

RESENHA

Book Review:

THON, Sonia. **Contexto, estilo y forma en la obra de Jorge Luis Borges y Manuel Puig**: ensayos. Lewiston, N. Y.: The Edwin Meller Press, 2011, 148 p.

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This book is a collection of eight essays about two main literary figures of contemporary Argentinean fiction. The first text constitutes a comparative study of Borges and Puig. There are three chapters exclusively dedicated to Manuel Puig's novels, two chapters solely devoted to Borges's stories, and two other chapters that, respectively, compare Borges to Cortázar and Borges to Cervantes.

The first chapter is a comparison of the use of language made by Borges and Puig throughout their literary production. According to Thon, both writers aim at reflecting the roots of the speech used in Buenos Aires, but emphasize different aspects of the phenomenon. On the one hand, in his texts, Borges is in search of an authentic voice, capable of separating itself from the language inherited from the Spanish colonizers. In this sense, Borges wants to construct an identity based on the tradition of the Creole version of the Spanish language, one that is intimately related to the *gaucho*, the *lunfardo*. On the other hand, Puig intends to reproduce the blend that emerges as thousands and thousands of people from all over the world arrive to Argentina. Puig –himself a direct descendant of immigrants– reflects in his writing his own encounter with the voices of Buenos Aires. Thus, in his books, he abundantly uses expressions that can be found in popular songs, soap operas and films.

The second chapter of the book is dedicated to the analysis of the style of Borges and Cortázar. Here, Sonia Thon studies the relation between the context of several stories by these authors and the syntactic order that they use in their writing. According to the author, Borges's stories are

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characterised by linearity and an economy of words, thus, making it possible for him to succeed in writing very short texts. In contradistinction, Cortázar's style abounds in deviations and interferences that produce longer stories. Accordingly, she demonstrates that each writer develops different rhythmic and stylistic strategies to communicate his message to the readers.

The fourth chapter of the book is also a comparative study. In this case, the author analyses Borges's story «Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote» in terms of its links to Cervantes's *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, beyond the obvious intertextual role that the Spanish novel plays in the Argentinean story. Essentially, the aim of this article is to establish how both literary works use parody and irony in order to deal with the complex tensions that arise between fiction and reality.

In chapter five, Sonia Thon studies Borges's story «La casa de Asterión». As it has been determined before, in his text, Borges actualizes the myth of the Minotaur. However, in a thorough analysis, Thon shows that the Argentinean writer refers to the Greek myth as well as to the Bible. In this sense, the death of Asterión, as the story comes to a close, would not only stand as the end of a monstrous creature –as designed by the Ancient gods–, but would also include a quest for redemption, the Minotaur's own quest for pardon. Accordingly, the author deciphers the implicit message of the story: the risks foreseen by Borges in finding in organised religion an easy way out of human responsibility.

The last chapter of the book is dedicated to the contextualisation of Borges's story «El tema del traidor y del héroe». Time after time, as the author estates, Borges's work has been considered as pertaining to fantastic literature and essentially independent from the writer's socio-historical context. However, lately, some critics have come to assert that his writing is intimately related to his life experience and his encounters with main political and intellectual figures. In her analysis, Sonia Thon recapitulates many interpretations of this story in relation to Shakespeare, the Roman Empire, and the Independence of Ireland. Then, in what we consider a genuine tour de force, she provides all the necessary data to relate the story to Juan Domingo Perón. According to Thon's analysis, Borges establishes an analogy between the traitor of the story –Julio Cesar– and the Argentinean dictator of that period, Perón. Essentially, while positioning Argentina as an apparent neutral country during most part of World War II, Perón had signed a treaty

with Hitler and provided the Nazi regime with weapons and scientific instruments. Thanks to this interpretation, Thon reveals that Borges was an engaged writer who, through this particular text, opposed Nazism and Peronism. This is a very interesting discovery that may well be a first step to unearth other political messages hidden in Borges's stories.

In «De la literatura al cine y viceversa» –chapter three–, the author analyses *Boquitas pintadas* in terms of the different discourses found in the novel. Particularly, Thon studies the correspondence between the novel's structure and the popular soap operas. Based on narratology, she investigates the relations between the fragmentation found in Puig's novel and cinematographic storytelling.

This line of thought is continued in chapter six, where Sonia Thon explores how the reader of the text or the movie watcher has the task to reconstruct the story and give it a sense of unity. In order to deepen her research, the author analyses time and mode in Puig's *Boquitas pintadas* and *El beso de la mujer araña*. According to her, the success of the adaptation of both novels by filmmakers is due to the fact that the texts already present a patchy structure. Therefore, in both cases, the receptor of these works of art will use her/his memory to make sense of the different scenes that compose the fragmentary narrative.

Finally, in chapter seven, Thon completes her analysis of the abovementioned novels by focusing on time and space as paradoxes. In fact, in these novels, Puig sheds light on the frontier between free and restrictive societies. *Boquitas pintadas* takes place in a town where, under the appearance of liberty, people –especially women– have to face many social constraints. On the contrary, in *El beso de la mujer araña* the two main characters of the novel –who are in a State prison – may experience freedom in the isolation of the cell that they share. These three detailed studies of Puig's novels contribute to the understanding of the complexity of the work of this main Argentinean author, who had been initially disregarded as a popular writer. Through her analysis, Sonia Thon demonstrates the importance of Puig not only as a novelist, but also as an engaged artist who suffered and fought against social and political oppression.

Throughout the book, the author examines the texts of two main Argentinean writers focusing on several aspects: the use and rhythm of language, the importance of intertextuality, the role of myth, the social and

historical contexts, and the relations of the texts to other discourses. We would like to emphasize the relevance of the questions considered by Sonia Thon, as well as the accuracy and refinement of her analysis.