

certain Straussian trope in his own conclusion when he writes that free minds who “embrace a strict intellectual conscience in pursuit of truth” should accept “temporary blindness to truth” (324). Although Nietzsche does believe that truth should be in the service of life, this demand for “temporary blindness” to truth seems closer to the position adopted by the ascetic priest Nietzsche denounces at the end of the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morality* than the type of Free Spirit he was advocating. Moreover, the conflict between life and truth Lampert posits is more reminiscent of Strauss’s opposition between reason and revelation—or again, nature and reason—than anything Nietzsche would have wanted. Indeed, in maintaining his allegiance to an untruth—God’s existence after the “death of God”—instead of abandoning it to create new values, the ascetic priest only succeeds in deepening nihilism.

In his preface to the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche asks that his readers develop a new art of reading—what he will call “rumination”—so that he may be understood. Lampert is undoubtedly one of the best readers Nietzsche has ever had, and in identifying the eternal return as the way out of nihilism he has transcended the type of close textual reading Strauss offers. With *What a Philosopher Is*, Lampert has started to practice this new art of rumination.

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Alejandra M. Salinas: *Liberty, Individuality, and Democracy in Jorge Luis Borges*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017. Pp. vii, 135.)

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Jorge Luis Borges did not see himself or at least did not want to be read as a political writer. He states in the prologue to *Brodie’s Report*: “But I do wish to make clear that I am not, nor have I ever been, what used to be called a fabulist or spinner of parables, what these days is called an *auteur engagé*. I do not aspire to Aesop. My tales, like those of the *Thousand and One Nights*, are intended not to persuade readers, but to entertain and touch them. ... I have never hidden my opinions, even through the difficult years, but I have never allowed them to intrude upon my literary production, either, save that one time when I praised the Six-Day War” (*Collected Fictions*, 345–46).

This suggests that approaching Borges’s writings from a political perspective requires a certain amount of caution and care. Dr. Salinas’s work achieves that

required balance and finesse. She acknowledges not only our limitations in understanding our universe, but also that the texts of strong artists open themselves to multiple readings. It is a thoughtful, thorough, and insightful study.

The author makes an important assertion in the introduction when she states that “Borges’s works are not intentional political statements but literary pieces that bring in the political as a stimulus for his writing.” The suggestion is that a number of his works were not written as an intentional comment on the political situation of the time, but do subtly engage the political in their literary statement. The political thus quietly contributes to the artistic depth and quality of his work.

The manuscript is divided into six parts, an introduction and five chapters. In the introduction, the author defines her terms and her approach while discussing some of the challenges that confront the interpreter of Borges. Chapter 1 deals with the way in which political philosophies are latent in Borges’s work. Chapter 2 contends that in Borges’s texts individuals searching for their creative voice often engage with multiple philosophical and literary traditions. It thus highlights the role of the individual and of reality. Chapter 3 deals with what the author describes as “untlonic” and utopian world. The word “untlonic” is coined from Borges’s story *Tlön Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. The focus is on what Borges calls universal histories and utopian visions, their fallibility and limitations, and Borges’s reservations about them. Chapter 4 deals with the mythic images and values of the frontier in Argentine culture as well as that of other Latin American countries and the United States. Salinas discusses how not only other writers, but also politicians have employed and manipulated these images at times to undermine the liberal republic in its emphasis on the strong man. The final chapter traces the evolution of Borges’s attitude toward democracy from a supporter of liberal democracy, to a skeptic and critic of it when confronted with certain challenging political realities, to his reconciliation with the democratic system as the best guarantee of liberty.

This work is the most detailed and thorough treatment of Borges’s fictional works and essays from a political perspective of which I am aware. It sheds light on an aspect of Borges’s vision that has been only partially analyzed and debated. It is this political specificity and detail that stands out and that makes this a worthwhile contribution to the field. The author regularly links the background social and political events of the period and the Argentine writer’s work, often interpreting Borges’s works as comments on those events. She traces Borges’s evolving attitudes on liberal democracy, anarchy, and the concept of the self, all in the service of defining Borges’s attitudes toward political communities and systems. The author’s reluctance to accept at face value Borges’s statement that he does not let politics enter into his literary writings, and her insights and skill in making connections between historical and political events, Borges’s life, and political overtones in his writings, are bold. Salinas is suggesting not only that the stories can be read in this way, but also that Borges may have intended some of them

to be read as subtle political statements because they reflect Borges's attitude toward the events at that moment. Whether one can know the intentions of an author is always questionable and debatable. That said, with a couple of exceptions, her readings of the texts do work. Salinas skillfully makes connections between some of Borges's philosophical ideas and their political overtones. Overall, this work makes an important contribution to Borges studies. Salinas has thoroughly familiarized herself with Borges's writings and with the secondary, critical literature. Her research is complete and detailed. Her tone is balanced and fair, even when she disagrees with certain critics. She makes a subtle but important case that critics cannot ignore the political and social contexts within which Borges's works were written. In the short story "Pierre Menard, author of the *Quijote*," Borges himself makes a similar argument. Salinas brings into the discussion her background in political science, philosophy, and political theory to help flesh out the argument. Let me give an example of how she proceeds.

In chapter 2, Salinas refers to the configuration of the Company in the story, "The Lottery in Babylon," "as a euphemism for a totalitarian State" or the role of a dictator in such a state. Personally, I believe the Company functions metaphysically as a symbol or metaphor for God and that the story is about the role of "chance" in our lives and the relationship between "chance" and/or the divine in our lives if God exists. The narrator makes a brief reference to the story as being about the role of chance at a later point. Nonetheless, Salinas acknowledges that, and at the same time makes a reasonable case for her reading of the story, one that basically works.

This work is directed toward scholars and academic libraries. The target audience for this work is not only the community of Borges scholars, who are plentiful, but also the community of political scientists and historians who are interested in Argentina's history and its politics. This text could be used at the graduate level in literature courses on Borges or on Latin American literature, in political science courses, or courses in a Latin American studies program.

As I mentioned, I do not know of any text that deals just with Borges's attitude toward political systems and politics in such detail. Most authors who write about this topic do not go into this kind of depth. While not an extremely long book, considering its specific focus, it is much longer and much more detailed than most other treatments of the topic. This is a thoughtful and serious work, the product of extensive research that offers insights into Jorge Luis Borges's ideas and the evolution of his thoughts on political matters.

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