

*Three South American Writers**

INTERTEXTUAL LATIN AMERICAN NARRATIVE IN THE WORK OF JORGE ACCAME

Jorge Accame writes poetry, plays, and fiction, and teaches classical languages. Thoroughly imbued with the humanities, he lives in wary relation to the academic world. Remarkably, though born in a cosmopolitan and cultural capital—Buenos Aires—he decided to move to northern Argentina, to the edge of the jungle, a violent natural setting, and dwell within the mysterious, multicultural ambiance of indigenous people. His work reflects the choices that he made.

The first paragraph of “The Diary of an Explorer,” reprinted here, is a fine introduction to Accame. His recourse to a diary—written by a dead man—is a strategy that passes from Cervantes to Roa Bastos to Borges. Written as a narrative without dates, “The Diary” reminds us, in tone, language, and themes, of Horacio Quiroga, but also of Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Laura Esquivel.

Accame gives us identical twins, who speak both at once, as if they had the same thoughts at the same moment. Who are those twins if not transformations of Aureliano and Arcadio Buendia? Immediately, too, we are caught up in the jungle, with its magic and superstitions, much as Vargas Llosa led us into “The Green House.” For Accame, like Quiroga, reality controls this imaginative world. The jungle governs by laws of its own as we come to believe in the fatalism of its people.

Quiroga’s vision is more than a literary influence on Accame. A powerful realism commands both writers. The same setting, the same oxygen, the same legendary creatures—real pumas and wolves that transform themselves into myths—draw similar narratives from the two, without Accame’s abandoning other literary relationships.

*The three writers presented here, from Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia, were 1997 members of the International Writing Program. Each introduces one of the others, in a round. The introductions were edited and translated by David Hamilton, the story and poems as attributed.

On “Day Five,” his voices resonate with García Márquez. On “Six,” Accame’s question, “Where does this fear come from, from which part of our souls?” finds its answer on the first pages of *The Rule of Love* by Esquivel, the Mexican novelist, who answers, “Fear makes itself the command center of all action. Situated immediately behind the belly button, it receives all sensations before the brain does.”

Magic realism, as people have come to call it, in Accame as in other writers, is essentially a way of reflecting Latin American reality, with its modes of thinking at once militaristic and indigenous, and its exuberant sense of the natural world—an immense landscape that both absorbs and devours. “I have to convince myself that only the jungle is to blame,” says Accame.

—Lourdes Espinola

DIARY OF AN EXPLORER

Not long ago, a young woman—I’ll call her Elisa Villagarcía—handed over to me a diary her deceased grandfather had kept while serving as a scout for the Bolivian army in the jungles of Paraguay during the war of ’32.

I have removed all personal references, and, aside from certain literary adjustments I believed convenient, left the text essentially the same:

Day One

I am first lieutenant Ernesto Villagarcía, leader of a group of scouts charged with finding the straightest and least challenging route to C. The men with me are: Tobías, a Mataco Indian; Abel Nieve, a hefty and bald giant two meters tall, who looks like an enormous kneecap protruding from a military uniform; Agamenón and Teófilo Sánchez, identical twins who speak always at the same time, as if both coming up with the same idea instantaneously; and finally, Cancio Cruz, the youngest of the squad. I don’t know his exact birthday, but he can’t be more than seventeen.

Yesterday we left base camp and entered the jungle.

I’ve seen at least three birds I’ve never seen before. I asked the Mataco, our guide, for their names, but he told me them in his own tongue and now I can’t remember them.

Night watchman: Agamenón Sánchez, nothing to report. My turn tonight.