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. 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-

The African American experience as represented by the lives of many of the characters in this novel is a significant part of the novel’s narrative style. The novel’s portrayal of the African American experience is both realistic and idealistic, presenting a range of experiences and perspectives that contribute to the novel’s overall theme of the African American experience in the United States.

In the opening pages of the novel, the author introduces the reader to the central character, John (“John Dee”), a young African American man who is struggling to find his place in a society that is hostile to his race. John is a complex character, with a troubled past and a complicated personality, but he is also a symbol of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.

The novel’s other characters—many of them African American—share John’s experiences and struggles, but they also offer different perspectives on the African American experience. Some of the characters are represented as successful and well-adjusted, while others are more troubled and conflicted. Through these diverse perspectives, the novel offers a nuanced and realistic portrayal of the African American experience in the United States.

In the final pages of the novel, the author returns to John’s story, offering a hopeful and optimistic view of the future. Despite the challenges that John and his fellow African Americans have faced, the novel suggests that they are capable of overcoming adversity and building a better future for themselves and their communities.

Overall, the novel offers a powerful and thought-provoking exploration of the African American experience, presenting a range of perspectives and offering a message of hope and resilience in the face of adversity.
tive. 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 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.

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." 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.

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." On the very last page of the book, Borges even forges a principle, a requirement out of such direct experience

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2 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.


5 Ibid, p. 143.

6 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; with out having felt its adobe walls, its small fields, its moon shining just around the corner grocery store..."

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"). 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."). 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-

rain, and would assert with utmost confidence that "our patrimony is the universe."  

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." 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."  

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
seven years as a youthful experimenter with his family across
Europe. His personal aim of self-education after having spent
considerable distance from that home.

In "Rosés," a mediative poem devoted to the 19th century
European scene, some attention is paid to the intellectual
trends of the time. There are many fine poetic insights into the
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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. 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. 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 started out by "implementing the old aspirations of the nationalist groups." 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." 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 P or L, so often had we heard them prostituted on the lips of public crooks." Similarly, in a 1930 pamphlet, the Communist Party boss Rodolfo Ghioffi once said, "In Argentina we have oppression by the landlords, the imperialists, and the

17 Ibid., p. 248.
The controversy ofrace, preceding the events, helped to extend the boundaries of the American Indian's experience, and also seeking new homes as the 1860s showed. The idea of an American cultural event was written at the very heart of the controversy, as the American Indian's experience was a part of the European colonizer's experience. The American Indian's experience was also a part of the European colonizer's experience, as the European colonizer's experience was a part of the American Indian's experience.

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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 hoodlums 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 porteño, 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 Carthagic 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."22 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 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-realistic," 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."23 Borges's family background, nationalistic years, anti-fascist cosmopolitanism, and narrative use of Argentine subjects all clearly sustain his counter-argument. Allied and attached to a liberal Argentinean 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.


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