



Plot Martín, Chaos and Cosmos. The Imaginary and the Political in Jorge Luis Borges.

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Book Review

Originally written in English and not yet translated into Spanish, *Chaos and Cosmos. The Imaginary and the Political in Jorge Luis Borges*, by Martín Plot, is an unusual book on the work of the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986). Although there have been innovations and new perspectives on Borges's work, most of these studies belong to the field of literary criticism.

Martín Plot's book represents a fundamental contribution to exploring the complex relationships between writing and politics in the most important Argentine writer of the twentieth century. Going against some canonical readings that focus on Borges's oral opinions, Martín Plot offers a perspective grounded in political theory that establishes a dialogue between fiction and the political. The book approaches this relationship through a set of authors from different ideological traditions, whom Martín Plot knows well

and has already explored in his previous work. In his hands, the intersection of different intellectual registers flows naturally.

Divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters, the book addresses issues such as political forms, truth in history, the relationship between the Same and the Other, and the alterity of identities in democracy. It also deals with aspects of Argentine political culture that allow the reader to better understand the intellectual contexts in which Borges intervened. However, the task Martín Plot sets for himself throughout his book is not an easy one, since Borges is not, strictly speaking, a socially committed intellectual or a writer who speaks to real power, although for Martín Plot he is indeed a thinker of the political. This is probably one of the key interpretive clues the book proposes. Indeed, Martín Plot resolves this “problem” by appealing to the idea of a “detour,” a deviation that fiction itself is capable of providing. Drawing on a series of important authors in political theory and political philosophy —from Claude Lefort to Judith Butler, from Carl Schmitt to Hannah Arendt, passing through Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre —the text leads us to reflect on lesser-known or less explored aspects of Borges. By removing him from the encapsulation that often dominates the Argentine intellectual *milieu*, the book opens the question of the conditions of possibility for intertwining political theory with fiction and the political with narration.

In what sense does fiction dialogue with the political? Let us venture a plausible hypothesis: fiction can imagine, anticipate, and even create the political. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the word “imaginary” appears in the title, one of the book’s central organizing ideas. This term allows the author to distinguish between “politics” and “the political.” This distinction, however, does not simply suggest a thematic absence regarding Borges and politics, but above all invites us to read the political beyond the clichés that have dominated interpretations of this author over time, largely encouraged by his conservative opinions in a cultural environment that, in Argentina, tended to be predominantly progressive and left-wing. Thus, the book reveals that beyond those generally unappealing and supposedly anti-political opinions, there exists in Borges a universe in which the political is revealed in another way.

Such is the approach of Chapter I, “Tlön as Political Form,” based on Borges’s short story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” first published in 1940 and later definitively included in *Ficciones* in 1944. In this first chapter, one of the aspects that most interests Martín Plot is unfolded: the complex relationship between democracy and totalitarianism. According to his reading, this story can be

interpreted as a metaphor for Nazism, a will to power that seeks to create an entirely new reality. For Martín Plot, the totalitarian idea of a “closure” of the political order through the establishment of a single truth must be read considering the concept of the Other, according to the different dialectical conceptions put forward by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre.

An important part of the book is devoted to analyzing the novel political changes that took place in Western democracies starting in the 1930s, as a result of the emergence of radical ideologies. As the horizon of liberal democracy darkened and fascism, authoritarianism, and populism rose in Europe and Latin America (with special attention to Borges’s views on Peronism), Borges was one of the first to denounce antisemitism, racism, and authoritarian nationalism. In his fictions, as well as in essays of immediate political intervention, Borges was concerned with the advance of “totalitarian ideologies,” an issue that Martín Plot reads through the contributions made by the French intellectual Claude Lefort. In this sense, approaching Borges from the perspective of the political rather than politics is not merely a semantic distinction, since it implies a particular kind of gaze that reveals in the Argentine writer the possibility of speaking of a “fiction of the political.”

The political enables this different question precisely because it starts from the assumption that “not everything is political”; the political must be invented. We could even say that the political is invented because it is also narrated. Beyond the competition between political parties or the rules of the electoral system, in democracy the political is a detour from that which resists incorporation into the logic of “normal politics.” That is to say, the political can also be thought of as a *via regia* (a royal road) or an entry point for thinking about what politics does not think — or cannot think — where precisely the imaginary and the other are inscribed, that is, the other of politics that comes to say something different about social logic. As Martín Plot states: “To use a more Borgesian than Arendtian thinking about it, the political is the way in which the imaginary makes itself into the real, or the way in which the imaginary transforms the real” (Plot 2024: 106). In other words, representations, concepts, and narratives are not only discourses about politics, but also shape political reality. Following Jacques Rancière in this respect, another author Martín Plot knows well, the political can also be thought of as a rupture in the order of the sensible, where the imaginary irrupts to produce new effects and realities. This is where narrative fiction becomes productive for imagining certain future states of the political. It is no coincidence that Martín Plot speaks of Borges as a theorist

of imminence and of *what is yet to come*, a powerful image associated with art and aesthetic creation that Borges himself cultivated.

On the other hand, as Iván Jablonka has developed in his book *History Is a Contemporary Literature: Manifesto for the Social Sciences* (Jablonka 2014), Martín Plot's text opens a possible dialogue between the social sciences, political theory, and literature. In this sense, *Chaos and Cosmos...* invites us to ask how we do the social sciences and how they are constructed, investigating the place of writing and narration within the broader field of the human sciences, which are oriented, in principle, toward a different object and a different claim to knowledge than fiction. Because if the political is the reverse of politics, fiction is the reverse of science. In this way, the political and its narration can be seen as a way of framing and giving form to political experience. I believe there is an idea here that can be taken from this book and that dialogues with a rich tradition that includes the names of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Hayden White. It is not accidental, in this sense, that at the beginning of *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault comments that the idea for the book arose from "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," the essay in which Borges thematizes the relations of uncertainty governing the relationship between language and reality. From these concerns about the political as a way of reading social logic, radical political ideologies, and the relationship between the Same and the Other, there is also room to think about the emergence of new authoritarian-leaning political forms (from Donald Trump to Israel and including the government of Javier Milei in Argentina). Although socio-historical conditions have changed, the truth is that these experiences share the image of a political order that, based on a notion of truth as "closure" and *post-truth*, challenges a plural and contingent order. Indeed, Borges thinks in the opposite direction, and Martín Plot points this out: "And the few times he reflected on aesthetic matters, Borges showed that his method was based on what I would describe as the "strategic" removal of the author's sovereign position from the storytelling, something that fits the uncertainty of experienced reality well" (Plot 2024:7).

This book is an invitation to a wide range of readers interested in philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, art, and, of course, literature. Martín Plot has constructed a fascinating intellectual adventure through which we can read Borges's best texts from another angle — especially the stories from his two finest works of narrative fiction: *Ficciones* and *The Aleph*. The value of Martín Plot's book lies in its wager on universality, a political gesture that, through other means, takes up and continues the best lessons that Borges himself bequeathed to us.