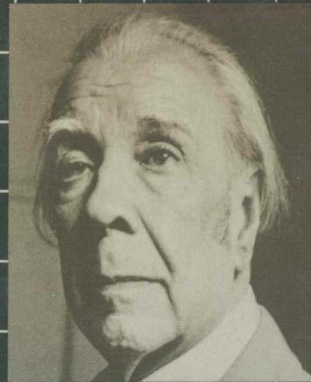
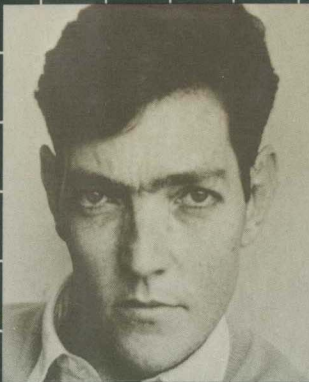
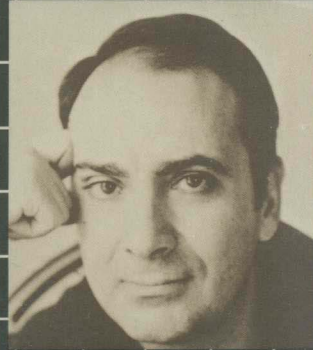
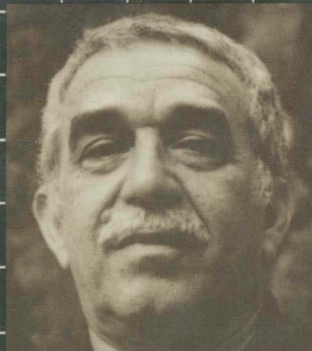
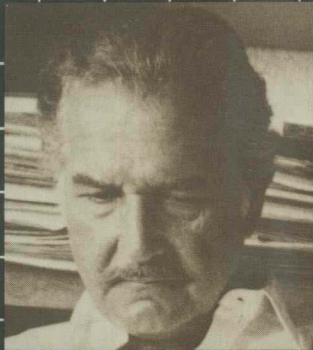


*The Critical Cosmos Series*

*Edited and with an Introduction by HAROLD BLOOM*

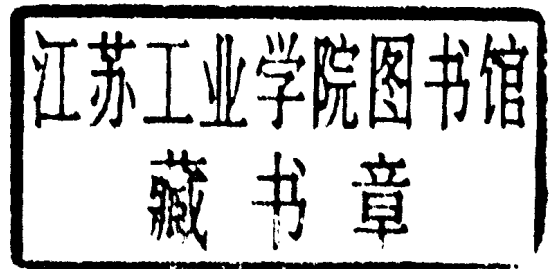
# Modern Latin American Fiction



THE CRITICAL COSMOS SERIES

*Modern Latin American Fiction*

Edited and with an introduction  
by *HAROLD BLOOM*  
Sterling Professor of the Humanities  
Yale University



CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
*New York ◇ Philadelphia*

© 1990 by Chelsea House Publishers, a division of  
Main Line Book Co.

Introduction © 1990 by Harold Bloom

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means  
without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Modern Latin American fiction / edited and with an  
introduction by Harold Bloom.

p. cm.—(The Critical cosmos series)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-555-46096-8

1. Latin American literature—20th century—History and  
criticism. I. Bloom, Harold. II. Series: Critical cosmos.

PQ7081.M53 1987

863—dc19

87-18336

CIP

## Editor's Note

This book gathers together a representative selection of the best criticism available in English upon the principal authors of modern Latin American fiction. We have taken the term "Latin American" to include authors from Puerto Rico, Central America, and Brazil. Three essays each are given to Borges, Carpentier, Cortázar, and García Márquez, as they are clearly the four most eminent figures. Lezama Lima, Rulfo, Donoso, Lispector, Fuentes, and Vargas Llosa each receive two discussions, and the remaining novelists a single examination each. I am grateful to Bernice Hausman, Viviana Daiz Balsera, Johann Pillai, and Frank Menchaca for their help in editing this volume.

My introduction centers upon García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, not in the mistaken notion of regarding it as a representative novel, but because it is now the most widely read single work of modern Latin American fiction. Its scriptural aspect is stressed in my appreciation.

Carter Wheelock discusses the short stories of Borges's late phase, with an emphasis on the symbolism of blindness and death, and on Borges's characteristic philosophical skepticism. The story "The Immortal" is read by Sophia S. Morgan as a parable of literature transformed into ritual, while Bella Brodzki interprets "Emma Zunz" as Borges's least characteristic tale, since its protagonist is a woman, and sees it as "a tragedy of restricted choices."

The Chilean critic Ariel Dorfman studies *Men of Maize* by Miguel Angel Asturias, finding in it a unity that other readers have overlooked. Alejo Carpentier is examined in an overview by Roberto González Echevarría, who shows how *The Kingdom of this World*, *The Lost Steps*, and *Explosion in a Cathedral* demonstrate the tragic flaws of history without departing from their own coherent aesthetic designs. José Piedra reads Carpentier's Afro-Cuban tale, *Histoire de Lunes*, as the turning of an imperialist code against

itself, while Julie Jones examines *El recurso del método* as a parable of the trickster tricked.

The demolition of realism by João Guimarães Rosa is Allan Englekirk's subject, after which George Levine compares *A Brief Life* by Juan Carlos Onetti to *Madame Bovary*. The novels of María Luisa Bombal are seen as transitional or crossroads works by Phyllis Rodríguez-Peralta, since their women suffer human estrangement, yet go on longing for the Romantic role once assigned to them by Hispanic society.

Lezama Lima is praised by two fellow novelists, Julio Cortázar and Severo Sarduy. Cortázar celebrates *Paradiso* for its unabashed appropriation of tradition, while Sarduy compares the book to Proust.

A sequence upon Cortázar himself follows, with Saúl Sosnowski regarding the novelist's personae as pursuers, marked by signs of searching. Barbara L. Hussey centers upon chapter 55 in *Rayuela* as a kind of negative epiphany, while Lois Parkinson Zamora relates Cortázar's recent techniques to allied temporal structures in film and photography.

Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* is studied by Paul B. Dixon in terms of metaphors of visual ambiguity, after which Steven Boldy ponders the relations between authority and identity in Rulfo's *El llano en llamas*. Harry Enrique Rosser, analyzing Elena Garro's *Los recuerdos del porvenir*, praises the novel for its universal projection of the role that the consciousness of death plays in the human condition.

Severo Sarduy compares Manuela in Donoso's *Hell Has No Limits* to Goya's portraits, while Alfred J. MacAdam considers *The Obscene Bird of Night* as a triumph of monstrosity. Clarice Lispector's story "Sunday Before Going to Sleep" is read by Hélène Cixous as a series of systems of symbolic value, after which Lispector's *Family Ties* is seen by Marta Peixoto as a bleak vision of female possibilities, lightened only by the wry symbol of "the smallest woman in the world, alone in her tree house," who has successfully developed.

Susanne Kappeler finds in the epic mode of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* a sequence of "voices of patriarchy," while Patricia Tobin praises *The Autumn of the Patriarch* for being always ahead of all our contemporary critical moments, and Claudette Kemper Columbus returns us to Macondo as a contemporary realm of the Gothic.

Carlos Fuentes becomes the focus in Jaime Alazraki's appreciation of *Terra Nostra* for its bold grasp of history, and in Wendy B. Faris's tracing of the erotic lineaments of Fuentes's fiction. The role of language in *Tres tristes tigres* by Cabrera Infante is studied by Stephanie Merrim, after which Frances Wyers (Weber) accompanies Manuel Puig to the movies.

Bell Gale Chevigny sees Elena Poniatowska's work as a kind of alchemy that transforms empty privileges into responsibilities. Mario Vargas Llosa is read by Ronald Christ as a revolutionary who converts "mere" rhetoric into the action of his plots, and then is praised by Roger Kaplan as a lucid democrat of the Latin American novel.

Stacey Schlau studies the use of mass media images by Luis Rafael Sánchez, after which Roberto González Echevarría returns with an analysis of Severo Sarduy's *Cobra*. Giovanni Pontiero provides notes on Nelida Piñón, while Luisa Valenzuela is saluted by Patricia Tobin for her varied art.

The highly advanced art of Reinaldo Arenas is praised by Julio Ortega for its spontaneity and freedom. In this volume's final essay, Doris Meyer finds a new departure in the feminist second novel of Inés Malinow, *Free Entry*, which conveys the life force of a woman, and the images of the female unconscious, with a true clarity.

# Contents

Editor's Note	ix
Introduction <i>Harold Bloom</i>	1
Borges's New Prose <i>Carter Wheelock</i>	5
Borges's "Immortal": The Ritual Experience of Literature <i>Sophia S. Morgan</i>	25
"She Was Unable Not to Think": Borges's "Emma Zunz" and the Female Subject <i>Bella Brodzki</i>	45
Myth as Time and Word <i>Ariel Dorfman</i>	59
On <i>Reasons of State</i> <i>Roberto González Echevarría</i>	75
A Return to Africa with a Carpentier Tale <i>José Piedra</i>	81
The Picaroon in Power: Alejo Carpentier's <i>El recurso del método</i> <i>Julie Jones</i>	89
The Destruction of Realism in the Short Prose Fiction of João Guimarães Rosa <i>Allan Englekirk</i>	97
Anguish of the Ordinary <i>George Levine</i>	105
María Luisa Bombal's Poetic Novels of Female Estrangement <i>Phyllis Rodríguez-Peralta</i>	111
An Approach to Lezama Lima <i>Julio Cortázar</i>	123

- A Cuban Proust 131  
*Severo Sarduy*
- Pursuers 137  
*Saúl Sosnowski*
- Rayuela*: Chapter 55 as Take-(away) 149  
*Barbara L. Hussey*
- Movement and Stasis, Film and Photo:  
 Temporal Structures in the Recent Fiction  
 of Julio Cortázar 159  
*Lois Parkinson Zamora*
- Three Versions of *Pedro Páramo* 179  
*Paul B. Dixon*
- Authority and Identity in Rulfo's  
*El llano en llamas* 199  
*Steven Boldy*
- Form and Content in Elena Garro's  
*Los recuerdos del porvenir* 209  
*Harry Enrique Rosser*
- Writing/Transvestism 221  
*Severo Sarduy*
- José Donoso: Endgame 225  
*Alfred J. MacAdam*
- Reading Clarice Lispector's  
 "Sunday before Going to Sleep" 233  
*Hélène Cixous*
- Family Ties*: Female Development 241  
*Marta Peixoto*
- Voices of Patriarchy: Gabriel García Márquez's  
*One Hundred Years of Solitude* 255  
*Susanne Kappeler*
- The Autumn of the Signifier:  
 The Deconstructionist Moment  
 of García Márquez 267  
*Patricia Tobin*
- The Heir Must Die: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*  
 as a Gothic Novel 281  
*Claudette Kemper Columbus*



<i>Terra Nostra: Coming to Grips with History</i>	297
<i>Jaime Alazraki</i>	
“Without Sin, and with Pleasure”: The Erotic Dimensions of Fuentes’s Fiction	307
<i>Wendy B. Faris</i>	
A Secret Idiom: The Grammar and Role of Language in <i>Tres tristes tigres</i>	323
<i>Stephanie Merrim</i>	
Manuel Puig at the Movies	343
<i>Frances Wyers (Weber)</i>	
The Transformation of Privilege in the Work of Elena Poniatowska	357
<i>Bell Gale Chevigny</i>	
Rhetorics of the Plot	371
<i>Ronald Christ</i>	
Beyond Magic Realism	383
<i>Roger Kaplan</i>	
Mass Media Images of the Puertorriqueña in <i>La guaracha del Macho Camacho</i>	391
<i>Stacey Schlau</i>	
Plain Song: Sarduy’s <i>Cobra</i>	401
<i>Roberto González Echevarría</i>	
Notes on the Fiction of Nélida Piñón	421
<i>Giovanni Pontiero</i>	
Voices in the Silence	427
<i>Patricia Tobin</i>	
The Dazzling World of Friar Servando	431
<i>Julio Ortega</i>	
Woman’s Space, Woman’s Text: A New Departure in Inés Malinow’s <i>Entrada libre</i>	437
<i>Doris Meyer</i>	
Chronology	447
Biographical Notes	451

Contributors	457
Bibliography	461
Acknowledgments	469
Index	473

# Introduction

Macondo, according to Carlos Fuentes, “begins to proliferate with the richness of a Columbian Yoknapatawpha.” Faulkner, crossed by Kafka, is at the literary origins of Gabriel García Márquez. So pervasive is the Faulknerian influence that at times one hears Joyce and Conrad, Faulkner’s masters, echoed in García Márquez, yet almost always as mediated by Faulkner. *The Autumn of the Patriarch* may be too pervaded by Faulkner, but *One Hundred Years of Solitude* absorbs Faulkner, as it does all other influences, into a phantasmagoria so powerful and self-consistent that the reader never questions the authority of García Márquez. Perhaps, as Reinaldo Arenas suggested, Faulkner is replaced by Carpentier, and Kafka by Borges in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, so that the imagination of García Márquez domesticates itself within its own language. Macondo, visionary realm, is an Indian and Hispanic act of consciousness, very remote from Oxford, Mississippi, and from the Jewish cemetery in Prague. In his subsequent work, García Márquez went back to Faulkner and Kafka, but then *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a miracle, and could happen only once, if only because it is less a novel than it is a scripture, the Bible of Macondo. Melquíades the Magus, who writes in Sanskrit, may be more a mask for Borges than for the author himself, and yet the gypsy storyteller also connects García Márquez to the archaic Hebrew storyteller the Yahwist, at once the greatest of realists and the greatest of fantasists, but above all the only true rival of Homer and Tolstoy as a storyteller.

My primary impression, in the act of rereading *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is a kind of aesthetic battle fatigue, since every page is rammed full of life, beyond the capacity of any single reader to absorb. Whether the impacted quality of this novel’s texture is finally a virtue, I am not sure, since sometimes I feel like a man invited to dinner who has been served nothing but an enormous platter of Turkish Delight. Yet it is all story,

where everything conceivable and inconceivable is happening at once, from creation to apocalypse, birth to death. Roberto González Echevarría has gone so far as to surmise that in some sense it is the reader who must die at the end of this story, and perhaps it is the sheer richness of the text that serves to destroy us. Joyce half-seriously envisioned an ideal reader cursed with insomnia who would spend his life unpacking *Finnegans Wake*. The reader need not translate *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a novel that deserves its popularity, as it has no surface difficulties whatsoever. And yet, a new dimension is added to reading by the book. Its ideal reader has to be like its most memorable personage, the sublimely outrageous Colonel Aureliano Buendía, who “had wept in his mother’s womb and had been born with his eyes open.” There are no waste sentences, no mere transitions in this novel, and so you must notice everything at the moment that you read it. It will all cohere, at least as myth and metaphor, if not always as literary meaning.

In the presence of an extraordinary actuality, consciousness takes the place of imagination. That Emersonian maxim is Wallace Stevens’s, and is worthy of the visionary of “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction” and “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven.” Macondo is a supreme fiction, and there are no ordinary evenings within its boundaries. Satire, even parody, most fantasy—these are now scarcely possible in the United States. How can you satirize Ronald Reagan or Jerry Falwell? Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* ceases to seem fantasy whenever I visit Southern California, and a ride on the New York City subway tends to reduce all literary realism to an idealizing projection. Some aspects of Latin American existence transcend even the inventions of García Márquez. I am informed, on good authority, that the older of the Duvalier dictators of Haiti, the illustrious Papa Doc, commanded that all black dogs in his nation be destroyed when he came to believe that a principal enemy had transformed himself into a black dog. Much that is fantastic in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would be fantastic anywhere, but much that seems unlikely to a North American critic may well be a representation of reality.

Emir Monegal emphasized that García Márquez’s masterwork was unique among Latin American novels, being radically different from the diverse achievements of Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Lezama Lima, Mario Vargas Llosa, Miguel Angel Asturias, Manuel Puig, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and so many more. The affinities to Borges and to Carpentier were noted by Monegal as by Arenas, but Monegal’s dialectical point seemed to be that García Márquez was representative only by joining all his colleagues in not being representative. Yet it is now true that, for most North American readers, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* comes first to mind when they think of the Hispanic novel in America. Alejo Carpentier’s *Explosion in a Cathedral* may be an even stronger book, but only Borges has dominated the North American literary imagination as García Márquez has

with this grand fantasy. The paperback translation I have just reread is in its thirtieth printing, and the novel's popularity seems certain to be permanent. It is inevitable that we are fated to identify *One Hundred Years of Solitude* with an entire culture, almost as though it were a new *Don Quixote*, which it most definitely is not. Comparisons to Balzac and even to Faulkner are also not very fair to García Márquez. The titanic inventiveness of Balzac dwarfs the later visionary, and nothing even in Macondo is as much a negative Sublime as the fearsome quest of the Bundrens in *As I Lay Dying*. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is more of the stature of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, latecomers' fantasies, strong inheritors of waning traditions.

Whatever its limitations may or may not be, García Márquez's major narrative now enjoys canonical status, as well as a representative function. Its cultural status is likely to be enhanced by the end of this century, and it would be foolish to quarrel with so large a phenomenon. I wish to address myself only to the question of how seriously, as readers, we need to receive the book's scriptural aspect. The novel's third sentence is: "The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point," and the third sentence from the end is the long and beautiful

Macondo was already a fearful whirlwind of dust and rubble being spun about by the wrath of the biblical hurricane when Aureliano skipped eleven pages so as not to lose time with facts he knew only too well, and he began to decipher the instant that he was living, deciphering it as he lived it, prophesying himself in the act of deciphering the last page of the parchment, as if he were looking into a speaking mirror.

The time span between this Genesis and this Apocalypse is six generations, so that José Arcadio Buendía, the line's founder, is the grandfather of the last Aureliano's grandfather. The grandfather of Dante's grandfather, the crusader Cassaguida, tells his descendant Dante that the poet perceives the truth, because he gazes into that mirror in which the great and small of this life, before they think, behold their thought. Aureliano, at the end, reads the Sanskrit parchment of the gypsy, Borges-like, Magus, and looks into a speaking mirror, beholding his thought before he thinks it. But does he, like Dante, behold the truth? Was Florence, like Macondo, a city of mirrors (or mirages), in contrast to the realities of the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, the *Paradiso*? Is *One Hundred Years of Solitude* only a speaking mirror? Or does it contain, somehow within it, an *Inferno*, a *Purgatorio*, a *Paradiso*?

Only the experience, and disciplined reflections, of a great many more strong readers will serve to answer those questions with any conclusiveness. The final eminence of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for now remains

undecided. What is clear to the book's contemporaries is that García Márquez has given contemporary culture, in North America and Europe, as much as in Latin America, one of its double handful of necessary narratives, without which we will understand neither one another nor our own selves.

# Borges's New Prose

*Carter Wheelock*

In 1966, some ten years after "God's magnificent irony" had given him "books and the night," apparently ending his career as a writer of prose fiction, Jorge Luis Borges published a short story, "The Intruder." His devotees sat up with interest, but many leaned back again because the new story—devoid of brain-rattling sophistry and erudite allusions—was not like the old Borges, whose three dozen gripping "fictions" published up to 1953 had made him the most important living writer in the Spanish language. Since "The Intruder," Borges has written more than a dozen new narratives, most of them collected under the title of one in the series, *Doctor Brodie's Report*. Two of them, along with several other short prose pieces, are interspersed with the poetry of *Elogio de la sombra* (1969). A long story, "The Congress," was published separately in 1971.

This new prose has yet to be fully appraised. My effort here can be only a superficial beginning, and we must start by remembering the old Borges.

## THE FORMER BORGES

Toward the end of the 1930s Borges turned from poetizing Buenos Aires and fictionalizing the hoodlums of the city's outlying slums (as in "Street-corner Man," 1933) and took to playing literary games with time, infinity, destiny, and the nature of reality. He was well equipped for it, being multilingual and having spent most of his forty years as an eclectic reader, absorbing everything from Burns's *The Saga of Billy the Kid* to Berkeley and the Panchatantra. His life, he has said, has been devoted less to living than to reading. In the following ten or so years he produced three small col-

lections of compact fiction (the first two are now combined as *Ficciones* [1944; enlarged 1956]; the third is *The Aleph* [1949; enlarged 1952]). These stories, suggestive of highbrow detective fiction and of symbolist poetic theory applied to prose, are utterly lacking in social consciousness or moral implication; unemotional, sexless, and uncontemporary, they wave no banners and press no points. They allude to everything and recommend nothing.

For the most part, these highly intellectual creations of the 1940s are clinical, cosmic tales peopled with almost faceless characters who are not really people but archetypal miniatures that move about in a purely cerebral universe. They often act like mythical beings in primitive cosmologies, or like dream figures: two men can be one, they can be dead but alive, and they can be only half real; they can pass in and out of mortal life ("The Immortal"), stare at magic coins until they go mad ("The Zahir"), behold the universe under the cellar stairs ("The Aleph"), live a year in a moment ("The Secret Miracle"), or dream other people into being ("The Circular Ruins"). Borges's people live in ignorance of the secret laws, or the secret will, which guide their destinies, and their actions are not finally their own. Borges surrounds them with the dicta of metaphysical philosophers who make all things logical, and their behavior is told in deftly ambiguous language. The reader finds himself acclaiming with emotion what he doesn't quite grasp and perhaps doesn't believe. He is floated into a kind of esthetic hysteria, feeling spoofed but also sublimated. Although Borges insists that he does not push a philosophical viewpoint (or any other), his underlying skepticism, or idealism, comes through.

Far from being verbose in proportion to their intricacy, these earlier stories are written in a wondrously frugal and exact style—richly suggestive, poetic, and full of ironic humor, baroque artifice, and rhetorical sleight of hand. Prominent symbols—mirrors, labyrinths, tigers, towers, knives—are repeated with unabashed regularity (Borges calls himself monotonous), and the repetition of other images or secondary symbols suggests an esoteric pattern with a meaning: circles, coins, pyramids, horses, swamps, cards.

But again, no messianism intrudes into Borges's work. The ideas of men are arbitrary formulations with infinite alternatives. Certitude is intellectual death; therefore, for Borges, even his basic philosophy is a conjecture. Speculation is the law of intellectual life. Out of this view come the irony and humor of Borges's prose. He mocks knowledge by displaying it lavishly, finally turning it against itself. But his jibes are gentle, because he relishes all ideas for their esthetic value.

Every strange figment of thought implies a whole new structure of reality, a realm in which the errant idea would not be strange at all. By piling up these pieces of heretical "fact," Borges overpowers us with the illusion that we almost understand that realm and that if we did we would know everything. The creation of this illusion of near-understanding seems, on the surface, to be the whole esthetic motive of Borges's older fiction.



By attacking our conception of reality and implying another—a secret order in our chaos—he stalks the “esthetic occurrence” in an Olympian arena. In a short essay, “The Wall and the Books” (*Other Inquisitions* [1952]), he tentatively defined the esthetic event or fact (*el hecho estético*) as “the imminence of a revelation, which never comes.” But to say that Borges fabricates esthetic situations is a fundamental error; for he has not believed, apparently since the early 1920s when he split with Ultraism, that the esthetic is man-made.

Much light is thrown on Borges’s fiction by his essays, his short prose thoughts, and his poems, where he often centers his attention on literature and philosophy, but where he just as often focuses upon a natural, historical, or literary event that strikes the sensitive intellect as marvelous because of what it implies (that is, what it does not reveal) of time, destiny, or reality. For example, a gaucho murdered by his son does not know that perhaps he died only to repeat Caesar’s death along with the words “And thou, my son”; or when a man dies, an infinite number of things in his memory die with him and leave the world poorer, as when the last man died who had seen Woden’s rites or the living Christ. These are not intellectual fabrications of an esthetic illusion but simple wonder at the mystery and suggestiveness of real facts. When Borges adds metaphysical half-explanations, the little miracle he is pointing to is only heightened. When he marvels at the strange spiritual likeness between Omar and FitzGerald, there are inevitable overtones of circular time, reincarnation, and Platonic form, or of the primordial metonymy that makes two men one if they share merely a characteristic. When Borges writes that Shakespeare is nobody because he so long pretended on the stage to be other men, he conjures the old theological platitude that God, being everything, is not any one thing, therefore is no thing—nothing. Such logic is a trick of language—both intellectually palliative and spiritually cathartic. Such deliberate speciousness is rare in fiction, and its proliferation in Borges’s prose has moved critics to treat it as an esthetic principle. Most readers of the old Borges, if pressed for a quick characterization of his typical stories, would call them dramatizations of intellectual propositions. This makes Borges a coiner of abstruse parables or fables, an allegorist; he is frequently defined as a writer who allegorizes heretical ideas, and more often than not there is the implication that he is some kind of truth-seeker who uses literature as a megaphone for his anxieties or his agnostic faith. Borges knows this. In his new fiction he seems to be telling us that his strange literature of the past is not an intellectual destruction of reality but an esthetic affirmation of it.

#### THE NEW BORGES

The excellence of “The Intruder” appears to have been somewhat overlooked because many were disappointed that Borges’s first story in many years was not of the old vintage. Borges punctured any hope that he would