

A STUDY OF THE SHORT STORIES OF HORACIO QUIROGA

by

Hulda Henderson Widby

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A Thesis

submitted to the faculty of the

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Approved:

J. D. Fitz-Gerald  
Director of Thesis

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WILLIAM HENNINGSON WILBY

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## Introduction.

While Spanish America has produced vast numbers of poets and many novelists, some of whom rightly have a place in world literature, it has given us a remarkably small number of short story writers. Of the latter it is generally considered that Horacio Quiroga, a Uruguayan who lived most of his life in Argentina, is the greatest.<sup>1</sup> Quiroga's death in 1937 evoked a re-evaluation of his work which corroborated this opinion.<sup>2</sup>

The content of some of Quiroga's stories and the circumstances of his death have led certain critics to believe that he was mentally deranged.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this study is two-fold: First, to determine the distinguishing elements of Quiroga's genius as a story-teller. Second, to decide, from the internal evidence of the stories, whether or not he was insane.

## I. Horacio Quiroga's Life.<sup>4</sup>

On December 31, 1879, don Prudencio Quiroga and doña Pastora Forteza de Quiroga, his wife, became the parents of a son whom they named Horacio. This happy event, which gave to the region of the Plata its most eminent writer of short stories, took place in the town of El Salto, El Uruguay. The town was a beautiful setting, located, as it is, on the left bank of the broad river that gives the country its name, with sleepy streets that smell of orange blossoms. Don Prudencio died when Horacio was only six months old, but since the father, in addition to being Argentine consul, had owned a prosperous business in the place, the family remained established in El Salto.

The young Quiroga's childhood and youth were happy and unvexed. Free, as he was, of paternal guidance, he soon displayed the independence of character and impatience of restraint that marked his life to the end, perhaps dictated that end. Soon after the death of his step-father, which took place in 1892, he and his brother Prudencio, set up an independent establishment in a house that belonged to the family. This bachelor establishment became the center of the jeunesse dorée of the town. The Quiroga brothers and their friends engaged in a series of jokes, practical and otherwise, that

left neighbors gasping, or sneezing, as in one case was reported. In a certain home a dance was held, attended by the socially élite. This fiesta ended unexpectedly in a sneezing polka when the dancers pounded the sneezing powder from the rugs. The culprits were not found, but the finger of suspicion pointed strongly at the Quiroga brothers. Enough incidents are reported to show that these two never let the days become monotonous for their neighbors.<sup>5</sup>

Quiroga's earliest education was by private tutors. For brief periods he attended the Instituto Universal in Montevideo and afterwards attended courses in the Instituto Politécnico of El Salto. This latter work was irregular in its nature, since he was financially independent and soon abandoned all idea of preparing for a university course. It is to this period of youthful exuberance, desultory schooling and voracious reading of the French and North-American Moderns (Mallarmé, Gautier, Verlaine, Whitman, Poe)<sup>6</sup> that Quiroga's first literary work belongs. He wrote graceful verses in young ladies' albums and modernist verses and essays for the newspapers of El Salto. In 1900 he founded a literary review called La Revista del Salto with the purpose of propagating the ideals of the modernist school.<sup>7</sup>

After a brief stay in Córdoba, Quiroga went to Montevideo and soon won a secure place for himself in the literary circles of the city. This place was firmly established when

his story of Cuento sin razón, pero cansado<sup>8</sup> won a prize in a contest sponsored by La Alborada. In the following year Quiroga published Los arrecifes de coral, his first book and the first book of modernist verse and sketches to appear in Montevideo.<sup>9</sup> During these years Horacio belonged to two different literary groups with Bohemian tendencies. One, La Torre de los Panoramas, had Herrera y Reissig as its leading spirit; the other, El Consistorio del Gay Saber, was headed by Quiroga and his intimate friend Federico Ferrando. This latter group had a strange and sudden ending. While Horacio was showing his friend Federico a gun that he had recently purchased, something went wrong, the gun exploded. Result, Federico Ferrando died. Horacio was absolved from any guilt.

Even at this early age, Quiroga had an intimate acquaintance with death, and death in violent forms. His father, don Prudencio Quiroga, died of a gunshot wound received while hunting. According to some accounts the wound was accidental, according to others it was self-inflicted. Altogether, the former view seems probable, since the father was a prosperous man, a happy man, and a respected man. Of course Quiroga could have no recollection of this tragic event, but, when he was thirteen his step-father, the only father he had ever known, committed suicide. A few years later, Prudencio Quiroga, Horacio Quiroga's elder brother, killed himself.

After the shock of his friend's death, Quiroga found it impossible to remain in Montevideo and paid a visit to Paris,

where he spent several months plunging himself into the gay life of the artistic capital of the Latin world.

1903 found Quiroga back in America, this time in Buenos Aires -- he never thereafter visited Montevideo, unless forced to do so, and then for no longer than a day or two. In this year he visited Misiones as a member of an official expedition headed by Leopoldo Lugones. This was his first contact with the powerful attraction of the tropical region, which was to provide the rich and varied inspiration for his most famous stories.

Like most intellectuals of the time, Quiroga was a liberal in politics and was active in support of the government during the Civil War of 1904. Following this short disturbance, he went to the Chaco and made abortive efforts at growing cotton and maté. This period saw the publication of El crimen del otro and Los perseguidos.

After his Chaco adventure, Quiroga returned to Buenos Aires and for a while taught in a normal institute for girls. Among his students was his first wife. They were married in 1908 and in the same year Historia de un amor turbio was published.

In 1909 Quiroga secured an appointment as justice of the peace in San Ignacio, a village of Misiones located on the very edge of the virgin jungle. Here our author lived quietly for years, studying the jungle, absorbing its atmosphere and writing about it. Death still dogged his steps, for his

wife, distracted by the solitude of Misiones, killed herself in his presence. In 1917, after a silence of almost ten years, Quiroga published Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte. The years of observation, contemplation, and writing flowered rapidly in El salvaje, Cuentos de la selva (para niños), Anaconda, Sacrificadas.

In 1924 Quiroga was appointed to a position in the Uruguayan consulate in Buenos Aires. He established himself in a suburb, Vicente López, and in his home there entertained on Sunday mornings the members of "Anaconda", an informal group composed of his literary friends and admirers. Since his work in the consulate was light, he was able to write for periodicals in Buenos Aires, and to complete and publish El desierto, Los desterrados and Pasado amor. Of this stay in Buenos Aires, Enrique Espinosa relates a humorous incident. It shows that Quiroga must have looked somewhat Jewish. The little story is entitled Don Horacio Quiroga, mi padre. At this time, Espinosa was a frequent visitor of Quiroga, and the two friends appeared frequently on the streets, going to the same entertainments. A Jewish jeweler, noted the two pass together for a month or so. Then for some reason Espinosa discontinued his visits for some time. When he did return, Quiroga had a letter, sent to him through the clerk of the jeweler. The note was written in Yiddish. When translated, it revealed that the Jew had a daughter whom he wished to marry to Quiroga's son, meaning Espinosa. To the

jeweler, both young people had apparently been educated in Jewish ways. "I am able to assure you, dear sir, that they would be in a family home, a Jewish home of the ancient kind, like that of your sainted ancestors. And if God, we and our children wish, all will be well, and we will dance together soon as parents." The letter was signed Hersh Dabin.<sup>10</sup>

During this time, Quiroga met a lovely woman who filled his need for companionship, and he married again. But even this late romantic adventure was doomed, since the newly formed companionship was suddenly terminated when the lady died of fulminating meningitis. Once more Quiroga was forced to stand alone.

In 1930 Quiroga returned to Misiones. Four years later his last book, Más allá, appeared. He arranged this production without hurry. He seems to have been living alone in the vast surroundings that no longer entertained him. While he was again in Buenos Aires preparing for another return to Misiones, he committed suicide, February 19, 1937. It is believed that this act was dictated by the discovery that he was suffering from an incurable disease, and enduring great physical pain, which would have made life in Misiones a torture, if not an impossibility.

## II. Quiroga's Works.

Quiroga was not a facile nor a prolific writer. He published only after long and leisurely observation, contemplation and study. He rewrote and revised his work with great care in order to attain the economy and vigor of expression which is such a marked quality thereof. Considering this, it is natural that the bulk of his work is not large. More than thirty-five years of continuous and rather intense literary activity produced only some dozen published volumes. It is true that he did some journalistic work, but this was desultory, done without interest and at irregular and widely separated intervals. He essayed various literary forms, verse in his youth, twice the novel with but scant success, the drama once; but fortunately he concentrated his efforts on the form of which he became a consummate master -- the short story.

In order that the casual reader may have before him, when he considers Quiroga's stories, a picture of the writer's whole literary production, a list of his works is appended. Since this study is concerned chiefly with the stories, some description of the other works is given.

Cuento sin razón, pero cansado, (1900). Prize winning story in a contest sponsored by La Alborada. It was later

included in Los arrecifes de coral. This story describes the repulsion which grows out of an adulterous and purely carnal love affair. The lover strangles his mistress, who is the wife of his most intimate friend. The husband infers what has happened, makes no reproaches, only asks: "Did she struggle much?" "Yes, a great deal."<sup>11</sup> is the answer; and the end of the story.

Modernist influence is clearly discernible in the story, in the striving for suggestion rather than plain statement, the use of color and light effects, and the use of unusual words that express fine shades of thought.

Los arrecifes de coral, (1901). This is a collection of verses, sketches, and stories in the Modernist manner, the fruit of Quiroga's association with the "Consistorio del Gay Saber", most of which had been published in reviews and newspapers of Buenos Aires and Montevideo. The new qualities which can be noted are: a complete abandonment of traditional forms for new ones inspired, in the main, by the French symbolists and decadents; a vocabulary enriched by words and expressions drawn from the arts, the sciences, and even from other languages, and which sought to express almost imperceptible shades of meaning; the use of symbolism and suggestion, some of it veiled and obscure; the symbolic use of color and effects of light and shade to suggest moods and emotions; the figurative use of adjectives. One notices especially the search for subject matter that is rare and unusual. This is,

of course, a characteristic common to the Modernists, but with Quiroga it evolved into a fixed interest -- some say an obsession<sup>12</sup>-- which lasted throughout his life. An eminent critic calls the collection a "Byzantine mosaic"<sup>13</sup>, using a term that was often applied to Rubén Darío. It is interesting to note that this was the first book of Modernist tendencies to be published in Montevideo and that its appearance created a considerable uproar among the conventional critics.<sup>14</sup>

El crimen del otro, (1904). A collection of stories dealing with abnormalities of human behavior and written under the influence of Edgar Allen Poe. The two best known are directly inspired by stories of Poe; El crimen del otro by The Cask of Amontillado, and La historia de Estilicón by The Murders in the Rue Morgue.

Los perseguidos, (1905). A short novel or novelette which is in reality a psychological study of paranoic delusions of persecution. Some editions contain other stories.

Historia de un amor turbio, (1908). A novel which presents a detailed study of jealousy and its destructive effect upon love. The story is better handled than the Rea Silvia, yet the author exaggerates the analysis without other effect than prolonging it unnecessarily.

Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte, (1917). A collection of short stories whose nature is fairly adequately indicated by the title. They deal with cases of abnormal psychology and with animals. The first stories with the

Misiones setting, appear in this collection.

El salvaje, (1920). A collection of stories. The scene is Misiones, the human characters behave extravagantly or madly.

Cuentos de la selva (para niños), (1921). Animal fables for children.<sup>15</sup>

Anaconda, (1923). Contains more jungle stories. The title story is the author's most famous.

Las sacrificadas (poema escénico), (1923). A dramatic adaptation of Una estación de amor, one of the stories in Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte. The protagonist re-encounters the sweetheart whom his youth had idealized and destroys the ideal which he has held, with a physical climax which is bitter to both.

El desierto, (1924). Stories in which animal characters predominate.

La gallina degollada, (1925). Made up of stories already published in previous collections, with the exception of the title story and El perro rabioso.

Los desterrados, (1926). This collection is devoted entirely to Misiones. It is divided into two parts: "El ambiente" and "Los tipos". "El ambiente", which is designed to give the essence and feeling of the locale, contains El regreso de Anaconda.<sup>16</sup> "Los tipos" contains sketches of the strange and unusual men who drift into the frontier territory of Misiones, never to leave it.

Pasado amor, (1929). A novel which many consider to be Quiroga's weakest work.<sup>17</sup> The plot is based on a love triangle. A young widower is madly in love with an insipid girl who finally rejects him, at her mother's insistence, because he is an atheist. Another woman, who has silently and hopelessly loved the hero, commits suicide, and so conveniently eliminates herself.

Más allá, (1934). A collection of stories dealing with abnormalities of the human mind. Obsessions of one sort or another predominate.

### III. Quiroga's Stories.<sup>18</sup>

#### A. Material.

Almost without exception Quiroga's stories are based on material that is rare, unusual, exotic. This choice of material is of great significance in regard both to the stories and to their writer. It determines the nature and atmosphere of the stories and is the common element which runs through all of the author's work from his earliest stories in Los arrecifes de coral to those in Más allá, characterizing and identifying them. Its significance in regard to the author's personality will be discussed in the following chapter.

Quiroga's search for the exotic and striking first led him into the shadowy fields of abnormal psychology. The result was a series of stories dealing with abnormal or eccentric human behavior, which cover almost the whole range of mental aberrations. Some types of abnormality that appear in the best known stories, and that can even be said to be studied in them are: the power of suggestion on four idiots who slit their sister's throat after seeing the cook kill a hen in this way, in La gallina degollada; auditory hallucination and obsession that cause a mother to take such excessive precautions in order to protect her daughter's life that she helps to bring about her death, in El llamado;

amnesia which produced new intellectual powers, lost when the subject recovered his memory, in Su ausencia; delusion brought on by great and prolonged anxiety which causes a father to believe his son, who in reality has been killed in an accident, still lives, in El hijo; madness that results in murder brought about by emotional strain, in Cuento sin razón, pero cansado, La mancha hiptálmica and El solitario; necrophilia in which the subject explains his ghoulish activities by saying he has been seeking his wife, in El vampiro<sup>19</sup>; insanity of a railroad engineer who, after he has been stricken with insanity, succeeds in saving his train through professional automatism, in El conductor del rápido; drug addiction in El infierno artificial. These stories are characteristic and indicate to what a degree the mysterious and abnormal in psychology and in nature also (as we shall see later) attracted Quiroga.

His curiosity to penetrate and dissect unusual psychological states was also satisfied in stories concerning cases less morbid than those we have cited, all of which deal with unvarnished insanity.

Picturesque figures and eccentricities furnish the material for a striking gallery of figures that appear in the collections Los desterrados and El desierto. Among these men<sup>20</sup> who have fled an unconquered or unsympathetic civilization to find refuge on the frontier is:

John Brown, eminent engineer. He came to Misiones to

spend a few hours viewing the ruins of Iviraromí; and settled down for life because it was too much trouble to go anywhere else. Evening invariably found him in the village bar playing cards, arguing and drinking with his friend Rivet the chemist. The latter "went out like a lamp, too full of wood alcohol"<sup>21</sup>, which he had imbibed in the course of a drunken argument with Brown. The latter demonstrated his greater toughness, since he lived to drink another day.

Others of the "desterrados" react to ordinary situations in the most extraordinary ways. -- The cultured creole bandit<sup>22</sup> Sidney Fitz Patrick had "such a free and easy attitude toward human life that he tried out his Winchesters on the first passer-by"<sup>23</sup>. -- Joao Pedro, proscribed general, arrived from Argentina at the head of an army of ten men. The ranch owner who hired him tried to pay him with revolver shots, as he did his other workers, but Joao Pedro "removed him from the scene"<sup>24</sup>, to use his own words. -- Joao Pedro's friend, Tira-fogo, was a horse breaker, a champion with the machete, who worked only in the hours of burning sun which everyone else avoided. Though he drank more than three ordinary men he always slipped through the fingers of the police who were seeking him. These two old men, they were over eighty, died of exhaustion in the forest while they were attempting to reach the land of their birth. -- Van Houten, a Belgian of phenomenal strength, battered by a life of hardship and accident, lacking one eye and one ear, lived through all mishaps, only

to drown in the Paraná after he had drowned himself in rum. -- Subercassaux devoted his life to the care of his motherless children, until the implacable forest killed him too, and they were left completely abandoned. -- Malaquías Sotelo a miserly, distrusting Indian, village justice of the peace, loses his money in the city and dies of an attack of asthma on his return home. His corpse presents a horrible appearance which sickens the photographer who photographs it, and horrifies his children who are forced to kiss it. -- The peon Olivera, the strangest workman who ever worked in Misiones. He is a dandy, temperamental in regard to his work, pays no attention to the traditions of the region or what others think of him. The boots of which he was vain are instrumental in his death: he is hanged by the heel in the fork of a tree. -- Doctor Else who once organized the hospitals of a neighboring republic. He now seeks in rum release from reality. A nameless one-armed man, who devotes his boundless energies to fruitless experimentations on development of the industrial possibilities of the region, takes up the distillation of orange brandy. Else helps him with advice in regard to fermentation but ruins the experiment when he drinks up the product of the still as fast as it is produced. The delirium tremens, which results from this scientific venture, "causes him to confuse his daughter with a rat"<sup>25</sup> and he kills her with a stick of wood.

Still within the range of stories with a predominantly psychological interest are several in which the thoughts and emotions of dying men are analyzed. Las moscas describes the death of a man who has broken his back while alone in the forest. El hombre muerto gives an account of the last moments of a man who has fallen on his machete. A la deriva, one of the author's most impressive stories, tells of the last hours of a man who has been bitten by a snake and starts rowing down the river to get help. He collapses pleasantly before he reaches it.

Accompanying the stories which have been mentioned and which are very serious and often very detailed psychological studies are a number of stories which are based on spiritism and weird supernaturalism. These stories seem to be the result of the writer's imagination unrestrained by the bounds of science and reality which he usually placed upon it. Among the stories of this type one notices especially Más allá in which lovers who have committed suicide continue a conscious existence as though nothing had happened; El vampiro<sup>26</sup>, in which mysterious rays (known as  $N^1$  rays) give substance to the motion picture projection of a woman and enable her to kill the experimenter who has been using them; El canto del cisne in which the swan does not sing but speaks, avowing his love for a human being; El espectro and El puritano in both of which motion pictures of a dead person take on

for his associates something of his real and actual personality and in so doing bring about suicides. The title story of El salvaje which is divided into two parts is a weird scientific reconstruction of the prehistoric past. The first part tells of a man who has atavistic dreams of wandering about the basin of Paraná in company with a dinosaur. It finally attacks him and he kills it. The second part tells of a "tertiary family" which learns to shelter itself from the elements and the wild beasts in caves, and that raw meat constitutes a better food than roots and fruits.

One sees then a well defined group of Quiroga's stories based on abnormalities of human behavior -- insanity, eccentricity, and the supernatural. It is of special interest that death occurs in many, even in most, of them. This death is often suicidal. In the main, it comes quietly and inevitably because of the illusion of reality which the story teller's skill has built up. However, at times it is pathetic and moving as in the case of Anaconda in El regreso de

Anaconda, of Joao Pedro in Los desterrados, of Subercassaux in El desierto; grotesque at others, as in that of Van Houten in the story of the same name, of Olivares in El peón; shocking and brutal as that of Korner in La bofetada and of Podoley in Los mensú. It is always striking and produces a strong emotional effect in the reader either because of its casual introduction or, in some few notable instances, of the realism of detail. Since the latter sort of death is rare in

Quiroga's work an example may not be amiss. In describing the death of Malaquías Sotelo, Quiroga says:<sup>27</sup>

"I found our justice of the peace lying on a cot in one of the rooms, fully dressed, but without his coat. He was half sitting up with his shirt open and the collar unbuttoned in front although still fastened behind. He was breathing as an asthmatic person breathes in a violent attack -- which is not pleasant to behold. When he saw me he moved his head on the pillow, lifted one arm which moved aimlessly, and afterwards the other which rose convulsively to his mouth.

"Aside from his features, from the unfathomable sunkenness of his eyes, and from the brownish sharpness of his nose, one thing above all attracted my glance: his hands half showing out of his cuffs, fleshless and blue fingernailed; the fingers livid and close-joined, commencing to pluck at the sheets.

"I looked at him more attentively and then saw, I realized clearly, that the judge's seconds were numbered: that he was dying: that he was dying at that very moment. Standing motionless at the foot of the cot, I saw him feel at something on the sheets and then dig in his fingernails as though he did not find it. I saw him open his mouth, slowly move his head, and fix his eyes in astonishment on one side of the roof and there detain his gaze fixed forever on the zinc roof.....My excited nerves were saturated with that half-open mouth blacker towards the back than death itself, with the fallen jaw which left a finger's breadth between the teeth, with the opaque glassy eyes under the eyelashes which seemed gluey and swollen, with all the horror of that brutal caricature of a man."

In 1903 Quiroga visited the Territory of Misiones, a sparsely populated tropical jungle region lying between the Uruguay and Alto Paraná Rivers, in the north-eastern corner of the Argentine Republic. This region exerted on him an immediate and powerful attraction, which lasted as long as he lived and caused him to live in it for extended periods of time. He became permanently enthusiastic over San Igna-

cio, not because of its picturesque past and associations with the Jesuit founders, but because of its vivid beauty and its promise for the future. In this village, where he was justice of the peace, Quiroga lived quietly observing and studying the three immensities of nature: the forest, the river, the sky, and their inhabitants human and animal. He absorbed the atmosphere and feeling of the burning tropical nature of Misiones so completely that no one has succeeded as did he in interpreting its varying aspects and moods. The stories that were inspired by life in the jungle comprise the second great division of Quiroga's work. These jungle stories include his most individual and best stories, the ones on which his fame will rest, notably Anaconda. The author himself liked them the best of all his work, at one time writing to a friend, "The thing of which I am proudest is my expeditions in the forest where I had to take care of myself. And so the stories about the forest are the ones I like best."<sup>28</sup> They picture the tropics which they present as inimical towards man, who is forced to struggle ceaselessly in order to preserve his life. The forest is implacable, death lurks behind every tree, under every leaf, and often seizes upon him. Many of the jungle stories have as characters its wild inhabitants, animals, birds, reptiles, insects. In some of them they are the main characters. Of all the jungle dwellers the snake most intrigued Quiroga. He wrote of snakes of all kinds, conditions and sizes, from the vir-

tuous, even noble Anaconda, who was thirty meters long, to vicious little fellows no bigger than a lead pencil. This special interest in the snake, man's enemy, is accompanied by an interest in man's friend, the dog. Dogs appear in many stories; in Yaguaí and in La insolación they are the main point of interest. A particular group of nature stories is found in Cuentos de la selva. These were written for the author's own children. They are moralizing fables; each one teaches some virtue such as industry, co-operation, kindness towards one's fellows.

Quiroga's interest in animals is also remarked in Los reyes. This sketch, it can hardly be called a story, gives the life history of six elephants, who have escaped from man-made hazards or tortures, and sets forth their ideas in regard to man.

Several stories and sketches have as the main point of interest phenomena of weather; extreme heat in El simún; torrential rainfall and great heat in La gloria tropical; unusual cold in Los fabricantes de carbón. Quiroga's interest in the unusual and striking persists. When he writes of the weather he must have extremes enough to threaten the life of man, burning heat, piercing cold, rain in floods. This is true of his treatment of the weather in all the Misiones stories, but it stands out especially plainly in the stories named.

One is rather surprised to find a small group of stories

of religious inspiration among Quiroga's works. Navidad, Pasión, Corpus Cristi take up incidents in the life of Christ in rather conventional fashion. They are most notable for their glorification of charity, tolerance, and forgiveness.

A few of the stories, and they are pleasing exceptions to the atmosphere of death and destruction, doom and disaster given off by the others, are purely humorous. Cuento para novios tells how a young man cheerfully resigned himself to single bliss when he experienced the nocturnal bawlings of a friend's infant child. Dieta de amor warns against falling in love with the daughter of a dietitian. El mármol inútil gives an account of an artist's incapacity for business. In El alambre de púa, some cows slyly tease a couple of horses because they are not so brave and enterprising as the bull Barigüí, who does whatever he wants to do.

One of Quiroga's journalistic activities gave the material for a group of stories that are colored also by interest in the supernatural. For some years he wrote motion picture reviews for Caras y Caretas<sup>29</sup> of Buenos Aires. His pursuit of the bizarre led him to toy with the idea that something of the actor's essence and life force goes into his pictures and that this projected personality has an existence aside from the actor's real life, that it can grow and act independently. In El puritano this independent pictured life called so strongly from an actress beloved after her suicide that, even

though the hero of the picture rejected her love in life, he too committed suicide in order to join her in death. In El vampiro<sup>30</sup> experiments with photography and strange rays known as "Rayos N<sup>1</sup>" give life to the pictures of a girl. This artificially created being turns out to be a vampire and destroys her creator. Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa is less gruesome. It shows us a young Argentine who falls madly in love with a film star though he knows her only from her pictures. He travels to Hollywood, meets her and introduces himself as a South American millionaire. His deception is discovered, but Miss Phillips has fallen in love with him. There are some imaginative pictures of life in the screen colony. It is interesting to note that Arizona is mentioned -- as the place where Lon Chaney was bitten by a rattlesnake. This qualification is repeated so frequently that it gives the impression that the rattlesnake is the most prominent feature of Arizona's fauna.

One of the dominant qualities of the stories is the wealth of scientific knowledge displayed in them.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the earliest stories are the work of phantasy and imagination and intuitive psychological analysis. The later ones are based not only on study of life but on study of science, a study that produced a solid scientific foundation. For instance, when in Anaconda, the vipers who attend the congress of the snakes are described, thorough knowledge of their classification and habits is displayed.<sup>32</sup>

"It was there, consequently, where, in view of the imminence of the danger and presided over by the rattlesnake, the Congress of Vipers met. There were there, besides Lanceolada and Terrífica, the other yararas of the country: the little Coatiarita, Benjamin of the Family, with the reddish line of his sides and his particularly sharp head very evident. There negligently stretched out, as if it were a matter of anything except displaying for admiration the white and coffee-colored curves of its back against bands of salmon, lay the slender Neuwied, a model of beauty and who had preserved for itself the name of the scientist who had determined its species. There was Cruzada, whom in the south they called the snake of the cross, a rival of Neuwied in point of beauty of marking. There was Atrocious, with her sufficiently threatening name, and lastly, Golden Urutu, discretely hiding in the depths of the cavern her hundred and seventy centimeters of black velvet crossed obliquely with bands of gold.

"It is to be noted that the species of the formidable genus Lachesis, or yararás, to which all the members of the Congress except Terrífica belonged, maintain an old rivalry over beauty of marking and of color. Few beings, in truth, are so well endowed as they."

The foregoing illustration shows the wealth of detail used. Other examples will be given in subsequent sections of this chapter.

We observe then that Quiroga's stories have a single persistent and dominant quality which runs through them all: his taste for the rare, exotic, strange, mysterious. There is no anomaly in the author's abandonment of material dealing with human abnormalities for material he gathered during his life in Misiones. He wrote of nature, but of a strange nature entirely foreign to the scenes of his youth. This is unlike many writers who began as modernists, Leopoldo Lugones, for example. The latter also abandoned the modernist

manner to write of nature directly observed, but he described the placid fields of wheat and flax. Quiroga's love for the rare persisted, at least in choice of subject matter, to the end of his life.

#### B. The Plots.

The plots of the stories are almost without exception very simple and lack all complication and intrigue. The plots of many of them might be condensed into a single sentence. For example, all that happens in La miel silvestre is that a city man, alone in the forest, consumes some combs of wild honey, is paralyzed by it, and, while in that condition, is eaten by ants. In Los inmigrantes a German couple is walking to their new home in the American forest; the wife gives birth to a child in the wilds, dies. Her husband wishes to bury her in hallowed ground; carries her body on his back until he is overcome. Los pescadores de vigas reduced to its simplest terms is simply the story of a man who wanted to buy a phonograph and in order to get it risked his life fishing rosewood logs out of the river. In this last mentioned story there is a great deal more than the narration of this incident, but this additional material is merely setting a background for which the incident is only an excuse. It might be made, with the excision of a few sentences, a description of the Parana River in flood. On the whole then, attention is focused on a single in-

cident. At times, however, the main interest is centered on some trait or traits of character in an individual. In stories of this kind the reader is given glimpses of the main character at intervals of varying lengths. Thus, in Tacuara-Mansión we are told that John Brown, central figure of the sketch -- it is really too loosely bound together to be called a short story -- came to Iviraromí to spend a couple of hours, but never left. Then his figure and residence are described. Anecdotes are given to show his brevity of speech, his devotion to card playing and to alcohol. The death of his friend Rivet is detailed and we are also told how Brown calculated the amount of lumber that Rivet's coffin would require. Finally, we come to know that when the first piano was brought to Misiones, it was discovered that Brown was a splendid player on that instrument. The anecdotes concerning Brown cover a period of thirty years. A less extreme example of this sort of story is El yaciyateré. The author visits the hut of some natives of the region. In it a child is apparently dying of fever. The parents pay no attention to suggestions for treatment, saying that its condition is due to having heard the song of the yaciyateré, a thing that brings death or insanity to children. Four years later the author revisits the place. He finds the child thin legged, big bellied, driveling, idiotic. It might be remarked in passing that this is Quiroga's only venture into the field of folk lore. Though the story is mysterious and vague, he seems

less credulous in regard to popular belief in the feared bird than in regard to the possibilities of his own *Rayos N° 1*. In a few instances the main interest of a story is focused on some detail of setting, with a negligible narrative content. This is the case with El simún, and La gloria tropical which describe extremes of weather. The effect is weak. They seem like strange fact items packed into the back pages of newspapers.

Anaconda is Quiroga's best known story and also displays as much complexity of plot as any of his stories that deal with human characters. A brief resumé of its plot follows:

Lanceolada, a viper indigenous to Misiones, discovers that man has invaded the region and established himself in the abandoned house. She reports this threat, (man is the enemy of the jungle, of all its inhabitants, especially of snakes,) to the other vipers, her cousins. They hold a congress and discuss the matter. They agree to send *Nacaná*, a boa of some small kind, to explore. This she can do with great ease as she is a swifter traveler and a better climber than the vipers and is not so hated by man. She enters the house, fearing only that the dog will betray her, and hides on a beam over the living room table. There she learns from the men's conversation what is afoot. They are establishing an institute of ophidian serotherapy for the purpose of producing anti-venom serum. They already have in the pens of the snake farm a number of snakes, also a horse

and a mule from which the serum is drawn and which are immunized. They plan to proceed rapidly with the collecting of venomous snakes and express pleasure at the latter's abundance. Ñacaní is so surprised she falls from her perch, but escapes. She reports to the vipers what she has learned and they are much incensed over the projected affront to their snakely dignity. There is some discussion of the steps to be taken. Ñacaní suggests that the snakes might retreat to the other side of the river. This idea is received with scorn by the vipers, who are all belligerent, stupid, and jealous of their constrictor cousins. The rivalry that exists between venomous and constricting snakes is expounded. In general, the venomous snakes are vain, irritable, and stupid, while the constrictors are generous, peaceful, and intelligent. The congress decides to fight man, and Ñacaní returns after they have decided to hold a full congress of all snakes the following night.

Cruzada with characteristic viperine venom decides that she will not wait for her sisters, but will attack on her own. She goes to the house, is surprised by the dog, and bites it on the nose. Her jubilation is cut short when she is captured by the director of the Institute and placed in the pens. She talks to the other captive vipers, then notices one especially large snake in a private pen and approaches. They converse: 33.

"Who are you?" asked Cruzada. "Do you belong to us?" That is to say venomous.

The other, convinced that there had been no intent to attack on the yarara's approach, deflated her two great ears. "Yes," she replied. "But not from here...from very far away...from India."

"What's your name?"

"Hamadrias...or Royal Cobra."

"I am Cruzada."

"Yes, you dont need to say so. I've already seen many of your sisters. When did they catch you?"

"A little while ago. I couldn't make a kill."

"It would have been better for you if they had killed you."

"But I killed the dog."

"What dog? The one they have here?"

"Yes."

The Royal Cobra began to laugh, and at the same time Cruzada got a shock. The woolly dog that she thought she had killed was barking.

"It surprises you, eh?" added Hamadrias. "The same thing has happened to many."

"But I bit it on the head," answered Cruzada, more and more disturbed. "I haven't a drop of venom left," she added, since it is characteristic of the yararas almost to empty their glands in a single bite.

"It makes no difference to him whether you emptied yourself or not."

"Can't it be killed?"

"Yes, but not by us. It is immunized. But you dont know what that is."

"I do know," answered Cruzada quickly. "Nacarina told us."

The Royal Cobra then looked at her attentively. "You seem intelligent to me."

"As much so as you, at least," replied Cruzada.

The neck of the Asiatic again expanded, and again the yarara fell on guard. Both vipers looked at each other for a long time, and the cobra's hood fell slowly.

"Intelligent and brave," murmured Hamadrias.

"It seems to me that I can talk to you. Do you know the name of my species?"

"Hamadrias, I suppose."

"Or Najus Bungarus, or Royal Cobra. We are in regard to the common cobras of India the same as you in regard to one of these coatiaritas. And do you know what we eat?"

"No."

"American vipers, among other things," she

ended, swaying her head toward Cruzada.

The latter rapidly estimated the size of the foreign cannibal. "Two meters fifty?" she asked.

"Sixty, two sixty, little Cruzada," replied the other, who had followed her eyes.

"It's a good size...more or less the length of Anaconda, a cousin of mine. Do you know what she eats?"

"I suppose..."

"Yes, Asiatic vipers."

The cobra this early displays her irritable, even ferocious, temper. However, she is impressed by Cruzada's spirit and invites her to join in a plot to escape. Cruzada agrees, and approaches the wire netting of the private pen so closely that Cobra is able to bite her. Cruzada is paralyzed and thrown out as dead. Later, when the director is removing Cobra's venom, Cruzada crawls up and bites the peon who is holding Cobra. He loosens his grasp on her neck, and she is able to twist her tail around the leg of a table and bite the Director. In the confusion the two snakes escape. The Director dies.

The plenary session of the snakes' congress is now pictured. The boas are represented by several species.<sup>34</sup>

One was missing in addition to Cruzada; but the vipers pretended not to notice it. In spite of all this, they were compelled to turn when they saw rising from among the ferns a head with great luminous eyes.

"May I come in?" asked the visitor gaily.

Some of the vipers jealously wish to exclude her but are reminded by the rattlesnake, who presides by virtue of the profusion of her species, that the laws of the congress give

her the right to be present. The nobility and intelligence of Anaconda cause her to overlook spiteful remarks of the vipers. Cruzada arrives, bringing with her Cobra. The latter adopts an arrogant attitude, quarrels with Ñacaná. Plans of action are discussed. Ñacaná wishes to attack the men's dog as the most menacing element at the snake farm, while Cobra advocates attacking the horse and mule, since it is for them that the venom is collected. Anaconda's tranquil and superior manner so enrage Cobra that she attacks Anaconda and is restrained only by members of the congress, who insist that private quarrels be laid aside during the campaign. Because of the success of her plot for escape, Anaconda's plan is adopted.

The snakes attack the horse and the mule in their stable. They are easily routed by the men with lanterns, canes, and their invulnerable dog. The only result is that the bites inflicted save the lives of the animals, who have had no injection of venom for several days and are dying for the want of it. Cobra, one of the last to flee, hears the men say this, and knows that all is lost. Her malignancy leads her to keep it secret, and when Ñacaná and Anaconda urge the fleeing snakes to disburse and seek shelter individually, she persuades them to take refuge in the cavern of the congress. Anaconda realizes that the slaughter of the snakes is inevitable, and, knowing that the laws of the congress

are abolished, decides to kill Cobra before she herself dies. A masterly account of the fight is given. In its economy and rapidity it is superb. It ends in these rapid paragraphs:<sup>35</sup>

Little by little, sure of the terrible embrace with which she held her rival motionless, Anaconda's head ascended along her rival's neck, with brief, hard bites, while the cobra madly thrashed its head about. Anaconda's ninety-six sharp teeth climbed ever up: they reached the hood, they climbed, they came to the throat, they went higher still, until at last they fastened on her enemy's head, with a long, dull crunching of chewed bones.

It was all over. The boa opened her rings, and the massive body of the royal cobra slipped heavily to the ground, dead.

"At least I die content", murmured Anaconda, falling senseless in her turn upon the body of the Asiatic.

The men come up to kill all the snakes who have taken refuge in the cavern -- in this process the dog, Daboy, is somewhat bothered by seventy-four bites, despite his immunization. They find the body of Cobra, and, deducing what Anaconda has done, carry her home and nurse her back to health. She lives with them a year, observing everything, friendly and in freedom. At last she feels the call of her native rivers and leaves for them. El regreso de Anaconda is foretold in the final paragraph.

The comparative complexity of this story, with its plots, intrigue, multiplicity of incident, is easily seen, even in the brief sketch of its content that has been given.

However, this is the exception rather than the rule. The plots are almost always simple, and concentrate on some single incident or on some single trait of character.

### C. The Setting.

The setting, in stories which are not laid in Misiones, is of very little importance. It is simply the city, the street, the house, the room. No description is given, and the action might be taking place in any Spanish-American or European country. A good example of this disregard of the scene, in order to emphasize other elements of the story, is to be found in Dieta de amor. The setting is described in one line:<sup>36</sup> "The dining room was very large, very poorly lighted, and very cold." Quiroga at times foregoes descriptions as brief as the one just quoted. The protagonists of Una estación de amor visit a sugar plantation in Entre Ríos, a region that has charmed other writers. There is not a single word describing the scene.

The setting of a few scattered stories deserves some notice because they are unusual.

Los cementerios belgas tells of the sufferings of a number of Belgian women, refugees during the first World War. They wander endlessly through scenes of death and destruction. The horror of the scene is strikingly presented. It is interesting to note that this is the only one of Quiroga's

stories to have a European setting and the only one in which he definitely expresses a social consciousness. La gloria tropical is laid in Africa at the mouth of the Niger. The heat, the torrential rainfall, the exuberance of tropical vegetation are well described and are the main point of interest, but it might as well be a description of an American scene.

Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa is the only tale in which the author ventures into the United States. New York and Hollywood won no description from him. He honored Arizona with the remark that it has more rattle-snakes than it should have.

Two of the stories have an entirely imaginary setting. These are El sueño and La realidad, both laid in the jungles of the prehistoric past -- presumably South American jungles. In El sueño, the hero wanders about with a dinosaur which finally attacks him and which he kills. Water is everywhere, the forest swimming in it. In the last lines we are told that it is a dream inspired by the heavy rains of the Alto Paraná. In La realidad, the Tertiary man swings through the tree tops of a forest that steams and sweats. He is in constant danger. His hunger is seldom satisfied. His pursuit and conquest of a mate is noted, as well as the dissatisfaction of both with their damp living quarters in the tree top. Then on the scene the cave-dweller, with his woman and three children, appears seeking a new cave home. The tree-

dweller's curiosity is aroused. Throughout the story the alertness of the characters to smells and the way the hair rises at the scent or sight of danger keeps the characters well in their age. The tree-dweller watches the cave-dweller kill a young deer and take it to the cave. Through a chink in the wall he watches the first feast of meat that he has seen among his own kind. The next day, when the family leaves to hunt, he enters the cave, grabs a bone, and goes off on three feet! He is definitely dissatisfied with his cocoanut and root diet. But he waits until the cave-dweller has made the kill, and then steals the remains. This state of affairs goes on for some time. Meanwhile the rains come. The forest steams more profusely. Animals become arthritic because of the damp. The huts of the tree-dwellers fall apart with decay. Snakes and toads abound. Finally, the two men meet, and each stands on the defensive. An approaching wild animal prevents conflict. Later, when a lion attacks the cave-dweller, the tree-dweller helps in the battle and shares in the spoils. When the lioness comes seeking her mate, the cave-dwellers discover that a stone will serve as a door. Their fear and sleeplessness now become lessened. The tree-dweller is converted. The story ends. Here the special significance of the setting is its influence on the evolution of the prehistoric man.

This leaves to be considered the stories laid in Misio-  
nes. In them the setting is of supreme importance. It dom-

inates; is the most important character, more important than the human characters who move against its background.

The nature of Misiones, which furnishes the setting of these stories, is exceptional (and hence attractive to Quiroga). The land between the Upper Paraná and Uruguay Rivers is covered by thick tropical forests with occasional grassy bits. During the rainy seasons much of it is flooded, and there are pools and lagoons left by the rains except in periods of exceptional dryness. The heat is intense, the sun blinding. The region has, as its only human inhabitants, wandering lumber cutters, rubber gatherers, and, around the few villages, some hardy settlers who are trying to establish plantations. There are, of course, the animal, reptile, and insect inhabitants which so much engrossed Quiroga, but which ordinarily pass unnoticed. The landscape always presents, then, three vast immensities: the sky with its burning sun, the forest, the river -- great as the sea.

Quiroga presents all of these vast aspects of nature with sustained vigor and effect. To him the forest, with its silent solitude and amazing lushness, is mysterious and menacing. A young accountant visits the forest (La miel silvestre):<sup>37</sup>

...he reached his godfather's clearing, and within an hour the latter had to restrain his godson's zeal. "Where are you going now?" he asked him in surprise.

"To the forest; I want to go about in it a bit," replied Benincasa, who had just slung his Winchester over his shoulder.

"But you poor fellow, You wont be able to take a step. Follow the path, if you want...or better, put away your rifle, and I'll have a peon go with you tomorrow."

Benincasa gave up his walk. However, he went to the forest path and stopped. He vaguely took a step inside and stood still. He put his hands into his pockets and looked attentively at that inextricable tangle, weakly whistling bits of airs. After again observing the woods in every direction, he went back quite disillusioned.

The next day, however, he went on the central path a league and, although his gun came back without having been fired, Benincasa did not regret the walk. The wild beasts would come later.

They came two nights later, in a somewhat singular manner.

Benincasa was sleeping soundly when he was awakened by his godfather. "Hey, sleepy-head. Get up, or they'll eat you alive.

Benincasa sat up suddenly in his bed, dazzled by the light of three lanterns that moved from one side of the room to the other. His godfather and two peons were sprinkling the floor.

"What's the matter?" he asked, jumping out of bed.

"Nothing. Be careful of your feet. The corrección."

Benincasa had already been told about the curious ants we call corrección. They are small, black, shiny, and march rapidly in rivers of varying width. They are essentially carnivorous. They advance, devouring everything they find in their path, spiders, crickets, scorpions, toads, snakes, and every being that cannot resist them. There is no animal, however large and strong it be, that does not flee from them. Their entrance into a house determines the absolute extermination of every living being in it, since there is no corner nor hole into which the devouring river does not flow. The dogs bark, the oxen low, and it is necessary to abandon the house or be gnawed to a skeleton in ten hours. They remain in a place one, two, as many as five days, in accordance with its wealth in insects, meat, or fat. Once all is devoured, they leave.

In passing it may be remarked that this introduction of the corrección is a dramatic foreshadowing. When Benincasa

did go into the woods he was eaten by them.

The fiery sun with its burning heat is also a threat to man, who may be killed by its rays, and even to the animals, for it may cause a drought and dry up the pools in the forest, as it did in El regreso de Anaconda. The following paragraphs from Yaguaí excellently show the impression of heat which Quiroga gives so frequently:38

Back from his bath, the dog sat down again watching the wind strengthen little by little, while the thermometer, as low as 15 degrees at dawn, reached 41 degrees<sup>9</sup> at two in the afternoon. The dryness of the air caused the fox-terrier to drink every half hour, having to fight then with the wasps and bees which invaded the buckets, dying with thirst. The hens, with their wings dragging on the ground, panting, stretched out in the triple shade of the banana trees, the summer house, and the red flowered creeper, without daring to take a step upon the burning sand, under a sun which instantly killed the red ants.

Around about, as far as the gaze of the fox-terrier reached, the blocks of iron, the volcanic rock, the forest itself, everything, danced, giddy from the heat. To the west, in the bottom of the wooded valley sunk in the depression of the double row of mountains, lay the Paraná, dead at this hour in its zincky waters, awaiting the fall of evening in order to come to life again. The atmosphere, slightly hazy up to that hour, veiled the horizon in a dense vapor behind which the sun, falling upon the river, hung, asphyxiated in a perfect circle of blood.

And while the wind was dying away completely and, in the still burning air, Yaguaí dragged over the meseta his diminutive spot of white, the black palm trees, standing out against the dull red of the river, gave to the landscape the sensation of a lush and sombre oasis.

Just as the heat is burning, so the cold is sometimes freezing, and also a threat against man's life. The changes of temperature in one day are great, and men die of exposure

in the night that follows a day of heat. In Tacuara-Mansión, a night on "the icy pasture"<sup>40</sup> helped cause the death of Rivet. In El yaciyateré, we are told that "In Misiones, with a summer storm, the temperature changes easily from 40 degrees to 15 degrees, and in a single quarter of an hour. No one gets sick because that's the way the country is, but people die of the cold."<sup>41</sup> Los fabricantes de carbón tells of an extremely cold spell which rotted the banana plants, caused the oranges to fall from the trees, and caused the Meteorological Institute to question the minimum temperature of 11 below zero that was reported.

The river too, generally the Alto Paraná, "vast as a sea", is ever present. It furnishes the chief means of communication, and, perhaps for that reason the horse has no place in the stories. It is fair to say that in them the river has the importance that the horse has in the stories of the pampa. The river, too, is a menace to man's peace and safety. In flood it may wash away his wealth, upset his boat and kill him. When low, it hinders transport and travel. The vagaries of the river inspire the whole story of El regreso de Anaconda. The great snake, now grown to the length of ten meters, thirty years old, and in the full vigor of youth, has returned to the valley of the Paraná. Two months' drought dry up the pools, and much suffering is caused among the animals. They cannot go to the river, for man, with his "miserable zeal to see, touch, and cut",<sup>42</sup> has estab-

lished himself on its bank. Anaconda, still noble and unselfish, formulates a plan that will free her bit of the jungle of man and droughts at one and the same time. Her super-keen senses tell her that a deluge of rain is at hand. She hopes to enlist the coöperation of all the forest dwellers and with their help block the river with camalotes, floating islands of aquatic grass and straw. The rains come, Anaconda and her friends float downstream. There is a magnificent description of the river in flood, but one which is too long for quotation. Anaconda finds on her camalote a dying man, she protects him against vipers who wish to kill him. Finally they reach the broad estuary of the Plata, it grows cold, they pass steamers, Anaconda knows there is now no hope of carrying out her plan. She lays her eggs beside the body of the now dead and decomposing man, is shot and killed by some men in a launch who think her dangerous.

A story which draws attention to man's struggle with the river is En la noche. It tells how a young woman, carrying her husband, who had been stung by a ray, to help, rowed for twenty hours against the swollen Paraná. She rowed until her hands "soaked the handles of the oars with blood and serous water"<sup>43</sup> but saved her husband and became famous for her feat.

Of course the rains which cause these floods are torrential. They are solid masses of water which come down ceaselessly for ten days at a time.

The Misiones setting, then, is always exotic, always

vast, always menacing to man, with death everywhere. It is lush, impressive, colorful, well fitted for the rare and the unusual.

#### D. The Characters.

Quiroga's characters form a vast procession: non-men, ex-men (he himself uses the term),<sup>44</sup> men, animals, snakes, insects, all nature fused into a single force. The presentation of the characters is, with some few exceptions, direct and lifelike. We know what they are because we see them act and react, hear them talk. The author makes but little use of direct exposition in developing them. When he does so it is in a piece like Los desterrados which has no central figure, but gives equal importance to a number of figures. Above all, the characters act, they move, and this makes even the vaguest of them a convincing representation of a human being. In addition, when they talk, they talk like human beings. This adds powerfully to the illusion of reality. A noticeable quality is the lack of description of the persons of the characters. The reader seldom knows what the character looks like. A few words, at most a few lines, tell us of the character's appearance. Unless this is essential to the story, even these brief impressionistic indications are omitted.

Use was made above of the term "non-men". It seems to describe very well the characters who suffer from some seri-

ous mental disease, who are so abnormal that they are scarcely human. In these cases it is the abnormality that has life and acts and speaks and is of interest. The human being is only a clothes-horse which serves to exhibit the abnormal case. For example, in El solitario the crazed desire of the wife for the jewels with which her husband works is the only thing of interest, the only theme developed.

Quiroga uses the term "half-men" to describe the human derelicts who gravitated to Misiones as they do to all frontier regions. They all have one quality in common. They are extravagant in their behavior. They, like Quiroga, have sought in Misiones escape from a painful past or from the disappointments of an unappreciative environment. They have found what they sought; they can throw off all restraint, and they do. A number of these characters are described in Section A of this chapter. However, their extravagance can not be overemphasized. Dr. Else, whom we saw die of delirium tremens, was such a drunkard that, "Aside from drinking in all the gin-mills every day from eleven to four, he did nothing."<sup>45</sup> The several inventors who are described, Los destiladores de naranja, Los fabricantes de carbón, are incurable optimists. No hardships are too great for them, no failures suffice to discourage them. The treasure-seekers believe that there is a cache of Jesuits' gold at the foot of every rainbow, El entierro. Even the ordinary inhabitants of Misiones have some extravagance in their nature. The employers

are harsh and overbearing, modern slave-drivers. The workers are brutal and vengeful. These types are developed in Una bofetada: a peon kills his employer with blows of a whip, in revenge for a slap he was once given; and in Los mensú, two contract laborers die in an attempt to escape from a lumber camp.

In many, perhaps in all, of the Misiones stories, nature is the chief character and man is a secondary one. Nature is inimical to man, relentless in its hostility. Man must struggle ceaselessly against it. This struggle has something about it of the age-old struggle between good and evil. Man fights for progress and civilization, resisted by the elemental forces. The defeat of Anaconda's scheme and her own death, in El regreso de Anaconda, seem to be a prediction of man's ultimate victory over the wild.

One notices that Quiroga has created no great women characters, none so striking as his men. In the Misiones stories there are only a few women, and although this is natural enough, it does serve to emphasize the starkness of the territory. In the other stories, the women are vague. They are soft and silent, exert no influence on the lives of men, but rather receive influence from them. This limited conception of women seems to be of some significance, and will be considered in Chapter IV.

Of great importance in Quiroga's stories are what can be called his animal stories. Of course the whole fauna of

Misiones appears on his pages, but several stories have as their main characters either dogs or snakes. These two animals interested Quiroga more than any others, perhaps because they are such evident antitheses. In these stories the author invested his animal characters with qualities which are generally considered to be exclusively human. He gave them the power of speech, of well developed reasoning, of good memory. He gave them a sense of irony and of humor. He gave them individual and differentiated characters (perhaps among the snakes this is true only of species, not of individuals). He made them possessors of human virtues and faults: unselfishness, loyalty, charity, spitefulness, treachery. All this may be bad psychology, but it makes very interesting reading and won Quiroga his greatest fame.

The most attractive of the dog stories is Yaguaí. This is the name of a fox-terrier whose owner sends him to the monte to learn to hunt native rodents. He is neglected, almost starves, displays native virtues of his race, wins his way home to be shot by his master, who thinks that he is a marauder. La insolación tells of a group of dogs who scent death approaching their master. They discuss it:<sup>48</sup>

"It's the master," exclaimed the pup, surprised at the other's attitude.

"No, it isn't he," replied Dick....

Prince showed his teeth. "No, it isn't he, it is Death."

The pup bristled with fear and retreated to the group.

"Is the master dead?" he asked anxiously...."And

how do you know that the person we saw was not the master alive?"....

"Because it wasn't he," the others answered angrily.

(Then this reflection, as it might have come to the dogs' minds.)

"So then death, and with it a change of masters, misery, kicks, was upon them."

They passed the rest of the afternoon at their master's side, serious, alert. At the slightest sound they growled, without knowing in what direction. Mr. Jones felt satisfied at their restless watchfulness.

However, their watchfulness did not avail. Death came to their master, and they went to the Indian huts, where they became thin and mangy.

The content of the two snake stories, Anaconda and El regreso de Anadonda, has already been given in other connections. It might, however, be interesting to note here a few details. The vipers are said to be touchy, irritable, vain of their beauty. They are impulsive and weak in judgement, just as are vain, irritable people. On the other hand, the boas, and especially Anaconda, are noble, magnanimous, self-sacrificing, even-tempered and good-natured in the knowledge of their own strength. It is interesting to note that this analysis of snake psychology is corroborated by Raymond L. Dittmars, who remarks on the belligerency of the King Cobra and the natural antipathy that exists between certain constrictors, notably the American King snake and viperine snakes.<sup>47</sup> The snakes engage in certain human activities,

which lends an impression of reality.<sup>48</sup> They use their tongues to feel, -- like fingers. They point at objects with their tails. They whisper. They laugh. They smile graciously. They indulge in sarcasm, as when they refer to Cobra's hood as "the hat with which this Asiatic lady is trying to dazzle us".<sup>49</sup> Less convincing is Anaconda's harangue urging unity among all the animals.<sup>50</sup> But, after all, Anaconda was a remarkable snake.

Some snake talk has already been given in our consideration of Anaconda. A few lines from Los cazadores de ratas, may serve to indicate the way in which Quiroga has his animals talk:<sup>51</sup>

One winter afternoon, the rattlesnakes who were sleeping stretched out on the mud, coiled quickly when they heard an unusual sound. Since sight is not their particularly strong point, they kept still, while they listened.

"It's the noise those fellows make," murmured the female.

"Yes, it's the noise of men; they are men," affirmed the male.

This simple style is rather characteristic.

One of Quiroga's most interesting stories is La reina italiana. It tells of the trouble that results from cross-breeding:

This story begins with a war between the bees and the hens. The bees drink the water provided for the hens, and the hens try to stick their heads into the beehives to eat the dead bees. Kean, the owner, conscious of this friction

between his bees and his hens, made a pact with the former. He provided a new drinking place for the bees, and cleaned the hives each morning so that the hens had no reason to peck at them. In return Kean was to receive a certain amount of honey for his trouble.

In the meantime Kean had imported an Italian Queen from Buenos Aires. The hybrid results of this importation were good collectors of honey, but much given to pillage and to being very irritable. However, it was not until the bees started to swarm that trouble began. Kean decided to imprison the Queen by a contraption on the hive which permitted the other bees to escape, but kept her inside. The bees grew angry at this indignity. They reminded Kean that, according to the pact, he was to receive a certain amount of honey, but that no mention had been made of their right to swarm.

The reader gets an inkling of the ingenuity with which Quiroga handles both insects and men. The bees continue to swarm and attempt to leave, but are held back because of the Queen. They keep reminding Kean of his rights and of theirs. Finally the bees become exasperated. They kill the Queen, and attack first Kean's horse, then his son and daughter. The horse is killed. Kean and his wife work hard and long to save the life of their baby daughter, although they themselves are severely stung. The story ends with the eyesight of the daughter still in danger.

There is not a great deal of humor in any of Quiroga's stories. Life is too vivid, too sweeping, too vast, too intense for much laughter, or even for a few chuckles. Humor doesn't have a very contagious atmosphere in scenes of death or madness. It is also a rather foreign element in panoramic views of nature, wherein the elements predominate. However, since we are here considering Quiroga's animal characters, there is the story of El alambre de púa, that does contain touches of humor. Here the cattle and horses talk about the field of nice green oats that adjoins the pasture. The cattle poke fun at the horses, who cannot get through the fence, while they, the cattle, always get through. They follow the bull, and no fence can hold him, they say proudly. The mares are kittenish and try to make the cattle believe that they could get to the oats if they really wanted to. The cattle chew. The humor lies in the nonchalance with which the beasts discuss the matter:<sup>52</sup>

"The bull, Barigüf! He goes through the worst fences."

"Fences? He goes through?"

"All. Wire fences too. We go after him."

The cows accuse the horses of being lazy, but the horses are confident that the bull cannot go through the new fence that the owner puts up. But the bull does get through the new fence, two wires strung very tightly. However, he cuts himself so severely that he leaves streams of blood on the

oats.

A problem of interest that presents itself in regard to Quiroga's characters is the extent to which he identifies himself with them. It seems very plain that he wrote with entire objectivity. He does not sympathize with his characters, though he does sentimentalize some of the animals, notably Anaconda and the dog Yaguaí. Just as a general proposition, it would be hard for a man of Quiroga's intellectual powers to identify himself with insane persons and with snakes. He studies them, but that does not mean that he felt himself to be one of them.

#### E. The Construction.

At various points in the course of this study the plot of a number of stories has been given, in order to illustrate Quiroga's material and method. The purpose of this section is to indicate several qualities of his work which seem to be matters of technique rather than of material or of plot.

Quiroga focuses the main interest on some one element, an anecdote, a rare character, but his fund of information is so vast that he continually inserts remarks that are really digressions. These extraneous elements are very characteristic of Quiroga and give his work charm. However, they often slow down the movement of the stories. For instance, Los fabricantes de carbón is concerned chiefly with the experiments of Dréver and Rienzi, who are trying to make char-

coal. The story is complicated by the sickness of Dréver's daughter. Paragraphs like the following abound:<sup>53</sup>

Later, delirium from time to time, with sudden sittings up supported by her arms. Dréver petted her, but the little girl avoided contact with him, turning to the other side. The father then recommenced his pacing, and went to take Rienzi's eternal coffee.

One of Quiroga's favorite devices is the surprise ending. He uses it very effectively and is always able to build up considerable suspense with it. One of the best endings of this kind is that of El hijo, which is one of Quiroga's few sympathetic stories. A father is searching for his son, who has gone hunting. The boy is really dead, but an hallucination makes the father think he is alive:<sup>54</sup>

He smiles with hallucinated happiness. Well, that father goes alone. He has found no one and his arm is supported on empty space. Because behind him, at the foot of a post and with his legs in the air, twisted in the barbed wire, his well-beloved son lies in the sun, dead since ten o'clock in the morning.

Another of Quiroga's characteristic devices is the sudden inclusion of some naturalistic or even gruesome detail. Since this is not his usual practice, it produces a vivid emotional effect. Probably the most striking of these bits are to be found in Los inmigrantes and in La gallina degollada. In the first, a German immigrant's wife dies of childbirth in the forest. He wishes to bury her body in holy ground, and carries it on his back for days, until he

collapses and falls to the ground, with the decomposing body beside him:55

The man cast a glance at the horrible softish mass which lay at his side, and, crossing his hands on his knees, he fell to looking fixedly ahead at the poisonous marsh, in whose background delirium sketched a village in Silesia, to which he and his wife, Carlota Phoenig, were returning happy and rich, to find their adored firstborn.

In the latter, four idiots have just cut their sister's throat, when the father enters, under the impression that he has heard his daughter call:56

"My daughter, my daughter!:" He ran desperately toward the rear. But, in passing the kitchen, he saw on the floor a sea of blood.

#### F. The Prose Style.

Quiroga's prose style is robust, straightforward, vigorous. Its most evident characteristic is economy. Descriptions and characterizations are brief, but they are highly effective. A few well-chosen adjectives and figures of speech serve to do the thing that the author wants to do.

#### IV. Quiroga as he Reveals Himself in his Stories.

We have already stated that Quiroga wrote in a purely objective way, and that he did not identify himself with his characters. Hence, it is not possible to point to any one of them and say: this is Quiroga; this is the way he acted or would have acted; the words that this character speaks are words that Quiroga spoke or might have spoken. It is necessary to look deeper into the whole mass of his work to find something of the man himself. And, in passing, it might be remarked that, unlike some other literary forms, the short story is not a good vehicle for self-revelation.

The essential, integrating feature, the common quality which informs all his work, is his search for and use of rare and exotic material. This, no doubt, constituted for him an escape from reality. All of us seek this escape, at least at times, and find it in a thousand ways. One has only to look at the hundreds of pulp magazines and confession-story magazines that crowd the newsstands, and at the large number of detective novels that fill the bookshops, to know how millions of present day Americans find it. Others find it in music. Others daydream. There is no abnormality in such a search unless the seeker carries it so far that he confuses the dream life he creates with reality itself. We know that

Quiroga did not do this. He did not withdraw from life in order to dream his dreams; he was an active man -- a newspaper writer, a cotton-planter, a justice of the peace.

It has been asserted that Quiroga himself was insane.<sup>57</sup> This is obviously untrue. Quiroga studied insane people, but it is only those who are entirely sane themselves who can study the insane with the complete equanimity and cool objectivity that Quiroga displayed. Certain psychologists believe that those who display excessive horror of such states of insanity fear that they may be suffering from them.<sup>58</sup> This is not especially complimentary to those who proclaim that Quiroga was mad.

It is much more sensible to assume that Quiroga looked for an escape because he was lonely. He showed that of others he understood more than was ever understood of him. Both of his wives preceded him to the grave. He knew the love of children, but his women must have left him lonely. Amorim tells us that he was "dramatically lonely".<sup>59</sup> He found companionship in the studies he made, rather than in drink, or in drugs, or in one of countless other things.

His interest in death can be sufficiently explained, without recourse to morbidity, by the long succession of deaths in his own family. He did not pursue death, it pursued him and naturally aroused his interest.

The circumstances of Quiroga's suicide, which were related earlier, made it seem almost natural. It must be re-

membered that many eminent and many eminently sane people have advocated euthanasia. ✓

The plot of Polea loca hints at Quiroga's philosophy of life. A minor government official answered no official notes and things went on quite well. This seems to indicate a belief that loose wheels do not stop the wheels of life; that the individual is of little importance in the flood of life. Quiroga's mentally ill do not imply a disturbance of the natural order. They are simply different from the few in their own sphere. Their fate is quite interesting, but not of great consequence. Perhaps to them, as to Quiroga, life was wearisome and perplexing, if not toilsome.

### Conclusions.

Horacio Quiroga was a writer of uniquely individual stories -- the most individual that America has produced. Every element of the stories is original: plot, characters, setting. In addition, the general handling of the stories is peculiar to Quiroga. The way in which he makes the setting of a large group of his stories enter into the very spirit of the narration gives those stories a very American flavor.

There is no evidence to show that Quiroga was insane. On the contrary, everything points to his having been entirely sane.

## Notes.

1. Zum Felde, Alberto, "Estudio preliminar" in Más allá by Horacio Quiroga, p.21. Many other critics express the same opinion.
2. Lasplaces, Alberto, "Prólogo" to Cuentos by Horacio Quiroga, Vol.I, p.47.
3. Crow, John, "La locura de Horacio Quiroga", Revista Iberoamericana, May, 1939, Tomo I, Numero 1, pp.33-45.
4. The material for this sketch of Quiroga's life was taken from Alberto Lasplaces' "Prólogo" to Horacio Quiroga's Cuentos, pp.17 ff. A biography, Vida y obras de Horacio Quiroga, by Alberto J. Brignole y José M. Delgado, Claudio Garcia y Cia., editors, Montevideo, has been published. Unfortunately the writer of this study has been unable to consult it.
5. Princivalle, Carlos María, quoted by Lasplaces in "Prólogo" to Cuentos, p.18.
6. These are the writers who, in general, most interested and influenced the Spanish-Americans who formed what was later known as the modernist school.
7. We should remember that Rubén Darío had published Azul in 1888, had been in Buenos Aires from 1893 to 1898, and had published Prosas profanas in 1896; also that the work of Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Julian del Casal, and José Asunción Silva was known, admired, and imitated in the region of the Plata.
8. This story was later included in the collection Arrecifes de coral.
9. Lasplaces, Alberto, "Prólogo" to Cuentos, p.25.
10. Espinosa, Enrique, "Don Horacio Quiroga, mi padre", in America, August, 1939, p.31

11. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo I, p.70.  
 --¿Hizo mucha resistencia?...  
 -- Mucha -- le contestó Luciano distraído.
12. Crow, John, "La locura de Horacio Quiroga" in Revista Iberoamericana, mayo de 1939, Tomo I, Num. 1, pp.33-45. This whole article is devoted to an attempt to prove that Quiroga's interest in death and suicide amounted to an obsession or even to insanity.
13. Lasplaces, Alberto, "Prólogo", Cuentos, p.25:  
 "mosaico a la manera bizantina"
14. Lasplaces, Alberto, "Prólogo", Cuentos, p.25.
15. This collection has been translated into English by Arthur Livingston with the title South American Jungle Tales, New York, 1922.
16. This story has been translated into English by Anita Brenner and is included in Tales from the Argentine, Waldo Frank, editor, New York, 1930.
17. Crow, John, "La obra literaria de Horacio Quiroga", in Memoria del primer congreso internacional de catedráticos de literatura iberoamericana, Mexico, 1939, pp.75 ff. Note also reference to other adverse criticism and to Quiroga's defence.
18. Many stories are contained in collections which were published after their first appearance. Hence, the same story appears in several collections. In later editions there was further re-arrangement of the stories. In addition, numerous volumes of selections have been published. In order to avoid confusion, reference will be made only to the title of the various stories mentioned.
19. This story is included in Anaconda. Another story with the same title, but entirely different, is to be found in Más Allá.
20. The various characters mentioned reappear in several stories. In some stories they are the main point of interest, in others mentioned casually. They first appear in the following

stories, Los desterrados, Tacuara-Mansión, Van-Houten, La camera oscura, El desierto, Los destiladores de naranja, El peon. Quiroga gives to these characters the generic title "desterrados" (exiles). It is to be noted, however, that their exile is self-imposed.

21. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, p.101:  
 ...se extinguió como una lámpara, demasiado repleto de alcohol carburado...
22. A creole is a person born in America but who is of European descent.
23. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, p.101:  
 ...bandolero de un desenfado tan grande en cuestión de vidas humanas, que probaba sus winchesters sobre el primer transeunte.
24. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, p.106:  
 --Eu vengo...a quitar a vocé de en medio.
25. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, p.101:  
 ... a quien la destilación de naranjas llevó a confundir a su hija con una rata...
- This reference by the author, in the opening paragraph of Los desterrados, seems to have struck the fancy of the critics. They all quote it and ignore the pitifully tragic details which are found in Los destiladores de naranja, Quiroga, Cuentos, Tomo V, pp.123 ff.
26. This is El vampiro, included in the collection Más allá.
27. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, pp.147 ff. and 150:  
 En una de estas piezas encontré a nuestro juez acostado vestido en un catre, sin saco. Estaba casi sentado con la camisa abierta y el cuello desprendido, aunque sujeto aun por detrás. Respiraba como respira un asmático en

un violento acceso--lo que no es agradable contemplar. Al verme agitó la cabeza en la almohada, levanto un brazo, que se movió en desorden, y después el otro, que se llevó convulso a la boca. Pero no pudo decirme nada.

Fuera de sus facies, del hundimiento insondable de sus ojos y del afilamiento terroso de la nariz, algo sobre todo atrajo mi mirada: sus manos, saliendo a medias del puño de la camisa, descarnadas y con las uñas azules; los dedos lívidos y pegados que comenzaban a arquearse sobre las sábanas.

Lo miré más atentamente, y vi entonces, me di clara cuenta de que el juez tenía los segundos contados: que se moría: que en ese mismo instante se estaba muriendo. Inmóvil a los pies del catre, lo vi tantear algo en las sábanas, y como si no lo hallara, hincar despacio las uñas. Lo vi abrir la boca, mover levemente la cabeza y fijar los ojos con algún asombro en un costado del techo, y detener allí la mirada hasta ahora, fija en el techo de cinc por toda la eternidad.

.....  
 ...empapar mis nervios sobreexcitados en aquella boca entreabierta (más negra hacia el fondo) que la muerte misma; en la mandíbula retraída hasta dejar el espacio de un dedo entre ambas dentaduras; en los ojos de vidrio opaco bajo las pestañas como glutinosas e hinchadas; en toda la crispación de aquella brutal caricatura de hombre.

28. Letter of Quiroga quoted by Lasplaces, "Prólogo", Cuentos, Tomo I, p.35:

...de lo que más me enorgullezco en esta vida es de mis correrías por el bosque en donde he tenido que arreglármelas yo solo. Y desde luego, son las narraciones de monte las que me agradan más.

29. Crow, Juan, "La obra literaria de Horacio Quiroga", in

Memoria del primer congreso internacional de  
catedráticos de literatura iberoamericana,  
Mexico, 1939, p.63.

30. This is "El vampiro" in Más allá.
31. Alberto Zum Felde refers to this quality in his preliminary study to Más allá.
32. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, pp.10-11:

Fue allí, en consecuencia, donde, ante la inminencia del peligro y presidido por la víbora de cascabel, se reunió el Congreso de las Víboras. Estaban allí, fuera de Lanceolada y Terrífica, las demás yararas del país: la pequeña Coatiarita, benjamín de la Familia, con la línea rojiza de sus costados bien visible y su cabeza particularmente afilada. Estaba allí, negligentemente tendida, como si se tratara de todo menos de hacer admirar las curvas blancas y café de su lomo sobre largas bandas salmón, la esbelta Neuwied, dechado de belleza y que había guardado para sí el nombre del naturalista que determinó su especie. Estaba Cruzada--que en el Sur llaman víbora de la cruz--, potente y audaz, rival de Neuwied en punto a belleza de dibujo. Estaba Aproz, de nombre suficientemente fatídico; y por último, Urutu Dorado, la yararacusú, disimulando discretamente en el fondo de la caverna sus ciento setenta centímetros de terciopelo negro cruzado oblicuamente por bandas de oro.

Es de notar que las especies del formidable género Lachesis, o yararas, a que pertenecían todas las congresales menos Terrífica, sostienen una vieja rivalidad por la belleza del dibujo y el color. Pocos seres, en efecto, tan bien dotados como ellos.

33. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, pp.25-27:

--¿Quién eres?--murmuró Cruzada--.  
¿Eres de las nuestras?

Es decir, venenosa. La otra, convencida de que no había intención de ataque en la aproximación de la yarará, aplastó sus dos grandes orejas.

--Sí--repuso--. Pero no de aquí..., muy lejos..., de la India.

--¿Cómo te llamas?

--Hamadriás..., o Cobra capelo real.

--Yo soy Cruzada.

--Sí, no necesitas decirlo. He visto muchas hermanas tuyas ya...¿Cuándo te cazaron?

--Hace un rato...No pude matar.

--Mejor hubiera sido para ti que te hubieron muerto...

--Pero maté al perro.

--¿Qué perro? El de aquí?

--Sí.

La Cobra real se echó a reír, a tiempo que Cruzada tenía una nueva sacudida: el perro lanudo que creía haber matado, estaba ladrando...

--¿Te sorprende, eh?--agregó Hamadriás--. A muchas les ha pasado lo mismo.

--Pero es que mordí en la cabeza...--contestó Cruzada, cada vez más aturdida--. ¡No me queda una gota de veneno!-- concluyó-- , pues es patrimonio de las yararás vaciar casi en una mordida sus glándulas.

--Para él es lo mismo que te hayas vaciado o no...

--¿No puede morir?

--Sí, pero no por cuenta nuestra... Está inmunizado... Pero tú no sabes lo que es esto...

--¡Se!--repuso vivamente Cruzada--. Nacanina nos contó...

Lo (sic.) cobra real la consideró entonces atentamente.

--Tú me pareces inteligente...

--¡Tanto como tú...por lo menos!--replicó Cruzada.

El cuello de la asiática se expandió bruscamente de nuevo, y de nuevo la yarará cayó en guardia.

Ambas víboras se miraron largo rato, y el capuchón de la cobra bajó lentamente.

--Inteligente y valiente--murmuró

Hamadrias, --A ti se te puede hablar...  
¿Conoces el nombre de mi especie?

--Hamadrias, supongo.

--O Naja bungaro..., o Cobra capelo real. Nosotras somos respecto de la vulgar cobra capelo de la India lo que tú respecto de una de esas coatiaritas... ¿Y sabes de que nos alimentamos?

--No.

--De víboras americanas..., entre otras cosas--concluyó, balanceando la cabeza ante Cruzada.

Esta apreció rápidamente el tamaño de la extranjera ofiófaga.

--¿Dos metros cincuenta?...--preguntó.

--Sesenta..., dos sesenta, pequeña Cruzada--repuso la otra, que había seguido sus ojos.

--Es un buen tamaño... Más o menos, el largo de Anaconda, una prima mía. ¿Sabes de qué se alimenta

--Supongo...

--Sí, de víboras asiáticas...

34. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.33:

Alguna faltaba, fuera de Cruzada; pero las víboras todas afectaban no darse cuenta de su ausencia.

A pesar de todo, se vieron forzadas a volverse al ver asomar por entre los helechos una cabeza de grandes ojos vivos.

--¿Se puede?--decía la visitante alegremente.

35. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.48:

Poco a poco, segura del terrible abrazo con que inmovilizaba a su rival, su boca fué subiendo a lo largo del cuello, con cortas y bruscas dentelladas, en tanto que la cobra sacudía desesperada la cabeza. Los noventa y seis agudos dientes de Anaconda subían siempre: llegaron al capuchón, treparon, alcanzaron la garganta, subieron aún, hasta que se clavaron por fin en

la cabeza de su enemiga, con un sordo y larguísimo crujido de huesos masticados.

Ya estaba concluido. El boa abrió sus anillos y el maçizo cuerpo de la cobra real se escurrió pesadamente a tierra, muerta.

--Por lo menos estoy contenta...-- murmuró Anaconda, cayendo a su vez exánime sobre el cuerpo de la asiática.

36. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo V, p.60:

El comedor era muy grande, muy mal alumbrado y muy frío.

37. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, pp.92-94:

...llegó al obraje de su padrino, y a la hora tuvo este que contener el desenfado de su ahijado.

--¿Adónde vas ahora?--le había preguntado sorprendido.

--Al monte; quiero recorrerlo un poco--repuso Benincasa, que acababa de colgarse el winchester al hombro.

--¡Pero infeliz! No vas a poder dar un paso. Sigue la picada, si quieres...O, mejor deja esa arma y mañana te haré acompañar, por un peon.

Benincasa renunció a su paseo. No obstante, fue hasta la vera del bosque y se detuvo. Intentó vagamente un paso adentro, y quedó quieto. Metióse las manos en los bolsillos y miró detenidamente aquella inextricable maraña, silbando débilmente aires trunços. Después de observar de nuevo el bosque a uno y otro lado, retornó bastante desilusionado.

Al día siguiente, sin embargo, recorrió la picada central por espacio de una legua, y aunque su fusil volvió profundamente dormido, Benincasa no deploró el paseo. Las fieras llegarían poco a poco.

Llegaron éstas a la segunda noche --aunque de un carácter un poco singular.

Benincasa dormía profundamente, cuando fue despertado por su padrino.

--¡Eh, dormilón! Levántate que te

van a comer vivo.

Benincasa se sentó bruscamente en la cama, alucinado por la luz de los tres faroles de viento que se movían de un lado a otro en la pieza. Su padrino y dos peones regaban el piso.

--¿Qué hay, qué hay? --preguntó echándose al suelo.

--Nada... Cuidado con los pies...  
La corrección.

Benincasa había sido ya enterado de las curiosas hormigas a que llamamos corrección. Son pequeñas, negras, brillantes y marchan velozmente en ríos más o menos anchos. Son esencialmente carnívoras. Avanzan devorando todo lo que encuentran a su paso: arañas, grillos, alacranes, sapos, víboras, y a cuanto ser no puede resistirles. No hay animal, por grande y fuerte que sea, que no huya de ellas. Su entrada en una casa supone la exterminación absoluta de todo ser viviente, pues no hay rincón ni agujero profundo donde no se precipite el río devorador. Los perros aúllan, los bueyes mugen, y es forzoso abandonarles la casa, a trueque de ser roído en diez horas hasta el esqueleto. Permanecen en un lugar uno, dos, hasta cinco días, según su riqueza en insectos, carne o grasa. Una vez devorado todo, se van.

38. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, pp.50-51:

En vuelta de su baño, el perro se sentaba de nuevo, viendo aumentar poco a poco el viento, mientras el termómetro, refrescando a 15° al amanecer, llegaba a 41° a las dos de la tarde. La sequedad del aire llevaba a beber al fox-terrier cada media hora, debiendo entonces luchar con las avispas y abejas que invadían los baldes, muertas de sed. Las gallinas, con las alas en tierra, jadeaban, tendidas a la triple sombra de los bananos, la glorieta y la enredadera de flor roja, sin atreverse a dar un paso sobre la arena

abrasada, y bajo un sol que mataba instantaneamente a las hormigas rubias.

Alrededor, cuanto abarcaban los ojos del fox-terrier: los bloques de hierro, el pedregullo volcanico, el monte mismo, danzaba, mareado de calor. Al Oeste, en el fondo del valle boscoso, hundido en la depresion de la doble sierra, el Parana yacia, muerto a esa hora en su agua de zinc, esperando la caida de la tarde para revivir. La atmosfera, entonces ligeramente ahumada hasta esa hora, se velaba al horizonte en denso vapor, tras el cual el sol, cayendo sobre el rio, sosteniase asfixiado en perfecto circulo de sangre. Y mientras el viento cesaba por completo y en el aire, aun abrasado, Yaguai arrasaba por la meseta su diminuta mancha blanca, las palmeras negras, recortandose inmóviles sobre el rio cuajado en rubí, infundían en el paisaje una sensacion de lujoso y sombrío oasis.

39. Of course one must remember that these are degrees centigrade.

40. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, p.123:

el pasto de hielo

41. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.87:

En Misiones, con una tempestad de verano, se pasa muy fácilmente de 40° a 15°, y en un solo cuarto de hora. No se enferma nadie, porque el país es así; pero se muere de frío.

42. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.54:

...miserable ansia de ver, tocar, y cortar....

43. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.122:

...manos que mojaban el puño del remo de sangre y agua serosa;...

44. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, p.117:  
ex-hombre
45. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo V, p.131:  
Fuera de beber en todos los boliches y todos los días, de 11 a 16, no hacía nada más.
46. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, pp.10-11:  
--¡Es el patrón!--exclamó el cachorro, sorprendido de la actitud de aquellos.  
--No, no es él--replicó Dick.  
.....  
--No es él, es la Muerte.  
El cachorro se erizo de miedo y retrocedió al grupo.  
--¿Es el patrón muerto?--preguntó ansiosamente.  
.....  
--¿Y cómo saben que ese que vimos no era el patrón vivo?--preguntó.  
--Porque no era él--le respondieron displicentes.  
¡Luego la Muerte, y con ella el cambio de dueño, las miserias, las patadas, estaba sobre ellos! Pasaron el resto de la tarde al lado de su patrón, sombríos y alerta. Al menor ruido gruñían, sin saber hacia donde. Mister Jones sentíase satisfecho de su guardiana inquietud.
47. Dittmars, Raymond L., Snakes of the World, New York, 1937, pp.59, 150.
48. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, pp.7 ff.
49. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.40:  
!..esa dama importada que nos quiere deslumbrar con su gran sombrero!
50. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.58.
51. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo I, p.133:  
Una siesta de invierno, las víbo-

ras de cascabel, que dormían extendidas sobre la greda, se arrollaron bruscamente al oír insolito ruido. Como la vista no es su agudeza particular, mantuviéronse inmóviles, mientras prestaban oído.

--Es el ruido que hacían aquéllos...

--murmuró la hembra.

--Sí, son voces de hombre; son hombres--afirmó el macho.

52. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo II, p.22:

--¡El toro Barigüí! El puede más que los alambrados malos.

--¿Alambrados?... ¿Pasa?

--¡Todo! Alambre de púa también. Nosotras pasamos despues.

53. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo III, p.106:

Luego, delirio de vez en cuando, con súbitos corporamientos sobre los brazos. Dréver la tranquilizaba, pero la chica rechazaba su contacto, volviéndose al otro lado. El padre recomenzaba entonces su paseo, e iba a tomar el eterno cafe de Rienzi.

54. Quiroga, Horacio, Más allá, p.148:

Sonríe de alucinada felicidad... Pues ese padre va solo. A nadie ha encontrado, y su brazo se apoya en el vacío. Porque tras el, al pie de un poste y con las piernas en alto, enredadas en el alambre de púa, su hijo bien amado yace al sol, muerto desde las diez de la mañana.

55. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo I, p.140:

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

56. Quiroga, Horacio, Cuentos, Tomo I, p.160:

--¡Mi hija, mi hija! --corrió ya desesperado hacia el fondo., Pero al pasar frente a la cocina vió en el piso un mar de sangre....

57. Crow, John, "La obra literaria de Horacio Quiroga", in Memoria del primer congreso internacional de catedráticos de literatura iberoamericana, Mexico, 1939.

58. Hart, Bernard, Psychology of Insanity, University of Cambridge, 1921, p.118.

59. Amorím, Enrique, "H. Q. Fiel y Solitario", Nosotros, (segunda época) Año II, Tomo III, p.321:

"Su vida fué la del verdadero artista, fiel a su condición, dramáticamente solitaria."

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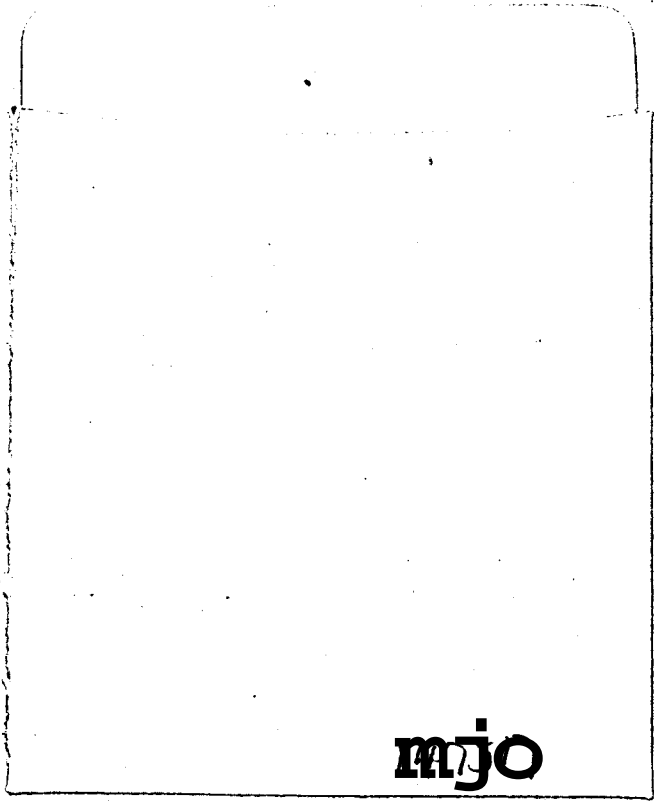
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