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Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación

Trabajo Fin de Grado

**The story of a challenge:
The short story as
postmodern genre**

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Abstract: The main aim of this final project is to demonstrate that the short story is the literary genre that best represents the idiosyncrasy of the postmodern era. The project is structured in three parts: the first one deals with the concept of postmodernism. The second one is devoted to the short story, in which an overview of the theory and criticism of this genre is offered, and also, a personal approach to a poetics of the short story. The last one presents an analysis of six short stories through which the questions developed in the theoretical parts are exemplified.

Key Words: Short story, postmodernism, genre, narrative, theory, criticism, poetics, fragmentation, perspective, paradox, hierarchy, authority, reader, author, writer, text.

Resumen: El objetivo principal de este Trabajo Fin de Grado es demostrar que el relato corto es el género literario que mejor representa la idiosincrasia de la era posmoderna. El trabajo está estructurado en tres partes: en la primera se trata el concepto de posmodernismo; la segunda está dedicada al relato corto, en la cual se ofrece una visión general de la crítica y teoría acerca de este género y además, un acercamiento personal a la poética del mismo; la última sección está dedicada al análisis práctico de seis relatos cortos mediante el cual se ejemplifican las cuestiones desarrolladas en los apartados teóricos.

Palabras clave: Relato corto, posmodernismo, género, narrativa, teoría, crítica, poética, fragmentación, perspectiva, paradoja, jerarquía, autoridad, lector, autor, escritor, texto.

1. Introduction

This final project is aimed at demonstrating that the short story is the literary genre that best represents the postmodern perception and mentality that the twentieth century brought forth. It is divided in three parts: in the first one, the concept of postmodernism will be developed. The second one will be devoted to providing a poetics of the short story adapted to the new era. And finally, in order to prove the previous hypothesis, a corpus consisting of six different twentieth-century short stories will be analyzed. The first part will contain a brief compendium of the principal ideas and concepts related to the issue of postmodernism. The second part will offer, on the one hand, a general idea of the existing criticism and theory about the short story, and on the other, a personal approach to the subject, that will be exemplified, later, through the analysis of the following short stories: “The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen” by Graham Greene,

“Murder in the Dark” by Margaret Atwood, “Never Marry a Mexican” by Sandra Cisneros, “Enoch’s Two Letters” by Alan Sillitoe, “The Werewolf” by Angela Carter and “Snow” by Ted Hughes. A section for conclusions will summarize the main contents and will offer a general overview. A final appendix will be added to show additional quotations from the short stories in the corpus.

2. A postmodern perspective

“I’ve never been able to endure anything but contradiction.”

—Bertolt Brecht

2.1. The problem of a definition

The first thing to do when dealing with a concept should be to provide a clear, complete and comprehensible definition about the matter. That is the only way in which the ideas and arguments will be better understood by the reader; however, what would happen if the writer finds no way of defining this concept? What if any kind of plausible definition seems to contradict seriously the nature of the notion to be analyzed? That would pose a great problem to the writer: “How are my readers going to understand my texts?” The literary critic Ihab Hassan, maybe finding himself in such a situation, resolved to show what was for him writing postmodernism rather than trying to explain, in theoretical terms, the concept itself. His article, “POSTmodernISM: A Paracritical Bibliography” (1971), far from organizing ideas, establishing patterns or reaching conclusions, consists in a rough presentation of strangely arranged items. It is not very common to find this kind of essays in criticism. The canonical postmodern theoreticians of the twentieth century, say Michel Foucault or Jean-François Lyotard, have tried to deal with the concept in a more *serious* manner; however, the issue of postmodernism is characterized by a rigid obstinacy to definitions.

Theorizing and defining has never been an easy task. The very word *literature* has always supposed a great conflict for literary critics; the same happens with the question of genres, as well as with the different ages or periods in which the literary history has been divided. Abstract concepts seem to resist objectivity. Unfortunately, definitions could be as annoying as necessary, especially for pedagogical purposes: definitions allow delimitations, something essential for students and researchers. The problem with postmodernism is that, although there are plenty of books and articles

devoted to explain it, yet, due to its contradictory nature, very few are able to reach a convincing solution and critics do not seem to find a real agreement.

2.1.1. Socio-historical background

In order to understand postmodernism it is important to go back to its origins. It is impossible to provide an exact date of apparition; postmodernism was not a movement created by a group, but rather a common feeling that soon took hold of the whole world. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that the postmodern era began and developed in the second half of the twentieth century. The historical and socio-political background is crucial to understand this issue; the twentieth century is a century of great changes that transformed the world in a decisive manner: the First and the Second World Wars, followed by the Cold War, created a devastating panorama, destruction and tension seized the world. Technological advancements shortened distances and facilitated communication among nations. Out of Europe, in the former colonies of the great Empires, gradual movements for the independence began to emerge; the postcolonial subjects started to vindicate their right to raise their voice and speak out their minds. In North America, the various waves fostered by feminist groups, together with the apparition of the homosexual movements, supposed a complete shift of perspective. The set of values and beliefs that had sustained a certain order in society suddenly collapsed and the legitimacy of traditional authorities staggered, situating the world behind a kaleidoscopic glass of uncertainty and disbelief. Inevitably, all these rapid changes had significant consequences upon literature. The situation produced by the numerous war conflicts was a trigger for writers. Many postcolonial subjects started to produce a hybrid literature in which, with the language of the former colonizer, they were able to spread their own vision to the world, and destroy thus, myths and stereotypes. Women jumped into the literary sphere more than ever, and a wide variety of possibilities opened up for writers. Linda Hutcheon suggests that the roots of the change are to be found specifically around the sixties, when what she calls “silent groups” (2004: 61) stood up to defend their race, class and sexuality and fight for equality. The twentieth century is also the age of the literary critics. The apparition of the English departments in universities of America fostered the interest in the study of literature and language in

a more *scientific* way, and the emergence of the New Criticism¹ gave rise to a series of heterogeneous trends and schools that revolutionized the literary panorama. The authority of the literary tradition and the canon were soon put into question, and many writers opted for experimentalism in different degrees. Modernism is the first movement to gain wide popularity, which after emerging in the United States and England was rapidly spread to the rest of the Western world.

2.1.2. The meaning of *post*

The very term *postmodernism* simply suggests, with the prefix *post*, that it is a movement that comes after modernism. In his article of 1986, “Defining the Postmodern”, Jean-François Lyotard suggests that “the ‘post-’ of postmodernity does not mean a process of coming back or flashing back, feeding back, but of *ana*-lysing, *ana*-mnesing, of reflecting” (2001: 1615). What Lyotard tries to explain is simply that in referring to something previous, postmodernism does not pretend to go back in time to recover something which is missing, but the intention is rather to reconsider; moreover, he highlights the etymological prefix *ana*-, which carries the meaning of separation or opposition. In relation to this idea, Hutcheon argues: “There is no desire to break with the past, [...] but rather an attempt to inscribe a new historicity and a new problematizing of the notion of historical knowledge” (2004: 218). Considering both views, an essential difference can be identified: on the one hand, Lyotard rejects the idea of postmodernism as a nostalgic movement; on the other, Hutcheon denies that it implies a complete rupture with the previous age. Those divergent opinions come from different treatments of the postmodern. Even though they reject opposed ideas, they both share a common point, that of reconsidering the past and looking at history from a new perspective. That could obviously take place thanks to the great social changes that have been briefly mentioned in previous paragraphs. In fact, Hutcheon quotes Edward Said’s term “critical consciousness” to refer to the idea that the new era is “aware of differences, resistances, reactions” (2004: 224). Postmodern mentality is inevitably critical, “even of itself” (2004: 203), in Hutcheon’s view. It means a reordering of

¹ New Criticism is the name given to a formalist literary theory that appeared in North America by the second half of the twentieth century. It was mainly developed by the scholar I. A. Richards. This hermeneutic approach defends the study and interpretation of the literary text without making reference to its external background, i. e. period, socio-political context, author’s biography, etc. The focus is made upon explicit textual elements and references which provide the meaning of the literary text.

thoughts and places an interrogation before established rules and patterns. Irony and humor is the attitude adopted to face such a chaotic new conception of life; its rebelliousness is manifested as a parody of the world.

2.1.3. Different proposals

Undoubtedly, in the aforementioned historical context culture and arts received the greatest impact; those were the chosen tools to spread the new mentality. Humanity needed a fresh way of expression and the twentieth century provided culture with new possibilities for artistic creation. This situation fostered a confrontation between those critics who praised the innovations and those who heavily criticized what they called the loss of authority and tradition. As Selden, Widdowson & Brooker argue:

For some, postmodernism indicates a deplorable commercialization of culture and the loss of traditions and values, crucially embodied by the modernist works in this century; for others, it has supposed the liberation of the conservative orthodoxies in the high culture, and a well-received dispersion of the creativity in all the artistic fields and the new mass media, now opened to new social groups.² (2001: 245)

In fact, both options can be perfectly true and acceptable, and they are indeed complementary ideas. Having analyzed the causes that promoted postmodernism, it is easy to understand that this questioning of traditions offered an open door for different perceptions, and equally, the acceptance of new values implied a reanalysis of the old ones. Postmodernism is usually referred to as a paradox, since it has supposed, from its beginning, a continuous clash and questioning of ideas which are able to coexist together. New visions implied the rejection of totalizing systems and hierarchies: concepts like fragmentation, decentering, dissemination and *collage* are usually employed when dealing with the postmodern. Here enters into scene the controversial opposition between absolutism and relativism; however, postmodernism, rather than representing a relativist vision of the world, offers the possibility of adopting a perspectivist position, that is, the postmodern does not impose rules or ways of behaving and thus leaves an open path for interpretation and free expression. As Hutcheon puts it: “The contradictory nature of postmodernism involves its offering of multiple, provisional alternatives to traditional, fixed unitary concepts in full knowledge of (and even exploiting) the continuing appeal of those very concepts” (2004: 60).

² The translation is mine.

The uncertainty that postmodernism brings forth made some critics doubt about its legitimacy. Jean Baudrillard, for instance, considers that the postmodern era is the era of “simulacra” (1999: 492): for him, the impact of the new mass media caused a questioning of the real. Technology creates new and more attractive realities; consequently, the distinction of representation and reality is obscured due to the lack of absolutes or universal truths to establish such limits, building thus a world of artifices and *façades*. A very common example usually employed as representative of postmodernism is shown below in Figure 1. The famous painting by René Magritte *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* supposes the negation of an assumed truth through which the author reveals his belief in the incapability to represent the external reality by an artificial means.



Figure 1. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*.³

Many authors, especially in the visual arts, have surpassed the boundaries of representation to express not just the fantastic or the incredible, but the unimaginable. This idea affects seriously again the understanding of the postmodern, for it offers a world difficult to be trusted, and that is maybe the reason for its resistance to definition:

Since the postmodern challenges the distinction between mimesis or copy and the real, it contests the modes of its own representation, of representation itself. Thus it paradoxically defines itself in terms of luminal phenomena which defy both categorization and, finally, expression – the unrepresentable. (Hutcheon, 2004: 286)

The philosophers Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari coined a new term to designate, if not postmodernism as such, at least its irreverent nature, its inclination towards decentering and perspectivism. They employ and develop the idea of *rhizome*, “an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a general and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states” (2000: 112). In

³ Image retrieved from <<http://curiator.com/art/rene-magritte>> (1 July 2014).

other words, a rhizome, represented as a complex web of interconnections that lacks any kind of pattern, and that has no center or point of departure, pretends to be a metaphor of the difficulties for categorization that the postmodern concept offers. The rhizome is the alternative for the traditional modes of representation based on hierarchical distributions. This type of organizing information places all elements at the same level of importance and connected by mutual relations; in this way, one element cannot be understood alone but by its relation to the others. Figure 2 below shows the graphic representation of a rhizome, which will keep on expanding and which, according to Deleuze & Guattari, is very similar to the nervous system:

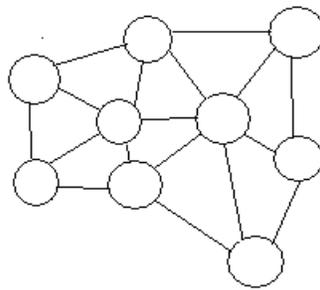


Figure 2. Graphic representation of a *rhizome*.⁴

As can be seen, the impossibility of defining the postmodern is rooted in a continuous paradox that challenges representability. Its chameleonic and non-totalizing behavior escapes all forms of constriction. The great dilemma finds its higher peak in the fact that this is precisely what the postmodern idiosyncrasy is about: problematizing and questioning the value of truth and the conception of everything, even of its own nature. According to Jürgen Habermas, postmodernism cannot provide clear answers “without betraying its anti-totalizing ideology” (Hutcheon, 2004: 231). That is to say, offering a definition of postmodernism threatens its very nature.

2.2. Literary approach

So far, the concept of postmodernism has been dealt with from a more or less general perspective, but the aim here is to observe its impact upon literature. The most accepted

⁴ The design is mine

idea is that postmodernism appeared as a reaction against modernist⁵ tenets and set of thoughts; even sometimes, the end of the modernist movement, 1941 (when James Joyce and Virginia Woolf died), is proposed for its date of beginning.

2.2.1. Modernism vs. postmodernism?

Postmodernism is usually confronted to modernism as being a complete opposition: modernism is associated with respect for the classics, nostalgia for the past, elitist style, belief in progress and hope, and logical thinking, whereas postmodernism is described as chaotic, a complete rupture with the past, loss of belief and respect, anarchy and pessimism. Those theoretical approaches usually blur the actual value of the works produced in both moments of time and draw, equally, a rigid line which is not totally correct. First of all, there is no doubt that modernism is characterized by experimentalism. Examining the canonical works such as those of Virginia Woolf or T. S. Eliot, for instance, it is easily observed that they are writers in the search of a new expression; traditional narrative types are abandoned in order to create a more free exposition of ideas. Modernism is a kind of experimentation difficult to be understood; writers usually make reference to classical sources and literary authorities that demand a very learned reader. The writer is usually one having a good position in society, producing refined and elitist literature for just a few. The narrator's voice mingles with that of characters in a very spontaneous way, jumps in time and gaps in the plot are recurrently employed and fragmentation is a much exploited resource. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) is the perfect example to illustrate this idea, where the text offers a *collage* whose components can only be understood as parts of a whole. Then, what is the difference between modernism and postmodernism in practical terms? It has been previously mentioned that fragmentation and dissemination are essential concepts of the postmodern thinking, but, in the words of Bennet & Royle:

Fragmentation is not unique to the postmodern. But the postmodern entails a new kind of critique of the very ideas of fragment and totality. [...] Fragmentation in the postmodern does not depend on the possibility of an original 'unity' which has been lost. The Romantics and Modernists, by contrast, tend to figure fragmentation in terms of the loss of an original wholeness. [...] Postmodern fragmentation is without origins, it is dissemination without any assurance of a centre or destination. (2009: 282)

⁵ In the text, the adjective *modernist* is applied to concepts related to modernism, whereas *modern* is used with the meaning of *contemporary*.

That is to say, fragmentation in postmodern literature does not consist in a set of pieces from a whole that can be recovered or that were once joined, but it is a complete decentering of totalizing assumptions which does not necessarily need to be coherently organized to be understood. Another crucial distinction related to the idea of elitism is the irreverence towards authority, and in this case, authority simply means the great classics and canonical works which were taken as the only models to be followed and to learn from. Referring to irreverence does not mean that the great works were despised, but that the behavior towards them started to adopt a different form, again, a reconsideration. One clear example is that of the great Argentinean writer, J. L. Borges, who in his short story “Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote” (1944), makes reference to Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* using an ironic tone that permits him create a witty parody of traditions as imposed authorities. In practical terms, the relation between modernism and postmodernism is one of influence and evolution. The rupture that some critics suggest is simply a liberation from rules, which meant the exploitation of the tools and possibilities that the modernist had introduced in the literary panorama.

2.2.2. Questioning and reorganization

The decline of the classics supposed for some a terrible betrayal to literature. Lyotard, being in fact one of the few critics who dares to firmly establish a sharp and concise sort of definition, states: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives”, and he explains that

This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive and so on. (1999: 509)

Metanarratives, or grand-narratives, are the terms employed to designate those great classics which have been *abandoned* for the production of little narratives. Bennet & Royle, moving to a more wide conception, propose that “‘Grand narratives’ such as Christianity, Marxism, the Enlightenment attempt to provide a framework for everything” (2009: 282). Postmodern perspectivist little narratives, on the other hand, offer a wide variety of small portions of reality which do not try to provide the absolute response. Lyotard wonders in preoccupation: “Where, after metanarratives can

legitimacy reside?” (1999: 510). The inevitable answer is that in postmodern literature the search for legitimacy stops being a primary objective, since the belief in the universal value is now understood as an artifice and not as an accessible truth.

The postmodern conception of literature, not just the kind of literature that began to develop, but also the vision that critics and readers adopted, is due as well to the great shift that poststructuralism⁶ and its different branches supposed for hermeneutics and literary theory studies. These movements certainly played an essential role in the dethroning of traditional and absolutist methods in literary analysis. The concepts of *text*, *author*, *reader* and *narrator* suffered a significant reconsideration under the influence of postmodernism. The author, for example, seen as the authoritative figure controlling the development of the text, was displaced and discredited. One of the most representative writers dealing with this issue is Roland Barthes. In his famous essay “The Death of the Author” (1968), he proclaims in a very Nietzschean way, as the title suggests, the death of the author as an absolutist figure imposing meaning on the text. According to him,

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his [her] person, his [her] life, his [her] tastes, his [her] passions, [...]. The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author ‘confiding’ in us. (2001: 1466)

These ideas are to be understood in the context of the development of the so-called Reception Theory. This hermeneutic approach gives the reader the leadership as individual subject in the interpretation of a literary text. Barthes rejects the idea of the author as the reference for the reading process and for interpretation, since that assumption involves looking for a univocal and absolute meaning. In Barthes’ words: “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (2001: 1469). Michel Foucault also considers that the author is a tyrant and he advocates for its execution. According to him, the writer is the “victim of his [her] own writing” (2001: 1624) and once the text has been written, the

⁶ The term *poststructuralism* designates a series of different philosophical theories that spread during the sixties and seventies. These theories appeared as a response to structuralism. They reject the structuralist ideas of binary oppositions and hierarchies, which were insufficient to explain life and the human being. Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva are some relevant figures in poststructuralism.

author disappears leaving the final product living as an independent entity. In the same line of thought, Wolfgang Iser, the main representative of the Reception Theory, makes reference to the act of reading as an interaction between the reader and the text. He argues that the meaning of the text depends on the response and interpretation of the recipient during the reading process.

2.2.3. The postmodern text

Regarding the concept of the postmodern text, it is characterized, first of all, by the development of a consciousness of its own existence, that is to say, the literary text is no longer presented as a parallel world or a reflection of the real one, but it blends with reality causing a breach that connects both worlds and permits a direct communication between the characters and the actual author. Self-referentiality and metafiction are widely employed techniques through which the author is able to share the task of writer with the reader; additionally, the text is then understood as a hybrid product that is inevitably influenced by the weight of the literary tradition and the contributions of both author and reader. The text establishes then connections with other texts, sometimes explicit and more often than not implicit. This conception is known as *intertextuality* and denies, in this way, the possibility of originality, in strict terms, in writing. Barthes suggests the following:

A text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘teleological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. [...] The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them. (2001: 1468)

Considering those statements, the idea of providing the text with a single, universal and true meaning is an obsolete objective in postmodern criticism. This idea is something impossible to reach since the text is constantly sharing information with the internal and external world of everything that enters in contact with it.

One of the most recognized and influential figures in postmodern writing is the author and critic John Barth, who, in his article “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967), expresses the necessity of innovation and changing, of making use of the possibilities that art offers in order to keep literature updated and in accordance with the new era.

For Barth renovation is essential in a writer, which does not mean searching for the creation of original works. According to him, the “artistic victory” of the writer “is that he [she] confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work” (Barth, 1984: 69). One of his main contributions to postmodern literature is his short story “Lost in the Funhouse”, a literary piece which presents the perfect example of the text’s possibilities and through which Barth exposes all the problems, contradictions and uncertainties that the postmodern era supposes for writers. This short story is full of self-references and paragraphs devoted to metafiction. It is a combination of literature and essay; the passages of the story are alternated with reflections and explanations about the use of certain stylistic devices, among other concerns. In the story, Barth refers to the so-called Freitag’s Triangle to represent “the action of conventional dramatic narrative” (1980: 91) (see Figure 3 below):

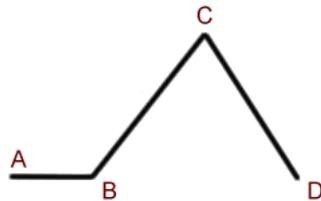


Figure 3. Freitag’s Triangle.⁷

where AB is the exposition, BC action, C climax, CD falling action, and finally, D resolution. After presenting the traditional structure of plot development, Barth argues the lack of necessity of maintaining this pattern in storytelling for being just a convention: “there is no reason to regard this pattern as an absolute necessity, like many other conventions it became conventional because great numbers of people over many years learned by trial and error that it was effective” (1980: 91). This thought is closely related to the ideas exposed in “The Literature of Exhaustion”, i. e., the necessity of innovation. Nevertheless, Barth is not the first writer to suggest this type of change; two centuries before, Laurence Sterne offered, in his masterpiece *Tristram Shandy* (1767), a daring exhibition of his interpretation about the real plot structure:

⁷ The design is mine

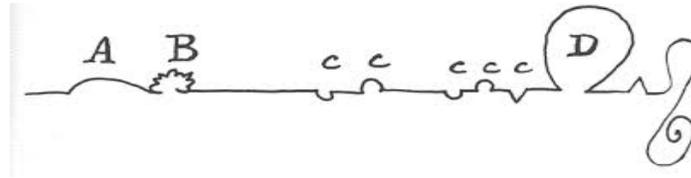


Figure 4. Laurence Sterne's plot-structure design.⁸

Figure 4 above shows something really striking for the eighteenth century, but that today does not seem so absurd after all in the poststructuralist vein.

Not only does the text question the traditional narrative structure, but also Barth shows his presence in “Lost in the Funhouse” as the creating entity. The story stuns for its continuous bathetic moments in which the author expresses his incapability to decide how to continue or how to finish the story. “I’ll never be an author” (1980: 83), he concludes; by contrast, in this way Barth is able to become one of the most representative authors in postmodern literature, and reaffirm thus, contrary to Barthes’ opinion, the powerful position of the author in the new era.

In the following sections the focus will be made upon one of the major contributions to the literary field: the short story. The possibilities that postmodernism offered fostered the bursting of a genre, which although not completely new, started to develop and to adopt a form of expression unknown until that moment.

3. The short story: the challenge of a new genre

“The short story is not time-bound, but timeless, not explanation but astonishment, not credible but incredible, not life but language.”

—Charles E. May

3.1. Emergence and reception of the short story

Short forms of narration have always played an important role in literatures. Generally, all civilizations, from their origins, have made use of tales, fables and legends, which have been rooted to their traditions and that had belonged to their history and culture. The contemporary short-story critic Charles E. May states that “in the ancient history of the human use of narrative as a mode of communication, the short story precedes the

⁸ Image retrieved from <http://ozandends.blogspot.com.es/2006_11_01_archive.html> (1 July 2014).

long story as the most natural means of narrative communication” (1994: 131). But even though short narratives exist since the very beginning of literary history, they have developed in different ways and adapted to the necessities of the times. This section is particularly devoted to the contemporary short story, which settled during the second half of the twentieth century.

In literary criticism the short story has been regarded with suspicion, maybe due to its recent apparition in literature. At the beginning it was a newborn genre, an entity in evolution, so it was difficult to find a stable place among the major genres: the novel, poetry and drama; in fact, the short story has been eclipsed by them and placed in the background. The modern short story is the direct heir of the tale, a genre that was cultivated in America by great writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne or Washington Irving, but both the treatment of this genre and its structure differ much from those of the short story as it is known today. According to Ian Reid, those tale writers who were publishing in the first half of the nineteenth century were defined by a “stylized characterization, detachment from social behaviour, and tendency towards allegory” (1977: 25). The greater problem that this literary form had to face was the immense popularity that it reached among middle classes, a situation that caused a massive production of tales in magazines which resorted to commercial forms of less artistic quality and just sought to satisfy the interests of the mass. The reception of this product was very negative on the part of the critics, the tale decayed and its bad reputation meant a significant impact on the short narrative.

3.1.1. Criticism and theorization

The theory of short fiction started to gain attention and popularity with Poe’s essays; from then on, the theorization of this genre has undergone a continuous questioning. There is not an accepted theory about the short story in literary criticism, and even sometimes it is not considered as a genre in full right. In this context, many authors, such as Charles E. May, criticize, in fact, this lack of serious criticism or literary theory, which, by contrast, is plentiful for the novel:

In their concern [that of critics] with the wide variety of narrative forms that existed before the novel, neither of these studies mention, except as an aside, that form of prose fiction which originated in the most primal narrative impulse and which has developed with sophistication and vigor alongside the novel –the short story. (1994: 132)

Similarly, Alan Pasco complains about the absence of a real agreement able to provide with a definition of the short story. From the earliest contributions to criticism, short-story theory has developed individually in different ways; at the same time, the genre has been in constant evolution, especially from the 60s onwards, an evolution that is still present today. Therefore the short story offers, as well, an unresolved question that maintains a constant open debate of confrontation. Pasco thinks that “it might help if we could agree on a definition” (1994: 115), but, for him, the problem lies in the fact that writers take critics’ agreements as challenges and they constantly turn to new possibilities.

3.1.2. A new genre for a new era

The short story can be considered as the genre that best encapsulates this fragmented and perspectivist mentality of the modern era. It can be seen as a representative genre for a world surrounded by virtual realities, since short narrations offer the possibility to look from new and varied perspectives. Nadine Gordimer’s contribution to the genre is widely recognized; she herself has argued that the short story is “*the* form of our age, being well suited to representing the fragmentary nature of much contemporary experience” (Prescott, 2008: 3). This is a especially heterogeneous genre with regard to authors, style, narrative structure and subjects. It has been widely used by different writers, thanks to its versatility and flexibility and its anti-authoritarian postmodern character. The short story develops independently from criticism, essentially because the later has proved incapable of delimiting its possibilities, a situation that offers writers free way for experimentation.

In the case of English literature, many different authors belonging to diverse nationalities and dealing with myriads of topics are found. The short story is usually conceived as the most suitable genre for the outsider. For instance, in postcolonial writing, apart from the novel, the short story has been widely used, presumably because of the analogy of an emerging entity, alienated and searching for its place. Suzanne Ferguson, in relation to modern fiction, states that it is characterized by “alienation, isolation, solipsism, the quest for identity and integration” (1994: 220). If those social groups were looking for their place in the literary field, it is logical that they chose a non-canonical genre with freedom of expression, a genre which, additionally, shared with them their marginal condition. Viorica Patea suggests that both are the victims of a

“theoretical neglect” and that the short story “is linked to marginal people, women or outsiders, all of whom are plagued by a sense of exile and existential isolation. For them the volatility of class structure accounts for the genre’s experimental nature” (2012: 8). They make a common journey to obtain a place in society. The Irish writer Frank O’Connor, in his book *The Lonely Voice* (1962), has also mentioned the inclination to the outsiders, “outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society” (2004: 21). For him, this condition provides short stories with “an intense awareness of human loneliness” (2004: 21).

3.1.3. Common approaches

For the majority of the critics and readers, the most outstanding characteristic of a short story, its defining feature, is shortness. Obviously, this conception comes from the fact that this is a feature that can be easily observed and it gives the name to the genre, but above all, it is considered the principal contrast that separates the short story from the leading narrative genre: the novel. Normally, essays and articles devoted to the production of a poetics of the short story are carried out in relation to the novel, for it is firmly established in the literary field and market, and what is worse, it is usually taken as a superior genre to which the short story is subordinated. The problem of defining the short story in contrast to the novel to explain their differences is that in this way the short story does not liberate itself from this imposed dependency. The critic Mary Louis Pratt provides in her article a list of oppositions through which she tries to explain the dependency and the *incompleteness* of the short story. Pratt thinks that “shortness cannot be an intrinsic property of anything, but occurs only relative to something else” (1994: 96), and this *something else* is the novel.

The Aristotelian division of narrative structure, which had been inviolable, together with the strict –though innovative in his time– theory developed by Poe, have had a great influence for many short story critics; however, as the end of the twentieth century came nearer, those analytical modes were progressively abandoned, for they became insufficient to confront the new literary possibilities. The following paragraphs will be thus devoted to present an alternative poetics of the short story.

3.2. Towards a poetics of the short story

The first thing to bear in mind is that, in this explanation, the comparison to the novel will not be employed. It has been proved with the coming of the new century that the short story is a fully recognized and developed genre, a genre on its own right. Therefore, it is not necessary, in order to present the theory, to make use of other genres, and especially, because that is the only way to liberate the short story from the influence of the novel. As it has been mentioned above, Pratt offers a rather derogatory kind of theory. Her ideas are summarized in Figure 5 below:

	Novel	Short story
1	Tells a life	Tells a fragment
2	Deals with many things	Deals with a single thing
3	A whole	A sample
4	A whole text	Part of a text
5	Deals with traditional and central subjects	Deals with new and peripheral subjects
6	Writing	Orality and speech
7	History and travel tradition	Anecdote and folklore tradition
8	Art and creativity	Craft and skill

Figure 5. Mary Louis Pratt's theory about the short story.

It can be clearly observed that her ideas are based on a radical system of oppositions that cannot prove the dependency of the short story. Firstly, it is an argument based on traditional ideas of a canonical and orthodox conception of literature in a context where the grand-narratives have been overthrown and the hierarchies destroyed. Secondly, it offers no possibility of connections and influences, which is something natural in literary genres. Through the following explanations these absolutist oppositions will prove self-evidently inaccurate.

The novel and the short story are completely different in their internal and external configuration, in the treatment of narrative elements and ultimately they are read differently, but they share a very significant feature: they are both subcategories of the narrative genre. In this line, one of the most loyal authors to Poe's legacy, the critic Brander Mathews, explains that the short story "neither can be conceived as part of a Novel, nor can it be elaborated and expanded so as to form a Novel. A good Short-story

is no more the synopsis of a Novel than it is an episode from a Novel” (1994: 75).⁹ Indeed, their difference is originally rooted in the fact that they both evolved from different forms. According to Boris M. Éjxenbaum, “The novel derives from history, from travels; the story—from folklore, anecdote” (1994: 81). This idea can be identified in points 6 and 7 in Figure 5 above, a contrast which, although originally true, has been blurred in contemporary writing. For example, there are many novels based mainly in dialogue, and short stories in which philosophical dissertations occupy most part of the narration. Charles E. May adduces that the difference between the short story and the novel “is one of essence” (1994: 132). And those elements that constitute that *essence* of the short story will be probed hereafter.

The concept of shortness or brevity has been introduced already, and the treatment of this feature should be analyzed with caution. We agree with Mathews that a short story is not analogical to a chapter or an extract from a novel, and that “it would be spoiled if it were made longer” (1994: 71). Although there is no fixed length or delimitation of extension, it is true that the short story, obviously, cannot be an extensive narration. Some critics, as Alan Pasco, have the opinion that shortness “determines the devices used and the effects achieved. Certainly brevity constitutes the short story’s greatest limitation” (1994: 127); however, this idea very much restrains the vision towards the short story. Its shortness is not a handicap or a constraint, but just the space needed to tell the story. If the narration has certain brevity, it is because there is no more to be told, at least explicitly. The very nature of the story, its internal configuration and the events that take place, is what really determines its extension, and not the other way round. In May’s words: “The short story is short precisely because of the kind of experience or reality embodied in it” (1994: 133).

Therefore, rather than considering shortness one of the most characteristic features, since it is not intrinsic, condensation could be an alternative way of looking at it. Many things can be in fact intensely compressed in a short story. According to the Argentinean writer Julio Cortázar, “The idea of significance is worthless if we do not relate it to the ideas of intensity and tension, which refer to the technique used to develop the subject” (1994: 248). For him, short stories struck with momentary power.

⁹ In relation to the spelling of *Short-story* Brander Mathews explains: “I have written ‘Short-stories’ with a capital S and a hyphen because I wished to emphasize the distinction between the Short-story and the story which is merely short” (1994: 75). The capital *N* in *Novel* is also a personal decision of the author.

This intense ascent to the climax of the story is achieved thanks to the emotional load produced by an imminent end. That state appears with what is implicit and suggested. That is the main reason why in short stories high precision is needed and details usually compose an essential part of the narration; details are usually the revealing foreground in the narrative scenery. Every single element plays an important role in short stories. In Ferguson's words: "the 'best' short stories give us a sense of the inevitability of each sentence and persuade us that they are as complete as possible, that any addition or deletion would destroy their aesthetic wholeness" (1994: 219).

The search for the perfect subject has also been debated in criticism. Some try to defend the importance of picking up specially fitted topics for short narrative, however, they are unable to provide with the answer, as it is the case of Mathews. A more recent opinion is that of the contemporary short story writer Raymond Carver, who thinks that

It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, and to endow those things – a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring – with immense, even startling power. (May, 2007: 211)

Cortázar also agrees on that idea. He thinks that the importance of the subject of a narration lies in how it is told. The way the writer treats the topic is crucial to determine a good or bad story, and he adds: "even a stone is interesting when a Henry James or a Franz Kafka deals with it" (1994: 247). There are no special topics designed for short stories. This is a question open to the writer's selection. The skill of writing short stories is that gift of being able to transform any kind of subject, as trivial as it could be, in a remarkable moment or event. The use of language, the style, the way characters are introduced and how the context is set, are thus decisive factors that would determine the final effect of reading a short story.

For Poe, the most important feature of a short story, as well as of a poem, is what he called "unity of impression" (1994: 69), the creation of a single effect that is achieved thanks to the reading in one sitting, something that is reiterated by Brander Mathews; nevertheless, in what sense is *unity* to be understood? The unity of the story, based on the neat organization of structure, plot and characters, is precisely abandoned in contemporary narrative; moreover, short stories sometimes manage without some of the originally basic parts of a narrative structure. We agree with Ian Reid that "in many good stories symmetry is not present at all" (1977: 59). Fragmentation, asymmetry and

impressionism are some of the most salient contributions to short narration that are better identified with the contemporary age. As in plastic arts, short stories offer the possibility of expressing by seemingly disconnected spots of light, by brush-strokes of expression. Reid also suggests that

Fiction can be as disjunctive, yet as emotionally compelling, as a weird dream; and not to let 'story' cover just cases would be to make the generic category more constricted than some modern story-tellers wish it to be. (1977: 7)

Moreover, short stories rely much on perspective and viewpoint. The vision that they offer is delimited by its internal time and space; they work pretty much like photographs, where the rest of the scenery is hidden and where the view angle permits the sight of just a certain part of the landscape. According to Patea, a short story is an exposition of a fragment, a moment taken from reality that "centers on a scene, a person cut off from a larger social, historical or existential continuum, and concentrates on a moment of awareness rather than a completed action" (2012: 11). Nadine Gordimer even adds that short-story writers usually narrate the immediate present, the only thing that they can trust to a certain extent; she observes that "they have learned to do without explanation of what went before, and what happens beyond this point" (1994: 265).

Usually, a short story transmits the feeling that something is on the verge of happening. Even though the narration may seem static, some psychological movement or action tends to alter the initial configuration of the story. Not in vain, Mathews thinks that dynamism is something indispensable. For him "A Short-story in which nothing happens at all is an absolute impossibility. [...] In a Short-story there must be something done, there must be an action" (Mathews, 1994: 77). The concept of *action* should not be considered just physical as Mathews suggests; every time there is a story, something is taking place even though these events or changes may not be perceived visually. An internal discovery or a personal evolution may produce the intended effect on the reader.

Short stories are able not only to take out and show a perspectivized piece of reality, but also, by singling it out, they permit a direct facing with the most sincere human reality. They tend to present a defamiliarization of the ideal everyday life, shaded by monotony and disguised information, in order to make an internal discovery that challenges the initial conception of the world. As May puts it:

The short story is closer to the nature of reality as we experience it in those moments when we are aware of the inauthenticity of everyday life, those moments when we sense the inadequacy of our categories of conceptual reality. (1994: 142)

This discovery or revelation –or *epiphany*, as James Joyce termed it–, is normally identified with the climax of the story, though it is sometimes what gives way to the story itself or even what constitutes the ending. Nevertheless, May thinks that epiphany is not the consequence of the confrontation with the everyday world, but of the encounter with “the sacred” or “the absurd” (1994: 133); however, it is precisely *the sacred* or *the absurd* present in every-day life what really disrupts the integrity of the individual. Be as it may, the short story “presents moments in which we become aware of anxiety, loneliness, dread, concern, and thus find the safe, secure and systematic life we usually lead disrupted and momentarily destroyed” (May, 1994: 142).

The short story has sometimes been conceived as a genre placed between the novel and the poem, as if it were the point where both genres collide and mingle, for it contains a narrative structure and, at the same time, a high degree of lyricism. Some even place it closer to poetry than to the narrative genre. The opinion of Reid is that “The short story, like much characteristically Romantic poetry, tends to concentrate on some significant moment, some instant of perception” (1977: 28). Although it is true that many short stories are loaded with lyric elements, I would contend that it is not an intrinsic feature of the genre. Not all short stories are nearer to poetry than to novels in language and style. Nevertheless, this concentration of meaning that Reid mentions permits short stories to maintain a lyric load in a high level during the narration. In Patea’s opinion, “The lyric element is inherent in the short story’s compact form” (2012: 10). This is something that would be unthinkable in a more extensive text, in which lyricism can happen with frequency but not in a continuum, for that would destroy the characters and disturb the reader.

In contemporary fiction, as has been previously mentioned, the reader is an essential figure, not only in the analysis and criticism of the texts, but also in the creation process. The author is aware that the reader is there, but not to simply read and receive the information as a passive recipient, but to assimilate, process and participate actively in the communicative act. Short stories, because of their fragmented and perspectivist nature, are usually rather dialogical and the effort of the readers in their encounter with the story is, more often than not, a great one. This effect is achieved

thanks to the use of narrative blanks, that is to say, gaps in plot elements and characterization that readers have to suppose or infer from what is said. According to Ferguson, “the reader must to some extent construct this hypothetical plot in order for the actual story to seem meaningful” (1994: 222). Consequently, the ultimate significant of those missing elements is not univocal and thus *the* meaning of the text is frequently left open.

If there is an element that really determines the efficacy of a short story, it is the ending, or adopting May’s terminology, the *closure*. Endings tend to reveal the essential hints for the understanding of the story as a whole. In a sense, every element in a short story gravitates towards the contextualization of an end that gives its sense –or its non-sense– to the text, and that endows the story with an astonishing power. The Russian critic Éjxenbaum thinks that the short story tends to concentrate “its whole weight toward the ending”, and that it is ultimately characterized by “*Small size and plot impact on the ending*” (1994: 81). Something important to be taken into account is that endings do not involve an answer or a disclosure of the plot. As May points out, short stories “are frustrating in their inconclusiveness” (2012: 300). Obviously, structurally speaking, all stories have an inevitable end, for the author cannot keep on telling a story to the infinite; however, virtually, in terms of plot, most of the times the closure, the resolution, is not given. Short stories are plucked out fragments, that is why it is technically difficult to build a perfect ending which is able to close the story and, at the same time, to leave it open.

Having presented a personal approach on the basic features of the genre, and previously an overview of postmodernism, the following sections will be devoted to exemplify and connect all the theory that has been developed up to this point.

4. The short story in practice: analysis of a corpus

“The short story must be, for all purposes, essential.”

—J. L. Borges

As Paul de Man suggests in his article “Resistance to Theory” (1982) it is not useful to theorize about such an abstract concept as literature without making use of the practice. That is the reason why the following sections will be devoted to the analysis of a corpus of short stories to exemplify how this genre is the one that best encapsulates and

represents the postmodern idiosyncrasy. It is important to make it clear from the beginning that the selected short stories are not part of a postmodern canon, nor are they considered a postmodern piece of literature. As has been previously suggested, postmodernism is not here considered as a specific movement with certain rules or categorizations, but rather as a critical attitude or perspective; therefore, the aim of this part is to show the great potentiality of short stories and the innumerable possibilities they offer to express, with a special freedom, the paradoxical and perspectivist postmodern mentality. The corpus to be analyzed is composed of “The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen” (1965) by Graham Greene; “Murder in the Dark” (1983) by Margaret Atwood; “Never Marry a Mexican” (1991) by Sandra Cisneros; “Enoch’s Two Letters” (1973) by Alan Sillitoe; “The Werewolf” (1979) by Angela Carter; and finally, “Snow” (1956) by Ted Hughes.

4.1. “The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen” by Graham Greene

Even though this text was written in the sixties, Greene’s¹⁰ short story presents a setting and circumstances that can perfectly be transposed to a more contemporary context. “The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen” is settled in a London restaurant. The story is about a young woman who discusses with her partner about her great future as a novelist, something that –as she thinks– will make them very rich (see Q1¹¹ and Q2). A male extradiegetic narrator retells the couple’s conversation as a witness and offers the reader with his own opinion, a voice that contrasts sharply with the woman’s idealistic mentality (see Q3-Q5).

The main subject that can be found in the short story is the act of writing literature and being a writer. Contemporary writing is presented as a common job which is not precisely glamorous, a difficult task, especially because of the hardships of selling well and having a positive reception among critics: “As the years pass writing will not become any easier, the daily effort will grow harder to endure” (120)¹² (see also Q6).

¹⁰ Graham Greene (1904-1991) was born in Hertfordshire (England). He is well-known for novels such as *The Power and the Glory* (1940) or *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), dealing with Catholic themes, and *Our Man in Havana* (1958) or *The Human Factor* (1978), dealing with politics and espionage. Greene worked as journalist for the *Nottingham Journal* and *The Times*. He also wrote poetry and short stories. The author suffered bipolar disorder and died of leukemia in Switzerland.

¹¹ The additional quotations of the short stories are found in a final appendix.

¹² All the quotations taken from Greene (1997).

The commercialization of culture, that Selden, Widdowson & Brooker mention in his book (2001: 245), is neatly offered and criticized through this short story, where it seems that writing literature, particularly novels, has been reduced to a merely economic activity that anybody can perform if “you began with some reading” (119) (see also Q7). That is something that the woman tells her partner to encourage him to enter the writing sphere. In fact, the narrator himself, who claims to be also a writer, shows a very negative panorama of what writing implies: “it was a shock too that she was one of my own profession. She couldn’t have more than twenty. She deserved better of life” (118). The task of being a writer is thus demystified and moved away from an aesthetic conception. Publishing houses, additionally, are presented as not always reliable, companies that manipulate the author’s literary product in order to sell better. For the narrator, publishers are not to be trusted in everything they say: “I wanted to say to her, Are you certain your publisher is telling you the truth? Publishers are human” (119) (see also Q8-Q10). The narrator is not the only one who seems to disagree with the young writer in her unconditional belief that she is going to make a fortune with her novels; her fiancé, throughout the conversation, expresses a rather mistrustful attitude towards Mr. Dwight’s –the publisher– promises. Furthermore, he is able to exasperate the woman by his pessimistic, though down-to-earth, commentaries:

‘And of course another advance will be due, darling, when the next book’s finished. A bigger one if *The Chelsea Set* sells well.’

‘*Suppose it doesn’t.*’¹³

[...] ‘I’ve got the title for the next book – *The Azure Blue.*’

‘I thought azure was blue.’

She looked at him with disappointment. ‘You don’t really want to be married to a novelist, do you?’

‘*You aren’t one yet.*’¹⁴(120)

Those hits of reality disturb the young writer and yet she, in her conviction, is not able to reconsider her thoughts.

¹³ The italics are mine.

¹⁴ *Idem.*

It is interesting to highlight the importance of the title in order to understand better the story. The context in which the narrator settles the story is the following: “There were eight Japanese gentlemen having a fish dinner at Bentley’s. They spoke to each other rarely in their incomprehensible tongue, but always in a courteous smile and often with a small bow. All but one of them wore glasses” (118). The Japanese that are sitting between the narrator and the couple are mentioned continually throughout the story (see Q11-Q15), and, curiously enough, they give the title to the short story. In this way, the story suggests that the Japanese gentlemen are in the restaurant for some important reason and, although they do not seem to take part in the plot, it is inevitable to notice them. The short story is highly ironic and that is something that the reader realizes at the end; the reason why Mr. Dwight gives hope for his client, according to the woman, is because he thinks she has great *powers of observation*: “My publisher. He said he hadn’t read a first novel in the last ten years which showed such powers of observation” (119). However, the short story closes with the proof that probably her publisher is not as trustful as she could think and that she may not be such a good observer, since, for her, the ever-present Japanese gentlemen seem to be invisible. In the last lines, when the couple is going to leave the restaurant, the fiancé wonders what would be those Japanese doing there, and the woman answers: “What Japanese, darling? Sometimes you are so evasive I think you don’t want to marry me at all” (121).

The narrative frame offers a very interesting picture for the reader, who has access to the information as witness in the background, filtered by the narrator. The narrator presents a fragment from a wider reality which the reader has to infer or suppose. The irony, as has been mentioned in previous sections, is commonly employed in contemporary fiction. This device permits the narrator to present the story with amusing tone and also allows the reader, at the end, to guess about the young writer’s future, even though her literary ability is, indeed, unknown.

4.2. “Murder in the Dark” by Margaret Atwood

Atwood’s¹⁵ text is a brief short story full of direct addresses to the reader which appear

¹⁵ Margaret Eleanor Atwood (b.1939) was born in Ottawa (Canada). She is a poet, novelist, critic, essayist and also an environmental activist. Atwood has won several literary prizes such as Prince of Asturias Award or Booker Prize among others. Atwood’s most famous works are the novels *Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and *The Edible Woman* (1969), and the short-story collection *Dancing Girls* (1977).

with shocking power. The story can be considered as a game, and that is what the title suggests, as the narrator explains. At the beginning, in the first part of the story, the narrator remembers the time when she was a young girl and played *murder in the dark* with her friends (see Q16), but in the second part, the tone starts to change and the narrator shows the reader the rules to play the game:

You fold up some pieces of paper and put them into a hat, a bowl or the centre of the table. Everyone chooses a piece. The one who gets the x is the detective, the one who gets the black spot is the killer. The detective leaves the room, turning off the lights. Everyone gropes around in the dark until the murderer picks a victim. He can either whisper, "You're dead," or he can slip his hands around a throat and give a playful but decisive squeeze. The victim screams and falls down. Everyone must now stop moving around except the murderer, who of course will not want to be found near the body. The detective counts to ten, turns out the light and enters the room. He may now question anyone but the victim, who is not allowed to answer, being dead. Everyone but the murderer must tell the truth. The murderer must lie. (38)¹⁶

From this point, the narrator is continually addressing the reader as the receiver: "Here is how *you* play" (37), "If *you* like, *you* can play games with this game" (38)¹⁷. The reader is here taken as a present identity who does not only take part in the text but also in the game the narrator proposes. She offers different variants of the game: "the murderer is the *writer*, the detective is the *reader*, the victim is the *book*. Or perhaps, the murderer is the *writer*, the detective is the *critic* and the victim is the *reader*" (38)¹⁸. The first proposal may imply a reconsidering of the traditional roles carried by the author, reader, critic and text, in which the reader is the detective, the legitimate researcher, in contrast to the second in which this role is performed by the critic. The author then is placed behind, seen as a destructive figure, something that clearly connects with that idea that Barthes criticizes in "The Death of the Author".

In the closing lines of the story the narrator starts playing with the reader. Being in fact the murderer she explains, using present simple and present continuous, the way she is acting: "that's me in the dark. I have designs on you. I'm plotting my sinister crime, my hands are reaching for your neck, [...] you can hear my footsteps approaching, I wear boots and carry a knife" (38) (see also Q17). This simultaneous narration simulates a kind of performative act, an action that takes shape in the reader's

¹⁶ All the quotations taken from Atwood (1997).

¹⁷ The italics are mine.

¹⁸ *Idem*.

mind. By doing so, the narrator is able to portray the great creative powers of the author, which poses a paradox in relation to the role of the author by the very final lines of the story: “by the rules of the game, I must always lie. Now: do you believe me?” (38). The narrator’s voice, which in this case can be identified with that of the author, is presented as something which is not to be trusted; nevertheless, the speaking voice demonstrates how she is able to manipulate the reader and the text. Furthermore, this self-consciousness of being an author as a creative entity replaces, to a certain extent, the threatened authorial power, even though her statements should not be taken as truthful or univocal.

The gradation in terms of tense and of narrative mood is crucial to build the psychological impact on the reader; it blurs the line between fiction and reality, and the action finally gets out of the text in order to develop independently in the reader’s mind. As has been previously mentioned, this short story challenges the assumed roles of author and reader, which are transformed into a paradox in terms of textual authority.

4.3. “Never Marry a Mexican” by Sandra Cisneros

The following short story is an example of postcolonial literature. Cisneros¹⁹ is a contemporary author especially known for being a Chicano²⁰ writer. Additionally, it is worth mentioning the deep mark of feminism that the text contains. The story is not only written, but also narrated by a woman who does not hide her impulses, passions and feelings. Clemencia, the protagonist, is an intradiegetic narrator and the events described are told from her most intimate self. The story can be divided in two parts: in the first one, Clemencia retells the past, how her mother, coming from a humble Mexican family living in the States, met her father, a middle-class Mexican; her father’s death and the consequences upon the family; the mother’s second marriage and, finally, how Clemencia and her sister Ximena moved to the South and settled there. The second part implies a complete shift: the addressee, who in the first part could be thought of as

¹⁹ Sandra Cisneros (b. 1954) was born in Chicago (USA). She is a well-known Mexican American writer who deals with postcolonial issues. Cisneros has spent her youth migrating between Mexico and USA, something that inspired her for her literature. In her writings, she deals mainly with the problems of identity, misogyny and poverty. Cisneros’ most famous works are her novel *The House in Mango Street* (1984) and her short-story collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991).

²⁰ The term *Chicano* refers to Mexican people living in the United States or North American people with Mexican background. The Chicano literature is very popular in postcolonial studies.

a hypothetical reader, becomes an explicit listener who is alternating continuously: Drew, her lover; and the boy, his son. This alternation, together with sudden shifting scenes, endows the story with a highly fragmented narration.

The most outstanding element in this short story is the language employed. Clemencia makes clear, by the way she speaks, her Mexican background and her bilingual condition:

You know the place, the one on Zarzamora on top of the barber shop with the Casasola prints of the Mexican Revolution. Neon BIRRIA TEPATILÁN sign around the corner, two goats knocking their heads together, and all those Mexican bakeries, Las Brisas for *huevos rancheros* and *carnitas* and *barbacoa* on Sundays, and fresh fruit milk shakes, and mango *paletas*, and more signs in Spanish than in English. (181)²¹

There are many examples of code switching in the narration as in sentences such as “The barrio looked cute in the daytime” (181), “Because I married so young *mi’ja*” (182) or “Come here, *mi cariñito*” (187) (see also Q18-23). This way of speaking shows spontaneity, something emphasized by several marks of orality such as “and it’s *not* the same, you know” (179) or “But that’s—how do you say it?—water under the damn?” (182), when she is addressing the reader. Language is a very important issue because it shapes a part of her identity, a difficult question for Chicano people in particular, and postcolonial subjects in general. That is explicitly mentioned when Clemencia speaks to Drew: “*Mi doradita*. I liked when you spoke to me in my language. I could love myself and think myself worth loving” (183) (see also Q24 and Q25). The figure of the outsider—the *other*—is clearly represented in the protagonist. A great feeling of alienation and displacement takes hold of the general atmosphere of the story; first of all, the fact of being the daughter of parents from different backgrounds with conflictive relations shows a sharp cultural clash:

Having had to put up with all the grief a Mexican family can put on a girl because she was from *el otro lado*, the other side, and my father had married down by marrying her. If he had married a white woman from *el otro lado*, that would’ve been different. That would’ve been marrying up, even if the white girl was poor. (180)

Secondly, her displacement is also present in the socio-economical context, where she cannot either find a safe position: “I don’t belong to any class. Not to the poor, whose

²¹ All the quotations taken from Cisneros (2000).

neighborhood I share. Not to the rich, who come to my exhibitions and buy my work. Not to the middle class from which my sister Ximena and I fled” (181). However, her attitude is that of adaptation; she refers to herself as “amphibious” (181) to manifest her versatility (see also Q26).

The second part is highly fragmented, something mainly due to the continuous shifts of addressee. There is a constant alternation between Drew and his son. Clemencia declares that she is too romantic to marry for she knows that marriages are most of the times a fake (see Q27 and Q28); nevertheless, she cannot help falling in love, precisely with a married man who cheats on her wife with the protagonist. Clemencia talks to his lover about the moments when they meet and how she feels about him: “You’re watching me, Drew. I feel your weight when you sit on the corner of the bed” (184) (see also Q29 and Q30). Then she inserts passages in which she is addressing his son, the boy, as she calls him, telling him about the times she spent with his father and how she hated his mother: “All I know is I was sleeping with your father the night you were born” (184) (see also Q31 and Q32). The impudence or liberty with which Clemencia tells her memories and confessions decays little by little as the story ends. Behind all her apparent mental strength and hate, her frustration turns into desolation when she realizes that loneliness is the price to pay for being free: “That’s the problem of being cloud. The sky is so terribly big” (188) (see also Q33). The protagonist chooses finally not to marry any man. All her men were “borrowed” (179) (see also Q34); therefore, as daytime comes she finds her bed and her life empty while her lover is sleeping besides his wife, “radiating her own heat, alive under the flannel and down and smelling a bit like milk and hand cream, and that smell familiar and dear to you, oh” (188).

A strong sense of alienation and displacement is present in the story. Clemencia’s crossed identity is clearly shown through her use of language. In this way, the short story shares with the protagonist this hybrid and marginal state and participates thus, as has been pointed out in previous sections, in the postcolonial quest to find a safe place in society.

4.4. “Enoch’s Two Letters” by Alan Sillitoe

The ordinary and local vocabulary is something present in Sillitoe’s²² writings (see Q35-Q39). Those details of contextualization and setting endow the narration with a high level of realism which permits a special proximity between reader and characters. There are three principal characters: Enoch, the protagonist, is an eight year-old boy living with Edna and Jack, his parents, who one day decide to part individually leaving their son abandoned with no one to take care of him. An omniscient narrator provides the vision and feelings of each character, permitting thus the reader to analyze the circumstances from an external perspective. The story is highly fragmented in terms of perspective, although the one that stands out and leads the narration is that of the boy.

The story begins with Jack, who has planned to escape with René, a workmate whom he has fallen in love with, and that is the only reason he seems to have to abandon his family without their knowing. “So long, love. See you this afternoon” (33)²³ (see also Q40), says Jack before leaving, something that, only the reader knows, is completely false. Edna, on her part, when Enoch has left the house to go to school, prepares her luggage to run away from home. Her problem is her husband, his indifference towards her, his carelessness:

The trouble with Jack was that he’d let nothing worry him. He was so trustworthy and easy-going he got on her nerves. He didn’t even seem interested in other women, and the worst thing about such a man was that he hardly ever noticed when you were upset. When he did, he accused you of upsetting him. (34)

Edna’s attitude shows as if she were looking for some kind of excuse, something wrong with her husband which could justify her departure, when indeed, there is a real reason for her to be angry, but she does not know. The real problem of the couple is rooted in their lack of communication: “As a couple they had given up tackling any differences between them by the human method of talking” (34) (see also Q41). They do not know each other, they both feel lonely but they are unable to express themselves: “It wasn’t

²² Alan Sillitoe (1928-2010) was born in Nottingham (England). He is well-known for his prose works but he also wrote poetry and plays. Sillitoe had a poor background, he started working in a factory very young and later he participated in WWII. His novels usually deal with working men and their poor living conditions. Sillitoe’s most famous novels are *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1959). He died of cancer in London.

²³ All the quotations taken from Sillitoe (1997).

that life was dull exactly, but they had nothing in common. If they had, maybe she could have put up with him, no matter how bad he was” (34).

When Enoch returns home, the house is unexpectedly empty so he prepares his own meal and waits patiently the coming of his parents. While waiting Enoch’s thoughts reveal his isolated condition, present before the leaving of the parents; additionally, he expresses a particular rejection towards the father:

When he tried to imagine his father walking into the house and switching on the light it was difficult to make out his face very clearly. He hated him for that, and hoped one day to kill him with an axe. Even his mother’s face wasn’t easy to bring back, but he didn’t want to kill her. (37)
(see also Q42 and Q43)

The incompetence of Edna and Jack to form a family is made explicit from the very beginning. The child’s continuous obsession with his father’s death and the fact that he thinks that maybe his parents were gone for a divorce, show a lack of unity and a void hard to fulfill; however, he is just a child who cannot still live on his own and soon he becomes seriously worried (see Q44). Next day in the morning he decides to go and visit his grandmother to tell her his parents are gone. His grandmother decides to go back home in order to find out what has happened. After searching all around the house, grandma starts worrying too: “‘A bloody big one it is, as well.’ It was the first time he’d heard her swear, but then, he’d never seen her worried, either” (41). It is precisely then when she realizes that there may be something wrong with the couple: “‘They kept the house clean, any road up,’ she said, touching the curtains and chair covers. ‘That’s summat to be said for’em. *But it ain’t everything*’” (41)²⁴. As they talk, Enoch sees two letters next to the door, presumably the ones that his parents have written telling him they have left (see Q45 and Q46). The story closes with a rather devastating picture: “He watched her broad back as she bent to pick them up, thinking now that they were both dead for sure” (41). The boy is now certain that he is completely alone.

The reader shares this uncertainty about the future with the protagonist. As has been previously mentioned, many short stories deal with those sudden discoveries that imply a complete turn in the life of the characters. The story transmits a rather pessimistic condition of the world: in particular, the rupture and disrepute of the respect

²⁴ The italics are mine.

for the family, and in general, the individuality of the modern society and the selfishness of people, something that sinks humanity in solitude.

4.5. “The Werewolf” by Angela Carter

Angela Carter²⁵ is widely known for her book *The Bloody Chamber* (1978), a short-story collection including a remake of classical fairy tales with a complete shift of perspective, a very common technique today. “The Werewolf”, in particular, is a different version of the popular “Little Red Riding Hood” tale.

First of all, the narrator describes the setting: cold, danger, bleakness and darkness constitute the landscape; a first impression that contrasts sharply with the original tale: “Is a northern country; they have cold weather, they have cold hearts. Cold; tempest; wild beasts in the forest. It is a hard life” (108)²⁶. Punctuation is a very important element in the story: the use of brief and sharp sentences contributes to create this idea of hardship. As the previous fragment shows, there is no flow in the narration, sentences appear as if interrupted by the axe of a woodcutter. In addition, the plain style portrays with more strength the poverty of the scenery described: “A bed, a stool, a table. Harsh, brief, poor lives” (108). Apart from being a cold area, the place in this story is plagued with terrible creatures that frighten and attack the population: bears, wolves, witches, vampires and even the Devil wander about looking for victims. The setting is thus filled with dreadful images that create the context for the story (see Q47).

The protagonist is a girl who is asked to go and visit her sick grandmother; the mother warns her about the dangers of the forest: “do not leave the path because of the bears, the wild boar, the starving wolves. Here, take your father’s hunting knife; you know how to use it” (108). The fact that the girl carries a knife with her endows the story with an acceptance of real danger that is absent in the original tale. Soon a huge, red-eyed wolf appears from the darkness, but instead of cheating on the girl by adulatory conversation, it attacks directly. The girl then bravely chops off its forepaw

²⁵ Angela Carter (1940-1992) was born in Eastbourne (England). She was a fiction writer and a journalist. She worked for the *Croydon Advertiser* and studied literature in the University of Bristol. Carter’s works are characterized by feminism and magical realism. Her best known book is the short-story collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1978). The most famous story of the collection, “The Company of Wolves”, was adapted to a film released in 1982. She died of cancer in London.

²⁶ All the quotations taken from Carter (1993).

and the wolf flees in pain (see Q48 and Q49). When the child gets to her grandmother's house, she finds the old woman in bed with fever, and it is here where the werewolf enters into scene:

She shook out the cloth from her basket, to use it to make the old woman a cold compress, and the wolf's paw fell to the floor. But it was no longer a wolf's paw. It was a hand, chopped off at the wrist, a hand toughened with work and freckled with old age. There was a wedding ring on the third finger and a wart on the index finger. By the wart, she knew it for her grandmother's hand. (109).

The child's cry alerts the neighbors, who stone the grandmother to death for being a witch (see Q50). The ending of the story is as sharp and brief as the rest of the narration: "Now the child lived in her grandmother's house; she prospered" (109). This way of closing reaffirms the steady and independent character of the protagonist.

The impact of the story is also to be found, firstly, in the way the elements of the story are condensed thanks to the sharp and concise linguistic style; secondly, in the reordering of assumed thoughts, the use of a different viewpoint that defamiliarizes and adapts the classics to new realities. This permits a deconstruction –rather than a destruction– of canonical works, which are, in a sense, recycled. In showing something known for the reader but that has been distorted, Carter is able to present the mysterious, to maintain, in this way, the magical touch of the traditional tale.

4.6. "Snow" by Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes'²⁷ short story is a peculiar one: the narrator, the setting and the action seem to be placed in the immensity of nowhere, and yet "Snow" is a striking short story which hits with amazing strength. The story narrates the reflections and obsessions of a man who is lost somewhere in a vast area covered by snow. He does not know how he has ended up there, he does not know how to get out either.

Emptiness is the ruling feeling in the story; cold, desolation and loneliness are the fitting words to describe the landscape that constitutes the setting. The ever-present

²⁷ Edward James "Ted" Hughes (1930-1998) was born in Yorkshire (England). He is best known as a poet although he also wrote prose for children, as the popular work *The Iron Man* (1968). Hughes was married to the famous poet Sylvia Plath with whom he maintained a difficult relationship. He became Poet Laureate in 1984. Hughes' most well-known poem collections are *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Crow: From the Life and the Songs of the Crow* (1970). He died in London.

snow is a clear symbol of void and solitude: “Falling, groveling. So on. The snow” (136)²⁸. The only speaking voice in the story is an intradiegetic narrator who seems to be speaking to himself to stay awake and not to collapse. One of the facts he says he can be certain of is that he is on earth: “This could be no other planet: the air is perfectly natural, perfectly good” (133) (see also Q51). The uncertainty takes hold of the character every time he tries to state something (see Q52 and Q53). He finds it difficult to trust even himself. In the second paragraph, the man narrates how, after a plane accident, he escaped from danger and then fell unconscious, and that is the reason for his being there. But after all the explanation, he confesses that this event is simply a supposition, since he has lost his memory: “Whatever chance drop me here in the snow evidently destroyed my memory. That’s one thing of which there is no doubt whatsoever. It is, so to speak, one of my facts. The aircraft crash is a working hypothesis, that merely” (133). The protagonist’s capacity and effort to keep his mind sane is highly difficult and his priority (see Q54). As he says, it is the only way in which he will be able to escape from that place. Any type of mistake or careless act would lead him to complete destruction, that is why he tries hard to keep negative thoughts away from his mind:

My mind is not my friend. My support, my defence, but my enemy too—not perfectly intent on getting me out of this. If I were mindless perhaps there would be no difficulty whatsoever. I would simply go on aware of nothing but my step by step success in getting over the ground. The thing to do is to keep alert, keep my mind fixed in alertness, recognise these treacherous paralyzing, yes, lethal thoughts the second they enter, catch them before they can make that burrowing plunge down the spinal cord. (134)

His attitude denotes an unexpected mental equilibrium and enormous will power, something showed by its determination to walk against the wind and not to be carried along by its fanciful changes (see Q55-Q57). Despite the uncertainty that reigns around him –“Am I a lie?” (134) or “I am in no position to be sure about anything” (139)–, the protagonist expresses his enthusiasm to go on living. His dreams empower him with the hope that there must be something more than all that snow: “If all this is not final evidence of a reality beyond my own, of the reality of the world it comes from, the world I re-dream in my sleeps—I might as well lie down in the snow and be done with” (137). He even thanks his lucky condition, since he could have awoken hurt, old or

²⁸All the quotations taken from Hughes.

without snow-clothes: “The facts are overwhelmingly on my side, I could almost believe in Providence” (136) (see also Q58-Q60).

The virtual structure of the story is a cyclic one. The narrator seems to be extending the story to the infinite, as the first line suggests: “And let me repeat this over and over again” (133); and also the last lines, in which the narrator repeats what he has said at the beginning of his narration: “Never so long as I keep control, keep my mind firm. All the facts are in my side. I have nothing to do but endure” (141). This cyclical overview informs the reader about the desperate condition of the protagonist, who is lost in a circular labyrinth. This idea is also present in the way he moves: he says he walks in circles since there is no reference to guide him: “Obviously I am not travelling in a straight line” (135) (see also Q61).

This is a perfect example of a story in which apparently nothing happens. The only evidence of movement and passing of time is the flow of the snow and the protagonist’s slow and heavy steps; nevertheless, the story is full of dynamism based on psychological action, a mental voice and movement which emphasizes the character’s encaged estate. “Snow” demonstrates the possibilities of the short story to show, not only the emptiness of the contemporary era, but also the anxiety of nothingness.

5. Conclusions

The eclectic condition of the postmodern mentality, its resistance to definition and its fragmentation and perspectivism open up a wide –even overwhelming– panorama of possibilities for writers. The facilities to access knowledge and literatures from myriads of nationalities, together with the new voices, permit the existence of a literature with an insuperable richness. The chaotic and revolutionary attitude that appeared during the twentieth century supposed the birth of the genre that marked a new identity and that today is still growing in the twenty-first century. The short story, with its great potentiality, its accessibility, its fresh, free and vindicative attitude, is, in my opinion, the best literary option to express the postmodern condition of the contemporary individual.

The independency of the short story as a fully developed genre has been properly shown through the exposition of an alternative poetics and the analysis of the corpus: brevity, condensation, fragmentation and lyric capacity, together with its

potential to deal with a great variety of subjects, its inclination towards direct address to the reader, momentary revelations and powerful endings, constitute the constants for building a balanced and comprehensible theory of the short story. The analysis of the corpus has proved the genre's promptness to portray with great efficacy the postmodern attitude and condition. That is the reason why the short story keeps on expanding in the contemporary sphere; its short nature and accessibility conforms the perfect features for a society in which time is scarce and even leisure points towards the practical. The most reliable proof is found in the innumerable novice writers which opt for short stories, or the vast amount of anthologies that are devoted to this genre in particular.

It is inevitable to feel the essential condition of literature; it is something intrinsic in the human spirit, something that grew with language, that evolves and adapts to each particular time. It is something that constitutes the expression of an individual, its perspective, an expression that is shared and added thus to the world to configure the rich mosaic of human experience. The short story was born out of necessity, to supply with a means for a new social, human and literary expression that was unknown until this moment and that, after great effort, has become indispensable.

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Appendix: Additional quotations

This final appendix contains a set of quotations from the short stories that have been analyzed in section 4. They are referred to in the text with the abbreviation Q1, Q2, Q3, etc., which mean quotation 1, quotation 2, quotation 3, and so on.

“The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen” by Graham Greene

Q1: “She said, ‘They are giving me an advance of five hundred pounds, and they’ve sold the paperback rights already.’” (118)

Q2: “‘The advance is only an advance. I get fifteen per cent after five thousand copies and twenty per cent after ten. And of course another advance will be due, darling, when the next book’s finished.’” (120)

Q3: “I wanted very much to warn her against any future based on a first novel called *The Chelsea Set*.” (119)

Q4: “Will *The Chelsea Set* be read in five years? Are you prepared for the years of effort, ‘the long defeat of doing nothing well?’” (120)

Q5: “I found myself hoping that *The Chelsea Set* would prove to be a disaster and that eventually she would take up photographic modelling while he established himself solidly in the wine-trade in St. James’s.” (121)

Q6: “You will be judged, when you reach your forties, by performance and not by promise.” (120)

Q7: “‘I do think that with a first novel one should try to keep one’s publisher happy. Especially when, really, he’s going to pay for our marriage, isn’t he?’” (119)

Q8: “‘Only he [the publisher] wants me to change the title.’ [...] ‘He doesn’t like *The Ever-Rolling Stream*. He wants to call it *The Chelsea Set*.’” (119)

Q9: “They [publishers] may sometimes exaggerate the virtues of the young and the pretty.” (120)

Q10: “I wondered to which publishing firm Dwight belonged. I could imagine the blurb he would have already written about her abrasive powers of observation.

There would be a photo, if he was wise, on the back of the jacket, for reviewers, as well as publishers, are human.” (121)

Q11: “I sat down at my table, with the Japanese gentlemen between us.” (118)

Q12: “I missed some of the conversation then, because the eldest Japanese gentleman leant across the table.” (118)

Q13: “The Japanese gentlemen had finished their fish and with very little English but with elaborate courtesy they were ordering from the middle-aged waitress a fresh fruit salad.” (119)

Q14: “She looked at me and the party of Japanese gentlemen.” (120)

Q15: “He submitted just as two of the Japanese gentlemen gave tongue simultaneously.” (121)

“Murder in the Dark” by Margaret Atwood

Q16: “This is a game I’ve played only twice. The first time I was in Grade Five. I played it in a cellar, the cellar of a large house belonging to the parents of a girl called Louise.” (37)

Q17: “You can see the cinematic glow of my cigarette, waxing and waning in the fog of the room, the street, the room, even though I don’t smoke.” (38)

“Never Marry a Mexican” by Sandra Cisneros

Q18: “I imagine my father in his *fanfarrón* clothes, because that’s what he was, a *fanfarrón*.” (180)

Q19: “Everyone repeating over and over the Ave Marias and Padre Nuestros. The priest sprinkling holy water, *mundo sin fin, amén*.” (182)

Q20: Nights I light all the candles in the house, the ones to La Virgen de Guadalupe, the ones to El Niño Fidencio, Don Pedrito Jaramillo, Santo Niño de Atocha, Nuestra Señora de San Juan de los Lagos, and especially, Santa Lucia, with her beautiful eyes on a plate.” (183)

Q21: “I touched the fabrics. *Calidad*. Quality.” (186)

Q22: “On the way home, on the bridge over the *arroyo* on Guadalupe Street.” (187)

Q23: “Here, little piece of my *corazón*.” (187)

Q24: “I can even get the sayings right even though I was born in this country.” (182)

Q25: “Why is it worse at night, when I have such an urge to communicate and no language with which to form the words?” (188)

Q26: “I’m a person who doesn’t belong to any class. The rich like to have me around because they envy my creativity; they know they can’t but that. The poor don’t mind if I live in their neighborhood because they know I’m poor like they are, even if my education and the way I dress keeps us worlds apart.” (181)

Q27: “I’ll never marry. Not any man. I’ve known men too intimately. I’ve witnessed their infidelities, and I’ve helped them to it. Unzipped and unhooked and agreed to clandestine maneuvers.” (179)

Q28: “So, no. I’ve never married and never will. Not because I couldn’t, but because I’m too romantic for marriage. Marriage has failed me, you could say. Not a man exist who hasn’t disappointed me, whom I could trust to love the way I’ve loved. It’s because I believe too much in marriage that I don’t. Better not to marry than live a lie.” (179)

Q29: “Drew, remember when you used to call me your Malinalli? It was a joke, a private game between us, because you looked like a Cortez with that beard of yours. My skin dark against yours. Beautiful, you said. You said I was beautiful, and when you said it, Drew, I was.” (182)

Q30: “You’re almost not a man without your clothes. How do I explain it? You’re so much a child in my bed. Nothing but a big boy who needs to be held. I won’t let anyone hurt you. My pirate. My slender boy of a man.” (185)

Q31: “Because your father wanted to leave your mother and live with me. Your mother whining for a child, at least *that*. And he kept saying, Later, we’ll see, later. But all along it was me he wanted to be with, it was me, he said.” (183)

Q32: “Once, drunk on margaritas, I telephoned your father at four in the morning, woke the bitch up.” (184)

Q33: “What is it inside me that makes me so crazy at 2 A.M.? I can’t blame it on alcohol in my blood when there isn’t any. It’s something worse. Something that poisons the blood and tips me when the night swells and I feel as if the whole sky were leaning against my brain.” (187)

Q34: “Just the cream skimmed off the top. Just the sweetest part of the fruit, without the bitter skin that daily living with a spouse can rend. They’ve come to me when they wanted the sweet meat then.” (179)

“Enoch’s Two Letters” by Alan Sillitoe

Q35: “He turned the clock to face the right way, then went into the scullery and put the kettle on.” (35)

Q36: “When the light went, taking the flickering telly with it, he found a torch at the back of the dresser drawer, then looked for a shilling to put in the meter.” (37)

Q37: “Weaving his hand as far as it would go, he felt that the gas fire had gone out, meaning that the cooking stove wouldn’t work.” (38)

Q38: “His mother had given him sixpence for sweets the morning before, and he already had twopence, so he knew that this was enough to get him half fare to Netherfield.” (38)

Q39: “It took a long time to get clear of traffic at Canning Circus.” (39)

Q40: “Now wearing a reasonable suit, he [Jack] walked to the railway station. There he met René, who had in her two suitcases a few of his possessions that he had fed to her during clandestine meetings over the past fortnight. Having worked in the same factory, they had, as many others who were employed there saw, ‘fallen for each other.’” (33)

Q41: “They never said much, and spoke even less on this particular morning because both were solidly locked in their separate thoughts which, unknown to each other, they were at last intending to act on.” (33)

Q42: “Not that it bothered him that his father might have been killed.” (35)

Q43: “When Johnny Bootle’s father had been killed in a lorry last year he’d envied him.” (36)

Q44: “It was eight o’clock, and he wondered where they were. They ought to be back by now and he began to regret that he’d hoped they never would be, as if God’s punishment for thinking this might be that He’d never let them.” (36)

Q45: “He [Jack] would send her a letter from London to explain that he had gone – in case she hadn’t noticed it.” (33)

Q46: “For a week she’d [Edna] been trying to write a letter, to be posted from where she was going, but she couldn’t get beyond: ‘I’m leaving you for good, so stop bothering about me anymore. Just look after Enoch, because I’ve had my bellyful and I’m off.’” (34)

“The Werewolf” by Angela Carter

Q47: “But the Devil they glimpse often in the graveyards, those bleak and touching townships of the dead where the graves are marked with the portraits of the deceased in the naïf style and there are no flowers to put in front of them, no flowers grow there, so they put out small votive offerings, little loaves, sometimes a cake that the bears come lumbering from the margins of the forest to snatch away. At midnight, especially on Walpurgisnacht, the Devil holds picnics in the graveyards and invites the witches; then they dig up fresh corpses, and eat them. Wreaths of garlic on the doors keep out the vampires.” (108)

Q48: “When she heard that freezing howl of a wolf, she dropped her gifts, seized her knife, and turned on the beast.” (108)

Q49: “It was a huge one, with red eyes and running, grizzled chops; any but a mountaineer’s child would have died of fright at the sight of it. It went for her throat, as wolves do, but she made a great swipe at it with her father’s knife and slashed off its forepaw.” (109)

Q50: “They know the wart on the hand at once for a witch’s nipple; they drove the old woman, in her shift as she was, out in the snow with sticks, beating her old

carcass as far as the edge of the forest, and pelted her with stones until she fell dead.” (109)

“Snow” by Ted Hughes

Q51: “Beneath my feet is the earth, some part of the surface of the earth beneath the snow beneath my feet, that is. What else could it be? It is firm, I presume, and level. If it is not actually soil and rock, it must be ice. It is very probably ice. Whichever it may be, it is proof—the most substantial proof possible—that I am somewhere on the earth, the known earth.” (133)

Q52: “What do I know about the truth?” (134)

Q53: “A huge futility grips me, as it were physically, by the heart, as if the organ itself were despairing of this life and ready to give up.” (139)

Q54: “To keep my mind firm, that is the essential thing, to fix it firmly in my reasonable hopes, and lull it there, encourage it.” (134)

Q55: “I have been walking through this blizzard for five months and during that time have covered something equal to the breadth of the Atlantic between Southampton and New York.” (135)

Q56: “This resignation to the wind’s guidance is the very foundation of my firmness of mind.” (135)

Q57: “No. All I have to do is to endure: that is, keep my face to the wind. My face to the wind, a firm grip on my mind, and everything else follows naturally. There is not the slightest need to be anxious.” (136)

Q58: “I could not have existed. And in the moment before death by asphyxiation I would certainly have been convinced I was out on some lifeless planet. Or if I had no body but simply arms and legs growing out of a head, my whole system of confidence would have been disoriented from the start. My dreams, for instance, would have been meaningless to me, or rather an argument of my own meaninglessness.” (136)

Q59: “The chain of providential coincidences is endless. Or rather, like a chain mail, it is complete without one missing link to betray and annul the rest. Even my dreams are part of it. They are as tough and essential a link as any, since there can no

longer be any doubt that they are an accurate reproduction of my whole previous life, of the world as it is and I knew it.” (137)

Q60: “Everything fits together. And the result—my survival, and my determination to survive. I should rejoice.” (137)

Q61: I would have to make deliberate changes of direction to break out of that circle—only to go on a larger circle or a circle in then opposite direction. So more changes. Wilder and more sudden changes, changes of my changes.” (136)