



Borges: Selected Non-Fictions

By Jorge Luis Borges

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Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism

It will come as a surprise to some readers that the greater part of Jorge Luis Borges's extraordinary writing was not in the genres of fiction or poetry, but in the various forms of non-fiction prose. His thousands of pages of essays, reviews, prologues, lectures, and notes on politics and culture—though revered in Latin America and Europe as among his finest work—have scarcely been translated into English.

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Borges: Selected Non-Fictions By Jorge Luis Borges Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Jorge Luis Borges was our century's greatest miniaturist, perpetually cramming entire universes onto the head of a pin. Yet his splendid economy, along the wafer-thin proportions of such classic volumes as *Ficciones* and *Labyrinths*, has given readers the impression that Borges was miserly with his prose. In fact, he was something of a verbal spendthrift. His collected stories alone run to nearly 1,000 pages. And his nonfiction output was even more staggering: the young Borges cranked out hundreds of essays, book notes, cultural polemics, and movie reviews, and even after he lost his sight in 1955, he continued to dictate short pieces by the dozens. Eliot Weinberger has assembled just a fraction of this outpouring in *Selected Non-Fictions*, and the result is a 559-page Borgesian blowout, in which the Argentinean fabulist takes on being and nothingness, James Joyce and Lana Turner, and (surprisingly) racial hatred and the rise of Nazism. So much for our image of the mandarin bookworm! The very *engagé* author of *this* book seems more like a subequatorial Camus, with a dash of Siskel and Ebert on the side.

Selected Non-Fictions demonstrates just how quickly Borges began wrestling with such brainteasers as identity, time, and infinity. Indeed, the very first piece in the collection, "The Nothingness of Personality" (1922), already finds him fiddling with the self: "I, as I write this, am only a certainty that seeks out the words that are most apt to compel your attention. That proposition and a few muscular sensations, and the sight of the limpid branches that the trees place outside my window, constitute my current I." There are many such meditations here, including "A History of Eternity" (in which Borges maps out his own, disarmingly empty version of the eternal, "without a God or even a co-proprietor, and entirely devoid of archetypes"). But it's more fun--and more revelatory--to see the author venturing beyond his metaphysical stomping grounds. Borges on *King Kong* is a hoot, and a cornball masterpiece such as *The Petrified Forest* elicits this terrific nugget: "Death works in this film like hypnosis or alcohol: it brings the recesses of the soul into the light of day." His capsule biographies are a delight, his critiques of Nazi propaganda are memorably stringent, and nobody should miss him on the tango. True, the sheer variety and mind-boggling erudition of *Selected Non-Fictions* can be a little forbidding. But, taken as a whole, the collection surely meets the specifications that Borges laid out in a 1927 essay on literary pleasure: "If only some eternal book existed, primed for our enjoyment and whims, no less inventive in the populous morning as in the secluded night, oriented toward all hours of the world." Oh, but it does. --James Marcus

From Publishers Weekly

Reviewing a book that seeks to validate the existence of ghosts through testimony by the upper crust of British society, Borges writes: "the Honorable Reginald Fortescue became a firm believer in the existence of 'an alarming spectre.' As for myself, I don't know what to think: for the moment, I refuse to believe in the alarming Reginald Fortescue until an honorable spectre becomes a firm believer in his existence." In this compilation of nonfiction prose, the third of Viking's magisterial three-volume collection of Borges's complete works, a new, fuller Borges emerges, as the writer becomes a joker; the fabulist shows himself to be a rationalistic skeptic; and the alleged conservative skewers upper-class pretensions. We also find the familiar man of letters in such classic essays as "A New Refutation of Time" and "Kafka's Precursors" (which foreshadows the most interesting ideas of Harold Bloom in a mere two and a half pages). Among the gems to appear in English for the first time are slyly brilliant literary essays, such as an appreciation of Flaubert's enigmatic novel, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, and an authoritative critical history of the translations of the *1001 Nights*. Other newly available aspects of Borges's oeuvre are trenchant critiques of Argentinean anti-Semitism; contemporary reviews of such works as *Citizen Kane*, *Absalom, Absalom* and *Finnegan's Wake* (Borges finds it incomprehensible); and capsule literary biographies for a woman's magazine. While

the translations capture Borges's unfailingly elegant style, the editing at times seems overly academic: certain sentences, even paragraphs, are repeated, and certain topics (particularly time and eternity) are overrepresented, a tendency that makes the book rather difficult to read straight through. Even so, this is a volume of inexhaustible delights. First serial to Grand Street. (Sept.)
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From Library Journal

After Collected Fictions and Selected Poems, nonfiction pieces from a 20th-century master, making up a three-volume centenary edition.
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Users Review

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