

## TEMA 57.

### La novela corta, el cuento y el ensayo actuales en Gran Bretaña: Selección de textos y análisis de una obra representativa.

#### THE ESSAY

An **essay** is a short work that treats a topic from an author's personal point of view, often taking into account subjective experiences and personal reflections upon them. Essays are usually brief works in prose, but works in verse are sometimes dubbed *essays* e.g. **Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* and *An Essay on Man*** .

Virtually anything may be the subject of an essay. Topics may include actual happenings, issues of human life, morality, ethics, religion and many others. An essay is, by definition, a work of non-fiction, and is often expository

The word *essay* derives from the French *essai* ('attempt'), from the verb *essayer*, 'to try' or 'to attempt'. The first author to describe his works as essays was, unsurprisingly, French: **Michel de Montaigne** (1533-1592). Montaigne began to compose his essays in 1572; the first edition, entitled *Essais*, was published in two volumes in 1580. For the rest of his life he continued revising previously published essays and composing new ones.

**Francis Bacon's** essays, published in book form in 1597, 1612, and 1625, were the **first works in English** that described themselves as *essays*.

Notable essayists include Virginia Woolf, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and George Orwell.

It is very difficult to define the genre of essay, but the following remarks by Aldous Huxley, regarded in his day as a leading practitioner of the genre, may be of interest: "*Like the novel, the essay is a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything.*"

By the 1920's Virginia Woolf was complaining that the art of essay writing was being lost and attributed this modernism - essays need an ordered, secure mind and in such convulsive times the essay was unsuited to the troubled minds of her contemporaries. **Modernism sunk the essay but propelled the novel and the short story**

#### **THE SHORT STORY**

A **short story** is a form of short fictional narrative prose. Short stories tend to be less complex and more concise and to the point than longer works of fiction, such as novellas (in the modern sense of this term) and novels. Because of their brevity, successful short stories rely on literary devices such as character, plot, theme, language, and insight to a greater extent than long

form fiction. Usually, a short story will focus on only one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a limited number of characters, and covers a short period of time.

Famous and/or influential modern English-language short story writers include Ernest Hemingway, by Edgar Allan Poe, "Bartleby the Scrivener" by Herman Melville, "The Dead" by James Joyce, "To Build A Fire" by Jack London, and "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner.

## Origins

Short stories date back to the oral story-telling traditions which produced such notable tales as Homer's the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

In Europe, the oral story-telling tradition began to transition into written stories in the early 14th century, most notably with Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Both of these books are composed of individual short stories (which range from farce or humorous anecdotes to well-crafted literary fictions) set within a larger narrative story (a frame story), although the frame tale device was not adopted by all writers.. During the Renaissance, the term novella was used when referring to short stories.

## Modern short stories

CHARLES DICKENS - *A Christmas Carol*

THOMAS HARDY - *The Three Strangers*

GEORGE ELIOT - *Scenes of Clerical Life*

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON – *New Arabian Nights*

Modern short stories emerged as their own genre in the early 19th century. Early examples of short story collections include the Brothers Grimm *Fairy Tales* (1824–1826), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* (1842), Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1836), and Guy de Maupassant's *La Maison Tellier* (1881). In the later part of the 19th century, the growth of print magazines and journals created a strong market demand for short fiction between 3,000 and 15,000 words in length.

In the first half of the 20th century, a number of high-profile magazines, such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*, all published short stories in each issue. The demand for quality short stories was so great, and the money paid for them so high, that F. Scott Fitzgerald repeatedly turned to short story writing to pay off his numerous debts.

The demand for short stories by print magazines hit its peak in the middle of the 20th century, when in 1952 *Life* magazine published Ernest Hemingway's long short story (or novella) *The Old Man and the Sea* (The issue containing this story sold 5,300,000 copies in only two days)

Since then, the number of commercial magazines that publish short stories has declined, even though several well-known magazines like *The New Yorker* continue to feature them.

Literary magazines also provide a showcase for short stories. In addition, short stories have recently found a new life online, where they can be found in online magazines, in collections organized by author or theme, and on blogs.

## TEXT - A HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10½ CHAPTERS

*A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is a semi-fictional literary work by Julian Barnes. The book is sometimes categorised as a novel, a collection of short stories or even a set of essays — the ambiguity arising from the unique renditions styles employed by Barnes at various places in the work.

The work deals primarily with Christian history and legends, but is neither ecclesiastical nor heretical. Nonetheless, it does attempt to satirise popular myths and legends in many places. **Every chapter is devoted to an individual or an entity, who is said to have witnessed or experienced a key event in the history of the world.** The reader often gets an alternate version of these events from this player — and the tone of this rendition is seldom as exalted as popular mythology. The work also at various points suggests a greater reality to the universe than normally perceived. It sketches the obsession of our thoughts and activities with legendary symbols. **One recurrent motif in the book is the portrayal of ships, shipwrecks and frigates.** This is an allusion to Noah's Ark — the subject of the first chapter — which plays a dominant role in the mythology of Abrahamic religions, and similar myths make an appearance in many others (e.g Hinduism) as a symbol of God's judgement of good and evil. The woodworm who speaks to the reader in the Chapter questions the wisdom of appointing Noah as God's representative. The woodworm is left out of the ark, just like the other "impure" or "insignificant" species; but a colony of woodworm manages to enter the ark as stowaways and thus to survive the Great Deluge.

The reader also comes across fictional explanations to modern mysteries - like that of the unicorn, which the woodworm alleges was killed by humans on the ark for its meat, and was forever lost to modern man. The woodworm puts in appearances throughout the book — either as a key player or as a casual reference. In the chapter where an inquisition is held against the woodworm, (a satirical reference to the Spanish inquisition) the woodworm is accused of precipitating the fall of a bishop from a chair whose wood was rendered weak by the woodworm's presence. The woodworm seems to represent nature or the lack of sophistication, towards which humans have displayed a conceited arrogance, often in the name of religion or culture.

The chapter *Shipwreck* is devoted to the analysis of Gericault's painting of the incident of The Raft of the Medusa. The first half narrates the incidents leading to the shipwreck and the survival of the crew members. The second half of the chapter renders a dark platonic and satirical analysis of the painting itself, and Gericault's "softening" the impact of crude reality in order to preserve the aestheticism of the work.

\* **Julian Patrick Barnes** (born in England in 1946) is a contemporary British writer whose novels and short stories have been seen as examples of postmodernism in literature. His most notable works include *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *England, England* (1998), and *Arthur & George* (2005).

## COMMON GROUND

### Postmodern literature

Postmodern literature argues for expansion, the return of reference, the celebration of fragmentation rather than the fear of it, and the role of reference itself in literature. While drawing on the experimental tendencies of authors such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner in English, and Jorge Luis Borges in Spanish - writers who were taken as influences by American postmodern authors such as Norman Mailer, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, and Paul Auster - the advocates of postmodern literature argue that the present is fundamentally different from the modern period, and therefore requires a new literary sensibility. The literature which arose as a series of styles and ideas in the post-World War II period which reacted against the perceived norms of modernist literature has been termed **postmodern literature**. It can also be described as a literature that keeps on going, from the World War II till the present literature. The style of narrative breaks from modernism, in its earlier form, with the idea of subconscious-mind-talk, a continuous conscience stream of narrative.

### Background: modernism and comparisons with postmodernism

Both modern and postmodern literature represent a break from 19th century realism, in which a story was told from an objective or omniscient point of view. In character development, both modern and postmodern literature explore subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness, in many cases drawing on modernist examples in the *stream of consciousness* styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. In addition, both modern and postmodern literature explore fragmentariness in narrative- and character-construction, reflective of the works of Swedish dramatist August Strindberg and the Italian author Luigi Pirandello.

Unlike postmodern literature, however, modernist literature saw fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis or a Freudian internal conflict. In postmodern literature this crisis is avoided. The tortured, isolated anti-heroes of, say, Knut Hamsun or Samuel Beckett, and the nightmare world of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, make way in postmodern writing for the self-consciously deconstructed and self-reflexive narrators of novels by Vladimir Nabokov, John Fowles, or Julian Barnes.

**Shift to postmodernism** - as with all stylistic eras, no definite dates exist for the rise and fall of postmodernism's popularity. The 1941 death of Irish novelist James Joyce, one of modernism's last and biggest giants, is sometimes used as a rough boundary for postmodernism's start.

Another common divide is the end of the second world war, which saw a critical assessment of human rights in the wake of the Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, The Holocaust, and Japanese American internment. It also coincides with the beginning of the Cold War, the American Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968) and the beginning of movements which worked towards: (a) the end of Colonialism, (b) the Partition of India, (c) the 1947 UN Partition Plan, and (d) the development of Postcolonial literature. Finally, it reflects the influence of the computer which garnered new importance during the war. During this time, computers became integrated within postmodern fiction often referred to as Cyberpunk

Literature of this era does not set itself against modern literature as much as it develops and extends the style, making it self-conscious and ironic. In such literature, one finds a shift in the role of the "inner narrative of the self," from the self at war with itself to the self as arbiter, pointing to the phenomenological roots of postmodern thought.