

Brushwood

Twayne's Critical History
of the Short Story



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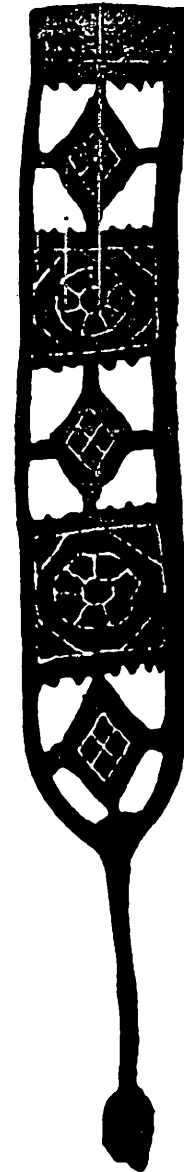
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The LATIN AMERICAN Short Story

A Critical History

Margaret Sayers Peden, Editor
University of Missouri-Columbia



Twayne Publishers

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The Latin American Short Story
Twayne's Critical History of the
Short Story

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Chronology

- 1492** October 12, Christopher Columbus lands on one of the Bahama Islands, now known as San Salvador.
- 1500** Discovery of Brazil by Pedro Alvares Cabral; original names for the territory are Santa Cruz and Ilha de Vera Cruz (Island of the True Cross).
- 1519** Hernán Cortés arrives in the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, where a superstitious Moctezuma receives him as a descendant of the god Quetzalcoatl.
- 1531–1535** Francisco Pizarro conquers the Incan civilization of the Andean mountains, centered in Cuzco.
- 1609** *Comentarios reales de los Incas* (Royal Commentaries of the Incas) written by the half-Inca, half-Spanish Garsilaso de la Vega, the first truly American writer.
- 1636** Juan Rodríguez Freile writes *El Carnero* (The Ram) in Colombia. Historical essay with local oral tradition.
- 1691** Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the genius of Latin American baroque, signs her autobiographical "Respuesta a Sor Filotea" (Response to Sor Filotea).
- 1773** *El lazarrillo de los ciegos caminantes entre Buenos Aires y Lima* (El Lazarrillo: A Guide of the Inexperienced Travelers between Buenos Aires and Lima), a collection of anecdotal material by Alonso Carrió de la Vándera (known as Concolorvo).⁴
- 1810–1812** Many Latin American countries declare their independence from Spain. The resulting period of confusion proves unpropitious for the development of literary prose.

- 1815** Brazil is named a kingdom coequal with Portugal.
- 1816** José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's *El periquillo sarriento* (The Itching Parrot), a fully elaborated novel.
- 1822** The independence of Brazil is declared by Prince Dom Pedro, who becomes Emperor Pedro I.
- 1830** French romanticism begins to infiltrate Latin American literature through travelers returning from Paris.
- 1836** *O cronista* (The Chronicler) is first published, a Brazilian newspaper that includes the first short stories signed by its founders, Justianiano José da Rocha, and others.
- 1838** The Argentine Esteban Echeverría's "El Matadero" (The Slaughtering Grounds) is the first short fiction in Spanish America.
- 1839** Birth of Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, the Cervantes of Brazilian literature, founder of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, and the most important name in Brazilian fiction.
- 1872ff.** Ricardo Palma, born 1833 in Peru, composes *tradiciones* all his adult life.
- 1870** Publication in Brazil of the First Republican Manifesto; publication of Machado de Assis's *Contos fluminenses* (Rio de Janeiro Stories).
- 1883** Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Mexico, publishes the collection *Cuentos frágiles* (Fragile Stories).
- 1880s** Ecuadorean Juan Montalvo writes *Capítulos que se le olvidaron a Cervantes* (Chapters Cervantes Forgot). The Cuban José Martí produces his remarkable journalistic essays, combining reportage, cultural criticism, and renovated, direct, literary Spanish.
- 1888** The Nicaraguan-born Rubén Darío publishes his experimental *Azul . . .* (Azure . . .), marking the beginnings of Spanish American modernism.
- 1888–1891** The prolific Mexican writer Manuel Payno publishes series *Los bandidos de Río Frío* (The bandits of Río Frío).
- 1895** José Martí and Gutiérrez Nájera die. Rubén Darío and Leopoldo Lugones dominate the Buenos Aires literary community.

- 1896** Machado de Assis founds the Academia Brasileira de Letras, the Brazilian Academy of Letters.
- 1898** Gutiérrez Nájera's *Cuentos color de humo* (Smoke-colored stories) is published posthumously. Spain grants Cuba independence, the last stronghold in the American hemisphere of once-powerful Spanish rule.
- 1899** Birth of Jorge Luis Borges, foremost figure of the Latin American short story.
- 1904** Baldomero Lillo's *Sub terra: cuadros mineros* (Scenes of mining life) appears in Chile.
- 1906** Leopoldo Lugones publishes *Las fuerzas extrañas* (Strange Forces).
- 1910** Lugones is organizer of the cultural arm of the 1910 Centennial. Darío participates with celebratory verse. Publication of "Tuércele el cuello al cisne" (Wring the Swan's Neck) by Enrique González Martínez. Artificially, but conveniently, heralded as the "death" of Spanish American modernism.
- 1910–1920** Decade of the Mexican Revolution. This period gives rise to a vigorous non-European literature throughout Spanish America, focusing on the poor, peasant, Indian, and black.
- 1917** Publication of Horacio Quiroga's *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte* (Stories of Love, Madness, and Death), Quiroga's best-known collection and a landmark in Spanish American short story.
- 1918** *Urupês* (Bracket Fungus), the first major example of twentieth-century short fiction in Brazil, published by the social reformer José Bento Monteiro Lobato. The Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro propounds his esthetic of *creacionismo*, which in later years he will claim is the forerunner of surrealism.
- 1919** Leopoldo Lugones publishes *Los caballos de Abdera* (The Horses of Abdera).
- 1920** The Peruvian Enrique López Albújar publishes *Cuentos andinos* (Andean Stories).

- 1922** The Semana de Arte Moderna (Modern Art Week) in São Paulo inaugurates literary and artistic modernism in Brazil and contemporary vanguard culture.
- 1926** *Cuentos para una inglesa desesperada* (Stories for a Forlorn English Lady), by Eduardo Mallea, one of Argentina's foremost representatives of existential themes.
- 1929** *Lenita*, the first novel to be published by Jorge Amado, the most famous living fiction writer in Brazil.
- 1934** Mário de Andrade, one of the leading figures of Brazilian modernism, publishes *Os contos de Belazarte* (Stories of Belazarte), reflecting his attempt to compose fiction based on Portuguese spoken in Brazil.
- 1935** *La última niebla* (Last Mist), an early collection of short stories by one of Spanish America's most important women writers, María Luisa Bombal, who after 1944 lived many years in New York.
- 1936–1939** Period of the Spanish Civil War, which has a profound effect on many Latin American writers, most notably, her poets.
- 1937** Getúlio Vargas becomes dictator-president of the authoritarian Estado Novo (New State), Brazil's version of fascism. A despondent, erratic, ill Horacio Quiroga commits suicide.
- 1939–1945** The Second World War isolates South and Central America from Europe economically and culturally. Many trace cultural contemporaneity of this part of the world to the period following the end of the war.
- 1940** Puerto Rico's literary generation of 1940, including René Márques, Pedro Juan Soto, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, José Luis González, and Luis Rafael Sánchez.
- 1944** Publication of *Ficciones*, (Fictions) perhaps still the most widely known collection by Jorge Luis Borges.
- 1945** The Nobel Prize for literature is awarded to Gabriela Mistral, Chilean poet, the first Latin American to be so honored. A military coup removes Vargas from office in Brazil, and democratic government is restored.

- 1946** João Guimarães Rosa's *Sagarana* (Collection of Sagas) is published, an early example of his fiction of magical realism.
- 1950** Peru's literary generation of the 1950s, including Enrique Congrains Martín, Carlos Zavaleta, and Sebastián Salazar Bondy.
- 1951** Publication of *Un sueño realizado* (A Dream Come True) by Juan Carlos Onetti, an innovator slow to receive appropriate recognition. *Bestiario* (Bestiary) a fantasy collection by the Argentine Julio Cortázar, after Borges the most famous contemporary Latin American *cuentista*.
- 1952** *Confabulario total* (Confabulario and other inventions), a collection of fantastic tales by the Mexican Juan José Arreola.
- 1953** *El llano en llamas* (The Flaming Plain), short stories by the Mexican Juan Rulfo, acknowledged as a master for this collection, and the novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955). Publication of *Los pasos perdidos* (The Lost Steps), the most typical early example of Spanish American magical realism.
- 1954** *Los días enmascarados* (The Masked Days), short stories by Carlos Fuentes, a Mexican writer to become best known for his novels.
- 1955** Following the overthrow of the Peron dictatorship in Argentina, Borges is named Director of the National Library in Buenos Aires.
- 1956** One of Cortázar's most widely distributed collection of stories, *Final del juego* (End of the Game).
- 1960** *Life en español* short story contest elicits submission of 3149 original manuscripts. The existential and profeminist stories of Clarice Lispector's *Laços de família* (Family ties). Cuban generation of 1960, including Norberto Fuentes, Jesús Díaz Rodríguez, Eduardo Heras León, and Juan Luis Herrero.
- 1961** Borges shares with Samuel Beckett the International Publishers Formentor Prize.

- 1962** Translation into English of Borges's *Ficciones*, opening the decade of the boom in Latin American literature in English translation. Gabriel García Márquez, probably the Latin American prose writer most widely read in English, publishes the stories of *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (in English, included in *No One Writes to the Colonel and Other Stories*).
- 1964–1970** *La onda*, (the wave), movement of young Mexican writers, including José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz, Juan Tovar, and René Avilés Fabila.
- 1964** The government of Jõa Goulart, amid widespread fears of its leftist policies, is deposed by the military in Brazil; intense violence and abridgment of civil liberties and human rights ensue.
- 1965** *Los mejores cuentos de José Donoso* (The Best Short Stories of José Donoso) a Chilean writer; most of the stories are included in *Charleston & Other Stories*.
- 1967** Miguel Angel Asturias, Guatemalan novelist and short-story writer noted for his mythic and political writing, is awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.
- 1970** *The Cardinal Points of Borges* is a special issue of *Books Abroad* in book form, dedicated to Jorge Luis Borges. Salvador Allende is Chile's first democratically elected marxist president.
- 1971** *Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana*, special issue dedicated to the short story. Pablo Neruda, Latin America's most widely translated poet, wins the Nobel Prize for literature. *Review* runs special supplement on the writing of Gabriel García Márquez. *Studies in Short Fiction* dedicated to the Latin American short story.
- 1972** Winter issue of *Review* focuses on Julio Cortázar. Fall issue of *Review* focuses on José Donoso.
- 1973** In Chile, a counter-coup of the military deposes Allende government; Allende dies of suicide, or murder. *Modern Fiction Studies* 19 dedicated to Borges. *Revista Iberoamericana* 39 dedicated to Cortázar.
- 1974** Ernesto Geisel assumes presidency in Brazil as first elected president since the 1964 coup.
- 1976** *Books Abroad* 50 dedicated to Julio Cortázar.
- 1977** *Revista Iberoamericana* 43 dedicated to Borges.
- 1980** *Jaula de palabras* (Cage of words), an anthology of fifty-three Mexican short stories edited by Gustavo Sainz. *Review* 27 dedicated to contemporary Chilean literature. *Agua quemada* (Burnt Water), latest collection by Carlos Fuentes. (The stories under this title in English are accompanied by a number from previous collections.)

1930s has become less dependent on the tricky plot, the dramatic climax, and the ironic twist. This tendency is apparent not only in the two stories compared here, but also in "Una cáscara en la banquetta," "La plaza de las carretas," and "Warma Kukay."

Return to Innovation and Cosmopolitanism: The Early 1940s

In 1939 María Luisa Bombal (Chile, 1910–1980) published "El árbol" ("The Tree"), a key work in Spanish American literature. This story confirms and strengthens the kind of narrative represented earlier by "Conversación" and earlier still by "Tachas." From the publication of "El árbol," the regionalism—cosmopolitanism pendulum swings again toward the latter.

Bombal tells the story of a rare personality—a woman who is outwardly unsure of herself, but who, deep within, knows exactly who she is and what she wants. The story is framed by a piano recital attended by Brígida, the protagonist; the music by Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin, in that order, corresponds to different stages in her life, evoking memories that are intensely confessional, narrated in third person. The story is what Brígida experiences; the reality develops as she sees it. Bombal very unobtrusively furnishes the reader some important information near the beginning of the story: that Brígida is not an intellectual but she is a very sensitive person, that she is separated from her husband, and that he is older than she. This information evokes the questions, are these facts related to each other and, if so, how?

The exposition in "El árbol" includes information about Brígida's childhood, so the story covers a considerable number of years. As the narrator concentrates on answering those questions, there is no feeling that excess information is being offered. As a small child, the protagonist lived in a situation that laid the foundation of her personality, and the narrative conflict is between her deep emotion and her inability to express what she feels.

This unusual little girl eventually marries one of her father's friends. Thus the conflict, while remaining basically the same, now metamorphoses into her passion versus her husband's reserve. Brígida's disappointment turns into resignation and the conflict then is best described as her desire for excitement instead of the calm that she decides is her fate. This condition does not last, however, and she develops a private life, a world of her own that functions with reference

to what she sees from the window of her dressing room and focuses on a tree that becomes symbolic of the joys that are absent from her real life but present in her dreams. The alterations of narrative conflict that reflect Brígida's feelings have taken place as follows: deep emotion to passion to desire for excitement to life in her imaginary world. On the side involving her husband, the stages are inability to express herself to husband's reserve to calm resignation to unsatisfactory love life.

With the destruction of her imaginary world Brígida is finally able to say, at least in her own way, what she has been unable to express; at which point the two lines of conflict coincide. As Bombal brings the story to an end, it no longer matters whether Brígida's ultimate expressive self-realization happens before the recital or as a result of the memories stimulated by the music. "El árbol" makes an interesting comparison with "La lluvia" and "Conversación." In still a third social context, it is the story of a couple in a troubled relationship, of conflict between meaning and meaninglessness. As the boy in "La lluvia" acts as an agent of resolution, in "El árbol," the imaginary life of the protagonist functions in a similar way.

It is quite accurate—and probably useful—to refer to "El árbol" as a psychological story, but that is not a satisfactory generic term. Hernández Catá's "Noventa días" may also be called psychological, but it is an entirely different kind of story, more like *Madame Bovary*, with the narrative clearly developed. "El árbol" takes the reader inside the making of the narrative. This difference is characteristic of many stories of this period and it is created by changes in narrative strategy, even in the attitude of the author toward fiction, rather than by innovations in subject matter or theme. Speaking of Efrén Hernández, Luis Leal says the author is more interested in the simple pleasure of narrating than in telling what happens.⁶ This quality is apparent in "Tachas" and is even more important in a later story, "Cerrazón sobre Nicomaco" (1946; *Nicomaco Closed In*), in which the narrator directs himself specifically to his readers (or listeners) while in the act of narrating, refers to himself as "I" and also as "Nicomaco," and comments frequently on the act of narrating the story. For example: "Let us blow, as time blows upon our lives, let us blow upon the edge of the notebook made of these pages. Let unread pages turn; unread and unwritten, let the pages turn." Or an entirely different kind of reference: "Between the preceding line and this one, a real eternity intervenes."

Hernández has the ability to be funny and absolutely serious at the same time. There are moments when his stories seem surrealistic. His

narrator-protagonists are amusingly self-deprecatory. Nicomaco, in one part of the story, satirizes the inconsequential bureaucrat in his own person. But the story also has its tragic side, and although one may not always be quite certain what is going on in "Cerrazón sobre Nicomaco," it seems fairly safe to assume a case of paranoia, or possible masochism. It ends with the protagonist's account of a repeated dream of being closed in, but by his own effort. Clearly, this is a psychological story of still a different kind.

It is well to mention Juan Bosch (Dominican Republic, 1909–) at this point because his work is decidedly *criollista*, and his presence is a reminder that the literary pendulum has not swung all the way to one end of its arc. Bosch's best known story is "La mujer" (1933; The Woman) which excels in narrative structure of two carefully balanced criss-crossing themes and concludes with an ironic twist that seemed stranger three decades ago than it does now.⁷ The irony is that a woman kills the man who defends her against an abusive husband. The theme was not new in literature, but was generally taken to be characteristic of an identifiable socioeconomic circumstance.

Bosch is a realist *cuenterista*, a good one, but different from the majority of more innovative writers of the 1940s. "La mujer" was published in the mid 1930s and is quite appropriate to that time; however, Bosch continued to write in a similar manner while the short story, as a genre, was developing in other directions. "Dos pesos de agua" ("Two Dollars' Worth of Water") was published in 1941. The material is folkloric and the setting is another drought. It also contains an element of fantasy and an ironic twist. The principal character is a woman who refuses to leave her farm in spite of the drought. An outside narrator tells her story and inserts the fantastic element that she could not know.

As her neighbors leave one by one, she gives each two pesos for the souls in purgatory, in exchange for rain. The fantastic elements enter in the form of a scene in purgatory in which the council regrets having overlooked all this prepayment and decides to make just retribution. Since even one gift of two pesos is much larger than any other single gift, the accumulated funds pay for an excessive amount of rain. The theme of the story gives it a tone of legend, and this effect is enhanced by the scene in purgatory. The end is tragic, not simply because of the rain itself, but because the woman's immeasurable faith causes her to lose everything.

Lino Novás Calvo (Cuba, 1905–1975) deals with humble people in an entirely different way. While maintaining a keen awareness of the

unfortunate circumstances and attitudes that may affect their lives, his own attitude as a *cuenterista* allows him to see them as a part of society rather than as alienated from it. For the most part, he accomplishes this difference by manipulating the point of view, that is, who is seeing what we are told, rather than whose voice is telling it.

His "No le sé decir" (1946; I Don't Know What to Say) presents a peasant's dilemma through the eyes of a compassionate physician. Novás Calvo's narration seems straightforward; it opens with some necessary background, then suggests the character of the physician before beginning the action. Much of the interest in the story is created by withholding information while he develops the characters of the peasants whose standard response is, "No le sé decir." The physician suffers the frustration caused by this inability or disinclination to communicate. In turn, his attempts to help are limited when his old Ford ambulance gets stuck on a country road. Two women whose husbands are engaged in a knife fight have come to him for help, but give him little information. Their hermetic character is emphasized when they remain stolidly seated in the ambulance while the doctor tries to extricate the mired wheel.

The conflict in "No le sé decir" is especially interesting because on the first level of awareness it is life versus death, and it is the same on the deepest level. Between these two levels, there are several contrasts, created by different incidents, that are interesting variations on the basic conflict. The life-versus-death contrast is mirrored in the difference between activity and resignation. When the two women come to the doctor for help, even that small act is something of a victory for him. Other metaphors of the contrast are communication versus "no le sé decir," the ambulance in motion versus the ambulance mired, and the active physician versus the stoic women.

Novás Calvo's story material may be either rural or urban; whatever the setting, the central incident is supported by interesting characterization. "No le sé decir" portrays the uncommunicative aspect of the peasant personality, but it suggests a full characterization of the doctor even though only a few details are made explicit. In "'Aliados' y 'Alemanes'" (1946; 'Allies' and 'Germans') the central event is an act of vandalism provoked by the rivalry between drivers of the old carriages in Havana and drivers of new Ford taxis. The enormous appeal of this story, however, is created by the narrator who remembers the rivalry when he was a boy and was involved with both sides of the fight. We know what the narrator knows and the author scrupulously avoids

revealing more. Another story, "La noche de Ramón Yendía" (1942; "The Dark Night of Ramón Yendía"), is a terrifying chase, both psychological and real. Novás Calvo creates an intimate mood of terror by combining exterior narration with passages in stream of consciousness.

Cuentistas in the 1940s used both rural and urban story material without making one seem more regionalistic than the other. Novás Calvo's urban stories are as typical of a time and place as "No le sé decil." Familiarity with the story material and narrative strategies that cultivate the reader's sensitivity to detailed characterization are primary qualities in his work, just as they are in Bombal's "El árbol." Similar qualities are apparent in José Revueltas's (Mexico, 1914–1976) "La soledad" (1944; Solitude). It is important to note that, while "El árbol" and "La soledad" are less related to a specific place than any of the three stories by Novás Calvo, they are clearly related to a time when anguish or alienation was the most frequently discussed characteristic of modern individuals.

"La soledad" opens in the middle of a sentence: ". . . with the desk sergeant," from a fragment of dialogue. Immediately the narrator's voice makes us aware of the sergeant himself, and tells us how he perceived the spoken words. Once this point of view is established—almost immediately—Revueltas maintains it throughout the story. The officer is referred to by his title rather than by a personal name, yet a large part of the story concerns his difficulty associating self-awareness with his identity as desk sergeant. A man who claims to be a murderer makes contact with the officer, who, throughout the story, is continually aware of the problem of identity, of the commitment of individuals to each other, and of the relationship of doing to being. The conflict between individual identity and alienation persists until the end of the story, at which point the officer signs a report with his name, not merely his title.

Revueltas is one of the most versatile *cuentistas* in Latin America. His settings and narrative procedures vary so greatly that he is not easily classifiable. "El encuentro" (1940; Encounter, or perhaps, Discovery) is an especially poignant story in which one unfortunate person establishes a relationship with another outcast. The setting is a small town, although it does not matter what town it may be, or even whether it is a neighborhood in a large city. In this very short work, unusual behavior or unusual ugliness places a character in the role of outcast. Revueltas depicts one of the principals from the point of view of other people in the town; he shows the other principal from the narrator's point of view, but describes how the people reacted to her. This difference serves as an identifying device in the brief characterizations.

A third Revueltas story, "Dios en la tierra" (1944; God On This Earth), is very different, but no less typical of the author's work. It is more easily understood if one knows something of Mexican history. In the 1920s the anticlerical policies of the Mexican government were militantly confronted by religious traditionalists, with the consequent atrocities that religious wars often inspire. Religious traditionalism was a popular sentiment, so the federal soldiers were not always enthusiastic about enforcing the law. Public school teachers were often in the position of being enemies of the people because they represented the progressive attitude of the government. "Dios en la tierra" tells the story of a detachment of federal soldiers who are in enemy territory where they are denied water. They face the people's hate or, as Revueltas puts it, "The town was closed with hate and stones." The story focuses on this hate and the evil it creates, the suffering of the soldiers and the brutal murder of the teacher who tried to help them. Revueltas uses metaphors of dryness or hardness, and constantly repeats the word God. Although no one could avoid feeling sympathy for those who are mistreated, this story depends not on characterization but on an idea—the notion of religious fanaticism; while it is not an essay, it does convey a message. Characters are used to bring the notion to life, rather than to reflect a human condition.

Jorge Luis Borges (1899–) does something similar in "El Sur" (1944; "The South"). This story has nothing to do with a religious war, but is based on a notion that, again, is better understood if one knows something about Argentina. Although it is an uneasy comparison, one may reasonably say that the South in Argentina has many of the connotations that the West has in the United States—adventure, manliness, escape from urban dreariness, and freedom. Borges tells the story of a very unadventurous man in Buenos Aires who goes South, either in reality or in illusion, and is trapped into an immediate demonstration of his prowess as a fighter. The characterization deals with two aspects of the man, his quiet self and the frontiersman. He is the personification of the idea of going South.

Much of the charm of "El Sur" comes from the skill with which the story is constructed. One cannot be certain what is reality and what is illusion. It is important to recognize Borges's insistence on making a good fiction, especially since many modern *cuentistas* have tended to deemphasize the clever fiction in favor of perceptive characterization. It might seem, therefore, that Borges is no more than a literary reactionary looking back toward past masters of the short story, but that is the case only to a limited extent. He is indeed well informed in the tradition

of the genre, and he readily admits his special interest in several writers. Borges does more than cultivate the carefully made story, however; he persistently bases his works on notions or concepts that turn out to be of more enduring interest than the characters as individual people.

"Las ruinas circulares" (1944; "The Circular Ruins"), unlike "El Sur," is not only based on a concept, it is based on one that is not related to the reality in which Borges lives. The author might have known a person like the protagonist of "El Sur," and he certainly knows the concepts behind both stories, but he does not know a philosopher who decided to dream another man into existence only to discover that he is himself the product of another's dream. "Las ruinas circulares" is a wonderful story that can be read and enjoyed on different levels or within different frames of reference. There is a basic reading that begins with a sense of mysterious origin, flirts with reality, and finally discovers the trick in the story. A "mythic" reading may begin with a sense of primordial reality, progress through an ordering of chaos, and end with the knowledge that the source and the product are of the same order. A metafictional reading may find this to be the story of the creative act. In the final analysis, all the readings are one—the experience of the story itself, and this experience is the narration of a concept.

"Las ruinas circulares" is a long way from Quiroga's "La gallina degollada," and there may be echoes of "Juan Darién" as far as narration of a concept is concerned; Borges is as pleased to surprise us in "Las ruinas circulares" as Quiroga is at the end of "La gallina degollada." From Quiroga to Borges, the Spanish American short story exploits many themes and variations, and is characterized by fascinating experiments in the strategies of narrating. Perhaps Borges himself is the one to write the history of this genre that is always changing, but is always the same.

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THE SPANISH AMERICAN SHORT STORY FROM BORGES TO THE PRESENT

George R. McMurray

1940–1949: New Directions

Since 1940 the Spanish American short story has displayed a growing diversity in its development. In general, the genre has become increasingly sophisticated, its universal themes and experimental techniques having served to reflect the complex realities of today's rapidly changing world. The tendencies toward universality and experimentation can be traced in part to sociohistorical factors such as the arrival in Spanish America of many highly educated European immigrants during World War II, the unprecedented growth of urban centers, and progress in public education, which has created a larger and more intellectually oriented reading public. At the same time it should be pointed out that most contemporary Spanish American writers remain committed to the betterment of their underdeveloped, strife-ridden societies, although their ideology is often embedded in the texture of their creations.

A logical starting point for a discussion of contemporary Spanish American short fiction is the work of the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges whose metaphysical tales of the 1940s gave birth to a new literary era. Written in a highly compressed, classical style with an occasional baroque twist, these tales present a series of hallucinatory, although hauntingly real, visions of the absurd human experience. Perhaps Borges's most significant metaphysical *ficción* is "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" (1941; "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"), a combination story and