

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID
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DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA II



TESIS DOCTORAL

**The cross-cultural roots of contemporary
micronarratives: journeys across the Atlantic
Rim**

**Las raíces multiculturales del microrrelato
contemporáneo: viajes a través del Atlántico**

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TESIS DOCTORAL DE:

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Madrid, 2017

DEDICATION

To the memory of my loving mother

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation examines the progressive surfacing of a new genre in the literary world: a micronarrative, and the growing tendency of an increased fragmentation of the literary unit as a whole.

I argue that short fiction is always the dichotomy of itself since it can always teleport anywhere/turn into anything owing to the stylistical resources that facilitate it to become something else, as well as due to the interpretation of the reader.

This is why, at the same time, I underline the role of a recipient as a key part, and stylistic resources such as double-entendre, metaphors, symbols, irony and sarcasm, that grease the wheels as far as creation of hints is concerned. The literary phenomenon of today is being displayed as an incessant game of chess in which the creator and the recipients move their pieces equivalently, contributing by equal shares. This type of narrative always incessantly creates itself, depending on who has been reading it, constantly generating new contextual meanings and creating new forms.

In order to demonstrate the incessant dismemberment of the totality of the literary form, six authors, three from Spanish-speaking and three from English-speaking countries have been analysed for traces of fragmentation in their works and seeds of microfiction.

The Spanish-speaking writers are, as follows: Horacio Quiroga (Uruguay) and his *Los arrecifes del coral*, Julio Torri (Mexico) with aphoristic and humoristic brief approach in *Ensayos y Poemas De Fusilamientos* and *Prosas dispersas*, and Ramón Gómez de la Serna, father of *la greguería*.

As for the English speaking authors, three female writers have been approached, namely, Leonora Carrington (UK) and her surreal stories from *The Oval Lady*, specifically “The debutante”, Angela Carter (UK) with *The Bloody Chamber’s* “Snowchild” and, ultimately, Margaret E. Atwood (Canada) with her short story prose collections and recently created Flash Fictions.

KEYWORDS: Fragments, Fantastic, Micronarratives, Short Fiction, Horacio Quiroga, Julio Torri, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Leonora Carrington, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood

RESUMEN

Esta tesis doctoral examina la progresiva aparición de un nuevo género en el mundo literario: el microrrelato, y la creciente tendencia de fragmentación incrementada de la unidad literaria en su conjunto.

Argumento que la ficción corta es siempre la dicotomía de sí misma ya que siempre puede teletransportarse en cualquier lugar/convertirse en algo distinto, debido a los recursos estilísticos que le facilitan para llegar a ser algo nuevo, así como debido a la interpretación del lector.

Por eso, al mismo tiempo, subrayo el papel del destinatario como parte clave, y los recursos estilísticos como el doble-entendre, las metáforas, los símbolos, la ironía y el sarcasmo, que engrasan las ruedas en cuanto a la creación de pistas. El fenómeno literario de hoy se muestra como un incesante juego de ajedrez en el que el creador y los receptores mueven sus piezas de manera equivalente, contribuyendo por partes iguales. Este tipo de narrativa siempre se crea incesantemente, dependiendo de quién lo ha

estado leyendo, generando constantemente nuevos significados contextuales y creando nuevas formas.

Para demostrar el desmembramiento incesante de la totalidad de la forma literaria, se han analizado seis autores, tres de habla hispana y tres de países anglófonos para detectar rastros de fragmentación en sus obras y semillas de microficción.

Los escritores de habla hispana son los siguientes: Horacio Quiroga (Uruguay) y *Los arrecifes del coral*, Julio Torri (México) con un enfoque breve y humorístico en *Ensayos y Poemas*, *De Fusilamientos* y *Prosas dispersas*, y Ramón Gómez de la Serna, padre de *la greguería*.

En cuanto a los autores de habla inglesa, me he acercado a tres escritoras, Leonora Carrington (Reino Unido) y sus historias surrealistas de *The Oval Lady*, específicamente "The debutante", Angela Carter (UK) con "The Snowchild" de *The Bloody Chamber* y, en última instancia, Margaret E. Atwood (Canadá) con sus colecciones de cuentos cortos en prosa y tres micro-relatos recientemente creados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fragmentos, Fantástico, Micronarrativas, Ficción corta, Horacio Quiroga, Julio Torri, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Leonora Carrington, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood

INTRODUCTION

This doctoral thesis takes us on a long and arduous journey in search of the cross-cultural roots of contemporary micronarratives. Being petite, compressed streak of texts, short short stories were once ice cube chunks that used to form a part of an iceberg, before breaking off and beginning free roaming all across narrative seas. Their mere existence is a consequence of literary fragmentation and alienation from the long narrative vein. In such a small story-like space, there is no place for complete development of a well-thought out plot, thorough characterization of protagonists or detailed description of sceneries. Short short stories strive towards conciseness, and such textual condensation is achieved through the economy of language.

Only the essential words are used and rarely will you see a miniature story excessively laden with adjectives or adverbs. Merely bare necessities are present; location where the story is occurring is solely hinted and sometimes not even that, since it might be irrelevant. Nouns and verbs are dominant, divulging the names of participants and the action that is taking course. Often, for the protagonists' characterization, dialogue is used. The objective is to pile up as many informative facts in as little words as possible.

Such literary nakedness prods readers to fill in the gaps that he or she might feel necessary for better comprehension of the story. Micro-narratives are fully open to readers, allowing them to enlist their imagination, directly interact with the text. The reader becomes the author; constantly reconstructing the micronarrative and editing it in the interpretative effort. The meaning of the story is multiplied thousand-fold under the

scrutiny of worldwide uncountable readers with distinct perceptions of the material lying in front of them. Largely, they are the ones that give meanings to a text, generating new, similar and yet different, short short stories after each read.

Divided in nine sections, the journey to the roots of contemporary micro-narratives takes us, is made up of fragments and segments of writing within the larger narrative piece. Section I deals the characteristics of these fictional works of extreme brevity and the ontology of modern short fiction, with its roots in the fragment and its symbolical alienation value. The plural nature of micro-narratives is reflected in their multiple names: from short fiction to short short story and flash-fiction, and more recently Six-Word Story, Twitterature (140-character stories), Drabble (100 words) or Dribble (50 words). The prehistory of micro-narratives lies in the first written words, recorded from oral tales; in folk forms such as fables (notably Aesop's fables in the West) as well as worldwide parables laden with socio-cultural content (as in the Panchatantra and Jataka tales in India). The tales of Turkish populist philosopher Nasreddin or Nasreddin Hodja with their subtle touch of humour and moralising intend are another example. In China, Chan (Zen) koans compiled by the Chinese Wumen Huikai epitomize the polarities of consciousness that form an obstacle/barrier to one's insight. As we move to the 21st century, *Petits Poèmes en prose* by Charles Baudelaire hold similar motives and intentions. Moving cross-culturally and across historical periods, Section I underlines the relationship of micro-narratives to the development of technology, focusing on a key moment in Western history which is Modernism and the 20th century avant-gardes. The trans-historical comparison traced in Section I also

focuses on the virtual encounter between authors and reader across time and space; a happening which eventually turns the recipient simultaneously in co-creator and co-destroyer of the literary piece. Approaching short fiction as a trans-literary “device” through Viktor Shklovsky’s essay “Art as a Device”, helps us define the short short story as a phenomena that mainly accentuates the channel of communication between the writer and the reader, locked in a space-time continuum and fluidity of present, past and future.

The fragment and its presence are introduced in fifth part of Section I, including its origin and features. The meaning of its appearance and the beginning of severing of larger literary portions becomes a symbol for *ostranenie*, alienation from the previous relation with a mother-narrative form, which at the same time allows the text section to be rid of predetermined meanings. Rather than totality, it involves its shattering and suspension. Examples of literary and philosophical fragments scattered throughout the last few centuries are also given.

Part Six with Section I concerns itself with digitalization of fragment in contemporary epoch, and the way it has become a symbol for innumerable paths that branch without deriving from a single timeline moment; but coming from multitudinous forking pasts and shaping an equally numerous number of diverging futures.

In the seventh portion of Section I, we take a progressive leap towards short fiction parting from the notion of the fragment as apprehended in consciousness, to its more unconscious forms, present in Sigmund Freud’s early *Interpretation of Dreams* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. I strive to demonstrate how the creative motion lies

beyond human rationality; never strictly determined or bordered; out of narrative sequence; in the form of fragments and images, especially visible in dreams or in altered states of mind (i.e madness). This part points to later sections where women's short fiction is semiotically explored, in contrast, as Julia Kristeva would have it, with the more symbolic action of male short fiction writers.

The eighth component of Section I enumerates the framework and the course of the investigation, simultaneously making a brief stop before the research makes its way into section II.

Section II deals with the roots of micro-fiction raising a number of queries concerning the definitions around short fiction and its variants and characteristics. The first component in this part analyses the cultural contexts of short stories and the origins of prose miniatures in general along the literary timeline, and the way their structure and characteristics altered and developed over the timeline. In the second segment of Section II, the problems encountered in the definition and categorization of the short fiction genres are enumerated, namely, the debates between the experts on the topic "what exactly is a short-short story" and "what literary form should be denominated as such".

Section II moves on to question the controversial emergence of literary genres and disappearance of others, underlining the rapid changing of textual formats from the end of the 19th century to the emergence of digitalization. This part also enumerates various exemplary authors whose short poems later became the seedbed for the creation of micronarratives, and ponders about the characteristics and origin of the "prose poetry"

genre. Part 2.4 is focused on the evolution of micro-narratives in the 20th century with a special accent on the seventies and the eighties as a period of a prominent flowering of this prose form in Latin America. The fifth and final fragment that brings Section II to an end revisits the problem of definition and categorization of a short-short story genre, offering diverse attempts that have been made so far in its nomenclature and classification, by experts such as Zavala, Rojo, Koch, Lagmanovich and others, enumerating its most prominent features according to their opinions.

Section III deals with hybrid scenarios of the short story and hybrid narratology in general. I place particular emphasis on the causes and consequences of narrative polysemiosis that has led towards the readers' wandering in the open woods, as Umberto Eco would have it, and their equal participation in interpretatively constructing short stories.

Thus, the first component of Section III is concerned with the origins of the fantastic and its characterization, positing that all the early forms of short narratives have fantastic segments. I also state that the fantastic always tends to expand out of reach of reality and it usually evades concepts of space and time, striving to become universal, like a dream.

Section III pursues the trail Modernism and the appearance of artistic *avant-gardes* as well as the re-emergence of the fragment at a crucial historical moment when the socio-economic problems are at their peak. I also underline that modernity and avant-garde are not merely linked to the societal influence, but that are, at the same time, connected with technological and scientific development, constructing the world we live in. As we move towards the postmodern condition, it would seem that modern way of

life has led humanity towards the decomposition of all essences and re-organizing of any trace of ideal forms.

The third piece of Section III explores the way the notions of multi-disciplinarity and ambiguity were presented in the last century in works of different authors in relation to philosophy, literature and art in general. The fourth segment dismisses cataclysmic visions of fragmentations and welcomes the new aesthetic as a breath of fresh air. The concept of totality is dethroned and the monarchy of fragment begins.

Brief sector five turns to the quick inspection of the relationship between technological development and the newly created figure of productive consumer. My theory claims that the appearance of technology and the inventions it brought with it opens yet another door on a humanity perception and allows us to see and imagine the world around us in a different way, changing our focal point.

The final unit within Section III, 3.6 explores the growing influence and presence of fragment in our lives, observing its split from the larger narrative body as an inherent splitting of spirit from matter, through quotes from Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Descartes perceptions of distinctive dualism between *res extensa* and *res cogitans* in *Meditations*. The body of the Modern text has lost its totality and its smooth oneness, and it has been replaced with a patchwork which has neither the beginning nor the end, and which can always incorporate new members and isolated units.

Section IV marks the end of the so called theoretical sections and changes rhythm and tone of the dissertation. It is the beginning of tripartite structure that

encompasses Sections V and VI, concerning Spanish speaking male writers that can be considered forefathers of today's short-short stories. The same can be said of the three parts that focus on English speaking female authors, Sections VII to IX, described below.

Section IV deals with prose poetry of Uruguayan writer Horacio Quiroga, analysing prose poems from his 1901 book *Coral reefs*. The first component refers to the modernist influence and the way his opus mimics that of his teacher Leopoldo Lugones, moving on to emphasize the strong link between his biography and his creations. Unit 4.2 discusses themes and motifs in Quiroga's literary opus, such as motifs of death, insanity, jungle and eroticism, as well as his style and other writers that influenced him. Part three of Section IV moves on to show him as pursuer of innovative narrative techniques in Baudelaire's fashion. The section explores Baudelaire's poem in prose, "The Stranger" and points out its similarities with modern micro-narratives. The final segment of Section IV is centred on the volume *Coral Reefs*, with the modernist and avant-guard style of young Quiroga. The volume displays numerous short musical poems from which I selected and analysed the ones titled "Toda la noche..." (All night long...) and "Sin haber llegado..." ("Without having reached...")

Section V concerns itself with Julio Torri, Mexican author and narrator. The first segment talks about the trajectory of his life, education he had, early publications and activities he participated in. The second component focuses on his literary production and influences, such as his best friend Alfonso Reyes, a style also greatly resembling that of Oscar Wilde and Charles Lamb. Torri considered the precursor of modern prose

poem in Mexico and his contribution to short fiction began with his early 1917 work *Ensayos y poemas*, a work that almost went unnoticed due to its innovativeness, and with his *De fusilamientos* (1940) and *Tres libros* (1964). Unit 5.3 describes the thematic that was often used by Torri, such as the motif of suffering and fragility of human beings, woman and love, Mexican patriotism, or the development of imagination and fantasy. The literary techniques he cultivated are also explored, alongside irony and brevity, as the main characteristics of micro-fiction. The final part of Section V pursues a close reading of Torrie's short stories and witty aphorisms, which are lively sketches of the everyday life. "El mal actor de sus emociones" ("The Bad Actor of His Emotions") y "La humildad premiada" ("Humility Rewarded") are the ones that caught my attention and that I analyse in detail as I conclude this section.

Section VI reaches out towards the futurist aesthetics and links it with the re-emergence of the fragment. At the same time, it is the final section regarding the Spanish speaking micronarratives antecedents and it focuses on Ramón Gómez de la Serna, a prolific writer, who was at the same time a Spanish avant-garde agitator, belonging to the Spanish Generation of 1914. The first part offers De la Serna's biographical profile, his birth in Madrid, his education, frequent travels to Paris, and early works. He was famous for literary meetings and discussions held in *Sagrada Cripta del Pombo*, and his sudden move to Argentina at outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Part two discusses the presence of Futurism as an aesthetic movement in entire Europe and, especially, Spain, thanks to Gómez de La Serna and his translation of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's Futurism Manifest to Spanish. It also enumerates some of the Futurism main

characteristics and its relevance in relation to the fragment and short fiction. Unit 6.3 deals with visualisation and fragmentism in De La Serna's literary work, as well as with stylistic devices he employs in his work, that are polar opposites: "personification" and "objectification". Fragmentism tendency is hinted in more detail in the final section which is dedicated to De La Serna's own invention, *la greguería*, a manifestation of narrative microtextuality and the aesthetics of brevity.

Section VII opens up a new triptych, made up of Sections VII, VIII and IX. This final part of the doctoral thesis elaborates on three English-speaking female writers from United Kingdom and Canada, whose creations contribute to the modern world of micro-narratives.

Specifically, Section VII deals with the opus of an English-born artist, surrealist painter and novelist Leonora Carrington. This dissertation includes an entire section to her work due to the linkage that exists between short fiction and fantastic sceneries prodded to existence by the unconscious, dream-desires and madness. Unit 7.1 narrates Carrington's family life and the great influence her father exerted on her, causing her rebel spirit to emerge. Another man that had gigantic impact in her life path was the German surrealist Max Ernst, her partner for a short while until the outbreak of World War II when he fled to USA leaving her devastated behind. Carrington's descent into madness began shortly after her nervous breakdown, and was institutionalized in an mental institution in north of Spain. Escaping her mental prison, Carrington travelled to Mexico where she stayed until the end of her days in 2011. The second component of Section VII refers to Surrealism and the fragments of madness emerging in Leonora's

mind and shaping her creativity: the subject of her book *Down Below* (1943). Posteriorly it moves on to discuss the motif of the Surrealist Woman, (strength she possesses and the central place she begins to occupy in male's world), and to elaborate in detail Carrington's stay at the asylum. The final section analyses Carrington's short story "La debutante" in which bodily transformation and incessant movement, change of shape comes to focus. This brief prose piece explores the ambiguous state of a child-woman protagonist who is forced into a Superego of adulthood but cleverly manages to escape societal bonds, placing a carnivorous hyena as symbol of her *barbarie* and feminist assertion.

Section VIII is dedicated to the magical realism British female author Angela Carter, who was at the same time a journalist and a teacher, focusing on a short story *Snow Child* from her 1979 book *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. The first part refers to her biographical profile, the way she was educated, and influences present in her life that impacted her literary ripening and the development of her way of thinking, namely her divorce and her experience in Japan. Unit 8.2 discusses Carter's writing techniques, deconstruction and rewriting through appropriation, which come from postmodernist aesthetics and poststructuralism. She targeted fairy tale motifs and then transformed and replaced them with her own perspective, fragmenting the literary body and inserting new sections that would alter an entire traditional premeditated reader's perception about the seemingly familiar text. Part three speaks of recurring subjects and ideas that tended to circularly appear throughout Carter's literary opus. I refer to various motifs, among which are the motif of Old Woman, New Woman and Changed Woman,

empowered female roles, pornographic motif, motif of female desire, nature, animal symbolism, Gothic elements, and motif of monstrosity and grotesque. The final segment is centred on a vignette “The Snow Child” as it analyses its similarity to micronarratives of today.

Section IX, is dedicated to the still living Canadian female poet, novelist, literary critic and short story writer Margaret Atwood. The first segment of Section IX deals with her life and work, and the way her peculiar childhood next to her father entomologist in the forests north of Quebec, Ottawa and Toronto reflected on her perceptions of life. I enumerate some of her most important works she has published so far, including poem collections, essays, novels and short story books. Part two encompasses the entire literary world of Margaret Atwood and the labels placed on her opus as far as wandering topics are concerned. She explores what it means to be a woman and promotes female perspective and societal matters related to them; at the same time she moves onto the more humanist themes as well. Similarly to Carter, Atwood has also dabbled in rewriting literary topoi from fairy tales and folk tales placing them into a modern context. Other topics she is dedicated to include food/eating, nature, and animals. Unit 9.3 and at the same time last portion of the final Section that concludes my thesis refers to Margaret Atwood’s books of short short stories: *Murder in the Dark* (1983), *Good Bones and Simple Murders* (1994) and *The Tent* (2006). Apart from mentioning her prose poems “Cold Blooded”, “Homelanding” and “The Tent”, I also list three six-word-stories with which Atwood participated in a *six word story*

contest in 2006, and that were consequently published by *Wired Magazine* in an article “Very Short Stories”.

The dissertation closes with some conclusions and desires for the continuation of this research in Section X.

SECTION I. Short Story lands

1.1. Introduction

The hypothesis underlying this dissertation is that Short Fiction as a genre perpetually in the process of positioning itself elsewhere. Short Fiction weaves unconventional and schematized forms of writing that open up allegorical interpretations and displace the integrity of the writing self. The crisp controlled sequences in short fiction produce a constellation of practices that multiply spatial contingency. Built on the dichotomy of the authentic self and its alienation, short narratives mobilize the zero degree of writing and the ghost in the machine by manipulating spatiotemporal narrative structures. In doing this, they turn the narrative into a process of engagement and an act of performance on the part of the reader. The short story becomes a way of practicing the fiction of identity at a time when the self is in constant change, vastly increasing the possibilities of transitory commitments and fragmented relationships.

The achievement of the short story is admittedly fragile. It is built upon semantic ambiguities, language games, paradox and irony; feeding upon a stolen presence acquired by a dynamics of perpetual de-centering and manipulation. The quicksand substratum of short stories defines the unity of meaning as well as the identity of the self; that is, the telling of the story by the 'who' of discourse. The short story can be contemplated as a solution to the modern preoccupation with self-estrangement brought about by the accumulation of information and also by its speed, enabled by media technologies. In its openness to the reader, the short story offers an artistic response to

the human need of narratives that make sense of their origins and destiny. Aesthetics and style can be seen as techniques that tell of how reality is accessed and recorded, and serve to express cultural patterns of specific worldviews. Each style attaches value to certain properties of thought over others. The short story makes use of particular techniques in order to rewrite the personification of utterances and construct a self-creating semiotic phenomenon. The borderline situation of the narrative persona make its determination an interpretative challenge. The construction of the poetic I depends on the particular act of reading of the audience, rather than the creator, relegating the interpreter to searching for a continuous reconstituting voice.

The reduplicated perspective of the Self forms part of a semiotic structure of multiplicity that overwrites the story's meaning-in-process. As a result of the interpretative dilemma, the reader is charged with the task of deciding. Identity is called into question in the divisibility of the 'I'. One part of the Self lives in a dream world, the other determines the corporeal reality by facing the devaluation of his/her own standards. The energy of creativity comes from the presence of Apollo-Dionysus polarities, transposed by the language-based memory of the historical past. The 'I' of the short story is no longer in control of language; it is not attached to the principle of traceability of a single subject. It dissolves in the multiplicative artistic play of Bakhtin's voices; of self-definitions. The formation of meanings in the short story is largely determined by the construction and deconstruction of these person positions, faces and voices that mobilize the text, and by the similarly non-identifiable spatiality of the contexts, creating indeterminacies and open articulations of the past and the future.

The Short Story uses different techniques in order to articulate this mutant narrative form that voices diverse textual realizations of the 'I', opening the writer to the reader. Short fictions are forms of emphatic narratives that discipline poetry into objectivity while weaving subjectivity and affect into prose. Their structure in process overwrite the ideological nature of ossified meanings by scrutinizing the texts' indeterminacies and their tropological paradoxes while simultaneously maintaining a certain contextual and biographical determinacy as meaningful factors. Their unusual doubling destabilizes the territorial determinacy of self-identity and leaves behind the obviousness of a univocal form of narrative based on memory and experience, opening itself to reader response.

This dissertation sheds new light upon the story of short stories and their development into their new online format. Short fiction emerges as a combination of factors that involve not just aesthetic taste and generic concerns but also bearing the impact of changing material formats. As the inquiry presupposes that the mapping of earlier short story formats onto their new online forms, a referential comparison to earlier examples is performed. Although there are references to earlier forms of the short story, as well as a brief study of the fragment as 'device' in the 19th century, the research is focused toward the 20th century, tracing the influence of the avant-gardes upon its evolution towards contemporary forms of Flash Fiction which tend to overcome the formal disposition towards closure of Modernism. Ultimately, the dissertation also questions the role of women in this process. I have chosen several female short story writers in order to explore their vitalist input into the skeleton of the short story.

1.2. Methodological concerns

At the end of the 19th century, literary fiction and criticism casted off the restrictions of space. With the introduction of steam-powered printing presses, pulp mills, automatic type setting there were many improvements in the printing, publishing and book-distribution, reaching all corners of the world with the increase of transportation networks. Inexpensive books bound in paper like pamphlets, yellow backs and dime novels were popular. Serialization was another way in which longer narratives reached the public in the monthly instalments of popular journals. We are not often conscious how the development of narrative fiction was indeed bound by strict publishing rules, as well as enclosed national paradigms.

It was only in the 20th century that stories embraced a spatial mobility beyond the bounded space of the printed page and the borders of the nation. For centuries, stories were ruled by space before they were able to traverse it. As Formalist and Structuralist critics realized, technique and style were the core tools for storytelling creation. Their struggle with the structural frameworks of artistic expression, and the engagement of authors in this process reminds that "Modernism is less a style than a search for style" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:29). In their guide to Modernism, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane deplore the use of a single term for a phenomenon that involved a variety of different artistic groups such as Impressionism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism and Surrealism. The term 'Modernism' is more

a sort of stylistic abstraction of “forbiddingly intertwined and overlapped producing a doubtful synthesis of many movements radically different in kind and degree.” (1991:44-5) Indeed, this explanation shows the desire to move beyond comparison by linear contact to fractal and networked comparison across levels, characteristic of 20th century thought evolution. David Lodge's investigation of Modernism summarizes its innovations in the following paragraph:

(1) Modernist fiction subverts established modes of discourse. (2) It is interested in various states of consciousness. (3) As a result, introspection and other modes of introversion outweigh the significance of "external, 'objective' events essential to traditional narrative." (4) Due to its focus on individual experience Modernist novels have no real beginning and tend to have open endings. (5) The dissolution of narrative structures leads to "alternative methods of aesthetic ordering," such as the reference to "mythical archetypes and the repetition-with-variation of motifs, images, symbols." (6) Chronological ordering and the use of reliable narrators are replaced with fragmentating perspectives (1977:45-6).

The term ‘Modernism’ has been used retrospectively by critics who desire to identify, classify and reassemble a number of diverging avant-garde movements of early 20th century, all of which showed a desire to transcend the text and reimagine new textual configurations beyond the printed page as well as new geopolitical relationships in the comparison of themes and topoi. In the postmodern condition, as Lyotard would

have it, art and criticism shows a desire to move beyond the dominance of historization, searching for forms of inter-medial and trans-medial reading across space and time (López-Varela 2002). In spite of their problematic denominations, Modernism and postmodernism allude to common denominators among a myriad of artistic trends and movements. One of such is the claim that the ‘modern’ implies a “radical re-imagining” (Kermode 1971:65) of the past, rather than the continuity of an obsolete state of affairs. More to the point is the description by French sociologist of science, Bruno Latour, who indicates that

[t]he adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern,' 'modernization,' or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns. 'Modern' is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished. (1993:10)

Such definition reveals the tensions and conflicts that arise between period categorization, akin to those that exist between genre divides. What Bradbury and McFarlane write about the sense artists have of participating in “totally novel times” and of an emerging “new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind” (1991:22)

could have been the description of similar feelings during the Romantic period. As Randall Stevenson observes, Modernism could be seen as a sort of utopian compensation for the dehumanising nature of daily life; “as a late extension of Romanticism” (Stevenson 1992:78). The problem of definition and categorization comes once more to the fore, simply because all human stories seek to capture attention; to be made unique. Is uniqueness about essentialism and singularity? Can the One capture infinity? How do we make the world into a nutshell? Why do short stories attempt the impossible? These are some of the questions we will try to address in this dissertation.

1.3. Spaces and times of the research

Recent developments in digital archiving and data mining are eroding not just the borders of conventional historical and literary periods. Infographics have change the way we do ‘close’ reading, focusing in the particular. Comparisons are now done using greater spectrum of times and spaces, including interdisciplinary, intermedial and even transmedial accounts. Franco Moretti’s ‘distant reading’ is a revolution in storytelling. In a scenario of algorithmic change, how does our sense of novelty and uniqueness apply to these rapid changing human configurations. Indeed, the sense of ‘the modern’, as Charles Baudelaire noted while walking the city, revisions in world views are associated to rapidly changing environments.

While the pace of nature is slower, the significance of technological advance in the transfiguration of our world cannot be underestimated. As Theodor Adorno puts it

“[a]rt is modern when, by its mode of experience and as the expression of the crisis of experience, it absorbs what industrialization has developed” (1997:34), destroying and creating new social, and even natural, environments. The collapse of pictographic/hieroglyphic language representations and the emergence of the domination of the eye in alphabetic writing is evident in early stories such as the fall of Babel, or the myth of Echo and Narcissus, a story of the fall into silence of the oral tradition (see López-Varela 2014; De Kerckhove 2017). Bradbury and McFarlane assert the immense impact of technological transformations and science (Darwin or Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle) upon modern art, as well as “[...] the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character.” (1991:27) Alienation, displacement and exile (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:11) are possible the three most popular words to characterize the modern. The three have spatial connotations. When coming to the postmodern, frontiers are no longer in “dangerous flux” (1991: 13).

Long long ago, back when the world was young - that is, sometime around the year 1958 - a lot of artists and composers and other people who wanted to do beautiful things began to look at the world around them in a new way (for them). They said: “Hey! - coffee cups can be more beautiful than fancy sculptures. A kiss in the morning can be more dramatic than a drama by Mr. Fancypants. The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music” And when they saw that, it turned their minds on. And they began to ask questions. One question

was: “Why does everything I see that’s beautiful like cups and kisses and sloshing feet have to be made into just a part of something fancier and bigger? Why can’t I just use it for its own sake? (Dick Higgins “A Childhood History of Fluxus”)

The catastrophe of technological advance holds the seeds of a hypothetical power of ‘self-repair’. The always provisional (new) architectures, both within and outside the computer, may be a “magnificent disaster”, reinforcing the necessity to look at creativity not just as “the presence of sophistication, difficulty and novelty in art; it also suggests bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration” (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:26). Short Fiction has found ways of looking beyond the notion of discontinuity, integral to the apocalyptic outlook advocated by some Modernisms.

The ontology of Short Fiction plays on the impossibility of reification, urbanization and mechanization of industrial society. Short Fiction, as I shall try to show, constructs a whole fictional world with the minimum amount of bricks and simultaneously destructs it. Thus, it transgressing any mournful or distressing sense of the fragment as unique and essential. The deconstructive work of Short Fiction posits alternative spatiotemporal frameworks that use forms of hybrid narratology to avoid locating textual meaning in a unit; not matter whether this unit is short or long. Consequently, a more complex alternative to contemporary characterization of the genre of Short Fiction remains to be developed; one that would read not just across or against periods within intra-historical micro-frames. Is it possible to practice something like a

trans-historical close-reading to supplement and complement distant-reading as we enter the big data era? My argument is that trans-historical comparison, as I attempt to do in this dissertation, does not involve reading across a wider time scale but thinking and performing comparison across category folds, including a number of variables that can be studied in their replication across structural levels.

By combining a close attention to these trans-historical concerns, the research also draws from Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's model of 'surface reading,' a critical practice that focuses primarily on the text's immediate properties instead of taking it as an opportunity for "symptomatic reading," plumbing the text for the meaning latent in its manifest content (1-3). Symptomatic interpretation seeks to categorize the text in relation to its context and period. This restrains its interpretations. Surface reading is almost an intuitive practice that extends the notion of surface to include an element of the virtual encounter between the writer and his/her readers. It looks at the spectral and ghostly relationships that operate across all the semiotic variables of communication.

1.4.Short Fiction as 'device'

The word 'text' may be too broad of a term when talking about very brief forms of Short Fiction. Thus, the primary method of this dissertation is to examine a single device. Drawing on Viktor Shklovsky's classic theorization in "Art as Device," I consider the Short Story as a trans-historical trans-literary device, staging an interaction between the fluidity of present, past and future in formal terms, and uniquely concerned with questions of the limits of memory and intermedial representation. The trans-literary here refers to two fundamental

aspects. First, to the capacity of Short Fiction to create mental (also perhaps aural) images (beyond alphabetic writing). Second, to the possibility of replicating Short Fiction in digital electronic literature formats where letters are mobilized in such a way as to become images.

In order to speak of the term ‘device’, we need to go back to Viktor Shklovsky’s essay “Art as Device” (1917). The essay is perhaps mostly known by the importance that the term *ostraniene*, translated commonly as “defamiliarization” acquired in Modernism. According to Shklovsky, art has the unique capacity to bring to life or reanimate the everyday world made invisible by habit: “after being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of ‘recognition.’ An object appears before us. We know [it is] there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can say nothing about it” (6). In the complex net of human memories, “recognition” is the key word that, with the right aesthetic devices, allows us to see the world anew again; to experience it perceptually. Art is a device that touches us affectively and allows the stone become “stony”, as the author’s famously put it.

Shklovsky asserts that art is thinking in images” and that these images are relatively static, crossing history “without change” (2). Shklovsky seems to present images as essences that endure and last,” and “belong to ‘no one,’ except perhaps to ‘God’” (2) He adds “The more you try to explain an epoch, the more you are convinced that the images you thought were created by a given poet were, in reality, passed on to him by others with hardly a change” (2). Images are, thus, basic units, possibly invariant because of the physical limitations of human perception and cognition. Aesthetics, for Shklovsky, is the use of identifiable techniques, structures, or manipulations of language that cumulatively produce the work of art. This he calls the “device,” which is no other than *ostraniene* (9), later interpreted as “otherness”. His argument reveals *ostraniene* to be not a device, but the

possible effect or consequence of any device, since he illustrates his theory with an example from Tolstoy that focuses on the linguistic substitution of a verb with the literal description of the activity, injecting a bizarre character in the narrative. His second example involves *ostraniene* using the opposite technique that is, using figurative language to describe a sexual activity (10).

Repetition, that is, *experience within time*, is necessary for a perception to become both habitual and automatic (5) Automatic recognition, for Shklovsky, is an “algebraic method of thinking” in which “objects are grasped spatially” (5). The delayed perception produced by art reverse this process: “The object is perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity” (12). Through art, the spatial becomes the temporal, and recognition returns to vision. Shklovsky claims that “(the) life of a poem (and of an artifact) proceeds from vision to recognition, from poetry to prose, from the concrete to the general [. . .]. As the work of art dies, it becomes broader” (6). In Shklovsky’s description, the transformation of artistic devices from perception to recognition moves first linearly, at the level of individual memory, only to transcend to a “broader” interpretative non-linear scenario; another level where, using the simile of poetry and music, Shklovsky claims that “we are dealing here not so much with a more complex rhythm as with a disruption of rhythm itself, a violation, we may add, that can never be predicted” (14). Such unexpected break takes the notion of the device from the linearity of perspectival vision to the aural temporal dimension of simultaneity, where the leap to another fractal level of representation is possible.

Clearly, the notion *ostraniene* is related not just to the conditions in which perception moves beyond automatic recognition, but to the aesthetic devices that enable the flight of the mind, that is, the possibility of transcending the contingent by playing in non-

linear scales. Furthermore, Shklovsky's oscillation between *ostraniene* as device and as phenomenon, between metaphor and metonymy signals it a powerful semiotic tool that seeks to transcend spatial levels and temporal frameworks by assuming specific, even if mutant, instantiations.

Shklovsky's account of the device enables us to pose new questions about Short Fiction and its shorter variations. What can they reveal about the nature of the genre and its transhistorical persistence? Short Fiction harkens back to earlier times and hybrid scenes of prose-poetry, generating an effect of both belatedness and originality. The oral tradition could be considered to be a primal scene of minimal forms of technologies of memory, as short narratives are, devices designed to capture both attention and recollection as kernels of information or memes to be passed on, as Jack Zipes (2008) has claimed. Over time, this oral tradition was written down, first on the printed page; more recently digitized onto our screens. My argument is that Short Fiction is a node in the aural/visual cultural network of memory and language.

Short Fiction stages memory as "mediation", that is, as "strategic narrative", both in its instability in-between a fact-fictional function that attempts to capture attention and reduce it to an mental image, a device destined to be memorized and recollected, and in-between its spatial limitations that, as Jacques Derrida would have it, claim a presence that actually masks and evokes a loss. The central tasks of Short Fiction would be to summon up a world and make it vivid to its audiences in a synthesized form. Short Fiction as a device draws attention to the paradox of claiming presence out of a sign of absence.

As the research will show, the economy of Short Fiction frameworks does away with some of the temporal structures present in longer narrative forms. This reduction situates

many short stories in a static situation very close to prose-poetry. This reduction also produced an articulated silence, a deliberate gap at the heart of the story. For example, with narrative conflict minimalized, characters, as if suspended in time, become signs for the unnamed and the unnamable; spectral presences lurking beyond the spatial finitude of the readable text. These absences within Short Fiction may also indicate its deep relationship to the act of mourning that follows the loss; the breaking of causality; the void of the silenced text. Internal time in Short Fiction, that is, the links between the narrative situations presented, is almost obliterated. External time (on this see Genette as well as Ricoeur), which forges links between the text and the cultural situation it ostensibly represents, is activated on the surface of Short Fiction. The temporal gap enables a poetic-like rhythm that yields a ghostly trace behind the apparent simplicity, transparency and economy of the narrative structure. The void opens to the reader in the form of virtual interpretations to come, paradoxically saturated with plenitude. The birth of Short Fiction is a ghost story.

1.5. On the limits of Short Fiction: the fragment as device

We are at each instant only fragments deprived of meaning
if we do not relate these fragments to other fragments.
(Bataille, 1989: 165)

The ghostly presence of the fragment can be traced in aphoristic writings, present in the earliest historical accounts (for instance in the hybrid genre of chronicle); in the first philosophical wanderings, whereas in Chinese Confucian thought or in pre-socratic

Western examples, developed from the Greek and Latin tradition in the form of apologues and epigrams. It is present in the short of the shortest fictional forms of oral storytelling in all cultural traditions. It served as a “stimulus to polite conversation” in the salon culture of the 17th and 18th centuries (Kubiak 1994: 413) and it contributed to public and oral popular culture as a mode of capturing attention, from the Romans to Oscar Wilde. Interestingly, Kubiak also notes, the aphorism pursued a mode of persuasion that lay outside the kind of rationalism typically associated with Cartesian logic. Rather than an appeal to reason, aphorisms were used to deliver moral lessons by directly affecting the senses of audiences. In other words, aphorisms were performative rhetorical devices. As such, they followed a series of operations to challenge common sense meanings by introducing a main topic and a secondary one that contrasts with the first. What is left is the imaginative interpretation or the expression of possible latent meanings by means of additional commentaries, either on the part of the speaker, or in a dialogue with the audience.

Matthew Bell explains that the fragment may have become a particularly useful device for attacking the system of Enlightenment reason, particularly at the turn of the 18th century (1994: 389). However, unlike the aphorism, which was usually accompanied by a title, the fragment, as used by the Jena circle, constituted as polemic declaration of negativity, refusing resolution and unity (1994: 373). The influence the romantic fragment had on literature, poetry, and philosophical criticism was studied by Jean-Luc Nancy, with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in their *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, a volume that explored the work of a

group of German writers and critics, including Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schelling, and Novalis, who were all involved with the journal *The Athenaeum*. The group placed significant attention on the fragment as a process from which the idea of an integral work of art could emerge. Indeed, the romantic fragment made it possible to think of the work of art as productive of its own conditions rather than being evidence of something else.

To write in fragments, risks producing a work that has been severed from its outside, that has lost all relation, that is at rest in the “blissful tranquility” of meanings that have been determined in advance, as Friedrich Schlegel observed (1991, Fragment 169). This research suggests the possibility that the romantic fragment may not be exclusively a product of literary and philosophical analysis, but also might be a symptom of a broader cultural disposition that informed the origins of western modernity. One of the first things to remark is the lack of definition, explanation and even description of the fragment in the works of the Jena circle. The word itself seems to indicate a rupture, a resistance to complete meaning, almost like Short Fiction, as we shall see in the following chapter. If romanticism inaugurates a movement or gesture towards the fragment, Modernism can be understood as the anxious search for structural closure and formally limited totalities. In *The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Genre*, Camelia Elias suggests that “The modernist fragment repeats and rationalizes the process whereby it is achieved.”(2004: 133), “[...]the composition forming around me was a prolonged present” as Gertrude Stein describes in *Writings and Lectures* (1971: 25) The economy of the fragment, its suspension, never involves a

totality, and thus, it cannot shatter a unity that was never there. It is “forever becoming [ewig nur werden] and never perfected” (Schlegel “Atheneum Fragments” 1991: 32). The fragment is no longer and not yet; it is meanwhile and an in-between. It interrupts causality and sequence. “A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated [abgesondert] from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine.” (Schlegel “Atheneum Fragments” 1991: 45)

In *The Unfinished Manner*, Elizabeth W. Harries offers another view on the fragment by focusing on English examples drawn from Sir Joshua Reynolds, Jonathan Swift or Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. Her analysis focuses upon the sketchiness and digressive structure of the pieces, which became enormously popular in contemporary journals as they were accompanied by caricatures, political and moral jokes, calling into question rational unity with deliberate constructions of human folly. Harries argues that “[t]he lines actually on the canvas, the words actually on the page are synecdoches; the beholder or reader expands or “finishes” their suggestive, unfinished forms. The more indistinct or incomplete their forms, the more the reader is required to do.” (Harries 1994: 44) For Marjorie Levinson, fragments direct audiences towards an absence and essential incompleteness, a state of existential anxiety (1986: 26, 33). In all these accounts, formal irresolution invites an interpretative reception on the part of the audience. The fragment is not an active device. It “subsides into textuality, patiently awaiting the next structural opportunism” (Levinson 1986:199)

In her study on Pushkin, Monika Greenleaf mentions that the particular characteristics of the fragment make it cut “across the traditional boundaries between the

arts” (1994: 14). Greenleaf assigns the fragment a particular place in the development of “culture’s perception of itself as Modern” (Ibid.) Greenleaf argues that the early 19th century was an era of artistic production in which the fragment brought an essential problematisation to questions of the appearance, production and reception of works of art, and to the very idea of creation (Ibid.) Indeed, the fragment became the episteme of the tendency to fragmentation evidenced also at the turn of the 20th century by authors such as Nietzsche, and congruent later with the fractured identities of modernity and the artistic avant-gardes. When referring to the aphorism in his volume *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche writes that it requires an “art of exegesis” (1967: 23) He draws attention to the fact that an aphorism seeks to *differ*, as Derrida would have it. Nietzsche insists that the aphorism “has not been ‘*deciphered*’ when it has simply been read”. (Ibid. emphasis in the original) Indeed, it is a singularity which becomes meaningful in the rational linguistic system in which it operates only when it is deferred beyond.

In *Meta-romanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (2003), Paul Hamilton discusses some of the characteristics of the fragment as suggestively incomplete longing in its failure to disclose an alluring unattainable wholeness; to reach a conclusion or map its object. The fragment displaces the authority of knowledge onto a momentary feeling. But does the fragment relate to any other larger items? Does it defeat transience? “Is it a metonym, or a metaphorical likeness? Is it a word in a language, or a piece in a puzzle? Is it a love-letter to its other half, or a philosophy of irony, a knowledge of ignorance?,” writes Hamilton in his study of Leopardi. He goes on to explore Novalis’ re-evaluation of the relationship between poetry and prose in *Logolologie*, which based on a

dialectical theory between the idea of the fragment and that of prose-poetry. Novalis arrives at the same conclusion that Zoltán Kövecses in his studies of cognitive metaphor (see for example 2009), that the very structure of human cognition, in particular those aspects more closely related to creativity, are typically poetic, because this is the way by which humans perpetuate themselves in new forms. Hamilton moves on to the trace Novalis leaves upon Walter Benjamins idea of the magical adequacy of a poem to its idea (*Sprachmagie*) which “works by the extension of its dynamic individuality into the prosaic sobriety of other discourses, an extension Benjamin will eventually call its reproducibility (*Reproduzierbarkeit*).” (Hamilton n/p) He adds that “for Benjamin, reproducibility is a democratizing of access to the work of art which, at one stroke, destroys its ‘aura’ by rendering the work’s uniqueness fragmentary, only one part of the unfolding history of its continuing significance in different forms.” (Ibid.) Poetry, in this sense, is a fragment of a larger creativity or craft (*poïesis*; on this see López-Varela 2017).

Indeed, the expansion of poetry into prose, a phenomenon that takes place particularly during the Romantic period, is akin to the expansion of the aphorism (the fragment) into philosophy. Hamilton concludes that “poetry’s fragmentariness in a world of creativity gives it an afterlife in the ways in which its peculiar formative power is reproduced in other disciplines and activities for which it can still provide inspiration without dissociating itself from what they are doing.” (Ibid.)

Through the nineteenth and the twentieth century, short writings, often shaped as fragments, whether literary (Charles Baudelaire, Franz Kafka, Ramón Gomez de la

Serna, Edmond Jabès, Félix Fénéon), or historical and philosophical (Friedrich Nietzsche, Alain, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Wilhelm Adorno, Maurice Blanchot), became means of interrogating knowledge. To Giorgio Agamben, the fragment, alienated from its context, is “an alienating power” with “unmistakable aggressive force” (*The Man Without Content* 1999: 104) that emerges not just in the French Symbolism, but with particular strength in the explosion of fragmentary writing that takes place in Italian Futurism. The fragment, writes Maurice Blanchot is

A new kind of arrangement not entailing harmony, concordance, or reconciliation, but that accepts disjunction or divergence as the infinite center from out of which, through speech, relation is to be created: an arrangement that does not compose but juxtaposes, that is to say, leaves each of the terms that come into relation *outside* one another, respecting and preserving this *exteriority* and this distance as the principle—always already undercut [*toujours déjà déstabilisé*]—of all signification. Juxtaposition and interruption here assume [*de chargent ici*] an extraordinary force of justice. (“The Fragment Word” 1964)

1.6. Digitising the fragment

Short Fiction writers show a concern with the linear model of time based on the principles of succession and the infinite divisibility of temporal fragments. In order to overcome the intellectual problems posed by linearity and divisibility, from the 20th century, Short Fiction writers begin to use models based on folds or networks and rhizomas. These models have the advantage of moving across structural levels because they take into consideration dynamic networked structures, that is, systems and processes. Some of the narrative strategies proposed in these models present alternative theories of linearity, with ideas taken from the theory of parallel universes or the one about forks in time, which derive from post-Einsteinian physics. The narratives of Lewis Carroll (see López-Varela 2015, 2016) already show this concern with the problem of divisibility, illustrated with Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise, which also appears in Jorge Luis Borges' essay *The Perpetual Race of Achilles and the Tortoise*. Indeed, our way of relating to reality is based on the intellectual understanding of linear succession while our sensorial perception, which often experiences time as flux, also experiences the sameness of certain recurrent moments. This sameness, in the form of temporal simultaneity, is the object of much Futurist experimentation. The experience of a sense of sameness between past, present and their projection onto the future can be made into a feeling that time has not passed, building the individual momentary experience into a sense of eternity, as William Wordsworth does in his poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (also known as "Daffodils") or in his well-known

recollection of “Tintern Abbey” in the *Lyrical Ballads*. By focusing on a natural object, with a longer time span, the human concept of time as duration loses its meaning, and the sense of interval between moments falls away completely, opening the aesthetic to the experience of the ‘sublime’

Nevertheless, spatial discreteness and the sense of divisibility attached to objects (matter in space) and their location is a pre-condition of human perception and understanding. To image object as metamorphic matter, able to change shape beyond the Euclidean three-dimensional world, requires moving to a higher level of cognitive abstraction. Writers have used different forms of representing infinite division in a way that it is easily understood. In Borges’ story “Funes el memorioso” (1942), the protagonist develops an incredible capacity to remember every detail of past experiences as well as all the sensorial perceptions which accompanied them. His memory stores all the parts and perceptions which constitute a single moment of recollection, displayed as separate points on a sort of horizontal plane or surface which he sees all the time, similar to contemporary online infographic displays, but with a difference. Funes mentally maps all his memories made up of components in fixed positions. He does not remember through association of ideas, which would cross space levels. Unlike online maps, Funes’ does not allow zoom in to see the networked structures across levels. This form of recollecting and imagining space has consequences, because Funes is unable to see how an object call ‘dog’ can contain many different types and specimens; nor understand that viewed from different angles, ‘dog’ is the same animal. He can only see a multiform world which was instantaneously and almost intolerably exact. Funes is not

able to think because to think is to forget difference, to generalize and abstract, writes Borges. Unable to zoom to another level of the network, Borges creates an alternative to the linearity of time and to sequential succession through the theory of forking paths, a labyrinth of infinite temporal pathways each of which forks in different lines or presents. This overcomes the problem posed by Zeno's paradox; that is how time can proceed over discreteness; how continuity is made up of fragments that fork, not derived from one single past moment only, since each present moment comes from different forking pasts and yields different forking futures.

We make ours Funes' concerns with types and specimens. How then does the fragment connect to the story of Short Fiction? The last part of this dissertation explores the visibility of fragmentary (poetic) structures we call by many names –short stories, micro-narratives, Short Fiction; particularly as short stories approach short short stories and online formats, in what is known as Flash Fiction.

As we have shown, much of the appeal of the fragment to Romantics and Modernist alike was related to its indefinable pleasure (various authors (i.e. Schlegel, Nietzsche, etc.) use the term 'cryptic'; its 'aura', as Benjamin would describe it; grounded in a sort of poetic impalpability; an uncertainty that cannot be framed or systematized, rendering an instantaneous sense of fleeting shock and emptiness, without visible embodiment.

My argument here is that this foreign alterity is an intruding force in the space of the image. The uncanny nature of the image can only be told by means of a language that forces its limits, conveying the ineffable through a language device. In Borges' model,

objects are approached as if from a bird-eye point of view; filled with superficial images mostly related to spaces and distances, yielding the vision of a whole geographical region in the horizon almost as a mode of surveillance. A contemporary theory, that of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, maps knowledge in a different way.

The theory of rhizome proposes a model of knowledge as an assemblage or a multiplicity of discrete elements involved in a system of anti-hierarchical relations. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is essentially a map “entirely oriented toward [...] experimentation. [...] open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.” It also “has multiple entryways” and “it has to do with performance.” (*A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* 1987: 12) Performance is a way to trace the process of becoming by acting to connect nodes in the network of discrete elements. In a long narrative, visualized as an online hypertext, nodes function as pages in different contexts. A click on a link to visit those pages can change the original course of action and thought. A new system of correspondences, alternative to the traditional causal referential process, is created. It is no longer based on linearity or sequence of thoughts in large strings of text. It may move in shorter spans of language units, like the digits of a hand. The mental image turns ones and ceros.

1.7. From Fragments to Short Fiction

It still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of my subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own (Freud, *Standard Edition*, 1953-74, vol. II, 160.)

In the work of Sigmund Freud, the ‘nature of the subject’ corresponds, as *The Interpretation of Dreams* stages, to the structure of the unconscious, which eschews the categories of diurnal logic (as the principle of non-contradiction) and forces therefore the limits of language when one tries to let the unconscious speak. The unconscious, however, has an extra-verbal dimension that is mostly figurative (*Bildersprache*) and that when verbalized results in the slips of tongue and parapraxes as well as other language devices that make the repressed ‘flash’ forward, without being fully understood. The impropriety of language to represent the unconscious is also acknowledged by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) where he accepts that the analyst is haunted by the same alterity, based on the empathic relationship with his object of study, that he is trying to avoid for the sake of objectivity.

The following lines explore how the poetic effect, which lies outside the sphere of the rational dissolves the borders between the subject/creator of the message and the object or addressee/audience. While diurnal rationality requires a strict correspondence between signifier and signified and the strong adherence of semiotic codes to the principle of non-contradiction, emotional states with less control of the rational create spatiotemporal

ruptures which include causality, linearity etc. This is visible in dreams, but also in aesthetic states, which became the object of research of many avant-garde groups in the 20th century, notably in Surrealism. For this reason, this dissertation will dedicate one chapter to explore the work of Leonora Carrington and the relationship between Short Fiction and scenarios of ‘the fantastic’, characterized by a “constitutive ambiguity of the poetic (literary) message” (Barthes 2004: 27) and the use of artistic ‘devices’ close to the operations of the unconscious.

My argument in relation to the above discussion on the ‘fragment’ is that its role is to open other possibilities of reading, insofar as the fragment is constructed as a space of tension, eschewing the principles of diurnal logic and rationality, and seeking an empathic ‘tuning’ of the reader in order to trigger his/her participation in interpretation of the silenced aspects which the fragment contains. For example, the fragment may be constituted by a string first of adjectival phrases without verbs and, hence, not much action. The economy of syntax proper of the fragment uses no coordination, offering a prime example of what is known as parataxis. One might argue that such a technique develops a superabundance of details or anecdotes, less designed to characterize objects and events exactly than to open up a large number of non-exclusive possibilities of disjunctive logic, each of which seems to point in a different direction. In this sense, a list or words, for instance, is a mysterious form that gives the impression of shapelessness, infinitely extendable. In interpretation, fragments are piled up at several levels, rather than mapped in a linear roll through time; that is, they are extendable through insertion between fixed limits. What is contradictory is only what happens at another moment, what would exist as if in another, different, little story.

Thus, the fragment, and by extension Short Fiction, is built upon an irreducible ambiguity which requires the reader to use not just reason but also other irrational devices. This form of reading reassesses discursive practices and dissolves the borders between languages, for instance those termed ‘scientific’ and those closer to ‘the aesthetic’. This is what López-Varela has termed “hybrid narratives” (see López-Varela 2015, 2016). In the case of fragment, which appear as disconnected details, interpretation may include the momentary abdication of reason, letting the intuition come to the rational mind as an unexpected flash, as in Flash Fiction.

SECTION II. Sites

This part discusses the origin of tales and short stories and points out some of their characteristics. It also seeks to unveil some of the cultural contexts and layers of meaning in the genre, and a brief evolution of Short Fiction forms (short short story, micronarrative and Flash Fiction varieties).

2.1 The cultural contexts of short stories

The metaphysicians of Tlön do not seek for the truth or even for verisimilitude, but rather for the astounding. They judge that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature. They know that a system is nothing more than the subordination of all aspects of the universe to any one such aspect. (Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius')

The tale (also called short story) has occupied a prominent position in the cultural memory of many communities, registering the relationships between humans and nature, as well as their social interactions. Ancient tales were mostly passed on orally or as part of songs. Sometimes they were embedded in myths and legends whose authorship remained unknown.

The origins of tales and short stories can be traced back to ancient oral folk traditions, first in the form of rhythmic prose-poetry and song, formats that helped recollection and memorialization. Some of the short stories contained in the Indian epic Mahabharata belong to this oral tradition are thought to fall between the 8th and 9th centuries BCE, although they were not written until later. Possibly the oldest written tales appeared in the different collections of tales that form the books of the Tanakh or canonical Jewish texts, some of which are also contained in the Christian Bible. The *Jātaka Tales* are among the earliest forms of Indian Buddhist Literature (c. 4th century BCE), one of the sources of inspiration behind the most famous collection of tales of all times, the *One Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights*, one of the earliest sources of short stories in Central Asia and the Middle East. The earliest mention of the collection appears in the Arabic translation of a Persian book entitled “The Thousand Stories” (*Hazār Afsān*), which later came to form another collection compiled in Baghdad in the 10th century, including Persian, Mesopotamian, Indian, Egyptian and Jewish folk tales. Badi' al-Zamān al-Hamadāni (969-1007 CE), an Iranian writer from Hamadan, the ancient capital of the Persian empire, is also known for his work *Magamat*, a collection of 52 short stories about a rogue.

Another ancient collection of prose-poetry tales and songs was the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shih-ching*), comprising over 300 works from the Zhou dynasty, which lasted until 771 BCE, supposedly compiled by Confucius (551 – 479 BCE). In China, many classical works of the pre-Qin period and the Han Dynasties, such as the *Zhuangzi*, the *Liezi*, the *Huainanzi*, the *Chronicles* by Zuo Qiuming, *Conversations from the States*,

and the *Book of Mountains and Seas*, contain short stories of ancient Chinese myths. Curiously, many new names have flourished for this genre during the centuries, such as little short story, pocket size story, palm size story, minute long story, and even the most surprising one of them all: the smoke-long story –just long enough to read in a time in which you might finish smoking the cigarette. Other examples are the well-known collection of Classical Chinese *Chuanqi* (Marvelous Tales or Tales of wonder) and the *Taiping Guangji* which preserved the corpus of tales from the Tang and Song dynasties (10th century). These stories consisted of anecdotes, jokes, legends, and tales involving mystical, fantastical or legendary elements. In Japan, pre-Buddhist short lyrical poems and songs called ‘uta’ were used before the 7th century in ceremonies such as courting, marriage, agricultural feasts, eulogies, etc. Among the most popular, the so –called ‘waka’ became refined into word games called ‘tanka’ and ‘renga’(chained verses) whose elegance changed abruptly in the 15th and 16th centuries into what became known as ‘haikai’ which developed into short comic pieces, similar to western 20th century forms of limerick. Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) inspired some Julio Cortázar’s works in his 1984 collection. In the 19th century, Masaoka Shiki introduced a new flavor to haikai which he rename ‘haiku’, and which has become very popular beyond Japan and Asia.

In the Western world, the fables of the legendary figure of the Greek slave Aesop (c. 550 BCE) can also be read as early forms of short narratives and micro-narratives. As mentioned, these mythic and epic oral narratives were recited in rhythmic verse with special stylistic devices that helped recollection. Many were short narratives that could be told at one sitting, and were frequently accompanied by music. The overall plot

emerged through the telling of the multiple shorter tales, as in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (c. 8th century BCE), with stories that were once mythical and shaped the history of societies. Herodotus' accounts (c. 484–c. 425 BCE) or Lucian of Samosata's satires (c. 125-180 CE) were designed to capture the attention of audiences in public readings and other oral settings. Extraordinary and supernatural events functioned well in these initial contexts. As stated by David Lagmanovich, short and extremely short narratives have always existed and can be found in Biblical paragraphs, in the Arabian tradition, in African prose and in the prose of other continents. This author indicates that the writers' tendency toward brevity has been a constant in the literary world (Lagmanovich, 2005: 2).

In the Medieval Period, tales begin to shape into romances, short legends, riddles, proverbs and didactic parables grounded on religious texts. Brief Roman historical accounts were also collected in the 13th or 14th century as the *Gesta Romanorum*, also known as 'anecdotes' remained popular in Europe well into the 18th century. Medieval exempla, the tales in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349-1353), Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* the first collection of French *nouvelles*, the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, which appeared between 1430 and 1470, *L'Heptaméron* (1558) or Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares* (1613) are other examples of Western short novels in the Renaissance.

In the 13th century and in the area occupied by present-day Turkey, the Sufi Nasreddin (also known as the 'Travelling defender of faith') composed a number of anecdotic funny stories that became very popular. In the same century, in Shiraz, Iran,

the writer known as Saadi became one of the most important Persian poets for the quality of his *Gulistan* (or *Rose Garden*). It is a collection of short stories, Sufi teachings and poems characterized by their precise language, both optimistic and satirical, and psychological insight as well as by their minimalism. The metaphor of the 'rose-garden', a mirror for princes, also acquired much relevance in the Western world.

Also in that century, the Chinese Zen master Wumen Huikai produced a collection of 48 Zen koans (dialogic stories used in Zen practice to provoke doubt and test students' progress) translated as *The Gateless Barrier*.

With the onset of drama, short dramatized stories were used in between scenes that required complicated changes backstage. Because the purpose continued to be the quick capture of the audience's attention, an emphasis on the fantastic was predominant, and the borders between the real and the imaginary were always fuzzy and ambiguous. At the same time, the stories sought an equilibrium between the presentation of facts as a form of testimony, in order to get closer to the audience, and an essentialist abstraction of a version of reality, achieved in the allegorical mode.

In the 1690s, traditional fairy tales began to be published (one of the most famous collections was by Charles Perrault). Unlike the tale, short stories and French *nouvelles* claimed a more realistic foundation. The truth is that the limits between them have always been somewhat diffuse. During the middle of the 17th century, France saw the development of a refined short novel, the "*nouvelle*", by such authors as Madame de Lafayette. The appearance of Antoine Galland's first modern translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* (or *Arabian Nights*) (1704) would have an enormous influence on the

18th-century European short stories. Honoré de Balzac (*La Maison du chat-qui-pelote*, *Contes drolatiques*), Gustave Flaubert (*Trois contes*), Victor Hugo (*Claude Gueux*), Stendhal (*Chroniques italiennes*), Barbey d'Aurevilly (*Les Diaboliques*), George Sand (*Nouvelles*) Zola (*Contes à Ninon*) and Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) with his more than three hundred short stories, are some well-known examples.

In the Western world, a new aesthetics that emerged in the Romantic period and developed in the 19th century contributed to the development of the genre. Collections, such as those by the German Heinrich von Kleist in 1810, and the Grimm brothers (with seven editions published between 1812 and 1857), as well as E. T. A. Hoffmann's fantastic stories. Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) also published collections in Denmark.

With the rise of industrialization there was also an increase in literacy rates, and people began to spend more money on entertainment. The publication market expanded with cheaper publication formats (in the Victorian period, these were called 'penny dreadful' because their prize was only a few shillings and less than a penny). The first short stories in the United Kingdom were gothic tales like Richard Cumberland's "The Poisoner of Montremos" (1791), as well as Sir Walter Scott's 'romances' and Charles Dickens' short tales. Periodicals like *The Strand Magazine* and *Story-Teller* contributed to the popularity of the short story. This contributed to the popularization of short stories and tales. In the United States, Charles Brockden Brown's "Somnambulism" dates from 1805, and Washington Irving wrote mysterious tales including "Rip van Winkle" (1819) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820). Nathaniel Hawthorne published *Twice-Told*

Tales in 1837, and between 1832 and 1849 Edgar Allan Poe wrote his *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. During the second half of the 19th century, the growth of print magazines and journals created a strong demand for short fiction of between 3,000 and 15,000 words.

In the 20th century, Latin-American expressions of the genre came mainly from the following countries: Chile with Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948) or Alfonso Alcalde (1921-1992); Nicaragua with Rubén Darío (1867-1913) with his twelve ‘prose pictures’ that appeared in a journal in Valparaíso in 1887 under the general title “En Chile”, and which were later part of *Azul* in 1888 (Darío 1950: 40-50). The influence of Baudelaire is recognizable in some of these compositions. Others, such as “Naturaleza muerta” (1950: 48) or “El ideal” (50) enjoy autobiographic and anecdotic elements as well as hermetic echoes, as in “La resurrección de la rosa” (Darío 1950: 176). Around a page long, these short stories are structured in such a way as to create a great impact on the reader, particularly “Palimpsesto (I)” (199) and “Palimpsesto (II)” (288-90), much like contemporary micronarratives.

Mexico was also an emergent center with authors such as Julio Torri (1889-1970), whose first collection “Essays and poems” (1911) enjoys the hybrid characteristics of the genre, and makes use of techniques to substitute and synthesize the longer descriptions and dialogues as noted by Dolores Kock (1981) referring to “El mal actor de sus emociones” (1917: 21-23), “La conquista de la luna” (1917: 31-34; 1964: 13-14) or “De funerales” (1917: 71-72; 1964: 23). Other fundamental Mexican authors include: Octavio Paz (1914-1998), Juan José Arreola (1918-2001), Augusto Monterroso

(1921-2003), Max Aub (1903-1972), García Márquez (1897-2014) or René Avilés Fabila (1940-2016), with Dolores Kock producing a study of the Mexican tradition in 1881. She also explored Venezuelan authors in her 1985 work, including authors such as José Antonio Ramos Sucre (1890-1930), Alfredo Armas Alfonzo (1921-1990), Eduardo Liendo (1941-), Luis Britto García, Ednodio Quintero (1947-), Gabriel Jiménez Emán (1950).

In Argentina, one of the first anthologies entitled *Cuentos breves y extraordinarios* was published by Jorge Luis Borges and Bioy Casares in 1955. Borges published numerous short stories among which we can mention “The Library of Babel” (1941) and “The Aleph” (1945). Other Argentinian writers who have cultivated the genre are Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938), whose short stories with a philosophical fine irony and a certain ludic character were collected in *Filosofícula* (Lugones 1924: 7). The rewriting of myths, such as that of “Orfeo y Eurídice” (Lugones 1924: 47-48) and the rewriting of Biblical tales, like “Jesús y la samaritana” (112), are particularly interesting among Lugones’ production. Also in Argentina, Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888-1963) authored hybrid ‘greguerías’, and Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), Silvina Ocampo (1903-1993), Enrique Anderson-Imbert (1910-2000), Marco Denevi (1922-1998) with his ‘dramatic sketches’, Ana María Shua (1951-), Flavia Company (1963-), Eduardo Berti (1964) or Andrés Neuman (1977). In Peru we have the work of Fernando Iwasaki (1961-).

Machado de Assis and Mário de Andrade are the major novelists and short story writers from Brazil, as well as female writers like Clarice Lispector, Lygia Fagundes Telles, or Adélia Prado, who write from a feminine viewpoint.

There is also an important tradition in short story writing in Europe. In Russia, Ivan Turgenev gained recognition with his story collection *A Sportsman's Sketches*. Fyodor Dostoyevski wrote "The Meek One" (1876) and "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877), two stories with great psychological and philosophical depth. Leo Tolstoy handled ethical questions in his short stories, for example in "Ivan the Fool" (1885). Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), who wrote more than six hundred short stories, has been widely credited as the father of the genre in the Western world. Classic examples of his realistic prose are "The Bet" (1889), "Ward No. 6" (1892), and "The Lady with the Dog" (1899). The Polish Boleslaw Prus (1847-1912) and Slawomir Mrozek (1930-2013) are also important figures. In Germany, the term *Kürzestgeschichten* has been used to describe the short stories of writers such as Franz Kafka (1883-1924), Heimito von Doderer (1896-1966), Günter Kunert (1929-1979), Helmut Heissenbütel (1921-1996), Peter Bichsel (1935-). In France, we can mention Xavier Forneret (1809-1884), Régis Jaffret (1955-) or Félix Fénéon.

Spain counts with many contemporary authors who cultivate the genre, among them: Antonio Pereira González (1923-2009), Ignacio Aldecoa (1925-1969), Juan García Hortelano (1928-1992), Antonio Fernández Molina (1929-2005), Francisco Ayala (1906-2009), Javier Tomeo (1932-2013), José Jiménez Lozano (1930), José María Merino (1941-), Juan Pedro Aparicio (1941-), Luis Mateo Díez Rodríguez (1942), Juan

José Millás (1946), Cristina Fernández Cubas (1954-) la argentino-española Clara Obligado (1950-), Ángel Olgoso (1961-), Antonio Fernández Ferrer, José Luis Torres Vitolas (1971-) director of the publishing house “La casa de cartón”, Patricia Esteban Erlés (1972), Óscar Esquivias (1972-), Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel (1974-), or Espido Freire (1974-). Among the publishing houses specialized in short and micro-narratives in Spain, we can mention ‘Páginas de Espuma’. One of the first antologies of micro-narratives in Spanish was compiled by Antonio Beneyto in 1973 with the title *Manifiesto español*. Irene Andrés-Suárez coordinated later *Antología del microrrelato español 1906-2011*, and define micro-narratives as the forth narrative genre in *El cuarto género narrativo* (2012).

In Canada, Laurent Berthiaume and the collective Oxymoron in Québec, where in 2010 an Institute of ‘twittérature’ was established in collaboration with France, with contributors such as Bernard Pivot (1935), André Berthiaume (1938-), Michel Tremblay (1942-), Thierry Crouzet (1963-), Éric Chevillard (1964), Alexandre Jardin (1965-), Karim Berrouka (1964-), Oliver Gechter (1972-), Stéphane Bataillon (1975-), Fabien Déglise, Jacques Fuentealba, as well as Alice Munro, who won the 2013 Nobel Prize for literature.

Short fiction is also very important in the English speaking world. In Britain it is very important the work of Sir Arthur Charles Clarke (1917-2008). In the United States we can mention, Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914), Kate Chopin (1840-1904), William Sydney Porter, also known as O. Henry (1862-1910), Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), who wrote Hemingway also wrote 18 pieces of Flash

Fiction for that were included in his first short-story collection, *In Our Time* and has been credited with the first 6-word story: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn”¹, Ray Bradbury (1920-2012), Fredric Brown (1906-1972), Raymond Carver (1938-1988) or, more recently, Robert Coover (1932-), who has also published some of his short stories in e-literature format. In the 1920s, early forms of short short stories, later termed ‘Flash Fiction’ was popularized in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and later collected in anthologies such as the one by William Somerset Maugham entitled *Cosmopolitans: Very Short Stories* (1936).

A number of high-profile American magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Scribner's*, or *The Bookman* published short stories in each issue. In the 1940s, frequent contributors to the journals mentioned above included John Cheever, John Steinbeck, Eudora Welty, or J. D. Salinger. In the late 50s and 60s, Philip Roth and Grace Paley cultivated the genre with distinctive Jewish-American voices. More recently, we can mention Donald Barthelme and John Barth, John Updike and Joyce Carol Oates, Raymond Carver or Ann Beattie. Other North-American short story authors include: Richard Gary Brautigan (1935-1984), Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922-2007) who published three short story collections, Fredric Brown (1906-1972), Philip Kindred Dick (1928-1982) and Ray Douglas Bradbury (1920-2012), all science fiction and mystery short story writers like Robert Sheckley (1928-2005) who wrote quick-witted and unpredictable stories. John Milton

¹ This attribution was in a book by Peter Miller called *Get Published! Get Produced!: A Literary Agent's Tips on How to Sell Your Writing* (1974: 27).
<https://books.google.ca/books?id=VqKAE2euEnMC&lpg=PP1&dq=Get+Published!+Get+Produced!:+A+Literary+Agent%E2%80%99s+Tips+on+How+to+Sell+Your+Writing&pg=PA27&hl=es#v=onepage&q=baby&f=false>

Cage Jr. (1912-1992) was both a musician and composer as well as a short story writer and one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde. Also notable are the 62 "short-shorts" which comprise *Severance*, the thematic collection by Robert Olen Butler (1945-) in which each story describes the remaining 90 seconds of conscious awareness within human heads which have been decapitated.

Among North-American Flash Fiction (super short) writers, we can mention Lydia Davis (1947-), Barbara Henning (1948), David Gaffney, whose work has appeared in such publications as *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine* and *Ambit*, Robert Scotellaro who has published in *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, *Blink Ink* and the *New Flash Fiction Review*, Sherrie Flick, whose fiction has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Weave Magazine*, and *Quick Fiction*, among other literary magazines, Bruce Holland Rogers (who also writes under the pseudonym Hanovi Braddock), who has won several science fiction awards, and is a member of the Wordos writers' group. We can also mention Nancy Stohlman (1973) who is the author of 2 Flash Fiction pieces, as well as musician and performer, and Grant Faulkner, co-founder of the online literary journal 100 Word Story.

The Arabic-speaking world has produced a number of micro-story authors, including the Nobel Prize-winning Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), whose book *Echoes of an Autobiography* is composed mainly of such stories. Other Flash Fiction writers in Arabic include the Syrian Zakaria Tamer (1931-) and Haidar Haidar (1936), as well as the Kuwaiti Laila al-Othman.

China and Japan are two countries where short fiction has enjoyed great popularity. Of particular interest is the collection entitled *The Pillow Book*, which Sei Shônagon (c. 966-1017/1025), a Japanese courtier of Empress Sadako and which includes not just short stories but also poetry, gossip and observations written during her years in the court; a hybrid genre of writing that has been termed *zuihitsu*. After the post-war period, Flash Fiction was popularized by Michio Tsuzuki and Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972) who received the Nobel Prize in 1968. Other figures include Kenzaburō Ōe (Nobel prize winner of 1994), Yukio Mishima and Haruki Murakami. In China, Nobel Prize in Literature 2012 winner Mo Yan is one of the most important short story writers, much inspired by Lu Xun (1881–1936). Japanese world-known short story writers include In India, Rabindranath Tagore published the short story collection entitled *Chotogolpo*, and Dhanpat Rai Srivastav, who used the pen name Munshi Premchand, published over 300 short stories that were serialized in local journals at the beginning of the 20th-century. Katherine Mansfield from New Zealand wrote many of short stories between 1912 and her death in 1923.

In *The Short Story: The Reality of Artifice* (2002), Charles E. May explains that short fiction writers of the period between 1960 and 1990 are said to fall into two different groups. On the one hand, the ultimate extreme of the mythic-romance is the fantastic anti-story style of Jorge Luis Borges, Donald Barthelme, John Barth, and Robert Coover. On the other hand, the extremes of Chekhovian realism can be seen in the so-called —minimalism of Ann Beattie, Mary Robison, Raymond Carver, and Tobias Wolff. Further, May adds that the minimalist style of Raymond Carver is

sometimes called hyperrealism, and indicates that the twin streams of romance and realism are inextricably blended in the works of contemporary short story [and short-short] writers (May *The Short Story* 20).

There are also a growing number of journals dedicated to the topic, many of them publishing very short Flash Fiction. For example, Vesta Review (<http://www.vestalreview.org/>), Smoke Long Quarterly (<http://www.smokelong.com/>), Everyday Fiction (<http://everydayfiction.com/>), Flash Fiction Online (<http://www.flashfictiononline.com/>), Quick Fiction Boston Literary Magazine (<http://www.bostonliterarymagazine.com/spring10quick.html>), Six Words Memoirs (<http://www.alexandria.com/siteinfo/sixwordmemoirs.com>), Literary Kicks (<http://www.litkicks.com/FlashFiction/>), Six of the best: CNN readers tell us their stories (<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/08/15/short.stories/index.html>) Fabrique de Littérature Microscopique (<https://fablimi.wordpress.com/>), La Microphéméride (<http://microphemeride.surlebout.net/>), Les deux Zeppelins (<https://les2zeppelins.wordpress.com/>), Le Bulletin de L'Insondable (<http://actusf.com/spip/+Le-Bulletin-de-l-Insondable+.html>), L'Autofictif (<http://autofictif.blogspot.com.es/>), Ministore (<http://ministore.fr/pluie/>), Flash Fiction France (<https://flash-fiction.fr/>)

Graciela Tomassini Graciela and Stella M. Colombo point out that the short narrative flowered in different places at various times and also formed part of the diverse cultural traditions such as fables, parables, aphorisms and legends, basing itself on its formal and thematic molds. (Tomassini & Colombo, 1) For Juan Armando Epple, the

origin of short stories in Latin-America lies in the composition of Mayan codices, in medieval literature and in the Renaissance period, when the stories were intercalated in narrative sagas (Armando Epple, 31).

Si bien el origen del cuento se remonta a épocas muy antiguas, su concepción moderna como género independiente y articulado... se comienza a discernir sólo durante el siglo XIX, especialmente a partir de propuesta poética de Edgar Allan Poe. Con la minificción ocurre algo parecido, si bien su decantación como forma independiente es mucho más difícil de precisar, ya que parece imbricada con otras formas literarias e incluso bajo nombres que sirven para denominar otras formas de relatos: anécdotas, historias, acaecidos, fantasías, fábulas etc. (Armando Epple, 31)

[Even if the origin of the story is remounted to the extremely antique periods, its modern conception as an independent and articulated genre... is discernable exclusively during the nineteenth century, especially apart from the Edgar Allan Poe's poetic proposal. With the Flash Fiction occurs something very similar: although its decantation as an independent form is much more difficult to specify, since it appears highly imprecated with other literary forms and even under the names which generally serve to denominate other tale forms: anecdotes, stories, events, fantasies, fables etc.] (Armando Epple, 31)

In a genre that feeds on apologues, fables, sketches, medieval bestiaries as well as religious sources and philosophical aphorisms, flexibility is an important characteristic. Changes in the genre have coincided with a progressive rejection of the rules that determine the form and content of all literary genres, and include changes in aesthetic taste, ways of entertainment and media formats have been and will be a continuous source of power for this versatile genre. Tales were always popular, but it is this term ‘popular’ that has come to acquire diverse connotations. The distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ (or popular) culture became more pronounced with the establishment of nations and the canonization of certain artistic works to contribute to the idea of national identity. Ideas, perspectives, attitudes, values, and other cultural phenomena became part of the mainstream of a given nation. With the development of democratic regimes, the disappearance of aristocracy and the influence of mass media, the differences between high and popular culture became more diffuse. Nowadays, popular culture englobes many entertainment activities, many of them with a basis on artistic works as shown, for example in the development of the various styles of music, or in literary fiction and its adaptation into cinematography, as well as online formats (i.e. videogames, electronic literature, or digital books).

2.2. The debate over the development of shorter narratives

This section anticipates some of the problems encountered in the definition and categorization of the Short Fiction narrative genres –micronarrative, microfiction, short

short stories and Flash Fiction. For some authors, such as Mose, micro-stories are a separate genre that they should not be understood as a mere sub-category of the short story. (84). For other specialists, the presence of what is now denominated short-short story can be detected in previous literary forms, as mentioned above. I shall use the term micronarrative to refer to these shorter version, in spite of the differences between subcategories.

Micronarratives exhibit definition problems at several levels. First, the fact that the notion of brevity is diffuse, and these short narratives can range from ten pages to one. Lauro Zabala limited the extension to no more than 400 words. However, within micronarratives, 'Flash Fiction' can take place in a few words. Lagmanovich has explored the structure of micronarratives of one and two lines (no more 30-40 words). He indicates that the use of more or less verbal or nominal forms does not seem to restrict their narrativity. As text length decreases below 30 words, verbal tenses become more important for story coherence, particularly as one approaches the 20 words threshold which includes hyper-short micronarratives. Lagmanovich notes an obsession to reach extreme brevity without losing narrative qualities, as if trying to reduce the essence human existence to a simple sentence, as William Faulkner claimed. Indeed, as human memory records increase with the huge amount of information shared across the World Wide Web, the desire for synthesis, simplicity and brevity seems to be stronger than ever. As Augusto Monterroso would say, brevity is not a rhetorical issue but a question of politeness.

There is also the question of fictionality, as some stories resemble philosophical aphorisms with some degree of reality, while other tales abound in fantastic elements. However, no matter how fantastic, the ability to create a sensation of immediacy is an important characteristic of a genre which needs to capture the reader's attention very quickly. For this reason, these stories always require a certain relation to human nature by portraying individual anecdotes or cultural content that might be considered residual but which, gradually, becomes collective transcendental knowledge. Another characteristic is the breaking of chronological order in the narrative, which may accompany a fragmented or and enigmatic story, often starting *in media res*. There is also the question of the title, which in very short micro-fictional forms part of the entire story, often helping to focalize it. The reader of very short stories seems to be someone seeking greater implication in deciphering the mysteries behind the brevity of the micro-message. Micronarratives are also adequate for the parodic, ironically critical, and sometimes even surrealist and absurd postmodern aesthetics, in many cases appears close to metafiction. They work particularly well in online formats (blogs, social networks such as Twitter, etc.)²

Lagmanovich argues that distinctive features of micronarratives of any length are the relation to human nature even if unrelated to the natural world (as in fantastic tales), a powerful individual event that turns into a universal concern; the marking of time through given verbal tenses and sometimes by means of adverbs, and a shortened distance between narrative, writing, and reading times. In the case of very very brief texts, the novelty and impact upon the reader manifests itself in breaking the temporality

² See for example <http://documentaminima.blogspot.com.es/> and <http://www.shortstoryproject.com/es/>

of predominant reading routines. A fundamental differencing factor is the speed ability of the narration to create a sensation of immediacy through verbal economy, able to cancel the reader's expectations, almost as a ray of lightening. It is not surprising that these narratives have been described as 'sudden fiction' (Shapard and Thomas 1973) 'short shorts' (Howe and Howe 1982) and 'vertiginous stories' (Lauro Zabala 2000); minimal graphic content that explodes in various semantic paths. The brief writing space of the micronarrative seeks a competent reader, able to rescue the anecdote of the tale and with the help of the correlations established by the author, provide it with new and epiphanic meaning. Violeta Rojo says that the silences of micronarratives speak. (Rojo, 1997:23) It is a genre of metamorphic nature, plastic and residual that cannot be looked at with innocence, explains Rojo. She adds that it deconstructs the literary canon introducing non-traditional formulas and games that motivate the reader to co-participation.

The hybrid language border-crossings used in micronarratives, sometimes theorem-like, challenge definitions of a genre which is also heir to journalistic forms such as chronicle and columns of opinion. Behind their light, evanescent and even superficial appearance, most micronarratives capture transcendental visions of the world in only a few words. This heterodox form seems to enjoy greater creative freedom than any other literary form, and is versatile in adapting to new formats more easily than longer narratives. Its immediacy seems to be very gratifying for the contemporary reader, who can get the whole story in just one sitting while traveling to work on public transport for instance.

The above lines give an idea of the flexible and loosely defined character of the genre, often using parables, aphorisms, riddles and conundrum to express universal ideas and morals by means of word-play or astute rhetorical forms. It comes as no surprise that these ancient tales were first attributed to sages and oracles in some traditions, such as the Greco-Roman, as well as to visionary and cultural heroes.

2.3 The controversial roots of contemporary micronarratives at the turn of the 19th-century and the beginning of the 20th.

There are many reasons behind the emergence of new literary genres and the disappearance of others. Often the generic boundaries change with the introduction of new material formats, and sometimes they become blurred and unclear. This seems to have been one of the trends in 20th-century literary representation, particularly in the so-called postmodern period, after the 1960s. Many critical studies have focused on the study of the relations between changing material formats and generic changes. The French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard, who developed much of his critical work in the 1980s, considered the impact of mass communications upon semiotic exchanges and, like Marshall McLuhan, showed how the nature of social relations, all of them represented in diverse artistic and cultural forms (including literary genres), is determined by the forms of communication that a society employs.

Because of its concentration, short fiction penetrates rapidly, daringly invading the reader's mind and impacting his viewpoint with the speed of lightning. Charles E.

May, one of the best known critical experts on short stories, claims that the story preceded the novel in its primal origins, and that “brief episodic narratives, may have constituted the basis of the short story, even preceding later epic forms which constituted the basis of the novel.” (May *The Short Story* 1)

Jose Flavio Nogueira Guimaraes explicitly names Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) as the father of the contemporary short story. The author points out all the characteristics of his writing -association with lyric poetry, freedom from highly plotted stories, minimal plot, and scarce use of language and dialogue, nameless and succinctly described characters, all of which can also found in many examples of contemporary short stories and short short story (Nogueira Guimaraes, 23)

For other critics, significant predecessors of today’s micro-narratives would have been the French symbolists, Aloysius Bertrand and later Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Stephane Mallarme and Paul Verlaine, who introduced a new literary hybrid and petite genre branded ‘prose poetry’, when large poems were compressed, fitting merely in one page. Prose poetry lead to the complete and utter lyrical impregnation of narrative forms. The poetry freed itself of the mechanic of the verse, which implicated the enrichment as far as the prosaic expressive possibilities and its continuous development were concerned.

Baudelaire, who was also Edgar Allan Poe’s translator, explained that the short story had definite advantages over the vast novels of Victorian England.

Elle a sur le roman à vastes proportions cet immense avantage que sa brièveté ajoute à l'intensité de l'effet. Cette lecture, qui peut être accomplie tout d'une haleine, laisse dans l'esprit un souvenir bien plus puissant qu'une lecture brisée, interrompue souvent par le tracas des affaires et le soin des intérêts mondains. L'unité d'impression, la totalité d'effet est un avantage immense qui peut donner à ce genre de composition une supériorité tout à fait particulière, à ce point qu'une nouvelle trop courte (c'est sans doute un défaut) vaut encore mieux qu'une nouvelle trop longue. L'artiste, s'il est habile, n'accommodera pas ses pensées aux incidents, mais, ayant conçu délibérément, à loisir, un effet à produire, inventera les incidents, combinera les événements les plus propres à amener l'effet voulu. Si la première phrase n'est pas écrite en vue de préparer cette impression finale, l'œuvre est manquée dès le début. Dans la composition tout entière il ne doit pas se glisser un seul mot qui ne soit une intention, qui ne tende, directement ou indirectement, à parfaire le dessein prémédité. (*Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe. Correspondance II*, 329)

It is interesting that, in his essay, "The Philosophy of Composition" Edgar Allan Poe speaks of an idealized process of creation of a work of art, emphasizing that he used it to write one of his most famous poems, "The Raven", in order to illustrate his own theory. (Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition, 163). Poe favors a logical, rigid process

over a spontaneous burst of creation, and recommends careful planning before writing. It is interesting that the three central elements he incorporates in his philosophy of composition are much related to the Flash Fiction of today or at least support it. These are: length –Poe believed that all literary works are to be short and deemed short story superior to the novel; methodical and analytical writing –short stories are normally written in this way and their structure is carefully planned; unity of effect –this is probably one of the postulates short short story follows utterly and completely, since we are talking about an emotional response an author wishes to draw deliberately from the reader by previously planning a surprising and moving ending. Poe firmly states that other story elements such as theme, characters, plot and conflict are to be determined afterwards –the ending, preferably with the twist, has an absolute priority. (Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition, 167).

In *La République mondiale des Lettres* (1999), Pascale Casanova also signals the 19th century French writers as exemplary authors of these new short poems that later became the seedbed for the creation of micro narratives. Prose poetry, cultivated by Charles Baudelaire in particular, may have been transformed into Flash Fiction in the Latin-American context (see also work by Franco Moretti), spreading towards neighboring countries, where it continued to be cultivated by the well-known authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, Gabriel D’Annunzio, and Gustavo A. Becquer. Also, let us not forget Aesop’s fables some of the stories from Ovid (in his *Metamorphoses*), Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chekhov, O.Henry and Franz Kafka in his *Parables and Paradoxes*. As David Lagmanovich explains:

Mientras tanto, se ha experimentado la influencia de un género de la errática aparición en las letras francesas: el poema en prosa. Actúa fuertemente sobre nuestros escritores modernistas y del 98, el ejemplo es Charles Baudelaire, cuyos *Petits Poèmes en Prose* son (publicados en el libro después de la muerte del autor en 1867) son de frecuente lectura. (Lagmanovich, 13)

[Meanwhile, we have experienced the impact of the genre of the erratic apparition in the French literature: the prose poetry. It strongly influences our modernist writers and the writers from the generation of 98, the example is Charles Baudelaire, whose *Petits Poèmes en Prose* are (published in a book after the author's death) are frequently read.] (Lagmanovich, 13)

However, it might be necessary to point out that 19th-century French symbolists were not the first to cultivate prose poetry, even though its initial popularity at that time occurred precisely because of their influence. The so called 'poèmes en prose' had already been present in 18th-century French literature: "breves, sintéticos, escritos con la mayor economía de medios y sumamente líricos [short, synthesized, written with the mayor linguistic resources economy possible and extremely lyrical]." (Bernard, 15); that is how they were described by Susane Bernard in her documented respective study about

the topic. Lauro Zavala also postulates that short fiction and prose poetry are narrowly related:

[...] Encontramos, además, una gran proximidad con el poema en prosa y, en algunos casos, una apropiación paródica de las reglas genéricas de la parábola o fábula, incluso del aforismo, la definición, el instructivo, la viñeta y otros géneros extraliterarios.

[Besides, we can see a great proximity with prose poetry and, in certain cases, a parodic appropriation of the generic rules of the parable or the fable, aphorisms, definitions, the didactic genre, vignettes and other extraliterary genres.] (Zavala, 15)

Indeed, many micro-narratives of today are precisely boosted with poetic charge. In a short and concise article, written for the journal *Quimera*, Pedro Aullón de Haro defends the similar tenets. He states that, along with the refreshing aesthetic sense, prose poetry can be contemplated from the relatively conciliatory aspect:

Su carácter neutralizable o de marco, en razón del cual el fragmento puede alojar o ejecutarse plenamente bien como texto ensayístico (claro, con rasgo de fragmentado) o bien como texto poético, en prosa o en verso, en uno y otro caso, como es evidente, siguiendo cualquiera de las posibilidades realizativas. (Aullón de Haro, 22)

[Its neutral framed character, that allows the fragment to be placed or fully executed either as an essayistic text (naturally, with features of the fragment) or as a poetic text, in prose or in verse, in either case, as it's evident, follows each of its possible realizations.]

Thus, it became the perfect genre for the symbolists, as they despised and rejected the rigid form, meter and rhyme of traditional poetry. A prose poem can never be denoted as a creation whose only goal is to simply tell, narrate and memorialize a historic event or occurrence point by point. Its objective is quite the opposite: it struggles to transmit the sensations, visions, subjective impression of the lyrical subject about the surrounding world. But not like poetry, limited by metrical cadences. It tries to do it freely, with words full of life and passion, in a way that the author can express the dynamism of his or her live and fluent imagination –without detaining it. If one stops to ponder which form, which meter, which rhyme, shaping the vivid sensation, imposing an artificial, organized and universal form, the disorganized and fluid process ceases to be.

Thus, Pedro Aullón de Haro notices that the origin of 'prose poetry' is based upon various factors, which may remain reduced to two fundamental principles. One of them is, according to his estimates, the "integration of the opposites", and the another, the "suppression of the goal". Both of them, as it is plausible to conclude, support all

types of certain superseding of the personal limits, freeing individuality. (Aullón de Haro, 23)

Although apparently, this new wave would seem similar to the one initiated during the Romantic period, in its desire to escape once and for all from the rigid norms imposed by Neoclassicism, a different principle emerges from, this new trend whose aesthetic motto is “art for art’s sake”; that the art should find its purpose in itself, being a new, parallel reality, or at least presenting itself as a new face of the existing reality that surrounds humanity, only contemplated from the altered point of view, that originates in the mind of its author. According to Aullón de Haro, art, judging by the proclamation of this deliberately anarchic code, is not and in any way a simple tool serving the mimetic purpose of plagiarizing the already existent nature. (Aullón de Haro, 23) It creates the world anew.

Omil Alba also points out the similarities and draws parallel lines between the “lyrical poem” and micro-narrative, designating them as an ancestor and a descendant, thus contributing to the multitude of the authors dedicated to the analysis of the short short stories. He notices certain characteristics that these two literary forms have in common:

Ambas formas, microrrelato y poema lírico, están cargadas con un plus de efecto tardío, por el cual, aún a distancia de su lectura, continuarán resonando y gravitando en la memoria del receptor. (Omil, 19)

[Both forms, micro-narrative and the lyrical poem, are imbued with the plus of the delayed effect, and that is why, even at a distance from their reading, they'll continue to resonate and to influence the receptor's memory.]

Pondering on the discursive/reflexive tendency of prose poetry, Pedro Aullón de Haro defines it as an inclination that seeks to leave impressions, influences, and incite the reader's reflections. He contrasts it to the narrative tendency of the prose poetry, which has always possessed the predilection to represent occurrences objectively. (Aullón de Haro, 23) Meanwhile, Omil Alba focuses on other similarities, stating that micro-narrative and prose poetry are also connatural in the syntactic plain, in the relations of the contents between word pairs. He also pays attention to the way they are related in their *modus operandi*, because in both of these literary forms, a word passes through extremely severe philters before it is actually considered relevant and used by the author. (Omil, 20)

Prose poetry is a very modern genre, fully opposed to Classicism. This is confirmed by Pedro Aullón de Haro, who shrewdly perceives that this may mean its reconstruction from an entirely new point of view. He contemplates this literary form in a contrastive manner, always countering one of its characteristics with the other, something extremely useful to us once we start enumerating the features of short short stories in relation to the similarities that exist between the two genres. First he mentions discrimination pairs such as short/extended and loose/integrated, their references to

external and formal classifications, and the danger that extended parts may become abundant but without essence. Brevity seems to more efficient in encountering the desired target. However, great skill is required in order to present the essence of an idea in the smallest number of words. With regards to the concept of integration, Aullón de Haro indicates that by being part of a bigger literary whole, the (smaller) part may remain colorless and unnoticed so that its perfect individuality remains suspended.

The debate on the origin of the ‘prose poetry’ genre is far from closed. Some critics question its status as poetry or prose, or if it can be considered a separate genre altogether. The argument for prose poetry belonging to poetry only emphasizes its heightened attention to language and prominent use of metaphor. On the other hand, it can also be identified as prose because it relies on the association with narrative and on the expectation of an objective presentation of reality. However, there are texts that in some cases resist the restrictive ascription to poetry, testimony or traditional fiction, attracting to the textual product the implicit questioning of its generic legality. The truth is, as it frequently occurs, lies somewhere in the middle, for prose poetry is in fact a fusion of poetic and prosaic elements, and presents a real challenge to traditional notions of genre theory.

Alongside those who trace the origin of contemporary short stories to the prose poetry of the turn of the 20th century, there are others who situate it squarely as a product of 20th century Modernism. The changes in publishing industry that took place in those years were determinant for the development of short story writing. The new layout of journals and magazines required filling small spaces with illustrations, short poems,

quotes, short and micro-stories. For example, some of Rubén Darío's micro-stories fulfilled this role. Vicente Huidobro's "miniature stories", which he published in 1927, seem to have been part of an avant-garde project which he apparently left aside, and which approach parody and irony in a line that would become popular in the 1950s, gradually opening itself to other creative options which contributed to distend and transgress the conventional boundaries of the genre. The demand for short fiction grew so much more than the traditional serials, that some authors published manuals offering instructions to create good stories, such as the "Decálogo del perfecto cuentista" ("The Decalogue of the perfect storyteller") by Horacio Quiroga.

As Juan Armando Epple (1988) notes, the genre tends to override the resources of the parody and exercise an art of recycling, as Violeta Rojo (1997) has also noted. Indeed, Rojo mentions that a distinctive trait of short fiction is a modality of scriptural reformulation which is in the process of setting as a sub-genre. She indicates that the intertextual and parodic traces that distinguish these texts are a cultural phenomenon that predominates at times of canonical re-articulation and explains the protean and transgeneric nature of the short story, a context that other authors (i.e. Graciela Tomassini y Stella Maris Colombo 1993) situate in the destabilization of cultural codes and the discursive fragmentation taking place in modernity, which in the Latino-American case, textualized complex multicultural hybrid forms (see also work by Andrea Bell, Dolores M. Koch)

2.4 The evolution of micronarratives in the 20th-century

Short short stories represent an absolutely innovative, recent and revolutionary phenomenon in literature. The genre has received a lot of attention in the last two decades. This is confirmed by María Isabel Larrea in an article where she states that short short stories have generated a lot of critical and theoretical works. Important anthologies have been published, diverse critical essays and magazines, as well as conferences, lectures and seminars that have been held on this topic. Thus, the micro-story has managed to find its place in the literary institutions of today. (Larrea, “El microcuento en Hispanoamérica”, 1)

Francisca Noguerol designates the seventies and the eighties as the period of a special flowering of this short prose form, and simultaneously points out that this is precisely the time when Flash Fiction reached its new peak. The establishment of the short short story canon is parallel to the formation of the postmodern aestheticism, characterized by a refusal of ideas of universality, rationality, truth and progress emphasized in modernity. The postmodern culture is marked with the disappearance of the emancipating tales and the legitimization of knowledge. Micro-stories appear as a new form of understanding reality, and as an expression of a new episteme: the postmodern thought, with its preference towards disjunction, opening, process, playfulness, and fragmentation. (Noguerol, 2)

In his book *The Latin American Short Short Story: The formation of the genre in the XX century*, Guillermo Siles underlines the fact that in the decade of the 1980s the

renovated focus on Flash Fiction is significant. He minutely elaborates the initiators of this fictional literature of extreme brevity, among them: Dolores Koch, Juan Armando Epple, Lauro Zavala, Violeta Rojo, Francisca Noguerol Jiménez and Laura Pollastri. (Siles, 10)

Debating on the popularity of sudden fiction, Lauro Zavala suggests that it is due to editorial growth and to the increment of studies and creative workshops dedicated to it. (Zavala, 14) His suggestions are confirmed by Tomassini Graciela and Colombo Stella Maris, who refer to the Latin-American case.

El texto ficcional breve también ha encontrado un canal de difusión idóneo en revistas y suplementos literarios, medios desde los cuales, incluso, se ha incentivado su producción a través de la convocatoria de los certámenes como los organizados por *El Cuento* (México) y *Puro Cuento* (Argentina). Se sabe, asimismo, que esta clase de escritura constituye una práctica muy frecuentada en talleres literarios, muchas veces como ejercicio preparatorio al cultivo de formas narrativas de mayor extensión como el cuento o la novela. Al respecto cabe esperar que dicha dinámica de trabajo no esté orientada por el convencimiento ingenuo de que brevedad y facilidad han de ir necesariamente aparejadas, lo cual podría redundar en un incremento cuantitativo no siempre asociado a un alto nivel de excelencia artística. (Tomassini, Colombo, 7)

[The short fictional text has also found an ideal channel of diffusion in various magazines and literary supplements, the means from which, even, their production has been incentivised throughout the various competitions and contests, such as the ones organized by *El cuento* (Mexico) and *Puro cuento* (Argentina). Also, it is very well known that this type of writing constitutes a frequent practice in the literary workshops, many times as a preparatory exercise for the narrative forms of mayor extensions such as the story or the novel. Therefore, it's logical to expect that the mentioned dynamism of work won't be oriented by the naive conviction that the brevity and ease necessarily flock together, which could result in the quantitative increment, not always associated to the high level of the artistic excellence.] (Tomassini, Colombo, 7)

2.5. Short short stories, micro-fiction, Flash Fiction and other brief narratives: the problem of definition and categorization

What is a short short story? Can this genre be precisely denominated and defined? In previous subsections, I have briefly addressed some of these concerns and I have attempted to sketch the similarities of short short stories, prose poems and other hybrid forms. A general inquiry into the nature of brief narratives, their distinct characteristics and diverse names is the object of this section.

Defining the short story or tale is an arduous task, conditioned by the different definitions that have been given over time and by the type of stories that have prevailed. There is an interesting corpus on the poetics of the short story including works by H. Quiroga, J. Cortázar, Juan Bosch, Mario Benedetti, M. Lancelotti, Enrique Anderson-Imbert, or Cristina Peri Rossi, among others. In 1882, Irwing Howe and Ilana Weiner Howe tried to define a canon for North-American 'short-short' stories' but their proposal was not very convincing.

Mexican scholar Lauro Zavala and author was one of the first to point out problems in the definition of short short stories, Flash Fiction and other types of short tales:

Debido a su proximidad genérica con otras formas de la escritura, al tratar de ofrecer una definición del cuento breve, nos enfrentamos a varios problemas simultáneos: un problema genérico (¿son cuentos?), un problema estético (¿son literatura?), un problema de extensión (¿qué tan breve puede ser un cuento muy breve?), un problema nominal (¿cómo nos llamamos?), un problema tipológico (¿cuántos tipos de cuentos muy breves existen?) y un problema de naturaleza textual (¿por qué son tan breves?) [Due to the genre proximity with the other writing forms, when we try to offer a definition of a short story, we face numerous simultaneous problems: a genre problem (are they stories?), an aesthetic problem (are they literature), an extension problem (how brief can be a

very short story?), a nominal problem (what is our name?) a typological problem (how many types of short short stories are there) and a nature problem (why are they so brief?)] (Zavala, 3)

Zavala proposed a division of micro-fiction in three types, depending on length issues, that is, the number of words that the works contained: short stories (from 1000 up to 2000 words), very short stories (from 200 up to 1000 words) and ultra short stories (from 1 up to 200 words). He gave an example for each of those types and briefly enumerated their characteristics.

Beside terms such as ‘short short fiction’, ‘micronarrative’, ‘Flash Fiction’, or ‘brief narratives’, we can find variations across languages and cultures. In Spanish, el ‘*cuento*’ is a short narrative, frequently in the oral tradition, based on real or fictional events, with a reduced number of characters and a simple plot. Its main objective was to convey simple ideas by means of awakening of an emotional reaction of impact. Julio Cortazar used to say that the tale, unlike the novel which beats by score, wins by knock out. Its brevity does not allow long descriptions or deep psychological profiles in the characters. The climax is often the moment of greater impact, and is achieved by a conjunction of strategies aimed at creating a deep perceptual impression, generally by means of visuality, that is, generating a picture in the reader’s mind, an image that triggers myriad of associations, as the analysis of Baudelaire’s and Quiroga’s prose poems in the following chapter.

Violeta Rojo thinks that “So little attention has been paid to this type of narrative that it doesn’t even have a fixed name, and when we speak of it, we have to debate between a multitude of expressions.” [“Tan poca atención se ha prestado a este tipo de narrativa, que no cuenta ni siquiera con un nombre definido para llamarla, y a la hora de hablar de ella hay que debatirse entre una multitud de expresiones.” Rojo, 12] The same author mentions some of the expressions used to determine a literary production belonging to brief narratives. Apart from Flash Fiction, she adds short short stories, mini fiction, prose fiction, blaster, snapper, sketch, vignette, experimental fiction, draft, picture, text, Flash Fiction, sudden, postcard, furious, fast, quick, skinny and microfiction, among others. (Rojo, 13)

On the other hand, Dolores Koch makes a clear distinction between a short short story and a Flash Fiction. For this author, a short short story is any brief tale. However, the Flash Fiction is extremely short, even shorter than a short short story –which makes one think that she doesn’t contemplate these two words as absolute synonyms, but she rather points out to their principal difference. She also sets it aside from other brief forms, such as legend and the anecdote, basing this decision on the difference in the style and language used in these forms and the Flash Fiction:

Como el juego ingenioso de lenguaje, se aproxima al aforismo, al epigrama y a la greguería. Posee el tono de monólogo interior, de la reveladora anotación de diario, de la voz introspectiva que se pierde en vacío y que, al mismo tiempo parece querer reclamar la permanencia de

la fábula, la alegoría, el apólogo. El desenlace de este relato es generalmente una frase ambivalente o paradójica, que produce una revelación instantánea de esencias. [As an ingenious language game, it draws closer to the aphorism, epigram and to the greguería –graphic short poem. It possesses the tone of the interior monologue, of the revelatory annotation of the diary, of the introspective voice lost in the emptiness and which, at the same time, seems to call for the patience of the fable, of the allegory, of the apologue. The denouement of this story is generally an ambivalent or paradoxical phrase, and it produces an instantaneous revelation of the essence.] (Koch, *El microrrelato en México*, Julio Torri, Juan José Arreola y Augusto Monterroso, 3)

Violeta Rojo opts for using the term *minicuento* (short short story) simply because, in her opinion, this name points to its most prominent characteristic: “Lo llamaremos minicuento por varias razones. En primer lugar, éste es uno de los nombres más habituales. Además, expresa dos de los rasgos diferenciadores de este tipo de narrativa: *es muy breve y es un cuento*.” [We shall call it short short story for various reasons. In the first place, this is one of its most habitual names. Moreover, it expresses two of the differentiating features of this type of narrative: it’s extremely short and it’s a story]. (Rojo, 34) Other scholars, such as Tomassini Graciela and Colombo Stella Maris, insist that the genre resists definition, and for this reason there would be multiple denominations for it. (Tomassini, Colombo, 4)

In the continuous search for categorization and definitions of the genre, Guillermo Siles explains that “The necessity of naming, labeling and classifying is inherent to human beings, who use these resources to comprehend the world around them, to perceive similarities and differences. From observation, emerges the imperative of ordering, establishing hierarchies for certain types of objects, actions, events, situations, based on criteria of a very diverse procedence.” (La necesidad de nombrar, de etiquetar, de clasificar es inherente al ser humano, que se vale de estos recursos para comprender el mundo que lo rodea, para percibir similitudes y diferencias. A partir de la observación surge el imperativo de ordenar, jerarquizar cierto tipo de objetos, acciones, eventos, situaciones, sobre la base de criterios de procedencia muy diversa; Siles, 19)

However, he adds that, specifically, the criterion of selection in the case of short stories, referred to two fundamental theoretical questions: the genre status and the fictional condition of the text. These were problems of extension and genre condition, as well as those of the fictionality. (Siles, 20)

More problems arise “if to this we add a parodic and humoristic habitual character, and the fact that there are short short stories in which apparently nothing is told, we face something that is considered a mere diversion, a little jest, something pleasing to our eyes, but of no real literature value.” (Si a esto se suma un carácter paródico y humorístico habitual, y el que haya minicuentos en los que aparentemente no se narra ninguna historia, nos encontramos con que se le considera un mero divertimento, un chistecito, algo agradable de leer, mas no verdadera literatura. Rojo, 15)

There was also another obstacle when defining the short short story, the fact that “there are also texts, equally characterized according to their brevity, which are not literary.” (“También hay textos igualmente caracterizados por su brevedad que no son literarios”; Lagmanovich, 23).

These difficulties in definition have been carried over to the new digital formats. More and more classifications take into consideration length criteria. For instance, the organization of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America speaks of ‘short story’ when it contains less than 7500 words. *Novelette* is the designation chosen for stories between 7500 and 17499 words. *Novella* comprehends stories between 17500 and 40000 words.³

Amid the multitude of attempts to define short short stories it becomes obvious that some of the above quoted emphasize the extension of these narratives and allude to their extreme brevity. Note that Dolores Koch’s definition, quoted above, pays special attention to the style of a short-short story, pointing out at the same time the subjectivity as well as the existence of a turnover, what Baudelaire denominates “l’intensité de l’effet”, an outcome which is imbued with symbolic meaning.

Gustavo Luis Carrera defines Flash Fiction by pointing out its brief extension and the inevitable turnover: Es un texto de cien o milquinientas palabras publicable en una o dos páginas en una revista. Se supone que es un drama intenso, con final sorprendente. [It is a text of one hundred or one thousand five hundred words, publishable in one or two pages in a magazine. It is supposedly an intense drama, with a surprising finish.] (Carrera, 27) Three more definitions follow, each of which draws

³ Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Awards <<http://www.sfwawards.org/#6>>

attention not only to the brevity and the precise language, but also to the fact that sometimes, a short short story can look like a compressed anecdote. The first one was written by Alba Omil and Raúl Piérola: “El minicuento es una travesura donde se combinan inteligencia, palabra, destreza y cierta dosis de magia dentro de una estructura rigurosa, para extraerle a la expresión todos los valores posibles.”[The short short story is a mischief which combines intelligence, word, dexterity and a certain dose of magic inside a rigorous structure, in order to extract all the possible values from the expression.] (Omil, Piérola, 125) This characteristic is also noted Domingo Miliani: “el minicuento se nutre esencialmente del ritmo vertiginoso de la anécdota.” [The short short story is essentially nurtured from the vertiginous rhythm of an anecdote] (Miliani, 20)

In her introduction to a special number of a *Quimera* journal on Flash Fiction in Spanish, Rebecca Martín and Fernando Valls offer a short short story definition in which they set criteria referring to the relations between the short short story and the similar genres, opening a debate elaborated by David Lagmanovich:

Las concomitancias del microrrelato con el poema, la fábula, el aforismo, el artículo, o incluso el mensaje publicitario, son a veces evidentes, pero éste exige algo que no tiene una historia. La acción, si la hay, está sumamente condensada, los personajes, que en muchas ocasiones carecen del nombre, aparecen apenas perfilados, pero es necesario que el autor de microrrelatos le cuente una historia al lector. (Martín & Valls, 14)

[The concomitances of short short story with the poem, the fable, the aphorism or the article, or even with an advertising message, are sometimes evident, but it requires something that a story doesn't usually demand. The action, if it exists, is extremely condensed, the characters, which on many occasions have no names, appear barely outlined, but it is always necessary that the author tells a story to the reader.] (Martin & Valls, 14)

In "Retorno al micro-relato: algunas consideraciones" ("Return to Flash Fiction: some considerations"), Dolores Koch adds some more characteristics of a Flash Fiction. One of them is genre hybridization. The short short story combines the elements of the story, of the poem in prose and of an essay: it doesn't lack the narrative element, but it is expressed in the first person with an intimate tone as if it were an essay, it cherishes the language just as the poem in prose. It is followed by an ambivalent or elliptical outcome, a turnover, the obligatory part of each short short story, which concludes it with a boast of genius: "El verdadero desenlace o resolución de la situación, de interpretación abierta o simplemente sugerida, require un lector activo, el lector cómplice, obligado a interpretar la lógica implícita en la última línea." [The true ending or a resolution of a situation, of an open or simply suggested, it requires an active reader, a reader accomplice, obligated to interpret the implicit logic in the last line.] (Koch, "Retorno al micro-relato: algunas consideraciones", 20)

A work of Flash Fiction, according to Koch, often contains literary, biblical, mythical and historical allusions, and it is frequently written in the form of a fable or of a bestiary. Obligated to linguistic economy, one more of the important characteristics of a short short story, the writer uses the context supposedly known to many readers, and he does it with brevity, clarity and precision. Another feature of microfiction are also the aforementioned antique forms of writing such as bestiaries and fables, and with the help of the numerous stylistic devices among which stands out the irony. (Koch, “Retorno al micro-relato: algunas consideraciones, 24)

In his article “El microrrelato y la teoría de los géneros” (“Short short story and genre theory”), David Roas systematically enumerates the most prominent features of the short short story, dividing them into the following four groups: discursive features; thematic features; pragmatic features; formal features. In his opinion, the discursive features would be: narrativity, hyper-brevity, and as a complement to the last one, the concision and the intensity of expression; the thematic features are the intertextuality, the metafiction, the irony, the parody, the humor and the critical intention –although they do not have to appear simultaneously in one short short story); the pragmatic features would be, at the same time, the necessary impact of the writer on the reader, but the exigency of an active reader as well. The formal features are the characteristics that are present on the textual level, and they are many, and varied. David Roas enumerates the most important ones: the plot does not possess a structural complexity, the protagonists are few and stock characters are often used. He also notes, as far as the narrative form is concerned, that a lot of attention is paid to the construction. Since it

should contain only an essence and nothing else, the construction lacks descriptions and there are many references to the concrete places and characters –this the case of the linguistic economy already mentioned by Dolores Koch. There aren't many dialogues, unless they are important and functional. Frequently, the title of the short short story plays a significant role in its interpretation. (Roas, 49)

It is obvious that hiperbrevity is one of the characteristics emphasized by all theoreticians as a common feature of all Flash Fiction genre works. Dolores Koch dedicated an entire article to the stylistic devices used in short short story. The most prominent and relevant are listed here: the author uses the already known ready-made stock characters (biblical, historical, legendary, mythological, literary, or from a popular culture); he or she may offer the title in another language to insinuate what the microfiction is about, or writes the title in such a manner as if part of the short-short story; the use of the ellipsis, merely insinuating the expression of the denouement, without pronouncing it directly; a reader with a relatively broad cultural knowledge; precision and concision; and scarce use of adjectives. (Koch, "Retorno al micro-relato: algunas consideraciones", 27-28)

Virtually everyone in the micronarratives' world is familiar with Baltasar Gracian's quote from *Art of Worldly Wisdom*: "Good things, when short, are twice as good". Apart from the influence that terseness has on the recipients, it also helps the creators to crystallize their thoughts and practice their writing skills. Shortness is one of the principal characteristics of Flash Fiction.

Violeta Rojo, in her *Breve manual para reconocer minicuentos*, (Short manual for the recognition of short short stories) speaks about brevity in a different way than Lauro Zavala. He measures it in terms of word count; she does it in pages: Son muy breves, no llegan por lo común a las dos páginas impresas, aunque lo más frecuente es que tengan una sola página. [They are quite short; they do not normally extend to two printed pages, even though they mostly have only one page.] (Rojo, 8)

David Lagmanovich assigns this brevity to the concision, and while pondering where the limit of a reduction of story is, he informs us that there are even such short short stories which are no longer than a single line, quoting the most famous one, the hyper brief construction of the Guatemalan author Augusto Monteroso, which consists of only nine words, including the title, titled *El dinosaurio* (The dinosaur): Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí. [When he woke up, the dinosaur was still there.] (Lagmanovich, 20)

Maria Isabel Larrea, as many other theoreticians, also points out to the extreme brevity as one of the principal features of the short short story, but she also pays a lot of attention to the already mentioned incomplete narrative sequence, the so called “turnover”, and she offers us her own definition of this denouement, determining at the same time its significant function: interlacing the author and the reader inside of this particular literary genre, leaving it to the open interpretation, creating as many different meanings possible:

Su final abrupto, impredecible, pero abierto a múltiples interpretaciones, impone una lectura que incide en el desarrollo de la imaginación y del pensamiento exigiendo un lector modelo que recree el contexto de este minicósmos narrativo. [Its abrupt, unpredictable ending, open to the multiple interpretations, imposes a reading which highlights the development of the imagination and of thought, requiring the model reader which would recreate the context of this narrative micro cosmos.] (Larrea, “El microcuento en Hispanoamérica, 2)

This author adds that it should be emphasized that this type of literary genre requires an active and educated reader who has to order words, while reading, and fill in, sensing correctly, a series of empty spaces and unspoken gaps: in the reader, an opening has to be left as a sort of preparation for the aforementioned turnover. If all of this happens, the short short story can be considered successful. Larrea also stresses the importance of the stylistic devices, and underlines the rhetoric elements characteristic for the omission, such as ellipsis, zeugma, asyndeton... Besides, she names other rhetorical figures, informing us that each and every one of them possesses its own function inside the corpus of the microfiction:

El uso de la paradoja, de la alegoría, de la fábula o de la parábola le imprime un carácter pragmático cuya historia está regida por el humor escéptico e irreverente, el doble sentido, el absurdo y la subversión del

mundo. Construcciones en abismo, metalepsis, juegos del lenguaje como lipogramas, tautogramas o repeticiones lúdicas inciden en una textualidad altamente connotative. [The use of the paradox, of the allegory, of the fable or of the parable gives it certain pragmatic character whose history is reined by a skeptical and irreverent humor, double-meaning, the absurd and the subversion of the world. Constructions in abysm, metalepsis, and language games such as lipograms, tautograms or playful repetitions focus on a highly connotative textuality.] (Larrea, “El microcuento en Hispanoamérica”, 4)

Tomassini Graciela and Colombo Stella Maris also speak of the importance of the stylistic devices, elaborating especially on ellipsis as the most important rhetorical figure, in their opinion: “La ‘ellipsis’ señorea en estos relatos: troquela sus bordes recortando toda excedencia en relación con el eje semántico vertebrador de su desarrollo, o se manifiesta bajo la forma de huecos informativos que ponen a prueba la competencia del lector para restituir los contenidos escamoteados.” [Ellipsis is dominant in these stories: it cuts their borders slashing through all the excess in relation to the semantic axis –the backbone of its progress, or it is manifested in a form of informative holes that test the reader’s competence in restoring the scant content.] (Tomassini, Colombo, 17)

It is significant that these two authors also speak of yet another Flash Fiction feature: diversity/heterogeneity. Basically, even though the brevity is the one thing all of

the short short stories have in common, they differ among themselves according to the forms they adopt: the fable, the parable, the legend, the myth, the aphorism, the comedy of manners, the maxim, the scientific report, the advertisement. (Tomassini, Colombo, 27) This feature of the microfiction is called the emblematic writing (Lagmanovich, 134). Lauro Zavala, one of the greatest theoreticians of today as far as the short short stories are concerned, doesn't stray from his opinion, while he enumerates the elements that are characteristic for a Flash Fiction and its diverse strategies of intertextuality:

- a) Diversas estrategias de intertextualidad (hibridación genérica, silepsis, alusión y parodia);
- b) Diversas clases de metaficción (en el plano narrativo: construcción en abismo, metalepsis, diálogo con el lector; (en el plano lingüístico: juegos de lenguaje como lipogramas, tautogramas o repeticiones lúdicas);
- c) Diversas clases de ambigüedad semántica (final sorpresivo o enigmático);
- d) Diversas formas de humor (intertextual) y de ironía (necesariamente inestable). (Zavala, 10)

[a) Diverse strategies of intertextuality (generic hybridisation, zeugma, allusion, and parody);

- b) Diverse classes of metafiction (in the narrative plan: abysmal constructions, metalepsis, dialogue with the reader; (in the linguistic plan: language games such as lipograms, tautograms or playful repetitions;
- c) Diverse classes of semantic ambiguity (surprising or enigmatic ending);
- d) Diverse forms of humour (intertextual) and of irony (necessarily unstable).] (Zavala, 10)

The Venezuelan Violeta Rojo, proposes the following characteristics of a short story, explicitly stating that the narrative forms which do not possess them can not belong to this genre: brevedad extrema (menos de doscientas palabras); economía de lenguaje y juegos de palabras; representación de situaciones estereotipadas que exigen la participación de lector y carácter proteico, es decir, hibridación con otros géneros literarios o extraliterarios, en cuyo caso la dimensión narrativa es la dominante; o bien hibridación con géneros arcaicos o desaparecidos (fábula, aforismo, alegoría, parábola y proverbios, y habría que añadir mitos), con los cuales se establece una relación paródica. (Rojo, 7) [extreme brevity (less than 200 words): language economy and wordplay; representation of the stereotypical situations which require the participation of the reader and protean character, that is, hybridization with other literary or extraliterary genres, in which case the narrative dimension is the dominant one; a hybridization with other, archaic or extinct genres (fable, aphorism, allegory, parable and proverbs, and myths

should also be added) exists as well, and a parodic relation is established with them.] (Rojo, 7)

David Lagmanovich reflects on the short short story structure, informing us that it is possible to consider it from two points of view: “Debido a la generalización de la escritura y publicación de microrrelatos, ahora disponemos de un corpus suficientemente extenso como para intentar algunas elementales clasificaciones. La primera, referida a la estructura externa de tales textos, permite distinguir entre una modalidad dialógica y una monológica.” [Due to the generalization of writing and publishing of the short short stories, now there is a sufficiently large corpus and we are able to intent with elementary classifications. The first one, which refers to the external structure of such texts, allows us to distinguish between a dialogical and monological variety.] (Lagmanovich, 52)

It is perfectly clear that this structural division depends of the narrative structure and its organization: a short tale can be written as a monologue, a soliloquy or a dialogue and it can most certainly adopt many different narrative forms.

Another characteristic can be the fact that it is a new and relatively unexplored genre, and that is why there are many contradictions between the critics and theoreticians who are dedicated to its analysis as far as its nature and its definition are concerned. Some of them may consider a certain type of narrative to be a short short story, others no. All of this is normal for the recently discovered genre, for the genre which has just woken up the interest of the public and of the critics. The Flash Fiction genre is relatively new in comparison with other literary forms written in poetry and in

prose, and, as such, the theoretical knowledge about it is being created even as we write. New opinions about this genre appear daily.

Maria Isabel Larrea offers us a different perspective of a short short story, as seen from the point of view of the reader, offering him certain manual for understanding and better interpretation of brief narratives. She makes us realize that the characteristics of the microfiction do not merely serve as its decoration or distinction between other literary genres. She contemplates brevity as a sign:

El microcuento, por el contrario, al no cerrar sus secuencias, contribuye a que el mundo narrado se fragmente y desestructure, permita configurar una retórica de omisiones y de recursos parabólicos que, inevitablemente, conlleva a la transtextualidad. De esta manera, la completación de la historia está en otro lugar del texto, es decir, en la recepción, en la competencia enciclopédica e intertextual del lector. [The short short story, on the contrary, doesn't close its sequences and this contributes to the fragmentation and dismantling of the narrated world, thus allowing the configuration of a rhetoric of omissions and parabolic devices which, inevitably, involves the transtextuality. This is how the completion of the history is in another part of the text, that is, in the reception, in the encyclopedic and intertextual competence of the reader.] (Larrea, "Estrategias lectoras en el microcuento", 180)

Another characteristic that she elaborates in her article is the aforementioned transtextuality, which she elevates to a cultural level:

El lector de un microcuento ha de tener una competencia transtextual, es decir, ha de conocer los mecanismos de evocación, las alusiones, en suma, los modos de diálogo entre los textos. Por lo general, los textos breves incluyen en su codificación la intertextualidad con otros textos mayores, a menudo muy prestigiosos, para parodiarlos, invertirlos o recuperarlos desde otro sesgo semántico. [The reader of a short short story should have a transtextual competence, that is, he should be familiar with the mechanisms of evocation, with the allusions, all in all, with the modes of the dialogue between the texts. In general, short texts include the intertextuality in their codification, along with other bigger texts, frequently quite prestigious, in order to make a parody of them, invert them or recover them from another semantic bias.] (Larrea, “Estrategias lectoras en el microcuento”, 182)

To sum up, the key content features of the Flash Fiction genre are the following: apart from hyper brevity and a necessary impact they must have on the reader who is to actively participate in the plot, there are also concision and the intensity of expression, intertextuality, metafiction, irony, parody, humour, and, occasionally, the critical intention.

Naturally, these characteristics need not all appear at once in a micro-narrative. As far as the formal features are concerned, they are generally the following: the plot doesn't have structural complexity, the protagonists are almost always stock characters, roughly presented and virtually without psychological characterization. Dolores Koch (1985) mentions the "linguistic economy": since the micro-narrative is to contain merely an essence and nothing else, the construction is scarce, the words that dominate are nouns and verbs and there are almost no descriptions (one adjective at the most). Dialogues are absent (unless they serve to characterize the protagonists and are essential to the plot) and the title is generally highly suggestive and as significant in the interpretation of the short short story as its body and its conclusion.

To conclude, the most important characteristic of the short story is its immediacy. Short fiction contains all the classic story elements: protagonists, conflict, obstacles and their resolution. However, unlike longer narrative forms such as the novel and the novella, the short story has less descriptions and less dialogues; it portrays a present event where past and future might be inferred; the number of characters is also limited, and the time spectrum of the action shorter; its relation to the natural world might be irrelevant (in the case of fantastic stories) but it needs to be related to some kind of human activity. For this reason, it tends to portray concrete environments rural as in the early folk tales, or urban and metropolitan in the 20th and 21st centuries. The individual occurrence can then be extrapolated to a more general or universal setting. In other words, the limited word length present in short stories, and even more in short

short stories and Flash Fiction, forces some of these elements to remain unwritten, only hinted or implied in the storyline.

Based on these fundamental distinctions, David Lagmanovich signals three types of short narratives. The first type employs parodic elements and are often rewritings of previous well known texts. Lagmanovich mentions three micronarratives that exploit characters in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*: "The truth of Sancho Panza" written by Franz Kafka, the story "Teoría de Dulcinea" by the Mexican Juan José Arreola (Arreola 1962, 19) and "El precursor de Cervantes" by the Argentinian Marco Denevi (Denevi 1966: 28-29). The second type is a form of substitute discourse which appropriates canonical language only to distort it. It is experience as a rupture, and used for political purposes. Among the examples he cites are Vicente Huidobro, César Vallejo, Oliverio Girondo or Julio Cortázar in chapter 68 of *Rayuela* (Cortázar 1963: 428). Lagmanovich indicates that one of the ways in which these short narratives exploit substitution at the formal level is by breaking the analogic mechanisms traditionally use in discourse. For instance, this can be done by making puns out of broken words, or playing with their double meaning, or using other double-coding techniques (these aspects will be explored in more detail in the section dealing with short narratives and the fantastic). The example provided by Lagmanovich is a story by Luisa Valenzuela (1975: 93) entitled "Zoología fantástica", where she appropriates masculine discourse to bring attention to patriarchal structures and criticize them. Finally, the third type of short narratives are those that Lagmanovich describes as 'emblematic writing' and which includes short stories that offer a transcendental vision of human existence, starting from a simple individual

anecdote. He mentions, for example the story “Jericó” by the Mexican José Emilio Pacheco (1977: 137-138) and “Atlas” by the Uruguayan Cristina Peri Rossi (1987, 39-40).

SECTION III. Hybrid scenarios of the short story

One of the probably most significant features of short fiction and very short fiction is its immediacy and the subituous way in which it affects the recipient. I posit that this impact is based on a combination of factors that have to do with the development of ambiguity in the narrative. The reader is now allowed to take part in forging the interpretation of the story.

Part of my inquiry relies on the investigation made by my doctoral supervisor, Prof. Asunción López-Varela, who has been probing the grounds of hybrid narratology during long time. Based mostly on her 2008 paper, “Cultural Scenarios of the Fantastic”, I show an overview of formulae of complex-coding that generate indistinctness and open the text in countless ways. At the same time, I trace roots of these fluctuations to the late 19th century and early 20th century when the technological shift became particularly important.

3.1. The origins of the fantastic and its characterization

All the initial forms of short narratives carry fantastic elements in their tissue. Most of epic narratives in all cultures have strong fantastic constituents, from the Sumerian *Gilgamesh*, to the Hindu *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, including the Saxon *Beowulf*, the German *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Icelandic sagas and Arthurian legends. When the epic girated towards more realist forms, this caused the appearance of a hybrid versions of

romance, and then of genres such as the picaresque, journey narratives, social stories, etc. Fantastic elements are present in the gothic tales that became very popular in the 19th century in works by Horace Walpole, Anne Rathcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis or Mary Shelley in the United Kingdom; in France François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil, Baculard d'Arnaud, Madame de Genlis, Prosper Mérimée, Guy de Maupassant or Jules Verne; in Germany Friedrich Schiller, Christian Heinrich Spiess, o Hoffmann; Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne or Henry James in the United States, and many others. Along sentimental stories, the fantastic became one of the most popular genres, particularly present in short stories.

Fantastic elements are very important in the utopian genre, with works such as Plato's *Republic*, Thomas More's *Utopia* or Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, among many others. The recurrent motif that flows through many of them is placing of the occurrences in secluded, remote societies, outside of parameter of what we call civilization. It is not a coincidence that the etymology of the word is thus: from Greek *outopia* (*ou* = no; *topos/topia* = place, location) + *eutopia* (*eu* = good; *topos/topia* = place, location).

Apparently, the fantastic constantly strives to expand beyond the threshold of the real: beyond what is accepted by society and beyond concepts of time and space. We cannot but ask ourselves whether there might be a connection between the fantastic and the artistic *avant-gardes* due to the fact that the concept, coming from French, means metaphorically the first line of creation and artistic renovation: the space beyond what is established.

“The fantastic tends to escape categorization”. Indeed, it might not be a genre. As Julio Cortazar has explained “the fantastic and the mysterious are not only the greatest imaginations of cinema, literature, stories and novels. They are present within us, in our psychic mind, and science or philosophy can explain them only in a primary and rudimentary manner.” (Cortazar “El sentimiento de lo fantástico”) If this claim is true, it is necessary to question why this “feeling” appears at determined times and comes about simultaneously as the technological changes in society. Already in Maupassant’s fantastic stories there is a theory which underlines that technological advances have altered human perception of supernatural.

Vladimir Soloviev approaches the fantastic claiming that all that happens in one’s life isn’t only related to evident causes, but it also relies on a deeper causality which is not so immediately visible. Soloviev speaks of an exterior and formal possibility for the explanation of phenomena and about an internal type of explanation which lacks all internal probability (see Tomachevski 61-95). Tomachevski brands Soloviev as an idealist because of his use of these terms, however, words like ‘causes’, ‘exterior possibility’ and ‘internal probability’ remind us more of existential approaches and dynamical systems theory, as we shall see later on. Roger Caillois also indicated that “the fantastic is a rupture of the recognized order, an emergence of the unacceptable within everyday immutable legality” (161 our translation). Todorov comprehensive classic on the fantastic describes it as being a liminal state of the supernatural. He compares “the fantastic” to “the uncanny”, wherein the phenomenon turns out to have a rational explanation, and to “the marvellous”, where the explanation is truly supernatural

as in fairy-tales. Todorov explains that “the fantastic” is the state of mind which leaves the reader with a sense of confusion about the work whether or not the phenomenon was real. Both “the grotesque” and “supernatural fiction” contain fantastic elements but “the fantastic” is based on an ambiguity of those elements, explains Todorov.

In the introduction, Todorov states that the concept of genres must be discussed before the fantastic can be discussed as a genre. Todorov poses the difficulty of doing this, since it would be necessary to study all texts included in a given genre, texts that are continually increasing and changing. Todorov also poses a second difficulty that refers to the subdivisions of the genres themselves. Even so, he insists on the necessity of the concept of literary genre since all text is related to others that are different from itself. Todorov's criticism of the book by the Canadian critic Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* focuses on how it is not necessary for a text to possess all the characteristics of a single genre, as Frye does. Finally, and as an example, Todorov offers a complete definition of what is fantastic literature, which must meet certain requirements. Among them, the reader should see a strange event in the real world and hesitate between a rational explanation or a supernatural one. The identification between reader and character can also contribute to this hesitation. In addition, the reader must adopt an attitude towards the text in which he/she comes to doubt the origin of an event.

Todorov indicates that the fantastic genre cannot be defined as supernatural literature because not all texts with supernatural elements are fantastic. For example, although it is frequent, it is not necessary that a fantastic text causes fear in the reader. It is better to explain the fantastic as a genre that exists between the worlds of the unusual

and the wonderful. The development of the work determines to which genre it belongs. If phenomena can be explained by reality, it is unusual. If phenomena can be explained only by new laws of nature, it is marvelous. Todorov also speaks of the following combination: The uncanny - The fantastic/the uncanny - The fantastic - The fantastic/the marvelous - The marvelous. In the pure uncanny there is a rational explanation for an incredible, frightening, or extraordinary event. The horror literature is an example. Sometimes an author creates a sense of the uncanny to present a taboo subject. In a fantastic/unusual text the events seem supernatural throughout the text but there is a rational explanation in the end. There are two kinds of explanations for these events which at first glance seem supernatural. First, it may be that, in reality, something supernatural never happened, but was caused by the imagination (e.g., a dream, insanity, or drug influence.). Instead, it may be that phenomena occurred but there is a rational explanation for them (e.g., an accident or coincidence, a joke, or an illusion of the senses.) When a text is fantastic/marvelous, it begins as fantastic but ends with acceptance of a supernatural cause. Finally, in a marvelous text the origin of supernatural phenomena does not produce a reaction of hesitation or fear for the characters or readers. Fairy tales belong to this genre. For Todorov, the fantastic only exists in narrative fiction, although oftentimes, fantastic literature contains a connection between fiction and reality.

The discourse of fantastic literature is tripartite, it has the articulation, the act of articulation and the aspect of syntax. The articulation implies the supernatural characteristics and their figurative meanings. The presence of exaggeration creates the

supernatural characteristics. Then, the act of articulation refers to the characters who speak in first person. For this reason, the reader understands the thoughts and emotions of the characters. Finally, the syntax look indicates the word “write”, directly or indirectly, as a part of a plan.

Fantastic literature has a particular effect on the reader (fear, horror, curiosity, etc.) The fantastic elements allow a plot organization and represent an experience of its limits. Here lies the importance of the interpretation of fantastic literature. Todorov explains the subject of the “self“, using various groups of explanations. The first group is metamorphism. The idea of metamorphism refers to the change from one thing to another. The supernatural in metamorphism begins when a word changes things the word describes. The second group is pandeterminism. The idea of pandeterminism is that everything that happens in the world has a cause, which can be supernatural. The third group is the multiplication of personality, an idea that has to do with metamorphism, although here the cause is a transformation at the physical level.

All these groups are based on the transition and mixing of matter and mind, which creates the idea of the fantastic. In particular, the idea of time and space. The time of the fantastic is considered outside the real, beyond what we may think. Space is also an out of the ordinary place.

Todorov also mentions the relation between desire and perversion. Sexuality, violence, cruelty, death ... These are exacerbated desires. The reading of death in the fantastic has to do with love, because it is the desire in its maximum excess. Here, Todorov uses concepts taken from Freud's studies, such as the 'death drive'. Todorov

further explains that his purpose is not to interpret the themes of the fantastic, but the presence of the themes, since the images used in fantastic literature can have a different meaning in each literary work. That is why, when analyzing literary themes, it is better to establish a relationship between them.

According to Todorov, the theme of the “self” is based on the idea of language. It is the distortion of language that is important in fantastic literature and therefore, it has to do with childhood, with the world of repressed experiences. In infancy the child is not able to distinguish the difference between mind and matter until it reaches the world of language (see Freud, Lacan and Piaget). Similarly to a child, a drug addict and a psychopath are affected in their language because they reject communication with other people and thus cannot participate in the world, remaining locked in their own mind. For Todorov, a fantastic work must generate a hesitation in the mind of the reader. This is achieved by breaking the experiences of the latter, making him hesitate between the real and the fictional, creating ambiguity at all levels.

Todorov points out that the fantastic surges at the end of the eighteenth century, denouncing social taboos such as homosexuality, incest etc. It was a way of combating censorship by attributing perversions to the devil in most cases. Today, the grotesque is psychologically related to the repressed and to the world of the Other, the one that is different, dissimilar from us and whom we are afraid of, due to not being the same. Generally, the fantastic arises from a daily situation that is suddenly contemplated from another perspective, producing a hesitation, an insecurity that causes fear. An example for this statement is a following excerpt from Jean-Paul Sartre:

I sit down in a café, I order a light coffee, the waiter makes me repeat my order three times, and repeats it himself in order to avoid any chance of mistake. He rushes off, transmits my order to a second waiter, who scribbles it in a notebook and transmits it to a third. Finally a fourth waiter appears and says: "Here you are," setting the inkwell down on my table. "But," I say, "I ordered a light coffee." "And here you are," he says as he walks away.

3.2. Modernism, the avant-gardes and the fragment

From the historical point of view, artistic *avant-gardes* are situated at a critical moment in the history of the 20th-century: the first World War, the Soviet Revolution, the economic recession, totalitarian regimes such as Nazism and Fascism and the II War World.

As I have mentioned, the experience of modernity is entwined with the growing importance of technology. However, this experience was distinct for each of the different groups that formed 20th century avant-gardes. While Futurism which celebrated the new technological age, many Anglo-American Modernists were more often worried about the menace of what Nietzsche terms "the machine age." Marshall Berman writes that "modernity is constituted by its machines, of which modern men and women are merely mechanical reproductions" (1988:29). Alongside the theme of

mechanization comes an intensified sense of disaster as Modernists faced World War I and II. Exploring “Dada and Surrealism”, Robert Short writes the apocalyptic imagery present in many works was the result of an experience of disintegration and alienation, consequence of “the West's obsession with technological advance and the over-estimation of reason.” (Short 1991:293). The sense of suffering and distress present at the turn of the 19th century appears to grow stronger, as the world faces self-destruction in the inter-war period. Northrop Frye defines anxiety as a “terror without an object, as a condition of mind prior to being afraid *of* anything,” a symptom which “is now conceived as *Angst*” (1969:66).

Modernism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, Constructivism, Surrealism. All of these literary currents search for new spaces of artistic creation, but each and every one of them in particular approaches it in a different manner. Their questioning about the customary order, the individual's experience of modern life, the apprehension over the events that surround them, these are all common concerns that cause an epistemological shift leading to question and experiment with uncertainty.

The alteration from the optimistic point of view towards a sense of the individual's agony in dealing with the real world is actually the most significant facet which assists in explaining the 20th century aesthetic progress. In *The Modes of Modern Writing*, David Lodge observes that “a total alienation from history leads to solipsism and, in literary terms, the abandonment of realism” (1977:41). The sabotage of realistic modes of writing is required because, according to Lodge, realism is “consistent with historical fact” (1977:25) as mediated by dominant culture. Old fashioned arrangement

of ideas which persist even surround with modern day and age leads to abundance of aesthetic experiments that now make an effort to accentuate such fallout: “in their pursuit of what they took to be real found it necessary to distort the form of their discourse until it bore less and less resemblance to the historical description of reality” (Lodge 1977:46).

The conviction that their aesthetic project must be based on distortion led to a proliferation of experiments. Evidence of the 20th century turn to questions of technique presents itself in T.S. Eliot's famous essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920). Writing of the significance of poetry and the poet, T.S. Eliot maintains that the “progress of an artist is [...] a continual extinction of personality” intricately related to a “sense of tradition” (1985:1062). In other words, Modernist experimentation should not content itself with individual attempts to render modern experience or to subvert ancient modes of artistic practice. Peter Nicholls notes the differences between European avant-garde movements, and Eliot's view, exerted from the vantage point of a self-exiled North-American: “continental avant-gardes had defined modernism as a phenomenon of rupture, the absolutely 'new' appearing over the corpse of the old,” while the kind of Modernism defended by Eliot and Pound was “inextricably enmeshed with cultural tradition” (Nicholls 1995:253).

As Maria Di Battista detects, consecrated modernists such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, “are generally characterized as self-conscious formalists wrestling with newly perceived instabilities of language and meaning” (1996:3). Consider, for instance, Woolf's widely acknowledged essay "Modern Fiction"

(1919/1925) which problematizes representation because “the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide” (1986:1995). The artist’s role in transmission of representation of life (no longer ‘reality’) is to somewhat lighten it. For “[l]ife is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope.” (1986:1996) Thus, early 20th century trialing turns “from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life” (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:25).

Prefigured in the appeal to substitute the rational with the intuitive present in Nietzsche’s study of Dionysian impulses in an Apollonian world (*The Birth of Tragedy*), vital experience became a particular point of interest in the phenomenological approaches of the 20th-century. The notion of ‘élan vital’ or ‘vital impetus’ that came from work by the French Philosopher Henri Bergson and his book *Creative Evolution* (1907) is one of the first attempts to relate consciousness to the evolution and development of organism, moving beyond positivist approaches to the self-organising morphogenesis expounded later in the century by dynamic systems and complexity theories. Semioticians like Charles S. Peirce and John Dewey, also helped rethink aesthetic premises in terms of vital experience, since ‘sense perception’ can only be fully established by acknowledging the organic human body. On the basis of his observation that “[s]ense’ covers a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, and the sentimental, along with the sensuous,” Dewey maintains that “sense, as meaning so directly embodied in experience [...] is the only signification that expresses the

function of sense organs." From the understanding that "senses are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the ongoings of the world about him" (1932/1980:22), a clear perseverance on embodied experience arises. Dewey therefore pursues the thesis that a unpretentious aesthetic experience must reflect the origins of human experience, that is to say, the multiple sensory human interactions with the environment. As a consequence, Dewey maintains that "[e]xperience in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality" (1980:19).

Much of the distress that appeared in modernity was attributed to modern industrial societies. Marxist scholars such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer from the Frankfurt School, posited that this trend originated in the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1944), when the individual began to be "wholly devalued in relation to the economic powers, which at the same time press the control of society over nature to hitherto unsuspected heights" (1979:xiv). Industrialization is also envisaged as changing the patterns of growth and decay in modern artificial environments, undermining the essential "synchronization between an organism and the rhythms of its natural environment" (Frye 1969:106) Northrop Frye maintained that "cyclical theories [...] help to rationalize the idea of return" (1969:62) as an "abstract structural principle of the cycle", intricately related with the regenerative hope of rebirth (1969:159), a view present in other important contemporary scholarship, such as Sir James Frazer's exploration of fertility rites and their allegorical interpretation as rebirth. Thus, vitalist approaches connect the idea of the natural cycle to biological organisms in order to help create a sense of connection and meaningfulness.

For other scholars, the disintegration of forms and the penchant towards self-destruction present in the modern period embodies a very physical despair, based on the fact that wars engender the modern way of life by inflicting corporeal damage, the stress on the body plays a vital role in vitalist approaches. The emphasis on ecology and a sense of wholeness in relation of humans to other living organism becomes particularly important in the second half of the 20th century, as seen for example in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's interpretation of modern fragmentation as the individual's confrontation with "machinic enslavement" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:428) that " [...] implies processes of normalization, modulation, modeling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement, etc." (1987:458).

Thus, 20th century experimentalism can be construed as an amalgamation of crisis and an disturbing anxiety of life into aesthetic practices. Many scholars, including Bradbury and McFarlane, observe a focus on "fragmentation, on the breaking up and the progressive disintegration" (1991:80). Poetic space is broken, ending with succession and causality through calligrammes, and narrative space is fragmented in terms of structure, multiple point of view, temporal experimentation, syntax and even breaking the word, as in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. It is as if the nonconformist character of *avant-gardes* sought to crack the real and approach to the imaginary and the virtual. In the case of Modernism, this phase would be followed by an attempt to produce a "re-structuring of parts, a re-relating of the fragmented concepts" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991:80).

Bradbury and McFarlane explain that, eventually, modernity is perceived as a portent which by means of dissolution and unification of disparate entities produces a new “sense of flux, the notion of continuum, the running together of things in ways often contrary to the dictates of simple common sense” (1991:80-1), a sense of plurality within some kind of higher form of unity, analogous to the Romantic absolute: the non-unity of unity.

Nonetheless, as I have previously stated, the 20th century experimental quests do not allow for a single methodology as far as modernity is concerned. As Bradbury and McFarlane’s model makes clear, the re-structuring of fragmented parts acquiesces a mass of diverse possibilities.

The sometimes visionary aesthetic restructuring of the 20th century are, in Bradbury and McFarlane’s words, a “highly aesthetic response,” which is based on the crucial premise that “the registering of modern consciousness or experience was not a problem in representation but [...] a problem in the making of structures” (1991:28-9). In this context, “[t]he act of fictionality thus becomes a crucial act of imagining” which endows the artist with a special aesthetic responsibility “at the same time this sort of order seemed more than ever difficult to create out of a reality increasingly shapeless” (1991:50)

Conversely, the modern fragment is also thought-provoking, due to the fact it joins the ideas of spatial and temporal rupture. Whereas certain modern responses act in response by looking at the idea of the regenerative organic cycle, in consonance with romantic approaches to nature, the 20th century notices the rise of mathematical non-

linear models at several levels of the structure; that is, not a closed cycle of generation, decay and rebirth but a complex spatial temporality that surmounts sequence by means of folds.

3.3. Interdisciplinarity and ambiguity in 20th century representations

Unlike other literary forms that frequently had a tumultuous relationship with a hypothetically objective “reality” that they would try to mirror in an exact and transparent way, short fiction has often sought to highlight fantastic features, and as stated before, the discussion on the fantastic is also narrowly related to the theme of ambiguity.

Friedrich Nietzsche who in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, (1878) (*Human, All-Too-Human*) anticipated many of the claims of the movement towards ambiguity in the 20th-century, but the theoretical thread that would explore aspects of ambiguity related to philosophy, art in general and literature in particular passes by very diverse authors, mainly William Empson, whose work *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) was fundamental for the development of *New Criticism*. Also work by Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* where he explains that "through irony, paradox, ambiguity and other rhetorical and poetic devices of his or her art, the poet works constantly to resist any reduction of the poem to a paraphrasable core, favoring the presentation of conflicting facets of theme and patterns of unresolved stresses" (Leitch 1350). In France it was Maurice Blanchot, who dedicated his work to French symbolists such as the poet

Stéphane Mallarmé and his formulation of literary language as anti-realist and different from everyday experience. Blanchot's work is also linked to that of his colleagues Georges Bataille and Emmanuel Levinas. Theorists such as Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, François Lyotard or Jean Baudrillard have gone over patterns of representation and the conception of reality and the world as exercises of construction, underlying performative aspects, that is, the idea of culture as process. In Mikhail Bakhtin's trail, Julia Kristeva scrutinises certain artistic strategies guided by the need of excess and transgression that the Russian theorist terms "grotesque realism". Works recovering Walter Benjamin's thesis on the influence of technology upon modernity, such as those by Buc-Glucksmann or Calabrese's work, and in Spanish research by Arriarán and Beuchot, de la Flor, Jarauta, Lucas, Maravall, Sarduy, Cornago Bernal or Octavio Paz, all of which consolidate new perspectives on the baroque, modernity (or rather postmodernity) and the importance of ambiguity. The vision of representation as a field of tensions and contradictions but also of dialogue is recuperated. Ideas of excess and transgression were somehow also developed by Caillois, Bataille etc., defined by Sarduy (85) and de la Flor (16) as "hipertelia" o "ultratelia", that is a state in which representation mechanisms seem to go beyond their apparent ends, creating new types of relations between signified and signifier, trying to reflect not a unique reality but diverse perceptions of it and fundamentally avoiding all utilitarian interest in order to acquire the condition of revolutionary gratuity. In works such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno and Horkheimer theorized their aesthetic theory as a correction to abstract and instrumental thought.

The movement towards dialogue, process and ambiguity manifests itself in various disciplines such as radical constructivism (see Schmidt, Glasserfeld, Tötösy de Zepetnek), complex systems paradigms (see Ilya Prigogine, Morin, Deleuze *The Fold*), breakthroughs in the field of quantum physics (Heisenberg; Bohr), neurobiology (Maturana & Varela; W. Calvin), biology (Bertalanffy) or cybernetics (see Wiener, Martin Jay, Luhman, Bertalanffy, Gleick, Capra), all show a change of orientation towards models that emphasize processes instead of states, and even a certain empiricism anti-objectivist with the sight on uncertainty, non-linear dynamic systems theory (also called “chaos theories”), complexity, fractal geometry, etc., where the relationship between the principles of order and disorder, imbalance and instability, construction and deconstruction, and the discovery of an unpredictable world beyond statistic trends.

These are the foundations of a systemic way of knowing that unveils a world apprehensible only from a new epistemology of complexity and ambiguity. Within this epistemology, the distinction between open and closed systems becomes fundamental. Closed systems are characterized by two conditions: centre and a perimeter. Their symmetrical organization around their centre confers order and stability but also stiffness and stagnation. The second ones generate expansive forces that can create a crisis within the system in its movement towards openness. The same persistence is manifested in the development of critical theory where deconstructive mechanisms, such as those unravelled by Jacques Derrida or orientations towards an aesthetic of reading based on reception and audience studies and “the open work” (George Landow noted

this convergence in his *Hypertext 2.0* and Katherine Hayles in *Chaos Bound*) These readings elude canonical order and essential stability, requiring instead acts of invention in a world in continuous movement (see Eco). While the humanities and the arts congratulate themselves for this new alliance with the sciences which seems to aim at all-embracing knowledge, even if ambiguous, of reality, and where diverse approaches enhance one another under comparative study, one wonders if these shared paradigms of uncertainty and ambiguity are the simple result of interdisciplinary dialogue, intertextuality and re-mediation (transferring previous discourses into multiple media formats) or if, on the other hand, we are really talking about a cultural and epistemological revolution.

The rapprochement between reason and intuition, between empiricism and spiritualism, between perception and abstraction, has one of its most radical expressions both in Wittgenstein's thought and the crisis of phenomenology. The difficulty of capturing reality through perception can be tracked down to Baudelaire's work, *Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, and is the fundamental objective of many modernist and 20th-century *avant-gardes*, artistic movements artists, whose works announce the crisis of the object tied to the crisis of the mutant perceiving subject. It is therefore not its sense of time-period, of being yet another categorization, but its character of dynamic process, integrative of opposites and open to change, what allows us to contemplate postmodernism more as a new way of looking towards the cultural past that implies a radical revision of dominant epistemological paradigms, now oriented towards ambiguity, complexity and hybrid coding.

The project of the avant-gardes and later the postmodern struggle to constitute itself simultaneously as opening and closing, as the end of representation and history in order to inaugurate a new moment within a never ending process, is thus a symptom or expression of the underlying epistemological crisis; a comprehension that moves towards sceneries beyond what can be named, that is, towards the mystery of the infinite, the unstable, the empty and the fantastic in art (Baudrillard 46; see also Lyotard). This crisis has its origin in the new forms of materiality of objects, forms mediated more and more by digital technologies and mass communication, which have meant not only the multiplication of representational spaces but the growing re-mediation of these spaces (see various publications by López-Varela).

3.4. The new aesthetic

With the exception of some forms of Modernism, which strive for utopian closure, the new aesthetic that emerges in the 20th avant-gardes is not an aesthetic of totality but a aesthetic of the fragment; of moments of singularity that insist on the rupture of the inscription of the whole, and proceeding by variations and re-writings. Hence, new poetics centre on 1) the study of detail (photography, slow motion cinema, close-ups, minimalism, etc.), 2) the production of fragments (collage, description without unity, exquisite corpse or cadaver, and other surrealist techniques), 3) in the reception of details and fragments, as we shall mention below. There is also a desire to exceed limits,

a desire of eccentricity and excess, imagination, fantasy, etc., all implying destabilization. Omar Calabrese has indicated that the *avant-gardes* value the work of art as a diversion of the norm resulting in ambiguity, but also novelty and originality, and this is reflected in the development of short stories.

In the postmodern paradigm, however, artists are used to the fact that works can continue to generate themselves by re-readings, re-writings and re-creation, becoming dynamic systems that try to overcome exhaustion by opening themselves, instead of centralizing, categorizing or closing as classical systems did. This aesthetics of re-creation and repetition brings into play several modalities: standardization, that is, the possibility of serial production (TV series for instance); structural variation, as movie's follow-ups; repetition of standard fragments, etc. Calabrese describes these modes of repetition: iconic which respects images (maintaining for instance the same protagonist), thematic and narrative (structural variations, scripts, recurrent motifs, etc.).

Contemporary technology, the different types of information support materials, text, image, audio, video, etc., produce all these variations. In fact, what we term "hypermedia" produces all type of reconfiguration, re-mediating classical formats and converting them in digital and intermedial. Thus, we are talking about a phenomenon where the cultural and the technological meet, since repetition arises from excess of information, that is excess of history, what once more shows the corpuscular and local character of the cultural (the fact there exist different cultures and that these change over time). At an epistemological level this shows once more fragmentation, questioning again the concept of totality.

The fragmentation of totality also appears as deconstruction of categories. As we have shown in previous sections, this is the case of literary genres, which become more and more hybrid. New technologies enable even more inter-generic crossings. Poetic sense is found by means of a removal from regularity and the search for ambiguity.

At the level of literary characters' presentation the changes in aesthetic orientation show the incorporation of negative principles, how seen under a new light. At a structural level labyrinth visions proliferate. The labyrinth is also one of the images of chaotic systems: it has order but it is hidden and complex. The complexity of the labyrinth can be defined as ambiguous: on the one hand it denies the value of the global; on the other it constitutes a challenge to find a new order. That is, the labyrinth is a game which begins with a pleasure, that of getting lost, and ends with another pleasure, that of finding oneself. It is the pleasure of the enigma resolution, process that it is only possible through a vision of constant change, through transformation more than stability; open, interdisciplinary, dynamic, according to a non-lineal path of the plot, even at the risk of losing orientation.

Like Gilles Deleuze, Omar Calabrese proposes that this characteristic is part of a generalized rejection of sistematization, caused by a new nomad way of living-thinking. It is easy to relate this to changes in our ways of living during the 20th-century, as means of transport have allowed greater mobility, including large contemporary diaspora, along with the revolution in communication media.

3.5 Technological development and the figure of the productive consumer

It is not necessary to point out once again that these changes in our ways of living are associated to technological changes that in turn enable cultural and ideological changes. In this research, I am suggesting that the technological is related to the apparition of the fantastic because it allows new ways of seeing and imagining the world that surrounds us. Studies such as those by Walter Benjamin, “The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction”, or more recently John Berger’s *Ways of seeing*, show the cultural changes that technologies such as photography or cinematography introduced in human’s consciousness of our own observation. The camera makes evident that what we are watching is framed within a spatial and temporal context, even if it break the uniqueness of the image allowing its infinite reproduction, depraving it from its original context. Although photographing might seem as an act of no intervention it is indeed much more than a passive observation. It would be equivalent to sexual *voyeurism* in that observation contributes, at least tacitly, to stimulate so that what is happening continues to happen. If the camera can, thus, invade, transgress and distort, cinema allows even more. Christian Metz established an analogy between the cinema screen and the mirror, explaining that by means of identification with the gaze in the camera, the spectator can re-establish what the theorist of psychoanalysis Jacques Lacan called “mirror stage”, a scenery where looking into the mirror allows the child to see him or herself for the first

time as *other* – a significant stage in ego formation. In this sense, we can establish a link with what Lacan calls “dialectic of identification with the other” (*Écrits*, 4), pointing out that the function of the mirror stage is reveal to us as a particular case in the function of the imago, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality.

We could situate the main characteristic of the 20th-century paradigms as an invasion of space, to the detriment of temporal models which become integrated in the system’s own dynamics (see research by López-Varela). The spaces of the *avant-gardes* incite looking positions that are not satisfied with *voyeurism* and seek the implication of the observer, reader, etc., turning him/her into a performer; an architecture of vision that places the audience in a spatial relationship with what is being represented. This perspectival disposition is not statically ordered but the result of an articulation of complex spatial conditions where the borders are continually re-written in relation to the audience/spectator, depending on his/her focal point.

As an open and dynamic system, the new aesthetics knows that objectivity is impossible and, thus, encourages the reader/audience/spectator to become involved. It develops intentionality which aesthetically also strengthens distortions. It is in this sense a form of perversion that encourages interactivity. According to Fredric Jameson’s, this new aesthetics makes us productive consumers. Omar Calabrese again indicates that there is pleasure in breaking perimeter rules and that this is reflected in two possible attitudes: a tendency towards the border, limit or threshold (without completely breaking the rules), and the need to overcome it. Calabrese offers several examples to illustrate the operation of overcoming the threshold. One is the manipulation of “slow motion” to

create certain effects in cinema, television or video. The other is the so-called *zapping* which allows the viewer the possibility of fragmenting discourses.

These possibilities of surmounting the time/space threshold appear also in multitasking. By luck or misfortune, nowadays a growing number of people prefer to interact with tablets and mobile phones watch TV. Unlike TV *zapping* audiences, Internet users have at their reach a huge amount of all kinds of information, fit for all pleasures. One can read, search for information in libraries all over the world, buy products, watch a movie, speak through the telephone line with anyone anywhere in the world using programmes such as *Skype*, seek sexual pleasures, etc., etc. The user constructs his/her own palimpsest or individual collage, providing significances *à la carte*. Internet users seek greater freedom in their paths, more interactivity and structures sufficiently open and flexible to allow manipulation of information in a radical way. Open code, Open Access, Peer-sharing, Wiki movements are a few examples. In the case of short stories, a number of sites encourage the production of short stories directly from the readers.

3.6. Short Fiction, changing of formats and conditions of hybridity: From fragments to flux: the evolution of the body patchwork

As we explore the relationship between technological development, the materiality of objects, and the emergence of fantastic models, it becomes evident that during the 20th century there is a growing return to the fantastic and its foundations are a systemic way

of knowing that unveils a world apprehensible only from a new epistemology of complexity and ambiguity. This ambiguity emerges in the form and content of short narratives and also in the blurring of differences between formats and genres complicates the definition of short narratives and other shorter forms.

As mentioned, the development of short fiction and the emergence of even shorter micronarrative formats is particularly strong in the 20th century, when contemporary short story writers depart from the models provided by Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* and *Historical Roots of Russian Fairy Tales*, which fixed structural patterns replicated until the 19th century and gathered in collections such as those by the German Grimm Brothers or Hans Christian Andersen. More recently, Italo Calvino (1923-1985) who published *Italian Folktales* in 1956, skillfully used hybrid elements of the fable and the fantastic to create his own stories.

This inherent splitting of spirit from matter can be seen as the foundation of the nature versus culture dichotomy. As a consequence, when theorists focus on the problematic status of the human body, they tend to draw a parallel to the equally problematic status of the physical world. Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* argues that the separation of body and mind resulted in a perception of human identity in which the body is scorned and rejected as something inferior, and at the same time desired as something forbidden, objectified, and alienated, a dead thing or *corpus*. They add that this denigration of the body is a result of the reduction of nature to an object for domination, a raw material. (1979:232-3). This understanding assumes that both the body and the physical world have been devalued by the paradigm shift

instigated by Enlightenment-thinkers like René Descartes (1596-1650) who, in his *Meditations* (1641), advocated the separation of mind and matter—*res extensa* and *res cogitans*, nature and the body. To Descartes, representation occurs when a space is identified and acquires meaning in the mind of a thinking subject. Physical perception (*res extensa*), made up of fragments moving towards decomposition and death, allows the *res cogitans* to account for a variety of information, later held as a unified mental idea. His mechanistic view sought to provide a kind of framework for the infinity variety of forms of the world, fragments harmonically linked to a kind of higher ‘whole’ entity which was the divine. The relation between ideas and their representations were based on a claim to natural or transparent mediation, aimed at contributing to give meaning to everything in the world and contribute to the unity of the whole.

Descartes’s dualism was based on a distinction between mechanical, unthinking matter (minerals, plants, and animals, as well as the human body) and the pure thinking mind (exclusive to humans and God). Since humans alone are a mixture of extended matter and thinking mind, they are the only ones that can feel and experience sensations. All other organisms, consisting solely of extended matter, are nothing more than automatons, unable to feel pleasure or suffer pain. This definition of humans as rational beings has profoundly altered the individual's sense of the self. The Cartesian separation of mind and matter, establishes a distinction that reflects human self-estrangement from the physical world. Nature denotes all that is external and unconnected to the human condition, out there to be used and controlled.

Ultimately, as John Dewey has demonstrated the separation of body and mind sustains the belief that “mind, soul, and spirit can exist and go through their operations without any interaction of the organism with its environment,” (1980:263) as well as the fact that industrial transmutations of urban environments are perceived as intrusions from without, for which humans are not fully responsible. “In making mind purely immaterial (isolated from the organ of doing and undergoing), the body ceases to be living and becomes a dead lump” (1980:264), a collection of parts, a dissectible organism, separated from an ideal organic unity to the cosmos and society, as Mary Shelley criticized in her novel *Frankenstein*. The study of anatomy and dissection tore the body apart so that pieces could be replaced by other elements. Even contemporary Donna Haraway’s struggle to use the cyborg as a figure of contemporary online activities is haunted by the awareness that “[o]ur machines are disturbingly lively, and we are frighteningly inert” (1991:152) Rousseau’s impetus advocates that human supremacy is not based on an emancipation from nature. His nostalgic return to childhood as a place of reconciliation with the authentic ‘nature’ of the human locates alienation not only in the industrial city, but also in representation, for the examination of this nostalgia highlights the ambiguity of its frame of reference. The crisis of representation (and imagination), present also in Percy B. Shelley’s *Defense of Poetry*, entails the artist’s demonstration of rhetorical distress. Representation and mimesis becomes the mark of absence (see López-Varela and Saavedra 2017)

The empirical approach seeks to isolate events and work with context-free abstractions of knowledge so that it entails an atomizing pattern. Neil Evernden

explains, “When we abstract, we 'take away' or 'withdraw—we remove something from the totality.' Abstraction is not only a noun, [as] we commonly use it, meaning 'the idea of something which has no independent existence' or 'a thing which exists only in idea.' It is also a verb: 'the act or process of separating in thought, of considering a thing independently of its association'; it is an action, not simply an idea divorced from reality.” (1993:47-8) In the search for objective abstraction, the exclusion of subjective attributes, which, are essential to an embodied experience of the world, creates a fragmented material which is no longer organic, but dead. “[w]hen the linkage of the self with its world is broken, then also the various ways in which the Self interacts with the world cease to have a unitary connection with one another. They fall into separate fragments of sense, feeling, desire, purpose” (Dewey 1980:247). Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of Enlightenment pointed out this “the disenchantment of the world” (1979:3), a distance that has reduced the physical world to an object to be exploited and subjected to human interests.

Wilhelm Leibniz’s *Monadology* and his theory of the monad was another attempt to find a solution to the problem of the individual thing and its order in the universe. To Leibniz, each element was a different expression of the infinite variability of natural material things contained in the same divine universe. Each monad had an irreducible structure which did not open onto the world nor allowed the world enter its domain. However, each fragment showed infinite potential to be directed toward this unity, which the Romantics later identified as the Hegelian ‘absolute’, a sort of universal organizing principle. Walter Benjamin’s postdoctoral work on the *The Origin of German*

Tragic Drama (Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels 1928), and his earlier thesis *The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism*, focused on the potential of the fragment in the baroque period. For Benjamin, the fragmented structure of baroque allegory, a variation from the logical argumentative traditions, and from Leibniz's closed monad, created as a metamorphic representational form that held together parallelisms as well as differences. Benjamin claimed that "every single monad contains, in an indistinct way, all the others" and this establishes "the becoming of phenomena in their Being" (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 1998: 47). Benjamin tried to distinguish between being and phenomenon, for being was an entity that contained all its history, all its past. By associating the fragment with the philosophical structure of the monad the fragment is aligned with a particular philosophical-historical discourse that seeks to account for the ontological totality of Being. Thus, Benjamin believed that Schlegel "committed the old error of confounding 'abstract and 'universal' when he believed he had to make that [Absolute] ground [of art] into an individual" (*Selected Writings* 1, 166–7). Benjamin's believed in the superiority and openness of the baroque allegory over the closeness of romantic symbol, as explained by Paul de Man in his *Allegories of Reading* (1979). Benjamin's work can be seen as resolving some of the philosophical divisions regarding the fragment as void or as wholeness-in-the-making, as well as the fragment as a close or open structure, or the fragment as an organic system. To Benjamin, the fragment preserves, perhaps unseen or invisibly, loss as a value of plenitude. Consequently the fragment acquires a generic representational function, and wholeness and fullness based on this function.

Benjamin's reading of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) points out the identification of Romanticism with Modernity due to its interest in autonomy and the balance between *techne* and *poiesis*, skill and genius (see López-Varela 2017). To Baudelaire, the romantic fragment is open and disperse, not cumulative; concerned with the nature of becoming, not with the becoming of Being. In his view, the disposition of the Romantic age is to make a fragment of anything, articulating difference and presence as a moment caught in the tempest of progress, a disposition inherited by 20th century avant-gardes which are, to Benjamin, expressions of a similar ethos. Baudelaire's definition of modernity unfolds in the context of a discussion on beauty and contemporary art in his 1863 essay "The Painter of Modern Life." His notion of modernity emphasizes the tension between the transitory and incomplete and the whole and stable. For Baudelaire, however, modernity is not an ideal to which transitory fragments and experiences refer. It emerges as the difference between opposing forces. Modernity can only be understood as a fragment, as that which introduces difference: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable." (1964: 13) Unlike the Romantic fragment, the Modern fragment is viewed in relation to a whole that is not. In some Modernisms, the fragment seeks a resolution; a promise of the whole. The most radical avant-gardes (i.e. Futurism, Surrealism) see the new (the modern) as something transitory, a passing 'mode' (or fashion) that, instead of mourning the loss of unity, celebrates "the pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present", "due not only to the beauty with which it can be invested, but also to its essential quality of being present."

(Baudelaire 1964: 1) This is precisely what Baudelaire tries to achieve in his poetry, the gap between the whole and the transitory in the form of lyric expression by means of the evocation of a mental image which is at odds with an idea. An example is his poem “La Beauté” where Baudelaire shows his disdain for idealism:

Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre,
Et mon sein, où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour,
Est fait pour inspirer au poète un amour
Éternel et muet ainsi que la matière.
Je trône dans l'azur comme un sphinx inconnu;
J'unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes;
Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,
Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris.
Les poètes, devant mes grandes attitudes,
Que j'ai l'air d'emprunter aux plus fiers monuments,
Consumeront leurs jours en d'austères études;
Car j'ai, pour fasciner ces dociles amants,
De purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles:
Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles!

I'm fair, O mortals, as a dream of stone;
My breasts whereon, in turn, your wrecks you shatter,
Were made to wake in poets' hearts alone
A love as indestructible as matter.
A sky-throned sphinx, unknown yet, I combine
The cygnet's whiteness with a heart of snow.

I loathe all movement that displaces line,
And neither tears nor laughter do I know.
Poets before my postures, which I seem
To learn from masterpieces, love to dream
And there in austere thought consume their days.
I have, these docile lovers to subject,
Mirrors that glorify all they reflect —
These eyes, great eyes, eternal in their blaze!

The poem shows the illusory aspect of the process of reflection, where Baudelaire introduces the idea of mirror reflection as transformation, making something other than it is and introducing an instability in the notion of beauty as body of an ideal, parts of a collective. This same position appears in “The painter of modern life”, where taking Edgar Allan Poe’s “The man of the crowd” as inspiration, Baudelaire reflects on fragments not as constitute parts of any sort of structural whole or essence, but as items which never resolve into unity: (Benjamin “Some motifs on Baudelaire” 1968: 165) Indeed, Modernity is not amenable to being systematized, that is, contemplated as a body, and the different avant-gardes as ‘movements’ of that body. Rather, in Modernity, the body becomes incomplete and ephemeral; a sort of Frankenstein; a spectre, a ghost in the machine.

Mary Shelley’s novel is concerned with understanding between *physis* (nature) and metaphysics, that which transcends and binds all the fragments in the world. In chapter II, the death of young Frankenstein’s mother triggers his desire to raise her ghost, “[...] a promise liberally accorded to my favourite authors, the fulfilment of

which I most eagerly sought.” “It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn”, he adds, “and whether it was the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical, it in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world (Shelley 1818: 30) Whereas in Romanticism, the struggle is for an ideal of form, that is, a material body, Modernity does not envision any sort of ‘natural’ connection to forms, as the idea of ‘reality’ begins to be dissolved in representational practices, each functioning according to diverse signs (icons, indexes and symbols in Charles S. Peirce’s classification).

Not a close system, the Modern body is always in the making, and can incorporate a growing number of parts and fragments which function in relation to the ‘other’. In Baudelaire, the pursuit of an ideal of beauty as an abstract entity which seeks to overcome the monstrosity of its isolated parts has disappeared alongside the illusion of totality. The modern fragment is only a ‘sign’ that operates as mediator between the object and the representation: Shklovsky’s “device of estrangement. Indeed, the Freudian split subject of Modernity, ego and id, whose sense of self (ego) is constituted by a mental image, a psychical representation of the body, which we only come to know in a partial way, for example through pleasure or pain and, above all, fear (i.e. castration).

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1962, 1968), the body-image is, as for Freud, a sort of map interpretation of the physical, which Lacan situates in the birth of ‘the symbolic’ (or the acquisition of language in socialization- the presence of the third or

father figure), it is important to note that significantly, this phenomenological map does not entirely coincide with the corporeal 'reality' of that body (and this has been demonstrated in the case of phantom limbs prosthesis). Jean Paul Sartre's (1943) holds a tripartite ontological phenomenology of the body: for-it-self (our conscious point of view on the world), for-others (what others perceive of us), and the alienated body (experienced by a subject compelled to take the point of view of others on its own body, which then becomes objectified; similar to Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection). Despite the fact that Freud, Lacan and Merleau-Ponty have been criticised by feminist scholars (i.e. Elizabeth Grosz 1994 or Toril Moi 2001) for their universalising use of the male body in their theorisation, so that the fear of bodily fragmentation seems to be gendered, an exploration of the representation of the body in female artists also seems to allegorize loss, representing moments of absence that strive for an illusion of wholeness. To Jacques Derrida's view, this is result of cultural ethos that "remains governed by the theme of presence [and] participates in the movement of the reduction of the trace." (*Of Grammatology*, 1976; 10-18 and 61-62) The trace refers to the phenomenological, as represented in discourse. This is not only the irony of 20th century deconstruction and postmodernism. It is also the irony of the 21st century, where the widespread use of technology in media communication has rendered 'natural' the denaturalisation of the body, performatively institutionalising fragmentation as the modern and the postmodern condition in the replication of normative discourses.

As mentioned before, the last years of the 20th century have seen an attempt to think nature and the body in terms of organic flux in order to "unhook ourselves from

the points of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to a dominant reality” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 1987:160). Deleuze and Guattari propose a “body without organs” which is the more living because “it has blown apart the organism and its organization” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 1987:30), escaping the authority of formal unity and hierarchy. It points to a vision of the world in which everything flows, with the body immersed in the ceaseless processes of its environment, no longer scattered in separate parts. But the concept of flux is not easily capture in the linearity of language. Not even in the iconicity of the image.

Margot Norris refers to Roland Barthes to illustrate the deficiency of analytical discourses to represent corporeality: “[...] in order to *make* a body *seen*, it must be either displaced, refracted through the metonym of clothing, or reduced to one of its parts.”(Barthes, quoted in Norris 1985:145-6) This decomposition of into fragments returns discussion to the metaphor of nature and the body as machines, comprising the same basic uniform constituents, following similar schemes, and performing similar processes that can be analysed easily. Thus, Adorno and Horkheimer explain that “[t]he man of science knows things in so far as he can make them” or “manipulate them” (1979:9), domesticated into language. Even the term organism derives from an analogy with a musical instrument made up of many parts.

“The irony of the Anthropocene is that we are conjuring ourselves as ghosts that will haunt the very deep future” writes David Farrier for *The Atlantic*.⁴ (31 Oct. 2016). The concept of ‘deep time’ was first described in 1788 by the Scottish geologist James

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/10/aeon-deep-time/505922/>

Hutton, although only coined as a term 200 years later, by the American author John McPhee. Deep time signifies a dynamic relationship its humanity in its greater geological and astronomical context, where awareness lies beyond the consciousness of sensorial experiences. It is a sort of return to the romantic idea of a metaphysical totality. But instead of the 'sublime', the 'uncanny' is more appropriate term, writes Farrier. Human activity has left a real impact on the earth. Even the data centres of "the cloud", which appear to be ephemeral, persist in the future, contributing to global warming, he writes. "Deep time is not an abstract, distant prospect, but a spectral presence in the everyday."

SECTION IV. Prose-Poetry in Horacio Quiroga (1878-1937)

This section highlights some significant events of Quiroga's life, since his biography plays an important role in his work. Then it will focus on his particular style, and on the thematic the writer frequently used. At the conclusion of this chapter I shall some prose-poems from *Coral reefs* (1901).

4.1 An introduction to Quiroga

Horacio Quiroga, a Uruguayan writer, could perhaps be denominated as the best storyteller in Latin America. His innovative stories respond sharply to the traditional narrative technique of his time, breaking with the literary tradition that dominated the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Arango, 153).

Apart from being a storyteller, Horacio Quiroga was also a playwright and poet, but to his reader circle he was possibly best known as the author of fantastic stories. His work is at the crossroads of two literary trends: his first creations belong to Modernism and in them he imitates his teacher, his friend and idol, Leopoldo Lugones, as the founder of the modernist school in Latin America, Ruben Dario (in terms of style and narrative technique). Later, he will approach the new literary trend, Vanguard, and begin to experiment with the form and content of his stories. Quiroga's book, *Coral reefs*, published in 1901, on which we are going to focus, belongs to the first period of his

creation, that is, to the modernist experience, since it is precisely in this opus that we find the short prose poems that resemble short-short stories.

The life and creation of Horacio Quiroga are strongly linked, which is not always the case with authors and their works. From childhood, he seems to have been surrounded by death: his father accidentally shot himself with a shotgun, when Quiroga was merely two months old. As a young man, he witnessed the suicide of his stepfather. His first wife also committed suicide in the jungle, desperate and tired of the life she led with him there; the very same Quiroga, discovering he had prostate cancer, committed suicide in 1937.

These occurrences create an obsession with death in the mind of the young writer and thus make the death precisely one of the most recurrent motifs in Quiroga's tales. In his narrative, he will try to represent how, when and where each of the protagonists of his stories meets his end. This is interesting to us, since the topic of death, being so universal, and touched by many poets, playwrights and writers, has not been precisely elaborated in the way Quiroga does:

La muerte en los cuentos de Horacio Quiroga no se presenta en forma natural, sino que ella sorprende a sus víctimas [...] La muerte accidental es muy frecuente en los cuentos de Quiroga, y esta se explica por las condiciones del medio que forman el trasfondo de sus cuentos: la selva. Las víctimas son de diferente género: hombres,

mujeres, serpientes, hormigas negras, abejas, caballos, toros, y otros seres del reino animal. (Arango, p.155)

[Death in the stories of Horacio Quiroga does not occur naturally; it surprises its victims [...] The accidental death is very common in Quiroga's stories, and this is explained by environmental conditions that form the background of his tales: the jungle. The victims are of different gender: men, women, snakes, black ants, bees, horses, bulls, and other creatures of the animal kingdom.]

Pablo Rocca confirmed what has been said previously, noting that, unfortunately, in the life of Horacio Quiroga there were many forgettable memories, episodes that were repressed and rejected in his mind:

Esa lista empieza con la vertiginosa carrera de suicidios que ocurren en su familia desde sus primeros años (padre, padrastro, la primera mujer) y que lo sobrevivieron, puesto que sus tres hijos se quitaron la vida en 1939, 1954 y 1988. (Rocca, p.27)

[The list begins with the heady rush of suicides that occur in his family since his early years (father, stepfather, the first wife) and what they must have gone through, since his three children killed themselves in 1939, 1954 and 1988.]

The first "stage" in Quiroga's life and work is related to the influences he receives from Ruben Dario, Leopoldo Lugones and his followers. Emir Rodriguez Monegal comments on the influence that these writers had on Horacio Quiroga:

Para Quiroga, el poeta argentino es el primer maestro. Su *Oda a la desnudez*, de ardiente y rebuscado erotismo, le revela todo un mundo poético. Luego ávidas lecturas (Edgar Allan Poe sobre todo) lo ponen en la pista de un decadentismo que hacía juego con su tendencia ligeramente esquizofrénica, con su hipersensibilidad natural. [...]
(Rodríguez Monegal, p.9)

[For Quiroga, Argentine poet is his first teacher. His *Ode to nudity*, filled with burning and stilted eroticism, reveals a whole world of poetry to him. Then avid readings (Edgar Allan Poe especially) place him on a runway of a decadence that matched his slightly schizophrenic tendency, with their natural hypersensitivity. [...]]

From the pages of Rodriguez Monegal we learn from that Quiroga travelled to Paris in 1900, dreaming about the great conquest of the city of lights, full of illusions; however, the reality was very different from his imagination, since he was starved and humiliated many times. (In 1949 he published a work in which he talked about

everything that happened to him while living there, *The Diary*). In Uruguay, in 1901, he founded a bohemian cenacle, el Consistorio de Gay Saber, and published *Coral reefs*, an openly erotic and decadent book that was poorly received in bourgeois circles of Montevideo.

His first book, which lists both prose and poems stories, caused a small literary scandal in the local literary sect. Pablo Rocca mentions the public reception of Quiroga's first works:

La burguesía montevideana debió ignorar el contenido del libro y hasta su misma aparición, pero se pudo enterar por las murmuraciones al día de cierto tono réprobo y aun satánico de algunas piezas, y quizá pudieron llegar a sus oídos ciertos versos de ese extravagante que pasaban el límite del pudor. (Rocca, p.18)

[The Montevideo bourgeoisie must have ignored the content of the book and even its very appearance, but it found out about its certain reprobate and even satanic tone of some parts by the daily gossip, and perhaps certain verses of that extravagant passing the limit of decency could have reached their ears.]

After accidentally having killed his best friend, Federico Ferrando, Quiroga left Uruguay forever. Defeated in the duel with reality, after several vicissitudes, he begins

to abandon the tenets of Modernism, and he turns towards the fantastic naturalism and realism. As early as 1907, when perhaps his best prose work, *Tales of love, madness and death*, appears, moves away from the Parnassian embrace and his stories become more and more similar to the Poe-ian stories. It already in this book where other Horacio Quiroga is gradually revealed to us. (Rodríguez Monegal, pages 9-11)

The most important step in the journey of his life and his literary work, is perhaps the discovery of Misiones, a province of Argentina. To this writer, the revelation of the jungle is the revelation of himself and his tormented interior. It attract him with its perpetual state of tension. In 1910. Quiroga bought land and settled there with his wife as a colonist. Misiones has a huge influence on his mind and on his creative process and Quiroga manages to dominate the narrative devices such as objectivity and accuracy of the description, precisely because of its surroundings. However, in this second stage of his creation, a "postmodern" one, he still has not reached the peak of his creative power, which seems to be related to his very being and the events of his life:

La visión es todavía externa. Aunque el narrador había alcanzado una habilidad enorme, aunque cuenta exactamente lo que quiere y como quiere, la creación, de magnífica objetividad, es limitada. Porque el narrador está notoriamente ausente de ella: es un testigo, a veces hasta un personaje secundario del relato, pero no está él entero, con sus angustias y su horrible sentido de la fatalidad personal. Reconoce y muestra el

destino que se desploma sobre los otros, pero cuando es él el implicado, la historia adquiere un leve tono humorístico. (Rodríguez Monegal, p.13)

[The vision is still external. Although the narrator had reached enormous skill, even he narrates exactly what he want and how he wishes to tell it, the creation of magnificent objectivity is limited. This is because the narrator is conspicuously absent from it: he is a witness, sometimes a secondary character in the story, but he is not wholly present, with his anguish and his horrible sense of personal fatality. He recognizes and shows us the destiny that collapses on top of the others, but when he's the one involved, the story takes on a slightly humorous tone.]

You can perfectly tell that the author fully experiences the surface of reality in which he lives, abandoning himself to receive his surroundings, both with mind and with his open arms. The reason he had to flee his own pain was the suicide of his first wife, the event which he, naturally, found very difficult to accept. The widower writes closed in the innermost, living with two small children; leaving the region of Misiones and trying to get rid of bad memories that haunt him. The books of this period, which lasts approximately until 1917, are the aforementioned *Tales of love, madness and death*; *Jungle Tales for children*; *The Wild* and *Anaconda*.

In opinion of Rodríguez Monegal, whose work helped us to tell the biography of the Uruguayan writer, the real, the more "mature" creation of Horacio Quiroga, begins in

1918 and extends intermittently until 1930. It is the time period in which Quiroga has not returned to Missions except for brief excursions: he is established in Buenos Aires and participates in the literary life of the capital of Argentina. (Rodríguez Monegal, 14)

Precisely in this period he published his best and most consistent book, entitled *The Exiles* (1926). We can freely say that this series of stories represents a master volume and deeper work of the author, since Quiroga now "enters" his stories:

El momento en el que la fría objetividad del comienzo, aprendida en Maupassant, ensayada a la vera de Kipling, da paso a una visión más profunda y no por ello menos objetiva. El artista está dentro de la obra. Esto no significa que sustituya a la obra. Significa que el relato ocupa no sólo la retina sino las capas más escondidas y personales de la individualidad creadora. (Rodríguez Monegal, 15)

[The moment when the cold objectivity of the beginning, learned from Maupassant, practised in Kipling's manner, gives way to a deeper vision which is by no means less objective. The artist is inside his book. This does not mean that he replaces the book. It means that the story concerns not only the retina but also the most hidden layers of personal and creative individuality.]

The characters depicted in these stories are marginalized individuals, and it is possible that part of the character of each and every one of them symbolizes the conflicting psychological profile of Quiroga himself, who projects it in the story. Interestingly, the same year he also published the book *Don Segundo Sombra* that managed to unite the gaucho literature to art and prove that literature of Argentina may have literary and “gaucho” qualities at the same time. Precisely because of this coincidence in publication, despite its quality and originality, the book was not sufficiently respected by his contemporaries:

[...] La realidad le presta su materia más inmediata para representar el mundo de misterio, patologías y alucinaciones de sus habitantes: *outsiders*, ex hombres, antihéroes que de algún modo son, a menudo, duplicaciones de sus propios conflictos interiores. La originalidad de *Los desterrados* fue poco valorada en su época, más propicia a apreciar libros como *Don Segundo Sombra*, un clásico del regionalismo imperante, que se publicó el mismo año. (Millares, 44)

[[...] The reality lends him the most immediate matter to represent the world of mystery, disorders and hallucinations of its inhabitants: *outsiders*, former men, antiheroes that somehow are often duplication of their own inner conflicts. The originality of the exiles was undervalued at the time, more conducive to appreciate books such as *Don Segundo*

Sombra, a classic of the prevailing regionalism, which was published the same year].

However, despite such poor reception in the circles of the elite literature, Quiroga was edited and reissued in Spain; Madrid Espasa Calpe publishing house included him in a collection of narrators; Babel literature magazine even dedicated a special number to him. Although this period is, as we can see, actually the most successful for him, since his literature is finally beginning to be known and praised, it is also the beginning of his period of gradual decline. Quiroga slowly abandons the creation; his stories are already too autobiographical; which makes them look more like the pages of a diary:

Artículos y notas que escribe cada vez con mayor abundancia a partir de 1922, vierten la experiencia acumulada por este hombre en tantos años de dolor y escasa alegría. De tanto en tanto publica textos (como *La serpiente de cascabel*, noviembre 27, 1931) en que es difícil trazar la línea de separación entre la ficción y el relato verídico. Aunque escribe algunos cuentos más, Quiroga ya está de espaldas al arte. (Rodríguez Monegal, 17)

[Articles and notes that he writes with increasing abundance from 1922, pour out the experience of this man in so many years of pain and little joy. From time to time he publishes texts (such as *Rattlesnake*, November 27, 1931) in which is difficult to draw the line between fiction and true

story. Although he wrote some more stories, Quiroga had already turned his back to art.]

In 1937 Horacio Quiroga committed suicide with cyanide that he had previously purchased at a pharmacy; he was found dead in hospital where he was about to undergo an operation that couldn't have completely cured him, but only mend him for some time. That was how a great genius of his time abandoned his life voluntarily, an immense writer and man hurt by past experiences that eventually got to him.

4.2. Themes and motifs in Quiroga's works

The first part of this chapter that have intentionally dedicated to Quiroga's biography will help us to better understand the themes and motifs he used to write about and the style he used in his stories since his work and his life are tightly linked.

First motif that is very present in his opus is the motif of death. His representation of death in his narratives is extremely realistic; death is a place of no return, when it occurs, it is abrupt, violent and eternal. This way of writing about death is probably due to his personal experiences with close relatives who died in this way. Reading his narrative, we have noticed a repeating pattern at the end of his stories: almost all the protagonists die and not infrequently too suddenly and forcefully.

Another recurring motif in the narrative of Horacio Quiroga is the motif of insanity. It is both a cause that frequently appears closely linked with the motif of death, sometimes anticipating it or rather acting as its intermediary. The best example of what we have just mentioned would be the famous quiroguian story "The slaughtered hen" when the idiot children of the married couple Manzini kill their only daughter, who was perfectly healthy because the "bad" family, due to their madness, saw her as a chicken. The motif that is also highlighted in this story is the motif of fear and terror provoked in readers, to which Quiroga was no stranger; some of his most successful stories are precisely horror stories ("The feather pillow" is also one of them).

The jungle motif, as a symbol of everything wild and barbaric, but also the contrast of natural versus the artificial, occupies a significant place in the best quiroguian stories. The jungle environment, on the one hand, serves to Quiroga to interpret the return to the beginning of humanity, when there were still strong ties between human beings and Mother Nature. His descriptions are very careful when writing about vast forests, rivers, wild animals, snakes, endemic fevers and fights between a man and an untamed jungle, which in most cases end up in tragedies and human victims.

The quiroguian eroticism, the motif that also stands out in many of his stories, made both mature and young women the strongest group of his readers; Horacio Quiroga used to initially focus exclusively on clandestine relations between men and women from different social classes, this subject and the manner of its elaboration was apparently quite attractive to them. With the passage of time, the writer begins to replace

the bourgeois type of woman by jungle woman and dares to pose a high sexual temperature, which was also excellently received in his female readers' cycle. (Rocca, 81).

The last type of stories, but not the least important, that should be mentioned, would be Quiroga's tales for children. Horacio Quiroga wanted to contribute to the children's market and the education system in Uruguay. This prompted him to write his own book of short stories, entitled "Tales from the jungle". Unfortunately, his book was rejected by school inspectors, which found them distasteful, poverty reflected in the repetition of words, the lack of moral in most narratives except "Lazy bee" that seems to exemplify the Marxist maxim that "he who does not work does not eat." Pablo Rocca, however, convinces us of the existence of Horacio Quiroga's didactic intentions regarding this book:

En todo caso, a Quiroga le importa mostrar a través de estas historias los valores que el hombre puede aprender de los animales, convenientemente humanizados o dotados de consciencia: la generosidad sin precio, la valentía, la entrega al trabajo colectivo y solidario, la utilidad de violencia cuando no hay otra alternativa. (Rocca, 106)

[If anything, Quiroga cares to show, through these stories, the values that man can learn from animals, suitably humanized or endowed with

consciousness: priceless generosity, courage, dedication and collective solidarity work, the utility of violence when there is no other alternative.]

Apart from his personal experience that greatly influenced his creations, sometimes (especially in the stories he wrote after 1930) to such an extent that you could not tell where life ended and where literature began, the influences that other writers had on the opus of Horacio Quiroga are also worth mentioning. Hanne Beck Gabriele states:

Quiroga pasa desde los cuentos de *Las mil y una noches* y de Andersen, a través de las fantasías científicas de Verne a escritores como Dumas, Scott, Dickens, Balzac, Zola, los hermanos Goncourt, Maupassant, a los grandes rusos, Dostoievski, Turguenef, Tolstoi. Su gusto lírico se ve satisfecho por Heine, Bécquer y Hugo. (Beck, 9)

[Quiroga passes from the tales of the *Arabian Nights* and Andersen, through scientific fantasies of Verne to writers like Dumas, Scott, Dickens, Balzac, Zola, the Goncourt brothers, Maupassant, great Russians, Dostoevsky, Turguenief, Tolstoy. His lyrical taste is satisfied by Heine, Bécquer and Hugo.]

We can consider Horacio Quiroga a true disciple of Edgar Allan Poe and Maupassant, Kipling, Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Joseph Conrad. He learned with his "masters" the lessons of aesthetics and in the beginning, he incorporated them into his

creations when necessary. You could say that from each of them, he inherited a certain trait of their style, but at the same time, he gave a personal touch to his entire opus:

De Edgar Allan Poe: el bagaje de lo extraordinario; de Guy de Maupassant, el realismo minucioso y la interpretación de la psicología femenina; de Chejov: la pintura de los personajes, de Conrad: la poesía vivencial; de Kipling: el paisaje. (Orgámbide, 132).

[From Edgar Allan Poe: the baggage of the extraordinary; from Guy de Maupassant, the meticulous realism and interpretation of female psychology; Chekhov: depiction of the characters, Conrad: the existential poetry; Kipling: the landscape.]

Since Quiroga occasionally dedicated himself to journalism, he could undertake various forms of writing such as chronicle or cultural article. About twenty journals from both banks of River Plate welcomed his texts. Writing for the press made him learn the domain of an austere and concentrated prose, the stylistic feature that we shall elaborate later on. However, he also managed to shed the somewhat schematic forms of his first articles and conquer grace, humor and irony. (Rocca, 70)

The quiroguian style could be termed bipolar and highly contrasted: on one side are the topics on which he wrote, such as love, eroticism, madness and death, coupled with the fantastic elements of fear and horror; secondly, there are accuracy, brevity,

density, tendency towards synthesis and objectivity, which were the only way for Horacio Quiroga to describe the literary world and the characters he had created. Pedro Orgambide adds:

Dos mundos en lucha, en permanente contradicción e interacción que, sólo en su síntesis, nos dan la acabada imagen de Quiroga. Desde luego, no era posible expresar este orden en la labor creadora sin poseer todos los recursos de un gran escritor. Fue esto lo que logró el perfecto cuentista: encontrar un lenguaje personal e intransferible para narrar su drama. (Orgambide, 129)

[Two worlds fighting, in constant contradiction and interaction that, only in their synthesis, give us the finished image of Quiroga. Of course, it was not possible to express this order in the creative work without having all the resources of a great writer. It was this that the perfect storyteller managed to do: find a personal and not transferable language to narrate his drama.]

The author even wrote the guidelines or, rather, the advice that other writers should follow if they wanted to polish and perfect their style; they are found in the book *Decalogue of the perfect storyteller*. Quiroga choose words like "strength," "concision" and "concentration" to highlight the primary qualities of the short story: the power of the

noun, which must always be used before the adjective, the importance of the sharp phrase before the use of circumlocution, and economy of words, which is precisely one of the most important features of modern short-short stories. However, it is interesting that Quiroga sometimes twists the syntax and conjugation of tenses and pronominal forms in the speech of his characters whose mother tongue isn't Spanish; orality of illiterate person has priority above a cultured voice, which is further proof of his desire for objectivity and faithfulness to the realistic interpretation of its protagonists. (Rocca, 117-120)

4.3 From prose poetry to Short Fiction: Charles Baudelaire and Horacio Quiroga

Quiroga's stories respond to narrative innovative techniques that sought to break the literary tradition dominant at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th-centuries (Arango, 153) Quiroga has often been named a true disciple of Poe, Maupassant, Dostoyevsky, Kipling, Chekhov and Conrad. He adopted their aesthetic principles and he went on to incorporate them in his own creations. We may say that he inherited certain characteristics of style from each of them, while maintaining a personal touch to his entire opus.

De Edgar Allan Poe: el bagaje de lo extraordinario; de Guy de Maupassant, el realismo minucioso y la interpretación de la psicología

femenina; de Chekhov: la pintura de los personajes, de Conrad: la poesía vivencial; de Kipling: el paisaje. (Orgambide, 132)

[From Edgar Allan Poe: the baggage of the extraordinary; from Guy de Maupassant, the meticulous realism and the interpretation of the feminine psychology; from Chekhov: the painting of the characters, from Conrad: experimental poetry; from Kipling: the landscape.] (Orgambide, 132)

However, the influence of Charles Baudelaire as a pioneer of modern Short Fiction is also very important. Baudelaire's work in which modernist prose poetry crystallized is, without a doubt, the famous *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1842), posthumous book by Aloysius Bertrand. Juan Armando Epple clearly designates him as the precursor of the modernist prose poetry. He offers some details about his life, discovering that he was of Belgian origin and the fact that the author had past the most of his years in Dijon and Paris working as a journalist. (Epple, 32) His book (*The Fantasies of the Gaspar of the Night*) was "un conjunto de poemas en prosa, con temas oníricos y fantásticos centrados en la Edad Media." [a collection of the prose poetry with oneiric and fantastic themes placed in the medieval period.] (Epple, 33) The text had been rediscovered by Charles Baudelaire and it influenced his later narrative. It is interesting that Aloysius Bertrand had never used, while talking about his revolutionary poems, the expression 'prose poetry'. This differentiates him from Baudelaire, who even explicitly entitled his book

The short prose poetry, thus opening the door to the new literary genre and naming it at the same time.

Baudelaire, named the ‘accursed poet’ by Paul Verlaine under the pseudonym *Pauvre Lelian.*, was an appellative used to refer to him at the time, eventually adopting the more pejorative ‘ill-fated’, also used to refer to Tristan Corbiere, Stephane Mallarme, Arthur Rimbaud, and other melancholic, anarchic, bohemian authors who seemed to oppose the revered values of society. These authors rendered themselves free innovations without imposing limitations and norms from the past. The ‘accursed poets’ were also denominated “Parnassians”, in reference to the Greek mountain, Parnassus, dwelling place of the poetic muse of inspiration. Baudelaire was a major figure within Symbolism, a literary movement that emerged during his lifetime, almost at the same time as Romanticism. It is believed that he planted the seed of modernity that flourished afterwards with the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Dario in South America.

Many critics of the time disliked what they considered the vile and repugnant creations of Charles Baudelaire, whose vision of evil impregnated all of his work. Such was the disdain of the censors and the judges of the literary scene that they were blind to any positive changes that the new movement may have introduced. Refusing to conform to rules imposed by their society, Baudelaire and the circle of his faithful followers became self-marginalized. Critics mostly attacked him for his bohemia and his morbid passions, placing emphasis on his abundant economic problems. In drawing a psychological portrait of the artist, Ernesto Feria Jaldon assures us that “Por [...] denunciar la ignorancia, la mediocridad y la incomunicación, estaba sumido en la más

temible soledad.” [Because... he denounced ignorance, mediocrity and lack of communication, he was submerged in the most terrible solitude]. (9) Feria Jaldon confirms that Baudelaire’s personality had a lot in common with the contents of his literary work, especially since the writer had lived as a prisoner of his own subjectivity. Being intelligent and perceptive, inordinately objective and flexible, Charles Baudelaire saw a glimpse of the defects and vices of the contemporary society in which he lived.

Little Poems in Prose was a collection inspired by Aloysius Bertrand, as stated in the prologue of the book. The compilation wanted to stimulate visions of the city of Paris, all filled with melancholy. The truly wondrous thing about the book are the stylistic devices Baudelaire perused in order to describe the heart of France. He managed to do so merely by using a few words imbued in visual metaphors with a strong significance. In order to show the workings of such metaphors, let us look at one of the poems and compare its features with similar characteristics in Flash Fiction. The Stranger is an extraordinarily well-written poem in prose, which, at the same time, possesses great many features of short short stories. The complete original and the translation are reproduced below :

L'Étranger

- Qui aimes-tu le mieux, homme énigmatique, dis? ton père, ta mère, ta soeur ou ton frère?
- Je n'ai ni père, ni mère, ni soeur, ni frère.
- Tes amis?

- Vous vous servez là d'une parole dont le sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu.
- Ta patrie?
- J'ignore sous quelle latitude elle est située.
- La beauté?
- Je l'aimerais volontiers, déesse et immortelle?
- L'or?
- Je le hais comme vous haïssez Dieu.
- Eh! qu'aimes-tu donc, extraordinaire étranger?
- J'aime les nuages... les nuages qui passent... là-bas... là-bas... les merveilleux nuages!

The Stranger

- Tell me, enigmatical man, who do you love best, your father, your mother, your sister or your brother?
- I have neither father, nor mother, nor sister, nor brother.
- Your friends?
- You are using the word whose meaning, until today, I had never known.
- Your homeland?
- I don't know in what latitude it lies.
- Beauty?
- I could indeed love her, since she is an immortal Goddess.

-Gold?

-I hate it like you hate God.

-Then, what is it that you love, extraordinary stranger?

-I love the clouds... The clouds that pass up there... I love the marvelous clouds!

At this point, it is important to emphasize the importance of the language economy as far as short short stories are concerned. One word on a blank piece of paper might offer a tremendous impact upon the reader's perceptions and comprehensions, creating a metaphorical image that expands in parabolic representation. Such is the power of the word and the void; the empty space that seems to ask to be filled in. Collective and individual memory finds expression in ritualistic behaviour, cultural values and artistic representations. A glance at art history shows that culture offers several modes of *incorporating* a body (*corpus*) or physical reality in mental worlds. The different types of signs that appear in written discourse, the visual arts, architecture, sculpture, and mathematical codes, allow humans to record events in memory for future use. In her analysis of the impact of personal trauma on Walter Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle," a work inspired by Baudelaire's city experiences, and partly written during Benjamin's exile in Paris, the author finds that "the walls and quays, the asphalt surfaces, the collections and the rubbish, the railings and the squares, the arcades and the kiosks, teach a language so singular that our relations to people attain, in the solitude encompassing us in our immersion in that world of things, the depth of a sleep in which

the dream image waits to show the people their true faces. (“A Berlin Chronicle” 1999, 614) To Benjamin, “Signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, and bars must speak to the wanderer like a twig snapping under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its centre.” (“A Berlin Chronicle” 1999, 598) His theory of memory as experiences that retain their shock value becomes evident when he writes that “Such moments of sudden illumination are at the same time moments when we separated from ourselves, and while our waking, habitual, everyday self is involved actively or passively in what is happening, our deeper self rests in another place and is touched by shock.” (“A Berlin Chronicle” 1999, 633) In his work on Baudelaire, he finds evidence of the shock felt by the destruction of old life styles, and the automatism of capitalist societies. Benjamin explains how Baudelaire contemplates poetic representation as a sort of dream recollection, a defensive mechanism, used to distract from the shocks of daily life that he sees embodied in the traumatic figures of the crowd, the prostitute and other marginal groups (“On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 1999, 116).

“L’Étranger” is a prose poem with little adjectives. Nouns stand alone in their multiple connotations, like the title itself; a visitor, a voyager, someone from abroad, whose customs may be different, perhaps a speaker of an alien language, someone who might inspire curiosity but also fear. The imaginative reader can almost feel the silent texture of the gap between the stranger and his interlocutors; “l’homme énigmatique”, without family ties (père, mère, soeur, frère); Without a country (patrie), standing at the border between the land within and the land beyond; where words, “une parole dont le

sens m'est resté jusqu'à ce jour inconnu," are continuously rewritten and rediscovered and the distance between speaker and listener, author and reader, re-située, like "les nuages qui passent".

Brevity, the essential characteristic of the flash-fiction, is met. The short short story follows its own principles of a literary genre and it allows itself to start *in medias res* (Perucho, 3). Abruptly, escalating in a dialogue of questions and odd answers that rises to the clouds, "L'Étranger" is an exercise in 'estrangement' that stages the futile attempt to remove the aura of mystery that surrounds "l'homme énigmatique". The story indulges in the shock value of the encounter with the mysterious stranger, whom we would wished reduced to a normal, common human being, with the same fears and problems that the rest of us.

"Enigmatical" is one of the few adjectives in the prose poem. It has connotations related to the mysterious, the unknown, and someone or something difficult to understand and/or read. The words that are perused are "mother", "father", "brother" and "sister" allude to the significance of the family, a sacred institution, in which a child learns how to talk, makes his first steps, and feels the first paternal and fraternal love. Such symbolic words are impregnated with meaning and they practically represent key words of the poem or a short story. The answer of the stranger is short, enumerative and sad; he has no family. He has no friends. He has no homeland. "Patrie" invokes the roots and all the connotations associated to fatherland (the term comes from Latin *pater*).

Such questions help to 'identify' a person, to make him or her known to us. But "L'Étranger" remains a stranger to his interlocutors and to the readers. Identification

fixes meaning. A proper name identifies but also maps the person to a certain group, family, friends, community, nation. The stranger does not want to be ‘fixed’, situé. He wants to be like “les nuages qui passent”, forever in movement.

At the mention of the word beauty associations with femininity and the immortal goddess are triggered, “Je l’aimerais volontiers, déesse et immortelle.” However, there are no indications of personal relations in this reply, of love relations (perhaps) that might have provided a hint to the more humane level of the stranger. The association of beauty with the goddess, the muse of creation, merely situates L’Étranger as an artist, interested in the beauty of life in the abstract, and whose bohemian background is further established by his rejection of ‘gold’: “L’or? Je le hais comme vous haïssez Dieu.” The thought of material wealth is immediately dismissed, as the stranger confesses that he hates gold just as his interlocutors hate God. The clever use of personal pronouns is there to enhance the effect of separation, the positioning of the almost invisible border between the stranger and his interlocutors. With merely two words, a deep chasm is opened, a gap widen by the use of the adjective ‘extraordinary’ (‘extraordinaire étranger’), that informs the readers of the remote, distant, and perhaps exotic nature of the stranger.

The ephemeral image of the floating passing clouds closes the poem delving the readers into an abyss of white and blank. Cosmopolitan travelers, free wanderers, the images of clouds bring forth connotations of escape, of freedom from mundane troubles, of light hearted travel and naïf, almost pure, imagination. It immediately recalls William Wordsworth’s famous “I wandered lonely as a cloud”, inspired by an event on 15 April

1802, in which Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy came across a "long belt" of daffodils, as the poem is also known, when taking a walk around Glencoyne Bay in the Lake District. The topic of Wordsworth poem is recollection; in particular, his poem explores how a particular moment can be captured and almost frozen in time by a powerful image that stays in the mind and in memory forever. This is exactly the meaning of the 'shock' that Walter Benjamin uses in his writings, inspired by Baudelaire himself. This is how short short narrative operates. It saves words by indulging in connotative images that help transversal reading: Baudelaire > Benjamin > Wordsworth > Baudelaire, and not necessarily in this order.

The beauty of "L'Étranger" is that it captures the feelings associated to *estrangement*: the shock that makes readers wonder and wander; the extreme brevity that helps the critic write thousands of pages of interpretation; the few words, made up of white paper and cloud (imagination) that seek to be forever strange.

To summarize, Baudelaire's 'Stranger' has the following characteristics: brevity, start *in medias res*, key words with multiple semiotic connotations that yield multiple interpretations, few unnamed unknown characters, well planned structure, dialogical form open to the reader, and an unexpected turnover at the end that leaves the story open and the climax forever postponed. These features are shared with many contemporary short short story and approach, epistemologically, postmodern concerns.

Interwoven in figurative speech, the play between words and tropes brings forth a break in discursive contingencies and enables the irruption of transversal readings. Similarly, the dialogical open structure creates a temporal flux, conveying the idea of

change and process, present also in the image of the cloud. Such open and fragmented patterns allow interpretative gaps that work as points of connection between past, present and future events, translating the brevity of the short short narrative in a moment of shock that allows the presentness of the past and projects it in the future. According to the Alan Verjat and Luis Martinez, who author the prologue to *The Flowers of Evil*, Baudelaire was determined to pursue the ideal of the progress in all of the areas of human existence and creation, especially in what concerns the scientific and technical domain (11), thus, Verjat and Martinez connect Baudelaire's work with the later emergence of Futurism, a topic that I shall address in a separate section in this dissertation.

4.4. *Coral reefs*

Admittedly, the volume on which I focus to discuss his poems in prose and its obvious similarity to micro-narratives has a unique style, markedly different than the previous style we have just described, closer to the Vanguard; it is the style of young Quiroga, influenced by modernist and symbolist literary currents. In it, we encounter his ability and skill in the moments when he uses symbols, or when playing with the rhythms using the words as if they were musical notes. We shall directly quote Pedro Orgambide who descriptively notes the characteristics of the prose poems which, joined with different compositions in verse form part of *Coral reefs*:

Poemas pequeños, musicales, sostenidos por la sonoridad de una palabra, por el engarce de un símbolo con otro. Se diría la joya de un artesano, el placer hasta sensual de pulir un objeto, de resaltar su brillo entre las sombras de un cuarto; un arte privado, por decir así, que exige cierta complicidad (Orgambide, 60)

[Short musical poems, supported by the sonority of a word, one symbol linked with another. The jewel of a craftsman, we would say, a sensual pleasure to polish an object to highlight its shine in the shadows of a room; a private art, so to speak, which requires a certain complicity.]

Coral reefs appeared in November 1901, and it's considered the first book published by Horacio Quiroga. It was printed in "El Siglo Ilustrado", Montevideo and dedicated to Leopoldo Lugones, whom Quiroga worshiped at that time. It was a limited edition of five hundred and ten copies, elaborate typesetting, which today is one of the oddities of Uruguayan literature. At the National Institute for Research and Literary Archives of Montevideo a preparatory notebook of this book, which contains forty-four compositions, of which eleven were not incorporated in the book, is safekept. (Beck, p.23)

Although the book was not well received neither by critics nor by the most readers' circles, and not much attention had been paid to it then, for us it is extremely significant as a source of information on motifs, style and narrative technique that the writer cultivated when he was just beginning to engage in this trade; at the same time it

is valuable, since among the prose poems there are some that attract our attention because they possess the characteristics similar to the micro-stories of today.

Coral reefs have a large extraordinary variety as far as their content, since they are a mixture of compositions in verse and prose; all creations are short, distinct and varied. In the book of modernist and symbolist Quiroga, still a novice, we noticed strong influence of Leopoldo Lugones, especially in some sonnets and free verse. The poetic part of the book is shorter and short stories abound more; this could be the sign of a future Quiroga prose writer, leaning towards novels and narrative rather than towards the verses and poetry. In his sonnets, yearning toward perfection is noticeable, as the young author carefully chooses verbs and consonants, without wasting unnecessary words, which leads us to the conclusion that even then, quirogian style was beginning to form, concise and short.

As for the prose poems contained in *Coral reefs*, they are many and varied in terms of topics, language and style that Quiroga employs writing them; we discover a general trend that the writer has to name almost all the poems of the book with two or three first words that they begin with, without revealing anything about the contents above; in fact, reading the titles one cannot deduce what the stories are about. It is a trait that his short stories have in common with micro-narratives, since the micro-stories in general are very tied to their sense and their meaning titles, sometimes so strongly linked that the very title forms part of the short story. At the same time, Quiroga thus attracts interest of the readers, who, as they cannot sense anything from the title, are compelled to read on and discover the "mystery" of the story, captivated by suspension points.

The first poem in prose that contains elements of the short story and that we are going to analyse is entitled: "All night ..." It has got less than two hundred words distributed on nine lines of text (excluding the title) and complies with the trait of brevity; the poem's theme is the contrast between life in its booming and death which is approaching; the environment where the short story is placed is a ballroom. The protagonists are the happy couples dancing merrily, carefree, under the masks which are metaphorical representatives of life and, in stark contrast to them, a man, also in disguise, that is slowly dying of tuberculosis and is the symbol of the Death.

"Toda la noche..." ("All night long..."), from Quiroga's book *Los arrecifes de coral* (*Coral Reefs*) and published in 1901, is a prose poem that contains the elements typical of short-short stories. Shorter than two hundred words distributed evenly in eleven lines (without counting the title), the poem contrasts life and death which draw closer and closer in a dance room.

Toda la noche había estado sentado en un rincón de la sala, con las manos sobre las rodillas, sonriendo dulcemente a las parejas que pasaban bailando. Era una delicada visión de baile, solo, asombrado y enfermo, a ratos tosía, llevaba el pañuelo a los labios y oprimía con solicitud cariñosa su pobre pecho. Con los compases de la orquesta se mezclaba su secatosecilla.

Pasó una máscara y se detuvo, mirándole.

—¡Pobrecito!—exclamó.

Él sonrió débilmente, tratando de levantarle el antifaz con su dolorida mano. La máscara huyó riéndose. Y él volvió a los espejos de su enharinada cara de pierrot, bajo la cual dos manchas de vivo carmín agonizaban en los pómulos, tan rojas como las manchas del pañuelo que llevaba a la boca... (Quiroga, 62)

[All night he had been sitting in a corner of the room, hands on knees, smiling sweetly to passing dancing couples. He was a delicate dance vision, alone, stunned and sick, as he sometimes coughed, taking the handkerchief to his lips and pressing his poor chest with loving request. His dry cough mixed with the strains of the orchestra. A mask passed next to him and stopped, staring.

-Poor thing!-it exclaimed.

He smiled weakly, trying to lift the mask with his sore hand. The mask fled, laughing. And he returned to the mirrors of his floured Pierrot face, under which two spots of lively crimson were dying on the cheekbones, red as stains on the handkerchief he was taking to his mouth ...]

Written in third person of singular, Quiroga, like Baudelaire, chooses to describe life as a fleeting dance of masks, with the brevity of people's encounters, passing glances and gestures that evaporate, except for the red of the blood left behind. Any attempt to grasp the Other, to take off his or her mask, is futile. We never get to know

them. Those Others that dance among us. The gesture of separation between the sick man and life is reinforced by the person's escape, his/her laugh, and the uncaring remark "Poor thing!" The man's silence speaks more than the words. The attempt to remove the mask of the dancer is almost the last try of the agonizing man to discover the hidden essence of life. Life pulls away, laughing, and leaving him alone and without the desired knowledge. A great deal of attention is paid to the construction of the short short story, explains David Roas, with a scarce structure, lacking detailed descriptions or references to the concrete persons and places (49).

With only two words, the structural economy of Quiroga shows the man seated (weakness, immobility, illness) and the couples in the movement of life (dance is synonymous with strength, health). The adjectives and the adjectival compositions used are indicative of his poor health: "delicate vision of the dance", "alone", "amazed", "ill". The sound the "orchestra" is played along the man's "hacking, dry cough". The reader is invited to visualize the scene and also to listen to it. Metaphorically speaking, the music of the orchestra is the music of life, while the hacking, dry cough is the sound of death.

The prose poem ends like contemporary Flash Fiction masterpieces, in an incomplete narrative sequence, with the well-know figure of the sad clown 'pierrot', a stock character of pantomime and Commedia dell' Arte whose origins are in the late 17th century Italian troupe of players performing in Paris. The character, popular also in poetry, fiction, the visual arts, represents the fool in love with Columbine, sometimes his master's daughter, sometimes a dancer who breaks his heart and leaves him for Harlequin. His origins among the Italian players in France have been traced to Molière's

peasant Pierrot, in *Don Juan, or The Stone Guest* (1665). The character of Pierrot performed and is represented unmasked, with a whitened face, emblem of his naïveté and trusting idealist nature.

The figure of Pierrot invaded the arts at the turn of the 20th-century. He became an inspiration to writers, visual artists and movie makers. Inspired by the French Symbolists, especially Verlaine, the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, famously used the sad poet and dreamer in opposition to the materialistic fatal woman in his 1898 prose-poem *The Eternal Adventure of Pierrot and Columbine*.

During the carnival of 1898, Quiroga had met his first love, Mary Esther Jurkovski. The parents of the young girl disapproved of the relationship because Quiroga was not Jewish. The following year, Quiroga's stepfather committed suicide by shooting himself and the poet found the body. He decided to travel to Paris, seeking to come to terms with these two losses. The trip was a failure and he came back sad and discouraged. "Toda la noche..." was published soon after in 1901.

White Pierrot stands not just for the poor sad poet who feels like a clown. It contrasts with colorful and patterned Harlequin. Pierrot may stand also for the blank piece of paper of the short short story, the *tabula rasa* of a child-like and uncertain mind, struck by awe. Careful attention to the palimpsest reveals the impressions and shocks of life; the strong and deep marks, almost scars, when they first occur, fading, in time. Covered in patterns and lines, Harlequin is the longer story, full of itself and of words. Tinted with" two intense carmine patches...as red as the stains on the handkerchief upon his mouth," the gap between Harlequin and "the floured pierrot face", between the

Stranger and his masked Other, between long and short, is as wide as the gap between sensation and imagination, between rationality and feeling, between life and death: one and the same, red. And, thus, I finish this section "Among School Children" with the ending lines of William Butler Yeats (*The Tower*, 1928):

Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The poem is written in third person singular; there is an omnipotent narrator who witnesses the scene and represents it to us with verisimilitude. The only difference we noticed in the narrative form is the cry of a mask which stops in front of our "Pierrot"; this exclamation is isolated and it highlights the rest of the poem, since it actually symbolizes the only bridge between life and death in the prose poem. However, dialogue is not developed because the man never responds with words, but with a simple and eager movement tries to get closer to "life" by removing the mask; he fails to do so since the person escapes, laughing; this gesture reaffirms the slow separation of the sick man of life. The features of this story completely coincide with those pinpointed by David Roas: the plot has structural complexity, few protagonists, the characters are scarcely described and poor psychological characterization is used. David Roas also denotes, in terms of space, that a lot of attention is given to construction, which is obvious in "All night ..." Since it must contain only essence and nothing more, construction is limited,

without descriptions, and specific references to places and people are reduced. (Roas, 49)

In style, several stylistic figures immediately raise as a proof of virtuosity of quiroguian narrative and they simultaneously characterize many contemporary micro-stories: they are the symbol, contrast, allegory, paradox and irony; couples and mask are the symbol of life, "Pierrot" is the symbol of decay, disease and death; between them a strong contrast is present, and the whole poem is imbued with paradox and irony and yet it's allegorical; let us remember the representation of Shakespeare's life as a theater, where everyone has to play a role, but for all time comes when you have to get off the stage and die; when the masks and costumes are removed, and both the king and the beggar are equal in death. This story is also an allegory: people who can still dance, coupled and happy, are still on the stage of life; isolated Pierrot, the sad clown is already backing away in a corner, he no longer acts on the vital stage and is waiting to die.

Maria Isabel Larrea underlines that the use of paradox and allegory gives a pragmatic feature to short-short stories and indicates that are precisely these stylistic figures that appear in most short stories. (Larrea, 2)

The plot of this quiroguian prose poem operates with the help of precise and carefully chosen vocabulary, with the careful words, contrast is always present, until the very end, when we realize that man is dying. We have traced a scheme to show the effectiveness of the structural organization of Horacio Quiroga's work and economy of words which the author managed in this way:

-the man is sitting (the reader begins to glimpse weakness, immobility, illness): couples are dancing ("dance" as a symbol of strength, mobility, health); only using these two verbs in gerund form Quiroga immediately achieved to pull them apart as two very different motifs; one of life and one of death.

-the adjectives and adjectival syntagms used when the isolated man is mentioned paragraph are clearly the following indications that he is feeling sick: "delicate vision of dance", "alone", "amazed", "sick" (the most striking of all).

-the contrast is also present in the use of the names "orchestra", "dry cough"; the noun "orchestra" symbolizes music, joie de vivre, while the name "cough", although used in diminutive and apparently insignificant, coupled with a substantial adjective "dry" is the sign of serious illness: the reader already suspects that it's tuberculosis. Metaphorically said, the orchestra music is the music of life, while the dry cough is the "music" of death.

-when one of the masks senses that something bad is happening to him, it stops to look, at him, using the adjective "poor". Hence we understand that the disease that we sensed is more serious from what it seemed at first. The lack of response and silence of a man speaks louder than any words he could have said in response: we deduce that he is so weak and close to death that he cannot even talk. The effort to unmask himself is the last attempt of a dying man to discover the hidden essence of life; however, "life" slips away, laughing, leaving him without the desired understanding.

-the end is propitious to late micro-narratives, as it is surprising and enigmatic, it represents an incomplete narrative sequence, a sting. In the last paragraph we detect that

the mask the man wore was that of a cheerful Harlequin, a "Pierrot", his face bore two red spots painted as a sign of joy/life, but also his handkerchief was stained red, because of red blood: the ultimate symbol of death so far only hinted with the use of highly suggestive adjectives. Thus, with the same color, the master storyteller, Horacio Quiroga, expressed for the last time the most dynamic contrast of an entire poem in prose; and both the paradox and irony of the story are obvious to us. The reader remains thoughtful, pondering the meaning of life and that was precisely the effect that the author wanted to achieve. Life and death become one and the same, united with the red colour.

Another poem in prose that we have chosen to compare with micro-narratives, "Without having reached ..." is a little longer in terms of size, it consists of nearly three hundred words distributed in seventeen lines. Its theme is the well-known Biblical story of Genesis, the test of faith that God put Abraham to, asking him to go to the mountain and to sacrifice his son Isaac, whom he loved very much. This time Quiroga doesn't experiment with vocabulary, as he did in the previous story, but with the narrative form: the story is deliberately written in the first person singular, as if very Isaac was telling it from his perspective. Quiroga offers us the same story, but told from the point of view of the young man, a new angle from which we can contemplate the biblical story. (In the Bible, the story is written in third person singular, and the emphasis is on descriptions of Abraham, his internal struggle and sadness overcome by immense faith, without going into details how his son Isaac might have felt) Using both biblical theme, known by the reader circle, such as the stock characters of Abraham and Isaac and objects: the cutlass

and a bundle of firewood, economy of words is also achieved because there is no need to describe the protagonists and the scene/environment, but it's sufficient to outline them. Apart from the description, a brief dialog appears, the only spoken interaction between parent and child. The poem begins *in medias res*, suddenly taking the reader to action, Isaac and Abraham are walking around looking for a suitable place for sacrifice:

Sin haber llegado nunca a la convicción de que mi martirio fuera necesario, paseé aquella noche de luna, con el alfanje en la mano derecha y debajo del brazo un haz de leña. Abraham llenaba mi sombra y el holocausto estaba próximo. Caminábamos por una llanura acribillada de solfataras; y en el humo de los acres sulfatos éramos dos aventureros. El suelo se hundía a cada paso. Una profunda astricción anudaba nuestras gargantas, y las pocas palabras que podíamos articular estaban llenas de rencor. La senda era larga. Atravesamos una llanura y después un bosque de limoneros. Después un bosque de cien leguas. Y de nuevo una llanura. Estábamos rendidos.

—Decídete—murmuró Abraham.

—No,—le respondí apenas; —más lejos.

Al comenzar de nuevo la marcha, dimos vuelta la cabeza: el bosque estaba ardiendo como una zarza, y la palabra de Dios no salía de entre la zarza. Seguimos. El paisaje se accidentaba. Huellas de fantásticos animales cruzaban el suelo. La pisada era profunda, el terreno cuaternario

bramaba de nuevo, y sobre la cabeza blanca de Abraham llovía aún el diluvio aterrador.

Le miré: el alfanje, suspendido sobre mi pecho, cayó. Y de la honda herida, los ojos aún cerrados, surgió lentamente la cabeza del cordero.
(Quiroga, 79)

[Without ever having reached a conclusion that my martyrdom was necessary, I walked around on that moonlit night, with a cutlass in my right hand and a bundle of firewood under my arm. Abraham filled my shadow and the Holocaust was about.

We walked by a plain riddled with solfataras; and in the smoke of sulphate acres we were two adventurers. The floor sank at every step. A deep astriction knotted our throats, and the few words we could articulate were full of resentment.

The path was long. We crossed a plain and then a forest of lemon trees. After that a forest of hundred leagues. And again a plain. We were exhausted.

-Decide already-muttered Abraham.

-No, I barely answered him; -further away.

When we started up again, we turned our heads: the forest was burning like a bush, and the word of God wasn't coming out from the bush. We went on. The landscape became uneven. Traces of fantastic animals were

crossing the floor. The tread was deep, the quaternary field roared again,
and on the white Abraham's the terrifying flood was still falling.

I looked at him: the cutlass, suspended over my chest, fell. And from a
deep wound, eyes still closed, the lamb's head slowly appeared.]

In terms of content, we immediately realize that obviously there are certain discrepancies between this story and the biblical tale: reading the words of Isaac we realize that he knows what is going to happen, he is aware that his father is going to sacrifice him and he feels fear, disbelief and anger; Isaac does not understand why he has to go through this martyrdom. Meanwhile, in the Bible, Isaac is ignorant, and even innocently asks his father where the lamb for an offering is, without realizing that "the lamb" will really be himself. Moreover, God commanded Abraham to move toward the mountain, warning him that he was going to point out the place of slaughter; in this prose poem, Isaac asks Abraham to "decide already", as if he were the one who has to select where he is going to be sacrificed. Let us also notice the absence of two servants who were with Abraham and Isaac as the absence of the angelic voice that told Abraham not to kill his son but to sacrifice a lamb, which suddenly appeared beside the cutlass. The supernatural element does not appear until the very end of the poem, when surprisingly (from the point of view of Isaac but expectedly from the point of view of the reader) Abraham sacrificed a lamb (in the Bible, it is a ram). The lamb symbolizes innocence and the use of this word can point out that the author believes that the

sacrifice of the lamb is also unfair. Also, in this story, the father and son are headed toward the mountain at night, which is not the case in the Bible.

Speaking of vocabulary, let us pay attention to the adjectives and symbolic and allusive nouns, similar to those frequently used in short-short stories:

-the nouns like "martyrdom" and "holocaust" and the phrase "Abraham filled my shadow" indicate that Isaac is aware of the threat of death that awaits him. At the same time, we associate them with martyrdom of Jesus Christ and the holocaust of the Jews; the unjust events that nevertheless were allowed by God: notice a slight disapproval of the author; "white head" is the phrase that reveals Abraham's old age; and "the terrifying flood" is a clear biblical reference to the flood of Noah's time that lasted forty days, God's wrath and the curse that was still above the heads of the descendants of Noah.

-the syntagms such as "plain riddled with solfataras plain", "smoke of the sulphate acres" suggest the fire, the smell of sulphate, which the reader relates to hell. The hell is also internal, since it occurs in the tormented souls of the father and son.

-the descriptions of a landscape, quite accomplished, serve to emphasize the distance Abraham and Isaac had to go through until they finally reached the place of sacrifice.

-the verbs and verb syntagms, "he muttered," and "I barely replied" indicate the mood of the protagonists, who cannot even speak, one, because of sadness, and another, due to the fear he is feeling.

Finally, in the last paragraph, as in the micro-stories today, sudden and abrupt conclusion occurs, an unexpected ending (this time only unexpected for the protagonist of the story) when Isaac feels a deep relief seeing the closed eyes of sacrificed lamb, now knowing that it is not he who must die. The contrast is obvious in the words "I looked" (with his eyes open as the symbol of life) and "Eyes still closed" (closed eyes of the lamb indicating death).

In both prose poems we have observed very important characteristics of contemporary micro-stories, both in terms of brevity and concision as in style, vocabulary and narrative form; in one, the effect is achieved precisely with the vocabulary, in the other one: with the narrative form. The obsession of young Quiroga with death is also very obvious and even now it's visible that later it was going to become one of the most cultivated topics in his opus.

SECTION V. Julio Torri (1889-1970)

5.1. A biographical portrait of Julio Torri

Opening this chapter on the watershed of contemporary micro-narratives, we start with a brief introduction, analysing the life of the author, trying to summarize the trajectory of his birth, education, publications and activities conducted as a cult writer and man of letters and which led him towards the cult of the brief writing.

Julio Torri was exceptional Mexican author and narrator, who was born in Saltillo, Coahuila in 1889. He died in Mexico City in 1970. In his hometown, he attended his first studies, and at fifteen, he managed to publish the first successful text he wrote, entitled "Werther". From an early age he showed a special liking for the Spanish, French and ancient Greek classics, probably due to the familiar atmosphere. It did not take him long to travel to the capital, Mexico City, and enter law school. He left the province wishing to pursue the career of attorney. (Zaitzeff, 7).

In 1909 Torri joined the new *Ateneo de la Juventud* as a listed member next to Alfonso Reyes, Pedro Henriquez Urena and other talented young writers. This group of young people had as its aim to break the old patterns of both literary and vital aesthetics and ideology. Interestingly enough, although he formed part of the Ateneo and was recognized as one of its most prominent authors, he stayed out of the events, being a peripheral figure, never central, without much participation in conferences, seminars, literary gatherings etc. (Pereira, 117). Torri was

Miembro del Ateneo de la Juventud y gran amigo de Alfonso Reyes — que siempre le recriminó con afecto su parquedad, así como su reticencia a publicar sus escritos, el mexicano Julio Torri fue un maestro indiscutible en el género del poema en prosa.[...] (Millares Martín, 67)

[Member of the Ateneo de la Juventud and great friend of Alfonso Reyes – who always affectionately protested against his parsimony and his reluctance to publish his writings, the Mexican Julio Torri was an undisputed master in the genre of prose poem. [...]

However, during his legal career, Julio Torri became more and more interested in the world of books. He began to translate a lot, especially books and texts from English, ancient Greek and classical Latin, sporadically publishing translations both as his stories and dialogues in the newspapers, but not as often as his friends.

Serge Zaitzeff informs us that, unlike his partner in letters, Alfonso Reyes, who until 1914 had already published several volumes of poetry, essays and fiction, Torri hesitated, suspicious, or perhaps too perfectionist, not daring to publish any book, since he didn't think his writings had something valuable and worth printing. (Zaitzeff, 15)

It seems that Julio Torri, in that creative time, preferred the role of passive observer rather than the actor's role in the cultural scene, always maintaining a certain distance between himself and his peer colleagues.

Armando Pereira offers his own explanation of the behaviour of Julio Torri, insisting that the author merely had a diverse intellectual disposition and looked at the world in a different way, in fact unequal behaviour is the result of his way of being unique and individual. (Pereira, 117)

At the time of the Revolution, after death of the father of Alfonso Reyes and when the young man goes to France, Julio Torri says, taking leave of his friend, that he does not know what is going on in Mexico since he never reads newspapers. It seems that Torri is trying to ignore the dramatic reality, and proceed to live as if he lived somewhere else.

His peers were more interested in life, and related it with the foundation of the world, trying to explain its origin and the way it worked in their literary opus; they were writing about the history of humanity, either on their homeland, or on the reconstruction of one's nationality. Julio Torri disagreed and even tried to ignore his own environment. (Monsivais, 117.)

5.2. Torri's literary production and influences

How can an intellectual like Torri survive when he was dedicated exclusively to spiritual life and literature, as well as continuing the armed struggle which lasted between 1910 and 1917? This young man alternated his studies in philosophy with exhausting work, read a lot, learning new languages and dreamed of traveling. He maintained contact with his best friend at the time, Alfonso Reyes, complaining about the types of jobs that he

had to do (he was a professor of morality and law and he also taught Spanish literature at the Escuela Normal de Maestros). He began to writing prolifically, and his specific style could already be discerned; the bare and sparse style, which he uses even in his correspondence as Carlos Monsivais:

En las cartas de Torri se extiende el tono de sus textos, un tono que normará los elementos distintivos: la brevedad como el espacio idóneo de la exactitud, la ironía como el ajuste permanente del estilo, el idioma labrado, la irrupción paisajística de lo popular. (Monsivais, 137)

[In Torri's letters tone of his texts extends, a tone that will regulate the distinctive elements: brevity as the ideal space for the accuracy, irony as the permanent adjustment of style, wrought language, the landscape irruption of the popular.]

What also gave a peculiar flavour to his work was the affinity which he developed to writers like Oscar Wilde and Charles Lamb, who would significantly influence their style and temperament between humorous and ironic.

Serge Zaitzeff informs us that the author, despite hesitation regarding the publication of a book written by him or any collection of his poems and stories, came relatively early in the capital's literary life, publishing fantastic prose or short dialogues. In addition, he parallelly translated texts from Latin and English, and worked with *El*

Mundo Ilustrado between 1910 and 1911, vigorously writing several short stories, articles, reviews and essays. (Zaitzeff, 14)

Being very young, Julio Torri cultivated his passion for conciseness, brevity and playful extravagance, which was already noticeable in 1912, when he published in *Las Novedades* "Prologue to a novel I will never write," which poses a possible future existence of a new genre: "imaginary prologue". (Millares Martín, 69)

In 1913 Torri graduates from law school and he feels immense frustration because he has to make a living from secular jobs that are far from his true passion for literature. He even begins to consider leaving the country, deeply disappointed and this feeling intensifies especially at the moment of dispersion of the Ateneo group and the aforementioned departure of his best friend Alfonso Reyes in July 1913. Nonetheless, his discovery of *Gaspard de La Nuit* and poems in prose-what is extremely important to us because we know that the prose poems represent the germ of actual short short stories- allows him a break from the political chaos and military tyranny around him, while he was immersed in his reading.

Por esas fechas llegó a sus manos un libro capital, *Gaspar de la nuit* de Aloysius Bertrand, francés, vanguardista y escritor esmerado que le señaló el camino hacia frutos notables, "La vida del campo", "La balada de las hojas más altas" y "Estampa", entre otros. (Espejo, 5)

[At that time he got his hands on a capital book, *Gaspard de la nuit* of Aloysius Bertrand, French and conscientious avant-garde writer that pointed him the way to remarkable results, such as "Country life", "The Ballad of the Highest leaves" and "Stamp", among others.]

With Reyes gone, since Torri has been almost left alone, he takes refuge in silence and "sterility", writing his first poems in prose. Posteriorly, he became an undisputed master in this genre, to which he referred ironically saying that he, the most sterile of all, now works on sterility genres such as prose poems.

One of the central ideas of his work was that, in reality, any act of writing is, in a way, excessive. All has already been said, the today's writer has nothing left to do but to hover around certain reasons, to find some edge or a reef where he could stop. Hence his praise of brevity and verbal restraint. (Pereira, 122)

Armando Pereira notes that Torri's passion for brevity, for the obsessive and meticulous care of his writings, the desire to once again review the written word to find the right and irreplaceable word, and the fact that throughout his entire life he wrote nothing but three books, which altogether do not reach the set or two hundred pages, has earned some comments about his alleged "passion for infertility"; his friends called him "the writer who did not write" and "dropper". Armando Pereira reasons differently:

Y en realidad creo que no se pueda hablarse de Torri trastocando los términos: rigor, contención, sobriedad, autocrítica, no son sinónimos de

esterilidad. No veo cómo se hubiera beneficiado su obra si en lugar de tres hubiera publicado diecisiete. ¿Cuántos libros necesitaron Rulfo, Arreola, Josefina Vicens o Inés Arredondo para figurar, con plenos derechos, como protagonistas de la literatura mexicana. (Pereira, 123)

[And actually, I think, we cannot speak of Torri disrupting the terms such as: rigor, restraint, sobriety, self-criticism, which are not synonymous with sterility. I do not see how his work would have benefited if instead of three he had published seventeen books. How many books did Rulfo, Arreola, Josefina Vicens or Inés Arredondo need to appear, with full rights, as protagonists of Mexican literature?]

Turning to prose poems, it should be noted that, as in all movements of modernity, the foundation for a new school is always rooted in the movement which was immediately previous to them. To give an example, the first seeds of contemporary Mexican poetry date from the early decades of the twentieth century, and they are born through the image. Julio Torri today is considered the precursor of modern prose poem in Mexico, although less justice has been made to him than to his contemporaries Jose Vasconcelos and Alfonso Reyes.

Pero con Julio Torri (1889-1970) el olvido al que su obra ha estado sujeta después de su muerte es triste y grave. Grave pues los jóvenes que

acceden al orden de la literatura carecen del contacto necesario con algunos de los más grandes poetas que están olvidados como Cuesta, Owen, Ortiz de Montellano y el mismo Torri. (Vallarino, 72)

[But with Julio Torri (1889-1970), the oblivion to which his work has been subjected after his death is sad and grave matter. Grave as young people entering the order of literature lack the necessary contact with some of the greatest poets who are forgotten as Cuesta, Owen, Ortiz de Montellano and the very same Torri.]

5.2. Torri's contribution to Short Fiction

Julio Torri began exploring a genre that would later influence the formation of many great Mexican writers and the creation of the short short story we know today: the prose poem. Although *El minuterio* de Ramon López Velarde and some scattered Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera's prose were previously written, in the work of Julio Torri we notice a strong determination to write the genre of "prose-poem" and not isolated poetry and prose; Torri this way managed to give birth to an unclassifiable genre.

Roberto Vallarino attributed the idea of musicality and language allied with plasticity, both used by Julio Torri, Mallarme and Valery. Paul Valéry clarified the extreme distinction between discourse in prose and poetic discourse; however, Torri progresses further, managing that no writing is governed by rhyme or meter, without

using free verse, the prosaic speech having the characteristics of poetry. His prose makes instant, visual and verbal, sound and intellectual impact. Unfortunately, as the same critic confirms us, the work of Julio Torri is not a easy read, and therefore, according to the passage of time, more and more readers do not recognize the value of his literary opus. His work is no longer moving, it stops being reissued and it slowly dies. Vallarino attributed this vicious circle to the ignorant criticism, and the problem of historical incompetence, since in the very heart of Torri's work develops what he calls *the lateness of opus*. (Vallarino, 73-76).

Serge I. Zaitzeff fully agrees with Roberto Vallarino, noting that this was an exceptional book that was far ahead of his time, both the style and the theme chosen that had nothing to do with war and violent historical context surrounding him but it merely referred, polished and clear, to personal reflections of Julio Torri. The book went almost unnoticed:

Antes de 1917 sólo Alfonso Reyes había señalado la deslumbrante originalidad del joven escritor. Pero aún así la publicación de *Ensayos y poemas* fue poco comentada por la crítica del día. Aunque es cierto que la inestabilidad política de la nación debe haber sido un factor, lo más probable es que la escasez de las opiniones críticas se deba al hecho de que la innovadora prosa de Torri no pudo ser entendida por muchos lectores acostumbrados a una literatura de tendencia criollista. (Zaitzeff, 10)

[Before 1917 only Alfonso Reyes had noted the dazzling originality of the young writer. But even so, publishing of “Essays and Poems” was recently discussed by today's critics. While it is true that the political instability in the country must have been a factor, it is likely that the shortage of critical opinions was due to the fact that Torri's innovative prose could not be understood by many readers accustomed to the “criollista” literary trend].

As for the course of the life of Julio Torri, in 1914, the suspicious author had not yet dared to publish any book because he was too demanding and selective with himself - which really is the perfect feature for the author of one short story - unlike his dear friend Alfonso Reyes. In addition to his devotion to literature he discovered his love of sports, especially tennis. However, he still felt very lonely and wanted to emigrate, which was prevented by the lack of economic means. He resigns himself and instead of travel to California and New York, Torri remains in Mexico, working on what he hates and with his underpaid classes. He becomes ironic and satirical, his personality tinged with a fine sense of humour. (Zaitzeff, 17)

Since he had stayed in the country during the Revolution, this historic event, of course, greatly affects Torri, but his epistolary references to it are rare and fleeting, more out of fear than out of anything else. Torri was against the Revolution and when he signed a counterrevolutionary manifesto in 1915, he was afraid and he sold his books as

an economic mean of escape. Nothing happened; the two texts he wrote: *On Shootings* and *Mexican Night*, although very dramatic and deterministic, we would say, do not represent his hate of reality but an attempt to save it through literary aesthetics. The estimated number of victims during the revolution number reaches around one million people, and all that in just seven years of its duration. Carlos Monsivais describes the life of Julio Torri at this time, before he published his first book:

¿Cómo sobrevive un intelectual en los años de la lucha armada? Torri alterna el estudio de la filosofía con trabajos ominosos y desgastantes, pide libros prestados, aprende idiomas, suena con viajar y adquirir novedades editoriales. Y entre lecturas naturalmente desordenadas se niega a la docilidad. (Monsivais, 136)

[How does an intellectual survive in the years of armed struggle? Torri alternates the study of philosophy with ominous and exhausting work, borrows books, learns languages, dreams of travelling and acquiring new publications. And of course, among his disordered readings, Torri refuses to turn in to docility.]

After this pre-first publication biographical sketch, it is worth stressing that Torri, finally, in 1917, publishes his first book, *Essays and Poems*. The book was a collection of prose and pointed towards a new thematic. Beatriz Espejo highlights "Old Stamp" and

"Mexican Fantasies," which, in her opinion, cemented the colonial current; then she makes us pay attention to "The Conquest of the Moon" that started the modern everyday thematic on science fiction, and ends the selection with "It was a very poor country", stating that this prosaic work served Torri to propound crisis of a nation that earned economic boom thanks to its literary productions before rushing to a disaster, drawing analogies with aspects of oil economy. (Espejo, 5).

Nely Maldonado Escoto spent her time on gender clarification of the texts published in the first book of Julio Torri, referring to its indecipherable generic hybridity, and the fact that, despite being called that, it did not contain poems and essays:

Textos breves que lindan géneros distintos, la prosa contenida en ese primer libro de Torri es sin duda la de un escritor que no sólo ha encontrado un estilo propio, sino que ha invertido tiempo e inteligencia en perfeccionarla a máximo. Ensayos cortos que se acercan a la poesía en prosa, poemas (siempre en prosa) que recurren a la reflexión sobre una idea, ensayos que también pueden ser cuentos o imaginaciones fantásticas o incursiones en la ciencia ficción. (Maldonado Escoto, 1)

[Short texts bordering various genres, prose contained in that first Torri's book is definitely that of a writer who has not only found his own style, but has invested time and intelligence to improve it. Short essays that

approach poetry in prose, poems (always in prose) resorting to reflection on an idea, essays that may also be tales or fanciful imaginings or incursions into science fiction.]

The title of the book may seem dry, too typical and widespread, uninviting, and without trying to attract the general public. It seems that Julio Torri wanted his work to be noticed by a few cultured and selected readers. The cover of the edition, courtesy of Genaro Estrada was neat and elegant. (Zaitzeff, 9)

Essays and poems contains twenty texts of which fourteen are apparently unpublished, and others were already known since Torri had published them in newspapers and magazines with which he collaborated: *El Mundo*, *La Vida Moderna*, *La Nave* etc. The book contains one hundred sixty three pages in total.

The same Julio Torri has designated Jules Laforgue, Arthur Rimbaud and above all Aloysius Bertrand, as influences of *Essays and poems* to. Carlos Monsivais highlights the influence of Oscar Wilde as well, especially in terms of aesthetic passion and vision of the world that Torri has in his writings. (Monsivais, 142)

In the years that followed, however, references to the work of Torri are unfairly sparse and unfortunately, those that do appear, tend to be of little critical value. Both silence and misunderstanding continue surrounding his opus. Many critics, while acknowledging that the author has vast philosophical knowledge, severely judge his production, finding it extremely scant. Apparently, we had to wait almost until 1924 to read a wider and less rigorous comment.

Torri's next book is just the second edition of *Essays and poems* printed in early 1937; this issue is virtually identical to the previous one, apart from some almost insignificant changes. Even after so many years - two decades have passed -Torri is refusing to publish a new book. Reissue of *Essays and poems* saw many accolades:

Resulta que el pequeño libro no ha envejecido de ninguna manera. Al contrario, los críticos se entusiasman por su novedad y frescura. Sus rasgos característicos de precisión, brevedad, lúcida inteligencia y penetración siguen seduciendo al lector culto. (Zaitzeff, 13)

[It turns out that the little book has not aged at all. On the contrary, critics are excited by its novelty and freshness. Its characteristic features of accuracy, brevity, lucid intelligence and penetration continue to seduce the educated reader.]

The success and the universality of this Torri's book are confirmed with an English translation in the following year, 1938. Finally, in 1940 Julio Torri decides to gather eighteen texts-of which only six were unpublished -in a new book entitled *On Shootings*. The book's title is identical to the first prose volume, which in turn is the only one with the date, dating back to 1915. His last published work, named *Three books*, comes to light of the day twenty-four years later, in 1964. With this book, published by the Fondo de Cultura Economica, his long career as a writer closes: Torri unites his

previous two books here, along with some scattered and other unpublished prose works.

According to Armando Pereira,

Julio Torri publicó sólo tres libros de ficción: *Ensayos y poemas* (1917), *De fusilamientos* (1940) y *Tres libros* (1964) Los tres guardan una unidad temática y formal impecable. No hay grietas, no hay resquicios: se trata, en definitiva, de un mismo libro. (Pereira, 119)

[Julio Torri published only three books of fiction: *Essays and Poems* (1917), *On Shootings* (1940) and *Three Books* (1964) The three kept an impeccable thematic and formal unity. No cracks, no gaps: it is ultimately the same book.]

5.3. Torri's thematic concerns

After the biographical presentation and exhibition on Julio Torri's publications, we move on to describe the thematic often used by the author.

Serge I. Zaitzeff, when classifying motifs used by Julio Torri, divides them into five most significant groups:

1) Suffering - Julio Torri does not lose the opportunity when it comes to allude to the fragility of human beings, taking a comprehensive and positive attitude: for him, suffering ennobles and purifies the human being;

2) Woman and love - author approaches this issue ambiguously: allusions that he sometimes makes to women are interesting, calling them "terrible enemy of men" and comparing them to certain animals such as jennys and cows which make him look like a misogynist; but on the other hand, he considered them to be enigmatic and powerful, beings full of understanding and wisdom. The same goes for love, it is sometimes represented as a positive force that ennobles and sometimes as an overwhelming force.

3) Mexican motif - Torri rejects the typical folkloric and false and seeks the real and meaningful essence. He uses simple phrases to capture the environment, the landscape and the character of the Indian ("Glorious") or elaborates the synthesis of modern Mexican history and past ("Mexican Night").

4) Imagination and fantasy -Torri recommends maintenance and development of fantasy, imagination, childhood characteristics even in middle age, and he manifests his fertile imagination in various stories; one of them is "The misfortune of Lucio The Dog" (1912), where the protagonist's head is cut off; Another example would be "It was a poor country," where he experimented with the creation of utopias and narrates, from an ironic point of view, the strange case of a poor country that manages to become prosperous thanks to its abundant literary production. (summarized from (Zaitzeff, 51-66)

Torri's keen sense of the absurd gives his opus an air of modernity that will arise later in the works of Borges, Arreola and Cortázar. Carlos Monsivais named, in terms of often used themes and motifs in Torri's prose, short stories: *On shootings*, *On funerals* and *The Cook* as examples of what we today might call a "black humour". In *On*

funerals, Torri resorts to techniques previously used by Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll of the commonplaces of intensified pain, while describing burials, adding malevolently that people often go to them just for fun as if they were a theatre. The motif of *The Cook* would be the relationship between gastronomy and cannibalism, a morbid bond, since this Torri's story ingestion of human flesh represents the irresistible addiction to the author. (Monsivais, 141).

Armando Pereira's contribution to the themes and motifs that appear in Julio Torri's opus is also significant, although the author has preferred to choose and submit only two which seemed the most characteristic and the most expressive to him. One of them is the motif of a common man-an antihero. Pereira notes that Torri, even when he resorts to the descriptions of myths and legends, makes fun of the presentations of the proud and arrogant heroes and tries to insert the behaviour of simple, everyday man in myths and legends. The motif of women and marriage is also featured by Armando Pereira, and he confirms the Zaitzeff's view that the Coahuilense writer approaches this particular issue with a strange mixture of horror and fascination, assuming that's what led him to never marry. Other recurring themes and motifs of Torri's work denominated by this critic are is the vocation of failure, self-portrait, the bad taste of success, the other side of the myth or legend and the relationship between life and art. These are the central topics that always returned in each of his books; it seems that he was never interested in telling something else, and he did not even try. (Pereira, 127-128)

Beatriz Espejo points out, referring to the small female zoo invented by Torri and mentioned by Serge I. Zaitzeff, that almost all his references to women were sarcastic:

[Julio Torri] Veía en la mujer al animal de ideas cortas y cabellos largos, con quien el diálogo era imposible [...] la entendía como un objeto redondo, precioso y antagónico, capaz de inspirarle temor y atracción. (Espejo, 63)

[[Julio Torri] saw in women an animal of short ideas and long hair, with whom a dialogue was impossible [...] he understood her as a round, beautiful and antagonistic object, able to inspire fear and attraction.]

Many critics have tried to understand and interpret Julio Torri in recent decades, to comprehend his way of looking at life and list the stylistic devices that he used to represent his thoughts. What is certain is that this great author was very bold, influential and dazzling. Emmanuel Carballo ascribed certain fixed characteristics to him:

En un primer intento de entender a Julio Torri como escritor (y como hombre) le aplico, revueltos, diez adjetivos: raro, cínico, misógino, corrosivo, elegante, parco, exacto, malicioso y, sobre todo, cerebral. (Carballo, 69)

[In a first attempt to understand Julio Torri as a writer (and a man) I will apply to him, scrambled, ten adjectives: weird, cynical, misogynistic, corrosive, elegant, sparse, accurate, malicious and above all cerebral.]

The two most notable features of his style are obviously irony and brevity, which are precisely the essential features of today's micro-stories. His books were brief and polite, his essays and short stories were little ironic sketches that were stained by a subtle lyricism as poems in prose –an author like that well deserves the title of an essential writer, because what interested Torri was to discover the essence of life and literature in little words, without the exaggerated ornaments, without inappropriate terms. The best proof of his love of brevity is his small-sized opus, reduced to the strictest and most significant parts.

The author usually presents a true picture of reality, an image that often escapes the everyday man, hidden by society and good manners. He does so by stylistic devices of irony and humour, that go hand in hand with brevity, always expressed in measured, accurate and concise sentences. It is the way in which Torri reveals things, suddenly, in a verbal blow, without circumlocution, without long explanations. Armando Pereira indicates the following:

Pero en el caso de Torri, brevedad e ironía no sólo son dos técnicas literarias, dos formas de estructurar un cuento o un ensayo, sino más bien dos maneras de acercarse al mundo y tratar de comprenderlo, dos maneras

de intentar explicarse el papel que uno juega en medio de esa realidad muchas veces hostil y adversa. (Pereira, 121)

[But in Torri's case, brevity and irony are not just two literary techniques, two ways of structuring a story or essay, but rather two ways of approaching the world and trying to understand it, two ways of trying to explain the role that one plays in the middle of that reality which is often hostile and adverse.]

This kind of abbreviated literature and short prose, so present in Torri's work, has anticipated the modern appearance of the minimum story anthologies, of microfictions, of sudden stories and other derivations of short prose. Brevity is precisely what has made Torri predecessor of micronarratives- The author invests his time and intelligence in order to refine and polish his short prose and short essays to the maximum. Nely Maldonado Escoto warns us of a problem that may arise when reading his brief and compressed work, especially when reading his hybrids, his poems in prose:

[...] la misma riqueza literaria que proviene de su capacidad camaleónica, hace que la incursión en sus textos no sea del todo sencilla. Y es que justamente esa hibridez genérica convierte sus breves prosas en textos complejos; y la propuesta torriana en conjunto, un verdadero rompecabezas para quien lo lee.

[...] The same literary wealth that comes from his chameleon-like ability, makes the foray into his texts not entirely straightforward. And it is precisely this generic hybridity that converts his brief prose in complex texts; and Torri's proposal altogether is a puzzle for those who read it.

The literary forms that the author treats are varied: they are short stories, aphorisms, epigrams, short essays and hybrid variations of the listed forms. His domain is in space, in metaphors, suggestions and illusions. For his formal and stylistic innovations, consisting of going out of the metrics and versification of poetry, we can consider him avant-garde writer, but, at the same time, he is imbued with modernity, trying to stimulate readers' imagination with the power of carefully chosen words. He hates the speeches that are both too long and do not synthesize the most important things. He mocks them using a distinctive ironic tone.

It is easily observed that the characteristics of the micro-fictions identified by experts in the field are very similar to the features that we have just outlined in Torri's prose; obviously, the first of them is the brevity, followed by a subtle irony, a sense of specific humour and deep scepticism, the tendency to write "open" works, longing for the active participation, full of abrupt and unexpected endings. (Maldonado Escoto, 7)

5.4. Torri's emotional fragments: some close readings

Hereafter we shall mention some of Torri's short stories, essays and witty aphorisms whose stylistic and formal features approach those of modern short short stories and may represent a germ of contemporary mini-fiction.

Of course, the first condition of the brevity – the extension of a text cannot exceed two thousand words, according to Lauro Zavala - is already fulfilled if one considers that most of Torri's narrative is extremely short. Since Torri was the master of witty language games and wrote a good deal of aphorisms, we conclude that this is yet another common trait. The rhythm of his prose is intensive and fast, without subjective and apologetic tone; rather, the author aspires to objectivity and accuracy, wanting to provoke a reaction in the reader.

Although Julio Torri wrote many poems in prose, they are not stationary, descriptive or static and most of the ones written by, for instance, José Antonio Ramos Sucre. They are lively and ironic sketches and annotations of everyday life and events which surrounded the writer and which he witnessed. The nuances of parody, "English" humour, critical in its nature are ubiquitous in Torri's opus as in the current minifiction. His prose poems, besides being capable of lyricism, also possess philosophical attributes and narrative elements.

Julio Torri's texts that are supposedly most successful and most acclaimed are, apart from the most famous and most quoted, "To Circe" the following ones: "On Executions", "Women" "Humility awarded" and "Epigraph"; although they are a good

example of the entire Torri's opus, they limit the selection of his prose and the rest of the short stories that deserve to be mentioned. The first story that the author published in the *La revista* of Saltillo, in 1905, was titled "Werther" and it can certainly be name the precursor of micro story, since it had less than three hundred words.

Torri was only fifteen, and the influence of writers of stories with elements of horror as Edgar Allan Poe or Franz Kafka was notable in the story. The atmosphere evokes fear in the reader, but the outcome is surprising: it turns out that all occurrences are a fearful dream of the protagonist who had fallen asleep on the book *Werther*. The composition of this short work is quite well thought out but a bit simple-which is logical, given the age of our author and it meets several requirements for contemporary micro-fiction: brevity, perfect structure and the unexpected 'sting' or 'flash' at the end.

Among the twenty stories contained in the book *Essays and Poems* (1917) we found several that share common features with the dwarf prose of today. Among them there was one that caught our attention, entitled "The bad actor of his emotions," which we quote here in full since it does not take up much space.

EL MAL ACTOR DE SUS EMOCIONES

Y llegó a la montaña donde moraba el anciano. Sus pies estaban ensangrentados de los guijarros del camino, y empañado el fulgor de sus ojos por el desaliento y el cansancio.

—Señor, siete años vine a pedirte consejo. Los varones de los más remotos países alababan tu santidad y tu sabiduría. Lleno de fe escuché

tus palabras: “Oye tu propio corazón, y el amor que tengas a tus hermanos no lo celes.” Y desde entonces no encubría mis pasiones a los hombres. Mi corazón fue para ellos como guija en agua clara. Mas la gracia de Dios no descendió sobre mí. Las muestras de amor que hice a mis hermanos las tuvieron por fingimiento. Y he aquí que la soledad oscureció mi camino. El ermitaño le besó tres veces en la frente; una leve sonrisa alumbró su semblante, y dijo:

—Encubre a tus hermanos el amor que les tengas y disimula tus pasiones ante los hombres, porque eres, hijo mío, un mal actor de tus emociones.
(Torri, 14)

[THE BAD ACTOR OF HIS EMOTIONS]

And he came to the mountain where the old man dwelled. His feet were bloodied by road pebbles and the glow of his eyes tarnished by discouragement and fatigue.

Sir, seven years ago I came to you for advice. The men of the most remote countries praised your holiness and wisdom. Full of faith, I heard your words, "Heed your own heart, and do not hide the love you have for your brothers." And since then, my passions were not masked to men. My heart went out to them as a pebble in clear water. But the grace of God didn't descend upon me. The proofs of love I gave to my brothers, they saw them as pretense. And behold, loneliness darkened my way.

The hermit kissed him three times on the forehead; a slight smile lit up his face and he said,

-Conceal the love you have for your brothers from them, and dissimulate your passions before men, because you are, my son, a bad actor of your emotions.]

The narrative form of this Torri's tale corresponds to an old format of a parable or a legend, which is characteristic for a micro story. The elements that bring it close to a parable are the place where this narrative lies, and one of the protagonists-the wise old man. The journey of another protagonist seems almost like a religious pilgrimage, search for advice from a wise and prudent hermit. Having chosen only three substantive-adjectival phrases, with no need for further elaboration, Torri manages to represent the long torment of a man "bleeding feet," "discouragement", "tired". The number of protagonists is reduced to two stock characters: a wise hermit and a man who has come to ask him for an advice; they are in a unique situation in a particular location in the mountains. Known characters reveal to some extent the development of narrative and contribute to the economy of language.

Their dialogue begins directly, *in medias res*, with the request for help - and as we can see, it is the second time he comes to ask for it-, the unhappy young man who complains of loneliness and little luck on a personal level.

The unhappy young man has little joy in his interpersonal relations despite obeying the first tip of prudent and wise old man: to clearly show his emotions to his brothers and loved ones. The style of the story, like the style of most of the tales of Julio Torri, is very direct, clear and concise, yet another feature of contemporary mini-fiction. The words are carefully chosen, which is noted in the selection of the verb "dwell" instead of a basic verb connotation "live" -the use of the more picturesque verb contributes to the legendary atmosphere, the mystery; the reader associates it with ancient times. The old man's benevolent response, but sudden and unexpected, leaves the reader thoughtful, despite having already read it in the very title of this story, because he/she can now relate it to the sense of the story and the moral being offered.

Another interesting story from the same book is entitled "The Life in the Field." It is also quite short, and is presented in the form of dialogue. Enter supernatural elements and well-know Torri's irony: a drunkard and a dead man in his funeral procession will talk to each other and each of them defends his lifestyle. The characters are obviously representatives and symbols of the delightful life and death, allegedly painful, but, in the words of the dead man not necessarily so. The last sentence of the story, a surprising outcome "The life in the field has its attractions," has ambiguous meaning and wordplay (characteristic resource of micronarratives). Precisely this duplicity is often the feature of micro story: the reader understands that the word 'life' refers to life after death, and the term becomes a satirical symbol and the word "field" becomes reference to a "graveyard". The style is smooth, sparse and subtle.

In the second book, under the name *Shootings*, the author also publishes literary pieces difficult to classify, between lyricism and objectivity. Both themes and motifs, such as narrative style, are very different. Apart from the stories encompassing more than two pages, there are some in length from one to two pages, and even, in the latter part, there are outlines of Torri's thoughts, several prose poems, epigrams, aphorisms etc. One of them, arguably the turning point of micro-stories, is entitled "Humility rewarded" whose three short paragraphs we shall transcribe in full:

LA HUMILDAD PREMIADA

En una Universidad poco renombrada había un profesor pequeño de cuerpo, rubicundo, tartamudo, que como carecía por completo de ideas propias era muy estimado en sociedad y tenía ante sí brillante porvenir en la crítica literaria. Lo que leía en los libros lo ofrecía trasnochado a sus discípulos la mañana siguiente. Tan inaudita facultad de repetir con exactitud constituía la desesperación de los más consumados constructores de máquinas parlantes. Y así transcurrieron largos años hasta que un día, en fuerza de repetir ideas ajenas, nuestro profesor tuvo una propia, una pequeña idea propia luciente y bella como un pecesito rojo tras el irisado cristal de una pecera. (Torri, 25)

[HUMILITY REWARDED

In a little renowned University, there was a small bodied, ruddy, stuttering professor, who, as he completely lacked his own ideas, was highly esteemed in society and bright future in literary criticism lay before him.

What he read in books, he offered, outdated, to his disciples the next morning. His unprecedented power to repeat with exactitude constituted the despair of the most accomplished builders of talking machines.

And so many years passed until one day, by dint of repeating the ideas of others, our teacher had a small idea of his own shining and beautiful as a red little fish behind the iridescent glass of an aquarium.]

The strong stylistic device of irony, which grows into the spiteful satire is obvious in this narrative. The derision of the physical appearance of the teacher ("small bodied", "ruddy", "stuttering") and contempt for his lack of originality are obvious in the first paragraph. Descriptive and objective narrative form, is the form of a story in the third person singular, and is no longer told as a dialogue.

Along with the biting irony and satire in this story, lies a hidden criticism of society that supposedly appraises people who repeat the ideas of others and lack of originality; bright future awaits only such individuals. The last paragraph gives an amazing spin and thus Torri achieves an obvious contrast to the first two paragraphs of his short story, now using adjectives with positive connotation: "own", "shining", "beautiful" and very accomplished metaphorical comparison. On the subject chosen, in

this story critical Torri emerges along with satirical moralist Torri, defending the authenticity, and laughing at copycats society apparently supports.

The complete works of this silent and elusive author is of great literary value. He is one of those rare writers who put national concerns and nationalism aside or they elaborate them differently. Torri is also one of the initiators of Mexican prose poetry and the influential antecedent of a fantastic literary movement. He created a subgenre, unclassifiable at that time, which now has come to be known as "micro-narrative". Contemporary mini-fiction cannot be studied or analysed without mentioning Torri as a pioneer of Short Fiction.

SECTION VI. Futurist aesthetics and the re-emergence of the fragment.

Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888-1963)

Ramón Gómez de la Serna was a Spanish writer, dramatist and avant-garde agitator who belonged to the Spanish Generation of 1914, or so called *Novocentrism*. He was broadly acknowledged as someone with an extravagant public persona, but at the same time, a writer who was constantly and deliberately moving away from traditional ways of thinking and adopting a peculiarly innovative way of observing the world, thus generating some of the most original and creative prose writing of that period.

He is perhaps most widely known for his innovative short form of prose poetry, denominated “Greguerías”. *Greguería* could be described best as a certain kind of aphorism, a one-liner comic joke; also similar to wordplay, and occasionally, to mini philosophical annotations on life. Furthermore, De la Serna is considered the father of the *Greguería*, since he used it for the very first time at the beginning of 1910. After its appearance, this literary form became very popular and spread as a rhetorical and stylistic device within Spanish and Latin American literature. The *Greguería* nurtures a cult for the image; specifically, a witty and surprising image.

De la Serna wrote over 90 works in various literary genres, which makes him an extremely fertile, prolific author. His literary works stretch from essays, articles and biography and autobiography to novels and theatre. In spite of this vastness, the focal point of his written art are the *Greguerías*, this form of unusual conceptual pirouette with the extraordinary force of metaphor. (Rodríguez de la Flor-1987: 23)

De la Serna's literary preference was the avant-garde. His book *Ismos* (1931) is dedicated to this movement and it introduced a new term in Spanish dictionary. In it, he defends artistic autonomy and freedom of words. Unlike Horacio Quiroga, who was born merely nine years before him, De la Serna found himself at a literary crossroads with regards to the literary currents of his time, but in terms of style, experimentation and narrative technique, the model he chose to work with in *Greguerías* is obviously very close to contemporary short-short stories.

6.1. Biographical profile

The chapter begins with an elaboration of crucial occurrences in Ramón Gómez de la Serna's life. His experiences had a deep impact upon his work. During his life time, De la Serna witnessed great social and political altercations in Europe and in Spain, and he played a crucial role in some of them. (Umbral, 1978:13) Later in the chapter the will shift to his style and motifs, and finally, on the *Greguerías* themselves, which I will relate to contemporary micro narratives.

The life of Ramón Gómez de la Serna has been accounted for by various biographers, some of whom were his close friends. José Ortega y Gasset, for instance, compares him with Marcel Proust and James Joyce in his avant-garde experimentation with the fragmentary and chaotic formlessness. He also wrote about his own exile in Buenos Aires when he was sixty in *Automoribundia* (1948). Gómez de la Serna was born into an upper-middle-class Madrilenian family. His father Joaquin was fond of law

and politics, being a lawyer himself. After having returned from his trip to Paris in 1903, which was a present from his father for his completion of high school studies, he quickly adopted a marginal lifestyle; that of a bohemian bourgeois writer. He began his studies at a Faculty of Law, but as the years passed, he realized his lack of interest for that particular professional branch in question. At that same time, his seventeen years old uncle published a book titled *Cantares (Poems)*, which awoke in him a wish to imitate him. De la Serna's father financed the publication of his first written work, *Entrando en fuego (Entering fire)*. The entire family was surprised at the discovery of a new young writer. De la Serna's aunt, Carolina Coronado, a writer herself, strongly supported him.

In 1908, at twenty, he entered University of Oviedo with an intention to continue his law studies. He also published his second book, *Morbideces (Morbidities)* (Camón Aznar, 1972:23). His mother died a few months later, and his overindulgent father established a journal called *Prometheus*, funding it during the following four years in order to help his son to find his literary feet. De la Serna's character shows an imaginative and nihilist rebellion against the stagnant bourgeoisie of Madrilenian society. Soon, he abandoned the family house and became independent. He wrote for *Prometheus* under the pen name 'Tristan', mostly analysing the current Spanish literary stage and screaming for change. Some of the works that are published during this period (1909-1911) are *Beatriz, Desolación (Desolation)*, *Ateneo*, *El libro mudo (Mute book)*, *Sur del renacimiento escultórico español (Decline of sculptural Spanish renaissance)* and *Las muertas (Dead women)*. He also falls in love with Carmen de Burgos, nicknamed Colombina, a woman twenty years his senior and with a daughter. They

spent several years together in Madrid and Paris, alternating between the two. This relationship inspires the birth of his novel *La viuda blanca y negra*, (*The Black and White Widow*) published in 1921.

At the break of the First World War, he became a neutral chief exponent of avant-garde writing, establishing a base in the literary *tertulia* at the centre of Madrid in the old café Pombo (hence the name “Pombian era” that literary critics so often use when referring to this period of Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s life). Literary meetings and discussions in this café, named *Sagrada Cripta del Pombo* (*Pombian Sacred Crypt*) went on for 22 years, well until 1936; Roger Shattuck called them ‘the banquet years’. (Shattuck, 1969:315) Gutiérrez-Solana’s celebrated painting of the Pombo Tertulia can be seen today in Madrid’s Reina Sofía Museum. Sadly, the equally famous cubist portrait of him, painted in 1915 by Diego Rivera was lost during the Civil War.

In 1914, on the very same day when the WWI began, De la Serna published his first novel, *El doctor inverosímil* (*The Improbable Doctor*). He went on to publish five more outstanding works: *El Rastro* (The Flea-Market), *El Circo* (The Circus), *Greguerías* (Greguerias), *Senos* (Breasts), *Pombo* (Pombo). They are all a seed of the new fragmentary genre he was looking to establish in Madrilenian literary circles, very close to short prose poems. As far as the recurring motifs are concerned, he exalts trivial everyday objects and emphasises eroticism; his style is sarcastic, witty and playful, as he cultivates the metaphor, with his clever and sharp images. It’s in this time period when Don Ramón becomes more “Madrilenian” himself. (Gómez de la Serna, 1952:35)

De la Serna's father passes away in 1922, due to complications that ensued after his long fight with diabetes. The following year, general Miguel Primo de Rivera comes to power, and income of De la Serna's payroll comes to a halt. He commences his collaboration with *Revista de Occidente*, but feeling the tenebrous atmosphere owing to the Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, and being one of the intellectuals who have declared themselves to be enemies of the regime, don Ramón, now thirty five years old, temporarily and briefly exiles himself to Naples.

Upon his return from Spain's neighbouring country, Italy, de la Serna encounters two technological innovations, radio and cinema. He travels extensively throughout Spain participating in diverse seminars and conferences. In between trips, he scrabbles his *Greguerías*, incorporating them in his speeches. (S. Granjel, 1963).

During the decade between 1927 and 1936, De la Serna travels frequently, and publishes his articles in various newspapers, such as Revista *La Nación* and Revista de Occidente. He spends his time between Madrid and Paris, and starts making use of new technologies; for instance, he has radiophone sessions from his house every day. After the death of his great love, Carmen de Burgos, he travels to Argentina with Luisa Sofovich, a girl of Russian origin who was to become his wife in a years to come.

The political situation that De la Serna encounters in Spain after his second trip to Argentina is volatile. Revolutions occur one after another, in 1933 and 1934. The haste and sudden outbreak of Spanish Civil War in 1936 surprises the author in Madrid. He and his wife Luisa leave the city in a cargo ship and head towards Marseilles. They

continue their voyage to Montevideo and permanently install themselves in Buenos Aires with the help of Oliverio Girondo.

Even after the end of the Spanish Civil War, Gómez de la Serna remained in Argentina until his death thirty years later, in 1963. Step by step, the author managed to adapt to the society of Buenos Aires, and his inspiration stemmed and thrived from these roots. By the end of 1940s, he published his autobiography, *Automoribundia* (1948), despite some health problems such as diabetes, previously also diagnosed to his father, as well as sleep disorders. The following year he publishes *Las tres gracias*, where the nostalgia that he feels for Madrid rings true and palpable. He is invited to an official two month trip to Spain by the president of Ateneo de Madrid, and he arrives to the capital of Spain on 25th of April in 1949, where he spent the first month of his stay. Madrid Town Hall places a commemorative plaque on the building where he was born. He is also received by Francisco Franco. The following month Ramón Gómez de la Serna travelled to Barcelona but he suddenly decided that he and his wife should return to Argentina without participating in previously scheduled ceremonies and literary gatherings.

After this last and short lived visit to Spain, the writer never came back to his native country; at least not until his death. Two bad news arrived from Spain while he continued to work in the solitary confinement of his residence in Buenos Aires: the first one was that his book *Las tres gracias* did not receive the National Prize in Literature, which went to the Uruguayan, Antonio Larreta; the second told him about the definitive closure of Café de Carretas, taking away any possibility of the literary gatherings celebrated there. (Tudela, 1988).

His fertility as a writer, nevertheless, lingers on, and between 1953 and 1960, Gómez de la Serna publishes twelve books and various thousands of articles, as well as a series of his new *Greguerías*. At the same time De la Serna works as a screenplay writer for Argentinian television and acquires fame. Various homages are paid to him in Spain and Argentina as his health deteriorates. Argentina offers him a lifelong pension and in 1962 Gómez de la Serna is diagnosed with colon cancer. In April of the same year, he receives the Juan March Prize, just before his death in Buenos Aires at the beginning of 1963. In a letter to one of his companions he even writes that he welcomes and acknowledges his imminent and inevitable passing. Ten days after his death, his remains are brought to Madrid where he is buried in the Panteón de Hombres Ilustres, next to Larra, Espronceda, Núñez de Arce and others.

Despite the fact that his reputation was in decline, Octavio Paz and Pablo Neruda declared their admiration for Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Lately there has been a revival of interest on this figure, inspired by the recent trend for postmodernism. The complete works of this author are being published in 20 volumes by Círculo de Lectores/Galaxia Gutenberg, in an edition edited by Ioana Zlotescu.

Ramón Gómez de la Serna's figure stretches beyond any comprehensible definition. He belonged to a "unipersonal generation" (Fernández-Almagro, 1930:74) and in *Automoribundia* (1948) proclaimed that he did not belong to any generation:

He vivido antes de que naciesen, y en estrecha confidencia con ellas después, con las nuevas formas del arte y de la literatura. Por

eso puedo poner un poco de orden en lo que todo eso ha significado, y puedo cernir al fin lo que hay de perenne en todo lo que ha sucedido”. (Gómez de la Serna, 1931:7)

Mancebo Roca points out that the very personality of De la Serna represents the confluence of traditional and modern, defined by idiosyncrasy of the Spanish avant-garde. He was a sporadic figure; without antecedents, contemporaries or disciples. His knowledge of the Spanish classics, of the Generación del 98, his frequent trips abroad and his proclamations prepared the terrain for the Generación del 27 in Spain. (Mancebo Roca, 2006: 3)

6.2. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and futurist aesthetics in Spain- Spagna veloce e toro futurista

The speedy train of Futurism rushed through Iberian Peninsula precisely thanks to Ramón Gómez de la Serna. Not only did he translate the text Marinetti wrote about Futurism, but he himself also pondered about the fundamental values of the new literature that appeared in the beginning of the XX century.

The magazine where some of the first writing about this new literary current appeared was called *Prometeo* (“Prometheus”), and the articles were regularly published between 1908 and 1912. (Marinetti, 1910: 519-531) Ramón Gómez de la Serna is the one who makes Marinetti known in Spain by publishing his very own translation of

“Fondazione e Manifesto del Futurismo” from Italian to Spanish. The name of the article was “Movimiento intelectual. El futurismo”, and even though it wasn’t signed by name, its author indubitably was Gómez de la Serna. It was the first time that the readers of Iberian Peninsula had the chance to get in touch with the ideas of Italian Futurism, with the eleven points of the manifest, that is. These can be resumed like this: love for danger, for bravery and rebellion, exaltation of the aggressive attitude, of feverish insomnia, somersault, slap and punch, beauty of speed, praise of the automobile, a man at the wheel as a hero, contempt directed towards the past, glorification of war-the only possible hygiene of the world, militarism and patriotism, destruction of museums, libraries, academies, glorification of the multitudes, of the revolutions, of the vibrant flame of arsenals and shipyards, voracious railway stations, factories, gigantic bridges, steamboats, locomotives and airplanes. (Letzen, 1989: 309)

In 1910, in the same magazine, another manifest appears, named “Proclama futurista a los Españoles”, which was also translated by Ramón Gómez de la Serna. The title of this article in Italian was “Contro la Spagna passatista”. Marinetti shouts at the Spanish people, inviting them to leave their mystic past behind and open up to the grandiose spectacle of electricity, and to turn away from the cathedral, which symbolizes the clerical dominion, or they shall be buried underneath its ruins. He also insists on progress of agriculture and industry in order to renew a country with a vision of the future, underlining that that task is on the shoulders of politicians, writers and artists. The article appears preceded by a short prologue, written by Gómez de la Serna and signed with pseudonym “Tristan”, and it is particularly interesting because it is in

consonance with the futurist way, filled with successive interjections in accord with the ideas of the movement:

¡Futurismo! ¡Insurrección! ¡Algarada! ¡Festejo con música Wagneriana!
[...] Violencia sideral! [...] ¡Antiuniversitarismo! [...] ¡Iconoclastia! [...]
¡Voz, fuerza, *volt*, más que verbo! [...] ¡Saludable espectáculo de
aeródromo y de pista desorbitada! [...] ¡Gran *galop* sobre las viejas
ciudades y sobre los hombres sesudos; sobre todos los palios y sobre la
procesión gárrula y grotesca! [...] ¡Simulacro de conquista de la tierra,
que nos la da!” (Brihuega, 1979:89)

The movement of Futurism appears as a strong reaction to post-rubenian Modernism, and is looking for the new forms and contents, the ones that shall be more in consonance with the spirit of the upcoming era, dominated by the technical and scientific progress. It is fascinating, not only because of the cult of the machines and speed but also due to the appearance of the idea of “freed words”, and the typographic text arrangement, partially also adopted by Spanish poets.

Still, it has to be pointed out that the transcendence of Futurism was different and perhaps a tad slower in Spain in comparison to other European countries such as United Kingdom or pre-soviet Russia, a bit less organized as well. The reason for this can be found in the lack of national identity that was still looking for itself when the derived transformations of the progress arrived to Iberian Peninsula. (Mancebo Roca, 2006:7)

As far as Ramón Gómez de la Serna is concerned, we can conclude that his own territory in which he wrote and created and was even called *ramonismo* at a certain point, was closely linked to the vanguard movement, not only because he was the first to translate the manifest, but because his style, motifs and structure of his opus fit perfectly in Futurism.

A proof of this link lies in his aforementioned book, *Ismo*, published in 1931 and reedited in 2005, formed by various articles that he wrote between the years 1910 and 1939. As Ioana Zlotescu states, this book is an entire era, presided by the dream of *porvenirismo*, and the fight against the past and tradition, which was started by futurists but simultaneously fought by Dadaists and by Surrealists and their *esprit nouveau*. (Zlotescu, 2005:11-26)

Apart from the first phase of Futurism in Spain, that commences the moment the text is published in *Prometeo*, there is a second phase that is to be situated in 1928, which is the year when Marinetti arrives to Spain. The division in two phases is also somewhat aesthetic and politic, since the first period would correspond to the diffusion of aesthetic ideas and the second one had a more political halo glowing around it. (Mancebo Roca, 2006: 8)

6.3. Visualisation and fragmentism in De la Serna's opus

We have already mentioned above that the works of Ramón Gómez de la Serna are vast and abundant in volume, but at the same time variable in genres and forms employed by

the author. It is almost incredible and impossible to imagine that all of those essays, poems, theatre plays, short short stories and aphorisms had been written by one person and under same artistic guidelines, yet it is so. In the following segment of his chapter we shall try to offer a clear cut and reconciled-representation of the variety of elements that comprise his unique style.

One of the fundamentals of the artistic system of Gómez de la Serna is a so called “plastic vision of reality”. This way of defining it leads us to think that its literary discourse lacks of linear narrative and the so-called conceptual zone. Everything De la Serna related entails imagery, plastic and plastic representations. In some of his works, such as *El Rastro*, reality is dutifully transferred to figurative impressions. (Briones, 1986: 282)

Another constitutive component of De la Serna’s art is “presence of things”, or as Francisco Ynduráin calls it, “nervio de la obra de Ramón”. To clarify this, it’s necessary to say that objects and objects only are not what characterizes the topic of his writings, but rather his perception of those objects and a certain way in which he “enlivens” them. The items that his focal lens turns toward, are suddenly seen by a reader in a different light as well, and the perceiver of De La Serna’s opus can establish new connections between things, thus discovering new meaning. (Ynduráin, 1969:200).

Such use of de-automatization of the vision of reality, and that constant search of new ties between the being and the non-being had become the basic characteristics of the “new genres” that this author has implemented in his opus, one of them precisely being *la Greguería*. (Rivas, 2006: 39). Inevitably, due to such prism of perceptive

thought, two polar opposite stylistic devices emerge in his writing: “personification” and “objectification”. They are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin.

The first one has even led Francisco Umbral to state: “Ramón funciona como los niños y los primitivos, mediante el pensamiento mágico y el animismo” (Umbral, 1978: 255). On occasions, it is eerie how De la Serna performs an authentic psychological characterization of a certain object, which in turn obtains its own personality. Nevertheless, humanized objects are not the only trick the writer has up his sleeve, he also adds a poetic vision in to the game, and a convergent, associative dynamism, that doesn’t necessarily need to be symbolic or metaphoric. (Briones, 1986: 283)

Its polar opposite, objectification, even though both phenomena are convergent, is a presentation of protagonists reduced to objects, such in these two example, one from *El hombre perdido*, and the other one from *La abandonada en el Rastro* (in this one, protagonist eventually dissolves in many objects).

[...] Yo soy una radiografía que salió mal [...] Mas le voy a decir...soy el sillón que ya no sirve para el imposibilitado y la peluca del cómico viejo.
(Gómez de la Serna, *El hombre perdido*, 1947: 35)

Se disolvía en sombrero, dentadura postiza, sillón ortopédico, corsé papiro, cabeza de peinadora fracasada, ojos de cristal, cuerpo de prueba modistil, piernas de muestra de sedería y sombrilla colgada de los

alambres tendidos como paraguas inocentes. (*La abandonada en el Rastro*), 1929: 283).

Leo Spitzer denominates such way of writing “enumeración caótica” (Spitzer, 1968: 247-291), which maintains concomitances with surrealist writing, since it constantly tries to unveil the Baudelaire-like affinities and connections that lie in the sub consciousness. As F. Ynduráin says, De la Serna “no fue hombre de ideación sistemática, pues procedía por un asociacionismo mental e imaginativo deliberadamente caprichoso”. (Ynduráin, *Prólogo a Museo de reproducciones*, 1980:16).

This general aesthetics affects equally his novelistic genre, his essays, his theatre plays, and it looms above all of their elements, plot, protagonists and atmosphere likewise. Briones states: “Este tipo de relaciones entre las cosas solo es posible merced a su inesperada colisión en la consciencia, gracias, en definitiva, al azar... [...] la acción obedece casi siempre a la impremeditación; no hay necesaria relación causal-consecuencial entre los acontecimientos [...]” (Briones, 1986: 291).

Apart from metaphors, symbols and visualisation of existing connections between the humane and non-humane world, yet another jarring characteristics of our author is aforementioned fragmentism. The creation of Gómez de la Serna consists of isolated glimpses, sudden, atomized revelations which do not belong in a larger context as subordinate elements. (Briones, 1986: 284)

They rather behave as independent textual unit, preserving a complete autonomy in comparison to the rest of the text and this is why, while reading his novels, one might

be under the “patchwork” impression: element is added upon the element upon the element. Such as it is, we might as well state that discontinuity constitutes one of the most dominant notes of his opus. The most genuine expression of afore-stated fragmentism is la Greguería.

6.4. De La Serna’s own invention-La Greguería

To state that De la Serna was only an avant-garde creator, would be an utter fallacy. Naturally, it is true that he was devoted to that literary movement, but not in its entirety. At the same time, De la Serna was a man who was inspired by diverse XX century movements, schools and literary tendencies, without actually giving himself over to one of them exclusively.

De la Serna was a connoisseur of Charles Baudelaire and dedicated his biography essay *El desgarrado Baudelaire* (1929, in *Efigies*) to him; I had already stated that Baudelaire can be placed in the very origins of an occidental microfiction, because of his collection called *Petits Poèmes en Prose* (1869). At the same time he dedicated one of his famous essays, *Edgar Poe. El genio de América* (1953) to Edgar Allan Poe, the father of the Anglo-Saxon microfiction (minute story, sudden fiction, Flash Fiction...) because of his tales “Shadow: A Parable”, from 1835, “Silence: A fable” from 1837 and “The Oval Portrait”, from 1842.

Our author was, in a wide sense of the word, a *modernist*, open to all aesthetics novelties in his literary work, which abounds. Apart from being an author of various

novels, essays, his own autobiography, translations, he has invented his own genre due to which he became internationally famous, so called: la greguería. How is one to define such genre? According to the author himself “humorismo+metáfora=greguería” (Gómez de la Serna, 1962: 35). As our section advances I will posit that it’s hard to outline its features as it is a synthesis of all characteristics of Ramon’s literary art, or as Briones would state [...]la cristalización en una fórmula personalísima de una singular manera de concebir la literatura.[...] (Briones, 1986: 285).

A slightly different definition was, yet again, given by the author in the prologue to the 1960 edition of *Greguerías*: “la greguería es el atrevimiento a definir lo que no puede definirse, a capturar lo pasajero, a acertar o a no acertar lo que puede no estar en nadie o puede estar en todos”. (Gómez de la Serna, 1990: 51).

The *Greguerías* do, so to speak, resemble an aphorism, but it’s the forcefulness in the strength of an imagery that which separates them. It’s a literary manifestation that praises the value of the fragment. At the same time it is a faithful and visible reflection of a heterogeneity and multiplicity of meanings in a modern world. Simultaneously, it represents this non-stop searching for novelty. Gómez de la Serna has referred to his voracity to reach that dream of “Lo Nuevo” with the following words:

Lo Nuevo, en su pureza inicial, en su sorpresa de rasgadura del cielo y del tiempo es para mí la esencia de la vida. Lo nuevo nace más veloz. Hay que emplear hoy dos imágenes cada cinco segundos de escritura para emplear mañana tres en los mismos cinco segundos. Si el nuevo día

dijese en qué consiste su novedad, nadie lo comprendería. Lo mejor que tiene es que es nuevo. Esto es lo que revelan las nuevas imágenes.
(Gómez de la Serna, 1975: 14-15)

Greguerías were, without a doubt, his most attractive cover letter in the international context. Even though it wasn't always neither well understood nor interpreted, it would find the way to fascinate the readers and the writers likewise. This new genre was the result of the new time, an epoch of modernity and fragmentation. Its constitution is basically metaphoric or, stating more precisely, it establishes an associative/analogue relationship between two notions or two perceptions that we capture with different senses.

Plasticity as a configuring element of *greguería* is evident due to numerous baudelairian correspondences between concrete and material objects. According to Briones, there is a significant number of *greguerías* where the ideas of love, death, fear, life, and the passage of time are expressed via plastic impressions (Briones, 1986: 287)

El miedo es un ratón que se nos mete en el corazón.

Los recuerdos encogen como las camisetas.

Another characteristics of *greguerías* is a protagonism of objects, or so called personification:

El huevo nos mira con su pupila interior.

Lloraba de frío la noche.

Las azucenas llevan los guantes a medio poner.

But above all, De La Serna's *Greguerías* are an unavoidable reference to explain the origin of short short stories in Spain, an essential touchstone regarding birth and development of microfiction in Iberian Peninsula. De La Serna published a first volume of *Greguerías* in 1917 which was closely followed by another compilation, *Greguerías selectas* (1919). This was a miscellaneous opus that contained short short stories called "caprichos." In 1925 Don Ramón published a separated volume of "caprichos", named *Caprichos*, and in 1926 he published *Gollerías*-230 short prose forms without a narrative linkage.

Antonio Rivas defends that Gómez de la Serna had a fundamental role in establishing the short short story tradition since he experimented with microfiction early on and went on contributing to the popularity of the genre. (Rivas, "Entre el esbozo..." 22). The author, using the fragmentation method, renews the prose form of his age, sort of atomizing it and reducing it into its basic form: an image and a metaphor, a narrative sketch if you will.

In "los caprichos", he also defies rational thought and explores the absurdity, basing his narrative construction on condensation, humour and antirealism. This is why they are a manifestation of a narrative microtextuality, such as modern fable, parable, or anecdote. *Greguerías* are an example of a short short story writing but they aren't short

short stories per se since they lack narration: “el género del aforismo y sus derivados, entre los que sin duda debe contarse la greguería, especialmente por el empleo continuado de la metáfora, de tanta trascendencia en los poetas del 27, se sitúa habitualmente dentro de las modalidades líricas”. (Utrera Torremocha, 1999: 322).

Luis López Molina inserts the concept of *greguería narrativa*. Even though I have just stated that descriptions and humoristic tone are usually predominant in these pseudo short short stories, there are some of them which have more narrative elements and could have freely be named micronarratives/included in anthology of micronarratives:

Por mi parte, para elaborar un corpus de *greguerías narrativas*, he entendido por narratividad el hecho de que en ellas se cuente una historia, por breve que sea, es decir que haya: 1) un “personaje” soporte (persona, animal u objeto) aunque el autor no tenga tiempo para caracterizarlo; 2) una situación inicial que evolucione hasta otra situación final distinta de aquélla; 3) un factor de cambio que se instala en la base de dicha evolución y que la genera. En una primera aproximación, como es la emprendida aquí, cabe afirmar que la narratividad de una greguería existe en función de este principio y que resulta mayor o menor según su grado de sometimiento a él. (López Molina, 2008: 18)

Luis López Molina illustrates his hypothesis with various examples of narrative greguerías, some of which I shall quote: “Hay cojos con pierna de palo que reflorece cuando viene la primavera y se vuelven sátiros”; “El doctor ha llegado (la fiebre, asustada, sube)”; “Cayó el cuchillo del crimen al mar y desde entonces lo surca un pez más afilado que el lenguado y con la cola roja”. (López Molina, 2008: 18).

At the same time, greguería isn't narrative only: in many cases it presents an idea of a lyrical type (Fernández Romero, 1996: 432). Nonetheless, we shall not deal with those in this section of our thesis proposal due to the fact that the ones written in prose contain a much more evident narrative component and they are closer to the microfiction that is the ultimate result of fragmentation we are aiming at.

It was belief of Gómez de la Serna that la prosa debe tener más agujeros que ninguna criba y las ideas también. Nada de hacer construcciones de mazacote, ni de piedra, ni del terrible granito que se usaba antes de toda construcción literaria. Todo debe tener en los libros un tono arrancado, desgarrado, truncado, destejido. Hay que hacerlo como dejándose caer, como destrenzando todos los tendones y los nervios, como despeñándose. (Gómez de la Serna, 1962: 25)

From these words and based on the publications De la Serna had between the year 1917, with *Greguerías* and 1925, with the first edition of *Caprichos*, we draw the conclusion of the tremendous originality of a writer way ahead of his time. Apart from

the values such as brevity and fragmentism, he introduced a new jovial element of humourism in his creations. Rodenas de Moya points out that his work influenced many young aspiring authors belonging to the posterior literary movements and that even nowadays, he continues to be an authentic reference for many microfiction writers.

Los ejemplos próximos de Juan Ramón y Gómez de la Serna sirvieron de guía y estímulo a los jóvenes escritores. No constituían los únicos paradigmas de la estética de la brevedad, desde luego, pero sí los más inmediatos. Las revistas de la joven literatura recogen muy pronto las escaramuzas con los diversos géneros que, de manera invariable, se materializan en forma de microtextos (Ródenas de Moya, 2008: 99)

One thing is certain: *la greguería* as a newly invented short prose genre is a groundbreaking move and yet another piece that contributes to the belief puzzle of fragmentism. Its existence forces many literary experts to review the conventional literary classifications and to admit the slow but certain dissipation of the firm novel structure into smaller pieces and the upcoming inevitable desire of words to be free and associate themselves with audio and visual content in order to create new art forms.

SECTION VII. The Fragments of Surrealism: Leonora Carrington (1917-2011)

7.1. Leonora Carrington and her journey to madness

Leonora Carrington was an English-born Mexican artist, surrealist painter and a renowned novelist. She is perhaps most widely known for her paintings, but at the same time, she was one of the final surviving participant in the Surrealist movement that started in the 1930s. It is quite intriguing that Carrington is to occupy precisely section seven of this doctoral thesis, due to the fact that number seven is a magical number which recurrently appears in her short stories. This multifaceted English artist was frequently associated with André Breton and Max Ernst. At the same time, she was also a founding member of the Women's Liberation Movement in Mexico during the 1970s. (Chadwick, 1986: 37-42).

Carrington led a somewhat stifled family life as a daughter of a wealthy textile manufacturer before turning her back on both her family and their wealth to study art in London. Thus, she left her life in rural Lancashire at the age of 18 to become a prominent figure in the surrealist movement. Her first encounter with Surrealism occurred when Leonora was merely ten years old, when she got a glimpse of a Surrealist painting in a Left Bank gallery. Later on, the young girl had the opportunity to meet many Surrealists, among which Paul Éluard stood out. As far as the opinion of her family about her artistic tendencies is concerned, let it be said that her father rather opposed her career as an artist; her mother, nonetheless, was the one who encouraged

her. When Leonora was 19 years old, it was precisely her mother who gave her a copy of Herbert Read's book, *Surrealism*, and this is how Carrington grew to become familiar with this literary and overall artistic movement. (Grimes, 2011).

Perhaps the crucial moment in young artist's life occurred in 1936, when she attended the International Surrealist Exhibition in London. That is where Carrington had the opportunity to see the paintings of the German surrealist Max Ernst. She later stated that she felt the attraction towards the artist before she even met him. Following year, when Leonora was merely 20 years old, they met at a party held in London and almost instantly bonded. Max was already 47 years old back then, and he was quite famous among surrealists. The great difference in age, the fact that Max had already been married and his radical surrealist tendencies made her father strongly disapprove of their relationship. Leonora and Max returned together to Paris and Ernst promptly separated from his wife. During one year in Paris, Carrington formed part of the friendship circle led by André Breton, Jean Arp, Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Joan Miró, Man Ray and others.

In 1938, the couple left Paris and settled in Saint Martin d'Ardèche, in southern France. It's important to emphasize that Carrington and Ernst collaborated and fully supported each other's artistic development. They even made sculptures of guardian animals (Ernst made birds and Carrington created a plaster horse head) to decorate their home. As a tribute to their relationship, Leonora painted a portrait of Max Ernst the following year. (Aberth 2010: 11)

Their happiness was abruptly interrupted with the swift outbreak of World War II. Ernst, being a German was firstly arrested by French authorities for being a “hostile alien”. With the intercession of Paul Éluard and other friends, Max was discharged couple of weeks later. Nevertheless, soon after France was invaded by Nazis and Ernst was arrested again, this time by the Gestapo, who considered his art to be “degenerate”. He was sent to a concentration camp but he managed to escape to United States with the help of Peggy Guggenheim, who was a sponsor of his arts, leaving Carrington behind.

Leonora was utterly devastated and she fled to Spain with her two female friends. She was raped in a hotel in Madrid and that unfortunate occurrence, combined with her paralyzing anxiety and growing delusions culminated in a final nervous breakdown. Her parents intervened and had her hospitalised in a mental institution in Santander, a town located in north of Spain. Carrington was given so called convulsive therapy and was injected with Cardiazol, a powerful anxiolytic drug which is nowadays banned by FDA (US Food and Drug Administration). She had also been given Luminal, a barbiturate, which is a medication recommended by WHO for the treatment of certain types of epilepsy, seizures, but also anxiety and trouble sleeping.

Cardiazol induced psychological states similar to epilepsy in Carrington and her state of mind was overall diagnosed as hysteria. She eventually managed to leave the sanatorium and she was released into the care of a nurse who took her to Lisbon. “Nanny in a submarine” was sent to rescue her, but she avoided an underwater return to England. After finding out that her father was planning to send her to a sanatorium in South Africa, she ran away and sought refuge in the Mexican Embassy. A Mexican

Ambassador, Renato Leduc, a friend of Pablo Picasso, agreed to marriage of convenience with Carrington so that her safe passage out of Europe could be arranged. The pair divorced in 1943 and three years later, Leonora went on to marry a Hungarian painter Emerico “Chiqui” Weisz, who was a photographer and the darkroom manager for Robert Capa during the Spanish Civil War. The couple had two sons and her husband died four years before her, when he was 97 years old.

Meanwhile, Max Ernst had married Guggenheim in New York in 1942, and even though that marriage ended a couple of years later, Ernst and Carrington hadn’t resumed their relationship. She left to live in Mexico, growing to love the country and that is where she lived on and off for the rest of her life. Far from the war in Europe, there was tolerance to artistic and political exiles.

Mexico City in the mid-20th century must have had an extremely creative and experimental climate, which afforded her opportunities to experiment in painting, writing, tapestry-making, design for theatre and film and collaboration with photographers. The traditions and culture of Mexico chimed with the themes that surrealists were already exploring, particularly those surrounding death and religion so it was a fertile ground for Leonora.

In 1963, Carrington was asked to create a 15ft (4.5 metres) mural which she called *El Mundo Mágico de los Mayas*. (The Magical World of the Mayas). Mural themes she depicted were heavily influenced by folk stories from the region and the mural can nowadays be seen in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. She was a person who was hugely excited by Mexican history and culture and it showed

in her work. Perhaps this is why, despite not being that well regarded in her home country, she virtually became a treasure in her adopted country. In 2015, the mural has been shown in England at The Tate exhibition and it was the first time it has been on display outside Mexico. It was also the first time Carrington's work had been shown in England since 1991. (Aberth, 1992: 83-85)

Leonora also designed a poster for the Women's Liberation movement in Mexico. As a person who was primarily focused on freedom of thought, she shared a belief that such freedom could not be achieved until the accomplishment of political freedom. She would always underline the importance of cooperation and sharing of knowledge between politically active women in Mexico and North America. Such political commitment led to her winning the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Women's Caucus for Art convention in New York in 1986. (Chadwick, 1986: 37-42)

In one of the rare interviews she conceded, in 2008, with *The Times*, Carrington responded with a fanciful spell of words about returning to Europe: "I didn't have time to be anyone's muse... I was too busy rebelling against my family and learning to be and artist. There are places I'd like to return to. But not as I was then, but as I am now. 'Cause I'm trying to understand. And I've understood nothing. One is born, one lives, one dies. What death is, I don't know." Leonora Carrington died on 25 May 2011, aged 94, in a hospital in Mexico City, as a result of complications arising from pneumonia.

Biography of Leonora Carrington might be of assistance in order to better comprehend the themes and motifs that abound in her literature, and the style she used in her stories, seeing how it frequently occurs that work and life are connected. To best

understand Carrington's work we need to comprehend that the symbolism, metaphors and motifs she uses in her paintings are also recurrent in her literary opus.

Leonora didn't focus on the writings of Sigmund Freud, as was the case with other Surrealists. She slid towards magical realism instead and allowed autobiographical detail and symbolism to heavily prevail in her paintings and in her stories. She was quite interested into presenting female sexuality as she herself saw it and at the same time she managed to subvert the traditional male role.

7.2. Surrealism and the fragments of madness

The journey to madness as a descent into hell is the subject of Leonora Carrington's autobiographical account (1917-2011) entitled *Down Below*, in French, *En Bas*, translated into Spanish as *Memorias de abajo* (1943). The linkage of this versatile English artist to the Surrealist movement and in particular the influence of André Breton in his work and of Max Ernst in his life are the object of study of this section. Beginning with a reflection on the myth of descent into hell and madness, this essay inquiries into the extent to which Carrington's text can be read as a counter-narrative to Breton's *Najia*, or at least as a revision of several of the clichés Surrealistic

According to the definitions of most dictionaries, madness is a disorder or pathological disturbance of the mental faculties. It can also be viewed as a reckless, senseless, or unreasonable action that is performed recklessly. From the point of view of philosophy, madness has been interpreted in different ways. In his posthumously

published *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal (1623-62) indicates that the unawareness that humanity is crazy is already a form of madness, a position that contrasts with that of René Descartes for whom true thinking can only be rational, thus excluding all forms of irrationalism. While Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1931), in *Philosophy of the Spirit*, considers insanity a thoughtless form of thought, Nietzsche, on the contrary, believes that all thought is within madness, since reason is illusory (*Thus spoke Zarathustra*). Michel Foucault (1926-1984) asserts that for Descartes, unlike Socrates, to doubt is a mad form, since it is not directed towards the truth. Foucault adds that for centuries Western thought has regarded madness as doubt and deviation, not as a form of cognition, and that everything that is illusory and ambiguous has been rejected in the framework of rational thought that seeks only certainty and evidence. This brief overview of the conception of madness from philosophy shows the evolution that the concept has suffered. In older texts biblical texts, for example, it was linked to the possession of the devil, that is, outside forces, external to the body. During the Middle Ages, the conception of madness as something cosmic, tragic and quasi-religious became progressively associated with mental illness.

Mourning and melancholia are psychological states that are somehow related to the condition of madness, In Sigmund Freud's essay (1984: 245-268) on the topic, he explains that the feeling of mourning' results in an indifference to the material world as the ego seeks to stabilize itself in the face of real loss. This involves preserving, somehow, the idea of a whole either in memory or in representation. In melancholy, on the other hand, "it is the ego itself" that comes to know itself as having suffered loss.

Melancholia develops when the ego is unable to place fragments in relation to an organizing principle. Both psychological states evidence a continued existence – the present – and a happy state in the past that has passed. Freud suggests that loss may, in fact, derive as much from an absence or fracture that has been imposed on consciousness, as it might from the real loss that triggers mourning. However, while mourning develops in relation to loss (of something or someone), melancholia develops when the feeling of void is prolonged in time and it becomes increasingly difficult to find a unifying principle that would bind the temporal memory fragments together, and project them onto the future. It is, thus, experienced as a ‘no way out’. Melancholia arises in the encounter with a loss whose nature cannot be determined; an absence that has lost its material palpable dimension.

One of the important aspects of madness, as with any traumatic phenomenon (see Lacan’s seminar nice, “L’angoisse”) is the impossibility of verbalizing experiences and feelings. At other times, even if emotions (frustration, hatred, etc.) are verbalised, the internal suffering cannot be communicated to others. Jacques Derrida asserts that silence, which often accompanies insanity, is a form of logic and organized language, an alternative order that reveals the renewal of all that has been perpetrated against insanity in the act of denouncing it. For Derrida, the association with silence is natural, since language is linked to the functioning of rational thought and to the normality and linearity of language. Thus, the enunciation of madness can only occur in the dimension of possibility and in the language of fiction (or in the fiction of language, Derrida 1967: 84-5); that is, in the paradox and fragmentation of discourse. "What I mean," says the

French philosopher, is that "the silence of madness cannot be said; It cannot be said in the logos of this book; But it can be made indirectly, metaphorically, in the 'pathos' "(Derrida 1967: 60). The term 'pathos' refers to the intensity and emotion that become apparent in the style of enunciation. In this way, the madness that reflects the art and the works of fiction does not appear in its thematic or conceptual content but in its level of the form. It appears in the place of the enunciation of the subject, linked to its position; In relation not to what he says, but to how he says it: from that place unknown to him from which he speaks; A place in which he believes himself to be a subject, but in reality it is a transitory subject that in its moment becomes the object of another subject.

Based on these ideas, the section explores the metaphor of the descent into hell in relation to psychological changes comparable to madness in Carrington's autobiographical narration *Down Under*. As Derrida says, art and fiction would allow the pathos of madness to surface linked to two fundamental aspects: the emotional part of the subject who enunciates, and also its position. This is the case of the descent metaphor, which is also closely related to near-death experiences and archaic initiation ceremonies.

If one examines the role of madness in classical literary works, as in Shakespeare's, for example, one realizes that there is an absolute equivalence between the artist, the madman and the philosopher, as pointed out by the American professor Shoshana Felman. As far as modernity and postmodernity are concerned, Felman explains that only psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis can be considered in their relationship with evolution (1985: 109): "It can only be defined by their relation to the

age of psychiatry” (Felman 1985: 22). Curiously, since the antiquity has been linked to women with emotional disorders and insanity, something that is reflected in the etymology of the word 'hysteria' (from the Greek hystera - uterus). In the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud's studies of history would confirm this trend. As Elaine Showalter points out "by the end of the [nineteenth] century, 'hysterical' had become almost interchangeable with 'feminine' in literature, where it stood for all extremes of emotionality." (*The Female Malady* 129) Symptoms associated with hysterical disorder included fainting, mood swings From crying to laughter, and physical symptoms such as pains, coughs, fever, etc., many of them collected by Freud in his studies (1895 and 1905). Hysteria, like madness, as Foucault pointed out, was regarded as a form of frustrated discourse of concealment; A mode of physical protest in which the body pronounces itself beyond verbal and rational language.

Indeed, recent neuroscientific studies show the relationship between emotional categories such as anger or fear that acquire body at the instance of specific sensomotor modalities based on previous experiences

Neurons in different modalities (e.g., vision, audition, interoception, motor behaviour) capture different sensory and motor elements of a perceptual event, and neural representations accumulate to produce a ‘simulator’ that serves as a toolbox for creating any future conceptual representation of a category. For example, a simulator for a category of knowledge, like anger, will develop as sensory, motor, and somatovisceral features that are

integrated across contexts and settings where instances of anger are labelled... As instances of anger accumulate, and information is integrated across instances, a simulator for anger develops and conceptual knowledge about anger accrues. The resulting conceptual system is a distributed collection of modality-specific memories captured across all instances of a category. These establish the conceptual content for the basic-level category anger, and can be retrieved for later simulations of anger. (Barrett & Kristen 2008: 247)

The active and performative performance of these emotions reinforces the acquired learning on the basis of which previous physiological experiences create conceptual categories, as in the case of rage madness, explain Barrett and Lindquist (2008). These physically experiential connections would have been elevated through learning and memory to the category of symbols, so that they can be invoked through language, already linked to emotional repetition. It is frequent in these cases the inability to explain what they feel, except through representations that go beyond words (motor and facial expressions, phonological and guttural like shouting, blasphemy, insults, grunts, etc., gestures or signals). For example in Richard Burton's classical study *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Saint Vitus' dance is described as a sort of madness.

In the 1980s, French and American feminists began to use the metaphor of madness and hysteria as a form of liberation. Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva spoke of

"feminine language" and "semiotic chora", a sort of pre-linguistic and pre-written maternal language (in contrast to the Lacanian symbolic language where the socialization process creates a series of taboos, repressions, ruptures and fragments) (see Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 4, 12, 61). The allegory of madness became a form of female liberation against discourse and patriarchal oppression. According to Kristeva, the semiotic phase is repressed but not eliminated, it is also reflected in the use of masks (extending Bakhtin's ideas about discursive ambiguity and carnival): A duplicity in the feminine language that breaks male symbolic structures, just as silence breaks the linearity of discourse. Helene Cixous also expressed similar views in her concept of *écriture féminine*, highlighting the importance of changing discourses in order for women to have their own symbolic and social space. In her study of insanity and fiction, the North-American Shoshana Felman tries to demonstrate that what she calls "*la chose littéraire*" reveals the repressions of the author, self-censored and hidden in the unconscious. Thus, "to speak about madness is to speak about the difference between languages: to import into one language the strangeness of another (Felman 1985: 19).

All these authors expand Foucault's position, who following Lacan contemplates madness (and the traumatic episode linked to it) as a symptom of an absence; at times an inability to communicate, related also to a melancholic state and, at other times, linked to outbreaks of frustration. For some feminists, the inability to learn the language of the masculine other isolate the subject in this world of anger. The feminine writing of madness, as it appears in the *Down Below*, opens an ambiguous space of reflection; that of a hybrid narrative that functions as a place of healing.

The metaphor of the descent into hell, sometimes linked to madness and other times to initiation ceremonies that would lead to experiences beyond what is considered 'real', shows a constant concern for the subject and the realities that surround it. Certain periods, such as the 19th and 20th centuries, would show a progressive crisis of the perceived subject. The self would be first part of God's plan, without wondering how. In the Renaissance, technological advances like the telescope allowed the subject to see alternate universes signalling its place in the world. Then came questions about how; the abandoning of faith and belief for scientific explanations leading to more concrete answers. The scientific impulse discovered new ways of looking, lenses that fixed the photographic image in the collective memory, and later mobilized in cinematography. The subject experiences multiple perspectives when looking, which also enable new ways of seeing others. Futurism and Surrealism are two of the artistic avant-gardes that more clearly reflect the gradual dislocation of the subject who looks. Surrealist works often evoke the myth of the descent into hell as the scene of a return to the most primitive part of the human brain: the unconscious. Beyond the real, the term surrealism indicates 'being below', a descent that at the same time wants to be a resurgence, proposing a rupture with previous artistic forms based on the capitalist and bourgeois model. Susan Suleiman defines Surrealism as a "collective project" that unites "artistic experimentation and a critique of outmoded artistic practices with an ideological critique of bourgeois thought and a desire for social change "so that artistic practice can be seen as" a genuine intervention in the social, cultural, and political arena."(Suleiman, 1990: 12)

Surrealism was linked to war and madness. The metaphor of madness as resistance appears mainly in Dadaist authors, such as Jean Arp, who simulated a mental illness not to enlist. It is also prominent in their Manifesto, closely related to the fragment:

Plus de peintres, plus de litterateurs, plus de musiciens, plus de sculpteurs, plus de religions, plus de republicains, plus de royalistes, plus d'imperialistes, plus d'anarchistes, plus de socialistes, plus de bolcheviques, plus de politiques, plus de proletaires, plus de democrates, plus d'armees, plus de polices, plus de patries, enfin assez de toutes ces imbecillites, plus rien, plus rien, rien, rien, rien, rien.' 'Manifeste du mouvement dada. (Litterature, no. 13 May 1920)

For the young medical student André Breton, the experience of working at the military hospital in St Dizier between August and December 1916 was fundamental. His friend Theodore Fraenkel, an assistant physician on the front said that Breton was deeply disturbed by the experience. During his practice, Breton became particularly interested in psychiatry, collaborating with Dr. Pierre Janet, author of *The Mental State of the Hysterics*, and reading the book *The Early Dementia of Constance Pascal*. Breton also interned at the Val de Grace military hospital in Paris in collaboration with Professor Babinski. In his memoirs, Breton recognized that the time that passed had a decisive

influence on the development of his thought. It was during these years that he entered psychoanalysis, in the themes of dream interpretation and free association (see Breton, *Entretiens avec Andre Parinaud* 1973: 36-8).

From Pierre Janet, Breton takes the idea of mad love (*amour fou*), essential in his poetics and in his conception of eroticism. From Freud the role of the unconscious as a key component of artistic creation, to which, we might say, an ally of love. Dreams, chance, unconscious premonitions, always in relation to the love theme are recurrent motifs in his works. In *Communicating Vessels* (1932), a title referring to the communication between the waking world and the dream world, the woman appears as an enigmatic and evasive being, wrapped in melancholy and solitude. Thanks to the dream, objects, places and people acquire authentic meaning as they animate themselves through the poet's evocative and irrational capacity. In *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*, Katherine Conley comments Breton's idea of love as a revolving door that brings the possibility of starting the search for a new adventure when the previous one is finished, as when he fell in love with Nadja Delcourt, later writing about her in the novel with the same title (1928) and in *L'amour fou* (1937).

Love, woman and madness meet in Nadja. André Breton relates in first person his adventure with the young woman (Nadja, is a Russian word for "hope") called Léona-Camille-Ghislaine-Deharne whom he met in Rue La Fayette in Oct.4, 1926. Through her characterization in this work, Nadja becomes the paradigm of the *femme-enfant*: beautiful and very young, enigmatic, still innocent and a bit of a vagabond and

extravagant, artist, who approaches both genius and madness and falls in love with her mentor. The last news about her, once the relationship between them finished, were that she had been hospitalized in an asylum. The real Nadjia worked as an employee, dancer and actress; she drew and wrote poems. She was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in 1929 where she died in 1940. Breton's work ends with the announcement of a new relationship, X. This essay inquires if Carrington's text can be read as a counter-narrative to Breton's *Najia*.

7.3. Leonora Carrington's *Down Under*

The centrality of women is fundamental in Surrealism. Whitney Chadwick states that "No artistic movement since Romanticism has elevated the image of woman to a significant role in the creative life of man as Surrealism did; no group or movement has ever defined such a revolutionary role for her." (1991: 7) Transgression refers precisely to the subject of madness and hysteria, a role in which, paradoxically, women remain a central presence, always within the marginality in which they were relegated by their male counterparts. In *Women of the Left Bank*, Shari Benstock (1986) examines the lives of more than twenty English, American, and French women whose artistic talents shaped the experience of early twentieth-century Paris. Although Leonora Carrington is not among them, she is undoubtedly one of the Writers and paintings of the surrealist movement.

Leonora Carrington met the German Max Ernst at a party in 1937 when she was only 20 years old. They moved to Paris, and Ernst left his wife. In Paris, Carrington joined the circle of friends led by André Breton, Jean Arp, Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, or Man Ray. In 1938, he moved with Ernst to the south of France, and shortly afterwards he was arrested and sent to a concentration camp from where he fled to the United States with the help of Peggy Guggenheim, leaving Leonora. She travelled to Spain with two friends. To the trauma of the abandonment of Ernst was added a violation that suffered in a hotel in Madrid. She was admitted to an institution in Santander where she was injected with Cardiazol. The drug was induced by psychological states close to epilepsy, diagnosed as hysteria. Leonora managed to leave the hospital and move to Lisbon from where her father planned to send her to a sanatorium in South Africa. However, Carrington fled with the Mexican diplomat, Renato Leduc, friend of Pablo Picasso, and settled in Mexico where in 1946 he would marry the Hungarian painter Chiqui Weisz.

En Bas tells the story of Carrington's descent into the underworld after the deportation of Ernst in May 1940: "Je commence donc au moment où Max fut emmené pour la deuxième fois dans un camp de concentration, les fers aux poignets, à côté d 'A gendarme armé d'un rifle (May 1940) "(Carrington 8). He continues with the trauma of his rape, and the subsequent trauma of his internment, where he asks "Hôpital ou camp de concentration?" (Carrington 35). Between 23 and 25 August 1943, Carrington dictated the text, in French to Jeanne Ménégné, the wife of the doctor Pierre Mabillet whom Carrington admired. Carrington later revised it and translated it into English. The end of the relationship with Max Ernst, as Nadja had with Breton, Carrington begins the

journey to madness. In *Down Below* Carrington relates in first person the episode of hysteria that suffers from that gendarmes take to their lover in the south of France at the beginning of World War II until regaining the lucidity in the Sanatorium of Santander where it is confined in 1940.

In her study on female insanity in the nineteenth century, *La Ronde des folles: Femme, folie et enfermement au XIXème siècle*, Yannick Ripa, mentions the conditions of internment in France, Germany and Spain (Ripa 55). The author describes how women were admitted who rejected the conditions of submission to the opinions of a male doctor who did not know their real problems, something about which authors like the British Virginia Woolf or the North-American Charlotte Perkins Gilman had already complained about. The study of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (2000), denounces the oppressions suffered by women and show the internal conflicts that arise in their artistic works, evident in Carrington's autobiographical account:

Le 23 Août 1943. Il y a maintenant exactement trois ans, j'étais internée dans la clinique du Dr. Moralès, à Santander (Espagne), considérée par le Dr. Pardo, de Madrid, et le consul britannique, comme folle incurable. Depuis ma rencontre fortuite avec vous, que je considère comme le plus clairvoyant, je me suis mise, il y a

une semaine, à réunir les fils qui auraient pu m'amener à traverser la première frontière de la connaissance"⁵ (Carrington, *En Bas* 7).

Avant d'aborder les faits de cette expérience, je tiens à dire que l'arrêt prononcé contre moi par la société à ce moment-là était probablement, et même sûrement, un bien car j'ignorais l'importance de la santé, c'est-à-dire la nécessité absolue d'avoir un corps bien portant pour éviter le désastre dans la libération de l'esprit" (Carrington, *En Bas* 8).

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⁵ The expression « première frontière de la connaissance » refers to 'madness'

du conformisme.¹¹⁵ Avant d'aborder les faits de cette expérience, je tiens à dire que l'arrêt prononcé contre moi par la société à ce moment-là était probablement, et même sûrement, un bien car j'ignorais l'importance de la santé, c'est-à-dire la nécessité absolue d'avoir un corps bien portant pour éviter le désastre dans la libération de l'esprit (*En Bas* 7-8).

24 août: Je crains de me laisser aller à la fiction, véridique, mais incomplète, par manque de quelques détails qui ne me viennent pas aujourd'hui à la mémoire et qui devraient nous apporter plus de lumière. Ce matin, l'idée de l'oeuf me hante et je pense l'employer comme un cristal où je verrais Madrid en juillet-août 1940; pourquoi ne refléterait-il pas ma propre expérience aussi bien que l'histoire passée et future de l'Univers ? L'oeuf est le macrocosme et le microcosme, la ligne de partage entre le Grand et le Petit, qui rend impossible la vision du tout (Carrington 30).

As interns were stripped of their possessions, clothes, hair, and even their names, habits, memories and memories were also left behind as internalised fragments of self, degrading the body and effecting a split between the mental and the physical. The body becomes 'not I', in Kristeva's terms, as interns symbolically distance themselves from the sensations and markers of physical decrepitude in and on their material bodies.

Carrington's fragmentation, the separation between her self-consciousness and her body is experienced through both physical suffering and psychical imaginary projections of the body, becoming animal-like. Emblematic animals are the horse or the hyena, an aspect I will explore in greater detail by comparing André Breton's "La Debutante" and Carrington's story by the same title. This aspect mobilizes the narration in a schizophrenic way, signalling a transient subjectivity: "Dans un instant de lucidité, je compris la nécessité d'extraire de moi les personnages qui m'habitaient" (Carrington, *En Bas* 79).

Although Carrington directs his story to Pierre Mabile using the pronoun 'je' to refer to herself, her narrative is oral, transcribed by Mabile's wife, a situation that places the enunciating subject, Leonora, in a constant mobility. It is thus the formal content and structure of the narrative that allows the 'pathos' of narration to emerge, as Shoshana Felman would have it. The displacement of the identity of the enunciating subject is also perceived in Leonora's continuous association with a gender identity perceived as androgynous: "It is said that, par le soleil, j'étais androgyne, la lune, le Saint-Esprit, une gitane , Unites acrobate, Leonora Carrington et une femme. Je devais être aussi, plus tard, Elisabeth d'Angleterre "(Carrington, *En Bas* 62-63). It is also identified, as mentioned above, with the Jewish people in a messianic tone: "J'expiais ainsi mon exil du reste du monde; C'était le signe de ma sortie de Covadonga (qui était pour moi l'Egypte) et de ma rentrée "In Bas" (à Jérusalem) où je devais porter la connaissance "(Carrington 66-67). At times Leonora is transformed into animals and objects, something that is also reflected in her paintings and drawings and her short stories:

"Lorsque je devins tristement raisonnable, on me raconta que, les premiers jours, je m'étais conduite comme divers animaux, Which je sautais avec l'agilité d'un singe sur l'armoire, which je griffais et rugissais comme un lion, je je hennissais, buoy, etc ... "(Carrington, *En Bas* 35). Memoirs below could be read as an impersonation under the mask of Cardiazole: "C'est, j'en suis a peu près certaine, dans la nuit qui précéda ma piqûre de Cardiazol, j'eus cette vision: [.. .]. J'étais moi-même le poulain blanc "(Carrington, *En Bas* 60-61).

Although Carrington's madness arises from the actual circumstances of her life experiences, her memories, re-written interwoven with reality and fantasy, show the ambiguity that would characterize 'female writing' or the semiotic body, as Cixous or Kristeva

Notant une certaine extravagance chez ces messieurs, j'en déduisais qu'ils étaient tous sous l'influence hypnotique de la bande de Van Ghent, et que cet endroit était par conséquent une sorte de prison pour ceux qui avaient menacé la puissance de ce groupe, que moi, la plus menaçante de tous, je devais subir une torture plus terrible encore, afin de mieux être réduite et de devenir gâteuse comme mes compagnons de détresse. Je croyais les Moralès maîtres de l'univers et puissants magiciens qui se servaient de leur pouvoir pour semer l'horreur et la terreur (Carrington 48).

According to Bonnie Lander, *Down Below* is a response to André Breton's work on female insanity. Although with points in common, in a way Carrington and Nadja represent different positions, as we will see below. Leonora Carrington comes into contact with the surrealist group through her relationship with Max Ernst in the 1930s, coinciding with the boom in the image of the girl-child. The arrival in Paris of an attractive nineteen-year-old, aristocratic, in love with an artist much older than herself, who has rejected the upper class from which she comes and has broken the paternal bonds must have dazzled everyone. In Breton's words: "Your beauty and your talent has mesmerized us. You are the very image of the femme-enfant "(Poniatowska, 90). However, it seems that Carrington did not accept this idea of women as and sensual muses.

Despite this, we cannot deny that the couple Ernst-Carrington fits perfectly into what we have been saying about the relationship between the Surrealists and their women. Ernst's influence on young Carrington is key. The German artist, who, by the way, had taught painting and drawing to the mentally ill in Bonn, is a very prominent figure of surrealism, recognized by Breton himself for the strength and originality of his creations. He instructs her, encourages her to tell of her childish fears and inhibitions. The years that they lived together, between 1937 and 1940, are very productive artistically for both. Carrington's paintings and writings created in this period, *The inn of the Dawn Horse*, *Max's Portrait*, or *The House of Fire* are works that fully participate in Surrealism.

In “La Debutante”, Breton describes Carrington as lover of the forbidden, displaying the qualities of a witch. Indeed, in her memories in *Down Below*, Carrington frequently uses the metaphor of the mirror, a magic crystal ball. The mirror appears a gateway with several openings. As in Freud account, it is associated to oral, the telling itself. It also refers to the mouth of the stomach: "C'était, pour employer votre image, le miroir de la terre, dont réflexion contient la même réalité que le reflété. Ce miroir - mon estomac - a dû être lavé des épaisses couches de crasse [...]" (Carrington 9). A little later she insists: "Je me convainquis that Madrid était l'estomac du monde et moi j'étais chargée de Guérir cet appareil digestif" (Carrington 21). Finally, those openings related to her sex: "Mes règles s'arrêtèrent à cette époque, pour ne reparaître que trois mois plus tard. (Carrington 33)

Carrington's de-re-composition shows how that inevitable fragmentariness need not be disavowed, and that embracing it can be a way out of imposed constructions of the body. If the body is discursively constructed through regulatory norms, then we can use the 'telling' (hence the mouth) as a mode of inscription and embodiment to take ownership of our pieces, forging right to the very core and the visceral (the stomach). What is at stake here is not wholeness, but self-definition of how the fragments are assembled. This is beyond the kind of appeasing symbolic wholeness that may be achieved in the Lacanian mirror stage. This is the difference between productive and destructive fragmentation, whether self-willed or imposed by others. It is the difference between the split subject constructed by phallogentric discourses and a re-signified female subject. It also shows how the alienated body, the “body-for-others” of Jean Paul

Sartre's (1943), can become a "body-for-itself", without cancelling out the multiple constituent elements of the body as physiological, social and cultural self. Carrington's text encourages a productive reflection on issues of agency and power, and of multiple potential modalities of material and phantasmatic embodiment, opening the way to understandings and experiences of the body beyond the problematic sexed and gendered, notion of lack.

It is also interesting that Carrington's account describes certain obsessive moments associated with Judaism, not so much because of its role in the Second War but rather because of its mystical resonances, mainly kabbalistic and alchemical: "Deux bouteilles d'eau de Cologne, Together of forme plate: les Juifs, l'autre de forme cylindrique: les non-Juifs. [...] Deux pots de crème dont l'avait un couvercle noir: la nuit, le côté gauche, la lune, la femme, la destruction; L'autre, a couvercle vert: l'homme, le frère, les yeux verts, le soleil la construction "(Carrington 65). Carrington sees herself as the incarnation of the Jewish people who aspire to be admitted to the hospital, a kind of New Jerusalem, and where the images of the mistreatment she feels she suffers in her internment are compared to visions of torture by hand Of the Nazis. The owner of the hotel in Madrid, scene of one of her traumas, was also German: "Van Ghent était mon père, mon ennemi et l'ennemi des hommes; j'étais seule à pouvoir le vaincre; pour le vaincre, il me fallait le comprendre. [...] Je tentai de convaincre celui-ci que la guerre mondiale était faite à base d'hypnotisme par un groupe de gens, Hitler et Cie., représentés en Espagne par Van Ghent, qu'il suffisait de prendre conscience de ce

pouvoir hypnotique pour le vaincre, pour arrêter la guerre et délivrer le monde coincé comme moi [...] (Carrington 26-27).

Juncal Caballero and Julia Salmerón also attribute to the historical circumstances the alienation of the author, calling it war psychosis. In her descent, Carrington experiences in his own flesh the passage by the madness and the internment in an asylum, as well as the survival and the recovery. From her testimony, it seems that her experience at the psychiatric hospital is even more traumatic than the crisis of madness. On more than one occasion she says that the main reason for writing is to get rid of obsessive memories. In *Down Below*, torture appears fundamentally connected to the use of Cardiazole, which transforms her into a living dead zombie:

“Tout cela me pénétrait comme un corps étranger et cette torture était au-delà de tout pouvoir de description” (Carrington 49).

“*Mercredi 25 Août*. Voilà le troisième jour que j’écris, et je pensais me délivrer en quelques heures; c’est dur, parce que je revis cette époque et je dors mal, troublée et inquiète de l’utilité de ce que je fais. Je suis bien obligée cependant de terminer mon récit afin de sortir de cette angoisse” (Carrington 46).

“J’étais toujours convaincue que Van Ghent était celui qui hypnotisait Madrid, ses hommes et sa circulation, lui qui rendait

les gens *zombies* et distribuait l'angoisse comme des bonbons afin de faire de tous des *esclaves*" (Carrington 24-25).

The experience of the descent into hell fascinated André Breton, given his obsession with the subject of madness and, especially, madness in women. Breton advises Carrington to write about her experience when they meet again in New York during the exile in 1941, and two years later in Mexico. Carrington's text will go through different versions that will go from written to oral and from oral to writing. According to Marina Warner, Pierre Mabille's wife, Jeanne Megnen helped transcribe Carrington's oral account over five days, from Monday 23 August to Friday 27 August 1943, narrating the trauma of three years before, an experience that continued to obsessed her and that, as seen in the reports and interviews, she was never to forget. These memories follow a chronological order but they are not sequenced in a logical way, that is, it seems that the author writes impulsively each day until the day is gone and she is exhausted. The process lasts more than she had calculated and, her telling distresses her: "I have been writing for three days, although I expected to put everything down in a few hours; I find it painful because I am reliving that period. I sleep bad, restless and worried about the usefulness of what I am doing" (181).

The consequence of this convulsive, almost automatic writing is that, although the order of discourse is linear, internal time is blurred ("A few days later", "two or three days"). Inaccuracy increases when events deals with her time in Santander not knowing where she is nor the time that has elapsed since leaving Madrid. Thus, the narrative is

made up of fragmented moments: "One day", "One morning". The account presents itself as a journey towards self-awareness: "I believe that it will help me, in my journey beyond that border, to remain lucid and allow me to take and remove at will the mask that will be my shield against the hostility of conformity" (155). The metaphors related to creation and fertility used by Carrington refer to this opening of the 'semiotic cora', as Kristeva would describe: "Ce n'était qu'un embryon de connaissance que je vais essayer d'exprimer ici avec la plus (Carrington 8) and later writes: "Ceci est le sens exact de mes paroles. Pourtant, lorsqu'on allowed me to enjoy the suite, je ne trouvai aucun temple et le paysage était tout à fait fertile "(Carrington 46)

Following an apparent chronology, the narrative includes temporal lapses, mise en abyme structures, and an ambiguous account interwoven with reality, as well as fantasies and self-fiction, bordering the fantastic, as explained in Section III. The author tries to describe all the experiences as events without interpretation or analysis, as if she were re-living them: the terrible effects of Cardiazole injections, brutal electroshocks, hallucinations, lapses of memory and misinterpretations of reality.

Une nouvelle époque commence alors avec la journée la plus terrible et la plus noire de ma vie entière. Comment pourrai-je écrire cela quand j'ai peur, seulement, d'y penser ? Je suis terriblement angoissée et pourtant je ne peux pas continuer à vivre seule avec ce souvenir... Je sais que lorsque je l'aurai écrit, je serai *délivrée*. Vous devez savoir, ou bien je serai persécutée jusqu'à la

fin de mon existence. Mais pourquoi exprimer l'horreur de cette journée par de simples paroles? (Carrington 55).

In *Down Below*, Carrington relates her experiences between May and December 1940, from Ernst's second arrest to the moment she escapes from the psychiatric hospital. After a first week of solitude, she enters a constant delirium: she eats very little and drinks wine without stopping, works intensely, surprising himself with her own strength, and sleeps in the kitchen on a pile of potatoes. She feels that her body is a microcosm where the evils of society are reproduced, and struggles to purge it by bulimic vomiting. Her friend Catherine and her boyfriend meet her three weeks later. When they see her in this state of alienation, they convince her to go with them to Spain, on the grounds that she can find a visa for Ernst. During the drive, the hyperbolic interpretations are repeated: she identifies himself with the damaged vehicle. Her anxiety, the seizure of her muscles, the lack of control over her steps, to the point of becoming immobilized, all is described in minute detail. In Madrid, her behaviour is bizarre and self-destructive, disconcerting friends and family. Her parents ask the Dutchman Van Ghent and the British consul to look after her, but after an unfortunate group sex encounter in a bar in Madrid, described as rape, she no longer shows rational control and she is sent to Santander to doctor Morales' clinic. Her months there are described as a real nightmare. Her delusions intensify and she sees her doctor and his assistant as some kind of God, and herself as the Holy Spirit. She discovers encrypted messages in all kinds of objects, and becomes obsessed with the dead daughter of her

doctor, Covadonga. In Ernst's absence, la "femme-enfant", a fragmented Self half woman half daughter, imagines herself to be the daughter of her psychiatrist, Don Mariano.

Un jour, cependant, Catherine, qui depuis longtemps était entre les mains des psychanalystes, me persuada que mon attitude trahissait un désir inconscient de me délivrer, pour la deuxième fois, de mon 'père': Max, que je devais pouvoir supprimer afin de pouvoir chercher un autre amant" (Carrington 11).

Je rentrai en Egypte, assez dégoûtée de la *Sainte Famille*... J'appris par Asegurada que Covadonga (la fille de Don Mariano) était enterrée dans ce cimetière. [...] je pensais que c'était Don Luis qui l'avait tuée en la torturant comme moi pour la rendre parfaite. Je croyais que Don Luis cherchait en moi une autre soeur qui, plus forte, résisterait à ses épreuves et atteindrait avec lui le *Sommet* (Carrington 72)

J'entrai avec lui [Don Luis] chez une jeune dame enceinte à qui il devait faire une piqûre (je pensais qu'il s'agissait de Cardiazol et que j'étais moi-même l'enfant qu'elle portait). [...] Je me précipitai sur la bibliothèque et choisis une bible que j'ouvris au

hasard. Je tombai sur le passage où le Saint-Esprit, descendant sur les apôtres, leur donne le pouvoir de parler toutes les langues. J'étais le Saint-Esprit et me croyais dans les limbes, les limbes – ma chambre – où la lune et le soleil se rencontrent à l'aube et au crépuscule (Carrington 83).

“Je me résignai à prendre la place de sa soeur et à subir la dernière épreuve qui lui rendrait Covadonga dans ma propre personne”
(Carrington 86).

In "Beyond the Border: Leonora Carrington's Terrible Journey," an article in the book by Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*, the author states that the hybridity of the story is also perceived in the metaphors related to delusions by drug intake: “the tale is fantastic, coloured by dream and drug experiences, describing a genuinely alternative mental state” (63). She also mentions that the narrative has an intergeneric component: “the narrative's structure and meta-narrational component (it reads like a mystery tale in which Carrington plays both the roles of victim and sleuth) highlights the role of language itself” (Conley 63).

Carrington's desire to be transferred to the hospital 'down floor' contrasts with the traditional conception of 'paradise', traditionally situated above:

- D'où venez-vous?
- D "'En Bas"? -
- Délicieux. Tout le monde and est heureux.
- Emmenez-moi.
- No N.
- Pourquoi?
- Parce que vous n'êtes pas assez bien pour et aller (*En Bas* 54).

Je croyais that Don Luis et son père, voyant les problèmes résolus dans mon assiette, me permettraient d'aller *En Bas*, au paradis. (Carrington 62).

[...] ayant terminé l'Oeuvre, je descis l'escalier et retournai en Egypte" (Carrington 70).

Nanny, effrayée d'aller habiter dans le grand jardin, où elle craignait de rencontrer les fous, essaya de me dissuader de m'installer 'En Bas'. C'était, disait-elle, an endroit dangereux et maléfique. J'insistai tellement qu'elle céda. (Carrington 82).

Carrington makes fun of not only the conception of Breton and other surrealists around the theme of the Immaculate Conception. The following paragraph alludes to

both Christian and esoteric beliefs formulated by Victor Hugo in the figure of the hunchback of Notre Dame and his adventures with the gypsy woman:

Je pensais que l'on me faisait subir les tortures de purification pour me faire atteindre la Connaissance Absolue et qu'alors je pourrais vivre 'En Bas.' Ce pavillon était pour moi la Terre, le Monde Réel, le Paradis – l'Eden – et aussi Jérusalem. Don Luis et Don Mariano étaient, eux, Dieu et son fils. Je les croyais juifs et pensais que moi, aryenne, celtique et saxonne, je subissais ces souffrances pour venger les Juifs des persécutions qu'ils subissaient. Par la suite, en pleine lucidité, j'irais 'En Bas', comme troisième personne de la Trinité. Je sentais que, par le soleil, j'étais androgyne, la lune, le Saint-Esprit, une gitane, une acrobate, Leonora Carrington et une femme. Je devais être aussi, plus tard, Elisabeth d'Angleterre. J'étais la personne qui révélait les religions et portait sur ses épaules la liberté et les péchés de la terre mués en connaissance, l'union de l'homme et de la femme avec Dieu et le Cosmos, tous égaux entre eux (Carrington 62-63).

A paragraph she reminds us of Breton's *Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme* : "Je crois à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et

la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de *surréalité*, si l'on peut ainsi dire" (*Manifeste* 319) is the following one :

Une nuit, tout éveillée, je fis ce rêve : une chambre à coucher immense comme la scène d'un théâtre, un plafond voûté peint comme un ciel, le tout très délabré mais luxueux, un lit d'autrefois garni de rideaux déchirés et de cupidons peints, ou réels... je ne sais plus ; un jardin assez semblable à celui dans lequel je m'étais promenée la veille: il était entouré de fils de fer barbelés entre lesquels mes mains avaient le pouvoir de faire pousser les plantes qui s'enlaçaient autour d'eux et, les recouvrant, les rendaient invisibles (Carrington 44).

Breton's position against the mental institutions, already exposed in his *Manifestos*, becomes more evident in his novel *Nadja*, where he seems to suggest that the healing of women in psychiatric institutions is impossible. Breton never did anything to visit Nadja in the hospital. He passively remembers her and regrets her fate in *Communicating Vessels*. In *Nadja*, the reader does not have access to the voice of the female protagonist and only receives his words through a narrator who uses it as an example of his 'amour fou'.

A lot of emphasis is placed on her eyes: "Je n'avais jamais vu de tels yeux" (*Nadja* 64). They become the object of the narrator's gaze, without ever becoming the

subject. In Carrington, however, the mirror is fundamental. The poem 'Los Ojos Verdes' by Garcia Lorca's is a recurring motif:

Les yeux verts avaient toujours été pour moi ceux de mon frère, et maintenant c'étaient ceux de Michel, d'Albert et d'un jeune Homme of Buenos Aires that j'avais rencontré dans le train between Barcelone and Madrid ... Les yeux verts, les yeux de mes frères qui me délivreraient enfin de mon père (Carrington 32-33).

The eyes of the psychiatrist are like rays full of power, symbol of patriarchal control "[...] je reconnus a maître par, that of the minuscule pupille de ses yeux clairs, jaillissaient les rayons roux qui m'avaient hypnotisée déjà dans les reyes de Van Ghent et de Don Luis. Celui-ci était Don Mariano Moralès "(Carrington 59).

However, Carrington manages to recover herself as subject. The madwoman recovers her voice and writes her own history through complex forms of "écriture féminine" that surpasses the masculine clichés of surrealism:

You tell me: 'J'ai résolu les problèmes qu'il m'a posés, je serai certainement conduite en Bas. (Carrington 66).

Thus Carrington's narrative can be read as a story of success, where Leonora breaks down in fragments only to be reborn, owner of her own destiny:

Il me prit par le bras et m'emmena dans un pavillon désaffecté:

- Je suis le maître, ici.

- Je ne suis pas propriété publique de la maison. J'ai, moi aussi, des pensées et une valeur privée. Je ne vous appartiens pas

(Carrington 86).

The multidirectionality and ambiguity of Carrington's account is much more than a scene of transient madness. Madness thus becomes more than a trope, rather than a rhetorical figure. It becomes a (pre)text that begins by giving voice to Carrington, a voice that finally fixes itself after the revision of the printed text and its translation, positioning her as subject among the mobility of fragments. Madness can also be interpreted as the opening of an alternative space through oral narration, and subsequently of writing and translation (we must remember that Carrington later revised his oral narrative and translated it from French to English). The text also questions the ideas of Breton and other surrealists about madness. In the Warner edition of 1987, an Epilogue written by Leonora Carrington summarizes the events after her departure from the sanatorium: the reencounter with Renato Leduc in Madrid and the strategy to escape from the family plans of being sent to a psychiatric hospital in South Africa. She mentions the days in Lisbon, when he sees Ernst again but everything has changed, and

finally, her trip with the refugees to New York. Thus, the artist moves beyond victimization and reclaims her own space as a creator and artist, the demonstration of the return to life, after her descent into hell.

Légende de la carte d'*En bas*:

A- Lieu désert ; cimetière de Covadonga.

B- Haute muraille entourant le jardin.

X. – Grille du jardin.

1. – Villa Covadonga.

2. – Radiographie.

3. – Villa Pilar.

4. – Pommiers et vue sur Casa Blanca et sur la vallée.

5. – « Afrique ».

6. – Villa Amachu.

6b. – Arbre.

7. – « En Bas ».

8. – Jardin potager.

9. – Tonnelle et caverne.

10. – « Quartier » de Don Mariano.

11. – Rue « du Monde extérieur ».

a. – Ma chambre « En Bas », l'éclipse et les limbes.

b. – Le repaire.

c. – La bibliothèque.

Grand allée d'*En Bas*

7.4. The dissected organism and the body-fragment as patchwork: “La debutante”

As mentioned, *la surréalité* Carrington’s experience, reflected in her memoir *Down Below*, is intertextually netted with multiple allusions to different characters, taking as basis Persephone and her imprisonment in Hades. Her mutant identities mobilize the narration in a schizophrenic way. This is visible in her transient subjectivity:

Dans un instant de lucidité, je compris la nécessité d'extraire de moi les personnages qui m'habitaient. (Carrington 79).

Although Carrington directs her story to Pierre Mabile using the pronoun 'je' to refer to herself, his narrative is oral, transcribed by Mabile's wife, a situation that places the enunciating subject, Leonora, in a constant mobility. It is thus the formal content and structure of the narrative that allows the 'pathos' of narration to emerge. The displacement and fragmentation of the enunciating subject is also perceived in Leonora's continuous association with a gender identity perceived as androgynous:

Par la suite, en pleine lucidité, j’irais ‘En Bas’, comme troisième personne de la Trinité. Je sentais que, par le soleil, j’étais androgyne, la lune, le Saint-Esprit, une gitane, une acrobate. (Carrington 63).

Leonora is also transformed into animals and objects.

Lorsque je devins tristement raisonnable, on me raconta que, les premiers jours, je m'étais conduite comme divers animaux , Which je sautais avec l'agilité d'un singe sur l'armoire, which je griffais et rugissais comme un lion, je je hennissais, buoy, etc ... (Carrington 35).

C'est, j'en suis a peu près certaine, dans la nuit qui précéda ma piqûre de Cardiazol, j'eus cette vision: [...]. J'étais moi-même le poulain blanc. (Carrington 60-61).

This mutability appears later in her paintings and drawings and short stories. In the following lines, I shall explore some of these motifs in one of her best known tales: “La debuntante”

A young woman from an affluent family finds herself dreading her formal entrance into high society. An affable hyena offers to take her place; the young woman acquiesces, but the hyena demands a face to wear in place of her own. A maid enters, and the hyena murders her. The debutante doesn't object; she merely asks that the killing be done quickly. Later, the debutante learns

of what transpired at dinner: the hyena's masquerade persisted until she took umbrage to the cake being served. She stood, tore off her false face, and escaped through a window. (Tobias Carroll for the *Paris Review*, August 14, 2013)

“La Debutante” was the only story written by a woman included in André Breton’s *Anthology of Black Humor*. The anthology was published in 1939, on the eve of the German invasion of Paris. However, it did not appear until 1945 because it was censored by the regime at the time. “Black Humor” was used as a violent resource to bring awareness to society evils in a subversive way. Carrington was the twenty-two years old, and she had written the story in 1937, when she lived in Paris and later in St-Martin d’Ardeche with Max Ernst. The story was also included in her own collection of short stories *The Oval Lady* (1939).

“La Debutante” was written during the same period in which Carrington painted her self-portrait in “The Inn of the Dawn Horse”. In both works, the motif of the hyena re-appears. Whitney Chadwick (1985: 78-79) interprets the hyena as a creature of the night, while the rocking horse represents daylight and childhood. The story is set in 1934 when Leonora attended the Ascot races from the royal enclosure, as she would explain in *The Mexican Years* (1991: 44). Because she was not allowed to the paddock, she took a book to entertain herself. It was Huxley’s *Eyeless in Gaza* (1991: 34).

As mentioned above, the motif of the looking-eyes and also the looking-glass is very important in Carrington. It so happens that the French publisher of *En bas* was also

the translator of Lewis Carroll. Both the story and the painting deal with the issue of the breach between the domestic and the public body, reflected also in the duality of the human versus the devouring hyena that escapes its prison beyond the window or the cage in the zoo. The narrator of the tale recalls Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, the sequel to *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* where Alice personifies la "femme-enfant", a young woman coming into self-awareness: "Nurse", she calls the maid, whom rather than a maid appears to be a caretaker. "Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyena and you are a bone", echoing the beginning of Carroll's story. The story may also contain echoes of the famous crime of the Papin sisters, two French maids who violently murdered their female employer and her daughter in 1933, pulling their eyes out and disfiguring their faces. The psychology of the case drew the attention of young Jacques Lacan, who was writing his doctoral thesis on paranoia, and other French intellectuals. Simone de Beauvoir reported that the case had a huge media impact because of the almost cannibalistic overtones (Beauvoir cited in Lusty 36).

Carrington's own fairy tale turns into a cannibal fantasy of grotesque violence, where the hyena tears off the maid's face, eats the corpse, and places the face as a mask. In *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Natalya Lusty notes that the illustrations drawn for *En bas* cover "repeat in emblematic form a blank ink silhouette of Alice's 'womanly' body about to jump through a skipping rope." (26) The author also mentions that at the time Ernst and Dali were completing the illustrations of the Alice series for Breton's homage to Carroll. Lusty also notes the "libidinal and oneiric quality" of the illustrations recalling Alice's own dreams in both of her tales. Indeed, the fragmented

motifs repeat themselves on the book-cover as well as in Leonora's drawings of herself, animal-like, staring at the mirror. Interestingly, the mark on the side wall with a three-dimensional effect echoes a similar mark in one of her photos. The mirror, a sort of alchemic Sun (symbol of masculine power), appears also on *En bas* cover, behind the female (breasted) figure with three long legs that seem to be skipping. The other figures bear hyena and cat-like masks.

Carrington's exploration of the ambiguous status of the child-woman figure dwells on the contradictions of the fragmented Self, a hybridity present in all her stories and paintings, as well as in her autobiographical account in *Down Below*. Although Carrington claimed that the story is a satire of English upper-class debutante ritual, a moment when young girls were introduced as marriage prospects "in the market" (Carrington *The Mexican Years* 1991: 34), which Natalya Lusty compares to the Mad Hatter's Tea Party (27), "The Debutant" seems to reflect the author's own debut in Paris Surrealist circles in 1936. As in other of her works, Carrington problematizes the struggle of the Ego, torn apart between the Freudian uncivilized Id represented as the wild nature in childhood, and the socialized civilized Superego of adulthood, embodied in the figure of "la femme-enfant", object of exploration for Breton's circle at the time.

Natalya Lusty points out that the nurse portrayed in the story was the Irish nanny Mary Kavanaugh. However, in my view, although the reader might immediately identify the maid and the hyena as females, there is no indication that they belong to this sex. Indeed, Carrington's descriptions in *En bas* show androgynous and unstable

conceptions of genre, and her esoteric alchemic inclinations would have pointed in the direction of Jungian genre ambivalence as well.

In *The Mexican Years*, Carrington mentions to have been reading Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* while at Ascot debutant ceremony. The protagonist of "The Debutant" chooses Swift's *Gulliver Travels*, perhaps a more appropriate fantastic story for a young reader. In both cases, Carrington connects her telling to dystopian narratives meant to provide a veiled social critique of society. Indeed, Swift, alongside Carroll, Nietzsche, Sade, Lautréamont, Appollinaire, and other contemporary writers, had been included in Breton's *Anthology of Black Humor*, where he celebrated literature subversive potential. Breton's description of Swift, as an outraged man wearing a mask, may have inspired the masking exercise in "La debutante", where the narrator finds herself escaping the company of other girls of her age to go to the zoo. It reminds us of Alice's escape, into the rabbit-whole in the first story, and through the looking-glass with her black kitten in the sequel. As Lusty notes, the macabre defacing of the maid registers the impersonal treatment of the working class, a treatment young children shared, relegated to the nursery, usually located at the top of Victorian houses, as far away as possible from areas where the family entertained its guests. Alice Gambrell (cited by Lusty 35) mentions Edith Wharton's treatment of debutante rituals in *The Age of Innocence* (1920), in which the author compares these ceremonies to ancient fertility rites and the coming of age. This comparison of ancient pagan uncivilized rites may underlie Carrington's wild and violent treatment in her story, where the hyena represents the animal primitive instincts. Indeed, in ancient fertility rites, as in the

Fisher King legend in Celtic mythology, blood-sacrifices were performed in order to display generational renovation, as described by Jessie Weston (1850–1928) in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), and previously by the Scottish social anthropologist Sir James Frazer (1854-1941) in *The Golden Bough* (1890). In “Between Heaven and Earth”, included in *The Golden Bough*, Frazer describes the ritual of seclusion of young girls at puberty, a purification ritual related to the sacred powers of blood, and practiced as a rite of passage in ancient societies. In *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Studies in Rituals of Women's Initiation* (1981), Bruce Lincoln explains that during the period of seclusion, which parallels Persephone’s imprisonment in the underworld, the menstruating girls were not allowed to touch the ground nor see the sun. He also speculated that the lack of facial features in ancient Venus figurines represented this feature of not-seeing-the-sun. The figures also lacked legs (so as not to touch the ground). During the seclusion, girls were only accompanied by older women who taught them about their future roles. Interestingly, Carrington’s drawings, and her description in “The debutant” emphasized the stretching or skipping legs, as well as the fact the hyena keeps the legs of the maid to eat later. The paintings also place the mirror-Sun in a defiant prominent position.

As mentioned above, the hyena is an animal that enjoys a tradition of androgyny and hermaphroditism because the male and female genitals are almost identical in size. They have strong teeth that can crush bones easily. The spotted hyena produces a number of different sounds, limited to howling and a chattering laugh, in the striped hyena. As it resembles human hysterical laugh, it has been mentioned in works of

literature such as Webster's *Duchess of Malfy* (1623) and Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (*Act Iv. Sc.1*). The cubs from spotted hyenas are born fully developed with their eyes open and large ears. Those of striped hyena are born with closed eyes and small ears. In many cultures, hyenas were associated to the devil, as they are night hunters and scavengers who can eat dead bodies and sometimes stole livestock and young children. They were also used in witchcraft, and as symbols of fertility; their body parts used in ancient medicine, a practice that dates back to the Greco-Roman period. It was believed that their body parts were effective to ward off evil and ensure love and fertility (Frembgen 1998: 331-344)

After Ernst's separation from his wife in 1937, Leonora settled with him in the south of France at Saint Martin d'Ardèche. The place is famous for the "Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc Cave" one of the best preserved examples of figurative cave paintings. Among the figures, a prominent spotted hyena that no doubt sparked Leonora's associations with the animal in relation to Breton's 'black humor' and his references to Carrington as 'the witch'. Besides, these associations, the hyena may also symbolize Carrington's mutant Self. In her letter to Henri Parisot, who facilitated *En bas* publication in 1945 in the collection "L'âge d'or" (Flammarion), Carrington insists that she will no longer submit to the femme-enfant roles: "Je ne serais jamais pétrifiée dans une 'jeunesse' qui n'existe plus" and insists in making him "voir à travers Le monster".

Chihuahua, 194. Cal. Roma. Mexico D.F.

Cher Henri, merci de votre lettre – Je suis d'accord qu'on publie
En Bas MAIS croyez moi qu'il n'y a eut aucune 'mal entendu'
entre nous – Vous n'avez peut-être pas compris mon irritation que
je ressente encore, *Je ne suis plus la jeune fille ravissante* qui a
passé par Paris, amoureuse – Je suis une vieille dame qui a vécu
beaucoup et *j'ai changée* – si ma vie vaut quelque chose je suis le
résultat du temps – Donc je ne reproduirais plus l'image d'avant –
Je ne serais jamais pétrifiée dans une 'jeunesse' qui n'existe plus –
J'accepte L'Honorable Décrépide actuelle – ce que j'ai à dire
maintenant est dévoilé autant que possible – **Voir à travers Le
monstre** – Vous comprenez ça? Non? Tant pis. En tout cas faites
ce que vous voulez avec cette fantôme – *avec le condition que vous
publiez cette lettre comme préface* – Comme une vieille taupe qui
nages sous les cimetières je me rends compte que j'ai toujours
étais aveugle – je cherche à connaître Le Mort pour avoir moins
peur, je cherche de vider les images qui m'ont rendus aveugle – Je
vous envoie encore beaucoup d'affection et je vous embrasse à
travers mon ratelier (que je garde à côté de moi la nuit dans une
petite boîte bleu ciel en plastique) JE N'A PLUS UNE SEUL
DENT

Leonora

P.S. Si les jeunes me disent maintenant qui j'ai l'esprit jeune je
m'offence –J'ai l'ESPRIT VIEILLE. Tachez de comprendre ça.⁶

As a sort of inconclusive conclusion, the example of Carrington's *Down Below* and "The debutant" show how the fragment locates the process of *poïesi*, origination, and auto-production within the work of art; the movement from fragments to the whole that occurs at the moment of writing. In writing, meaning can only be found by traversing the fragments that make up writing. Distorted mirror-images that radically reject mimesis, intangible and elusive, suspended in-between, Carrington's surrealist fragments perform the uncontainable unrepresentable presence of masked-faces who look and have eyes, a necessary pre-condition of Self-discovery. The hybrid Self of her narrators, their masked mutant identities, reclaim, reframe and transform preconceived images into something else in order to avoid presenting life and nature as something manageable and controllable. Rather than a point of infinite recession with which the author, her narrators and her readers could identify and find assurance of universal, objective values and meaning, Carrington's body in fragments, the corps, perversely becomes a metonym for the state of the modern female subject. Surpassing the world of appearances, her representations strive for the artificial, the enigmatic, the cryptic, because that is what representation is about. Reading the fragments left behind by Carrington's obscure

⁶ Carrington's short prose and fiction—was collected in two editions published in the U.S. in 1988 by Dutton's Obelisk imprint: *The House of Fear: Notes From Down Below* and *The Seventh Horse and Other Tales*. *The House of Fear* incorporates a short collection called *The Oval Lady: Six Surreal Stories*, first released in the U.S. in 1976 by Capra Press with an introduction by Gloria Orenstein

writing is like reading the traces of a shattering explosion, incomplete and no longer present. However, fragments, as archeological remains, are important in documenting what the writer has overgrown and no longer needs, or simply what has been suddenly and unexpectedly destroyed by various forms of violence. Reading Carrington brings us one step closer to the 'flash' of Flash Fiction.

SECTION VIII. Angela Carter (1942-1992)

8.1. Biographical profile

Angela Olive Carter-Pearce (née Stalker) was a writer, translator, journalist and a teacher. Being a fabulist and magical realist, Angela Carter's name is often heard next to Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende. Her opus includes novels, short stories and newspaper articles, and she is perhaps most widely famous for her feminist, magical realism and picaresque works. She has been placed on a list of the fifty greatest British writers since 1945 by *The Times*. In addition, a book she wrote in 2012, *Nights at the Circus*, was selected as the winner of the 1984 James Tait Black Memorial Prize (Flood, 2012). The variety and diversity of her writing makes it extraordinarily hard to identify her unique writing style. Linden Peach states that "although most of her novels are relatively short, they're crammed with an extraordinary range of ideas, themes and images." (Peach, 1998: 2).

The majority of everything she wrote has to do with a certain type of feminism and a criticism of the traditional views on women throughout the history of mankind. This is why female characters in her books often become rebels, and confront oppression in order to obtain equality. It isn't coincidental that some of their actions mimic those of 1970's feminist movement who are all about deconstructing patriarchal roles. (Formisano, 2010: 1)

The trajectory of her life, the education she received, and the people who surrounded her were of vital importance for her literary ripening and the development of her way of thinking, which is why I will commence this section with her biographical profile.

Carter had a misfortune, so to speak, to be born during the outbreak of the Second World War and German invasion on Great Britain. Due to this fact, her parents, Sophia Olive (née Farthing) and Hugh Alexander Stalker had to send her to live in Yorkshire with her maternal grandmother, to a village name Wall-Upon-Deare.

Even though the profession Angela Carter chose to follow in her later life years was that of a journalist, just as her father was before her, the person who affected her most and had a great influence on Carter's upbringing was precisely her grandmother whom she spent early years of her life with. She was a working class suffragist and radical so it's no wonder such ideas started to form in our author's head. (Formisano 2010: 3)

In a year 1962 she went to attend the University of Bristol and she dedicated herself to various disciplines of the time, such as psychology and anthropology. She was also an avid fan of science fiction and horror comics. She studied English literature, specializing in medieval literature, and she also learnt French and German due to the combined effort of her eagerness and numerous travels she did around Europe.

Angela got married very early to Paul Carter; the same year she started attending university. Four years later, she published her first novel *Shadow Dance*, and just one year after, *The Magic Toyshop*, which won the John Llewelly Rhys Prize and was

posteriorly adapted into a movie. As I have mentioned before, she followed in the footsteps of her father and dedicated herself to journalism. She published two novels in quick succession, *Several Perceptions* (1968), which brought her a Somerset Maugham prize, and *Heroes and Villains* (1969).

That was, coincidentally the very same year in which she, now economically and financially independent, suddenly decided to abandon her husband and travel to Japan. Carter lived in Japan during three long years, at the same time working as a journalist. Out of that experience in the country of a rising sun, three books emerged: *Love* (1971), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), and her first short story collection, *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces*. (1974), a book almost exclusively inspired by her stay in Japan.

Carter always emphasized that her staying in Japan changed her in a professional and personal way. She was touched by observing how the Japanese lived their lives free from distinction between essence and existence (Sage, 2009: 4). It seems that her experience in Japan had also helped her in construction her identity. In 1972 she eventually returns to England and formalizes the decision about her divorce with Paul Carter. Shortly after that, she commences to regularly write articles for a political magazine called *New Society*.

Angela Carter was a peculiar reported since she wanted to transmit the experiences first hand, just as she lived through them, which is why she usually went out, studied and observed the British culture and later she would write critiques. Being a journalist allowed her to expand her own thoughts and disseminate them to avid readers

throughout Britain. In 1989, “Onlywomen Press”, which was a women’s publication in UK actually made an effort to gather people against a bill, Section 28, which banned the government funding to the presses that publish anything related to homosexuality and its promotion. (Anderson, 2009: 1). It goes without saying that Angela Carter was one of the greatest supporters of this press.

Five years later she steps into another marriage, this time with Mark Pearce with whom she posteriorly had a son. In 1977 she wrote *The Passion of New Eve*, and in 1978 her most famous and most controversial essay saw the light: *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*. This essay was a sort of feminist treatise, where female sexuality and desire is represented equal to its male counterpart:

Women were not passive baby-factories, but sensuous and sometimes sexually aggressive beings. Throughout her writing career, Carter presents a similar attitude (perhaps not as graphic as Sade’s, but not far from it), concerning the subversion and liberation of female sexuality. (Formisano, 1998: 3)

In 1979, another short story collection is published, thanks to which she obtained the Cheltenham Festival literary prize: *The Bloody Chamber*.

Carter was employed as a university teacher at four UK universities: Brown University, The University of Adelaide, The University of East Anglia and University of Sheffield. At the same time she went on writing and published two works in 1984: *Black*

Venus, Come into These Yellow Stands: Four Radio Plays, and *Nights at the Circus*, which won her a James Tait Black Memorial Prize. In 1990, she published *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* and in 1991, her last book, *Wise Children*. Sadly, 1991 was precisely the year when Angela Carter was diagnosed with pulmonary cancer and she died of it the following year, on 16th of February 1992, without having been able to celebrate her 52nd birthday on 7th of May.

Apart from the aforementioned works in prose, Carter was also prolific poet, with collections such as *Five Quiet Shouters*, (1966), *Unicorn* (1966). She also cultivated drama, including *The Curious Room: Plays, Film Scripts and an Opera* (published after her death, in 1996), *The Holy Family Album* (published after her death, in 1991). As far as children literature is concerned, she wrote *The Donkey Prince* (1970), *Miss Z*, *The Dark Young Lady* (1970), *Comic and Curious Cats* (1979) and *Moonshadow* (1982). Carter is the author of two essays as well: *Nothing Sacred: Selected Writings* (1982) and *Expletives Deleted* (1992). Her known anthologies are: *Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: An Anthology of Subversive Stories* (1986) and *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (1992). She also did scripts for radio and TV. Finally, as a translator, she published *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977) and *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales* (1982).

In spite of her early death, we could say that she had quite a prolific professional career, multifaceted and filled with success. Her work is a reflection of her particular tastes and experiences that marked her life: from medieval literature to popular folklore, Victorian epoch, works of Marques de Sade, feminism, journalism and magical realism.

Her short stories, being complex, rich in language metaphors and picture evoking symbolism can be considered the antecedents of micro-fiction, following along the lines of fragmentism.

8.2. Writing techniques: deconstruction and rewriting through appropriation.

This passage concerns itself with tendencies and movements which, deriving from poststructuralism, and postmodernist aesthetics, affected Angela Carter's opus. It simultaneously explores writings that had had impact on her creations.

Taking into the account the fact that I will posteriorly focus on the two short stories that are mostly alike to today's micro-fiction, it is only logical to point out the influences that played an important role in the creation of her short stories, specifically the ones belonging to the book entitled *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*.

In an attempt to define postmodernism, not as a literary movement, but as a 'condition', as Lyotard would have it in his *The postmodern condition*, the reader might be led astray with a prefix post- that rather suggests the continuation of Modernism, which figures such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf representing the UK. Woolf herself once said, prophetically emphasizing the importance of writers' and readers' perspectives, symbolism and imagery:

And the novelists in the future will realize more and more the importance of reflections, for of course there is not one reflection

but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the descriptions of reality more and more of their stories. (Woolf, “The mark on the wall”⁷).

Carter, who merges different genres as she creates, could also be referred to as a postmodernist. At the same time, she insists on narrative strategies that will shed light on the illogicalities in fairy tales and popular folklore, where female protagonists are mistreated or simply victims of circumstances. Valery Traub wonders if such a narrative technique convolutedly justifies precisely what it had been intended to question (Traub 1992: 96), and Robert Clark asks an inevitable question, whether Carter’s work should be viewed in context of postmodernist aesthetics and under which terms:

Her work seems like that of Robbe-Grillet and other postmodernists to move from an understanding of the world as only knowable through modern myths to a writing whose only resort is play and parody. (Clark, 1987: 155)

It is hard to determine who might or not might be considered as a genuine postmodernist writer, if such concept does indeed exist. Nomenclatures are in general usually open to cultural confrontations and difference in interpretation, so one shouldn’t

⁷ <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/English104/woolf1.html>

be carrying the hallmark lightly. One thing seems obvious: postmodern fiction seems to be marked by fragmentation. And Carter's fiction shows this tendency.

In Angela Carter's case, her deconstructive tendency is mostly focused on the content; economically presenting fairy tale motifs, themes and literary topoi with regards to characters and their relationships, rather than in diminishing the structure itself.

No one can deny that Carter's books are deeply connected with genres and narrative traditions from the past: in fact, they drain strength from them, transforming and replacing them. She adopts a different perspective and interweaves her own points of view, joining the surrealistic milieu with the literary techniques of symbolism and imagery.

Having studied English literature, Carter got to know European Art, French Symbolists and Dadaists. While focusing on medieval literature, she was also drawn towards Shakespeare and allusions to his work traverse her entire opus. Posteriorly, the writer "became more conversant with European critical theorists, especially with the poststructuralist and the feminist psychoanalysis". (Peach, 1998: 18) Taking into account her obsession with the motif of a circus, it is inevitable to link Marc Chagall as an influence as far as his creativity, imaginative force and suggestive allegorism are concerned. Surrealist Chagall was as obsessed with a motif of the circus, music, dance and movement as Carter was. In an interview she gave to John Haffenden in 1985, she states:

Surrealism didn't involve inventing extraordinary things to look at, it involved looking at the world as though it were strange [...]

Another way of magicking or making everything strange is to take metaphor literally, and in some respects Fevvers [...] starts off as a metaphor come to life – a winged spirit. And she's the Winged Victory [...] except that she does have a head!" (Haffenden, 1985: 92-93)

The technique of taking parts of the whole of a work so as to make it into a new work, is not a novelty, although it is true that postmodernism generalized it and added political meaning to it. In words of Marcela Iochem Valente and Lília da Cruz Cordeiro Moreira, Carter was the one who took fairy tales and folklore from their context in traditional culture, and altered them in order to demonstrate that what readers might observe as facts are mere historical constructions established "once upon a time". (Iochem Valente, Cordeiro Moreira, 2009: 99) We might go even as far so as to say that her objective might have been altering such reality and destroying established perception, changing the canon and giving free reins to the readers, helping them realize that they are the ones creating their own story, in a way. At the same time, such technique openly alters the concepts of authorship and originality.

Julia Kristeva states that all texts have two axes, a *horizontal axis*, which represents a line that leads from a text to its reader, and a *vertical axis*, that leads from

one text to other written works, thus connecting them into a sort of intertextual network.

Nothing occurs in isolation, explains Michel Foucault:

[T]he frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other text, other sentences: it is a node within a network... The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hand... Its unity is variable and relative. (Foucault, 1974: 23).

Whether the recipient will comprehend the message that the writer is trying to transmit depends on the so-called shared codes between the reader and the creator of the work of art. That is to say, it is desirable that the reader has read the original first so that he/she could understand what the writer is alluding to in her/his text.

Taking it one step further, a postmodern reader, with a knowledge that a text is not an isolated unity, as we have previously said, feels free to reach out and look for other hidden meanings amidst all the imagery, thus actively participating in the construction of the literary work. This language economy is one of the principal characteristics of micro narratives, in which the writer uses as few words as possible, almost all of which are imbued with symbolism, and leaves it to reader to disentangle the web in his own way.

Reception theory represents an entire process of analysing readers' reactions to literary work(s) over the course of time. Stuart Hall has proposed a change, in order for reception theory to focus on media and communication studies while letting the principal premise remain identical: a work of art, regardless whether we are talking about a book or about a movie, is determined through its relationship with its audience/viewership/recipients. The recipient decrypts the encoded message using his/her experience and cultural background, and this is based on a discourse: "Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse." (Hall, 1980: 166-167)

Hall presents a four tiered model that explains 'production, circulation, consumption and reproduction' of coded media messages. The first two depend on the writer, who is at the same time the "encoder", in the third one, the reader is an active decoder of ciphered messages and in the final one, the transformation from reader/recipient into author occurs: now a recipient is capable of reproducing an encoded media, albeit differently than it was the case with the original.

Different reproduction has become very popular lately in the literary world, namely, with the phenomenon of fanfiction, where the recipients dismembers the original text, using the same characters and altering their fates or ending of book.

If short short stories were a type of alphabet, they would most certainly be hieroglyphs, since each of the words carries a heavily laid, previously measured

meaning and has a reason for being interwoven in a text. It is up to recipient to figure out what each chosen position of every used word actually means.

Carter adeptly uses both aforementioned techniques, intertextuality and appropriation in all of her works, namely, in *Nights at the Circus*:

Carter managed to carefully interweave elements taken from such different sources as Greek, Roman or Eastern mythology, the Bible, traditional fairy tales the poetry of Byron, Blake, Yeats, Goethe and Baudelaire, the works of Shakespeare, *Moby Dick*, *Arabian nights*... (I. Valente, C. Moreira, 2009: 100)

At the same time, while rewriting a fairy tale, Carter used an approach of simultaneous deconstruction and construction, bringing down the walls of the previously established literary topoi and inserting alternative characters, beginnings and endings. Susan Sellers underlines the need to use the following “tricks” during re-construction: *ironic, revealing mimicry, clever twists, explorative and exposing tactics* that should leave the myth open; but simultaneously, enough usage of *keywords* for the reader to recognize the old format, while synchronously offering *new perspective* and *opportunities for reflection* (quoted in Koshy, 2010: 78-79; emphasis in the original) These techniques are the same ones micro fiction writers use in the short short stories based on mythologies and fairy tales, which is why Carter is of such interest to us.

8.3. Motifs in works of Angela Carter and their societal function

Speaking of recurring subjects, themes and ideas that tended to repeat themselves throughout Carter's literary work, many theorists of literature have considered the curious possibility to divide her opus in pre- and post- Japanese experience we had previously mentioned. (Dimovitz 2005: 17)

It can't be denied that it is precisely in the Japanese culture where Carter finds symbols which later repeat in her work, being reutilized, resignified and given a new meaning, without being worn out. She thoroughly investigates Japanese culture and traditions which in turn endows her with new perception of individuality and will later come to her aid as she attempts to overthrow the disciplined literary patriarchal model. Carter herself states that the difference in language caused the abrupt change in perception, since she had to learn new symbols and name everything anew. Thus, new, stronger Carter was born, with reforged identity. (Passolini 2011-2012: 131-132)

After her return to United Kingdom her work starts resonating with the song of femininity. This is one particular aspect/motif of her writing that all readers encounter as soon as they begin reading her fiction. She also becomes politically active and wishes to liberate a female figure in a society controlled by men:

But mostly, unconsciously entrapped by the male dominated values, they hardly portray their protests. Angela Carter is one such postmodern feminist writer who through gothic mode

successfully draws her desired and decisive thought. Through the portraiture of the 'entrapment' type of women, she catches our critical attention to the problems attached to the female gender. (Sarkar, 2013: 1)

Paulina Palmer goes on to explain the three different female protagonists in Carter's opus, which can be described as the Old Woman, the New Woman and the Changed Woman. The Old Woman symbolizes passivity, and she is basically a wooden marionette whose strings are pulled by the dominant males who surround her. They are the ones who tell her what she may think, say or do. The New Woman, in contrast, does whatever she wishes. Free from all societal changes, she behaves as she pleases and her erotic desire is fully liberated. Finally, the Changed Woman, who is perhaps the most successfully described character, and begins as an Old Woman but ends up a New Woman. The message sent to all the "old women" is that they can change in their own perception, thoughts, words and deeds. (Palmer, 1997: 31)

The above mentioned passivity is a fundamental characteristic of the "Puppet Woman". A simple but strong personification of this quality is the character "Sleeping Beauty from *Nights at the Circus*. She is an "exhibit of Madame Schreck's Museum of Woman Monsters:

Oh, what a tragic case, sir! She was country curate's daughter and bright and merry as a grig, until, one morning in her

fourteenth year, the very day her menses started, she never wakened, not until noon; and the day after, not until teatime; and the day after that, her grieving parents watching and praying beside her bed, she opened her eyes at supper-time and said: “I think I could fancy a little bowl of bread and milk”” (Carter, Angela, *Nights at the Circus*, 1984: 70.)

A wide riverbed of “femininity” motif meanders into several brooks closely related to it, namely the motifs related to the so-called “glam rock” feminism and empowered female roles, which in the book emerge with the characters of Miss Z and Daisy, and which have” been termed the “pornographic motif” and the motif of female desire.

The empowerment of female roles comes from fusion of gender roles, which used to be strictly divided in the past. Women were supposed to be kind, warm, loving and sympathetic, always searching for approval, as men were meant to exhibit obstinacy, determination, ambition and competitiveness. The solution was, according to Carter, for a female to unify these “specified” feminine and masculine characteristics inside of her. Such mixture of two type of traits inside a woman would make men admit that women are no more destined to be passive than men are destined to be active (Tong, 2009: 50)

The “pornographic motif” emerges to the light with the publishing of *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1978). In it, Carter argues that Sade is right, due to the fact “he treats all sexual realty as a political reality” and he “declares

himself unequivocally for the right of the women to fuck” as aggressively, tyrannously and cruelly as men. (Carter, 1978: 27) Carter defines Justine, in passive terms of utter obedience and complete sexual abstinence. She is never changed by experienced and is unable to act. She is “the heroine of the black, inverted fairy-tale”:

To be the *object* of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case—that is to be killed. This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman. (Carter, Angela, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography*, 1978: 76-77)

Her stance on pornography and female sexuality is posteriorly reiterated in “The Bloody Chamber”, where she uses the motif to criticize the current relation between the sexes and male aggressiveness and violence diametrically proportional to the grade of their sexual desire.

In her protest against the repression of women’s sexual desire, her determination to break the ideological link between sex and romance, and her apparent willingness to accept sadomasochism as an eroticized exchange of power negotiated between partners, Carter anticipates many of the arguments made in support of pornography during the 1980s. (Sheets, 1991: 641)

The femininity motifs stretch throughout her entire work, hiding inside other themes and topics. Alongside the “pornographic motif” is the motif of female desire. Having placed a woman in a position to wish for something, and to choose whether she will pursue that goal or not, Carter in fact produces the subjectification of the female and gives her power to decide over her own destiny.

The discovery that hesitation between fear and desire of entrapments can be only an object of her own making, of her own mind, is a breakthrough, immediately giving her autonomy from male engulfment. Although the fulfilment of desire is problematic and fraught with patriarchal residues, the female has not been passive in the process and she has achieved the decisive center. (Bonnici, 1997: 15)

The short story from *Nights at the Circus* titled “The Lady in the House of Love” is similar to Bluebeard story, but with a Lady Vampire and now inverted gender roles. Male protagonist is a young British soldier furloughing in Romania during the WWI. As he is drinking from the fountain in an abandoned village he is invited to spend the night as the guest of the owner of the nearby castle by a peculiar old woman. After dinner he is introduced to a weird young woman Carter describes in the following terms:

She is like a doll...a ventriloquist's doll, or, more, like a great, ingenious piece of clockwork. For she seemed inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born...she might be and automaton, made of white velvet and black fur, that couldn't move of its own accord. (Carter, Angela, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. 1988: 102).

Girls' desire is to have intercourse with him, but she knows no consummation than the only one she can offer him. Yearning for the much-postponed sensuality and sexual fulfilment with the soldier turns the unreal Countess into a human being. She defies loneliness and isolation breaking the historically overcoded patriarchy and triumphantly emphasizing the victory of desire.

Moving away from femininity, we step into a territory of Carter's naturalist perspective which also inspired many of her works. In an interview she gave in 1985 the author indicated that she had a passionate interest in natural history: "I suppose I am a Darwinian in that way" (Cagney Watts, 1974: 164). Nature and its representatives are in service of Carter's writing style and they help her deconstruct social codes and strict social roles, opening a whole wide new dimension of erotic physiological needs, and psychological, emotional natural needs, which stand in sharp contrast opposite the cultural ballast of society which smothers an identity of a human being instead of setting it free. (Müller-Wood, 2012: 105)

Here we can draw a parallel with animal motifs and animal symbolism that appears in Carrington's tales, underlining a hyena that embodied the savage release of forbidden desires of all kinds and a horse which symbolized freedom for one to go and do as they are pleased. In one of the Carter's stories, "The Tiger's Bride", the heroine goes so far as to transform into a glorious tiger and becomes a proper mate to the Beast.

Carter thought that for all the socialization and obedience, there is no escaping our animal nature. She considered animals to be part of human life, on the inside and on the outside, so it should not surprise us that her work is full of multitudinous appearances of diverse animals such as cats, pigs and dogs. Not to mention the reiterated presences of hybrids such as werewolves, the ape-man or the winged protagonist Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*, and the constant parallels and analogies the author draws between animals, human character and behavioural traits. Mary S. Pollock believes that such dabbling expresses Carter's innate curiosity to discover and find the nature of barriers that separate human animals from all the others (Pollock, 2001: 39). The comparison between animals and humans usually leads to a negative or unsettling end. For instance, in *Love*, protagonist Lee has a leonine profile, (Carter 1988:30) as his brother Buzz is compared to a 'giant, hairy toad squatting upon his life and choking him', (ibid.,66) and Annabel, the secretive naïve girl who starts living with Lee is in the beginning presented as a stray animal who is being caressed and fed by her new owner. (ibid.,15) (Carter, Angela, *Love*, 1988: 30, 66, 15).

Carter also makes use of Gothic elements and especially the ones which belong to the Gothic fairy tale, a sub-genre of Gothic fiction. Motifs like windswept black stone

castles, deep dungeons and dark rooms serve well as metaphors of suppressed erotic and neurotic emotions; since giving voice to the inhibited and liberating it, drawing in onto the surface is very much a feminist trait.

According to Anne Susan Koshy, other motifs include dark forests, murderous maniacs, rape, incest, insanity, torture, demons, ghouls, vampires and werewolves. (Koshy, 2010: 132). Ellen Moers states that: “in Gothic writing fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, all with one intent” (quoted in Koshy, 2010: 134). Such surroundings are astutely used by Carter to turn the tables as they force the long suffering heroines to emerge from their prisons, releasing the suppressed desire and transforming the Old Woman into a Changed Woman.

The final motif I will mention in this part is the motif of monstrosity and grotesque which mostly appears when Carter subverts the fairy tale tropes. Reading Carter we come to a conclusion that monsters reside everywhere and that they in a strange way form a part of us. Of course, yet again, the author manages to create a makeshift bridge between the presence of the monsters in the western culture and female sexuality. Marina Warner underlines the difference between the portrayal of male and female monstrosity, asserting that male representation is culture coded as females are nature coded (Warner, 1994: 2). In other words they differ in reasons they have to exhibit their violence and/or monstrosity: males wish for power and in order to obtain it they use violence and oppression as female monstrosity shows in the moments when they wish to gain their supremacy and escape submission.

One of the examples of Carter's works where monsters make their appearance is *Nights at the Circus*. Here Fevvers, the central character, is a winged giantess with a monstrous body and excessive sexual appetite, being brought up by a brothel mama and her concubines. There is an uncanny erotic quality about her, even though her torso is disproportional:

don't tally with [her] upper part of [her] body from the point of view of pure aesthetics ... Were [she] to be the true copy of Venus, one built on [her] scale ought to have legs like tree trunks ... these flimsy little underpinnings of [hers] have more than once buckled up under the topheavy distribution of weight upon [her] torso ... [they] ain't fitted out like neither bird nor woman down below. (Carter, *Nights at the Circus*. 1985: 41).

We might argue that she represents a strange mixture between a bird and a woman, just like a harpy, who are frequently referred to as lovely-haired creatures. It's precisely her hair that sparkles Walser's desire for her and leads to an erotic moment. As he interviews her she gazes at him flirtatiously trying to seduce him:

Walser felt the strangest sensation, as if these eyes of the *aerialiste* were a pair of sets of Chinese boxes, as if each opened into a world into a world into a world, an infinite plurality of

worlds, and these unguessable depths exercised the strongest possible attraction, so that he felt himself trembling as if he, too, stood on an unknown threshold. (Carter, *Nights at the Circus*. 1985: 30).

These examples of Carter's works, where monsters make their appearance as in *Nights at the Circus* (Fevvers, the winged giantess with a monstrous body and excessive sexual appetite), *Wise Children* (Dora and Nora hide the monstrous grotesque within due to their incestuous sexual relationship) and *The Magic Toyshop* (chauvinistic Uncle Phillip who is more of a mental monster, represent the chains of patriarchal traditional society and trying to subdue women with physical violence as he seeks power.)

8.4. A vignette "The Snow Child" and its similarity to micro-narratives

The short story "The Snow Child" was first published in 1979 in the United Kingdom by Gollanz and it won the Cheltenham Festival Literary Prize as a part of collection of short fiction called *The Bloody Chamber* (or *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*). Carter found inspiration to write these after having translated fairytales written by Charles Perrault.

All of the stories in this collection have in common the fact that they are closely based upon fairytales or popular folklore tales. There are ten stories in total: "The Bloody Chamber", "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon", "The Tiger's Bride", "Puss-in-Boots",

“The Erl-King”, “The Snow Child”, “The Lady of the House of Love”, “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves” and, finally, “Wolf Alice”.

The stories belonging to this anthology all have a different magnitude. “The Bloody Chamber” is practically a novelette, seeing how it’s twice as long as any other stories, but it is more than thirty times the length of the shortest one that shall be object of our analysis, a vignette “The Snow Child”.

The name *vignette* has its origins in a word “little vine”, from French language and it actually refers to the drawings of little vines that 19th century printers employed in order to decorate the title pages and beginnings of chapters. “The Snow Child” abandons the traditional structure and story development. Rather than following the plot line and have developed protagonists, it’s merely a short scene that focuses on one moment in time or gives one impression about the character, idea or setting. Description has supremacy over narration, as vignette makes an effort to evoke meaning through imagery and symbolism, making recipient decode its hidden meaning using cultural “clues” (s)he already possesses. “The Snow Child”, as all the other tales in this collection, has roots in various folktales, most obviously in a European folktale “The Snow-child” and its version The Snow, the Crow and the Blood, but as well in stories such as Russian tale Snegurochka and Snow White.

The economy of language is present in this vignette, and we see it well in carefully chosen verbs, adjectives and colours, where every word has a characteristic meaning and a reason for being there. The scene is limited to one location and there are

only three vaguely represented characters. The vignette itself is under five hundred words long and as such fulfils the trait of brevity.

All the unnecessary elements are thrown away, even verbs, which we can see in the very first sentence: “Midwinter – invincible, immaculate” (Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 2006:105) In the second sentence we are already introduced to two protagonists and we find out what they are doing, what kind of clothes they are wearing:

The Count and his wife go riding, he on grey mare and she on black one, she wrapped in the glittering pelts of black foxes; and she wore high, black, shining boots with scarlet heels, and spurs.”

(Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, 2006: 105.)

The recipient thus forms a perfect and clear image in his/her mind as far as setting and protagonists are concerned after mere two sentences. Then Count makes a wish. He wishes he had a girl as white as snow, as red as blood and as black as raven’s feathers. It is difference in comparison to the original version since there, the mother is the one who wishes for a child. Also, the reason for which he wishes for the girl to appear isn’t the same: this desire of his is simply his wish to control the female identity and existence.

The recipient notices the tri-coloured symbolism and the fact that the colours refer to elements of girl’s physical appearance. She is thus objectified in Count’s eyes,

since it appears that is the only thing he is interested in. In a way, Snow Child is a product of his fantasy and imagination, he forcibly willed her into reality but she had no desire to exist. She is in no control whatsoever over her own destiny.

The fact that girl simply appeared “stark naked” is a glaring contrast with the wordy enumerative way in which it was described how Countess is dressed. Clothed protagonists are related to civilization and society protocols, while the naked Snow Child symbolizes *barbarie*-the nature. So as the Count dresses and undresses the Countess throughout the story, such action shows him bestowing and withdrawing her power or “cultural status”.

The recipient of the scene is also briefly and effectively informed that the Countess hates the girl and wishes to get rid of her. She sees an enemy in a girl, and a rival for Count’s attention.

Still, the only true active agent in the entire vignette is the Count since he says and does as he pleases, while the Countess and the Snow Child are both passive and have no power independent of him, they can only observe and/or suffer the state that has been imposed on them. Even the actions that the Countess undertakes, such as dropping her glove in the snow, or throwing her diamond brooch through the ice of the frozen pond, in order to leave Snow Child behind or let her freeze in the lake, don’t bear fruit since Count shows his disapproval. The male power of decision heightens the female one.

The Countess dropped her glove in the snow and told the girl to get down to look for it; she meant to gallop off and leave her there

but the Count said: "I'll buy you new gloves." At that, the furs sprang off the Countess's shoulders and twined round the naked girl. Then the Countess threw her diamond brooch through the ice of a frozen pond: "Dive in and fetch it for me," she said; she thought the girl would drown. But the Count said: "Is she a fish to swim in such cold weather?" Then her boots leapt off the Countess's feet and on to the girl's legs. Now the Countess was bare as a bone and the girl furred and booted (Carter, 105)

The Countess's final demand is met with approval by Count and as a child picks a rose, her finger bleeds and she suddenly dies. This moment causes a sudden shock and disbelief for the reader who didn't expect such turn of events and the surprise continues as the count "thrusts his virile member into the dead girl", using her body for his own sexual satisfaction even though she had just passed away.

The Countess merely observes him as he pleases himself and will not and cannot do anything to stop him, still being passive in the scene and seeing how it will all play out. One of them seemingly must die in order for the other one to continue existing and having her place next to the Count. When the rose pricks her and she bleeds, symbolizing menstruation, the Snow Child "comes of age" as a being capable of sexual intercourse. Once she has fulfilled her purpose of becoming a sexual object, she can die. Because she was not expected to receive pleasure in having sex or otherwise being alive, it is sufficient for him to rape her corpse. She is weak and she died because she was

simply a figment of Count's imagination, and she had no own identity. She became a reflection of male idealization. Countess won, which we know since she has all her clothes on again and the Count bows to her as his "true wife"; handing her the rose which represents her silent victory and a reminder.

SECTION IX. Margaret E. Atwood (1939–)

9.1. Life and work

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born in Ottawa, Canada, on 18th November 1939. She is an extremely prolific poet, novelist, literary critic, short story writer, author of children's books, teacher and political activist. She basically wrote in every conceivable genre, except a biography or autobiography.

Atwood is also member of the organism of human rights *Amnesty International* and one of the persons who presides *Bird Life International*, in defence of birds. She won countless awards for her writings, some of which are Arthur C. Clarke Award, Prince of Asturias Award for Literature, has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize five times, winning it once, and has been a finalist for the Governor General's Award several times, winning twice.

In 2001 she was even inducted into 'Canada's Walk of Fame'. Atwood founded the 'Writer's Trust of Canada', seeking to encourage Canada's writing community. At the time, she spent her life between Toronto and Pelee Island in Ontario.

Atwood is second of three children of Carl Edmund Atwood, an entomologist and Margaret Dorothy (née Kiam) nutritionist and a former dietitian from Woodville, Nova Scotia. Due to the investigations her father did about forest entomology, and an important research he did concerning tree-eating insects, the entire family had to follow.

They would often spend long periods of time in the woods, usually in the summer, when they would establish an encampment. In autumn, they would come back to the city, but not always to the same house. As Sullivan notices, this was done almost cyclically:

Life in the bush, from Margaret's cumulative descriptions, was remarkably orderly. The family would live in tents while Carl Atwood built a small, just serviceable cabin; once he had them ensconced, he would start work on a bigger cabin. This process would be repeated casually when he moved to a new location. (Sullivan, 1998: 28)

Atwood spent a great deal of her childhood between the north of Quebec, Ottawa and Toronto. She did not attend school full-time until she was eight years old. Her mother would assume the role of the teacher during bush retirements: "they were taken out of school early in the spring, or would be returned at in the fall, and Mrs. Atwood gave them their lessons". (Sullivan, 1998: 30) Such family habits give the impression that her progenitors were "eccentric" people (Atwood, *Negotiating*, 2003: 11) A curious fact: Atwood began writing when she was merely five years old. (Howells, 2015: 14)

She was provided with the most potent amalgam of two ingredients every young writer has been exposed to: books and solitude. Soon enough, she became an avid reader of all types of literature, from mystery novels to Brother's Grimm tales, stories about

Canada and comics, which were her great passion. Atwood attended High-School in Leaside, Toronto.

She started writing professionally very soon, when she was merely 16 years old. In 1957 she started her university studies at Victoria University in Toronto. Her teachers were Jay Macpherson and Northrop Frye, who led her initial poetry attempts towards the topics of myths and archetypes. She finished her university studies in English philology in 1961, and she simultaneously studied French and philosophy. (Howels, 2015: 13-14)

In 1968, she got married to Jim Polk, but they divorced five years later. Afterwards, Atwood stepped into a second marriage with Graeme Gibson with whom she moved to live in Ontario. In 1976 they had a daughter. The family came back to Toronto in 1980.

In autumn 1961, after winning E.J. Pratt Medal for her book of poems *Double Persephone*, Atwood commenced her postgraduate studies in Radcliffe College at Harvard University, with a Woodrow Wilson Scholarship. She obtained a master's degree from Radcliffe in 1962 and continued studying at Harvard for two more years without completing her dissertation "The English Metaphysical Romance".

She has been teaching at University of British Columbia (1965), Sir George Williams University (1967-1968), University of Alberta (1969-1979), York University (1971-1972) and New York University. In June 2011, she was conferred with an honorary degree of Doctor of Literature from the National University of Ireland, Galway. On November 16, 2012, she received an honorary degree from the Royal

Military College of Canada. She also has honorary degrees from several other Canadian Universities, as well as Oxford University, Cambridge University and the Sorbonne.

Atwood is also incredibly socially active: she fights for human rights, freedom of expression and other causes. She donated an entire money prize she won with Booker Price in order to collaborate with environmental causes; and helped to launch the career of a poet Carolyn Forché when the USA editors refused her poetry about El Salvador's civil war.

As far as her literary opus is concerned, Atwood has written novels belonging to different genres, essays, short stories, poems and micro-fiction. Many have described her as a feminist writer, since the theme of gender is quite blatantly present in her early works. She has also focused on the meaning of Canadian identity and the relationship of this country with United States and Europe, on human rights, environmental causes, social myths about femininity, representation of a female body in art and its socio-economical exploitation, as well as on the relationship between women and relationship between women and men. That focus on Canadian events and issues represents a hallmark of her career and is one of the reasons she is quintessentially considered a Canadian novelist.

Consequently, I shall enumerate some of her most important works that Atwood has published so far. She made her debut as a writer in 1961 when she was merely 19 years old publishing *Double Persephone*. Her poem collection *The Circle Game* (1964) received the Canadian Governor General's Award for poetry in 1966. In 1969 she published *The Edible Woman*, with an emphasis on women's social marginalization. In

her two following poetry books, *Procedures for Underground* (1970) and *The Journals of Susana Moodie* (1970), the protagonists struggle to accept irrational social rules. This last book, is perhaps her most famous collection of poems, in it, she describes the life from the point of view of Susana Moodie, a colonization pioneer from the Canadian border in the 19th century. *Power Politics* (1971) serves Atwood to use words as a refuge for weak women who face male force.

As a literary critic, Atwood is quite famous for her 1972 work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, which has been defined as the most amazing book written on Canadian literature and has managed to increase a worldwide interest in the literature of this country. During the very same year, she published *Surfacing*, a novel in which the conflict between nature and technology is formulated in political terms. Like Angela Carter, Atwood tries to represent a woman's struggle to free herself from the crippling of work, marriage and motherhood and establish her own identity. Her 1974 book *You Are Happy* was praised by the critics as well as her third novel that came out in 1976, *Lady Oracle*, which was a parody on fairy tales and historical romance novels. It can be considered a Gothic romance, and it won her a City of Toronto Book Award and Canadian Booksellers Award.

In 1977, *Dancing Girls* came out and this short-story collection won her the City of Toronto Book Award, the Canadian Booksellers Association Award and the Periodical Distributors of Canada Short Fiction Award. *Two Headed Poems* (1978) explores the duplicity of language. Her next novel *Life Before Man* (1979), is more traditional than the previous ones and it mostly focuses on a series of love triangles.

Atwood has always been interested in human rights, which is reflected in her poetry book *True Stories* (1981) and a novel *Bodily Harm* from the same year. The title draws roots from the notion that bodily harm is omnipresent but that a woman should stand up to male brutality. The following year, 1982, she published *Second Words* (one of the first feminist works written in Canada); during that year she also directed the revision of *Oxford Book of Canadian Poetry*, which positioned her as a leader of the Canadian poets of her generation. She is now internationally acclaimed and is one of the major figure in Canadian letters.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), is her sixth novel for which Atwood received the Governor General's Award, the Los Angeles Times Prize and was short-listed for the Booker Prize. This is perhaps the most popular book by this author, seeing how it has been translated into more than thirty languages. Volker Schlöndorff made it into a film and Poul Ruders, into an opera.

Her seventh novel *Cat's Eye* (1988), discovers the scars that childhood can inflict and the way they transmit far into the adulthood, affecting the person concerned even many years after they have been made.

Novel number eight, *The Robber Bride* (1993) dissects the way of living in Toronto and the falsehood of female friendship, since women compete with each other in an incessant lust for power and domination.

Alias Grace (1996), Atwood's ninth novel, was nominated for the Booker Prize and also short-listed for the Governor General's Award. For the first time, Atwood

touches the subject of split identities and the spirit of a woman inhabiting the body of another.

Her tenth novel, *The Blind Assassin*, (2000) finally brought the prestigious Booker Prize to Margaret Atwood. It consists of three intertwined stories that represent the World War I, World War II and the social milieu of the war epoch.

In 2003 Atwood publishes a science fiction novel with dystopian post-apocalyptic elements called *Oryx and Crake*. It was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2003. It has been continued in 2009 in the writer's twelfth novel called *The Year of the Flood*. Some protagonists from the 2003 book resurface and the plot goes on about two humans, Toby and Ren, who survived the pandemic.

Her second work of criticism, following *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* is *Second Words* (1984), in which she describes Canadian poetry and international human rights. These are followed by: *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995), *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2002) and *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (2008).

Atwood has also written a number of children's book: *Up in the Tree* (1978), *For the Birds* (1990), *Princess Prunella and the Purple and Peanut* (1995), *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes* (2003) and *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda* (2006).

Having been a writer for over four decades, she has enraptured an ever increasing audience and critical reception: "No other writer in Canada of Margaret Atwood's generation has so wide a command of the resources of literature, so telling a restraint in their use as Margaret Atwood." (Woodcock, 1975: 327)

In my analysis of her work, I will focus on her short short fiction; that is, writings under one thousand words such as *Murder in the Dark* (1983), filled with experimental postmodern prose poems which got critical attention in new circles; *Good Bones* (1992), that concerns female body parts and social constraints; and *The Tent* (2006). Not many literary critics have done work on Atwood's short stories and micro-fiction, which means that most of the analysis related to this particular part of her works will be my own.

9.2. The Literary World of Margaret Atwood

Atwood is a shapeshifter writer, whose opus changes form and jumps playfully from one genre to another, feeling comfortably in each and every one of them. Gina Wisker calls her a magic realist, since she adds the fantastic ingredient into the broth of reality, not unlike Jeanette Winterson, Toni Morrison and Salman Rushdie. (Wisker, 2011: 2)

Feminism is an inevitable label upon her creations, since Atwood indeed does explore what it means to be a woman. However, she usually opposes such nomenclature and emphasizes that she writes for people who read books. For example, she called *The Edible Woman* (1969) a proto-feminist work and stated that although she enjoyed Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir "behind locked doors", there was no active women's movement at the time so there was no "formal framework" to work with. (Atwood quoted in Nischik, 2009: 19).

Despite her own rebuttal of such “feminist writer” stamp, we cannot deny that she does promote female perspectives and self-consciousness in addressing significant societal matters related to women. Mukti Upadhyay attests that

Women have ever been exploited in multiple ways by the so-called godlike Man. It is a misconception to give more importance to men over women [...] Man is considered a symbol of power and prosperity. It is a stale set rule in the world that only men are supposed to work and earn money. [...] Women only represent an object for sexual pleasure and for doing monotonous petty works like washing clothes, cleaning utensils and cooking food. (Upadhyay, 2012: 27)

This critic moves on to confirm that nowadays, nude women are used for selling almost everything under the sun, and that Atwood places a new objective in front of women: to try and reclaim their identity and their right to make decisions. (Upadhyay, 2012: 32)

We might argue that Atwood’s literature in fact establishes a goal to prod into female psyche, wake up the dormant identity from its lulled state, and make a reader begin a quest for his/her uniqueness and identity, which can be multifaceted: identity of selfhood, womanhood, or, even more so, national/cultural/ethnicity/religious identity.

In her post-feminist text *Bodily Harm* (1981), she shows the bleakness of legal, economic, social and political conditions of women. Suppressed, and exploited, their basic human rights are taken away from them and female bodies suffer abuse, torture, mutilation and ultimate destruction. (Srinivasan, 2013: 49) In such world, the writer as the alter-ego of the heroine Renate Wellford (whose name implies “born again”), who is to be born anew and to create her new identity, new female space within the contemporary society, crafting an antidote to male violence and domination. She is an example of Carter’s Old Woman who became Changed Woman; but that is not all.

Atwood does have a history of placing already powerful females in her novels, which we called New Women (see Section VIII), that are embodied, for example, in the presence of the Aunts in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. (Johnson, 2004: 69). They are women placed in power in order to control other, “lesser” women, and while they are the direct victims of male hierarchy, and choose to use the power they have over other females.

Lee Briscoe Thompson describes the Aunts as “a paramilitary cadre in charge of indoctrinating Handmaids and enforcing female (even Wifely) obedience to the new rules” (Thompson, 1997: 32). Thompson goes on to say that: “the Aunts wear army khaki without veils, befitting their quasi-military role, and reminiscent of the fascistic Brownshirts of World War II (not to mention the no less fascist childhood Brownie troop uniforms of other Atwood fictions!” (Thompson, 1997: 32). They use violence to abuse or punish the handmaids and when one of them makes an attempt to flee the Centre, she is beaten with steel cables on her feet and she can’t walk as a consequence of such Aunts’ abuse.

Mária Huttová, on the contrary, considers a significant shift in usage of familiar themes as far as Atwood is concerned, arguing that the author has stepped away from solely feminist, woman-centred themes onto the more humanist themes in her novels, as she explores such transition in *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *The Robber Bride* and *Oryx and Crake*. (Huttová, 2012: 71)

Similarly to Carter, Atwood also uses the familiar literary topoi from fairy tales and folk tales but deconstructs the fairy tale intertext, by altering the initial, authentic plot and the personality of the protagonists. (Koshy, 2010: 86-87). Unlike Carter who reinvents and represents the negative aspects of the tale, Atwood rewrites the tale into a contemporary setting, thus changing time and place of occurrences. She does both in order to bust and expose the patriarchal myth and try to create female protagonists which will fight for themselves and reinvent their own identity from within the revitalized “feminist” fairy tale. (Koshy, 2010: 94)

It is not uncommon that Atwood’s texts mock the literary conventions upon which they are based, turning into sort of a parodic experience for the reader, according to Cristina Pérez Valverde:

Profundizamos también en el hecho de que el texto, que deconstruye y parodia las propias convenciones literarias en las que se basa, y puesto que llama la atención sobre su propia ficcionalidad, constituye un ejemplo de metaficción y puede ser

clasificado como “an anti-fairy tale” o “metafairy tale” (Pérez Valverde, 2001: 71)

Another of the central topics in various Atwood’s novels (such as *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *Life Before Man*, *Bodily Harm* and *Handmaid’s Tale*) are food and eating, or metaphorically represented hunger/lust for life. The author has considered it to be so in a natural way, due to the fact that all humans, indeed, have to eat and are, by nature’s law, sort of “forced” to establish a relationship with food from the day they are born.

The types of food we consume, particular dishes, if you will, are connected to our country of origin, social class, and even religion. As a constant daily presence in human lives they are building our personality and, at the same time, identity. (Lupton, 1996: 1). Meals bring people together but they can also cause them to fall apart and it is also closely related to control and power. Human body reacts to food ingestion in different ways, with pleasure or with disgust, depending on our personal gusto. Food is at the same time related to sexuality. Freud points out the analogy between the hunger for food and libido, which is hunger of life and sexual satisfaction (Freud, 1962: 1).

Nature occupies a huge presence in Atwood’s opus, and she herself makes a distinction and contrast, comparing her own presentation to that of fellow Canadian writers. Atwood notices that as far as Canadian opus is concerned, writers do not trust nature or suspect some dirty trick (Atwood, *Survival*, 1972: 32-3) Nature is represented as alive and actively hostile towards man. Nevertheless, she justifies this choice:

Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life-denying experience as individuals [...] and that their identification with animals is the expression of a deep-seated cultural fear. (Atwood, *Survival*, 1972: 79)

It leads us to a conclusion that Canadian literature is rather dark and negative, bearing a pessimistic reflection of the national sensibility. Even so, such negative features contribute to uniqueness and originality.

Nonetheless, when it comes to nature, it turns out that it played a quintessential role in Margaret Atwood's life, especially when she was just a little girl. Experiences she had with her family have without a doubt become a permanent part of her opus. Rosemary Sullivan asserts "the landscape of childhood provides the foundation layer of our psyche. Margaret's landscape was the north woods" (Sullivan, 1998: 29) Nature becomes a paragon of strength of personality, something wild, instinctive and free, that cannot be contained or tamed, and it's a recurrent elements in Atwood's works.

With the passage of time, this motif transforms into Atwood's concern for the preservation of nature and environment. In a dystopian trilogy comprised of *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), she shows us the future where the human beings are almost extinct and the planet is polluted by chemicals and nuclear radiation-environment is represented as degraded and it reflects Atwood's unease and apprehension about the topic.

Tightly related to the destiny of nature and wilderness, which the author so often depicts in her work, is the final corner of Atwood's literary world we shall visit in this part of Section IX: destiny of animals that inhabit it. Moss explains their frequent presence in Atwood's literary opus:

Margaret Atwood [...] concentrates in much of her writings on the lives of animals – in the wilderness, as domesticated pets or as laboratory objects. Whereas especially in Atwood's earlier texts, animals frequently function as symbols of Canadian identity (or the lack thereof), Atwood starts focusing on the plight of animals apart from any notion of a Canadian identity crisis in her later writings at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. (Moss, 2015: 120)

Various of her fictional texts employ animals, and some of those are her novels *Surfacing* (1972) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003).

In *Surfacing*, a female protagonist spots young men who have murdered the heron she saw earlier with a friend. The heron is depicted as a martyr due to the fact that its wings are spread on a bush like a Jesus-like figure nailed to the cross. The narrator feels disgust with such ill treatment of the animal, and represents the heron as a victim.

In *Oryx and Crake*, animals are yet again prey to human ambition as they are being used for testing and are being cross-bred in genetic engineering labs, producing

new hybrid species such as rakunks (combination of racoon and a skunk.). Atwood becomes concerned with global ecological problems and concentrates on various subjects which include both humans and animals, interlacing their destinies. Maria Moss summarizes Atwood's attitude towards animals:

By constructing the actuality of the animal rather than hiding it behind a shield of symbolism and metaphor, Atwood challenges the role of the oftentimes marginalized other – and thus power structures in general – in favour of privileging negotiations between differing perspectives. By offering animals a place in her fiction, she offers her reader both the aesthetic and the humanistic experience of connection – always desired but hard to achieve. (Moss, 2015: 134)

9.3. Margaret Atwood's excursions to Lilliput

First time Atwood commenced moving away from a pre-modernist literary tradition towards postmodernist project in fiction occurred when she published *Murder in the Dark* in 1983, and continues with *Good Bones and Simple Murders* (1994) and *The Tent* (2006).

Even though they are separated in time, they form a specific trilogy, since they are bound by brief fictions, well contrived and designed plot, experimental rhetoric and genre hybridity (Nakajima, 2016: 86)

Christl Verduyn asserts that “these collections of short fictions and prose poems by Atwood can be confidently described as a “fiction théorique”. (Verduyn, 1986: 124)

Reingard M. Nischik has emphasized the difficulty to categorize Atwood’s short fiction, and has underlined their hybridity. Ever since that first story collection, the writer has been using a new medium for her challenging redefinitions and inversions, and such “half a page” stories do not truly have ancestors in Canadian literature. (Wilson, 2003: 5)

Nakajima Keiko beautifully describes the nature of these stories:

Each work is like a candy with many colours and flavours, and the collection is like a mini-candy box with mysterious arabesque scrolls that tickle reader’s fancy without end. In the small candy of fictional art we can taste and find an immense and boundless cosmic space, which takes the shape of a bottle or just a page of a book, and lets us be irresistibly involved in the exploration and creation of unknown spheres. (Nakajima, 2016: 85)

In *Murder in the Dark*, Atwood represents everyday situations that all children/teenagers go through at some point of their lives and firstly deconstructs it only

to posteriorly build in again but with a new eerie predicament, in order to unsettle the reader and make him wonder:

Hence, childhood play involves making poison; in nostalgic trips to the attic, stories about strange creatures and mad and sinister people are read; comic books transform friends into vampires, boyfriends dissolve into damp and smelly blurred shapes; and aging stripteasers are exposed and humiliated. (Verduyn, 1986: 126-127)

Murder in the Dark is the first book which participates in a distinct abandon of traditional fiction and fictional traditions in Canada, leading to the construction of new forms and fictions.

Yet another thematic and structural experiment, *Good Bones*, resembling its predecessor *Murder in the Dark*, filled with short shorts that do not tend to surpass 1000 words, plays with familiar motifs and concepts, twisting and inverting them, as the author, at the same time, slyly expresses her own opinion about current socio cultural happenstances, gender equality, sexual and textual politics. (Delville, 1995: 1)

Different genres abound, and similarity is noted between the two mini science-fictions: “Cold Blooded” and “Homelanding”. In both, presence of aliens is prominent: in the first one, our planet is visited by insectoid aliens, and in the second one the aliens are being shown round by other aliens who turn out to be us, humans.

“Cold Blooded” is especially interesting since plays out as a parody of life on Earth and a critique of a patriarchal traditions: ever since the Moth-like aliens arrive, observe humans and are surprised at the male hegemony in the society of Earthlings. The form of the story is epistolary novel and the narrator is an alien who is reporting “home”, to the “Kingdom of the Female”:

To my sisters, the Iridescent Ones, the Egg-Bearers, the Many-Faceted greetings from the Planet of Moths. At last we have succeeded in establishing contact with the creatures who, in their ability to communicate, to live in colonies, and to construct technologies, most resemble us, although in these particulars they have not advanced above a rudimentary level. (Atwood, *Good Bones*, 1992: 32)

In Atwood’s *The Tent*, one of the latest collections but *Stone Mattress*, the mini fictions and microdramas include variety of topics and literary forms, from parodies to playlets, from monologues and meditations to mock epics. It can be deemed as a collection of mini fiction essays and fragments that feel like writing exercises. The author uses her writing scissors to cut apart everything that might be a surplus, leaving just essential messages.

Some of the most accomplished brevities in this book are “The Tent”, where Atwood metaphorically underlines how writers’ “doodling” simultaneously dissociates

them from the world and paradoxically brings them closer to it, showing all the nuts and bolts of the torturous creative process; and one of the most moving pieces, a poem “Bring Back Mom: An Invocation”, where the speaker communes with her dead mother.

Colin Bulman reminds us that many readers are regarded, and often view themselves as recipients. The world seems to have forgotten that reader’s mind can contribute to the text, and blend the author’s offerings with his/her own life experience, at the same time connecting it with other written works he/she has read. (Bulman, 2014)

Many short story writers have also dabbled in obscure arts of micronarratives, taking up the challenge to offer just a bare roughly made shack, with hinted plot and hastily sketched protagonists, leaving the readers’ interferences to fill in the gaps and in their own way, complete the story which the writer only winks at. One of the most prominent examples is this Hemingway’s six word masterpiece, of whom almost everyone who is familiar with micronarrative world has for sure heard of by now: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

In six words, the reader can feel the despair hidden behind the ad, realizing that the person who published it is a deceased child’s parents who find themselves in need to sell what would have been their baby’s clothing. There is an actual character, backstory and plot occurring right in front of the reader’s eyes, packed in mere twenty five letters.

Following Hemingway’s example, numerous websites have celebrated so called *six word story* contests, in which Atwood herself participated. *Wired Magazine* published an intriguing article “Very Short Stories” in 2006, with masterpieces written by Orson Scott Card, William Shatner, Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman and others.

In the following lines, I quote three of Margaret Atwood's most famous brevities that were published in *Wired Magazine* and reflect on married women:

“Longed for him. Got him. Shit.”

Full length novels have been written on exact the same subject, along with the details on settings, atmosphere, protagonists' characters (and names, to begin with), what happened, why, when and how did they meet and establish a relationship; but this Atwood's perfectly circled ouroborostic little piece has all universality and all the content it might need. Of course, the story can be made much more interesting and attractive with such details,

“Corpse parts missing. Doctor buys yacht.”

It's a perfectly macabre six-word story the whole narrative is told; no further details or explanation are required to comprehend exactly what has occurred. Just simple subject-verb, subject-verb-object construction. There is no beginning, however, the only adjective used: “corpse” directly insinuates the way in which the doctor got rich and was suddenly able to buy a yacht.

Last, but not the least humorous and intriguing example of her nanofiction is the following:

“Starlet sex scandal. Giant squid involved.”

The appearance of short-short fiction (also called micro-fiction, flash-fiction or nanofiction) is often being related to the growing popularity of electronic forms of expression such as Twitter and text messages. Margaret Atwood has a long-standing interest in the short-short genre and in related inter-genres such as the prose poem, from *Murder in the Dark* (1983), to *Good Bones* (1992) to *The Tent* (2006). One of her stories, “I’m Starved for You” appeared with Byline press, then as a Kindle single, as a Quick Read at the Apple iBookstore and as a “Nook Snap” at BarnesAndNoble.com, as well as for Chapters-Indigo’s Kobo (Quill). (York, 2013: 150).

As for her online presence, Atwood has an account on Twitter, as many contemporary writers do now, since they mostly use it as promotional website. People in general utilize this social network to represent places they travelled to, retweet articles on matters of political or environmental concern or arts-related events, or to simply respond to followers’ tweets. She herself designed superhero costumes for two of her followers, and she also signed and forwarded an Avaaz.org petition and called upon Canadians to protest a proposed Fox-style Sun TV news channel.

Nowadays there are many online publications dedicated to primarily literary micro-fiction which only proves the constant presence of this minuscule literary genre in the digital world.

SECTION X. CONCLUSIONS

I consider that micro-narratives are one of today's most relevant literary forms, belonging to the polygeneric category of microfiction. As such, I have explored it from multiple theoretical perspectives that have allowed its presentation and analysis as a literary fact and cultural phenomenon framed in varying contexts. Its form slowly acquired a generic status in the 20th century, and has gone on to firmly root itself as one of the representatives of the narrative form of the 21st century.

Following the aesthetic principles of the postmodern condition authors pursued a growing textual and structural fragmentation, making their writings more synthetic and opening them to their readers. Alongside the emergence of new textual formats enabled by digitalization processes, these principles have deeply affected the conditions of production, reception and circulation of texts.

The author of micronarratives faces a complex process of distancing as far as the attitude towards the content is concerned. In trying to capture the infinite forking varieties of reality, the short story writer employs ambiguity as a key concept, shattering the uniqueness of understanding and enabling a fragmentary consideration of the narrative tissue. Creative freedom becomes prominent as the creator displays this doubling attitude of continuity and rupture with tradition, as well as certain generic eclecticism.

Writing micronarratives is a demanding work of synthesis in which a high level of competence is required: emotional, cultural, narrative, linguistic and literary. The

writer must be able to approach her creative work from a critical multilateral attitude that, combined with the experimental procedure, surprises the reader, giving way to deep reflection and active participation in the disentanglement of the narrative enigma, according to the recipient's perception. The creation of a short short story, as I argue, is a complex construction that slowly reveals in its great density an heterogeneity of worlds.

The content of the micro-story is appreciated as constantly fluctuating and oscillating, perpetually blurring the line between reality and fiction, with the very foreboding intertextual presence of realism and dreamwork, the philosophical and the metafictional, the symbolic and the fantasstic. This is achieved by using a multitude of subversive, ironic, parodic and satirical attitudes and stylistic resources.

The rupture of a larger narrative chunk is by no means a simplification. It is rather its reconstruction in a form of a puzzle that the attentive reader must unlock and solve, amplifying it. Microfiction strives towards the thinning of the fable, it longs to induce chaos and, on purpose, produce the narrative uncertainty, emphasize hidden inaccuracies or transmute certain well known elements in order to bring an element of surprise upon the reader.

The maximum audacity in this process of elaboration is to condense all the heterogenous possibilities of referential construction and the virtuality of history, and capture them in a single text of extreme brevity, that encloses the maximum intensity and tension. For this reason, each word used is extremely important, and due to a double principle of conciseness and evocative suggestion, a significant relevance is granted to

titles, beginnings and closures, to the speedy progression and decisive staccato rhythm of the narrative, to the precision or ambiguity of the descriptions, the role of the narrator, and the mechanisms by which transdiscursivity is frequently achieved.

Language becomes a necessary ally of the writer during the creative process as they fight side by side. On occasions, a lot can be said without saying a thing, and silent indications and authentic narrative gaps can hide numerous meanings. The so called orthodox treatment of the language is substituted with “everything is permitted” motto, as all kinds of literary resources are used, such as, for instance, the strategies that express the distanced, revisionist or critical attitude with an inevitable sense of humour.

Faced with this textual reality, the reader, with whom the author has established a certain complicity that manifests itself in a particular reading agreement, must show a similar broad area of competence. This is required, so that the recipient, from such an open and complicit, co-creative attitude can carry out a demanding analysis that allows him/her to enjoy a process of reception in which he/she eventually transcends from the ludic and the amazing to reflective and artistic, imaginative reading.

In my view, the combination and interrelation of these principles and pragmatic requirements, history and discourse justify the definition of the micro-narrative as a historical genre within the narrative, since its characterization shows that there was a process of evolution by decantation, hybridization and slow and constant sliding and slipping away from other genres. A new genre has emerged and it is, sufficiently differentiated to be called such.

There are countless definitions by numerous experts that all tend to point out its different characteristics, but we can freely agree upon the fact that micro-narrative, is a narrative form that acquires its generic status in the bosom of postmodernity, it's characterized by the intensity, tension and unity of effect,, achieved mainly by the complexity of the fictional worlds, the virtuality of narration and extreme textual brevity. This combination leads to means of procedures by which author and reader are impelled to a laborious and demanding process of creation and reception respectively, which is facilitated by the collaborative work established and we could say, equally divided between them. Relationships of varying degrees-closeness, hybridization, and assimilation have conditioned the diachronic development of short short stories and explain their present diversity.

Since we have considered the micro-narrative a historical narrative genre that was born, developed and consolidated over the last hundred years, an approximation to its chronological evolution became necessary. To this end, various agents and processes involved must be taken into account, such as historical circumstances, influences of certain currents of thought and culture, evolution of literary tendencies contribution of some authors through their creations or through the exhibition of their aesthetic ideas, the interest of critics and researchers and the changes in circuits and forms of diffusion and re-diffusion. According to the incidence of these elements, a periodization of the micro-narrative can be conducted in three phases or stages: formation, legitimation and consolidation. It is a process that, favoured by the existence of a literary tradition which I argue was born in modernity and consolidated in postmodernity. During the last

decades, the irruption of a new technological model of relation and global communication, forces to deepen in certain phenomena has notably affected the diffusion, canonization and, ultimately, the popularization of micro-narrative.

Since the end of the 19th century and especially during the first third of the 20th century, an aesthetic path marked by brevity, conciseness and fragmentation was traced in culture and arts. In the literary field, factors that favoured and promoted the brevity and the birth of the micro-story are varied: the search for essentiality, which manifests especially in the poem in prose of symbolist root; influence of a formulation of German idealism; mimetic representation, objective and totalizing of the world that had predominated in Realism; tendency towards the dissolution of the genera or, at least, to the generic hybridization and fragmentism was initiated in Romanticism, continued in Modernism and settled in the Vanguards. Apart from these, it would be necessary to add other conjunctural factors, such as the limitation of space that was used in the press for literary collaborations and the proliferation of specialized publications, especially literary journals of avant-garde, which hosted and disseminated the new microtexts.

In Latin America, this stage of formation (1890-1930) is represented by compositions of writers linked to Modernism, such as the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, the Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga, (see section IV for further details), the Mexican Amado Nervo and the Argentinean Leopoldo Lugones; by intense activity around the Ateneo de la Juventud de Mexico, whose members are identified as initiators of the genre - Julio Torri (whom I analyzed in Section V), Ramón López Velarde, Mariano Silva and Aceves, and Alfonso Reyes.

Later on, avant-garde writers followed, such as Vicente Huidobro (Chile), Oliverio Girondo (Argentina) or Luis Vidales (Colombia), who to a greater or lesser extent approached very brief narration. We shouldn't forget contributions of writers like Argentinean Macedonio Fernandez or Venezuelan Jose Antonio Ramos Sucre, both of whom anticipated subsequent trends and fashions.

In Spain, this period of training can be limited in a similar temporal period, although it emphasizes the strength that “aesthetics of brevity of new art” showed from 1920 in whose prose came trends that were forged in movements such as Modernism, Novecentism and the Avant-gardes. The main contributions in this process of micro-narrative formation, both in the field of creation as in the field of poetic reflection, we owe it to two exceptional writers who have a clear foundational role: Juan Ramón Jiménez and Ramón Gómez de la Serna, promoter of Futurist movement and father of *la gregueria* (Section VI) The repercussion of this new aesthetic would settle in the diffusion that it had in the literary magazines of the time - Index, Greece, Ultra - with an extensive list of authors who published their brief stories.

Gradually, this literary form begins to detach itself from other genres present in its origin - book, poem in prose, chronicle, or forsaken theoretical approximations with valuable intuitions and some volumes with greater homogeneity than the miscellanies in which they were used begin to appear. All this, added to the culture of the micro-narrative and authentic references of the genre, leads us to consider this period of its trajectory and development as the legitimation. However, due to certain historical, cultural and literary differences, this process of legitimation does not occur with the

same intensity or within the same chronological limits in Latin America, Spain, United Kingdom, United States, Canada and rest of the world. For instance, between 1930 and 1970, approximately, a large group of writers already possesses a recognized prestige as brief story cultivators, and their works offer masterful samples of micro-narratives, while in Spain and in English-Speaking areas this consolidation will come much later.

The definitive universal consolidation of micro-narrative occurs during the last decades of the last century and the first years of the current century which is dominated by postmodernity, episteme that had been gestating from the modernity or, if you prefer, from the crisis of modernity. Brief writing forms begin to proliferate both in author's books and in anthologies so that writers, readers, editors, critics and researchers may grant a differentiated statute to an extensive corpus of texts in which certain canonical features already begin to emerge.

In Latin America, the micro-narrative is already well established and extended in the 1970s, so consolidation and canonization occur from early dates, especially in those countries with a strong microfictional tradition. In addition, the interest of critics and researchers develops according to this reality, so specific studies on gender are emerging during the eighties. Mexico and Argentina are good exponents of both phenomena: in Mexico, voices are being heard, like those of René Avilés Fabila, Guillermo Samperio, Jaime Muñoz Vargas or Rogelio Guedea, besides specialists in the genre as Lauro Zavala and Javier Perucho; and in Argentina, Luisa Valenzuela, Ana María Shua or Eduardo Berti are some examples of the vitality of the genre, while in the list of critics

and investigators we may emphasize David Lagmanovich, Laura Pollastri, Raúl Brasca and Guillermo Siles.

In Venezuela and Chile, the momentum from the 1970s also comes from the hand of creators and critics: to works of Luis Britto García, Gabriel Jiménez Emán and Armando José Sequera, theoretical-critical contribution of scholars and diffusers such as Luis Barrera Linares and Violeta Rojo were added. And in Chile, to the contributions of Alejandro Jodorowsky, Virginia Vidal or Diego Muñoz Valenzuela, we must add the intense work of research and dissemination carried out by Eddie Morales, Andrés Cáceres, Juan Armando Epple and José Luis Fernández Pérez. Although in other countries the roots of the micro-narrative have not reached the same level of interest in gender, it is true that it has been extended in such a way that we can find authors and critics of almost any Latin American nation.

For historical and aesthetic reasons, the consolidation of the micro-narrative in United Kingdom, North America and Spain was much slower and it could be said that until early 1990s micro-narrative is not considered to be a differentiated literary form and much less a genre. It could even be claimed that, although the Spanish micro-story now does have its own modest tradition, the outbreak in Spain is largely due to Latin American micro-narrative and short narration in other languages.

This path towards consolidation of the genre was soon driven by short prose of excellent writers like José Jiménez Lozano, Rafael Pérez Estrada, José María Merino,, Juan Pedro Aparicio, Luis Mateo Díez, Juan José Millás and Julia Otxoa. In addition, the inherited delay in dissemination had for consequence a fact that a myriad of publishers

became extremely interested in publishing micro-stories. At the same time, with regard to research, this, gender finally entered the academic field thanks to the dedication of several specialists such as Fernando Valls, Irene Andres-Suarez, Francisca Noguerol, Domingo Ródenas de Moya, David Roas etc.

Referring to English speaking countries, early signs of Flash Fiction can be found in the 19th century. Micronarratives truly began to develop due to their publications in various magazines and antologies in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. (I am referring to *Cosmopolitan* magazine and *American Short Short Story* anthology.) Many writers that are renowned for other writing genres such as novel have also tested the flash fictio waters, some of them being H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip K. Dick and Ernest Hemingway.

An interesting point of view is given to the readers in book *Severance*, written by Robert Olen Butler. This work contains sixty two micronarratives in which the protagonists are severed human heads. Every prose piece focuses on the last ninety seconds of consciousness within those heads. Their stories are told in trancelike, first person run-on sentences in a manner of unpunctuated prose poems and the talking heads include a wide range of characters, such as Gorgon Medusa, two of the apostles, John the Baptist, the novelist Yukio Mishima, a Texas farmer, a German baroness etc.

Numerous English speaking writers continue to publish their Flash Fiction today, whether in printed format and online. Among the 21st cultivators of this revolutionary genre, I highlight Lydia Davis, David Gaffney, Bruce Holland Rogers, Sherrie Flick, Grant Faulkner among many others. In sections VII, VII and IX of my dissertation I

analyze the work of female authors that belong to English-speaking area and might be considered antecedents of short short stories as well, namely Leonora Carrington, Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood.

In recent years, it seems that the differences between Latin America and the rest of the world, as far as the consolidation of micro-narratives is concerned, have been largely neutralized by the effects of cultural globalization, which has influenced them in a threefold direction - canonization, internationalization and popularization - in addition to being associated with a new concept that could be called transmodernity. The canonization has been boosted and supported by the international academic interest, which manifests itself in bi-annual meetings held since 1998. Internationalization is perceived not only in these meetings, but also in the flow of creation and information that circulates through the network and can be accessed from any country in the world. And popularization is due to the media-press, radio, and World Wide Web that help the world to contract a veritable fever of micro-narratives. The freedom has been given to some digital media to house the creations themselves. This fruitful twinning between digital media and media finds its maximum expression in the phenomenon of blogs and Twitter- which, based on principles inherited from the postmodern perception of the world and with a format conducive to microfiction, offer a very accessible management and free dissemination of these creations, regardless of the publishing circuits established. However, we believe that this popularization also carries a risk of fostering a banal and false conception of micro-narrative, which risks being distorted and relegated to the realm of simplicity, spontaneity and immediacy.

My future line of investigation will continue to include short short stories but will instead primarily focus on their characteristics of symbolism and imagery, as well as hypertextuality and possible intertwining with digital literature, combining lines of text with audio visual stimuli which might contribute them to explode in even wider scope potential interpretations, meanings and perceptions.

I myself am an arduous prolific creator of microfiction and I have taken part in various creative writing workshops and short short story contests, receiving several prizes for my work such as 2011 first prize on story and poetry from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid for a story “Day after Day” and 2012 third prize of the International Short Short Story Contest “Los Alephs” for my story “Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder”. This story, whose title in Spanish is “La belleza está en los ojos del quien mira”, as well as yet another microfiction of mine, “The Dream” (“El sueño”) have been completely digitalized and turned into brief videos, accompanied with creatively designed images and background sound. They are just the first of many to come as my journey of fusion of micro- narratives with technology goes on.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Action

Any event or series of events depicted in a literary work. It doesn't matter if it's verbal as well as physical: narrating a story within the story is considered an event.

Allusion

A brief, often implicit and indirect reference within a literary text to something outside the text. It could be another text such as the Bible, a myth, another literary work, a painting, or a piece of music or any imaginary or historical person, place, or thing.

Antagonist

A character or a nonhuman force that opposes, or is in conflict with, the protagonist.

Aphorism

A short clever saying that is meant to express general truth.

Atmosphere

The dominant mood or feeling that encompasses all or part of a narrative. Atmosphere is an effected transmitted to a reader, by the author's use of language, images and physical setting. Atmosphere is often used to foretell the ultimate climax in a narrative.

Author

It is a person who actually wrote a narrative. It not to be confused with the implied author, or authorial persona adopting an outlook implied by the work as a whole (and that may differ drastically from that of the real author). The author should not be associated or identified with the narrator who tells the story. When a narrator conveys a story in the first person, the reader should not think that it is in fact the author who is telling his/her own experiences.

Avant-garde

Meaning "advance guard" in French, is a term used to describe art that is innovative or experimental in its subject matter. Name avant-garde started its use in XIX and XX century and it refers to literary currents such as Realism, Modern art, Cubism and Surrealism. Today, this term is connected with any art that seems to question existing ideas and forms or is seen as original and often controversial.

Biography

A work of nonfiction that recounts the life of a real person. In case that the person represented in a book is at the same time its author, we are talking about autobiography. If an autobiography elaborates only on a specific aspect of, or episode in, its author's life, it is called a memoir.

Character

An imaginary person who acts, appears, or is referred to in a literary work.

Major or main character: central character that receives most attention.

Minor character: marginal or secondary character that receives less attention.

Flat character: two-dimensional character with few traits and predictable behavior or responses.

Round character: complex, multifaceted character capable of surprising the readers.

Static characters do not change while **dynamic characters** do.

Characterization

The presentation or demarcation of a fictional character.

Direct characterization or **direct definition** transpires when the narrator openly tells what a character is like.

Indirect characterization or **indirect presentation** occurs when the narrative reveals a character's trait/s implicitly, through his or her speech, behavior, thoughts, appearance, and so on.

Deconstruction

This term is frequently used in relation to French intellectual Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction posits that meaning, as accessed through language, is indeterminate because language itself is indeterminate. It is a system of signifiers that can never fully "mean": a word might help us to identify an object since we named it such, but it can never be that object. Deconstruction appeared as a reaction to certain strains of Western philosophy. Used as a method of literary critique, deconstruction represents a work as open-ended, ceaselessly available to interpretation, and far beyond the reach of authorial intention. Deconstruction traces how language generates meaning both within a text and across texts, while insisting that such meaning can only ever be provisional.

Dialogue

- 1) Usually, the representation of an oral exchange involving two or more characters.
- 2) More rarely, a literary work that consists mainly or entirely of the speech of two or more character

Drabble

A piece of fiction that is exactly 100 words long.

Dribble

A piece of fiction that is exactly 50 words long.

Essay

A short literary composition on a particular subject. It tends to be written in prose and its content is generally analytic or speculative.

Fable

A type of short fiction, which might be written either in verse or in prose. It places accent on moral or it satirizes human behaviour. The characters in a fable are often animals that talk and act like humans. The fable is sometimes treated as a specific type of folktale and sometimes as a fictional subgenre.

Fairy tale

A type of short fiction which is often treated as a synonym for *folktale*, but more properly designating, it could be said it is a particular type of folktale featuring fairies or other fantastic creatures.

Fantasy

A literary genre representing strange settings and characters and often involving magic or the supernatural. It is closely related to horror and science fiction, nevertheless, fantasy is typically less concerned with the macabre or with science and technology.

Fiction

We denominate “fiction” any type of narrative, especially in prose, which features invented or imagined characters and action. Today, fiction falls into three major subgenres based on length—the *short story*, *novella*, and *novel*. Older, originally oral forms of short fiction include *the fable*, *legend*, *parable*, and *tale*. Fictional works may

also be categorized not by their length but by their handling of particular 5 elements such as plot and character. *Detective* and *science fiction*, for example, are subgenres. Others fictions include *gothic*, *romance*, *historical* and *nonfiction*.

Flash fiction

Flash fiction is a genre of fiction where all of the stories are very brief. They reach merely 100 words in some cases, even though there is no agreed-upon length for what constitutes a flash fiction story. Some stories are a single sentence, while others stretch on for an entire page or two pages.

Folk tale

It is a tale that follows conventions such as formulaic beginning and ending (“Once upon a time...” “... they lived happily ever after”), a setting not highly particularized in terms of time or place, flat and often stock characters, animal or human, and fairly simple plots.

Fragmentation

Fragmentation is disintegration, collapse or breakdown of various types of norms (thought, behaviour or social relationship). (in this dissertation, I used it in literary sense to show the shattering of a narrative as a whole)

Futurism

An avant-garde aesthetic movement. Its roots originate in Italy and Russia in the early 20th century. Its proponents—mostly painters and other visual artists—rejected past forms of expression, and embraced industry and new technology. Speed and violence were the favored vehicles of sensation. F. T. Marinetti, in his futurist Manifesto (1909), advocated “words in freedom”—he campaigned for a language rid of common syntax and order that, along with variations in typography, could quickly convey intense emotions. Marinetti and other Italian futurists allied themselves with militaristic nationalism, which alienated their cause internationally following World War II.

Greguería

Greguería is a short statement, usually merely one sentence long, in which the author articulates a philosophical, pragmatic, or humorous idea in a witty and original way. *Gregueria* is roughly similar to an aphorism or a one-liner joke in comedy. It is a rhetorical and stylistic device used in Spanish and Latin American literature.

Haiku

A Japanese verse formed of three unrhyming lines in five, seven and five syllables. After having been read, it creates a single, memorable image and a unique atmosphere and sensation in a recipient.

Hero/Heroine

A protagonist of a literary opus. It is a main male/female character, who is especially virtuous, usually larger than life, sometimes almost godlike.

Image/Imagery

Widely determined, we consider as *imagery* any sensory detail or evocation in a literary work; more narrowly, the use of figurative language to evoke a feeling, to call to mind an idea, or to describe an object. Imagery may be *auditory*, *tactile*, *visual*, or *olfactory* depending on which sense it primarily appeals to—hearing, touch, vision, or smell. An *image*, on the other hand, is a particular instance of imagery.

Irony

A situation or statement portrayed by a significant dissimilarity between what is anticipated and what actually transpires, or between what is understood and what is meant. ***Verbal irony*** ensues when a word or expression in context means something different from, and habitually the opposite of, what it appears to mean; when the intended meaning is harshly critical or satiric, verbal irony becomes ***sarcasm***.

Situational irony occurs when the character's actions have an opposite effect from what was intended, or lead to a reversal of expectation or unexpected.

Dramatic irony occurs when there is a gap between what an audience knows and what a character believes or expects; when this occurs in a tragedy, dramatic irony is sometimes called ***tragic irony***.

Cosmic irony and ***irony of fate*** are sometimes used to refer to situations in which situational irony is the result of fate, chance, the gods, or some other superhuman force or entity.

Metaphor

A figure of speech involving comparison; more commonly, a particular figure of speech in which two unlike things are compared implicitly—that is, without the use of a signal such as the word *like* or *as*—as in “Her eyes were fireflies”.

Modernism

A literary current that appeared in 19th century and reached its most drastic peak just before World War I. It grew out of the philosophical, scientific, political, and ideological alterations that followed the Industrial Revolution, up to World War I and its aftermath. For artists and writers, the Modernist project was a re-evaluation of the assumptions and aesthetic values of their predecessors. Modernist writers reacted negatively to Romanticism and broke with Romantic pieties and clichés. They became self-consciously sceptical of language and its claims on coherence.

Motif

A central or recurring image or action in a literary work that simultaneously pervades other works. Unlike themes, motifs are details whose repetition adds to the work's larger meaning; multiple and varying motifs can come about within one work and across longer collections.

Narration

- 1) Broadly, the act of telling a story or recounting a narrative.
- 2) More narrowly, the portions of a narrative attributable to the narrator rather than words spoken by characters (that is, dialogue).
- 3) Term used in conjunction with qualifiers that determine the sort of perspective taken in the narrative (*first-person narration, second-person narration, third-person narration, internal narration and external narration*).

Narrative

A story, whether fictional or true, in prose or verse, related by a narrator or narrators (rather than acted out onstage, as in drama). At times a *frame* recounts the telling of another narrative or story that thus “frames” the inner or *framed narrative*.

Narrator

Someone who recounts a narrative or tells a story. An *internal* narrator is a character within the work telling the story to an equally fictional auditor or listener; internal narrators are usually first- or second-person narrators (see below). An *external* narrator is not a character. When applied to the actual narration, one talks of either *internal narration* or *external narration*.

A *first-person narrator*: an internal narrator who consistently refers to himself or herself using the first-person pronoun *I* (or, infrequently, *we*). The *first-person narrator* should

not be confused with the *author*. When a narrator tells a story in the first person, it does not mean that the author is telling his/her own experiences.

A ***second-person narrator*** consistently uses the second-person pronoun *you* (not a common technique).

A ***third-person narrator*** uses third-person pronouns such as *she, he, they, it*, and so on; almost always *external narrators*, third-person narrators include *omniscient, limited* and *objective narrators*.

Omniscient narrators (literally, “all-knowing”) describe the inner thoughts and feelings of multiple characters.

Limited narrators relate the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of only one character (the central consciousness).

Objective or detached narrators (acting as “*camera eye*”) reveal nothing of characters’ thoughts and feelings, but report only actions, dialogue and behavior.

An ***unreliable narrator*** causes the reader to view the account of events with suspicion, as opposed to a ***reliable narrator***, whose judgment and narration the readers may trust.

An ***intrusive narrator*** is a third-person narrator who occasionally disrupts his or her narrative to speak directly to the reader or audience in ***direct address***.

Novel

A fictitious prose narrative of book length.

Ostranenie (defamiliarization)

A theory and technique, originating in the early 20th century, in which an artistic or literary work presents familiar objects or situations in an unfamiliar way, prolonging the perceptive process and allowing for a fresh perspective.

Oxymoron

A figure of speech that combines two terms that are normally contradictory: real nightmare, living death, educated guess.

Paradox

A statement or a concept that seems to be self-contradictory.

Parable

A short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle or moral lesson.

Personification

The attribution of human nature or character to animals, inanimate objects, or abstract notions, especially as a rhetorical figure.

Plot

The arrangement of the action. The five main parts or phases of plot are *exposition*, *rising action*, *climax or turning point*, *falling action*, and *conclusion or resolution*.

Poetry

Term which can cover any kind of metrical composition. It is usually employed with reservations and often in contradiction to verse.

Point of view

The perspective from which people, events, and other details in a work of fiction are viewed; also called focus, though the term *point of view* is sometimes used to include both focus and voice. The narrator conveys the point of view.

A limited point of view reveals only the perspective of one character.

An *omniscient* or *unlimited point of view* reveals the perspective of multiple characters.

Postmodernism

A term used to refer to changes, developments and tendencies which have taken place in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy etc. since the 1940s or 1950s. Its name does not imply that modernism is over and done with, but simply that it has begun, and it's still occurring, after Modernism. Certain features of this movement are: non-traditional literature against authority and signification; experiments with form, content and presentation, eclectic approach, aleatory writing, parody and pastiche.

Prose

The regular form of spoken and written language, measured in sentences rather than verses, as in poetry.

Prose poem

A composition printed as prose but distinguished by elements common in poetry: such as elaborately contrived rhythms, figures of speech, rhyme, internal rhyme, assonance, consonance and startling images. Aloysius-Bertrand (1807-41) appears to have been one of the first writers to establish it as a minor genre in his *Gaspard de la nuit* (1842). Other writers of note to have attempted the prose poem are Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Oscar Wilde, Amy Lowell, T.S. Elliot etc.

Protagonist

The main character in a work, whether male or female, heroic or non-heroic.

Short story

A short work of prose fiction (it can have in between 500 and 10,000 words) that, according to Edgar Allan Poe, can be read in a single sitting of two hours or less and works to create “a single effect.” We differentiate between the *initiation story* and the *short short story*.

Stream of consciousness

A type of third- or first-person narration that replicates the thought processes of a character without much or any intervention by a narrator. The term was initially made up by the nineteenth-century American psychologist William James (brother of novelist Henry James) in order to refer to the workings of the human mind. Later, its use became more universal as it was adopted to describe the type of narration that seeks to replicate this process.

Style

A unique manner of expression; an author’s style issues from a combination of aspects, such as diction, rhythm, imagery, and so on.

Surrealism

This movement originated in France in the 1920s and was a development of Dadaism. The Surrealists attempted to express in art and literature the workings of the unconscious mind and to synthesize these workings with the conscious mind. The surrealist allows his work to develop non-logically (rather than illogically) so that the results represent the operation of the unconscious. The first manifesto was written by the poet André Breton who recommended that the mind should be liberated from logic and reason. The surrealists were particularly interested in the study and effects of dreams and hallucinations and had experimented with automatic writing under hypnosis. Illustrious

writers of this movements are: Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Péret and Philippe Soupault. The main surrealist painters have become much more famous: primarily, Chirico, Max Ernst, Picasso and Salvador Dalí.

Surprise ending

A plot twist occurring near or at the very conclusion of a story, an unexpected finish to a work of fiction that causes the recipient to reevaluate the narrative or characters.

Symbol

A person, place, thing, or event that figuratively represents or stands for something else. Often the thing or idea represented is more abstract and general, and the symbol is more concrete and particular.

A *traditional symbol* recurs frequently in (and beyond) literature, making it immediately recognizable to those who belong to a given culture. In Western literature and culture, for example, the rose and snake traditionally symbolize love and evil respectively. Some symbols may accumulate their complex meanings only within a particular literary work

Theme

1) Broadly and commonly, an idea explored in a literary work (e.g. “the value of all life”). 2) More narrowly, the insight about a topic communicated in a work (e.g. “All living things are equally precious”). Most literary works have multiple themes, though some people reserve the term *theme* for the central or main insight and refer to others as *subthemes*. Usually, a narrative illustrates a given theme rather than explicitly stating in it. Many narratives may illustrate the same theme, such as war and peace, generational gap, gain of maturity, and more, but the particulars will differ.

Twitterature

A written work (or body of works) of a particularly humorous, clever and/or poignant nature, and artfully stated in 140 characters or less.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Esta tesis doctoral nos lleva a un largo y arduo viaje en busca de las raíces transculturales de las micronarrativas contemporáneas. Estos cuentos brevísimos son como cubitos de hielo que forman parte de un iceberg antes de romperse y empezar a vagar libremente por todos los mares narrativos. Su mera existencia es consecuencia de la fragmentación literaria y de la gradual alienación que sufre la narrativa larga. En un espacio tan pequeño, no hay lugar para el desarrollo completo de una trama bien pensada, ni para una caracterización completa de los protagonistas, o para una descripción detallada de los paisajes.

Los cuentos breves se esfuerzan para lograr concisión, y esta condensación textual se consigue a través de la economía del lenguaje. Sólo se emplean palabras esenciales y rara vez se ve una historia mínima excesivamente cargada de adjetivos o adverbios. Sólo hay espacio para necesidades básicas. La localización de la historia se sugiere solamente; y a veces ni siquiera eso, puesto que puede ser irrelevante. Dominan los nombres de los participantes y los verbos, que denotan las acciones que se suceden. A menudo se utiliza el diálogo para la caracterización de los protagonistas. El objetivo es acumular la mayor cantidad de hechos informativos como sea posible en pocas palabras.

Tal desnudez literaria incita a los lectores a llenar las brechas necesarias para una mejor comprensión de la historia. De esta forma, la micronarrativa está completamente abierta a sus lectores; les permite imaginar e interactuar directamente con el texto. El

lector se convierte en el autor, reconstruyendo constantemente la micronarración y editándola en el esfuerzo interpretativo. El significado de la historia se multiplica mil veces bajo el escrutinio de lectores con distintas percepciones. En gran parte, son los que dan significados a un texto, generando minicuentos nuevos, similares e incluso diferentes después de cada lectura.

Dividida en nueve secciones, esta tesis doctoral, que traza un recorrido hacia las raíces de la micronarrativa contemporánea, está compuesta de fragmentos y segmentos de escritura dentro de una pieza narrativa de mayor tamaño. La sección I trata las características de estas obras ficticias de extrema brevedad y de la ontología de la ficción corta moderna, trazando sus raíces en el fragmento y en su valor simbólico de alienación.

La naturaleza plural de la micronarrativa se refleja en sus múltiples nombres: de ficción corta a corta historia corta y flash-ficción, y más recientemente Six-Word Story (Historia de seis palabras), Twitterature (historias de 140 caracteres), Drabble (100 palabras) o Dribble (50 palabras). La prehistoria de la micronarrativa se encuentra en las primeras palabras escritas en rocas, tablillas y otros materiales, que recogen pequeñas experiencias orales. Las formas populares tales como fábulas (especialmente las fábulas de Esopo en Occidente), así como parábolas mundiales cargadas de contenido sociocultural (como en los cuentos de Panchatantra y Jataka en la India) son antecedentes de la micronarrativa contemporánea. Los relatos del filósofo turco Nasreddin Hodja, con su sutil toque de humor y su intención moralizante, son otro ejemplo. En China, los 48 koans Chan (Zen) compilados por Wumen Huikai representan

las polaridades de la conciencia. A medida que avanzamos hacia el siglo XXI los *Petits Poèmes en prose* de Charles Baudelaire cumplen funciones similares.

La Sección I se mueve transculturalmente a través de varios períodos históricos con el fin de subrayar también la relación de las micronarrativas con el desarrollo tecnológico. Se centra sobre todo en un momento clave de la historia occidental: el modernismo y las vanguardias del siglo XX. La comparación transhistórica trazada en esta sección explora también el encuentro virtual entre autores y lectores a través del tiempo y el espacio; un acontecimiento que finalmente convierte al receptor en co-creador y co-destructor de la pieza literaria.

El acercamiento a la ficción corta como "aparato" trans-literario a través del ensayo de Viktor Shklovsky "El Arte como Dispositivo" nos ayuda a definir el cuento brevísimo como un fenómeno que acentúa principalmente el canal de comunicación entre el escritor y el lector, encerrado en un continuo de tiempo y espacio y la fluidez del presente, pasado y futuro.

El fragmento y su presencia se introducen en la quinta parte de la Sección I, incluyendo su origen y características. El significado de su aparición y el comienzo de la separación de porciones literarias más grandes se convierte en un símbolo de *ostranenie*; una forma de enajenación de la relación anterior con una forma narrativa madre, que al mismo tiempo permite que la sección de texto se libere de significados predeterminados. En lugar de la totalidad, esta nueva relación implica una quiebra y suspensión. Se ofrecen también ejemplos de fragmentos literarios y filosóficos dispersos a lo largo de los últimos siglos.

La Parte VI de la Sección I se ocupa de la digitalización del fragmento en la época contemporánea y de la forma en que se ha convertido en un símbolo de innumerables caminos que se bifurcan, por utilizar el término borgiano. Sin un solo momento en la línea del tiempo, la micronarrativa proviene de múltiples caminos ramificados y forma, así mismo, un número igualmente numeroso de futuros divergentes.

En la séptima parte de la Sección I, damos un salto progresivo hacia la ficción corta, partiendo de la noción del fragmento aprehendido en la conciencia, a sus formas más inconscientes, presentes en la obra temprana de Sigmund Freud: *La interpretación de los sueños y más allá del principio del placer*. Aquí, mis esfuerzos se dirigen a demostrar cómo el movimiento creativo está más allá de la racionalidad humana; nunca estrictamente determinado ni limitado, la creación imaginativa puede situarse fuera de la secuencia narrativa en forma de fragmentos e imágenes (especialmente visibles en sueños o en estados alterados de la conciencia, como por ejemplo la locura). Esta parte apunta a secciones posteriores en las que la ficción corta de las mujeres es explorada semióticamente, en la línea de Julia Kristeva, y con el fin de contrastar estas micronarrativas con la acción simbólica de los varones de ficción corta. El octavo componente de la Sección I enumera el marco y el curso de la investigación.

La Sección II trata de las raíces de la micro ficción planteando una serie de preguntas acerca de las definiciones en torno a la ficción corta y sus variantes y características. El primer componente de esta parte analiza los contextos culturales de cuentos breves, los orígenes de la miniatura en prosa, así como su forma, estructura,

características, y desarrollo en el tiempo. En el segundo segmento de la Sección II se enumeran los problemas encontrados en la definición y categorización de los géneros cortos de ficción, a saber, los debates entre los expertos sobre el tema: "¿qué es exactamente un cuento brevísimo". En esta sección se cuestiona la polémica aparición de unos géneros literarios y la desaparición de otros, subrayando el rápido cambio de formatos textuales desde finales del siglo XIX hasta la aparición de los formatos digitales.

Esta parte también enumera varios autores ejemplares cuyos poemas cortos se convirtieron más adelante en el semillero para la creación de micronarrativas. Finalmente, la sección pondera sobre las características y el origen del género de la "poesía en prosa". La parte 2.4 se centra en la evolución de la micronarrativa en el siglo XX, poniendo el acento en los años setenta y ochenta como período de una floración prominente de la prosa corta en América Latina. El quinto y último fragmento que pone fin a la Sección II revisa el problema de la definición y categorización de un género de cuentos brevísimos, ofreciendo diversos intentos que hasta ahora han sido hechos en su nomenclatura y clasificación por expertos como Zavala, Rojo, Koch, Lagmanovich y otros, enumerando sus características más prominentes.

La sección III trata de los escenarios híbridos del cuento. Se pone especial énfasis en las causas y consecuencias de la polisemiosis narrativa que ha llevado a los lectores a vagar por los bosques abiertos (Open Woods), tal como lo diría Umberto Eco, y a su participación igualitaria en la construcción interpretativa de cuentos. La sección III se ocupa de los orígenes de lo fantástico y de su caracterización, postulando que

todas las formas tempranas de narrativa corta tienen segmentos fantásticos. También afirmo que lo fantástico siempre tiende a expandirse fuera del alcance de la realidad y por lo general evade conceptos de espacio y tiempo, tratando de llegar a ser universal, como un sueño utópico. La Sección III sigue el camino del modernismo y la aparición de las vanguardias artísticas, así como el resurgimiento del fragmento en un momento histórico crucial en el que los problemas socioeconómicos están en pleno apogeo. También subrayo que la modernidad y la vanguardia no están simplemente vinculadas a la influencia social, sino que al mismo tiempo están relacionadas con el desarrollo tecnológico y científico, construyendo el mundo en que vivimos. A medida que avanzamos hacia la condición posmoderna, parecería que el modo de vida moderno ha llevado a la humanidad a la descomposición de todas las esencias ya la reorganización de cualquier vestigio de formas ideales.

La tercera parte de la Sección III explora la forma en que las nociones de multidisciplinariedad y ambigüedad se presentaron en el siglo pasado en obras de distintos autores en relación con la filosofía, la literatura y el arte en general. El cuarto segmento rechaza las perspectivas que contemplan la fragmentación como una forma de cataclismo narrativo, y da la bienvenida a la nueva estética como un soplo de aire fresco. El concepto de totalidad es destronado y comienza la monarquía (o la república, según se prefiera) del fragmento.

La breve parte cinco gira hacia la rápida inspección de la relación entre el desarrollo tecnológico y la recién creada figura del consumidor productivo. Mi teoría afirma que la aparición de la tecnología y las invenciones que ha traído consigo una

apertura que permite ver e imaginar el mundo que nos rodea de una manera diferente, cambiando los puntos de focalización perspectiva. La unidad final dentro de la Sección III , 3.6 explora la creciente influencia y presencia de fragmentos en nuestras vidas, observando su división del cuerpo narrativo más grande como una división inherente del espíritu de la materia, a través de citas de Adorno y *La dialéctica de la iluminación* de Horkheimer y las percepciones de Descartes sobre el dualismo distintivo entre *res extensa* y *res cogitans* en sus *Meditaciones*. El cuerpo del texto moderno ha perdido su totalidad y su unicidad, y ha sido reemplazado por un mosaico que no tiene ni principio ni fin, y que siempre puede incorporar nuevos miembros y unidades aisladas.

La Sección IV pone fin a las secciones teóricas e introduce cambios de ritmo y tono en la tesis doctoral. Es el comienzo de la estructura tripartita que abarca las secciones V y VI, referentes a los escritores hispanohablantes que pueden ser considerados antepasados de los cuentos brevísimos de hoy. Lo mismo se puede decir de las tres partes que se centran en las escritoras de habla inglesa, secciones VII a IX, y que se describen a continuación.

La sección IV trata de la poesía en prosa del escritor uruguayo Horacio Quiroga, analizando poemas en prosa de su libro de 1901 *Los arrecifes de coral*. El primer componente se refiere a la influencia modernista y a la forma en que su obra imita la de su profesor Leopoldo Lugones, pasando a enfatizar el fuerte vínculo entre su biografía y sus creaciones. La Unidad 4.2 discute temas y motivos de la obra literaria de Quiroga, como motivos de muerte, locura, selva y erotismo, así como su estilo y otros escritores que lo influyeron. La tercera parte de la Sección IV pasa a mostrar a Quiroga como

perseguidor de innovadoras técnicas narrativas a la manera de Baudelaire. La sección explora el poema de Baudelaire en prosa, "El extranjero" y señala sus similitudes con las micro-narrativas modernas. El segmento final de la Sección IV se centra en el volumen de *Los arrecifes de coral*, con el estilo modernista y vanguardista del joven Quiroga. El volumen muestra numerosos poemas musicales cortos de los cuales seleccioné y analicé los dos titulados "Toda la noche..." y "Sin haber llegado..."

La Sección V se refiere a Julio Torri, autor y narrador mexicano. El primer segmento se refiere a la trayectoria de su vida, a la educación que tuvo, a las primeras publicaciones ya las actividades en las que participó. El segundo componente se centra en su producción literaria e influencias, como a su mejor amigo Alfonso Reyes, a su estilo muy parecido al de Oscar Wilde y Charles Cordero. Torri fue considerado el precursor del poema de la prosa moderno en México y su contribución a la ficción corta comenzó con su trabajo temprano de 1917 *Ensayos y poemas*, una obra que casi pasó desapercibida debido a su innovación, y con su *De fusilamientos* (1940) y *Tres libros* (1964). La Unidad 5.3 describe la temática utilizada con frecuencia por Torri, como el motivo del sufrimiento y la fragilidad de los seres humanos, la mujer y el amor, el patriotismo mexicano o el desarrollo de la imaginación y la fantasía. Las técnicas literarias que cultivó también se exploran, junto con la ironía y la brevedad, como las características principales de su microficción. La parte final de la sección V sigue una lectura cercana de los cuentos cortos y los aforismos ingeniosos de Torri, que son vivos esbozos de la vida cotidiana. "El mal actor de sus emociones" y "La humildad premiada" son los que me llamaron la atención y que analizo en detalle al concluir esta sección.

La Sección VI se extiende hacia la estética futurista y la vincula con el resurgimiento del fragmento. Al mismo tiempo, es la sección final sobre los antecedentes micronarrativos de habla española y se centra en Ramón Gómez de la Serna, escritor prolífico, al mismo tiempo agitador vanguardista español, perteneciente a la Generación Española de 1914. La primera parte ofrece el perfil biográfico de De la Serna, sus reuniones literarias y discusiones en la Sagrada Cripta del Pombo, y su repentina mudanza a Argentina al estallar la Guerra Civil Española. La segunda parte discute la presencia del futurismo como un movimiento estético en toda Europa y, especialmente, en España, gracias a Gómez de La Serna y su traducción del Manifiesto Futurista de Filippo Tommaso Marinetti al español. También enumera algunas de las principales características del futurismo y su relevancia en relación con el fragmento y la ficción corta. La Unidad 6.3 trata de la visualización y el fragmentismo en la obra literaria de De La Serna, así como con los dispositivos estilísticos que emplea en su obra, que son polos opuestos: "personificación" y "objetivación". La tendencia del fragmentismo se insinúa más detalladamente en la sección final que se dedica a la propia invención de De La Serna, la greguería, una manifestación de la microtextualidad narrativa y la estética de la brevedad.

La Sección VII abre un nuevo tríptico, compuesto por las Secciones VII, VIII Y IX. Esta parte final de la tesis doctoral desarrolla tres escritoras de habla inglesa del Reino Unido y Canadá, cuyas creaciones contribuyen al mundo moderno de la micronarrativa.

Específicamente, la Sección VII trata de la obra de una artista nacida en Inglaterra, pintora surrealista y escritora Leonora Carrington. La tesis incluye toda una sección de su trabajo debido a la vinculación que existe entre la ficción corta y los escenarios fantásticos, vinculado el tema de los deseos y la locura. La Unidad 7.1 narra la vida familiar de Carrington y la gran influencia que su padre ejerció sobre ella, provocando su espíritu rebelde. Otro hombre que tuvo un impacto gigantesco en su camino de la vida fue el surrealista alemán Max Ernst, su compañero durante un corto tiempo hasta el estallido de la Segunda Guerra Mundial cuando huyó a Estados Unidos dejándola devastada. El descenso de Carrington a la locura comenzó poco después de su colapso nervioso, y fue institucionalizada en una institución mental en el norte de España. Escapando de su prisión mental, Carrington viajó a México donde permaneció hasta el final de sus días en 2011. El segundo componente de la Sección VII se refiere al surrealismo ya los fragmentos de locura que emergen en la mente de Leonora y dan forma a su creatividad: el tema de su libro *Memorias de abajo* (1943). Posteriormente pasa a discutir el motivo de la mujer surrealista (fuerza que posee y el lugar central que ocupa en el mundo masculino), y para detallar la estancia de Carrington en el asilo. La sección final analiza el cuento de Carrington "La debutante", en el que la transformación corporal y el movimiento incesante, el cambio de forma vienen a enfocarse. Esta breve prosa explora el estado ambiguo de una protagonista niña-mujer que se ve obligada a un Superego de la adultez pero inteligentemente logra escapar de los lazos de la sociedad, colocando una hiena carnívora como símbolo de su barbarie y aserción feminista.

La Sección VIII la dedico a Angela Carter, autora británica de realismo mágico, que era al mismo tiempo periodista y maestra, centrándose en un cuento *The Snow Child* de su libro de 1979 *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. La primera parte se refiere a su perfil biográfico, la forma en que fue educada y las influencias presentes en su vida que afectaron su maduración literaria y el desarrollo de su forma de pensar, a saber, su divorcio y su experiencia en Japón. La Unidad 8.2 discute las técnicas de escritura de Carter, la deconstrucción y la reescritura apropiativa que provienen de la estética postmodernista y del postestructuralismo. Utilizando los cuentos de hadas, la autora los transforma y reemplaza con su propia perspectiva, fragmentando el cuerpo literario e insertando secciones que alterarían la percepción del lector tradicional sobre un texto aparentemente familiar. La tercera parte habla de temas recurrentes e ideas que tienden a aparecer circularmente a lo largo de la obra literaria de Carter. Me refiero a varios motivos, entre los que se encuentran el motivo de la Mujer Vieja, la Mujer Nueva y la Mujer Cambiada, los roles femeninos potenciados, los motivos pornográficos, los del deseo femenino, el simbolismo animal y los elementos góticos, grotescos y monstruosos. El segmento final se centra en una viñeta “The Snow Child” y se analiza su similitud con la micronarrativa contemporánea.

La Sección IX, está dedicada a la poeta novelista y crítica literaria canadiense Margaret Atwood. El primer segmento trata de su vida y de su trabajo; de la forma en que su peculiar infancia, junto a un padre entomólogo en los bosques al norte de Quebec, Ottawa y Toronto, influye en sus obras. Enumero también algunas de sus obras más importantes que ha publicado hasta ahora, incluyendo colecciones de poemas, ensayos,

novelas y cuentos cortos. La segunda parte abarca todo el mundo literario de Margaret Atwood. Explora lo que significa ser mujer y promover la perspectiva femenina, al tiempo que se mueve hacia temas más humanistas. Al igual que Carter, Atwood reescribe topoi literarios de cuentos de hadas y cuentos populares situándolos en un contexto postmoderno. Otros temas que incluye se refieren a la comida y al acto de comer, la naturaleza y los animales. La unidad 9.3 última parte de esta sección final de mi tesis, se refiere a los libros de cuentos breves de Margaret Atwood: *Murder in the Dark* (1983), *Good Bones and Simple Murders* (1994) y *The Tent* (2006). Además de mencionar sus poemas en prosa "Cold Blooded", "Homelanding" y "The Tent", también listo tres historias de seis palabras con las que Atwood participó en un concurso de *six word story* en 2006 y que fueron publicadas por Wired Magazine en un artículo "Historias muy cortas".

La tesis cierra con algunas conclusiones y deseos para la continuación de esta investigación en la Sección X.