

Borges and Calvino: An Introduction to Contemporary Theories of Reading and Translation

COLI214G, LACS280B, LING239G, ROML200G

Thursdays 4:25 p.m. to 7:25 p.m., S2G35

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Office Hours: Thursdays, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (by appointment only)

General Course Description

This course will provide an introduction to contemporary theories of reading and translation associated with non-essentialist notions of text and the subject. As we discuss some of the main implications of post-Nietzschean thought for reading and translating, and, particularly, as we concentrate on some fundamental texts associated with poststructuralism, we will also bring to the fore our readings of a few texts (both fiction and non-fiction) by Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino. Their ingenious plots will help us refine and problematize our insights regarding the relationships that can be established between originals and translations, texts and their readings, readers and authors, authors and translators.

Students will also have an opportunity to focus on the basic characteristics and conventions of academic texts as they will be required to practice and reflect on this kind of writing, which will be an important component of our course.

Required Texts

All the texts required for this course will be available in the bookstore and on reserved reading (either on Blackboard or in the library).

Main Goals

At the end of the semester, students should be able to recognize and critically discuss the main trends of non-essentialist, poststructuralist theories of reading and translation, and to associate them to the works of Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino.

Students should be able to show in their writing that they are familiar with the bibliography proposed by the course, and that they are able not only to handle the main issues covered in class, but also to associate them to their readings and experiences in other contexts. At the same time, their papers should present a coherent structure that includes an appropriate introduction, in which their goals will be clearly stated, followed by a solid, well-fundamented argumentation that leads to a logical conclusion. Students should also demonstrate the ability to produce texts that are compatible with the general conventions of academic work (correct grammar and spelling, appropriate punctuation and documentation).

Grading and General Expectations

Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to arrive on time and to attend at least 75% of all our scheduled meetings. Any student who misses more than 3 classes will not be eligible for a passing grade.

Mere attendance will not count as class participation. Students are expected to read all the assigned texts before each class and to make informed contributions to our discussions.

Students will be required to write three papers (about 5 pages each) on topics selected by the instructor, and to submit a revised version of at least one of them. Submissions of papers will have to conform to the deadlines established by the instructor.

Final grades will be based on the following: 80% (three papers and one revision); 20% (class participation). The grading of papers will take into account both “form” and “content,” that is, both the quality and the cohesiveness of the material presented, as well as its formal aspects. The final grade will also reflect the student’s progress and ability to revise her/his own work.

There will be no incompletes.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are very serious matters and will not be tolerated to any degree. Students who plagiarize or take credit for any work that is not their own will fail the course, as well as be subject to further disciplinary action. For information on the University’s policies on cheating, visit: <http://bulletin.binghamton.edu/integrity.htm>
<http://sehd.binghamton.edu/students/currentstudents/academic honesty.htm>

Calendar and Reading Assignments

Jan 31 General Introduction

Feb 7: Introduction to Plato’s Theory of Representation

- Plato’s Republic (Book X), available on line (The Internet Classics Archive/The Republic by Plato – classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html.)

Feb 14: Nietzsche’s Anti-Platonism

- Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” (*Philosophy and Truth – Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1890’s*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale, Humanity Books 1999) (Blackboard).

(Topics for the first paper are announced.)

Feb 21: Borges’s Post-Nietzschean Universe

- Texts by Borges:

- “The Other Tiger” (*Selected Poems*, New York, Viking, 1999), (Blackboard).

- “Coleridge’s Flower,” “The Postulation of Reality,” “Superstitious Ethics of the Reader,” and “The Homeric Versions” (*The Total Library – Non-fiction 1922-1986*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, London, Penguin 1999), (on Reserve).

- “Averroes’ Search,” “Funes, His Memory” (*Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley, New York, Penguin 1999), (on Reserve).

Feb 28 and March 6: Introduction to Poststructuralism: Barthes, Foucault, and Intertextuality

- Barthes’s essays: “From Work to Text” and “The Death of the Author” (*Image, Music, Text*, Fontana, London, 1977); and “Theory of the Text” (Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Routledge, Boston, 1981), (on Reserve).

- Graham Allen, “The Text Unbound: Barthes,” (*Intertextuality*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, pp. 61-94), (Blackboard).

- Foucault's essays: "What Is An Author?" (*The Foucault Reader*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984), (Blackboard); and "The Order of Discourse" (Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Routledge, Boston, 1981), (on Reserve).

(First paper is due on February 28.)

(Topics for the second paper are announced on March 6.)

March 13, 20: Borges's "Poststructuralist" Conceptions of Text

- Short stories: "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," "The Library of Babel," "The Circular Ruins," "A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain," "Borges and I," "The Gospel According to Mark," "The Immortal," *Collected Fictions* (on Reserve).

- Non-fiction: "The Translators of the 1001 Nights," "Kafka and His Precursors," *The Total Library* (on Reserve).

(Second paper is due on March 20.)

March 27, April 10, 17: Calvino on Texts, Authors, Readers and Translators: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*

- Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, trans. by William Weaver. Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, 1981 (on Reserve).

(Topics for the third paper are announced on March 27.)

(Third paper is due on April 17.)

April 24: ACLA meeting in Long Beach, CA. No class.

May 1st: Conclusion

May 8th: Portfolios containing the three papers and the revision of one of them is due.