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Big Borges: What Can Big Data Show About a Classic Writer on Social Networks?

1 Introduction

The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges is one of the most quoted authors in scientific articles from any discipline when it comes to talking about big data.¹ Stories such as “The Library of Babel”, “The Aleph”, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins”, “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”, and “The Garden of Forking Paths”, function as examples of the ideas of infinity, accumulation, condensation, causality, virtuality, and simultaneity, which govern twenty-first century digital *dataism*. On top of this we can add the many artistic interventions carried out using the big data of Borgesian works, such as: *Libros de arena (Books of Sand)* (2003)² or *Cuatro días con Borges en mente (Four Days with Borges in Mind)* (2012),³ by the artist Mariano Sardón; *El Aleph engordado (The Fattened Aleph)* (2009), by the writer Pablo Katchadjian; *Remake* (2011) by Agustín Fernández Mallo; and *Borges-tein* (2012) by Sergio Bizzio.

This is all a response to the double effect that the poetics of Jorge Luis Borges produces. On the one hand, it is ontological – in a technical and philosophical sense – given that Borges’s texts are used to understand the nature, conceptualization and problems of the new digital media, whose paradigm would be the story, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” (Martínez 2007). On the other hand, the effect is epistemological, as Borges becomes method, which is another way of saying he becomes a model of interpretation – we could almost say he becomes algorithm – of the digital sphere and social media, to the point of being considered a precursor of the internet by the way in which the new technologies seem to have been sketched

1 Carolina Ferrer shows, in a study on the presence of Borges in bibliographic databases, that Borges is quoted – not only quotations but also concepts – more in scientific texts (mathematics, biology, genetics, anthropology, environment, geography, archaeology, sociology, linguistics, etc.) than in works of literature and criticism (2012: 505–506).

2 See https://marianosardon.com.ar/books/books_esp.htm.

3 See https://www.marianosardon.com.ar/day_borges/borges_mind_esp.htmón.

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out in his work (Brook 1995; Lapidot 1999; Sasson-Henry 2007; Brown 2009; Callus & Herbrechter 2009; Acuña Zumbado 2012; Newhouse 2019). In this area, the paradigmatic story is “Kafka and His Precursors”, due to the fact that, after the rapid emergence of digital techniques and of Artificial Intelligence, we read Borgesian fiction in another way.

Yet Borges is not only a “classic” (Calvino 1993)⁴ and a cult figure in humanist, scientific and technological discourse, but also – paradoxically – he is equally revered in mass media, particularly on social media like Twitter. There is no doubt that this media discourse – based on his myth and his oral output – forms part of his oeuvre and of his poetics of fiction. It is therefore necessary to analyse it from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view in order to measure his current impact on media holistically. Moreover, the case study that we hereby present opens up a new line of research in the field of literary studies, which means that we need to expand the notion of the *writer figure* (Gallego Cuiñas 2020) based on the (re)production, circulation and consumption of the authorial image and of the literary text – oral and written – on social networks. It will even help us to reconsider the value of literature in (digital) mass culture and the need to resignify the aesthetics of reception in the era of big data.

1.1 Borges and (digital) Mass Culture

In the decades of the seventies and eighties, Borges had already become a public figure, a writer in demand by communication media from all over the world, and he made regular appearances on the radio, television and in the press (cf. Borges & Ferrari 1992, 1999; Borges & Carrizo 1997).⁵ His oral performances overflowed with intelligence, erudition and humour, talking of the most sublime and the most prosaic, making constant references both to books and to personal anecdotes (Bruni 1999; Pauls 2004).⁶ And that is precisely what is striking about an author whose written work is a sign of *unreadability* (Gallego Cuiñas 2019): his ability to “trans-

4 Premat states that Borges is read (and is consumed, we would add) as a classic: “In any case, Borges can be deemed to be the leading classic writer of Latin American letters” (2022: 9).

5 Pineda Cachero recounts that in those years he would do up to three or four interviews a day (2002: 52). Annick Louis specifies that this happened above all when he left his job at the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) and withdrew into domesticity, when he began to receive journalists, students and critics at his home (2020: 276).

6 Even when journalists asked him his opinion on political topics – due to his evident anti-Peronism – or insisted on asking him about his private life – of his relationship with his mother or his controversial marriage to María Kodama – despite his “policy of modesty”, as Pauls calls it (2004: 45), being well known.

late” the codes of high culture to mass culture without making distinction and fascinating a non-specialist public.⁷

This peculiar relationship that Borges had with mass media has not received much critical attention (i.e., Bruni 1999; Saïtta 2018; Pineda Cachero 2022), at least not specifically. However, there are two fundamental studies that address this issue: the celebrated chapter devoted to it by García Canclini in *Culturas híbridas (Hybrid Cultures)* (1990), and the recent article by Annick Louis, “*A momentary lapse of history*” (2020). In the former, Canclini studies the protagonistic position that the figure of Borges acquired in the media in the second half of the twentieth century, and the way in which he contributed to the professionalization of the writer when he reached out to mass culture – like Octavio Paz – with his literary discourse. He then became the authorial benchmark of what a writer in the Spanish language could do with the media (Canclini 1990: 95), of how to construct a reading framework of the actual work and of the self for academic doxy and, simultaneously, for mass media.

Annick Louis, who has worked on the author figure of Borges for decades, for his part has focused on the construction of the public character of Jorge Luis Borges between 1976 and 1986, the figure that articulates a “poetics of the media” in dialogue and relationship with his literary oeuvre (2020: 271). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that his oral work is almost as extensive as his literary production in his later years (Premat 2022: 86). Although it was his fiction – national recognition, its translation first in France and then in the US, the Formentor Prize – that won him fame (being named as Director of the National Library and as professor of the University of Buenos Aires, and awarded various honorary doctorates), it was his media appearances that made him popular (Louis 2020: 281). In what way? For Louis, there are two main factors: his “enfant terrible, controversial and provocative” role that he performed in interviews, and the parallel predominance of his image as a “wise and universal old poet” that prevailed in the media (Louis 2020: 277), particularly after he lost his sight in the mid-1950s.⁸ This biographical fact, as Julio Premat notes, changed his way of conceiving literature and brought about his conversion into an oral writer (2022: 85), of himself and of others. Alan Pauls also stresses this transformation and the performative attitude of Borges in the media, where he appeared more and more frequently: “The celebration of his sullenness, the low voice as his hallmark, the fostering of malice and mockery that seep into a laconic phrase” (2004: 47). This idea seems essential to us because it helps to ex-

7 Borges ironized about his fame and the fact that people bought his books and did not read them. This idea is still around today: Borges’s fiction is read little due to its intellectual difficulty.

8 An association is frequently made between the coming of Borges’s fame and his blindness. Even he himself considers it to be “a defining trait of his position as writer” (Premat 2022: 91).

plain his strong presence on social media today – what we could call the “iconographic capital” of Borges; or, what amounts to the same thing, the way in which his image – his body – is a response to the pristine, romantic imaginary of the writer: a blind old man, solemn and ingenious, who speaks and does not write – at least not in the traditional way, because the older Borges *dictated*.

However, up until now, the way in which Borges, his image and his oral texts are (re-)produced and circulated in digital mass culture has not been studied. By way of clarification, we understand ‘digital mass culture’ to mean all that culture that is created, transmitted, and experienced in a digital medium. Mass culture, as understood by Adorno in his *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), has not only expanded exponentially over the last quarter century through the digital medium, but is also dominated by three typical components of this medium: the audiovisual, the aphoristic, and the affective.⁹ These three *politics of mass culture* explain both the extraordinary success and the ‘conditions of reproduction’ of the word and image of Borges in the twenty-first century.

The first component, the iconography, corresponds to the image of Borges that has been assimilated to the prototype – one could also say cliché – of the universal genius: an old man with a walking stick, blind – like Homer himself¹⁰ – and cosmopolitan, who is capable of conversing with an astrophysicist, an expert in the Kabbalah, or with Mick Jagger. The photographs of Borges that appear the most on all media are those of him in old age: “In the last few years of his life, the visual images of Borges framed, completed and defined his texts” (Premat 2022: 97). Yet even in the market, the face of Borges appears on coins, bags, T-shirts, mugs, and comics, to the same degree as Shakespeare and Virginia Woolf. He is also the subject of memes and YouTube montages, quotations from his oral discourse appear on social media, and even in trap music compositions, with his poem “Ajedrez” (“Chess”) reproduced in the style of the artist Bizarrap.¹¹ What does this mean?

9 As Cabot states: “Above all we must point out that the culture of today is not a digital culture – this is only the medium – rather it is an audiovisual culture. Digitality is the last frontier, for now, of a process that is as old as human reason: the reduction of multiplicity to unity, or, if you will, the comprehensive reduction of the complexity of reality – complexity that increases at the same pace that our understanding of it increases.” (2013: 24).

10 Premat specifies in this regard: “The identification with Homer, the first legendary writer of the West is explicit, as much as the value attributed to blindness: losing one’s sight is a trigger of the writing; a writing that will construct a specific memory, an epic past, to culminate at last in the emergence of a virtual life, a life made of ‘a rumour of glory and of hexameters’” (2022: 93–94).

11 See the video uploaded by Diego Palatino in 2022 on his Instagram account, @lectordeltren: https://www.instagram.com/p/CZajvW3jsfT/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=2a4191da-5f55-4e31-bf19-241e6922933b.

One immediate deduction is that the classical and pop aura of the figure of Borges prevails over that of his fictional oeuvre in mass media and has become an emblem of “the Great Writer” (Premat 2022: 86).

The second politics is the aphoristic, which is woven together through the use of brevity, exactness and orality. Hence, Borges’s oral discourse, born out of the many interviews he gave,¹² functions as a double of his written discourse. For Borges had a great capacity for speaking as he wrote, with sentences that appear simple but contain truly surprising periphrases, paradoxes, and analogies, in which terms that we could call Borgesian appear: “conjjetural” (“conjectural”), “vasto” (“vast”), “fatigar” (“tire”), or “acaso” (“perhaps”). The Borgesian practice of the aphorism, both in fiction and in public, gave rise to the making of a documentary, *Borges para millones* (*Borges for Millions*) (1978) – the title, which seems to be an oxymoron, is symbolic of the fusion between high and mass culture in the figure of Borges – based on the utterances that, in the form of seductive sentences, the “maestro” gave in the media. The compendium of Borges’s quotations, *Diccionario de Jorge Luis Borges*, that Blas Matamoros published in 1979, likewise arises out of this faculty. This was organized according to traditional and timeless subjects such as love, art, cinema, philosophy, history, the Argentinians, books, literature, politics, religion, tango, and society, and contains the most popular of Borges’s quotations, the same that now circulate throughout the internet. The attractiveness of Borges’s aphoristic opinions lies in the illusion of truth, wisdom and authenticity that the oral format in which they were uttered, through precise and careful language that makes one forget the artificiality and fictional construction of all media discourse. Hence it is the oral writer who is favoured in social networks, the Borges who is more readable and more reproducible; rather than the writer of stories and essays, who is unreadable and cryptic.

The third and last politics alludes to the era of affective capitalism (Illouz 2007; Santamaría 2018) or a capitalism of the emotions (Ahmed 2011) that greatly strengthen digital mass culture through the hybridization of the sentimental with the commercial. The consequences in the cultural field are clear: on the one hand, art is associated with emotion and fun first, before emancipation and resistance. On the other hand, the more symbolic capital an artist has, the more (economic) value is attributed to their biographical space, thus a shift ends up occurring from the myth to the man. As Canclini had already indicated in the nineties: “What is most common is that the public shift their concentration from the work to the biography of the artist and replace the struggle with forms by historical anecdote.” (130). However, with respect to Borges, although the inte-

¹² One must remember that for Borges, the interview is a literary genre.

rest in his biographical space increased after he got married to Kodama, his authority in the emotional sphere (his well-known quotations on love, friendship and life) is born out of the iconographic¹³ – that is to say, out of the image of the artist “as the representative hero of big emotions” (Canclini 1990: 139) – that comes from the romantic imaginary of the nineteenth century. Thus, as we will see, the Borges that is praised in media is the “communicator” (Lipovestdky 2020: 94) who operates like a guru of feelings or of *eudaimonia* – as a medium of subjective expression and self-legitimization for the users of social media.

In conclusion, in these three politics of (digital) mass culture that explain the visibility of Borges, we find: (i) an increase in the exchange value of the signified over and above the signifier (that is to say, of the content before the treatment and formal innovation); (ii) greater social value of the oral and aphoristic than the narrative and aesthetic Borges; (iii) an appropriation and use value of the myth of the cult writer as mode of subjectivation and affective self-legitimization; and (iv), the persistence of romantic values in the reception and use of the image of the writer that circulates in mass culture.

1.2 The Borges Writer Figure

In the last quarter century, neoliberal capitalism has entered into a new ontological phase, where the market, emotions, the processes of subjectivation and the new technologies have saturated all spheres of life, including literary culture. This has led to a significant change in the legitimization and valuation of the cultural and social status of the writer. Their resemantization and overexposure as a media personality, their setting up as a consumer article and the multiplicity of gestures or scenes that mediate their public (digital) image has made studying the *writer figure* fundamental in the agenda of twenty-first-century literary criticism (Gallego Cuiñas 2022b). One could even maintain that it is one of the most revealing signifiers of the changes that have occurred in the relationship between literature and mass culture. Few social actors depend as much as writers on a context, on a readership and a market, “for what they are and for the image that they have of themselves on the image that other people have of them and of what they are” (Bourdieu 2003: 21). In this media image, in this performance of the public personality that is cause and effect of the meaning of the work, the social value of literature is also at stake. Thus, “the aesthetics are relative to the positions that writers occupy in the field”

¹³ As Ana Peluffo (2015) shows, scant attention has been paid to Borges’s relation with the culture of the emotions within his written work.

(Sapiro 2016: 37) because their public interventions form part of the work and build another interpretative direction for their poetics.

Despite the centrality the writer has acquired in our culture, until the twenty-first century there was no growing interest for *author figures*¹⁴ in literary studies (cf. Díaz 2007; Meizoz 2007; Premat 2009; Louis 2013; Gallego Cuiñas 2015; Fontdevila & Torras 2016), since it was still seen – under an essentialism of a romantic ilk – to be a topic and problem outside of the text, where literary value is not on the line. This explains why the Borges writer figure in the public sphere has not been studied as much as one would expect (with the exception of García Canclini, Louis, Premat, and Saïtta, along with Lefere). There are still areas that need covering, as is the case with the uses¹⁵ of the oral texts and of the Borgesian image in social media. This lack of attention to the figurations of the writer perpetuates the artificial separation between high and mass culture, as if the author were not also (re-)produced, circulated and consumed by the global and media market, and as if this did not constitute a(nother) frame of visibility and of readability. Borges, in contrast, did value this question of “becoming an author” (Premat 2022: 8) and was very attentive to other writer figures in his biodiscourse, where he constantly quoted “authors, author figures, with their gestures, their manias, their idiosyncrasies, as one who quotes texts” (Molloy 1999: 231). What interested him was the myth, the way in which a writer forges an image, as he did, to define “successive fields of production and of reception” (Lefere 2015: 159) that not only self-legitimize but also enshrine it.¹⁶ Moreover, as Annick Louis states, “Borges’s early reflections on the question of fame (in essays from *Inquisiciones*, *El tamaño de mi esperanza* and *El idioma de los argentinos*, see Louis, 2014: 353–354) created in him an intense awareness of the implications of the processes of canonization, which he explored and translated into textual forms and into positions throughout the rest of his career” (Louis 2015: 18).¹⁷

¹⁴ In the critical field, the denomination “author figure” predominates, but we prefer to speak of the *writer figure* to transcend the notion of authorship tied to the (intellectual) property of the text and place emphasis on the specific exercise of the literary profession inside the cultural market, whose forms of rating value are different to those of other artistic professions (Gallego Cuiñas 2020).

¹⁵ We understand the category of ‘use’ not only in the Marxist sense but also as Virno (2017) proposes it: an “appropriation” that emanates from the relationship between life and language, between subject and object.

¹⁶ Remember that, for example, in “Presencia de Miguel Unamuno” we note how he reads his texts under the protection of the image of the writer, which is the one he projects in the work.

¹⁷ In this sense, Louis speaks of two periods in the construction of the Borges-author: one from 1919 to 1955, and the other from the return of Peronism in 1973 until his death in 1986 (2015: 18). She also takes brilliant charge of exploring the way in which the textual fiction of Borges forms an image of the writer (e.g., *The Aleph*, *Tlón*, *Pierre Menard*, etc.). For Lefere, the most autobio-

In (digital) mass culture, the modes of authorial (self-)representation are no longer confined to the book-text, but to the texts and images that make up the media figure of the writer (in interviews, lectures, notes, photographs, social networks, and so on). The social value thus shifts from the work, from the book-text that becomes a *zombie* category, to the author, the image and the oral-text. This entails thinking about an *epistemology of the writer figure* that needs to be addressed through three gestures (Gallego Cuiñas 2020):

- *the posture*: the way in which the writer occupies a position in the market and is visible in various instances of mediation: publications, translations, teaching, festivals, Master’s degrees, conferences, social networks, et cetera;
- *the pose*: the performative strategy of image circulation and the scenography they deploy in the public sphere;
- *the myth*: consequence of the positive reception in academia, of the legitimization of high culture, and of meeting the levels of expectation of readers.

The case of Borges is revealing in this sense since he not only represents these three epistemic instances to perfection, but has also been raised up as the post-modern paradigm of the classic *writer figure* who triumphs on social media. It is evident that the Borgesian “pose” of the seventies and eighties has contributed significantly to furthering the “myth” of the erudite and cosmopolitan writer – described in the previous section – that is still being reproduced in digital mass culture almost forty years after his death. This becomes a specific digital “posture” on social media like Twitter, where Borges occupies the public place of the romantic writer (the figure of the writer par excellence), but also that of the visibility of the literary in mass media, which in spite of its loss of social influence is still tied to positions of prestige that the users of social media perpetuate with their tweets.

1.3 Borges and Social Media

The advance of the creative industries, the democratization and spectacularization of culture, have all favoured the proliferation and professionalization of new instances of mediation of the literary such as social media. The figuration of the writer, as we said earlier, is no longer disseminated only in texts of fiction, oral discourses, newspaper articles, and interviews; but in posed photos on Instagram,

graphical book by Borges is *El Hacedor* (2015: 154), because it is where he established his last image.

in memes, videos, blogs, bots and social networks. From among all those symbolic and material “I’s” that proliferate in mass digital culture, the one that has gone the most unnoticed by literary criticism concerns precisely the topic that we are addressing: social media, that exceptional device for literary promotion and for the construction of the writer figure today (cf. Gallego Cuiñas 2022a).

There is therefore a need to go further in the analysis of the figurations of the writer based on social media such as Twitter – where the most attention is paid to literary culture and the emotional¹⁸ – through *dataistic*, sociological and critical reading, to see how this network operates with the literary field, through mechanisms of reproduction and appropriation of certain writers and texts. Social networks function with an economy of affective representation that is modulated through the image and the (auto)biographical discourse of the writer, two textualities that certify and signify not only the *authenticity* or singularity of the authorial myth, but also that of the (re)producers and consumers themselves. Indeed, the first thing that we observe is that tweeters quote Borges because it causes an intelligent “reading effect” in whoever uses it, even if they have not read him, along with emotional capital in search of social recognition: “I read/know Borges”. As Sosa Escudero explains, Borges has always caused “a contradictory sensation: on the one hand, that one ought to read him: to do so requires an intellectual education that only a chosen few possess, validated by a kind of secret sect that grants permission to “be Borgesian” after some initiatory manoeuvres” (2020: 16). For this reason, the Borges that is circulated on networks is the oral, aphoristic and affective Borges: the consumable and readable Borges, who goes well with a distant reading for life; rather than the literary work that is resistant and hard to read, which is more suited to close reading for specialists in literature.

Nevertheless, the digital space seems to be a beneficial medium for critical reflection because it makes it possible: (i) to measure the visibility of a classic writer in current mass culture, which allows us to revitalize the dialectic between literature and society; (ii) to think about the category of the writer figure via new formats like social media, which perpetuate the romantic icon and extol the short form and emotional content; (iii) to compare the ‘being an author’ (the writing) with the authorial image (writer figure) to demonstrate the way in which the author as intellectual property of the work – which does not sell – is becoming subordinated to the writer as actor of the writer-subject that sells (or is sold) as a work, the first example of which, in the history of Spanish-language contempo-

¹⁸ As Helgueta Manso argues, Twitter is one of the “predominantly (hyper-)textual, and therefore literary, platforms, as opposed to the audiovisual applications” (2022: 45), where the textual has a secondary role. Twitter, however, has as a driver the affective dimension, in its positive and negative sides, not like Facebook, not allowing insults or direct confrontation.

rary literature, is undoubtedly Jorge Luis Borges. Thus the writer figure of Borges is a material sign of a particular idea of the (classic) writer, of literature and of subjectivity that operates in the mass digital culture of our times, which has become a vital route for the construction of the social value of the literary, crystallized in the ability of reproducibility – digital – of a writer-subject, and no longer of a work. The writer figure of Borges is only comparable to Shakespeare's, to the point at which both the global academic reception of his texts and his presence on social media have turned him into one of the most recognized contemporary writers and known as an intellectual – as 'classic' – throughout the world.

1.4 Objectives

Borges's presence is increasingly prominent on Twitter, a medium on which messages are constantly being spread about him, and different appropriations of his image and quotations constantly appear. This undoubtedly affects the construction of his authorial figure and the reception of his work. Taking this as our basis, the framework objective that assembles and guides this study is focused on the analysis of the diffusion, reception and assimilation of the figure of Borges on Twitter, by means of informetric techniques (Moed, 2017) and Big Data (Zgurovsky & Zaychegniko 2020; Domingo Barroso et al. 2021) that allow us to construct a theoretical framework of readability. On the practical level, we have organized and divided our general objective into three specific sub-objectives:

- *Volume*: first, to find out the volume and frequency of tweets on Borges and to determine some basic characteristics, such as the language, and the measurement of the diffusion and interactions that generate such publications.
- *Content*: second, to find out what is shared, concerning ourselves with two of the aspects included in the three politics of mass culture: the aphoristic, on the one hand, and the iconographic, on the other.
- *Community*: third, we focus on identifying who are the actors – in this case Twitter accounts – that are the most relevant when spreading Borges's work, identifying their basic characteristics (type, sector, followers, etc.).

Our results shed light in two complementary directions, one theoretical, the other methodological. From the theoretical perspective, our investigation expands the scope of the critical discussion concerning the relationship between literature and mass culture through the way in which classic writer figures are reproduced in social media. This appears to be an extraordinary chance to rethink, in turn, the theory of reception, the writer figure, and the social value of the literary in the digital medium. From a methodological perspective, we confirm the viability

and advantage of using the most advanced informetric techniques and big data for the gathering of mass data on a writer – in this case Borges – on a social network. In this way, we show the different analytical possibilities, both epistemic and technical, that Twitter offers for their application and development in later research that we could include within the general category of “(Literary) Cultural Analytics”.

Lastly, we have organized this paper into three sections: one on the method, one on the results, divided into three subsections (quotations, audiovisual content, and community), and the final section with our concluding thoughts.

2 Big Data Methods

In order to carry out the proposed analysis, we have used the big-data app, *Tractor*, for the data capture (Hurtado et al. 2021), to download the tweets that mentioned Borges during the time frame 01/01/2018 and 12/31/2021. We thus concentrate on a four-year period. In order to identify the tweets, we have sought the different ways in which the Argentine author was quoted without generating noise, which are as follows: “Jorge Luis Borges”, “Jorge L Borges”, “JL Borges”, “Borges JL”, “Borges, Jorge Luis” and “Borges, Jorge L”. We recovered tweets published in all languages, although in certain studies, such as the aphoristic, only tweets written in Spanish were utilized. We refer to these sets of tweets as the “global collection” and “collection in Spanish”, respectively. Lastly, regarding the search strategy, it should be specified that we have taken into account the typologies of conventional tweets but also those typologies that entail the diffusion and interaction of users, such as replies, retweets and retweets with comments (quotes).¹⁹

The total number of tweets recovered, including the four typologies, amounts to 205,216 (global collection). These tweets were exported in .csv format, subjected to computer-aided normalization processes, such as for the quotations, which involved the design of a semi-automatic routine for their identification and unification. To analyse the content and communities, the main tool used was *Graphext* software,²⁰ another paid online platform directed at big data and knowledge discovery. Thus we were able to transform the data, visualize and examine them to discover patterns, tendencies and for their subsequent critical elucidation. More specifically, *Graphext* enabled us to learn which emoticons and hashtags were used the most, analyse account biographies, establish the professional sector of

¹⁹ See: <https://help.twitter.com/es/using-twitter/types-of-tweets>.

²⁰ See: <https://www.graphext.com/>.

the users and, lastly, for the analysis of the communities, to create an illustrative network of co-mentions. In other words, in this network, two accounts will appear linked in the visualization if they have simultaneous mentions, with which we have been able to define a series of communities and/or similar accounts (Robinson-Garcia et al. 2019).

3 Results

3.1 Volume: The Big Numbers of the Borges Phenomenon on Twitter

Table 1: Annual evolution of the number of tweets published on Borges in the period 2018–2021, according to year and language of publication.

Tweets: Language of publication	Year 2018	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021	Total 2018–2021	% language
Spanish	32480	37099	39566	34902	144047	70%
English	7197	7404	7636	7345	29582	14%
Portuguese	1338	1517	2002	1718	6575	3%
Italian	1407	1480	1403	1512	5802	3%
Turkish	999	1198	1367	1282	4846	2%
French	993	1021	1319	956	4289	2%
Dutch	947	876	1156	1092	4071	2%
Catalan	708	780	895	724	3107	2%
Other languages (41)	779	788	840	890	3297	2%
Total n° tweets >>	46848	52163	56184	50421	205616	100%

The global set of tweets that mention Borges amounts to 205,616, written in 49 languages (Table 1), where Spanish is the most represented with 144,047 (70%), followed by English with 29,582 (14%). The other languages obtain values equal to or less than 3%, and therefore their representation is not particularly significant. The gross total of annual tweets is fairly stable, with figures of around 50,000 tweets, and with 2020 being the year with the most Borges messages tweeted, at 56,184. The average number of daily tweets (Figure 1) was 141, with prominent peaks on key biographical dates for Borges, such as the day of his birthday, the 24th August (2,300 average tweets), or the date of his death, the 14th June (1000 average tweets). Curiously, on World Book Day, the 23rd April, Borges also received a lot of attention, which confirms him as the epitome of

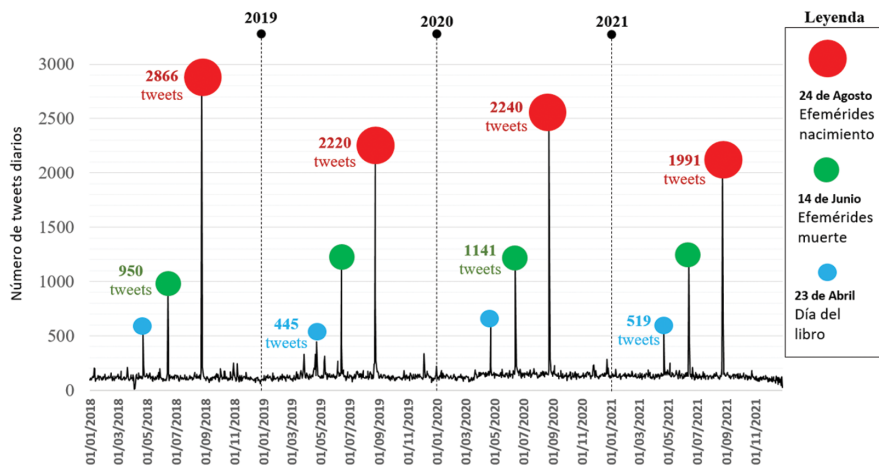


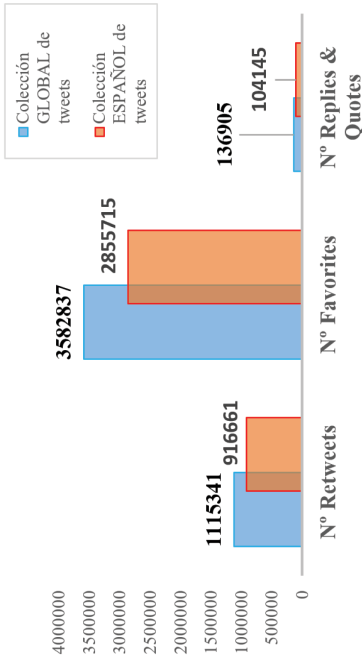
Figure 1: Daily evolution of the number of tweets on Borges from 01/01/2018 to 01/12/2021, highlighting those days (anniversaries of birth and death, and World Book Day) when the greatest number were written.

the classic writer figure: the great reader, surrounded by books, possessed of immense erudition.

Having determined the volume and frequency of tweets on Borges (Figure 1), we proceeded to examine the number of interactions and reactions generated by those tweets. For this we calculated indicators, both for the global collection of tweets (blue bars), and for those published in Spanish (orange bars). In 2.1 we can see that the messages have been spread through a total of 1,115,341 retweets; moreover, on 3,582,837 occasions they have caused a reaction in the reader, since they were added to favourites.

Almost all the interactions and reactions were in Spanish, which clearly exemplifies the predominance of this language community. Furthermore, examining the averages, we can see that this language also accounts for the most retweets and tweets added to favourites (2.2). We can therefore affirm that not only are there a large number of tweets published in Spanish on Borges, but also these are the most shared and appreciated by users. In short, what these figures demonstrate is that Borges is a stand-out model in the Ibero-American twitter community, which is why in the following analyses, we focus exclusively on their collection of tweets.

2.1. Number of Interactions or Reactions



2.2. Average of Interactions or Reactions

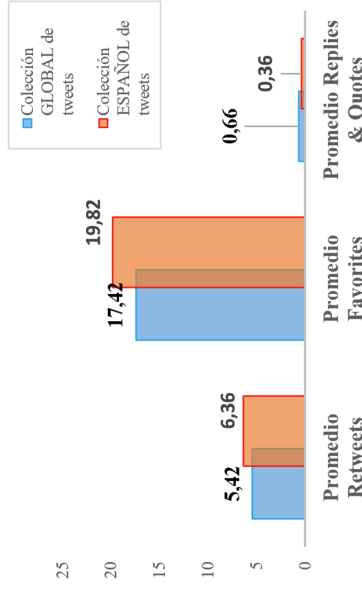


Illustration 2: Global indicators of tweets related to diffusion and interaction, according to both the global collection of recovered tweets and the collection of tweets in Spanish.

Table 2: The 20 quotations of Borges that have received the most attention/dissemination on Twitter, according to various indicators of diffusion: retweets, favourites, replies and commented retweets.

Borges quotations mentioned on Twitter	Indicators of dissemination (interactions and reactions)				
	N° Tweets	N° Retweets	N° Favourites	N° Replies + r. with comment	Total Attention
1. The pursuit of serenity seems to me to be a more reasonable ambition than the pursuit of happiness.	1091	26991	89066	2113	118170
2. I won't speak of revenge or forgiveness; forgetting is the only vengeance and the only forgiveness.	1995	27994	80212	1672	109878
3. Of the various tools invented by man, the book is the most amazing; the rest are extensions of his body . . . Only the book is an extension of the imagination and memory.	1602	26643	66279	1667	94589
4. Don't speak unless you can improve on silence.	683	19130	63434	1489	84053
5. One can give what one does not have. For example, a person can give happiness and not be happy; can scare and not be scared. And one can give wisdom and not have it. Everything is so mysterious in the world . . .	519	20554	58964	1009	80527
6. One can fake many things, even intelligence. But one can't fake happiness.	643	19376	56508	1015	76899
7. I owe you the best and perhaps the worst hours of my life, and that is a bond that cannot be broken.	720	17191	56605	851	74647
8. There are defeats that hold more dignity than a victory.	860	16686	46876	1083	64645
9. Of course I believe in dreams. To dream is essential, it could be the only real thing that exists.	446	12724	43702	863	57289

Table 2 (continued)

Borges quotations mentioned on Twitter	Indicators of dissemination (interactions and reactions)				
	N° Tweets	N° Retweets	N° Favourites	N° Replies + r. with comment	Total Attention
10. Neither have I lacked the friendship of a few people in my life, which is what matters. I don't believe I have a single enemy, or, if I do, they never made me aware of it. The truth is that no one can hurt us except the people we love.	216	13165	37676	996	51837
11. If a book is tedious for you, don't read it – it hasn't been written for you. Reading should be one of the forms of happiness.	141	12437	35256	834	48527
12. I always imagined that paradise would be some type of library.	1079	8659	31338	1563	41560
13. Gratitude is one of the highest forms of being.	194	9264	31377	831	41472
14. Don't hate your enemy, because if you do, you are in some way their slave. Your hatred will never be better than your peace.	222	9589	29557	480	39626
15. When one hates something, one thinks about the other constantly, and, in that sense, one becomes their slave. The same thing happens when we fall in love.	254	7803	28851	563	37217
16. We have the right and the duty of hope.	113	7596	26264	590	34450
17. "Journalist: Do you think young people are interested in politics? Jorge Luis Borges: I don't know. I was never interested in politics. I'm more interested in ethics. I think that if everyone acted ethically that could have a very large political effect."	113	8975	23936	504	33415

Table 2 (continued)

Borges quotations mentioned on Twitter	Indicators of dissemination (interactions and reactions)				
	N° Tweets	N° Retweets	N° Favourites	N° Replies + r. with comment	Total Attention
18. Friendship does not need frequency; love does.	318	6591	23928	517	31036
19. I would like a minimal state. I lived in Switzerland for five years and there nobody knows the president's name. I would propose that politicians were not public personalities.	149	7734	22292	438	30464
20. There are communists who state that being anti-communist is being fascist. That is as incomprehensible as saying that not being a Catholic is being a Mormon.	326	9178	20611	536	30325

3.2 Content: Scope and Characteristics

3.2.1 Of Aphorisms and Affects: The Big Quotations of Borges

When we focus on the analysis of the tweet collection in Spanish, both initially and using *Graphext*, we can quickly detect that one of the most disseminated types of content are the quotations. Hence we undertook the task of identification and homogenization to learn their real weight. In total, we identified 98 different quotations, which have been quoted on Twitter 40,255 times, which represents almost a third of the tweets published in Spanish. In other words, one of every three tweets on Borges has the aim of sharing a quotation of his, thus becoming the essential Borges content on Twitter. These tweets, moreover, have received a great deal of attention and reception in the medium, since they have been retweeted 482,861 times (52% of retweets in the Spanish collection) and marked as favourites 1,437,644 times (49% of favourites in the Spanish collection). These data verify the validity and social value of the Borgesian word in (digital) mass culture.

The most seen Borges quotation is a true aphorism, tied – as we noted at the start of this paper – to the management of subjectivity and of the emotions: “The pursuit of serenity seems to me to be a more reasonable ambition than the pursuit of happiness.” The entire amount of different indicators of diffusion (retweets, favourites, etc.) comes to 118,170, a high figure that denoted that it has had an extraordinary readership. In this regard, if we consider that it has been retweeted 26,991 times, we can do a small arithmetic calculation of the potential audience of this Borgesian aphoristic message. If we begin from the basis that each person that has retweeted it has an average of 150 followers (a conservative estimation – see the followers column, Table 3), this single quotation could have had a remarkable reception and audience of 4,048,650 users.

This is not the only Borges quotation that has had an impact. In Table 2, we compiled the twenty most popular quotations of Borges, which give a very clear pattern of expression, since most are related to the short and sentimental form, which adheres to the concept of personal “development” or “growth”, typical of emotional capitalism and of universal teachers such as Seneca, Confucius, or Buddha. Examples of these are the following Borgesian aphorisms: “Don’t speak unless you can improve on silence”; “One can fake many things, even intelligence. What one can’t fake is happiness”; “Gratitude is one of the highest forms of being”; “We have the right and the duty of hope”; and, “Friendship does not need frequency; love does.” We can also identify some subthemes that are repeated, particularly in reference to books and libraries. The quotations on this theme are published most often on 23rd April, which is World Book Day (Figure 1). One example is the quotation, “I always imagined that paradise would be some kind of library”, which is fourth in the total number of tweets in our ranking.

Thus, the identified quotations operate as universal dogmas that are perfectly suited to rapid consumption and to the character constraints of Twitter messages. Their content, moreover, is sufficiently impersonal that it would be possible to attribute them not only to Borges but to any philosopher or intellectual in the world, even to famous authors of self-help books like Eckart Tolle with *Stillness Speaks* (2003) or Rafael Santandreu with *Las gafas de la felicidad (The Lenses of Happiness)* (2015). It is no surprise, therefore, that the quotation with the most retweets occupies this realm: “I won’t speak of revenge or forgiveness; forgetting is the only vengeance and the only forgiveness.” Borges’s power lies in his erudite figuration, in his myth of genius, that he has knowledge not only of literature and culture but of morality. Borges the opiner, who would today be quite the *influencer*, for in his media discourse he condenses the elemental structures of seduction: “beautiful rhetoric, slowness, ambiguity” set to serve an “emotional branding” (Lipovestdky 2020: 21), which is what triumphs on social media. Thus his success on Twitter comes from the spreading of aphoristic quotations uttered in his oral biodiscourse –

particularly in television interviews and in the press – rather than in his written literature, because the creation of emotions, swift and collective, prevails over intellectual reflection, deliberate and individual.

3.2.2 Iconography, Audiovisual Content and Notable Messages

3.1. – Most used emojis / emoticons	3.2 – Most used hashtags
🍏 1.63k 📖 1.62k 📺 1.49k 🍌 1.38k ✕	#borges 3.17k #appstore 2.24k #itunes 2.24k
☀️ 1.24k 🎯 1.17k ⭐ 1.16k 🌸 1.11k	#audiolibro 1.1k #jorgeluisborges 1.03k
🔔 1.11k 📧 1.1k 📌 972 📄 933	#literatura 923 #libros 560 #libro 547
🌱 921 🌿 910 🌸 749 🇦🇷 728	#argentina 538 #frases 528
👉 560 ❤️ 417 📌 402 📺 393	#undiacomohoy 436 #pensamientos 410
❤️ 384 📌 343 🗿 225 🌹 206	#reflexiones 397 #diadellector 365
😞 201 📺 198 🗿 195 😊 185	#diadellector 351 #cultura 339
😞 184 ❤️ 178 🍌 170 😊 162	#fuedicho 334 #diadellibro 312
	#lectura 290 #felizlunes 282 + 13838 more

Illustration 3: Emojis and hashtags included in the tweets on Borges written in Spanish.

Examining the semiotic elements that accompany the tweets can help us to accurately trace the outline of Borges’s reception in (digital) mass culture. Illustrations 3.1 and 3.2 show the emojis and hashtags that appear when Borges is mentioned in the Spanish collection. For example, an apple as a symbol of Apple alongside the logo of iTunes indicate the privileged medium of technical (re-)production used to mention Borges. Likewise, the most used emojis are associated (in order of frequency) with the following elements and contexts: books; television (which underlines the proliferation of Borges’s image in the audiovisual media); a bomb or a target (which stress the nature of certainty and truth that his quotations have); and at the same time affective aspects such as a sun, a star, or hearts. The hashtags, for their part, show the relevance of his quotations (reflections, thought), as we saw in the previous section, while labels connected to the recommendation of his work (audiobook, books, reading) also abound.

As well as this, a significant proportion of the Twitter messages tend to be accompanied by videos and images. We have identified a video that illustrates the huge reach of audiovisual content: we are referring to the tweet on Borges posted by the account “literland” (*Community of reading and literature lovers*) on 19th February 2019 (literland [@literlandweb1], 2019). This has text entitled: “Diferencias entre amor y amistad según Jorge Luis #Borges” (“Differences between love and friendship according to Jorge Luis #Borges”), and shares a video, one minute in length, that received 8,175 retweets and 16,000 likes. On Twitter

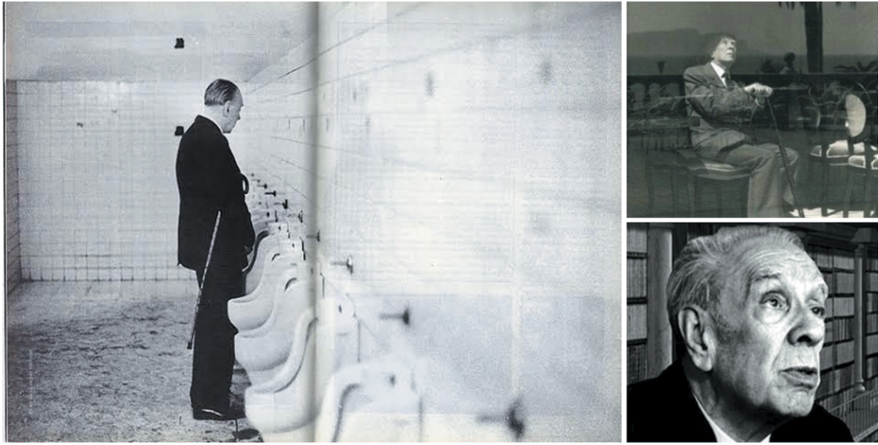


Illustration 4: Photographs uploaded with some of the tweets that have been shared the most.

alone, it has been played 322,000 times, and if you look for it on YouTube, it has more than 900,000 visits.²¹ This video could be considered the most popular of Borges, and brings together precisely the three politics of (digital) mass culture that we have discussed: the iconographic figure of the classic, blind and lucid writer; the use of oral discourse; and the expression of affects, whose maximum signifiers are precisely love and friendship.

The analysis of images likewise gives us another side of the multifaceted digital diffusion of the Borgesian universe (Illustration 4). In this category, we have found the photograph of Borges that has the greatest circulation on networks, which is one in which the author appears to be using some urinals (*Escritores haciendo cosas* (“Writers doing things”) [*@CosasEscritores*], 2021), and looks as though he was caught unawares. The photo is from 1973, when Borges went to Mexico for the first time, and was taken in the toilets of the fabled *Colegio de San Ildefonso*, where he recorded a television programme. As the photographer Rogelio Cuéllar recalls, Borges heard the camera shutter, but instead of getting angry he took it with good humour and did not censure the photograph. In this image, as you can see, Borges still represents the icon of the elderly writer, blind and with walking stick, but here showing his human side. Thus, although we have seen that the quotations occupy a central place in the reception of Borges, the audiovisual content and its iconographic value are also significant.

²¹ See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7K-Hk1qt_mk.

3.3 Digital Community around Borges

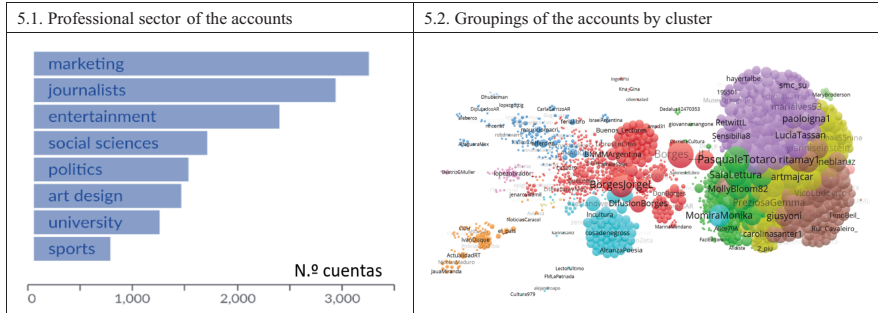


Illustration 5: General and summarized overview of the professional sectors the Twitter accounts belong to and of the groupings/clusters of them according to their interactions through retweets and annotations.

The Twitter community (Illustration 5) makes up a discursive and social ethos that is of interest to literary studies due to the high circulation of cultural content that exists on this network. If we focus on the accounts that bring together their community of reception, we see that there is a total of 85,960 active users, although 63,918 have only published one tweet. If we draw a parallel with the consumers of books, these users would be akin to those who buy just one book by the author and do not declare themselves to be fans or specialists. If we consider the classification that *Graphtext* gives according to the user biography, we can get a clear idea of the sector the biggest tweeters of the Borgesian message belong to. There are many accounts related to marketing and content marketers, above all as a marketing strategy to gain followers and, also, the world of communication, where we can identify many Argentinian newspapers that use Borges as a form of enticement.

There are also communities linked to entertainment, social sciences, politics, art, sport, business, photography, medicine, economy, travel, and video games. In an intermediate position we find the academic community, connected to the “university”. On the network, we show how the accounts group together according to their interactions, thus verifying that there is a connected community that spreads content and comments on it, channelled through specific accounts on Borges and other literary accounts from Argentina (red cluster). In addition, in the large cluster on the right, we can make out personal accounts linked to various countries. Ultimately, we can state that the (digital) Borgesian community is broad, made up of sectors with diverse aims and interests, of which a relatively small proportion is able to interact and stay connected.

If we now pause to examine the famous personalities who retweet the most widespread messages on Borges, we can again identify a great deal of heterogeneity in the profiles. The tweets that stand out first are those of the president of Argentina, Alberto Fernández (Alberto Fernández [@alferdez], 2019), announcing the donation of 6000 books from the Borges collection (4037 Retweets; 24.8 Likes); and of the president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who made a laudatory commemoration on the anniversary of Borges's death (2757 Retweets; 12,200 Likes). Then there is the use of the term, "Matria", which Borges used in a debate in Spain, revived (Ángel L. Hernández [@Angel_L_Hern], 2021) as a sign of authority and legitimacy; and the mistake made by the king of Spain, Felipe VI, when getting Borges's name wrong, saying José Luis Borges (Juan Carlos Monedero [@MonederoJC], 2019). Curiously, in these two cases, the tweets are linked to Podemos, a left-wing Spanish political party that campaigns for more and better public education and the promotion of culture and reading as instruments for critical emancipation.

Lastly, in Table 3 we show the most relevant accounts according to the circulation their tweets have attained. We should explain that that it is not always the accounts that post the most on Borges that are the most relevant.²² The first is Cultura Bang, which has posted 482 tweets on Borges, with aggregate indicators that amount to a total of 335,283 retweets and interactions. In this list, which already has a marked cultural and intellectual character, the accounts dedicated to the dissemination of literature and reading, such as Literland, El Lector, Libros y Escritores, Cementerio de Libros, and Letras Breves, predominate. These are serious accounts, usually with miscellaneous content, but with a large following of tweeters, as illustrated by the 757,735 followers of Literland. We can also find a few personal accounts on this list, such as the Argentine film director Juan José Campanella, the Colombian journalists María José Castaño and Félix de Bedout, and the director of communication of the publishing house Planeta, Laura Franch from Spain. In these cases, the name of Borges is spread by well-known personalities, tied to the world of culture and, as can be seen, from different Ibero-American countries.

²² These are some of the accounts that have posted the most tweets about Borges: importantbot = 1254, LibretoStar = 2349, Autoayuda_Es = 1173, jinyounglandss = 1002, Libromovil = 793.

Table 3: Twitter accounts / users that have reached the greatest propagation with the publication of tweets on Borges. Only those that write in Spanish have been selected.

Account	Aggregate Indicators of Diffusion & Interaction					TOTAL
	Nº Followers	Nº Tweets	Nº Retweets	Nº Favourites	Nº quotes Replies	
Cultura Bang	191065	482	67774	267027	3397	335283
Literland	757735	121	69872	211277	4994	281270
El Lector	501716	352	63333	205548	3502	269233
Libertario	163395	135	69704	193971	3533	263810
Fuedicho	445333	229	53869	158063	3170	212161
Páginas Redondas	142181	73	28758	85773	3000	114604
Poetas Hispanos®	112032	107	26167	61651	1547	87925
Libros y escritores	88329	37	21383	49389	1044	70809
Alexis Pérez	87694	670	12136	34152	568	46958
Winston	154150	14	11915	28430	802	40359
Cementerio De Libros	225609	42	7597	25345	203	32984
Alberto Fernández	2155004	1	4047	24927	3273	28975
¿QuéLeer?	1929333	149	7259	23841	798	31249
El reinado de las flores	28745	297	6906	23491	364	30694
Maria Jose Castaño	47198	28	6283	22947	1337	29258
Cúpula de Libros	191486	12	7309	18440	185	25761
laura franch	80011	31	4849	18730	282	23610
Jorge Luis Borges	12788	377	6323	16624	334	23324
Ana Bolena	79569	56	4391	18408	519	22855
Juan José Campanella	886143	1	5096	15825	372	20922
Andrés Manuel	8376274	1	2757	12200	2037	14958
Félix de Bedout	2454515	4	2797	13177	543	15978
Escritores haciendo cosas	18337	3	1391	13631	379	15025
Letras Breves	177588	8	3969	9402	260	13379
Eres Inteligente	780616	14	3798	9544	119	13356
La Parada Poética	59212	73	3296	9845	122	13214
Buenos Aires en el recuerdo	90945	25	2019	9612	188	11656
Cristina CR	17184	14	1957	9704	98	11675
¿Por qué es tendencia?	1100509	8	426	10694	280	11128
Leer es Vivir . . .	79372	57	3067	7843	84	10967

4 By Way of Final (open) Reflection

In this chapter, we have studied a classic writer such as Borges through informetrics, a hyperquantitative perspective, and using a digital communication medium such as Twitter, which is usually overlooked in literary studies. Thus we have been able to measure the diffusion and reception of the literary message of Borges

and approach a reconfiguration of the concept of ‘writer figure’ thanks to the analysis of the volume, content and communities that generate tweets about Borges. Our analysis of 205,216 tweets has shown that the practical application of big data to literature opens up a whole field of study and offers an opportunity to reformulate and update classic concepts of literary theory. In this regard, our first conclusion is that the concept of literature tied only to the category of writing published in book form is insufficient to grasp the new modes in which “literary culture” (Gallego Cuiñas 2022) is expanding today, through other (digital) codes and values that can be analysed with the help of *dataistic* tools, as our study has been able to demonstrate.

In the specific case of Borges, we can confirm that on Twitter the same phenomenon is taking place as in academic production and in the mass media, whereby his name is synonymous with erudition – “insolent, exasperated, exacerbated” (Premat 2022: 69), encyclopaedic, and transdisciplinary – which guarantees the impact of his image and of his discourse in (digital) mass culture, governed by “the supremacy of the law of being pleasing and emotionally moving” (Lipovestdsky 2020: 17). It is evident that the oral Borges of mass culture, with his aphoristic potency, is winning the battle of social value over the Borges that circulates in books and is praised in academia for the aesthetic values of unreadability, intertextuality and interdisciplinarity. We have also shown that the quotations of Borges that are reproduced on Twitter crystallize the stylistic traits of his poetics of fiction: erudition, concision, parody, efficacy, linguistic precision, humour, use of the oxymoron and of the analogy, and so on. Hence the oral, audiovisual and media discourse of Borges, associated with “intelligence capital” (Lipovestdsky 2020: 258),²³ morality and the ontological revelation of the truth, strengthen his own writerly myth and vice versa. In other words, they expand and enrich his poetics.

What implications does this have for criticism? On the one hand, the need also to expand its objects of study, as occurs with ‘writer figures’, in order to legitimize them as literary episteme and to think about them against the backlight of the notions of ‘author’, ‘literary work’, and ‘reader’. As Julio Premat states, the iconic figure of Borges “is inseparable from his writing [. . .], therefore, it fulfils a function in the reading of the texts” (Premat 2022: 97). On the other hand, the importance of renewing the aesthetics of reception through sociology, (digital) mass culture and big data, not as a mere empiricist record of audiences, public taste and opinion (García Canclini 1990: 125), but through the way in which a non-specialist (digital) community co-produces meaning by appropriating an author, or better still, a

23 In this regard, Premat writes: “Borges puts us before the obligation to interpret, to reason, which is why his readers feel that they are on the same level as the author. The reading of these texts gives us the conviction, pretty difficult to define, of being intelligent, of being almost as intelligent as him” (2022: 153–154).

name and a corpus that function as paratext of the work. These communities are not interpretative, there is no textual exegesis; rather, they are reproductive of certain content, which arises from a selective gesture that simultaneously constructs social and literary value.

What, therefore, do the communities of tweeters consume when they quote a tweet on Borges? An *augmented* Borges. There is no doubt of the strong impact the Argentine has, not only on social media but in academic discourse, which turns him into a cult or pet writer for high culture and for mass culture, whose separation – as we said at the beginning of this chapter – is revealed to be artificial. Because both appropriate his published and/or oral writing out of the same “literary forms, which are, in Borges, inseparable from the aesthetic effect” (Premat 2022: 13). The joining of academic value – symbolic and experimental capital – and media value – iconographic and affective capital – is interwoven with the correspondence that occurs between his life (his iconographic image) and his work (his oral texts), as a paradigm of the romantic utopia of writer that is commercialized in digital mass media (Illouz 1997), which the literary field should not turn its back on. Thus social media acts as an ideal laboratory for practising theory with the quantitative results that the big data analysis provides. Through Borges, we have tackled the relationship between literature and (digital) culture today, which is set up as a new and productive route for sociological interpretation for the “literary criticism of value” (Gallego Cuiñas 2022) of the twenty-first century. In conclusion, what we have attempted to demonstrate in this study is that the values of Big Borges are many and varied, and thus many varied critical, literary and dataistic parameters are needed to give a (good) account of them.

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