

"Deutsches Requiem" and its Literary Heirs: Representing Nazi Perpetrators in Latin American Fiction

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"Deutsches Requiem" (1946), Borges's story from the famous collection *El aleph*, provides an early and innovative model for representing fascism from the point of view of a Nazi perpetrator. Although often misunderstood by twentieth-century US literary critics, "Deutsches Requiem" has gained attention in recent years. This article adds to the critical interest in the story by demonstrating how Borges created a genre that some of the most prominent Latin American authors would adopt to grapple with World War II, the Holocaust, and their legacy in Latin America. The study examines seven novels written by five prominent Latin American authors between 1967 and 2009 that feature Nazi protagonists. These "perpetrator fictions" continuously rewrite, reexamine, and replicate Borges's "Deutsches Requiem" to pose the same probing questions while reevaluating the story's importance. In this way, the novels also provide the interpretive gloss on Borges's enigmatic story that had been missing from critical conversations.

Keywords: Jorge Luis Borges, "Deutsches Requiem," Nazis, World War II, Holocaust, José Emilio Pacheco, Carlos Fuentes, Roberto Bolaño, Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla

"Deutsches Requiem" (1946), la historia de Borges de su famosa colección *El aleph*, proporciona un modelo temprano e innovador para representar el fascismo desde el punto de vista de un perpetrador nazi. Aunque a menudo mal entendido por los críticos literarios estadounidenses del siglo veinte, "Deutsches Requiem" ha ganado más atención en los últimos años. Este artículo se suma al interés crítico en la historia al demostrar cómo Borges creó un género que algunos de los autores latinoamericanos más prominentes adoptarían para tratar la Segunda Guerra Mundial, el Holocausto y su legado en América Latina. El estudio examina siete novelas escritas por cinco destacados autores latinoamericanos entre 1967 y 2009 que presentan protagonistas nazis. Estas "ficciones perpetradoras" continuamente reescriben, reexaminan y replican el relato de Borges para plantear las mismas hondas preguntas mientras reevalúan la importancia de la historia. De esta manera,

las novelas también proporcionan la glosa interpretativa de la enigmática historia de Borges que había estado ausente de las conversaciones críticas.

Palabras clave: Jorge Luis Borges, “Deutsches Requiem”, Nazis, Segunda Guerra Mundial, Holocausto, José Emilio Pacheco, Carlos Fuentes, Roberto Bolaño, Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla

Introduction

Jorge Luis Borges’s “Deutsches Requiem” (1946) is perhaps his darkest short story. Written during the Nuremberg trials, the dense monologue, penned by a Nazi perpetrator the night before his execution, reads like a deposition.¹ The first-person Nazi narrator, Otto Dietrich zur Linde, calmly describes his transformation from erudite German citizen to subdirector of a concentration camp and professes to be unconcerned about his upcoming death. Although he will die and Nazi Germany will be defeated, zur Linde darkly suggests that Nazism has fundamentally changed both Germany and the world by ushering in a violent new world order inspired by Hitler’s “faith of the sword”: “Mañana moriré,” he proclaims, “pero soy un símbolo de las generaciones del porvenir” (Borges 1946, 8). There is no moral at the end of Borges’s fiction, no point at which the author or the fictional editor explicitly condemns Nazism or the Nazi protagonist. The lack of condemnation is likely one of the reasons why many twentieth-century literary critics failed to understand the story.

Adding to the confusion, Borges’s protagonist is complex and transcends the typical evil Nazi or Nazi buffoon described in Petra Rau’s study of Nazis in Anglo-American literature and film (Rau 2013, 1–12; 160–164). Zur Linde claims to be a deep thinker and an admirer of Brahms, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Spengler: “Nací en Marienburg, en 1908. Dos pasiones, ahora casi olvidadas, me permitieron afrontar con valor y aún con felicidad muchos años infaustos: la música y la metafísica” (8). Continually undercutting zur Linde’s version of events, however, are footnotes from an unidentified editor who amends and casts doubt on parts of the narrative. Although zur Linde’s monologue begins with a list of his ancestors, the editor notes that his most illustrious predecessor, a famous Hebraist named Johannes Forkel, is

¹ Borges first published the story in the Argentine literary journal *Sur* in February 1946, shortly after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, adding a layer of dramatic irony to the Nazi narrator’s disturbing proclamation that violence and hatred would continue to flourish even after the fall of Nazi Germany. The last article in the same *Sur* issue (opened by “Deutsches Requiem”) is a long reflection by Carlos María Reyles titled “La bomba atómica: la política y el tiempo,” which discusses the destruction of the Japanese cities, the newfound power of the US with the atomic bomb, and implications for the future. Therefore, the issue of *Sur* is bookended by the Nazi’s chilling proclamation of a new, violent world order and Reyles’s description of both the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the terrifying possibilities of future atomic warfare. “Deutsches Requiem” was later included in Borges’s *El aleph* (1949).

missing. This note points to zur Linde as an unreliable narrator, warning the reader not to take his words at face value.

The Nazi is forging a new identity for himself, deliberately removing any traces of Jewishness in his heritage. The ancestors he mentions are soldiers, examples of the new man he would like to be. The climax of “Deutsches Requiem” is the inner conflict the Nazi narrator describes when David Jerusalem, a Jewish author he admires, is sentenced to Tarnowitz, the fictional concentration camp zur Linde directs and whose name evokes Auschwitz. It is unclear exactly what happens to Jerusalem. Most likely, zur Linde ordered him tortured and killed, an act which ultimately annihilates the Nazi’s own identity. The fictional editor, however, casts doubt on zur Linde’s version of events by stating that there is no record of a David Jerusalem in Tarnowitz and that Jerusalem probably is a symbol of all the Jewish intellectuals whom the Nazi ordered to be tortured (12).

Borges’s complex depiction of Otto zur Linde in “Deutsches Requiem” captures an idea that Hannah Arendt would highlight more than a decade later in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: that the experience of World War II erased the identities of not only concentration camp victims but also of Nazi perpetrators (1958, 442). By representing a Nazi from his own point of view, Borges shows the human toll that World War II took on the Nazis. Zur Linde’s monologue reveals that the war destroyed his house and laboratory and killed his brother. He also lost a leg and, with that, the possibility of becoming a perfect Aryan archetype. Zur Linde speculates that his years of apprenticeship were difficult because, “a pesar de no carecer de valor, me falta toda vocación de violencia” (Borges 1946, 9). “Deutsches Requiem” pays homage to the intellectual Germany represented by the Jews, David Jerusalem, and even by zur Linde, through recollections of his prewar life, interests, and pastimes. Though Borges strongly criticized Nazism elsewhere, here he recognizes the Nazis’ humanity, warning that we cannot separate ourselves from what happened in Germany and suggesting that if Nazism can take root in Germany, it can flourish anywhere.

Although Borges himself failed to denounce the right-wing military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s, I argue that “Deutsches Requiem” provided later authors with literary tools to deeply interrogate Nazism as well as the reverberating, lasting effects of fascism in Latin America. Like his story, the later works use textual fragmentation, doubling, metatextuality, and unreliable first-person narrators to pose the same questions about the human toll of war and the universal propensity for violence. This study is broadly articulated and provides a conceptual framework for future research into the importance of “Deutsches Requiem” for subsequent Latin American authors and the fields of both Holocaust and perpetrator studies.

This analysis examines seven novels written by five prominent Latin American authors between 1967 and 2009 that feature Nazi protagonists. These “perpetrator fictions” continuously rewrite, reexamine, and replicate Borges’s “Deutsches Requiem” to ask the same questions while reevaluating the story’s importance. In this way, the novels also provide the interpretive gloss on Borges’s enigmatic story that had been missing from critical conversations. None of the works contains an explicit statement from the author denouncing the actions of the Nazi character(s). However, the failure to expressly condemn Nazism is not a weakness, but rather a reflection of the ambiguous line between civilization and barbarism and an exhortation to the reader to act in the world to combat the often-invisible, but ever-present, shadow of fascism. The seven novels analyzed have not been discussed as a coherent genre. Yet, their textual innovations predate similar experimentation by American and European authors such as Jonathan Littell in his highly discussed 2006 French novel, *Les bienveillantes*, which also presents the Holocaust from the point of view of a literate, well-educated Nazi, not unlike Borges’s protagonist.

Early and Recent Critical Readings of “Deutsches Requiem”

This research builds on findings by Edna Aizenberg (2005, 2016) and my previous work (Warner 2001) to establish Borges’s importance for Holocaust literature. Aizenberg (2005) discusses the critical misunderstanding and silence regarding “Deutsches Requiem” in the US between the story’s publication in 1946 and her 2005 article. Over those forty years, leading US literary critics misinterpreted the story as an apology for Nazism or simply ignored it. Aizenberg asserts that “Deutsches Requiem” made commentators like John Sturrock “and so many other critics squeamish” and that their squeamishness “was a root reason for its disregard. The Holocaust just didn’t make for a good read” (37).

Another reason for the silence was adherence to the ideas of the early, influential Borges critic Paul de Man, who affirmed that the author’s dalliance with Nazism was mere artifice, as Borges never took a moral stance but rather merely exploited Nazism as another type of infamy to create novel plot twists. De Man’s viewpoint about a purely apolitical Borges “spread like wildfire” and informed criticism for decades (Aizenberg 2005, 34). Yet, we now know that de Man’s perspective likely reflected his own discomfort with Borges’s political position, given that he was posthumously found to have been a Nazi sympathizer (Aizenberg 2016, 9). My previous work (Warner 2001), cited by Aizenberg in both 2005 and 2016, highlights Borges’s serious approach to World War II and the Holocaust. Interest in “Deutsches Requiem” and political readings of Borges have grown with critics like Annick Louis (2008) and Ilan Stavans (2016) who also elucidate Borges’s political conscience. However, no other critic has examined the seven novels discussed in this article as a cohesive oeuvre that adopts “Deutsches Requiem” as a model to explore the

psychology of Nazi perpetrators and the opaque logic of Nazism, told from the point of view of Nazis themselves.

This study complements the work of Javier Barroso (2017), Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado (2018), and Maarten Van Delden (2014), who also discuss Latin American authors' serious approach to World War II and the Holocaust, a departure from other recent critics, including Hector Hoyos (2015). For instance, in tracing Nazi themes in current Latin American literature, Hoyos argues that many contemporary Latin American novelists merely dabble in Nazi themes and tropes rather than deeply engaging with the reality of World War II. Hoyos specifically suggests that Roberto Bolaño, Jorge Volpi, and Ignacio Padilla "transform the international, marginal phenomenon of Neo-Nazism into a displaced figure of globalization" (2015, 26). As in this analysis, Hoyos approaches novels vis-à-vis Borges but uses the story "El aleph" as a lens through which to discuss the novels as examples of globalization, suggesting the authors use Nazism as an "aleph," or compressed version of Western culture, to reflect on the Latin American author's peripheral place in the world (35–64). Reading these and other Latin American novels through the alternate lens of "Deutsches Requiem" produces a vastly different view and brings into focus both Borges's and the subsequent novelists' serious treatment of both World War II and the Holocaust.

By focusing broadly on the Borges story and seven subsequent novels, this study hopes to foreground future in-depth studies of the importance of Latin American authors for the fields of Holocaust and perpetrator studies. The novels take up the same questions, use the same literary devices, and recast versions of the Nazi protagonist, Otto zur Linde, throughout time and space. Each text uses Borgesian metatextuality, unreliable narrators, doubling, and textual fragmentation, all with the effect of metonymically posing questions about the impact of war on human identity and on the difficulty of finding a viewpoint outside the violent, self-referential reality created by Nazism. By frequently using unreliable first-person Nazi narrators, these Latin American authors show the extent to which their characters are implicated in such realities.

These complex novels each require an engaged reader to disentangle a snarled web of facts and misinformation. In so doing, the reader becomes a moral witness, questioning whether the unreliable narrators are who they say they are and whether their version of events can be trusted. This act of textual unscrambling also requires the reader to undertake uncomfortable self-analysis. Though the authors examined are not Jewish, each provides a deep dive into the psychology of a Nazi perpetrator, providing insights that regrettably continue to be relevant with the continued presence of fascism around the world.

“Deutsches Requiem” and Germany

In “Deutsches Requiem,” Borges describes Nazism and anti-Semitism in a way that mistakenly could be read as an apology for Nazism. Borges deeply admired the Germany that preceded Nazism and feared for the world after the atrocities of World War II. In an interview, he discussed publishing “Deutsches Requiem” when “nobody had a word for the tragedy of Germany.” Borges considered the story to be a eulogy for the Germany that no longer existed: “I mean such an important nation. A nation that had produced Schopenhauer and Brahms and so many poets and so many philosophers, and yet it fell a victim to a very clumsy idea” (Burgin 1988, 21).

The story’s title refers to Brahms’s “Ein Deutsches Requiem” and the story portrays Germany’s demise in the grip of Nazism, expressed as a “clumsy idea” that evokes Hannah Arendt’s description of Adolf Eichmann and the “banality of evil” in her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, published in 1963 after Eichmann’s trial for genocide. The book delves into the universal human capacity to commit unspeakable evil, pointing to Eichmann as a terrifying example of the evil that “normal” people can commit. The book ignited a storm of controversy by suggesting that Eichmann—the brains behind the Holocaust—was neither a monster nor radically evil. Arendt instead found him to be an average, boring bureaucrat, “terribly and terrifyingly normal” (1963, 311). Yet, it was precisely this “moral emptiness,” or “banality” that permitted him to proceed with the bureaucratic day-to-day logistics that resulted in the Holocaust and allowed him “to become one of the greatest criminals of that period” (322).

Published seventeen years before *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, “Deutsches Requiem” also explores the common humanity of a Nazi perpetrator. It was the first literary text published anywhere to present World War II and the Holocaust through the eyes of a rational Nazi protagonist, and it was an important literary precursor to *Les bienveillantes* (2006) by Jonathan Littell, the French-educated, American-Jewish author. Like “Deutsches Requiem,” *Les bienveillantes* presents the fictional autobiography of a Nazi protagonist. It became a best-seller in France and won that country’s most prestigious literary award, Le Prix Goncourt. The book also divided critics and sparked lively debates about why Littell (a Jew) would internalize a Nazi’s point of view and give him life through his novel. Some critics described the novel as groundbreaking since so few texts or films had portrayed the inner life of a Nazi perpetrator (Suleiman 2009, 1–3). Susan Rubin Suleiman, a key Holocaust literary scholar, briefly mentions “Deutsches Requiem” as an important precursor to *Les bienveillantes*. However, she and other Holocaust scholars appear to be unaware of the Latin American novelists who, starting in 1967, adopted the genre Borges initiated to explore the inner life of Nazi perpetrators while deeply reflecting on the banality of evil and the legacy of Nazism in Latin America.

"Deutsches Requiem" warns that if Nazism could pollute as great a nation as Germany, the same could happen in Argentina. Having spent years of his childhood in Europe and being fluent in German, Borges saw himself as a true Germanophile. In his 1940 essay, "Definición del germanófilo," Borges denounced Argentina's supposed Germanophiles for not loving Germany, but rather, Nazism. The essay argues that true German culture is not violent and Nazi-like, but instead derives from Jewish culture (Borges 1997, 166–168). Borges's 1944 essay "Anotación al 23 de agosto de 1944" states that Nazism suffers from "irreality," that it is uninhabitable, and that while men can die, lie, and kill for its sake, deep inside no one honestly could hope for its triumph (200).

Borges's political conscience shines through in World War II-era essays that openly excoriate Hitler, Nazism, and Argentine Nazi sympathizers. His stories featuring Jews and Nazis, however, are more morally opaque and require an active reader to try to puzzle out their meaning. Like "Deutsches Requiem" these stories resist moral absolutes and fixed ideas about reality, suggesting instead simultaneous realities. In "The Secret Miracle" ("El milagro secreto," 1944) two versions of time exist side by side, and "Emma Zunz" (1948) presents two simultaneous versions of the truth. Borges's later "A Weary Man's Utopia" ("Utopía de un hombre que está cansado," 1975) suggests enigmatically that future humans will regard Hitler as a hero.

Literary Heirs of "Deutsches Requiem"

Like "Deutsches Requiem," the seven novels I have designated are more serious and important than critics have acknowledged. When considered together, they show how Latin American authors reinterpreted the story and created a cohesive oeuvre that reflects on Nazism and its legacy in Latin America. Carlos Fuentes, José Emilio Pacheco, Bolaño, Volpi, and Padilla adopted multiple aspects of the genre Borges created with "Deutsches Requiem." Each of the novels incorporates the point of view of at least one Nazi perpetrator (or in the case of Bolaño, that of aspirational Nazis in Spain and Latin America). Textual fragmentation and contradictory versions of the same story present readers with complex and ultimately unsolvable puzzles. All seven novels use literary devices like fictionalized editorial notes and unreliable narrators to emphasize the "createdness" of the texts. Whether through metatextual self-awareness or unreliable Nazi narrators, each of the novels forces readers to critically distance themselves from the story and judge the extent to which the narrator can be trusted. Furthermore, each suggests ways that Otto's "faith of the sword" also permeates the reader's reality.

The reader, a type of Borgesian detective, must serve as a literary and extraliterary moral witness both to what happens in each text and what has happened in the outside world where Nazi sympathizers frequently have blended in with the general

population. The experimentation and complexity of these works modeled after "Deutsches Requiem" perplex readers and blur boundaries between them and Nazi perpetrators. Furthermore, the lack of poetic justice in these novels forces readers to grapple with the reality that many fascist perpetrators in both Europe and Latin America remain free after committing unimaginable atrocities. If Nazism can take hold in Germany, it can take hold anywhere, including Latin America, and indeed it has. Therefore, the works' textual fragmentation is not a weakness but instead reflects a broken reality desperately in need of moral witnesses.

José Emilio Pacheco's *Morirás lejos* (1967)

Of the seven novels to be discussed, Pacheco's *Morirás lejos* (1967) has drawn the most critical attention for its profound approach to the Holocaust and the need for the reader's active engagement to make sense of its density and complexity.² Pacheco edited and republished the novel in 1977. The 1977 edition is the most widely known and the one discussed here. *Morirás lejos* focuses on the relationship between a Nazi perpetrator, "eme," and his victim, "Alguien,"³ just as "Deutsches Requiem" focused on the relationship between the perpetrator, zur Linde, and the victim, David Jerusalem. Pacheco's novel transports the victim and perpetrator to the 1960s in Mexico City and explores what could happen if both had escaped to Mexico and their roles were reversed, with the victim waiting every day menacingly on a park bench outside the perpetrator's apartment. Like the fictional editor from "Deutsches Requiem" who suggests that Jerusalem may be an amalgam and not a real person, the omniscient narrator in *Morirás lejos* constantly questions the two men's identities (as well as his own).

Morirás lejos jumps in time and space with sections that alternate between Mexico and scenes of Jewish persecution from the first century A.D. to the Warsaw ghetto and Nazi death camps. Adding to the confusion, the section titles do not correspond to their content. The Mexican sections, all titled "Salónica," alternate with other sections that explore the history of Jewish persecution and then provide background information about eme's possible role in the Holocaust. The Salónica sections begin by proposing twenty-seven-lettered possibilities about the identities of eme and Alguien, but the narrator frequently raises questions about the men's identities and even their existence. The only constant throughout the "Salónica" sections is a pervasive smell of vinegar. Many of the Mexican sections suggest that eme, hiding in his apartment, is a well-educated German who became a Nazi physician and

² See Barroso (2017); Saalman (1985); and Van Delden (2014).

³ "Eme" is the name of the letter *m* in Spanish. "Alguien" in English is "Someone" or "Somebody."

performed horrific human experiments in concentration camps. Elsewhere, the text mentions that the man on the bench is Alguien and that he is one of eme's victims.

Additional footnotes from a fictional editor and interjections from an unknown listener, however, question the omniscient narrator's credibleness and ability to tell the story. As in "Deutsches Requiem," Pacheco presents a world without moral absolutes or the idea that justice will be served, leaving it up to the reader to decide what has happened and make a moral judgment about eme's guilt or innocence. Toward the end of the novel, a section titled "desenlaces" is followed by an appendix of "otros de los posibles desenlaces." In one possible ending, the narrator conflates his own identity with that of Alguien. In another, the narrator questions his own existence, saying he may be no single person, but rather an amalgamation of the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust: "O no soy nadie. Tal vez no hay nadie en la banca del parque. O quizá hay seis millones de fantasmas sin rostro" (Pacheco 1977, 153).

Dieter Saalmann (1985) asserts that Pacheco's novel is an important piece of Holocaust literature, as it answers the thorny question of how to represent that which defies representation. By accentuating "man's inability to obtain a fixed perspective in time," the critic affirms that Pacheco's novel is emblematic of "the post-Auschwitz era" (1985, 93). Saalmann also connects Pacheco's novel to Fuentes's 1967 *Cambio de piel*, discussing the importance in both that their readers "assume the moral burden of sleuth" investigating the guilt or innocence of the Nazi characters (92, 100). Building on Saalmann, Lucas Martín Adur Nobile (2018) addresses the complex characterization of Nazi perpetrators in both *Morirás lejos* and "Deutsches Requiem" but does not explore Borges's story as a model for the novels discussed here.

Carlos Fuentes's *Cambio de piel* (1967)

Weighing in at more than 600 pages, Fuentes's dense *Cambio de piel* provides the reader with another challenging puzzle. The external action in the novel is limited to a twenty-four-hour period on April 11, 1965, but the novel jumps in time and space as it recounts the characters' complex and contradictory memories from Greece, Mexico City, Nazi Germany, New York, and New England. By the middle of the book, the reader realizes that the protagonists, a middle-aged couple named Elizabeth and Javier, are experiencing marital difficulties and that each has taken a lover to try to salvage their marriage. Elizabeth's lover is a German named Franz who turns out to be a well-educated Nazi architect. Javier, a professor and author, is accompanied by one of his students, a young ingenue named Isabel, whom he has seduced. All four are together on the way to Veracruz when their car breaks down in Cholula.

The novel's metatextuality and circularity are on display from the first line: "El Narrador termina de narrar una noche de septiembre en La Coupole y decide emplear

el apolillado recurso del epígrafe" (Fuentes 2002, 9). The epigraph also references the text's circularity and the over-the-top situations described in the novel: 'Terminando, el libro empieza. Imposible fiesta' (9). The mysterious narrator recounts the characters' disparate memories, apparently while driving. The reader does not learn that the narrator's name is Freddy Lambert until the last pages of the book. Also at the novel's end, Freddy discloses that he lives in a mental health facility and that he learned everything he knows about the characters when Elizabeth visited him there.

The novel's title, *Cambio de piel*, draws attention to the constantly changing identities of the novel's characters and forces the reader to think about the nature of identity—is it fixed or fluid? Like Otto in "Deutsches Requiem," Franz is an educated Nazi who, before the war, shows no obvious inclination toward violence. Although his passion is music, he studies architecture and becomes the architect of a massive Czech ghetto and concentration camp. One of the characters questions whether the educated Franz, who loves music and metaphysics (like Otto zur Linde), is more guilty than anyone else, or if he simply reminds us of all humans' capacity for cruelty (550).

Fuentes evokes Borges's story throughout the novel. For instance, Franz's memories of Germany are associated with Brahms's "Deutsches Requiem." Franz deeply reflects on Brahms's requiem and recalls how his love of that music led to his meeting Hanna, his prewar, German-Jewish girlfriend (298–305). Hanna later becomes a prisoner at Theresienstadt, the concentration camp that Franz designed. She is in a Jewish choir whose extermination is delayed briefly so they can perform for German dignitaries, including Eichmann. Franz is dismayed that the choir sings Verdi's requiem instead of Brahms's "Deutsches Requiem," which he considers to be the true German requiem. Franz takes no action to try to save Hanna from the gas chambers even though she is pregnant (probably with his child).

As in "Deutsches Requiem," narrative devices such as intertextuality, metatextuality, the unreliable narrator, and the doubling of characters purposefully undermine the novel's believability. Like *Morirás lejos*, there are alternate endings—each more unbelievable than the previous one—but they all judge and punish Franz for his crimes against Jews. In the final alternate ending, Freddy steps from behind the curtain and suggests that each of the characters has a double identity as a monk. The characters then transform into miniature dolls that the narrator can manipulate before transforming them back into monks. In this section, Freddy uses Cortázar's *Rayuela* as a pillow, a nod to the multiple ways this book can be read and the need for a "lector-cómplice" (537). The many narrative devices that Fuentes uses to undermine the narrative are not shortcomings but rather force readers into an active role. As readers attempt to disentangle the novel's contradictory accounts, they are confronted with similarities they may have with Franz, serve as moral witnesses to

his guilt or innocence, and consider whether they would have had the courage to resist.

The novel ends without solving any of the puzzles it presents, including the horrific possibility that Otto and Franz's "faith of the sword" already prevails. Franz's unborn son, Jakob, is reincarnated into an adult at the end of the novel. Like Otto zur Linde, Jakob asserts that Nazism has irrevocably changed the world order to one of violence. He suggests that Franz's skills, precision, and demonstrated willingness to follow Nazi orders are needed urgently in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, South Carolina, Peru, Mexico, and Spain for "all the prisons and death rows and crematoriums that still must be built so that the entire world can become a single vast concentration camp" (608).⁴ Combining the theme of fluid identity with the judgment of Franz for his role in the Holocaust, the enigmatic final pages of *Cambio de piel* suggest that its characters and places represent all places and all people throughout time and, in so doing, bear guilt for all of humanity's unthinkable crimes (including the murder of indigenous people, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam war).

Roberto Bolaño's *El Tercer Reich* (1989)

Bolaño's first novel, *El Tercer Reich* (1989, published posthumously in 2010) builds on "Deutsches Requiem's" dark notion that the Nazi "faith of the sword" will filter into all aspects of life even after the defeat of Nazi Germany. Like "Deutsches Requiem," *El Tercer Reich* also fails to explicitly condemn its Nazi characters. Instead, the novel relies on the reader to reflect on the "constructedness" of the text. As in "Deutsches Requiem" it is up to the reader to decide whether he/she can trust the Nazi (or aspirational Nazi) narrator and then to imbue meaning to the text's hollow moral core. The novel begins as a travel diary by Udo Berger, the novel's unremarkable first-person narrator. And without an actively engaged reader, the text would read as an unreflective travelogue. Udo and his attractive but lazy girlfriend, Ingeborg, have just left Germany for the Costa Brava in Spain to spend August at a resort where Udo vacationed in the summer as a boy. Ingeborg enjoys the sun and sea, but Udo cannot stop thinking about his favorite pastime, a strategy game called "El Tercer Reich." Claiming to be the German champion of the game, Udo fantasizes about quitting his job and devoting himself full-time to playing and publishing articles about the game. Though he presents himself as a devoted and caring boyfriend, the reader sees a different Udo when he becomes irrationally angry at the hotel staff for not providing him with a big enough table to set up the Tercer Reich game in his hotel room. This revelation provides the first clue of Udo's angry disposition.

⁴ My translations throughout.

The novel has a small cast of characters. Frau Else, the hotel owner, was Udo's boyhood crush whom he continually tries to seduce. Charly and Hanna are a German couple who become fast friends with Udo and Ingeborg. El Lobo and El Cordero are local ne'er-do-wells. Finally, el Quemado, a badly burned young man to whom Udo is drawn from the beginning, oversees boat rentals and lives and sleeps on the beach among the boats. Notably, El Quemado and Frau Else's terminally-ill husband, who does not appear until the end of the novel, are the only characters with any moral awareness, and they point to another possible reading of Udo's banal summer vacation. Narrative interest builds when Charly disappears while windsurfing at sea. Hanna and Ingeborg return to Germany soon after Charly's disappearance, but Udo decides to stay under the guise of waiting to identify Charly's body. Now, alone in Spain, Udo devotes himself to his true passion, the Tercer Reich game.

Udo thinks constantly about the war, which unfolds chronologically in his mind. He perfects his "Mediterranean strategy" from the banks of the actual Mediterranean with the war occupying more of his thoughts and more of the narrative. Increasingly, the line between the game and Udo's daily life blurs. Eventually, he admits that he no longer can tell if he is awake or dreaming. Although he insists vehemently to other characters that he is neither a Nazi nor Nazi sympathizer, various clues suggest otherwise. Most conspicuously, there is a chapter toward the end of the book titled "Mis generales favoritos," where Udo lists names of Nazi generals, compares them to famous authors, and creates tender nicknames for them. Udo ends the chapter by saying that the generals give him comfort and hope (282–285). This revelation by Udo confirms his Nazi sympathies and provides context for his obsession with the Tercer Reich game.

The mysterious El Quemado is arguably the most literate and cultured character (with the possible exception of Frau Else's husband). He understands German, has a library account, and reads history and poetry, although Udo (an aspiring poet) has never heard of El Quemado's favorites: Neruda, Vallejo, and Lorca. Udo realizes that El Quemado is not a Spaniard, but a South American, though Udo never asks from where he emigrated. El Quemado quickly masters the Tercer Reich game and is determined to represent the Allied powers and defeat Udo. A bar owner recommends that Udo stop playing the game with El Quemado, who bears a grudge against the Germans because his extensive burns came from "el bando alemán" (230). Udo is confused by this and unaware of the "verdaderos soldados nazi que andan sueltos por el mundo" (230) that the bar owner references. The bartender reports to Udo that El Quemado sustained his burns "en un tiempo remoto e impreciso [cuando] ejerció el oficio de soldado, una especie de soldado luchando a la desesperada" (230–231). By not giving more precise details, the novel evokes both World War II and the interconnected atrocities of fascist regimes in South America in a kind of mythical time, alluding to an ongoing war between good and evil, now being played out on the

beach in Spain. This portrayal follows the description of World War II in “Deutsches Requiem” as an ongoing battle between “eternal antagonists”: “a través de los siglos y latitudes, cambian los nombres, los dialectos, las caras, pero no los eternos antagonistas” (102).

Toward the end of the novel, Frau Else’s husband warns Udo to pack his bags. He reiterates that El Quemado is intelligent and vengeful, and learned to play El Tercer Reich as quickly as Atahualpa learned chess, “tan sólo una tarde observando cómo sus captores movían las piezas” (326). Udo’s defeat is all but certain, and the husband warns him that El Quemado will be waiting to do what always is done to Nazi pigs, insinuating that Charly had been killed for being a Nazi (326). The investment both Udo and El Quemado have made in the Tercer Reich game and the tension building in the narrative suggest that Udo will be made to suffer after losing the game to El Quemado.

According to Udo, however, this does not happen. El Quemado gives Udo a bit of a scare after his loss, but Udo returns to Germany unscathed. And even though he is an irresponsible employee, an unfaithful boyfriend, and a terrible friend, he easily returns to life in Germany with Ingeborg by his side. The only change is that he no longer actively plays El Tercer Reich but still watches the game from the sidelines, hinting that there is more to the story than Udo is telling. Back in Germany, Hanna tells Udo she is not naïve enough to believe his version of events, but he refuses to tell a different version, as does Hanna when he asks her what really happened to Charly. If readers connect the dots between Udo’s angry outbursts, his idolatry of the Nazi generals, and his—likely false—account of what happened to El Quemado, they, like Hanna, must doubt Udo’s reliability as a narrator.

As in “Deutsches Requiem,” Bolaño forces readers to take an active role and to question the first-person Nazi narrator’s account, as they try to puzzle out the true story. The only two characters with any moral awareness—Frau Elise’s husband and El Quemado—are gone by the end of the book. The husband has died, and El Quemado has mysteriously disappeared without a trace, leaving the reader to serve as a moral witness and question Udo’s (likely false) account. *El Tercer Reich* ends with multiple unanswered questions, most importantly, what happened to El Quemado? Relying only on Udo’s account of the story, the reader will never know. The lack of justice is disturbing and references the many victims like El Quemado whose stories remain unknown and the pervasive impunity for crimes committed by World War II war criminals (and Latin American fascists). As in “Deutsches Requiem,” Bolaño’s refusal to bring justice to the novel also requires the reader to engage in a way that may be upsetting. To make sense of the narrative, the reader must recognize the ongoing harm and continued threat of Nazism and fascism in both Europe and the Americas.

Roberto Bolaño's *Literatura nazi en América* (1996)

Bolaño's *Literatura nazi en América* (1996) further develops the genre Borges initiates with "Deutsches Requiem," by presenting an encyclopedic catalog of pseudo-Nazi perpetrators to explore the razor-thin line between civilization and barbarism. Bolaño was a Borges devotee; his literary debt is clearly on display in *La literatura nazi en América*, an encyclopedia composed of fictional obituaries of thirty authors, similar to Borges's *La historia universal de la infamia*. *La literatura nazi* creates an alternate Nazi literary universe that confirms Otto zur Linde's disturbing promise that Hitler's "faith of the sword" will continue to prevail. The literary Nazis from the fictional encyclopedia have birthdates spanning from 1880 to 1962. They hail from North and South America and frequently crisscross continents during their lives. The US-born author, Zach Sodenstern—with the same last name as the famous Nazi general—dies in 2021, and the Chilean-born Willy Schürholz, raised in a colony founded by escaped German Nazis, dies in 2029. These dates, more than 20 years after the text's publication, suggest darkly and prophetically, as Otto does in "Deutsches Requiem," that Nazism will continue to be a problem well into the future.

Each of the authors dabbles in Nazism or fascism, though some of the banally infamous authors do so more overtly than others. The authors' biographies intersect with each other, as many publish their literary works in the same fictional journal and press, *El Cuarto Reich Argentino*. Some entries make mention of real authors (Borges, Julio Cortázar, Allen Ginsberg, Ezra Pound, and Arthur Rimbaud, among others). The appearance of famous authors in the novel shows that literature—even experimental literature—is not immune to involvement with or appropriation by right-wing extremism.

The novel's tone becomes more personal at the end when Bolaño appears as a first-person narrator in a Chilean detention facility. This account seems to affirm that the characters in the novel are real. However, the epilogue pulls the rug out from under the reader with a whole new fictional bibliography of Nazi authors from North and South America containing entirely different authors from those mentioned in the prior narrative. Adding to the confusion, the epilogue's bibliography mixes publications by the novel's featured authors and the ones mentioned in the epilogue. The literary gloss on "Deutsches Requiem" in *La literatura nazi* provides an acerbic indictment of the continued and pervasive presence of fascism in Latin America. It relies on an astute reader to puzzle out the relationships between the fictional authors and their relationship to real twentieth-century people and events. As with "Deutsches Requiem," the reader must decide what to make of the work's dark message about fascism now forever lurking barely beneath the surface, even in the arts and literature.

Jorge Volpi's *En busca de Klingsor* (1999)

Like "Deutsches Requiem" and other previously discussed literary heirs, Jorge Volpi's *En busca de Klingsor* (1999) and *Oscuro bosque oscuro* (2009), and Ignacio Padilla's *Amphitryon* (2000) present fictional characters as historical figures from World War II, tell a (fictional) secret history that is presented as truth and demand that the reader extricate fact from fiction. The action in all three novels takes place in Nazi-occupied Europe. However, critics have not discussed how Volpi's and Padilla's novels reimagine both themes and experimental techniques from "Deutsches Requiem" to provide a literary gloss on Borges's story.

As in "Deutsches Requiem," *Klingsor's* educated, unreliable, first-person Nazi narrator also tries to convince the reader of his version of events. The novel presents a complex cat-and-mouse search for "Klingsor," Hitler's (supposed) chief scientific advisor who had led the Third Reich toward developing an atomic bomb and disappeared without a trace after the war. Gustav Links is *Klingsor's* octogenarian protagonist whom the reader finally discovers is writing from a mental hospital where he has spent the last forty years. As the novel progresses, it becomes impossible to deny that Links is Klingsor. Similar to "Deutsches Requiem," the narration is limited to the first-person Nazi narrator's version of events, which makes it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. Furthermore, both texts require the reader to serve as an exterior moral witness, not only to the Nazi perpetrator's guilt or innocence but also to contemplate how intelligent, educated people (like Gustav Links and Otto zur Linde) could have so easily become Nazis. Volpi acknowledges that Borges inspired *Klingsor's* unreliable first-person narrator, but mentions a conversation between Borges and Bioy Casares in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and not "Deutsches Requiem" as its inspiration (Areco 2007, 305).

The Nazi narrators in both "Deutsches Requiem" and *Klingsor* try to rationalize themselves out of their complicity. Otto uses his belief in the inevitability of the new Nazi world order of the "faith of the sword" to try to exonerate himself from his involvement in the Holocaust. Links, similarly, uses science as an overarching ideology to absolve himself of his war crimes, including any guilt associated with heading the German nuclear weapons program. Links invokes physics theories like relativity and quantum mechanics to show that science, like Nazism, can cause harm when taken to logical conclusions. Links depicts himself and his role in a positive light, frequently mentioning his relationship with real-life scientists including Heisenberg and Bohr. But his version of events unravels by the end of the text when he reveals his allegiance to Hitler. As in "Deutsches Requiem," it is up to the reader to unsnarl the first-person Nazi narrator's version of events and to make a moral judgment.

Jorge Volpi's *Oscuro bosque oscuro* (2009)

Volpi presents Holocaust themes even more directly in *Oscuro bosque oscuro*, published ten years after *Klingsor*. Using fairy tale images and language, the novel presents a group of Germans in World War II-era Germany who live on the edge of a dark forest, which serves as a metaphor for Nazism. If they kill an “insecto” (a Jew), they will never be able to leave the forest and return to normal life. Cast in a mythic time, the ragtag group of men comes from all walks of life—bakers, tailors, retired elderly—but none has the moral strength to resist or flee from working in a concentration camp.

Like “Deutsches Requiem” and the other novels, this narrative also creates a fictional secret history within the official history. The novel evokes Christopher Browning’s research on Reserve Police Battalion 101, a group of German city policemen and county sheriffs, most of whom became Nazi perpetrators. This group was largely well-educated, came of age before Nazism, and had the ability to tell right from wrong. Nevertheless, they were responsible for organizing and carrying out the mass extermination of Jews in Eastern European concentration camps (Browning 1993, 182–183). Browning observes that few battalion members exhibited the moral strength needed to resist the Nazi doctrine, noting: “If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?” (189). The residents in *Oscuro bosque oscuro* also succumb and become Nazi assassins who kill their Jewish neighbors. Like “Deutsches Requiem” and the previously discussed novels, *Oscuro bosque oscuro* continues to reflect on the tenuous line between civilization and barbarism.

The fairy tale setting of *Oscuro bosque oscuro* casts the Holocaust in cyclical rather than linear time, highlighting universal components of human cruelty and complicity. The novel implicates the reader more directly than does *Klingsor* by questioning the reader directly and frequently. *Oscuro bosque oscuro* often asks the reader what they would have done (“¿y tú?”), and at times directly asserts that the reader also murdered “insectos.”

Various narrative breakdowns raise questions about the narrator’s vague identity, which prompts readers toward self-reflection about what they would do in similar circumstances. The novel’s final words point to the reader’s complicity: “Nadie supo lo que fue de ti, lector” (Volpi 2009, 147). As in the previous novels, the textual fragmentation of *Oscuro bosque oscuro* forces the reader into an active role to try to

disentangle fact from fiction, to engage in uncomfortable self-examination, and to question how ordinary civilians could have so easily become hardened killers.⁵

Ignacio Padilla's *Amphitryon* (2000)

Ignacio Padilla's *Amphitryon* uses four separate first-person narrators, each of whom understands only part of the complex story. Borrowing from Borges and like *Klingsor*, *Amphitryon* conceives of another secret history excluded from the official accounting of World War II. The novel's fictional Amphitryon Project imagines an initiative whereby human-body doubles replaced important Nazi officials. While originally intended to protect the officials, the project becomes a secret plot by rebellious Nazis to end the Holocaust. As part of the Amphitryon Project, the real Adolf Eichmann was assassinated during World War II and replaced with a body double. Therefore, the Adolf Eichmann who was extradited from Argentina to Israel in 1960 was merely a double. The mastermind behind the project is a man named Thadeus Dreyer. Each of the four first-person narrators has some knowledge of Dreyer's complex identity, but no one has enough information to understand the complete picture. As in the previously discussed novels, the reader must be both detective and moral witness, deciding to what extent they can believe the narrators, at least three of whom are Nazis.

The characters' inability to maintain their individual identities reflects the devastating toll of war on everyone, even Nazi perpetrators. Two of the narrators corroborate that Dreyer's birth name was Jacob Efrussi, that he grew up Jewish in a poor suburb of Vienna, and that he was a child chess prodigy. His chess abilities allowed him to acquire new identities by winning high-stakes chess matches after which the winner was supposed to assume the identity of the loser, and the loser was supposed to commit suicide. Efrussi had already swapped identities several times before meeting the man who actually had been born Thadeus Dreyer, most recently having swapped identities with someone named Franz Kretzschmar. Efrussi (now Kretzschmar) loses a chess match to the original Thadeus Dreyer, who is supposed to be going to the World War I front. Instead, the original Thadeus Dreyer wins Kretzschmar's identity and his job as a railway pointsman. Efrussi (no longer Kretzschmar) does not commit suicide, takes on the name Dreyer, and heads out to the Eastern Front of World War I. At the end of the war, a childhood acquaintance of Jacob Efrussi, still called Dreyer, recognizes his friend. Ravaged by the war, Dreyer/Efrussi commits suicide, but not before his childhood acquaintance, who also has been living under an assumed name, takes Dreyer/Efrussi's identity and becomes the third man in the novel to be called Thadeus Dreyer.

⁵ See Barroso (2017) for a detailed close reading of Holocaust themes in *Oscuro bosque oscuro*.

The real Thadeus Dreyer (who still is Franz Kretzschmar and a railway pointsman) dedicates his life to avenging his identity theft, even orchestrating a train crash to try to kill Dreyer. However, he does not realize that the Dreyer he is trying to kill is not the same person who took his identity after losing the chess match with him. This (third) Dreyer rises in the ranks of the Nazi party, and, according to several testimonies, was responsible for initiating the Amphitryon Project. Adding to the complexity, Kretzschmar's son (who may be the third Dreyer's biological son) could be the body double for Eichmann who is arrested in Argentina and taken to Israel.

As with "Deutsches Requiem," understanding *Amphitryon* requires that an attentive reader question each first-person narrator's version of events and the motives for what is included or omitted from the story. In "Deutsches Requiem" a fictional editor questions Otto's version of events. In *Amphitryon*, inconsistencies among the four first-person narratives challenge the veracity of each account. The novel's coda, signed by Padilla, makes it even more difficult for the reader to disentangle fact from fiction. Padilla authoritatively states that the Amphitryon Project actually happened and refers to the final narrator, Daniel Sanderson, as a real author rather than a fictitious character. This coda is similar to the editorial notes in "Deutsches Requiem" that cast doubt on parts of Otto's account, but reinforce that he was a real, historical person (although he was not). As in "Deutsches Requiem" and the other later novels, *Amphitryon* provides no answers, and no *deus ex machina* moment solves the puzzle. In *Amphitryon*, the puzzle pieces and overlapping accounts also do not quite fit together. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to determine what to believe and what is missing from the official story and to serve as a moral witness to what actually happened. As in "Deutsches Requiem," the erasure of each narrator's individual identity attests to the human toll of war, even for Nazi perpetrators.

Conclusions

Up until ten years ago, "Deutsches Requiem" was largely missing from critical conversations about Borges. However, this study shows how "Deutsches Requiem" inspired a later series of novels that require active readers. By essentially rewriting "Deutsches Requiem," Fuentes, Pacheco, Bolaño, Volpi, and Padilla serve as active readers and external moral conscience that "Deutsches Requiem" demands. Each of their novels, in turn, requires its own active reader to make sense of a fragmented and morally opaque narrative and to determine the trustworthiness of a narrator who is often unreliable and sometimes a Nazi perpetrator.

As in "Deutsches Requiem," readers of the later novels also need to take on the perspective of a Nazi perpetrator to try to untangle fact from fiction and to question whose accounts are missing from the Nazi's "official" version. Like puzzles with

intentionally missing pieces, the subsequent novels also pose unsolvable questions that blur the boundaries between the literary universe and the actual world. Therefore, as with “Deutsches Requiem,” readers must approach the text as a type of archive, where they must sift through inconsistent accounts to puzzle out the text’s meaning. The unreliable narrators, contradictory stories, and unresolved plots are not textual weaknesses. Like “Deutsches Requiem,” their textual fragmentation and incongruencies serve as metonymic representations of multiple coexisting versions of history.

Borges’s chilling story poses questions that the later novels continue to ask. Among the most important are: How can one represent violence that defies representation? How could well-educated people so easily have become Nazis? Otto’s justification for his actions embodies the disturbing “banality of evil” that Arendt described (1963, 22–35; 252). Like Eichmann, who suggests he was “just following orders,” Otto zur Linde’s “faith of the sword” becomes his moral escape route. Zur Linde dismisses his own complicity with the Holocaust by imagining that the world order has changed to one of violence. The Nazis in the later Latin American novels excuse themselves with similarly banal excuses such as following the chain of command, the rules of science, or the rules of a board game (El Tercer Reich in Bolaño’s novel, chess in *Klingsor* and *Amphitryon*). Otto’s haunting premonition of fascism’s continued importance after the defeat of Hitler is as relevant today as in 1946. His assertions about an ever-present “faith of the sword” closely predict the continued presence of violence and fascism, making his proclamation impossible to disprove.

Both Borges’s story and the seven subsequent novels draw the reader’s eye to the “constructedness” of the historical record, which too often privileges the point of view of the perpetrators rather than the victims of war. Reading Borges’s story and its literary descendants together highlights the importance of “Deutsches Requiem” in its own right and as a model for later authors to explore the thin (and often ambiguous) line between civilization and barbarism. In this way, these seven Latin American novels provide an interpretive gloss on “Deutsches Requiem” that was missing from the critical conversation about Borges.

“Deutsches Requiem” and the seven subsequent novels are more ingenious than previous critics recognized, and the literary tools they provide to grapple with the experience of living in a fascist regime also, regrettably, continue to be relevant. It is time for critics to take another look at these challenging texts and to recognize the pioneering role that Latin American authors took in their portrayal of Nazi protagonists and the opaque logic of Nazism and fascism.

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In addition to her literary research, Ann frequently publishes on high-impact teaching practices. She has led study abroad programs in Spain, Peru, and Costa Rica and has developed long-term community-engaged research programs for TCNJ students both abroad and in Trenton, NJ. Between 2018 and 2022, Ann received grants from the Pulitzer Center's 1619 Project and NJ Manufacturer's Insurance to collaborate with students and faculty colleagues on an oral history and documentary project with long-time Puerto Rican residents of Trenton. The resulting short documentaries, created in conjunction with the community, help to capture its rich, unrecorded history. Visit this link for more information about the project:

<https://prtrenton.wixsite.com/history>.

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