

Sergio Pastormelo

Borges crítico

Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007

Enough can never be said about Borges, especially in light of recent work like that of Sergio Pastormelo in which he examines the critical trajectory of the Argentinean author. In *Borges crítico* (2007), Pastormelo grapples directly both with Borges's way of reviewing literature and with the controversy that his strategy generated among writers and critics, situating him in the central debate of what constitutes a literary critical work. Borges believed that a writer leaves two works: his writings and his image as a writer. But then why is his image as a critic not well defined in his works? Pastormelo responds to this question in this book. Most of us understand criticism to consist of evaluating the literary merit of writers; Pastormelo's book addresses how the critical production of Borges demystifies the same act of critical production, a type of demystification that has its repercussions among writers and academic critics. Based on Borges's critical writing in journals such as *Sur* or *El Hogar*, the author examines the dichotomies created by Borges: the "writer's critique" and "academic critique," an endeavor that Borges himself pursued in parallel to his "destiny" (as described by Pastormelo) as a fictional writer and as a poet.

In his prologue, Pastormelo entertains the critical categorization of Borges—by Adolfo Prieto in his book *Borges y la nueva generación*—as a bad critic of literature for his alleged lack of knowledge of the norms of critical production in academia. Pastormelo, in response, constructs an argument that defines Borges as an important critic and as an avid reader. Pastormelo formulates two main questions: (1) what did Borges do to Argentine literature with his publications, and (2) why has Borges, the critic, lacked an image as a critic. In his judgment, Borges is above all a critic who is able to establish crucial relationships between literatures across history but this, at the same time, contributes to a weakening of his image as a critic. Pastormelo claims: "No leer a Borges es un buen método para no entender la literatura argentina" (26). According to the author, Borges's critical way of reading and, by the same token, his disbelief in criticism, which he thought would distance the writer and the reader, is precisely what makes him the kind of writer that would transform Argentine literature. In order to answer his main questions, Pastormelo positions himself in the middle of a discourse already created by Prieto, Rodríguez Monegal, Piglia, Pezzoni and Sarlo, among others, regarding how Borges has been reviewed as a critic across time.

Pastormelo constructs Borges as an object visible through the prism of three central "personajes" (or characters) present in his critical work: the "superstitious man," the "atheist," and the "priest." He reveals Borges as being able to construct a sort of literary, priestly image through the autobiographical presence in his works and his interviews, consecrating the author's life, not to live but to read. And just as Borges credits Poe for creating the skeptical reader, Pastormelo credits Borges for making critics out of his readers. Pastormelo studies this transition from reader to critic through Borges's creation of the "atheist" figure, an image that rejects a single way of believing in literature and that provides a counter weight to the excessive devotion to books of the "superstitious" figure.

Pastormelo describes Borges as a critic who had sympathy neither with the common "superstitious" reader nor with the writer who writes in order to appeal to this credulous reader. At the same time, for Pastormelo as for Borges, as readers develops a system of beliefs through

literature, they must also exercise skepticism towards that same system of beliefs created by the writer. Borges's questioning of the conditions of a belief and literary value is, according to Pastormerlo, key to a rupturing of the paradigm of the superstitious veneration of the original text-object. Pastormerlo analyzes Borges by providing examples of how author's critical work helps the reader to better understand the relationships built between *Quijote*, Menard, Valéry and Duchamp, and by showcasing the superstitions and the sacrileges accorded to a classic text, to an "original" work and to a translation. He then expands on Borges's critical take on encyclopedic texts, on the contradictory figure of Poe, on metaphors and on the separation of politics and literature. Finally, Pastormerlo enters into the subject of the critique of taste, where he recognizes the relationship that Borges establishes between literature and ideology.

Readers of this excellent book will find a literary genre that intersects Borges's complete works, providing them with a platform not only to reread his texts with a different set of lenses, but also to reexamine the way literary criticism functions in Argentina. This lucid book helps readers to understand the work of Borges through his creation of images and their transformations throughout his career. Pastormerlo describes the various images left by Borges (the youth, the avant-garde poet, the translator, the leftist militant) and how these images dissolved into others. As an image that has somehow lost its effect, the figure of the critic in Borges can only be understood by recognizing how Borges interjected himself in both "academic critique" and "writer's critique." Pastormerlo gives an excellent presentation of examples that reinforce his argument for positioning Borges, above all, as a critic. These examples (taken from short stories, essays and interviews) point the reader to a literary critical point of origin that, in effect, transforms taste and ways of believing in literature. Pastormerlo adopts Borges's program by converting critical analysis into a reflexive exercise and by modifying current critical debates. *Borges crítico* is a pleasure to read, and important for showing how his creative work is complemented by his critical work.

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