

Of Short Stories, Narratives, and *Crônicas*: An Introduction

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This issue of *Gávea-Brown* privileges the short story or what in diaspora literature we prefer to call the *Luso-short story*, typically concerned with Portuguese migration issues, as opposed to the short story in general or the short story in the literary diaspora of other ethnic groups. As genres related to the Luso-short story, we also acknowledge the modern *Luso-crónica* and the *Luso-narrativa breve*, both of which share three basic characteristics with the Luso-short story: brevity; a preference for diasporic themes, and often other characteristics that only a much longer introduction could hope to do justice to and a few others that will be discussed below. Before delving into the Luso-short story, let us enumerate some of the elements that these genres may have in common, and also some elements that may justify the different names by which they are known – names, be it noted, that may reveal little more than the preference of a given author or critic.

The *crónica* has often been defined as an informal essay. The *crónica* reveals a broad range of thematic and structural interests that may draw it close to history, sociology, philosophical reflection, cultural criticism, (auto)biography, and even poetry. The *narrativa breve*, although it may be simply another name for a *crónica*, can also be a name preferred by an author for an account that is essentially non-fictional but which may contain some invented elements. The short story, as the second most prestigious fictional genre after the novel, is the most demanding of the three genres, for both the author and reader, on account of its synthetic polyvalence and its esthetic demands.

The *Luso-short story* is a brief fictional text (typically with a range extending between 3 and 40 pages) that focuses on Portuguese migrant experiences and the experiences of those descendants who still identify in some way with the language and or culture of their ancestors, at least for literary purposes. Except thematically, the Luso-short story does not differ markedly from the Western short story practiced since the 19th century, except in many cases, thematically. We might add that, in addition to stressing its brevity vis-à-vis the novella and the novel, other tendencies of the short story are its small number of characters, its limited action and plot, and the few themes treated in individual stories. If the novel harbors a pluricellular community and the novella constitutes an entity composed of far fewer characters and themes, the short story tends to be a unicellular entity. The most we can say is that, despite having its roots in humanity's most distant past, the modern short story is an art genre whose origins and theorization in the Western World are associated with the 19th century, Edgar Allan Poe being one of its key practitioners and theorists. Needless to say, neither of these three genres is entirely separate from the others. Much that one can say about other fictional genres, such as the novel and the novella, including their diasporic varieties, also applies to the short story and vice-versa.

Therefore, instead of providing more information on the short story in general,¹ it is preferable, for purposes of this introduction to the Luso-short story, to focus on a couple of especially pertinent

¹ The information provided in the rest of this introduction is extracted from the chapter “The Luso-Short Story” in the forthcoming anthology *Margins/Margens: A Pedagogical Anthology of Portuguese Diaspora Literature*. Editor and Author of Preambular and Pedagogical Texts, Francisco Cota Fagundes; Coeditors, José Francisco Costa and Sílvia Oliveira; Consultant, Tania Martuscelli.

theoretical concepts related to the genre under analysis: 1) the short story as a genre particularly suited to the expression of intercultural experiences; and 2) the short story as the voice of “submerged population group,” of which migrants and minority racial and ethnic groups are among the most obvious. These two related theories are associated, respectively, with the ideas presented by Tom J. Lewis and Robert E. Jungman in their *On Being Foreign, Culture Shock in Short Fiction: An International Anthology*; and Frank O'Connor's book, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*, a special anthology edition. Lewis and Robert provide a very useful anthology of stories, illustrating each of the phases the migrant undergoes. O'Connor provides an anthology of the stories that illustrate his theory of the “submerged populations.”

Lewis and Jungman express the belief that the development of anthropology and the concept of culture as a complex system of communication set the stage for the study of intercultural experience (of temporary sojourners, exiles, migrants) as a series of stages that the individual undergoes: “culture shock”, “transition shock”, and “re-entry shock”. “[T]he experience of being foreign,” they add, “has the potential for working a significant transformation at the deepest level of an individual's sense of being, possibly ending in his destruction” (xviii). They go on to quote Czeslaw Milosz who in turn points to the fact that the uprooting of the individual is something contrary to his nature and that in a desperate attempt to preserve the initial environment, the exile resorts to memory, now stagnant, since he has no present from which to feed, to transform the lost reality into words that become all the more assertive as their content fades in the time of personal memory.

Within this framework, social scientists and social psychologists created the so-called Gullahorn curve, which represents the temporal adjustment of the subject to the new conditions: there is a decline that immediately follows the initial shock of contact, which is then followed by a recovery period; after the return to the culture of origin, a new decline is followed by a new recovery. From here, the authors create a graph of the emotional intensity of the experience of being a foreigner, which is divided into *a preliminary phase*, *a spectator phase*, *a participation phase*, *a shock phase*, *an adaptation phase*, and *a re-entry phase*. The first phase corresponds to the mental preparation for the departure from the homeland; the second, to the initial shock in the foreign country before the unknown during which the individual remains mostly passive and attentive; the third phase happens when the subject is no longer capable of maintaining impassivity, resulting in a greater participation on his or her part which may end in frustration but may also lead to the overcoming of challenges and increase in self-esteem:

Characteristically it [the participation phase] involves a clash of cultures, a conflict between one's own culture-based behaviors and values and those of the host culture. It may result in extreme resistance to adaptation and a more or less straight-line descent to the nadir of the culture shock [...] a roller coaster of highs and lows as they surmount barriers to communication and contact only to discover abysses of value and perpetual difference. For those who are more successful, the phase of Increasing Participation constitutes an acceptance of, and tentative involvement with, the external manifestations of the host culture [...] little by little they become internalized, relegated to areas of the subconscious. (Lewis and Jungman: xxi)

The fourth phase, or shock phase, inevitably happens due to the clash that separates the two cultures and the ambiguity of the experience of being a foreigner; if, on the one hand, being in a foreign country turns into the opening of new horizons, the feeling may emerge that the values that are brought from one's own culture are nothing more than a culturally determined illusion. The shock phase is manifested by a more or less obvious lethargy or depression, irritation and/or obsessions,

and manias. The desirable end point is that of adaptation, which is reached when the individual not only feels the comfort of the host culture but has moments of a sense of belonging, “a sense of being not only in it but of it as well” (xxiii). Theoretically, it would end here, but almost as a rule, there is a last phase – that of re-entry which the subject experiences when and if he or she has the opportunity to return to the homeland and undergo the shock phase in reverse. This reentry phase can be all the more painful as the subject had already successfully negotiated the fifth phase in the foreign land.

The Lonely Voice is a study and anthology (in the edition used here) by Frank O'Connor, an Irish writer and critic, that explores the nature and art of the short story. It is based on a series of lectures he gave at Stanford University in 1961, where he discussed the works of many influential short story writers, such as, among others, Turgenev, Chekhov, Maupassant, Joyce, and Hemingway. O'Connor also proposed some of his theories about the short story form, such as the concept of “the submerged population group” – a term that refers to those individuals who are marginalized or oppressed by society and who often find their voices through the medium of the short story. O'Connor argued that the short story is not defined by its length but by its focus on the “Little Man” – the ordinary person who struggles to find meaning and dignity in a hostile and alienating world. According to O'Connor, the “submerged” population changes its character from writer to writer, from generation to generation: “It may be Gogol’s officials, Turgenev’s serfs, Maupassant’s prostitutes, Chekhov’s doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson’s provincials, always dreaming of escape” (“Introduction: xii)

Curiously, Frank O'Connor does not mention migrants or ethnic minorities per se, although they have always been among the loneliest of voices, the most submerged of populations. The diaspora literature we are considering here represents the collective voice of Portuguese migrants and their descendants who, because they have resisted total assimilation up to now, still speak and live with a foreign language and culture with an accent sufficiently pronounced to stand apart, conspicuous but largely submerged.

The purpose of theory, however, is never to box the student into some narrow view of the stories, but simply to provide one more possible way to make sense of the texts. The student is encouraged to pursue, as often as possible, his or her paths to the understanding of the texts presented. Theoretical constructs are but a few more ways to contextualize or make sense of what we read, never to replace it. You will probably find that some of the pieces included in this anthology have little to do with the theoretical constructs outlined above.

Here is the list of the collections of Luso-short stories in the USA, Canada, and Trinidad & Tobago, originally written in the English language. A few of the authors included wrote originally in Portuguese but have had some of their work translated into English. One writer, Alfred H. Mendes, although he wrote many stories (some of them still unpublished), only composed a handful touching upon his Portuguese-Madeiran background.

Charles Reis Felix

“On Being Drafted” – short story probably written in the 1940s

José Rodrigues Miguéis

Léah, e outras histórias (4th ed., 1968)

Gente da Terceira Classe (1971)

O Espelho Polidrico (1972)

Steerage and Ten Other Stories (1983)

The Polyhedric Mirror: Tales of American Life (translation of stories from various collections; 2005)

Onésimo Teotónio Almeida

(Sapa)teia Americana (1983)

- Tales from the Tenth Island* (translation; 2006)
- Laura Bulger
Vaivém (1986)
Paradise on Hold (translation; 1987)
- Alfred H. Mendes
The Man Who Ran Away and Other Stories of Trinidad in the 1920s and 1930s (2006)
Selected Writings of Alfred H. Mendes (2013)
Alfred H. Mendes: Short Stories, Articles and Letters (2016)
- Katherine Vaz.
Lady of the Artichokes and Other Portuguese-American Stories (2008)
Fado & Other Stories (1977)
- Faria, Joseph M.
From a Distance (1998)
- Kastin, Darrell
The Conjuror & Other Azorean Tales (2012)
- Sousa, Brian
Almost gone: a novel in stories (2013)
- paulo da costa
The Midwife of Torment & Other Stories (2017)
The Green and Purple Sky of the World (2013)
The Scent of a Lie (2002)
- Hugo dos Santos
Then, there (2019)