

THE INVENTION OF TRUTH
KHC RS 101

Spring 2011
Tuesdays/Thursdays 12:30-2 pm
Room: CAS 538

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Romance Studies

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Course Description

The seminar addresses contemporary strategies for representing truth in literature and film through the examination of key concepts: dreams vs. wakefulness, original authorship vs. plagiarism, tendentious representations of history vs. testimony, documentaries vs. fictional films. Students are encouraged to discuss, participate and learn collectively. Our daily assignments, in the form of answers to questions to be considered in class, will be criticized and interpreted in terms of the subject of the seminar. We shall constantly ask about the persuasiveness of our arguments and how they might be broadened and refined. The seminar format will foster creativity through an examination of an exemplary group of works intended to trigger further research and discussion. A bibliography of suggested materials (literature and film) may be found in the last page. Students should check Blackboard frequently for announcements, added materials and special events. The Borges texts are to be found in the edition of Ficciones required for the course. The stories not studied in class will serve as selections for the special presentations. Required books (as enumerated in the syllabus) are at Barnes and Noble, Kenmore Square. Other materials (video and audio) are at the Geddes Language Lab) and may be used anytime.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory.

Academic Dishonesty

Students are expected to abide by both KHC and BU's Undergraduate Academic Conduct Code. The Academic Conduct Code can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>.

Grading

Attendance and class participation (30%)

Oral presentation (20%)

Personal projects (30%)

Final exam (20%)

Course Schedule

Tuesday, January 18

Introduction

Is there a privileged genre for the representation and embodiment of truth? What are the contemporary cultural realms claiming a privileged relationship to truth? How might truth be defined? The discussion will elicit examples from philosophy, historiography, journalism, literature, film and religion.

Thursday January 20

Borges J.L, "The Circular Ruins"

How can we tell whether we are the masters of the meaning of our perceptions? Can dreams produce a reality? Who tells the story in "The Circular Ruins?" Could one represent the story visually? What does it say about ourselves as readers? Where does interpretation stop and factual understanding begin?

Tuesday January 25-Thursday January 27

Borges J.L, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote"

How does this fiction mock Pierre Menard? What is wrong with his project? Do you agree with the point of view of the reviewer who presents Pierre Menard's work? Is it possible to have a CV with invisible work as told in the fiction? Do you agree with Borges in the use of the term *ficción* (fiction)? What do you think it entails? How would you write one? Are there any connections between Menard's desire to be Cervantes and the project of the protagonist of "The Circular Ruins"?

Tuesday February 1-Thursday February 3

Borges J.L, "The Book of Sand"

Why is truth dangerous? Is there a link between being able to buy an infinite book and the door-to-door selling of Bibles? How does this story convey fears of and various approaches to truth?

Are there "books of sand" in our culture? Present your own "book of sand". .

Tuesday February 8- Tuesday, February 15

Calvino, Italo, "The Argentine Ant"

Why do the characters in this story deny the existence of the ants? Are they lying? Do you see here traces of the community of interpretation to which Borges and Calvino belong? Those interested in the consequences and genealogy of their positions are encouraged to read their common master, Macedonio Fernández and their precursor, Franz Kafka. Please talk to the instructor for specific references.

Thursday February 17-Tuesday, March 3

Martínez, T.E, Santa Evita

How does myth transmit the facts of a life? Do you think that the political situation in which Evita's body disappeared would have been changed had it been left in Argentina? What is the relationship between T.E. Martínez's knowledge and work as a journalist and his novel? Which genre do you trust more? Need one compare the novel with the documentation he presents in his book about Perón? What do you think of the inclusion of parts of the novel as fact in subsequent biographies of Evita?

Compare the documentaries and films about Evita with the novel. Pay special attention to the facts that the different sources choose to present. Which ones do they have in common? How are they interpreted?

Choose a character and try to build a myth that would represent his or her truth.

Tuesday February 22 No class

Tuesday March 8- Thursday March 10, The Official Story

How did the military dictatorship in Argentina steal the identities of the children born to their abducted mothers? What do the students learn in History class? Does the teacher know who her own child is?

What is truth in the film? Why are those constructing "the official story" lying?

March 12-20 Spring Break

Tuesday March 22- Thursday March 23

Mandelbaum, J. Our Disappeared.

The making of a documentary film about the disappeared: their faces, friends and children. How do intimate stories become political statements? What kind of truth is uttered when we speak about the disappeared?

Tuesday March 29 FIRST PROJECT DUE

Thursday March 31

Meet the film-maker and discuss with him this film which was made, in part, in our university.

A conversation with Juan Mandelbaum. Possible visit to his studio to be arranged.

Tuesday April 5- Thursday April 14

Roth, Philip, The Human Stain

What is the truth about race in this novel? How is lying represented in the academic environment? Is there a moral argument in the novel? What do you think about self-invention? What is the truth of the protagonist according to the novel?

What is the relationship between truth and authenticity in this work?

Can you think about other such examples in our culture?

Thursday April 21 No class

Tuesday April 26- Thursday April 28

Archival materials on the subjects studied in class. Journalism, film, critical works.

A visit to the Rare Book Collection of the Mugar Library is planned..

Tuesday May 3- Thursday May 9

Oral presentations

Thursday May 12

SECOND PROJECT DUE

Special events: Please check Blackboard for dates:

Lunch discussion with Juan Mandelbaum ("Our disappeared").

Concert : Osvaldo Golijov

Lecture: Edith Grossman (translator of Don Quixote, works by García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa among others).

Performance

How does truth relate to authenticity in performance? A visit of student actors and director of CFA theatre division is planned.

For further reading:

Bioy Casares, Adolfo. A Plan for Escape.(New York: Graywolf, 1988).

Borges, Jorge Luis. Doctor Brodie's Report. (New York: Penguin,, 1995)

--. The Aleph and Other Stories. (New York: Penguin, 2004)

Calvino, Italo. Invisible cities. (San Francisco: Arion Press, 1999)

--. The literature machine: essays. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987).

--. The uses of literature: essays. San Diego: (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986)

--. Why read the classics? (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999).

Dussel, Enrique. The Invention of the Americas (New York: Continuum, 1995)

Foucault, Michel,The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.
(London:

Routledge, 2002)

Irwin, John T, The Mystery to a Solution (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1993)

Roth, Philip. American Pastoral (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997)

Shell, Marc, Ed. American Babel: Literatures of the United States from Abnaki to Zuni.

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002)

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).

On Jorge Luis Borges:

Alazraki, Jaime. *Borges and the Kaballah: and other Essays on his fiction and poetry*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Barrenechea, Ana María. *Borges, the labyrinth maker*. New York: New York University Press, 1965.

Bloom, Harold. Ed (*Jorge Luis Borges: Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House, 1986)

Molloy, Sylvia *Signs of Borges*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994)

Rodríguez Monegal, Emir, *Jorge Luis Borges, A Literary Biography* (New York: Dutton, 1978).

TLS issue with a review of the new Borges translations and the polemic around the "true" text (2011). See materials distributed in class.

"Vincere". Watch film (available from the Geddes Language Lab).

Williamson, Edwin, *Borges, A Life* (New York: Viking, 2004).

On the disappeared in Argentina:

Feitlowitz, Marguerite. *A lexicon of terror: Argentina and the legacies of torture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)

Graziano, Frank. *Divine violence: spectacle, psychosexuality, and radical Christianity in the Argentine "dirty war"* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992)

"The Official Story/La historia oficial" Watch film (available from the Geddes Language Lab. Lab).