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Born in 1959 in Lima
Studied Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, Philosophy at the École normale supérieure de Paris, and Spanish Literature at Stanford University

PROJECT

Jorge Luis Borges and War

Borges and war is not a topic that has captured the imagination of many literary scholars, but it was a central concern for the Argentine writer himself throughout his literary career. At the Wissenschaftskolleg, I propose to write a book on Jorge Luis Borges and war, addressing his formative years in Geneva from 1914 to 1918, the care with which he followed the rise of the Third Reich and the Second World War when he returned to his native Argentina, and the prominence of the two world wars in his literary works. I will also address Borges' stories and poems set in Latin American wars of the 19th century and in several other wars from Antiquity to the present. I will show how Borges wove his concerns about war into the fabric of his fictions, including his most philosophical ones, and how an ethical dimension in his literary world comes to the fore when his attention to war is recognized.
I am envisaging a monograph of five chapters along the following lines. An initial chapter will explore Borges' earliest writings featuring poems, parables, and translations about the First World War (WWI). The second chapter will show the extent to which Borges read and reviewed a considerable number of books on WWI in Buenos Aires after his return from Switzerland and how our understanding of his fictions is enriched when we realize the extent to which a number of them are informed by his detailed knowledge of WWI. The third chapter will show how Borges followed the rise of National Socialism in Germany; his participation in polemics with fellow Argentine intellectuals sympathetic to Hitler; and how several of his signature tales chronicle the vicissitudes of the Second World War. This chapter will also show that Borges continued writing stories with affecting references to the two world wars until the end of his life. The fourth chapter will explore Borges' writings about the wars of Spanish-American independence in the 19th century and other wars in the period that gave rise to the nations of Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay.
The fifth and final chapter will discuss other stories by Borges about war from Antiquity to the present. It will also address the work of several Latin American and European writers who have written novels on war inspired by Borges' legacy, or whose works can be fruitfully compared to his.

Recommended Reading

Kristal, Efraín. Tentación de la palabra: Arte literario y convicción política en las novelas de Mario Vargas Losa. Lima and Mexico City: Fondo de cultura económica, 2018.
-. "Theoretical/Philosophical Approaches to Translation." In A Companion to Translation Studies, edited by Sandra Berman and Catherine Porter, 28-40. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.
-. Invisible Work: Borges and Translation. Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002.

TUESDAY COLLOQUIUM, 11.02.2020

Borges and War

Scholarship on Jorge Luis Borges has given pride of place to deserving aspects of his writings, but it has not sufficiently noticed the extent to which the two world wars were among the central concerns of his essays from the 1920s until the 1940s and are recurrent motifs in his fictional world.

In a broad sense, I am interested in what happens to culture and art in the aftermath of war. I have been inspired by Aleida Assmann's pioneering work on memory studies and by Heiner Muhlmann's suggestive claim that cycles of stress and relaxation before and after military conflicts are privileged vantage points from which to consider cultural and artistic developments. In the specific case of this project, I am interested in underscoring the significance of both South American and European wars to better understand Jorge Luis Borges' intellectual biography and his contributions to literature. For the purposes of this presentation, I will focus on the two world wars, but wars in South America are just as central to my research. Indeed, there are important connections to be made between Borges' meditations on the two world wars and his approach to war in the history of his native Argentina, particularly in its formative period.

I will begin my presentation on the European war contexts and subtexts of Borges' literary oeuvre with an account of his formative years in Switzerland, where he lived with his family for the duration of the Great War. I will then explore the extent to which Borges paid close attention to the literature of the First World War when he returned to Argentina in the 1920s, to the rise of Fascism and National Socialism in Europe in the 1930s, to the impact of these movements in Argentina, and to the Second World War itself after it broke out. In the second half of my presentation, I will illustrate the significance of the two world wars in Borges' narrative fiction in three of his signature tales: "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," published in 1939, when he was certain a catastrophic European war was in the offing; "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," published in 1940, just after the Second World War had begun; and "Deutsches Requiem," which he wrote as a response to the Nuremberg Trials in their immediate aftermath. Time permitting, I will also discuss "The Garden of Forking Paths" as an example of a story set in the First World War.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOWS' LIBRARY

Kristal, Efraín (Lima,2022)

Querencias : guerra, traducción y filosofia en Jorge Luis Borges

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1809110327

Kristal, Efraín (Vigo,2019)

Los heraldos negros by César Vallejo : between Rubén Darío and Las flores del Mal by Eduardo Marquina

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1689200138

Kristal, Efraín (Miraflores, Lima,2018)

Tentación de la palabra : arte literario y convicción política en las novelas de Mario Vargas Llosa

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1672426804

Temptation of the word

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1672426804

Kristal, Efraín (Chichester [u.a.],2014)

Philosophical/theoretical approaches to translation

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1668636751

Kristal, Efraín (Philadelphia, Pa.,2014)

Jorge Luis Borges's literary response to anti-semitism and the Holocaust

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=166863516X

Kristal, Efraín (Cambridge [u.a.],2013)

The book of sand and Shakespeare's memory

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1689201738

Kristal, Efraín (Oxford,2013)

Yves Bonnefoy and Shakespeare as a French poet

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=168911980X

Kristal, Efraín (2012)

An interview

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1672426022

Kristal, Efraín (2012)

From utopia to reconciliation : The Way to Paradise, The Bad Girl and The Dream of the Celt

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1672422647

Kristal, Efraín (2012)

The total novel and the novella : conversation in The Cathedral and The Cubs

https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1672422329