

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Contexts Rather Than Close Readings of Latin American Literature

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This essay reviews the following works:

Borges and the Literary Marketplace: How Editorial Practices Shaped Cosmopolitan Readings. By Nora C. Benedict. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021. Pp. ix + 365. \$35.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780300251418.

Oriente no es una pieza de museo: Jorge Luis Borges, la clave orientalista y el manuscrito de “Qué es el budismo.” By Sonia Betancort. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2018. Pp. 316. Paperback. ISBN: 9788490129678.

Artesana de sí misma: Gabriela Mistral, una intelectual en cuerpo y palabra. By Claudia Cabello Hutt. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2018. Pp. vii + 240. \$45.00 paperback. ISBN: 9781557538079.

Jorge Luis Borges in Context. Edited by Robin Fiddian. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. viii + 285. \$116.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108470445.

A History of Chilean Literature. Edited by Ignacio López-Calvo. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 654. \$115.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781108487375.

Ascent to Glory: How “One Hundred Years of Solitude” Was Written and Became a Global Classic. By Alvaro Santana-Acuña. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. Pp. 384. \$28.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780231184335.

Within the restrictive context of a class period, teaching a work of literature requires the presentation of some modicum of contextualizing background knowledge before the focus shifts to the work itself; through close reading, along with some reference to research, the teacher engages students and pursues an interpretation of said work. This is perhaps too obvious a point to make, and it is just as obvious a point that the central focus of the class period is the piece of literature being studied, which organizes and delimits what will be said and learned about it. In its efficiency, this literature-centric setting is stable and familiar. The six books reviewed here recognize the literary work as privileged discourse, yet in each book that discourse is set aside to explore the myriad other discourses that inform and shape the literary without the obligation to return to literary analysis as necessary and fundamental proof. Without the anchor of the close reading episteme, time and space are freed up to pursue other analytical avenues, and

these books direct our attention to other texts and contexts: background knowledge (perhaps a misnomer) that is foregrounded and plentiful rather than efficiently managed.

The three books on Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) look at other aspects—many other aspects—of Borges’s intellectual life besides what he is most famous for, his short stories. The analyses are decentering and refractive in complementary ways. The stories are touchstones in the three books, but more often than not they are treated glancingly while the authors turn their attention to the surrounding contexts (local, global) and texts to explore Borges’s intellectual, creative, and professional life.

At the core of Sonia Betancort’s *Oriente no es una pieza de museo: Jorge Luis Borges, la clave orientalista y el manuscrito “Qué es el budismo”* is a manuscript study, a close analysis, including the notes and manuscript material of *Qué es el budismo* and its journey to publication. From that core, though, Betancort develops a much bigger project, which is an intellectual history of Borges’s interest, from childhood forward, in Asian culture, philosophy, and literature. It is also a reading history and an aesthetic and creative history, in which Betancort charts not only what Asian material Borges takes up and how, but how that material becomes a catalyst for Borges’s aesthetic development and creative output through his life. In the introduction, Betancort invokes postcolonial theorist Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism, which “denounces the scientific insufficiency of a perspective arising from the exploitative need [denuncia la insuficiencia científica de una perspectiva surgida del afán explotador]” (20); against this she counterpoints an artist and writer like Borges, who “with a transgressive traveling spirit, his works managed to install themselves in Western culture by spreading an Orientalist vision distanced from the purposes of the Empire . . . to *Asiatize* and transform the Western European being [con un transgresor espíritu viajero, lograron instalar sus obras en la cultura occidental difundiendo una visión orientalista distanciada de los propósitos del Imperio . . . para *asiatizar* y transformar al ser occidental europeo]” (21). Per the title, for Borges the Orient is not a museum piece; rather, he uses it as “an open and dynamic reading that demonstrates the Orientalist approach as a method of thought and writing in dialogue with other perspectives of Borges’s work [una lectura abierta y dinámica que muestre el enfoque orientalista como un método de pensamiento y escritura en diálogo con otras perspectivas de la obra de Borges]” (32). In this closely researched book, Betancort successfully argues against seeing Borges as a Western Orientalist reproducing conventional clichés, and for Borges’s authentic, serious, and engaged knowledge of Asian culture, a knowledge that allows him to creatively bridge East and West. Given Betancort’s argument, Borges seems like the US poet Gary Snyder (1930–), whose lifelong study of Zen Buddhism fundamentally shaped his poetry, intellect, and life and led him, in the blurring of East and West, to an environmentalism that challenged the exploitative nature of mainstream America.

In terms of a reading history, Betancort begins, as so many Borges volumes do, with the family library, and she claims that Borges’s fascination with the East started with Oscar Wilde’s children’s story “The Happy Prince” (1888), whose Swallow character would migrate to an idealized (read Orientalized) Egypt. Moving forward a few years, while Borges’s family was stranded in Geneva for the duration of WWI (vacation plans gone terribly or fortuitously wrong), Borges was introduced to Oriental philosophy through the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), and by the time he returned to Buenos Aires, knowledge of Oriental culture had preceded him through fellow Argentine authors like Roberto Arlt (1900–1942) and Ricardo Güiraldes (1886–1927). Moreover, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Borges pursued his interest with his writer friend and mentor Macedonio Fernández (1874–1952), who was equally taken by Schopenhauer and Oriental philosophy. According to Betancort, for Borges studying Oriental philosophy was a tactic “that pursues the intersection, always at the service of his literature, of the cultures that interested him . . . because for Borges the great nationality was universal literature [que persigue la intersección, siempre al servicio de su literatura, de las culturas

que le interesaron . . . porque la gran nacionalidad de Borges fue la literatura universal]” (66). Thus, by finding inspiration through his study of the Orient, Borges wrote stories, like “El jardín de los senderos que bifurcan,” that decenter and deterritorialize Argentina and the Occident.

In the 1940s and 1950s, as Borges began to work as a lecturer and produced his initial collections of short stories (*Ficciones* and *El Aleph*), he also wrote his first essays on Buddhism, “La personalidad y el Buddha” and “La nadería de la personalidad,” which led him to challenge Western concepts of time and imagine “a writing strategy based, mainly, on the allegory of personality [una estrategia de escritura asentada, principalmente, en la alegoría de la personalidad]” (110). Thus, the “exercise of writing returns to experience: the story of Buddha becomes meaningful not in the realization of his human existence—always unreal—but in the philosophy and ethics it reveals [ejercicio de la escritura es cuanto recae en la experiencia: la historia de Buda alcanza sentido no en la constatación de su existencia humana—siempre irreal—sino la filosofía y la ética que revela]” (124). Through the study of Buddhism, Borges found the link between erudition and fiction, a paradigmatic connection between Orientalism and fantasy: thus, nihilism does not lead to nothingness but creativity, multiplication of possibilities, where fiction becomes the means to reproduce an impenetrable nature that cannot simply be sorted through the conventions of western realism. As Betancort notes, Borges is an “Argentine-Occidental being in search of an Oriental literary destiny [ser argentino-occidental en busca de un destino literario oriental]” (164).

After following the threads of Borges’s often koan-like trajectory, in the concluding chapter Betancort turns to the fiction Borges produced (*Ficciones*, *El aleph*, *El hacedor*, *El libro de arena*, *El informe de Brodie*); but while in the rest of the book Betancort spends much time on the creative paradigm Borges developed out of his lifelong fascination with Oriental thought and writing, here she only sketches out potential links to the literary works Borges produced. Betancort recenters the book at the end on Borges’s fiction, but given her sketchy treatment she directs us to look again to the surroundings she has curated for her argument about the nature of Borges’s creativity: “an open and dynamic reading that demonstrates an Orientalist focus as a method of thinking and writing [una lectura abierta y dinámica que muestre el enfoque orientalista como un método de pensamiento y escritura]” (164).

While Betancort creates a highly delineated contextual frame, in *Jorge Luis Borges in Context*, Robin Fiddian edits a volume replete with contextual frames, each derived from Borges himself—his life, family history, writing, reading history, interests, and influences on others—a prismatic turning to contexts. Fortunately, Borges is a strong enough figure to anchor and organize all these contextual frames, and none of the essays lose sight of their central focus, Borges, while exploring their chosen context. To invoke a spatial and perceptual analogy, all the essays in the volume maintain a clear balance between figure and ground. The book is organized in two parts, reflecting Borges’s existence as local and global. The first half focuses on Argentina and Buenos Aires—Borges the local—and the essays take up topics of Argentine identity, Buenos Aires, Uruguay, family, war (WWI, WWII, Las Malvinas), dictatorship, democracy, Peron, popular culture (tangos, milongas), and Argentine literature: the Gauchesque, the twentieth-century avant-garde, Ricardo Piglia (1941–2017), César Aira (1949–), Domingo Sarmiento (1811–1888), and Adolfo Bioy Casares (1914–1999). These essays build a multivalent psychological, historical, political, and cultural map of Borges and the immediate world that gave rise to and reacted to him, and to which he reacted as he became an influential writer and cultural and national figure. In the globally focused second half of the book, the chapters can be broadly grouped into three categories: literary influences (Cervantes, Shakespeare, the English Romantic poets, James Joyce, Kafka, the Spanish avant-garde, Persian literature); philosophy and religion (idealism, the Bible, Judaism, Buddhism); and reception (the Latin American

“Boom” authors who came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, J. M. Coetzee, Portugal, Italy, Cuba). That these essays can do so much in so few pages is a mark of their accomplishment, yet the short length of the essays in this volume also mitigates against attempting both a larger contextual discussion and a detailed application. Nonetheless, to sketch out the broad contexts provides impetus for further scholarly work. As an introductory volume, *Jorge Luis Borges in Context* demonstrates the many—or infinite?—queries that Borges generates.

If the main value of this volume is the collective and prismatic scope of the essays, it is also worth noting that some of them are not only concise but virtuosic, packing an extraordinary amount into a short exposition. Robin Fiddian models this virtuosity in the introduction, focusing on Romantic nationalism and “The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero.” Fiddian looks at how Borges layers in his own familial and national patriotism within a larger global context, Ireland, and more. Impressively, in “Borges in Person: Family, Love, and Sex,” Edwin Williamson takes on the arc of Borges’s love life through the years and links it with the evolving sexuality expressed in Borges’s writing. In “Borges and Cervantes,” in just a few pages Roberto González Echevarría works with texts across Borges’s career and uses them to reflect Borges’s changing attitude toward Spain and Argentina, taking into account the large immigrant Peninsular population in Argentina and the differences between Argentine and Peninsular Spanish. In “Borges and James Joyce,” Patricia Novillo-Corvalán speaks to the Argentine connection that got Borges a copy of *Ulysses*: the novelist Ricardo Güiraldes subscribed to the initial publication of the novel by the Paris bookstore Shakespeare and Company and sent Borges a copy. Borges then reviewed the novel and translated portions of it into Argentine Spanish, creating an interest that ultimately helped produce Leopoldo Marechal’s *Adán Buenosayres* (1948) and Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (1963). Novillo-Corvalán also points to Borges’s own conflicted relationship with *Ulysses*; while Borges was fascinated by Joyce’s attention to detail and language he was turned off by the novel’s length (933 pages), and he wrote the short story “Funes el memorioso” (1942) as a compact critique of *Ulysses*. These are the best realized essays in the volume, but all of the essays contribute to the prismatic effect of *Jorge Luis Borges in Context*.

Of the three Borges books under review here, Nora C. Benedict’s *Borges and the Literary Marketplace: How Editorial Practices Shaped Cosmopolitan Readings* shifts most strongly away from the narrow conception of Borges as author (inspired, solitary genius) and toward an understanding of him as a literary professional and influencer with a multifaceted identity. Although Benedict focuses on the period in Borges’s life when he was at his most productive as a creative author, by the end of her book Benedict leaves the impression that Borges was the hardest-working person in the *porteño* publishing industry in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. She shows how Borges worked assiduously in this tight-knit world to publish and market his own work, the work of his friends and collaborators, like Adolfo Bioy Casares, and the world literature that he had read and loved, particularly modernist texts. At a time of rising literacy, Borges engaged in an already vital and burgeoning literary scene (with book stores, publishers, and printers) to become an amazingly productive force within it. In the course of eight chapters, Benedict spends very little time on Borges’s creative output (stories, poems, and essays) or literary interpretation. Rather, working with the book (the physical object, bibliographic information, and concept) because it is “a fundamental object for Borges” (272), Benedict focuses her attention on the real world forces which impacted Borges and which he transformed in turn in order to make available works, global and local, and shape the cosmopolitan reading public that he envisioned for Buenos Aires. For Benedict, “Borges’s relationship to the literary marketplace is a global history of how books make the world and the world makes books” (9–10).

After Benedict describes the burgeoning book world of Buenos Aires in the first half of the twentieth century in the introduction, the subsequent six chapters read like an

extended curriculum vitae for Borges, a carefully curated work history that makes Borges look like a jack-of-all-trades—or at least of the book trade. As Benedict explores the different roles he pursued—author, critic and collaborator, editor and anthologist, publicist and promoter, publisher, translator—she identifies “one common characteristic: the promotion of underrepresented, forgotten, or unknown literature” (184) as key to understanding how Borges acted to broaden Argentina’s literary horizons. The first chapter, “Borges and Books,” anchors the volume and describes the way books infiltrated Borges’s life, from the family library to all the porteño bookstores and to a cataloging of the presence of books in Borges’s stories in *Ficciones* and *El aleph*. Of all the chapters, this is the one that turns most explicitly to Borges’s fiction. In doing so, Benedict blurs the line between real and fictive books to demonstrate just how fully books dominate Borges’s life. This chapter sets up the subsequent chapters, each of which looks more narrowly into the ways that Borges involved himself in the book industry.

In chapter 2, “Borges as Author,” Benedict shows how Borges moved strategically to use his intimate knowledge of the porteño publishing industry, people and companies, to find his way into print. Borges published first in literary journals, but as he moved that material into book form he worked with a variety of printers and publishers of high and low quality, from fine art books to mass-produced paperbacks, to maximize his exposure to elite and popular audiences. Working to be published is not a particularly unique story line, because it is the story of all authors. Benedict distinguishes Borges in the subsequent chapters, showing him to have far more ambitious ends than simple self-promotion.

In chapters 3–6 (“Critic and Collaborator,” “Editor and Anthologist,” “Publicist and Promoter,” “Publisher”), Benedict looks at Borges’s role as globalist. As a journalist, writing for a variety of periodicals (such as *El Hogar* and *Sur*), Borges pushed world literature, particular in English, German, and French, prompting local presses, like Editorial Emecé, to publish foreign works, some translated by Borges himself. As an editor and anthologist, Borges continued to expand the canon, including Argentine literature in the many anthologies he edited. As publicist and promoter, Borges wrote prologues for these authors, explicitly shaping the canon. Borges’s actions reflected his goal of globalizing Argentine literature in his essay “The Argentine Writer and Tradition” (1951), taking the peripheral and making it central. In all of his different roles, Borges also pushed detective fiction, particularly with Adolfo Bioy Casares. In these chapters, Benedict makes clear that Borges was a mover and shaker, a force who made things happen, who got works published. He worked for or closely with a variety of journals and publishing houses: *Sur*, Editorial *Sur*, Editorial Losada, and Editorial Emecé. He translated. He wrote prologues. He lectured. He had his finger in as many pies as he could, so that he could direct not only what was published (author, work, content, and form) but how it was marketed to attract a broader audience. He did not just want to be published; he wanted to change what and how Argentines read, to shift reading habits away from provincial nationalism and toward an inclusive, global cosmopolitanism.

All that Borges accomplished would have remained an interesting local experiment if it weren’t for the fact that Borges shared the international Formentor Prize in 1960 with the Irish writer Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) and became world famous. In the conclusion, Benedict extrapolates from the two decades of Borges’s life that are her focus to look at how Borges’s concern for books in his life, stories, and essays influenced subsequent book scholars and our understanding of books. He changed our understanding of the book and all things surrounding it (publication, printing, promotion, and the material object itself). Benedict’s project is based on the primary research she did in the Borges Collection at the University of Virginia and the Fundación Internacional Jorge Luis Borges in Buenos Aires. Benedict builds her argument out of that material, using distant-reading techniques to organize everything into comprehensible units and a clear narrative and argument. Her regular use of graphs and charts lends a clear visualization to

her argument. There is also a digital adjunct to the book (“Mapping Borges in the Argentine Publishing Industry,” <https://norabenedict.github.io/borges/>) that includes an interactive map and descriptive bibliography to help the reader navigate Borges’s book-centric Buenos Aires.

While the previous books coalesce around a single figure, Ignacio López-Calvo’s *History of Chilean Literature*, a massive 654-page reference volume, is by its nature much more diffuse. It includes thirty-two contributors and thirty-one essays broken into three historical sections—colonial, nineteenth-century and independence, and twentieth-century to the present. Besides chronology, literary histories are often organized around literary genres and major authors. In this volume, genre and author are only a part of a more comprehensive, detailed exploration of literary production in Chile and the variety of inputs (material, linguistic, aesthetic, cultural, historical, class, gender, and sexual) that have shaped its formation and development. López-Calvo’s introduction is a concise lecture on the history of Chilean literature and national, continental, and global contexts, which not only previews the rest of the book but functions as the initial deployment of the multifaceted understanding of Chilean literature that the collection develops. The essays build an increasingly complex understanding that, to invoke the English art critic John Berger (1926–2017), introduces new ways of seeing Chilean literature that cannot be reduced to a set of canonized figures, period traits, and curated lists of essays, novels, poems, and plays.

Parts 1 and 2 are essentially about the coalescing of Chilean identity, culture, and nationality seen through the formation of its literary tradition. The essays in part 1 are grounded in explorations of otherness. Some focus on texts of the Spanish encounter with the Araucanians/Mapuche, while others look at early writings by or about subaltern women: nuns, Indigenous women, women of color, and enslaved women. Through different textual lenses, these chapters construct a foundational Chilean identity, conflicted by conquest and sympathy, the epic and the tragic, while exploring forms of (self-)representation across discourses. The essays of part 2 focus on the early Chilean literary tradition, mapping how the intersection of multiple social and aesthetic forces—the printing press, the printing industry, journalism, the feuilleton tradition, poetry, essays, novels, autobiographies, letters, and memoirs—combined with historically significant moments to become the seedbeds for a national literature.

Part 3 continues the documentation of this large, heterogeneous tradition both within and beyond Chile in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. There are chapters on genre (poetry, theater, film) and major authors: the poets Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) and Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) and the novelists José Donoso (1924–1996), Isabel Allende (1942–), Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003), and Alejandro Zambra (1975–). A series of essays focuses on the transnational nature of Chilean heterogeneity. There are two chapters on Mapuche poetry. Four chapters focus on the literary production that has come from immigrant communities—Jewish, Arab, Asian, and Croatian—and their desire to preserve cultural and linguistic ties with their homelands. Because the violence of the 1973 coup and the subsequent dictatorship headed by Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) triggered a wave of emigration by artists, intellectuals, musicians, and writers, a number of the chapters focus on Chilean exile literature. Reassessments of gender and sexuality add to the heterogeneity of part 3, and while part 1 includes the importance of the arrival of the printing press in Chile, the volume ends with an essay on digital literature. Befitting the diffuse focus of the volume, there is only one chapter on the literary Boom of the 1960s and 1970s that brought Latin American literature to a global audience.

This is a volume that demonstrates the deep and dynamic literary history of a country whose vitality has allowed it to transcend its national boundaries to become a global player that, to use a boxing metaphor, always punches above its weight class. As such, *A History of Chilean Literature* undercuts any attempt to teach that literature reductively but instead reimagines it functioning on the world stage.

Within the Chilean context but with a single focus, we see a similar reimagining in Claudia Cabello Hutt's *Artesana de sí misma: Gabriela Mistral, una intelectual en cuerpo y palabra*. Mistral was a poet and educator and the first Chilean and Latin American writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature (1945). Following from the work of scholars like Licia Fiol-Matta, Elizabeth Horan, and Raquel Olea, Cabello Hutt's book is part of a now two-decades-old reconsideration of Gabriela Mistral's life and legacy. As Cabello Hutt states in her introduction: "This book reevaluates the place and function of the Chilean writer, educator, and diplomat Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) and her conditions of production in Latin American literary and intellectual history, in an attempt to fill gaps in the study of this canonical figure. [Este libro reevalúa el lugar y la función de la escritora, educadora y diplomática chilena Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) y sus condiciones de producción en la historia literaria e intelectual latinoamericana, en un intento por llenar vacíos en el estudio de esta figura canónica]" (3).

Cabello Hutt's purpose is to portray Mistral as the autonomous agent of her own multiplex life rather than as the product of the cultural, most often patriarchal, forces that would use her for their own narrow ends. Cabello Hutt hardly talks about Mistral's poetry or her poetic career. It is almost as if she writes out that part of Mistral's life in order to focus attention on other things—an intellectual history, another life and identity—that have been overlooked by scholars and the public at large. Cabello Hutt's work was made possible by the release of new archival material (essays and letters) upon the death of the American Doris Dana, Mistral's companion, in 2006. Moreover, because of her work in the Chilean Biblioteca Nacional, Cabello Hutt was asked to take part in the transfer of this new material from the United States to Chile. Her special access made this volume possible and afforded her an expertise that few others can claim. With this new material, her particular purpose is to challenge the older biographical narratives, like the one the right-wing dictator Augusto Pinochet deployed about Mistral, which reinforce "the myths that sought to elevate her as the suffering poet, the teacher of America, and the always virginal spiritual figure [los mitos que buscaban elevarla como la poeta dolorida, la maestra de América y la figura espiritual siempre virgen]" (144), and to create a more complex understanding of Mistral that speaks to "the multidimensionality of her transnational position in her discourse, her networks, and her identity as a public intellectual [la multidimensionalidad de su posicionamiento transnacional, en su discurso, sus redes y su identidad como intelectual pública]" (6). As Cabello Hutt redraws the lines of Mistral's life, the portrait is of someone who has embodied her multiform intellectual life and used that image as a foundational performance "that opened alternative and successful models of representation for women and women's discourse in the twentieth century [lo que abre modelos alternativos y exitosos de representación para la mujer y su discurso en el siglo XX]" (186). *Artesana de sí misma* is a carefully crafted study. Cabello Hutt knows Mistral's life and writing as well as the old blinkered, reductivist narratives about her. Building from the forward-thinking twenty-first-century scholarly reconsiderations of Mistral, Cabello Hutt uses the new archive material and contemporary theorists (John Berger, Homi Bhabha [1949–], Pierre Bourdieu [1930–2002], Judith Butler [1956–], and Jean Franco [1924–]) to fashion a complex understanding of Gabriela Mistral as a powerful, agile agent of her own intellectual, public, and private lives in Chile, throughout the Americas, and across the globe.

On April 8, 2022, Camila Vallejo Dowling, who led the student protests in Chile in 2011 and is the current minister secretary-general of government in the Boric administration, posted a picture of herself on Facebook with two books of Gabriela Mistral's writings—*Por la humanidad futura* (2015) and *Toda culpa es un misterio* (2020)—to celebrate Mistral's birth in 1889. The former is a collection of political essays while the latter is a collection of religious essays and mystical poems. What is most interesting about Vallejo Dowling's post is her celebration of Mistral not traditionally as a poet but for the broader range of Mistral's

creative work. Vallejo Dowling is a powerful agent of her own political life and that of the nation, and she holds up a reimagined, liberated Gabriela Mistral as a predecessor for such autonomy.

Another example of decentering, globalizing work is Álvaro Santana-Acuña's *Ascent to Glory: How "One Hundred Years of Solitude" Was Written and Became a Global Classic*. Besides occasional references to scenes in the novel, Santana-Acuña spills no ink about the text of the novel itself. Although *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the organizational center of the book, Santana-Acuña metaphorically blanks it out in order to look elsewhere. *Ascent to Glory* is the arch-story of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The Colombian Nobel Prize-winning (1982) Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) is part of this narrative, as is his breakthrough novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), which was the clearest signal at the time of Latin America's arrival on the world stage. Santana-Acuña, though, tells a much deeper and broader story that feels like a highly choreographed crowd scene in an epic movie or the camera work in the film *Russian Ark* (2002) by the Russian filmmaker Aleksandr Sokurov (1951–).

Rather than understand *One Hundred Years of Solitude* narrowly as a singular work of a unique literary genius, Santana-Acuña sees the novel as a collective expression, product of a vast network of collaborators (individuals, groups, and institutions) and historical, cultural, and aesthetic forces. Some of this material is well known because of the numerous interviews with García Márquez over the course of his life, his autobiography *Living to Tell the Tale* (2002), or Gerald Martin's thorough biography *Gabriel García Márquez: A Life* (2008); but Santana-Acuña is charting a vaster ground in *Ascent to Glory* because he wants to understand how *One Hundred Years of Solitude* can be initially conceived within Colombian regionalism, then through its development and publication become a scion of the new Latin American novel, then through translation transform into a piece of world literature, and finally be taken up by nonliterary cultural forces to become a global classic. At each stage, the novel breaks from one context—one set of collaborators and collaborations—into a geographically and culturally broader, more networked context with new, more numerous collaborators. It is through this widening arc of cultural power, dissemination, and presence that Santana-Acuña organizes his diverse research and makes sense of his collaborative focus and argument. While the novel at the center of the book remains opaque, the frame that surrounds it becomes larger, more nuanced and complex.

The book initially reads like a traditional biography, focused on historical background, García Márquez's family and childhood in Aracataca, his education, key experiences (for example, the Bogotazo in 1948), his journalism career, his literary apprenticeships in Cartagena and Barranquilla, his exile from Colombia, and his time spent in Europe and New York before settling in Mexico City in 1961. Santana-Acuña organizes the biographical material as a *Künstlerroman*, an evolving set of apprenticeships, from García Márquez's family stories to the skills he learned as a journalist, and to the literary skills he learned in Barranquilla, Cartagena, Paris, Rome, London, and Mexico City, through which he acquired the expertise he needed to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Santana-Acuña places this portrait of an artist and an artist's work within the larger context of the publishing industries in Latin America, Spain, and the global cultural centers of power (Paris, New York, and London); he also speaks to the rise of literary journalism and journals in the Spanish-speaking world that promoted Latin America literature and created an interest in and market for new authors and works.

Santana-Acuña speaks to the collapse of the Boom and the collaborative network that had buoyed up García Márquez, subsequent to the success of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. As the novel moves onto a global stage, it finds a new set of collaborators (publishers, translators, marketers, and educators) to transform and disseminate it. Finally, there are nonliterary actors—those who have heard of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* but not read it yet treat the novel and its contents as malleable cultural signs: for example, British

Petroleum's Deepwater Horizon platform in the Caribbean was drilling into what the company called the Macondo Prospect, and the 2010 oil disaster was dubbed the Macondo Blowout. In the end, the book is a case study of how a literary work develops the staying power to become a classic. In the last chapter, Santana-Acuña applies his method to four other Latin American works—the Ecuadorian José de la Cuadra's *Los Sangurimas* (1934), the Colombian Álvaro Cepeda Samudio's *La casa grande* (1962), the Cuban José Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* (1966), and the Chilean José Donoso's *The Obscene Bird of Night* (1970)—to explore why such deserving works failed to become global classics.

Ascent to Glory is the result of extensive, dedicated, and patient research, and through it Santana-Acuña weaves together sources, discourses, and disciplines to tell a macro-level story about the creation of a work and its realization, dissemination, and continued presence in the world. He coherently builds out ever more increasing and complex cultural networks to understand a single work of literature, balancing a singular focus with multifaceted analyses. Santana-Acuña's analysis of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is even more important because his method of working outward through ever broader contexts is also worth adapting and applying to other Latin American works and, more widely, to literature from across the world.

The books in this review remind me of a set of works produced by the American artist John Baldessari (1931–2020) called *Crowds with Shape of Reason Missing* (2012), in which he removed the center of focus of a photographic or filmic image and replaced it with white space. The image is still structured with a central focus, but the central focus is missing. The conventional cues that shape the viewer's gaze are disturbed: thus, the viewer's gaze, which moves away from the missing center, focuses on the material that surrounds it in search of meaning. The six books in this review function similarly, for each directs our attention elsewhere—away from a literature-centered perception—and each in its own way productively disrupts a conventional reproduction of literary knowledge to illuminate other material, the corners of the canvas.

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