

But neither can exoteric readers (or reviewers) be sure that their interpretations are correct. In reference to this study of bold critical imagination, detailed analysis, and impressive learning, it therefore seems fair to say of de Armas what my philosophy professor once said of Martin Heidegger: "Even if he is wrong, he is profoundly wrong." And, of course, a clause with "if" can summon its ghostly contrary, resisting full disclosure. In this case: "And if he is right, . . ."

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Brescia, Pablo. *Modelos y prácticas en el cuento hispanoamericano. Arreola, Borges, Cortázar.* Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Editorial Vervuert, 2011. 367 pp.

Until recently, Spanish-American drama was the Cinderella of criticism in the field. Brescia argues that now the short story is the neglected area, though his vast and most useful bibliography rather contradicts that. His introduction traces the development of the genre, narrowing down to modern Spanish America. Then he proceeds to deal with his three examples, affirming that "[e]n estas páginas se da prioridad al marco teórico" (12). By this is meant the views of the writers in question with regard to short-story writing. Brescia has combed their output for such views in what will probably for most readers be the most interesting part of his work. In each of the three cases this is followed by a thorough analysis of selected short stories and the existing state of criticism on them. In the case of Borges, the stories are *El Sur* and *Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto*. In that of Cortázar, they are *La noche boca arriba* and *Omnibus*. For Arreola, Brescia selects *El gurdaguas* and *El silencio de Dios*. All of these stories are treated in enlightening detail on a basis of meticulous research. The author's conclusion is not especially original. It is anticipated on page 160, where Brescia writes, apropos of "las cuentísticas de los tres escritores que se estudian en este libro: El eje filosófico-literario rechaza la mirada que explica el mundo en términos de realismo 'falso' para favorecer una visión 'fantástica' en la cual, desde un orden superficial, 'real,' normal, se erige otro orden profundo, secreto, menos comunicable; un orden que, a veces, solo se sospecha." Thus the stories tend to function at two levels, which the alert reader is called upon to recognize.

What this underlines afresh is that these writers use fantasy to subvert the readers' confidence in our ability to interpret reality at all. This is really the most important conclusion to be drawn from the book. I regret that it was not more clearly spelled out, as it was in Jesús Rodero's excellent *La edad de la incertidumbre* (New York: Lang, 2006), which studies the fantastic short story in general in Spanish America and which Brescia unfortunately overlooks, but which is in some ways a companion volume to his own book.

As it is, what we can see is that his approach owes most to the views of Cortázar, who, as Brescia points out, comes closest to having a coherent theory of

short story writing as exemplified by his own ones. The difficulty is to fix on an "ur-text" in each of the writers in question which best fits what appear to be his views on his art. Borges, for his part, is quite clear that each of his tales has its own technique, but Brescia shows convincingly that the underlying approach to reality mentioned above does, in fact, impose what he once refers to as "una cierta inevitabilidad en la forma del cuento." This is what he teaches us to look for. It does not, however, strait-jacket his own analyses of the individual stories with their very helpful handling of earlier criticism. The key pages in this chapter seem to me to be 188-89, in which Brescia alludes to Cortázar's stories as in some sense cognitive: they incorporate "una actitud ante el mundo que se traslada a la literatura en tanto método de conocimiento." This involves questioning social convention, normal aspects of causality and the use of Cortázar's famous "figuras" and leads to the implicit postulate of a parallel pattern of reality with its own system of order.

It is suggested that Arreola, with Rulfo, begins a new epoch in the Mexican short story. Brescia postulates three or four constants in the former's stories: intertextuality, precision and efficacy of language, appeal to reader-collaboration and inevitably, "una estructura doble." The last predominates.

For many readers the selection and treatment of the individual stories will be the core of the book. Brescia's underlying affirmation is that this group of *cuentistas* produced a "viraje" in the modern Spanish American short story. His analyses are intended to prop up this assertion. With regard to Borges, this is not a difficult task. A key-date is 1940, with the publication by Borges, Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo of the *Antología de la literatura fantástica*, which opened that portentous decade, after which nothing in Spanish American fiction was quite the same. The technical result was the discovery of the *doble argumento* or *doble historia* mentioned above. An interesting feature of the shift was subsequently mentioned by Bioy when, in 1965, he admitted "acometimos contra las novelas psicológicas." One wonders which they were, since the *roman d'analyse* (apart from those of Mallea) is strikingly missing from both Argentine and Spanish American fiction. This is an often overlooked turning-point which Brescia perceptively emphasizes (72).

Faithful to his proposal, Brescia examines *El Sur* "desde la posible teoría de Borges sobre el cuento," arguing that it illustrates the four basic forms which the latter thought fantastic literature can adopt: the tale within a tale, the interface between reality and dreaming, the journey through time and the theme of the double. It is a commentary on Borges criticism that no one has used this approach before. As so often, once it emerges, it seems obvious and produces a convincing analysis. In effect, as Brescia himself affirms a "doble lectura" which reveals how the story works (83). In *Abenjacán*, noting that the tale has received some sharp criticism, Brescia considers "los riesgos y los avatares de la estructura de la doble historia." Whether the risks are entirely avoided by Borges's suggestion that the story should be read to some degree as a parody remains an open question. But it seems to me that Brescia establishes both his objectives: that we must actively consider the clues contained in Borges's own writings (in this case about how to read detective fiction) and the view that "el doble argumento es esencial a la construcción del cuento" (123).

Many of us have faced the difficulty of trying to define the difference(s) between Borges and Cortázar as writers of fantastic stories. By carefully analyzing the latter's relevant writings about the short story after those of the former, Brescia offers useful hints. But mainly his concern once more is to put *La noche boca arriba* and *Omnibus* in their correct context. The four forms postulated by Borges remain, together with the notion of an "estructura doble": "dos historias" woven together to symbolize the mystery of reality. Once again, this approach proves fruitful.

It is suggested that Arreola and Rulfo initiate a new epoch in the Mexican short story. Brescia identifies three or four constants in the former's practice of short story writing: intertextuality, precision and efficacy of style, appeal to reader-participation and, inevitably "una estructura doble." These are explored in his commentary on *El guardaguijas*, which is partly designed to argue that the story's aim is to "explorar la existencia" and not, as so often before, to "copiar la vida." It is not a question of thematics but of creative strategies.

To colleagues who teach Spanish American short story courses, this will be a most helpful book. What is best about it is precisely that it emphasizes narrative strategies and not content. This is what our students, especially at the graduate level, need.

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Castillo, David R., and Bradley J. Nelson, eds. *Spectacle and Topophilia. Reading Early Modern and Postmodern Hispanic Cultures*. Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt UP, 2011. xxiv + 276 pp.

The editors of *Spectacle and Topophilia* continue the work of a previous volume also edited by David R. Castillo, in which he and another editor assembled a series of supple, provocative, and erudite essays. As happened with its precursor, *Reason and Its Others*, the present twelve-piece ensemble traces correspondences between place and spectacle in order to tell a cogent story of the role played by such correspondence in the development of modern secularization and the triumph of individualism—*sine qua non* tools for anyone attempting to understand modernity or subjectivity. Where others in the field of Hispanic studies have seen the dismemberment of nature, the objectification of the world or the rise of a visual episteme as signs of modern times, the essays in this collection argue that *topophilia* (or significant sense of place as a determining factor in cultural identity) and a *spectaculist* structuring of space, "going back to the theatrical productions of the Spanish Golden Age" are indispensable heuristic tools in the (once impossible) contiguous reading of early-modern-and-postmodern Hispanic cultures (xii). The contribution of this volume to debates about environmentalism, reification, and perspectivism or, as Castillo and Nelson state in the "Introduction," "to a better understanding of the cultural and sociopolitical configurations that continue to structure our perception of the world in an age of global communications and virtual selves," is bound to be significant (xii).