

Short Story Criticism



SSC

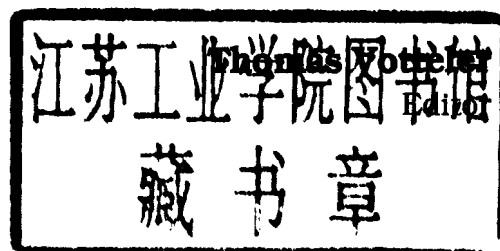
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Volume 4

Short Story Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the
Works of Short Fiction Writers



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Preface

Short Story Criticism (SSC) presents significant passages from criticism of the world's greatest short story writers and provides supplementary materials—biographical and bibliographical—to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the authors of short fiction. This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons who had noted an increasing number of requests for critical material on short story writers. Although major short story writers are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, and *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to writers of the short story genre.

The Scope of the Work

SSC is designed to serve as an introduction to major short story writers of all eras and nationalities. For example, the present volume includes commentary on Jorge Luis Borges, a central figure in modern Latin American literature, and Robert Penn Warren, the Pulitzer Prize-winning first Poet Laureate of the United States who also published distinguished short fiction; D. H. Lawrence, one of the most original English writers of the twentieth century, and Nikolai Gogol, a seminal nineteenth-century Russian writer and a forefather of the modern short story. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, SSC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Twelve to fifteen authors will be included in each volume, and each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work: some early criticism is included to indicate initial reaction, later criticism is selected to represent any rise or decline in the author's reputation, and current analyses provide a modern view. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Critical articles and books that have not been translated into English are excluded. Every attempt has been made to identify and include excerpts from the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors will sometimes reprint essays that have appeared in previous volumes of Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty-five percent of the author entry.

The Organization of the Book

The author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical introduction, a list of principal works, excerpts of criticism (each preceded by an explanatory note and followed by a bibliographical citation), and references for further reading.

- The **author heading** consists of the author's full name, followed by birth and death dates. The unbracketed portion of the name denotes the form under which the author most commonly wrote. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction.

- The **biographical and critical introduction** contains background information designed to introduce a reader to the author and to the critical debates surrounding his or her work. Parenthetical material following the introductions provides references to biographical and critical reference series published by Gale, including *CLC*, *TCLC*, *NCLC*, and *LC*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and *Something about the Author*.
- *SSC* entries include **portraits of the author**. Many entries also contain illustrations of materials pertinent to an author's career, including holographs of manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, or representations of important people, places, and events in the author's life.
- The list of **principal works** is chronological by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises the short story collections, novellas, and novella collections. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All short story, novella, and collection titles by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type to enable a reader to ascertain without difficulty the works discussed. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. When an anonymous essay is later attributed to a critic, the critic's name appears in brackets at the beginning of the excerpt and in the bibliographical citation.
- Critical essays are prefaced with **explanatory notes** as an additional aid to students and readers using *SSC*. The explanatory notes provide several types of useful information, including: the reputation of a critic, the importance of a work of criticism, and the specific type of criticism (biographical, psychoanalytic, structuralist, etc.).
- A complete **bibliographical citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, follows each piece of criticism.
- The **further reading list** appearing at the end of each author entry suggests additional materials on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

Cumulative Indexes

Each volume of *SSC* includes a cumulative **author index** listing all the authors who have appeared in *SSC*, *CLC*, *TCLC*, *NCLC*, *LC*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, as well as cross-references to the Gale series *Children's Literature Review*, *Authors in the News*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Something about the Author*, *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*, and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*. Users will welcome this cumulated author index as a useful tool for locating an author within the literary criticism series.

Each volume of *SSC* also includes a cumulative **title index**. This index lists in alphabetical order all short story, novella, and collection titles contained in the *SSC* series. Titles of short story collections, novellas, and novella collections are printed in italics, while all individual short stories are printed in roman type with quotation marks. Each title is followed by the author's name and the corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work may be located. English-language translations of original foreign language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are listed in one place.

Suggestions Are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editors, either by letter or by calling Gale's toll-free number: 1-800-347-GALE.

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Authors to Be Featured in SSC , Volumes 5 and 6

Hans Christian Andersen, 1805-1875. (Danish fairy tale writer, poet, short story writer, novelist, travel writer, autobiographer, and dramatist)—One of the most distinguished and best-loved writers of fairy tales, Andersen created an enduring legacy of lively and inventive literature that includes such tales as “Thumbelina,” “The Princess and the Pea,” and “The Ugly Duckling.”

Kay Boyle, b. 1902. (American novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist, and translator)—An eminent author of the American expatriate movement of the 1920s, Boyle is noted for her intriguing and innovative prose style. Her stories often reflect an ardent commitment to social activism and convey an impassioned concern with the individual's search for love and understanding.

Pearl S. Buck, 1892-1973. (American novelist, short story writer, dramatist, essayist, editor, biographer, autobiographer, translator, and author of children's books)—Best known for her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Good Earth*, Buck is distinguished as the first American woman to have received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Critics applaud Buck's astute descriptions of setting and character in both her novels and her short stories.

(Francis) Scott (Key) Fitzgerald, 1896-1940. (American novelist, short story writer, essayist, scriptwriter, and dramatist)—Renowned for his classic novel *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald is considered one of the most influential novelists and short story writers of the twentieth century. In such stories as “May Day,” “Babylon Revisited,” and “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” Fitzgerald depicts the prosperity, excess, and subsequent disillusionment that characterized America's Jazz Age.

O. Henry, 1862-1910. (American short story writer and novelist)—A major figure in the history of the short story, Henry is renowned for his poignant caricatures of life in early twentieth-century New York City. Considered a master of the “surprise ending,” Henry is perhaps most readily recognized for such widely anthologized stories as “The Gift of the Magi” and “The Last Leaf.”

Franz Kafka, 1883-1924. (Czechoslovakian-born German short story writer and novelist)—Frequently identified as a genius who gave literary form to the disorder of the modern world, Kafka's prophetic and profoundly enigmatic stories often describe modern human degradation and cruelty. His well-known and widely studied short story “The Metamorphosis” is regarded as a masterpiece of the genre.

Doris Lessing, 1919- . (Persian-born English novelist, short story writer, essayist, dramatist, poet, nonfiction writer, journalist, and travel writer)—Considered among the most powerful contemporary novelists, Lessing has explored many of the central ideas, ideologies, and social issues of the twentieth century. Three of her most acclaimed volumes of short fiction, *Five: Short Novels*, *The Habit of Loving*, and *African Stories*, focus primarily on racial concerns and the emancipation of modern women.

Frank O'Connor, 1903-1966. (Irish short story writer, novelist, essayist, and critic)—O'Connor is one of Ireland's major literary figures. His stories are widely read and cherished for their realistic and humorously sensitive portrayals of Irish life.

Liam O'Flaherty, 1896-1984. (Irish novelist, short story writer, autobiographer, and travel writer)—O'Flaherty is considered an important figure in the Irish Renaissance, a literary movement that sought inspiration in Celtic cultural tradition. Best known for novels that chronicle the Irish struggle for independence from England, O'Flaherty is also respected for short stories that vividly portray the arduous peasant life of his native Aran Islands.

Mark Twain, 1835-1910. (American novelist, short story writer, journalist, essayist, autobiographer, and dramatist)—Regarded as the father of modern American literature, Twain is credited with freeing American fiction from the staid literary conventions of the nineteenth century. Although best known for his novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain also wrote such acclaimed stories as “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,” and “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” which caustically satirize hypocrisy and social injustice.

Additional Authors to Appear in Future Volumes

- Agnon, Shmuel Yosef
 1888-1970
 Aiken, Conrad 1889-1973
 Aldiss, Brian 1925-
 Aleichem, Sholom 1859-1916
 Asimov, Isaac 1920-
 Atherton, Gertrude 1857-1948
 Babel, Isaac 1894-1941?
 Baldwin, James 1924-1987
 Balzac, Honoré de 1799-1850
 Barth, John 1930-
 Beattie, Ann 1947-
 Beerbohm, Max 1872-1956
 Bellow, Saul 1915-
 Benét, Stephen Vincent
 1898-1943
 Bierce, Ambrose 1842-1914?
 Boccaccio, Giovanni 1313?-1375
 Böll, Heinrich 1917-1985
 Brentano, Clemens 1778-1842
 Bunin, Ivan 1870-1953
 Caldwell, Erskine 1903-
 Calisher, Hortense 1911-
 Camus, Albert 1913-1960
 Carter, Angela 1940-
 Carver, Raymond 1938-1988
 Cassill, R. V. 1919-
 Cervantes 1547-1616
 Chandler, Raymond 1888-1959
 Chaucer, Geoffrey 1345-1400
 Chopin, Kate 1851-1904
 Conrad, Joseph 1857-1924
 Coover, Robert 1932-
 Cortázar, Julio 1914-1984
 Crane, Stephen 1871-1900
 Dahl, Roald 1916-
 Dante Alighieri 1265-1321
 Davenport, Guy 1927-
 de la Mare, Walter 1873-1956
 Dick, Philip K. 1928-1982
 Dinesen, Isak (ps. of Karen
 Blixen) 1885-1962
 Disch, Thomas M. 1940-
 Doyle, Arthur Conan 1859-1930
 Elkin, Stanley 1930-
 Ellison, Harlan 1934-
 Fast, Howard 1914-
 Flaubert, Gustave 1821-1880
 Forster, E. M. 1879-1970
 France, Anatole (ps. of Anatole-
 François Thibault) 1844-1924
 Friedman, Bruce J. 1930-
 Gaines, Ernest J. 1933-
 Gallant, Mavis 1922-
 Galsworthy, John 1867-1933
 García-Márquez, Gabriel 1928-
 Gardner, John 1933-1982
 Garland, Hamlin 1860-1940
 Gass, William H. 1924-
 Gide, André 1869-1951
 Gilchrist, Ellen 1935-
 Golding, William 1911-
 Gordimer, Nadine 1923-
 Gordon, Caroline 1895-1981
 Grau, Shirley Ann 1929-
 Greene, Graham 1904-
 Grimm, Jakob Ludwig
 1785-1863
 Grimm, Wilhelm Karl
 1786-1859
 Hammett, Dashiell 1894-1961
 Harris, Joel Chandler
 1848-1908
 Harte, Bret 1836-1902
 Heinlein, Robert A. 1907-
 Hesse, Herman 1877-1962
 Hoffmann, E. T. A. 1776-1822
 Hughes, Langston 1902-1967
 Jackson, Shirley 1919-1965
 James, Henry 1843-1916
 James, M. R. 1862-1936
 Jewett, Sarah Orne 1844-1909
 Jhabvala, Ruth Praver 1927-
 King, Stephen 1947-
 Kipling, Rudyard 1865-1936
 Knowles, John 1926-1979
 Lardner, Ring 1885-1933
 Laurence, Margaret 1926-1987
 LeFanu, Joseph Sheridan
 1814-1873
 LeGuin, Ursula K. 1929-
 Machado de Assis, Joaquim
 Maria 1839-1908
 Malamud, Bernard 1914-1986
 Mann, Thomas 1875-1955
 Mansfield, Katherine 1888-1923
 Masters, Edgar Lee 1869?-1950
 McCullers, Carson 1917-1967
 Maugham, W. Somerset
 1874-1965
 Mérimée, Prosper 1803-1870
 Oates, Joyce Carol 1938-
 O'Brien, Edna 1936-
 O'Faolain, Sean 1900-
 Olsen, Tillie 1913-
 Ozick, Cynthia 1928-
 Paley, Grace 1922-
 Pasternak, Boris 1890-1960
 Pavese, Cesare 1908-1950
 Perelman, S. J. 1904-1976
 Pritchett, V. S. 1900-
 Robbe-Grillet, Alain 1922-
 Roth, Philip 1933-
 Saki (ps. of H. H. Munro)
 1870-1916
 Saroyan, William 1908-1981
 Schwartz, Delmore 1913-1966
 Scott, Sir Walter 1771-1832
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 Spark, Muriel 1918-
 Stafford, Jean 1915-1979
 Stead, Christina 1902-1983
 Stein, Gertrude 1874-1946
 Steinbeck, John 1902-1983
 Stevenson, Robert Louis
 1850-1894
 Sturgeon, Theodore 1918-1985
 Tagore, Rabindranath
 1861-1941
 Taylor, Peter 1917-
 Thackeray, William Makepeace
 1811-1863
 Tolstoy, Leo 1828-1910
 Turgenev, Ivan 1818-1883
 Updike, John 1932-
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 Wells, H. G. 1866-1946
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Jorge Luis Borges

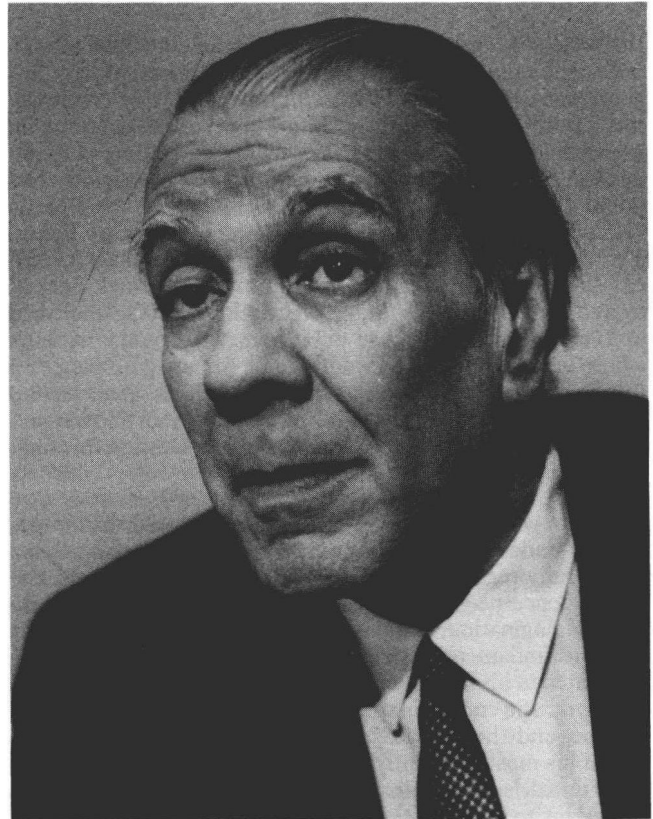
1899-1986

(Also wrote in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares under the joint pseudonyms Honorio Bustos Domecq, B. Lynch Davis, and B. Suarez Lynch) Argentinian short story writer, essayist, poet, translator, critic, biographer, travel writer, novelist, and scriptwriter.

Regarded as among the foremost figures in modern Latin American literature, Borges is acclaimed for his esoteric and intricate short stories in which he combines fantasy and realism to address complex philosophical questions. His works often defy classification, synthesizing elements of both fiction and the essay, while generally eschewing the use of complex characters and realistic settings. In his writings, Borges employs paradox and oxymoron to examine such metaphysical issues as the existence of a supreme being, the malleability of personal identity, and the impotency of human intelligence. Ana María Barrenechea observed: "Borges is convinced that nothing in Man's destiny has any meaning. This incredulity incites him, nonetheless, to create a literature out of literature and philosophy in which the metaphysical discussion or the artistic problem constitutes the plot of the story. His literary creativity vitalizes what, *a priori*, would otherwise seem abstract, and he is capable of infusing drama and the throbbings of adventure into thoughts which in themselves lack narrative substance."

Borges was born in Buenos Aires, where he lived for most of his childhood. His father was Jorge Guillermo Borges, a respected lawyer, author, and educator, and Borges once commented: "If I were asked to name the chief event in my life, I should say my father's library." From an early age, Borges absorbed a wide range of world literature. He learned to read English before Spanish due to the influence of his English grandmother, and when he was seven years old, he translated Oscar Wilde's parable "The Happy Prince." Borges's first original story, "El rey de la selva," was published when he was thirteen. While his family was stranded in Switzerland following the outbreak of World War I, Borges enrolled at the Collège de Genève, where he studied French and German and familiarized himself with such European philosophers as Arthur Schopenhauer and George Berkeley. Upon graduating in 1918, Borges traveled to Spain. There, he published reviews, essays, and poetry and associated with the Ultraístas, an avant-garde literary group whose fiction combined elements of Dadaism, Imagism, and German Expressionism. Striving in their poetry to transcend boundaries of time and space, the Ultraístas championed metaphor as the ultimate form of expression, and their influence permeates much of Borges's early work, particularly *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, his first poetry collection.

Borges returned to Buenos Aires in 1921. During this time he helped develop several small Argentinian publications, including the literary magazine *Prisma* and the journal *Proa*. He also became reacquainted with Macedonio Fernandez, a writer and colleague of his father whose friendship and guidance greatly influenced Borges. Encouraged by Fernandez to develop his interest in metaphysics and the complexities of language, Borges began publishing essays on these topics,



many of which were later collected in such volumes as *Inquisiciones* and *El tamaño de mi esperanza*. In 1938, Borges developed septicemia, a form of blood poisoning, from a head wound he suffered in a fall down a staircase. Concerned that the condition had impaired his writing ability, Borges published a short story as his first work after the accident, intending to attribute its possible failure to inexperience in the genre rather than a loss of literary skill. The tale, "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" ("Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote"), unexpectedly garnered positive reactions, and Borges's ensuing short fiction earned increasingly widespread critical recognition in Argentina.

Borges's early tales, which closely resemble his essays in style and subject matter, are often interpreted as parables that illustrate the limitations and possibilities of art. In his early story, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote," for example, Borges focuses upon a modern writer who sets out to create his own version of Miguel de Cervante's *Don Quixote* yet composes a text that corresponds precisely to portions of the original work. In the prose piece "El acercamiento a Almotásim," which appears in *Historia de la eternidad*, Borges questions conventional perceptions of reality in the form of a bogus review of a nonexistent Indian detective novel. Borges's collection *Historia universal de la infamia* (*A Universal*

History of Infamy) purports to be a criminal's encyclopedia of knife fighters, rogues, and felons that includes fabricated sketches of such historical figures as Billy the Kid, mafia boss Monk Eastman, and nineteenth-century slave trader Lazarus Morell. Also included in the translated edition of this work is "The South," a tale in which a fastidious librarian, desiring the chivalric lifestyle of an Argentinean gaucho, enters into a fatal knife fight that may exist only in his imagination.

In 1943, after signing a manifesto denouncing Argentinian military dictator Juan Perón, Borges was demoted from his government post as an assistant librarian to poultry inspector, a position he refused, however, in favor of becoming an itinerant lecturer and teacher. Following the ousting of Perón in 1955, Borges was named director of the prestigious National Library of Argentina and later awarded the Premio Nacional de Literatura, the country's highest literary honor. Yet, Borges remained largely unknown outside Latin America. In 1961, Borges and Irish dramatist Samuel Beckett shared the Prix Formentor, an international prize established in 1960 by six avant-garde publishers to recognize authors whose work they deemed would "have a lasting influence on the development of modern literature." This achievement closely coincided with the publication of his short fiction collection *Ficciones* and helped establish his reputation throughout the world.

Ficciones, which includes material originally published in Argentina under the title *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, is generally regarded as Borges's most significant work. Primarily concerned in these stories with conflicts between reality and imagination, Borges utilizes what he considered to be the four fundamental aspects of fantasy, which James E. Irby recounted in his introduction to *Labyrinths*: "the work within the work, the contamination of reality by dream, the voyage in time, and the double." In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," one of his most frequently analyzed stories, Borges combines fiction with such elements of the essay as footnotes and a postscript to describe the attempts of a secret philosophical society to create an invented world free of linear space and time. As their ideas cohere, objects from their imagined realm surface in reality. Frances Wyers Weber commented: "The story develops the contrasts not only between the cohesiveness of Tlön and the incomprehensible, unstable realities of the experienced world, but also the inevitable mutilation that order imposes. The utopian world of unlimited capricious speculation becomes a carefully wrought complex that eliminates all alternatives and bewitches humanity with its utter intelligibility."

Among other stories collected in *Ficciones* is "La lotería en Babilonia" ("The Babylon Lottery"), the tale of an unidentified company whose lottery system controls the most intimate aspects of Babylonian society. Meting out punishments as well as prizes, the lottery promotes a "controlled chaos" that ultimately replaces chance as the dominant factor in the lives of Babylon's citizens. In the piece "La muerte y la brújula" ("Death and the Compass"), Borges draws upon the detective fictions of Edgar Allan Poe and G. K. Chesterton. The protagonist, Lönnrot, is a coolly analytical investigator who pursues the murderer of three rabbis, certain that the killings hold religious significance despite evidence that implicates Red Scharlach, the detective's antithetical double and former adversary. Following a lengthy chase through a labyrinthine manor, Scharlach traps Lönnrot and reveals that the murders were in fact part of his plot to kill the sleuth, whose overconfi-

dence in his superior intellect ultimately betrayed him. D. P. Gallagher observed: "Such is the nature of Borges's amused critique of pure reason, and of his playful dramatization of the impossibility and vanity of definitive knowledge. For like Lönnrot we can only piece together infinitesimal fragments which in turn we can only interpret through a spectrum of limiting assumptions."

In his next collection, *El Aleph* (*The Aleph*), Borges continued to dismantle what he viewed as the false absolutes of space, time, and identity. The simultaneity of the universal and the particular that characterizes much of Borges's fiction is evident in the "Aleph" of the title story, a stone that encompasses all visual images of the universe and confines all points of space, signifying humanity's limitless, if misguided, possibilities. The Aleph's opposite, described in the story "El Zahir," is a coin that symbolizes the religious doctrines and scientific theories used to systematize the universe. In addition to these highly metaphysical pieces, *El Aleph* contains several stories in which abstract experience blends with realistic characterization and settings. In "La espera" ("The Wait"), for instance, a mobster dreams that he successfully eludes a gang of assassins. When he wakes he is emboldened by his dream, and he calmly confronts the gunmen, who shoot him rather than vanish as they had in his imagination. In "Emma Zunz," one of Borges's most realistic stories, the title character, a young factory worker, plots to murder her employer, Loewenthal, whose false accusations prompted her father's suicide. As part of her scheme, Emma deliberately loses her virginity to a stranger, planning to claim that Loewenthal raped her and that she killed him in self-defense. Yet Emma is so disgusted by her encounter with the stranger that she murders Loewenthal for reasons arising from her feelings of violation rather than revenge. Gene H. Bell-Villada asserted: "'Emma Zunz' is one of the few great Borges stories in which the decisive factor is not an abstraction, not a bookish or mental pattern, but the forces of sheer passion, albeit passion slightly twisted. This is a story that, to an astounding degree, peers into the depths of a simple human heart."

Borges continued his straightforward approach to character and plot in *El informe de Brodie* (*Doctor Brodie's Report*), a collection consisting of such pieces as "La señora mayor" ("The Elder Lady"), the story of a centenarian who ignores her central role in a patriotic celebration, and "Historia de Rosendo Juárez" ("Rosendo's Tale"), the sequel to Borges's earlier "Hombre de la esquina rosa" ("The Streetcorner Man"), in which he chronicles violence in the Argentinian underworld. Ronald Christ remarked that in *Doctor Brodie's Report*, "Borges confronts the provincial, the petty and the stupidly cruel—exactly that world he avoids in his great fiction—at the same moment that he attempts to understand the nature of his own experience not from the heights of his former metaphysic but from an unintellectually contemplative, reluctantly lyrical point of view." Borges's collection, *El libro de arena* (*The Book of Sand*), although similar to *Doctor Brodie's Report* in its traditional treatment of character and plot, returns to the fantastical themes of his earlier fiction. This volume includes the long tale "El congreso" ("The Congress"), in which a world parliament attempts to incorporate all of humanity's diverse ideologies and thoughts in a collection of books housed in one remote library. The congress eventually realizes the arbitrary nature of their task and agrees that all historical knowledge restricts the intellect. They abandon their project and destroy the books, concluding that

"every few centuries, the library of Alexandria must be burned down."

In the late 1950s, Borges's eyesight declined due to a hereditary disease, and he limited his literary output to essays and easily recalled, metrically structured poems, which he later collected in such anthologies as *El hacedor* (*Dreamtigers*), *Elogio de la sombra* (*In Praise of Darkness*), and *The Gold of the Tigers: Selected Later Poems*. During this period, Borges's mother increased her role as his secretary, a position she had occupied throughout his career, taking dictation of his work and reading to him in Spanish, English, and French. In 1985 Borges was diagnosed with liver cancer, and he left Buenos Aires for Geneva, Switzerland, where he married his companion and former student, María Kodama. Three weeks later, at age eighty-seven, Borges died.

Among the first contemporary Latin American authors to achieve international recognition, Borges is lauded for his stylistic and philosophical innovations, which have redefined the boundaries of fiction and the essay. Citing his imaginative infusion of fantasy into South America's essentially realistic literary tradition, critics often attribute Borges's influence to the works of such ensuing Latin American authors as Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and G. Cabrera Infante. While several commentators have faulted Borges for his refusal to address social or political issues, most agree with Octavio Paz's contention that "he was brave when faced with the circumstances of his country and of the world. But above all he was a writer, and the literary tradition seemed to him no less alive and present than current events." Jaime Alazraki observed: "Borges' stories, which trite criticism insists on seeing as an evasion of reality, bring us in fact much closer to reality . . . an essential reality which reduces us to a fortuitous number in a gigantic lottery and at the same time links us with everything that was and is to be, to a reality which transforms us into a cycle which already has occurred and yet teaches us that a minute can be the receptacle of eternity, to a reality which effaces our identity and yet converts us into depositories of a supreme Identity—in short, an improbable, contradictory, ambiguous, and even absurd reality."

(For further information on Borges's life and career, see *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vols. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 19, 44, 48; *Contemporary Authors*, Vols. 21-24 rev. ed.; *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series*, Vol. 19; and *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook*: 1986.)

PRINCIPAL WORKS

SHORT FICTION

- Historia universal de la infamia* 1935
[*A Universal History of Infamy*, 1972]
El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan 1942
[*The Garden of Forking Paths* published in *Ficciones*, 1962]
Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi [with Adolfo Bioy Casares under the pseudonym Honorio Bustos Domecq] 1942
[*Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi*, 1981]
Ficciones, 1935-1944 1944
[*Ficciones*, 1962; published in England as *Fictions*, 1965]
El Aleph 1949; enlarged edition, 1962
[*The Aleph, and Other Stories*, 1933-1969 (enlarged edition), 1970]

- Obras completas*. 10 vols. (short stories, essays, and poetry) 1953-1967; published as one volume, 1974
Manual de zoología fantástica [with Margarita Guerrero] 1957; also published as *El libro de los seres imaginarios*, 1967
[*The Imaginary Zoo*, 1969; also published as *The Book of Imaginary Beings* (revised and enlarged edition), 1969]
Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings (short stories and essays) 1962
Crónicas de Bustos Domecq [with Adolfo Bioy Casares under the pseudonym Honorio Bustos Domecq] 1967
[*Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, 1976]
El informe de Brodie 1970; published in *Obras completas* [Doctor Brodie's Report, 1972]
El libro de arena 1975
[*The Book of Sand*, 1977]

OTHER MAJOR WORKS

- Fervor de Buenos Aires* (poetry) 1923
Inquisiciones (essays) 1925
Luna de enfrente (poetry) 1925
El tamaño de mi esperanza (essays) 1926
El idioma de los Argentinos (essays and lectures) 1928
Evaristo Carriego (essay) 1930
Discusión (essays and criticism) 1932
Historia de la eternidad (essays) 1936
Poemas, 1922-1943 (poetry) 1943
Otras inquisiciones, 1937-1952 (essays and lectures) 1952
[*Other Inquisitions*, 1937-1952, 1964]
Antología personal (poetry and prose) 1961
[*A Personal Anthology*, 1967]
El hacedor (prose and poetry) 1960; published as Volume IX of *Obras completas* [Dreamtigers, 1964]
Obra poética, 1923-1967 (poetry) 1967
[*Selected Poems*, 1923-1967, 1972]
Nueva antología personal (poetry and prose) 1968
Elogio de la sombra (poetry and prose) 1969
[*In Praise of Darkness*, 1974]
El oro de los tigres (poetry) 1972
Borges on Writing (interviews) 1973
La rosa profunda (poetry) 1975
The Gold of the Tigers: Selected Later Poems (poetry) 1977; includes English translations from *El oro de los tigres* and *La rosa profunda*
Historia de la noche (poetry) 1977
Prosa completas. 2 vols. (prose) 1980
Siete noches (lectures) 1980
[*Seven Nights*, 1984]
Antología poética, 1923-1977 (poetry) 1981
Atlas [with María Kodama] (prose) 1984
[*Atlas*, 1985]

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[In the following excerpt, Barrenechea focuses upon Borges's symbolic treatment of the universe as a chaotic labyrinth.]

Jorge Luis Borges was born in the very heart of Buenos Aires on August 24, 1899. He was:

the son, grandson, great-grandson, and great-great-grandson of native-born Argentinians . . .

who contributed their Spanish, English, and Portuguese blood to his veins. He often mentions his ancestors in his works, and the meaning of their presence therein must be understood. . . . (p. 1)

As a writer who feels temporality so deeply:

I who am Time and blood and anguish.

Borges is enabled, through the union with the males in his lineage, to experience the incarnation of Time in the prolongation of some of their anxieties and hopes. This union already evolves under the guise of the temporal labyrinth and the cyclical returning which confront the same destinies (Nietzsche), or under that of an immortality which is not personal but is achieved through the succession of generations (Schopenhauer), or else under that of the simple occurrence which leads to death.

Such throwbacks are also justified by the intense symbolism which characterizes his work. Borges discovers key moments in men's lives, moments which explain their destinies. At the same time, he emphasizes that writers and other artists create symbols of the universe, of human destiny, and of themselves through contained oscillations which attempt to convey at once that Man wanders through life blindly and that each man is all men and therefore no one. (pp. 1-2)

His childhood was spent in the house in the Palermo district, in the hotel, and later in the house in Adrogué where the family resided during the summer months. The town of Adrogué appears from time to time in his poems, essays, or stories with a magic which restores the lost days of scenting honeysuckle or eucalyptus, or is useful in contaminating with unreality some of the stories which are populated with statues, useless fountains, rhombic glass doors in yellow, red, and green; it is the unreality of childhood remembrances which memory sifts and fantasy elaborates.

In his earlier works Borges revived memories of the Palermo district with its exploits of brawlers because he was motivated by the nostalgia for adventure and the interest in recreating unpublished aspects of his land in the thematic manner used by Carriego. But afterward, the house in Palermo represents that symbolic closed perimeter wherein the child reads interminable stories by Kipling and Stevenson, as well as those in *The Arabian Nights*. (pp. 3-4)

[From the beginning, Borges] was attracted to many diverse aesthetic and philosophical questions. In his literary essays appear Argentinian authors alongside chosen foreign ones: Spaniards, Englishmen, Germans, Americans. His impassioned meditations on language are focused on the conflict between the Spanish and vernacular forms, as well as on the problematical nature of all language. Next to an exalted remembrance of Buenos Aires is found a speculation on Berkeley's idealism or on the negation of the "I." (p. 9)

Borges applies his capacity for synthesizing human destinies and emphasizing their symbolic character to life itself, converting it into a parabola of his work. He sees himself imprisoned in a house (which becomes a prison-labyrinth without exit) and condemned endlessly to construct literary labyrinths. This is and will remain his task: poems, essays, and stories are definitively oriented toward the universal forms of the fantastic-metaphysical plane. But this does not mean that he separates himself from his country to become an uprooted artist. He has always been an Argentinian; as he himself has

noted, one either belongs or does not belong to an area, and this happens naturally, not by design. He does, however, disown local color, those aspects of language consciously set off, and a programming of the Argentinian theme.

He chooses to allow the theme to appear whenever it becomes "necessary," whenever universal suffering present in national human values or national suffering projected in universal terms demand it. . . . Besides, since he abandoned his "studiously native" attitude, the fusion of the two themes is achieved without hardship and often by obscure routes. A disreputable tenement in Buenos Aires becomes the Hindu house where the eternal Final Judgment of "The Man on the Threshold" is held; a vision of its desolate neighborhoods persists in the nameless city of "Death and the Compass"; gauchos and *compadritos* try to appeal to, supplant, or elude the Divinity, or themselves become the Divinity in "Funes the Memorious" and "The Dead Man." The resonance of the local may accentuate what is dramatic or satirical in a story. (p. 11)

[The Argentinian] reaction with respect to Borges is a very special affair. From the beginning there was controversy over his work and a resultant split among contenders into impassioned supporters and pitiless detractors . . . when he had yet to write the stories which have made him universally known. Everyone recognized the mastery of his style, a style which was not only copied—along with his world of fantastic stories—by his followers, but penetrated surreptitiously into that of some of his detractors. His enemies charge him with "foreignism," nihilism, evasion of reality, dehumanization, unfounded use of the imagination, while extremists accuse him of being a writer for the select few who has forgotten the people. If they concede that he has concerned himself with Argentinian life, they then limit the concession by saying that he has done so only in a slight or partial manner; if they emphasize his foreignness, his metaphysical preoccupation, and his strange literary preferences, they also find him superficial and a mere copy of European writers superior to him. (pp. 13-14)

In 1930, Nestor Ibarra could analyze his work and deny him any standing as a narrator. It was not until 1933 and 1934, in a series of works published in *Crítica* and later collected in *A Universal History of Infamy* (1935), that he began to evolve as a storyteller through the reworking of known tales and the direct translation of others. In spite of the maturity they revealed, Borges himself severely considers them as the provisional exercises of a writer who was delving into a new field. . . . (p. 14)

To 1935 corresponds "The Approach Towards Al-Mu'tásim" . . . where the characteristics which have made his stories renowned are fully defined. However, Borges did not yet possess a clear awareness of his stature as a narrator. In 1938, he wrote "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"; afraid that he would lose his writer's faculties during a painful period when a type of septicemia clouded his mind, Borges created that story with a purpose: if he failed with it the consolation would be that he was working in a genre in which he would never distinguish himself. But its success was evident in the rapid succession of stories thereafter; these he collected in *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941). By that time Borges' fiction had achieved the stature it holds today.

Borges has reached a high literary level through strange and lucid narratives. He constructs poetic and hallucinatory fan-