



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies



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Hopscotch!

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Latin American Literature in Translation

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The Rules of the Game

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Hopscotch!

Latin American Literature in Translation

The Rules of the Game

with Jon Beasley-Murray

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In this course, we will be reading literary texts from Latin America, that were originally written or published in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This course's first and minimal goal is to engage with a series of interesting and challenging texts, devise strategies to read them well, and expand our horizons through this exploration of new texts, new readings.



PLAYING WITH CONTEXT

A second and more ambitious goal is to seek patterns of commonality and difference between our readings.

What, if anything, binds these particular texts together?

What, if anything, binds these particular texts together?

Alternatively, what makes each one different and distinct?

Why restrict ourselves to the past 120 years, or why treat these books in more or less chronological order?

We are not doing history here,
not even literary history.

We are not doing history because there is a difference — and a distance — between literature and life, and the one cannot be reduced to the other.

There are things that a text cannot or will not tell us; there is distortion, elaboration, invention, mystification, fabrication, and much else.

Literature draws attention to the gap between representation and the real, and takes advantage of the “play”—movement or slippage; “free action; freedom, opportunity, or room for action; scope for activity”—that always intervenes between articulated discourse and its conditions of possibility.

Literary history often if not always consists in more or less idealistic parades of literary movements and “ism”s.

It is more interesting to think of literary and other histories as intertwined or loosely braided—again, in “play,” in a series of encounters and missed encounters, resonances and influences, determinations and lines of flight.

We can make these texts skip and jump as we find unexpected connections or unanticipated dissonances across time and space.

I have sought a rough balance in terms of gender, geography, period, and language.

Translation is a hop or skip from the original, which may flatten out differences by casting it all into a common tongue.

**There are constraints and limits
to every game.**

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to every game.

What we have here is more than enough
to play with.

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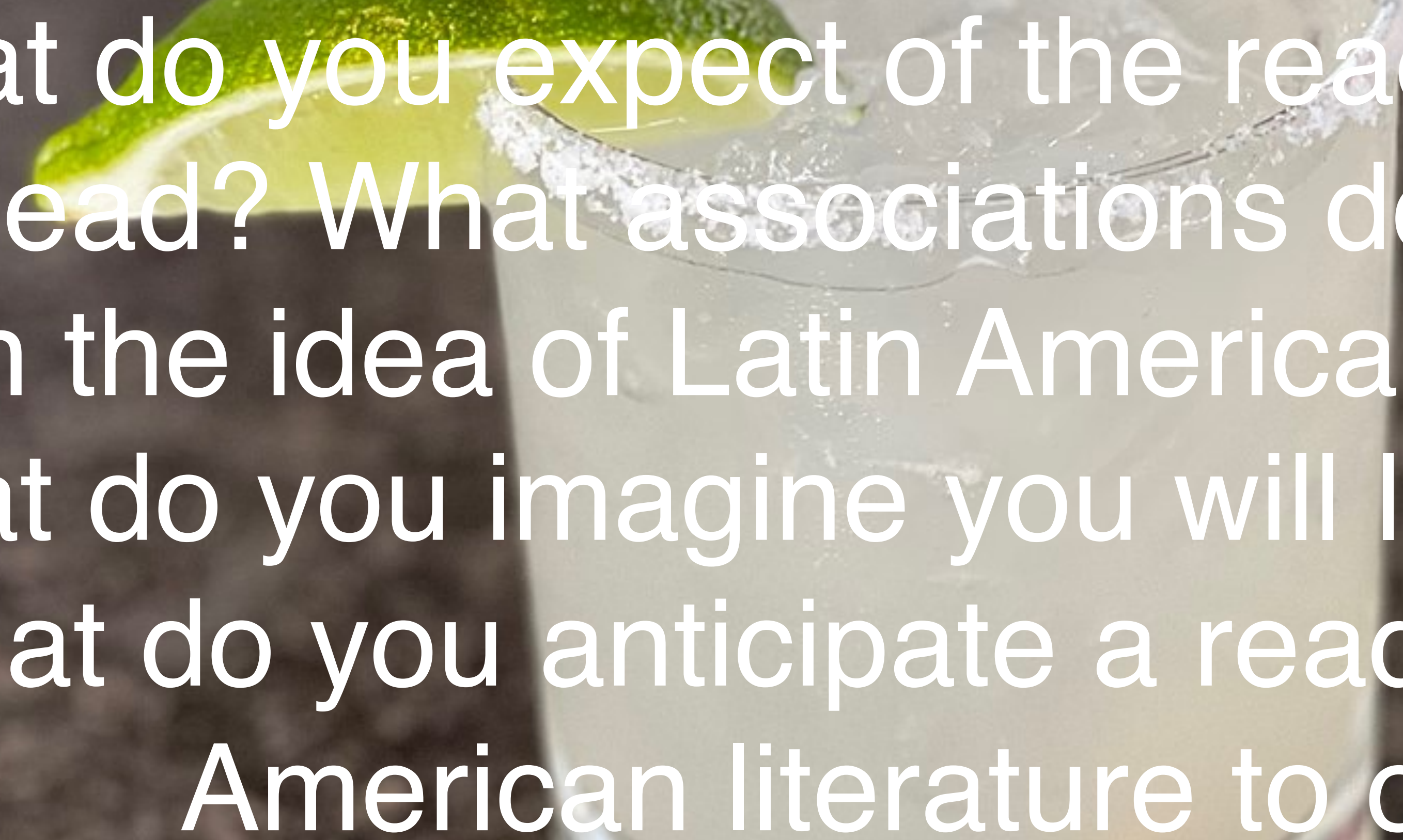


HOPPING FROM THEME TO METHOD

All these texts are tied in some way to those parts of the Americas that were colonized by Spain or Portugal, and where either Spanish or Portuguese is the official language or spoken by much of the population.

Do these texts have anything in common simply thanks to the fact that they share, to a greater or lesser extent, some common cultural or linguistic heritage?

What do you expect of the readings that lie ahead? What associations do you have with the idea of Latin American literature? What do you imagine you will learn from it? What do you anticipate a reading of Latin American literature to offer?

A close-up photograph of a glass filled with a light-colored, possibly citrus-based beverage. A fresh lime wedge is perched on the rim of the glass. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a table or countertop. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the lime and the condensation on the glass.

What do you expect of the readings that lie ahead? What associations do you have with the idea of Latin American literature? What do you imagine you will learn from it? What do you anticipate a reading of Latin American literature to offer?

I am willing to bet that one term that cropped up as you described your expectations for this course was “magic (or magical) realism.”

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This is, after all, Latin America’s contribution to world literature.

An image—by now a fantasy—of magic realism overdetermines too much public preconception, and even experience, of the region's literature.

There is much more than magic realism in
the texts we will be reading.

I propose that we give up in advance on the quest for any single style, theme, or motif that would identify or characterize Latin American literature.

Perhaps even the idea of Latin America
is an obstacle.

I suggest that we assume that there is no such thing as “Latin American literature.”

I suggest that we assume that there is no such thing as “Latin American literature.”

That project is dead.

The “Latin Americanness” of the texts
we are reading is merely an
arbitrary constraint.

Out and back, out and back, the game
requires precision and agility.

Out and back, out and back, the game
requires precision and agility.

A player runs the risk of falling, losing their
balance by trying out new forms of perhaps
ungainly movement, but a good player
makes it look as graceful as dancing.

The reader has the chance to experience the book differently, or to uncover another book among the “many books” that *Hopscotch* contains.

The third and final goal of this course is to think about the many things we can do with literature, as well as what that literature does to us

What is the “play”—the “freedom, opportunity, or room for action; scope for activity”—that literature offers, once we realize that there is no one “right” way of reading?

How to take literature both more seriously,
and more playfully, with less anxiety about
always getting the “right” meaning, the
“correct” interpretation?

Meaning is never finite and fixed, and there may well be other, sometimes more interesting, things to do with texts beyond simply interpreting them.

I will not prescribe how you should be
approaching literary texts.


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approaching literary texts.

Which is not to say that anything goes.

There are no games without rules.

There are no games without rules.

What to do within the limits that those rules impose, unafraid to fall, prepared always to get up and play again?



MUSIC


Fósforo,
“Cochabamba”



PRODUCTION

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HISPANIC STUDIES





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¡Don't leave it to mañana!

