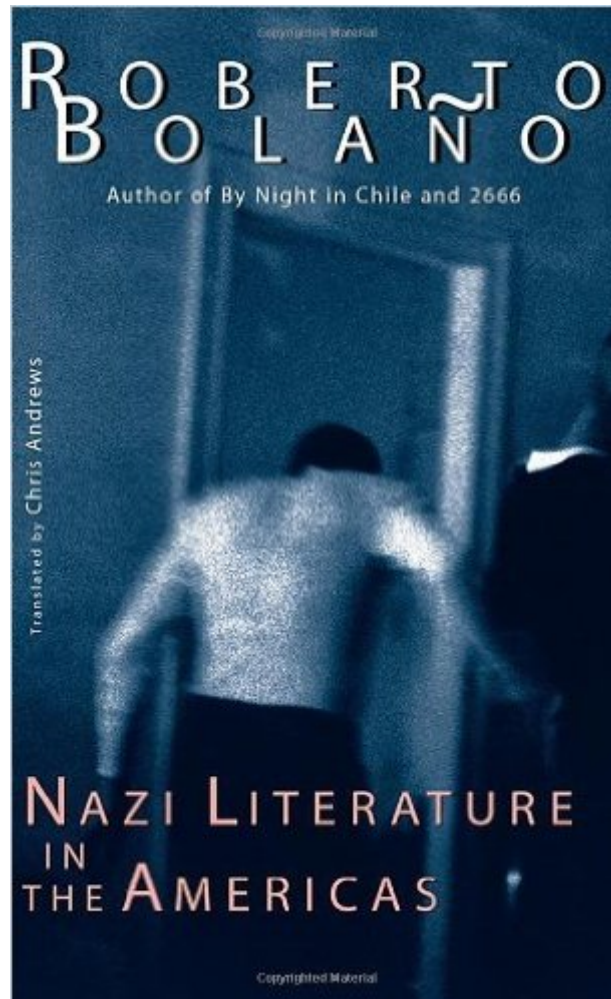


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Nazi Literature In The Americas (New Directions Paperbook)



Synopsis

A "biographical dictionary" gathering 30 brief accounts of poets, novelists and editors (all fictional) who espouse fascist or extremely right-wing political views. *Nazi Literature in the Americas* was the first of Roberto Bolaño's books to reach a wide public. When it was published by Seix Barral in 1996, critics in Spain were quick to recognize the arrival of an important new talent. The book presents itself as a biographical dictionary of American writers who flirted with or espoused extreme right-wing ideologies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is a tour de force of black humor and imaginary erudition. *Nazi Literature in the Americas* is composed of short biographies, including descriptions of the writers' works, plus an epilogue ("for Monsters"), which includes even briefer biographies of persons mentioned in passing. All of the writers are imaginary, although they are all carefully and credibly situated in real literary worlds. Ernesto Pérez Masón, for example, in the sample included here, is an imaginary member of the real Orígenes group in Cuba, and his farcical clashes with José Lezama Lima recall stories about the spats between Lezama Lima and Virgilio Pinera, as recounted in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Mea Cuba*. The origins of the imaginary writers are diverse. Authors from twelve different countries are included. The countries with the most representatives are Argentina (8) and the USA (7).

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

To preface: As we all know, Roberto Bolaño passed away in 2003. Like many in America, New Directions let us in on the secret with "By Night In Chile" and "Distant Star" (which is actually an

elaboration of the final story in "Nazi Literature in the Americas"). Next came "Last Evenings on Earth" and "Amulet" last year. "The Savage Detectives" came out via Farrar, Straus and Giroux last year as well and, his masterpiece, "2666" is on its way. If you haven't read any of these, it doesn't matter what order, just read any and all. "Nazi Literature in the Americas" reads like a history (but not in a bad way). Bolano creates dozens of personalities, each with intricate details and interesting character traits that even a third-party (Bolano) can convey gently. Each character exists throughout North and South America in the twentieth-century, some not dying until 2040 (which Bolano uses to hint that these people still exist into the later twenty-first century). As the title suggests, each character is tied, in Bolano fashion, to fascist literary movements in their respective time period and country. Edelmira Thompson de Mendiluce, the first chronicled in the novel, is a bourgeois Argentine who met Hitler in the 1930's and was sympathetic to the cause ever since. Max Mirebalais, is a poor Haitian who steals from other European poets and crafts "many masks," which he uses to create an ideology of hate. Argentino Schiaffino is a thug from Buenos Aires who loves soccer and violence and believes in the hierarchy of races and is on the run most of his life for murder. One gets the point. The problem is, this doesn't half convey the textual density and complexity of the work. The way the characters interact within each others stories, how one influences the other, etc.

Nazi Literature in the Americas was Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño's first major success when it was first published in Spanish in 1996. It is the latest of his books to be published in England, following the excellent *The Savage Detectives*, the epic *2666* and the novella *Amulet*. But *Nazi Literature in the Americas* is a very different book to these previous translations, albeit equally innovative and interesting. The book is a collection of imaginary biographies of invented right wing writers from Latin and North America, both historic and from the future. Bolaño knew something about political writers, having himself been imprisoned in Chile as a suspected left wing terrorist. What he provides here is a parody of both the right wing views and of literary criticism. His invented writers are intentionally absurd, often leading bizarre and tragic lives which are beautifully crafted in their descriptions. It's an exceptional achievement that these all hang together in a complete imagined world with the book complete with bibliographies of their works - often covering obscure and strange titles. I particularly likes the pilot-poet whose chosen medium is sky writing and the two football supporter gang leaders in Argentina who in their more tender moments resort to poetry. There are plenty of amusing moments and the effect is a clever parody of literature, political views and literary criticism. There's an almost Bob Dylan-like take on the absurdities of analysis of

these sad writers. In saying that, if this is your first introduction to Bolaño, I'd recommend starting elsewhere - probably with *The Savage Detectives*. Why?

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