
Mapping Borges in the Argentine Publishing Industry (1930–1951)

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“A book is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships.” Jorge Luis Borges’s words resonate not only with much of my work on book history, but also with my ongoing digital mapping project of the publishing industry in twentieth-century Argentina. The central aim of my current research is a materially informed look into Borges’s process of production in the early part of his literary career (1930-1951): who were his primary publishers? What types of editorial jobs did he hold? Which works were independently printed and which did others fund? What can we tell about his development of aesthetics based on analysis of typography and paper choices? By asking these types of questions about Borges’s preferences toward the publication of his own works, we also find that he had a very specific taste for the look and feel of *others’* books and, in one of his early works from this period, makes a snide, and extremely revealing, remark about second-hand bookstores as nothing more than “turgid purgatories.” In light of the fact that the places in which a book is published, printed, and even purchased are all key characteristics of that specific volume, I am creating a project with Leaflet and Jekyll that allows me to think deeply about the spatial (and temporal) evolution of the process of publication (and, in turn, the circulation of published works) in Jorge Luis Borges’s Argentina (1930-1951).

My project has three distinct layers: mapping the industry, grids of contact, and textual materiality. The first layer uses data from books’ colophons and publishers’ catalogues to pinpoint the locations of Borges’s printers, publishing houses, booksellers, and even places of employment throughout the early part of the twentieth century. The second layer draws on biographical information from the individuals involved in the Argentine book industry to highlight their connections and working relationships. The third and final

layer consists of a (visual) catalogue of certain physical aspects of the books in question including their covers, any illustrations, samples of typefaces that certain printers utilized, and any colophons or printers’ marks. This data also will include a more general descriptive bibliography of all of Borges’s works published between 1930 and 1951, as well as works that he edited, prefaced, or translated during this time. In light of the fact that there are virtually no extant publishers’ archives from this historical moment in Argentina and, furthermore, that much of the ephemeral print material related to Borges is in private hands, my aim is to provide researchers and any interested parties with an easily accessible reservoir of data for future projects. Moreover, the specific data collection and interfacing used for this project allow for a deeper understanding of Borges’s idea of a book as “an axis of innumerable relationships” and, thus, provide insight into the accessibility of materials, scarcity of resources, aesthetic features, and canon formation in Argentina. In a way, I see this project as something that will not only further material studies (related to the book and publishing history) and digital projects in Southern Cone Literature, but also something that will serve a much wider audience.