THE DEATH THEME IN THE SHORT STORIES
OF HORACIO QUIROGA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ..................................................1
Chapter I .....................................................24
Chapter II .....................................................35
Chapter III ....................................................49
Conclusion ....................................................65
INTRODUCTION

Throughout the life and works of Horacio Quiroga one can identify death as a most important and impressive element. The death theme in Quiroga's works was preceded by a personal life that was tragically dominated by death. In fact, many aspects of Quiroga's life, like the presence of death, a fondness for the cinema, a love for the jungle and jungle creatures, can all be found, in one way or other, in the stories he has written. To substantiate this close relationship between the writer's life and his stories one need only read his biography and then a collection of his short stories.

Many critics have written very extensively on the works of Quiroga and nearly all of them mention this close relationship between this artist's life and his works. Antonio M. Grompone mentions this relationship in his study:

...todos los temas parecen sugerir algo de la vida misma del autor, como si en el desarrollo de las ideas hubiese un índice capaz de revelar cuál fue la consagración más íntima y el sentido profundo de esa vida.

Another critic, Guillermo De Torre, speaks of this relationship in his prologue to the Aguilar edition of "Cuentos Escogidos." His mention comes at the outset where he says of Quiroga that 'En rigor, semeja un personaje más, elemental, rudo, dramático, de sus propios cuentos.' Most critics also mention the similarity
between this author's experience with death personally and his use of the death theme in his stories. John A. Crow says the following in his study:

Esta preocupación del cuentista por la muerte, no sólo demuestra una exagerada sensibilidad artística, sino que también parece tener raíces en su vida real.  

Another critic who supports this association is Noé Jitrik. Commenting on "El Desierto" he refers to this association in the following passage:

Subercasaux, el protagonista, tiene dos hijos, como Quiroga. Vive con ellos en la selva teniendo que hacer de padre y madre, pues ésta murió hace poco, como la mujer de Quiroga. 

There is however a significant absence of a serious study on the death theme alone. The objective of this paper is to supply such a study. It is the author's hope that something helpful may be accomplished in the way of additional support or new insight into this area of Quiroga's works.

An overall picture of Quiroga's life is of primary importance; this picture has three distinct parts. The criteria for the divisions is based on the literary activity of Quiroga. The first period of his life would be the formative years when he was acquiring his taste for literature and the background for his first literary product, an unexciting book of verses and short stories entitled Los arrecifes de coral. With this book the first part of Quiroga's life ends and the second begins. The first period covered the years between 1878, the author's birth, and 1901, the birth of his literary career. From 1901 to 1932
Quiroga was writing. In the resultant collection of short stories, as we shall see later, the artist reveals himself as a man who was extremely active physically and mentally. Nearly all that he experienced can be found in the tales he was creating during this period. Logically the termination of this part of Quiroga's life is also connected with the cessation of his literary life. In 1932 Quiroga returned to Misiones and the jungle life he had known previously. From Misiones most of this artist's best stories had emerged with their color, their violence, their pathos and their unforgettable characters. The year 1932 marks the end of Quiroga's publishing; he did write, but nothing new was ever published again. Hence 1932 is the beginning of the third and final period which ended in 1937 when Quiroga committed suicide in Buenos Aires.

The specific details of general importance concerning the three divisions of Quiroga's life are definitely essential to a complete understanding of any aspect one wishes to consider in the works of this writer. The emphasis here shall, understandably, be directed toward tragic death which haunted the life of this author who finally became its victim by his own choice.

Quiroga was born on the thirty-first of December, 1878, in Salto, Uruguay. During these first years of his life this writer was acquiring the tools with which he would later construct a lasting memorial to himself and to the life he led. There are two elements of general importance during the first twenty-three years of Quiroga's life: the first is his intellectual and literary
development; and the second is his early confrontation with tragedy.

Concerning the first element, it is curious to note that Quiroga never attended a university; his formal education ended with his studies in the Instituto Politécnico de Salto and the Colegio Nacional de Montevideo. This lack of advanced formal education is curious insofar as it belies the presence of a vigorous young intellectual. As early as 1892 this young man had declared himself a "Franco y vehementemente soldado del materialismo filosófico." In 1896 he, Alberto J. Brignole, Julio J. Jaureche and José Hasda gave birth to a literary group called the "tres mosqueteros." This group would meet in an uninhabited house to read their compositions; Quiroga's notebook containing some twenty-two works written between 1894 and 1897 still exists. Further evidence of this man's early intellectual and literary activity is his contributions to La Revista, La Reforma and his own weekly publication of literature and social science which was called the Revista del Salto. In 1900, after twenty editions, the Revista del Salto stopped appearing. Apparently the failure of this review did not discourage Quiroga's literary aspirations because in March, 1900, he set off to visit Paris, the literary center of enchantment and inspiration. A very interesting thing about this trip is that this young author did not find Paris enchanting or inspiring. Commenting on the trip Quiroga says:

La estadía en París ha sido una sucesión de desastres inesperados, una implacable restricción de todo lo que se va a coger.  

It is quite obvious that Quiroga did not share the opinion that
considered Paris as the magic center of the literary world. He returned to Montevideo the twelfth of July, 1900, somewhat poorer and evidently quite disillusioned about Paris. It is imperative to point out that although this trip took some of the illusionary charm from the literary world, it did not destroy Quiroga's interest or retard his activity in that realm. Before 1900 ended, our author, Asdrubal Delgado, Fernandez Saldana, and Federico Ferrando founded the "Consistorio del Gay Saber."
The pursuits of this group were literary; the members experimented with rhyme, aliteration, semantics and other mechanical elements of literary expression. In 1901, while still a member of the 'Consistorio,' Quiroga's first genuine literary effort of any consequence was published. The name of the book, a collection of verse and short stories, is *Los arrecifes de coral*. Although this initial work was not overwhelmingly popular or literary, it did mark the beginning of a new era in Quiroga's life. From this point on this author's life was different; he did what he had been preparing for during most of his first twenty-three years—he published until 1932.

The second element, tragedy, hangs like a dark shadow over the beginning of this author's life. The events composing the tragic element can be recounted briefly but their significance can not be ignored. Later we shall point out the same sort of element in the short stories to be considered.

The first event took place before Quiroga was old enough to know its significance. His father, Prudencio Quiroga, acci-
dentally killed himself with a shotgun when returning from a hunting trip. The date, 1879, precludes any possibility of the writer's cognizance of such an event. The second occurrence however was tragically comprehensible to Quiroga. His mother had remarried in 1891 and young Horacio came to accept and love his step-father, Ascencios Barcos. A short while later Barcos became paralytic. His step-son assumed the task of rehabilitating him in all of the elementary skills he had lost. Some progress was evident when Barcos suddenly committed suicide in the presence of his thirteen year old step-son. The emotional shock must have been very severe and must be taken into account when examining the subsequent works of this boy where death appears so frequently.

Certainly the impression of his step-father's suicide was deep but it was not Quiroga's last association with tragic death. His brother and sister, Prudencio and Pastora, were taken by typhoid fever in 1901, the same year Los arrecifes de coral was published. Thus no less than four deaths occurred in Quiroga's immediate family when he was most susceptible to such extreme emotional stress. The whole of Quiroga's first twenty-three years was then marked by tragedy and the aforementioned intellectual artistic activity.

The second phase of Quiroga's life is primarily one of writing and publishing; but it is also tragically plagued by death. Other things Quiroga was doing will be mentioned here and the most important of these, his life in Misiones, shall be
emphasized.

In 1902 Quiroga's acquaintance with death was sadly renewed. Federico Ferrando, who was a member of the 'Consistorio del Gay Saber,' contracted a duel with Guzmán Papini y Zas. Being a very close friend of Ferrando, Quiroga came to visit him before the duel. Our author was examining a gun in his friend's room when it accidentally discharged. The bullet struck Ferrando killing him instantly. The exact relationship between this event or any other and the stories is not absolutely certain but cannot be overlooked.

An inquisition followed Ferrando's death; but Quiroga was absolved of any guilt. Immediately after his release, he went to Buenos Aires to live with his sister María. His brother-in-law, Eduardo D. Forteza, helped him become a teacher in the Colegio Nacional Central.

In September of 1903 the author accompanied a study expedition to Misiones as a photographer. This foray into the wild beauty of the jungle made a lasting impression on him. He was so fascinated by the wonder of the landscape that he returned the very next year to raise cotton.

Due to a costly failure with his crop, Quiroga returned to Buenos Aires in 1905 where he picked up his writing and began to live with Alberto J. Brignole, one of the 'tres mosqueteros.' In 1906 he was named professor of 'castellano y literatura' in the Escuela Normal No. 8 Bolivar 1255. Shortly after this appointment he purchased some land in the jungle of Misiones.
In this same year he visited his newly acquired land and established a garden and house. After making this crude beginning in the wilds the author returned to Buenos Aires to replenish his financial resources.

About three years later Quiroga was married to Ana María Cires, one of his students. Immediately after the wedding he returned once more, accompanied this time by his bride, to San Ignacio, Misiones where they began married life in an extremely rugged setting of natural beauty.

In 1911 Quiroga resigned his teaching position in Buenos Aires and accepted a civil service post in San Ignacio. In this same year a daughter, Eglé, and one year later a son, Darío, were born. The childhood of these children is somewhat described in 'El Desierto,' a story telling of a boy and girl raised by their widowed father.

During this period Quiroga continued his literary production. Such stories as "El alambre de púa," "Yagualá," "Los mensú," and "Una bofetada" were written during these years. In 1915 tragedy again visited this artist; Ana María took her own life by injecting herself with a strong dose of sublimates. Her death was agonizingly slow as she suffered for a week before dying. One year later the widowed father and his children returned to Buenos Aires.

The remainder of this period, the productive years, was spent writing, working for the Uruguayan government as consul to Argentina, remarrying in 1927, and, of course, making intermittent trips to the beloved jungle of Misiones. In these years our
author became very fond of the cinema which provides a background for some of his more interesting stories. Other interesting facts from this period were: an eccentric habit of riding a motorcycle wildly through the streets of Buenos Aires, a constant feuding with his wife and her family, and a very independent self-styled defense of his work—"Ante el tribunal."^6

The third and final period of Quiroga's life begins with an inevitable return to Misiones. The renewal of jungle life was not strange, but the cessation of literary production was unusual and can be considered as the beginning of the final years of this artist's life. The only records of his from this period are personal letters and some unedited compositions. His second wife deserted him in 1936 taking their daughter with her. These years represent the meditational phase, the terminal period. In his letters our author reveals that he was concentrating on what he loved best: the care of his flowers, trees and home. Most indicative of his thoughts and most revealing of his attitude toward death are the following words taken from a letter to Ezequiel Martinez Estrada, dated April 29, 1936, one year before his death:

Yo siempre sentí (aún desde muy pequeño), que la mayor tortura que se puede infligir a un ser humano es el vivir eternamente, sin tregua descanso (ahasverus).^7

With the above attitude in mind, it is not difficult to comprehend the suicide of Horacio Quiroga which occurred in 1937. He had known for some time that he was ill and had finally come to Buenos Aires to have an operation. The doctors informed him on
the eighteenth of February that there was no hope and late that
evening he took a fatal dose of cyanide. Evidently he felt
that by suicide he could accelerate the peace and rest of death
which was surely coming.

Now that a brief account of the author's life has been set
forth, it is time to look into his work. It consists of short
stories, novels, some early verse and one attempt at drama.
Quiroga's efforts with the novel, poetry and drama were not
successful. As Roberto Giusti says, "Es, ante todo, Quiroga,
profesionalmente, en literatura, un cuentista y no otra cosa...";8
I don't think any critic seriously considers Quiroga as anything
but a 'cuentista' whose fame rests most assuredly with the short
story. Regardless of the worth of the author's other work,
we shall concentrate only on the short story. Although the death
theme per se will be reserved for subsequent treatment, it will
guide the ensuing discussion of general themes which are pertinent
to such a consideration.

The first general theme of importance concerns abnormal
human psychology and animal psychology. Both aspects of this
theme are relevant to the death theme insofar as they both
lead to death or concern death in some respect. Generally the
abnormal psychological aspect is equivalent to madness which
for the most part results in death. Hence one might say that
abnormal human psychology is a symptom or forerunner of death
in Quiroga's stories. Animal psychology is, on occasion, in-
dicative of the preservation or pursuit of life in the face of
impending death. Nevertheless, animal psychology is also closely connected with death and frequently is a sure sign of a fatal outcome for a character or characters involved.

A good example of the human side of this theme is found in "El crimen del otro." The irrefutable model for this story is Poe's "Cask of Amontillado"; Quiroga leaves no doubt about this point as the following quotation from his story reveals:

Poe era en aquella época el único autor que yo leía. Ese inaudito loco había llegado a dominarme por completo; no había sobre la mesa un sólo libro que no fuera de él. Toda mi cabeza estaba llena de Poe, como si la hubiera vaciado en el molde de Ligeia. ¡Ligeia! ¡Qué adicción tenía por ese cuento! ⁹

The major difference between Quiroga's story and the one by Poe is that the action in "El crimen del otro" is the result of a reader's obsession with Poe in general and "The Cask of Amontillado" in particular. As the foregoing passage indicates, the main character, the narrator, has developed an overpowering fondness for Poe. The extent of this narrator's mania is violently manifested when he entombs his friend in a dry well. The cause of this act of violence is due in part to similarity of physical situations: the protagonist's friend's name is Fortunato, like that of the victim in Poe's story; the two men had been drinking; it was late at night; and the scene is deserted, ideal for such an act. But the most important element in Quiroga's story is not the crime but the mental aberration brought on the narrator by his obsession with Poe. This story is only one of many in which abnormal psychology is the main
concern and in which the result is death for one or more characters. Another good example of this theme is "Las Rayas" which deals with an inexplicable madness.

This tale involves two employees, one a sales clerk and the other a bookkeeper, who work side by side in a small isolated business in a little village. They become close friends; they live in the same house, eat in the same restaurant and keep very close company at all times. One day the salesman comes to work laughing and talking. Three days later he experiences a fierce attack of the grippe but returns from lunch cured. The bookkeeper is suddenly attacked by a seizure of sneezing which mysteriously vanishes hours later. Intermittently these physical discomforts return to bother the companion protagonists. Finally the illnesses disappear, thus becoming much like a prelude to a weird finale. A short time after the recovery of their physical health, these inseparable friends begin to lose their psychological health. The first hint of their mental undoing is the discovery that their books are filled with lines instead of the normal data. Their employer warns them to refrain from such nonsense, but they cannot be reached, their case is too far gone. They grow as thin as 'rayas,' comb their hair differently and become silently more inseparable. The ultimate act of their madness on the job causes their dismissal. One day the bookkeeper was caught marking lines in his registry with his insanity quite evident; both were fired immediately. The last two lines of this story reveal the common fate of these two madmen in their home:
Terminaban en el albañal y doblando los, vimos en el agua fangosa dos rayas negras que se revolvían pesadamente.10

The two black lines in the muddy water were the clerks. The abnormal psychology of these two men, as in the preceding instance, is the forerunner or symptom of death. A curious thing about this theme, here and in other similar stories, is that the change from normality to abnormality is gradual, not immediate and the causes for the change are hardly discernible. This general characteristic is, to a great degree, responsible for the tremendous success of many of Quiroga's stories. The reader is, in effect, swept along and through the current of thought which composes so many of the stories. Then he is hurtled into a chasm of complete and violent change. Such an abrupt and total change, like a waterfall, leaves the reader stunned and in a turmoil as to the cause. The most effective and frequent change used by Quiroga is death; the sudden finality of death accounts for its effectiveness. Still there is the unexplained reason for such a swift and total turn of events in the lives of the characters depicted by this author. One possible suggestion is that this author had experienced firsthand what it means to see someone unexpectedly commit an act of violence in flagrant disregard for accepted norms, and then decided to explore this activity to see what effect it would have on a reader. In any event, there seems to be a great deal of similarity between such literary treatment and the factual events in this writer's personal life. I am referring to the suicide of Ascenios Barcos,
his step-father, and to the suicide of his wife, Ana María. It is imperative to remind the reader that it is still the abnormal psychology theme which is central here; death is only the end result. In conjunction with this theme one should begin to see Quiroga as a man who constantly was probing in the general area of death. Here he seems to be exploring one precursor of death—insanity. The reason for this exploratory type of writing may have been, as mentioned, to see what effect it would have on the reader but it seems quite possible that it has something to do with the author's personal experience with death. We shall discuss this belief later.

Quiroga's treatment of animal psychology is very interesting in that it reveals a man who was searching for a comprehensive explanation of life in the natural world he knew. Whatever drew this author to the jungle is not exactly known, maybe even he could not tell what it was. What is certain is his fondness for the jungle and the creatures of the jungle. One thing the writer did was to keep the animals of his stories in their own habitat and in their own physical scope. Their thoughts are like human thoughts, but they concern animal problems in animal worlds. Generally men enter these stories but they are distinctly men. In short, these stories treat animals in their own peculiar realm where life is really more instinctive than it is logical. One deduction from this sort of approach is that the author was attempting to see the magic formula for life in its crudest form. Concomitant with this deduction is the observation that death is a
common and most disconcerting element which also appears. Thus one sees a presentation of animals thinking, talking and reasoning, keenly aware of the value of life in a world which is vibrantly alive. One also finds death in this world which seems to indicate the author's failure to find what he was seeking. In relationship to the overall death theme, this failure would demonstrate the writer's inability to answer the unfathomable mystery of death and, in part, explain why the death theme is so predominant.

An excellent example of animal psychology is "Regreso de Anaconda," the epic struggle of this snake and her fellow jungle dwellers to drive man from their domain. Evidently man is the greatest threat to the animals which inhabit the jungle because Quiroga says the following of Anaconda:

Muy poco costó a Anaconda convencer a los animales. El hombre ha sido, es y será el más cruelem enemigo de la selva.\(^{11}\)

In this tale, as in many others concerning animal psychology, the primary concern of the wild creature is survival. In a world where life and death is instinctive rather than dependent on logic, it is curious to find creatures calling councils of war to discuss their problems. The reason for this kind of presentation is that man has invaded the realm of the animals and has brought his civilization along. As a result, the wild birds, beasts, snakes, etc., must find a means of survival. Otherwise men will kill them and destroy their previous sanctuary so that life would be impossible. In general, this
tension between man and beast results in death to one or the other and definitely is closely associated with Quiroga's personal life; he lived the conflict between wild animals and men who brought their civilized ways to the jungle. It would not be too improbable that this kind of theme represents the author's desire to probe further the mystery of life in a world so full of sudden death. That is, he sympathizes with the beasts of the jungle in their appreciation for life and their consternation at the coming of men. This portrayal would indicate the author's estimation of an instinctive life rather than a logical one and his personal rejection of civilized society where one need ponder life and death.

In "Juan Darién" and "La Señorita Leona" one finds a variation of the animal psychology theme. These stories concern an attempt at coexistence between man and animals. In both instances the result is a pathetic failure. The cause of such failure is pertinent to the death theme and is closely linked with the aforementioned desire for peaceful existence on the part of animal characters. A brief account of these two stories will reveal the cause of this failure.

The first tale is rather fantastic in nature. A mother has just lost her infant son to the smallpox; she is seen alone in her house at the very edge of the jungle. She has just buried her son and is now reflecting on the injustice of her plight. Being a widow it seems all the more unfair that God should take her son. In the midst of her grieving she sees a
small unsteady creature approaching her door. She stoops and
picks up a newly-born tiger cub. Instead of destroying the cub,
as might be expected, the young mother presses it to her bosom.

The following passage serves to explain this unexpected act:

La mujer pensativa siempre, entró en la casa. Y
en el resto de la noche al oir los gemidos de hambre
del cachorrillo, y al ver como buscaba su seno con los
ojos cerrados, sintió en su corazón herido que, ante
la suprema ley del Universo, una vida equivale a
otra vida....

In the days that follow the mother comes to love the wild
offspring as her own but her love is not blind. She knows that
if the news of her savage son reaches the other villagers
they will kill the small creature. One rainy night a passerby
hears the wild cry of the young tiger and stops to seek out
and kill the beast. In her panic the young widow carries
the cub to the garden in hopes of saving it; to her dismay
she encounters a snake. By some act of providence this ser-
pent is wise, old and gentle. Moreover this snake talks;
its words are very interesting and provide us with the
ensuing plot of this tale:

--Nada temas, mujer -- le dijo. --Tu corazón de
madre te ha permitido salvar una vida del Universo,
donde todas las vidas tienen el mismo valor. Pero
los hombres no te comprenderán, y querrán matar a
tu nuevo hijo. Nada temas, ve tranquilía. Desde
este momento tu hijo tiene forma humana; nunca lo
reconocerán. Forma su corazón, enseñale a ser
bueno como tú, y él no sabrá jamás que no es hombre.
A menos ... a menos que una madre de entre los hombres
lo acuse; a menos que una madre no le exija que
devuelva con su sangre lo que tú, has dado por él,
tu hijo será siempre digno de ti. Ve tranquilía,
madre, y apresúrate, que el hombre va a echar
la puerta abajo.
True to the words of the wise old serpent the tiger cub becomes human and is brought up in accord with her instructions. At the age of ten the boy who has come to be called Juan Darién meets with a tragic fate. It is a day of celebration in the village and an inspector of schools has come to hear the students recite. When Juan recites he stutters and produces an extraordinary sound. The inspector, representing society in its most restrictive force, immediately recognizes the sound as that of a wild beast. Further examination evokes a self-condemnation on the boy's part. Once the village learns of this unfortunate revelation there is no hope for Juan Darién. They want nothing to do with a wild beast which they feel will destroy them. As the story proceeds the villagers are shown to be insane with fear and hatred toward the pathetic boy who has never harmed anyone. Juan Darién's end is in accord with the snake's prophecy. He was being chased from the village with stones, clubs, and fists when a mother with a small child badly misinterpreted his pleading gestures. This mother cried out to the tormentors:

-- ¡Me ha querido robar mi hijo! -- gritó la mujer.
-- ¡Ha tendido las manos para matarlo! ¡Es un tigre! ¡Matemosle en seguida, antes que él mate a nuestros hijos!\footnote{14}

Thus a mother has demanded the life and heart another mother had given to Juan Darién. The result is death to Juan; he is burned in a fireworks display. During this persecution Juan had no one to aid him as his mother had died shortly before. After the fires have taken life from the boy, he
returns to his original form, a tiger. In a sort of epilogue the tiger recovers and returns to avenge Juan Darién's death. The victim of the tiger is a wild animal trainer who had been instrumental in the persecution of Juan Darién. One need only recall the 'ley del Universo' to see that this vengeance death is justice. The message of this story is contained in the following passage which is the farewell speech of the tiger at the tomb of his human mother:

---¡Madre! ---murmuró por fin el tigre con profunda ternura. ---¡Tú sola supiste, entre todos los hombres, los sagrados derechos a la vida de todos los seres del Universo. Tú sola comprendiste que el hombre y el tigre se diferencian únicamente por el corazón. Y tú me enseñaste a amar, a comprender, a perdonar. ¡Madre! Estoy seguro de que me oyes. Soy tu hijo siempre, a pesar do lo que pase en adelante, pero de tí solo. ¡Adiós, madre mía!15

There is no doubt as to the meaning of this story: men and wild creatures cannot coexist because men do not adhere to the universal law that says one life is equal to another. Men do not live by this law because they cannot understand it; they are too concerned with their own survival to consider the universal value of life.

In "La Señorita Leona" the results are not so tragic but the message is similar. Men are pictured as having reached the highest level of intellectual achievements. In so doing, however, they have exhausted their capacity for being sincere. With the hopes of recapturing some spark of their primordial being they plan to adopt a wild lion cub.
The adoption is completed and the cub, a female, comes to live in their city. She is educated in all the human ways of life. The young lion successfully adapts to civilized life and becomes the finest singer imaginable. In her singing she interpreted better than any of her human compatriots the feelings of a soul which was foreign to her. In fact a soul she did not possess. This success was fine but it did not fulfill the humans's dreams; they had hoped to hear, "frescura ingénita, sinceridad salvaje, grito de libertad — cuanto en suma había perdido el alma humana en su extenuante correría mental."\textsuperscript{16}

These humans were asking an animal to be civilized as they were and, at the same time, to retain the wild freedom in which it had been born. In other words, these intellectually complete individuals were hoping to reverse the process of evolution in one short life. Their goal was admirable but hardly feasible as their failure proves. In concert after concert the lion was urged to sing out with a wild note, a note her parent public so desperately wanted. She did manage to produce such a note but it was her downfall because it turned out that after giving birth to a savage roar, the long anticipated note of sincerity, she could utter nothing but these savage sounds which could hardly be erradicated in her short life. The meaning of this story is clear: it is impossible for man to retain his wild instinct and civilized ways in the same way of life. That is, civilized man must be
content with his progress, he cannot recapture what he has left behind and still hope to maintain what he has gained. A most obvious conclusion would then be that man can never hope to understand or appreciate the savage beast's realm; this is exactly what we have seen in "Juan Darién."

The tragic misunderstanding on the part of men in these two stories clearly represents the author's disappointment as a man who loved and understood jungle life. The writer's dismay indicated that he associated himself with the animals in two ways: first, he knew and appreciated their simple instinct for a peaceful existence and second he was grieved at the incredible brutality of his fellow man's inability to coexist with wild creatures. In effect, the author's grief is linked with death because the aforementioned lack of comprehension and incompatibility between man and beast is tantamount to a situation where death for one or the other party involved is inevitable. In fact, this sort of situation makes up many of the animal stories; "Regreso de Anaconda," "La guerra de los Yacarés," and "El Salvaje" are good examples of this "impasse" between men and beasts.

Occasionally there is an exception to this sort of treatment. A man who has understood wild creatures and proved his understanding by some sort of deed is not only spared death but in most instances he is aided by the creature or creatures he has helped. A good example of this variant is "El paso del Yabebiri" in which a man works to prevent other men from destroying fish in the
Yabebirí. He succeeds in stopping this wanton destruction and as a result becomes a friend of the river creatures. The friendship proves invaluable to this man when he is confronted with a tiger he has wounded. His only hope is crossing the Yabebirí to an island; this crossing is defended by "las rayas," sting-ray fish. The sting-rays remember the man's friendship and in return they allow him to cross. Later they protect him from the tiger's onslaught by closing the crossing of the river. These fish used their poisonous stings to repulse the tiger and, later, tigers when they attempted to cross the Yabebirí. "Las rayas" are killed by the dozen, but the man finally gets help and survives. The point of such a variant theme is that man could profit greatly if he would only try to get along with the wild beasts of the jungle. But, as has been shown, man cannot understand or realize a peaceful world peopled by both animals and men.
FOOTNOTES


4. Ibid., p. 13.

5. Misiones is a province in the extreme northeastern section of Argentina.

6. Ante el tribunal -- Quiroga presumes, in this short article, to be tried before a tribunal of younger writers. He defends his work against their criticism and tells them that they too will face such attacks when they are old.


CHAPTER I

In Juan Darién we have seen a general law of life: one life equals another. By its own definition this law is universal. One may wonder about this law's importance in other areas of Quiroga's work and the uninitiated reader may think this law a literary convention, especially in view of the fantastic nature of this story. Such speculation should be discouraged because this law does appear in other tales; in fact it is the motivating principle of "La tortuga gigante," "El paso del Yabebirí," "Una cacería humana en Africa," and "Las fieras cómplices." It is difficult to say with certainty that this law was or was not a literary device; but it seems likely that this law was just as much a part of the author's life as it was a part of his literary creations. This belief is based mainly on the artist's personal love for the jungle, where life is constantly in peril and therefore a precious thing, and on his personal experience with death which most certainly would have taught him that life cannot be taken for granted.

At any rate, this law is of great importance in the artistic world this writer created. We have seen how it applies to the conflict between man and beast. Man generally does not know this law because he is inherently afraid of the wild creature's ability to take life and this fear prevents him from seeing that animals
do know and live by this law. We have also seen what happens when this law is violated; Juan Darién's life was taken in flagrant disregard of it and justice was served when, in accord with this mandate, the life of the animal trainer was taken. This justice can also be called vengeance. It is exactly this kind of vengeance that is the central motif of several stories. We have already discussed one such story in "Juan Darién" which is an example of one type of vengeance story, the animal versus man variety.

Now we are going to examine the other kind of tale involving vengeance and the aforementioned universal law. This brand of story is distinct in that it concerns only human relations. Animals do appear but they are neither the violator nor the avenged. Violation of the 'law' in animal versus man conflicts has been shown a serious offense. The same is true when one man takes another man's life. Due to the insistence on death as the transgressor's penalty we shall consider this particular group of stories as comprising the first major aspect of the death theme. In the following analysis of El Solitario and Las fieras cómplices, two excellent examples of this type of narrative, we shall look closely at death and examine its significance under the circumstances in which it appears.

El Solitario is technically one of the best stories by Quiroga. This tale deals with one central idea: if one person fails to recognize the inviolable rights of another person to life, he may then expect to suffer an equal and certain treatment.
The author depicts a woman, María, in her incredible passion for material riches. Such a passion does not make a person necessarily villainous or despicable; but María's passion causes her to become a murderer even though she does not kill or cause physical death. This woman's crime consists of mental torture and, in effect, spiritual homicide. The way the author keeps building towards his climax is a technical feat because the reader can feel certain limits of human endurance being reached and he knows that something is bound to happen. Every detail, every word leads to Kassim's final act; but the reader cannot know and does not know the exact outcome of this tale until it comes. One cannot know what Kassim will finally do because one does not have time to wander from the story. Quiroga's words seem to demand complete attention; they are telling the story of María's inhuman torture of Kassim. María demands so much attention that one does not stop to consider her victim's potential. In fact, Kassim is pictured as a weak, sickly person who, one would think, is quite incapable of violence.

Kassim is a jeweler and a very good one; but he had not been able to establish his own shop. He lacked the necessary commercial skill and drive to become rich. Nonetheless he had a steady income as a journeyman for larger established stores. In this sort of work he handled precious stones of all kinds which became brooches, pins and so forth. However his income was too little to allow him to purchase any of his finished products.

Into this man's existence came María. This woman was Kassim's
downfall because she married him for what he could give and not for what he was. She wanted the jewelry he made and each time he refused to give it to her she would ruthlessly attack. María attacked Kassim in the most vulnerable places; she constantly berated him for not being able to give her fine jewelry and in addition for not being man enough to make her happy. María's cruelty has no limits. This woman's inhuman mental torture of Kassim is so severe and complete that his life is rendered meaningless. María is, for this reason, guilty of transgressing the 'law'; she has taken the equivalent of Kassim's life. María's treatment is equal and certain.

It seems that Kassim had received a magnificent diamond to mount. María's passion for this gem knows no bounds; she interrupts Kassim ten times a day to see it shine on her breast. She implores him to give it to her; for María this pin is life itself. One feels the injustice of this plea because Kassim cannot possibly yield to her desires; he could never afford to buy such a jewel.

As María's insistence for this jewel grows, Kassim works more persistently. During the day before the completion of it, María is frantic with passion. Finally she goes to bed exhausted. But still Kassim is working, almost as if finishing this pin would mean an end to his suffering. As before, however, Kassim cannot give María anything. The very soul of this man must be eaten with unhappiness; María has made him suffer more than death could. About an hour after she is in bed, she cries out, "Give it to me." Kassim continues working on the pin. At two o'clock in the
morning he finishes the work, goes to his wife's room and
resolutely drives the diamond pin deep into his wife's heart.

Thus, the miserable jeweler has finally given in to his
wife's demands; first he gave her his life and now, when that
failed to satiate her thirst for material goods, he gave her the
sparkling jewel she so passionately wanted. Kassim's gift to
María rectifies a horrible injustice. She had rendered his life
meaningless over a period of time and now, in one sudden thrust,
he has justifiably done the same to her.

In effect El Solitario is a tale of vengeance. Kassim's
final act is revenge for all that he has undergone. According
to the universal law such an act is justified because María had
in truth taken what constituted this meek creature's life. She
had taken his honor and his pride. Her words were like knives
and their effect was her undoing; she had pushed Kassim until
he no longer felt his life of any value. The only difference
between María's destruction of Kassim and his of her is that he did
it swiftly. Furthermore the jeweler's act of violence is just,
because it rectifies the horrible injustice María had committed.
The universe, with Kassim's final act, is once more balanced
because one death has been equally and justly reciprocated by
another death or inflicted injury.

One must, however, keep in mind that this universe and its
laws are Quiroga's own. The author evidently feels life is a
sacred thing, a thing no man may take or devalue. That is,
anyone who dares to take a life or its equivalent, as seen in
Juan Darién and El Solitario, may then expect to pay equally and without exception for what they have taken.

Quiroga's peculiarly strong insistence on the 'law' and his equally strong enforcement of it is not an isolated occurrence. Another fine example of this treatment is Las fieras cómplices. This story also concerns the plight of 'los mensú,' native laborers in Misiones who were exploited by the owners of large lumber camps. It concerns one native worker and a man who attempted to treat him and his fellow workers fairly.

In this tale, which reminds one a great deal of the lawless period in the western United States, justice is an individual matter. Each man is responsible for dealing with unjust situations and a common solution is a violent killing. That is, if a despotic type of individual were imposing his unfair ways on others, a common recourse would be to kill this man. In all its crudeness this approach to justice proves quite fair and acceptable under the circumstances.

If we were to look at Las fieras cómplices as a 'wild west' tale, we could find a great deal of similarity. For example, the lawlessness of the jungle is very much like that of the western plains before civilization was established, especially in the isolated logging camps. The action takes place in one of these camps. Yucas Alves is the owner of this camp; he is also the despot. Longhi, Alves's inspector, is the agent of justice, and he kills Alves.

The basic problem in this story is a conflict of personalities
and a conflict of values. Yucas Alves is the typical owner of logging camps. According to Quiroga, "Alves era el perfecto tipo del despota, iracundo, cobardo, miserable, cruel, hasta el refinamiento y con una voluntad de hierro." Diametrically opposed to Alves's character is that of Longhi, his newly acquired inspector. This man is obviously the author's self-appointed hero because he is the one who by punishing Alves will observe the 'law' and uphold it in the face of injustice.

Longhi is an unexpected new experience for the Indian laborers in Alves's camp. He is the exception to the rule; he treats them fairly. Quiroga makes it clear what the usual inspector is like. He says, "Los revisadores, en general, miden de tal modo madera, que siempre hallan medio de anotar de menos: 'en vez de 4 metros, 2.50; en lugar de 0 pies cuadrados, 50, y así por el estilo.'" Then, in direct contrast to the ordinary 'revisor,' Quiroga says:

Como se comprenderá, Longhi era demasiado hombre para prestarse a esos robos, tanto más viles cuanto que eran contra un pobre peón desamparado, cuyas penurias y rudo trabajo para conseguir una bolsa de grasa, o porotos, él conocía bien. De modo que a los quince días habíase conquistado las simpatías de los peones, a despecho de ellos mismos, pues, acostumbrados a la eterna mala fe y expoliación de los revisadores de madera, creían sencillamente que su justicia era aparente, ocultando algún engaño. Longhi se daba cuenta de la lógica desconfianza de esa pobre gente, compadecido desde el fondo de su alma.

This fair and just man is supposed to be Alves's chief agent in his inhuman treatment of the native labor, but, obviously, Longhi is incapable of cheating. Thus, one sees these two men, Alves and Longhi, face to face in a violent conflict of values
and personalities.

In addition to Longhi's fairness in business, one sees him as a compassionate man who helps a particular Indian. While checking the lumber of Guaycurú, one of the natives, he notices that this poor man is suffering from malaria. In complete accord with his character Longhi sees that Guaycurú gets the quinine he cannot afford; this is very unusual for a 'revisor.' So rare, in fact, that Longhi receives this man's undying gratitude and complete friendship.

The inevitable conflict between Alves and Longhi occurs not long after the latter and Guaycurú become friends. As one might expect, Alves finds fault with Longhi's work. In the presence of the 'revisor' the owner accuses him of having accepted inferior lumber from none other than Guaycurú. The reasons Alves adduces are not important; he merely wanted an excuse to punish Longhi for having been fair. He finds enough false reasons to infuriate Longhi:

Longhi, con un grito ronco en que había explotado toda su indignación contenida hasta ese momento por un formidable esfuerzo de voluntad, había lanzado su mano seca y nerviosa sobre la cara de Alves. El golpe fue recio y sonó como un estallido. Alves tambaleó, llevándose la mano a la boca ensangrentada, y un segundo después daba un salto atrás, revolver en mano. Apuntó al pecho de Longhi y lanzó una carcajada sarcástica, estridente."

One thing leads to another and, in the end, Alves gains the upper hand. When he does so, it is not surprising to learn of his diabolic plans for Longhi and his accomplice Guaycurú who had unsuccessfully aided him.
Alves has both men tied up and carried to a dry well. Then, with supreme confidence, he fills the well with rocks and places a dynamite charge in the center. In the meantime he has the Indian stripped. When all is prepared, he has the other natives pour turpentine over an anthill; this infuriates the carnivorous insects. The resultant action is horrible: a fifteen minute fuse is lit; Longhi is placed on top of the well; and the Indian is laid over the anthill. To the sounds of Guaycurú's screams Longhi awaits the explosion and death.

The only thing Alves had not counted on was that Longhi might survive. Of course, this miracle takes place. Quiroga depicts Longhi as a man who passes twenty days between life and death, but finally recovers.

Now is the time for revenge because Alves has attempted to take Longhi's life and has caused Guaycurú to suffer an inhuman torture. His indictment is according to the 'law.'

Longhi acquires a female lion cub and trains it to be the instrument of justice; thus preparing it to avenge himself and his native friend. In the preparation of this vengeance, the lion, affectionately called Divina, becomes exactly what Longhi had been. That is, she represents an effective agent of redress; she, like Longhi, is an instrument of justice. In a way, it seems as if Nature were aiding in the execution of Alves. The lion is a natural creature allied with the unjustly persecuted, Longhi and the Indian, to punish Alves for his crime.

Furthermore, the name Divina seems to suggest something sacred,
something that is infinitely good. The function of the lion is to maintain the holiness of the 'law' and she does, "De pronto Longhi dio una imperceptible palmada en el lomo de la leona y en el silencio se propagó por la picada, fría y blanca de luna, el crujido de la cabeza de Alves que acababa de partirse entre los dientes de la leona."5

With Alves's death, Quiroga has powerfully and unreservedly shown that no man may ignore the basic right of every living creature to live. He has shown a realm where life is sacred, an inviolable right. It is also very clear that a vengeance death, if it is in accord with the 'law,' is a just act.

The relationship between Quiroga's obsession with life and death is very important in the total analysis of the death theme because it reveals him as a man who was very much concerned with the value of death as an instrument of justice. That is, he is obviously preoccupied with the basic rights of every living creature to live. As far as this author is concerned, it makes no difference as to the value or importance a creature may have, that being still has the inviolable right to live; and no man may, as we have shown, ignorantly or knowingly infringe that right. This evidence leads to the conclusion that this author wanted to safeguard life from death caused by a base character, like Alves, who brings disharmony and suffering. More explicitly this approach means that death is natural; every living thing must die. Therefore, no living creature should willfully, regardless of the circumstances, go beyond the bounds of natural law which condemns the living to die.
FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid., p. 169.

3. Ibid., p. 170.

4. Ibid., p. 176.

5. Ibid., p. 196.
CHAPTER II

Condemnation of the living to die is an extremely elementary fact of life, but the importance of death and its meaning in one's daily life is overpowering. Organized religion is perhaps the greatest attestation to the inexplicable fears which accompany the knowledge of this inevitable fate. A great deal has been written about the inexorable fate which enigmatically awaits every living creature, but no one has brought forth anything to assuage man's fear. Everyone must at one time or another decide what comes after death; this is a universal problem with many answers. Some people have very consoling ideas about eternal life, reincarnation, an eternal sleep, or an empty void; but no man has ever returned from the grave to say what does occur after death. Therefore, there is still a great deal of horror, grief, and fear surrounding the necessary end we all face. This universal consternation is what seems to govern so many of Quiroga's short stories; he persistently deals with death both physically and psychologically.

In this chapter we shall examine death in three stories which best represent the writer's attitudes toward his characters' fatal end. We shall attempt to interpret the author's position as it relates to the general theme of death and as it relates to his personal experience with death which can hardly be ignored.
In "A la deriva" the author depicts the agonizing futility of a man bitten by a poisonous snake. Only the essential details are presented: the story begins, "El hombre pisó algo blanduzco, y en seguida sintió la mordedura en el pie;"¹ and ends "y cesó de respirar."² The victim's interim struggle for life is completely in vain. He goes home after being bitten and drinks 'caña' (a very strong rum), to quench his burning thirst. But this act is the first indication that Paulino, the victim, is in a desperate situation because "el hombre tragó uno tras otro dos vasos, pero no sintió nada en la garganta."³ Immediately after Paulino's unsuccessful effort to relieve his thirst he sees that the snake bite is rapidly growing worse and, not wishing to die, he then sets out in his canoe. He thinks that he will be able to reach help in five hours. When he reaches the middle of the river the victim realizes for a second time that he is helplessly dying:

El hombre, con sombría energía, pudo efectivamente llegar hasta el medio del río; pero allí sus manos dormidas dejaron caer la pala en la conca y tras un nuevo vomito—de sangre esta vez dirigió una mirada al sol, que ya trasponía el monte.⁴

Even the description adds to Paulino's distress: his energy is 'sombría'; his hands are 'dormidas'; his vomit is of blood this time; and he notices that the sun was disappearing. Every detail emphasizes the gravity of the victim's situation; he, just as the sun, is surely bound to sink into darkness if he does not get help.

The story takes a sudden turn towards a possible rescue when Paulino, knowing that he cannot reach Iguazú, his original
destination, decides to ask a friend for help. He easily gains the beach and manages to drag himself ashore. At twenty meters Paulino falls exhausted; he can not go on because the trail is uphill. Once more the victim is shown helpless; he is being cut off from all hope. The complete futility of Paulino's fate is complemented by the fact that he and Alves, his friend, had not been on good terms for some time. When one reads the disconsolate cry of the prostrate victim, "¡Compadre Alves! ¡No me niegue este favor!," one cannot ignore its significance: this man is tragically aware that this is the last chance for help.

The fervent plea of the author's victim is answered only by the silent jungle, so he turns to his canoe. The current rapidly carries the small craft 'a la deriva.' There is no physical strength left in Paulino; he is vanquished. Only the mental activity of this man is known now. The physically inert victim thinks, "Viviría aun su compadre Gaona en Tacurú-Pacú? Acaso viajaría también a su ex patrón mister Dougal y al recibidor del obraje." This mental trend is completely incongruous. These thoughts have no bearing on Paulino's immediate problem. It is as if he were psychologically incapable of facing the situation at hand.

The author has shown man's futile efforts for survival against insurmountable odds. Man may exist as long as he does not become careless; but when he does, he may then expect to be inexorably crushed as was Paulino. We could assess the author's intent simply by saying that he wants to point out man's sub-
servience, not prevalence, to an unfathomable and unfeeling natural environment which is a common fate. Furthermore, man may endure in life only so long as he abides by the laws of his natural surroundings and when he accidentally or purposely disobeys such laws, regardless of his worth, he must be aware of the penalty he faces. One might view such treatment as being didactic. That is, the author may be instructing his readers of a simple fact of jungle life.

We, however, think there is much more in such stories. There are two deeper meanings. One is that man, as a physical force, is an absurd, hopeless, ridiculous being who can but prostrate himself to the immense, omnipresent power of nature which resembles that of the Christian's God. That is, this power is constant, everpresent and infinite. In addition this power, like that of the Christian God, is really unfathomable and completely dispassionate. Men may say that God has his purpose and so on; but this does not remove the unjust quality, the inexplicable nature or the incredible element from acts said to be God's will. Exactly identical to the Christian God's will, Quiroga's Nature works its astonishing ways in the lives of all men. In addition one may view the power of nature as vengeful like the Christian God's. That is, when a subservient being violates one of the infinite being's commandments, he must pay for the crime without hope for salvation. Thus we see the meaning of physical death and fruitless struggle in "A la deriva."

The second underlying meaning in this kind of treatment
resides in the victim's metaphysical rejection of reality. This inability to accept death is, we feel, the author's way of showing man in general as incapable of confronting psychologically what he is aware of for most of his life. Man cannot reconcile himself to the thought that death has finally come. Even though every man knows of death before it comes, the author apparently feels that mentally some men cannot fully accept its arrival. In the next chapter we shall discuss more fully the psychological aspect of death. Presently we return to another example of this presentation which concentrates on the physical ineptness of man to compete with the overwhelming forces of nature and, to a lesser extent, on his psychological incapacity to confront death.

The next story for consideration is "Los inmigrantes." This tale also features an unrelenting fate which dispassionately claims its victims' lives. The chief concern here leans more toward a fatal mistake than toward an unfortunate accident. One also learns more about the helpless victims.

From the outset there is great emphasis placed on the opposition of two forces: two inexperienced human beings and Nature. A man and woman are walking; they have been going since four o'clock in the morning. They are traveling through oppressive heat near a steamy swamp somewhere in the jungle. It is the calm before the storm. Finally rain begins to fall but the pair stubbornly goes on. They are fighting against their natural surroundings.

When the rain finally stops we begin to get an idea of the crisis facing the protagonists. In anguished desperation they
look at each other. The man says, "¿Tienes fuerzas para caminar un rato aún?"; this indicates an awareness of futility in the face of an immediate exigency. The seriousness of the situation is not yet known; we only know that a man and woman are anxiously striving against a hostile background, to reunite with another group.

The journey is renewed. Shortly the woman stops and moans, "¡No puedo más!" In addition to her inability to continue, the woman's mouth is twisted and she is soaked with perspiration. This time the reader knows something is definitely wrong, something which could be serious. The gravity of the predicament is even worse when the author says the man, after a look around, was convinced there was nothing he could do. This futile resignation is readily understood when the author further relates that this man's wife was pregnant. One cannot but feel the incredible anguish of this desperate man: he is far from the group he and his wife were pursuing; he is in an inimicable environment; and his wife is sick and unable to move because she is pregnant.

A somber tone is set by the author who says the man was hallucinated with excessive fatality. This expression of feeling is really a clue to this entire story and many others like it; this excessive fatality is what the author is showing here and elsewhere. Our introductory remark concerning Quiroga's concern for death is revealed by the denouement of this tale. The man cuts boughs and makes a bed. On this crude bed he lays his wife and then sits at the head with her head in his lap. The author graphically
represents more with this pathetic scene than he does in almost any other story. He has shown the tenuous nature of human life in the figures of this poor man and woman; and the awesome power of destiny, here exhibited by the adversity of Nature. The remaining action is pitiless: the woman dies on her rustic bed; the husband attempts to carry the corpse out of the jungle; and then he dies. Before dying, however, the empty, incoherent mental patterns of the victim are related:

El hombre echó una ojeada a la horrible masa blancuzca que yacía a su lado, y cruzando sus manos sobre las rodillas quedóse mirando fijamente adelante, al estero venecoso, en cuya lejanía el delirio dibujaba una aldea de Silesia a la cual él y su mujer, Carlota Proening, regresaban felices y ricos a buscar a su adorado primogénito.  

Once more the author has shown a man unable to accept the reality of death. This poor immigrant certainly realized the impossibility of his physical situation but he stubbornly ignored its significance; he refused to reconcile himself to his plight. His psychological rejection of reality is again a clear point; the author shows here one consequence of such an incapability. The immigrant, had he simply resigned himself to what his mind certainly told him, could have saved himself. He could have buried his wife and probably reached safety. The fact that he did not bring himself to acknowledge the gravity of his situation caused him to defy Nature and this, as already seen, is fatal.

In these two stories we have seen the horrible but realistic power which relentlessly and indifferently extracted life from its victims. This power is again unfathomable and inexorable. The author has shown himself to be a silent, impassive witness who does
not intervene on behalf of the victim. He rather seems bent on exposing the incapability of the human victim as a futile and totally inept force. His purpose, as mentioned, seems to be to show man in conflict with Nature which, much like the Christian God, is a vengeful, implacable, omnipresent power that prevails in every instance.

"El desierto" is the account of Subercasaux and his two children. This tale is a great deal like the previous two, especially in the presence of the uncontrollable and unforeseen forces of destiny. A little unlike the other two, this tale devotes more time to the protagonists. We see the three main characters in their daily life in the jungle and we get a complete account of the children's mother's death. We also learn of the father's devoted work with his son and daughter, one is five and the other is six, who have been taught to fear nothing in their sylvan environment. They have been instructed of the chief danger, poisonous snakes, and of many others. But the author makes it quite clear that there is one thing they did fear:

No temían a nada, sino a lo que su padre les advertía debían temer, y en primer grado, naturalmente, figuraban las víboras. Aunque libres, respirando salud y deteniéndose a mirarlo todo con sus grandes ojos de cachorros alegres, no hubieran sabido qué hacer un instante sin la compañía del padre. Pero si este, al salir, les advertía que iba a estar tal tiempo ausente, los chicos se quedaban entonces contentos a jugar entre ellos. De igual modo, si en sus mutuas y largas andanzas por el monte o el río, Subercasaux debía alejarse minutos u horas, ellos improvisaban en seguida un juego, y lo aguardaban indefectiblemente en el mismo lugar, pagando así, con ciega y alegre obediencia, la confianza que en ellos depositaba su padre.¹⁰

Since the mother had been taken, the father was the only person the
children could turn to and it is made apparent that they would not know where to go or what to do if their beloved father should be gone.

In the account of this happy group's activities the father and the children are very content. Their felicity is well represented in this passage which tells of the trio's ceramic work:

A las diez los ceramistas daban por terminada su tarea y se levantaban a proceder por primera vez al examen critico de sus obras de arte, pues antes de haber concluido todos no se permitia el menor comentario. Y era de ver entonces el alborozo ante las fantasias ornamentales de la mujercita y el entusiasmo que levantaba la obstinada coleccion de viboras del nene. Tras lo cual Subercasaux extinguia el fuego del horno, y todos de la mano atravesaban corriendo la noche helada hasta su casa.11

This background is a flashback or filler; it separates the opening episode, a stormy black night of adventure introducing Subercasaux and the children, and the beginning of the final dilemma. It is precisely the felicity of this flashback that enables the author to achieve such power in the climax because all the fears of this diligent father find a tragic fulfillment.

It seems that Subercasaux could not retain a housekeeper. The fault was his because he would not treat them as they wished. He did not beat them or anything; he just ignored them and kept a harsh business manner. At any event, the lack of a woman caused him to do dishes, cook, scrub, carry water, and so forth. Subercasaux was thus kept busy and his preoccupation prevented him from clearing the patio of chiggers. Ordinarily a chigger is harmless but the author makes it known that "pero de cien piques limpios hay uno que aporta una infeccion, y cuidado entonces con ella."12 By some strange coincidence Subercasaux gets a chigger bite which
becomes so infected that nothing will reduce the pain or stop the
infection. The only thing this bite means is a reduction in the
father’s customary wanderings on foot. Still this small problem is
enough to trigger the ultimate tragedy.

More than ever Subercasaux feels the need of a girl to do the
menial chores he has been forced to do. After a while he finds one.
She arrives and stays for a month when she leaves without warning.
In the meantime unusual rains are beginning to fall; this is not
unknown in Misiones, the location of this story, and the father
knows that he and the children could be completely isolated by floods.
The necessity for a housekeeper grows because of this new threat.

Subercasaux remembers a good-sized lad he once had employed and
decides to get him. The only way he can go is in the canoe. On
launching the craft he finds it necessary to bail out some water.
In the process Subercasaux takes off his shoes and steps into the
pestilent mud of the Yabebiri River. This mistake proves to be his
undoing.

The waters of the river are too high and the father is forced to
return. The three future victims eat dinner and go to bed. At
daybreak Subercasaux is jolted by an icy shiver; he has a fever, a
very strong fever. The remainder of the story tells of the
subconscious of this delirious man who never really regains a firm
idea of anything. That is, anything but his approaching death.

The most powerful part is when Subercasaux is about to die.
Realizing the certainty of death he calls his children to his
bedside and talks with them:
—Chiquitos— les dijo Subercasaux, cuando los tuvo a su lado—. Oiganme bien chiquitos míos, porque ustedes son ya grandes y pueden comprender todo ... Voy a morir, chiquitos ... Pero no se aflijan ... Pronto van a ser ustedes hombres, y serán buenos y honrados ... Y se acordarán entonces de su piapiá ... Comprendan bien, mis hijitos queridos ... Dentro de un rato me moriré, y ustedes no tendrán más padre ... Qedarán solitos en casa ... Pero no se asusten ni tengan miedo ... Y ahora, adiós, hijitos míos ... Me van a dar ahora un beso ... Un beso cada uno ... Pero ligero, chiquitos ... Un beso ..., a su piapiá ... 13

This final scene is extremely effective because it has been carefully prepared. We are referring to the aforementioned passages which give the children's only fear as that of being left alone and to the common joy these three had had.

After this story there seems to be no end to Quiroga's lack of compassion. He purposely made these three protagonists likeable and admirable. Then he just as deliberately crushes the father which will ultimately cause death for his beloved children who are barely old enough to know what death is. Again there seems to be this implacable fate at work from which no man, no matter how wise, good or important, may escape. As pointed out before, this treatment seems to bear a great deal of resemblance to the author's life.

He was a widower with two children and he lived many years in Misiones near the Yabebiri River.

This story is further proof of his attitude toward his characters in their futile and almost constantly failing struggle with fate. It is imperative to note that fate in the three stories analyzed here was carried out in close association with a hostile jungle setting. This relationship of the tropical rain forest and Nature in general to the workings of destiny in this type of story
is consistent as described. One major exception to this treatment
might be "Estefanía" where an inexplicable act of fate takes the
long-suffering widower from his miserable existence. The only
difference would be that this poor man was not involved in a life
and death struggle with destiny. Another exception to this treatment
would be "En la noche" where a woman wins her battle with the unknown
powers; she saves her husband from death by an inhuman act. She
rowed for eighteen hours against a flooded current to obtain
serum for her dying husband. This exception is in complete accord
with the opposite treatment in tales where the victim dies. Here the
victim is aided by a woman who rationally accepted the reality of
his approaching death. She acts logically and with great, almost
inhuman, strength to prolong her husband's survival. This conquest
does not negate in any way the previous presentation of the prevalence
of a far superior power; this man and this woman are still subject
to that force. They have merely observed the significance of death
and postponed its coming.

Thus we feel Quiroga has demonstrated his appreciation of
Nature as an unconquerable being which, like the Christian God,
reigns over man. Man, according to such stories, must know about
these fatalistic forces and must be ready to face the consequences
if he breaks the laws such a being implies. Man must be prepared
to face such a fate both physically and psychologically. Due
to Quiroga's consistent treatment of death in these stories and many
like them, we suggest that his intent is somewhat didactic. That is,
he is quite realistically showing his reader what man's relationship
to Nature is and what it should be. In support of this theory we add the author's generalized characters. On occasion he gives names but usually it is, "El hombre," "Los niños," "La mujer," and so forth. This categoric treatment would support this pedagogic tendency because it is about the same as saying that if a man, any man, acts as this one does, the following will result. We feel that the nonintervention by the author further testifies to his instruction. He makes the reader aware that Subercasaux, Paulino, the children, and the immigrants are not unpleasant or despicable. That is, they apparently do not deserve their fate because of a base character; but the fact that they still die indicates a lesson to the reader. The author is saying that one should, by learning of such pathetic cases, know what to do to avoid a tragic end and, if unavoidable, one should at least be ready to accept death when it comes. Other stories in which Quiroga harshly portrays the last hours of his characters are: "El hijo," "Las moscas," "El hombre muerto," "Los cazadores de ratas," "Regreso de Anaconda," "La cámara oscura," "El peón," "Van-Houten," and "Los destiladores de naranjas."
FOOTNOTES

2 Ibid., p. 99.
3 Ibid., p. 96.
4 Ibid., p. 97.
5 Ibid., p. 97.
6 Ibid., p. 98.
7 Ibid., p. 222.
8 Ibid., p. 222.
9 Ibid., p. 225.
10 Ibid., p. 386.
11 Ibid., p. 390.
12 Ibid., pp. 392-395.
13 Ibid., p. 404.
CHAPTER III

In this chapter we should like to point out the author's past probing in the area of death in human life. We have seen how he insists on the intrinsic value of life per se, as seen in the animal stories and those dealing with the universal law of life. Then how he portrayed the physical ineptness of man in Nature which crushes him with an unfeeling and unconquerable power. To continue the study of this progress we shall investigate the metaphysical reactions of the dying victim or those closely associated with him. And to complete our study we shall look into some tales which take an imaginary step beyond life into the world of the dead and into the existence of the living dead.

Three excellent examples of metaphysical reactions to death are El hijo, El hombre muerto, and Las moscas. The first is distinct insofar as it deals with the thoughts of one closely associated with the victim and not the victim himself. This first tale also bears a lot of resemblance to Los immigrantes where the husband was unable to bring himself to act logically when his wife died. The basic difference between the two stories would be one of degree. The immigrant husband accepted the fact that his wife was dead but could not bring himself to bury her and died trying to carry her body out of the jungle. The widowed father in El hijo, on the other hand, could not accept his son's death; he refused to believe and,
at the story's end he walked in a daze still convinced that his son lived.

In El hijo the son actually represents the father's hopes and faith, "sin otra fe ni esperanza que la vida de su hijo."¹ So, the relationship between the father and his son is nearly one of spiritual union. We don't know if the son feels the same about the father because the father's mental processes are the dominant feature here. The important factor is that this man's spiritual life is almost totally dependent on his thirteen-year-old son.

To a certain extent the father had been aware of the possibilities of a sudden death. He had taught his son to be, "consciente de la inmensidad de ciertos peligros y de la escasez de sus propias fuerzas."² He is mentally preconditioned for what happens to his son and the following passage seems to indicate a realistic attitude toward the fate of his long awaited son:

¡Oh! No son suficientes un carácter templado y una ciega confianza en la educación de un hijo para ahuyentar el espectro de la fatalidad que un padre de vista enferma ve alzarse desde la línea del monte. Distracción, olvido, demora fortuita, ninguno de estos nimios motivos que pueden retardar la llegada de su hijo hallan cabida en aquel corazón.³

But when the father sees the body of his beloved son, he breaks psychologically. Despite the pre-knowledge and the apparently realistic predisposition to his son's death, this man could not cope with the bitter truth. His son's life had been crushed and he has shown himself psychologically unable to go on living with reality, so he proceeds as if his son still lived.

The significance of such a story is closely associated
with death which, according to the author, may occur at any time and without warning, "el peligro subiste siempre para el hombre en cualquier edad."⁴ Even though a man, like this widower, knows of the dangers in life and of the very real possibilities of death at any time, this does not mean that he is in any way ready psychologically to face death or its equivalent as shown in El hijo.

Prior to the son's death this man had indeed been able to cope with reality; he did not break with reality until he saw his dead son. That is, the father had been, previous to his boy's accident, psychologically normal, whereas, at the point of his son's death, he snapped into an anti-realistic and completely abnormal state of psychological fantasy.

This break is very much like that of a soldier who trains for war but cannot or does not function properly when confronted with actual battle conditions. This father had envisaged death; he had realized beforehand that his boy probably was dead. But still when he saw the proof of his presentiments, he could not accept it. Instead, this grief-stricken man yielded to a hallucination, an invented reality wherein his son still lived. Once again, this story illustrates the metaphysical unreadiness of man for death and one example of what may happen to a man who is confronted with the unique experience of death.

The unique quality of dying is sometimes ignored or simply incomprehensible to the living in personal terms. We all are presumably aware of death as one inevitable characteristic
of life. At the same time we have no way of knowing exactly how we will react when our turn comes. It is just this problem that El hombre muerto concerns itself with. The story deals specifically with the metaphysical impressions of a man who has accidentally impaled himself on a "machete." There are two outstanding thoughts which occur to the victim: the world is indifferent to his final experience and, as a result, he feels utter solitude at this time.

The victim searches vainly for some exterior sign of change. First he thinks, "¿Qué trastorno de la Naturaleza trasuda el horrible acontecimiento?" Then he answers himself, "¿Qué ha cambiado? Nada." He can not find any external change going on around him; everything is just as it always is at noon on a hot summer day. The rest of the story is taken up by this sort of discovery on the part of this dying man. The only conclusion reached is that, "sólo él es distinto." The world about him is completely unaffected by his death. There is nothing to mark his passing; for this reason, the author seems to be implying cosmic indifference and, with it, the solitude and exclusively individual nature of death.

The other thought which occurs to this man is, as pointed out, that only he is changing. Only he is undergoing this experience. He thinks, "desde hace dos minutos su persona, su personalidad viviente, nada tiene ya que ver ni con el potrero, que formó el mismo a azada, durante cinco meses consecutivos; ni con el bananal, obra de sus solas manos. Ni con su familia?"
The feeling here is one of complete loneliness. That is, death only can be known to him. From this, it seems impossible, therefore, to prepare in advance because death is a uniquely personal and final experience.

Thus we have another aspect of metaphysical unpreparedness for death. This man's reaction was one of incredulity. He could not overcome the utter indifference of the world; and, as a result, he felt the loneliness of dying. All through this account there is no feeling of pain which adds to the bizarre nature of this man's death. Also the total effort of the victim can be viewed as a last attempt to reaffirm his existence in terms of the world around him.

The author presents one more aspect of this situation-problem in Los moscas. This tale, like the previous one, deals with the waning activities of a moribund psyche. This man also notes the impassiveness of the exterior world, "¡y nada, nada en la serenidad del ambiente que denuncie y grite tal acontecimiento!" Unlike the preceding case this victim is not overwhelmed by this external indifference. He is more concerned with the exact instant of death. He thinks, "pero ¿cuando? ¿Qué segundo y qué instantes son éstos en que esta exasperada conciencia de vivir todavía dejará paso a un sosegado cadáver?" From this desire one gets the idea that this man cannot tolerate the suspense of dying. That is, he knows he is dying but not the exact moment. Therefore he is anguished with what time he has left and wishes to know when it is to be over. This anxiety can be attributed to mental
unreadiness for such an experience.

The victim continues to be exasperated by the approach of the unknown instant of his demise. His mind begins to wander into a fantasy based on his present situation. He imagines himself in a hospital where four doctors, who are friends, prognosticate his death with flies. These flies are supposed to be infallible indicators of death. They are let out of a jar and the victim is brought back to his present reality by their buzzing which is actually going on around him. This hallucinatory flight is, as seen in El hijo, one result of the mentally unprepared.

After the victim's return to his real present, he once again directs his thoughts to what is taking place. Around him he realizes that the buzzing of the imaginary flies is real. Flies are coming closer all the time. Death is, in fact, near. Suddenly he feels a change coming over him, "siento que fluye de mí, como la vida misma, la ligereza del vaho ambiente, la luz del sol, la fecundidad de la hora."¹⁰ This aspect is new. The victim has not broken with reality; he has endured the metaphysical anguish until he feels a new experience. This aspect is once more the result of an exploration into the psychological impact of death.

In peroration we shall briefly recount each essential aspect of the preceding tales and review their collective meaning. In the first one we have the impact of death on the non-self, the son, and its devastating result—a pathetic rejection of reality. The second story deals with the difference
between being and not being. The victim in this case cannot
experience non-being. All that he knows even in his last moments,
is only comprehensible in terms of his being. And, in the third
one, the principal concern of the moribund psyche is the exact
moment when being ceases. When that time arrives, he feels himself
flying freely about, diffused into a cosmic harmony.

In general, this treatment of death emphasizes the futility
of mental preparation for it. Death can be known of but not known.
It is a personal experience which by nature precludes any rational
pre-conception. That is, death marks the end of being, a nothingness
which is totally incomprehensible to man except in terms of his
being. From man's non-personal experience with dying and death
come fear, anguish, grief and so on; but, he cannot prepare for
what he has not experienced. This idea is basic to the foregoing
stories and to the overall death theme.

Now we turn to those tales which concern an imaginary step
beyond life into the world of the dead and into the existence
of the living dead. In these tales Quiroga explores a realm
in which the difference between life and death is extremely
vague. But curiously there is almost always a preponderance of
concrete lifelike detail; this serves to reinforce and maintain
the basic idea that death, by nature, is completely incompre-
hensible except in human terms. In the following discussion
we shall consider three types of stories: first, those dealing
with the cinema; second, those dealing with artificial death;
and finally those concerning actual physical non-being.
Quiroga seems to have been very fascinated by the cinema and its stars, especially the women. Directly or indirectly several stories bear a cinematic influence. The most dominant element of such narratives is the presence of a fantastic atmosphere peopled by film characters or somnambulistic figures closely associated with them. All of these beings are strangely realistic, lifelike creatures who are nonetheless quite dead. In "El puritano," one of these odd phantoms describes himself and his fellow spirits:

Estamos muertos, sin duda; pero nuestro anonadamiento no es total. Una sobrevida intangible, apenas cálida para no ser de hielo, rige y anima nuestros espectros.

The author is working with the dead but, still, there is a 'sobrevida' which animates or enlivenes these ghosts. This afterlife is of the dead and, at the same time, very much like their previous life. It is so united to their prior existence that one of the inhabitants, a beautiful young girl, is unable to enjoy her companions' 'mansa paz.' She had committed suicide for want of love. Her state of being is described in human terms which are unquestionably linked to the living past. Specifically, she "permanecía recostada allí mismo, arropada de frío, con la expresión ansiosa y jadeante." The author is bound to use language comprehensible to human beings, even when discussing an imaginary world of the dead, but here he transcends viable terminology; he is, in fact, using expressions, feelings and actions that are obviously those of the living and not the dead. Further proof of this lifelike treatment of specters is revealed when the forlorn girl is described at the time of her loved one's
entry into this macabre realm:

Súbitamente su rostro se iluminó de felicidad hasta ese radiante esplendor de que sólo la vida posee el secreto, y tendiendo los brazos adelante lanzó un grito. ¡Pero qué grito, oh Dios!14

In truth it seems that these dead beings are merely continuing their lives. There is the clear statement that "estamos muertos," but this is strongly contradicted by the foregoing proof to the contrary. Conclusive evidence that this existence is simply a slightly modified version of the prior one comes in the last paragraph:

Ella sonríe de dicha casi carnal, pura como su muerte. Nada debe ya al destino y descansa feliz. Su vida está cumplida.15

This 'vida cumplida' is unequivocally the key to this particular aspect of the post-life story. In those tales of a cinematic motif, the figures are dead but they continue functioning in a lifelike manner. Death is merely a transitional phenomenon here. There is no drastic change in the characters or their behavior. Really the author is no closer to death than he was in "El hombre muerto"; he is still showing live personalities in realistic life situations. These ghosts, or whatever they may be, still are something and, as such, must yet face the unconceivable nothingness of non-being. That is, Quiroga has infused as much life into the dead as he has into the dying or the living and, ironically, this new existence is unmistakably vital and readily comprehensible as such.

In the second category of this class are such stories as "El síncope blanco," "El infierno artificial," and "Su ausencia."
The differentiating factor is that death in the true sense is not experienced by the main characters. Their experience is one of approximation to death and may be considered as an artificial death.

In the first tale there is a little less of the simulated death experience and more of the approximation to a true state of non-being. The main character is a patient who suffers a post-operative shock. In an anesthetic state the man dreams that he is in a celestial realm. He thinks he has died in the operation and that his body is still on the operating table.

He soon discovers that he is only one of many similar cases. All people who undergo anesthesia presumably visit this way station which is divided into two waiting rooms: one is called 'Síncope Azul' and the other 'Síncope Blanco.' According to the story, the former is designated for those who will regain consciousness and, the latter, for those who will die.

The description of this supernatural place is very realistic. There is, in fact, a close resemblance to the waiting rooms of a train or bus terminal. The people are pictured like this:

No se conocían, ni se Miraban, ni se veían tal vez. Pasaban con su expresión habitual, acaso distraídos o pensando en algo, pero con preocupaciones de la vida normal—negocios o detalles domésticos—, la expresión de las gentes que se encaminan o salen de una estación.16

These are people, both physically and, evidently, spiritually who are very much alive. No matter how close Quiroga gets to a state of non-being, he still tends to portray lifelike figures in very vital situations. That is, the departure from life is nominal. There is no great difference unless one considers
the bizarre type of reality presented. This dream world and its unrealistic quality in a lifelike situation is representative of that most characteristic trait of Quiroga's fantastic narratives. Once more, however, it is interesting to observe how realistic and lifelike these stories of the dead or spirits really are. This factor would lend itself nicely to the logical incapability of graphically creating such a tale and, in turn, it would support the author's incessant but unsuccessful probing in this area.

The remainder of "El síncope blanco" concerns an amorous encounter between the main character and a beautiful young girl. She ultimately passes on to death while he regains consciousness. This affair in the celestial waiting rooms is also presented in human terms. He says of his love that "¿qué sed de belleza y adoración había en mi alma, cuando en aquellas circunstancias hallaba modo de henchirla de aquel amor terrenal?" There is a certain feeling of exasperation afterward because the girl has died and the young man is still in love with her. The unreal nature of such a love is the most improbable and fantastic element in this account because the young man remembers her. He inquires until he learns that she did exist but that she died during an operation. As to the reality of his brief meeting with the girl, it is more or less part of taking a step beyond as Quiroga does in this tale.

The important point remains: we were shown a world of supposedly incorporeal beings in the shadowy realm of imprecise fluctuation between life and death. However, as pointed out, this treatment still rests on lifelike detail and human creatures
with very human behavior.

In "El infierno artificial," Quiroga comes a little closer to the artificial death. The theme is drug addiction. The essential aspect of this story is the effect of cocaine on the addict. He describes his reactions to the drug in the following words:

Al fin, envenenado hasta lo más íntimo de mi ser, preñado de torturas y fantasmas, convertido en un tembloroso despojo humano; sin sangre, sin vida—miseria a que la cocaína, prestaba, diez veces por día, radiante disfraz, para hundirme en seguida en un estupor cada vez más hondo—, al fin un resto de dignidad me lanzó a un sanatorio y me entregué atado de pies y manos para la curación.18

Thus the victim is more or less divorced from normal life. He is in a near state of non-being, a stupor. This experience then is closer yet to death which is a total nothingness. Furthermore, the addict confesses that he is without blood and without life.

As the story develops, the addict somehow manages to fall in love and get married. His new bride is also an addict. They return to his previous home where his first wife and three children had all died and where in extreme depression he had first injected himself with cocaine. Their life turns into a continuous nightmare of exstacy brought on by drugs.

This artificial hell, as the title announces, does not last long. The young wife is a beautiful creature and her husband suddenly awakens to feel physically drawn to her. But he is totally incapable of realizing his desires. The passage following his discovery is very revealing:
¡Ah! ¡Para qué haber resucitado un instante, si mi potencia viril, si mi orgullo de varón no revivirá más! ¡Estaba muerto para siempre, ahogado, disuelto en el mar de cocaína!  

He feels that he, or at least some essential part of his being, is dead. This artificial death, this sleep, this dream is much closer to the nothingness of non-being. Also there is no attempt to describe the nothingness of this state as there was before. This lack of description brings one closer to death which is by nature impossible to envisage or describe.

The last example of this type of narrative is "Su ausencia."
The essence of this account is a six year absence from normal consciousness. Epilepsy is the given cause of illness. The victim, a man called Julio Roldán Berger, knows absolutely nothing of the time elapsed during six years of his life. But the weird thing about this loss of memory is, as Berger says "no he estado enfermo durante ese tiempo. Ni inconsciente, ni cataléptico." There is no explanation for his status during six years; it is just a period of oblivion in his past. This nothingness is as close to non-being as a living person could get without dying. Berger did not die; the rest of the story is spent telling what happened to him and what he did during the lost time. This story is the culmination of Quiroga's work in the area of artificial death because it comes about as close to that inconceivable experience as possible.

Very briefly we shall examine "Más allá," a story of two frustrated lovers who commit suicide to be together. After death, they have rendezvous after rendezvous, they take walks together; and
they move freely among the living after their death. But they become quite unhappy because:

¡No se juega al amor, a los novios, cuando se quemó en un suicidio la boca que podía besar! ¡No se juega a la vida, a la pasión sollozante, cuando desde el fondo de un ataúd dos espectros sustanciales nos piden cuenta de nuestro remedio y nuestra falsedad! ¡Amor! ¡Palabra ya impronunciable si se la trocó por una copa de cianuro al goce de morir! 21

This tale represents a slight variation because the ghosts finally wish to be reincarnated. They realize death does not give them their desire, physical love. This account differs from "El puritano" insofar as its lovers find the freedom of death the source of their problems while those of the cinematic background find happiness.

At any event, this story again fails to take life from the world of the deceased. These defunct beings are just as alive as they ever were. Death again is nominal; it has no noticeable effect on its victims.

In reviewing these stories, the first type concerns a very lifelike presentation of figures from the cinema which derive their vitality from the silver screen. They are very real human figures enjoying a nocturnal existence which is really a continuation of their former lives. The second type of narrative deals with artificial death. Quiroga comes nearer to true nothingness with these tales than anywhere else but still is bound by lifelike description which is the only conceivable mode of telling such stories. Finally there is the last story which relates the post-life activities of two lovers who cannot but look back to their
previous existence for happiness. Again, all these tales are marked by vitality and the logical impossibility of achieving the desired state of non-being.
FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid., p. 592.

3 Ibid., p. 594.

4 Ibid., p. 592.

5 Ibid., p. 528.

6 Ibid., p. 529.

7 Ibid., pp. 529-530.

8 Ibid., p. 586.

9 Ibid., p. 586.

10 Ibid., p. 589.

11 Some stories bearing a cinematic influence are: "Miss Dorothy Philips, mi esposa," "El puritano," and "El espectro."

12 Horacio Quiroga, El Más Allá, (Buenos Aires, 1954), p. 79.

13 Ibid., p. 81.

14 Ibid., p. 84.

15 Ibid., p. 85.

16 Horacio Quiroga, Cuentos, (Montevideo, 1942), Tomo IV, p. 89.

17 Ibid., p. 92.

18 Horacio Quiroga, Cuentos, (Montevideo, 1940), Tomo VI, p. 48.

19 Ibid., p. 51.

20 Quiroga, El Más Allá, p. 91.

21 Ibid., p. 16.
CONCLUSION

Horacio Quiroga's personal life was characterized by two general factors: he was tragically and intimately associated with death; and he was consistently active in literary pursuits. Although it is impossible to establish an irrefutable link between his personal life and his short stories, it is, at least, possible to suggest that anyone who seriously studies this author should be well informed about his life. The basic value of such knowledge would be appreciated most when one discovers story after story to be largely concerned with death, the cinematic characters or jungle creatures, because these elements also make up part of Quiroga's personal experiences.

Abnormal and animal psychology are two types of themes related to the death theme per se. Madness is a death substitute but the change from normality to insanity is hardly discernible. However, when that conversion is complete the result is generally death. The animal psyche is, in Quiroga's work, much like that of a human being but its scope of activities is restricted to the animal world and problems thereof. Invasion of this heretofore simple and instinctive realm by man is the cause of anxiety and generally death. Quiroga seems very much concerned with the wild creatures' right to live and, in accord with this belief, sets forth a universal law guaranteeing every living thing the
right to life. Life must not be taken for granted; it must be
preserved from an unnatural end. Vengeance, in agreement with
this principle, is acceptable and just in the author's eyes.

The 'law' and its validity extend to the area of human
relations. One man may not take or attempt to take life or its
equivalent from another. The inevitable punishment for such
abuse is death. Again, this capital punishment is just, so long
as it is carried out in agreement with the universal mandate.
The total effect of such treatment emphasizes the author's concern
for life in a world where death is a commonly accepted fate.

Man and beast alike are faced with an overwhelming fate
which favors neither. The power of this inscrutable force is
unconquerable and inexorable. Those living under its threat
may persist by observing certain inviolable laws but none may
prevail. There is an unfeeling power manifest in Nature.

When a human being reaches the threshold of death, there
are various reactions. Some cannot accept death and they refuse
to think of it. Instead their minds wander back into a more
acceptable past. Others, who have lost a close friend or relative,
likewise cannot cope with reality. They either invent a more
gratifying version of reality or, as before, retreat to a more
acceptable yesterday.

There are still others who do not break with reality. They
carry on a mental effort in realistic terms. Either they cannot
understand the indifference of their external surroundings to their
situation or they want to know exactly when they will die. This
type of exploration serves to substantiate the author's basic
belief about death. That is, a living being may be aware of death only in terms of his existence and any attempt to learn more is idle.

In fact, Quiroga proves that this is so when he writes of the living dead and of the deceased. Each time he directs his probing mind closer to death or non-being, he comes away with a very lifelike result which is unquestionably tied to life. The closest the author ever gets to non-being is when he portrays a character who has lost six years of consciousness to epilepsy.

Finally, Horacio Quiroga, a man who had a close acquaintance with death dramatically joined his many characters by committing suicide in the early hours of February nineteenth, 1937.
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