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The Latin American nueva narrativa has produced a variety of distinguished and unique authors, and among the group no one is more unique nor more distinguished than Ernesto Sábato. This is curious since Sábato does not consider himself to be part of any 'new movement'; it is rather his works, as considered by others, that group him in the category of major innovative Latin American novelists. Indeed, Sábato enjoys a rather eminent position among his contemporaries, for by virtue of his long career as a novelist, Sábato's works span nearly the entire period of the contemporary experimental novel, and his first novel, El túnel, clearly precedes the mainstream authors of the nueva narrativa. Sábato has in effect grown into the modern narrative, and the modern narrative has in turn been shaped by Sábato's writings.

In ironic contrast to the majority of other writers, Sábato seems to have had relatively little difficulty in writing, in the sense of being able to produce something from the roots of his imagination and introspection. His difficulty has been the gripping failure to accept as valid and worthy of exposure that which he has already written. This extreme reluctance to share his words with others, to accept them even for himself has led to the large gaps which separate the publication dates of his three novels: El túnel (1948), Sobre héroes y tumbas (1962) and Abaddon el exterminador (1974). Sábato also, by his own admission has destroyed (or perhaps merely hidden indefinitely) several other literary works, in various stages of completion. Even when he has finally decided on the publication of a novel, Sábato has been beset by doubts, recriminations and

frantic desires to correct, erase, revise and disown what he has written, and one of his greatest trials has been accepting the critical attention which his works have drawn.

Sábato is also distinguished from the majority of his contemporaries<sup>1</sup> in coming from a background in science and technology. Trained as a physicist and mathematician, Sábato worked at the Curie laboratories in Paris until his decision to abandon a career in science for literature, a decision which is partially explained in his works, and which in part is probably unexplainable even by the author himself.<sup>2</sup> While fleeing from science as a profession, Sábato has never abandoned it as a guiding force in his life. His training in science manifested itself in Uno y el universo and Sobre hombres y engranajes, where the relations of man to a technological society faced with the sobering truths of scientific discovery are probed. Further traces of this preoccupation appear in El escritor y sus fantasmas, where Sábato explains his views toward science and the humanities. In more subtle fashions, Sábato's intimate awareness of the mysteries of modern science has been a force in each of his literary endeavors, in particular his three published novels. He is in a knowledgeable position as regards the role of man in the modern world, for he himself has sensed the loneliness and desperation which come with the confrontation of the absolute. Sábato, whose work and associations have led him to deal with the world of the atom and the world of the cosmos, has had ample opportunity to be affected and afflicted by the full implications of the insignificant position of man in the universe, in the plethora of possible universes and possible visions afforded by modern scientific thought, and one might say that his literary creation has been an attempt to rationalize, to express this struggle, and

also an effort to overcome it. Even during the time of his scientific training, which included work in pure mathematics, Sábato immersed himself in writings on philosophy, as well as acquiring a thorough knowledge of the world's literature.

Sábato's long-awaited Abaddón el exterminador<sup>3</sup> is a most unique novel; it is, in the strictest sense of the word, not a novel at all. This fact alone is not surprising, given the great popularity of literary experimentation in the contemporary Latin American narrative, but it is a radical departure from the literary tradition of the more conservative Sábato. Abaddón el exterminador is a novel about writing a novel. This also is not an innovative feature; it has even been stated, somewhat ironically, that when a writer runs out of other ideas, he finally turns to writing about writing. Abaddón el exterminador is also a novel about its own writing. This is the distinguishing feature which places Sábato's work apart from the majority of other contemporary Latin American novels, although a close parallel exists in certain aspects with Cortázar's Rayuela. It is this aspect of the novel, its nearly totally reflexive and self-generating nature, that makes it so difficult to classify as a true novel. In the same fashion that Sobre héroes y tumbas included aspects of El túnel, Abaddón includes aspects of the other two novels. However, unlike Sobre héroes y tumbas, in Abaddón references to the other two novels are as novels, as literary creations by the living author Ernesto Sábato, and do not occur through simple reference to events contained in the other novels. Abaddón is a book about writing itself and it is also a book about the writing of the two preceding novels, as well as other intervening episodes. Most striking about the narrative structure of Abaddón is the inclusion of Sábato as the central character,

usually referred to in the third person by several different persons, but occasionally taking up the first person, sometimes in the form of letters or interviews, and sometimes in the narrative proper.

The novel is not divided into chapters but rather into fragments, ranging in length from a single paragraph to many pages. Thus it is possible for the author to insert a variety of digressions and references to distinct situations, as well as employing a shifting point of view, without causing a total disruption of the text. So frequent and so varied are the jumps that the book is more a collection or pastiche of isolated although related indications than a single narrative in the traditional sense. Within the pages of Abaddón Sábato combines long references to his earlier novels, "autobiographical" passages from stages of his own life, and numerous references to the process of writing Abaddón, in addition to a very basic, almost nonexistent background plot line, consisting of the author's association with certain people in Buenos Aires during the time period in which the novel is being written.

Sábato the novelist and creator becomes Sábato the character and victim of creation in the pages of Abaddón, in a stunningly reflexive format which at times annihilates all real signification through the impossibility of distinguishing the one from the other. Gérard Genette<sup>4</sup> suggests a reason for the feeling of malaise that arises in a reader confronted with a reflexive work in which the characters witness the formation of the work itself: "de telles inversions suggèrent que si les personnages d'une fiction peuvent être lecteurs ou spectateurs, nous, leurs lecteurs ou leurs spectateurs, pouvons être des personnages fictifs." In Sobre heroes y tumbas Fernando Vidal Olmos considers the following possibilities: "Dios existe, pero a veces duerme: sus pesadillas son

nuestra existencia ... Dios existe pero tiene accesos de locura: esos accesos son nuestra existencia."

The character in Abaddón is written as Sabato, without the accent; the effect is the transformation of the well-known writer into a secondary personage whose name bears a striking similarity but not quite identity. This form of self-distancing via punctuation is extended to the author's refusal to employ the question and exclamation marks at the beginning of sentences, as is traditional in Spanish orthography. As in English, one has to wait until the end of a phrase to determine whether it is declarative, interrogative, imperative or admiring; to the reader accustomed to the Spanish system of punctuation, this deviation has the effect of partially or totally negating the boundaries separating the various types of transformational derivation. By refusing to comply with the normal punctuational conventions, Sábato focuses attention on them and calls them into question as necessary to the process of communication. He also allows a certain purposeful ambiguity to filter down into the text through the reluctance to commit himself from the first on the transformational nature of a sentence. This failure to immediately specify the form of a sentence finds a ready parallel in Sábato's own reluctance to commit his works to publication, in that an initial tentative and multivalent gambit is eventually resolved into a single interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

The physical format of Abaddón el exterminador is that of a series of juxtaposed fragments relating to a number of separate episodes, both fictional and real, spanning a considerable time period of Sábato's life. More than pure narrative experimentation, Sábato has, whether with conscious volition or guided by deeper stirrings, imbued his novel with many of the same epistemological structures characterizing modern science,



particularly the revolution in physics which is the triumph of twentieth century scientific thought. In order to view in detail Sabato's use of these configurations, it is necessary to briefly digress and consider the developments which, reaching full swing during the earlier years of this century, shaped not only the course of contemporary scientific research, but also Sabato's own career, which was being formed at this time.

The two greatest scientific breakthroughs of modern times are the theory of relativity and the theory of the quantum, both advances which occurred early in the present century. While addressing themselves to essentially different domains, the two theories appear to share much in common (and one of the most sought-after goals is to unite the two theories), and indeed several individuals contributed to the development of both. As generally perceived by the layman, quantum mechanics deals with the world of the atom, while relativity is more frequently extended to cosmic dimensions, and finds its most ready tests in astrophysics. Nonetheless, when stripped of their pragmatic limitations of application, both theories are profound epistemological statements relating to the acquisition of scientific knowledge (and by extension, of all human awareness) at all points on the scale of size, from subatomic distances to intergalactic expanses. Each theory replaces earlier, classical views which described the universe in terms of simple intuitively satisfying models based on observations close at hand, which were assumed to be valid for all space and for all time. Both quantum mechanics and general relativity have called these assumptions into question, indicating that beliefs cherished for centuries and even millenia are only large-scale approximations, which when subjected to closer scrutiny dissolve and give way to much more complex relationships.

Quantum mechanics represents the abandonment of the infinite divisibility of time and space and replaces it with the notion of the 'quantum' or minimal unit of discourse. Even before the development of the quantum theory, it had been known that matter could be reduced to atoms, and even subatomic particles which were apparently not subject to further divisibility, but one still operated under the assumption that space itself, which was partitioned by such miniscule particles, was a continuous variable and could be accurately described, at least in theory, in the smallest units one desired. This continuity of space is the basis of calculus and other branches of mathematics, and underlies nearly every classical scientific theory. Similarly, time was regarded as a linear continuum which could be partitioned into units as small as desired, all converging on the asymptotically approachable notion of the 'instant.' Quantum mechanics destroys these comfortable feelings of infinite divisibility by placing a smallest limit on the divisibility of knowledge, and thus of space and time, through the "uncertainty principle." This principle states, in essence, that there are very definite (although for everyday purposes negligible) limits of precision for any measurement, beyond which space and time may no longer be said to "exist" in a unique and precise fashion. Furthermore, this unsettling state of affairs is said to result from the inevitable interaction, during any act of knowledge acquisition, between the observer and the phenomenon being observed. Translated into philosophical terms, quantum theory establishes absolute epistemological limits and thus places human cognition in a position of relative impotence as regards the acquisition of an arbitrarily detailed collection of knowledge. Needless to say, these realizations did not produce wholly positive feelings in the investigators present at the inception of the theory; in



fact, many were deeply upset by this removal of the underpinnings of epistemology. Einstein himself refused to accept its ultimate consequences, which to him represented "God's playing dice" with creation. Heisenberg, whose name is attached to the uncertainty principle, confessed<sup>6</sup> that "I remember discussion with [Niels] Bohr which went through many hours till very late at night and ended almost in despair; and when at the end of the discussion I went alone for a walk in the neighboring park I repeated to myself again and again the question: can nature possibly be so absurd as it seemed to us in these atomic experiments?" The answer appears to be a qualified "yes," and although modern science largely ignores these epistemological questions, cloaking the nature of indeterminacy in mathematical formalism, early theoreticians were profoundly disturbed and many spent more of their efforts expounding philosophical questions than actually working out the details of the scientific theories themselves. Even today, professional philosophers are far from agreement as to the total implications of the quantum theory, and during the years when Sabato was undergoing his scientific novitiate, the question was still very much an open one.

Developing parallel to quantum theory was the theory of relativity, also a statement of epistemological limits. In its earliest form (special relativity) the theory stated the relativity of simultaneity, the fact that notions regarded as intrinsic to the flow of the universe, such as simultaneity or successivity, were artifacts of the observation process, or more specifically, of the framework in which the observation was taking place. The extension to general relativity states that commonly accepted notions of space and time, thought since the time of Euclid to be universal and inescapable characteristics of the universe itself, hold only

locally, and the large-scale structure of the universe may be at once more complex and more indeterminate than ever suspected. More recent advances have postulated the existence of "black holes," the ultimate in epistemological breakdown, representing the complete destruction and elimination of any knowledge, of all possibility of acquiring knowledge.

Even the most rudimentary combination of quantum mechanics and relativity theory shows that, whether expounded in detail or merely held implicitly as the backdrop for scientific inquiry, there exist definite limits on the acquisition of knowledge, that the "universe" may not be a single, unitary structure subject to an unvarying interpretation, and that "space" and "time" may, in the final analysis, be purely illusory concepts which do not stand up under careful scrutiny. Science, which etymologically means knowledge itself and which has always stood for an enlightenment and an escape from the shackles of ignorance, appears to be the vehicle of its own destruction in that the very theories that were supposed to extend knowledge beyond current limits have, quite to the contrary, demonstrated that much current knowledge may be spurious and that the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge in the future may be out of the question. Reeling from these revelations, many early scientists were driven to extreme claims, for example, the total elimination of time and the notion of "becoming";<sup>7</sup> elimination of causality, even locally; the existence of several 'universes,' and so on. Whatever the tack taken by individual scientists, the overall feeling remained one of consternation, dismay and an urgency to replace the broken pieces of the earlier theories with some sort of tenable framework. It was in this spirit of wary and weary exploration that the young Sabato nurtured his budding scientific career, in which he saw the incontrovertible exactitude

of mathematics annihilate the bastions of scientific knowledge, and it may be that the contagion of the general spirit of disillusionment aided his eventual decision to abandon a profession in science. Whatever the causes for this decision, Sábato's intellectual and scientific upbringing must be placed against the background of these issues, and the effects have gradually made themselves visible in his writings. While it would be a fascinating enterprise to trace the emergence of the "new epistemology" in all of Sábato's writings, reasons of scope dictate that the present discussion limit itself to Abaddón el Exterminador, where one finds the clearest evidence of the new scientific thought.

In the view of Werner Heisenberg,<sup>8</sup> "quantum theory forcefully reminds us that natural science is made by man. It is not simply a symbolic representation of nature, but is part of the interplay between nature and man. What it describes is not nature as such, but nature as exposed to man's method of questioning. It makes Descartes' sharp separation between the world and I impossible." Speaking of the restrictions of the quantum, Petersen<sup>9</sup> states that "due to the irreducible and undefinable interaction accompanying an observation, the concepts of state and observation are no longer fully compatible. In a situation where one can speak of a well-defined state of a physical system, it is impossible to make any observation on the system. Under such circumstances one may be able to apply the concept of causality, but the concepts of space and time lose their immediate sense. On the other hand, if conditions are arranged such that contact can be established between the system and some measuring instruments, then one may use the spacetime concepts yet no longer ascribe a state to the system and there can be no question of causality...".

Max Planck, another physicist associated with the founding of quantum

theory, believes that there exists a real world but that it lies beyond our senses, and as such cannot be apprehended at all:<sup>10</sup> "as the view of the physical world is perfected, it simultaneously recedes from the world of sense; this process is tantamount to an approach to the world of reality." The scope of modern physics has been summed up by a contemporary physicist, when he points out that the right order of concepts may not be: here is the universe, so what must man be? but rather: here is man, so what must the universe be?<sup>11</sup> Science is thrust into a new role, not only that of discovering the universe, but in a very real sense, that of creating the universe out of the human cognitive apparatus. This is not only an extension of classical idealism, but also stems from modern views that, for example, certain scientific theories such as quantum mechanics might be a function of the mechanisms of the human brain,<sup>12</sup> or that certain basic logical concepts might underlie the entirety of scientific discourse.<sup>13</sup> Under all these views, man does not merely sit passively back as the universe evolves around him; he does not partake passively of a single uniquely defined "reality." Rather, man, faced by the inherent and fundamental indeterminacies of modern science is at once the inventor and the recipient of the universe; his "reality" is a fluid relative and purely local concept that may not under any circumstances be generalized to include all points in space and time. On the one hand this undercurrent of uncertainty and indeterminacy may give rise to feelings of anguish and bewilderment, but on the other hand the thinker attuned to modern philosophy of science feels a tremendous sense of freedom from classical limitations. He is no longer restricted to global models of reality, but is comparatively freer to explore and even, when necessary, to invent local models of reality compatible with his experience. This epistemological

freedom can be extended integrally to the domain of literature, where traditionally, although the author was always creating a separate, fictional "reality," this reality had to adhere to the same classical standards that were applied to the empirical sciences. Thus, for example, time and space had to be clearly delimited, leading from the classical unities of time, space and action to the more modern fluidity where, however, certain causal structures are still generally maintained. Fact and fiction must be neatly identified in the classical model since only thus will the reader be able to sort out for himself the epistemological threads which bind him, through the act of reading, to the world created by the author. Even further restrictions have traditionally applied to the literary text, for the author was expected to indicate, by some means, the various epistemological vectors which unite the characters and scenes in the work; in other words, the extent of knowledge shared by each personage, or attributable to each situation.

Sábato has taken his cue from these modern scientific views, which surrounded him during his apprenticeship in the physics laboratory, as well as his knowledge of philosophy and literature, to create Abaddon el exterminador, a work of unique epistemological foundations, which separate it not only from the author's earlier works but also from the majority of other Latin American novels. By far the most profound departure to be found in Abaddon is also one of the most subtle, since it does not readily emerge from a superficial reading. The reader equipped to evaluate the results of the text will note the constant oscillation between autobiographical fact and pure fantasy in the "biographical" descriptions of the character Sabato. Throughout Abaddon, Sabato the character is described in a highly lifelike fashion, and many details are



included which even the most casual reader will recognize as factual. Sabato speaks of the publication of his two previous novels and the critical controversies and acclaim which they aroused. He speaks of his scientific training, his life in Argentina and Europe, and various activities in which he has participated by virtue of his status as a writer. Subtly and insidiously, however, Sabato begins, early in the course of the novel, to insert other elements into the "autobiography" which, while consistent with the description of the character Sabato being developed in the text, bear little or no relation to his actual life. We learn, for example, of many aspects of Sabato's adolescence, told in a fashion as to suggest the revelation of intimate details. The character describes one of the greatest uncertainties of his life, the date of his birth, a figure never precisely recorded. The astrological consequences of the two prime possibilities for the birthdate are radically different, although both having sinister overtones, and the writer always has felt a profound unhappiness at being unable to ascertain this most vital statistic. A further cause for anguish is the fact that the character was named after a brother who died in infancy immediately before the "second" Ernesto Sabato was born. Even his sacred individuality, which in the light of science one must fight to maintain, has been usurped by the onomastic whims of his parents. Perhaps as a reaction to this uncertainty, Sabato found himself attracted to the field where accuracy and precision triumph. In Abaddon, Rosas confronts Sabato with precisely this interpretation. After pointing out that the author always had feared darkness and animals associated with it, he declares "Entonces huiste hacia la luz, hacia lo límpido y transparente, hacia lo cristalino y helado ... las matemáticas." Also related with a great vividness is Sabato's account

of his mother's part-Albanian heritage and the implications which arise from being descended from this little-known mysterious Indo-European stock. The reader of Abaddon comes to deeply identify and sympathize with the character who is revealing his innermost nature, who admits, under Rosas' accusations, to being obsessed with "cuevas, mujeres, madres," who desperately fights to be allowed to pursue his literary career in peace free from the clutching hands of critics and curiosity seekers. However, many of the above details bear no relation to the actual biographical details of Ernesto Sábato, the "real" Argentine writer, whose life has often been quite different from that of his metamorphosed fictional counterpart.<sup>14</sup>

In other instances, there is no doubt that the author has created a web of pure fantasy, which cannot possibly bear any resemblance to the life of the living writer. This occurs, for example, when the character Sábato relives several hallucinatory experiences reminiscent of those suffered by Vidal Olmos in the Informe sobre ciegos, or when he reenacts the latter's pilgrimage through the sinister underground world of Buenos Aires. Sábato also tells of his childhood initiation at the hands of Rosas and the mysteriously beautiful Soledad, and of his precognition of the blinding of his former schoolteacher. Through the inclusion of obviously fantastic incidents, the author provides a clue that all is not as it might superficially seem; however, by also including notably factual details, he suggests the possibility that those other elements which do not clearly belong to the realm of fantasy might therefore be relegated to the "real" elements of the text. The character Sábato is a composite of continuous variation from fact to fantasy, a shimmering artifact which refuses to be characterized in any single domain. Just as in quantum theory

which states that a particle cannot be simultaneously localized and measured, so the character Sabato slips across the text defying definition in any consistent way. He interacts both with real characters with whom the reader can readily identify and with the fictional creations from his earlier works. He carries on mundane conversations with students concerning literary, political and philosophical topics, and also sustains bizarre and improbable exchanges with the equally improbable characters who constantly beset him, largely as the result of the publication of the Informe sobre ciegos. Sabato becomes transformed into Bruno Bassán, who at many instances speaks with the former's voice and analyzes his actions and motives with omniscient perspicacity, and in the end Sabato becomes transformed into a giant bat, a monster facing the monster he has created.

At many points, Sábato discusses the problems of literary interpretation, the fact that all too many readers fail to distinguish between fiction and reality, between text and metacommentary. His readers have often assumed that anything he has written must have some basis in fact, must be in some sense autobiographical or directly symbolic. This is because, for Sabato, the truly revealing writers "son los que sueñan por los demás. Están condenados." And yet, in the last analysis, "el novelista no conoce los porqués de sus personajes." Related to the failure to distinguish between writer and written is the insistence upon receiving a further explanation of what has been written. Sábato has been tormented by those wishing an 'explanation' of the Informe sobre ciegos, although he tries to explain that anything he wished to communicate is already present in the Informe. Sábato does not wish to be too closely identified with Fernando Vidal Olmos, the tormented visionary protagonist of Sobre héroes y tumbas: "Vidal Olmos es un paranoico ... no cometerá

la ingenuidad de atribuirme a mí todo lo que ese hombre piensa y hace." Sabato has presented "himself" as the character in this novel about writing a novel, partially in order to demythify the relationships between a writer and what he writes, but also to create a continuum of epistemological possibilities that will indicate the non-absolute nature of the fact-fiction dichotomy. At no point in the text is the reader completely able to classify the character, for the novel itself is neither purely fiction nor totally autobiographical. It is a hybrid, indeterminate, in precisely the fashion suggested by the indeterminacies of modern science.

Sabato's refusal to precisely specify the characters according to the fact/fiction division is a further reflection of the difficulty which this prolific writer has encountered in exposing his works to publication. Throughout Abaddon the author gives hints as to the grave psychological difficulties he has encountered in submitting a final form of his novels, and the text of Abaddon itself is to be regarded, among other things, as a tortuous statement of its own ontogenesis. Perhaps it is a result of Sabato's scientific training, where everything was, or was at least supposed to be, accurate, precise, and empirically verifiable, that the author has experienced anxieties with the publication of his fiction, difficulties which do not seem to have impeded his output of essays to such an extent. The world of science was assumed to be the world of deliberate the determinate measurement, and yet at about the time Sabato was becoming initiated, science was undergoing the aforementioned revolution, which destroyed many of its fundamental tenets. Although mathematics still continues to be the world of "light" and precision, the physics and chemistry that result from mathematical considerations are further and further removed from the possibility of exact

specification. Precise determinism has abandoned science, and Sábato has abandoned precise determinism in his novel, following, perhaps, the course of the scientific realm he has never totally abandoned.

While the nature of Sábato the character vis-à-vis Sábato the real author constitutes the most apparent epistemological and ontological structure reflected in modern science, it is possible to draw a further example, from the obsession with blindness. In El Túnel, Castel has an affair with María Iribarne, cuckolding her blind husband, who actually seems to approve of the relationship. In the Informe sobre ciegos, the central portion of Sobre héroes y tumbas, Sábato's fascination with blindness reaches major proportions. In the depths of his paranoia, Vidal Olmos is convinced that blind people are part of a world-wide organization, a conspiracy of darkness which seeks to overthrow the world of the sighted and usher in a new realm of darkness. The adage "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king" is, according to Fernando, false: in the land of the blind, a man with sight, even in one eye, is a freak to be banished and destroyed for daring to bring light into the world of perpetual darkness.

This universal view of the blind reappears in Abaddon, but diluted by the metacommentary forming the bulwark of the novel. Abaddon is punctuated by allusions to the "grave mistake" which Sábato committed by opening for discussion the subject of the blind. At these times the already tenuous distinction between real author and fictional character becomes totally obliterated, so that it is never clear whether or not Sábato the character is reporting events, premonitions and preoccupations which beset Sábato the author.

Blindness appears in several forms in Abaddon, in addition to



references to the Informe Sobre ciegos. We learn of the blinding of Sábato's former school teacher, who had acid thrown in her eyes. Later, a similar real or imagined incident takes place when Sábato meets a woman who evokes a remarkable resemblance to the teacher; he has the same premonition of disaster that preceded the earlier incident and upon running to the unknown woman's apartment, he is informed that she has suffered an "accident." Terrified, Sábato pursues the matter no further. Blindness occurs again in the scene where the adolescent Sábato, together with Rosas, engages in the ritualistic and visionary encounter with Soledad; when the latter removes her clothing, Sábato sees that she has a single unblinking eye in place of a sex organ, and, in a scene reminiscent of Bataille's Histoire de l'Oeil, his penetration pierces this eye and blinds it. The painter Victor Brauner is also fascinated with women and eyes and some of his paintings depict women with configurations identical to that of Soledad in Sábato's vision. Brauner had painted a series of self portraits in which he appeared with a punctured eye, including one with an arrow, bearing the letter D, protruding from the eye. Brauner was later blinded in one eye by Domínguez. The theme of blindness is alluded to once more in the person of the nearsighted girl Silvia Gentile, who meets Sábato at a student meeting. Silvia, whose poor eyesight causes a perpetual straining look, has constantly refused to wear corrective lenses, ostensibly out of vanity. One suspects other motives, however, that of dependence on others, as Sábato leads her around by the arm so that she will not walk into things. Silvia's nearsightedness is an intermediate point between the world of the sighted and the world of the sightless; it is at least as metaphorical as it is real, since she, like the other students, views the problem of the world with an ethnocentric myopia that

drives Sabato into tirades of impatience. Silvia's near-blindness represents the final link in the paradigmatic passage from darkness and light, and concludes Sabato's panorama of visual possibilities.

For Sabato, blindness is darkness, the absence of light. Light is in turn equated with knowledge, with truth, with science. The blind individuals are sinister, evil; they are agents of destruction. Although blindness is more negatively charged in men than in women, even the blind women act in some fashion to increase entropy, to destroy understanding, to confuse and confound, whether deliberately, as in the Informe sobre ciegos, or through carelessness or ignorance, as in the case of Silvia Gentile. Blind men, as viewed through several layers of paranoia, take an even more active part in the destruction of knowledge, substituting it with a bizarre form of diabolical anti-knowledge, a phenomenological universe which is the exclusive property of the blind. Blindness is correlated with destruction of knowledge and science; the blind operate, not through any scientific system, but through an empirically undeterminable network of associations, a form of sorcery that cannot be explained or even approached by the sighted. The world of the blind is portrayed as the world of the irrational, or the transrational; every attempt of a sighted individual to come too close to the blind leads to some form of tragedy, to the destruction of knowledge, to the plunge into darkness. Just as, earlier in the century, some feared the new scientific discoveries would plunge science back into "darkness," so is the orderly world of the sighted faced with destruction by the legions of the blind. The above theories stress that the Newtonian-Euclidean quantities are valid only as local approximations, and blindness is compatible with vision only on a local scale, in the area of single interpersonal relations.

Once the global dimension is introduced, the world of blindness recedes ever further from the world of vision, further from the reaches of consciousness and empirical knowledge.

Sábato's ambivalence toward blindness appears to be a direct reflection of his ambivalence toward science, toward the domain of knowledge which he continues to surreptitiously skirt. Blindness may be regarded as another allusion to the epistemological vagueness and indeterminacy which was invading science at the time periods covered in the novel and which even today, while more widely accepted with good humor, is a basic assumption which places effective limits on scientific research.

Abaddon el exterminador culminates in destruction. The title, derived from the name of one of the angels of the Apocalypse, is also taken as one of the names of the devil, the ultimate agent of chaos and confusion. Not only in terms of content but also linguistically and structurally, the novel self-destructs at the conclusion; the passages become more and more disconnected, more incoherent, and represent wider sweeps of the continuum of ontological possibilities. Sábato becomes transformed into a bat, the world of the text is destroyed, and any form of knowledge that might have persisted up until this point is finally destroyed. The worlds of light and darkness are annulled; the determinacies hinted at by the dichotomies fact/fiction, real/imaginary, past/present, hallucination/vision, blindness/sight are all in the end indeterminate, equivalent.

Like Rayuela, the other great Latin American novel about its own creation, Abaddon el exterminador contains statements explicitly relating to its own creation. Sábato speaks of the inclusion of the author directly into the text: "no hablo de un escritor dentro de la ficción.

Hablo de la posibilidad extrema que sea el propio escritor de la novela esa el que esté dentro. Pero no como un observador, como un cronista, como un testigo ... como un personaje más, en la misma cualidad que los otros, que sin embargo salen de su propia alma. Como un sujeto enloquecido que conviviera con sus propios desdoblamientos. Pero no por espíritu acrobático ... sino para ver si así podemos penetrar más en ese gran misterio." The "gran misterio" is the mystery of life, of creation. Sábato has come to the conclusion that in order to offer a fresh assault on ancient philosophical questions, a more radical approach to literature must be offered, one which obliterates the distinction between text and author, between fact and fiction, observer and observed, and replaces all of the above with a single homogeneous textual flow in which the epistemological structures are self-contained, and into which no external perspective may be admitted to resolve the dilemmas. Blindness acts as the foil for the search for the "gran misterio" and in Abaddón as in Sobre héroes y tumbas, there is a battle against blindness, in physical and metaphorical aspects. Just as contemporary science has abandoned the distinction between observer and observed system via the principle of complementarity and the theory of relativity, so Sábato shows that only in this way may the blindness of groping ignorance, here represented by literary creation, be confronted. Sábato has not only been guided by his philosophical predilections, but more directly he has been spurred on by the challenges that have faced modern science and which, to an increasing extent, are becoming a part of contemporary philosophy in general. By extension, these epistemological novelties must ultimately bear direct consequences for more mundane human activities, and it is in anticipation

of this eventuality that Sabato's novel stands as an innovative trail marker.

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NOTES

1. With such exceptions as Leopoldo Marechal, Vicente Lenero, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Thomas Pynchon, to mention a few.
2. An interesting psychological perspective on the motivation for scientific thought is offered by D. Sibony, 'Le discours scientifique et l'inconscient', in Psychanalyse et Sémiologie, ed. A. Verdiglione (Paris: Union Generale d'Edition, 1975), pp. 93-120.
3. Abaddón el exterminador. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1974.
4. G. Genette, Figures I (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 17.
5. This aspect of Sabato's style has been noted, for example, by G. Siebenmann, 'La novela latinoamericana contemporánea como reflejo de la situación social,' Iberoromania 3 (1969), 244-52 [p. 251].
6. W. Heisenberg, Physics and Philosophy (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 42.
7. This was done primarily by J. Jeans, Man and the Universe. Sir Halley Stewart Lecture, 1935.
8. As interpreted by A. Petersen, Quantum Physics and the Philosophical Tradition (Cambridge: M. I. T. Press, 1968), p. 22.
9. Ibid., p. 108.
10. M. Planck, The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics, tr. W. Johnston (New York: Norton, 1931), p. 15.
11. Cf. Petersen, op. cit. p. 22.
12. For example, L. Rosenfeld, 'Foundations of quantum theory and complementarity,' Nature v. 190 (1961), 384-89.
13. Most notably by C. Misner, K. Thorne, J. Wheeler, Gravitation (San Francisco: Freeman, 1975), chap. 44 and references given therein.
14. See for example A. Dellepiane, Ernesto Sabato: El hombre y su obra (New York: Las Americas, 1968), pp. 17-30; also, Sabato's own comments in El escritor y sus fantasmas (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1963).