

Why Jorge Luis Borges Still Matters, Even Though He Hoped to be Forgotten

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Jorge Luis Borges died thirty-six years ago. Yet, he remains as popular today as he ever was in life. In this essay, I attempt to explain why. I explore how Borges is, on one hand, heralded as a genius in literary circles, but on the other, he is virtually unknown to the general public. I then discuss the enormous impact Borges has had on modern literature and film, including recent popular books and movies. I conclude that Borges's impact on art is what keeps him relevant and admired decades after his passing.

Keywords: Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina, literary criticism, Latin American literature

Jorge Luis Borges murió hace treinta y seis años. Sin embargo, sigue siendo tan popular hoy como lo fue en la vida. En este ensayo, intento explicar por qué. Exploro el hecho de que Borges, por un lado, sea considerado un genio en círculos literarios, mientras que, por otro, quede prácticamente desconocido ante el público en general. Luego presento el enorme impacto de Borges en la literatura y el cine modernos, incluso en libros y películas populares recientes. Concluyo que el impacto de Borges en el arte es lo que lo mantiene relevante y admirado décadas después de su fallecimiento.

Palabras clave: Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina, crítica literaria, literatura latinoamericana

Although Jorge Luis Borges died thirty-six years ago, on June 14, 1986, his work and his influence are very much alive. Pope Francis included Borges on his 2021 summer reading list,¹ former president of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, recently published a book about Borges,² and Michigan State University acquired a massive

¹ Colleen Dulle, "The Pope Francis Summer Reading List," *America Magazine*, June 2, 2021, <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2021/06/02/pope-francis-favorite-books-240778>.

² Marta Menéndez, "El expresidente Rodríguez Zapatero publica un ensayo sobre Borges, el inventor de 'otra dimensión de lo real,'" *El Independiente*, September 14, 2021,

trove of Borges papers last year, which consisted of nineteen boxes of manuscripts, correspondence, and photographs.³ Borges continues to show up regularly in literary discussions in the pages of *The New Yorker*⁴ and the *New York Times*,⁵ and his fiction and poetry continue to be published in prestigious literary forums, such as *The Atlantic*.⁶ Then there is the term “Borgesian.” This word, an adjective meaning “of, relating to, or suggestive of Jorge Luis Borges or his writings,”⁷ has grown in popularity in recent years. It now appears frequently in the popular press,⁸ in academic essays,⁹ and elsewhere.¹⁰

On websites like Amazon and Goodreads, reviews of Borges books, stories, poems, and quotes overflow with praise for the author, as do the comments to YouTube videos featuring Borges interviews, biographies, and audiobooks.¹¹ These reviews

<https://www.elindependiente.com/tendencias/2021/09/14/el-expresidente-rodriquez-zapatero-publica-un-ensayo-sobre-borges-el-inventor-de-otra-dimension-de-lo-real/>.

³ Bill Castanier, “MSU acquires massive Jorge Luis Borges collection” (2021).

⁴ Nina Sharma, “Jorge Luis Borges and Nancy Meyers Pitch a Movie (Because, Admit It, You’ve Watched Everything Else),” *New Yorker*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/humor/daily-shouts/jorge-luis-borges-and-nancy-meyers-pitch-a-movie-because-admit-it-youve-watched-everything-else>.

⁵ “Jorge Luis Borges, Master of the Mystical,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/obituaries/archives/jorge-luis-borges>.

⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Other Tiger,” *The Atlantic*, January 31, 2021 (illustrations by Miki Lowe), <https://www.theatlantic.com/books/archive/2021/01/poem-jorge-luis-borges-other-tiger/617885/>.

⁷ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Borgesian,” accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Borgesian>.

⁸ See, e.g., Judith Shulevitz, “Ruth Ozeki’s Borgesian, Zen Buddhist Parable of Consumerism,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2021, review of *The Book of Form and Emptiness* by Ruth Ozeki, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/19/books/review/the-book-of-form-and-emptiness-ruth-ozeki.html>.

⁹ Lloyd Davies, “All that is Solid Melts into Air: Borgesian Variations on Translation, Fidelity, Citation and Plagiarism,” *Romance Studies* 39 (2021): 138–155, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02639904.2021.1950359>.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Stavans and Albin, *Knowledge and Censorship* (2008) (in which Stavans, in an interview, called Scottish lexicographer and philologist Sir James Murray “a Borgesian character,” 73); *State v. Hurd*, 89 Ohio St. 3d 616, 618, 734 N.E.2d 365, 366–67 (Ohio 2000) (where the Supreme Court of Ohio noted, “it may seem that we are mired in a Borgesian Labyrinth . . . where there is a wrongdoing and yet no way to punish the perpetrator.”).

¹¹ See, e.g., five-star review of *Collected Fictions* by BlackOxford, Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/17961.Collected_Fictions (“The Master. What educated person could live without his . . . fiction? Borges created a genre which itself is now a fact in Western culture.”); “Profile of a Writer: Jorge Luis Borges,” two reviews of a Borges profile on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAM2NJnv3Dk> (One reviewer said: “Borges, he is the best. The best of all.” Another reviewer said: “Borges is a genius!”); five-star review of *Labyrinths* (New Directions, 2007) by Mr. R. O’Gorman, Amazon, <https://www.amazon.com/Labyrinths-Directions-Paperbook-Jorge-Borges/dp/0811216993/> (“Highly recommended. Borges has the ability to bend your mind into various vicissitudes of time and space. Mind blowing.”).

and comments are written in numerous languages. They come from people of diverse backgrounds and are written by young and old readers alike.

Why does Borges continue to generate so much admiration, even today, decades after his death? In this article, I attempt to answer this question. But to understand why Borges still matters to so many, it may be helpful to first explain why Borges matters to me, personally. Why? Because many others have been pulled into Borges's orbit the same way I was.

In my twenties, I set out to read books by the so-called "Greats." As I went about this task, however, I discovered I did not much like the Greats. I found most of them uninteresting. Many were unreadable. It was during this deep dive into the Greats, however, that Borges first came onto my radar. I picked up a book of his short stories. I found it dull. I put the book down. That was that. Or so I thought. Even after putting Borges behind me, I kept bumping into him. His name and his work kept flying onto my radar. His books appeared on recommended reading lists. People I knew suggested I read him. Even the spines of his books would catch my attention while browsing bookstore shelves. Part of the reason for this, I am sure, is my strong affection for Latin America and its literature. Having spent time in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, and Puerto Rico, and having married an Argentine, Natalia, whom I met while living in Buenos Aires, I have a particular affinity for Latin American culture and art, and even more particularly for Argentine authors. And anyone who has waded through the Spanish language literary Greats knows Borges shows up in every direction one looks.

So, from time to time, I picked up my Borges book anew. It was a compendium of stories called *Collected Fictions* (Borges 1998). But try as I might, I could not get into the prose. For two years, I kept picking up that book and trying to like it. The stories felt flat to me, lifeless. But while the stories did not resonate with me, I found myself nevertheless drawn to Borges by other forces, perhaps the desire to understand why he was so universally praised. I became determined to find a way into Borges, and so I bought another book of his stories, this one translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni. This other book is called *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933–1969* (Borges 1970). When I read it, I was blown away—I actually liked it. A lot. Many of the stories were the very same ones I had read in the other volume, but this version of those stories had somehow opened my eyes to something I had not seen while reading *Collected Fictions*. I found the prose not only good, but great. In fact, a handful of the di Giovanni translated stories in *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933–1969* were so good I had to read them again immediately. I have continued rereading them ever since. The superiority of the di Giovanni translations has been noted by scholars and readers (Richardson 1998, 140), although the assessment is not universal. Some prefer other translators.

Over the years, my admiration for Borges and his prose grew. I have trouble describing just what I feel because it is so different from what I feel for any other author. First, it was his stories. Then, his poetry. Then, his interviews. Then, biographies. Natalia has asked me on several occasions whether I really need all these Borges books. The truth is, I do. And the book that first turned me on to Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933–1969*—which was forced out of print in the 1980s (Basile 2018, 23)—has become my bedside companion. I keep it close by, opening it whenever I bore of whatever else I might be reading. I take it with me when I travel. I keep a copy of it in my office.

Although my fervor for Borges might be over the top, which it is, I have encountered many others who not only harbor a similar enthusiasm for Borges and his work, but who acquired that enthusiasm the same way I did.¹² People get pulled into Borges as if by the force of gravity. New Borges fans appear in each new generation. The comments on YouTube and Goodreads are living proof of this. I have witnessed it firsthand, as well. Recently, after publishing an academic paper on a Borges-related topic, several of my students (I teach law) approached me to talk about Borges. All of them expressed admiration for Borges, and a few told me he was either their favorite writer or one of their favorites. Complete strangers also reached out to me in regards to my Borges paper. One of them was a podcaster who asked me to sit for an interview.¹³ I was stunned. After six years of publishing academic papers, no one had extended me any invitation in response to my scholarship, let alone to a podcast. One Borges-themed article generated more feedback and interest than all my other writing combined.

What is it about Borges that keeps pulling in new readers and admirers? Many have weighed in to attempt to answer this question.

Literary critic Jane Ciabattari gave one of my favorite assessments: “Reading the work of Jorge Luis Borges for the first time,” she wrote, “is like discovering a new letter in the alphabet, or a new note in the musical scale” (2014). The *Encyclopedia Britannica* credits Borges with elevating all of Latin American literature: It was “through his work” that “Latin American literature emerged from the academic realm into the realm of generally educated readers.”¹⁴

¹² See, for instance, Rodrigo Rey Rosa’s account of how he came to Borges as a reader in *Literary Hub* (2019).

¹³ Wes Henricksen, “Some of Jorge Luis Borges Most Beloved Translations Were Wrongfully Silenced, Here’s Why You Should Care,” September 13, 2021. See Giovanni Fumei, Thesis podcast, <https://Inns.co/WRPAuVhZ8QK> and <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/thesis/id1561268533>.

¹⁴ Emir Rodriguez Monegal, “Jorge Luis Borges: Argentine Author,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*,

One Argentine writer said that, to him, Borges simply “was literature,” and even the way Borges talked about books was a “literary education.”¹⁵ Leslie McRoberts, head of recently-acquired Borges collection at Michigan State University, put it more bluntly: “Everyone should read his work.”¹⁶ Borges is widely, if not universally, considered one of the most important writers of the twentieth century.¹⁷ Everyone, in fact, from readers and critics to the literary Greats themselves, have nothing but the highest praise for him and his work.¹⁸ It is rare to find a discussion of Borges where he is *not* lauded as a genius or a god or a hero, where no reference is made to the pedestal he occupies within the Western literary canon.

Over the decades since his death, Borges’s global stature has continued to grow. “Today one could consider Borges the most important writer of the 20th Century,” says Suzanne Jill Levine, translator and general editor of the Penguin Classics five-volume Borges series. Why?

Because he created a new literary continent between North and South America, between Europe and America, between old worlds and modernity. In creating the most original writing of his time, Borges taught us that nothing is new, that creation is re-creation, that we are

August 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jorge-Luis-Borges>.

¹⁵ “Were Libraries Borges’s Universe or the Other Way Around? Rodrigo Fresan and Rodrigo Rey Rosa on Reading Jorge Luis Borges,” *Literary Hub* (2019).

¹⁶ See Castanier (2021). There is no shortage of opportunity for people to read his work. Borges’s poetry and prose have been compiled into at least seventy-seven books, according to a review of Jorge Luis Borges’s bibliography as listed in the Library of Congress, Wikipedia, and Goodreads.

¹⁷ See Ciabattari (2014), quoting Suzanne Jill Levine, translator and general editor of the Penguin Classics five-volume Borges series; “Jorge Luis Borges said that football was ‘stupid,’” NOTICIASFINANCIERAS, June 14, 2018, available on Westlaw at 2018 WLNR 18359523 (where the author noted that Borges was “one of the most important writers of the 20th century”); David Berry, “Art can be a beacon of hope or an explanation of the world,” *Postmedia News*, December 2, 2016 (noting that Borges was “unquestionably the most important Argentinian writer, if not one of the finest writers in the Spanish-language”); “Culture of prevention lost in haze of Mexico fires,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 17, 2003, available on Westlaw at 2003 WLNR 16519446 (noting that Borges was “one of the most important short story writers and essayists of the last century”).

¹⁸ One author, for example, said: “he was so important because he is one of the three writers, together with Joyce and Kafka, who defined the 20th Century” and called him “the most prominent and influential Argentinean writer of all times” (Irene Caselli, “Why Jorge Luis Borges matters 30 years after his death” (2016). See also “Jorge Luis Borges: Argentina’s most influential author,” *Pocket Cultures*, March 23, 2012, <https://pocketcultures.com/2012/03/23/jorge-luis-borges/> (“Jorge Luis Borges is considered the most prominent and influential Argentinean writer of all times.”); Jorge Luis Borges, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (2013), calling Borges the author “who had succeeded Joyce and Kafka” (13).

all one contradictory mind, connected amongst each other and through time and space, that human beings are not only fiction makers but are fictions themselves, that everything we think or perceive is fiction, that every corner of knowledge is a fiction. (quoted in Ciabattari 2014)

Very well. Ms. Levine’s assessment is poetic and articulate, but gets us no closer to understanding why Borges has endured, why his reputation continues to grow, and why Borges still matters. As with most “why” questions, these ones can only be partially answered. The physicist Richard Feynman explained how any “why” question inevitably leads to a bottomless rabbit hole of more whys.¹⁹ The ultimate answer to such a question most often eludes us in the end. There are too many layers to it.

This is just as true, or even truer, with aesthetic judgments. I believe the primary reason why I fail to locate the ultimate answer to why Borges matters is that no single answer exists. I do, however, believe one key factor is the author’s enduring pop culture influence. I will touch on that in a moment.

First, however, it is important to note the contradictory nature of Borges’s current status. While he is celebrated in literary and academic circles, he is not well-known by the general public outside Latin America and Spain. Most non-Spanish-speakers who have not either studied literature or familiarized themselves with the “classics” have little to no idea who Borges is. This is particularly true today, in a digital age when even a moderately successful Instagrammer’s or YouTuber’s fanbase dwarfs that of Borges.²⁰ If measured by name recognition among the general public, then, Borges ranks low on the scale of importance in the modern world, at least at first glance.

This makes Borges a contradictory figure. He is, on one hand, celebrated by readers, authors, academics, and philosophers as one of the great writers and thinkers of the past century. And his reputation in these circles is immense, and growing. On the other hand, his name and body of work becomes less well-known and accessible to the general public every year. To top it off, Borges himself considered his own work irrelevant. He told interviewers he did not like any books he had written, that his towering reputation was “a mistake,” that he was a “nobody” as a writer, and that,

¹⁹ Richard Feynman, “Why,” YouTube, Apr. 2, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36GT2zI8IVA>.

²⁰ For example, Felix Arvid Ulf Kjellberg, better known as PewDiePie, is a Swedish YouTuber who has more than 104 million subscribers, and whose YouTube videos regularly get over tens of millions of views. See PewDiePie YouTube Homepage, <https://www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie/> (105 million subscribers as of July 11, 2020). One video, entitled “bitch lasagna,” currently has over 246 million views.

after he died, he hoped he would be forgotten.²¹

Far from forgotten, however, Borges is one of the most renowned authors in history. And while assessments of why Borges matters from an aesthetic or artistic perspective are necessarily subjective, one critical factor for why Borges's work matters objectively is the impact his work has had on our modern world.

Borges's influence, after all, makes his work matter, even to those who have never read him. To begin with, as "the father of the Latin American novel" (Ciabattari 2014), Borges's work inspired a sizeable portion of the most popular and groundbreaking literary output of the second half of the twentieth century in the Spanish language, including the Latin American Boom and magical realism movements.²² "Through his work, Latin American literature emerged from the academic realm into the realm of generally educated readers."²³ This includes the work of writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Isabel Allende, and Carlos Fuentes, not to mention Julio Cortázar, Roberto Bolaño, and Augusto Monterroso, each of whom has professed a debt of gratitude to Borges.²⁴

²¹ Borges was dismissive of his own work in numerous interviews. See, e.g., Borges, *Last Interview* (2013), where the interviewer asks: "Do you think you're more gifted in fiction than in poetry or..." and Borges responds: "I don't think I'm gifted at all" (91). Borges says: "Come visit me in Buenos Aires, I'll show you my library, you won't find a single book of mine. I'm very sure of this—I choose my books. Who am I to find my way into the neighborhood of Sir Thomas Browne, or of Emerson. I'm nobody" (139). The interviewer asks if Borges likes his own work, to which he responds: "I don't like it too much. I prefer original texts. I prefer Chesterton and Kafka" (146). By this, Borges was alluding to the idea he had not written anything but only reworked texts he had read years before, that his work was not original or good. Interviewer: "Why shouldn't you be described as a genius?" Borges: "There's no reason why I should be. What have I written? Transcriptions of writing by other people" (166). Interviewer: "What will happen when you die?" Borges: "It's not important. Now, what I hope is that I will be forgotten because it's all a mistake, these superficial honors, people taking me seriously all over the place. They made me a Doctor Honoris Causa in a university in Rome this year, the University of Cambridge too; I'm not seduced by those honors or by any other" (172). Borges: "The books I've written don't matter. They're the least important thing" (175).

²² See Lanin A. Gyurko, "The Metaphysical World of Borges and Its Impact on the Novelists of the Boom Generation," *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv, Neue Folge*, 14, no. 2 (1988): 215–261.

²³ Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "Jorge Luis Borges: Argentine Author," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jorge-Luis-Borges>.

²⁴ See, e.g., Norman Thomas di Giovanni, *The Lesson of the Master: On Borges and His Work* (2003):

Not surprisingly, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, a critic and biographer of Borges, made the claim that *A Universal History of Infamy* was "the book that literally transformed the Spanish prose of the thirties and whose long echoes can still be heard in [García Márquez's] 'One Hundred Years of Solitude.' . . . García Márquez himself has paid tribute to Borges's 'extraordinary capacity for verbal artifice,' describing how he reads him every night and on his travels carries around in a suitcase Borges's complete works. The Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes goes even further, saying that without

Plots of Borges stories have been recycled by other authors to create two of the most-read novels in the history of literature, *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho and *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco.²⁵ Borges's influence on modern film is so great that he now has over fifty movie credits, including ten in just the past decade.²⁶ There are over thirty films either written by or based on Borges's work.²⁷ Recent movies based on Borges plots and ideas include *Inception* (2010), *The Matrix* movie franchise (1999, 2003, 2003, 2021),²⁸ and the international award-winning film *Extraordinary Stories* (2008).²⁹ Borges shows up in so many films that academic papers, PhD dissertations, and websites have independently analyzed and compiled examples of Borges in film.³⁰

Borges and his work even appear in literary and cinematic works he did not directly inspire. One example was in the film *Birdman*, which won four Academy Awards, including Best Picture.³¹ In the film, a leading character, played by Edward Norton, is

Borges's prose 'there simply would not be a modern Spanish-American novel' and that Borges 'constitutes a new Latin-American language'." (164)

Julio Cortázar, in a 1977 interview on the Spanish program *A Fondo* referred repeatedly to Borges as the "great" or "master" of his literary generation (Cortázar 1977). Roberto Bolaño refers to Borges reverentially in several interviews, including one where he clumped together three "brilliant prose writers": Cervantes, Quevedo, and Borges, the former two dating to the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and Borges to the twentieth century (Bolaño 2003).

²⁵ *The Alchemist* has sold over 150 million copies. See Ezekiel Boone, "Nine books that sold more than 100 million copies and how they compare to my book," Penguin Random House Canada, <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/532/nine-books-sold-more-100-million-copies-and-how-they-compare-my-book>. As of 1996, *The Name of the Rose* had sold over 50 million copies. See Amazon page for *The Library Journal* review of *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, <https://www.amazon.com/Name-Rose-Umberto-Eco/dp/1559273615>.

²⁶ "Jorge Luis Borges," IMDB, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0096566>.

²⁷ Allen B. Ruch, "Borges and Film," *Shipwreck Library*, last modified December 2019, <http://shipwrecklibrary.com/borges/borges-films>.

²⁸ See Jaime Perales Contreras, "Inception and Jorge Luis Borges," *Questia* (2010), drawing the connection between *Inception* and *The Matrix*, and noting that both share Borgesian roots. <https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-242018182/inception-and-jorge-luis-borges>.

²⁹ See Steven Ryder, "A Cinema of Forking Paths: A Borges Inspired Film Season," *Curzon Blog*, December 7, 2018, describing how the movie is based on Borges's work. <http://www.curzonblog.com/all-posts/jorge-luis-borges-a-cinema-of-forking-paths-last-year-at-marienbad-extraordinary-stories>.

³⁰ See P. Swanson, "Borges and Popular Culture," *Hispanic Research Journal*, 19, no. 3 (2018): 250–264, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682737.2018.1467855> & <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/130384/> (academic paper); Monica Sumihar Simorangkir, "Borges in Hollywood: From Art House to Blockbuster Cinema," (PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, 2017), <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1047823>; Shipwreck Library, "Borges and Film," <http://shipwrecklibrary.com/borges/borges-films/> (website); Edgardo Cozarinsky, "Borges in/and/on Film," <https://www.complete-review.com/reviews/borgesjl/bonfilm.htm> (website).

³¹ "The 87th Academy Awards," 2015, Dolby Theatre at the Hollywood & Highland Center,

shown in a pivotal scene reading *Labyrinths*, a collection of Borges short stories.³²

Borges's influence reaches beyond popular culture. Take philosophy. Borges is widely credited with having "inspired professional philosophers from both the continental and analytic traditions."³³ Another sphere where Borges has had a strong influence is academia. Borges is one of the most widely read and studied writers in literature, creative writing, and Latin American studies programs. Yet another place his influence is felt is the internet. Borges has struck a chord in the digital world. The *L.A. Times* dubbed Borges an "internet star,"³⁴ and Suzanne Jill Levine noted that "the world wide web, in which all time and space coexist simultaneously, seems as if it were invented by Borges" (quoted in Ciabattari 2014).

How strange that a man who considered himself to belong more to the nineteenth century, in which he was born, than to the twentieth century, in which he lived (Borges 2013, 130), to now be perfectly at home in the twenty-first century digital world. It is a world that seems both invented by, and invented for, Borges's way of thinking. Take, for instance, the libraryofbabel.info website. This is a re-creation, in digital form, of the infinite library Borges describes in his story "The Library of Babel."³⁵ The library in Borges's story contains limitless rooms and shelves, and all shelves are filled with books of the same size and shape containing every possible permutation of the twenty-six letters in the alphabet and basic punctuation (Borges 2017, 73–81). The website offers a digitized version of Borges's infinite library by using an algorithm devised by the website's creator.³⁶ The total number of possible books in this virtual library is mindboggling,³⁷ approaching a concept Borges returns to time and again in his prose—infinity.

It is no surprise numberless articles have been written on the importance of Borges,³⁸ or that eminent authors praise him,³⁹ or that the term "Borgesian" is now widely used

Sunday, February 22, 2015, <https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/2015>.

³² *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014.

³³ University of California Television, "Jorge Luis Borges on War," February 13, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5P1-q7hokE8>.

³⁴ Hector Tobar, "The Borges boom: he may be dead, but his legacy remains strong," *L.A. Times*, August 1, 2013, <https://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-jorge-luis-borges-blindess-and-books-20130731-story.html>

³⁵ Katy Waldman, "Jorge Luis Borges' 'Library of Babel' Is Now a Real Website. Borges Would Be Alarmed," *Slate*, April 30, 2015, <https://slate.com/culture/2015/04/jonathan-basile-brings-borges-library-of-babel-to-life-with-an-eerie-gibberish-filled-web-site.html>.

³⁶ Library of Babel, <http://libraryofbabel.info/>.

³⁷ Library of Babel, About the Library, "At present it contains all possible pages of 3200 characters, about 10⁴⁶⁷⁷ books." <https://libraryofbabel.info/About.html>.

³⁸ See, e.g., Caselli (2016); Ciabattari (2014).

³⁹ See Di Giovanni, *Lesson of the Master* (2003, 164); Cortázar (1977); Bolaño (2003).

to describe plots and real-life circumstances reminiscent of Borges.⁴⁰ His most lasting influence, however, is on art. This influence spans borders, oceans, and continents. The work of Borges has had an enormous impact on literature, cinema, television, and theater. If art matters, and many have put forth strong arguments that it does,⁴¹ then so too does Borges.

This, I believe, is the best answer we have to the question of why Borges still matters. This is why so many, from the head of the Catholic Church and former heads of state to readers, writers, literary critics, and even some of my own students, continue to revere him. Not only does Borges's work speak to us, but it continues to influence the public at large through his impact on art. Those of us who discover this cannot help but love him for it.

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⁴⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Borgesian": "Characteristic of the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges or his works, especially with reference to fantasy or magic realism." Accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/borgesian>.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Kirsten Weir, "Probing the power and importance of art," *American Psychological Association*, 50, no. 5 (May 2019): 66–69, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/probing-art>; Mary Boone, "Why Art Matters," *Huffington Post*, January 16, 2009, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-art-matters_b_151428. A viral meme on Twitter in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic stated: "If you think artists are useless, try to spend your quarantine without music, books, poems, movies, paintings, & games." @ArtsEarthorg, Twitter, April 2, 2020, <https://twitter.com/ArtsEarthOrg/status/1245671415828774913>.

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