

***Rethinking Philosophy with Borges, Zambrano, Paz, and Plato* by Hugo Moreno, Lexington Books, 2022, 240 P. ISBN-10: 1793639280, ISBN-13: 978-1793639288**

By Amy A. Oliver

Philosopher and novelist Hugo Moreno undertakes a thoroughgoing analysis of relationships between philosophy and literature throughout *Rethinking Philosophy with Borges, Zambrano, Paz, and Plato*. In Latin America, such projects have often taken the form of demonstrating the extent to which the region's ubiquitous essays of ideas ("thought") can be construed as philosophy in a land that sometimes, erroneously, has been deemed not to have produced much, if any, "real" philosophy. That usual debate does not appear in this book. A key innovation in this work is to focus instead primarily on other literary genres and their relationships to philosophy. Still, the author calls into question the border between literature and philosophy when he argues that "philosophy and literature are not mutually exclusive, autonomous categories" (173). Moreno's ambitious trans-Atlantic scope allows him to document carefully and painstakingly many perceived relationships between philosophy and literature in the Greek, Anglo, and Hispanic traditions.

For many years, particularly in the Spanish and Latin American traditions, scholars have made passing reference to some features of these relationships without making much effort to think about them in serious, profound, sustained, and well developed ways. This book is path-breaking in that the analyses undertaken are serious and comprehensive. Moreno raises many issues and questions for further contemplation and research, which is a clear strength. The choice of Borges, Zambrano, and Paz as exemplary cases, when considering philosophy *and* literature, is insightful and discriminating. Borges and Paz deservedly happen to be well known. Choosing to combine with them the lesser known (outside of Spain), but perhaps not as deservedly so, peninsular writer, María Zambrano, is innovative and fruitful. Bridging the gap between Spain and Latin America reveals a "Hispanic" tradition of literary philosophy. The appendix on Plato allows readers who are less familiar with the Spanish and Latin American traditions to have a familiar philosophical handle to grasp onto to aid in following the author's contention that "Plato reconciles philosophy and poetry and creates an alternative kind of poetry, a rational prose poetry that fuses argumentation and narration, dialectical and analogical reasoning, and abstract concepts and poetic images" (177-178).

In his introduction, the author offers:

What I intend to show in this book is that contemporary scholars disregard some of the most original texts of the Hispanic philosophical tradition when they exclude literary texts from the realm of philosophy. My main argument

is that Jorge Luis Borges' *Ficciones*, María Zambrano's *Claros del bosque*, and Octavio Paz's *El mono gramático* are examples of an ancient literary way of philosophizing, a way of seeking and communicating knowledge of reality that resorts to analogical procedures (2).

Defining and contrasting analogical procedures with other prevalent methods requires Moreno to devote considerable space to demonstrating why he believes the analogical is the best approach. He does so successfully, but the reader needs to make an effort to stay the course in what is a complex opening to the book.

Relying on Alain Badiou and Richard Rorty, among others, in chapter one Moreno explores arguments for and against consideration of Borges's fiction as philosophy. He highlights the labyrinth as a principal metaphor that "assumes a variety of shapes: for example, a forest (in Zambrano), a jungle (in Paz), as well as a book, an encyclopedia, a library, a garden, and various other shapes (in Borges)" (9).

In chapter two, Moreno argues that "the greatest contribution of Borges to contemporary philosophy is to have realized better than anybody else before him the philosophical possibilities of the short story" (13). I might add that Borges taught his "hijo espiritual" Julio Cortázar and others to employ such possibilities very effectively as well.

Different from Borges, but equally compelling, is María Zambrano's use of "poetic reason," which reaches its pinnacle in *Claros del bosque*, the subject of chapter three. As a student of José Ortega y Gasset, Zambrano wrote essays for many years. As she began to develop her own philosophy, her writing became more fragmentary and poetic, as we see in *Claros del bosque*. Moreno contends that she wrote philosophical literature through prose poems and poetic essays. Interspersed with fascinating details about her peripatetic life, including that Zambrano and José Gaos became *transterrados* in Mexico City around the same time but that discrimination by some at La Casa de España did not allow for a woman professor of philosophy, resulting in her transfer to Morelia (115), Moreno analyzes her writing alongside major events in her life.

Moreno's reading of Paz's *El mono gramático* in chapter four shows that "in addition to offering a poetic and philosophical critique of language, this text discusses and illustrates the analogical sense of being and the mystical character of language" (14). Moreno also emphasizes the visual imagery in *El mono* (166-167). Owing to the vast critical acclaim of Paz's work, Moreno provides extensive commentary on Paz's differing reception among critics while he develops the implications of language and painting in this work. Moreno also establishes meaningful connections between the work of Paz and Zambrano.

Moreno convincingly demonstrates that:

To privilege the literary dimension of these texts at the expense of their philosophical import, or vice versa, implies not just misunderstanding them

but, above all, failing to recognize their most laudable characteristic, namely, how they simultaneously call into question the conventional distinction between literature and philosophy, and how each of them embodies an alternative way of doing philosophy in literature (173).

Moreover, Moreno presents a compelling argument for applying this type of analysis to many more works in Spain and Latin America, both contemporary and from earlier centuries. He provides a clear blueprint for how more works could be analyzed and how philosophy and literature would both benefit from such a scholarly focus. Latin American philosophy, for example, would be conceived in a much broader way than has usually been the case.

To say more about the theses Moreno develops would constitute a spoiler, but his book is clearly written, flows well, and is encyclopedic in its documentation. Both Spanish and English versions of texts are made available at appropriate moments. Moreno's erudition in the humanities is admirable as he is well versed in many historical periods on both sides of the Atlantic. He compares and contrasts many figures not often associated with one another in ways that bolster and broaden the humanities in Spain, Latin America, and elsewhere.

I highly recommend the book for library purchase and for anyone interested in expanding their sense of the humanities in Spain and Latin America. Many delights and challenges await a serious reader.