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A Treasure in Manhattan: Collections and Resources of the Jorge Luis Borges Library

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Since 2003 the Jorge Luis Borges Library has been located at Amster Yard, a tranquil and harmonious space in midtown Manhattan which was designated a New York City Landmark in 1966. It is the library of Instituto Cervantes New York, an institution dedicated to the promotion and teaching of Spanish and the other official languages of Spain, and to the diffusion of culture in Spanish around the world.

The collection dates to 1979 when it came into existence as part of the Casa de España and it now forms a part of the RBIC (Red de Bibliotecas del Instituto Cervantes [Instituto Cervantes Library Network]), the most extensive network of Spanish libraries in the world. With nearly 100,000 items in all formats, it is one of the most important open access Spanish language libraries in the United States, a unique source of information on the arts and letters of Spain and Latin America.

The library offers indispensable resources and reference works for students and teachers of Spanish, including specialized dictionaries for studies on literature and the history of the language as well as for research.
on texts from across Spain and the Americas. In addition, there are basic
general collections in philosophy, social sciences, art, music, linguistics,
geography, and history. The history section is especially strong in works
on the early twentieth century and the Spanish Civil War. But the truly out-
standing areas of the collection are Spanish and Latin American literature
and the comprehensive collection of films and audiovisual materials. Nearly
one quarter of the monographs in the collection are works of literary cre-
tation from the Americas: novel, short story, essay, poetry, and drama.

During the twentieth century the writers of Latin America were part of a
golden age of poetry in Spanish and of the Boom in fiction writing, but the
researcher will find much material of interest from earlier periods as well:
Mayan, Aztec, Quechua, and other indigenous literatures that have inspired
authors in subsequent centuries, the legacy of the Crónicas de Indias where
Gabriel García Márquez saw the seeds of many contemporary novels, and
authors of the colonial period such as Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca, or Sor
Juana Inés de la Cruz. Among the later writers and thinkers are Andrés
Bello, Simón Bolívar, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Gertrudis Gómez de
Avellaneda, Ricardo Palma, José Martí, Julián del Casal, Rubén Darío,
José Asunción Silva, José Enrique Rodó, Alfonsina Storni, and also many
representative works of the nineteenth century such as El Periquillo Sar-
niento (The Mangy Parrot), El matadero (The Slaughteryard), Amalia, El
Gaucho Martín Fierro (The Gaucho Martin Fierro), María, Cecilia
Valdés, and Aves sin nido (Birds without a Nest).

Twentieth and twenty-first century literary trends are well represented
by writers of the Vanguardia, the Spanish exile, and the Boom, and also by
more contemporary intellectuals and writers of international renown
such as Roberto Bolaño. The library includes the complete works by all
the great authors of the Latin American Boom: Juan Carlos Onetti, José
Lezama Lima, Ernesto Sábato, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez,
Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa, among others. Their most repre-
sentative novels, which have drawn worldwide attention, can be found
there: El astillero (The Shipyardsad), Paradiso, Sobre héroes y tumbas (On
Heroes and Tombs), Rayuela (Hopscotch), Cien años de soledad (One
Hundred Years of Solitude), La muerte de Artemio Cruz (The Death of
Artemio Cruz), La ciudad y los perros (The Time of the Hero), etc.

Regarding the magazine collection, primarily in the area of artistic and
literary creation, and where it is possible to find valuable collaborations by
many of the aforementioned authors, the library has around 500 titles (the
complete runs of 200 of them), including many facsimile editions of titles
from the first half of the twentieth century, offering a great resource for
researchers, critics, and scholars. To mention just a few: from Argentina,
you will find Sur, founded by the celebrated writer Victoria Ocampo,
Proa, founded by Jorge Luis Borges in the 1920s, reborn in 1988, and
still published today, and the first period of Nosotros; Mexican magazines
include Contemporâneos and Letras de México, as well as, more recently,
Letras Libres, which added a Spanish edition in 2001 and has a web presence with a great deal of additional material. From Cuba, there is Orígenes, which was directed by José Lezama Lima, and Casa de las Américas, still published today. Additional titles include Repertorio Americano from Costa Rica, Asomante from Puerto Rico, Escritura from Uruguay, and Hueso Húmero from Peru, which is still published regularly; of a more international character, there is also Mundo Nuevo, first published in Paris in the 1960s.

Related titles from Spain include magazines such as Revista de Occidente, Litoral, Hora de España, and Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, and some associated exclusively with the Spanish exile such as Ibérica, por la libertad (with an English language edition titled Iberica, for a free Spain), which was donated to Instituto Cervantes following the death of Victoria Kent (Málaga, 1898 – New York, 1987). One of the more unusual titles is La Llumanera de Nova York, the only Catalan language magazine published in the nineteenth century in the U.S.

Among the monographs are works by recipients of all the major literary awards of the Spanish-speaking world: the Miguel de Cervantes Prize, the FIL Prize for Literature in Romance Languages, the novels awarded the Rómulo Gallegos International Prize, and the novels awarded the Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Prize, recognizing the literary work of women writing in Spanish.

With the motto Una biblioteca, un autor (One library, one author), the Instituto Cervantes libraries honor the winners of the Miguel de Cervantes Prize. The Jorge Luis Borges Library was inaugurated in 2003 and has become an important source for research on this major literary figure, who also contributed to many of the abovementioned magazines.

Finally, the Nobel Prize for Literature has been awarded to eleven authors writing in Spanish whose works are available in the Library.

The chapter on literature cannot be closed without mentioning acquisitions in some very specific areas. First is the donation made by Antonio Sánchez Barbudo (Madrid, 1910 - Palm Beach Gardens, 1995), writer, poet, and journalist of the Generation of 36, which included first editions of works (many signed and dedicated by the authors) by Luis Cernuda, María Zambrano, Rafael Alberti, and Rosa Chacel. Second is the acquisition during the ’90s of major collections from Eliseo Torres, a Galician immigrant, publisher, and bookseller located in the Bronx, as well as from other specialized book dealers in Buenos Aires, Lima, and Mexico. Travel literature, represented by works such as Viaje a las regiones equinocciales del nuevo continente (Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinocial Regions of America), Peregrinaciones de una paria (Peregrinations of a Pariah), and Republicanos en otro imperio. Viajeros mexicanos a Nueva York (1830–1895), forms a small but important area of the collection. Another topic of increasing interest and serious study is the literature of ethnic and religious minorities, usually by members of communities
who have immigrated to Latin America since the end of the nineteenth century.

As mentioned above, the other outstanding part of the library is the audiovisual collection, composed of more than 8,000 VHS cassettes and DVDs as well as related monographs and screenplays. Among the VHS tapes are many which are unavailable in any other format and are often one of very few existing copies. In order to preserve these documents, we have begun the process of conversion to DVDs so that users will continue to have access for teaching, study, and entertainment. This is being done with due consideration for copyright and intellectual property laws.

The movies in our collection include all genres: documentary, animation, science fiction, comedy, suspense, terror, fantasy, film noir, musicals, and historical, political, and social dramas as well as films for children and young adults.

Cinephiles will find the films of all the great directors, producers, and actors of Spain and Latin America: Segundo de Chomón, Luis Buñuel, María Luisa Bemberg, Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and Alfonso Cuarón. They will also find winners of the Goya Awards bestowed by the Academia de las Artes y las Ciencias Cinematográficas de España to the best creative and technical professionals as well as Oscar winners and nominees.

Other highlights in this collection are the television series and programs, many of which are essential for a real understanding of the most important voices in the arts, letters, and sciences of Spain and Latin America. Of special note is the program A Fondo, a series of wide-ranging interviews with prominent figures such as Juan Rulfo, Manuel Mujica Láinez, José Donoso, Chabuca Granda, Atahualpa Yupanqui, and Emilio Fernández, and the productions of the Blakman Collection from Argentina, which includes interviews with great writers such as Mario Benedetti, Griselda Gambaro, Angélica Gorodischer, Tomás Eloy Martínez, and Osvaldo Soriano.

Further information on library services and links to the catalog are available at:


Additional Instituto Cervantes Resources

Centro Virtual Cervantes http://cvc.cervantes.es/
Una biblioteca, un autor http://www.cervantes.es/bibliotecas_documentacion_espanol/biografias/biblioteca_autor.htm

Colección electrónica http://www.cervantes.es/bibliotecas_documentacion_espanol/recursos_en_linea/biblioteca_electronica.htm