

PABLO BRESCIA, *Modelos y prácticas en el cuento hispanoamericano. Arreola, Borges, Cortázar*. Madrid: Iberoamericana/Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert. 2011. 367 pp.

Pablo Brescia's volume studies three key figures in the Spanish-American short story: the Mexican Juan José Arreola and the Argentinians Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar. In each case he extracts and considers the short story theory of the writer and analyses a couple or so of their stories both in the light of that theory and as a contribution to it. The study is substantial in extension and content. Its detail and breadth of reference suggest that it is the fruit of many years of research and thought. At every stage copious footnotes reflect critical opinion on every issue and text, which is at once illuminating and hard work for a conscientious reader. The bibliography, at over 600 items, is a useful research tool in itself. The introduction, with a brief history of the genre and a sketch of his methodology, is followed by a chapter on each of the authors and a final section which reviews the contacts between the three and suggests further avenues of research.

The Introduction covers many dimensions of the topic, and is agile and effective. The genealogy of the genre in world terms is traced rapidly from *Gilgamesh*, through Greek epic, the *Satiricon*, fourteenth-century texts by Boccaccio and Chaucer, the *novelas* of Cervantes, the Romantic interest in folklore and the exotic in the tales of Grimm and the *Thousand and One*

*Nights*, up to what he sees as the classic texts on the practice of the modern short story: Edgar Allan Poe's review of Hawthorne and his 'Philosophy of Composition'. A similar, very useful summary of the genre in Latin America follows, taking in the colonial chronicles, Fernández de Lizardi, the *costumbrista* *Tradiciones* of Palma, the Romantic texts of Echeverría, through the *modernista* stories of Gutiérrez Nájera and Darío, the fantastic stories of Lugones, up to the foundational texts of Horacio Quiroga, together with the theory he expounds in the 'Decálogo del perfecto cuentista'. He approaches the notion of genre mainly through a contrastive approach, i.e. story *versus* novel, etc. Towards the end of the chapter Brescia selects Cortázar's 'Algunos aspectos del cuento' as the distinctive theoretical model for the work of his three writers, and highlights the notion of a double discourse of conflictive rationalities: 'la sospecha de otro orden más secreto y menos comunicable' (46).

In Chapter 2, Brescia demonstrates a very thorough knowledge of the bibliography of Jorge Luis Borges, and offers a rich account of Borges' thought on the short story. He opts for what he calls a vertical approach, which takes canonical essays such as 'El arte narrativo y la magia' and the prologue to Bioy's *La invención de Morel* as central and explores peripheral essays, 'la orilla', in 'operaciones de rescate' which recover little known texts such as the prologue to the stories of María Esther Vázquez. From the latter he extracts four principles concerning the order of the story as an organic whole dictated by the end, the centrality of Poe, the importance of the reader, and the notion of the two stories: the visible one and, as he paraphrases, 'una secreta que se trabaja elípticamente en los intersticios del otro argumento' (67). From a 1949 lecture in Montevideo, he extracts Borges' four themes of fantastic literature: the work within the work, the merging of dream and reality, time travel and the double. Within these terms Brescia offers a detailed analysis of the classic mirror story 'El Sur'. To this perspective, he adds a consideration of Borges' writings on detective fiction to analyse 'Abenjacán el Bojarí muerto en su laberinto', where he shows an impressive and detailed grasp of the complex mechanics of the tale and the history of its various readings.

The following two chapters follow a similar pattern of providing a fascinating and rich account of the developments of the authors' literary outlook before proceeding to the detailed analysis. On Cortázar, the most theoretically coherent of the three, Brescia gathers material from the letters and many other sources to recount the early history of Cortázar's engagement with story writing in Mendoza and in Buenos Aires before leaving for Paris in 1951. He boils down his detailed readings of later theoretical material to the central importance of the notion of 'apertura' and a dynamic structural principle: 'la dinámica entre lo centrípeto (límite-recorte-autonomía del mundo imaginado) y lo centrífugo (trascendencia-momento significativo-apertura)' (153). The very fine analyses of 'La noche boca arriba' (in many ways the twin of Borges' 'El Sur') and 'Autobús' use these notions and the constant of the double story very convincingly. The chapter on Arreola offers excellent insights into his role as publisher, mentor and public intellectual, while gathering fragmentary comments into a concept of the short form which Brescia skilfully condenses to three axes: 'imitación-vocación intertextual; condensación resultante de la belleza formal; el misterio poético que hace del lector un coautor' (226). The analysis of 'El guardagujas' and 'El silencio de dios' are technically accomplished as elsewhere and offer an awarding and enlightening exploration of the ambiguous and complex working of Arreola's literary mind.

Pablo Brescia's ABC of the Spanish-American short story is an important, indeed landmark work on this crucial strand of the literature of the region.

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