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Horacie Quiroga: The Poe of Latin America

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When considering the teaching of literature in a foreign language classroom, the teacher must make some very clear decisions before beginning. How do you present literature in a foreign language to students whose language skills in their own language may be weak and whose skills in the foreign language are likely to be woefully inadequate to do justice to the literature? What kind of literature is to be taught and to whom? How much background information do the students need to have? How much time are you prepared to spend on a given work? What do you expect the students to learn? What is the purpose in teaching the literature unit at all? Having grappled with these issues many times, I have become convinced that there is no pat set of answers which gives a coherent logic for the teaching of literature in a secondary level foreign language classroom. The answers set forth in this unit, therefore, are in no way meant to represent a personal philosophy of teaching literature in a Spanish class. Rather they represent a rationale for teaching this specific literature—the short stories of the Uruguayan Horacie Quiroga—to a specific group of students—those in Spanish II or III who by and large do not excel in language skill in any language including their own.

To answer the last and most important question first, my purpose in presenting this unit is twofold. I want my students to gain an appreciation for a new and different literary experience and I want them to appreciate the skill with which this experience is narrated. In other words, I want them to be exposed to the literature of another country and to read that literature critically. In order to achieve these goals my first decision is to present this literature in translation to the second year students and to give both English and Spanish versions to the third year students. I am convinced that a struggling to understand one word in three is no way to enable students to appreciate a work of literature or to induce them to read more of it. What they will lose in the beauty and precision of the original Spanish they will gain in their own willingness to read on and to consider critically what they have read.

Students whose basic language skills are limited often find it difficult to focus for long periods on a work of literature. They are used to TV programs and movies whose conflicts are quickly resolved. Short stories, therefore, lend themselves ideally to the study in a limited amount of time of serious literature. Short stories can be dealt with in one to three class periods. Because a number of stories can be read, they lend themselves to a greater variety of critical thinking skills, such as comparing and contrasting. Because they are obviously in prose they tend to be less intimidating than poetry. Last and not unimportantly, Quiroga's stories exploit the fascination with the horrific that seems to grip many teenagers.

As to background information, only a passing reference to some of the relevant literacy “-isms” will be made.

To expound on “naturalism” and “modernism” may excite the curiosity of some and impress others with the “learnedness” of the the teacher, but it will undoubtedly either bore or scare senseless most students. Because Quiroga’s life, on the other hand is fascinating, and because of the significance of his experiences in his writing, this unit will devote some time to his biography. The unit will then proceed to a discussion of Quiroga’s major themes and stylistic principles. It will conclude with a discussion of two of his stories and suggested classroom activities to accompany them.

To have students familiarize themselves with and to gain an appreciation for an important Latin American author who writes in a medium workable in a secondary foreign language classroom, and to have them read that author critically, therefore, are the overall goals of this unit. To begin to achieve those goals, let us first look at the man himself—Horacio Quiroga.

Horacio Quiroga was born in 1878 in Salto, Uruguay. Within months his natural father was killed in a hunting accident, the first of a series of tragic deaths that were to affect profoundly Quiroga and his work.

Quiroga was an unhappy and rebellious child whose mother both spoiled and misunderstood him. After living several years in Argentina, in 1891 the family moved to Montevideo. Quiroga’s mother remarried, and although the remarriage was problematical for the adolescent Horacio, he eventually came to be fond of his stepfather and was the one to nurse the man after he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. Later, in a cruel and tragic replay, Quiroga discovered the body of his stepfather, who, in despair, had shot himself.

As early as 1897 Quiroga was immersed in literary undertakings. He began to collaborate in various magazines in Salte. Two years later the first edition of *Revista del Salto* was published under his direction. At the same time he began forming friendships which would be of great importance to him throughout his life, not the least of which was with the great Modernist Argentine writer, Leopoldo Lugones. Although Lugones was only four years his senior, Quiroga idolized the man and cast him as a sort of father figure.

In 1900 Quiroga made the pilgrimage of all aspiring writers of his time to Paris, the capital of Modernism. His fascination for the city was short-lived, and after several months of poverty, misery and solitude, he returned to Montevideo and entered into a somewhat bohemian existence. Although he continued to write, not much of his writing ever reached the public. Largely because of the influence of Modernism, Quiroga’s early attempts were in poetry, but he also dabbled inexpertly in prose. In 1901 his first book, *Les arrefices de coral, a mixture of prose and poetry*, was published to generally unenthusiastic reviews.

The next year yet another tragedy devastated the young writer when he accidentally shot and killed one of his closest friends, Frederico Ferrando.

By 1903 Quiroga had assumed Argentine citizenship and was teaching in Buenos Aires, where he had fled after Ferrando’s death. This was to be a decisive year in the life and work of Quiroga, for in 1903 he accompanied Lugones for the first time to a remote area of Argentina called Misiones. Quiroga joined the expedition as a photographer and diarist. The effect of the jungle was immediate and irrevocable. Emir Rodriguez Monegal says that Quiroga went to Misiones as a Modernist dandy and emerged as a different man, a man marked by the jungle. Raimundo Lazo asserts, “La immersion en la selva es como una fecundacion. ... Se hunde en la selva, la posee y la fecunda, para que de esa monstruosa union nazca (renazca) el verdade Horacio Quiroga.”²

For the next several years Quiroga divided his time between Buenos Aires and el Chaco, a region in northern Argentina, where he attempted to live as a cotton grower. In the civilized, cultured world of Buenos Aires he

taught literature and continued to write and to participate actively in the literary life of the city. He was frequently published in magazines and began to be recognized as an important literary figure. In the jungles of el Chaco, Misiones and San Ignacio he undertook various enterprises, all of which resulted in failure, but he seemed to be driven and energized by those failures. In the jungles of Argentina Quiroga at last found a home—and a profound creative source. As stated by Lazo, “El resultado de estas fuertes contradicciones convierte su vida en drama de creciente intensidad, al por que presta materia viva y espíritu excepcional a su obra literaria...”.³ The complexity of Quiroga as a man and as a writer was always found in part to be in the same contradiction—the opposition of a cultured and refined intellectual on the one side and on the other a primitive governed by instinct and Nature’s laws.

Quiroga’s life, besides being marked by tragedy, was also plagued by frustrated love affairs. In 1898 he had fallen hopelessly in love with Maria Jurkowski, but the incipient affair was thwarted by her parents. In 1906 he fell in love with one of his students, Ana Maria Cires, and in December of 1909 the two were married above the strenuous opposition of her family. Quiroga and his new bride moved to San Ignacio where he had previously bought a few acres of land overlooking the Parana. In Ana Maria Quiroga hoped to find a life partner who could share in his dream of a life in the jungle. Soon the couple had two children, a daughter Egle, born in 1911, and a son, Darie, born in 1912. In pursuit of his dream, Quiroga struggled to make his lands habitable. Although the Quiroga homestead was not far from a village, Quiroga and his family endured a very primitive existence in the jungle. Quiroga loves his life in San Ignacio, but missed the intellectual stimulation of Buenos Aires. He had very few friends in San Ignacio and as his relationship with his wife deteriorated because of the stresses imposed on it by a jungle existence, both Quiroga and his wife came to feel very alone. Finally, in a desperate move, Ana Maria took a dose of slow-acting poison. For nine nightmarish days Quiroga nursed her as she slowly and painfully died. Quiroga’s paradise had become a hell. He left his children with his mother-in-law and returned to Buenos Aires, where he re-established Uruguyan citizenship and took a secretarial post with the Consul General of Uruguay in Argentina.

Quiroga’s return to Buenos Aires signified his return to an intense literary life. In 1917, the year he brought his children to Buenos Aires to be educated he published his fourth book, *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte*. Its success was immediate and catapulted Quiroga into the position of Latin America’s foremost writer of short stories. For the next several years Quiroga’s literary involvement led him to friendships with Alfonsina Storni and with Samuel Glusberg, whose literary pseudonym was Enrique Espinoza and who became Quiroga’s exclusive editor. It also led him to the publication of other books and to the formation of a group of literary intelligentsia called Anaconda. The years between 1917 and 1926 were ones of great stability and imaginative fecundity for Quiroga. Although he continued to live in Buenos Aires with only occasional visits to San Ignacio, the power of his jungle experience continued to fuel his creative fires. His literary fame was firmly established.

In 1926 Quiroga published “Los desterrados, considered by many to be his last great book and one of his best. Unfortunately for Quiroga, 1926 also saw the publication of Eduardo Guiraldes *Don Segundo Sombra*, a novel that was to affect profoundly the new generation of Latin American

writers, and *Los desterrados* was virtually ignored critically. By the end of the decade, while Quiroga’s fame and literary stature were still undeniable, a new generation of writers, led by Jorge Luis Berges, began to question the value of Quiroga’s work. Because Quiroga lived chiefly through his writing, his declining popularity posed a distinct economic threat as well as being a blow to him personally and artistically.

Never one to learn from life’s experiences in 1927 Quiroga married again, this time a school friend of Eagle’s Maria Elena Bravo. The following year a daughter was born to them. By 1931, again in pursuit of his dream of

a happy life in the jungle, Quiroga and his family were living an impoverished existence in San Ignacio despite his fame and the success of his books, but his feeling for life in the jungle, of a return to his roots, comforted him. Not so his new wife. While life seemed idyllic for some years, by 1934 his wife had returned to Buenos Aires. Quiroga too missed the intellectual stimulation of his literary friends and began a long series of letters to friends in the capital.

Quiroga's literary and physical powers seemed to wane coincidentally. By 1935 when Quiroga published *Mas alla*, his fourteenth and last book, he began expressing his concern for his health to his most intimate friends. His failing health forced him to return to Buenos Aires where an operation revealed he was suffering from cancer in the prostate. On February 19, 1937, Quiroga left the hospital to go for a walk. He visited his closest friends, said good bye to his daughter, returned to the hospital and took his own life by taking cyanide.

The complexity of Horacio Quiroga the man has been variously described. His younger brother says Horacio never understood the dynamics of family or social life, but clearly understood that they were essential to him.

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Lazo says he lived "de espaldas a la realidad" as evidenced by his disastrous marriages, and that he lived "inmerso en un desolado fatalismo" ⁵ undoubtedly due in part to the many tragic deaths in his life. He was at once cultured and primitive, solitary, introverted and reserved as well as warm, loving, and emotional. Monegal sees him as having had suicidal tendencies even as a young man. "Un suicida," he says, "no se hace en un dia; es un lento trabajo de anos." ⁶

Given his life experiences the fact of his suicide does not shock or surprise. Similarly his predominant themes are a direct outgrowth of those same life experiences. Quiroga himself grudgingly accedes to the presence of an author's life in his works:

...cuenta el escritor su propia vida en la obra de sus protagonistas, y es lo cierto que del tono general de una serie de libros, de una cierta atmosfera fija o imperante sobre todos los relatos, a pesar de su diversidad, pueden deducirse modalidades de caracter y habitos de vida que denuncian en este o aquel personaje la personalidad tenaz del autor. ⁷ And quite clearly the tone and atmosphere that most clearly define Quiroga's works come directly from his experiences in Misiones, el Chaco, San Ignacio. Although Quiroga was a voracious reader and was certainly influenced by such writers as Poe, Maupassant, Kipling, and Chekov, the most profound influences on his writing was always the jungle. He began his literary career under the aegis of Modernism, but soon began to feel it to be artificial and decadent. He then turned to themes implicit in life in the Argentine jungle. Some of these themes are love, madness, death, cruelty, rational man vs. irrational nature, and the roles of accident and effort in man's psychological makeup and destiny.

Quiroga is fascinated by the human personality under stress, and the jungle as he experienced it provides stressful situations in the extreme. There is no romantic notion of the new savage or natural man in Quiroga's stories. Man is rather portrayed as a being who has lost his ability to function instinctively. He tries to rely on his reason rather than on his senses. Quiroga does not see man as a superior animal because of his ability to reason, as reason is not necessarily an advantage in jungle survival. Man has an innate need to control Nature, but any efforts to do so can lead to tragedy if man fails to understand his own limitations or the ever present possibility of accident. Still man *must* act, and his measure is taken in his response to extreme situations imposed on him by Nature. Nature in Quiroga's stories does not serve merely as a colorful background. Rather it is a powerful adversary, a potent force that man seldom overcomes.

Some critics feel that Quiroga's characters are weak physically and psychologically, that there are lost souls, victims of forces that surround them and of destinies not of their own making, and that furthermore, Quiroga is indifferent to their fates. Others feel that Quiroga has a special tenderness for man, that he acknowledges man's frailty but at the same time his heroism in the face of psychological and physical hardship. ⁹ Margaret Peden summarizes the more humanistic view of Quiroga's characterizations. She feels that he has "an astute awareness of the problems besetting man," that man may indeed be "moved by greed and ambition, hampered by fate, bounded by circumstances beyond his control," but that through Quiroga's writing we see "man's faults nor weakness, but stresses his virtues—courage, generosity and compassion." ¹⁰

In his essay "El amor, la locura y la muerte", Hiber Conteris asserts that these three "son los agentes que, a veces a la plena luz, a veces embozados y ocultos, mueven la trama de la historia y precipitan su desenlace."

¹¹ All Quiroga's works, he continues, really revolve around a single overriding theme—the failure of human endeavor in love and reason. Madness as depicted by Quiroga, he maintains, goes beyond its clinical definition. It is, in effect, not far removed from the normal, but that Quiroga always pushes his characters to the outer limits of the normal. Madness is often seen through hallucination or in a moment of lost rationality.

¹² It is a definition that works well in the two stories included here.

The death theme obviously comes directly from Quiroga's life. Not only is death constantly imminent, but it can be invoked and made present through suicide. Death in the jungle is commonplace, an inexorable law of Nature, but when it surprises man in the midst of life, his nature is to fight heroically against it.

Love for Quiroga was always a frustrating experience, but was something he knew he needed. Of all his themes this is the one he is least able to treat with his renowned objectivity. He could not always successfully mask his very basic emotional nature.

Quiroga's style has elicited much critical appraisal. Most critics point to his realism, his objectivity, and his verbal economy. Quiroga himself has written much to illuminate his own stylistic principles. His three most cited pieces on the art of short story writing were published in *El hogar*, a literary magazine of Buenos Aires. "Manual del perfecto cuentista", published in April of 1925 sets forth a decalogue for short story writing. "La retorica del cuento", published in December of 1928 talks in part about the importance of work selection and ordering. "Ante el tribunal", published in September of 1930 defends his principles of writing and his work. Some understanding of these three pieces is critical to evaluating the stories which follow.

His decalogue, in an abbreviated translated form is as follows:

1. Believe in the masters...as you would in God himself.

2. Believe that your art is an unreachable summit.... When you are able to conquer it you will do so without being aware of it.

3. Resist imitation, but if you must imitate do so. The development of a personal style is a science.

4. ...Love your art as you would your lover, giving it all your heart.

5. Don't begin to write without knowing from the first word where you are going. In a well-constructed story the three first lines are almost as important as the three last.

6. If you want to express with precision the idea that "from the river blew a cold wind" there are no other words than those to say so.

7. Use no unnecessary adjectives. Useless adjectives cannot enliven a weak noun. If you find the right word it will live. The trick is to find it. ⁸

8. Take your characters by the hand and lead them firmly to the conclusion without deviating from your path. Don't be distracted by seeing what they cannot or don't value. Do not abuse your reader. A story is a novel devoid of useless verbiage. Take this as absolute truth even though it may not be.

9 Do not write under the sway of emotion. Let it die then evoke it anew. If you can revive what was, in art that is half the battle.

10. Do not think about your friends when you write, nor on the impression your story will make. Write as if your story were of interest to no one but its characters, of whom you could have been one. There is no other way for your story to truly live. In "La retorica del cuento" he discusses the importance of choosing and ordering words. It is the selection and ordering, he says that differentiate a great writer from a modest citizen. The art of writing consists of finding for each idea just the right words to express it. First a writer must have ideas, but a masterful writer must find the words which definitely express those ideas. Synonyms, he proclaims, are not. If a writer cannot see the profound difference inherent in any two words he cannot write effectively.

In "Ante el tribunal" Quiroga insists that a story have a single story line traced by a single, untrembling hand from beginning to end. A story, he says, should be as an arrow carefully aimed at its target. If butterflies perch on it during its flight, they will be obstructions no matter how beautiful.

Some critics make much of technical linguistic errors in Quiroga's writing and of a perceived lack of purity in his language. Monegal responds to his criticism by proposing that if by good writing one means that which follows the rules of linguistic purity as set down by the Spanish Royal Academy, then it is indeed evident that Quiroga does not write well. He himself has said he has no interest in such language. If, on the other hand, writing well means to write "de la manera mas eficaz, comunicar con la major fuerza expresiva le que se quiere decir; ... entonces Quiroga no sole escribe bien sine que escribe inmejorablemente." ¹³

There is little doubt that Quiroga loves his work and saw it as a necessity for his spiritual well being. "Creo que no se no puede sacar del cuento." He valued the short story for

la sostenida intensidad, síntesis y desnuda naturalidad. ...la sujeción a un plan claramente previsto, mantenimiento y culminación de la intensidad; eliminación implacable de toda la superflua, de toda emoción e interés que de modo natural no brote de la narración; absoluta subordinación de la forma a la esencial. ¹⁴

Because of all these beliefs as to how a short story must be constructed, most of Quiroga's stories are distinguished by an incredible intensity and reality. His is an art free of rhetoric. Washington Benavidez says that whether the stories are based on actual events in Quiroga's life or are pure creations of his imagination

they are “presentada con tal intensidad que, por lo menos mientras dura el cuento, se convierta en realidad.”¹⁵ And although his stories are all very specifically located both geographically and temporally, their very reality and intensity render them universal.

Two of Quiroga’s most intensely riveting stories are “A la deriva” (“Drifting”), included in *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte*, and “El hijo” (“The Son”), which appeared in *Mas alla*. They are also two of his most frequently anthologized stories. Both are to be found in the *Antología de cuentos hispanoamericanos*, edited by Alberto M> Vazquez and available through the Regents Publishing Company in New York. Unfortunately both stories do not appear in some of the works of Quiroga’s selected stories. Both are included, fortunately, in *The Decapitated Chicken*, a book of Quiroga’s stories in translation, edited by Margaret Sayers Peden, the University of Texas Press, Austin. Hopefully the work included in this unit to be done with students after their having read the stories will give a good framework for a critical appraisal of the two stories. Nonetheless, let us now take a closer look these two powerful and typical Quiroga stories.

“A la deriva” is perhaps the matchless example of Quiroga’s narrative economy and intense realism. “El hombre piso algo blanduzco y en seguida sintió la mordedura en el pie.” From the opening sentence the outcome is clear. Nature has once again surprised man, who in the midst of life has it snatched precipitously away from him. The action of the story is as straight forward and lineal as Quiroga’s arrow. The minutely detailed description of the progression of the poison through the man’s body leads us resolutely to his death. This *is* a story replete with adjectives, but each is so scrupulously chosen as to make the reader feel with him the intensity of the man’s pain and his desire to live. Yet there is no sentimentalism here. Death is simply seen as an unacceptable alternative to life. While we tangentially learn some facts of the man’s life, we really knew nothing of the substance of this man, nor do we need to do so. All we need know of him we learn through his actions.

Nature, too, is a dynamic force in this story. Action words abound in reference to both the man and Nature. There is no commentary, only intensely realistic description and action. The narrative teems with images of life and death. As the man drifts in his canoe down the powerful Parana, Nature is described as funereal, black, lugubrious. But at the same time Nature is aggressive, beautiful and majestic, and at twilight is golden, with the scent of wild flowers. It is indeed a river of life flowing inexorably toward death.

In his brief masterpiece Quiroga converts a possibly every day jungle accident into a universal symbol of human experience, of the tragic expression of human life. As *this* man drifts in his canoe so *every* man is adrift on the river of life. It is often a journey over which man has no control in that it cannot help but end in death. Perhaps Nicolas Bratosevich best sums up “A la deriva”:

Desde Paulino envenenado sabemos de la selva, de su relación de hostilidad con el hombre que la afronta, del pasado reciente y lejano de este, de sus conexiones con otros seres humanos que sin embargo no sirven para atemperar la radical soledad que es morir.¹⁶ “El hijo”, which Lazo calls “uno de los cuentos más valiosos de los más felizmente representativos de su estilo en lo más alto de su evolución”, is a vastly different sort of story in some significant ways. While “A la deriva” leaves us somewhat detached emotionally from the person of the main character, every empathetic human response we have ever felt is engaged in “El hijo”. It is one of Quiroga’s most profoundly emotional stories. The plot again is a simple one. A son goes hunting, and when he doesn’t return at the appointed hour his father goes in search for him. While we can theorize that “A la deriva” easily could have come from Quiroga’s own experience, “El hijo” was indeed based, at least emotionally, on an actual incident. Dario went hunting one day and didn’t return when expected. Knowing full well the menace of the jungle, a distraught Quiroga went in search of his son, and happily found him alive and

well, but not until the father had suffered some hours of intense mental anguish.

The external action of this story is minimal. The internal action, however is riveting. We are given an intimate look into the tortured mind of a father who has a history of hallucination. It is witnessing the agony of this man's soul that bonds us to him emotionally as he searches for his missing son. The depth of a parent's love has never been more touchingly and devastatingly presented.

In "El hijo" Quiroga brings the use of suggestion to its highest art form. As the frantic father scours the countryside he sees everywhere the possibility of death. This is a masterfully calculated story. Quiroga builds in us a dreadful anticipation then detours that dread as he carefully prepares us emotionally for the final scene. We come to believe in the veracity of the father's hallucinations. These hallucinations, Jaime Alazraki tells us, serve as an exorcism against a dreaded reality. When that reality seems inconceivable the hallucinations lose their meaning. But when ultimately the hallucinations become reality, the father produces an opposite hallucination to avoid confronting the most horrible ultimate reality.¹⁸

Quiroga shows us in "El hijo" a much more human side of death—the inconsolable grief and intolerable suffering it can cause. While we rather calmly accept the fact of the man's death in "A la deriva", here death assaults and horrifies us. We, with the father, desperately want it not to be. We refuse to accept the ultimate absurdity of the death of a son.

As in "A la deriva" there is nothing superfluous in this story. Although Quiroga plays with our emotions, the essential story line once again leads directly from start to finish. The interplay of the incredibly deep feelings of paternal love and the increasing sense of inexorable tragedy give this story the same intense realism as "A la deriva". And once again, although geographically specific, the story is profoundly universal. "La vuelta de tuerca final", says Benavidez, "no es deleite morboso; es una iluminacion brevisima de lo que puede ser—para un hombre—el infierno mental de cada dia."¹⁹

Through "A la deriva" and "El hijo" we see a manifestation of much that was Horacio Quiroga, man and artist. His style follows deeply held artistic principles forged by him. His themes come directly from his life. Quiroga knew what it was to be a disciplined literary technician, but he also knew what it was to be an emotional, caring human being. The realism, intensity and universality of his stories come directly from that deep personalization. "Yo sostuve," he says in "Ante el tribunal", la necesidad en arte de volver a la vida cada vez que transitoriamente aquel pierde su concepto...la vida no es un juego cuando se tiene consciencia de ella, tampoco le es la expresion artistica."

Having looked at the life, themes, style, and two stories of Quiroga, let now turn to classroom activities which will encompass much of what has been presented. The activities are purposely not broken up by days, as different classes will be able to do different activities in different amounts of time. All activities assume that the students have already read both stories previously discussed. For classroom discussion purposes, small groups are highly recommended. Divide the class into three or four small groups then have each group report back with someone to record all ideas on the board. A whole class discussion can then follow.

I. Background information sheet to be distributed to the students before they begin to read the stories.

Horacio Quiroga was born in Uruguay in 1878 and died in Buenos Aires in 1937. Although he wrote various works of poetry, drama and novels, he excelled in and was renowned for his favorite literary form, the short story. Quiroga was an educated and cultured man. He traveled to Paris, began an important literary circle in

Buenos Aires, and read voraciously. At the same time he was a man who always felt stangely out of step with the refined, cultured circles in which he often found himself. He was a very imaginative, complex and introspective man. He has often been described as morbid, a man with an obsession for the magical, for insanity, cruelty and death. He was very much influenced by such other writers as Poe, Maupassant, Chekov, and Kipling. He life was marked by a series of tragedies which deeply affected his work; the accidental death of his father, the suicides of his step-father and first wife, and the accidental death by Quiroga's own hand of one of his best friends. Upon realizing he suffered from incurable cancer he took his own life.

Quiroga spent most of his life in Argentina. While he spent many years in Buenos Aires, his real "home" was in a far removed area called Misiones. It was in this jungle area that Quiroga felt most himself, and the majority of his literary themes spring directly from his experiences in the jungle.

Quiroga's stories, while linguistically not always perfect, are extremely well constructed and emotionally riveting. As we will see, his characters are so realistic psychologically that they are totally convincing. Quiroga is a master at producing in the reader exactly the effect desired by the author. He gives very few details that are not absolutely essential to that desired effect. He presents the action and allows the reader to supply many of the details; he gives an outline and allows his reader to complete the picture. Narration and characterization are well balanced.

Some of his favorite themes are:

1. the jungle in all its majesty , with all its animals and dangers and difficulties to be faced by any man living in it

2. cruelty, sickness, insanity, death
3. horror and the morbid

4. the psychology of men and animals when find themselves in extreme situations (He often uses animals as protagonists.) Quiroga does not have a romantic view of the jungle. He doesn't see man as being a necessarily superior animal. Often, in fact, man's reason deosn't serve as well in the jungle as would animal instincts. The jungle in its most extreme is an irrational place. Men when try to dominate Nature through reason often find themselves faced with failure, disaster and death. Quiroga defines man through action. Man *must* act, even though those actions may lead to disaster. Man cannot control his destiny in an irrational jungle where accident is an every day possiblity.

Although both of the stories we will read take place in the jungle, you will easily see that Quiroga presents problems and emotional reactions to them that re inherent to and deeply felt by all people everywhere.

II. Questions to accompany "A la deriva"

This first group of questions is designed to arrive at the basic facts of the story. These are obviously more important if the story has been read in Spanish. These questions should be distributed before the class reads the story as a sort of guide to the reading.

1. How does the story begin? What happens to the man?

2. Where does the story take place? (It might be useful to locate key places on a map. Never take geographical knowledge for granted).
3. Where does the man's pain begin?
4. Where does he go after being bitten?
5. What is his wound like when he arrives at his ranch?
6. What does the man want from his wife? Why?
7. Why does he go to his canoe?
8. Where does he intend to go ? Why?
9. What is the wound like when he loses the paddle?
10. Who is Alves?
11. At sunset, how does the man feel?
12. Who is Dougall?

13. What happens to the man?

The second set of questions is designed to promote critical consideration of the story. These questions may best be handled in the small group setting.

1. What effect does the very first sentence have? Why does Quiroga begin the story with the snakebite? How did you feel when you realized what had happened?

2. List the specific actions the man takes after being bitten (i. e. kills snake, returns to ranch etc.). Do these actions make sense? Explain. Can you think of actions that would have made more sense or would have caused a different ending to the story? (This is a sort of devil's advocate question; obviously if he'd done anything to alter the story there would not be *this* story). Why do you think the man reacted as he did? How do you honestly think you would have reacted?

3. Look at the words that Quiroga uses to describe the wound from the time the man is bitten (You may want to get a list of words on the board). Go through the story and trace the progress of the poison from the man's foot throughout his body. How would you classify those words and descriptions? Are you able to understand the man's suffering? Can you "feel" his pain? Explain.

4. Look carefully at the passages that describe the jungle and the river. What specific words does

Quiroga use? What sort of feeling for Nature do you get from these descriptions? In a few words of your own, how would you characterize Nature as presented here? Can you see any relationship between the man's feelings and Nature?

5. What would you give as some possible themes for this story? What do you think Quiroga is trying to say about man in this story? What is the significance of the title? After this discussion most of the points pertinent to the understanding of "A la deriva" should have been covered. The teacher can then give a brief summation of the salient points and a sampling of critical opinion of the story, as presented earlier.

III. Questions to accompany "El hijo"

Again, the first group simply tries to arrive at the facts. These questions are given in what seems like excruciating detail, but if the story can be read in Spanish they serve to guide the student's understanding of the actual story line, which in this particular story is often very confusing.

1. Where does the story take place?
2. Who are the two main characters?
3. Where is the son going?
4. When is he to return?
5. How old is he?
6. Does he know how to handle a gun well?
7. How has the boy been educated?
8. From what does the father suffer?
9. What does the father hear in the distance?
10. What is the weather like?
11. Has the boy returned by noon?
12. Why does the father think the boy is late?
13. At what time does the father leave his workshop?
14. Has the father heard any other gunshots?
15. How does the father go to search for his son?
16. Why doesn't he call his son's name?
17. What does the father see everywhere he looks?
18. Does he finally find his son?
19. What does the boy "do" when his father reaches him?

20. What has happened to the boy? Questions to promote critical thinking and discussion:

1. How is Nature described at the beginning of the story? Look through the story for other references to Nature. Does the father's attitude toward Nature change?
2. Describe the relationship between the father and his son. Why do you think they have the relationship they do?
3. What philosophy does the father have in regard to the dangers of life in the jungle? Is this a reasonable attitude? Do you agree with his philosophy? (Keep in mind the circumstances of a jungle existence).
4. What role does hallucination play in the story? Discuss its importance.
5. Trace the emotional stress of the father from the time he realizes his son is late. What words does Quiroga use to describe the man's suffering? Can you feel the man's fear? Do you understand what he is suffering? How does Quiroga make you feel these things?
6. How did you feel when the father finds his son— *before* you read the last paragraph? How did you feel when you read the final paragraph? Explain as precisely as possible. To what do you attribute these feelings?
7. Look at the ways in which Quiroga "sets you up" in this story. Go back through the story and find all the clues/hints that Quiroga gives as to the outcome of the story. Given that, why are we so willing to accept that the father finds his son alive and well?
8. How would you explain the father's reaction to finding his son? What information does Quiroga give throughout the story as to the father's mental state? Does his reaction seem to you to be psychologically believable. Explain.
9. What are some possible themes of this story?
10. Which of the two stories did you like better and why?

IV. Follow up exercises

1. Discuss with students a comparison of the two stories. List on the board ways in which they are similar and different. Look at themes, characterization, word use, emotional and psychological impact, structure, etc. After discussing the similarities and differences have the students write a comparative essay about the two stories.
2. Based on the readings of both stories, discuss the jungle and man's life in the jungle. What have you learned from Quiroga about life in the jungle? Who might choose to live there? What

dangers would that person face? What might cause that person to fail in his endeavors? Is there anything he could do to increase his chances for survival? Would you ever choose such a life? Explain. After the discussion have the students write an essay summing up their ideas, or have them imagine they are pioneers in the jungle and write a letter to someone in the city explaining jungle existence and why they have chosen it.³ Quiroga's stories tend to leave the reader with very vivid mental images. If a student is artistically inclined, give that student the option of illustrating one of the stories in any way s/he sees fit.

D. Look at the ten points Quiroga lists as necessary to the perfect writing of short fiction. Choose either of the stories and analyze it in terms of Quiroga's own decalogue. In the same vein, search out Edgar A. Poe's rules for writing short fiction. How do the two lists compare? Choose one of Poe's short stories and read it. What comparisons would you make between it and either of Quiroga's stories.

E. Read other Quiroga stories on your own and review them in the light of what you have learned about the man and his writing.

F. Have the students look at their own inner city environment. What skills do you need to survive here? What sorts of forces are at work here that could make one fail? Would a person in these circumstances feel and react differently from Quiroga's characters? Would any of the survival skills needed here be of any use in the jungle?

After completing various of these exercises the students should have a very good understanding of Horacio Quiroga and his work. They certainly will have become familiar with the man's life, themes and artistic style, and hopefully will have come to appreciate two of his best stories. Furthermore they should have had ample opportunity to use some important critical thinking skills in discussing the stories. If their writings, drawings and discussions confirm that all this is so, then the goals of this unit will have been met.

FOOTNOTES

1. Emir Rodriguez Monegal, *El desterrado—vida y obra de Horacio Quiroga*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, S.A., 1968) p. 80.
2. Ibid, p. 137.
3. Raimundo Lazo, *Horacio Quiroga: seleccion segun orden cronologico; estudio preliminar y notas criticas e informativas*, (Mexico: Editorial Perrua, S.A., 1968) p. xi.
4. Ibid, p. xii.
5. Ibid, p. xiii.
6. Rodriguez Monegal, p. 28.
7. Ibid, p. 8.
8. Angel Flores, *Approximaciones a Horacio Quiroga*, (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1976) p. 42.
9. Ibid, p. 21.
10. Margaret Sayers Peden, *The Decapitated Chicken and other Stories by Horacio Quiroga*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), p. xiii.
11. Flores, p. 151.
12. Ibid, p. 153.
13. Rodriguez Monegal, p. 232.
14. Lazo, p. xiv.
15. Washington Benavidez, *Horacio Quiroga: Cuentos escogidos*, (Montevideo: Ediciones de la banda oriental, 1978), p. 65.
16. Nicolas A. S. Bratesevich, *El estile do Horacio Quiroga en sus cuentos*, (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, S.A., 1973), p. 105.
17. Lazo, p. 127.
18. Flores, p. 157
19. Benavidez, p. 34.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Much has been written about Horacio Quiroga and the Yale library houses an extensive collection of works by and about this author. In researching this unit, however, I found the books listed below to be not only the most useful and informative, but also not repetitious of each other. The teacher will note that most of the books cited are written in Spanish, so a knowledge of that language is essential to their use.

Anderson Imbert, Enrique and Florit, Eugenio. *Literatura latinoamericana: Anologia e introduccion historica* . New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960. The historical introductions are helpful in placing Quiroga within the context of the predominant literary trends and personalities of this time.

Benavidez, Washington. *Horacio Quiroga: Cuentos escogidos* . Montevideo: Ediciones de la banda oriental, 1978. Includes a good selection of stories with brief critical commentary about each.

Bratesevich, Nicolas A.S.. *El estile do Horacio Quiroga en sus cuentos* . Madrid: Editorial Gredos, S.A., 1973. An emphasis on the critical reading of the stories with particular attention to their structure and tone.

Flores, Angel. *Aproximaciones a Horacio Quiroga* . Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, 1976. A valuable book of critical essays by some of the foremost scholars of Quiroga. Covers all aspects of Quiroga's writings. Also contains exegeses of and commentaries on several specific works, including "A la deriva".

France, Jean. *Horacio Quiroga: Cuentos escogidos* . New York: Pergamon Press, 1968. A text book of Quiroga's stories. Includes a good introduction in English, a selected glossary (Spanish-English), and vocabulary notes for each story. The stories are in Spanish but the many notes make it a far easier task for the student to read. Does not include "El hijo".

Gomez-Gil, Orlando. *Historia critica de la literatura hispanoamericana* . New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968. A useful volume to provide background information on the literary movements which surrounded and influenced Quiroga.

Lazo, Raimunde. *Horacio Quiroga: seleccion segun orden cronologico; estudio preliminar y notas criticas e informativas* . Mexico: Editorial Porrua, S.A., 1968. Contains excellent and extensive critical and biographical information in its introduction. The notes for each story are too sketchy to be of any real value, but they, with the chronological presentation give an excellent overview of Quiroga's works. Includes "Manual del perfecto cuentista" and "Ante el tribunal".

Peden, Margaret Sayers. *The Decapitated Chicken and other Stories by Horacio Quiroga* . Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976. Invaluable as one of the few English translations of some of Quiroga's stories. Includes both "Drifting" and "The Son". Contains a good critical introduction. Translations tend to be very literal but can be quite happily used with students.

Rodriguez Monegal, Emir. *El desterrado—vida y obra de Horacio Quiroga* . Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, S.A., 1968. Invaluable to an understanding of the life and work of Quiroga. Very complete and fascinating to read. Contains a good, concise chronology of Quiroga's life and works. Provides excellent insights into the man and his art.

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