



reading

BOOKS ABOUT ARGENTINA / 1

If fiction is your thing, you're going to love Argentina. The country's rich literary tradition began even before the "master" Jorge Luis Borges appeared on the scene and Argentina today remains a land of innovative literature. Argentina's impressive culture also shines light on the country's often troubled political history. Our non-fiction recommendations include a study of the "Dirty War" of the 1970s and 1980s, and a biography of the legendary caudillo or strongman, Juan Perón. We also recommend two very different books about Argentina's large and vibrant Jewish community.

Fiction

Jorge Luis Borges, *Fictions (Ficciones)* (1944)

The most popular work by one of the 20th-century's most important authors. *Fictions* is marked by Borges' characteristic high-low fusion as it combines detective and sci-fi stories with philosophical considerations and literary innovation. Both it and *The Aleph and Other Stories* (1949) reveal Borge's interest in kabbalah, Jewish mysticism.

Adolfo Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel* (1940)

Set on a mysterious island, critics compared this novel with Kafka and Woody Allen before deciding it was really something quite unique. *The Times* called this tale of suspense, exploration, and a wonderfully unlikely romance "masterfully paced" while the writer Octavo Paz said it could be described "without exaggeration, as a perfect novel."

Julio Cortázar, *Blow-Up and Other Stories* (1968)

Cortázar was, along with the Columbian Gabriel Garcia Marquez and other luminaries, a key figure in the "Latin American boom" of the 1960s and 1970s which put this previously-ignored region at the center of the literary world. Magic realism is at the fore in these fifteen short stories which include a man reading a mystery who finds out too late that he is the murderer's victim. The title story "Blow-Up" inspired a famous film of the same name.

Tomás Eloy Martínez, *The Tango Singer* (2006)

A visiting New York student tries to uncover the origins of the tango, the dance and music that embodies the spirit of Buenos Aires. *The Guardian* called this novel a work of "hallucinatory brilliance" with a "liberating rhythm every bit as hypnotic as the tango itself."

Elsa Osorio, *My Name Is Light* (1998)

A young Argentinian woman believes her real father was one of the "desaparecidos," the political activists who were seized by Argentina's military in the 1970s and who then disappeared without trace. Der Spiegel said that this book "written against oblivion, will never be forgotten." Nathan Englander's *The Ministry of Special Cases* (2011) – which focuses on a Jewish family – is another well-reviewed novel about the legacy of Argentina's "Dirty War."



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Patricio Pron, *My Father's Ghost in the Rain* (2013)

The Dirty War is also the background to this largely autobiographical, highly regarded, novel. A young writer emerges from a haze of alienation and drugs to investigate the secrets of his father. The *Washington Independent Review of Books* called it "beautifully crafted" and a vivid picture of a nation in denial about the horrors of its past.

Non-Fiction

Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews* (1991)

A closely-researched account of how Argentina's large Jewish community was formed. It analyzes Argentinian attitudes to the many thousands of Jews who flocked to the country from the 1880s onwards and looks at the more modern phenomenon of Jews leaving Argentina for Israel and elsewhere.

Adriana Brody & Raanan Rein (eds.), *The New Jewish Argentina* (2013)

A prize-winning collection of essays on the Jewish experience in Argentina which eschews the usual focus on the organized Jewish community. Instead, it tells the usually-untold stories of unaffiliated Jews, women and gender, Jewish criminals and bookstores.

Bruce Chatwin, *In Patagonia* (1977)

Chatwin's account of his journey through this remote, barren part of south Argentina transformed travel writing. It features history, strange anecdotes, encounters with descendants of Welsh immigrants, and almost-forgotten legends about bandits such as Butch Cassidy.

Gabriela Nouzeilles & Graciela Montaldo (eds.), *The Argentina Reader* (2002)

Nine separate articles about Argentina's history, culture, and politics. *The Guardian* thinks it would be hard to find a "richer, more eclectic, overview of the country and its people" while *Foreign Affairs* magazine called it a "stellar collection" that touches on everything from caudillos (strongmen leaders), gauchos (cowboys), and Amerindian resistance, to sports.

Joseph Page, *Peron, a Biography* (1983)

Juan Perón, the caudillo or strongman leader, dominated Argentina for three decades from the 1940s. *The New York Times* called this an "excellent" account of a populist, autocratic leader. There are also many biographies of Perón's legendary second wife, Eva, including John Barnes, *Evita, First Lady* (1996).

Antonius C.G.M. Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (2011)

From 1967 to 1983, Argentinian life was disfigured by political turmoil, the government's kidnapping and killing of leftists, and human rights abuses. Robben combines history and anthropology to investigate the cycle of violence and trauma. *The Latin American Research Review* called it the "definitive account of the Dirty War and its origins and consequences."