1985


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Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/ariel/vol2/iss1/8

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The Latin American novel, particularly during the last two decades, has been the object of intense critical scrutiny in the United States, where it has received enthusiastic praise from literary scholars as well as the general reading public. By way of contrast, the short story from the region has lingered in relative obscurity in this country, with a few notable exceptions. While book-length studies of the Latin American novel seemingly abound, few works survey the short story as a distinct literary form and none in English prior to the appearance of this volume. Although the book treats an entire genre rather than the life and works of a single author, as is customary in the Twayne series, several Twayne requisites are easily identifiable: text and quotations in English, with subject matter heavily geared toward historical/biographical content and plot summaries, all framed by a chronology, bibliographies, and an Index. While space limitations prohibit exhaustive analyses of individual works, the summaries are accompanied by succinct critical commentary by recognized authorities in the field.

In the Introductory chapter Margaret Sayers Peden discusses the evolution of short fiction in Latin America and provides essential background information. In her comments on Brazilian modernismo, for example, she points out the close parallels between this movement and the phenomenon known as vanguardism in Spanish-speaking countries, thereby preventing an erroneous association with Spanish American modernismo. David William Foster begins his study of the Brazilian conto with Machado de Assis and critical realism. Then, employing several traditional rubrics such as naturalism, modernism, social realism, existentialism, and magical realism, he proceeds to highlight the contributions of a number of important figures, among them Monteiro Lobato, Lima Barreto, Mario de Andrade, Jorge Amado, Clarice Lispector, Joao Guimaraes Rosa, Dalton Trevisan, Rubem Fonseca, Roberto Drummond, and Jose J. Velga. Appropriately, he acknowledges the contributions of Brazilian writers to science fiction, a field which has attracted considerable attention in recent years. Naomi Lindstrom, in the first of three chronologically-arranged chapters dealing with Spanish America, examines the period from Echeverría to Quiroga. She chooses not to discuss colonial brief narrative on the grounds that those writings fail to qualify as short stories in a technical sense, a contention which is highly problematic. Lindstrom's essay raises thought-provoking questions on a variety of topics from racist attitudes in the stories of Echeverría and Javier de Viana to Ricardo Palma's ambivalence toward the colonial hierarchy. John S. Brushwood's coverage of the period from Quiroga to Borges, typical of the format employed in the other chapters, focuses on one story by each author that he includes, and occasionally two or three stories by a particular cuentista. Brushwood makes a crucial distinction between realism, which he considers a type of narrative strategy, and criollismo, which he views in terms of theme. In the final chapter George R. McMurray studies twentieth-century
manifestations of the short story from Borges to the "Boom" of the 1960's and on to the present. He sees this period characterized by a movement in the direction of greater diversity and sophistication with universality and experimentation as the principal features. Because space is at a premium, several important figures have been omitted. However, one must question the inclusion of cuentistas such as Adolfo Cáceres Romero and Alvaro Menéndez Leal instead of, for example, Mario Vargas Llosa and Mario Benedetti.

Written principally for the non-specialist, this guide has several features which make it an indispensable tool for the specialist as well. The bibliographies provide an excellent reference source for material in anthologies and collections of stories by individual authors in addition to book-length studies and critical articles. The clear, straightforward presentation of the text makes this a highly readable manual. Offering a palatable blend of literary history and criticism, the perceptive essays of Peden, Foster, Lindstrom, Brushwood, and McMurray represent a major contribution to scholarship on the huge corpus of Latin American short fiction.

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