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**Twayne's Critical History
of the Short Story**



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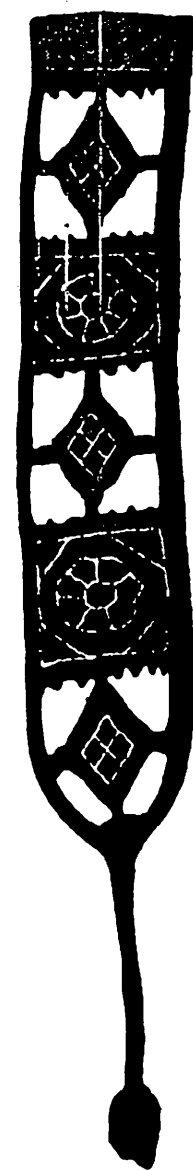
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**The
LATIN
AMERICAN
Short Story**
A Critical History

Margaret Sayers Peden, Editor
University of Missouri-Columbia



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

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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

essay about a planet named Tlön, which although described at length in an encyclopedia, turns out to be the invention of a group of scholars. Tlön is presented as a complete cosmos governed by strict, carefully formulated, but provisional laws based on philosophical idealism, that is, the belief that material objects are ideas in our minds, with no independent existence. Since the inhabitants of Tlön conceive of the universe as a series of mental processes, it is not surprising that their language has no nouns for material objects, nor that psychology has become their principal scientific discipline. The appearance of philosophical materialism and pantheism in their midst scandalizes them, but as the years pass they gradually accept certain tenets of these heretical philosophies, thus demonstrating the provisional nature of laws formulated by man. The story ends on an ironic note when two material objects (a compass from Tlön and a heavy, cone-shaped statue representing a Tlönian deity) make their appearance in the real world, and the inhabitants of Earth become fascinated with an encyclopedia describing the well-ordered, though fictitious, planet. Meanwhile, the story's skeptical narrator, whom we are tempted to identify with Borges, remains indifferent to the new philosophy, realizing that it is just another chapter in the ever-evolving history of ideas.

The reflection of an encyclopedia in a mirror at the beginning of the story provides an opening into its labyrinthine structure as well as a clue to its meaning. Borges suggests that just as mirrors reproduce illusions of reality, encyclopedic knowledge is nothing more than an illusory mirror of the human mind, a vast, but well-ordered labyrinth that stands in sharp contrast to the undecipherable labyrinth of the real world. Thus the encyclopedia of Tlön emerges as a reflection of a reflection, all of which suggests that for human beings reality is not what things are but how they see them artificially categorized and distorted by logic. Like all of Borges's metaphysical tales, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" negates reason by subverting objective reality and replacing it with a poetically conceived, hallucinatory creation of language. As we shall see in "La muerte y la brújula" and "El Aleph," irony and the magic of art constitute Borges's principal weapons against a world he can neither organize nor understand.

"La muerte y la brújula" (1944; "Death and the Compass") is another of Borges's seminal works, primarily because of its presentation of life as an absurd labyrinth created by human reason. A compelling detective story with profound philosophical implications and ironic overtones, this tale tells of a duel of wits between a clever sleuth named Erik

Lönnrot and an equally clever gangster, Red Scharlach. The plot describes a series of murders, the first of which induces the "pure reasoner," Lönnrot, to immerse himself in the study of the cabala to discover the culprit. This arcane subject, which fascinates Lönnrot but actually has nothing to do with the crime, brings him face to face with Scharlach who, it turns out, has set a trap for him all along.

"La muerte y la brújula" dramatizes not only the limits of reason, but its pitfalls. Lönnrot is doomed from the beginning because, as Treviranus (the simple-minded police commissioner) surmises, the first murder is the result of chance, an element Lönnrot rejects out of hand. Thus his efforts to solve the crime as he would a mind-boggling puzzle lead him into a diamond-shaped labyrinth that parodies the reasoning mind's fragmented view of random reality and, at the same time, suggests the absurdity of the confrontation between man and the irreducible world. As in several of Borges's tales, the climax occurs when the rationalistic protagonist meets his double, or alter ego, and falls victim to annihilation. Indeed, Lönnrot and Scharlach are more than likely meant to be doubles. Not only are their names similar (*rot* and *scharlach* mean red in German), but their minds function with the same rigid logic. Moreover, their antithetical natures, or inverted mirror images, are demonstrated by their roles as detective/criminal and pursuer/pursued, roles that ultimately become ironically reversed.

Metaphysical irony, or a striving man's defeat by a supreme being plotting against him, is another major ingredient. As D. P. Gallagher has stated¹, the story could be read as a fable about a man (Lönnrot) who attempts to explain God's (Scharlach's) deeds without suspecting that he is doomed from the start because God has placed him in a labyrinth, granting him limited success and then invalidating it by killing him. Lönnrot remains a prisoner of reason even in the face of death, plotting his afterlife duel of wits with Scharlach along a straight line, a reference to the maze described by Zeno of Elea² and here a metaphor of eternity. The title also anticipates the ironic ending because it is the compass, an instrument designed to guide its user to safety, that leads Lönnrot to Triste-le-Roy where he meets Red Scharlach and his tragic fate.

"La muerte y la brújula" parodies the modern detective story, Lönnrot bringing to mind the brilliant Sherlock Holmes and Treviranus the plodding Dr. Watson. It is a masterpiece of short fiction because it deftly fuses form and content; that is, its convoluted structure conveys the theme that for reasoning man, life is an absurd labyrinth designed more by chance than by logic. This theme of the absurd, which receives more

detailed attention in connection with "El guardagujas" (1952), by Juan José Arreola, becomes a major element in subsequent Spanish American fiction.

"El Aleph" (1949; "The Aleph") is perhaps Borges's finest example of self-conscious metafiction, a work in which the creative process itself, or the technique of writing a story, becomes the subject matter. In addition to describing Borges's esthetic concerns, this well-known tale presents some of his basic philosophical preoccupations and his ironic view of the Argentine literary scene. The first-person-narrator, who refers to himself as Borges and who will be referred to as the fictional Borges, is still grieving over the death of his beloved Beatriz Viterbo. Each year to commemorate her birthday he pays a visit to the home of her cousin, Carlos Argentino Danieri, a pompous, mediocre poet who is writing a long descriptive poem entitled "The Earth." His inspiration for this poem is the Aleph, a magical disk-shaped object he has discovered in his cellar and which contains a simultaneous vision of the entire world. (We are told in the story's epilogue that the Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and that for the cabalists it signifies limitless, pure divinity.) When Argentino shows the Aleph to the fictional Borges, the latter is thoroughly dazzled by it, but refuses to discuss the marvelous object because in it he discovers some obscene letters written to Argentino by Beatriz.

When the fictional Borges attempts to describe the Aleph, he experiences a sense of inadequacy because the all-encompassing vision he saw was simultaneous, and language is a lineal medium. Or, as the real Borges has stated on several occasions, reality is not verbal. Thus unlike the pompous Argentino, the fictional Borges forgets the Aleph, realizing that his linguistic description of it is inferior to its visible reality. Time soon erodes his memory of it just as it has eroded his memory of Beatriz's face. The real Borges, however, succeeds ingeniously in creating a symbolic Aleph, which as we shall see, not only surpasses the original in subtlety, but outlasts it.

Even the most casual reader will perceive certain parallels between the Aleph and Beatriz, both having been described at some length, and with the passage of time, both having faded from the fictional Borges's memory. (Beatriz is first presented in Argentino's home when the narrator gazes fondly at pictures taken of her during various stages of her life. Subsequently she is described by the fictional Borges, and finally the total vision of her is rounded out in his mind when he sees her obscene letters and her corpse in the Aleph.)

Although this vision of Beatriz is lost by the fictional Borges (the narrator), for both the real Borges and the reader it not only retains its totality but acquires a special significance. The real Borges, understanding that he can never capture the simultaneous vision of the Aleph in sequential language, creates the total picture of Beatriz within the story as a symbolic version of the Aleph. It is a version that the reader must grasp intuitively by combining all the story's parts into a simultaneous view of the whole. Thus the total fictional impression corresponds to the impression of totality conveyed to the fictional Borges by the Aleph. In fact, the symbolic Aleph (the story of Beatriz) is superior to Argentino's Aleph (which is destroyed when his house is torn down) because as a work of art it overcomes the limitations of language and conveys a permanent, intuited reality that transcends the barriers of logic and negates the erosion of chronologic time.

"El Aleph" can also be read as an example of the metafictional story that feeds on another literary work to create its own essence, the other work in this case being Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. One of Carlos Argentino Danieri's surnames combines the names of the medieval Italian poet; because Carlos Argentino leads Borges to the Aleph in his cellar, he can also be identified with Virgil, Dante's guide in the "Inferno;" and Beatriz Viterbo recalls Dante's beloved, not only because of her name, but also because during her lifetime she treated Borges with disdain, just as Beatrice treated Dante disdainfully in Paradise. These parallels serve to enrich the literary texture of Borges's story which, when read in this light, becomes a vast work of art in miniature, just as the Aleph represents the entire world in miniature. "El Aleph" is a story about a story; its themes are the elusiveness of reality and the efforts of an author (the real Borges) to capture this reality symbolically. The fact that this tale exists in the web of *The Divine Comedy* lends it an aura of myth and suggests that, given the inability of language to represent reality, the only stories that can be written are stories about fiction.

"Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," "La muerte y la brújula," and "El Aleph" all dramatize the negation of reason; the first parodies encyclopedic knowledge and philosophical systems; the second underscores the role of chance in determining human destiny; and the third demonstrates the superiority of intuitive art over mimetic realism as a means of capturing a reality eroded by time. Together these tales synthesize the principal elements of Borges's *Weltanschauung* and esthetics.

About the same time that Borges was creating his metaphysical fantasies, the Uruguayan Juan Carlos Onetti (1909–) began writing

short fiction that in some respects resembles that of the Argentine master. Onetti's "Un sueño realizado" (written in 1941, published in a collection in 1951; "A Dream Come True") is narrated by a retired theater director, Langman, who recalls that many years previously, at the request of a strange, middle-aged woman, he organized a single performance of a play based on a dream she described to him. The story and the play end simultaneously when the woman, having portrayed a youthful version of herself in her "sueño realizado," died on the stage. Like Borges, Onetti reveals a marked preoccupation with time; both depict psychological doubles; and just as the imaginary planet of Tlön becomes fused with the narrator's world, the woman's play and Langman's tale ultimately become one and the same.

"Un sueño realizado" also illustrates the surrealists' search for a certain point in the mind where life and death, past and future, and reality and imagination cease to be perceived as contradictions. Onetti's fusion of opposites creates an aura of ambiguity, often tinged with irony, that dominates the content as well as the structural patterning of his tale. For example, the mocking allusions to *Hamlet* expressed by Blanes (one of Langman's actors) becomes a leitmotif suggesting the artistic perfection Langman will never achieve as well as the work-within-a-work technique that in both Shakespeare's tragedy and Onetti's story reveals a climactic moment of truth. (*Hamlet* discovers his uncle's guilt in the same way that Onetti reveals the tragic reality of life.) The woman is portrayed through a series of striking contradictions, first being described as middle-aged, threatened by physical decay, and mad, and subsequently as youthful, childlike, and strange but not demented. Blanes informs Langman that the woman wants to relive her dream because it gave her a moment of happiness, although, he adds, the word "happiness" may not accurately describe her feelings. In the final lines, after the woman's unexpected demise, Langman enigmatically states that he understood what she was searching for, that "it was all clear, like one of those things you know as a child but later on find words are useless to explain." By reenacting her dream, the woman probably hoped to escape from the drab reality she, like Blanes and Langman, found increasingly intolerable. Onetti's response to her dilemma is the dramatization of a past moment of happiness (her dream) followed immediately by her death, a juxtaposition of dream and reality that constitutes a surrealistic moment of insight into the absurd human experience.

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980) of Cuba is another innovator who uses time as a major ingredient in his work. In "Semejante a la noche" (written in 1947, published in a collection in 1958; "Like the Night"), a first-person narrator of shifting identities relates analogous episodes from six moments of history: the Trojan War, the sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of America, the seventeenth-century French expeditions to America, the Crusades, World War I, and World War II. The narrators are all young, inexperienced warriors whose archetypal behavior prior to embarking on their dangerous missions suggests a striking circularity in time and, consequently, a negation of linear history and its implications of progress. Thus both theme and structure are conveyed by a series of motifs, which include the loading of ships, the soldier's exalted pride in his profession, the desire for wealth and glory, the belief in patriotic ideals and religious doctrine, the yearning for last-minute sexual adventures, and the gnawing fear of death.

Given the repetitions of the plot, it may surprise the reader that Carpentier has meticulously documented the historical events he describes. This strengthens his possible intent to prove unequivocally that time is circular and history repetitious. The author's preoccupation with time is further demonstrated by the story's twenty-four-hour framework, the first and final episodes occurring at dawn on consecutive days, and the remaining episodes occurring successively in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, and at nightfall.

This circular structure also implies condemnation of war and negation of the invincible hero myth, for through the technique of repetition with variation, noble ideals and patriotic fervor gradually give way to skepticism and cynicism. For example, the initial segment presents an idealized picture of Helen, who must be set free at all cost from her cruel captors; whereas on the final page we are told that the accounts of her mistreatment were propaganda and that the real cause of the war was the desire for economic gain. The last narrator, moreover, is reduced to the role of anti-hero when he finds himself incapable of satisfying the sexual demands of his sweetheart.

Carpentier's tale encompasses much of Western civilization: the abrupt temporal dislocations, shifting point of view, and exotic, baroque vocabulary lend a magical, mirror-like quality to the chain of events. The message conveyed by this ingenious montage of historical moments is that although human circumstances may vary from century to century, the human condition remains essentially unchanged.

The Argentine Adolfo Bioy Casares (1914–) takes quite a different view of time, using it as a tool to dissolve objective reality and create his psychological fantasies. Typical of this author's short fiction is "En memoria de Paulina" (1948; "In Memory of Pauline"), the story of a young writer (the narrator) who loses his lifelong friend and fiancée (Paulina) to an aggressive colleague named Julius Montero. On his return to Argentina after two years of study in London, the narrator has a fond, if brief and somewhat strange, reunion with Paulina, but the following day he learns that she had been murdered by Montero on the eve of his (the narrator's) departure for London. The narrator concludes that the image of Paulina that appeared to him was not her ghost, but the monstrous projection of his jealous rival's imagination.

Although Tzvetan Todorov would consider this story an example of the marvelous, other critics, including Ana María Barrenechea, place it in the category of the fantastic.³ Bioy Casares carefully anticipates the denouement through a series of mysterious, and seemingly insignificant, details that ultimately explain the intriguing temporal discrepancies as well as Paulina's behavior during her last encounter with the narrator. This hallucinatory vision of Paulina assumes greater plausibility, however, if Montero is seen as the narrator's inverted mirror image or antithetical self. The two characters are indeed opposites, the narrator emerging as shy and highly cultured and Montero (the name means hunter in Spanish) as vulgar, vigorous, and, in his own words, "a savage." Although both are writers, the narrator is unsure of his creative powers and even fears Paulina might discover that he is an "imposter." By contrast, Montero's self-confidence becomes evident when he brandishes his voluminous manuscript with the air of a tyrant just before reading it in its entirety to the docile narrator. The term imposter refers to the narrator's dubious ability as a writer as well as to his inability to overcome his narcissism—he sees Paulina as a mere reflection of himself—and prove himself as a lover. Thus he solves his dilemma by imagining her cruel rejection of him in favor of Montero and, consequently, her tragic fate. Montero's consuming jealousy not only bolsters the narrator's deflated ego, but serves as a tool for achieving his revenge.

The story's underlying irony derives from the narrator's unawareness of his irrational psychic impulses, a situation that leads him to his fantastic, but almost logical, explanation of the strange sequence of events he has envisioned. Like Borges and Onetti, Bioy Casares dramatizes the instability and disunity of the human personality,

another theme that assumes greater importance in subsequent Spanish American fiction.

1950–1959: Protest and Universality

The most noteworthy writers of short fiction during the 1940s reveal a marked tendency toward universality, emphasizing metaphysical, literary, and psychological themes. By contrast, the works of the 1950s convey a stronger awareness of the political and social problems plaguing much of Spanish America. A case in point is "Espuma y nada más" (1950; "Just Lather, that's All"), by the Colombian Hernando Téllez (1908–1966), a story based on the civil war (*la violencia*) that wracked his native land from 1948 until well into the 1960s. A barber (the first-person narrator) acting as a secret informer for the rebel cause describes his distraught state of mind on finding himself obliged to shave an army officer, Captain Torres, who has resorted to torture and mass executions to quell the guerrilla forces in the region. The story ends with an ironic twist that alters its esthetic form as well as its overall meaning.

"Espuma y nada más" is a masterfully structured tale that owes its tautness and climactic denouement to its subtly conceived characters and its various levels of conflict. The most obvious of these is the psychological duel between the two antithetical antagonists. Because the story is told almost entirely in the words of the barber, the reader witnesses his inner tension as he attempts to mask cowardice with professional pride, reminding himself that his duty to shave Torres to perfection precludes cutting his throat as the rebels would expect of him. An entire community in conflict is evoked when the narrator imagines that were he to kill Torres, he would be proclaimed a hero by some and by others a murderer.

Irony, the story's major structural element, is a balancing device that modifies opposites and shapes the reader's response. Thus throughout much of the narrator's monologue the reader tends to sympathize with him and loathe the brutal Torres, assuming, like the narrator, that Torres is unaware of the narrator's activities with the underground. As he leaves the barbershop, however, Torres reveals that he came there to find out whether the narrator would kill him. At this moment both the narrator and the reader become victims of irony, realizing that Torres has deliberately courted danger and, like the typical Latin macho, remained stoically calm in its presence. In this light, Torres elicits a measure of respect, while, by comparison, the weak, razor-wielding

narrator is seen as an anti-hero. The latter referred to in the title probably symbolizes the narrator's empty talk of blood revenge and his incapacity for decisive action.

As indicated, the philosophy of the Absurd began to manifest itself in the Spanish American short story during and immediately following World War II. According to Albert Camus, this concept stems from the clash between reasoning man and the unreasonable world, which ignores his quest for the meaning of life. An awakening to the Absurd occurs when the individual, suddenly aware of the lack of purpose in his daily routine, asks himself the crucial question, "Why?" An excellent fictional representation of Camus's philosophy is "El guardagujas" (1952; "The Switchman") by Juan José Arreola (1918–), who is occasionally referred to as Mexico's Borges. In this often-anthologized tale a stranger burdened with a heavy suitcase arrives at a deserted station at the exact hour his train is supposed to leave for his destination, "T." As he gazes impatiently at the tracks that seem to melt away in the distance, an old man (the switchman) carrying a tiny red lantern appears from out of nowhere and proceeds to relate to the horrified stranger a series of preposterous anecdotes illustrating the unreliability of the train service in that country and suggesting to him that boarding the train is more important than worrying about a precise destination. In the final lines of the story the far-off whistle of a train is heard, but on inquiring again where the stranger wants to go, the switchman receives the answer "X" instead of "T." At this moment the old man vanishes, leaving only the tiny light of his lantern bobbing up and down before the noisily approaching locomotive.

"El guardagujas" is rife with symbols that convey its philosophical meaning and determine its esthetic form. The railroad journey can be construed as a metaphor of life and the act of boarding the train as an acceptance of its challenges and uncertainties. The stranger is a non-Absurd man at the beginning of the story; his heavy suitcase represents the burden of reason he carries around with him. The railroad tracks melting away in the distance, however, symbolize the uncertain destiny he will eventually accept, and the fact that deceased travelers are taken, without fail, to the station directed by their tickets denotes death as man's only definite, predetermined destination, a fundamental Absurdist idea.

In an amusing anecdote, the old man describes what happened when a train arrived at an abyss over which no bridge had been constructed. Instead of turning back, the passengers took the train apart and carried it

piece by piece to the other side where they reassembled it and continued their journey. In Camus's terms these passengers represent Absurd heroes whose revolt against the Absurd must take the form of action. The stranger's change of destination from "T" to "X" at the end of the story, moreover, indicates his acceptance of the Absurd unknown. The fact that here he is referred to for the first time as the traveler instead of the stranger underscores his newly acquired role as a man (committed to the struggle against chaotic reality) with the potential of becoming a hero like the passengers who carried the train across the abyss.

The stranger's transformation, the mysterious disappearance of the switchman, and the train's arrival, set the stage for the ensuing Absurd journey. It would seem that the tiny lantern confronting the oncoming train symbolizes the clash between limited human reason and the world's dark forces of destruction. It would seem also that the title of the story refers not only to a railroad switchman, but to a kind of catalyst whose role is to awaken the protagonist to his condition and switch him onto another track. Finally, it is likely that the switchman represents the stranger's alter ego, and the entire story a metaphor of existential man's awakening to Camus's question, "Why?"

On an esthetic level, the symbol imagery and structural balance of Arreola's tale demonstrate his attempt to give artistic coherence to the elusive reality that he, as an Absurd creator, finds unacceptable. Thus when the tension between the stranger and his alter ego is finally dissolved, it is replaced immediately by the confrontation between the traveler and his destiny, a destiny rendered absurd by the tiny lantern of reason that appropriately frames the story.

The two leading Mexican writers of the 1950s, Arreola and Juan Rulfo (1918–), are exponents of very different literary trends. As we have seen, the former is the creator of highly amusing imaginary works based on ideas taken from a broad cultural spectrum; the latter is a pessimistic, hermetic portrayer of rural life in his native state of Jalisco. Despite their regional settings and sordid, naturalistic themes, however, Rulfo's stories, somewhat in the manner of Faulkner's, attain universal status by exposing the inner lives of their protagonists and thus the core of all humanity.

Rulfo makes effective use of the interior monologue in several of his works, one of these being "Es que somos muy pobres" (1953; "We're Very Poor"). The unnamed child narrator describes a series of disasters that has befallen his peasant family: the recent death of an aunt, a flood that carries away a cow given to his sister Tacha by her father for her

dowry, and the ruin of two older sisters who have become prostitutes. In view of these events, the story's initial sentence, "Everything is going from bad to worse here," would seem to imply that for the narrator and his family, life is fraught with misfortunes greater than death. This tragic vision of the world is underscored by their fatalistic acceptance of adversity, perhaps a result of their symbiotic relationship with hostile nature. A series of parallels serves not only to convey this intricate relationship, but to give esthetic coherence to a narrative that might otherwise lack structural unity. Just as the river carries off the highly prized cow, her legs in the air, the two older sisters are led astray by sexual passion, "rolling around on the ground, all naked, and each one with a man on top of her"; on separate occasions the narrator and his mother utter the same phrase ("May God watch over them"), the narrator referring to his sister's cow and her missing calf, and his mother to her two wayward daughters. In the last scene the sobbing Tacha is linked to both her cow and her sisters, her face covered with streams of dirty water, "as if the river had gotten inside her," and her maturing breasts bouncing up and down, starting her "on the road to ruin."

The point of view serves to re-create rather than merely to recount the feelings of the narrator, thus drawing the reader to the center of the action and involving him more directly. Rulfo's prose is sprinkled with regional expressions and concrete rural images that illuminate the bleak Jaliscan landscape and reflect the tragic lives of his protagonists. Although the interior monologue of "Es que somos muy pobres" reproduces the disjointed thought patterns and rambling syntax of a bewildered adolescent, on closer examination it reveals a high degree of stylization for poetic effect, relying on abrupt temporal dislocations, repetitions with variation, and the deft use of conjunctions to render the impression of spontaneity and vitality. The end result is a dynamic, but carefully measured portrait of dramatic human proportions that transcends the limits of rural Mexico.

The same year that Rulfo's story appeared, Paraguay's best living writer, Augusto Roa Bastos (1918–), published "La excavación" (1953; "The Excavation"). An ingenious melange of social protest and symbolism, "La excavación" portrays a political prisoner, Perucho Rodi, who many years previously had fought in the Chaco War between Paraguay and Bolivia (1932–1935). While Rodi is digging an escape tunnel for his fellow prisoners and himself, the ground above him collapses, entombing him alive. As he frantically attempts to claw his way out, he loses consciousness, and just before he dies, relives an

episode during the war when he and other Paraguayan soldiers dug a tunnel behind enemy lines and massacred an entire unit of Bolivians.

"La excavación" can be read on several different levels, the most obvious being that of social protest. In addition to the shocking prison conditions, Roa Bastos depicts the atrocities of war and alludes to the exploitation of Paraguayans and Bolivians by foreign economic powers. On a symbolic level, the story reveals possible influences of Borges, for whom Roa Bastos has expressed the highest esteem. The two tunnels resemble Borgesian labyrinths, the first leading Rodi to his death rather than freedom, and the second representing a conduit to the very center of his psyche, where he confronts his double in the form of the Bolivian soldier he had killed during the earlier massacre. Now alive and armed with a machine gun, the double shoots Rodi exactly as he had been shot by Rodi many years before.

An additional dimension of "La excavación" is provided by its mythical underpinnings, which not only illuminate its overall meaning but enhance its structural unity. Rodi emerges as the representative of an entire people struggling against oppression, but unlike the mythical hero, he is doomed to lose because of his own sins against his fellow man. His sins are magnified and thus linked metaphorically to those of mankind; moreover, in his nightmare of the Chaco War his Bolivian victims assume the appearance of his fellow prisoners who in the final lines of the story are massacred by their guards after being enticed to escape through the unlocked prison doors. Rodi, then, is both a hero and a traitor, one who must sacrifice his life for the cause of freedom because the evil he committed in his past lives on in the present. This dichotomy within the human personality, which Borges views as merely another of life's baffling phenomena, becomes a fundamental cause for Roa Bastos's pessimistic view of the human experience.

During the 1950s an outstanding group of young Peruvian writers gave new directions to the national literature, shifting their focus from rural to urban settings and establishing a balance between regional and universal themes. Although they continued to protest against social injustice, they also relied on technical innovations and stylistic artistry to dramatize the alienation increasingly characteristic of life in Peru's burgeoning capital. The leading representative of this generation is Julio Ramón Ribeyro (1929–), whose "Los gallinazos sin plumas" (1955; the Featherless Buzzards) has become a classic in Peruvian fiction. In this hair-raising tale, two young brothers living in a slum are obliged by their grandfather to collect garbage to fatten his pig, Pascual,

which he plans to sell for a handsome profit. When the boys are unable to work for several days because of illness, their grandfather throws their pet dog into the pigsty to satisfy the voracious animal. In anger one of the youngsters strikes the old man, causing him to fall into the sty where he is attacked and presumably killed.

The theme of "Los gallinazos sin plumas" is effectively conveyed by marxist symbolism. The insatiable, monstrous Pascual represents the capitalistic system based on economic growth through exploitation; the grandfather emerges as the exploiter who nurtures the system for his own gain; and the boys (the "featherless buzzards") stand for the exploited, alienated proletariat that Marx encouraged to revolt against its oppressors.

The marxist ideology and the sordid, naturalistic events are embellished by poetic devices that enhance the story's esthetic value. The rhythmic repetition of images and the adroit use of foreshadowing techniques sustain suspense up to the climatic ending. When the omniscient narrator describes the city through the minds of the young boys, it assumes a mysterious, magical quality, at times even conveying a sense of adventure. At other times, however, the city exudes a foreboding of doom, as in the final lines when it is described as a monster opening its "gigantic jaws" to devour the terrified youngsters who are fleeing from their slum dwelling. Ribeyro's tale is also replete with irony, the most obvious example being the grandfather's destruction by the monster he himself created. In addition, this episode suggests that the rigid, uncompromising upper classes in and beyond Spanish America could bring about their own apocalyptic downfall.

Several years before the generation of the 1950s began to revitalize Peruvian fiction, a similar phenomenon had taken place in Puerto Rico. The island's so-called generation of 1940, which in reality emerged during the late 1940s and early 1950s, enriched Puerto Rico's picturesque, regionalistic literature with innovative techniques and popular linguistic patterns at the same time it set out to reaffirm the national identity of a people dominated politically, economically, and culturally by the United States. One of the leaders of this group is Pedro Juan Soto (1928-), whose "Garabatos" (1956; "Scribbles") typifies this short fiction. The story of a poor Puerto Rican family living in a New York tenement, "Garabatos" dramatizes two basic yet distinctly different themes: the extreme hardships suffered by the uprooted Puerto Rican immigrant to the United States mainland, and the alienation of the misunderstood artist. These two distinctly different themes underlie

the binary opposition that gives dramatic tension and structural cohesion to Soto's tale. Amid the sordid reality of the family's desperate economic circumstances, Graciela makes disparaging references to what she considers the absurd artistic endeavors (scribbles) of her husband, Rosendo. The family's basement apartment reflects the Puerto Rican's position on the lowest rung of the social ladder, just as Rosendo's drawing on the bathroom wall—the only wall not covered with religious prints—demonstrates the subordinate role relegated to art in a poverty-ridden society.

The binary opposition shaping the story's structure also stems from the contrasting images of the filthy, snow-covered streets visible from the apartment window and the pristine Puerto Rican landscape Rosendo remembers from his youth. This dichotomy between ugly reality and romantic ideal is reinforced by the antithetical protagonists, Graciela, the practical, embittered realist, and Rosendo, the dreamer doomed to failure. When Graciela informs Rosendo that because of its sexual explicitness she has erased the picture he has drawn, his reaction is conveyed by the final sentence, which refers to the blank, grimy bathroom wall as "the wide and clear gravestone of [Rosendo's] dreams." This striking metaphor compresses the story's two principal themes into a single image, unifying structural design and underscoring meaning.

Like Pedro Juan Soto, Puerto Rico's best known contemporary writer René Marqués (1919–1979) belongs to the politically active Puerto Rican generation of 1940. An outspoken advocate of Puerto Rican independence from the United States, Marqués wrote many fine stories that reveal his preoccupation with the island's political and cultural destiny as well as his existential anguish over the passing of time and the individual's futile search for identity. "Purificación en la calle de Cristo" (1960; "Purification on Cristo Street") portrays three elderly upper-class Puerto Rican sisters whose lives reflect the vicissitudes of the island's history since the latter part of the nineteenth century. In the minds of Inés and Amelia, the recent demise of Hortensia evokes memories of the past that revive their guilt complexes, Inés's for informing Hortensia of her fiancé's love affair with another woman, and Amelia's for also being in love with Hortensia's fiancé. When she heard of the affair, Hortensia incarcerated herself and her younger sisters in the family mansion, where they lived in steadily worsening financial straits, refusing to recognize the changes that took place in their native land. In the final lines Inés and Amelia, hounded by American creditors,

set the deteriorating mansion on fire with themselves and their dead sister in it.

Marqués's use of the shifting indirect interior monologue is particularly effective in this story because it affords the characters the opportunity to express their preoccupations with the past, creating the impression that they have achieved their objective of stopping the flow of time. Inés's attempt to preserve the beauty of bygone days and thus expiate her guilt is symbolized by the family jewels she has kept hidden. In her fleeting imagination, an ugly water stain on the wall that takes the form of an isthmus between two continents links an unpleasant episode of the past (the loss of the family's country estate) with one in the present (Hortensia's death from cancer). The American military occupation and economic domination of the island provide additional motivation for the act of "purification," setting fire to the house. The sisters' guilt complexes become a metaphor of the collective guilt Marqués attributes to Puerto Rico, and the final dramatic scene alluded to in the title, the expression of his desire for a complete political and cultural renovation.

The most talented Spanish American writer of short fiction to appear on the literary scene since Borges is the Argentine Julio Cortázar (1914–), who is often compared to his more famous countryman. A major difference between the two is that Borges fabricates bookish tales based on literature and philosophy, whereas Cortázar excels at depicting poetic facets of humdrum, everyday life. Cortázar's works are characterized by generous doses of fantasy, but he has also been profoundly influenced by surrealism and the philosophy of the Absurd. One of his surrealistic masterpieces is "La noche boca arriba" (1956; "The Night Face Up"), the tale of a youth injured in a motorcycle accident as he speeds through a beautiful modern city, presumably in Mexico. While recovering after surgery, he dreams that he is a Motec Indian fleeing from the Aztecs who capture him and prepare to sacrifice him to their gods. His dream is frequently interrupted, however, by brief moments of awareness of his hospital surroundings. In the nightmarish climax, he finds himself on the steps of a pyramid waiting to be sacrificed when suddenly he realizes that dream and reality have been reversed.

The fluctuations between reality and dream generate abrupt changes in mood that are intensified by the emotionally charged atmosphere and sensual imagery of both the hospital and the exotic Mexican setting. The feverish protagonist imagines that between the initial impact of his accident and the moment when he was picked up from the

pavement he sank into a black pit of nothingness for what seemed an eternity. This temporal dislocation is repeated throughout the story as he is wrenched again and again from the comfort of his hospital bed into the horror of his nightmare. Still, numerous parallels between his conscious and unconscious states create a unifying, reflecting-mirror structure that foreshadows the surrealistic denouement. Thus the stretcher on which he is placed prior to his operation can be linked to his sensation of being carried face-up through a passageway of the pyramid; the lights and medicinal odors of the hospital reappear as Aztec torches and the cloying smells of war; the pulley holding his broken arm immobile is repeated in the ropes binding him to a stone slab; and his surgery emerges as a prelude to his sacrifice by a knife-wielding Indian priest.

In many of his works, Cortázar searches for the surrealist absolute, that intermediate gray zone between reality and dream where contradictions unite and antinomies are abolished. In "La noche boca arriba" he goes a step further, transforming objective reality into an insane dream and the terrible nightmare of Aztec savagery into reality, but he nevertheless accomplishes something akin to the surrealists' goal. The final esthetically charged lines of the story jolt the reader into a keen awareness of the precarious balance between the rational consciousness and the unconscious, an awareness that undermines faith in reason and creates an expanded, multidimensional surreality.

Another of Cortázar's masterpieces is "Las babas del diablo" (1958; "Blow-up"), on which Michelangelo Antonioni based his famous experimental film *Blow-up* (1966). The protagonist of this story is Robert Michel, a French-Chilean translator and amateur photographer who takes a snapshot of a woman and a boy on the Isle Saint-Louis in Paris, surmising that what he has witnessed is the woman's attempted seduction of her young companion. Immediately thereafter Michel is confronted by the hostile woman and a man who approaches from a car parked nearby. Meanwhile the boy has taken flight. Several days later Michel enlarges the snapshot and once again finds himself drawn into the scene, which takes on new meaning. To his horror, he now realizes that the agent of seduction was not the woman but the man. Thus in his imagination he relives the episode of the photograph, this time focusing his camera on the man and again giving the boy the opportunity to escape.

"Las babas del diablo" is the type of tale that lends itself to various interpretations, but it is primarily an example of self-conscious metafiction, that is, a story about writing a story. In the opening lines, the

narrator alludes to his predicament over how to relate the events he has witnessed, and throughout his story he alludes to the clouds drifting across the sky, symbols of an evanescent reality neither film nor words can capture. The analogies between the art of photography and the art of fiction serve to illuminate the metafictional theme; the camera and the typewriter are referred to as lifeless tools manipulated by the photographer and the writer as means of capturing a rigid fragment of fleeting reality by way of static images and words. If the photograph is good (and we are told that this one is), it can act like an explosion on the viewer, disclosing a dynamic, open-ended reality, just as the artistically conceived story often points to something beyond itself. Michel's enlargement takes on a life of its own, revealing a new element in the drama he saw. Similarly, his story acquires new dimensions as he reworks it and becomes emotionally involved with his three characters. Like "La noche boca arriba," which transforms reality into a surrealist nightmare, "Las babas del diablo" subverts the reality of the original snapshot, the enlargement of which becomes a metaphor of a creative process.

"Las babas del diablo" recalls "El Aleph," both of which dramatize the frustrations involved in the art of writing fiction. Borges resolves the problem of depicting a simultaneous vision (the Aleph) in linear language by creating a symbolic, intuitively apprehended Aleph (Beatriz) that defies the erosion of time. Cortázar requires the reader's active participation in the re-creation of his story, obliging him to grasp intuitively the metafictional implications of the enlarged snapshot.

Among the numerous satirical salvos directed against American imperialism by Latin American writers is "Mr. Taylor" (1959), by Augusto Monterroso (1921-), who, although born in Guatemala, has resided in Mexico since 1944. An American living with a tribe of primitive Indians in the Amazon region of South America, Mr. Taylor founds a highly lucrative business with his uncle, Mr. Ralston, exporting shrunken heads to be sold as artifacts in the United States. When the supply of heads provided by natural deaths fails to meet the increasing demand, tribal doctors are encouraged to let their patients die, the death sentence is imposed for minor crimes, and wars are declared against all neighboring tribes. Still the supply remains insufficient. The story ends with the arrival in Mr. Ralston's New York office of a package from South America containing the protagonist's shrunken head.

The symbolism of Monterroso's tale is obvious. Taylor's export business represents the gringos' economic exploitation of Latin America, whose leaders are frequently only too willing to assist in the plunder of

the nations they govern. In the manner of Jonathan Swift, the accumulation of hair-raising absurdities emerges as the principal structuring device of the story, which like all satire, is also laced with irony. Thus Mr. Taylor is repeatedly referred to as a man of vast culture and artistic sensitivity, although it is he who advises the president to declare war on the neighboring tribes just to assure his own continued prosperity. In view of the story's climactic ending, moreover, it is ironic that on his arrival in South America, Mr. Taylor is known among the Indians as "the poor gringo."

Innovative Forms and the Boom

During the 1960s the short story as a genre continued the major trends of the preceding decade, reflecting the political realities as well as the philosophical and esthetic preoccupations of a wide variety of writers. Although during this decade of the much-touted Boom the novel tended to overshadow short fiction, the short story of the 1960s reached heights of quality and originality that remain unsurpassed to the present. A major achievement of the year 1960 is "Paseo" ("The Walk") by José Donoso (1925-), Chile's most prestigious man of letters. In this deceptively simple tale Donoso uses Jungian psychology and an ironically detached narrator to dramatize the dichotomy between the rational and instinctual spheres of the human psyche. The protagonist is a straitlaced spinster named Matilde who supervises the household of her brothers, all successful lawyers. The strictly observed routine of their existence is disrupted when a white mongrel bitch follows Matilde home from church and little by little wins her affection. One night she takes the dog for a walk and never returns.

At the beginning of the story Matilde is presented as a rationally oriented person, whose rigid sense of order and inability to show affection indicate suppression of the instinctual side of her psyche, the side that, according to Jung, must be recognized and nurtured so that one can achieve a complete personality. The mongrel bitch represents Matilde's shadow, the repressed archetype of her unconscious that takes gradual possession of her, causing her daily routine to crumble, restoring her vitality, and inviting her to participate in life's unknown adventures. When it first attaches itself to her, it is a filthy, ailing stray, abhorrent to her strict sense of cleanliness and order. After she had bathed, fed, and restored it to health, symbolizing the recognition and nurturing of her shadow, the dog not only becomes an integral part of

her consciousness but even dominates her conduct and brings about her mysterious disappearance.

The story's irony stems from its point of view; the narrator is Matilde's nephew, now a middle-aged man, who recalls the events as he witnessed them when he was a child. This narrative distance, together with the child's horror over Matilde's unknown fate, strikes an ironic chord because the implied man behind the stodgy, middle-aged persona probably views her disappearance as a liberation from a life worse than death.

"Paseo" is replete with symbols and leitmotifs that reinforce its major theme and unify its structure. The boat sirens and city lights represent the irrational unconscious, and the nightly, ritualistic billiard games, the rigid routine dominating the lives of the excessively rationalistic characters. The story is symmetrically framed by the thick library doors, which muffle voices from within and thus symbolize the lack of communication in the narrator's boyhood home. Donoso's portrait of Matilde shatters the concept of the unified personality and, like much contemporary fiction, makes irony and ambiguity major esthetic ingredients.

"En el gran Eco" (1960; "At the Great 'Eco'"), by Cuba's Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929–) dramatizes another psychological situation fraught with ambiguity. In this tale, a young middle-class Cuban couple attends a religious ceremony of blacks honoring their dead and worshiping their god of purity. During the ceremony an old black woman speaks briefly to the young lady, who immediately thereafter terminates her relationship with her male companion.

Cabrera Infante's technique is reminiscent of Hemingway's, namely, his laconic dialogues, his sparse descriptions of surface reality, and his flat, deadpan tone. He also effectively uses the technique of suspended coherence, reversing normal cause and effect relationships to create suspense. Thus we are told that the young lady is obsessed by death and feelings of remorse before we learn why; allusions are made to photographs the man has shown her that subsequently turn out to be (we assume) of his wife and child; and although we remain in doubt about why she terminates the relationship, we surmise that the ceremony, and especially her conversation with the old black woman, externalize her feelings of guilt for living in sin with a married man.

The story owes its tautness to two sets of opposites: the antithetical natures of the couple and the gulf between the white middle-class and black cultures in Cuba. The man is rationalistic and arrogant, viewing

the religious ceremony as an exotic after-lunch diversion, while his companion emerges as a sensitive, intuitive individual deeply moved by the fervor of the participants. The schism between cultures comes to light through the structure of the story, the first part of which presents the slightly bored, bourgeois couple dining in a restaurant during a rainstorm, and the second, the magic-charged atmosphere of the ceremony, climaxing with the enigmatic episode of the black woman. Published in the same year, "Paseo" and "En el gran Eco" have much in common. Both are skillfully executed psychological portraits, both are full of ambiguity, and both depict the vulnerability of the upper middle class, which in Donoso's tale is threatened by the Jungian unconscious and in Cabrera Infante's by the more instinctual lower classes.

The artist's role in society becomes a major theme of "La prodigiosa tarde de Baltazar" (1962; "Baltazar's Marvelous Afternoon"), by Colombia's leading man of letters, Gabriel García Márquez (1928–). Baltazar is a thirty-year-old carpenter who makes an elaborate bird cage for the son of the town's most affluent citizen, José Montiel. The latter's refusal to pay for the cage and Baltazar's generous gesture toward the boy lead to the story's climax and denouement.

As the central motif, the cage symbolizes artistic creativity and illuminates the conflict between the ideal realm of imagination and the concrete world of reality. Baltazar represents the prototype of the artist whose generous, childlike nature stands in sharp contrast to the selfish, belligerent Montiel. Imagination and sordid reality also clash in the final episode, which portrays the inebriated, penniless Baltazar sprawled out on the street, vaguely aware that someone is stealing his shoes, but unwilling to abandon the happiest dream of his life.

In marxist terms, Montiel may be viewed as the bourgeois capitalist interested only in the accumulation of wealth, whereas the other citizens of the town, all of whom resent his power, represent the proletariat. Also illustrated is the marxist contention that in a capitalist society art becomes a commodity, an alien, antagonistic force devoid of its former sacredness. Baltazar, of course, does not see his art in this light, nor, at the beginning of the story, do his friends. Montiel's reference to the cage as a trinket that Baltazar should sell to whoever will buy it typifies the bourgeois attitude toward artistic endeavor that Marx deplored. When Baltazar arrives at the pool hall, his friends have lost all interest in his creation, seeing it only in terms of the money he has been able to extract from the niggardly Montiel.

The confrontation between Baltazar and Montiel also exemplifies the dialectic method of presentation that Marx alludes to in his literary criticism. Thus dramatic movement is generated by polarized characteristics such as idealism/materialism, sensitivity/insensitivity, poverty/wealth, generosity/avarice, and kindness/cruelty. For Baltazar, the artist, the synthesis resulting from his confrontation with Montiel may be a moral victory, but it is gained only through economic loss and alienation from a society that judges art only in terms of monetary value.

Magical realism is a term critics of Spanish American literature have bandied about for more than twenty-five years, but because it has yet to be defined precisely and universally, some critics would prefer not to use or even recognize the term.⁴ Still, it would be impossible in any survey discussion of recent Spanish American fiction to ignore this literary mode about which so much has been said. Basically, magical realism attempts to penetrate objective reality and to reveal the mysterious and poetic qualities underlying the daily lives of a community or people. With a few notable exceptions, it is found primarily in countries with large Indian or black populations, that is, wherever European civilization is only a veneer superimposed on hidden layers of primitive cultures.

A fascinating example of magical realism is "La culpa es de los tlaxcaltecas" (1964; "It's All the Fault of the Tlaxcaltecas") by Elena Garro (1920–) of Mexico. The title alludes to the conquest of Mexico, when the Tlaxcaltecas aided Cortés in his struggle against their enemies, the Aztecs, thus betraying their Indian heritage. The story's protagonist is an upper middle-class white woman who feels that she too has betrayed her heritage because she believes that in a previous existence she was the wife of an Aztec warrior fighting against the Spanish conquerors. When her dual role becomes unbearable, she renounces the modern world and disappears into the mythical past.

Like most magically real fiction, Garro's tale includes many commonplace details of contemporary Spanish American life. In addition, the protagonist's monotonous existence is constantly interrupted by scenes of the battle for the Aztec capital, which she witnesses while her husband fights to repel the foreign invader. Particularly impressive are the poetic devices and structural techniques used to distort time and render the fantastic plot almost believable. Garro's style is highly sensual and evocative, relying heavily on mysterious lighting effects, sounds, and olfactory images designed to blur the reader's perceptions

and preface the abrupt flashbacks into remote history. Ingeniously interwoven dialogues frequently accompany these temporal dislocations, replacing narration by the omniscient author and enhancing the overall impression of two true-to-life dramas existing simultaneously. The juxtaposition of the realistic present and the mythical past not only expands esthetic dimensions, but conveys the story's principal theme, that ancient myths still permeate twentieth-century Mexican life, undermining logic and altering individual destinies.

The dehumanization of man in a technological society has been treated by numerous Spanish American writers, but none has developed this theme with more artistry and humor than the popular Argentine satirist Marco Denevi (1922–). His fable "La mariposa" (1965; *The Butterfly*) describes a colony of ants whose food scientists discover how to manufacture synthetically, thus removing the ants' dependence on nature. Immersed in their artificial realm governed by the laws of technology, they are sealed off in the anthill and soon forget about the outside world. Generations later an ant somehow makes his way through a forgotten exit and discovers the marvels of nature. Dazzled and ecstatic, he returns to inform his fellow ants, but when he reappears before them transformed into a beautiful butterfly, they think he is a monster and kill him.

"La mariposa" satirizes modern man's lack of human qualities and separation from nature as well as his loss of freedom and creativity. The butterfly symbolizes the misunderstood artist whose talent and spontaneity are stifled by a society in which the individual is subordinated to the machine. Denevi's style is simple and direct, making his message unmistakably clear, lacing his narration with both technical jargon and poetic images to underscore the barriers between technology and art. The scientifically oriented ants' conviction that their hermetic domicile represents the real world is reminiscent of Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in which a well-ordered, but imaginary planet is also embraced as reality. Denevi's irony is enhanced by the dialectic opposites underlying his story's structural framework, examples of which include the progressive aspect of the ants' social organization, their "antiprogressive" denial of history, the roving ant's discovery of poetic beauty in the real world, and the wanton murder of the butterfly.

Salvador Elizondo (1932–) is another Mexican writer whose works, like those of Juan José Arreola, share many characteristics with Borges's. Elizondo similarly uses philosophical ideas to create fiction,

and like his two elder colleagues, looks beyond Latin America for much of his inspiration. "La historia según Pao Cheng" (1966; History According to Pao Cheng) emerges as an ingenious spoof of Borges's metaphysical *ficciones*, its themes of circular and philosophical idealism serving as the warp and woof of its content. Pao Cheng is an ancient Chinese philosopher who views history as a repetitive series of events. One day he imagines himself walking through a foreign city of the future where he discovers a man writing a story about him, Pao Cheng, who imagines that he (Pao Cheng) is in a city of the future where he (Pao Cheng) discovers a man writing a story, et cetera. Suddenly the author of the story about Pao Cheng realizes that he is no more than a memory of Pao Cheng in his own story, and that if Pao Cheng forgets him, he will die. So the author of the story of Pao Cheng finds himself condemned for eternity to continue writing the story of Pao Cheng because if Pao Cheng is forgotten, the author, who is only a memory of Pao Cheng, will disappear.

From the preceding summary, the importance of circular time in Elizondo's story is clearly evident. Even more important is his use of idealism as a basis for plot. The author of the story of Pao Cheng, like the magus of Borges's "Las ruinas circulares," is horrified to learn that he exists only in somebody else's mind. What makes Elizondo's tale a spoof of Borges's metaphysical work, however, is not only his treatment of time and idealism, but the fact that he (Elizondo) carries idealism a step beyond what Borges had done. In "Las ruinas circulares," for example, the magus (Borges's creation) concludes that he (the magus), like the man he has dreamed, is no more than an abstract idea in the mind of another. In Elizondo's tale, Pao Cheng (Elizondo's creation) exists in the imagination of another (like Borges's magus at the end of "Las ruinas circulares"), but the other is Pao Cheng's fictitious creation and this fictitious creation realizes that he exists only in his creator's (Pao Cheng's) mind. Thus, to continue to exist he must keep his creator (Pao Cheng) alive in his (the author's) mind by forever writing his story about Pao Cheng.

When a fictitious character in another fictitious character's imagination realizes that his existence depends on the continuation of the first character's imaginary existence, it would seem that the laws of idealism have been carried to absurdity. Borges himself would probably applaud Elizondo's playful endeavor because, like Borges's works, it dissolves objective reality and thrusts the reader into a fictitious, cerebral world not unlike the realm of history.

Although very different from Elizondo's philosophical abstractions, Julio Cortázar's "Autopista del sur" (1966; "The Southern Thruway") also dramatizes an absurd situation, namely, a massive traffic jam that begins on a Sunday afternoon in August and lasts until the following spring. The travelers on the six-lane double highway leading to Paris gradually form communes consisting of the cars in their immediate vicinity, and endeavor to deal with everyday problems such as procurement of food and water, treatment of the sick, and the inevitable friction between individuals and communes. The leading character is an engineer driving a Peugeot 404 who befriends a girl in a Dauphine. In the final lines of the story the bottleneck is finally eliminated and the cars speed toward Paris.

At the start of the traffic jam the travelers find themselves faced with circumstances entirely beyond their control, their movements toward their respective goals halted and their schedules totally disrupted. Their confrontation with this chaotic situation, which recalls Camus's definition of the Absurd, induces them to organize a kind of world in microcosm, a reflection of the mores and institutions men have lived by for generations. Thus their communes restore a semblance of order to their lives, but from Cortázar's point of view it is an order achieved through mindless routine, which the travelers accept passively without ever rousing themselves to ask "Why?" When the traffic jam finally dissolves, the engineer finds that he longs for the daily rituals of the past few months. In the final lines of the story he and the others are once again encapsulated in their metal cages, racing through the night to begin anew, one assumes, a routine existence as meaningless and absurd as the one from which they have just been freed.

"Autopista del sur" condemns today's emphasis on the mechanization that crushes individual identities and weakens human bonds. Thus the characters' names are usurped by those of their automobiles, and the engineer, who has fallen in love with the girl in the Dauphine and even fathered her unborn child, loses her, presumably forever, when their cars become separated in the rush toward Paris. For Cortázar, rituals and routine represent compulsive attempts to ward off the solitude and chaos that threaten the individual in a world he can neither understand nor control. "Autopista del sur" and Arreola's "El guardagujas" have much in common, both dramatizing human experience symbolized by the journey. A major difference is that Arreola's traveler-protagonist ultimately boards the train, having been fully apprised of life's absurdity, whereas Cortázar's travelers move from one

episode to another without ever confronting the existential reality of the modern world.

The death of the Argentine communist guerrilla Che Guevara in Bolivia in 1967 is the subject of one of Bolivia's finest contemporary short stories, "La emboscada" (1967; *The Ambush*) by Adolfo Caceres Romero (1937–). A complex montage of narrative fragments, this ingeniously structured tale relates an incident that occurs immediately after Che Guevara's body is found by his last surviving comrade, who is referred to as "the man." When the latter enters a hut in search of food, he is captured by deserters from Guevara's guerrilla band and hanged from a nearby tree. Meanwhile a young Bolivian army captain and his men surround the hut, but they are killed in an ambush by the deserters.

One of the few innovators in Bolivian fiction during the 1960s, Caceres Romero relates a disjointed chain of events by constantly shifting the point of view from the man to the captain to the omniscient narrator, all of whom inject snatches of dialogue into their fragments of the story. This technique facilitates the narrative movement from exterior to interior planes of action, from present to past or future tense, and from real to imaginary occurrences. For example, as he dissects Che Guevara's body to keep it from falling into enemy hands, the man recalls the bloody ambush in which his leader died. During this same skirmish the captain's mind flashes back to an incident in his past of shooting at a revolving lantern (*la calesita*) in a carnival. In anticipation of his victorious return to his base of operations; he imagines interviews with newsmen, eulogies from his superiors, and a promotion to the rank of major as a reward for his bravery.

Numerous leitmotifs link these episodes and give a more coherent pattern to the story's literary texture. The guerrilla *capitana* waving a white handkerchief during the ambush is evoked by both the man and the captain; as are barking dogs that pursue the guerrillas, discover the hanged man, and carry off Che Guevara's bones. Both the man and the captain catch sight of the river swollen with bloodstained bodies and the vultures hovering above. The captain's happy memory of the revolving carnival lantern stands out in ironic contrast to the tragic situation he first creates and to which he finally falls victim.

"La emboscada" is a fictitious account of Che Guevara's death and its aftermath; historic documents have revealed that in reality he was captured by the Bolivian army and executed the following day. Caceres Romero's tale does, however, exude the true-to-life aura of pessimism

the Argentine revolutionary's fate left among Latin American artists and intellectuals.

As might be expected, Cuba's literary generation of 1960 has probed various aspects of Fidel Castro's revolution. Although magical realism and fantasy characterize the works of some of these young, imaginative writers, the most original of the group, Norberto Fuentes (1943–), seems to have been inspired primarily by the neorealistic traditions of Hemingway and Rulfo. "El capitán Descalzo" (1968; "Captain Descalzo") is one of Fuentes's stories that dramatize the counterinsurgency campaign undertaken by the Cuban government between 1960 and 1966. A former captain in the revolutionary forces, Descalzo has returned to his plot of land from which he earns a precarious living for himself and his children. When an insurgent fleeing from the militia accosts Descalzo in a field he has been plowing, Descalzo kills him with a machete. He then returns to his house and chats with the militia commander before telling him where the body is to be found.

Fuentes's narrative technique is particularly reminiscent of Hemingway's, the language intense, unadorned, and concise, and the point of view that of the direct observer (as opposed to the omniscient narrator), who, like a movie camera, limits the fictional material to action, dialogue, and surface reality. His style is elliptical, concentrating on nouns and verbs rather than adjectives to stimulate the reader's imagination, heighten suspense, and accelerate the flow of events. The structural pattern is anticipated by the initial contrast between Descalzo's plowed land and the tropical jungle bordering it. The ensuing scene presents the two antagonists, Descalzo and the insurgent, the former with his well-cared-for machete and the latter with his rusty Luger, a symbol of Cuba's rejected past. After killing the insurgent, Descalzo reveals in his conversation with the militia commander that unlike other revolutionary officers who have profited handsomely from their role in the fighting, he is a simple, rustic man who can tolerate neither shoes on his feet nor life in the city (*descalzo* is the Spanish word for barefoot). Ultimately his calm revelation of the terrible deed he has just committed likens him to an epic hero or an Old Testament patriarch whose actions transcend the specific time and place in which they occur. Descalzo's brutality also underscores the firm resolve of a nation recently reborn to achieve its revolutionary goals.

In the mid-1960s the Mexican literary scene was profoundly altered by a movement known as *la onda*, (the wave) and composed of young

irreverent writers. Closely related to the worldwide student rebellion of this period, *la onda* reflected the nonconformity of youth and its rejection of traditional bourgeois values. One of the leaders of this group was José Agustín (1944–), whose "Cuál es la onda" (1968; "What's Cool") more than any other piece of short fiction typifies this movement. The protagonists are a young drummer, Oliveira, and a girl named Requelle, who initiates their friendship at a dance. They spend the night in a series of sleazy hotels, mocking virtually every aspect of the establishment in the iconoclastic, juvenile vernacular that emerges as both the medium and the message of the story.

Agustín's choice of the name Oliveira suggests the possible influence of Cortázar, whose famous novel *Rayuela* (1963) presents a protagonist of the same name. Somewhat like Cortázar, Agustín creates a spontaneous language consisting of colloquial words, puns, and popular foreign phrases, all of which represent a reaction to the rigid linguistic patterns as well as to the out-moded institutions of the status quo. He also reveals the strong influence of rock music groups such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, whose rhythms he re-creates in the humorous banter of his two youthful characters. Occasionally, he shifts the narrative perspective, abruptly injecting an offhand, and at times insulting, remark to the reader or an amusing authorial comment on the creative process. The ironic tone resulting from this technique becomes a major unifying element and also tends to make the reader laugh at, rather than identify with, the ludicrous antics of the couple.

There are several episodes that illustrate the satirical nature of the story, and exchanges in which Agustín pokes fun at government propaganda, Mexico's lagging technology, and the hypocritical attitude of the Latin macho toward sex. In spite of the rebellious tone conveyed by the language and the sexual liberation implicit in the plot, the union of the protagonists is never consummated, and the following morning, though lacking the necessary legal papers, they unsuccessfully attempt to bribe a judge to marry them. Furthermore, in an unguarded moment of self-revelation, Oliveira confesses that he is a middle-class prude at heart. It would seem, then, that Agustín's satire of middle-class Mexican society may also represent a parody of young rebels, whose rejection of tradition is more palaver than substance and whose future is destined to evolve like that of their elders once the crisis of youth has passed. Agustín's fertile imagination and linguistic agility illustrated in works such as "Cuál es la onda" made him the enfant terrible of Mexican

letters during the 1960s. Today, a decade and a half later, he has become one of Mexico's leading intellectuals.

Although science fiction in Spanish America has not enjoyed the success it has had in the United States, it has produced some highly imaginative, artistically conceived works. One of these is "Una cuerda de nylon y oro" (1969; *A Rope of Nylon and Gold*) by the Salvadoran Alvaro Menéndez Leal (also known as Alvaro Menén Desleal, (1931–). The first-person narrator of this tale is an American astronaut who leaps from this spaceship for a walk in space, but instead of completing the tasks he has been trained to perform, he cuts the cord attached to his capsule and continues to orbit the earth as a free agent. After an unspecified length of time, he witnesses a nuclear war that destroys the entire planet below and submerges it into darkness.

Menéndez Leal's technical jargon, sharp visual imagery, and accurate references to the space race in 1965, the year the action occurs, lend credibility to his story, the irony of which emerges as a major literary ingredient. Feeling supremely free and happy for having severed all contact with his fellow men, the narrator-protagonist is able to view human foibles, political intrigues, and natural disasters with complete detachment, thus underscoring the absurdity of the world he has left behind. The juxtaposition of unrelated information ("There was a president named Johnson, and my wife was sleeping with Sam Wilson") further illustrates the ironic perspective, a perspective the reader eventually comes to share. Also significant is the fact that most of the events seen from afar place the United States in a bad light, the nefarious activities of the Ku Klux Klan and the war in Vietnam serving as prime examples. In this science fiction tale fraught with political overtones, the nation responsible for the imagined nuclear holocaust is clearly identifiable.

Myth, Fantasy, and Reality: 1970s

The decade of the 1970s, while not lacking in short fiction of high quality, produced fewer new, innovative writers than the 1960s. Although one can only speculate on the reasons for this phenomenon, the end of the Boom in the novel, the slackening of student activism, and the relative political tranquility (except for Chile and Nicaragua) are possible explanations. Also significant is the gradually deteriorating

economic situation of the 1970s, which made publishing increasingly difficult for all but the well-established authors.

In 1970, after seventeen years of silence in the genre of short fiction, Borges published *El informe de Brodie* (*Doctor Brodie's Report*), a collection of stories that, unlike his complex metaphysical stories of the 1940s, is written, as the author himself has stated, in the straightforward style of the young Rudyard Kipling. The protagonist of "El evangelio según Marcos" (1970; "The Gospel According to Mark"), one of Borges's own favorites, is a thirty-three-year-old medical student named Baltasar Espinosa who is spending the summer on his cousin's ranch. While the latter is in Buenos Aires on business, a severe rainstorm causes a flood, isolating Espinosa, together with the foreman Gutre, and Gutre's son and daughter. Every night after dinner Espinosa reads to his three illiterate companions a portion of the Gospel according to St. Mark, which seems to fascinate them. One day Gutre asks Espinosa if Christ allowed himself to be crucified for the sake of all men, and although he is a free thinker, Espinosa feels obliged to answer in the affirmative. The story ends as the Gutres prepare to crucify Espinosa.

"El evangelio según Marcos" dramatizes two of Borges's favorite themes: circular time and the perpetually recurring human experience. Baltasar Espinosa emerges as a modern Christ figure, his Christian name recalling one of the three Magi and his surname ("thorn" in English), Christ's crown of thorns. His age, his kindly nature, and his outstanding ability as an orator represent additional characteristics of the Christian savior, while the pet lamb he cures brings to mind the significant amount of Christian symbolism involving lambs, including the sacrificial lamb that Espinosa himself will become. Espinosa's dream of the flood and the construction of the Ark foreshadow his act of redemption for the Gutres.

The allusions to the *Odyssey* and the Bible, the two stories men have always told and retold, have a direct bearing on the lives of the Gutres. Indeed, the history of the family is a kind of odyssey, since they had abandoned a civilized country (Scotland) for a remote, barbarous land where they lost their religion, forgot their native tongue, and regressed to ignorance and superstition. For them, the crucifixion represents a metaphoric return, a means of redemption and regeneration, for by sacrificing their redeemer they will supposedly assume his virtues.

Borges's reinterpretation of biblical myth suggests that although specific circumstances change, archetypal situations reflecting the essence

of human behavior will be repeated ad infinitum. The climax of this tale, which occurs when Espinosa catches sight of the cross the Gutres have erected, is enhanced by the weeping of Gutre's daughter (a symbolic Mary Magdalene) and the song of a goldfinch (a symbol of the Passion of Christ). The surprise ending is also an example of what Borges has called the "esthetic reality," a kind of hovering, vertiginous moment of apprehension in which an inexpressible reality is intuited.

Very different from Borges's reworking of biblical myth is a subtle psychological portrait entitled "Biografía" (1971; *Biography*) by the Uruguayan Carlos Martínez Moreno (1917-). The protagonist is a recently deceased, middle-aged government employee, Manfredo, whose life is depicted through the mind of his wife Elena. Because of his good looks, Manfredo also worked as a model for cigarette advertisements that appeared in the most widely read newspapers and magazines. Just when his friend and photographer, Julio, was promising him better contracts with beer and whiskey companies, Manfredo fell ill with a brain tumor and died.

Elena's memories of her husband are evoked by photographs of him in various settings such as yachts, well-manicured gardens, luxurious restaurants, and football stadiums. He was always elegantly dressed and accompanied by beautiful women whom Elena envies because she herself has become fat. Elena also contrasts the photographs of her husband with their drab daily life together, which she attributes to his total lack of ambition in the government bureaucracy and to the meager sums Julio paid him. Manfredo's lingering death and Julio's indifference to the tragedy represent additional fragments of the past generating the story's overall meaning. The final lines are particularly illuminating. As Elena gazes at a photograph of Manfredo listening sympathetically to what a young lady is saying to him, she sees his entire biography clearly written on his face, a biography consisting of his attentiveness to the needs of others.

"Biografía" is not so much the story of a man's life as it is the portrait of his lonely widow. Elena, however, is not drawn explicitly through physical descriptions or psychological analyses; rather, she is artistically implied through a montage of evocative photographs of her husband whose synthetic, make-believe identity has become more palpably real to her than the man she subconsciously prefers to forget. The deftly manipulated direct and indirect interior monologues reinforce her feelings of alienation and thus reflect the story's dominant theme.

A type of humor heretofore unseen in this study is that of a young Argentine writer, Fernando Sorrentino (1942–), whose tale entitled "La pestilente historia de Antulín" (1972; "the Fetid Tale of Antulín")⁵ is likely to elicit guffaws from most readers. The first-person narrator is a timid, meticulous occupant of a boarding house where Antulín, a slovenly, uncouth butcher, also makes his home. The narrator despises Antulín primarily because he must share the bathroom with this filthy, foul-smelling creature, who hangs his unwashed socks on the towel rack and has a copious bowel movement every morning at five o'clock, obliging the narrator to get up an hour before him to use the bathroom. After three frustrated attempts to kill his oafish enemy (by electrocution, fire, and gas), the narrator, although still seething with hate, is forced to abandon his efforts for revenge.

"La pestilente historia de Antulín" emerges as an exceptionally fine example of the grotesque, the purpose of which is to create tension in the reader's mind through the clash between the comic and an incompatible element such as disgust or horror. The reader's reaction to this unresolved incongruity can range from civilized repugnance to barbarous glee over the flouting of taboos, but the response is always emotional, never intellectual. Antulín's bathroom antics are particularly grotesque, as comedy is combined with scatology to produce predictable reader reactions. Additional examples of the grotesque are the narrator's attempts to murder the obnoxious Antulín, whose acute suffering from electric shock and burns as described is both horrible and hilarious.

The story's witty, artfully conceived style contributes much to its rollicking humor. The initial passages, for example, describe events in direct, realistic detail, but little by little pungent visual and olfactory images, hyperbolic distortions, and kafkaesque dream sequences create the absurd atmosphere that ultimately prevails. A unifying leitmotiv, repeated from beginning to end, is the narrator's obsessive reminder that he hates Antulín. His tone, moreover, oscillates between euphoric elation (when he thinks he has succeeded in murdering Antulín) and despair (when he realizes the lout has survived), a device that intensifies the reader's involvement in the ludicrous chain of events. The smoldering tension between the narrator and his nemesis is outwardly resolved when Antulín marries the landlady and becomes the overbearing owner of the boarding house. Antulín's triumph is also conveyed by the title of the story's final segment, "Olor constante más allá de la muerte" (Constant Odor beyond Death), a parody of Francisco Quevedo's sonnet, "Amor constante más allá de la muerte" (Constant Love beyond

Death), and García Márquez's tale, "Muerte constante más allá del amor" (Constant Death beyond Love).

As is obvious from the examples cited, the Mexican literary movement known as *la onda* consists of young, irreverent writers with a predilection for using juvenile slang and popular art forms to depict rebellious middle-class youths in the Mexican capital. Another tendency in recent Mexican letters is based on the concept of *escritura* ("writing"), that emphasizes universal themes as well as the subtle use of language and structure for poetic effect. A leading practitioner of *escritura* is José Emilio Pacheco (1939–), whose "La fiesta brava" (1972; The Fierce Sport of Bullfighting) constitutes a fine example of metafiction. The first part of this complex work consists of a story of the same title about an American army captain named Keller who commits atrocities in Vietnam and after having been discharged from the army, comes to Mexico as a tourist. While visiting the National Museum of Anthropology, he becomes fascinated with a statue of the earth goddess Coatlicue; the result is his nightmarish return to Mexico's remote past and his sacrifice to the Aztec sun god. The second portion of Pacheco's tale concerns the author of "La fiesta brava," Andrés Quintana, who submits his story to a *gringo* editor named Mr. Hardwick and later that same evening meets a fate similar to Keller's.

"La fiesta brava" (Pacheco's tale) evolves its meaning and esthetic unity through a series of parallels and contrasts that transcend the cultural and geographical borders of its immediate setting. The American presence in Vietnam is linked to American imperialism in Mexico when, just before he is sacrificed, Keller confuses his Aztec captors with his Vietnamese victims. In the second part of the story Mr. Hardwick, who not only edits the Mexican journal but also disburses the funds necessary for its existence, becomes an agent of cultural imperialism when he rejects Andrés's writing because of its anti-Yankee tone. For his literary efforts Andrés nevertheless receives one thousand of the six thousand pesos originally offered, a sum he feels obliged to accept because of need. Soon thereafter, however, he views the one thousand pesos as a form of Yankee domination, which triggers his feelings of self-contempt and anticipates the denouement. His final glimpse of Keller on the subway with three other passengers, and his own capture by three men as he leaves the subway, link his identity to that of Keller, his inverted mirror image or antithetical double.

Before Andrés leaves Mr. Hardwick's office, his friend Ricardo suggests that "La fiesta brava" (Andrés's tale) reflects the influence of Carlos Fuentes's works, a major theme of which is the continuing vitality of the

mythical past in present-day Mexican life. Andrés's preoccupation with the interpretations of his story and his guilty association with his protagonist draws him psychologically into its fictional framework, making his destiny and Keller's one and the same. Thus like most authors of self-conscious metafiction, Pacheco dramatizes the dialectic interplay between fiction and reality, blurring distinctions and imbuing each realm with elements of the other.

The *fiesta brava* is a term used to designate the sport of bullfighting, which the brutal Keller ironically rejects as a sign of savagery in the Mexican character. The story's title, however, points beyond this immediate connotation, emerging as a metaphor of the political and cultural conflicts between peoples throughout history. What distinguishes "La fiesta brava" from other *metaficciones* such as "El Aleph" and "Los babas del diablo" are its strong political overtones.

The dichotomy between reality and imagination becomes a major structural device in Gabriel García Márquez's tale, "El ahogado más hermoso del mundo" (1972; "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World"), in which the gigantic corpse of a young man is washed ashore near a drab seaside village. While preparing his body for burial, the women of the village gaze at him in ecstasy, imagining him in real-life situations and even christening him Esteban. The elaborate funeral they prepare not only establishes a common bond among all the villagers but also convinces them that because of Esteban's brief appearance in their midst, their lives will undergo a dramatic change for the better.

The themes of purification and rebirth are clearly suggested by the dead man's gifts of beauty, hope, and solidarity to a community steeped in inertia. These themes are reinforced by poetic resonances of myth that enrich the story's literary fabric. Like a classic hero, Esteban arrives mysteriously, and like Odysseus, who also traversed the seas, he assumes superhuman proportions. The wailing women at Esteban's funeral and the sailor tied to the mast of a passing vessel recall Odysseus's efforts to resist the song of the Sirens when he was making his way back to Ithaca. Esteban also reveals certain similarities to Quetzalcoatl, who represented an enlightened form of religion and who would, according to legend, return to Mexico via the sea. Esteban's enormous size in comparison to the other men of the village reminds the reader of Gulliver's adventures among the Lilliputians.

The structural artistry of "El ahogado más hermoso del mundo" stems from the dialectical interplay between baroque, hyperbolic flights of imagination and simple, down-to-earth reality. The children play de-

lightedly with the dead man's body, believing it to be a whale, until the more serious-minded adults discover it. The calm and bountiful sea that produced the marvelous stranger stands in sharp contrast to the arid, rocky village of only twenty houses; ecstatic over the sudden infusion of beauty into their lives, the women compare their husbands unfavorably with the godlike Esteban. After the latter is christened, however, he assumes more human proportions that alter their idealized perception of him and provoke sobs instead of sighs; the men react negatively to their wives' exaggerated grief, wanting to bury the body forthwith and forget it; and, in the final lines, the spiritual regeneration of the villagers, all of whom have become "kinsmen" through Esteban's inspiring presence, synthesizes the opposites enlivening the narrative thread. Also woven into the structure is the suggestion of cyclical time, as Esteban is returned to the sea wearing the trousers of an "undersized child"—implying a new beginning—and without an anchor in case he might choose to come back some day. Although allegedly written for children, this fictional eulogy to beauty, imagination, and human solidarity reveals esthetic qualities that expand its appeal to all age groups.

Since the military coup against Salvador Allende's socialist regime in September 1973, many Chilean writers have left their native land to continue their profession abroad.⁶ Among the most promising of these is Antonio Skármeta (1940–), two of whose stories dramatize events in Chile before and after the coup. "Primera preparatoria" (1973; First Grade) is narrated in first person by a young intellectual whose older brother is leaving for Australia, apparently because of his objections to Allende's policies. The night before his departure he has had a violent quarrel with his Italian-born father who supports the liberal government and now refuses to bid farewell to his son. "La llamada" (1975; The Phone Call) portrays a timid professor of literature who at some time in the recent past was detained briefly by the military regime of General Augusto Pinochet. (Neither Pinochet nor Allende is mentioned by name in either story.) As he leaves the institute where he works, he is approached by two policemen, one of whom is his former student. After a short, unnerving conversation, he enters a cafe to make a telephone call, but on seeing a man sitting nearby reading a newspaper, he changes his mind and leaves.

Skármeta's technique, like that of Norberto Fuentes and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, is reminiscent of Hemingway's, consisting primarily of

dialogue and simple narrative delivered by a direct, objective observer meant to stimulate the imagination and oblige the reader to discover possible cause and effect relationships from the limited material presented. In "Primera preparatoria" the father refers to the narrator's brother as a *reaccionario*, ("reactionary") but it is the latter's conservative dress, lack of interest in books (in contrast to the narrator), and decision to emigrate that suggest his opposition to Chile's left-wing government. His climactic, emotion-packed scene with his father and the narrator's cool farewell illustrate the impact on human relations of the tense political atmosphere providing the story's backdrop.

In "La llamada" the conversation of the three characters appears amiable on the surface, but an undercurrent of tension is revealed by the professor's jittery reactions to the false cordiality of the policemen. Dramatic tension mounts, with the ex-student's ironic reference to Pablo Neruda, who was a strong supporter of the Allende regime, and his parting remark that he and the sergeant will be dropping by the institute from time to time. In the final lines of the story the reader must decide if the man in the cafe is a spy or merely an innocent bystander in an atmosphere heavy with suspicion and fear. For Skármeta, it would seem, the suggestion of political oppression is more esthetically evocative than the description of acts of cruelty.

In 1947 Julio Cortázar published his first short story, "Casa tomada" ("House Taken Over"), in which a middle-aged bachelor shares a large home with his sister until their routine existence is abruptly ended by unnamed invaders who force them out into a world they are unprepared to face. "Verano" (1974; "Summer") is in some respects a reworking of the earlier tale, the protagonists being a childless couple, Mariano and Zulma, who, while vacationing in their cabin, agree to keep a friend's small daughter overnight. Late that evening a neighing horse gallops around the cabin, frightening the couple and arousing their erotic instincts. The next morning the appearance of normality is established once again.

"Verano" can be read as a psychological fantasy, the elements of Freudian and Jungian thought reinforcing those of the fantastic genre. The child's unexpected arrival at the country home of Mariano and Zulma disturbs the pattern of their existence, which is characterized by inflexible routine, lack of spontaneity, and alienation from each other. The little girl, who remains anonymous throughout the story, embodies imagination, her childlike innocence triggering Mariano's speculation that his and his wife's daily rituals are merely adult defense mechanisms

against the chaos of death and nothingness. The horse probably symbolizes lust, but it could also represent the blind cosmic forces of chaos and, as Jung has stated, the magic, intuitive side of man, all of which in the present context suggests the rebellion of instinct and imagination against the banality of the protagonists' lives. This clash between the rational and irrational spheres creates an esthetically charged aura of ambiguity that endures at the end of the story, thus placing it unequivocally in the category of fantastic literature.

Mariano and Zulma typify Cortázar's protagonists, many of whose lives are disrupted by hallucinations, nightmares, and monstrous visions emanating from the hidden recesses of the selves they have sought to suppress through meaningless, repetitive activity. By dramatizing the precarious order of the rational world, Cortázar demonstrates his contempt for oppressive routine and its disastrous effects on the fragile personality. For his characters, fantasy often takes the form of self-liberation brought about by the revelation of the mysterious "other." Their liberation, however, is either momentary, as in the case of Mariano and Zulma, or destructive, as in "Casa tomada." Written in a direct, understated style, both tales convey the author's ironic vision of a world in which at any given moment fantasy can subvert objective, everyday life, either through a primitive, animistic mode of perception ("Verano") or the mysterious gothic invaders referred to only as "they" ("Casa tomada").

Just as Sorrentino is relatively unknown outside Argentina, the Mexican writer María Luisa Puga (1936–) has yet to reach an extensive audience beyond the borders of her native land. Her "Inmóvil sol secreto" (1979; Secret, Immobile Sun) depicts the strained relationship between the two lovers who flee to an island in Greece hoping to forget an incident from their past. Narrated in first person by the young woman whose infidelity is the cause of the tension between them, the story ends when Enrique finds himself unable to forgive her.

This extremely thin plot serves as the framework for a finely wrought dramatization of the precarious relationship. The island setting may be seen as a symbol of the characters' isolation from each other, whereas their past represents a smoldering threat that determines the plot's trajectory and culminates with a postcard from the narrator's former lover and her brief encounter with a gringo tourist. Puga captures the essence of the exotic setting by means of visual and olfactory imagery, but it is her poetically stylized insights into the protagonists' fluctuating states of mind that provide the story's literary underpinnings. On one

occasion the narrator states that although a delicate and imperceptible bond is forming between them, she is unable to determine whether it is "companionship" or "solitude in very consoling company." Their daily swims, she believes, serve to bury their past by way of "a silent repetition" that also seems to inject life into their relationship. They return to the village holding hands, greeting the villagers and "building an image on which we try to lean." As the days pass, the narrator experiences a sensation of panic caused by "the frightful empty space" between each hour and "a vacuum" that little by little is consuming her existence. On her lover's face she detects the hurt expression she has learned to hate because it arouses her "pious compassion," which only drives them further apart.

The narrator's feelings of despair are given substance, and thus more poignancy, through metaphors combining abstract nouns and evocative verbs of action. "At times I am assaulted by a bitter laughter . . . because I see ourselves unwillingly dragging along this hope for a new life. And I find myself wanting to ventilate this present just as when I open the windows of the bedroom and shake the sheets aggressively. I want the sun to come in, the wind to wash these secret reticences that are born each night."

The narrator also realizes that when Enrique makes love to her he is seeking "the disintegration of another presence," her infidelity, and that he is not seeking her but rather a renewed image of himself. Thus when the postcard from her former lover terminates the present affair, her "other presence" assumes possession of her wounded ego and, immersed in a kind of dreamlike vertigo, she joins her gringo admirer. "Inmóvil sol secreto" is a skillfully executed portrait of jealousy and its nefarious effects by one of the bright new talents on today's Spanish American literary horizon.

A story that seems particularly representative of the early 1980s is one written by Carlos Fuentes (1929–), Mexico's best living writer of fiction and one of Latin America's most significant men of letters. The undying influence of the Mexican past, both pre-Hispanic and colonial, on present-day reality is a theme Fuentes has developed in several of his works by means of simultaneous, intersecting temporal planes. In "Chac Mool" (1954; "Chac-Mool"), his most popular tale, an idol representing the Mayan and Toltec rain god comes to life and claims the protagonist as a sacrificial victim.

The colonial period is evoked in "Estos fueron los palacios" (1980; "These Were Palaces"), which portrays a lonely retired servant, Manuela, and her friend, a crippled fourteen-year-old youth named Luisito,

both of whom live in a tenement near the Zocalo in Mexico City. A sensitive realist, Manuela feeds the stray dogs in the neighborhood and treats them when they are hurt, whereas the more romantically inclined Luisito spends his days envisioning the majestic past of his once-wealthy family and that of colonial Mexico when the tenements around the Zocalo were beautiful palaces. A mysterious, intuitive understanding develops between the two lonely protagonists, who need and complement each other in a variety of ways. Luisito not only replaces, in Manuela's mind, the daughter she has lost, but also induces her to imagine the grandeur of past centuries instead of reliving her own difficult life as a servant in the household of a general. Manuela's spiritual strength, moreover, compensates for Luisito's physical infirmity, making him more aware of life around him and thus allowing him to achieve a greater sense of identity. The tenement and the dogs symbolize legacies of the past, the former having derived from an affluent social class condemned to decay, and the latter representing the base of Mexico's societal pyramid built up through generations of cruelty, injustice, and poverty.

The final episodes of the story are especially revealing. In the dreamlike atmosphere of a moonlit night Manuela and Luisito descend the main staircase of their "palace" to the sounds of the barking dogs—a symbol of the present—and of beautiful music out of the remote past. Their subsequent dance reinforces the link between time levels when Manuela evokes her former lover and tells Luisito to imagine that he is embracing her beautiful daughter Lupe Lupita, who disappeared many years previously. The fading of the music and the increasingly strident barking of the dogs, whom Manuela and Luisito vow they will always care for, propel the action completely into the present and suggest a social message. The final scene in which Luisito goes alone to the kitchen for food despite his handicap indicates that he has taken a significant step in the maturation process. Unlike "Chac Mool," whose protagonist becomes a victim of the indigenous past, "Estos fueron los palacios" challenges Mexicans to overcome the crippling legacy of the conquest embodied in Luisito and master their own destiny.

Conclusions

Looking back over the past four decades of Spanish American short fiction, one is impressed by the wide variety of themes and techniques as well as by the generally high quality of the genre. From the metaphysical tales of Borges, who expunged the dead wood encumbering

Spanish American prose, many writers have learned greater respect for linguistic precision and, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, a fundamental skepticism toward language as a tool for mirroring reality. Thus many fine practitioners have rejected traditional realism for surrealism, fantasy, metafiction, the Absurd, or the grotesque to express their esthetic ideals and philosophical preoccupations. The psychological tale has attained new heights of excellence, with greater stress given to existential solitude, Jungian archetypes, and portraits of the alter ego or double. Also significant is a group of stories dealing with the political and social conflicts so common throughout much of Spanish American history, themes often conveyed in a direct, realistic style. Even in these stories, however, humor, irony, and elliptical ambiguity have tended to replace the tedious verbosity of much traditional social protest literature.

The most effective stylistic and structural devices used to capture the complex realities of today's world include the shifting point of view, the interior monologue, and the art of juxtaposition or montage, all of which also stretch, fragment, circularize, or destroy lineal time. The authors of modern short fiction often reject sequential action, preferring to present their materials in the form of incomplete mosaics that oblige the reader to link seemingly unrelated segments to discover intended meanings. Thus just as the protagonist of "Las babas del diablo" recreates his story while gazing at an enlarged snapshot, the reader must project his imagination beyond the immediate limitations of the fictional framework to supply the missing segments of the mosaic. Structural unity, then, remains intact but concealed by subtly manipulated techniques.

Although Borges is still the undisputed master of the genre, Cortázar has emerged as an exceptionally gifted weaver of fantasies whose prestige is beginning to approach that of his elder compatriot. The reputations of other established men of letters such as Carpentier, Onetti, Arreola, Rulfo, Donoso, García Márquez, and Fuentes have spread well beyond the Spanish-speaking world. Many younger writers whose works have yet to be translated will undoubtedly soon reach wider audiences both within and outside their native lands.

Many names worthy of notice have unfortunately been omitted. Among these are Antonio de Benedetto (1922–), Humberto Constantini (1924–), and Luisa Valenzuela (1938–), of Argentina; Renato Prada Oropeza (1937–), of Bolivia; Enrique Lafourcade (1927–) and Jorge Edwards (1931–) of Chile; Manuel Mejía Vallejo (1923–) and Oscar Collazos (1942–) of Colombia;

Yolanda Oreamuno (1917–) and Fabián Dobles (1918–) of Costa Rica; Humberto Arenal (1926–) of Cuba; César Dávila Andrade (1937–) of Ecuador; Rosario Castellanos (1925–1974) and Jorge Ibarguengoitia (1928–) of Mexico; Sergio Ramírez (1942–) of Nicaragua; Oswaldo Reynoso (1932–) and Mario Vargas Llosa (1936–) of Peru; Mario Benedetti (1920–) of Uruguay; and Salvador Garmendia (1928–) and Adriano González León (1931–) of Venezuela.

The contemporary Spanish American short story has demonstrated a remarkable degree of sophistication and originality primarily because of the universality of its *Weltanschauung* and the experimental, avant-garde nature of its form. The seminal works of the 1940s and 1950s were followed by an explosion of talent during the 1960s, a period of economic prosperity and political ferment. Although the 1970s have seen a slackening of this so-called boom, familiar figures are continuing to write short stories and newcomers are offering fresh insights into human behavior as well as new levels of contact with reality. This combination of time-tested creativity and esthetic discovery augurs well for the future of the genre.

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Notes and References

MAJOR FIGURES IN THE BRAZILIAN SHORT STORY

1. In the text the date in parentheses that follows titles of stories and of collections refers to book, not journal, publication. If the collection has been translated into English, the title appears in italics; if the story has been translated, its title appears in quotation marks.
2. David William Foster, "Joaquin Maria Machado de Assis," in *Critical Survey of Short Fiction* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Salem Press, 1981), pp. 1849–53. Metafiction, as a subcategory of metaliterature, refers to a work that articulates, either obliquely or explicitly, a preoccupation with the nature of fiction, particularly the difficulties of capturing experience through literary art and the ways in which literary art becomes a distortion rather than an accurate representation of experience.
3. David William Foster, "João Guimaraes Rosa," in *Critical Survey of Short Fiction*, 1563–68.
4. I should like to acknowledge the suggestions for this chapter made so generously by Naomi Lindstrom of the University of Texas at Austin and Roberto Reis of the Universidade de Gama Filho in Rio de Janeiro.

THE SPANISH AMERICAN SHORT STORY FROM ECHEVERRÍA TO QUIROGA

1. Enrique Anderson Imbert makes this comment in his *Spanish American Literature, A History*, trans. John V. Falconieri (Detroit, 1963), p. 211.
2. Noe Jitrik's objections to Payró's language of narration are expressed in "Socialismo y gracia en Roberto J. Payró" [Socialism and wit in Roberto J. Payró], in his *El fuego de la especie* [Fire of the species] (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971), pp. 99–127; see especially 110–14.
3. Octavio Paz's explanation of the metaphysical and theosophical underpinnings of modernist thought, and of how these notions corresponded to the work of producing a more rhythmic literary language, appear in *Cuadrivio* (Quadrivium) (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1965), especially "El caracol y la sirena" [The siren and the seashell], pp. 11–65, and "El camino de la pasión" [The route of passion], pp. 69–130. In English, see *The Siren and the Seashell*

and *Other Essays*, trans. Lysander Kemp and Margaret Sayers Peden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973) for Paz's orienting remarks concerning the modernist phenomenon. For a briefer commentary containing Paz's main ideas on modernism, see his "Prologue" to Lysander Kemp translation, *Selected Poems of Rubén Darío* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 7-18.

4. Jorge Luis Borges, *Leopoldo Lugones* (Buenos Aires: Pleamar, 1965), p. 12.

THE SPANISH AMERICAN SHORT STORY FROM QUIROGA TO BORGES

1. Horacio Quiroga, *Cuentos*, ed. R. Lazo (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1968, p. xxxiv. The decalogue appears in English in William Peden's "Some Notes on Quiroga's Stories," *Review* (Winter 1976): 41-43.

2. The dates of the Quiroga stories refer to the year of journal publication to emphasize the chronologic span of his work and the dates of different kinds of stories.

3. See Luis Leal, *Historia del cuento hispanoamericano*, (Mexico City, 1966) p. 69.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

5. Seymour Menton, *El cuento hispanoamericano*, (Mexico City, 1970), 2:112-14.

6. Leal, p. 97.

7. Menton, 1:312-14.

THE SPANISH AMERICAN SHORT STORY FROM BORGES TO THE PRESENT

1. See D.P. Gallagher's chapter on Borges in his *Modern Latin American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 94-121.

2. Zeno of Elea's "Dichotomy" is referred to here. According to his paradox, before a body in motion can reach a given point it must first traverse half of the distance; before it can traverse half it must traverse a quarter; and so on ad infinitum. Hence for a body to pass from one point to another it must traverse an infinite number of divisions. Theoretically, then, a goal can never be reached. When Lönnrot tells Scharlach to look for him at a certain point on a straight line, he is implying that in the infinite maze of eternity Scharlach will never be able to find him.

3. Todorov defines the fantastic as a state of uncertainty experienced by the reader because of the text's violation of natural laws. If the violation can be explained by the influence of an illusion, the laws of reality remain intact, and the text represents an example of the uncanny (*l'étrange*). If the violation of natural laws is due to the imposition of supernatural laws beyond the reader's experience (which is the case in "Paulina"), the text becomes an example of the marvelous. The fantastic, then, occupies the narrow, and often tenuous, realm of ambiguity between the uncanny and the marvelous. See Todorov's *The*

Fantastic: A Structuralist Approach to a Literary Genre (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 24-40.

Barrenechea sees the fantastic in broader terms, defining it as the confrontation between abnormal events and everyday reality. Consult her "Ensayo de una tipología de la literatura fantástica," *Revista Iberoamericana* 80 (July-September 1972): 391-403.

4. For a variety of critical views on magical realism, see *Otros mundos otros fuegos*, ed. Donald A. Yates (East Lansing, Mich.: Latin American Studies Center, 1975). Also the Spring-Summer 1981 issue of *Colorado State Review* 8:2 devoted to the subject of magical realism.

5. I am grateful to Professor Thomas C. Meehan for allowing me to read the chapter on Sorrentino from the manuscript of his forthcoming book, *Essays on Argentine Narrators* (Valencia: Albatros Ediciones, 1982).

6. For a sampling of fiction by Chileans in exile, see the anthology, *Joven narrativa chilena después del golpe*, ed. Antonio Skármeta (Clear Creek, Ind.: *American Hispanist*, 1976). In addition to Skármeta, prominent writers of this group include Poli Délano (1936-), Luis Domínguez (1933-), and Hernán Valdés (1934-).

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