



MACEDONIO
FERNÁNDEZ

Between Literature,
Philosophy,
and the Avant-Garde

Edited by
Federico Fridman

Macedonio Fernández



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No creo que la Metafísica sea el placer directo de una explicación: es un trabajo que tiene el placer reflejo de una perspectiva de poder; es un poder lo que se busca; un poder directo del amor; que éste pueda ser causa inmediata.

(I do not believe Metaphysics to be the direct pleasure of an explanation: it is an effort that has the reflex pleasure of a perspective of power; power is what one is looking for; the direct power of love; that this could be an immediate cause).

Macedonio Fernández

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The collective nature of an edited collection always depends on combining the authors' effort, time, energy, and their passion to converge together in a single book. In this case, however, the sense of a collective project that introduces essays on Macedonio Fernández, who advocated for collective and creative appropriations of his own work, achieves a fundamental meaning dwelling at the heart of Macedonio's thought. Therefore, I would like to thank the contributors for entrusting me their work and allowing me to articulate their texts illuminating communicating vessels among them. I would like to especially thank Julio Prieto for reading drafts of the Introduction and providing me with crucial feedback, and Todd Garth for reviewing translations from both Macedonio's texts and the English version of essays originally written in Spanish. I would also like to express my gratitude to Sean Manning, who translated several chapters for this book, and to Amy Martin, Assistant Acquisitions Editor at Bloomsbury, who assisted me in navigating the production and publication process. Their relentless work and support at every stage was critical in assembling this book. I also want to acknowledge the Museum of San José in Uruguay for allowing me to use Dardo Salguero Dela Hantý's drawing, *Arquicaricatura* (Archicaricature) of *Macedonia Fernández* (1924) for the book cover, and in particular Julia Sierra from the museum for aiding me to receive their authorization.

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The book embodies the intensity of the conversations that began at the ACLA conference, and seeks to configure a network of specialists and new readers of Macedonio Fernández's work.

"Notes on Macedonio in a Diary" by Ricardo Piglia is translated by Sean Manning and included with permission. © Herederos de Ricardo Piglia, c/o Schavelzon Graham Agencia Literaria, www.schavelzongraham.com.

Abbreviations

Frequently cited works by Macedonio Fernández are referred to using the following abbreviations. The editions listed below follow the original title and chronological order in which they were published for the first time.

- NTV:** *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos* (Not All Wakefulness Is with Open Eyes), Buenos Aires: Manuel Gleizer, 1928.
- PR:** *Papeles de reciénvenido* (The Newcomer Papers), Buenos Aires: Editorial Proa, 1930.
- UNC:** *Una novela que comienza* (A Novel that Begins), Santiago de Chile: Ercilla, 1940.
- PRC:** *Papeles de Reciénvenido y continuación de la nada* (The Newcomer Papers and the Continuation of Nothingness), Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1944.
- MNE:** *Museo de la novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena) (The Museum of Eterna's Novel (The First Good Novel))*, Obieta, A. (ed.), Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1967.
- CTN:** *Cuadernos de todo y nada (Notebooks of Everything and Nothing)*, Obieta, A. (ed.) Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1972.
- T:** *Teorías, Obras completas (Complete Works)*, vol. 3, Obieta, A. (ed.), Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1974.
- ABA:** *Adriana Buenos Aires (última novela mala) (Adriana Buenos Aires (The Last Bad Novel))*, *Obras completas*, vol. 5, Obieta, A. (ed.), Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1974.
- E:** *Epistolario* (Epistolary), *Obras completas*, vol. 2, Borinsky, A. (ed.), Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1976.
- PA:** *Papeles antiguos* (Old Papers), *Obras completas*, vol. 1, Obieta, A. (ed.), Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1981.
- R:** *Relato (cuentos, poemas y misceláneas)* (Story (short stories, poems and miscellaneous), *Obras completas*, vol. 7, Obieta, A. (ed.), Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1987.

Introduction

Federico Fridman

On March 24, 1921, Macedonio Fernández left his room at a boarding house in the Balvanera neighborhood of downtown Buenos Aires and headed for *Dársena Norte*, the north dock where the passenger ships arrived. After seven years in Europe, an old friend and his family were returning home. Maybe he took the tram or the metro to *El Bajo*, the city's shore along the Río de la Plata. Buenos Aires had changed drastically during the last few years. The incessant flow of immigrants from Europe and a booming economy had raised a modern, dynamic, and cosmopolitan city in the pampas. Nevertheless, one would like to imagine that to reach the river, Fernández, or Macedonio as he is commonly known, decided to walk through the heart of the city, among the Government House and other state buildings, and the various cultural, religious, and financial institutions still standing there to this day. His writing and the movement of the characters that dwell inside it embrace a particular way of roaming the city, skipping social and cultural conventions to elude capture by the state apparatus and reveal its distorted foundation.¹

What path might Macedonio have taken that day? Did he stop off briefly at a bar in the working-/middle-class and immigrant neighborhood where he had recently chosen to live? Or, did he visit a coffee shop on busy Florida Street, where maybe he encountered a former colleague or a friend from one of the upper-bourgeoisie and patrician families, whom he knew very well and with whom he had family ties and personal connections? Did he walk through Congress Square to laugh at the colossal statue commemorating the first National Assemblies?

¹ It is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when his first name began to overshadow his last. One would presume that at some point his commonplace *criollo* family name was insufficient for transmitting the singularity of his persona. In Hispanic criticism and the Spanish-speaking academic world he is known as Macedonio, and the authors included in this book refer to him using either one or the other. For all bibliographic references, see Fernández.

Did the statue of Mariano Moreno situated in a small adjacent square remind him of his claim that these monuments only served to convey the tragic stories, bloody battles, and sad affections on which the country had been founded?² And after his friend's ship reached the port, did he spend time with him and his family at their house in the Palermo neighborhood, perhaps staying for light refreshments? It is impossible to trace Macedonio's exact route that special day, but the same is also true for all the days before and all those thereafter.

The scarce information regarding Macedonio's life has rendered reassembling a complete biography an impossible task.³ He cultivated an anonymous existence and expressed, with acute wittiness and irony, his disdain for public recognition. He freed himself from social obligations and formalities. He often forgot invitations to attend public events or sent a written apology to be read aloud in his absence, although he might have been there sitting in a corner.⁴ In his texts, this fading presence becomes paradoxically visible through an experimental form of writing intended to dislocate the conventional idea that the author is the origin of the enunciation, undermining a representational form of thought wherein fiction is distinct from reality.

The anecdotes about Macedonio recounted by others sketched the contours of his elusive figure and fostered his mythological representation.⁵ One of the passengers whom Macedonio went to receive that day, a young Jorge Luis Borges, remembers him waiting alone at the dock:

² Mariano Moreno (1778–1811), an intellectual and a political leader of Argentina's independence movement, advocated for a radical revolution of the southern colonies to sever ties with Spain. In 1811, Moreno died in obscure circumstances while traveling for a diplomatic mission to Europe and was buried at sea (see Goldman, *Mariano Moreno*). Macedonio despised statues because they communicated sad affections and static experiences. In *PR*, he claims: "Aborrezco las estatuas: casi siempre son hombres con sobretodo griego, o amplia levita de mármol. [...] son intolerables, y todo para que un hombre esté allí asegurándonos con su mano y su boca que nos va a decir cosas elocuentes y no se le oye en todo el día" (I abhor statues: they are almost always men donning a Greek overcoat, or oversized marble frock-coat. [...] they are insufferable, and all so that a man can stand there persuading us with his hand and mouth that he will soon utter eloquent things, and yet nothing is heard from him all day) (1989, 13). All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

³ See Abós, *Macedonio Fernández. La biografía imposible* (The Impossible Biography). Nevertheless, we should consider that every biography is a partial glimpse of a person's life journey. The difficulty of reassembling an individual's biography does not mean this challenge could be overcome merely by piecing together the fragments of a life as if doing so would project a complete image of an individual history. In Macedonio's case, as we shall later see, this attempt has faced even more difficult obstacles.

⁴ In the prologue for a new edition of Macedonio's book *PRC* in 1944, Ramón Gómez de la Serna mentions how Macedonio frequently avoided public events and the humorous interventions he staged to do so (7–46).

⁵ See Obieta, *Hablan de Macedonio Fernández*.

Perhaps, the most important event when I came back [to Buenos Aires] was meeting Macedonio Fernández. Of all the people whom I have met in my life, nobody made such a deep and lasting impression on me as he did. When we disembarked at the *Dársena Norte*, he was there waiting for us, with his tiny figure and his black derby, and ultimately, I would inherit his friendship from my father.⁶

Borges has been particularly decisive in shaping the myth projected by his friend and mentor.⁷ The two first met at the *tertulias* his father, Jorge Guillermo Borges, organized at the family's home when Borges was just a boy, and they remained in contact throughout the family trip to Europe, when the young literary-minded Borges had already published essays, poems, short stories, and several translations.⁸

The performative power of literature and its ability to transform politics seem to have been the initial interests that drew them together and cultivated their intellectual affinities.⁹ Although Borges would eventually distance himself from the idea of literature's performativity, he always remembered the strong impact Macedonio's personality had had on him and praised him as his great teacher. At Macedonio's funeral in 1952, he delivered the following tribute: "In those years I imitated him to the point of transcription, to the point of devout and passionate plagiarism. I felt: Macedonio *is* metaphysics, Macedonio *is* literature. Those who preceded him may shine in history, but they were drafts of Macedonio, imperfect and preliminary versions. Not to imitate that canon would have been incredibly

⁶ "Quizás el mayor acontecimiento de mi regreso fue Macedonio Fernández. De toda la gente que he conocido en mi vida [...] nadie me ha dejado una impresión tan profunda y duradera como Macedonio. Cuando desembarcamos en la *Dársena Norte* estaba esperándonos con su figura diminuta y su bombín negro, y terminé heredando de mi padre su amistad" (*Autobiografía*, 70).

⁷ Todd S. Garth has studied this topic in particular in his article "Confused Oratory," 350–70.

⁸ Macedonio met Jorge Guillermo Borges (the writer's father) while both of them were in law school. After their graduation Macedonio embarked with two other friends, Julio Molina y Vedia and Arturo Múscari, on a ship going up the Paraná River to Paraguay. Their plan was to found an anarchist utopian community. Allegedly, the plan failed due to the inclemency of the jungle, but Macedonio and his friends never denied their participation in this project and contributed to spreading the legend of their journey. See Abós, *Macedonio*, 39–51.

⁹ See C. García, *Correspondencia*, 31. At the beginning of the 1920s, Macedonio conceived a conspiracy to become the president of Argentina; his intimate circle of friends actually considered this a possibility and spread the idea. This presidential scheme may have initially sought to achieve only a marginal effect (its actual range and circumstances still being a point of contention among critics), but the machination was a caricature that served to criticize the social and political system. See González, *Filosofía de la conspiración*; Piglia *Crítica y ficción*; and *Teoría del complot*; Prieto, *Desencuadrados*, 61–73; and *De la sombrología*, 61–7, 93–7. In his anthology *Macedonio Fernández* (1961), Borges says that the group's project also consisted of collectively writing a fantastic novel set in Buenos Aires, titled "The Man Who Will be President" (18).

negligent.”¹⁰ However, time and time again Borges referred to him as a thinker who could not translate his oratorical geniality into written intelligibility.¹¹

The encounter between Macedonio and Borges in 1921 coincided with another event in his life that has also been pivotal in constructing the Macedonian myth. A few months earlier, Macedonio’s wife, Elena de Obieta, unexpectedly died from a botched abdominal surgery, an experience he captured and immortalized in his acclaimed eulogy “Elena Bellamuerte” (Elena Beautiful Death).¹² Macedonio had been a well-established lawyer for twenty-five years, never feeling much enthusiasm for the profession, and when she died, he resigned and left his four children with their extended family. Although he maintained a close relationship with them, he adopted a nomadic lifestyle, moving from one place to another, almost never leaving the city and staying in the suburbs for short periods of time.

The convergence of his relationship with Borges and the death of Elena resulted in the dual origin that set in motion the myth of Macedonio: the metaphysician and genius thinker who, after losing his wife, withdrew from public circles and focused his attention on writing his poetry and his ruminations on the immortality of the soul, carelessly leaving his notes, papers, and manuscripts strewn behind him as he moved from one address to another.¹³ Only at the insistence of friends did he decide to publish fragments from his poems and essays, and after Macedonio’s death in 1952, it was his son, Adolfo de Obieta, who undertook the task of editing his father’s handwriting and manuscripts, assigning them dates of composition, and publishing the bulk of his work.¹⁴

¹⁰ “[...] Yo por aquellos años lo imité, hasta la transcripción, hasta el apasionado y devoto plagio. Yo sentía: Macedonio es la metafísica, es la literatura. Quienes lo precedieron pueden resplandecer en la historia, pero eran borradores de Macedonio, versiones imperfectas y previas. No imitar ese canon hubiera sido una negligencia increíble[...].” (“Macedonio Fernández,” *Sur*, 146).

¹¹ Beatriz Sarlo has analyzed Borges’s strategic aesthetic and ideological maneuverings to transform a marginal writer at the time such as Macedonio into the center of his system of thought (“Vanguardia y criollismo,” 127–71). See also Camblong, “De Macedonio a Borges,” 35–60; and G. García, “Duelo imposible,” 69–94; Garth, “Confused Oratory;” Bueno, *Macedonio*; Prieto, *Desencuadrados* and “La inquietante extrañeza de la autoría,” 475–504.

¹² See Fernández, *Relato. Cuentos, poemas y misceláneas*, 99–103.

¹³ In this sense, Borges writes: “Macedonio gave not the least value to his written word; upon changing lodgings, he did not take with him the literary and metaphysical manuscripts that had piled up on the table and that filled trunks and cabinets. Much was lost that way, perhaps irrevocably [...]” (*Macedonio*, 15). Garth adds: “Adolfo de Obieta also often mentioned his father’s lack of initiative to publish and his tendency to lose or discard his own writings; [...] But to dismiss the necessity of publishing one’s words is not the same as disdaining one’s writing” (“Confused Oratory,” 366).

¹⁴ For a chronological analysis of Macedonio’s production, see N. Salvador, “Cronología,” in *MNE* (1993, 341–61); and C. García, *Correspondencia, 1922–1939–261–96*. For a meticulous analysis of the multiple changes that Macedonio and/or his son might have introduced in the new editions of previous texts, see C. García, “Arqueología.”

During the 1920s, Borges actively participated in the formation of avant-garde literary groups, introducing Macedonio to these circles and publishing his work in their journals, while assuming a leading role in staging an intervention in the cultural scene. The new generation of writers—Oliverio Girondo, Raúl González Tuñón, and Leopoldo Marechal, among others—challenged the previous generation of intellectuals and their cultural institutions, which were influenced by Leopoldo Lugones and his *modernista* aesthetic.¹⁵ Consequently, they created new journals for their work: *Prisma* (1921), *Inicial* (1923), *Proa* (1922), *Martin Fierro* (1924), and *Oral* (1925). Macedonio became an assiduous contributor. They promoted him as a mythical figure whom they believed could oppose Lugones. Macedonio's thinking, which he preferred to communicate through subterranean and hermetic oral narratives within a closed circle of friends, strengthened the young writers' imagination and inspired their plans to subvert the intellectual elite from the periphery of the cultural milieu.¹⁶

Nevertheless, for scholars, Macedonio's relationship with these groups is still a controversial topic that will perhaps only be resolved once his book notes are finally published, his letters currently in private collections are made available to the public, and rigorous research is conducted to retrieve the traces of his trajectory. On the one hand, in Macedonio's texts we can analyze the meaningful dialogues he established with the avant-gardes and his ongoing conversations with Borges that call into question the idea that the mentor/disciple binary only entails an unequivocal influence of the former over the latter.¹⁷ Furthermore, an

¹⁵ For an analysis of avant-garde groups in this context, see Barletta, *Boedo y Florida*; Masiello, *Lenguaje e ideología*; Sarlo, *Borges, un escritor en las orillas* and "Vanguardia y criollismo," 39–69; Gilman, "Florida y Boedo," 44–62; Montaldo, "El origen de la historia," 24–9; and Muñoz, "Macedonio Fernández y las vanguardias estéticas."

¹⁶ Prieto has pointed out the ex-centric position that Macedonio occupied in this cultural milieu. He claims that his writings, "embody a discursive mode more faithful to the avant-garde 'spirit,' regarding his criticism of the literary tradition, than the critique of his contemporary rioplatenses, and relatively unfaithful to their local demonstrations and manifests, which wave, as a group, the flag of avant-gardism and move it toward a 'moderate' direction" (*Desencuadrados*, 25). Garth also claims: "Macedonio's poetics in many ways coincide much more closely with the principle of the historical avant-garde in Europe, at least when viewed retrospectively. That kinship with European movements is a result of Macedonio's faith in the relationship between art and daily life more than an adherence to aesthetic programs" (*The Self*, 48).

¹⁷ In this sense, it is interesting to consider Macedonio's own words: "Por culpa de la juventud artística de Buenos Aires, que conocí hace cuatro años, estoy abismado en un problema de estética. Me desvalijaron por aquel entonces con tanta prolijidad e inmenso provecho de mi estética pasatista que hasta la fecha no he podido recuperar una ignorancia igual" (The artistic youth of Buenos Aires, whom I met four years ago, should be blamed for my immersion in an aesthetic problem. They robbed me at that time with such neatness and immense profit from my pasatist aesthetic that until today I have not been able to recover an equal ignorance) (in R. Gómez de la Serna, "Macedonio Fernández," 172). Also see Prieto, *Desencuadrados*, 109–50; "La inquietante extrañeza;" and *De la sombrología*, 32–5.

examination of the cultural and literary journals edited by the young writers shows an intense fusion between Macedonio's thinking and the aesthetic project of the avant-gardes during the 1920s. However, on the other hand, his relationship with these groups has often been oversimplified to argue that the young writers served as his catalyst to become a literary writer, although there was in fact a bitter dispute in 1928 between the circles around Borges and Macedonio regarding the problematic continuities between the literary and intellectual production of both writers.¹⁸

The authors included in this book represent both of the positions schematically presented above. However, they all agree that the creation of Macedonio as a mythical figure has involved a reduction of the many origins and sources of his complex life journey and creative process, and that this myth has tended to preclude an in-depth analysis of his writings. Each chapter pulls back a portion of the veil that has kept his texts in the shadows, enabling new light to shine upon them. As a whole, they coalesce, drafting road maps that lead into the depths of Macedonio's work, expounding the meticulously articulated lines of thought that ramify throughout his philosophy, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetic. This book has been conceived as both a companion for readers who would venture into Macedonio's writings for the first time and as an invitation for specialists to revisit his work through new perspectives. With this in mind, each chapter provides extensive background and bibliographical references, as well as English translations of Macedonio's original texts, allowing them to be read independently or following the book's structure down the multiple avenues of analysis the authors have paved.

The book comprises eleven chapters, organized into three Parts. The first Part, "Life and Literature at the Edge," presents chapters by Mónica Bueno, Todd S. Garth, Ana Camblong, and Gonzalo S. Aguirre. In these chapters, the authors intertwine various aspects of Macedonio's life and location in Buenos Aires, including his position in its cultural and social milieu and his relationship with Borges, particularly with regard to central ideas in their thought. They reveal the groundwork on which Macedonio developed his writing and demonstrate the centrality that the city and its people (*porteños*) occupied in his oeuvre. In an effort to demystify his figure and recuperate his writings, the authors trace the

¹⁸ See Attala, "De la metafísica de la afeción al personaje," 107–22. C. García explains that Guillermo de Torre (Borges's brother-in-law) initiated this controversy with his article "Buenos Aires, literatura" in *La Gaceta Literaria* (Madrid) in which he addresses Macedonio's writing style in a disdainful manner. Marechal, who had become a close friend of Macedonio, then wrote "Recriminó a De Torre," which is a radical defense of his friend. He suggests to De Torre that he should look closer to his own inner circle to understand the deep influence that Macedonio as a "spiritual father" has on the new generations of writers, tacitly implying that Borges was one of the authors who was more receptive to this influence ("Borges y Macedonio, un incidente de 1928," 59–66).

extent to which his personal and intellectual relationships, his way of being in the city, or his visions of an alternative future are inscribed in his texts. They also examine the prolific link his metaphysical reflections forge in his philosophical and literary works between his space and those who inhabit it.

The second Part, “Philosophy, Affects, and Politics,” assembles essays dedicated to Macedonio’s call for the radical overhaul of Western philosophical tradition and his assailing of two of its fundamental pillars: the Cartesian subject and Kant’s moral philosophy. Authors Diego Vecchio, Julio Prieto, Luis Othoniel Rosa, and Daniel Attala examine the critical dialogues that Macedonio established with the history of philosophy, while tracing resonances between his work and a genealogy of thinkers that includes Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Benjamin, and others. In addition, they analyze points of convergence or divergence between his thought and intellectual trends during the first decades of the twentieth century, and articulate contemporary theory to illuminate how his theories and metaphysics anticipated main questions that have arisen in recent debates. Moreover, this Part invites us to consider how Macedonio’s work might polish new lenses through which to engage with literary and political theory, cultural studies, and philosophy, and especially, how his ethics and political thought can assist us in questioning our present and historical conditions.

The final Part, “Metaphysics on the Move,” includes essays by Ricardo Piglia, Horacio González, and Liliana Weinberg. Macedonio’s aesthetic and philosophical project urges future readers and new writers to appropriate and reshape his ideas, theoretical principles, and artistic techniques to lend continuity to a never-ending process of reading and rewriting. In particular, Piglia and González have furthered and intensified this project in their own literary and intellectual production. While Piglia’s work has been integral to rearticulating the literary canon to include Macedonio, extending his reception beyond the Argentinean context, González’s scholarship has offered interdisciplinary studies on Macedonio that integrate the complexity of his philosophical thought with his aesthetic project and positioning in his historical context.¹⁹ Weinberg’s research

¹⁹ Piglia’s scholarly work on Macedonio can be found in *Teoría del complot* and *Crítica y ficción*, while his literary production is permeated by Macedonio’s thought. For instance, Macedonio’s fundamental literary tropes are the clear source of inspiration for his acclaimed novel *La ciudad ausente* (1992) (*The Absent City* (2000)). In 2000, Piglia also co-edited the *Diccionario de La novela de Macedonio Fernández*. Horacio González published multiple articles on Macedonio Fernández, and his interdisciplinary research on this author is collected in his book *El filósofo cesante* (1995). He also dedicated several articles and books to Macedonio’s contemporaries such as Roberto Arlt and Ezequiel Martínez Estrada; see Arlt, *Política y locura* (1996) and *Restos pameanos* (1999).

on fundamental Latin American essayists has also been crucial in rebuilding not only the constellation of Macedonio's contemporary authors in the region, but also in restoring the singularities and multiple, complex dimensions of this literary genre, especially in the Latin American context. She reveals this perspective to be key in analyzing the theoretical and aesthetic operations that Macedonio developed, and how they were creatively amplified by the avant-gardes.²⁰

The present book comprehends a historical arch of Macedonio's intellectual and literary production that begins at the end of the nineteenth century when a young Macedonio had already begun publishing articles that expressed the seeds of his incipient anarchist ideas.²¹ Although he published only a few essays and poems during the first two decades of the following century, he continued to write his ruminations on metaphysics and delineate its principles. He had also already initiated his explorations into the structure of the psyche, which he would later elaborate in his theory of the selfless soul. These texts, along with others written between 1896 and 1950, were included in subsequent expanded editions of his first book *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos* (Not All Wakefulness Is with Open Eyes), which was originally published in 1928.²² The philosophical essays in this monograph show how in his first published book Macedonio produces a collage that does not follow one unifying concept, but rather myriad theoretical arguments that also highlight literary elements not present in his previous work.²³

²⁰ Weinberg's exhaustive and comprehensive research on Latin American essayists and writers can be found in *El ensayo en busca del sentido* (2001), *El ensayo, entre el paraíso y el infierno* (2004), *Literatura Latinoamericana: Descolonizar la imaginación* (2014), among several other of her books, articles, and essays.

²¹ The first volume of Macedonio's *Obras completas, Papeles antiguos* (Old Papers) (1981) collects the essays he wrote and published between 1897 and 1907, which were edited and ordered by Obieta. In the essay "La desherencia" (The Disinheritance) (1887), Macedonio writes: "[C]reo que el socialismo responde muy satisfactoriamente a las preguntas económica del problema social ..." (I believe that socialism provides a satisfactory answer to the economic question of the social problem) (10). In 1925, however, he will rectify this position in an editorial note: "[E]n aquel tiempo yo era socialista y materialista, hoy soy anarquista spenceriano y místico" (At that time I was a socialist and materialist, I am today a Spencerian anarchist and mystic) (PR, 1989, 45). This affirmation has prompted another intense controversy among different scholars. Luis Othoniel Rosa has particularly tackled this issue in his book *Comienzos para una estética anarquista* (2016).

²² The original complete title of Macedonio's first book is *No toda es vigilia la de los ojos abiertos: arreglo de papeles que dejó un personaje de novela creado por el arte, Deunamor, el No-Existente Caballero, el estudioso de su esperanza* (Not All Wakefulness Is with Open Eyes: An Arrangement of Papers Left by a Novelistic Character Created by Art, One-Love, the Nonexistent Gentleman, a Scholar of His Hope) (Gleizer, 1928).

²³ Attala has pointed out the inclusion of literary elements in Macedonio's metaphysical treatise and problematized this transition in his production (see "De la metafísica"). Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, one of Macedonio close friends, defined NTV as an "esoteric bible of the porteño spirit" (*El hombre que está solo y espera* (1931), 123).

Macedonio's second book *Papeles de reciénvenido* (The Newcomer Papers) (1930) presents a step forward in his quest for a form of written expression capable of setting his metaphysical premises in motion. The book, whose title comes from a short piece he wrote in 1923, compiles essays published during the 1920s in the journals *Martín Fierro* and *Proa*, which were edited by Borges and his circle of writers.²⁴ The epithet "newcomer" was applicable to Macedonio who, already in his forties at the time, was himself a late arrival in the literary and cultural scene. Furthermore, it paralleled the idea of the foreigner arriving in the city, particularly resonant with his historical context, leading him to transmute this term into a literary trope for the creation of an artistic and humorous character invested with metaphysical ontological status: the *Reciénvenido* (Newcomer). His development in Macedonio's texts allowed the author to articulate philosophical ideas, jokes, and literary narratives as he cultivated his metaphysical reflections.

It is also quite possible that instead of a collection of previously published essays, Macedonio's intention was to release his first novel, which he often publicized as nearly concluded and pledged would be available in print in the near future. By the end of the 1920s, his magnum opus *Museo de la novela de la Eterna (Primera novela buena)* (*The Museum of Eterna's Novel (The First Good Novel)*) had already started to germinate in a short fragment he published in 1929.²⁵ However, the novel remained a work in progress. He continued writing it until his death in 1952, and it was published posthumously in 1967. It would later be translated into English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and German.²⁶

²⁴ See Fernández, "El recién venido (fragmento)," *Proa*, no. 3 (July 1923): 3–4; and also Borges, "Macedonio Fernández—El Recién venido—inédito aún," included in the same issue, 2. In 1944, a new edition of *PR* was published, which also included *Continuación de la nada* (The Continuation of Nothingness) (Buenos Aires: Losada). Borinsky has analyzed continuities between *NTV* and *PR*, as she argues that in the latter book Macedonio sought to elaborate theoretical and aesthetics answers to the queries posed by his previous book; see "Correspondencia," 101–23.

²⁵ In *NTV*, Macedonio left traces that may be interpreted as strategic advertising for his forthcoming novel when he says: "Lee mi 'Conclusión'; y no te preocupe el enredo de personajes aquí: es en vista de futura obra" (Read my Conclusion and don't worry about the entanglement of characters here: it is foreshadowing a future work) (1990, 232). In 1929, he also published in the journal *Libra*, "Novela de la 'Eterna' y la Niña de dolor, la 'Dulce-Persona' de un amor que no fue sabido" (Eterna's Novel and the Suffering Girl, the "Sweet-Person" of an Unknown Love) (34–46), which would later be included in the prologues of *MNE*. In 1941, he published *Una novela que comienza* (A Novel that Begins) in Chile, which as Jo Anne Engelbert has claimed was a clear anticipation of *MNE*; see Fernández, *UNC* (Santiago de Chile: Ercilla, 1941); and Engelbert, "El proyecto narrativo de Macedonio" (Macedonio's narrative project) in *MNE* (1993), 373–91.

²⁶ See Fabio Rodríguez Amaya, *Museo del romanzo della Eterna* (Genova: Il Nuovo Melangolo, 1992); Jean-Claude Masson, *Musée du roman de l'Éternelle* (Gallimard, 1993); Margaret Schwartz, *The Museum of Eterna's Novel* (Rochester: Open Letter, 2010); Gênese Andrade, *Museu do romance da eterna* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2010); Petra Strien-Bourmer, *Das Museum von Eternas Roman* (Berlin: AB Die Andere Bibliothek, 2014).

Fifty-six prologues precede the beginning of the story, each one functioning as an independent series that at some point intersects with another, driving readers into different corners from which they can contemplate the beginning of a novel constantly postponed. Twenty chapters, four closing sections, and one dedication round out a book that deserves a place among other renowned twentieth-century works. Macedonio's experimental novel parallels Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), his writing techniques and composition of characters are comparable to Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* (1937), and his perception of new forms of power and domination at the beginning of the twentieth century evokes Kafka's most acute short stories.²⁷

Macedonio's initial strategy was to release two novels simultaneously as if they were conjoined twins or two facets of the same aesthetic project: *MNE* (The First Good Novel) and *Adriana Buenos Aires (última novela mala)* (Adriana Buenos Aires (The Last Bad Novel)), which he first drafted around 1922 and continued to edit until 1938. But rather than being antithetical, the two novels should be considered and read as complementary. While *ABA* is written following the institutionalized paradigm of the romantic and realist novel, *MNE* methodically undermines the idea that this literary genre has the ability to capture the metaphysical mystery and cosmic emotion of life.²⁸

The books summarized above, among other essays, short stories, poems, and letters, were included in the nine volumes of *Obras completas* (Complete works) published by Ediciones Corregidor since 1974, but the bulk of Macedonio's manuscripts and notes is still waiting to be unearthed, examined, and edited. It was Obieta who initiated this process in 1964, compiling and writing the prologue for *Papeles de Macedonio Fernández* (Macedonio's Papers). He then released the first edition of *MNE* in 1967 based on a text, according to him, written in 1947, and new editions of *PR* and *NTV* were published as well. Later on, he edited the volumes for Corregidor, and a second edition of *MNE* was published in 1975.²⁹

²⁷ As odd as it may seem, Gombrowicz and Macedonio did not meet in Buenos Aires while the Polish writer was there in exile from the beginning of World War II until 1963. But Piglia asserts it is more than likely that Macedonio read *Ferdydurke*, which Gombrowicz translated into Spanish with the assistance of the Cuban poet Virgilio Piñera and a small group of young writers and linguists, among them Adolfo de Obieta; see Piglia, "¿Existe la novela Argentina? Borges y Gombrowicz;" also see Balderston, "Rex Café," 29–37.

²⁸ *ABA* was finally published separately in 1974, but in one of *MNE*'s prologues, "Lo que nace y lo que muere" (What Is Born and What Dies) (267–8), Macedonio clearly mentions his intentions to publish the last bad novel and the first good novel together. In the first edition of *PRC* published in 1944, he also announced the forthcoming publication of both novels. See Jitrik, *La novela futura*, 49; Pérez Melgosa, "Macedonio Fernández's Narrative Pharmakon"; Attala, *Macedonio, lector del Quijote*, 127–34; and Prieto, "Pro cosmética (Pro cosmetic)" and *De la sombrología*, 133–45.

²⁹ Obieta also published *Macedonio: Memorias errantes* (Macedonio: Wandering Memories) (1999), and German García asserts that this text could be read as a cyphered dialogue between a son and the memories of his father. See *Macedonio Fernández, la escritura en objeto* (Literature as an object), 232.

In 1993, Obieta and Ana Camblong edited a new critical edition of *MNE*, which has become the main source of reference for scholars.³⁰ As the director of the series *Historia crítica de la literatura argentina* (2006) (A Historical Critique of Argentinean literature), Noé Jitrik dedicated the entirety of volume eight to Macedonio, which was edited by Roberto Ferro. The more than six hundred pages of this massive volume show its dimensions and ambition to reconstitute Macedonio's rightful place among a fundamental genealogy of writers. It is important to note that the only other author in the series to receive similar attention was Domingo F. Sarmiento: the nineteenth-century intellectual, founding father, and president of Argentina (1868–74).³¹

Also deserving of mention here are some of the pioneers who introduced Macedonio's work to the North American academic world: Alicia Borinsky, Jo Anne Engelbert, and Naomi Lindstrom. In 1971, Borinsky published the first article to rebuild Macedonio's transatlantic network as she traces, edits, and compiles his exchange of letters with Spanish writer Ramón Gómez de La Serna. In 1972, she released an article in which she further develops her doctoral dissertation and her analysis of Macedonio's theory of the novel.³² Engelbert furthered this first breakthrough in 1978 when she published *Macedonio Fernández and the Spanish American New Novel*, and later in 1984 with *Macedonio: Selected Writings in Translation*, which was the first anthology to translate and publish his texts.³³ Lindstrom's book *Macedonio Fernández* (1981) confirmed scholars' increasing interest in his work, and her study of his theories, philosophy, and literature through the lens of deconstruction opened and signaled a new fertile territory for literary criticism to explore.³⁴

³⁰ See Fernández, *MNE*, Nanterre: ALLCA XX, (1993). I would like to mention here Ana Camblong's lifework devoted to the rigorous study of Macedonio's oeuvre. Her books and multiple articles, among them, *Macedonio. Retórica y política de los discursos paradójicos* (2002) and *Ensayos macedonianos* (2006), have become canonical references.

³¹ See Jitrik, ed., *Historia crítica de la literatura argentina*, vol. 4. Contributors include: Julio Premat, Germán García, J. Prieto, M. Bueno, Marisa A. Muñoz, Raúl O. Cadús, Isabel Stratta, Alicia Borinsky, Ana Camblong, Gonzalo Aguilar, C. García.

³² See Borinsky, "Correspondencia de Macedonio Fernández a Gómez de La Serna" (1970); *Humorística, novelística y obra abierta en Macedonio Fernández* (diss, 1971); and "Macedonio: su proyecto novelístico" (1972). In 1987, Borinsky published the influential book *Macedonio Fernández y la teoría crítica: una evaluación* (1987), and in 2007, she compiled and edited Macedonio's letters for the second volume of his complete works, *Epistolario*, published by Corregidor.

³³ Engelbert also collaborated with the piece "El proyecto narrativo de Macedonio" for the critical edition of *MNE* (1993) edited by Camblong and Obieta.

³⁴ Lindstrom also published multiple articles on Macedonio and his experimental writing, among them: "Macedonio Fernández: Strategies against Readerly Sloth," (1977) and "Macedonio Fernández y su reinención del discurso metafísico" (1985).

Nevertheless, it was not until 2010 that Margaret Schwartz assumed the courageous task of translating *MNE*, a translation praised by specialists. In 2022, seventy years after Macedonio's death, his copyright will enter the public domain and we can expect to soon see more translations of his texts. This event coincides with renewed interest in his work as new generations of scholars have started to explore its connections with fields beyond Latin American studies such as visual studies and contemporary arts. The essays included in this book seek to support this process by facilitating Macedonio's rediscovery.

In the opening chapter, "Jorge Luis Borges and Macedonio Fernández: History of a Literary Friendship," Mónica Bueno recovers Macedonio's dissertation *De las personas* (On Personhood) (1897) to search for the principles of his notion of person, which she reveals as crucial for understanding not only his creative process and conception of artistic characters, but also his attitude regarding Borges's remarks on the geniality of his thought and oratory.³⁵ Bueno examines their relationship and the problematic continuities between their work as she addresses to what extent Macedonio's subsumed influence persisted as a vague trail or a distant voice in Borges's texts. She also explains how Borges's gestures toward Macedonio were a reflection of the nature and dynamic of their ludic dialogues, as they both elaborated their notions of literature, author, character, and intellectual property. Through an analysis of the figure of the Newcomer in *PR*, the literary devices in *MNE* inducing readers to become characters within the story, Borges's texts in which we can sense the presence of his mentor's voice, as well as Borges's own testimonies, Bueno argues that Macedonio embraced the idea of becoming himself a fictional character.

In "Heroes without Selves: Macedonio Fernández and a New Ethics of the Heroic," Todd S. Garth explores Macedonio's notion of heroism in light of his aesthetic and philosophical project, which posits a radical critique of the autonomous individual. He proves that Macedonio, in contrast to Borges whose search for the heroic implied a gaze toward the past, provoked a fundamental torsion of traditional definitions of the hero. Following the work of postmodern theorists Zygmunt Bauman and Nomy Arpaly, Garth develops lines of analysis to comprehend the multiple facets of Macedonio's definition of the heroic. He claims that the heroic reveals itself in Macedonio's literature, particularly in *ABA*, *PR*, and *MNE*, where he galvanizes his central ideas on ethics. But rather than a philosophical concept, Garth explains that, for Macedonio, ethics should provide

³⁵ For Fernández's dissertation, see Muñoz, "Macedonio Fernández: su tesis inédita *De las personas*."