had spent some months working with them, always smiling, always ready to lend a hand, when, one evening, the soldiers pick up several of the movement's most active militants as they leave a meeting. These mothers disappear, like their sons and daughters, and nothing more is heard of them.

The kidnapped mothers have been fingered by *the Angel*; that is, Frigate Lieutenant Alfredo Astiz, member of Task Force 3-3-2 of the Navy's Mechanics School, who has a long and brilliant record in the torture chambers.

This spy and torturer, now a lieutenant on a warship, is the first to surrender to the English in the Malvinas war. He surrenders without firing a shot.

(107, 134, 143, and 388)

1983: *Buenos Aires*
The Granny Detectives

While the military dictatorship disintegrates in Argentina, the Plaza de Mayo grandmothers go looking for their lost grandchildren. These children, imprisoned with their parents or born in concentration camps have been distributed as war booty, and more than one has for parent his own parents' murderers. The grannies investigate on the basis of whatever they can dig up—photos, stray data, a birthmark, someone who saw something—and so, beating out a path with native shrewdness and umbrella blows, they have recovered a few children.

Tamara Arze, who disappeared at one-and-a-half, did not end up in military hands. She is in a suburban barrio, in the home of the good folk who picked her up where she was dumped. At the mother's appeal, the grannies undertook the search for her. They had only a few leads, but after a long, complicated sweep, they have located her. Every morning Tamara sells kerosene from a horse-drawn cart, but she doesn't complain of her fate. At first she doesn't even want to hear about her real mother. Very gradually the grannies explain to her that she is the daughter of Rosa, a Bolivian worker who never abandoned her. That one night her mother was seized at the factory gate, in Buenos Aires . . .

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1983: *Buenos Aires*
What If the Desert Were Ocean and the
Earth Were Sky?

The mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo are frightening. For what would happen if they tired of circling in front of the Pin House and began signing government decrees? And if the beggar on the cathedral steps grabbed the archbishop's tunic and biretta and began preaching sermons from the pulpit? And if honest circus clowns began giving orders in the barracks and courses in the universities? And if they did? And if?

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