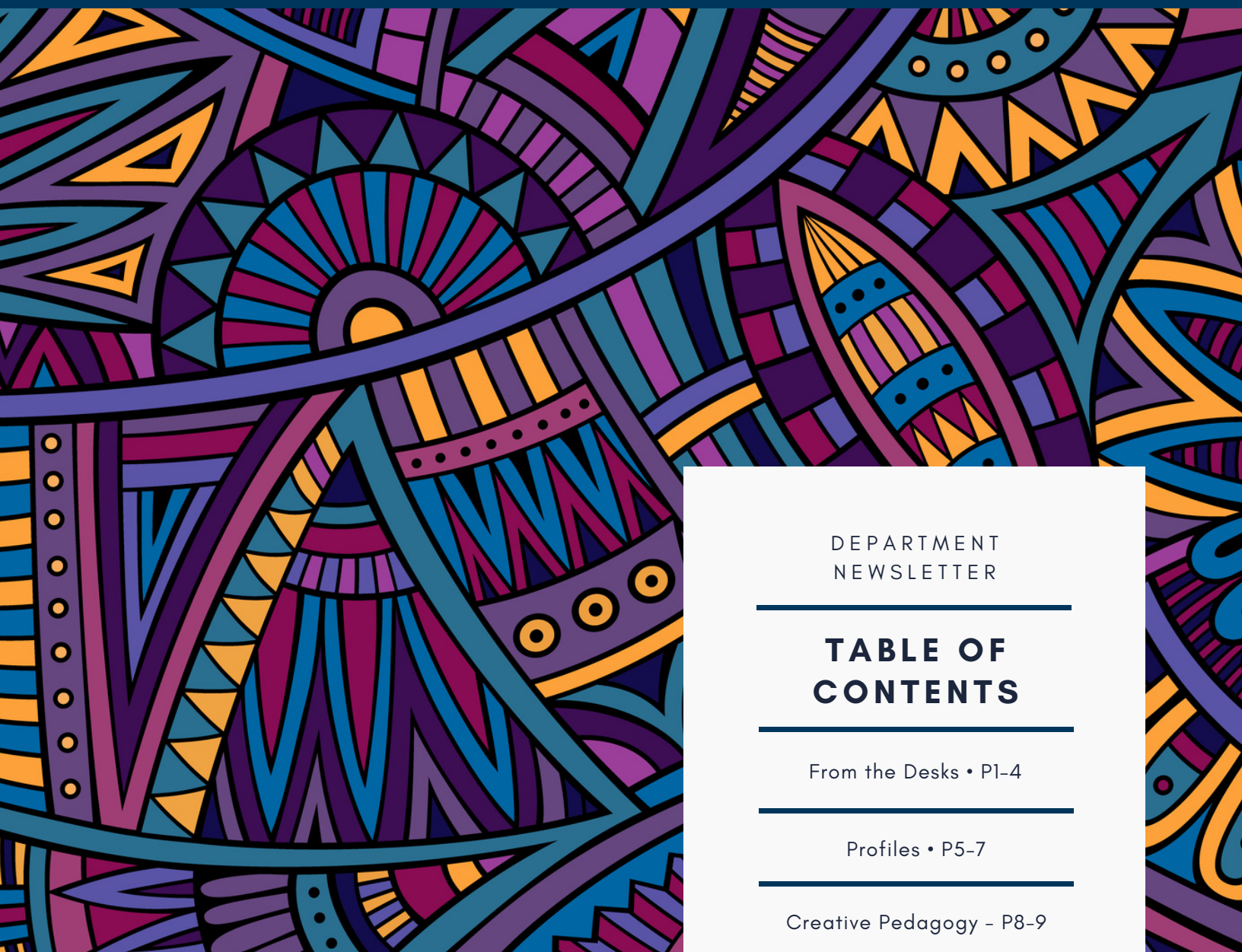


Yale  
Spanish  
& Portuguese

# ACENTOS

FALL 2023 | CREATIVITY



DEPARTMENT  
NEWSLETTER

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# THE CREATIVE FORUM

The Creative Forum was founded in 2022 after a successful vote by the Department of Spanish & Portuguese. Soon after, **Jesús R. Velasco**, current chair, asked **Alex Gil** to join him in shaping the direction of the Forum. Planning for the Creative Forum occupied the team during the 2022—2023 academic year. With the launch of the Forum's web home in the Fall of 2023, and the formation of a faculty board with our new colleagues, **Santiago Acosta** and **Mayte López**, the team began in earnest the work of building a community of practice around the creative arts and scholarship at Yale. The Forum's inaugural semester was by all accounts a resounding success, a splash, a blooming.



## FROM THE CHAIR'S DESK

Jesús R. Velasco

During the past few weeks, in the turmoil of a very eventful semester, I have wondered a lot about scholarship and creativity. We know the meaning of scholarship, but when we get to the *creativity* part, it seems an elusive notion—and even more elusive practice. Artificial Intelligence is out there (in its many forms) to do parts of the scholarly work that some may not like as much, already signaling bibliographic trails, outlining cultural trends, summarizing documents and data, all of which a machine does without the burden of tediousness or the threat of boredom. Now, machines are remarkably bad at being creative, no matter how intelligent they claim they are. The idea and practice of creativity may be hard to grasp, but the lack of creativity is just evident to anybody who can pass a captcha test.



## THE CREATIVE FORUM (CONTINUED)

In this issue of *Acentos* you will read about "Iberian Nights," and "Literary Bytes," pilot series of the Creative Forum. You will find iterations of the same themes: the encounter between scholarship and creativity, between pedagogy and creativity. The Creative Forum is in a sense the public staging of our shared preoccupation with creating new worlds, together. All of us in the Department of Spanish & Portuguese are—as we realize at the end of Borges's "El congreso"—the Creative Forum.

Now more than ever, we are asked to think creatively about our cultures and predicaments through a bevy of disciplines and lenses. The Creative Forum accepts the challenge. Our mission is simple: to bring together the creative arts and scholarship in closer dialogue with one another to help us better understand the worlds we inherit, and inspire us to create new ones. We do this fully conscious of our mediatic and computational moment. We do this together, in belonging to and for one another. We do this out of a need to repair masked as a choice to create. To our ends, we organize encounters, run programs and foster collaborative projects. We hope you join us!

## FROM THE CHAIR'S DESK (CONTINUED)

AI, in its current avatar, is just a modern version of a camera lucida, or a pantograph, or any of the instruments that painters and architects –for instance– have used throughout history. They allow them to understand better certain elements of proportion, or lines, or even perhaps design better those parts of the human body that don't have a usual name and that, because of this, are difficult to draw –the Mexican painter Elena Climent used to say that it is hard to paint something whose name you ignore, but easier to paint a cheekbone or an eyebrow. We could be using digital literacy, why would we not?

// BECAUSE THEY ARE PART OF THE SAME  
INTELLECTUAL AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE. //

Let's dwell a bit longer in the painting conceptual neighborhood: one thing is proportion, but a completely different thing is perspective, even though both can be examined through mathematical and geometrical rules. Yet, perspective is – this is not me, it is Leon Battista Alberti in his *De pictura* – an essential part of the *historia*, the creative need to open a window where there is none in order to tell what is going on within the frame. For perspective – or for the literary and scholarly equivalent of perspectivism – what seems to be required is critical thinking. In the book I am studying right now, Ibn Khaldun's *fatwa*, on the question of whether one can understand the paths of sufism with books alone, or whether one needs a guide, he posits that the question of the guide, the non-codified part and therefore not subject to simply aggregation of data, is not about knowing things and putting them together, but rather about the mystical experience that can only be achieved through personal creativity. And, yes, I did add the "creativity" part.

During the semester, we have invited dozens of people to ask about the combination of scholarship and creativity, not because they are two separate things – but because they are part of the same intellectual and mystical experience.

# FROM THE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

## Creativity in and beyond our classrooms

Teaching an additional language is most effective when aligned with a comprehensive set of pedagogical principles that ensure a harmonious balance between language and content. This statement, however, is only half of the story, because it takes two to tango: students must actively engage with the target language and materials used in class. To enhance students' engagement, the Spanish and Portuguese language programs constantly incorporate relevant and compelling multimodal texts and projects that increase students' interest and curiosity, encouraging them to explore and reflect upon linguistic and cultural practices that are prevalent in the Hispanophone and Lusophone worlds. In addition, our class materials create spaces for different communities in the Americas, Europe and Africa so they can tell their stories and highlight their cultural products and perspectives, thereby showcasing their enormous diversity, richness, and creativity.

While becoming more proficient Spanish and Portuguese speakers, our students also gain awareness of a seldom mentioned yet extraordinary fact: they are neither passive participants in the languages and cultures they are becoming familiar with, nor mere cultural translators. Rather, they are cultivating language skills and critical cultural competences that allow them to actively contribute to the target cultures and to their own cultures in ways previously unimagined. One concrete example of how our students become active contributors and co-creators is through the inclusion of creative projects in our classes. These projects promote agency while emphasizing collaboration not only within the classroom but also with peers, instructors, and the broader cultures beyond. By emphasizing openness to new ideas, these initiatives enable students to harness their enormous potential and creativity.

Our activities and projects in Spanish and Portuguese are integrated at all proficiency levels and are crafted from authentic materials in literature, philosophy, cinema, theater, science, ecology, global affairs, anthropology, art, and more. The impressive work by our students has led to the creation of a digital magazine by the Portuguese program. This semester, first-semester Portuguese students, inspired by Otávio Junior's *Da minha janela*, produced a book that critically explores how cities have historically fostered inclusion and diversity. Collaborative efforts by students of Portuguese (L1, L3, and L5) resulted in a script for an interview with Brazilian filmmaker and multimedia artist Bia Lessa, who





## FROM THE LANGUAGE PROGRAMS (CONTINUED)

visited Yale to engage with our community and present her latest film at Liffy, *The Devil in the Street, in the Middle of the Whirlwind*, based on Guimarães Rosa's masterpiece, *Grande sertão: veredas*. Additionally, students organized in the hallway of the Humanities Quadrangle an exhibition of street poems, featured in the digital magazine along with **bilingual audio guides** where students explain their creative process and motivations. April Morales' work was praised as outstanding, and therefore voted as the winner. Her poem emphasizes the courage inherent in **confronting life's diverse circumstances**. Congratulations, April!



/street poem by April Morales

Creativity, as the examples above demonstrate, is an integral part of what we do in the Spanish and Portuguese language programs. To give students more spaces and opportunities to tell their stories and create texts and cultural products in the target language(s), the Spanish program recently duplicated their offering of SPAN 227, Creative Writing, a class now taught by our new wonderful colleague, Mayte López, author of *De la Catrina y la flaca* (Sudaquia, 2016), and *Sensación térmica* (Libros del Asteroide, 2021).

**Giseli Tordin**

Portuguese Language Program Director

**Jorge Méndez Seijas**

Spanish Language Program Director

## On Language, Literature, and Creative Expression

An interview with Mayte López by Luna Nájera

**MAYTE LÓPEZ**, joined the department this Fall, as Lector of Spanish. She received a Ph.D. in Latin American, Iberian, and Latino Cultures from The City University of New York (CUNY), an M.A. in Literature from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing in Spanish from New York University. Prior to Yale, she taught Spanish at Columbia University and Lehman College. She is the author of the novels *De la Catrina y la flaca* (Sudaquia, 2016), and *Sensación térmica* (Libros del Asteroide, 2021).

**Luna Nájera:** Mayte, thank you for taking the time for this interview. Prior to joining our department this fall, you taught Spanish at Columbia University and Lehman College. Your academic journey is quite noteworthy, earning a Ph.D. in Latin American, Iberian, and Latino Cultures from The City University of New York (CUNY), an M.A. in Literature from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing in Spanish from New York University. That's truly impressive. Could you provide our readers with more insights into your background and experiences?

**Mayte López:** Thank you for the interview, Luna. And certainly, I'd be happy to. I grew up in Mexico, in a city called Cuernavaca. I then lived in Mexico City for many years before migrating to the United States to pursue the M.F.A. in Creative Writing at NYU, driven by my very early (and enduring) dream to become a writer. My first novel actually stemmed from the thesis project I developed during my MFA. Later, during my Ph.D. at CUNY, I discovered my passion for teaching. The first time I faced a classroom of over 25 students I was terrified! But I soon realized that teaching came very naturally to me, evolving into a second calling. Having lived in New York City for the past ten years not only shaped my academic and professional trajectory, but also became an integral part of my identity. The city was, in many ways, an inspiration for my second novel. Now I'm thrilled to have joined the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale, and I look forward to bringing my background, experiences, and passion for both

literature and teaching to contribute meaningfully to our academic community.

**LN:** In this semester's *Acentos* issue, we're focusing on creativity. Your extensive repertoire as a writer spans short stories, crónicas, the novel *De la Catrina y la flaca* (Sudaquia, 2016), and the recent exploration of relationships and violence against women in *Sensación térmica* (Libros del Asteroide, 2021). Your roles as an editor, translator, and more recently your position





## On Language (continued)

on the faculty board of our department's The Creative Forum are equally commendable. With your rich background as both a writer and educator, I'm eager to find out how you view the interplay between literary creativity and the teaching of language and culture. How do you perceive these aspects converging and how does literary creativity inform your approach to teaching?

**ML:** For me, literature is a dynamic exploration of language—an endeavor to unlock its limitless possibilities. Words, in their essence, wield the power to shape or dismantle worlds. This understanding informs my teaching approach, where I work to unveil the powers of language.

In my classes, I celebrate creativity, empowering students to express thoughts and cultural perspectives through a language that is both new and intriguing to them, and therefore holds a lot of mystery and unexplored possibilities. The exploration of societal issues in my writing also aligns with my commitment to fostering critical thinking and cultural awareness in the classroom. From this perspective, I use literature as a lens through which students can analyze and comprehend the complexities and potential of studying language and culture. I am convinced that integrating literature and creativity into language instruction can inspire students to become not only proficient communicators in the target language, but also insightful interpreters of cultural content, nuances, and the broader context in which the language is embedded.

**LN:** Can you tell us about your initiatives and projects within the department related to imagination and creativity?

**ML:** As part of the Faculty Board, working alongside my esteemed colleagues **Alex Gil** and **Santiago Acosta**, and with the fantastic support of our graduate students, we've launched an exciting luncheon series focused on imagination and creativity—*Literary Bites*. This series is meant to be a platform for engaging conversations about both past and ongoing creative projects, showcasing the impressive literary talents here at Yale. Our aim is to

encourage imaginative scholarship and turn our department into a thriving hub for literary creation. We're also actively working on the launch of a new literary journal, *Variantes*. The idea behind the journal is to explore the intersection of literature, research, and culture, while cultivating an inclusive, collaborative, and interdisciplinary community. In both these initiatives, imagination is the key driving force. Through these and other projects, we want to celebrate and nurture the imaginative spirit within our department, fostering a community dedicated to pushing the boundaries of literary creation and scholarly exploration.

**LN:** You'll be teaching Creative Writing in the spring, which means that you'll introduce students to the writing of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. What is your vision for the course?

**ML:** Yes, I'm thrilled about this course, and about the impressive response it's gotten already! My aim is to equip students with the essential techniques for crafting imaginative texts and honing their self-expression. I believe creative writing workshops can be collaborative journeys where writers explore the intricacies of storytelling together. We'll discuss our understanding of the choices, techniques, and strategies available to us as writers. With all this in mind, I want to invite students to dive into exciting and innovative writing assignments, engage in discussions on composition and craft, and analyze contemporary Latinx, Latin American, and Spanish works. I envision creating a new community of writers in the Department of Spanish and immersing ourselves in an environment that thrives on creativity and self-expression. Ultimately, the course is about cultivating a deep appreciation for literature and discovering our unique voices in the process.

// IN MY CLASSES, I CELEBRATE CREATIVITY, EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO EXPRESS THOUGHTS AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES THROUGH A LANGUAGE THAT IS BOTH NEW AND INTRIGUING TO THEM, AND THEREFORE HOLDS A LOT OF MYSTERY AND UNEXPLORED POSSIBILITIES. //

## On Language (conclusion)

**LN:** Tell us about your future creative projects.

**ML:** Currently, I'm working on my third novel—an exploration of memory, family dynamics, and the challenges of growing up in Mexico before migrating and leaving loved ones behind. This project holds personal resonance for me, so I'm excited to see where the creative process takes me as the narrative develops.

**LN:** Thank you Mayte for sharing your perspectives on creativity and language teaching in this interview. Your dedication to fostering imagination within our academic community, as evident in initiatives like Literary Bites and the forthcoming literary journal *Variantes*, is truly remarkable. I eagerly anticipate the positive impact these projects will have. I'm excited about your upcoming Creative Writing course and the buzz that it has already created; I have no doubt it will be an enriching experience for both you and your students. Additionally, I'm piqued about your forthcoming novel exploring themes of memory, family dynamics, and migration—it sounds like a compelling and meaningful project! Thank you for offering your valuable perspectives today, and I look forward to following your continued success and creative endeavors.

# Fall 2023

## Literary Bites

### A Luncheon with a Plot Twist

Feast your mind and spirit on a delectable fusion of literature and intellectual nourishment with "Literary Bites"—a Luncheon Series with a new plot twist each month.

[Learn more](#)





We asked our lectors to list some of their most creative exercises in the classroom. Here is a sampler of our collective imagination...

**María M Vázquez** (SPAN 110). After teaching a lesson on vocabulary about vacations, which covered the use of the verb "estar" with conditions and emotions, as well as the present progressive, I designed a creative activity to help my students better retain and recall the new vocabulary and grammar rules. To begin the activity, I showed an animated short film about a man's inner desire to fulfill the trip of his dreams. After discussing the movie, I asked each student to close their eyes and visualize themselves experiencing their own dream trip. After a few minutes of silence, I asked each student to share their experience with the rest of the class by answering in Spanish the following questions: ¿Dónde estás? ¿Qué estás haciendo? ¿Cómo están? Through the power of imagination, this activity aimed to create a mental image where students could associate newly learned words and grammar with something memorable for them. During the Study Abroad Program in Bilbao this summer, I assigned a one-day in-class project to my students (SPAN 140).. The project required them to choose a piece of artwork (painting, sculpture, etc.) from one of the museums we visited in Madrid and Bilbao. They were then asked to identify the emotions the artists were trying to capture in their art and write poems or short stories inspired by the artworks and the emotions expressed in them. The project culminated with the students reciting and reading their class work. Here is the collection of creative work by the students from the project "Painting Emotions with Words."

**María José Gutiérrez** (Span 110). After completing the reading of the novel *El escape Cubano*, I prepare a Google Slide for a collaborative writing and drawing activity. I organize the students in pairs, and I assign one chapter of the book to each pair. They must write in one sentence what was the more important event that happened in their assigned chapter using the preterit. Then, I redistribute the chapters and I assign a different chapter to each pair of students. I ask them to illustrate the sentence their classmates wrote. At the end of the task, they have compiled a beautiful summarizing of the book by chapters. And I can test two facts: their comprehension of the text, and their comprehension of what their classmates wrote about the text.

**Luna Nájera**. This semester in Reading Environments: Nature, Culture, and Agency (SPAN 230), a new advanced Spanish language course, I designed two assessments that foster creativity and critical engagement with language. The first, called "Human/Non-human Agency: Readers' Theater," is inspired by Richard Kern's integrative language teaching approaches. This project challenged students to think about agency through the medium of performance. The second assessment, named "Precarious Times: Imagining Sustainable Narratives," is also a creative project and it challenges students to apply concepts creatively. In this project students engage in a dialogue with the ideas of

political philosopher Michel Serres, as well as with Mapuche thinkers Marcelino Collio and R  ben Collio. The goal is to reconsider the social contract, or to propose alternative forms of thinking, being, and living that align with a more symbiotic relation to the Earth. Students crafted poems, short stories, conceptual videos, and wrote speculative fiction. The outcomes of these assessments will be further explored and discussed in the upcoming spring semester through presentations in the CLS Sharing Group and the Department of Italian Studies' language teaching series.

**Lourdes Sab  ** (SPAN 125). As in any fast-paced class, Intensive Elementary Spanish covers quite a lot of material in a short period of time. Trying to incorporate level-appropriate authentic materials in introductory courses can be a challenge at times but is always rewarding and students appreciate it. Prior to this particular assignment, students had learned basic language related to food items and practiced comparative and superlative structures. Now, students were asked to upload onto Jamboard two images of two different food items. One of them had to be a Hispanic food item of their choice, and the other one of their own culture but with some sort of similarity with the Hispanic item (color, shape, taste, type of food, etc.). In class, students describe both items to their peers using the comparative structure. [Here](#) are the images.

**Ian Russell** (Span 140). In our L4 unit on Representations of/by Women, we study several different perspectives on the ways that feminist art provides sites of resistance. One work that we study is *El tendadero* by Mexican artist M  nica Mayer, a public work of art which features questions and answers from small, colorful papers by women about the daily aggressions and challenges they face.

The work allows us to comment and analyze visual, linguistic, and environment-specific structures. Next, students put their own language skills to work: selecting social problems to make provocative public works of art. Groups wrote related prompts that we exchanged to write responses. We hung [our works](#) around Bass Library and reflected on how these small challenges might change the space.

**Maripaz Garc  a** (SPAN S148). In the summer of 2019, during the New Haven portion of the Bilbao program, I asked my students to do a critical thinking activity. They had to figure out the logical steps from one past event (Franco's death in 1975) to a current event (the reduction of retirees' pension in 2018-2019). The objective of the assignment was to identify the influence of some historical events in present day events in order to understand how the past shapes the present. I divided the class into groups of four students and let them work for 20 minutes. Since the other rooms in WLH were empty, I asked them to use those blackboards for the final product. This is a [picture](#) of one of the groups and their assignment behind them. All students were present while each group presented their logical sequence from the first event to the last one.





# SOCIAL MEDIA



With thanks to our inaugural community liaison,  
**Katherina Frangi**, for running our new, shiny  
Instagram account!

**@spanishportuguese Yale**

## 1,001 Iberian Nights

Writing our own epic tale, we gathered for the first 13 of 1,001 nights to dialogue with guests from all over the world on the matter of literature as survival, to reconcile scholarship and creativity. Our guests came to us with bodies of writing from many directions, written for many audiences, for many souls: Novels, reviews, the lives of afrodescendent people, dance, race, sexual violences, asylum briefs, and so many other forms of polyhedric writing that explore the limits of literature—and those of survival. Each guest was paired with one or two of our wonderful graduate students, who choreographed the most engrossing conversations for us, about our guests' work, about their thought and, certainly, about the joys and frustrations of the literary worlds they inhabit.

Our burgeoning series is inspired by the spirit of Sheherazade, Dhuoda, Christine de Pizan, Teresa de Cartagena, *the pequeñas mujeres rojas* and so many others for whom the practice of literature—in many of its facets—was the matter of survival. They existed in circumstances of physical and sexual violence, of civil war, of racial discrimination, of isolation; they also lived in circumstances that cannot be properly expressed outside their own experiments with literature. Our series will resume in the Fall of 2024, stay tuned. Just 988 nights to go!



Orit Gugenheim Katz, Yuri Herrea and Alan Mendoza on the 6th night.



# IN THE WORKS

Department website redesign

Department events calendar

*Variantes:* An undergraduate literary magazine

An undergraduate Spanish club

New graduate Pro-seminar

Collective research sprints

and

that blog Jesús is still dreaming of.