



### *Creators and Created Beings in Twentieth-Century Latin American Fiction*, by Amy Frazier-Yoder (2023)

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**Frazier-Yoder, Amy. *Creators and Created Beings in Twentieth-Century Latin American Fiction*. Lexington Books, 2023. 221 pp. ISBN 978-1-66692-552-4.**

At a time when institutions of higher education are abuzz with discourses around innovation, and creativity is increasingly incorporated into the educational sectors related to entrepreneurship and technology, comes a scholarly book in the humanities that addresses the question of creation itself, and reminds us that some of the great creative minds of twentieth-century Latin America have gifted us literary texts that comment upon the act of creating, revealing fears, possibilities, and critiques of this constant human endeavor.

Amy Frazier-Yoder's *Creators and Created Beings in Twentieth-Century Latin American Fiction* examines works in which a fictional character creates another being or world within the fictional frame, and whose creations achieve a state of autonomy that provokes questions as to the nature of reality and the role of fiction. Frazier-Yoder argues that these provocations can be categorized as revealing something about one of four areas: anxieties about technological innovation, metafictional commentary on fiction's relevance, challenges to traditional

assumptions about reality and existence, and understandings of desire and romantic attachments. The works studied include short stories and novellas, poetry, essays, and drama, including well-known works that have received attention from literary critics for decades, to lesser-known texts by some of the most renowned Latin American writers of the twentieth century.

The first chapter, "Creating a Worried Embrace: The Shared Anxieties and Exuberance of Early-Century Science Fiction," raises the perennial and yet also timely question of how humans should respond to technological creation. The works examined range from short stories to serialized novellas and novels, all in the genre of science fiction, in which the character creation element has devastating results for the creator and/or society, namely Eduardo Ladislao Holmberg's "Horacio Kalibang o los autómatas," Pedro Angelici's *El homunculus*, Horacio Quiroga's *El hombre artificial* and "El vampiro," and Clemente Palma's *XYZ (novela grotesca)*. Frazier-Yoder's argument that these works reflect the anxieties of a society grappling with the moral and ethical implications of rapid technological advances is supported by ample textual evidence and an enriching historical context.

Shifting from representations of scientific and technological creation of a semi-autonomous being to metafictional character creation, chapter two of *Creators and Created Beings* focuses on works by Southern Cone writers Roberto Arlt, Juan Carlos Onetti, and Julio Cortázar that present a frame and a frame break that lead the reader to question the limits and creative power of fiction. In addition to Onetti's *La vida breve* and Cortázar's "Instrucciones para John Howell," Frazier-Yoder uses the examples of two of Arlt's dramas, *Trescientos millones* and *El fabricante de fantasmas*, to illustrate frame crossing, as the creators of fictional characters and worlds are listed among the characters in the drama, thereby imbuing these "fictional creators" with a different level of reality than their creations. A special status does not protect them; instead, these characters are in turn destroyed by their creations, echoing the power of a work of fiction to take on a life of its own outside of authorial control.

In "The Word Made Flesh: Ontological Disruption in Character Creation in Works by Borges," Frazier-Yoder adds to the already significant body of criticism of the Argentine author's classic works. In this chapter, Frazier-Yoder analyzes Borges' short stories "Las ruinas circulares," "Parábola del Palacio," and "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis, Tertius," as well as his poems "El Golem," "Ajedrez," and "El otro tigre" through the lens of religious and philosophical traditions of Gnosticism, the Kabbalah, and George Berkeley. She observes that "Unlike purely philosophical writings, Borges' fictions may pose these philosophical issues [notions of reality and existence] as a confrontation to readers' pre-conceived notions without taking a decisive position" (114), instead using stories to destabilize the commonly held beliefs of his readers. While much has been written about Borges by critics over the years, Frazier-Yoder's focus on character creation contributes a new perspective about this

canonical author, and her analysis of Borges' own ideas about the subject as published in his essays is a particularly valuable contribution.

The final chapter, "Making Lovers: Power, Desire, Gender, and Identity Construction in Works by Bombal, Arreola, and Fuentes," deals with what Frazier-Yoder identifies as the most commonly created character: the lover. She argues that although the figure of the lover is created by characters in these narratives in order to fill a void or lack, it is the act of creation as a form of power-taking that comments on gender-based systems, challenging or magnifying societal power discrepancies. Her reading of the short story "Anuncio" by José Arreola in comparison to Rosario Ferré's "La muñeca menor" adds a new dimension to criticism of Ferré's well-studied text. In a note, Frazier-Yoder observes that some texts examined in the previous three chapters could also be categorized as depicting the creation of lovers, provoking a different question: is there another book-length project focusing exclusively on gender in the future?

In sum, *Creators and Created Beings in Twentieth-Century Latin American Fiction* provides a fresh perspective on classic texts, examining them in conversation with some lesser-studied works and authors, leading us to further question these literary creations.