

least some fantasized poetic version of it (Ch. 5); they were worried that there might not be a God or that, if he existed, he might not care very much about them (Ch. 6). These bromides are reiterated so often that I lost count of the number of times that phrases such as ‘Como ya hemos mencionado’, ‘Como ya hemos citado’ or (the default formula) ‘Como antes se ha indicado’ appear. Worse still, all these observations take place in a contextual void. There are vague allusions to ‘society’ and ‘modernity’, but no specific references to the concrete socio-historical circumstances in which the various poets mentioned were living and working. We are offered no literary-historical background and, incredibly, virtually no mention is made of nineteenth-century French poetry (ironically, the only relatively detailed contextual comments, on Darío’s famous ‘Lo fatal’, are consigned to the endnotes). As a consequence, the uninformed reader could be forgiven for concluding that, rather than being one of the most conspicuously derivative movements in recent literary history, *Modernismo* came into being *ex nihilo*.

The shortcomings of the author’s critical method are not redeemed by his prose. Clogged and leaden, it is liberally sprinkled with orthographic and grammatical idiosyncracies which are alien to standard Spanish on either side of the Atlantic: betacism abounds (‘revela’ is rendered as ‘rebela’ throughout, ‘socava’ appears as ‘socaba’ [165], ‘subvirtiendo’ as ‘suvirtiendo’ [222]), the verb ‘echar’ is repeatedly spelt ‘hechar’, ‘Había’ is mistakenly pluralized before plural nouns, the verb ‘Ha’ is commonly written as ‘A’, there are incorrect double negatives (‘Tampoco no existe’ [179]), separate words are frequently lumped together (‘Aveces’, ‘A pesar’ etc.), there are multiple errors of agreement etc. Typographical errors (misspellings, missing accents, rogue punctuation) run at the rate of two or three per page.

Despite these shortcomings, there remains something for which this book can be recommended. Guevara has clearly read a huge amount of *Modernista* poetry, and his study introduced me to many poems (some of them very fine) and indeed poets with which/whom I was previously unacquainted. Treated as a compendium of source-material, then, rather than as a work of literary criticism, it is not without its uses.

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***El lugar de Piglia. Crítica sin ficción.*** Compilación, prólogo y edición de Jorge Carrión. Canet de Mar (Barcelona): Editorial Candaya. 2008. 453 pp. + DVD.

Ricardo Piglia (1941–) is not only a leading Argentine novelist but one of the most distinguished literary critics of his generation. His literary precursors are mostly Argentine—Roberto Arlt (1900–42), Macedonio Fernández (1874–1952) (the subject of a film by Andrés di Tella on the DVD), Rodolfo Walsh (1927–77) and Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986)—as is his closest literary contemporary, Juan José Saer (1937–2005). Traces in his work of the Uruguayan, Juan Carlos Onetti (1909–1994), such as dreams, textual silences, the double, have been mysteriously overlooked. But his work also bears the imprint of foreign influence, notably Russian (Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy). Piglia is well known in Argentina and the United States where he has been based—at the University of Princeton—since the mid-’80s but his work, limited in terms of number of publications, deserves greater attention in Europe (its relatively recent publication in Spain drew enthusiastic if belated acclaim). The present book, an extensive anthology of brief notes, essays and interviews dating from 1968 to 2007, will undoubtedly serve to enhance Piglia’s growing literary reputation.

The editor’s prologue refers to the prominence of doubles in Piglia’s life and work. His name, Ricardo Emilio Piglia Renzi, is a case in point, ‘Ricardo Piglia’ being the name of the ‘real’ author, and Emilio Renzi, that of his literary alter ego. The titles of his works also conform to this pattern, invariably comprising a noun and an adjective: *Respiración artificial*

(1980). For Piglia, as for Borges, the concept of literary property (and therefore of plagiarism) is meaningless since ideas (like money, a Dostoyevskian motif, explored in Piglia's *Plata quemada* [1997]) are in constant circulation: 'la falsificación, la copia, la fotocopia, la duplicación: en ese campo semántico hay que entender la producción pigliana' (11). Chronology is as meaningless as property: 'sus gestos respecto a la cronología, a las fechas, son de desautorización' (18).

The first section, 'Piglia y sus precursors', highlights Piglia's preoccupation with literary failure—treated in such texts as *Nombre falso* (1975) and *Respiración artificial* where it is represented by the character of Tardewski (based on the Polish writer, Witold Gombrowicz, who resided in Argentina for twenty-five years) in whom 'el fracaso se convierte en un destino que se descifra y se busca' (Blanco Calderón [29]). Piglia emphasizes the literary *complot* (conspiracy) at the heart of the Argentine literary tradition which he sees as fundamentally unified as he reconciles the *bárbaro* Arlt and the 'civilized' Borges. In *La ciudad ausente* (1992) Piglia goes back to the gauchesque origins of Argentine literature: the oral tradition, the gaucho, music and water all inhabit the tales making up the novel which 'oscilan entre el micro-cuento y el micro-relato' (Sequera [65]). For Piglia, literature is the space where language is exiled, liberated from its functional, everyday uses, assuming a strangeness best demonstrated in the work of Borges.

In the second section, 'El lugar de Saer', Piglia emerges as an outstanding and innovative critic whose *Crítica y ficción* (2000) condenses autobiography, criticism and fiction. His best known work, *Respiración artificial*, is a hybrid that combines novel and essay and is set to endure, according to Saer, because its appeal is not limited to its powerful political message. Unsurprisingly, prison, surveillance and control are important themes in Piglia's work: the novel is itself configured as prison and the critic as detective whose work is a kind of *procesamiento* (402).

The third section, 'Piglia y el cine', shows how cinema influenced Piglia's style, noticeable in the abrupt transition, the cut, and the interruption, all nicely illustrated in *La ciudad ausente*. Piglia's breadth of cinematic knowledge emerges in the extended interview contained in the DVD, also entitled 'Puig y el cine', where he discusses such issues as his early interest in film and his admiration for Godard.

The fourth section, 'Afterpiglia', focuses on the self-consciousness of Piglia's work: the way he inverts the detective-story plot, proceeding from established fact to the contrivance of mystery. *Respiración artificial* is a kind of dialogue with literature; its foundational metaphor is the archive and its style is diversified by prolific citations. His *cuento*, 'Prisión perpetua' (1988), investigates the creative process. His critical work, *Formas breves* (1999) is an extravagant 'baile de frontera' where genres interact and merge and the limits between narrative and fiction break down (Vila-Matas [364]). Included here is the influential 'Tesis sobre el cuento' inspired by the Chekhovian notion of the story within the story as a recipe for precision.

This extensive and multi-faceted anthology brings together the salient aspects of the man and his work. Given its length and format there is inevitably some repetitiveness, though the principal works are treated, in the main, from different perspectives. The editor's prologue and concluding interview (in 'Piglia en Barcelona') provide strong framing contributions. Useful bibliographical information is offered in the list of contributors (including Piglia) and the DVD on 'Macedonio Fernández' and 'Puig y el cine' nicely complements the text. The major weakness in this volume is the lack of an index which would have enhanced the work significantly by pinpointing the treatment of individual texts and major themes.

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