

ROSARIO FERRÉ

her failed marriage. The next morning, when she was about to get into her Packard for the drive back home to her parents, she heard a knock at the gate. She peered out and saw a thin man with high cheekbones, shaking off the cement dust that had piled on the brim of his hat. He asked her politely if she needed a gardener.

Marina laughed shrilly and flung open the gate, pointing to the garden of cinders which swirled silently in the morning air. "It's what I've always dreamed of," the man said. "A dust garden." When Marina tried to explain that it was cement dust and not dream dust, and that it drizzled night and day from the nearby plant, he shook his head vigorously. "You're too young to understand," he said smiling, "but you own the most beautiful garden in the world."

Mystified by the stranger's comment, Marina decided to stay on a few days, and unpacked her suitcases. She toiled at the stranger's side in the garden from sunup to sundown, carving mysterious designs, rhomboids, cubes, and trapezoids, on the perpetually graying surface of the land. The stranger was untiring: he wielded his machete with the sobriety of an Egyptian priest, as he combed endless designs on the shifting dunes. When the garden was finally finished, they waited for a moonless night, and then went out to see it. The garden's footpaths, edged with insect wings and sea urchin shells, whistled mysteriously in the wind. As night lowered its star-pierced womb over the dusty plain, Marina thought she had done the right thing in staying. The garden was so beautiful, she found it difficult to breathe.

## Borges as Argentine Author, and Other Self-Evident (if Often Ignored) Truths

BY GENE H. BELL-VILLADA

In a polemical essay first published in *Salmagundi* in 1980, George Steiner unfavorably compared the intellectual scene in the United States with that of Europe. And twice in that controversial piece Steiner referred incidentally to Borges, mentioning him in the same breath with European figures such as Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Webern, Joyce.<sup>1</sup> The context and the tone were both highly flattering to Borges. Now, Borges was scarcely the focal point of Steiner's reflections, and obviously the eminent critic would know that Borges writes not in Europe, but from the remote latitudes of Argentina, in South America. Nevertheless, there is something symptomatic in George Steiner's casually listing Borges in his European line-up. Behind such an offhand inclusion there lies a received idea, an established judgment that, in routinely seeing Borges as a European sort of artist, suggests either passive ignorance or willful disregard of his origins, life, and work as an Argentine.

There is a neat political logic to the way in which this judgment has emerged and become standard, even com-

<sup>1</sup> In George Steiner, "The Archives of Eden," *Salmagundi* No. 50-51 (Fall 1980-Winter 1981). p. 85, and also "A.P.S.," same issue, p. 251.

monplace. On the one hand, the traditional, Hispanophile, Catholic old right could find nothing positive in Borges's values, his indifference to the culture of Spain, his skepticism, agnosticism, and philo-Semitism. On the other hand, the Latin American Marxist left has only begun to reconcile itself to Borges's taste for mental amusement, his love of metaphysics, his wholehearted defense of Western cultural values, his liberalism, anticommunism, and Anglophilia. Finally, in the middle, the educated Western (or Westernized) liberals who stand on Euro-American universalism, who live for the spiritual riches of the European past, and who profess a civilized and centrist, tolerant but skeptical attitude toward what they see as the extremes of left and right, inevitably find in Borges a kindred spirit who treasures their own values and sees the world much as they themselves do — or at least as they did from 1940 to 1970.

These differing perspectives, however, do have one thing in common — they all deny Borges any local roots, any Argentine preoccupations or content, any relationship with the national past or present. In so doing, they overlook entire blocks of elementary fact, such as Borges's youthful years as a fervent literary nationalist, the reasons for his breaking away from nationalism after 1930, and the substantial amount of Argentine material still present in his later work as storyteller and as cosmopolitan.

In order to address this issue I'd like to do a number of things together. First, I shall discuss a fascinating volume of essays written by Borges in 1926, entitled *El tamarito de mi esperanza* (*The Extent of My Hope*), and then I'll relate the book to the times during which it appeared. Next, I will briefly survey the political landscape of the 1930s and take stock of Borges's writing situation in that decade. Finally, I'll be taking a quick bird's eye glance at the entire body of Borges's major fictions, noting the Argentine and River Plate elements that, not withstanding Borges's "Europhile" and "universalist" stance, are a significant part of his output as narrative artist.

*The Extent of My Hope* is a remarkable gathering, in some ways typical for Borges, but in other respects unique, distinct-



Photograph of Jorge Luis Borges  
by Layle Silbert

tive.<sup>2</sup> It exhibits his now-familiar ecumenicism, his interest in a wide range of European writings as well as in general questions of poetics and aesthetics. Among the book's essays one finds a favorable review of Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*; an appreciation of Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*; a speculative commentary on a well-known line of verse by Apollinaire; theoretical articles on the lexicon of poetry; a critique of rhyme, which in those days Borges actually deemed useless; and a rapid history of the subject of angels in literature.

None of this is surprising — it is the Borges we all know today. But there is more. Borges, we might recall, had recently spent some time in Spain, where he had been keeping company with young avant-garde poets and intellectuals. And so, in *The Extent of My Hope* there are allusions to Medieval and Golden Age Spanish authors such as Góngora, Quevedo, Gracián, Lope de Vega, Juan de Mena, and Jorge Manrique; there is also a long study of Spanish ballads and the metamorphoses they undergo when transplanted to Argentina. These Peninsular opuses and names would appear but seldom in the later Borges, who would come to regard Spain's literature as of lesser interest and moreover, when compared to French or English authors, as an acquired and secondary taste for the typical Argentinian reader.

What is most striking about *The Extent of My Hope*, however, is its cultural nationalism, its programmatic advocacy of homegrown products and cultural values, its pleas directed to the Argentinian reader, and in particular its warm, romantic enthusiasm for the city of Buenos Aires. Borges's stance and intent are spelled out in the opening lines of the book:

I want to speak to the natives: to the men who experience life and death here in this land, not to those who think the sun and moon are in Europe. This is a land of born expatriates, of men who long for things foreign and faraway; *gringos* they truly are, whether

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *El tamaño de mi esperanza* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Proa, 1926). All subsequent translations from this volume are my own unless otherwise indicated.

or not justified by their blood, and my pen doesn't speak to them. I want to converse with the others, with our younger homebodies who don't go belittling the ways of this country. Today my argument is the fatherland and what it has of past, present, and to come.<sup>3</sup>

These first lines, with their glowing and inspired nativism, set the tone for the book and also hint at Borges's specific aim — namely, to help create a culture that will bring glory to the Argentinian capital. As he says later in that piece: "More than a city, Buenos Aires is now a country, and it must be discovered by the poetry and music, the painting and religion and metaphysic which accord with its greatness. That is the extent of my hope, which invites us all to be gods and to labor in its incarnation."<sup>4</sup> And in the next to last essay, Borges rhapsodizes lyrically around this expectation that his hometown someday will be duly celebrated:

How lovely it is to be the inhabitants of a city that has been commended by a great verse! Buenos Aires is a spectacle forever... But Buenos Aires, packed though it is with two million individual destinies, may remain deserted and without any voice so long as some symbol fails to settle within it... The provinces are populated, [but]... the city still awaits its poeticization.<sup>5</sup>

Oftentimes in this volume Borges announces his intention to roam about the city and explore its popular outskirts. As he says at one point, "More than a hundred outlying streets await me, with their moonlight and solitude and a glass of sweet rum."<sup>6</sup> On the very last page of the book, Borges even forges a principle, a requirement out of such direct experience

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 5. I have availed myself in part of the fragment translated by Ronald Christ in *The Narrow Act: Borges' Art of Allusion* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 8. Translated by Christ, p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

of Buenos Aires: "Let no one venture to write *slum* without having strolled leisurely on its raised sidewalks; without having desired it and suffered it as one does a lover; without having felt its adobe walls, its small fields, its moon shining just around the corner grocery store..."<sup>7</sup>

One reason why Borges advocates a poetry for the urban center is that, as he sees it, the Argentine countryside already has in its gaucho poems a literature worthy of admiration and respect. He unabashedly asserts that the humorous gaucho narrative *Fausto*, by Estanislao del Campo, is "a mi entender, la mejor [poesía] que ha dicho nuestra América" ("to my view, the best [poetry] ever to be spoken by our America").<sup>8</sup> The use of the expression "nuestra América" stands out, and of course makes sense in the light of Borges's nationalism in the 1920s, though admittedly the juxtaposition may be a matter of casual happenstance. And yet, most of us will recognize it as a term first given cultural and ideological significance by the great Cuban poet and freedom fighter José Martí, and as a set phrase commonly invoked today by Third World-style nationalists from Latin America.

At the same time Borges in *The Extent of My Hope* advocates not a narrow and parochial kind of nationalism, but rather one that will address broad human experiences and concerns as well. What he envisions is "Criollismo, pues, pero un criollismo que sea conversador del mundo y del yo, de Dios y de la muerte. A ver si alguien me ayuda a buscarlo." ("Nativism, then, but a nativism conversant with the world and with the ego, with God and with death. Let's see if someone can help me find it.")<sup>9</sup> Hence even at its most passionate, Borges's nativist ideal shows as it were transnational horizons, displays universalist and indeed metaphysical aspirations. In this way he looks forward to his well-known talk, "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" (publ. 1956), where he was to single out "all of Western culture" as the most suitable Argentine literary ter-

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 153.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

rain, and would assert with utmost confidence that "our patrimony is the universe."<sup>10</sup>

In keeping with the book's nativist content and cultural ideals, the language and style employed in *The Extent of My Hope* show a correspondingly Buenos Aires character and flavor. On repeated occasions Borges speaks to the reader not with the Castillian *tú* but with that distinctively River Plate pronoun *vos* — for example he says "vos y él y yo, lector amigo."<sup>11</sup> He also reproduces phonetically the everyday pronunciation of certain Spanish common nouns — he writes "la realidá," "la ciudá," "la voluntá", and so forth, without the final d's, somewhat as if T.S. Eliot had in one of his early essays spelled the present participle forms "reading" and "writing" without their final g's.

Whenever a lucky musicologist discovers an unknown manuscript by Mozart or Chopin, some enterprising musician will go out and perform the piece in order to show what it sounds like. Now, I've done no detective work other than look in a library catalog and walk to the appropriate bookshelf. Moreover, my awareness of the specific social, regional, and temporal nuances of the language here deployed by Borges is mostly secondhand and incomplete. Still, I was struck by the degree to which these essays are composed in what seems to be a kind of literary *porteño*, an artfully distilled version of the oral and informal Spanish of Buenos Aires. A couple of passages should simply be heard out loud, savored for their musicality. I ask those who have no Spanish to bear with me for a moment, and as Borges himself says when quoting a gaucho poet, "Aquí va un manojito."<sup>12</sup>

On the first page of the book, Borges says, "Quiero conversar con... los muchachos querencieros y nuestros que no le achican la realidá a este país. Mi argumento de hoy es la patria: lo que hay en ella de presente, de pasado y de venidero. Y conste que lo venidero nunca se anima a ser presente del

<sup>10</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Argentine Writer and Tradition," translated by James E. Irby in *Labyrinths* (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp. 184 and 185.

<sup>11</sup> Borges, *El tamaño*, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

todo sin antes ensayarse y que ese ensayo es la esperanza. ¡Bendita seas, esperanza, memoria del futuro, olorito de lo por venir, palote de Dios!<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, on the occasion of the folding of *Proa* magazine, Borges nostalgically recalls, in an open letter, the friendship of his fellow editors:

¡Brandán, Ricardo: Voy a orejear un aniversario teológico. Lejos, aun más lejos, quince cuadrats después del lejós, por escampados y terceros y pasos a nivel, nos arrearán hasta un campito al que miren grandes gasómetros (que harán oficio de tambores) y almacenes dorados, cuya pinta será la de los ángeles que se desmoronarán desde el cielo... Eso será el Juicio Final... y se verá que no hay ningún Inferno, pero sí muchos Cielos. En uno de ellos... empeará una suelta tertulia, una inmortal conversación sin brindis ni apuros, donde se tutearán los corazones y en el que cada cual se oirá vivir en millares de otras conciencias, todas de buena voluntad y alegrísimas...

¡Qué lindas tenidas las nuestras! Guitrales, por el boquete de su austera guitarra, por ese negro redondelito o ventana que da de juro a San Antonio de Areco, habla muy bien la lejanía. Brandán parece peisón, pero es que siempre está parado a la otra punta de un verso...<sup>14</sup>

And so forth. Much in these passages is virtually untranslatable. Besides their vision of the future, what they both offer is their inspired prose poetry—the rhythms, the suffixes, the consciously Argentine lexicon, the implied inflections of melody, the rhetoric in the best sense of that word. There is simply no non-Spanish or even non-Argentinian equivalent for this sort of prose, and it is therefore not surprising that *The Extent of My Hope* should have remained among the least recognized of Borges's earlier volumes outside his native land.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85-6.

Borges's literary nationalism in *The Extent of My Hope* is of a piece with his general outlook at the time. During the 1920s he had consciously set out to be the poet of his native city, a *porteño* Walt Whitman, and his first published book bears the appropriate title *Fervor of Buenos Aires*. A close and intimate involvement with the urban landscape is the most telling trait of the poetry from this period — one piece, "Vaniloquencia," begins "La ciudad está en mí como un poema" ("The city is within me like a poem"). With their tone of delicatè, subdued, romantic melancholy, these early verses quietly conjure up the streets, back alleys, plazas, and cemeteries; the patios, gardens, upper-class neighborhoods and interiors; the daylight, the sunsets, and the working-class districts of Buenos Aires. One of Borges's most beautiful and celebrated poems from this decade is entitled "Fundación mítica de Buenos Aires" ("On the Mythical Founding of Buenos Aires"); it ends by judging the town "tan eterna como el agua y el aire" ("as eternal as air and water"). So wistfully evocative of the old city's moods are these lyrics that I have encountered a good number of Argentine literati who, in spite of serious reservations about Borges himself, can nevertheless recite much of his *porteño* poetry by heart, and who have casually declaimed stanza after stanza to me over beefsteak dinner or coffee.

In similar fashion, Borges's 1920s verse shows a profound preoccupation with matters Argentine. The title of one book, *Cuaderno San Martín*, alludes obliquely to the Argentinian national hero. Several poems from the decade deal with the author's own ancestors and their political or military role in the Republic's heroic past — a reminder to us of Borges's patrician origins, of the part played by his forebears in shaping liberal Argentina. A few of the streets walked by the 27-year-old poet may in fact have borne the very names of Borges's illustrious forefathers. On the other hand, Borges was not above devoting some attention to the ideological enemies of his tribe, as in "Rosas," a meditative poem dealing with the 19th century conservative dictator of that name.

Borges's efforts at literary Argentinism during the 1920s reflect his personal aim of reintegration after having spent seven years as a youthful expatriate with his family across

Europe. The time of his return, moreover, was one of the happiest moments in Argentina's general history. There was a world economic boom, and Argentina, then the wealthiest country in Latin America, shared in the global prosperity through massive food exports, which at the time were reaching their highest percentage to date of foreign trade.<sup>15</sup> A moderately reformist party, known as the Radicals, was firmly in power, with strong support from the middle class as well as the sons of immigrant workers. Among those supporters was Borges himself, who was affiliated with the Radical Party, became mildly active in the 1928 presidential candidacy of Radical boss Ipólito Irigoyen, and actually alludes to Irigoyen in the poem "On the Mythical Founding of Buenos Aires."

This harmony of economic, political, cultural, and personal interests came to an abrupt end with the crash of 1929. The ensuing business slump in turn triggered the adventurist action of General José Félix Uriburu, who on September 6, 1930 sent tanks into the streets, deposed President Irigoyen, and seized state power. Though civilian rule was restored in 1932, Uriburu's move signalled the rise of an Argentine nationalist, and more or less fascist, wave. Throughout the 1930s, rightwing sects were to proliferate under names like Legion of Mars, Argentine Nationalist Action, Argentine Guard, Nationalist Civic Militia, and Argentine Civic Legion.<sup>16</sup> They shared anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic attitudes, and were also anti-British, a fact which, in a country long dominated by British imperialism, could appeal to the patriotic reflexes of otherwise unsympathetic Argentinians. To these perceived foreign ills the nationalists counterposed their model of Hispanic traditionalism and a nostalgic, idealized vision of Catholic Spain. This overall reactionary thrust eventuated into openly pro-Axis governments in the early 1940s, and was to culminate in the Perón presidency of 1946. The Perón regime developed into a strange species all its own, but it began with the blessing of the Church, the Army, and the police, and

<sup>15</sup> James Scobie, *Argentina: A City and a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 305.

<sup>16</sup> José Luis Romero, *A History of Argentine Political Thought*, translated by Thomas McGann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), p. 238.

started out by "implementing the old aspirations of the nationalist groups."<sup>17</sup> Among the first victims of Perón's nationalism was Borges, who, for having backed the Allies in World War II, found himself purged from his low-paying library job.

Ideologically, the nationalist groups were anti-liberal, anti Radical, and anti-left. Under General Uriburu, for instance, the national police inaugurated the Special Section for the Repression of Communism. So widespread and notorious were to become the abuses of this organism that a Radical deputy once characterized it as the agency which "formerly persecuted communists and now devotes itself to persecuting pedestrians."<sup>18</sup> As a result of this rightwing upsurge, the moderates, liberals, Radicals, socialists and Communists now found themselves thrown together as allies in the opposition. This historical accident would give rise to such curiosities as the March for the Constitution and Liberty, on September 19, 1945, when conservative landowners, former socialist deputies, and communist activists would march side by side against the nationalist military dictatorship.

An inevitable cultural consequence of the political drift since 1930 was that nationalistic sentiments, ideals, and aims had lost their credibility and legitimacy with anyone not situated on the far right. The distinguished novelist Ernesto Sábato once recalled how, during his days as a young communist student between 1930-35, "we were ashamed to invoke big words like fatherland and liberty, especially with a capital F or L, so often had we heard them prostituted on the lips of public crooks."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in a 1930 pamphlet, the Communist Party boss Rodolfo Ghioldi once said, "In Argentina we have oppression by the landlords, the imperialists, and the

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 248.

<sup>18</sup> The deputy was Leónidas Anastasi. Cited in Alberto Ciria, *Partidos y poder en la Argentina moderna (1930-46)* (Buenos Aires: Jorge Álvarez Editor, 1964), p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Ernesto Sábato, *El otro rostro del peronismo* (Buenos Aires, no publisher, 1956), p. 17.

bourgeoisie; to defend the fatherland here is to defend the landlords, the imperialists, and the bourgeoisie."<sup>20</sup>

Borges seldom stood on more than the sidelines of political thought or action, and of course a man of the left he never was. And yet he too would fall in with the new set of political configurations. His civilized, tender-minded, affective nativism from the Radical 1920s, for one, had nothing to say to the harsh and bellicose nationalism of the fascistizing 1930s. His ecumenical attachment to British, European, and Jewish high culture inevitably put him at odds with the xenophobic anti-Semitism and Anglophobia of the nationalist sects. In an incident often recalled by Borges, a right-wing newspaper in the 1930s "accused" him of being Jewish, to which Borges replied that his own extensive archival research, alas, had failed to turn up any such Hebrew blood in his past. Borges also belonged briefly to a committee to protest anti-Semitism.

Against his earlier desires Borges now found himself in the anti-nationalist camp, sharing terrain with center and left forces, and also fitting in with the larger shape of international politics, including quiet sympathy for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. Now, Borges to this day is attacked for his cosmopolitan ethos and his pro-European values. For example, the Cuban poet and essayist Roberto Fernández Retamar, in his highly influential book *Calibán*, finds serious fault with Borges for having repudiated the nationalism of *The Extent of My Hope*, and for saying in 1951 that "our tradition is Europe."<sup>21</sup> By citing these sources outside of their organic, temporal context, however, Fernández Retamar grants Borges neither a part in history nor a history of his own.

The conjunction of factors that helped encourage Borges's early nationalism, I think, are clear. Less clear is the fact that, during the 1930s and '40s, when Borges turned universalist and cosmopolitan, in all the advanced nations at the time, nationalism served as the ideology and rhetoric of the far right. The Spanish Falange, the German Nazis, the Action

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Rodolfo Puiggrós, *Historia crítica de los partidos políticos argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Argumentos, 1956), p. 333

<sup>21</sup> Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Calibán: Apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra América* (Mexico City: Editorial Diógenes, 1972), pp. 56-57.

Franceise, the diverse Argentinian sects, and a large segment of U.S. isolationist opinion were uniformly characterized by a provincial, strident nationalism combined with aggressive anti-liberal and anti-left attitudes. By contrast, liberalism and the left were internationalist or cosmopolitan in outlook and posture. Nationalism had a bad name before 1945: it was only after World War II, with decolonization and the emergence of the Third World, that left-wing thought begins fusing with nationalist action. Significantly, the opposition politics of the 1860-1940 period are dominated by entities known as the First, Second, Third, and Fourth Internationals, whereas a distinctive revolutionary feature since 1950 has been a succession of resistance groups named "National Liberation Front." Ironically, the chief reason for the Argentine Communist Party's failure to gain local followers was, precisely, its abstract internationalism, its excessive loyalty to Soviet struggles that, to the ordinary Argentinian migrant worker, seemed as remote as the moon. It took a skilled tactician like Perón to speak to the Argentinian worker in national terms, however opportunistic and perverted those terms were. Not accidentally, Borges's defense of European culture was written at the very height of Perón's nationalist régime.

The 1930s show Borges groping for usable materials, domestic and especially foreign, and also seeking new forms as a writer. He was publishing almost no poetry, having given up on being the native singer of Buenos Aires. Aside from some now-classic essays, the only substantial imaginative work he produced before 1939 was the experimental tales gathered in the *Universal History of Infamy*. These sketches — highly original but still inchoate in form, lively but awkward in their rhythms — are the product of a mature author then experimenting a mid-life career change and apprenticing himself to a new literary craft. Well, as we all know, the apprentice grew, became a master of the art, and, as the expression goes, the rest is history.

Borges's reputation rests overwhelmingly on the stories contained in *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*. A good many of those pieces are indeed universalist and cosmopolitan, set as they are in London or Prague, in imaginary Babels or Babylon.



Borges's detractors commonly cite this as proof of his indifference to Latin American realities. And yet, in his defense one could just as easily mention Borges's two retellings of the *Martín Fierro* gaucho classic, or those narratives depicting Argentine hoods and gangsters, or the one story each dealing with the late 19th century Argentine frontier and the 1904 gaucho uprising in Uruguay, or the touching portraits of a working-class *porteña*, of a Mayan priest, or of an unforgettable (and unforgettable) Uruguayan peasant boy. But then, such glaring omissions are typical of all charges that Borges is, as it were, un-Argentinian. The Germanness of Brecht, after all, is never questioned on grounds that his plays are set in exotic realms like China, or Chicago; nor is Flaubert's having produced Carthaginian or Biblical fictions and a novel about infinite books ever raised as evidence of his being un-French. I'm being obvious and simple, but the obvious has long been shunned, and one explanation for this blind spot on the part of the anti-Borgesians may be equally simple — in a word, they haven't read him very much, they know him mostly through the prism of the media and via the universalist image constructed of him by his liberal, Europhile devotees. Ultimately, however, Borges's mind, output, and history are too encompassing, too broad for the neat, closed schemes of theoreticians, be they of the "nationalist" or "universalist" persuasion.

A poet from St. Louis, Missouri who later emigrated to Europe once made a profound observation concerning the matter of local versus universal. In his essay "American Literature and the American Language," T.S. Eliot observes that "Universality can never come except through writing about what one knows thoroughly... And, though it is only too easy for a writer to be local without being universal, I doubt whether a poet or novelist can be universal without being local too."<sup>22</sup> Borges, we have seen, began his career as an intensely local poet, writing about what he knew thoroughly — the old Buenos Aires landscape. Later, driven into cosmopolitanism by the narrow, sterile chauvinism of the far right, he nonetheless was to

<sup>22</sup> T.S. Eliot, "American Literature and the American Language," in *To Criticize the Critic* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1953), pp. 55 and 56.

retain local roots even during his most universalist phase. The cosmic experience of the Aleph takes place in a Buenos Aires basement, in a street named after Juan de Garay, an ancestor of Borges who founded the city in 1580.

In 1971, an American student at New York University asked Borges if his work is "escapist," "anti-realist," and ignores "Argentine reality." Borges's telling riposte was, "I may be allowed to say something that smacks of vanity — I am a part of Argentine reality."<sup>23</sup> Borges's family background, nationalist years, anti-fascist cosmopolitanism, and narrative use of Argentine subjects all clearly sustain his counter-argument. Allied and attached to a liberal Argentinian and world-historical project that appears to have run its best course and, in our time, turns increasingly and harshly conservative, Borges may not have been part of the Argentina desired by the Hispanophile old right or the nationalist new left, but Argentinian it was. The anti-Borgesians as well as the European admirers like George Steiner, both of whom claim Borges for Europe, need to revise their mental charts and literary maps. It seems embarrassingly self-evident to say so, but Borges is an Argentine author.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Christ, editor, "Borges at N.Y.U.," in *Prose for Borges, Tri-Quarterly* 25 (Fall 1972), p. 456.



*Editor-in-Chief*  
ROBERT BOYERS

*Executive Editor*  
PEGGY BOYERS

*Associate Editor*  
THOMAS S.W. LEWIS

*Editorial Board*  
Gerald Graff  
Elizabeth Frank  
Martin Pops  
Charles Molesworth  
James O'Higgins  
Jerome Mazzaro  
Barry Targan  
Robert Orrill

*Regular Columnists:* Christopher Lasch / Roger Shattuck /  
David Rieff / Martin Jay / Stanislaw Baranczak

*Circulation:* Deborah Slezak & Elizabeth Engstrand

*Editorial Assistants:* Deirdre Mullen, Zachary Boyers,  
Ann Pollack, and Elizabeth Kendrick

SALMAGUNDI is published quarterly by Skidmore College. All correspondence should be addressed to SALMAGUNDI, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, N.Y. 12866. Subscriptions: \$12. for one year, \$18. for two years. Institutions \$16.00 and \$25.00. Foreign subscriptions add \$2.00 per year. Payments from abroad must be paid in U.S. currency (money orders or checks from banks with offices in the U.S.). Sample copies: \$4. Special rates on bulk orders available to organizations and stores: Write to SALMAGUNDI, attention Circulation Manager. Permission to reprint articles must be sought from publishers. Printed by Bookcrafters, Inc., Chelsea, MI. Distributed in the U.S.A. by DEBOER, Nutley N.J., and INGRAM PERIODICALS, Nashville, TN and in England by PERIODICALS IN PARTICULAR.

Mss. to be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope. No mss. will be returned nor queries answered unless accompanied by a S.A.S.E. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

SALMAGUNDI is indexed or abstracted in Abstracts of English Studies, Sociological Abstracts, American Humanities Index, An Index to Book Reviews in the Humanities, MLA International Bibliography, etc.

Copyright © by Skidmore College.  
3529

ISSN 0036-

# Salmagundi

A Quarterly of the Humanities & Social Sciences  
Published by Skidmore College

No. 82-83

SPRING-SUMMER 1989

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

The End of Philosophy? by <i>Cornelius Castoriadis</i>	3
Comments on Castoriadis by <i>Richard Rorty</i>	24
Heidegger, Again by <i>George Steiner</i>	31
From a Journal by <i>Leonard Michaels</i>	56
What Became of Abstraction? by <i>Rudolf Arnheim</i>	69
Anselm Kiefer by <i>Charles Molesworth</i>	78

### THE WRITER IN LATIN AMERICA

Politics, Literature & Intellectuals by <i>Enrico Mario Santi</i>	92
Foundational Fictions by <i>Doris Sommer</i>	111
Ideology, Exile, Language: An Interview with <i>Ariel Dorfman</i>	142
Reader A Story by <i>Ariel Dorfman</i>	164
After the Fuck A Story by <i>Guillermo Cabrera Infante</i>	185
Ta(l)king Liberties by <i>Regina Janes</i>	222
The Garden Next Door Fiction by <i>Jose Donoso</i>	240
Donoso's Narrative by <i>Juan Carlos Lértora</i>	258
Two Worlds A Memoir by <i>Ernesto Sábato</i>	269
Crime of the Other A Story by <i>Luisa Valenzuela</i>	279
Fragmentation in Valenzuela by <i>Patricia Rubio</i>	287
Four Poems by <i>Gonzalo Rojas</i> (Trans. Ben Belitt)	297
Dust Garden A Story by <i>Rosario Ferré</i>	301
Borges As Argentine Author by <i>Gene Bell-Villada</i>	305
Three Poems by <i>Heberto Padilla</i> (Trans. A. Kerrigan)	320
Reading in Cuba A Memoir by <i>Anthony Kerrigan</i>	322

### RESPONSES TO 'AFTER THE SIXTIES' (SALMAGUNDI, NO. 81)

Responses to Ellen Willis by <i>Charles Molesworth</i>	338
by <i>Robert Boyers</i>	345
Responses to Paul Berman by <i>Ronald Radosh</i>	350
by <i>Larry Nachman</i>	355
Responses to Benjamin Barber by <i>Larry Nachman</i>	360
by <i>Robert Boyers</i>	368
A Response to My Critics by <i>Benjamin Barber</i>	375