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**Olea Franco, Rafael. *Borges: desesperaciones aparentes y consuelos secretos*. México: El Colegio de México, 1999. 312 pp.**

This collection of fifteen essays, organized to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Jorge Luis Borges, contains critical readings from a variety of perspectives, all of them joined, according to the editor, by “su amor por la obra de Borges” (13). The essays, which span all the genres practiced by the Argentine writer, are organized thematically and divided into five sections.

“Laberintos infinitos,” the opening section, contains two of the most suggestive contributions of the collection. Julio Ortega’s piece, “‘El Aleph’ y el lenguaje epifánico,” focuses on the function of language and the way in which Borges rewrites the mystical tradition in order to place it in the realm of language. Contrasting the two representations of the language of the Aleph as embodied in the ways in which both characters, Carlos Argentino y “Borges,” use language to refer to what they have witnessed, Ortega perceptively notes that Carlos Argentino, a representative of modern discourse, merely duplicates the world through “el lenguaje de la mimesis empobrecedora del cosmos,” while “Borges” displays veneration before the universe revealed to him, employing “el lenguaje doxológico del asombro divino de lo real” (29). Between these two registers, the “instante epifánico” emerges as a metaphysical inquiry. The second essay in the first section, “Borges, o los laberintos de la inmanencia,” by Iván Almeida, examines the way in which Borges uses the variable construct of the labyrinth to configure his literary vision. According to Almeida, Borges’ originality resides in “la perversión laberíntica” that upsets the recursive order (51). At times employing the term “labyrinth” somewhat loosely to refer to *mis en abyme*, the critic concludes that the Borgesian representation of the labyrinth is a space from which it is impossible to leave, since it is characterized by “engaste infinito.” This impossibility of escaping infinite repetitions is what Almeida terms “inmanencia,” which he defines as “la jubilosa imposibilidad de salir de aquende (sueños, ficción, naturaleza)” (35). The section closes with Roberto González Echevarría’s noteworthy study, “Borges en ‘El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan.’” In an engaging and

convincing reading that establishes Richard Madden, the spy pursuing Yu Tsun, as the voice of the narrator-editor that briefly appears in the preamble to the story and in a footnote, González Echevarría reads the account as Madden's exculpation, which seeks to deflect the focus from his own failure to prevent Yu Tsun from sending his message. Accordingly, this reading, which considers the text to be an act of concealment instead of a document that reveals information, has considerable repercussions, since it implicitly questions the role of the writer, thus implicating Borges himself (66). Further expanding his analysis of the characters' identities, González Echevarría maintains that Stephen Albert can be read as a reincarnation of Ts'ui Pên; if Albert's assassination is viewed as a repetition of the death of Ts'ui Pên, this recurrence serves to dramatize the theories found in the latter's novel, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*.

The following section, "La reinención de los géneros," is comprised of two essays that analyze the work of Borges in relation to generic traditions and their implied constraints. "Borges y la subversión del modelo policial," by Cristina Parodi, examines Borges' use of the formal conventions of detective fiction. Through an examination of "La muerte y la brújula" and *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*, she indicates various innovations and inversions that Borges employs with respect to the generic conventions, which allow him to give narrative form to his philosophical concerns. The other essay that forms part of this section, "Magias parciales del ensayo" by Liliana Weinberg de Magis, is a broad, lengthy study that covers several of Borges' most famous essays. Defining some of the fundamental characteristics, mechanisms, and themes of the Borgesian essay, the critic also refers to Borges' impact on the genre. Weinberg de Magis notes that he both gave the essay a new place in the literary hierarchy and he liberated the genre: "lo emancipó, hasta hacerlo cómplice de sus planes creativos y de la posibilidad de *entrever*, a través de una interpretación original, nuevos mundos con su propia legalidad, muy particularmente el nuevo orden literario" (109).

The section "Desde las orillas del humor" is composed of two essays which, while different in style, consider humor to be a constitutive element of Borges' work. Evelyn Fishburn, in "Borges y el humor," investigates Borges' use of the classical mechanisms of humor. Tracing the various facets of humor that constitute essential elements in Borges' work, Fishburn underscores the importance of his ingenious use of incongruence and identifies the diverse manifestations of sardonic humor that provoke "una risa intelectual" (162). "El doblez humorístico," an informed piece by Saúl Yurkievich, discusses humor in more general terms, describing its generative role and revealing the freedom that humor, and the Borgesian use of skeptical irony in particular, affords the writer.

“Entonaciones nacionales” is the theme that links three essays covering somewhat divergent topics. Daniel Balderston, in “Borges, el joven radical,” inquires into Borges’ interest in Hipólito Yrigoyen and suggests that, in addition to other factors, such as the desire on the part of Borges to define himself against Leopoldo Lugones, Borges’ “yrigoyenismo” is best understood in relation to his own “fase de criollista crítico” (187). José Miguel Oviedo’s essay, “Borges/Lugones/Pierre Menard” focuses on Borges’ relation to Lugones. After noting the ambiguities that characterize the problematic relation between the two writers, as portrayed through Borges’ writings, Oviedo suggests that “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” can be interpreted as a mocking tribute to Lugones and his perception of literary creativity.

The section ends with an exceptional piece, “Un mundo de pasiones,” in which Beatriz Sarlo explains how Borges establishes “un tema moral vinculado con las pasiones (el valor) y una solución escrituraria que hace posible que ese tema pueda escribirse según los requisitos de la literatura culta” (208). This theme, related to the classic opposition “de Vida y Literatura,” appears in Borges’ work as a juxtaposition of the past space—mythical, heroic, and passionate—with the present literary space, which, paradoxically, is the locus in which the myth is grounded (210). Sarlo describes this as a typical conflict of modernity, in that the ethos that arouses the need for passion is an imagined construct, an object of nostalgia.

The text closes with “Diálogos e intersticios,” a diverse group of five compositions.

One of the aims of the first selection, titled “¿Cuán europa es Europa?” by William Rowe, is to reveal some of the ways in which Borges’ writing produces what the critic terms “lecturas de la modernidad” (243). More specifically, through an analysis of the appearance of time in “Funes el memorioso,” Rowe seeks to illustrate the way in which *Ficciones* includes “la formación del Estado argentino, en los siglos XIX y XX” (229). Rowe also mentions the function of chaos in the story, underscoring it as an aspect of Borges’ work which has been ignored by critics, since, he asserts, literary criticism tends to work with inherited assumptions which rely upon the stability afforded by institutions (238). “Un diálogo posible: Borges y Arreola,” by Rafael Olea Franco, initiates the study of correspondences between the work of Borges and that of Juan José Arreola. After indicating multiple areas of contact between the two writers, Olea Franco adds that his study is intended to serve as a point of departure for future investigations, which should seek to “restituir cierto sentido unitario a la evolución de la literatura en lengua española, particularmente en el ámbito hispanoamericano” (272). Sylvia Molloy’s article, “Traducir a Borges,” like the two preceding pieces, encourages new critical readings of Borges’ work. Admitting that she has no established recipe or plan of action to

promote new readings that resist what she terms “efecto Borges,” which hinders active readings, Molloy nonetheless offers examples of her personal inquiries—which part from special attention to detail, or to the “residuos” in the text, for example—into Borges’ texts. Edgardo Cozarinsky’s essay, “Un texto que es todo para todos,” begins by referring to the irritation that Borges provoked among his compatriots at the beginning of his literary career, criticized as he was for his lack of “identidad nacional” (288). Cozarinsky revisits the polemics aroused by Borges’ work, and, after adding his own autobiographical reflections of the experience of first encountering Borges’ work—which he describes as more important than the discovery of Kafka, James or Joyce—he concludes by affirming the influence of Borges on various writers, such as Danilo Kis and W. G. Sebald: “Borges representa una tradición que no es obediencia sino elección: de una familia no impuesta por la banal identidad civil, de un lugar donde respirar y seguir escribiendo” (291). The collection concludes with a piece by Carlos Fuentes, “Jorge Luis Borges: la herida de Babel.” The only previously published article in the compilation, this essay touches on a number of topics—from the figure of Borges as an Argentine writer to a brief reflection on the differences between Mexico and Argentina—before examining both the importance of time and space in Borges’ fiction, and his decisive influence on Latin American literature.

An excellent collection of critical readings by some of the most important contemporary Borges critics, this compilation proves that the author’s oeuvre “está hoy más presente que nunca” (12). As suggested by the title, the essays in this collection, taken as a whole, serve the double function of elucidating Borges’ writing while at the same time indicating certain areas of his work that continue to challenge interpretation. A unique body of work that lends itself to infinite readings, it is, in other words, one that still provokes “desesperaciones” which require a search—and we know from Borges’ teachings that the search itself, even if it uncovers nothing, is valid—for “consuelo.”

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