

Artificial Respiration (Latin America in Translation)

Ricardo Piglia



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Acclaimed as one of the most important Latin American novels in recent decades, *Artificial Respiration* is a stunning introduction for English readers to the fiction of Ricardo Piglia. Published in Argentina in 1981, it was written at a time when thousands of Argentine citizens "disappeared" during the government's attempt to create an authoritarian state. In part a reflection on one of the most repressive and tragic times in Argentine history, this is one of those rare works of fiction in which multiple philosophical, political, and narrative dimensions are all powerfully and equally matched.

As a prize winning detective novel, *Artificial Respiration* reaches through many levels of mystery to explore the forces that have been at play in Argentina throughout its violent history. The narrator, a writer named Renzi, begins to look for an uncle who has vanished, a man he knows only through a web of contradictory family stories and an exchange of letters. Through these letters he learns about his uncle's research into the life of Enrique Ossario, secretary to the 19th-century Argentine dictator Rosas and spy for the dictator's enemy. As Renzi's search leads further into his uncle's work and to conversations with his literary and chess-playing friends, the reader is led by Piglia to consider the nature of Argentine identity, its literature and history, and its relation, for example, to Europe, exile, and democracy. Finally, and made most vividly appreciable by the retelling of a story in which Kafka meets Hitler, it is the encounter between literature and history that is explored.

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