

FOREWORD

Uruguayan brief narrative is an area of literature that does not always receive the attention it deserves: with the exception of two or three big names, it is not particularly fashionable or “trendy”, and remarkably few of its practitioners have been translated into other languages and thus rendered more accessible to a wider reading public.

More than thirty years ago, Mario Benedetti described Uruguay as ‘un pequeño país de historias breves’. He explained this phenomenon in terms of the economics of publishing but as he rightly points out, ‘cada pueblo del Interior, cada oficina de la Capital, cada uno de nuestro intensos y efímeros entusiasmos, puede ser un formidable tema de cuento’.¹ We would like to recall the view of Edgar Allan Poe (a remarkably appropriate choice of critic, given the influence he exerted on Quiroga), expressed in his seminal review of Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* (1842), that ‘the tale proper affords the fairest field which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose, for the exercise of the highest genius.’

Because of our belief in the intrinsic literary and artistic merits of the short story in general, and the Uruguayan variety in particular, we have invited scholars based in Sweden, the United Kingdom and Brazil, with a known commitment to the literature of Uruguayan, *literatura rioplatense* or in one case, twentieth-century Hispanic prose fiction, to submit an article for inclusion in a special number of *Fragmentos*. The only condition imposed was that the articles should involve a close reading of a short story, or provide the context for a study of Uruguayan narrative. Authors were not

constrained to produce essays on particular narrator or his/her works. Such an imposition would have been counter-productive, limiting authorial choices and narrowing critical focus quite unnecessarily. Instead, we have a multiplicity of critical approaches, which include the historical, comparative and psychoanalytical, and permit contributors to engage with texts on different levels, articulating their preoccupation with issues of authorship, gender and identity.

For convenience, the essays are organised in an approximately chronological order. The first, by Leonardo Rossiello, is doubly appropriate, since Rossiello is himself a prize-winning Uruguayan *cuentista*.² In this article, he establishes a historical context for the Uruguayan short story, or, as he puts it, “contribuye a esclarecer las condiciones en que se origina el cuento en el Uruguay del XIX”. Through his analysis of a corpus of short stories he is able to draw a series of conclusions about narrative technique, point of view, the gender of principal narrators - predominantly masculine - and their content.

No collection of essays on Uruguayan narrative would be complete without at least one study of Quiroga. Even someone as widely read and studied as this canonical writer (not for nothing is he habitually labelled “the father of the Latin American short story”), Quiroga still has much to offer both lay readers and critics. While certain of his stories crop up time and time again in anthologies and in translation, others have never been the subject of a detailed commentary. Nor have critics paid much attention to the complexity and ambiguity of his works. Peter Beardsell³ sets out to remedy this situation by offering a penetrating analysis of “El sueño” and the ways in which Quiroga’s stories point up the ambiguities inherent in the human experience. At the same time he locates “El sueño” within the wider context of Quiroga’s preoccupation with Darwin’s views on evolution and with the notion of time as an abstract concept, a theme that finds its fullest development,

perhaps, in the writings of one of Quiroga's most distinguished successors, Jorge Luis Borges.

Gustavo San Román,⁴ another Uruguayan scholar living abroad, challenges commonly-held critical assumptions to offer a new and original reading of Acevedo Díaz's short story "El combate de la tapera".

Coincidentally, two scholars who are better known for their work in other areas, have opted to write essays on Felisberto Hernández: Mark Millington, noted for his psychoanalytical approach to Juan Carlos Onetti,⁵ and Frank Lough, best known, to date, for his work on Ramón J. Sender.⁶

Just as any compilation of essays on Uruguayan narrative would seem incomplete without at least one study of Quiroga, there is scope room for comment on another member of the Uruguayan canon, Juan Carlos Onetti. In fact, two contributors have opted to write on Onetti. Patricia Odber de Baubeta⁷ takes the intertextual approach, returning to Onetti's use of Shakespearian motifs; while Liliana Reales de Ruas⁸ considers Onetti's complex and complicated positioning with respect to other writers and to literary trends - the "diagonals" of her title.

In the final essay of this collection, the London-based Argentinian scholar Evelyn Fishburn⁹ explores a major Uruguayan *woman* writer, Armonía Somers, and achieves the dual objectives of addressing questions of narrative technique ("La inmigrante" is, unusually, a *relato epistolar*) and female sexuality and homosexuality, as well as supplying an alternative interpretation of her chosen *cuento*.

ENDNOTES

Selected articles or books by the contributors are mentioned below in these endnotes. These listings are by no means exhaustive, but are intended to indicate work that has been done in the field of Uruguayan or Latin American brief narrative.

- ¹ Mario Benedetti, *La literatura uruguaya cambia de voz* (1962), reprinted in *Literatura Uruguaya siglo XX*, Montevideo: Arca, 1998, pp.30-31.
- ² Leonardo Rossiello, *Sólos en la fuente y otros cuentos* (1990), *La horrorosa tragedia de reinaldo y otro cuentos* (1993), *La sombra y el guerrero* (1993), in addition to various critical studies of Uruguayan brief narrative.
- ³ Peter Beardsell, *Quiroga. Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte*, London: Grant & Cutler (Critical Guides to Spanish Texts), 1986; 'Irony in the Stories of Horacio Quiroga', *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv*, VI, n° 2 (1980), pp.95-116; 'The Psychological Element in Quiroga's Stories: Two Special Cases', *Spanish Studies*, 5 (1983), pp.1-12.
- ⁴ Gustavo San Román has published on Cristina Peri Rossi in *Iberoamericana*, nos.160-161 (1992), pp.1041-1048; 'Tabaré' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 29:4 (1993), pp.300-310, and has delivered scholarly papers on Juan Carlos Onetti at major international conferences on Onetti in Montevideo and St Andrews.
- ⁵ Mark Millington, *Reading Onetti. Language, Narrative and the Subject*. Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985; *An Analysis of the Short Stories of Juan Carlos Onetti. Fictions of Desire*. Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993; 'Objects and Objections: Onetti's "Tan triste como ella"', *Neophilologus*, 75 (1991), pp.207-221.
- ⁶ Frank Lough has a major study of Sender in press (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press).
- ⁷ P.A. Odber de Baubeta, 'The Deceptive Simplicity of Mario Benedetti: Narrative Technique in "El presupuesto"', in *New Frontiers in Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Scholarship. Como se fue el maestro: for Derek W. Lomax in Memoriam*. Edited by Trevor J. Dadson, R. J. Oakley and P. A. Odber de Baubeta. Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1994, pp.547-562; 'Sleeping Beauty meets Count Dracula. Intertextualities in Horacio Quiroga's *El almohadón de plumas*', *Fragments* (Florianópolis, Brazil), 4, n°2, (1994), pp.19-39; 'The Dead Man', Horacio Quiroga', and 'The Decapitated Chicken', Horacio Quiroga', *Reference Guide to Short Fiction*, London: St

James Press & Detroit: Gale Research, 1994, pp.683-684, pp.687-688; entries on Horacio Quiroga and Carlos Martínez Moreno in the *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, edited by Verity Smith, London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers. In press.

- ⁸ Liliانا Reales de Ruas, 'Presencia: A Infiltração da Realidade Imediata', in *Anuário de Literatura Brasileira e Teoria Literária*, Florianópolis, v. 2 n. 2, 1994, pp.139-145; 'A Escrita de Muitas Leituras de Onetti', in *Diário Catarinense/Diário de Cultura*, Florianópolis, 2 de abril de 1994, pp. 5.
- ⁹ Evelyn Fishburn is the author of 'Alfonsina Storni: A Feminist Reading of her Poetry', in *Feminist Readings on Spanish and Latin American Literature*. Edited by L.P. Condé & D.M. Hart, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, pp.121-136; "'Dios anda en los pucheros": Feminist Openings in Some Late Stories by Rosario Castellanos', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 62 (1995), pp.97-110.