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## Review

"Exhilarating...Will make a splendid bedside reader for those who can handle the richly stimulating effects."

-- Publishers Weekly

## Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: Spanish

## From the Inside Flap

Striking in its imagery, its history, and its breathtaking scope, Latin American fiction has finally come into its own throughout the world. Collected in this brilliant volume are thirty-five of the finest writers of this century, including:

Jorge Luis Borges

Carlos Fuentes

Julio Cortazar

Miguel Angel Asturias

Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Jorge Amado

Octavio Paz

Juan Bosch

Jose Donoso

Horacio Quiroga

Mario Vargas Llosa

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And many more

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- Sales Rank: #103640 in Books
- Brand: McNeess, Pat (EDT)/ Mancini, Pat McNeess
- Published on: 1996-09-29
- Released on: 1996-09-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x .79" w x 5.49" l, .80 pounds
- Binding: Paperback

- 390 pages

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13 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

Latin American short story collection

By Cesar Valverde

An adequate, though by no means exhaustive, anthology of Latin American stories translated into English. The "contemporary" label is not entirely adequate: the stories start from the late 19th century and continue only until the 1970's. There is a real need to update with more current selections. Also inadequate are the critical commentaries that accompany the stories, since much is taken from articles that are thirty years old. It would be useful to include in new editions the date of publication for each story, and the original title in Spanish or Portuguese. It is also worth noting that of the 34 stories, only two are written by women.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

No Longer Contemporary, but Still Worthwhile

By Reader in Tokyo

This anthology was one of the first collections for the region published in the wake of the Latin American "boom" of the 1960s, when Borges shared the International Publishers Prize, works by Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar, Garcia Marquez and others gained world attention, and Asturias won the Nobel Prize for Literature. It was published in 1974 and contained 33 short stories and 2 excerpts from novels, by 35 writers. The authors were from 14 Latin American countries and Puerto Rico, with Argentina, Brazil and Mexico

best represented.

The anthology contained work from roughly the 1890s to 1970, with a particular focus on the 1950s and 60s. There didn't seem to be anything from the 1920s. The oldest writers were Machado de Assis, Darío, Lugones and Quiroga, the youngest was Mexico's José Agustín (1944-). Others included the writers of the "boom," influential precursors (Borges, Asturias, Carpentier, Bombal, Onetti), Borges' collaborator Bioy Casares, and Guimarães Rosa, Paz, Arreola, Rulfo, Donoso and Lispector. Not included were writers from the 19th century such as Argentina's Esteban Echeverría and Peru's Ricardo Palma, or writers from the 20th century such as Brazil's Mario de Andrade, Costa Rica's Carmen Lyra, Cuba's Virgilio Pinera or Guatemala's Augusto Monterroso.

The anthology also contained an informative introduction, detailed biographies providing contexts for each author, and a list of recommended anthologies and novels from the region. The introduction briefly covered the development of modern Latin American lit from its beginnings in the 19th century, mentioning the early importance of Europe and particularly France for literary models.

Literary movements discussed included the region's first, modernismo, dating to the late 19th century. Influenced partly by French symbolism, its writers avoided political struggle, experimented with language and technique and began to win an international audience. Other writers, the early regionalists, focused on the life, language and traditions of the rural poor and the struggle to survive in a hostile environment, and were relatively untouched by foreign models. Stimulated by Zola's naturalism and the revolutions in Russia and Mexico, a literature of social protest developed, advocating social change and becoming increasingly didactic. Regionalist writing and novels of social protest dominated Latin American fiction during the 1920s and 30s. An opposing trend came from authors like Borges, who called for writing that went beyond a regional focus and who eventually developed a style that freed fiction from the documentation of reality.

From the 1920s and 30s, writers including Asturias, Carpentier and Bombal were influenced by French surrealism, which idealized the indigenous cultures and the primitive. From the 1940s, there was increasing experimentation to convey the fragmentation of human experience through stream of consciousness, shifting time sequences and points of view, partly affected by writers such as Faulkner. More recent decades saw a greater focus on the personal, on themes such as the internal conflicts and search for meaning of the individual, urbanization, the dehumanization of daily life and the failure to communicate.

In addition to the magic realists, the collection introduced representatives of other trends such as Roberto Arlt (1900-42), who focused on the marginal characters and small tradesmen of Buenos Aires and was described as advocating art for the people, in contrast to Borges and his literary circle, which represented a more elitist approach. As examples of regionalism and social protest, there was an excerpt from a 1930s novel by Amado (1912-2001) set among the slum-dwellers of Bahia and a 1950s short story by Jorge Icaza (1906-76) that described the ignorance and superstition of an indigenous couple in the highlands of Ecuador.

For me, one of the most memorable and introspective stories, by Onetti, concerned a narrator whose youthful ambitions were blunted by a rival. Meeting him years later in a bar, finding him ground down by life, the narrator nourished feelings of love mixed with resentment:

"I don't know if I ever welcomed Inez in the past with such joy and love as I daily welcome Bob into the shadowy and stinking world of adults. He is still a recent arrival and every so often he suffers this crisis of nostalgia. I've seen him teary and drunk, damning himself and vowing his imminent return to the days of Bob. I can assure you that then my heart flows over and becomes sensitive and affectionate as a mother's. Deep inside, I know he will never leave, because he has no place to go; but I grow gentle and patient and try

to go along with him . . . . I build up plans for him, beliefs and different tomorrows that have the light and taste of the country of youth from which he came some time ago. And he accepts; he always protests so that I'll redouble my promises, but he ends up saying yes, he ends up forcing a smile . . . and he feels at peace in the middle of his thirty years, moving about without disgust or uneasiness among the powerful corpses of old ambitions, the repulsive forms of dreams gradually wasted under the indifferent, constant pressure of so many thousands of inevitable feet."

In a 1950s work by Uruguay's Mario Benedetti, a narrator contemplated the sudden hospitalization of his wife, which upended their daily dull routine. In a 1960s story by Argentina's Abelardo Castillo, a narrator recounted what happened when he and his friends went to visit a friend's mother who was working as a prostitute, showing both cruelty and understanding.

Rare examples of humor included a story from the 1940s by the Dominican Republic's Juan Bosch, about a woman facing drought whose purchase of candles for souls in Purgatory got unexpected results. And an excerpt from a 1960s novel by Manuel Puig that blended two women's gossip and backbiting, a radio melodrama about love, and soap commercials.

I enjoyed this anthology as a well-informed and varied introduction to writers from the region. Since it was published in 1974, it's no longer contemporary, but for its time it was done well and since I was interested in the literature's background and development it was still relevant and worthwhile.

Readers looking for something more current might enjoy *The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories* (1997, 53 works) and *The Vintage Book of Latin American Short Stories* (1998, 39 works). The present anthology has 14 writers not in Oxford (including Amado, Paz, Arlt, Téllez, Benedetti, Cabrera Infante, Puig and Castillo) and 27 not in Vintage (including Machado de Assis, Darío, Quiroga, Gallegos, Asturias, Arreola, Roa Bastos and Vargas Llosa).

*Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real* (1990) is devoted to 31 female writers.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

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By dman7

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