

## DEUTSCHES REQUIEM 2005



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### BORGES AT THE UNITED NATIONS

On September 20, 2002 Ramsey Clark, former United States Attorney General, addressed a sharply worded letter to the United Nations. In it, he condemned his country's imminent invasion of Iraq, and desperately appealed to Secretary General Kofi Annan to seek peace, not war. Amid its thick discussion of no-fly zones and weapons inspections Clark's politically charged missive contained the following, seemingly unlikely, literary reference: "Like the Germany described by Jorge Luis Borges in *Deutsches Requiem*, George Bush has now 'proffered (to the world) violence and faith in the sword,' as Nazi Germany did. And as Borges wrote, it did not matter to faith in the sword that Germany was defeated. 'What matters is that violence ... now rules.' Two generations of Germans have rejected that faith," Clark asserted. "Their perseverance in the pursuit of peace will earn the respect of succeeding generations everywhere" (Clark 20/9/02). Clark's letter spread over the Web like wildfire and is now a central text in the opposition movement to the Iraq war.

Forty years earlier, on November 19, 1964, the Yale critic Paul de Man, published an elegantly crafted review of Borges's newly-translated *Dreamtigers* and *Labyrinths* in the *New York Review of Books*. Lamenting Borges's neglect in the U.S., de Man offered guideposts to this unknown modern master. Borges, he writes, is "often seen as a moralist, in rebellion against the times. But such an approach is misleading." "It is true," de Man went on, that "Borges writes about villains ... But Borges does not consider infamy primarily as a moral theme: the stories in no way suggest an indictment of society or of human nature or of destiny... Instead, infamy functions here as an aesthetic, formal principle." That happens in some of Borges's major tales, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," "The Shape of the Sword," and "The Garden of Forking Paths," all narratives shot through with violence, plagiarism, impersonation, betrayal, and espionage. Although always centered in an act of infamy and full of terror, Borges's fictions "are about the style in which they are written," the Belgian scholar concludes (Alazraki *Critical* 56-57). De Man didn't mention "Deutsches Requiem," but his silence and the approach he propounded spread through the academic world like wildfire and became central traits of Borges criticism for decades.

Which is it then, Borges the acute political seer, and "Deutsches Requiem" as his politically savvy, exemplary story for our already troubled 21<sup>st</sup> century? Or Borges, the esthetician of infamy, and "Deutsches Requiem," as an historically and morally irrelevant fiction best left for the dustbins of literature? In the succeeding pages I would like tread in the treacherous space between these two extreme positions in order to survey the changing fortunes of Otto zur Linde's piercing confession, and its transit from neglect to renown. With almost entire books now devoted to it, and essays in encyclopedias of Holocaust literature, Borges's story shows how much has changed in the word and the world since he first published it in 1946 (see López-Quñones, Meter, and Stavans).

## NOT SO BENIGN NEGLECT

Borges's story was ignored for many years—it was either unmentioned or roundly dismissed. A look at its classic reception shows three possibilities: no reference at all, passing allusion, or brief negative commentary; downplaying and negativity often went hand in hand. De Man exemplifies the omission of many important analysts, who like him preferred to talk about "Tlön," "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan," "La biblioteca de Babel," "La lotería en Babilonia," "Pierre Menard," "El Aleph," "El inmortal," or "La escritura del dios." Here are some examples. "Deutsches Requiem" isn't analyzed in Martin Stabb's, *Jorge Luis Borges* (1970), nor in Ronald Christ's *The Narrow Act* (1969). Jaime Alazraki's compilation, *Critical Essays on Jorge Luis Borges* (1987), which contains de Man's piece and other articles from the sixties and seventies, doesn't have a single reference to the story. Although written by intellectuals as famous as John Updike, Pierre Macherey, John Barth, George Steiner, Geoffrey Hartman, and Robert Scholes, the essays highlight almost *hasta la saciedad* the same fictions I have already mentioned, along with a few admired essays from *Otras inquisiciones*. "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins," "La esfera de Pascal," and "Kafka y sus precursores," are featured over and over.

The tendency to overlook "Deutsches Requiem" hasn't completely ended. Harold Bloom's volume on Borges, part of the prestigious Major Short Story Writers series (2002), includes essays on guess which fictions, and again not on "Deutsches Requiem." Bloom himself has glossed repeatedly on "Kafka and His Precursors," "Pierre Menard," and on the story he calls his personal favorite, "Death and the Compass" (*Jorge Luis Borges; The Western Canon*). Another illustration: Edwin Williamson's biography, *Borges, A Life* (2004), with its extensive commentary on narratives from the World War II years, especially "La muerte y la brújula" and "El milagro secreto," doesn't speak at all about the fictional Nazi commandant's brutal testimony.

French criticism reverential rush-to-Borges also reduced the German requiem to nothingness. Michel Foucault famously wrote out of a passage in "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins." Gérard Genette

built palimpsests on “Pierre Menard.” Jacques Derrida deconstructed by quoting “La esfera de Pascal,” and Maurice Blanchot explored the infinite through “The Aleph.” Didier Anzieu gave “Deutsches Requiem” the most attention of all his colleagues—one line.

Among major Argentine critics, the situation was not significantly different, as in Ana María Barrenechea’s, *La expresión de la irrealidad en la obra de Borges* (1957), Gerardo Mario Goloboff’s, *Leer Borges* (1978), or Sylvia Molloy’s, *Las letras de Borges* (1979). Even the most path-breaking studies at best made scant allusion to the story. And at worst, Argentine studies blended rapid insinuation with sharp, sometimes convoluted, critique, exemplified in Blas Matamoro parricidal study. To cite Matamoro: In Borges, he writes, “sólo existe el bien, es decir nada, porque el no bien no existe (doctrina que se desprende del cuento ‘Deutsches Requiem’...)” (Fló 186). Matamoro represented the parricidal generation that saw in Borges the paragon of a literature of evasion, where reality, particularly national reality, was largely missing; and when reality did peek through, as it occasionally might, it was the wrong reality. Thus, Borges’s insinuation in “Deutsches Requiem” that (happily) England defeated Hitler only reinforced British imperialism in Argentina (sic)—the unspoken subtext being Borges’s opposition to Perón (Fló 187).

Similar bare-mention currents flowed from other side of the River Plate, for example, in Emir Rodríguez Monegal’s *Borges, hacia una lectura poética* (1976). But to Borges’s life-long commentator goes the credit for being among the first to propose *another* reading of Borges that might begin to give “Deutsches Requiem” its due. In his essay, “Borges y la política,” (1977), Rodríguez Monegal puts forth the then radical notion that “la obra política de Borges [es] más abundante e inesperada de lo que se piensa” (269). He then goes on to talk about “Deutsches Requiem” as an important text, part of Borges’s lengthy and engaged anti-Nazi dossier—an exceptional evaluation in the climate of those times. As in other areas of Borges criticism, such as biography, the late Uruguayan scholar anticipated the yet to come if not the universally agreed upon.

A few intrepid scholars did take on “Deutsches Requiem” at greater length. They include John Sturrock in *Paper Tigers: The Ideal*

*Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges* (1977), Carter Wheelock in *The Myth-maker: A Study of Motif and Symbol in the Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges* (1969), and Jaime Alazraki in *Versiones. Inversiones. Reversiones. El espejo como modelo estructural del relato en los cuentos de Borges* (1977). But their analyses frequently followed the downplaying mode, since they adopted variants of de Man's esthetic position that Borges's stories were about the style in which they were written: infamy for art's (or thought's) sake.

John Sturrock says so point blank in remarks that jump off the page forty years later: "'Deutsches Requiem' is pure artifice; it should not be read as some kind of commentary on the rise and fall of Nazi Germany" (104). Shunting aside Borges's own poignant and politically charged remarks in the epilogue to *El Aleph* that "Deutsches Requiem" was an attempt to understand the tragic destiny of Germany whose defeat he had sorely wished for in the just ended war, Sturrock openly chides the author. Borges only "makes things worse" with these comments, he complains, what with a story that is already "uncharacteristically somber and portentous," dealing as it does the death of a Jew in a concentration camp (104; see also Bell-Villada). Obviously "Deutsches Requiem" made this critic, and so many other critics, squeamish; and this was a root reason for its disregard. The Holocaust just didn't make for a good read.

After reminding his readers once again that mere "game playing" marks "Deutsches Requiem" because no "serious story" would begin with a "quite jocular" recitation of the Nazi Otto Dietrich zur Linde's martial and theological ancestry, Sturrock proceeds to reveal to us what tragic "destiny" Borges is *really* talking about. It is the "supranational tendency of the human mind towards abstraction" (104). However forcibly and unpleasantly, then, "Deutsches Requiem" still "fits" the eponymous theme of Sturrock's book, *Paper Tigers: The Ideal Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges*. A few years earlier, Carter Wheelock had made just about the identical argument when he opined, "'Deutsches Requiem' is about ways of conceiving reality, not about Nazis and Jews and a Germany gone wrong" (161).

The possibility that "Deutsches Requiem" might indeed be about philosophy, but also about philosophy *and* politics, or, better yet,

about the relation *between* philosophy and politics, or about philosophy as a *political act* and politics as a *philosophical act*, doesn't even enter the horizon of expectation. In 1969 or 1977, Borges could only be a paper tiger, a purveyor of ideal fictions, in short, a mythmaker mired in unreality.

Borges's friend and assiduous commentator, Jaime Alazraki, shared these views, sustaining even in 1988, in the course of his moving reflection on the master's just extinguished life, "Borges' work is a prodigious artifice, an iridescent language, a self-contained form severed from historical reality" (*Borges and the Kabbalah*, 187). Accordingly, in his *Versiones Inversiones. Reversiones*, Alazraki studies "Deutsches Requiem" from a structural perspective, surveying the versions and reversiones in this distorted mirror of a tale. *And yet*. Despite the artifice-and-removed--from-reality speak, Alazraki opens his discussion with a contextual reference--the story originally appeared in *Sur* in February 1946, and it gave narrative substance to the essay, "Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944," where Borges, reacting to the liberation of Paris, famously says that Nazism is uninhabitable (91).

With that historically based start, Alazraki gives a reading of the fiction in which structure serves society (or, more accurately, gestures toward it). The perverted looking glass is none other than Otto's genocidal Nazi philosophy and practice, itself a deformed simulacrum of the very thing it sets out to destroy--the biblically-rooted Western order. Borges's narration, far from being "a self-contained form severed from historical reality," confronts "el nazismo, con todos los horrores del holocausto, ... la tragedia europea ... la masacre judía (Alazraki 94). To my knowledge, this is the first time a critic used (dared to use?) the word "Holocaust" in connection with "Deutsches Requiem." Over time the connection would take on major importance; but in 1977 it was still off the screen, too out of fashion, too uncomfortable.<sup>1</sup> (The only "Jewish" motif in Borges safely and frequently tackled at this stage was the "Kabbalah," since it fit in with the focus on his texts' *modus operandi*, not their

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<sup>1</sup> On Alazraki's own connection to the Holocaust and its consequences see his autobiographical, "La escalera de Elías."

world-historical context, as in Alazraki's and Sosnowski's kabbalistic studies).

What Alazraki also put his finger on *avant la lettre* were the difficulties in interpreting Borges's story. OK, Borges *was* saying something about the rise and fall of Nazi Germany (this is a *Deutsches requiem*), but what exactly was he saying? Nazism was a deformed simulacrum of the Western order it set out to destroy, but the inversions and reversions of the fiction made it hard to get a satisfyingly straightforward take. The story begins strangely with an epigraph from the Book of Job ("Aunque él me quitare la vida, en él confiaré" (13:15), which Otto uses to frame his Hitler-drenched *apologia pro vita sua*. Otto escribe una paráfrasis del versículo de Job, says Alazraki (94). A Nazi quoting the Bible? Very disconcerting, to say the least. So is Borges implying that Nazism is a more horrific and impenetrable version of Job's travails, ironically and inevitably enmeshed within the "Judaism" it seeks to obliterate (this is Alazraki's basic reading after much struggle with the text)? Is he also saying that attempts to comprehend the enormity of the Holocaust and of Germany's *Götterdämmerung* within our common paradigms are as unsatisfactory as Job's puny human endeavors to fathom his tribulations (another suggestion Alazraki makes, a suggestion that became a touchstone of post-Holocaust theology)?<sup>2</sup> All right, then, but why can't Borges just say it plain and simple, especially since these twists and turns (such a literate Nazi, such links with Judaism) can be interpreted otherwise. Could Borges somehow even have defended Nazism in this story? The suggestion was floated in 2000.

#### THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

On December 1, 1987, midway between Ramsey Clark's letter and Paul de Man's review, the *New York Times* published a photo of de Man, who had died four years earlier. With it ran the headline: "Yale Scholar's Articles Found in a Nazi Paper." In his native Belgium

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<sup>2</sup> On the Book of Job as significant in post-Holocaust theology, relevant to the thinking of Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackenheim, Elie Wiesel, and others see Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz*, and Friedlander, *Out of the Whirlwind*.

during World War II, the revered scholar and guru of deconstruction had written close to two hundred articles for *Le Soir*, a major newspaper intervened by the occupiers and toeing the Nazi line. Most of the ostensibly "literary" pieces had an unmistakably ideological cast that advanced Hitler's "New Order." The most infamous of them, entitled "The Jews in Contemporary Literature," decried the thankfully mediocre "Semitic interference" in Europe's cultural life, and called for the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe to solve the "Jewish problem" (Lehman 158; 269-271). While de Man was pondering the merits of such "isolation" the Jews of Antwerp, where he was living, were undergoing exactly this kind of persecution and exclusion, the prelude to the worse yet to come.

De Man placed this pro-Nazi past under erasure when he came to the United States where he initiated his brilliant career, and it was only revealed by accident after his death, causing a heated uproar. (The Belgian scholar Ortwin de Graaf, then a graduate student, stumbled on it through archival research).<sup>3</sup> De Man's weighty critical enterprise, which saw history, morality, responsibility, and meaning as bunk now took on a decidedly more ominous cast. Could deconstruction have been a mass cover up for a reality so ignominious that one did not wish to face up to it? Was this why de Man never wrote about "Deutsches Requiem," and resisted a reality-related reading of Borges?

I quote again from "A Modern Master": Borges is "often seen as a moralist, in rebellion against the times. But such an approach is misleading." "It is true," that "Borges writes about villains ... But Borges does not consider infamy primarily as a moral theme: the stories in no way suggest an indictment of society or of human nature or of destiny ... Instead, infamy functions here as an aesthetic, formal principle." Always centered in an act of infamy and full of violence, plagiarism, impersonation, betrayal, and espionage, Borges's fictions nonetheless "are about the style in which they are written" (Alazraki 56-57). *Sic dixit de Man.*

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<sup>3</sup> On the controversy surrounding the revelations, see Lehman. My thanks to Prof. de Graaf for providing me further information.

I have spent time recounting the sad history of Paul de Man because it is emblematic of gradual changes that rendered impossible ignoring, dismissing, or for want of a better word, merely “formalizing” Borges and “Deutsches Requiem.” The tide was turning, and the irritating tale was moving center stage. What factors caused the turn? And once the irritating tale was center stage, no longer “formalized,” how were we to gloss it?

“I’LL BE EXECUTED AS A TORTURER AND MURDERER “

Summarily put, the turning tide brought back history with a vengeance, and cover-ups were more difficult to pull off. Both inside and outside Borges’s native land there was a rethinking of reality as a scandal, with the Holocaust period critical to the rethinking process. Beginning in the nineteen seventies and eighties, when Argentina descended, then tens of thousands disappeared, tortured and murdered later ascended from its fascist hell, the country’s Nazi-connected past, the strain in Argentine life that kept replaying that chilling universe, came more and more to the foreground.

Adolph Eichmann’s capture in Buenos Aires in May 1960, and his subsequent trial in Jerusalem (a replay of the Nuremberg Trials for a new generation), was an early rumbling of a return to public consciousness of the era many dared not name.<sup>4</sup> What had been Argentina’s accommodating role during and after the Third Reich? (See Ronald Newton’s thorough study on the subject.) How had Argentine intellectuals, including Borges, reacted in their pronouncements and works? And, most relevantly, how did the mid twentieth-century years of lead in Europe correlate with the late twentieth century *años de plomo* in the River Plate? Did the general espousal of violence, left and right, contribute to the catastrophe? These questions gnawed at the Argentine body politic and intellectual arena, and they have not gone away.

Under the pressure, in 1997 the Argentine government created (was forced to create?) a Commission to Clarify Nazi Activities in

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent study on Eichmann’s capture, see Rein.

Argentina (CEANA), whose final report included a long section on the Nazi impact on literature and the cultural field. This step did not calm the waters, since the digging into the dark times still goes on.

In this changed environment, views of Borges moderated. For decades the *bête noir* of the left (as well as of the ultra-nationalists), he became the sharp prophesier of the brutalities that had transpired, his fictional dystopias turned into all-too-real kidnappings, disappearances, ESMAs and drugged bodies dropped out of helicopters. His imprudent, and quickly disowned comments and decisions in favor of the military, were placed in the context of his strong reiteration of long-held positions – the armed forces live in an artificial world of order, blind obedience, arrests; their wars are deadly follies leading nowhere (Vázquez 237; Sosnowski 79-80. See also Gelman 334-335).<sup>5</sup> Opinions shifted, and the fractured post-dictatorship cultural field started to reevaluate Borges, finding in him an antecedent and a guide.

Beatriz Sarlo represented the shift:

Against all forms of fanaticism Borges's work offers the ideal of tolerance. This feature has not always been identified with sufficient emphasis, perhaps because we left-wing Latin American intellectuals have been too slow to recognize it in fictions which deal with questions about order in the world.

Redirecting and amplifying the critical agenda, she argued that

The fantastic themes of Borges, which critics has universally commented upon, offer an allegorical architecture for philosophical and ideological concerns. If the defense of the autonomy of art and of formal procedures is one of the pillars of Borges's poetics, the other,

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<sup>5</sup> "Ante la fácil condena por las primeras declaraciones de Borges sobre Videla, la condecoración que aceptara de Pinochet y opiniones que seguramente compartían el deseo de escandalizar, conviene recordar que firmó una solicitud de la Madres la Plaza de Mayo y condenó a la dictadura, como también lo hiciera frente a la guerra de la Malvinas en su poema "Juan López y John Ward" (Sosnowski 80). See also Juan Gelman's comments: "A diferencia de otros intelectuales, que nunca supieron reconocer sus agachadas frente a la dictadura militar, Borges reconoció sus errores" (334).

more conflictual, pillar is the philosophical and moral problem of the fate of human beings and the forms of their relationship to society.  
(5)

Borges's finest stories can be read as "political philosophy," Sarlo went on, weaving questions of societal order and disorder into the fabric of his plots as a means of responding to world-historical processes, fascism foremost among them (84). "Let us begin with the most explicit," she writes, "racism is seen as an arbitrary form of state ideology that dismisses reason and distributes death at random" (85). It isn't surprising then, that Sarlo no longer neglects, but comments on "Deutsches Requiem" (85-87). I will return later to her reading, published in 1993.

If within Argentina Borges was now seen as an influential model for new generations of intellectuals, a forerunner of a literature that explored political disorder and opposition to fascism, outside Argentina he was also appreciated in a fresh light (see my "Postmodern or Post-Auschwitz: Borges and the Holocaust"). Representation as a scandal was being challenged in North America and Europe, often through the lens of the Holocaust. Eichmann's dramatic judgment in Jerusalem gave rise to an awareness of genocide largely dormant but lying beneath the erasure of a barbaric past and the sparkle of a rebuild present. The trial generated impetus for research, birthing categories such as "Holocaust Literature."

Looking at the man in the glass box led to a widening realization that the death camps created a "decisive breach in the fabric of the modern world," a "lasting violation" of what we had previously imagined as humanly possible (Schwartz 8). As official discourses had to own up to the past—from trials of war criminals to investigations about bank cover-ups and Nazi gold—intellectual discourses had to keep pace. "Admitting the Holocaust," in Lawrence Langer's phrase, inquiring how best to "represent" reality after the instruments of representation had been irrevocably broken, rose to the top of the critical agenda. Thinkers from Maurice Blanchot to Jean-François Lyotard, from Alain Finkielkraut to Emmanuel Lévinas, and authors and filmmakers from Elie Wiesel to Claude Lanzmann, William Styron to Steven Spielberg confronted these challenges, as

did an increasing number of literary and cultural commentators, Saul Friedlander, Berel Lang, James Young, among them.

Philosophy's collaborationist role, personified most by the sage of Freiburg Martin Heidegger, received special scrutiny. It was a scrutiny well known to Borges, as he wrote acerbically in "Guayaquil" (published in 1970). Speaking of Eduardo Zimmermann, his fictional German-Jewish historian escaped to Argentina from the Third Reich, and the refugee scholar's argument (*alegato*) against demagogic government and the cult of personality, Borges shows a remarkable familiarity with Heidegger's blotched past, which became widely publicized only in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Here is Borges:

Este alegato mereció la refutación decisiva de Martín Heidegger, que demostró, mediante fotocopias de los titulares de los periódicos, que el moderno jefe de estado, lejos de ser anónimo, es más bien el protagonista, el corega, el David danzante, que mima el drama de su pueblo, asistido de pompa escénica y recurriendo, sin vacilar, a las hipérbolos del arte oratorio. Probó asimismo que el linaje de Zimmermann era hebreo, por no decir judío. Esta publicación del venerado existencialista fue la inmediata causa del éxodo y de las tras-humanantes actividades de nuestro huésped. (OC 1063)

In the 1930s Heidegger saw in Hitler--the chief of state in the newspaper headlines--the embodiment of his own philosophical doctrines, particularly the *Führerprinzip* (leadership principle). And he considered his engagement with National Socialism, including purifying the *Volk*, the political actualization of philosophical "existentials"-- historicity, destiny, potentiality for Being-a-Self (Wolin 3-5). Against the background of a late twentieth century world and word, the possibility that "Deutsches Requiem" might be about philosophy *and* politics, or, better yet, about the relation *between* philosophy and politics, or about philosophy as a *political act* and politics as a *philosophical act*, entered the horizon of expectation. Critical interest in the story rose, and started to revolve around three crucial areas -- ideology and ethics, the problem of representation, and the

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<sup>6</sup> On Heidegger and Nazism see Wolin and Farías. (Farías has also written on Borges.)

vexing question of the Nazi-as-speaker, Otto Dietrich zur Linde's star role in the narrative. I'd like to briefly review each of these topics.

#### IDEOLOGY AND ETHICS

From the tried and true argument that "Deutsches Requiem" shouldn't be read as "some kind of commentary on the rise and fall of Nazi Germany," opinions have veered totally in the opposite direction. Today, the story is seen as an acute, on target portrayal Nazi philosophy (and its deathly consequences) mouthed by a high-ranking practitioner. Leonardo Senkman, Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones, Beatriz Sarlo, Ann Warner, Erin Graff Zivin, and I have studied the fiction from the perspective of Nazi thought and rhetoric, keeping in mind the chilling pronouncements of the Hitler men themselves, as well as theoretical analyses of the Holocaust, totalitarianism, and post-Nazi ethics.

Especially fascinating is how up and coming scholars have taken to the tale and produced readings that place it squarely within the context of writings by chief theoreticians of fascism and anti-Semitism, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, and Slavoj Žižek. These investigators also frequently cite the work of trauma researcher Dominick LaCapra and of historians George Mosse, Raul Hilberg, Saul Friedlander, Lucy Dawidowicz, and Daniel Goldhagen. Erin Graff Zivin's keen examination of "Deutsches Requiem" uses the lens of Emmanuel Lévinas's post-Auschwitz philosophy—the response to Heidegger—with its uncompromising emphasis on the ethical relationship between the same and the other.

In each case it becomes clear how Borges presciently touched upon major keys of Hitler's ideological and verbal arsenal, what Victor Klemperer, hiding and observing, termed *Lingua Tertii Imperii*. Before giving specifics of what these scholars say, I'd like to note that Borges's fluency in German from his youth in Switzerland, his first hand access to Nazi texts and talk, perhaps hasn't been underlined enough. Borges, an admirer of Germany and German literature and philosophy, needed no translation to understand what the

Nazis were saying; that made their pedagogy and practice of hatred all the more sinister, all the more threatening. (Maybe this explains why he called his protagonist Otto Dietrich, the name of Hitler's propaganda chief.)

Es infantil impacientarse; —Borges wrote somberly in 1941 — la misericordia de Hitler es ecuménica; en breve (si no lo estorban los venedpatrias y los judíos) gozaremos de todos los beneficios de la tortura, de la sodomía, del estupro y de las ejecuciones en masa. ¿No abunda en nuestras llanuras el *Lebensraum*, materia ilimitada y preciosa? (*Sur* Dec. 1941; *Borges en Sur* 32)

*Lebensraum* ("living space") was a pivotal word in Hitler's geopolitical vocabulary, designating a policy pursued mercilessly as part of the crusade against the world wide "Jewish Empire." Argentina's Patagonian spaces were reportedly ripe for the taking as "living space" (Newton 194-214).

We can't identify everything Borges heard, read, or knew about in the Third Reich's German — the subject needs more research. (What about radio broadcasts? Newspapers?) We do have an idea, however. Here are a few illustrations, some better known than others, from *El Hogar* and *Sur*. Borges knew about General Erich Ludendorff's anti-Semitic, anti-Masonic, anti-British, and anti-Goethe ranting ("los folletos iracundos") and his mystical racist "Aryan" religion. These, Borges reminded his reader caustically, Ludendorff presented in scribbling such as *Vom heiligen Quell deutscher Kraft*: "Desde el sagrado manantial de la fuerza alemana" (*El Hogar* 3 Sept. 1937; *Textos cautivos* 165; *Sur* July 1940; *Borges en Sur* 229). Borges knew (mightily) about Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* "La decadencia de Occidente" and its relation to the biologically mad Germany of 1936, the inheritor, as Borges put it, of the tendency to build grandiose dialectical edifices, always ignorant of reality (*El Hogar* 25 Dec. 1936; *Textos cautivos* 65-66). Like Nietzsche, Spengler was appropriated for Nazi thinking because of his hatred of democracy, glorification of authority, exaltation of the Prussian ("true German") sprit and "Faustian soul," and his advocacy of war as essential to life.

Borges also knew (indignantly) about Elvira Bauer's best selling anti-Semitic children's primer, *Trau keinem Fuchs auf gruener Heid und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid* 'Don't Trust a Fox in a Green Meadow or the Oath of a Jew.' He reviewed the book twice, minutely transcribing its racist language and loathsome illustrations, emphasizing the frightful brainwashing effect of text and image on young German minds (*El Hogar* 28 May 1937; *Textos cautivos* 136-137; *Sur* May 1937; *Borges en Sur* 145-146). (Is this the only [double] review of children's literature in Borges?).

He knew about doctor Johannes Rohr's Nazified version of A.F. C Vilmar's *Geschichte der Deutschen National-Literatur*, which expurgated Jewish and non-Nazi authors, left out Schopenhauer (of course much quoted by Borges), mutilated Goethe, Lessing, and Nietzsche, and acclaimed the literary labors of Joseph Goebbels, Alfred Rosenberg, and Adolph Hitler. To give us the flavor of these "labors" Borges, Klemperer-like, translates a selection:

Ríos de fuego de una potencia verbal hasta entonces inaudita en tierra alemana se desbordan sobre el pueblo: los grandes discursos del Fuehrer, henchidos de altos pensamientos y sin embargo abiertos de par en par a la comprensión del hombre sencillo. (*Sur* Oct. 1938; *Borges en Sur* 155-157)

Borges knew, finally (this is an understatement), about a Nietzsche reengineered as a prime source for Nazi ideology. The author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra's* concepts of the "will to power," "holy cruelty" (pity is a sin), and the *Übermensch* and *Untermensch* oriented Nazi thought and violence. So did the "notion that one could escape nihilistic despair by an act of will whereby good and evil were transcended to create a more primitive, vital and natural society." The Volkish religion of the Reich, with its "nobler values," was to triumph over Christianity (itself an enfeebled Jewish plot) and create a transcendent Nietzschean community that was both "primal and future oriented" (Yablon 743; *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On the Pitying," 88). No wonder, then, that Borges wrote sadly at war's outbreak that a local partisan of the Reich is one who "aprueba con fervor que Hitler obre a lo Zarathustra." A planetary Nazi victory would spew forth, in what especially grated on and frightened Bor-

ges, a despicable host of homegrown over-men “*Uebermenschen carseros*” — a prospect that didn’t seem so far fetched in 1939 (*Sur*, Oct. 1939: *Borges en Sur* 28-30).

The major Nietzschean strands in “*Deutsches Requiem*” are studied by Beatriz Sarlo, Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones and Ann Warner, as Otto Dietrich, who states that Nietzsche and Spengler entered his life about 1927, sets forth the (Nietzschean) vindication of Nazism and faith in its ultimate, merciless triumph. He writes of pity: “No en vano escribo esa palabra: la piedad por el hombre superior es el último pecado de Zarathustra.” “Lo que importa es que rija la violencia, no las serviles timideces cristianas” (*OC* 578; 581).

Spengler also receives (though less) attention in these critics’ work, what with Otto Dietrich’s “homage” to the “deeply German” philosopher: “Rendí justicia ... a la sinceridad del filósofo de la historia, a su espíritu radicalmente alemán (*kerndeutsch*), militar. En 1929 entré en el Partido” (*OC* 577). Interestingly, the assertion of Nazi Party membership closes the paragraph that began with the words, “Hacia 1927 entraron en mi vida Nietzsche y Spengler.” From philosophy the way led to the Führer. For many intellectuals, including Spengler Nazism (particularly at its outset), was the logical conclusion to philosophical speculations, which often, as Borges perceptively noted, did not take into account its sinister real implications.<sup>7</sup>

Hannah Arendt was foremost among post-war scholars who carefully studied Hitler’s ideology as a fiction divorced from reality, especially the searing physical suffering of human beings. The new “*Deutsches Requiem*” investigators often cite her work on the origins of totalitarianism, focusing on the lack of “common sense” in ideologies such as Nazism, with its fostering of mass think and a loss of individuality, its demonizing anti-Semitism, use of terror and pseudo-science, and future orientation. All of these elements are present in Otto Dietrich’s discourse: David Jerusalem’s isn’t a per-

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<sup>7</sup> Schopenhauer, another philosophical eminence acknowledged by zur Linde, could be omitted from Nazi-era texts—as Borges mentioned—and, at the same time, recycled for Nazi purposes. The topic merits further study. See Ciamarra, and on Borges and Schopenhauer, Almeida.

son (“ante mis ojos no era un hombre”), but an ideological construct, a “detested zone”; hence he can be “surgically” tortured in the name of the final Nazi victory (OC 579).

“El nazismo, intrínsecamente es un hecho moral, un despojarse del viejo hombre, que está viciado, para vestir el nuevo” (OC 578). This statement by Otto Dietrich, strange as it may seem, really sums up it up. Claudia Koonz quotes it in her recent book, *The Nazi Conscience*, which opens with the sentence: “‘The Nazi conscience’ is not an oxymoron. Although it may be repugnant to conceive of mass murderers acting in according with an ethos that they believed vindicated their crimes, the historical record of the Third Reich suggests that this was often the case.” After citing Borges, Koonz goes on to say: “Scholars have analyzed the broad outlines and subtle nuances of Nazi ideology without taking Hitler’s promise of a new moral order seriously. In this book, I examine ... [his] comprehensive ethical revolution” (1; 16). Her interest in Nazi ethics and reading of “Deutsches Requiem” as a precursor text reflects other researchers’ concern with this dimension. Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones works with Lucy Dawidowicz’s careful documentation of the Nazis’ care to overcome pity, and Erin Graff Zivin, examines “Deutsches Requiem” through Lévinas: How do you turn the face into an “other” in order to annihilate it? Otto Dietrich ruminates about Jerusalem’s looks and about the “danger” of confronting him as a “ro-tro,” a human being, not an anonymous zone or cipher.

#### THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION

How do you represent the Holocaust? The dilemma has plagued culture makers from the outset. Theodor Adorno’s now canonical dictum that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric hasn’t stopped the writing—but what writing, and how to make words, the material of fiction, commensurate with the crematoria? (See Lang and Friedlander in Aizenberg, “Postmodern”)

Borges, held to be a paragon of unreality, seemed ill equipped to represent Auschwitz where as survivor Jean Améry chillingly witnessed, reality was unbearably real as a glance at the watchtowers, a whiff from the gas chambers. But when contemporary criticism

more and more spotlighted the problem of Holocaust representation, Borges didn't appear so unprepared after all. Far from shirking the bind of fictionalizing the Shoah, Borges confronted it in tales such as "The Secret Miracle" and "Deutsches Requiem," composed in the heat of the events, way before the critical category "Holocaust literature" existed, way before the theoretical speculations.

He recognized early on that the reality of Auschwitz ("Tarnowitz" in "Deutsches Requiem") demanded a poetics of saying and unsaying—on the one hand mimetic approximation, the documentary accumulation on the tragedy; on the other hand escape, fantasy, fragmentation, fractured discourse. Reality and unreality jostling together, telling and unraveling what is told. Current scholarship on "Deutsches Requiem" identifies this poetics at work in the story; what was previously seen as weakness (incompleteness, piecemeal narration in the footnotes) is now viewed as strength (see López-Quñones).

On the one hand, the datum points: a fiction published only months after the Nuremberg Trials of the Nazi high command (November 1945-August 1946) has a protagonist who is a war criminal, sub-director of the "Tarnowitz" concentration camp. Just as Hitler's heresiarchs were publicly and privately allowed to speak and write their mind, while the world heard, read, and tried to fathom what made them tick (how cultured men could do such things), so did "Deutsches Requiem" let Otto Dietrich zur Linde write his piece (see Goldensohn). Argentina's newspapers were filled with headline articles on the judgments, the first time the depth of the atrocities was so publicized. The testimonies and self-justification of Hitler's henchmen spilled over the front pages of *La Nación*, for instance, the rhetoric as rendered into Spanish often sounding like zur Linde's. Here is Rudolph Hess: "Me siento feliz de saber que cumplí con mi deber como alemán, nacionalsocialista y fiel servidor de mi Fuehrer. Volvería, si tuviera la oportunidad, a proceder en la misma forma, aunque supiera que ello me constaría morir en la hoguera." Or Alfred Rosenberg: "Mi conciencia está completamente limpia. Hitler atrajo hacia sí más y más personas que no eran mis camaradas, sino mis enemigos. Nuestra lucha perseguía un noble ideal" (*La Nación* 1 Sept. 1946, p. 2).

“Deutsches Requiem” isn’t the only or the initial story where Borges uses the first-person confessional mode, but Otto Dietrich’s testimony wouldn’t have happened without Nuremberg. In a grim way the accused “invented” a war crimes, truth and justice commission paradigm, a perverse poetics of recounting (and omitting) that Borges adapts in his fiction.

And a fiction it is. Even if documentary accumulation molds the account, we are reading a fabrication. Here the “on the other hand” comes in, fractured discourse disturbing Otto Dietrich’s clockwork orange of an apologia. Senkman, Warner, Graff Zivin, López-Quiñones as well as Yasmine-Sigrid Vandorpe highlight the gaps, ironies, paradoxes, inconsistencies, and expurgations in zur Linde’s testimony. They study how “Deutsches Requiem” functions as a counterpoint of two major voices—the Nazi’s and the editor’s, as important if understudied presence in the text (see López-Quiñones, who has studied the editor most fully). David Jerusalem doesn’t speak, but as Graff Zivin underlines, the Nazi cannot totally snuff out his voice.

Distant from the ideal of the testosterone-laden *Übermensch*, Otto Dietrich is a one legged cripple, a fragmented being possibly castrated as a result of an amputation sustained precisely when he was on an anti-Semitic *Aktion*. Every time he injures Jews he injures himself, just as Germany immolated itself through the war and the Holocaust. The editor’s constant interpolations through the footnotes rupture the falsely smooth surface of the Nazi’s genealogy, physical prowess, and contribution to the so-called “Final Solution,” poking holes in the expurgations and euphemisms that mark the *Lingua Tertii Imperii*.

Otto Dietrich omits his most illustrious ancestor, the Hebraist Johannes Forkel, from the list of his forebears, says the first footnote; the consequences of his injury were graver (castrating?) than he let on, comments another. As for the “establishment’s disciplinary measures” (*el régimen disciplinario de nuestra casa*) that Otto Dietrich applies to David Jerusalem, they were torture so unspeakable that the text breaks off, with a footnote stating that the horror cannot be told. (Notice the word *casa* for concentration camp with its connotations of *heimlich*, domestically cozy.) Representing the Holocaust

with some degree of effectiveness can only be a piecemeal work, and it would be disingenuous to suppose a melodramatic photographic fullness.

#### THE NAZI AS SPEAKER

The central conundrum of Borges's fiction is that the main speaker is a Nazi, and not any Nazi, but one of the perpetrators of the Holocaust about to be executed for his crimes against humanity. How could Borges, whose anti-Nazi credentials were impeccable, have created such a hero and allowed him free rein so openly, so articulately? Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones, Yasmine-Sigrid Vandorpe, and Annick Louis are some of the scholars who have engaged this issue. López-Quiñones, author of the most exhaustive analysis, asserts unequivocally that "'Deutsches Requiem' es un cuento incómodo," adding, "Escribir las memorias de un nazi desde su punto de vista con el fin de comprender sus obras, no deja de resultar temerario ideológicamente" (136).

Vandorpe and Louis are more accusatory, charging that Borges either fudges the ideological lines or plays with a justification of Nazism. "L'ambiguïté idéologique du citoyen Borges se trouve magistralement articulée dans le discours littéraire de la nouvelle," says Vandorpe, while Louis writes, "'Deutsches Requiem' juega con la ficción de una justificación posible [del nazismo]." This fiction is not innocuous, Louis suggests, because for Borges fiction was more important than reality, and what counts isn't Borges's pro-Allied posture but his literary writings where his ideology really resides (Vandorpe 93; Louis, "Besando a Judas" 71).

Everyone would have been happier, if, as Warner remarks, Borges would have put an admonition at the story's end, a moral-didactic statement affirming "Nazism is bad and I stand against it." But Borges didn't, although he did provide a tag and an early reading frame in the epilogue to *El Aleph* (1949) where "Deutsches Requiem" was first collected. He clearly declared: "En la última guerra nadie pudo anhelar más que yo que fuera derrotada Alemania; nadie pudo sentir más que yo lo trágico del destino alemán; 'Deutsches Requiem' quiere entender ese destino, que no supieron llorar, ni siquiera sos-

pechar, nuestros “germanófilos”, que nada saben de Alemania” (OC 629). We are not obligated to use this frame or any other frame—Borges’s anti-Nazi articles and statements, or for that matter, his other stories. (Though we almost inevitably do.) Yet these particular remarks are illuminating. They explain Borges’s posture more fully and how it relates to “Deutsches Requiem.” More notably, they explain the story’s internal logic, comfortable or uncomfortable as it may be.

Borges passionately wanted Nazi Germany to be defeated (this is the part everyone focuses on); at the same time he also deeply felt the tragedy of Germany’s destiny (the more tricky part). “Deutsches Requiem” wants to understand this destiny *through its own logic*, logic of violence, hatred, and destruction, but logic nonetheless. How did Germany come to destroy itself, as it destroyed millions of people, Jews with special ferocity? What was the attraction of the Nazi system, an attraction that hasn’t disappeared? Because Borges admired Germany he tried to comprehend the Nazism, an ethics of cruelty, it in its own terms, possibly the most dangerous, yet the most unvarnished and penetrating way of doing it. He wrote of the Nazi time: “A los alemanes no les ha bastado con ser crueles; han creído necesario construir una teoría previa de la crueldad, una justificación de la crueldad como postulado ético” (*Textos recobrados* 316).

Still, Borges didn’t just leave his story as a presentation of Nazism’s logic—he built in the undercutting of the logic. We don’t have to believe that truth is on the side of the editor, the main undercutter, but then again, we don’t have to believe that it is on the side of the Nazi—the assumption made when we read the story as a straightforward Nazi apologia? <sup>8</sup> The editor does have a crucial advantage, though, the advantage of the margin, where lies are peeled away, exposing inhumanities the official story obfuscates.

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<sup>8</sup> On the question of how we position ourselves when we read or study about the Holocaust, with whom we identify, and the possibility of fore-grounding various identifications as a way of thinking through the Holocaust’s moral and representational issues, see Hirsch and Kacandes, 14-19.

Beneath the reasoning and the verbiage, beneath the euphemisms hides the reality of the system. In the counterpoint of above and below, upper text and lower text, Borges wove an exposé of Nazism, forcing us to read in the gap between the two, making us work, but then, why not? In 2005, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Germany's defeat, the war's end, and the liberation of the camps, we are still struggling to make sense of what occurred.

#### DEUTSCHES REQUIEM 2046

We can't predict how "Deutsches Requiem" will be read in the future. Ramsey Clark considered it exemplary, prophetic for our already troubled 21<sup>st</sup> century. But who knows? A great deal will depend on how we guard the world and the word—a lesson that (the non-didactic) Borges taught us.

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