

Princeton University

Honors Faculty Members
Receiving Emeritus Status



May 2011

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colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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Contents



Faculty Members Receiving Emeritus Status

James Alexander Boon	3
Garry Leslie Brown	7
Peter Robert Brown	10
Ronald Crosby Davidson	13
James Edward Gunn	16
Lincoln Steffens Hollister	20
Henry Stanken Horn	24
Simon Bernard Kochen	26
Burton Gordon Malkiel	29
Ricardo Emilio Piglia	32
Kenneth Steiglitz	35
Lynn Townsend White III	37

Ricardo Emilio Piglia



It is very difficult to imagine Latin American literature at Princeton without Ricardo Piglia. He is not only an admired novelist but also an inspiring teacher and the author of brilliant essays on major Argentine writers and on the art of fiction. Piglia has been associated with Princeton for almost 25 years since his appointment as a fellow in the Council of the Humanities in 1987. During the 1990s he taught at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and returned to Princeton on several occasions as a visiting professor. He also taught at Harvard University and at the University of California–Davis. In 2001 he accepted a position in the newly created Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures at Princeton and since then has been the Walter S. Carpenter Professor of Language, Literature, and Civilization of Spain.

During the Princeton years, Piglia has been a dynamic and committed member of the department and of the Program in Latin American Studies. He has taught memorable undergraduate and graduate seminars and has made invaluable contributions to the intellectual productivity of students and colleagues. His dedication as a teacher, his ability to listen respectfully, his original insights into writers' ideas about literature, and his wit and wisdom in dissertation defenses and panel discussions have left a lasting impact on our community.

Piglia's efforts to promote the work of writers and artists he admires have been tireless. In 2002, he founded the Princeton Documentary Film Festival in collaboration with filmmaker Andrés di Tella. He also has been instrumental in bringing to campus notable artists and writers such as pianist Gerardo Gandini, artist Roberto Jacoby, poet Arturo Carrera, and novelist Juan José Saer, among others. He co-organized a symposium on "Literature After Borges" that brought together writers from Mexico, Argentina, and Puerto Rico. Piglia is also an acute observer of the American scene, particularly of the cultural and political richness and challenges represented by Latinos in this country. Many of us will

miss listening to his shrewd comments on the works of James Joyce, William Faulkner, Philip Dick, and Thomas Pynchon or his passion for movies, moviemaking, and his admiration for the inventiveness of American commercial television series.

It is important to note how closely intertwined Piglia's very popular classes are with his own literary oeuvre. He was born in Buenos Aires in 1940 and grew up in Mar del Plata. He studied at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata where he majored in history and graduated in 1965. Early in his career, Piglia was connected to the important literary and political magazine *Los Libros* (1968–1974) and in 1968 began the publication of his first edited collection of detective novels: *La Serie Negra*. Already evident in this early work are his provocative essays that prepared the way for a rereading of authors such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Jorge Luis Borges, and Roberto Arlt, and the ways in which they contributed to shape the national literary tradition. Piglia also established himself as a writer of short stories and was the recipient of distinguished awards. His fiction grapples with the meaning of social and political processes as is evident in the stories collected in the volume *Nombre falso* (1975), translated as *Assumed Name* in 1995. This volume includes his celebrated short novel *Homenaje a Roberto Arlt* where his passion for the detective novel and literary investigation comes through vividly.

During the Argentine military dictatorship (1976–1983), and at a time when leftist intellectuals worked in extreme danger, he remained in Buenos Aires. Like other prominent intellectuals, Piglia was excluded from state institutions and earned a living teaching private seminars in what truly became an underground university. Much of his later work and the concerns that lie at the heart of his teaching grew out of these various forms of resistance to the extreme repression of the time.

In 1978, Piglia was one of the co-founders of the influential cultural journal *Punto de Vista*. His first novel *Respiración artificial* (1980) courageously tested the limits of political censorship at a time of torture and “disappearance.” The novel was justly acclaimed by literary critics and professional historians, bringing Piglia international attention. In an indirect but provocative way it confronts the reader with unspeakable trauma and the violent foundation of the nation. Translated into

English, Portuguese, Italian, and other languages, *Artificial Respiration* is considered a classic of contemporary Latin American literature and continues to provide powerful tools for a critical debate on memory and history. *La ciudad ausente* (1992), another novel later made into an opera, also addresses the utopian act of remembering and the desire to capture the memory of the survivors of catastrophe through literature.

At Princeton, Piglia regularly taught his now legendary courses on Borges. In other seminars he has been consistently interested in adding depth and complexity to the understanding of the narrative poetics of avant-garde writers including Macedonio Fernández, Juan José Saer, and Rodolfo Walsh, all central to his own work. Piglia has also taught classes dealing with literature and politics. One of his first seminars was on “Argentine Culture and *Peronismo*.” In 1997 he taught another seminar on “Paranoid Fiction: the Detective Genre in Latin America,” which became part of his regular offerings. He later developed a new course on Che Guevara that generated great excitement. Guevara is also one of the subjects of his wonderful book of essays *El último lector* (2005). More recently, Piglia introduced a new course on “Argentine Literature and Tango,” highly praised by his students.

During his last year at Princeton, Piglia published a new novel, *Blanco nocturno*. We regret that he stood firm and refused a public celebration of his book. At Princeton he wanted to be “el profesor” —not the novelist. Nonetheless, we are delighted and eager to celebrate him now that he has just been awarded the prestigious *Premio Nacional de la Crítica* for the best novel published in Spain in 2010.