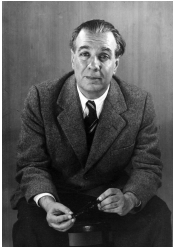
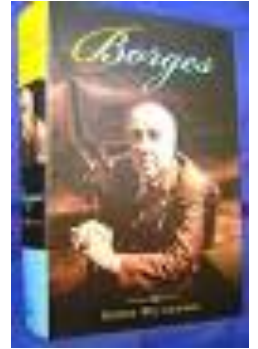


Review of Edwin Williamson: *Borges A Life*: h/b, London, Penguin, 2005



Edwin Williamson is Professor of Spanish at the University of Oxford and has written widely in the area of the literature, culture and history of Spanish America. Jorge Luis Borges was born of wealthy South American parents, his father from Spain and his mother from Uruguay. The family frequently spent time in Europe and both Spanish and English were commonly spoken in the family home. Borges and his sister had an unusual upbringing with the family constantly moving from South America to Switzerland and other parts of Europe. The result was that Jorge Luis Borges' formal education was by and large non-existent as his family moved from place to place and country to country.



Williamson tracks Borges' family life into adulthood with exceptional care and precision, particularly focussing on Borges' obvious fascination with writers and writing and his early passion for writing himself. Borges very quickly developed a fascination for German expressionist poetry and prose, for mythology and current affairs. His reading of both novels and poetry was vast and by the time the family moved back to Argentina Borges was already becoming immersed in writing and writers and writing for political purposes.

Williamson analyses Borges' progress with extreme care and thoroughness leaving no significant writing or poetry unanalysed. The result is a massive work of 492 pages in relatively small print with no significant work of Borges left not mentioned and commented on. At the same time Borges inevitably becomes involved in the political life of Argentina, struggling to create its place in the new world of literature, warfare and political power players of every sort including the all powerful Peron and his equally powerful wife Eva Peron. Williamson carefully crafts the inevitable interaction of literature and politics in Borges' life without allowing the political history to dominate.

A key component of Williamson's analysis is the intricacy and difficulty of Borges' love life which Williamson also carefully documents with extraordinary care. Equally powerful is the shift of Borges from a local Argentinian average poet into the powerful international poet and superstar author he became fronting vast lecturing courses throughout the United States and Europe. All of this occurs in the midst of Borges' failing eye sight which eventually completely fails him but does not stop his meteoric rise to poetic fame. A reader is either bewitched by Borges' extraordinary oeuvre or hates it and never reads more. If like me, you love the powerful and ironic work of Borges, you will take the time to read Williamson's quite exceptional and remarkable ***Borges, A Life***.