

Brescia, Pablo. *Modelos y prácticas en el cuento hispanoamericano: Arreola, Borges, Cortázar*. Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert; Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2011. 367 pp. ISBN: 978-84-8489-627-2.

Brescia is a scholarly expert in the short story and an accomplished practitioner of the genre, a condition that can cast tautological doubts about which practice influences which, or if it ought to. His *Modelos y prácticas en el cuento hispanoamericano. Arreola, Borges, Cortázar* should put such speculations to rest in Spanish American criticism, and not only because, well parceled, theory and practice enhance each other. Because there are innumerable studies on Borges and Cortázar, and fewer on Arreola, by joining the three masters Brescia fashions a justly novel way of understanding the production of intricately different contemporaries, as well as rewiring the numerous connections among them and their followers. He also distances himself from the teleological view that compels some national critics to see these authors as exclusive precursors who somehow start a cycle that grows organically from them. Much can be made about these authors' being the "ABC" of the Latin American short story and the "new world literature," and the result of his approach is conclusively evident in the fifth and last chapter. There the longest section, "A lee a B lee a C lee a A lee a C lee a B lee A: lecturas cruzadas" (293-320) is a syllogism emblematic of his constantly keeping in mind that his authors' prose and conceptualization of their craft merge into each other, and as a whole became a genetic marker for the genre's present practice.

Well aware that the reasons for his choice of Borges, Cortázar, and Arreola as models will be uppermost in readers' minds, especially in terms of the individual attention to each writer, Brescia devotes his first chapter to the genre's topography. That map leads to a working definition in the fifth section, a dialectic (without the political semantics) whereby his proposal "conforma un ABC en torno a un eje *filosófico-literario* del que puede inferirse un *modelo de lectura* del cuento hispanoamericano (en su teoría y en su práctica) a partir de Arreola, Borges y Cortázar" (46, emphasis mine). (Vervuert should be highly commended for maintaining its author's abundant references, which examined as a whole turn out to be justified and necessary). The four other sections of this initial chapter are historical in nature and contextualize the trends and developments of the Spanish American short story in terms of wider western practice and interpretation, and particularly in terms of its literary and non-literary nature, as examined in "Una cuestión de género" (31-42). These parts, like the six subsections of the first section in the fifth chapter, are marvelously succinct and convincing, and obviously in tandem with the ideas expressed in the first chapter. Moreover, Brescia's review of the extensive pertinent bibliography, abetted by an equally wide-ranging number of explanatory and reasoned footnotes, is by itself a major achievement.

Borges' world standing and the overabundance of criticism about him would seem to require a theory based on a selection of short stories and essays, an approach which has been the case for the Argentine, leading to a prevalence of the critic over the author. Brescia avoids that insufficiency, and while his second chapter concentrates on a thorough examination of two stories (68-94, 94-124), just about every fiction Borges ever wrote finds its way into his argument: Borges never stopped reworking his model for the genre because he greatly respected his readers (124-32). Brescia also accounts for a series of poetics of short fiction, the writer's development (130), and Borges' view of the ultimate impossibility of an aesthetic (60-68). As he does in the chapter on Cortázar, for his study of individual tales he summarizes literally all previous readings, and his scrutiny of "El Sur" (68-94) is exemplary and indeed will be a model for a long time to come. And if Borges' autobiographical essay and numerous biographies provide endless but contradictory clues,

Cortázar's letters do no less; but Brescia does not take all that information at face value and does a great job in compressing its pertinence.

The third chapter on Julio Cortázar is particularly impressive, given the meticulous micro-readings of specific stories and the world of connections Brescia brings to bear for the peerless Cortázar, who is enjoying renewed interest. As he does with Borges, his modeling for the author of *Hopscotch* is based on a frequently anthologized story ("La noche boca arriba") and two heretofore unheralded ones, "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto" for Borges, "Ómnibus" for Cortázar. As he posits, these stories are fully consistent with each author's practice. Weaving sources, influences, tributes, copies, and traces, as he did for "El Sur," Brescia unravels previous interpretations of "Ómnibus" (185-207). He does even more for "La noche boca arriba" (161-85), never slighting the plurality of critical readings of that story. To achieve this he has consulted not only standard and very recent or updated readings of each author but has sought to recover the canonical standing of critics like Ana María Barrenechea, for Borges, and Saúl Yurkiévich and David Lagmanovich for Cortázar, regarding the analysis of generic displacement.

It is further evidence of the equal importance Brescia attributes to his authors that the chapters he devotes to them are fairly symmetrical, with fewer than ten pages separating the extension of each one. The fourth, on the Mexican master Arreola is shorter, and could make one think why not Augusto Monterroso, or Roberto Bolaño. But Brescia historicizes his analysis in the best possible way: Arreola's writing, more associated with fragmentary forms, is not a deviation from the Argentines but rather a necessary complement to understand them. Given Arreola's scanty production of stories or essays, Brescia resorts to interviews, scattered articles and individual comments to the press (217-21). With Arreola the "práctica" of Brescia's book acquires its fullest meaning, and as he did with Borges and Cortázar he focuses on a canonical (pedagogically defined according to its presence in anthologies) story, "El guardagujas" (235-58). This analysis is preceded by an excellent examination of the role of "discordance" in the short story, vis-à-vis Arreola (223-35), nicely rounded off by a study of a "minor" story and Arreola's "chameleonic" role in the history of the genre (279-91).

*Modelos y prácticas en el cuento hispanoamericano* is a modest title for a formidable and long-awaited book, for it is ultimately a wide-ranging, revisionist history of the practices of the short story in Spanish America. Few scholars have attempted such a sweeping re-reading of the genre, mainly Enrique Anderson Imbert, Luis Leal, David W. Foster, Gabriela Mora, and Carmen de Mora, all well-established and recognized authorities, now elegantly complemented by Brescia. His independent, challenging, and learned reading across sub-genres in the continent's practice employs his "models" to make a greater point: it is impossible to decontextualize the Spanish American short story by attributing national characteristics to its form, representative authors, or canonical stories. Full of insights, historical referents, comparisons to other literatures, sensible and catholic in employing critical theories, this exhaustive study further shows that misreadings and intertextuality are equally inevitable for Arreola, Borges, and Cortázar; they feed on one another and thus engender ever-widening interpretations and narratives. The authors and stories he dissects (there in no better term) can now be seen in a totally new light, a view still hard to come by, precisely because of the reasons Brescia examines lucidly and with great economy of expression.