

## Early Borges on infamy in hardcover translation

By JOHN OUGTON

One of Jorge Luis Borges' earliest published collections, *A Universal History of Infamy*, is now available in English translation. That information alone should be enough to send Borges admirers winging off to their nearest bookstore with money or infamy in mind. Be forewarned that the hardcover edition costs \$8.35.

For those people to whom the name Borges sounds like nothing else then an Oriental pronunciation of "bulges", suffice it to say that the Argentinian once shared an international literary prize with Samuel Beckett and is one of the world's finest living writers. Borges is the master of short, story-length fictions which crosses and blends literary genres, at once pseudo-scholarship, science fiction, philosophy and narrative poetry. His more recent productions are complex fabrics of real and Borgesian myths in which mirrors, labyrinths and recurrences in spacetime are major characters.

*A Universal History of Infamy* is on the surface a less involved collection. The stories, first published in Spanish in 1935, examine many species of human infamy, from gangsters to pirates to false prophets. One thus meets in the same book Billy the Kid, Monk Eastman the New York thug, the insulting master of etiquette Kotsuke no Suke and the religious leader Hakim of Merv. Some of the

stories notably *Streetcorner Man*, are almost naturalistic compared with the contents of more recent anthologies like *Ficciones*.

But flashes of the mature Borges are omnipresent: "The world we live in is a mistake, a clumsy parody. Mirrors and fatherhood, because they multiply and confirm the parody, are abominations. Revulsion is the cardinal virtue. Two ways (whose choice the Prophet left free) may lead us there: abstinence or the orgy, excesses of flesh or its denial." Of course this excerpt from *The Masked Dyer Hakim of Merv* does not represent Borges' own philosophy, but its structural position in the story is a lesson in mathematical elegance; the surprise ending reveals the prophet to be both false and true, both the theorist and agent of revulsion.

Norman Thomas Giovanni, working in close collaboration with Borges, has done an excellent translation. There is very little to criticize in this book. One cavil has to do with the cover design; why a red devil's head for an author who views reality and literature as so replete with doubles, with multiplications of all powers? Satan aside, however, this book is one more witness to a writer who is both the most literate and literary of fabulists.

*A Universal History of Infamy*, Jorge Luis Borges. E.P. Dutton; 146 p; \$8.35 hardcover.



## Good Eats

### Dining à la Ritzy-like

By HARRY STINSON

Picking up from last week our grapplings with 'pseudo-Savoy' had brought us to the table-flaming stage. But seriously, this mode of cookery solves several problems, in that it is not only, as mentioned, impressive, when done properly, but allows everyone to be together during the preparation, serving and eating; ensures that the food is readily accessible at the table throughout the meal (you don't have to scramble abruptly to the kitchen every time someone rattles his empty plate, and gazes balefully about; it's fun; the food flavours can be quite differently tasty; and it's exotic. Despite the expensive aura about it, the process need not be so costly: you can reduce the priciness to the flaming ingredients: a chafing dish does keep things warm and in some cases permit you to cook it all before their very eyes, but it's usually necessary and desirable to just have the dish hot and ready in the kitchen—when ready, just fetch it out, splash the old flamer on it, ignite and carefully tend (i.e. stir it about carefully and keep it burning 'til the last drops are finished). There are lots of elaborate recipes for ultra-fancy flambe fare.

The classic one is stroganoff, which can be done surprisingly simply and still make your reputation. Starting with some meat — anything from hamburger to minute steak, chopped in strips and pre-fried, plus some onion (same thing) . . . fry them in garlic if possible . . . then add stuff like sour cream, cream of mushroom (or celery of like) soup, mushrooms — pre-cooked or broiled, or fried or even fresh if you like them that way — ketchup, soy sauce or Worcestershire. Spice the thing with garlic, onion salt, black pepper, basil, or oregano, marjoram, perhaps some thyme.

Another twist that can make the dish superb is to mix in some creamy cheese — anything soft will

melt in, others can be grated in, but a sharp cheese is not really the thing for this dish. In any case, the last touch (the 'crowning' glory) is to fold in a pile of noodles, or (pre-cooked please) rice, and cart the whole thing, hot, to the table. Another way of doing it is to complete the process without the filler, then spoon it over hot buttered noodles (or rice) tossed with poppy or caraway seeds.

Basically, however, a simple chafing dish arrangement will repay itself in P.R. effectiveness quite easily — use it to just keep pre-heated casseroles or entrees (simmering in some liquid) hot at the table, or for easy frying jobs.

The other table ritual that's worth the price of admission is *fondue cookery*. Keeping it simple, take some cheese (mixed Swiss gruyere and emmenthaler or some other not-too-hard but not-too-soft type), dredge it with flour or cornstarch and seasonings (i.e. put them in a bag and toss with the cheese — shredded). The seasoning should include at least black pepper, salt — preferably onion salt, dry mustard and perhaps sage. Then add this mixture gradually to some boiling hot wine (light white usually) or your choice of liquid, and stir constantly, adding more until you get a smooth, creamy concoction. You can do all this in a saucepan on the stove then either pour into a fondue dish if you have one, or a pot or bowl of some sort, and take to the table.

Give everyone forks, or prongs, or fondue sticks, and let them stir in speared chinks of French bread, ham, or whatever (most people use crusty bread — so there's something to impale the prong of your utensil firmly on). Fondue and salad is a really nice classy supper, with a dessert of fresh fruit (or carefully resuscitated canned/frozen relics) or ice cream (or sherbet) with the appropriate sauce. Serve a nice wine (fruit wine if you've got it) and some juice — fresh if possible.



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