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1 Introduction

I'm sure there are people that feel, much as I do, that Julio Cortázar's "*Continuidad de los parques*"¹ is one of the most masterfully constructed short stories yet written. Not only the ingenuity of the story's idea, but also the incredible attention to metaphorical detail, the purposeful manipulation of verbal tense, and the carefully intentional ambiguity that does not reveal its necessity until the story's climax all demonstrate Cortázar's ability with the short form²; Cortázar's "*Continuidad de los parques*" is all the more impressive, when one considers that it is less than 550 words long.

Intrigued by Cortázar's story, I was equally impressed to discover that it is not alone in the sphere of strikingly short fiction, and is in fact considered to be an early example of a new and extremely condensed form of 'short story' writing that has gained much popularity in Latin America over recent years. This new form is referred to under many names; the one I have chosen to adopt in this work is *minificción*. In fact, in comparison to the size of much of *minificción*, Cortázar's "*Continuidad de los parques*" is actually as much a giant as the title character of the following story by Augusto Monterroso, "*El dinosaurio*"³:

Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí.

It should be stated that, although a mere nine words in length – one includes the title in the word count of *minificción* – "*El dinosaurio*" is a complete and autonomous story. Monterroso's dinosaur is not only enigmatic, but has also become paradigmatic, passing into the realms of *minificción* legend and instantly – as well as easily – quotable by anyone familiar with the form.

¹ "*Continuidad de los parques*" first appeared in Cortázar's 1956 book "*Final de juego*", but is now readily available online in WWW, e.g., under URL: <http://www.literatura.org/Cortazar/Continuidad.html>.

² Oseguera de Chavez (2000:325-327).

³ Monterroso (2006:77).

Minificción is considered to be a new phenomenon, having developed at an increasing pace over the past century, although it is only in recent decades that it has begun to receive critical attention. Given *minificción*'s newness, there is still a dearth of critical analysis concerned with its analysis, and that which does exist is plagued by inconsistent use of terminology and lack of agreement on even the most basic definitions of what exactly *minificción* is. However, one thing that seems to be generally accepted to a larger or lesser degree by those critics who have tackled it is that *minificción* is essentially a relative of the short story, and is therefore a form of narrative.

It is this notion – that *minificción* is fundamentally a form of narrative – which I challenge in this work. It appears to me that critics may have been led to this assumption due to *minificción*'s parallel development with the short story in Latin America, and many examples of *minificción* are without a doubt indeed narrative texts. However, none of the critics cited appears to have tested *minificción*'s narrative qualities against the analytical tools at their disposal, which is what I aim to do in this work. In doing this, it will not only be shown that much *minificción* has been wrongly categorised as narrative, but many questions regarding the true nature of much of *minificción* will also be raised. It is my feeling that the search for answers to these questions could offer a firmer basis from which to approach the study of *minificción* in the future.

I have constructed this work in the following manner: Firstly, in chapter 2, I will present *minificción* on the diachronic axis. The aim of this is, as far as is possible, to show the development of *minificción* over the course of its history while familiarising the reader of this work with this as yet undefined and difficult to describe form of literature. Following this, in chapter 3, I will present three descriptive models by three different authors that will show *minificción* on the synchronic axis, i.e., where it is considered to be positioned in relation to other textual forms of both a literary and non-literary nature, and how these critics view the different classes of *minificción* itself. This chapter will also reveal the emphasis that has been placed on *minificción*'s supposed narrative qualities by

contemporary critics. Chapter 4 will then discuss the concept of narrative itself, drawing on the work of some of the leading thinkers in the field of narratology, such as Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette, in order to reveal the fundamental elements of narrative and how these can be recognised in a text. In chapter 5 I will examine examples of *minificción* in order to test whether or not they should be classed as narrative texts, and chapter 6 will contain a summary and the conclusions of this work.

There are two things that should be noted about the style and vocabulary employed within this work. Firstly and most importantly, with regards to the term ‘*minificción*’ itself, as mentioned above, many alternative terms have been coined to refer to this new form of literature. Each of the critics discussed in chapter 3 employs a different one of them, and this has been noted in the relevant discussions. However, to complicate matters even further, each of these critics also uses the term ‘*minificción*’ to refer to something slightly different to that which is implied by the term as it is used in this work. This has also been noted where necessary, but it should also be understood from the outset that, unless otherwise stated, the term *minificción* is used in this work to refer a new form of short, fictional text of between one and a couple of hundred words that has evolved principally in Latin America since the end of the nineteenth century.

Secondly, due to the fact that four different languages, namely English, Spanish, French and German, have all been used in the body of this work, a remark should be made about the typeset and formatting of the text. Words that appear in a language other than English are always presented in italics, as are direct quotes in any language, in which case speech marks and a footnote reference will mark them clearly as such. Where possible, quotes have always been reproduced in the original language, if that language is one of the four mentioned above. The titles of books, research papers and examples of *minificción* are also presented in italics and placed between speech marks, and these are also referenced with a footnote if the full text appears at a different location in this work. However, where an example of *minificción* has been reproduced in full, this has been done without the

use of quotation marks, precisely to show that that particular example is being shown in its entirety as opposed to being a quote from a larger piece.

There are two final points that I would like to make before starting this work, both of which could perhaps be considered disclaimers: Firstly, in arguing against the ‘narrative qualities’ of certain examples of *minificción*, it should not be understood that I am arguing against their ‘quality’; to say that an example of *minificción* lacks the fundamentals of a narrative text is certainly not the same as saying that it is a bad *minificción*. Indeed, it is the creativity shown by the writers of the form in their experimentation with non-narrative and sometimes even non-literary forms of writing that makes *minificción* such a fascinating form to read. Secondly, I have tried my utmost to present faithfully the ideas of the critics discussed in chapter 3. However, at times, due to the fact that their models are not always comprehensive, I have had to draw inferences to complete the ‘bigger picture’. Where this is the case, it will be stated clearly in the wording of the text.

2 A History of *Minificción*

This chapter will draw on the work of the few critics that have attempted to trace the origins of *minificción*, in addition to works concerning the history of Latin American literature in the wider sense, in order to present *minificción* along the diachronic axis, i.e., to describe the brief history of this brief form. Furthermore, this chapter should help to familiarise the reader with this as yet undefined and difficult to describe form of writing.

Subchapter 2.1 will deal with the roots of *minificción*, offering examples of the sort texts that are sometimes considered to be precursors to *minificción*, other times the first examples of *minificción* in their own right. Subchapter 2.2 will look at the period that saw awareness of the development of a new form arise, a period which saw the production of the first texts that are now seen to be the classics of *minificción*. In subchapter 2.3 I will look at the recent past and the present to show the developing interest that has been shown in *minificción* by writers and readers alike, followed by a brief outline of the status of contemporary *minificción*.

2.1 Roots of *Minificción*

Assuming that one wants to proceed chronologically from the past to the present, a tricky problem arises as soon as one attempts to lay down the history of *minificción*, namely, the problem of deciding at what point in time that history should begin.

On the one hand, given that the majority of critics consider *minificción* to be a form related to the short story, it would perhaps seem appropriate to examine the history of that form, hoping to find a point where the first examples of *minificción* begin to appear. This approach may appear straightforward at first consideration;

until one then considers that the short story itself probably predates history⁴, and that many different forms of the short story that compete with *minificción* in terms of size – such as the limerick, the fable or the parable – exist and have existed for a long time. Should any or even all of these be considered the precursors of *minificción*? Should any or all of these actually be considered *minificción*?

On the other hand, critics such as Lagmanovich point to the fact that:

*“Desde hace mediados del siglo XX comenzó a notarse la aparición, en diversas literaturas, de textos narrativos de muy reducidas dimensiones.”*⁵

Perhaps it is that moment of awareness and recognition that should be considered the beginning of the history of *minificción*; that moment when critical attention began to be attracted to the form, and began to name and classify it; that moment when writers began to be aware that they had a goal in common: to explore and extend the boundaries of the brief, fictional text. Such questions are not made any easier to answer by the fact that, as yet, nobody has been able to offer a commonly accepted definition of what this ‘new’ form called *minificción* actually is.

However, the very fact that we do intuitively feel when reading *minificción* that we are faced with something ‘new’, and not – despite the similarities that works of *minificción* may have such forms – a parable, a fable, a short story or a poem, suggests to me that the point where we should start is that point where examples of such literature began to appear on the literary scene.

Most critics agree that we can find this point towards the end of the nineteenth century, which is coincidentally also the epoch that witnessed the rebirth of the short story in its modern literary form⁶. Refraining from using the term

⁴ “Although there is some justification for the common claim that the short story as a distinct literary genre began in the nineteenth century, the wellsprings of the form are as old as the primitive realm of myth. Studies suggest that brief episodic narratives, which constitute the basis of the short story, are primary, preceding later epic forms, which constitute the basis of the novel.” May (1995:1).

⁵ Lagmanovich (2006:11).

⁶ Cf. May (1995:12).

minificción at this stage, the scattered examples of very short fiction found in this period are often associated with the literary movement known as *modernismo*, and involve authors as Rubén Darío, Alfonso Reyes, Julio Torri and Leopoldo Lugones.

2.1.2 From *modernismo* to *vanguardismo*

The 1888 publication of “*Azul...*” by Nicaraguan author Rubén Darío (1867 – 1916) is considered to have revitalised the literature of the Hispanic tradition, marking the establishment of the literary movement known as *modernismo*⁷. This movement encompassed a variety of South American authors active until the second decade of the twentieth century, and was to become the first major Latin American contribution to the larger world of literature. *Modernismo*’s anti-conformist stance represented an about-turn from the romanticism and positivism of the time, which had transformed literature into testimony and documentation of scientific and social aberrations of the time, in favour of a return to the aesthetic stance of ‘art for art’s sake’⁸. This is summed up in a quote from Darío himself, who, referring to his own work, said:

*“Veréis in mis versos princesas, reyes, cosas imperiales, visiones de países lejanos e imposibles,... ¡qué queréis!, yo detesto la vida y el tiempo en que me tocó nacer.”*⁹

Darío’s “*Azul...*” is a collection of short stories and poems that, in their style, are heavily influenced by the prose poem practiced by earlier European writers such as Baudelaire. Several of the pieces that appear in “*Azul...*”, such as “*Naturaleza muerta*”¹⁰, plus examples found in Darío’s later work, not only show the allegoric, symbolic and poetic qualities typical of the prose poem – qualities that are to be found in abundance in later examples of *minificción* – but they are also of an extension which was uncharacteristically short for their time. As such, Darío not

⁷ Cf. Oseguera de Chavez (2000:216).

⁸ Cf. Oseguera de Chavez (2000:213).

⁹ Oseguera de Chavez (2000:216).

¹⁰ Cf. subchapter 7.1.

only played a vital role in introducing such aesthetic innovations into the literature of the Spanish language, but he was also the first to frame them in narratives of extremely reduced extension¹¹. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that extension, or indeed lack of it, was a central aesthetic consideration for Darío¹² in the way that it has become for writers of *minificción* of later generations. Nevertheless, due to his undisputed influence, Darío introduced a form into the Hispanic literary sphere that was to be emulated and further developed by others.

Among the many authors who show the mark of Darío's influence were the Mexican writers and mutual friends Alfonso Reyes (1889 – 1959) and Julio Torri (1889 – 1970). Reyes, whose roots lie in the modernist movement, produced works representing many different literary genres, from the philosophical essay to the novel to poetry¹³. Among the body of his work one can find “*diversos textos narrativos brevísimos*,”¹⁴ although the number of such texts must not be exaggerated:

“*Dichos textos han de buscarse en los muchos volúmenes de su obra, por lo general en libros de variado contenido, ya que ninguno de estos libros está compuesto íntegramente por escritos de este tipo.*”¹⁵

Many of these narrative pieces demonstrate an affinity with the prose poem, but others, such as “*Sentimiento espectacular*”¹⁶ from his 1937 book “*Las vísperas de España*”, show experimentation with other forms of writing, in this case with the essay.

For his part, Torri's production was sparse in comparison with that of his colleague Reyes, but some examples of his work are considered so close to

¹¹ Lagmanovich (2006:168).

¹² Although brevity might have, at certain moments, been a consideration as a condition for publication: “*La compaginación de las revistas requería también llenar algunos espacios pequeños con ilustraciones o textos autónomos: fueron espacios propicios para agregar poemas cortos, citas, pensamientos y micro-relatos. Los micro-cuentos que publicó Rubén Darío a comienzos de siglo parecen obedecer a esta factura por encargo.*” Armando Epple, Juan, (1996).

¹³ Shimose (1989:192).

¹⁴ Lagmanovich (2006:170).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cf. subchapter 7.2.

minificción that they are regularly included in anthologies of the form. Perhaps the best known example is a short piece which appeared in his 1917 book “*Ensayos y poemas*”, titled “*A Circe*”, which is often cited as being the first true *minificción*:

¡Circe, diosa venerable! He seguido puntualmente tus avisos. Más no me hice amarrar al mástil cuando divisamos la isla de las sirenas, porque iba resuelto a perderme. En medio del mar silencioso estaba la pradera fatal. Parecía un cargamento de violetas errante por las aguas.

*¡Circe, noble diosa de los hermosos cabellos! Mi destino es cruel. Como iba resuelto a perderme, las sirenas no cantan para mí.*¹⁷

This early piece already shows many of the characteristics which are later to become commonplace in *minificción*, and unlike Reyes or Darío, brevity did appear to be an aesthetic intention of Torri, who described it as “*una extrema forma de la cortesía*”¹⁸. However, apart from its brevity – a mere 67 words – “*A Circe*” also demonstrates poetic characteristics (such as the anaphoric repetition at the beginning of each paragraph) combined with a narrative structure¹⁹, and perhaps most interestingly, intertextual reference to Greek mythology, which renders knowledge of the story of Odysseus, Circe and the sirens essential for the comprehension of the piece.

Continuing with writers whose roots lie in the modernist movement, it is also worthwhile pointing to influential Argentinean writer Leopoldo Lugones (1874 – 1938), who in his youth received the fervent support of Ruben Darío himself, and who went on to become the main exponent of the modernist movement in Argentina²⁰. The majority of Lugones’ literary output is of an extension which is too long to allow its classification as a true precursor to *minificción*. However, exceptions are found in his 1924 book “*Filosoficula*”, a collection of short essays,

¹⁷ Quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:127).

¹⁸ Zavala (2004:111).

¹⁹ The fundamentals of narrative are discussed in chapter 4. The narrative structure of “*A Circe*” is discussed briefly in subchapter 5.3.

²⁰ Lagmanovich (2006:173).

parables and poems that Lugones described as “*modesto y ligero*”²¹. One such example is the piece “*La dicha de vivir*”:

Poco antes de la oración en el huerto, un hombre tristísimo que había ido para ver a Jesús, conversaba con Felipe, mientras concluía de orar el Maestro.

– Yo soy es resucitado de Naím –dijo el hombre–. Antes de mi muerte, me regocijaba con el vino, holgaba con las mujeres, festejaba con mis amigos, prodigaba joyas y me recreaba en la música. Hijo único, la fortuna de mi madre viuda era mía tan solo. Ahora nada de eso puedo; mi vida es un páramo. ¿A qué debo atribuirlo?

– Es que cuando el Maestro resucita a alguno, asume todos sus pecados –respondió el apóstol–. Es como si aquél volviese a nacer en la pureza del párvulo.

– Así lo creía y por eso vengo.

– Qué podrías pedirle, habiéndote devuelto la vida?

*– Que me devuelva mis pecados –suspiró el hombre.*²²

The critic David Lagmanovich refers to those short fictional works rooted in *modernismo* as being situated in the “*aledaños*”²³ of *minificción*; conditioned by other forms of writing, such as the parable or the allegory or the prose poem, and therefore not *minificciones* in their own right. He draws a distinction between works such as these and those that evolved from the *vanguardismo* movement that followed, many of which he refers to directly as *microrrelatos*²⁴. Take, for example, the following piece by Spanish writer and *vanguardista* Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888 – 1921), titled “*El ciego bellísimo*”:

²¹ Ibid.

²² Quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:173-174).

²³ Lagmanovich (2006:174).

²⁴ Lagmanovich uses the term *microrrelato* in the same way that the term *minificción* is used in this work. Cf. subchapter 3.3.2.2.

*Aquella mujer repulsiva y fea se casó con el ciego de una belleza leonardesca. No le dejaba a solas con ninguna mujer y como aquel ciego no pudo tocar ningún otro rostro de mujer que el de la suya, no tenía idea de la medida. El lazarillo tenía ordenes severas de no dejar que se acercase a él ninguna mujer y él, sabiendo lo celoso que era su mujer, huía de todas. Un día, en el museo de escultura, acarició el rostro de una Venus y, asombrado y repugnado, cuando llegó a casa estranguló a su mujer, indignado por el engaño irreparable.*²⁵

Lagmanovich qualifies this distinction by claiming that many of the *vanguardistas* were drawn to short forms of writing, mainly as a result of the tight control the limited length of the form offers over the “elements of renovation”, and/or due to the inclination of artwork of the twentieth century towards fragmentation²⁶. This would seem to be in line with the common project that the many movements of *vanguardismo* had in common, namely that of:

*“esfuerzos renovadores encaminados a introducir cambios en la concepción y en las técnicas estéticas vigentes.”*²⁷

However, whether the brief works of *vanguardistas* such as de la Serna should be considered as true *minificciones* while those of the *modernistas* are excluded is, I believe, open to question; particularly if one considers that examples from both movements, removed from context and read next to modern *minificciones*, may in equal measure be received by the reader as such. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that such works were still few and far between in this period, and were not recognised as forming a unity based on their reduced dimension by the writers or critics of the time.

²⁵ Quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:181).

²⁶ Cf. Lagmanovich (2006:176).

²⁷ Oseguera de Chávez (2000:265).

2.2 The Classics of *Minificción*

Remaining with the work of Lagmanovich, the next period in the development of *minificción* is described by him as being the period of the ‘classics’. In referring to a *minificción* as a classic, Lagmanovich considers it to be a text which is:

*“por una parte [...] altamente representativo del género al que pertenece [...] por otra que sucesivas generaciones de lectores lo disfrutan, encontrando en él nuevas significaciones a lo largo del tiempo; por último, que se constituye en objeto de estudio para definir las características de la clase textual a lo que pertenece.”*²⁸

It is true that many of the pieces from this period, penned principally by writers of the period known as the Latin American ‘boom’, are staple *minificciones* that are found invariably in anthologies of the form and referenced routinely in critical works on the subject. They include short texts by writers of major influence in the Latin American literary sphere and beyond, such as the Guatemalan author Augusto Monterroso, the Mexican writer Juan José Arreola, and two Argentinean authors who require little introduction: Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges. Examples of *minificción* by each of the writers are discussed in depth later in this work²⁹.

What is interesting about this period, however, is not only that many of the *minificciones* written by the authors of the time have come to be perceived as classics in the sense used by Lagmanovich. In addition to this, the output of work that could be viewed as *minificción* per individual author also began to increase in comparison to the authors discussed in 2.1.2³⁰, and, in at least one case, the issue of brevity began to draw particular attention.

²⁸ Lagmanovich (2006:187).

²⁹ Cf. chapter 5.

³⁰ With the exception of Torri, whose relatively sparse output was entirely composed of brief texts. Cf. Maldonado Escoto (2006:51).

In terms of the increase in output, in the case of Borges, the short fictional form offered another means for the author to express and explore his favourite themes of:

*“los enigmas de la personalidad, los laberintos, el tiempo y la eternidad [y] la irrealidad fundamental del universo.”*³¹

One finds many examples of short fictional texts, mainly narrative based and *“intercalados entre composiciones más extensas o entre poemas o ensayos breves”*³², a good example of such being *“Diálogo sobre un diálogo”*, published in his 1960 book *“El Hacedor”*. The same can be said for Cortázar, where examples of *minificción* can be found scattered in some of his works, and indeed can be said to constitute the majority of others, such as in his 1979 work *“Un tal Lucas”*, or his 1962 work *“Historias de Cronopios y de Famas”*, from which the following piece titled *“Instrucciones para cantar”*, is taken:

Empiece por romper los espejos de su casa, deje caer los brazos, mire vagamente la pared, olvídense. Cante una sola nota, escuche por dentro. Si oye (pero esto ocurrirá mucho después) algo como un paisaje sumido en el miedo, con hogueras entre las piedras, con siluetas semidesnudas en cuclillas, creo que estará bien encaminado, y lo mismo si oye un río por donde bajan barcas pintadas de amarillo y negro, si oye un sabor de pan, un tacto de dedos, una sombra de caballo.

Después compre solfeos y un frac, y por favor no cante por la nariz y deje en paz a Schumann.

It should also be noted that this piece is not only interesting for its brevity, but also for its form, which is a parody of the instruction manual. As such, it forms one of several in a series in Cortázar’s *“Historias de Cronopios y de Famas”*, and the parody of other textual forms will go on to become a frequently employed technique in *minificción*.

³¹ Lagmanovich (2006:201).

³² Ibid.

Juan José Arreola, considered by at least one source to be “*el mejor cuentista de lo fantástico*”³³, is of particular interest to critics of *minificción* given the fact that the majority of his stories are “*invariabilmente breves*”³⁴, and as such:

“*dan nacimiento a un paradigma definitivo –y por ello clásico– de la minificción en lengua española.*”³⁵

In the work of Arreola, one sees many of the techniques that have since established themselves as integral to the art of *minificción* writing, including the blending of different textual forms noted in pieces such as Cortázar’s “*Instrucciones para llorar*” above. Arreola’s own “*De L’Osservatore*”³⁶ and the following piece, titled “*De John Donne*”, are two examples:

El espíritu es solvente de la carne. Pero yo soy de tu carne indisoluble.

Not only does this piece experiment with the aphorism while at the same time making use of poetic metre, but it also employs intertextuality in its referencing of English metaphysical poet and preacher John Donne. Moreover, we are dealing here with a work that reaches new levels of brevity, being composed of only 17 words including title. Although the majority of Arreola’s output was of a short extension, examples of such brevity are not commonplace. As such, even examples of Arreola’s work which were as short as the piece quoted above were considered to be in the vein of the short story by contemporary critics and were so read³⁷.

New levels of brevity were reached in what was to become arguably the most influential piece of *minificción* written to date, namely Monterroso’s “*El dinosaurio*”³⁸. Appearing within a collection of 13 short stories³⁹, three of which

³³ Oseguera de Chávez (2000:338).

³⁴ Lagmanovich (2006:188).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cf. subchapter 3.3.2.2 for full text of “*De L’Osservatore*”.

³⁷ Lagmanovich (2006:189).

³⁸ See Introduction for full text of “*El dinosaurio*”.

could be considered *minificciones* due to their extension, “*El dinosaurio*” further pushed the boundaries of what can and cannot be done in terms of narrative and size. This extremely enigmatic piece of only nine words stands autonomously as a complete story, and through its semantic ambiguity which leaves several integral questions unanswered in the mind of the reader, it defies definitive comprehension leaving it free for any number of interpretations. The interest that “*El dinosaurio*” has attracted and the influence it has exerted on later writers of *minificción* is immense, as evidenced by the abundance of literary criticism it has generated, plus the large quantity of *minificción* that shows its direct influence. The critic Lauro Zavala describes “*El dinosaurio*” as:

“[...] uno de los textos más estudiados, citados, glosados y parodiados en la historia de la palabra escrita, a pesar de tener una extensión de exactamente siete palabras. Tal vez el único texto de extensión similar que ha recibido semejante atención ha sido [...] la frase inaugural del Génesis en el Antiguo Testamento («En el principio fue el verbo»).”⁴⁰

In summary, this period of the classics of *minificción* can be distinguished from the former period through that fact that it was here that the paradigms of *minificción* were established. Although this is the case, it does not appear that a ‘common project’ existed among writers of the time to explore the boundaries of brevity. Despite this, it was during this period when such boundaries were pushed to their limits.

2.3 Minificción of the present

It was not only through the establishment of paradigms and the testing of the limits of brevity that the writers of the classic period of *minificción* were integral to its development. In addition to this, the weight and authority of names such as Arreola, Cortázar and Borges also lent instant credibility to the brief form. As Lagmanovich says:

³⁹ Monterroso, Augusto, *Obras completas (y otros cuentos)*. See bibliography for further details.

⁴⁰ Zavala (2004:143).

“Textos mínimos que en la década de 1920 hubieran parecido caprichos de un excéntrico, en la de 1960 fueron aceptados sin discusión porque estaban legitimados por nombres que eran imposible de ignorar.”⁴¹

Furthermore, such texts were also reaching and inspiring an ever widening audience, resulting in experimentation in the form by an increasing number of authors. This was of vital importance for a form that was still not:

“reconocido en sus características peculiares y en su emancipación con respecto a otras formas literarias.”⁴²

Indeed, it seems that by the beginning of the 1970s, the output of *minificción* had increased to the point where it finally began to receive critical attention in its own right. This is evidenced by the following quote from Mexican literary critic Luis Leal, which incidentally also appears to be the first time that an individual name was given to the form. Leal, referring to Arreola’s collection “*Confabulario Total*” (1962), states that some of the pieces within:

“apuntan hacia un nuevo género, el mini cuento, hoy de moda entre los jóvenes cuentistas”⁴³

This growing interest in *minificción* among the writing community was no doubt furthered by the appearance of a number of competitions dedicated to the form, the first of which was the *Concurso del Cuento Brevisimo* held by the Mexican literary magazine “*El Cuento*” from 1980 onwards. The limit set on the word count for competition entries lay at 250 words, and although now defunct, the magazine and the competition format enjoyed considerable popularity at the time. Since then, many competitions have appeared to take its place⁴⁴.

It was during this period that *minificción* is said to have established itself as a genre in its own right. Lagmanovich states that this occurred through the

⁴¹ Lagmanovich (2006:237).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ From *Historia del cuento hispanoamericano*, (México: de Andrea, 1971:115), quoted in RIB online in WWW (see bibliography for URL).

⁴⁴ Cf. Zavala (2004:81).

appearance of ‘autonomous projects’, in other words, works composed entirely of *minificción*. An early example of such is the 1984 work by Argentinean author Ana María Shua titled “*La sueñera*”, which comprises of a total of 250 *minificciones*. Such publications are now widespread (Shua herself has published four books of *minificción* alone⁴⁵), and the form is practiced by a vast array of writers far too long to be listed here.

Despite the growing number of writers practicing the form, it was still some time before *minificción* gained acceptance in the academic establishment, this acceptance manifesting itself in the form of critical works dedicated purely to the analysis of *minificción*, and its canonisation in the form of anthologies. Both of these have begun to appear, albeit in comparatively small but gradually increasing quantity, within the last twenty to thirty years. The first academic work dedicated to *minificción* appeared in 1986, titled “*El micro-relato en México: Julio Torri, Juan José Arreola and Augusto Monterroso*” by the critic Dolores Koch. This work was followed by several other academic theses over the years to follow.

Anthologies of the form, compiled by now recognisable names in the field such Lauro Zavala, David Lagmanovich, Raul Brasca and Juan Armando Epple, have been appearing in increasing numbers since the beginning of the 1990s⁴⁶. In addition to this, various congresses dedicated to the study of the form have been held since the final years of the twentieth century, the largest to these being the biannual *Congreso Internacional de la Minificción*, which will be convening for its fifth session in November 2008 in Buenos Aires.

However, despite the growing interest shown in *minificción* by academic circles, little consensus is yet to exist regarding even the most basic aspects of the form itself, such as the nature of its brevity, or of the underlying criteria that make *minificción* what it is. Violeta Rojo highlights a daunting list of 31 different names that have been applied to *minificción* and/or the different categories of

⁴⁵ “*La sueñera*” (1984), “*Casa de geishas*” (1988), “*Botánica del caos*” (2000) and “*Temporada de fantasmas*” (2004).

⁴⁶ Zavala (2004:368-374).

minificción, ranging from “*arte conciso*” to “*cuento cortísimo*” to “*ficción de un minuto*” to “*rompenormas*”, stating that:

*“Esta multitud de nombres indica varias cosas. Por una parte que, evidentemente, su característica más resaltante es la brevedad; por otra parte, que los límites de la narración muy breves no están bien definidos y por tanto no se sabe qué son esas narraciones tan cortas o a qué género pertenecen.”*⁴⁷

The chapter to follow will detail the critical models built by three specialists of the form that address these questions. One common approach taken by these critics is to view *minificción* as a subgenre of the short story, and therefore as a form of narrative. Such an approach, however, leads to various problems, as various works simply do not comply with narrative norms, as I will show in chapter 5.

⁴⁷ Rojo, Violeta, *El minicuento, ese (des)generado*, in: ‘Revista Interamericana de Bibliografía’, 1-4, 1996. Online in WWW (see bibliography for URL).

3 Models of *Minificción*: Zavala, Koch, Lagmanovich

In this chapter, I will be taking a closer look at how three contemporary critics of *minificción* view the form as a whole. The approach taken towards the presentation of their analytical models is geared towards gleaning answers to two main questions.

The first question is related to *genre*: how do contemporary critics view *minificción*'s position in the larger literary world? Is *minificción* considered to be a subcategory of one or more of the established literary genres, or is it considered to be a genre in its own right? What criteria are said to differentiate *minificción* from existing genres, and what characteristics does it have in common with them? As such, this question deals with revealing *minificción*'s position on the *synchronic* axis of textual production.

The second question involves examining how critics divide the world of *minificción* itself, i.e., how many different types of *minificción* are there considered to be, and what criteria are used to distinguish these different forms of *minificción* from one another? This question could therefore be called the *typological* question.

By examining the three critics' approaches to these problems it will also be shown that, although these critics have developed models which are often mutually incompatible, one underlying assumption is held in common by all: namely that *minificción* is predominantly a form of brief, *narrative* fiction. It is this assumption of the narrative nature of *minificción* that I challenge in this work.

The three critics I have selected to discuss in this chapter were all mentioned briefly in the previous discussion concerning the history of *minificción*. They are the Mexican academic Lauro Zavala, Cuban born academic Dolores Koch, and the Argentinean academic David Lagmanovich. Each of these three critics has been influential in the analysis of *minificción* in a variety of ways, and, due to the

sparse amount of secondary literature available on the topic at the time of writing, they also appear to be the only three critics who offer sufficiently developed models to be able to answer the questions highlighted above. Each will be discussed individually in the order listed above, and the chapter will conclude with a brief, comparative summary of the main ideas of all three.

3.1 Lauro Zavala

This subchapter discusses the first model of *minificción* that to be presented in this work. This will involve a brief biography of the author of the model, Lauro Zavala, followed by a critical description of the model he has developed, and conclude with a short summary and commentary.

3.1.1 Biography

Lauro Zavala is a teacher and scholarly researcher at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Xochimilco, Mexico City. Known for his work on literary theory, semiotics and film, Zavala has published several articles and books on the topic of *minificción*, a form of writing which he believes could become “*la escritura más característica del tercer milenio*.”⁴⁸ Besides his contributions towards the literary analysis of *minificción* as a form, Zavala has also played an important role in promoting discourse on the subject of *minificción* through his work as director of the *el cuento en red* website, a biannual Internet journal that focuses on the short story. Published since 2000, *el cuento en red* regularly contains features and has on occasions dedicated entire editions to *minificción*. The website features articles by critics and authors of *minificción* from all around Latin America.

The majority of Zavala’s ideas presented here can be found in his 2004 book “*Cartografías del cuento y la minificción*”, which contains a collection of his critical essays on the topic.

⁴⁸ Zavala (2004:70).

3.1.2 Zavala's Model: Terminology

Before going into detail describing Zavala's model, it is important to have a general idea of what Zavala is referring to when he uses the term *minificción*. A simple, working definition offered in the opening line of one of his essays, "*Seis propuestas para un género del tercer milenio*"⁴⁹, describes *minificción* as "*la narrativa que cabe en el espacio de una página*"⁵⁰.

Such a simple definition, which is not, it must be added, intended by the author to be comprehensive, leaves a lot of scope open to interpretation; for example, the broad use of the word 'narrative' means that many forms of literature which existed prior to *minificción*, in the sense in which the term *minificción* is being used in this work, could also be included within these very loose parameters, for example, short forms already mentioned such as the limerick, the parable or certain fables. Zavala follows up on this initial description of *minificción* by stating that:

*"A partir de esta sencilla definición encontramos numerosas variantes, diversos nombres y múltiples razones para que sea tan breve."*⁵¹

Although Zavala fails to offer these 'multiple' reasons to explain why *minificción* is necessarily so brief, he does attempt to elucidate on some of the different varieties, and his theories on this will be outlined in subchapter 4.1.2. It is also interesting to note, however, that Zavala mentions the fact that *minificción* is referred to under a variety of different names.

Indeed, Zavala's model introduces a very precise set of terms to describe the typography of *minificción*. However, when it comes to referring to *minificción* itself in a general sense, i.e., to the overarching whole, he also appears to fall victim to the imprecision in terminology that is seen in the works of many critics of the form. As such, terms such as *microficción* or *microcuento*, to name just two

⁴⁹ Zavala (2004:69-85).

⁵⁰ Zavala (2004:69).

⁵¹ Ibid.

examples, seem to be used by Zavala interchangeably along with the term *minificción*. This lack of consistency is not explained in the work of Zavala, resulting sometimes in confusion as to the precise object of discussion at certain points in his discussions. This confusion is compounded when one is also aware that other specialists in the study of *minificción* use these ‘interchangeable’ terms to refer to very different and very precise classes of *minificción*.

3.1.3 Zavala’s model: *el problema tipológico*

In the opening of his essay “*La minificción bajo el microscopio*”⁵², Zavala raises the point that:

*“Debido a su proximidad genérica con otras formas de la escritura, al tratar de ofrecer una definición del cuento breve nos enfrentamos a varios problemas simultáneos.”*⁵³

Listed here, in the order in which he introduces them, are these problems⁵⁴:

1. el problema **genérico** (*¿son cuentos?*),
2. el problema **estético** (*¿son literatura?*),
3. el problema de la **extensión** (*¿que breve puede ser un cuento muy breve?*),
4. el problema **nominal** (*¿cómo llamarlos?*),
5. el problema **tipológico** (*¿cuántos tipos de cuentos muy breves existen?*),
6. el problema de la **naturaleza textual** (*¿por qué son tan breves?*).

The problem which Zavala focuses on is the fifth, i.e., *el problema tipológico*⁵⁵, and his approach to this seems to be entirely based on the considerations of size (in this case word count). Departing from the statement that agreement exists

⁵² Zavala (2004:86-106).

⁵³ Zavala (2004:87).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ In offering a solution to this problem, Zavala does seem to simultaneously address *el problema nominal* and *el problema genérico*. He also cites examples of the shortest *minificciones*, one of which is one word in length. As it is not rational to think of a *minificción* that can be shorter than one word, one can assume this to be his answer to *el problema de la extensión*.

between writers and critics alike that the conventional short story, *el cuento*, oscillates in length from 2,000 to 10,000 words, Zavala classifies anything shorter than this as the *cuento breve*. Zavala then goes on to identify three different types of *cuento breve*. These three types are differentiated through their relative length in terms of words they contain, and are:

- 1 *el cuento corto* (1,000 to 2,000 words in length)
- 2 *el cuento muy corto* (200 to 1,000 words in length)
- 3 *el cuento ultracorto* (up to 200 words in length)

However, these boundaries in the word length in Zavala's typology are not arbitrarily selected; they are in fact considered to be responsible for the different characteristics that mark the three types, as:

*“Las diferencias généricas que existen entre cada uno de estos tipos de cuentos dependen de la extensión respectiva.”*⁵⁶

In other words, according to Zavala, a relationship exists between the length of the piece in words and the generic characteristics that it shows. Expressed in the extreme, this would suggest that the word length of any individual *cuento breve* is decisive in creating its 'generic characteristics', these characteristics setting it in opposition to other *cuentos breves* which, by nature of their word length, fall into the other categories described. The exact characteristics of these different categories, as perceived by Zavala, will now be briefly outlined and discussed.

3.1.3.1 El cuento corto

Zavala compares the *cuento corto* to the literary form which in the English language literary tradition is referred to as 'sudden fiction' or the 'short short',

⁵⁶ Zavala (2004:87).

and, borrowing a typology from the author and critic Irving Howe, recognises four different types of *cuento corto*⁵⁷:

- 1 That which contains: “*Un incidente repentino, lo cual produce epifanías surgidas en un periodo extremadamente corto en la vida de un personaje,*” although this epiphany is usually presented outside of its context, obliging the reader to “*proyectar sobre la situación un contexto imaginado por él mismo.*” Zavala offers the short stories “*El ramo azul*” by Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz and “*El eclipse*” by Augusto Monterroso as examples of this type.
- 2 That which consists of a: “*Condensación de toda una vida, lograda gracias a la capacidad de comprimirla en una imagen paradigmática*”.
- 3 That which is made up of an: “*Imagen instantánea en la que no hay epifanía, tan solo un monólogo interior o un flujo de memoria.*”
- 4 That which has an allegorical structure “*cuya belleza superficial nos puede llevar a resistirnos al placer de su interpretación.*”

Zavala also borrows from American author Charles Baxter when discussing the differences between the *cuento corto* and other, longer forms of narrative: Whereas the *novela* describes individuals in the long and complex process of reaching important moral decisions, and the *cuento* focuses on the actual moment in which such decisions are made, the *cuento corto*, in contrast, does not allow us to observe a moral action, as what we see depicted is the reaction of an individual or a community “*ante un momento de tensión súbita*”⁵⁸ in which there is no possibility for a decision to be taken.

⁵⁷ Zavala (2004:89) from Howe, Irving, *Short stories. An anthology of the shortest stories*, Howe, Irving / Howe, Ileana (eds.), ix-xiv, New York: Bantam Books, 1983.

⁵⁸ Zavala (2004:90).

3.1.3.2 El cuento muy corto

Drawing again from the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition, Zavala compares the *cuento muy corto* to ‘flash fiction’, describing it, with the words of Irene Zahava, as:

“[L]as historias que alguien puede relatar en lo que sorbe apresuradamente una taza de café, en lo que dura una moneda en una caseta telefónica, o en el espacio que alguien tiene al escribir una tarjeta postal desde un lugar remoto y con muchas cosas por contar.”⁵⁹

In fact, apart from this description, very little is said about the nature of the *cuento muy corto*. Instead, Zavala refers to Suzanna C. Ferguson’s work concerning the classic structure of the nineteenth century *cuento*, which is described as being either ‘elliptic’, where fragments of the story are omitted, or ‘metaphorical’, where, in place of the omission of certain parts of the story, parts are instead substituted by unexpected or dissonant elements⁶⁰. Rather than applying this theory exclusively to the *cuento muy corto*, Zavala discusses how the ‘elliptic’ short story corresponds to the first two classes of *cuento corto* listed above, and how the ‘metaphorical’ short story corresponds to the interior monologue and allegorical story of the last two types listed. This is relevant to the *cuento muy corto* inasmuch as that:

“En todas las formas del cuento muy corto se condensan las estrategias que hemos visto utilizadas en el cuento corto.”⁶¹

Therefore, at this point in the discussion, the only difference that Zavala has described as separating the *cuento muy corto* from the *corto* is one of relative word length. However, Zavala does then go on to state that:

⁵⁹ Zavala (2004:91) from Zahava, Irene, (ed.) *Word of Mouth. 150 Short-Stories by 90 Women Writers*, p. vii, Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1990.

⁶⁰ Zavala (2004: 92) from Ferguson, Sarah C., “Defining the Short Story. Impressionism and Form” in *The New Short Story Theories*, May, Charles E. (ed.), pp219 – 230, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994.

⁶¹ Zavala (2004:92).

*“Los títulos del cuento muy corto suelen ser enigmáticos, y en ellos puede haber ambigüedad temática y formal, hasta el grado de alterar las marcas de puntuación. Los finales suelen ser también enigmáticos o abruptos. Pero siempre se requiere que el lector participe activamente para completar la historia.”*⁶²

The characterisation of the *cuento muy corto* as a form in which the title is ‘usually’ enigmatic, likewise as a form where the conclusion is ‘normally’ enigmatic or abrupt, does, however, seem to conflict with Zavala’s premise that word length is responsible for the generic differences apparent between the forms described so far, as if a form ‘usually’ shows a certain characteristic, we must also accepting that on some occasions it does not. On this basis, size cannot be responsible for generating the characteristics, or else they would always be present.

Indeed, the only firm claim made by Zavala regarding the *cuento muy corto* is that the active participation of the reader is always required. Whether this statement is, however, offered as differentiating characteristic between the three forms of Zavala’s *cuento breve* is not clear, as the idea is not developed any further.

3.1.3.3 El cuento ultracorto

Zavala dedicates the most attention to describing and discussing the *cuento ultracorto*, a term which, it would appear, Zavala often uses interchangeably with the term *minificción*⁶³, although other terms already mentioned, such as *microficción*⁶⁴, *microtexto*⁶⁵ or *minicuento*⁶⁶ are also used in reference to the *ultracorto*. It must be noted that the *cuento ultracorto* as described by Lagmanovich is the form that approximates closest to *minificción* as that term is used in this work.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Zavala (2004:76).

⁶⁴ Zavala (2004:94).

⁶⁵ Zavala (2004:95).

⁶⁶ Zavala (2004:99).

This form of literature, which Zavala refers to as “*el conjunto más complejo de materiales de la narrativa literaria*,”⁶⁷ is also described as having the tendency of being closer to the epigram than to genuine narrative⁶⁸, and although Zavala states that: “*todos los estudiosos del cuento ultracorto señalan que el elemento básico y dominante debe ser la naturaleza narrativa del relato*,”⁶⁹ he also concedes that some authors prefer to refer to it as the *microtexto* as opposed to *microcuento*, presumably in an attempt to deemphasise the narrative connotations. Likewise, pointing among other things to the fact that “*en muchos casos de escritura ultracorta es difícil distinguir un cuento tradicional de otros géneros*”⁷⁰, Zavala accepts that “*podemos considerar como minificciones textos que no son necesariamente narrativos*.”⁷¹ It must however be stated that Zavala frequently contradicts this concession in his one-line definitions of *minificción*, which consistently refer to the form as *narrativa*.

Returning to Zavala’s description of the *cuento ultracorto*, four elements are listed which, apart from “*una brevedad extrema*,”⁷² are characteristic of the form. These are:

- Diverse strategies of *intertextuality*.
- Diverse classes of *metafiction*.
- Diverse classes of *semantic ambiguity*.
- Diverse forms of *humour* and *irony*.

Whereas the humour in the is simply referred to as ‘intertextual’ and the different classes of metafiction are only referred to with a short list of some of the techniques that can be found in different examples of *minificción* (i.e., “*diálogo con el lector*” or “*juegos de lenguaje como lipogramas*”), semantic ambiguity,

⁶⁷ Zavala (2004:93).

⁶⁸ Zavala (2004:94).

⁶⁹ Zavala (2004:99).

⁷⁰ Zavala (2004:107).

⁷¹ Zavala (2004:108).

⁷² Ibid.

intertextual strategies and the irony found in *minificción* are dealt with in more depth.

To begin with, the irony found in *minificción* is described by Zavala as being “*inestable*”⁷³, due to the fact that it cannot be “*determinada por la intención de la voz narrativa*.”⁷⁴ The reason behind this instability lies in the fact that:

“*la intención narrativa en general (y la intención irónica en particular) es indecidible en estos casos, a falta del suficiente contexto para ser interpretada de manera estable.*”⁷⁵

Although it may be difficult to come to terms with the concept of an irony that is present despite there being no indications to suggest it, Zavala’s observation is worth mentioning as it is one of the few instances where a characteristic attributed to *minificción* can be considered as a consequence of the brevity of the form: Due to the lack of explicit information present in *minificción*, in turn due to its extreme brevity, the reader is forced to decide himself whether that which is being narrated should be taken ironically or not.

On the subjects of intertextuality and semantic ambiguity, Zavala has much more to say. In fact, if it is reasonable to judge the relative importance of a characteristic by the amount of time dedicated to its discussion, then one can assume that these are the key characteristics of *minificción* according to Zavala’s model; indeed, according to Zavala, these characteristics are responsible for the artistic nature of *minificción*⁷⁶, the latter of the two described at one point in Zavala’s analysis as the characteristic responsible for lending *minificción* “*el elemento propiamente literario.*”⁷⁷

In terms of intertextuality, Zavala posits that the nature of the ‘hypotext’, i.e., the material which is being alluded to, determines whether the *minificción* is of a

⁷³ Zavala (2004:95).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Zavala (2004:94).

⁷⁷ Zavala (2004:100).

‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’ nature, each one implying a different relationship with literary tradition:

*“cuando el hipotexto es una regla genérica (por ejemplo, si se parodia el estilo de un instructivo cualquiera, en general) nos encontramos ante un caso de intertextualidad posmoderna [...]. Por otra parte, cuando lo que se recicla es un texto particular (por ejemplo, el mito de las sirenas o un refrán popular) nos encontramos ante un caso de intertextualidad moderna”*⁷⁸

Semantic ambiguity, on the other hand, is created by the “*presencia de un final sorpresivo o enigmático,*” and demands the active participation of the reader to complete the meaning of the text “*desde su propio contexto de lectura.*”⁷⁹ The result of the two forms of intertextuality and the semantic ambiguity in *minificción* is that the presence of the “epiphany” is described as being almost exclusively textual (or intertextual) in nature, as this epiphany cannot emanate from any particular character or his or her specific situation:

*“Esto es debido a que en estos textos el concepto mismo de personaje ha desaparecido bajo el peso de la intertextualidad o de la ambigüedad semántica.”*⁸⁰

Although it is possible to criticise Zavala’s approach to evaluating intertextuality in *minificción* – done in the absence of examples to highlight his ideas or references to scholars who developed the concept of intertextuality itself – and although it is questionable whether it is the ‘surprise or enigmatic ending’ found in many *minificciones* that creates semantic ambiguity and not vice-versa, Zavala’s recognition that these two characteristics give the reader the option to construct his or her own meaning from the text is interesting. Unfortunately, this is not developed further by Zavala. Neither does he probe the relationship between these characteristics – which can, after all, manifest themselves in many different forms of writing in addition to *minificción* – and the extreme brevity of *minificción*.

⁷⁸ Zavala (2004:95).

⁷⁹ Zavala (2004:100).

⁸⁰ Zavala (2004:95).

3.1.3.4 Typology of *minificción*

The fact that Zavala often uses the term *minificción* interchangeably with the term *cuento ultracorto* is to a certain extent contradicted at another stage in Zavala's discussion, in an essay titled *Relatos vertiginosos: cuentos mínimos*⁸¹. In this short essay, Zavala offers a typology of *minificción* in which the *ultracorto*, as we shall see presently, is considered one of three different classes of the form. Drawing on some of the characteristics discussed in the previous subchapters, Zavala distinguishes between the *minificciones clásicas*, *modernas* and *posmodernas*:

- ***Las minificciones clásicas*** have a structure that is logical and sequential, and end with a surprise. This group includes the *cuento ultracorto* (or *minicuento*).
- ***Las minificciones modernas***, also called *micro-relatos* or *relatos ultracortos*, are those *minificciones* which are allegorical or have an ironic tone. These *minificciones* may not actually contain a “story” in the true sense of the word at all, but rather a parody of story, or they simply consist of the end of a story. They may also resemble a vignette, an aphorism, or a diversity of allegorical wordplays.
- ***Las minificciones posmodernas*** are *minificciones* which are recognisable due to their hybrid nature. They show features of the previous to categories, i.e., they juxtapose elements of the *minicuento* and of the *micro-relato* as described above.

This typology of Zavala's is perhaps more harmful than helpful, as it introduces further confusion into his usage of terminology rather than further clarification. For example, a brief look at 3.1.3.3 demonstrates how the difference between the ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ forms is based on differing intertextual strategies, the former taking a specific text as its hypertext, whereas the latter adopts the generic

⁸¹ Zavala (2004:107ff).

qualities of certain types of text and employs them in a different manner. This differentiation no longer applies according to the typology above, in which the parody of generic forms, such as the aphorism, is included within the bracket of ‘modern’ *minificciones*.

However, this typology is useful in the sense that it introduces a further characteristic of *minificción* according to Zavala’s model, namely that of *hibridación genérica* (Eng: ‘generic hybridisation’). The diversity that arises through the mixing of different genres is said to be one of the problems faced by those who theorise about, read, publish, study or write *minificción*⁸², and this problem must be a common one, as Zavala also states that:

*“En todos los estudios sobre minificción hay coincidencia en el reconocimiento de que su característica más evidente es su naturaleza híbrida.”*⁸³

It should also be noted that, in an earlier part of his discussions, Zavala refers to the term *hibridación genérica* with a slightly different meaning. Referring to the work of the critic Violeta Rojo, Zavala states that the playful nature often found in *minificción* result from generic hybridisation, which presents itself in two manners: either through the hybridisation of narrative with other forms that are either literary or extra-literary, in which case the narrative characteristic is dominant, or through the hybridisation of narrative with archaic or defunct genres, such as the fable, aphorism, allegory, parable, etc. In the latter case, a relationship of parody is established between the *minificción* and the form with which it is being ‘crossed’⁸⁴.

As we shall see later in this chapter, agreement that generic hybridisation is the predominant characteristic of *minificción* is not an opinion held by all critics of the form, indeed one denies its existence outright, and I would also point out that

⁸² Zavala (2004:70).

⁸³ Zavala (2004:73).

⁸⁴ Cf. Zavala (2004:99).

most critics would probably agree that the characteristic most evident in *minificción* is its extreme brevity in relation to longer forms of fictional text.

3.1.4 Summary of and commentary on Zavala's model

3.1.4.1 Summary

Zavala's model departs from the assumption that a distinct form of narrative is observable in short stories that are under 2,000 words of length. This form is referred to as the *cuento breve*. The *cuento breve* can be further divided into three subgroups, which are differentiated through their relative length in words, which in turn leads them to exhibit different generic characteristics. These are the *cuento corto* (1,000 to 2,000 words), the *cuento muy corto* (200 to 1,000 words) and the *cuento ultracorto* (under 200 words), which is sometimes simply referred to as *minificción*.

Minificción itself is also divided into three subgenres, namely *la minificción clásica*, *la minificción moderna* and *la minificción posmoderna*. The first subgenre, *minificción clásica*, refers to standard narratives of extreme brevity that conclude with a surprise. Definitions for *minificción moderna* and *posmoderna* are not consistent throughout the work of Zavala, although it is safe to assume that *minificción posmoderna* involves generic hybridisation in some form, whether that is a mix of the two other subgenres of *minificción*, or the adoption of the generic style of other forms of writing that is then parodied.

The characteristics which are typical of *minificción* are humour and an unstable irony, different strategies of metafiction, modern and postmodern forms of intertextuality, and semantic ambiguity. The latter two characteristics give *minificción* its literary quality, and also render *minificción* a genre that requires active reader participation to complete the meaning of the story.

Given the fact that *minificción*, or the *ultracorto*, is considered a subgenre of the *cuento breve*, and given Zavala's frequent use of the word 'narrative' when describing *minificción*, it can be assumed that narrative is considered to be a common and important quality in *minificción*. However, Zavala does concede that not all *minificciones* must be considered narratives in the true sense of the word; therefore although common, narrative is not an essential ingredient in *minificción* according to his model.

3.1.4.2 Commentary

Zavala's model is useful inasmuch as it introduces some key terms in the study of *minificción*, and due to his suggestions that *minificción* differs from other forms of writing through the increased level of reader participation required in the reading of the form. However, neither the problems Zavala raises adequately addressed, nor are the theories he puts forward adequately developed. In addition to this, his tendency to constantly change his usage of terminology often leaves questions open as to what exactly he is referring to in parts of his analysis.

Zavala's model itself is also highly problematic. Credibility is lost through the use of sweeping statements (such as claims that *minificción* could become the predominant genre of the third millennium, for example) and through the presence of some factual errors (for instance, the two stories mentioned in 3.1.3.1 as examples of the *cuento corto* by Zavala should actually be considered *cuentos muy cortos* according to their respective word counts; in fact, Monterroso's *El Eclipse* only narrowly misses out on the word count attributable to the *ultracorto*). However, the biggest problem lies in Zavala's claim that the relative sizes of the different classes of *cuento breve* are responsible for their generic characteristics. This claim is not at any point supported by evidence or good argumentation, and is in fact weakened by the fact that Zavala includes several of the same characteristics in all three classes of the *cuento breve*. Besides, common sense suggests that the arbitrary addition or subtraction of one word from a story of 200

will not instantly change its character, making it, for example, more or less enigmatic, ambiguous or intertextual.

3.2 Dolores Koch

The following subchapter discusses the second model of *minificción* that I have chosen to present in this work. I will start by briefly introducing the author of the model, Dolores Koch. This will be followed by a description of the model developed by her, ending with a short summary and a commentary of the subchapter.

3.2.1 Biography

Born in Havana, Cuba, Dolores Koch migrated to the United States in 1961. In 1986, she received her doctorate in Latin American literature from the City University of New York. She presented her first work on the subject of the *micro-relato* in 1981, and her doctoral thesis, “*El micro-relato en México: Torri, Arreola y Monterroso*”, holds the distinction of being the first academic work to concern itself purely with the subject of *minificción*⁸⁵.

Since then, Koch has taught at secondary and university levels, as well as publishing English translations of works of many Latin American authors, such as *Before Night Falls* and *The Doorman* by Reinaldo Arenas and *Angel of Galilea* by Columbian novelist Laura Restrepo. Her other notable work includes an English translation of the memoir of Oskar Schindler’s widow, *Where Light and Shadow Meet*⁸⁶.

Koch has never abandoned her interest in *minificción*, and has had three articles published in the online literary magazine *El Cuento en Red*. In November 2006

⁸⁵ Cf. Zavala (2004:369).

⁸⁶ Cf. URL: <http://diglib.princeton.edu/ead/eadGetDoc.xq?id=/ead/mss/C0984.EAD.xml> (accessed 07.05.08).

she held a presentation titled “*Doce recursos para lograr la sonrisa en el minirelato*” at the *IV Congreso Internacional de Minificción*, in Neuchâtel, Switzerland⁸⁷.

3.2.2 Koch’s Model of *Minificción* – An Overarching Sub-Genre

According to Koch, *minificción* is a “*sub-género experimental del cuento*,”⁸⁸ a definition which places the emphasis firmly on its narrative quality, as opposed to the qualities evident in other genres, such as poetry or drama. The term *minificción* is used by Koch to apply to a wide range of different types of short fiction, and seems to be used interchangeably with the term *prosas breves*⁸⁹, the broad reference to ‘prose’ another suggestion of the broad scope of writing that is considered in the category of *minificción*.

Although Koch concedes that literary critics in general have not reached a consensus in being able to distinguish the different varieties of *minificción*⁹⁰, she does state that some types of simple *minificciones* can be identified with relative ease. These she lists as being, among others, the prose poem, the anecdote, the vignette, the aphorism and the epigram⁹¹. As is clear to see, these are all well established, familiar forms of short prose, and it is important to point out that Koch is referring here to the standard forms of these varieties of short prose that have existed for some time, as opposed to the ‘generic hybrid’ forms highlighted in Zavala’s discussion of *minificción posmoderna* outlined in subchapter 3.1.3.3.

Although such textual forms are not normally classified together in one group (the aphorism, for example, is not normally considered to be a “*sub-género experimental del cuento*”), there is no reason not to see them as forms of *minificción* in the context of Koch’s usage of this term, as, as stated above, Koch

⁸⁷ URL: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/hispanic/alumni/koch.html> (accessed 07.05.08).

⁸⁸ Koch (2000a:20).

⁸⁹ Cf. Koch (2000a:20).

⁹⁰ Koch (2000a:31).

⁹¹ Koch (2000a:21).

uses the term to encompass all forms of short prose. Koch does not herself classify forms such as the prose poem, vignette, aphorism or epigram in one single category of *minificción*, but for the purposes of this chapter I shall refer to them as the ‘traditional’ forms, to signify their difference from the contemporary forms of *minificción* that are the focus of this work.

The other varieties of *minificción* identified are more in line with the forms of writing that constitute the subject matter of this work. She lists a further five, although she does not exclude that there may be more, stating that:

*“Hay otras minificciones que carecen de carnet de identidad. Es necesaria una taxonomía que revalide su existencia y sus méritos, y haga posible realizar su estudio sistemático.”*⁹²

Nonetheless, the five other types that she does list are referred to as the *minitexto*, *cuentos fragmentarios*, *fractales*, the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato*⁹³. The type which is the focus of Koch’s analysis is the *micro-relato*, which Koch goes to great lengths to distinguish from the *minicuento*, as she feels that these are two fundamentally different forms whose difference is often overlooked, resulting in their erroneous categorisation as one.

I will treat these five main groups, along with the first group, in the next three subchapters, looking to highlight the distinctions between the groups. In accordance with Koch’s own analysis, more time will be devoted to discussing the concepts of the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato*.

3.2.2.1 The ‘Traditional’ Forms of *Minificción*

As stated above, Koch includes long established forms of short prose among those included in *minificción*. However, although *minificción* is described as a “*subgénero*” of the short story, which would suggest that *minificción* must also comply

⁹² Koch (2000a:21).

⁹³ Ibid.

with the same narrative conventions as those complied with by the short story, Koch points out that some of these traditional forms, such as the vignette or the prose poem mentioned above, do not⁹⁴. This is due to the fact that they lack “*un verdadero nudo y desenlace*,”⁹⁵ i.e., a ‘nexus’ (an event that binds two situations together) and a conclusion. It can be taken therefore that Koch considers the presence of a nexus and a conclusion to be necessary for a text to qualify as a (short) story. The absence of these elements, according to Koch, means that these traditional forms lack “*esa tensión y golpe de gracia final que esperemos del cuento*.”⁹⁶ Therefore, although these forms are often considered to be *minicuentos*, they are in fact not.

Anecdotes and jokes are likewise excluded from the group called *minicuentos*, but on a different basis, that of lacking ‘literary quality’, (although what exactly is meant by literary quality is not addressed) and due to the fact that they are often composed of dialogue. It can be taken for granted that such forms remain within the original genres within which they have traditionally been considered, but that they are also considered by Koch to fit into this new rubric called *minificción*.

3.2.2.2 Fractales, Fragmentos, y Minitextos

Before discussing Koch’s two most elaborated upon groups, it should also be noted that Koch separates three other forms of *minificción* from the mass. These are the *relatos o cuentos fractales*, the *relatos articulados* or *fragmentarios*, and the *minitextos*⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ It should be noted that Koch also states that: “*Un problema a resolver es comprobar si la estructura del minicuento sigue o no las pautas establecidas por el cuento*” (2000a:22). Although the *minicuento* has yet to be discussed in this work, Koch’s observation that the *minicuento* may not necessarily comply with all the conventions of the short story, without suggesting that its place in *minificción* should be reconsidered as a result, can be considered applicable to the ‘traditional forms’ mentioned here as well.

⁹⁵ Koch (2000a:21).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

For a definition of the *minificciones fractales*, Koch points to the work of Lauro Zavala, who describes *fractales* as series of autonomous *minificciones* that demonstrate similarities of form with one another:

*“Una serie fractal, en términos de minificción, es aquella en que cada texto es literariamente autónomo, es decir, que no exige la lectura de otra minificción para ser apreciado, pero que conserva ciertos rasgos formales comunes con el resto.”*⁹⁸

As such, a *minificción* can only be fractal as far as it appears in a group of other *minificciones*. Additionally, as specific formal characteristics aren't mentioned as a prerequisite for a series to be fractal, it is entirely reasonable to consider a *minificción* to be both fractal if it appears in such a group, while at the same to be a *minicuento*, a *micro-relato*, or any other of the types of *minificción* hitherto mentioned.

Prosas breves concatenadas or *articuladas*, on the other hand, are those short fictional texts which do not comply with the conventions established by the short story, but which in conjunction illuminate one another and amplify each others' meaning. As examples, Koch quotes the texts in Julio Cortázar's "*Historias de Cronopios y de Famas*"⁹⁹, in which the character types and relationships between groups of fictional creatures known as *cronopios*, *famas* and *esperanzas* are revealed through multiple short texts describing particular habits or peculiarities of these beings. It should be pointed out, however, that many of these texts do in fact comply with the norms of the (short) story¹⁰⁰, as is demonstrated by the following short piece from the collection, titled "*Historia*":

⁹⁸ Zavala (2005:150).

⁹⁹ Cf. Bibliography.

¹⁰⁰ Koch does not define these conventions, but the nature of the story, or narrative, will be discussed in depth in this work in chapter 4.

*Un cronopio pequeñito buscaba la llave de la puerta de la calle en la mesa de luz, la mesa de luz en el dormitorio, el dormitorio en la casa, la casa en la calle. Aquí se detenía el cronopio, pues para salir a la calle precisaba la llave de la puerta.*¹⁰¹

As is the case with the *minificciones fractales*, a *minificción* can by nature only be considered *articulada* if it appears in context with other *minificciones articuladas* with which it shares a common thematic characteristic. As such, there is no logical reason not to consider other forms of *minificción* as ‘*articulada*’, if they fulfil the prerequisite of containing information which amplifies the meaning of other *minificciones* with which they stand in relation. This is despite Koch’s assertion that the *articuladas* do not comply with the parameters established by the *cuento*. For example, two *minicuentos* that contain the same character(s), even if they contain completely different stories, could also be considered *articuladas* if they each contain unique information pertaining to the personalities of those character(s) which gives insight into the nature of those characters’ motives in the related *minicuento*. On this basis, I would argue that the classification of *minificción* as *articulada* or *fractal* is not necessary in the typology currently being described, as it serves no purpose in opposing the different forms of *minificción*: these two terms can be applied to many different types of *minificción*.

The *minitextos* (or *textículos*) are those *minificciones* which are not stories in the true sense of the word, but pieces of short prose or narrative which “*cabalgan de un lado y otro de las fronteras de los géneros tradicionales.*”¹⁰² This large group appears to incorporate all those *minificciones* which cannot be classified under any of the other terms so far mentioned in this subchapter:

*“A veces hay en ellos acción y personajes, a veces diálogo, o se asemejan al ensayo, creando un ambiente poético o una expresión personal (...) otros minitextos se acercan más a la semblanza, el cuadro, la estampa de la época, o emprenden un atrevido juego de palabras”*¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Cortázar (2004:142).

¹⁰² Koch (2000a:21).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Koch fails to punctuate her description of the *minitexto* with examples, but does list some authors that have produced such texts, also stating that the list of such writers is “*extensa*”¹⁰⁴.

3.2.2.3 Minicuento vs. Micro-relato

The main thrust of Koch’s analysis, as previously mentioned, is concerned with drawing a distinction between what she refers to as the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato*; as previously stated, Koch perceives a fundamental difference between these two forms which is often overlooked, leading critics to consider them as one. The fact that the terms she uses have suffixes which are different, but which are often taken to mean the same thing, i.e., *cuento* and *relato*, is telling. Indeed, Koch makes the point that one problematic that needs to be investigated thoroughly is the:

*“diferencia entre cuento y relato. Esto es necesario si queremos decantar el cuento del llamado micro-relato.”*¹⁰⁵

In addition, the fact that she chooses to refer here to the difference between the *cuento* and the *micro-relato*, as opposed to between the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato*, suggests that she does not perceive much of a difference between the *cuento* and the *minicuento* at all. Indeed, it does seem that the only difference that Koch recognises between the two is the arbitrary one of dimension:

*“Si bien la brevedad parece ser la característica primordial del minicuento, no lo es así del micro-relato, que es más complejo y literario, aunque la brevedad le sea esencial y de fácil distinción.”*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Koch (2000a:21).

¹⁰⁵ Koch (2000a:22).

¹⁰⁶ Koch (2000a:31).

However, the difference between the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato* is viewed as being based on more than just differing levels of complexity or literariness. According to Koch, the main difference between the two forms is that:

*“el desenlace del micro-relato no depende de una acción o suceso concreto sino de un idea. Algo sucede, pero no en el mundo, sino en la mente del escritor, y posiblemente en la del lector, aunque en algunos casos no sea necesariamente lo mismo.”*¹⁰⁷

In other words, the two forms differentiate themselves through the nature of their respective conclusions. In the *microcuento*, the conclusion takes the form of an event in the fictional world of the story, whereas in the *micro-relato* the conclusion – also considered to be an ‘event’ – is an event or occurrence takes place in the mind of the writer and, possibly, the reader. Koch illustrates this by comparing examples of the *minicuento* and *micro-relato*, two examples of which, both *minificciones* of the Mexican author René Avilés Fabila, are “*La Bailarina*”¹⁰⁸ and “*Hambre*” respectively.

According to Koch’s theory, “*La Bailarina*” is an example of the *minicuento*. The text opens with the narrator’s confession of his love for a ballerina, and continues with his description of the qualities he admires in her, while confessing his ignorance of whether or not she is even aware of his presence. The text ends with the revelation that the ballerina is not in fact a flesh and blood ballerina, but rather the dancing ballerina of a musical box. This becomes apparent when, in the solitude of his home, “*se le termina la cuerda*”, and the narrator once more puts her away in “*su caja de cristal*.”

In the *minicuento*, Koch claims that the essential thing to keep in mind is that the conclusion occurs through a concrete event or action in the fictional world of the story. In the case of “*La Bailarina*”, for example, this is presumably through the running out of the string of the musical box, or perhaps the first-person narrators’

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Appendix 7.7.

act of placing the ballerina back in the crystal box. According to Koch, in the *minicuento*:

*“El narrador, con frecuencia omnisciente, nos cuenta algo concreto que sucede y que resuelve la situación.”*¹⁰⁹

The *micro-relato*, on the other hand, distinguishes itself from the *minicuento* through the fact that in its conclusion:

*“no sucede nada en el mundo, sino en la mente del escritor (y a veces también en la del lector cómplice).”*¹¹⁰

As such, the story does not conclude with an event, or the change from one state of affairs to another, in the fictional world. As mentioned above, one example of such a *micro-relato* is Avilés Fabila’s “*Hambre*”:

Desperté con un hambre atroz e inaplazable; me dirigí a la cocina: el refrigerador estaba vacío; de una alacena obtuve un libro con docenas y docenas de sabrosísimas recetas; de inmediato lo herví en la olla de presión y luego puse la mesa dispuesto a darme un succulento banquete con sus páginas.

Koch points to the bisemy in the final line of the piece – which leads to different possible interpretations of the story’s end – as that which distinguishes it from the event/action ending seen in the *minicuento*. Koch summarises her own theory thus:

*“El minicuento resulta en lo que ocurre a alguien, mientras que el micro-relato resulta en lo que se le ocurre a alguien.”*¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Koch (2000a:23).

¹¹⁰ Koch (2000a:24).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

This statement highlights the fact that the essential difference between the two forms lays in the difference between a mental process in the ‘real world’ and a physical process the fictionally represented world.

3.2.2.4 Other Characteristics that make a *Minificción* a *Micro-relato*

Koch points to some further characteristics that are essential to the *micro-relato*. In order to qualify as a *micro-relato*, a text has to have:

“algunas de las características siguientes (no necesariamente todas a la vez): hibridez genérica, desenlace ambivalente o elíptico, alusiones literarias (o bíblicas, míticas, históricas, etc.), rescate de fórmulas de escritura antigua (como fábulas o bestiarios) y la inserción de formatos nuevos, no literarios, de la tecnología y de los medios modernos de comunicación.”¹¹²

Although Koch does go on to show examples of each of these characteristics in the context of the *micro-relato*, there is no convincing argument made as to why any one of them should be considered a necessary prerequisite for a *micro-relato*. Indeed, Aviles Fabila’s “*Hambre*”, considered a *micro-relato* by Koch, does not appear to have more than one of the characteristics listed above. Rather, it seems that Koch is listing characteristics that tend to recur in the *micro-relato*, rather than describing characteristics that are peculiar to it.

3.2.3 Dolores Koch and Brevity

In contrast to Zavala, who sets very exact limits to the sizes of the forms differentiated in his typology, Koch does not set boundaries on the size of *minificción*. In fact, at certain points in her discussions, Koch chooses to distance herself from such considerations:

¹¹² Koch (2000a:25).

*“Aunque se han publicado varios estudios sobre el minicuento, ninguno parece ofrecer razones convincentes que desmientan el hecho de que el minicuento se adhiere a las convenciones del cuento como lo definirían Poe, Quiroga y Corázar, cuya extensión nunca ha sido realmente delimitada.”*¹¹³

Bearing this in mind, there appears to be no real reason to separate the *minicuento* from the *cuento* at all: such a division would in fact appear to be an arbitrarily applied distinction that serves no real purpose.

Indeed, it seems that the aim of Koch’s analysis is to find the missing ‘ingredient’ that distinguishes the *micro-relato* from other forms of literary writing, and that she believes she has achieved this in her theory regarding the nature of the *micro-relato*’s conclusion. Surprisingly, this does not have much to do with the size of the *micro-relato* at all. As noted in subchapter 3.2.2.3, although size helps to distinguish the *micro-relato* from other forms on a superficial level, and although brevity is ‘essential’, size pales in comparison to the importance of the efficiency and the intensity of the language used in the *micro-relato*, as quotes such as: “*Es la intensidad la que se distingue en el micro-relato,*”¹¹⁴ and: “*Tan importantes como la brevedad resultan la lucidez y la eficacia del lenguaje,*”¹¹⁵ suggest.

The question then becomes: how do you judge if a text has reached the lucidity and efficiency of a *micro-relato*? Koch offers the following answer:

*“Puede comprobarse que la expresión es eficaz cuando ninguna palabra puede ser eliminada o alterada sin daño, pues cada palabra aprovecha sus matices y sentidos laterales. Esa eficacia hace imposible contar el micro-relato de otro modo en un número similar de palabras.”*¹¹⁶

As such, Koch’s concept of lucidity and efficiency can be compared to the rhetorical concept of *brevitas*, a principle considered so important in classical textual production that it constituted one of the three *virtutes narrationis* of the

¹¹³ Koch (2000b:3).

¹¹⁴ Koch (2000a:23).

¹¹⁵ Koch (2000a:31).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

classical Greco-roman orators. In the most general sense, *brevitas* is the art of saying no more is than necessary, while at the same time not omitting information that is essential to comprehension, examples of which being the exclusion of words that are not absolutely necessary and the omission of detail when a summary is sufficient¹¹⁷.

As is clear from the quote above, Koch distinguishes between *brevedad* (Eng: ‘brevity’) and *brevitas*, or: “*la lucidez y la eficacia del lenguaje*”. As such, a text can demonstrate *brevitas* while at the same time not being ‘brief’ in the more commonly understood meaning of the term, i.e., ‘short’. This seems logical: a very complicated and large text could be considered to have *brevitas* if the efficiency of the language is high. Likewise, a very short text could lack *brevitas* if its simple message is repeated several times within that text. Nonetheless, as also mentioned above, Koch does state that brevity itself is essential to the *micro-relato*. Therefore, we can consider Koch’s *micro-relato* to be a form in which both *brevitas* and brevity are necessary elements.

Unfortunately, although distinguishing the concepts of brevity and *brevitas*, and first focusing on the aspect of *brevitas*, Koch do not then go on to explain the reasons for the necessity of brevity itself. As such, the integral problem of ‘extension’ in *minificción* remains fundamentally unaddressed.

3.2.4 Summary of and commentary on Koch’s model

3.2.4.1 Summary

According to Koch’s model, the term *minificción* is used to refer to all forms of short, fictional prose, including ‘traditional’ forms such as the aphorism and the epigram. Several different varieties of *minificción* are briefly discussed, but the two varieties that are given prominence are the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato* respectively. The former is considered to be an extremely brief version of the

¹¹⁷ Cf. Üding (1994:53).

short story, and as such is only different from the short story in terms of its relative size. On the other hand, the *micro-relato* is a form of very brief narrative that distinguishes itself from the *cuento* or *minicuento* through the nature of its conclusion, which does not take the standard form of a ‘change of state’ or ‘event’ in the fictional world of the story, but rather in a mental process in the mind of the author and sometimes of the reader.

3.2.4.2 Commentary

As opposed to Zavala’s model of *minificción*, Koch’s model is more robust, as the terms she uses are employed consistently and the characteristics accorded to the different types of *minificción* are clearly distinguished and allocated to differing categories. Koch’s model can be shown to resemble Zavala’s in the fact that she too concentrates on and makes frequent references to narrative forms of *minificción*, although both concede that not all *minificción* must necessarily be predominantly narrative. Indeed, Koch uses the term *minitexto* to refer to what appears to be non-narrative *minificción*, although she fails to offer any examples or to discuss this variety in any depth.

Koch’s central premise of the difference between the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato* lying in the nature of the ‘conclusion’ of each is highly problematic, as will be seen in subchapter 5.1.3. In addition, although Koch introduces a concept similar to the classical rhetorical principle of *brevitas* to explain the ‘brevity’ of *minificción*, the issue of ‘extension’ actually remains essentially untouched.

3.3 David Lagmanovich

Subchapter 3.3 discusses the final model of *minificción* that will be presented in this work, namely that of David Lagmanovich. I will start by introducing the author of the model, and followed by a description of the model he has developed. This subchapter will end with a short summary of the main points described within and a critical commentary of the model itself.

3.3.1 Biography

Professor David Lagmanovich of the Universidad Nacional de Tucuman in Argentina has made numerous contributions to the field of critical analysis of *minificción*, including an introductory article in the literary journal “*Revista Interamericana de Biblioteca*” 1996 issue that was entirely dedicated to *minificción*, plus individual publications which deal exclusively with the form, such as the anthology “*la otra Mirada: Antología del Microrrelato Hispanamericano*” (2005) and the critical work “*El Microrrelato: Teoría y historia*” (2006). The latter is, at the time of writing, the most recent critical work to be published that is concerned exclusively with the topic of *minificción*.

3.3.2 Lagmanovich’s Model of *Minificción* - a ‘Narrativist’ Stance

While Zavala and Koch can be said to focus on *minificción* as a form of narrative, or at least to focus their discussions on those forms of *minificción* that they consider to be narratives, Lagmanovich’s approach is more extreme: Lagmanovich holds that all *minificción*, in the sense that the term is used in this work, is unequivocally narrative in nature.

In addition to holding that all *minificción* – or *microrrelatos* to use Lagmanovich’s term – are narrative in nature, Lagmanovich also discards any of the theories of genetic hybridisation that feature so prominently in the models

developed by the previous two critics discussed, preferring to emphasise *minificción*'s narrative nature.

How Lagmanovich explains his stance is the subject of subchapter 3.3.2.2. This is preceded in subchapter 3.3.2.1 by a presentation of Lagmanovich's typographical model, which will show where Lagmanovich locates *minificción* in the larger scheme of textual production.

3.3.2.1 Typography: From *Texto* to *Minificción*

According to Lagmanovich, the world can be viewed as an immense "*conjunto de textos*"¹¹⁸, this 'textual entirety' consisting of everything¹¹⁹ from, for example, human gestures to musical formulations, or from pictorial manifestations to written documents. Given the importance of language, this textual entirety can be divided into two sub-classifications, namely *verbal* and *non-verbal* texts, the former being those texts that are constructed from language, either in written or oral form¹²⁰, and the latter those that are not.

Focusing on verbal texts, Lagmanovich then goes on to describe how these can be either *literary* or *non-literary*. In order for a verbal text to be classified as literary, it needs to demonstrate the quality of 'literariness', which is described by Lagmanovich as being:

*"Un producto de ciertas características estructurales y de ciertos rasgos que transmiten el significado, todo ello aceptado en virtud de condiciones estéticas que el lector reconoce como tales."*¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Lagmanovich (2006:20).

¹¹⁹ It would appear that Lagmanovich's reference to the perception of the 'world' as consisting entirely of texts can be narrowed to mean the totality or a large proportion of human output, as he qualifies his enumeration by stating at the end that it includes "*muchas otras manifestaciones de la actividad humana*".

¹²⁰ Lagmanovich (2006:20).

¹²¹ Lagmanovich (2006:21).

As such, the onus of deciding whether or not a text is literary depends on it being perceived as such by the reader – a recognition that he or she is guided towards by certain characteristics displayed by the verbal text. Such a definition of literariness may not hold up under the scrutiny of examination, but for the purposes of this work it is sufficient to accept that verbal texts can be broadly differentiated on the basis of whether they are ‘literary’ or not.

Taking one step backwards briefly, within the corpus of texts that are considered either literary or non-literary, Lagmanovich identifies the *microtexto*. *Microtextos* are those verbal texts that are characterised predominantly by their brevity. According to Lagmanovich:

“[...] *el anuncio publicitario destinado a una transmisión televisiva es un microtexto; pueden serlo también los graffiti que decoran las paredes en las grandes ciudades, a veces en forma ofensiva; lo mismo, las noticias y comentarios breves que pueden leerse en los periódicos, y así sucesivamente.*”¹²²

The *microtexto* as a form is not discussed in great depth. Instead, the attention is focused on those *microtextos* that have literary value, i.e., verbal literary texts that are also characterised by their brevity. Lagmanovich refers to these texts as *minificción*. It is important at this stage to clarify two points concerning Lagmanovich’s usage of the word *minificción* and its implications.

Firstly, the combination of the word *ficción* with the prefix *mini-* is not arbitrary: Lagmanovich clearly states¹²³ that what separates the *microtexto* from *minificción* is fictionality: the former is not fictional, whereas the latter necessarily is:

“[U]na noticia periodística se organiza por lo común sobre una esquema narrativo, pero está firmamente arraigada en la realidad y no la ficción. Muestra, o se supone que muestre, ‘lo que es’, no ‘lo que puede ser’. En el fondo de esta oposición está, en definitiva, el divorcio que los seres racionales percibimos entre la vida y la ficción.”¹²⁴

¹²² Lagmanovich (2006:23).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

This difference is an important one, as although a *microtexto* is never fictional, Lagmanovich does not exclude the possibility that it may or may not have literariness. *Minificciones*, on the other hand, always possess both qualities.

Secondly, and of greater relevance to this work, is the importance of further explaining how Lagmanovich's usage of the term *minificción* differs from the usage of the term herein. Much in line with the widely encompassing usage of the word taken by Koch, for whom *minificción* refers to many different forms of short prose both old and new, Lagmanovich expands its reach even further: according to Lagmanovich' model, the term *minificción* seems to apply to all verbal, literary texts that are brief. Therefore we must assume that a *minificción* can be any brief text from any of the existing literary genres, be that prose, poetry or drama.

This is in contrast to the use of the term *minificción* intended in this work, where the boundaries are narrowed significantly to refer to a particular form of very short writing which is now prevalent in Latin America and which first came into being at or around the time of the *modernismo* movement, as discussed in chapter 2.1.

3.3.2.2 El Microrrelato

Lagmanovich's sub-classifications do not, however, stop at *minificción*. Indeed, as mentioned above, a further division is introduced within the body of textual output that constitutes *minificción*, separating those examples which are considered by Lagmanovich to be narrative in nature from those that are not. This class of *minificción* is referred to as the *microrrelato*.

This narrative nature is evident in these texts through the presence of a basic set of fundamentals, which are the same fundamentals of any narrative text of any extension. According to Lagmanovich these are¹²⁵:

- 1) A basic situation;
- 2) An incident capable of introducing a change or modification to that initial situation;
- 3) A conclusion that either returns to the initial situation, or makes a clear departure from it.

Lagmanovich points out that, in the case of the *microrrelato*, the first criterion –a ‘basic situation’– is often tacit. This would suggest that it is common for the *microrrelato* to start *in medias res*, and that the basic situation, not manifest in such cases and therefore only suggested through implication, is elliptical. The nature of the latter two fundamentals is not elaborated on in further depth by the author.

This approach, which separates the *microrrelato* from the body of *minificción* based on the narrative fundamentals of the former, is described by Lagmanovich as being *narrativista*, a position that:

*“establece como requisito del microrrelato la existencia de una trama narrativa, por escueta o apenas insinuada que ésta sea, a diferencia de la actitud opuesta, que suele denominarse **transgenérica**-, sostenemos que en el microrrelato no se produce un cruce de géneros ni un estatuto que los traspasa, como han considerado otros estudiosos.”*¹²⁶

So, according to the *narrativista* position, the *microrrelato* is not only firmly anchored in the family of textual production which includes the novel, novella and the short story (“*tal es la escala básica de narratividad*”¹²⁷), but the idea of any form of generic hybridisation as discussed in the context of Zavala and Koch is also discarded in favour of a strong emphasis on its narrative nature.

¹²⁵ Cf. Lagmanovich (2006:26).

¹²⁶ Lagmanovich (2006:30), bold own.

¹²⁷ Lagmanovich (2006:31).

Given this rejection of the concept of generic hybridisation, how then does Lagmanovich explain the obvious similarities that certain *microrrelatos* have with other textual forms? Lagmanovich makes his case using the following *microrrelato*, a piece written by Mexican author Juan José Arreola titled “*De L’Osservatore*”, which, according to Lagmanovich, shows the characteristics of journalistic writing:

A principios de nuestra Era, las llaves de San Pedro se perdieron en los suburbios del Imperio Romano. Se suplica a la persona que las encuentre, tenga bondad de devolverlas inmediatamente al Papa reinante, ya que desde hace más de quince siglos las puertas del Reino de los Cielos no han podido ser forzados con ganzúas.

According to Lagmanovich, what we see here is not a case of generic hybridisation, despite the characteristics that the piece has in common with another form of textual discourse. Rather, the *microrrelato* as a form is described as being “*un género omnívoro*” that “*asimila todos los alimentos que encuentra a su paso*”¹²⁸. From Lagmanovich’s viewpoint, the *microrrelato* is not subordinate to these forms that it assimilates; instead, it is the *microrrelato* that incorporates these forms into its structure, absorbing them without losing the elements that make up its own nature.

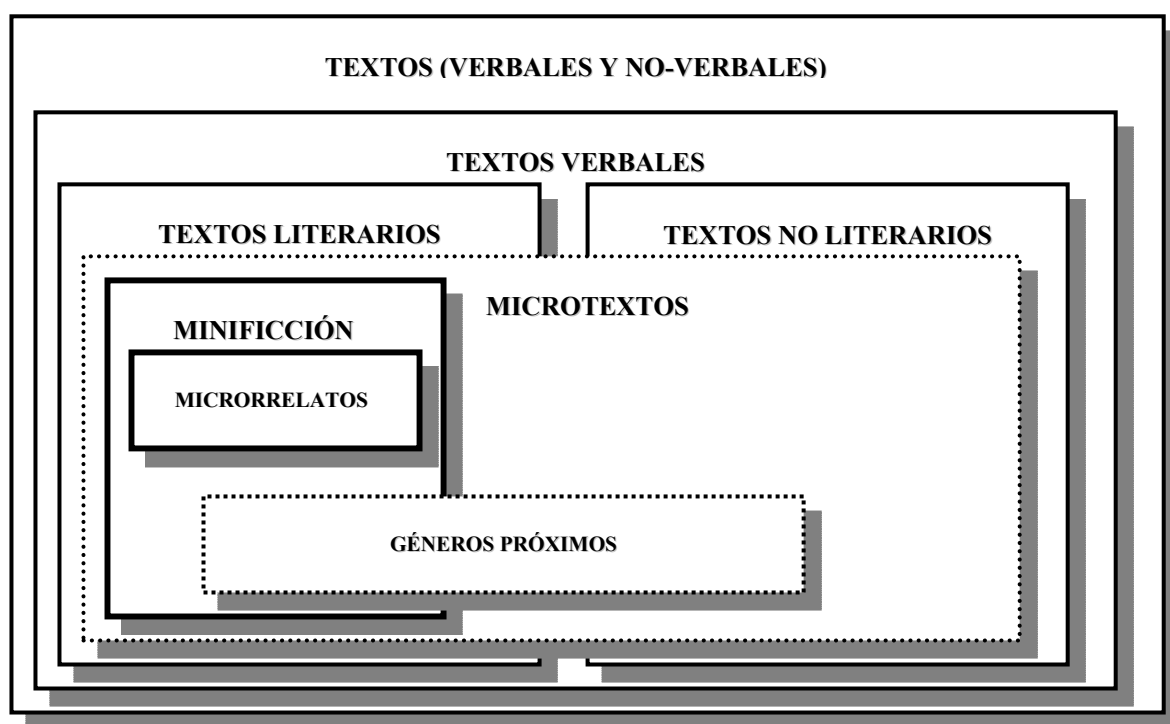
3.3.2.3 Los Géneros Próximos

A further sub-classification introduced by Lagmanovich, but which is difficult to place in the framework which he has developed, is a group that he refers to as the *géneros próximos*. This category refers to certain forms of verbal text that, due principally to their brevity, are often “*confundidos con microrrelatos*”¹²⁹. Lagmanovich is precise in his selection of forms that constitute this category, and

¹²⁸ Lagmanovich (2006:95).

¹²⁹ Lagmanovich (2006:86).

although they are considered to demonstrate enough proximity with the *microrrelato* to be confused with the form, as a group they actually represent a variety of different forms that range from the fictional to the non-fictional and from the prosaic to the poetic. As such, they occupy a position in his model that crosses the boundaries between more than one of the previously detailed subcategories, as demonstrated in figure 1 below:



1: Graphic Representation of Lagmanovich's Typological Model

To be specific, Lagmanovich quotes five textual forms that make up the category of *géneros próximos*¹³⁰, and these are:

- 1) the aphorism;
- 2) the prose poem;
- 3) the journalistic forms;
- 4) the fable;
- 5) the anecdote and the *caso*.

¹³⁰ Cf. Lagmanovich (2006:86-101).

According to Lagmanovich, all five of these forms often show two of the three characteristics necessary to constitute a *microrrelato* –brevity, fictionality and a narrative basis– but never do they demonstrate all three.

This non-conformity with the three essential fundamentals of the *microrrelato* may be easy to accept for the aphorism (non-narratives) or for journalistic forms of writing (non-fiction), but the case is not so convincing for the remaining forms, for all of which examples can be found that contain all three characteristics. Referring to the prose poem, for example, Lagmanovich quotes Rubén Darío's "*Naturaleza Muerta*"¹³¹ that, although undoubtedly principally descriptive in its content, does contain the very basics of narrative as they will be outlined later. The case for excluding forms such as the fable from Lagmanovich's definition of *microrrelato* is harder still to justify, and is argued (below in the case of the fable) by stating that:

*"a) la fábula puede aparecer indistintamente en verso o en prosa (lo primero es lo más clásico), y el microrrelato –como el cuento moderno– se escribe invariabilmente en prosa; b) no hay en los fabulistas un concepto claro sobre la extensión, un aspecto que constituye preocupación fundamental en los microrrelatos; y c) el mensaje moralizante o bien está ausente del microrrelato, o bien es de signo inverso, es decir, ajeno a los conceptos tradicionales o generalmente aceptados de moralidad."*¹³²

However, as we can see here, new criteria are being implicitly introduced, such as thematic principles to do with the inclusion and nature of a moral message. This contrasts strongly with the observable structural characteristics outlined above as the defining characteristics of the *microrrelato*. Besides, even if we are to accept that brief fables that are written in verse are always to be excluded from the body of work that makes up the *microrrelato*, regardless of whether or not such verse contains narrative, there is still no convincing argument to exclude those fables that are prosaic in form from the category, as each individual text should surely be judged on its own individual characteristics.

¹³¹ Cf. subchapter 7.1.

¹³² Lagmanovich (2006:98).

3.3.3 Lagmanovich and Brevity

In the last subchapter I discussed Lagmanovich's model of the *microrrelato*, without however addressing the critic's views on what is perhaps the defining characteristic of the *microrrelato*, or *minificción*, namely its extension. As we have seen, Lagmanovich identifies categories of text that distinguish themselves through their brevity in the many different textual forms that exist: From the literary to the non-literary, from the fictional to the non-fictional, from those texts that are judged as narratives to those texts that are not; all have their own subclasses that are identifiable due to their brevity. But what does it actually mean to Lagmanovich to say that a text is 'brief'?

While conceding that it was the brevity of *minificción* that first brought it to the attention of critics¹³³, Lagmanovich is quick to point out that describing this brevity through the technique of counting the words is flawed. This he argues by making a simple point:

*“Se ha sugerido que el límite máximo del microrrelato está dado por la cifra de... ¿cuál? ¿1.500 palabras? ¿1.000 palabras, 400 o 300 palabras? La imprecisión creada por la aritmética, esa disciplina aparantamente tan exacta, es notable. Una sola observación la destruye. Si la extensión máxima aceptable para la minificción es –supongamos– de 400 cientos palabras, ¿dejaremos en el corpus un texto de 398, y al mismo tiempo eliminaremos uno perfectamente afín, pero donde el cuento asciende a 405?”*¹³⁴

Indeed, as previously argued in the chapter dealing with the model set out by Lauro Zavala¹³⁵, it does seem implausible that the setting any such rigid limits as to what is and what is not *minificción* constitutes a truly useful method for categorisation.

¹³³ Cf. Lagmanovich (2006:33).

¹³⁴ Lagmanovich (2006:37).

¹³⁵ Cf. subchapter 3.1.3.2.

Lagmanovich tackles the issue of brevity by assigning the decision of whether or not a piece is brief to the discretion and intuition of the reader. To use his own words, “*breve es aquello que, en mi lectura, percibo como breve,*”¹³⁶ an argument which he admits is not very scientific, but which he considers to be better than the alternative: “*el corsé del cómputo.*”¹³⁷ Lagmanovich builds this argument by pointing to the differing perceptions of what is or is not brief found in different literary traditions, these perceptions conditioned by that particular literary tradition. Stating that the short story in the Spanish literary tradition tends to be, generally speaking, shorter than that found elsewhere, Lagmanovich comes to the conclusion that:

*“lo que queda, y lo que define tales cosas, es la percepción del lector, que de por sí reflejará los condicionamientos de una época y de un determinado ámbito cultural.”*¹³⁸

On this basis it is argued that it is not possible to set universal standards for what is and what is not brief.

However, the concept of brevity in *minificción* is not solely an external projection of the reader onto any individual piece, as brevity does manifest itself internally in *minificción* through what Lagmanovich describes as ‘concision’. Emphasising that *microrrelatos* are not merely longer stories that have been pared down in size, but are themselves created through the addition and not subtraction of words on a page, the concision evident in *minificción* lies in the creative process that is driven by the objective of saying what one wants to say by adding “*todas las palabras necesarias y ninguna de las innecesarias*”¹³⁹. In other words:

“El criterio no debe ser el de ‘poner menos palabras’, sino el de ‘no poner palabras de más.’”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Lagmanovich (2006:38).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Lagmanovich (2006:23).

¹³⁹ Lagmanovich (2006:41).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

As such, Lagmanovich's approach to brevity is also similar to the classical concept of *brevitas* as discussed in subchapter 3.2.3 in relation to Koch's model, although Lagmanovich equates brevity with *brevitas* as opposed to Koch's separation of the two. According to Lagmanovich, it is the aim to be concise in the creation of *minificción* that results in its brevity, rather than the concision being the result of an aim to write a piece of only a few lines or even words. The supposition is that, if the latter were the case, we would be reading works of literature that were originally envisaged as being longer in some prior 'abstract' form, and then whittled down in size as this abstraction takes on its tangible, written reality.

Word count does however receive some attention in Lagmanovich's discussions on *minificción*, and he points to his own personal preference for pieces that are around the 30 or 40 word mark, including title, in size. Lagmanovich feels that anything above that size loses the sense of being *hiperbreve* due to the fact that the reader, although perhaps unaware, begins to observe the piece in fragments. This difference in reception experienced by the reader is used by Lagmanovich to form the basis of one further subdivision, distinguishing the *hiperbreves* (the term *ultracortos* is also used synonymously) from within Lagmanovich's model. The term *hiperbreve* applies not necessarily solely to *microrrelatos* or even to *minificciones*, but represents the smallest scale of the larger continuum: If the prefix *mini-* or *micro-* is used to describe those textual forms that are characterised by their brevity, then the *hiperbreves* are those that distinguish themselves through their *extreme* brevity. Lagmanovich sets the word count of such texts arbitrarily at around the 20 word mark¹⁴¹.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Lagmanovich (2006:56 & 68ff).

3.3.4 Summary of and commentary on Lagmanovich's model

3.3.4.1 Summary

Starting with the concept of the 'text', Lagmanovich begins by identifying binary oppositions (verbal vs. non-verbal, literary vs. non-literary, fictional vs. non-fictional, narrative vs. non-narrative) within this concept. He simultaneously works down the axis of scale, identifying texts that are recognised by their brevity and even shorter texts that are recognised by their extreme brevity. It is the verbal, literary, fictional narratives that are recognised for their brevity and extreme brevity that Lagmanovich refers to as the *microrrelato*. Lagmanovich appears to make no distinction along the synchronic axis, although it is recognised that *microrrelatos* represent a new form of writing.

With regards to the concept of brevity, whether a piece is brief or not is a quality that is essentially projected onto that piece by the reader, who recognises it as such in comparison to the textual output of his or her literary tradition. Nonetheless, *microrrelatos*, or *minificciones* in general, are also marked by the characteristic of concision. Concision is described as the appearance of only those words that are essential to the piece, and none of those which are non-essential.

3.3.4.2 Commentary

There are two areas of Lagmanovich's model that I would like to briefly discuss, the first concerning his method of judging brevity, and the second concerning his extreme emphasis on the narrative nature of the *microrrelato*.

Regarding the topic of brevity, Lagmanovich is completely correct in criticising attempts to use word count to set firm boundaries on what is or is not *minificción*. However, I feel that he offers no satisfactory alternative. Lagmanovich states that a reader intuitively knows if a text is brief, and that this knowledge is influenced

or conditioned by the literary tradition or the types of texts he or she is familiar with. I believe he is right, and that it is true that a reader will regard a text to be brief if that text is comparatively shorter than other texts he or she has read, and that it is likewise true that a different reader with a different background in reading may not agree with the conclusions of the first. But does this tell us anything of any real value? After all, the word 'brief' only means something in a comparative sense; it seems to me therefore that all Lagmanovich is really doing here is pointing to the semantics of the word. However, we are not looking for a definition of the word 'brief'; we are looking to see if there are empirically observable characteristics in a particular form of text that we happen to call 'brief', characteristics which distinguish this form from those texts that are different in size. Without offering such characteristics, the method suggested by Lagmanovich is as arbitrary as that discussed by Zavala: Is the only difference between a *microrrelato* and a standard short story really the fact that I 'feel' that one is 'brief' in comparison to the other?

The bigger problem lies, however, with Lagmanovich's insistence on the narrative nature of the *microrrelato*. Many of the texts referred to by Lagmanovich as *microrrelatos* appear in this work as *minificciones*. Lagmanovich holds that all of these texts are narratives; I hold that they are not. In the first place, the narrative fundamentals laid down by Lagmanovich are insufficient; this will become clearer following the discussion on the nature of narrative in the next chapter. Secondly, even if we were to accept Lagmanovich's own narrative criteria as sufficient, many of the *microrrelatos* selected by Lagmanovich would simply not comply, as will be demonstrated in chapter 5.

3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored three independent models of *minificción*, in order to answer questions as to where contemporary critics position *minificción* along the synchronic axis, how they divide *minificción* typologically, and according to which criteria this is done. The critics discussed were Lauro Zavala, Dolores Koch and David Lagmanovich.

Zavala has built a model which is based principally on identifying different categories through relative word count. These differences are said to generate the characteristics typical of their respective categories. Starting with the *cuento* (short story), Zavala identifies three categories of reducing word count, the last of which, the *cuento ultracorto*, is analogous to *minificción* as the term is applied in this work. These have an upper limit of 200 words and a lower limit of one. Given the fact that Zavala works his way down from the short story, and given his frequent references to the narrative nature of such works, narrative can be considered a central characteristic of *minificción*, although concessions are made by Zavala that not all *minificción* is necessarily narrative.

Koch defines *minificción* as a “*sub-género experimental del cuento*”¹⁴², suggesting that narrative is a fundamental characteristic of the form. The term *minificción* is applied in a broad sense to many forms of short prose, including traditional, long-established forms such as the parable or the fable. Koch concentrates on a particular form of *minificción* that she calls the *micro-relato*. This differentiates itself from the *minicuento* –described as being a very brief *cuento*– through the nature of its conclusion, which is considered to occur in the mind of the author as opposed to in the fictional representation. Both of these forms are referred to as narratives. However, Koch does briefly describe the *minitexto* –or *textículo*– a class of *minificción* that are not stories, and therefore presumably not narrative. However, the concept of the *microtexto* is not addressed

¹⁴² Cf. subchapter 3.2.2.

in depth, and it should also be noted that Koch appears to classify many texts that I believe are non-narratives within the *micro-relato* bracket.

Lagmanovich's model is the simplest to summarise, as he holds that all *microrrelatos* (Lagmanovich's equivalent of *minificción*) are narrative in nature. The issue of brevity is, however, dealt with in a way that differs largely to that of Zavala and Koch: according to Lagmanovich, a *minificción* is brief as long as it is considered to be brief by its reader. In addition, Lagmanovich rejects any notions of generic hybridisation as discussed by Zavala and Koch, emphasising the predominance of *minificción*'s narrative qualities.

4 The Nature of Narrative

As chapter 3 has shown, one thing that is agreed upon to a larger or lesser extent upon by all three critics is that *minificción* (or the *microrrelato*, as it is referred to by Koch and Lagmanovich, or the *cuento muy corto* or *ultracorto* in Zavala's model) is essentially a form of narrative. This conclusion seems to be the logical consequence of viewing *minificción* as a form of the short story.

Despite arriving at this conclusion, none of the three critics appears to have analysed *minificción* in order to reveal whether it contains the fundamentals necessary to be considered narrative. In chapter 5, this is what I intend to do.

Before doing this, however, it is necessary to understand what narrative is and what these fundamentals are. Reaching such an understanding is the purpose of this chapter. This will involve a discussion of the meaning of the term 'narrative' and a discussion of the field of research that specialises in narrative, namely narratology. This will reveal the fundamental elements of narrative, and will be followed by an examination of certain descriptive models of narrative to see how these elements can be identified in text.

4.1 What is Narrative?

What do we mean when we refer to something as a 'narrative'? To begin with a simple definition, the New Oxford English Dictionary describes narrative as the:

*“spoken or written account of events, a story.”*¹⁴³

This definition, simple as it is, emphasises two important points: firstly, that narrative is an “account”, i.e., it is something that is “told” –regardless of whether that telling takes a spoken or written form– and secondly, that it is an account of

¹⁴³ Pearsall (2001:1231).

“events” (as opposed to a description of an object, for example, or an argumentative text). This dual emphasis suggests that ‘events’ first become a ‘narrative’ through their recounting, and inversely, that something which is ‘recounted’ is only a ‘narrative’ if it is an account of events, i.e., a ‘story’.

This definition of narrative is echoed by most definitions found in literary glossaries, such as that found in M. H. Abrams’ “*Glossary of Literary Terms*”, which describes narrative as

“[A] *story, whether told in prose or verse, involving events, characters, and what the characters say or do.*”¹⁴⁴

Such definitions are also consistent with the commonly held truism that “any tale requires a teller”. However, discrepancies do arise when viewing this simple model of what does and does not make a narrative, as I would like to demonstrate here by showing how Abrams’ quote continues:

“[...] *some literary forms [...] are explicit narratives, told by a narrator. In drama, the narrative is not told, but evolves by means of the direct presentation on stage of the actions and speeches of the characters.*”¹⁴⁵

Here, in order to include drama within the scope of his definition, Abrams has removed the prerequisite of a narrator, choosing instead to allow the concept of a narrative that “evolves by means of the direct representation”. Obviously, this contradicts even the simple definition laid out at the opening of this chapter, and one is now faced with the problem: Is it or is it not possible to have a narrator-less narrative?

This problem highlights a difference in opinion within the field of narrative research on how far to apply the division between ‘showing’ and ‘telling’ –in the

¹⁴⁴ Abrams (2005:181).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Platonic¹⁴⁶ sense of ‘*mimesis*’ and ‘*diegesis*’– which itself seems to stem from a more general problem resulting from the multiple uses of the word ‘narrative’. Both of these problems must be addressed if we are to arrive at a satisfactory working definition of what narrative actually is.

To address the first, drama is a form of *mimesis*, or “showing”. That which is being conveyed to an audience is not being narrated, it is being *imitated*. This is reflected in the synonym of *mimesis*, namely *imitatio*, which is described in Üding and Steinbrink’s “*Grundriss der Rhetorik*” as “*die kontrollierende Nachahmung vorbildlicher Reden und Texte*”¹⁴⁷. Plato contrasted *mimesis* to *diegesis*, in which the content is reported, or narrated: the substance of both *mimesis* and *diegesis* can be the same, but the manner in which that substance is conveyed distinguishes the two: *mimesis* embodies that content, whereas *diegesis* narrates it. Again, this is even clearer if one considers the synonym of *diegesis*: *narratio*, which is described by Üding and Steinbrink as the “*Darstellung eines tatsächlichen oder scheinbar tatsächlichen Vorgangs*”.

This important distinction is reflected in definitions of narrative offered by some narratologists, such as that given by Scholes and Kellogg, who describe narrative as:

“[A]ll those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a storyteller.”¹⁴⁸

In this definition, the difference between narrative and drama is emphasised through the prerequisite of a storyteller for the former. To quote Michael J Toolan in his book “*Narrative, a Critical Linguistic Introduction*”:

¹⁴⁶ Plato differentiated between *pure narrative (diegesis)*, in which the poet does not try to disguise himself, and *representational narrative (mimesis)*, whereby the poet assumes somebody else’s voice to make a speech. “[I]sn’t everything told by story-tellers or poets actually a narrative of events in the past, present, or future? [...] and don’t they achieve their effect by making use of either pure narrative, representational narrative, or of both? [...]” Cf. Plato (1994:392d). This contrast was somewhat neutralised by Aristotle, who makes both pure narrative and representational narrative forms of *mimesis*. Cf. Genette (1972: 190).

¹⁴⁷ Üding / Steinbrink (1994:328).

¹⁴⁸ Scholes / Kellogg (1968:4).

*“Narratives have to have a teller, and that teller, no matter how backgrounded or remote or invisible, is always important.”*¹⁴⁹

So, if this distinction is so important, why does a difference in opinion exist? This brings us to the second problem mentioned above, namely the multiple applications of the term ‘narrative’ itself. Gérard Genette addresses this problem in the introduction to his work *“Discours du récit”*¹⁵⁰, in which he describes the three different ways in which the word ‘*récit*’ (Eng: ‘narrative’) is commonly used, leading to the ambiguity surrounding the term.

Firstly, according to Genette, we use the narrative to refer to the:

*“[...] énoncé narratif, le discours oral où écrit qui assume la relation d’un événement ou d’une série d’événements.”*¹⁵¹

As such, the word narrative used in this way represents the narrative statement, or the ‘sequence of words’, whether spoken or written, that tell a story. The second use of the word narrative refers to the:

*“[...] succession d’événements, réels ou fictifs, qui font l’objet de ce discours, et leurs diverses relations d’enchaînement, d’opposition, de répétition, etc.”*¹⁵²

This use of the word narrative, described by Genette as being the least common use –although that which is commonly used by analysts and theorists of narrative– describes, in effect, an abstraction of the former: the succession of events, and their internal relations to one another. And third and finally, the term ‘narrative’ is also used in reference to the:

¹⁴⁹ Toolan (1992:5).

¹⁵⁰ In *Figures III* (1972:66-282).

¹⁵¹ Genette (1972:71).

¹⁵² Ibid.

“[...] événements [...] qui consiste en ce que quelqu’un raconte quelque chose: l’acte de narrer pris en lui-même.”

In other words: the conveying of the former two: the very act of narrating itself.

If we now refer back to Abrams’ definition quoted above, we can see that his definition of a narrative that is not ‘told’, but that ‘evolves’ through the actions of the characters, actually refers to the second definition of narrative as listed above. Genette, who makes no judgement as to whether any of the above usages of the word are correct or incorrect, accepts that all three are *features* of narrative, and goes into greater detail to describe each. This will be discussed in subchapter 4.4.1.

Nonetheless, the question still remains of whether or not of the presence of a narrator should be a requirement for a text to constitute a narrative in the true sense of the word. With regard to this, I opt to side with definitions such as those given by Scholes and Kellogg and Toolan above, as well as with Genette, and to view some form of narrator as an essential element of narrative. This in turn leaves us with two fundamentals of narrative –same two mentioned in our initial dictionary definition above– namely ‘events’ and a ‘narrator’. These will be elaborated upon in 4.3 and 4.4 respectively. Before that, I would like to briefly discuss the field of research concerned with narrative, namely narratology, to arrive at a further understanding of how narrative is analysed.

4.2 Narratology

In the opening line of her book “*Narratology. Introduction to the theory of narrative*” Mieke Bal defines narratology as:

“*The theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that ‘tell a story.’*”¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Bal (1999:3).

To describe narratology as “*the theory of narratives*”, with the emphasis placed on the definite article, is perhaps misleading, suggesting a greater degree of unity and agreement in the field of narratology than actually exists. In fact, narratology might be better described as a ‘variety of theories of narrative’ or a ‘variety of descriptive models of narrative’. These models may not necessarily oppose one another, as some appear designed to address different problems of narrative than others. The one objective that is, however, central to narratology as a whole, is the description of a ‘common model’ that can be applied to all texts of a narrative nature. To quote Roland Barthes:

“ou bien le récit est un simple radotage d’événements, auquel cas on ne peut pas parler qu’en s’en remettant à l’art, au talent ou au génie du conteur (de l’auteur) – toutes formes mythiques du hasard - , ou bien il possède en commun avec d’autres récits une structure accessible à l’analyse, quelque patience qu’il faille mettre à l’énoncer.”¹⁵⁴

The term narratology itself was coined by Bulgarian narratologist Tzvetan Todorov in his 1969 work “*Grammaire du décaméron*”¹⁵⁵, but has since been applied retrospectively to describe the works of many thinkers, dating as far back as Aristotle¹⁵⁶. Modern narratology is usually said to have begun with the Russian formalists, who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, were the first to examine literature from a structuralist perspective¹⁵⁷, i.e., striving to find the structure or system at work in literary output, or “*the distinguishing features of the literary materials*”¹⁵⁸.

The Russian formalist considered the principal pioneer in the field of narratology was Vladimir Propp, who, in his 1928 book “*Morphology of the Russian Folktale*”, looked to reveal the simplest, irreducible, recurring narrative elements

¹⁵⁴ Barthes (1994:75).

¹⁵⁵ From the French “*narratologie*” first used in Todorov’s introduction: “*Notre effort ici sera d’aboutir à une théorie de la narration, [...]. Par conséquent, plutôt des études littéraires, cet ouvrage relève d’une science qui n’existe pas encore, disons la NARRATOLOGIE, la science du récit*” Todorov (1969:10).

¹⁵⁶ Barthes (1994:74).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Erlich (1955:132ff).

¹⁵⁸ Erlich (1955:146).

in a corpus of 115 Russian folktales¹⁵⁹. The very important accomplishments reached by Propp will be outlined briefly below. However, it is not Propp's narrative model that will form the basis of the analysis of *minificción* later in this work, mainly because the field of narratology has progressed significantly since his time. A discussion of Propp's ideas will, however, take us further in establishing the nature of narrative events, and lead us to discuss Roland Barthes' theories of the smallest narrative units – which both Barthes and Propp referred to as 'functions'. This is the aim of the following subchapter.

From there we will turn our attention Gerard Genette and the division of the study of narrative into multiple levels of inquiry, and Genette's theories on the narrative instance in fictional narratives.

4.3 Events

4.3.1 Vladimir Propp, *Sjuzhet*, *Fabula*, and the narrative 'function'

As mentioned above, in his path-breaking work "*Morphology of the Russian Folktale*", Propp studied the overarching structure of this narrative form. In doing so, he identified the Russian folktale as form in which an initial state of equilibrium is disrupted by various 'forces' or 'turbulence', in turn bringing disequilibrium and upheaval, before some form of action leads to the restoration of a modified version of the original equilibrium¹⁶⁰.

Propp took a corpus of 115 Russian folktales, which he examined for recurring and variable elements and features. Through this examination, Propp found that although the characters and elements of the individual folktales may be superficially different, the number of different character types found in the entire corpus could be reduced to just seven: these would include archetypal roles such as the 'hero' and the 'villain'. He also found that the events that occur within the

¹⁵⁹ Toolan (1992:14).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Toolan (1992:8).

narrative representations that made up his corpus were relatively constant and predictable. Abstracting these events to their most fundamental form, and calling them *functions*, Propp found that the number of such functions, as well as their sequence, was fixed. In total, Propp isolated 31 functions, which always appear in the same order in any given folktale. Below is an example selection of Propp's 31 functions, in the sequence in which they appear in his model:

- 25 A difficult task is proposed to the hero.
- 26 The task is resolved.
- 27 The hero is recognised.
- 28 The false hero or villain is exposed.
- 29 The hero is given a new appearance.
- 30 The villain is punished.
- 31 The hero is married and ascends the throne.

Through the abstraction, simplification and organisation of the fundamental elements (functions and characters) of his selected corpus, Propp had, in effect, identified two different levels of inquiry, which he referred to as the *sjuzhet* and the *fabula*¹⁶¹.

The latter term, *fabula*, refers to the basic description of the fundamental events of a story, an example of which can be found in the quote above. These fundamentals are placed in their natural chronological order, with an “*accompanying and equally skeletal inventory of the roles of the characters in the story*”¹⁶². As such, the *fabula* is an abstraction of the original text. It is at the level of the *fabula* that any given narrative can manifest itself in different mediums or different languages, which is described by Claude Bremond in the following quote which reflects this abstract nature of the *fabula*:

“*The subject of a tale may serve as an argument for a ballet, that of a novel may be carried over to the stage or to the screen, a movie may be told to those who have not seen it. It is words one reads, it is images one sees, it is gestures one deciphers, but through them it is a story one follows; and it may be the same story.*”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Cf. Toolan (1992:9).

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Bremond, Claude (1964:4), quoted in Rimmon-Kenan (1985:7).

Any of the examples in the quote above could be considered different ‘versions’ of the *fabula*, and the word *version* used in this manner is helpful in understanding the concept of *sjuzhet*. In short, the *sjuzhet* refers to the version of the *fabula* that is received by the reader, i.e., in the case of the Russian fairytales, the original texts that were analysed by Propp, inclusive of all the techniques employed by the author to create those texts.

Since Propp, narratologists have identified another level of inquiry, and this has led to a bifurcation of the second level of inquiry, *sjuzhet*¹⁶⁴. The fact that narrative is now analysed on three different levels has been alluded to above when discussing Gerard Genette’s clarification of the three different uses of the word narrative. As the examination of all three levels is central to the narratological study of any given text, they will be discussed in depth in chapter 3, but before doing this, I would like to discuss the concept of the ‘event’ in narrative in more depth.

4.3.2 Barthes’ Simplest Narrative Units

So far throughout this chapter I have used the term ‘event’ without offering any closer definition. But what does the rather vague notion of an ‘event’ in narrative actually mean? Let us take as a starting point Rimmon-Kenan’s working definition of the term, which he describes in the opening of his investigation of narrative fiction as: “*something that happens, something that can be summed up by a verb or the name of an action*”¹⁶⁵. He elaborates on this further when he goes on to say:

“[W]hen something happens, the situation usually changes. An event, then, may be said to be **a change from one state of affairs to another**.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Toolan (1992:10).

¹⁶⁵ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:2).

¹⁶⁶ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:15), bold own.

As we have seen in subchapter 4.3.1, it was broad ‘changes of state’ in the representations in any given folktale that Propp isolated and inventoried in his famous study; these, in combination with character, he termed ‘functions’¹⁶⁷. The significance of the idea of a ‘change of state’ was also highlighted by Todorov in his famous study of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*: Todorov labelled the change of state “*transformation*” and described it thus:

*“The simple relation of successive facts does not constitute a narrative: these facts must be organised, which is to say, ultimately, that they must have elements in common. But if all the elements are in common, there is no longer a narrative, for there is no longer anything to recount. Now, transformation represents precisely a synthesis of differences and resemblance, it links two facts without their being able to be identified.”*¹⁶⁸

Therefore, for Todorov, an event –or “transformation”– was recognisable through the difference between two facts that bear a resemblance to one another; the actual level of “transformation” being the degree of difference between these two states.

Roland Barthes’ approach towards the narrative event can be found in his 1966 essay “*Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits*”, in which he looks to define the smallest units of narrative. Starting from the premise that meaning must be the criterion of such a unit, Barthes states that it is the “*caractère fonctionnel de certains segments de l’histoire qui en fait des unités*”¹⁶⁹, and accordingly names this first unit of meaning the *fonction*¹⁷⁰ (Eng: ‘function’). This functionality refers to the part any function plays in generating the meaning of the narrative:

*“L’âme de toute fonction, c’est, si l’on peut dire, son germe, ce qui lui permet d’ensemencer le récit d’un élément qui mûrira plus tarde, sur le même niveau ou ailleurs, sur un autre niveau .”*¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Toolan (1992:14).

¹⁶⁸ Todorov (1977:233).

¹⁶⁹ Barthes (1994:80).

¹⁷⁰ Barthes follows Propp in both his use of the term function, and defining it as “*l’action d’un personnage, définie du point de vue de sa signification dans le déroulement de l’Intrigue.*” Barthes (1994:80).

¹⁷¹ Barthes (1994:80).

At this point, the term function does not precisely correspond to a narrative event, i.e., a change of state, as a function is any unit of meaning: indeed, in Barthes' model, everything in any given narrative is said to contain meaning on some level, for example:

*“si, dans Un Cœur simple, Flaubert nous apprend à un certain moment, apparemment sans y insister, que les filles du sous-préfet de Pont-l'Evêque possédaient un perroquet, ce parce-que ce perroquet va avoir ensuite une grande importance dans la vie de Felicité; l'enonce de ce detail (qu'elle qu'en soit la forme linguistique) constitue donc une fonction, ou unité narrative.”*¹⁷²

Broadly speaking, Barthes identifies two levels of meaning in narrative, which, accordingly, correspond to two major classes of function, the *distributional* and the *integrational*. For the former class of function Barthes reserves the actual term *fonction*, while referring to the latter as *indices* (Eng: 'indices'). It is the function in the former sense that corresponds closest to the 'change of state' or 'event' in narrative, as functions correspond to a functionality of *doing*, while *indices*, correspond to a functionality of *being*¹⁷³. Functions derive their meaning in relation to their correlates, which are 'distributed' throughout the narrative:

*“l'achat d'un revolver a pour corrélat le moment où on s'en servira (et si l'on ne s'en sert pas, la notation et retournée en signe de velléitarisme, etc.)”*¹⁷⁴

Functions are in turn classified into two main kinds, namely those that advance the action of the story, and those that expand, amplify, maintain or delay the former. These are referred to respectively as the *fonctions cardinales* (or *noyaux*) (Eng: 'cardinal functions' or 'nuclei' ¹⁷⁵), which are actions that open or close an alternative and are of direct consequence to the development of the story, and the *catalyses* (Eng: 'catalysers'), which are the trivial incidents or descriptions that get you from one cardinal function to the other, and whose only functionality is

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Cf. Barthes (1994:83).

¹⁷⁴ Barthes (1966:82).

¹⁷⁵ Cardinal functions are also referred to as *kernels* by various authors; for example, by Rimmon-Kenan (1985:16) and Toolan (1992:22).

chronological. To quote the example given by Rimmon-Kenan when describing these two varieties:

*“If a telephone rings, a character can either answer it or not; an alternative is opened and the event is therefore a kernel. But between the ringing of the phone and the answer (or the decision not to answer), the character may scratch his head, light a cigarette, curse, etc. These are catalysts – they do not open an alternative, but ‘accompany’ the kernel in various ways.”*¹⁷⁶

However, determining whether or not an event is to be considered a cardinal function or a catalyst is not always straightforward. Commenting on the classification of a telephone ringing as a cardinal function, Toolan comments thus:

*“Not, the sceptic might be inclined to say, if it’s a wrong number. The criteria for kernelhood are just too vague: certainly a telephone ringing is an initiation, a summons, an opening move, as analysts of conversation remind us. But then, on the ‘to answer or not answer’ test, are we to treat every direct speech turn in a novel as a kernel, on the grounds that on each occasion the addressee ‘can either answer or not’?”*¹⁷⁷

With regards to the second large sub-class of narrative element mentioned above, namely the indices, these are the narrative units that create a mood. These units refer:

*“[...] non à un acte complémentaire et conséquent, mais à un concept plus ou moins diffus, nécessaire cependant au sens de l’histoire.”*¹⁷⁸

Examples of possible indices in a narrative text are, for example:

*“[...] indices caractériels concernant les personnages, informations relatives à leur identité, notations d’atmosphère, etc.”*¹⁷⁹

In the same fashion as functions, *indices* are also divided into two different classes, namely *indices proprement dits* (Eng: ‘indices proper’) and *informants*

¹⁷⁶ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:16).

¹⁷⁷ Toolan (1992:25).

¹⁷⁸ Barthes (1966:92).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

(Eng: ‘informants’). *Indices proper* are those units which refer the character of a narrative agent, a feeling, an atmosphere, etc., whereas *informants* are pieces of factual information present in a narrative that serve to identify or locate in time and in space:

*“Les indices ont donc toujours des signifiés implicites; les informants, au contraire, n’en ont pas, du moins au niveau de l’histoire: ce sont des données pures, immédiatement signifiantes. Les indices impliquent une activité de déchiffrement: il s’agit pour le lecteur d’apprendre à connaître un caractère, une atmosphère; les informants apportent une connaissance toute faite; leur fonctionnalité, comme celle des catalyses, est donc faible, mais elle n’est pas non plus nulle.”*¹⁸⁰

Two things have to be pointed out at this point about Barthes’ classification of the smallest narrative units. Firstly, it is entirely possible that a narrative unit can belong to different classes at the same time, for example:

*“[...] boire un whisky (dans un hall d’aéroport) est une action qui peut servir de catalyse à la notation (cardinale) d’attendre, mais c’est aussi en même temps l’indice d’une certaine atmosphère (modernité, détente, souvenir, etc.).”*¹⁸¹

Secondly, with regards to functionality in narrative, the importance of the cardinal function reigns supreme. This is due not only to the sliding scale of functionality suggested up to this point, but also in the alternative way of viewing these four basic units, posited by Barthes and described as being closer to the ‘linguistic’ model. Referring to cardinal functions as *noyaux* (Eng: ‘nuclei’), Barthes states:

*“Les catalyses, les indices et les informants ont en effet un caractère commun: ce sont des expansions, par rapport aux noyaux: les noyaux [...] forment des ensembles finis de termes peu nombreux, ils sont régis par logique, ils sont à la fois nécessaire et suffisants.”*¹⁸²

As such, it is the cardinal functions – or ‘nuclei’ – that provide the framework of the narrative; this framework is then padded out by the remaining units. It is,

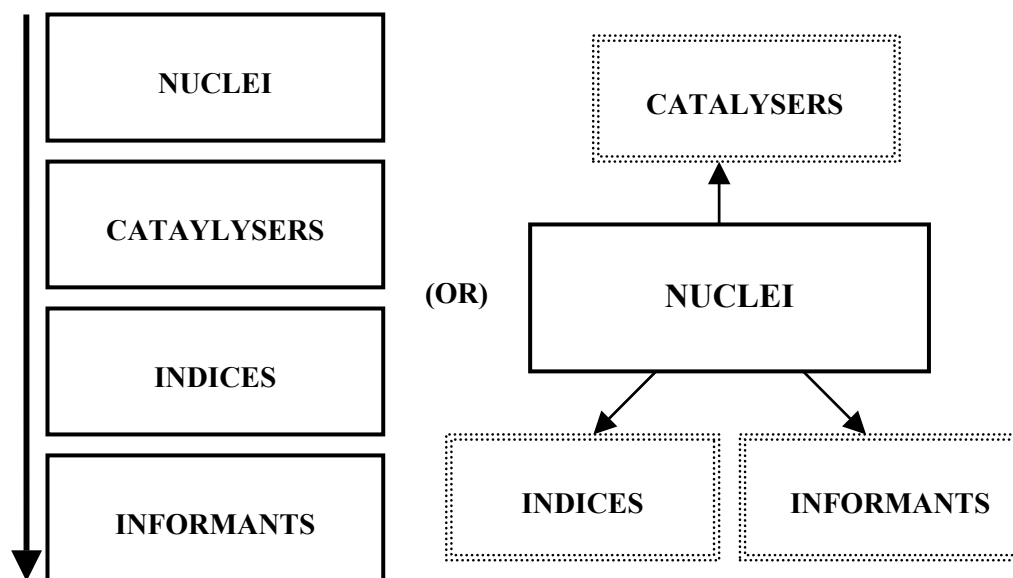
¹⁸⁰ Barthes (1994:85).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

however, possible to have a narrative that consists solely of this framework, i.e., without the padding that comes in the form of catalysers, indices and informants: whereas expansions can be deleted, nuclei cannot.

The cardinal functions are bound together by a relation of solidarity: “*une fonction de cette sorte oblige à une autre de même sorte et réciproquement [...]*”¹⁸³ which defines the very framework of the narrative.



2: Graphic Representation of Barthes' 'Functions'

Cardinal functions combined in this manner are referred to by Barthes as a *sequence* (Eng: ‘sequence’), each sequence opening:

“[...] *lorsqu’un de ses termes n’a point d’antécédent solidaire et elle se ferme lorsqu’un autre de ses termes n’a plus de conséquent.*”¹⁸⁴

Illustrating this with the examples of the different functions ‘order a drink’, ‘obtain it’, ‘drink it’, ‘pay for it’, Barthes describes how such closed sequences are always nameable (in this case “*consommation*”) as, in the ‘major’ function “*consommation*” as outlined above:

¹⁸³ Barthes (1994:86).

¹⁸⁴ Barthes (1994:88).

“[...] *il n'est pas possible de faire précéder la commande ou de faire suivre le paiement sans sortir de l'ensemble homogène «consommation».*”¹⁸⁵

According to Barthes, it was such major functions that were identified and named by Propp in his work on the Russian folktale¹⁸⁶.

4.3.3 Barthes' Proairetic Code

As an “*abstraction from the set of observable signifiers which is the text,*”¹⁸⁷ the *fabula* is intangible. This presents us with a problem, namely: how do we go about representing this abstraction in a form in which we can analyse it? The simplest approach to this, and that used by story-analysts, is through the paraphrase¹⁸⁸. We have seen this demonstrated already in the work of Propp, illustrated in his numerically listed sequence of functions quoted in 4.3.1. Such an approach seems logical enough. However, we are then left with a new problem: how do we arrive at the functions of a story, in order to create such a paraphrase?

One approach to this, taken by Roland Barthes amongst others, is to construct the paraphrase as a series of ‘event-labels’. Indeed, Barthes sees the process of constructing event-labels as one of his five codes of reading as defined in “*S/Z*”, his 1970 analysis of the Balzac novella “*Sarassine*”. This process is referred to as the ‘proairetic’ (Fr: ‘*proairétique*’) code by Barthes:

“[...] *la séquence proairétique n'est jamais que l'effet d'un artifice de lecture: quiconque lit le texte rassemble certains informations sous quelque nom générique d'actions (Promenade, Assassinat, Rendez-vous) et c'est ce nom qui fait la séquence; la séquence n'existe qu'au moment où et parce qu'on peut le nommer [...].*”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:13).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Barthes (1994:567).

However, there are two problems with paraphrasing through the use of event-labels alone. Firstly, as the labelling of events doesn't necessarily reflect the language used in the actual text, the problem exists of a lack of uniformity in the labelling. As Rimmon-Kenan points out, the same event could be referred to as crime, murder, shooting, or revenge¹⁹⁰, and so on and so forth. This doesn't cause a problem for the average reader of the text, who simply changes the event-labels during the process of reading, but for the narratologist a more precise system is needed. However, the problem of uniformity remains a problem in narrative analysis¹⁹¹.

The second problem that exists with Barthes' system as outlined above is that event labels of one word do not incorporate enough information to offer a full understanding of the story (if the event labels are viewed in isolation from the text):

*“An apparently coherent sequence of actions identified by the event-labels Shooting, Wounding, Killing, would lose much of its coherence if the participants did not remain constant (if the shooter were not the killer or the wounded person not the one who was killed).”*¹⁹²

The obvious way to resolve this problem is to include the names of the participants in the event labels while sequencing them for the paraphrase, i.e., to create simple sentences. This form of label is referred to as a *narrative proposition*¹⁹³.

Regardless which of the techniques mentioned above is used –event labels or narrative propositions– it is important to point out that, when paraphrasing the story, the events are placed in their natural chronological order, i.e., in the order in which they occurred in the fictional world of the story. This is must be emphasised, as, as Rimmon-Kenan points out:

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Rimmon-Kenan (1985:14).

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Rimmon-Kenan (1985:14).

¹⁹³ Cf. Rimmon-Kenan (1985:14).

*“If the content-paraphrase extracted from the text is organised according to principles other than chronological then it is not a story-paraphrase and **the text in question is not a narrative**. Descriptive or expository propositions, for example, are distinct from narrative ones in that they are thought of as simultaneously valid according to some spatial or logical principle which is relatively or ideally independent of temporality.”¹⁹⁴*

Therefore, it can also be inferred that a text which does not allow for the chronological sequencing of its events is not a narrative, and as such, we have arrived at an additional narrative prerequisite: the ability to reconstruct its events according to temporal succession.

4.3.4 The Necessity of Chronology and Causality

So far we have discussed one essential element of the narrative text, i.e., the event, and discussed how these are described by Barthes in the context of his descriptive model of the smallest units of narrative. We have also looked at how these events can be identified in the narrative text as those elements which form Barthes’ proairetic code, and how these are reorganised chronologically, i.e., according to the principal of temporal succession.

The principle of temporal succession of events in a narrative has been emphasised as a fundamental characteristic in the closing paragraph of the previous subchapter: some form of temporal succession is necessary in a narrative text, as the axis of temporal organisation is the axis which “*turns a world-representing text into a narrative*”¹⁹⁵. However, is the principal of temporal succession alone sufficient to turn a sequence of events into a narrative?

A second feature that often appears in conjunction with the principal of temporal succession in narrative is the principal of ‘causality’. If temporal succession puts the events in the order in which they happened temporally, causality is used to describe whether or not the events occurred as a consequence of that or those

¹⁹⁴ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:14f), bold own.

¹⁹⁵ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:6).

which preceded it. To put it another way, temporal succession can only suggest that the events are linked with a hypothetical ‘and then’, whereas if the events are linked as result of causality, they could be said to be linked with a hypothetical ‘and then that is why’. English novelist E. M. Forster used the principle of causality to distinguish between what he termed ‘story’ and ‘plot’:

*“We have defined story as a narrative of events arranged in time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. ‘The king died and then the queen died’ is a story. ‘The king died and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot.”*¹⁹⁶

Whereas causality always implies succession, the opposite is not necessarily true. Nonetheless, as Rimmon-Kenan points out, a reader may well read causality into Forster’s first example, and Barthes himself points out that stories themselves may be based on an implicit application of the logical error *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, i.e., ‘since that event followed this one, that one was caused by this one’:

*“Tout laisse à penser, en effet, que le ressort de l’activité narrative est la confusion même de la consécution et de la conséquence, ce qui vient après étant lu dans le récit comme causé par.”*¹⁹⁷

Rimmon-Kenan illustrates this point with the humorous account of the life of English author Milton, where the humour lies precisely in the projection of causality onto the story from the explicit temporal succession: “*Milton wrote Paradise Lost, then his wife died, then he wrote Paradise Regained*”¹⁹⁸.

The question remains, however, whether both the principles of chronology and causality are necessary to create a narrative, in its most minimal sense. The necessity of chronology has already been emphasised: to constitute a narrative, the story must contain some form of temporal succession. However, is causality of equal importance?

¹⁹⁶ Forster (1963:93), quoted in Rimmon-Kenan (1985: 17).

¹⁹⁷ Barthes (1994:84).

¹⁹⁸ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:17).

Addressing this question, Rimmon-Kenan quotes the following definition of a ‘minimal’ story supplied by narratologist Gerald Prince:

*“A minimal story consists of three conjoined events: the first and the third events are stative, the second is active. Furthermore, the third event is the inverse of the first. Finally, the three events are conjoined by conjunctive features in such a way that (a) the first event precedes the second in time and the second precedes the third, and (b) the second causes the third.”*¹⁹⁹

Rimmon-Kenan argues that, despite the criteria stated above, temporal succession alone is sufficient, at least as a minimal requirement, for a group of events to form a story. This argument is based two considerations: firstly, on the fact that causality can often, if not always, be projected onto temporality (as mentioned above), and secondly, that Prince’s criteria as stated are counter-intuitive in nature, and would necessarily result in many texts that we know to be stories from being excluded from classification as such. To make this point Rimmon-Kenan refers to Anton Chekov’s short story “*Lady with a lapdog*”, which he paraphrases in the following manner:

*“Gurov meets Anna Sergeyevna in Yalta, they then have an affair, then he returns to his family in Moscow, she to her husband in a provincial town, then Gurov goes to seek her out, and they resume their affair in Moscow.”*²⁰⁰

Noting the fact that the events described in the paraphrase do not display any obvious inversion or closed cycle, i.e., although the state of affairs at the end is different to those at the start of the story, they are not symmetrically related²⁰¹, and also noting that the paraphrase lacks the causality stipulated by Prince’s conjunctive feature ‘as a result of’, Rimmon-Kenan states that this paraphrase would nevertheless be intuitively recognised as a story by the reader. On this basis, concludes Rimmon-Kenan, any two events arranged in chronological order can theoretically constitute a story:

¹⁹⁹ Prince, Gerald (1973:31), quoted in Rimmon-Kenan (1985:18).

²⁰⁰ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:19).

²⁰¹ “[T]he characters are not ‘happy’ as opposed to ‘unhappy’, or vice-versa”. Rimmon-Kenan (1985:19).

*“There would indeed be something very odd about the following bit of story: ‘Little Red Riding-Hood strays into the forest and then Pip aids the runaway convict.’ But if we accept that this is the possible paraphrase of some text [...], then the temporal conjunction requires us to imagine a world where these events can co-exist.”*²⁰²

Given the fact that much *minificción* resembles the structure of the minimal story, it is important to opt either for causality as a requirement for narrative or to concede that it can always be projected onto a sequence of events. In a similar manner to Rimmon-Kenan, I feel that arguing that there must be an explicit causal link between events in *minificción* would result in many texts that we intuitively know to be stories from being excluded from classification as such. Therefore I opt to view explicit causality as a non-essential in narrative.

4.4 Narrating

4.4.1 Gerard Genette’s Three Levels of Inquiry

As was discussed in 4.3.1, Propp’s analysis of the Russian folktale lead him to distinguish between two levels of inquiry in the analysis of narrative, namely the *sjuzhet* and the *fabula*, the former being the textual presentation of the folktale in the form in which it is received by the reader, the latter the narrative propositions, or ‘propositional functions’, abstracted from the text and organised in their chronological order. As was also briefly stated, this binary division has since been expanded to include a third domain of inquiry, resulting from what some commentators see as diving-in-two of Propp’s *sjuzhet*²⁰³.

The division of the analysis of narrative into three levels of inquiry was first introduced by Gérard Genette in his 1972 book *Figures III*²⁰⁴, each level

²⁰² Rimmon-Kenan (1985:19).

²⁰³ Cf. Toolan (1992:10).

²⁰⁴ Genette (1972:71ff).

corresponding by in large to the three definitions of the word ‘narrative’ outlined by Genette and discussed in chapter 4.1. These defined the term ‘narrative’ as:

- The oral or written statement that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events.
- The succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of this statement.
- The event that consists of someone recounting something, i.e., the act of narrating.

In the first of these, i.e., the narrative statement or ‘signifier’, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, and the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout²⁰⁵. This level is referred to by Genette as the *récit* (Eng: ‘text’), and can be considered analogous to Propp’s *sjuzhet*.

The second level, to which Genette applies the term *histoire* (Eng: ‘story’), can be compared to Propp’s *fabula*, i.e., the narrated events abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants of these events²⁰⁶. Story, in this sense, corresponds to the term ‘narrative’ in its least common use, although this particular use is frequent among narratologists and therefore vital to understand in the context of a work such as this one.

It was, however, the introduction of Genette’s third domain which was the major innovation in the division of narrative into separate levels of inquiry. Ironically, the definition of narrative with which it coincides is described by Genette as being “*apparemment le plus ancien*”²⁰⁷, and is namely that which refers to the very act of narrating itself. It is this act that produces the narrative action, “*et par extension, l’ensemble de la situation réelle ou fictive dans laquelle il prend*

²⁰⁵ Cf. Rimmon-Kenan (2004:3).

²⁰⁶ Genette refers to story as “[...] *un ensemble d’actions et de situations considérées en elles-mêmes, abstraction faite du médium, linguistique ou autre, qui nous en donne connaissance.*” Genette (1972:71).

²⁰⁷ Genette (1972:71).

place”²⁰⁸. Genette gives this level of inquiry the name *narration* (Eng: ‘narrating’²⁰⁹).

Genette highlights that, although his study concerns itself principally with the first level of inquiry listed above, i.e., with the narrative discourse or ‘text’, the practice of such an analysis unavoidably implies a ‘study of relationships’²¹⁰ between all three:

“[...] *d’une part entre ce discours et les événements qu’il relate [...], d’autre part entre ce même discours et l’acte qui le produit, [...]*.”²¹¹

Indeed, the text is the only level of inquiry which lends itself directly to analysis, and it is through this level that the others owe their existence. However, in the same manner that the existence of story and narrating is only made possible through the existence of text, text is itself only a narrative if it consists of these two fundamental characteristics:

*“Le discours narratif ne peut être tel qu’en tant que une histoire, faute de quoi il ne serait pas narratif (comme, disons, l’Éthique de Spinoza), et en tant qu’il est proféré par quelqu’un, faute de quoi (comme par exemple une collection de documents archéologiques) il ne serait pas en lui-même discours. Comme narratif, il vit de son rapport à l’histoire qu’il raconte; comme discours, il vit de son rapport à la narration qui le profère.”*²¹²

This was outlined in a simple fashion at the beginning of this chapter, when it was established that both events and their recounting through a narrator are the two fundamentals of narrative. Having discussed narrative events in chapter 4.3, I

²⁰⁸ Genette (1972:72).

²⁰⁹ Genette’s terms ‘*récit*’, ‘*histoire*’ and ‘*narration*’ are translated by Rimmon-Kenan as ‘text’, ‘story’, and ‘narration’ respectively (Rimmon-Kenan, 2004:3). The 1980 translation of Genette’s “*Discours de récit*” by Jane E. Lewin, “*Narrative Discourse*”, refers to them as ‘narrative’, ‘story’ and ‘narrating’ (1980:27). I have chosen to use Rimmon-Kenan’s translation ‘text’ for Genette’s ‘*récit*’, in order to avoid over use and confusion with the word narrative. I have, however, chosen to use Lewin’s ‘narrating’ for Genette’s ‘*narration*’, as it is a less frequently used word than ‘narration’ in a general sense, and therefore stands less chance of being confused.

²¹⁰ “*L’étude des relations*”. Genette (1972:72).

²¹¹ Genette (1972:72).

²¹² Genette (1972:74).

would now like to turn my attention to the narrator, or ‘narrating’, and this will be done taking the work Genette as its basis.

4.4.2 Voice

Borrowing from the terminology of verbal grammar, Genette constructs three different categories that encompass differing problems in the analysis of a narrative text. The one that is of particular interest to us here is that of *voix* (Eng: ‘voice’)²¹³, which deals with those determinations which:

*“[...] tiennent à la façon dont se trouve impliquée dans le récit la narration elle-même au sens où nous l’avons définie, c’est-à-dire la situation ou instance narrative, et avec ses deux protagonistes : le narrateur et son destinataire, réel ou virtuel; [...]”*²¹⁴

As such, considerations of voice operate at the level connecting narrating to both story and text. Additionally, as seen in the quote above, the ‘narrating’ in Genette’s model deals not only with the actual act of narrating itself, but with the activity of narrating in a wider sense, incorporating the concept of an addressee, or ‘narratee’, as an equally fundamental element in its makeup: Accordingly, narrating implies a communication situation, and viewing it as such helps to conceptualise its autonomous nature from the other levels of inquiry identified in previous chapters.

Considerations of voice are broken down further into three categories that in fact function simultaneously in the complex whole that is the narrative situation²¹⁵. These refer to the ‘time’ of the narrating in relation to the time of the events in the story, i.e., the temporal relationship between these two levels; the ‘narrative level’, as narrating may occur on various levels within stories; and the ‘person’, i.e., relationship between the narrator and/or narratee and the story being told²¹⁶.

²¹³ The other categories are *temps* and *mode*.

²¹⁴ Genette (1972:76).

²¹⁵ Cf. Genette (1972:215).

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Although the aim of this work is not to investigate the different ways that such considerations manifest themselves in *minificción*, a brief discussion of each of these will help us in our ultimate task of identifying which characteristics to look for in a text in order to discern narrating, and therefore to ascertain whether or not *minificción* complies with the norms of narrative.

4.4.3 Temporal relations

As Rimmon-Kenan states:

“Since narration²¹⁷ is an event like any other, it can entertain various temporal relations with the events of the story.”²¹⁸

In this respect, Genette distinguishes between four different types of narrating, namely *ultérieure* (Eng: ‘subsequent’), *antérieure* (Eng: ‘prior’), *simultanée* (Eng: ‘simultaneous’) and *intercalée* (Eng: ‘interpolated’).

The first type – subsequent narrative – is the most common form of temporal relation found in narrative, and refers to those narratives in which the events of the story took place in the past from the perspective of the narrating. Subsequent narratives are hence marked most noticeably by the use of the past tense in the text. It is not necessary that any indication of the temporal interval between the narrating and the moment of the story be given²¹⁹.

However, the use of the past tense is not necessarily always the case in subsequent narratives, as can be seen in some third person narratives where:

“une relative contemporanéité de l’action soit révélée par l’emploi du présent, soit au début comme dans Tom Jones ou dans le Père Goriot, soit à la fin, comme dans l’Eugénie Grandet ou Madame Bovary.”²²⁰

²¹⁷ Cf. footnote 200, Rimmon-Kenan uses the term ‘narration’ instead of ‘narrating’.

²¹⁸ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:90).

²¹⁹ Cf. Genette (1972:232ff).

²²⁰ Genette (1972:232).

Prior narrating – which, in contrast to subsequent narrating, is the least common form found in narrative – is predictive in nature, and generally takes the future tense although, again, it is not unknown to find prior narrating framed in the present tense. Plenty of examples of prior narrating are to be found in the Bible in the form of prophecies, although examples in modern narrative are rare²²¹.

The third type – simultaneous narrating – is described by Genette as being the simplest in principal, due to the fact that:

“la coïncidence rigoureuse de l’histoire et de la narration élimine toute espèce d’interférence et de jeu temporel.”

In this form, the narrating occurs simultaneously with the action of the story, examples of which are certain styles of journalistic reporting or diary entries. Genette points to the fact that simultaneous narrating can have one of two contrasting effects, depending on whether the emphasis is placed on the story or on the narrating itself. The former, for example, a present tense narrative which limits itself to describing that which takes place strictly ‘at that moment’, gives a heightened impression of objectivity. In contrast, if the emphasis is placed on the act of narrating itself then the effect is the inverse; interior monologue is an example of such, in which the action appears to be reduced to a simple pretext²²².

The final type – interpolated narrative – is considered by Genette to be the most complicated of all four types, and occurs when narrating and story alternate in time. The complexity results from what are, in effect, several narrative instances rather than one, and the fact that the story and the narrating can become entangled in such a way as to have an effect on one another. An example of such is the epistolary novel with several correspondents, such as Pierre Choderlos de Laclos’ 1782 novel “*Les liaisons dangereuses*”²²³.

²²¹ Cf. Rimmon-Kenan (1985:91).

²²² Cf. Genette (1972:219).

²²³ Cf. Genette (1972:229f).

4.4.4 Narrative Level

In addition to being separated from the story in time and in space, the narrative instance is also separated from the story it narrates through what Genette refers to as “*une sorte de seuil figure par la narration elle-même, une différence de niveau*”²²⁴, i.e., a barrier that is established through the very act of telling. Genette defines this difference in level in the following manner:

*“tout événement raconté par un récit est à un niveau diégétique immédiatement supérieur à celui où se situe l’acte narratif producteur de ce récit.”*²²⁵

As such, a hierarchical structure is constructed that can also explain the occurrence of stories within stories, in which the highest level, referred to as the ‘extradiegetic’ (Fr: ‘*extradiégétique*’) level, is where the narrating immediately superior to and responsible for the first story takes place. Any story told within the story narrated from the extradiegetic level is then said to occur within the ‘diegetic’ (Fr: ‘*diégétique*’) level, the diegetic level itself being the subject of the extradiegetic narrating. Such stories within the main story are in turn referred to as ‘intradiegetic’ (Fr: ‘*intradiegétique*’), and any stories narrated within the intradiegetic level are referred to as ‘metadiegetic’ (Fr: ‘*metadiegetique*’).

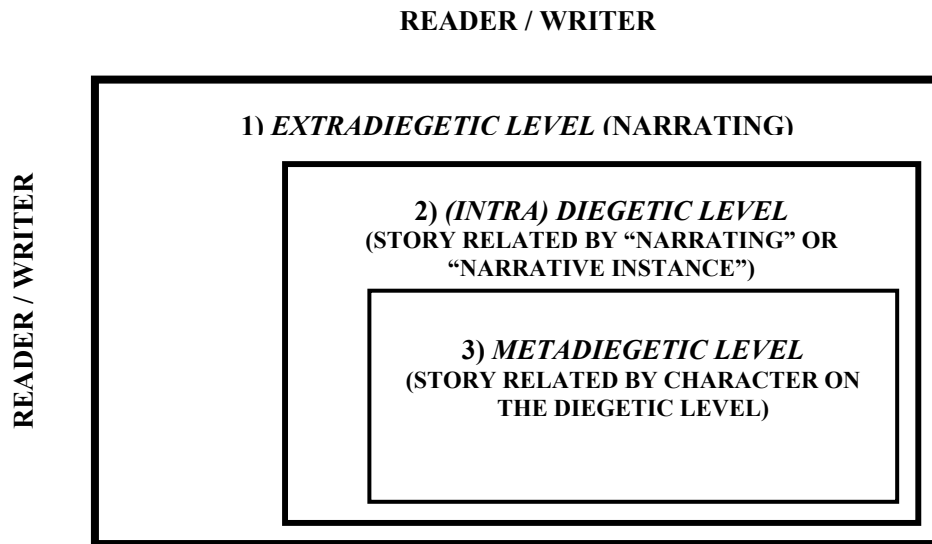
Many well known examples of intradiegetic storytelling are to found in world literature, including, for example, the tales told by Scheherazade in “*The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*”. These are related from inside the diegetic level, as Scheherazade is herself a fictional character in the story related by the narrating on the extradiegetic level. In turn, the stories recounted by characters within the stories told by Scheherazade are metadiegetic.

To clarify this more, it is helpful to think of any narrating situated on a higher diegetic level as dominating and framing all lower-level agents, who are in turn unaware of the existence of the higher-level agents: The characters at any level of

²²⁴ Genette (1972:238).

²²⁵ Ibid.

action are unaware that they are characters in a narrator's story, and have no influence on how their acts or motives are represented by this narrator. Genette describes the border between diegetic levels as a "*frontière mouvante mais sacrée entre deux mondes: celui où on raconte, celui qu'on raconte*"²²⁶. Below is a graphic representation demonstrating Genette's narrative levels:



3: Graphic Representation of Genette's Narrative Levels

4.4.5 Person

Bearing in mind the levels outlined above, the narrative instance is also categorised according to the narrative level to which it belongs. For example, the narrator who is, as it were, above or superior to the level which he or she is narrating²²⁷ is extradiegetic. Correspondingly, if a narrator is part of, i.e., exists within a level which is narrated by the extradiegetic narrator, then that narrator is termed as intradiegetic. In addition to this, narrators can be either absent from or present in the story which they narrate. If the narrator participates in the story which it is relating, or at least if some manifestation of this 'self' participates, it is termed a 'homodiegetic' narrator. In contrast to this, the narrator who does not

²²⁶ Genette (1972:245).

²²⁷ Cf. Rimmon-Kenan (1985:95).

play any role in that which is being narrated is referred to as a ‘heterodiegetic’ narrator²²⁸.

A narrator can be any combination of both pairs. For example, to refer back to our example of Scheherazade in “*The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*”, as mentioned, she is a fictional character in a story narrated by an extradiegetic narrator. She also narrates stories herself in which she plays no part. As such, she is an *intradiegetic-heterodiegetic* narrator. Alternatively, an extradiegetic narrator who is relating the story of his past life, for example, the character Pip in Charles Dickens’s “*Great Expectations*”, is classified as an extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator, as he features in the story he relates²²⁹.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Starting from a simple dictionary definition and then progressing to some basic definitions given by several narratologists, narrative was defined as a sequence of ‘events’ related by a ‘narrator’. The importance of the presence of a narrator was highlighted as a distinguishing factor between mimesis and pure narrative, and the importance of narrative events was highlighted as a distinguishing factor between narrative texts and other textual forms, such as descriptive or argumentative texts.

Following this, narrative events and the concept of the narrator were discussed in greater detail. Taking the work of Vladimir Propp as a starting point and progressing to Roland Barthes’ work on the smallest narrative units, it was ascertained that a narrative text can be reduced to a number of abstracted events, termed ‘functions’, which can be represented in the form of a paraphrase composed of event labels or narrative propositions. There are four different classes of functions, the fundamental functions of narrative being the ‘cardinal’ functions, which form the framework of any given narrative. It was also

²²⁸ Cf. Genette (1972:239-241).

²²⁹ Rimmon-Kenan (1985:95f).

established that the events in a narrative must necessarily be organisable into a sequence of temporal succession.

With regard to the narrator of a narrative text, taking the work of Gerard Genette as a basis and acquiring the term 'narrating' to refer to the narrative communication process in a text, the relationship between narrating and story were discussed, identifying the four different temporal relationships that can exist between the two. These are termed subsequent, prior, simultaneous and interpolated narrating. In addition to this, the relationships between narrative 'levels', as well as the relationship between any given narrating and the particular narrative level from which and of which is being narrated, were also discussed. This brought us to identify the extradiegetic, (intra)diegetic and metadiegetic levels of narrative.

In the following chapter, these concepts will be applied to a selection of *minificción* in order to establish whether or not they adhere to narrative norms, and therefore, whether or not they can be considered narrative texts.

5 Analysis of *Minificción*

In this chapter I will analyse examples of *minificción* in order to reveal whether or not they demonstrate the characteristics necessary to be classified as narrative texts. As such, I will be looking to identify the presence of the two characteristics that were emphasised and discussed in chapter 4 as essential elements of any narrative, namely:

- 1. The presence of a narrative instance ('narrating')**
- 2. A sequence of chronologically ordered events ('story')**

Any example of *minificción* found to be lacking one or both of these elements cannot be classified as a narrative as defined in Chapter 4. With regards to the examples of *minificción* that have been selected for analysis, it should be stated from the outset that most, if not all, of those featured here are considered to be narrative texts by at least one if not all of the critics discussed in chapter 3²³⁰.

The analysis in this chapter will not simply proceed in a random manner; the example texts have been organised into groups that correspond to some of the classes of *minificción* that were outlined by the critics discussed in chapter 3. As such, the examples of *minificción* presented in each group should be considered as representative of that group. By arranging the analysis in this fashion, I will also show how some classes of *minificción* tend to lend themselves to being narrative, while others do not.

Accordingly, the groups that have been selected for analysis are the following: first, in subchapter 5.1, I will be looking at examples of *minificción* that are simple short stories. The narrative qualities of this group are not necessarily in question, but a narrative analysis of these examples will demonstrate the approach that will be taken and provide a good comparative basis. Subchapters 5.2 and 5.3

²³⁰ Many of the examples are referenced as so by either Koch or Zavala, and the majority are featured in Lagmanovich's study of the microrrelato, "*El microrrelato, teoría y historia*".

deal with *minificción* in which the existence of narrative qualities is often debatable, focusing on forms of reported speech and the rewriting of familiar texts respectively. Subchapter 5.4 deals with *minificción* that often show no discernible narrative qualities, and centres on highly intertextual forms such as those considered to be examples of generic hybridisation by Zavala and Koch.

5.1. *Minificción* with unchallenged narrative qualities

Perhaps a majority, if not the majority, of *minificción* can be identified as a form of narrative. This seems to be particularly true for those *minificciones* which are of a comparatively longer length; indeed, most *minificciones* of around the 100 word count or more can be identified as such with relative ease, even if the narrative elements in these examples are heavily outweighed by the non-narrative (e.g. descriptive, argumentative) elements. As one approaches *minificción* of increasingly shorter length, however, the narrative qualities of *minificción* begin to become increasingly questionable, less visible, or simply cease to be present.

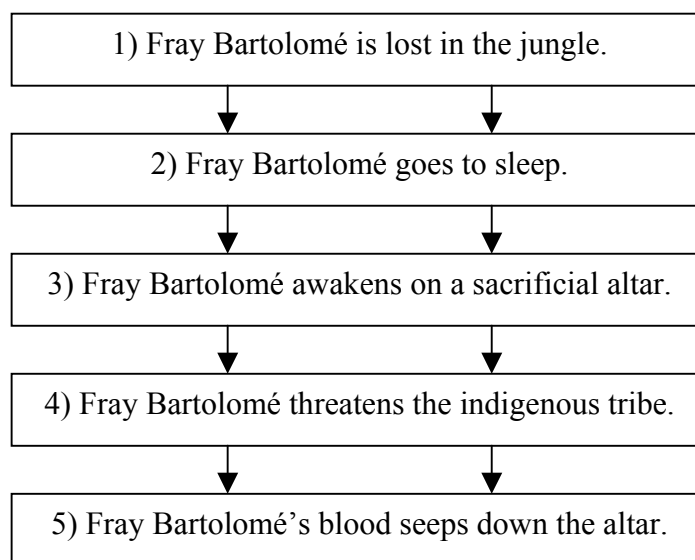
However, in this first subchapter, I would like to present and discuss some examples of *minificción* whose narrative quality is not being called into question, in order to demonstrate how a successful narrative analysis of *minificción* would appear. I will first be examining two examples of comparatively longer narrative *minificción* in subchapter 5.1.1, followed by two examples of comparatively shorter narrative *minificción* in subchapter 5.1.2. Subchapter 5.1.3 will apply a narrative analysis to the two forms of *minificción* referred to by Koch as the *minicuento* and the *micro-relato*.

5.1.1 *Cuento corto* and the *cuento muy corto*

The only critic to go into detail describing the longer forms of *minificción* is Lauro Zavala, who identified the *cuento corto* and the *cuento muy corto* as two generically distinct classes that range in length from 200 to 2,000 words. Zavala

identified several characteristics that he felt were not only representative of these classes²³¹, but which were produced as a result of their respective lengths.

As an example of such a text, let us take Augusto Monterroso's "*El eclipse*"²³², erroneously categorised by Zavala as a *cuento corto* despite its word count of only 316 words. A paraphrase of the story of "*El eclipse*" using narrative propositions is presented on the following page.



4: *El eclipse* in Narrative Propositions

As such, the text is easily recognisable as a series of events that are related to one another through temporal succession, although not necessarily through causation; indeed, causation does not seem to play a major role in the story: it is not because Fray Bartolomé threatens the indigenous tribes persons that he is sacrificed, and it is not because Fray Bartolomé is lost in the jungle that he goes to sleep – although one could argue that it because Fray Bartolomé is lost in the jungle that he goes to sleep *in the jungle*, which is in turn the reason why he awakens on the sacrificial altar.

In addition to this, an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator is easily distinguishable; the narrator's temporal distance from the story is clearly marked

²³¹ Cf. subchapters 3.1.3.1 & 3.1.3.2.

²³² See 7.3 for full text of "*El eclipse*".

though the use of the past tense throughout, for example: “*Cuando Fray Bartolomé se sintió perdido*”, “*se encontró rodeado por un grupo de indígenas*” or “*uno de los indígenas recitaba [...]*”. As such, the text is clearly a subsequent narrative.

With regards to the characteristics quoted by Zavala as being typical of the *cuento muy corto*, at least one is present, as the story is indeed elliptic²³³: the actual sacrifice of Fray Bartolomé is not described in the text, and the reader is left to fill in this ‘gap’ in the story by drawing inferences from the information given pertaining to the following event. As such, the reader is required to participate actively to complete the story. However, whether Zavala’s other characteristics are present is open to question: neither the theme nor the title of the piece is ambiguous, and that which is depicted in the story cannot be described as the reaction of a community or individual before a moment of sudden tension, without any possibility for a decision²³⁴.

Indeed, “*El eclipse*” clearly shows the two basic features seen in standard narrative texts, but, with the exception of its ellipse, cannot with certainty be said to contain the additional generic characteristics highlighted by Zavala as typical of a piece of its size. What does this tell us? In my opinion, this raises questions regarding the need for distinctions such as the *cuento corto* and the *cuento muy corto*, as there is little or nothing shown that makes them fundamentally different to the standard short story, meaning such divisions are essentially superfluous.

Although a mere 316 words in length, “*El eclipse*” stands at the upper limits of *minificción* in terms of word count. In fact, whether or not “*El eclipse*” should be considered a *minificción* and not simply a short story is, in my view, a matter for discussion. However, other *minificciones* of shorter length than “*El eclipse*”,

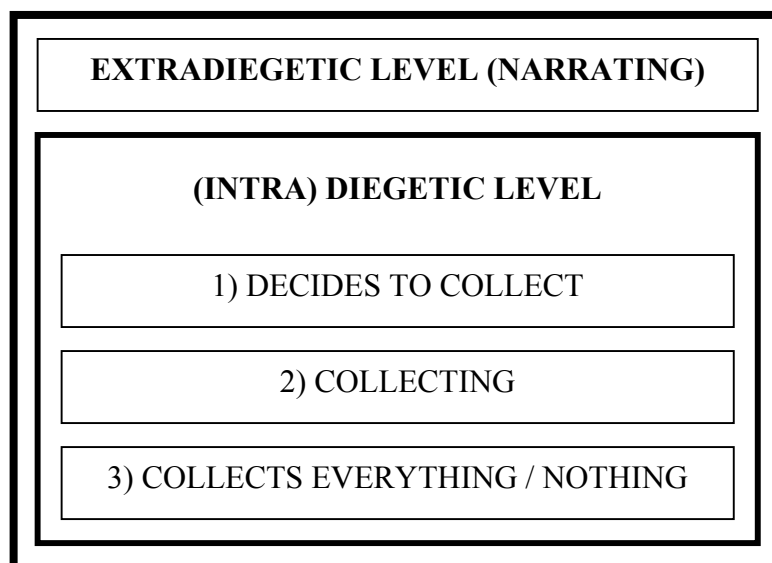
²³³ “*Ellipse (ellipsis, defectio): Auslassung: Figur, die entsteht, wenn ein Wort, das ausgelassen wird, hinreichend durch die übrigen Wörter verständlich ist.*” Üding / Steinbrink (1994:305). However, Zavala refers to a form of ellipsis that involves more than solely the omission of one word but of “fragments of the story” (Cf. subchapter 3.1.3.2).

²³⁴ See subchapter 3.1.3.1.

although still comparatively long in the realms of *minificción* itself, can similarly be shown to have obvious narrative qualities.

As an example, let us take Argentinean writer Ana María Shua's piece "*El collectionista ambicioso*"²³⁵. A third person extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator is easily discernible, revealing itself in the title and opening sentence through the value judgement of the story's protagonist as an 'ambitious' man: a subjective opinion that must have been reached on the extradiegetic level. In contrast to the past tense narrating of "*El eclipse*", the narrating in "*El collectionista ambicioso*" is related using a series of verbs conjugated solely in the present tense. This may initially suggest a simultaneous narrative; however, other indicators clearly point to the subsequent narrating of a sequence of events ordered in temporal succession: the semantics of the verbs tell us that the character *plans* to collect, *does* collect, and then *stops* collecting objects, presented in that order in the text, thus leading to the logical inference of a chronological sequence. In addition to this, adverbial expressions such as "*cada año*", "*y leugo cada seis meses*" followed by "*finalmente*" also point to temporal succession on the diegetic level. To use the box-format diagram employed in subchapter 4.4.4 to demonstrate Genette's narrative levels, the simple narrative structure of María Shua's "*El collectionista ambicioso*" could be graphically represented in the following manner:

²³⁵ See Appendix 7.6 for full text.



5: *El collectionista ambicioso* Narrative Levels

Representing the structure of the narrative levels through the use of such an abstraction shows not only the fundamentally ‘catalytic’ functionality of the events in the piece (all of the acts of collecting described in the story can be attributed to the nuclei of ‘collecting’), but also the very basic story structure which forms the story, consisting in essence of an initial state, an event that changes that state (the event of ‘collecting’), and, paradoxically in this particular *minificción*, both a return to the initial state (having nothing in the collection) and a complete departure from it (having everything in the collection). As such, “*El collectionista ambicioso*” complies with all the norms of narrative.

5.1.2 *Cuento ultracorto / microrrelato / micro-relato*

Zavala’s *cuento ultracorto* and Koch’s *minicuento* and *micro-relato* both correspond to *minificción* as the term is employed in this work. Both hold that these incredibly short forms of fictional text are relatives of the short story, and therefore essentially narratives, although they also concede that there are examples which are not. However, neither Zavala nor Koch offers any such examples, and the precise nature of non-narrative *minificción* is not discussed. For his part, Lagmanovich maintains that the *microrrelato*, also equivalent to this work’s *minificción*, is always, unequivocally, of a narrative nature. As will

become clear in the subchapters to follow, it is particularly in texts of extreme brevity that the narrative qualities become questionable or simply cease to exist. Nonetheless, even in the shortest forms of *minificción*, there are texts that are instantly recognisable as narratives, and it is the narrative features of such texts that I would now like to draw attention to.

The first example I would like to look at is a piece by Colombian writer Triunfo Arciniegas titled “*Pequeños cuerpos*”²³⁶, a story of 24 words including title, quoted in full below:

Los niños entraron a la casa y destrozaron las jaulas. La mujer encontró los cuerpos muertos y enloqueció. Los pájaros no regresaron.

An analysis of this text shows that it adheres to all the requirements of narrative: The third person focalisation and temporal markings of the verb indicate an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator and subsequent narrating. In addition, the story consists of a simple sequence of events that, although not explicitly stated in the text, appear to have taken place chronologically in the same order in which they are presented. However, this narrative is peculiar in the fact that it is extremely bare, consisting almost completely of cardinal functions, and therefore lacking almost any form of catalyser or index. As such, the text is practically irreducible in the form of a paraphrase. A similar case is the following example, “*El sueño*”²³⁷, in which a homodiegetic narrator recounts events in which it was involved; these events are finished and completed from the narrator’s standpoint on the extradiegetic level, the events in the diegetic level having taken place at an unspecified point in the narrator’s past:

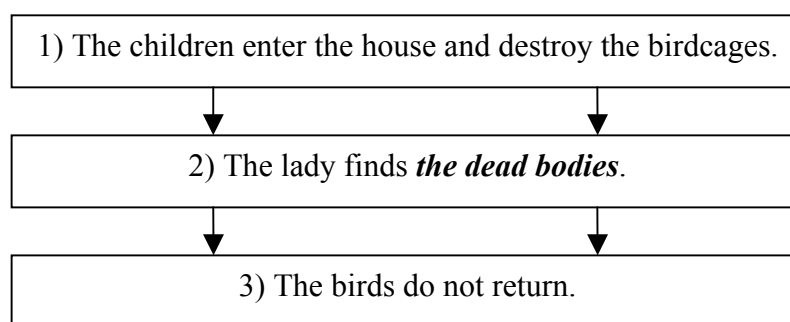
Soñé que un niño me comía. Desperté sobresaltado. Mi madre me estaba lamiendo. El rabo todavía me tembló durante un rato.

²³⁶ Arciniegas, Triunfo, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:61).

²³⁷ Diez, Luis Mateo, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:62).

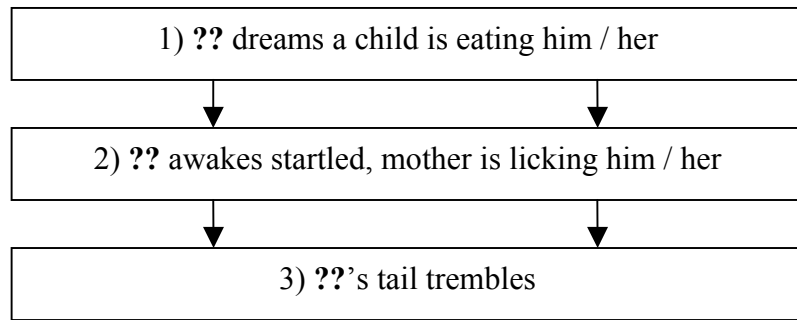
Again, the extremely bare nature of this text is evident, with the information present limited almost exclusively to cardinal functions.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that such examples of *minificción* do not have enough information to be fully understood by the reader, exceeding the limits of *brevitas* as outlined in subchapter 3.2.3 and resulting in, if not unintelligibility, then perhaps the possibility of misinterpretation until the texts reach their end. In fact, each these stories may rely on temporary reader misinterpretation to achieve their surprise endings. To illustrate this, the diagram below shows a paraphrase of the events of “*Pequeños cuerpos*” using narrative propositions:



6: *Pequeños cuerpos* in Narrative Propositions

This paraphrase, in effect almost identical to the text itself, emphasises the lack of information in the second event to indicate whose dead bodies are actually found by the lady. Making an assumption based on the information presented in connection to the first event, the reader assumes that these are the bodies of the birds. However, the final ‘event’ (or ‘*non*’-event, as presented here, i.e., the non-return of the birds) reveals that the birds are still alive, and that therefore the dead bodies must have belonged to the children. As such, the text as a whole contains sufficient information to be understood; however, if *brevitas* also operates on the level of the sentence, then the second event can be considered insufficient to offer full comprehension. This effect is clearer still if one considers “*El sueño*” in a similar fashion:



7: *El sueño* in Narrative Propositions

Here, the identity of the narrator is not revealed. However, the reader naturally fills this gap from the outset in the most logical way possible: In this case, since the story begins with a the narrator recounting his or her dream, and since the narrating is framed in language –both qualities normally associated with humans– the reader concludes that the narrator is also human. However, as the text unfolds, although the exact identity of the narrator is not revealed, it does become clear that it is in fact non-human; the reader is surprised, and obliged to reassess the proairetic code developed thus far.

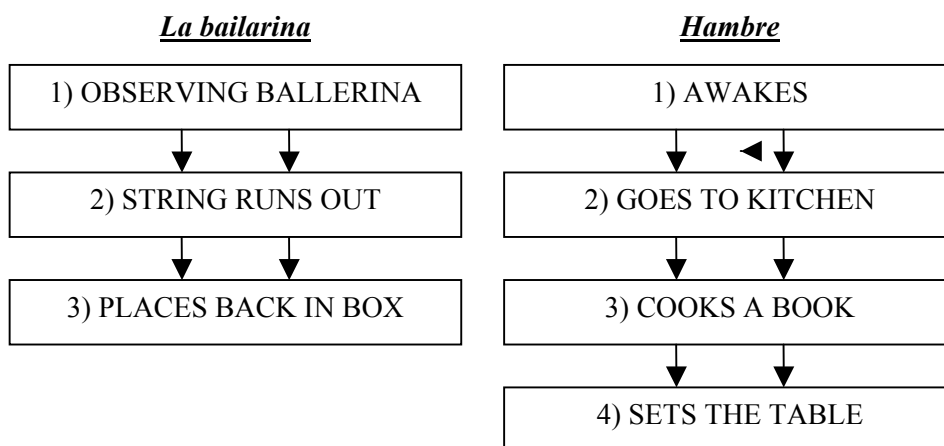
Zavala talks about the semantic ambiguity in the *cuento ultracorto* as being the product of such surprise endings²³⁸, although I feel that he has cause and effect in the wrong order, and that it is not the surprise ending that causes the semantic ambiguity, but vice-versa. Indeed, to talk of semantic ambiguity may in itself be a slight misinterpretation: in order for a word or a piece to be semantically ‘ambiguous’, I feel that its text needs to offer more than one plausible meaning, which is where the ambiguity arises. This does not, however, appear to be the case in the two *ultracortos* mentioned above, where the meaning becomes clear at the end of the story. Rather, it is the lack or omission of indicial information that potentially plays with the readers’ expectations, obliging them, as stated, to make assumptions which have to be entirely revised at the end of each text. As such, I would view such devices as forms of ellipse as described above, rather than forms of ambiguity.

²³⁸ Cf. subchapter 3.1.3.3.

5.1.3 Koch's division between *micro-relato* and *minicuento*

The concept of semantic ambiguity is also touched upon by Dolores Koch in her discussion of the difference between the *micro-relato* and the *minicuento*: Koch's premise is that the conclusion of the *micro-relato* lies in a mental process in the mind of the writer –and sometimes the reader– whereas the conclusion of the *minicuento* is a result of something happening in the fictional world of the story (i.e., on the diegetic level). In subchapter 3.2.2.3, Koch's theory was explained using an example of both a *micro-relato* and a *minicuento*, namely “*Hambre*” and “*La bailarina*” respectively. Koch claimed that it was the bisemy in the final line of the former that was responsible for its classification as a *micro-relato*, whereas the latter was considered to have concluded in the same fashion as any standard narrative. On this basis, the *minicuento* is said to be no more than a very short version of the short story, while the *micro-relato* is perceived by Koch to be the ‘new’ development in literary terms.

However, attempting a structural analysis of each of these stories seems to show otherwise. “*Hambre*” proves to be a relatively simple text to reduce to cardinal functions, whereas “*La bailarina*”, constructed of what appear to be, as described by Genette, iterative events²³⁹, and therefore essentially a descriptive text, proves much harder to reduce satisfactorily:



8: *La bailarina* vs. *Hambre* Event Labels

²³⁹ “Ce type de récit, où une seule émission narrative assume ensemble plusieurs occurrences du même événement [...], nous le nommerons récit itératif.” Genette (1972 :148).

Additionally it is quite clear that both stories do, in fact, conclude with an event on the diegetic level. In “*La bailarina*”, this is the protagonist’s (presumably iterative) placing of the ballerina back in its crystal box. In “*Hambre*”, the story ends with the protagonist setting his table, prepared to give himself “*un banquete*” with the pages of his cookbook. The fact that one ending may be more ambiguous than the other is irrelevant on the level of the structural analysis: what is important is that both stories comply with the narrative norms.

This in turn brings us to Koch’s assertion that the conclusion of the *micro-relato* is a mental process – or something that occurs – in the mind of the author (and possibly the reader) as opposed to an event that ‘occurs’ in the story. In my view, Koch’s appraisal lies in a confusion of two different types of ‘conclusion’, the first referring to the mental process of reaching an understanding about something, and the second referring to the simple act of something reaching its end. It seems to me that Koch contrasts the former against the latter, when indeed the two do not stand in opposition to each other and can quite easily coexist. As has been shown above, both the *micro-relato* and the *minicuento* conclude with an event in the fictional world created by the narrator. It would also appear to me that, in similar fashion, both ‘conclusions’ can be said to have been generated by mental processes in the mind of the author; whether these mental processes are different to each other is largely immaterial. Indeed, the very notion of interpreting texts based on the supposed intentions of the author has been argued against at length by many critics, most noticeably by Roland Barthes who, in his 1968 essay “*La mort de l’auteur*”, chose to refer to the author of a work as its ‘scriptor’ in an attempt to disassociate the idea of authorial omnipotence²⁴⁰ from literary criticism. According to Barthes:

²⁴⁰ Cf. Nünning (2004:278) on Barthes’ essay: “*Es gibt also keinen gottähnlichen Autor mehr, der seine Botschaft in quasi-theologischer Manier monologisch durch den Text vermittelt, sondern einen multidimensionalen textuellen Raum, der als ein Gewebe von Zeichen und Zitaten unterschiedlicher kultureller Provenienz erscheint [...] und nicht mehr eindeutig im Sinne des Autors entschlüsselbar ist*”.

“linguistiquement, l’auteur n’est jamais rien de plus que celui qui écrit, tout comme je n’est autre que celui qui dit je : le langage connaît un «sujet», non une «personne», et ce sujet, vide en dehors de l’énonciation même qui le définit, suffit à faire «tenir» le langage, c’est-à-dire à l’épuiser [...]. L’Auteur une fois éloigné, la prétention de «déchiffrer» un texte devient tout à fait inutile. Donner un Auteur à un texte, c’est imposer à ce texte un cran d’arrêt, c’est le pourvoir d’un signifié dernier, c’est fermer l’écriture.”²⁴¹

This is not to say that the author of a text plays no role in bestowing that text with meaning; however, the notion that the author is the sole responsibility for the ‘true’ meaning of any text is invalid in modern literary criticism, which does not consider a text to have one ‘true’ meaning at all²⁴². As such, any descriptive model based on the authors’ considerations of what a text should mean is by extension invalid, rendering Koch’s criterion for the division of the *micro-relato* and the *minicuento* insufficient.

5.2 Reported Speech

Genette differentiates between the *récit d’événements* (Eng: narrative of ‘events’) and the *récit de paroles* (Eng: narrative of ‘words’), i.e., between narrative in which that which is being recounted is a sequence of events, and narrative in which that which is being recounted is speech. Referring to the subject text of his analysis, Marcel Proust’s “*A la recherche du temps perdu*”, Genette states:

“Lorsque Marcel, à la dernière page de *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, déclare à sa mère : « il faut absolument que j’épouse Albertine », il n’y a pas, entre l’énoncé présent dans le texte et la phrase censément prononcée par le héros, d’autre différence que celles qui tiennent au passage de l’oral à l’écrit. Le narrateur ne raconte pas la phrase du héros, on peut à peine dire qu’il l’imite : il la recopie, et en ce sens on ne peut parler ici de récit.”²⁴³

²⁴¹ Barthes (1994:494, 496).

²⁴² Cf. Hassauer (2004:41).

²⁴³ Genette (1972:190).

Such one-for-one reproduction is referred to as *discours rapporté* (Eng: ‘reported speech’), and is equivalent to what is specifically termed *direct* speech. Genette describes this as being “*la forme la plus mimétique*”²⁴⁴, and as such is as far removed from pure narrative as can be reached without entering the realms of true mimesis. Indeed, as stated above, Genette states that one cannot consider reported speech to be ‘narrative’ in the true sense of the word. Examples of reported speech are nevertheless common in narrative, and to say this is not contradictory, as reported speech is common in a context in which it is framed within a narrative diegetic; however, what should we make of examples of *minificción* in which reported speech is the dominant or perhaps only textual element?

5.2.1 Dialogue

A form of writing frequently found in *minificción* is the brief dialogue. Ascertaining narrative elements within examples of dialogue *minificción* is not necessarily problematic, despite the fact that they may be dominated by reported speech. Let us take as an example Argentinean writer Orlando Enrique Van Bredam’s “*Preocupación*”²⁴⁵, which consists of two lines of dialogue between a condemned man and his executioner-to-be:

- *No se preocupe. Todo saldrá bien* – ***dijo el Verdugo.***
- *Eso es lo que me preocupa* – ***respondió el condenado a muerte.***

The narrating is clearly visible here through the presence of a narrator that identifies the speaker of each segment of the reported speech, highlighted in bold in the quotation above. In addition, the narrator appears to be relating the story from an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic perspective, marked by the tempus of the verbs. Such a narrator, manifest solely through such utterances, is naturally covert and draws little attention. Nevertheless, the presence of the extradiegetic narrator is still explicit in the text.

²⁴⁴ Genette (1972:192).

²⁴⁵ Van Bredam, Orlando Enrique, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:64).

However, in other examples consisting predominantly of reported speech, identifying a narrator is not quite as straightforward. Take, for example, Jorge Luis Borges' "*Diálogo sobre un diálogo*"²⁴⁶, in which almost the entirety of the text is formed of reported speech. Although it is clear that the initial and largest portion of the text, spoken by one of the interlocutors, depicts a series of events and is therefore narrative in nature, an examination of the entire text reveals that the interlocutor telling this narrative is not an extradiegetic but an intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator, depicted relating a story (*metadiegetic*) in which he played a part. The question then becomes: who is depicting, i.e., 'reporting' the speech, of the intradiegetic narrator? In order to answer this question, one is obliged to look to the extradiegetic level, and would expect to find a structure similar to the one presented below:

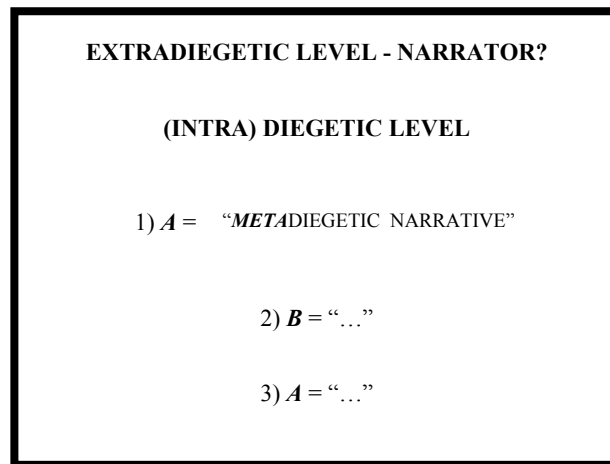


9: *Diálogo sobre un diálogo* Narrative Levels 1

However, a problem arises when one considers that text appears to be presented in what could be described as a 'script' format, which makes it difficult to tackle the question of 'who is speaking?' on the extradiegetic level: Is the script of any drama considered to be 'narrated'? This, coupled with the complete absence of any spatiotemporal references on the extradiegetic level, produces a feeling of direct fusion between the diegetic level and the reader, and the question arises as to whether the speech is actually being reported at all, or whether that which is

²⁴⁶ See subchapter 7.5 for full text.

being presented on the extradiegetic level is in fact a form of ‘direct’ representation, i.e., mimesis. As such, it could be said that the fictional, extradiegetic narratee is either invited to observe, or perhaps to read, the diegetic level in the absence of a narrator; a genuine breakdown of the diegetic structure is difficult to ascertain:



10: *Diálogo sobre un diálogo* Narrative Levels 2

Genette, referring to the fact that no narrative can ‘show’ or ‘imitate’ the story it tells, concedes that this is not the case when that which is signified is language itself: “*C’est que la mimésis verbale ne peut être que mimésis du verbe.*”²⁴⁷ It appears that Borges’ “*Diálogo sobre un dialogo*” may be just such an example.

Nonetheless, I am inclined to accept that there is some form of extradiegetic narrator involved in the narrating of “*Diálogo sobre in diálogo*”, no matter how obscure it appears to be. This is based on the fact that ‘something’ is indicating that there is an ‘*A*’ and a ‘*Z*’ involved in a dialogue, and that ‘*A*’ says something first, who is in turned followed by ‘*B*’, followed by ‘*A*’ again who finishes the conversation. In addition, indications are given to the expressions and/or reactions of the interlocutors involved in the dialogue, as highlighted in bold below:

²⁴⁷ Genette (1972:186).

“Z (burlon). - Pero sospecho que al final no se resolvieron.

A (ya en plena mística).- Francamente no recuerdo si esa noche nos suicidamos.”

Such descriptions could be considered the subjective observations of the narrator, which would in turn imply the existence of ‘someone’ who holds these subjective opinions.

However, if Borges’ “*Diálogo sobre un diálogo*” offers an example of a dialogue based *minificción* where the existence of a narrator is questionable, then the following example by Chilean writer Jaime Valdivieso, titled *Cordero de Dios*²⁴⁸, offers an example in which there is no discernible evidence of a narrating whatsoever, as the text consists entirely of reported speech:

– *¿Por qué vas a matarme? ¿No sabes acaso que soy el Cordero de Dios que quita los pecados del mundo?*
– *Precisamente por eso.*

As such, applying Genette’s criterion to this text would mean that we would have to consider it mimesis rather than narrative; even if one assumes that a narrator is present on the extradiegetic level, but remains silent except in order to reproduce the speech of the two characters, the very fact that the narrator relates in this fashion means that the narrator is imitating as opposed to narrating, and this *minificción* must still therefore be classed as mimesis.

5.2.2 Monologue

In a similar vein to that discussed above, many examples of *minificción* appear to be formed purely of monologue, whether this is in the form of a thought pattern of the character (invariably the sole character in the piece), or whether we seem to be faced with what is, for all intents and purposes, an exclamation of some form. For

²⁴⁸ Valdivieso, Jaime, quoted In Lagmanovich (2006:59).

example, take the following piece, titled “*Cálculos renales*”²⁴⁹, by Mexican author Agustín Monsreal:

¡Cuánto sufrí para poder arrojar la primera piedra!

Taking as its intertextual reference the biblical story of Jesus’ encounter with the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 8:7), this piece is actually a humorous account of the narrator’s removal of a kidney stone, as signalled in the title. The use of what appears to be a homodiegetic narrator is clear from first person singular of the verb *sufrir*. Additionally, the fact that the substance of the narrating lies in the past is indicated by the tempus of the only conjugated verb, which is conjugated in the preterit. What appear to be lacking in this *minificción*, however, are events: The only certainty is that the narrator ‘suffered’ at a certain point the past; but if this ‘suffering’ is considered an event, it alone is still not sufficient to create the fundamental sequence of events necessary for narrative. The reader must then abstractly translate the reference to ‘being able to throw the first stone’ into an event, either in the past or the future, although this is not actually specified by the text. As such, this text can perhaps be interpreted as both narrative and non-narrative.

A similar example is the popularly quoted “*Fecundidad*”²⁵⁰ by Augusto Monterroso, which refers to legendary work ethic of the French writer named in the text:

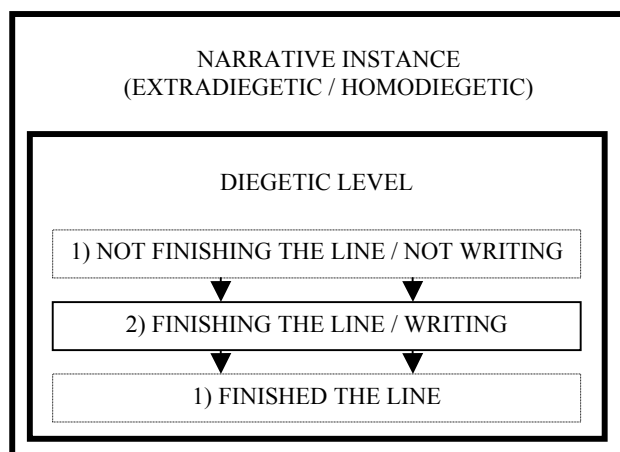
Hoy me siento bien, un Balzac; estoy terminando esta línea.

Here, the problem of locating a diegetic level is compounded by the fact that the tenses of the verbs are restricted to the present. In addition to this, only one true event seems to be stated in the text: namely that of ‘finishing this line’, although paradoxically the event cannot be said to have occurred until after the text is actually complete and the narrator has finished the sentence with a full stop. As

²⁴⁹ Monsreal, Agustín, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:77).

²⁵⁰ Monterroso, Augusto, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:77).

such, this text can only be considered a simultaneous narrative, and again, the reader has to allow a degree of elliptic generosity, either at the beginning or the end of the story, in order to recognise the ‘change of state’ and temporal succession necessary to form the minimal story requirements:



11: *Fecundidad* Narrative Levels

The following piece, by Argentinean writer Marco Denevi titled “*Justificación de la mujer de Putifar*”²⁵¹ is another case where the suggestion of events is not enough for the text itself to constitute a narrative in the strictest sense of the word:

¡Que destino: Putifar, eunuco, y José, casto!

Taking as its intertextual basis another biblical story, namely the story of Joseph from the book of Genesis (Genesis 39-41), the exclamation seems to be one of frustration –made by the wife of Potiphar, judging by the title of the piece– at Potiphar’s impotence and at Joseph’s unwillingness to be seduced. Again, identification of the narrator is relatively straightforward, but this piece differs from the previous two in that the utterance made by Potiphar’s wife contains no conjugated verbs, and seems only to refer to her current frame of mind. Indeed, it is solely through the intertextual reference to the biblical story that the reader can fill the gaps and imagine a scenario. Therefore, whether this piece itself can be considered a narrative I find extremely questionable: the frame of reference

²⁵¹ Denevi, Marco, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:74).

alluded to by the intertextuality enables us to understand the text, but it is not part of it; however, textual analysis obliges us to look at the structure before us, not at those which might be alluded to within it; to consider the actual events described in the Old Testament's story of Joseph as an integral part of the actual structure of this particular story would, in my view, be an invalid approach to analysing of the object at hand. Therefore, this text cannot be considered narrative.

5.3 Reescritura

A popular form of *minificción* is the 'rewriting' of well known texts. Lagmanovich refers to this as *reescritura*, defining it as:

*“un procedimiento ampliamente usado en la literatura de los siglos XX y XXI, que vuelve a los textos y a los mitos clásicos con la intención de narrarlos de otra manera.”*²⁵²

Lagmanovich considers *reescritura* to be one of the fundamental forms of the *microrrelato*, and similar concepts to *reescritura* also appear in critical work of Koch, who defines one of the fundamentals of the micro-relato as the “*rescate de fórmulas de escritura antigua (como fábulas o bestiarios)*”²⁵³, as well as in the work of Zavala, who considers it a form of modern intertextuality²⁵⁴.

One example of *reescritura* is Torri's “*A Circe*”, quoted in full in subchapter 2.1.2, which ‘rewrites’ the story of Odysseus and the sirens, making it Odysseus’ intention to be seduced and therefore led to his death by the sirens who, aware of this, choose not to sing for him. Torri's piece is essentially descriptive and, in much the same fashion as “*Justificación de la mujer de Putifar*”, takes the form of an exclamation that reveals Odysseus’ state of mind. However, the extradiegetic-homodiegetic narrator that we presume to be Odysseus himself mentions enough

²⁵² Lagmanovich (2006:127).

²⁵³ See subchapter 3.2.2.4.

²⁵⁴ See subchapter 3.1.3.3.

about the events of the past (for example, being tied to the mast, his impressions of the sea) to build a basic narrative of events.

However, many modern forms of *reescritura* in the sphere of *minificción* are considerably shorter than “*A Circe*”, and, in much the same way as the pieces quoted in 5.2.2, have only the most debatable of narrative qualities, relying on the reader’s knowledge of other textual sources to complete the meaning of the text. As such, can these examples be considered narratives?

The following example, “*La búsqueda*” by Mexican writer Edmundo Valadés²⁵⁵, again takes as its intertextual reference the story of Odysseus:

*Esas sirenas enloquecidas que aúllan recorriendo la ciudad en
busca de Ulises.*

In this *minificción*, there is an extradiegetic narrator, making a reference to the ‘maddened sirens’ that roam the city howling in search of Ulysses (presumably involving word play on the two meanings of the word ‘siren’). The temporal marking of the verb “*aullar*” in the present seems to mark the narrative as simultaneous, and the narrator appears to be homodiegetic as he is placed in spatial proximity to the howling sirens through the presence of the demonstrative adjective “*esas*”. The questionable factor here is whether or not the narrator is reporting a sequence of temporally successive events.

Again, if we view the events here as iterative (the howling sirens *habitually* roam the city), then it is perhaps possible to view the text as a narrative. However, what we still do not see is a change of state, and therefore even the basic requirements of narrative as described by Lagmanovich –an initial situation acted upon by an outside force, resulting in a departure from the state or a return to it– are not fulfilled.

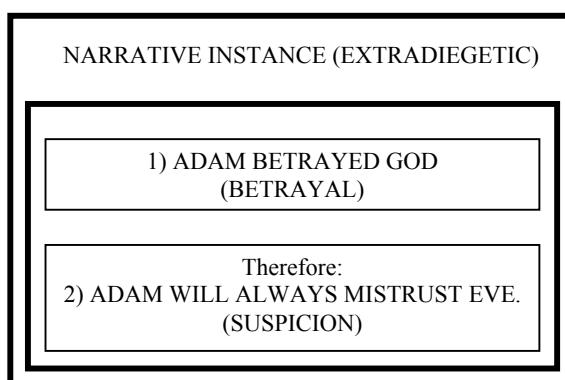
²⁵⁵ Valades, Edmundo, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:74).

Such a reading would nevertheless be an exaggeratedly ‘narrativist’ reading of the text. If we consider the fact that the diegetic level is created entirely by the utterance of the narrator, then a closer look at what the narrator actually says reveals that what we are dealing with is not a narrative at all: The narrator is merely signalling to the existence of the ‘maddened sirens’, the subordinate clause introduced by the relative pronoun “*que*” describing theses sirens as those that ‘howl’ and ‘roam the city’. As such, no diegetic level is being opened at all, as the narrator is referring to and describing something on the extradiegetic level, and we are therefore not dealing here with narrative.

An even more complex case of *reescritura*, difficult to analyse structurally, is the following piece, another by Argentinean writer Marco Denevi, titled “*Adán y Eva*”²⁵⁶.

*Recordando lo que él hizo con el amor de Dios, Adán siempre
reclerá del amor de Eva.*

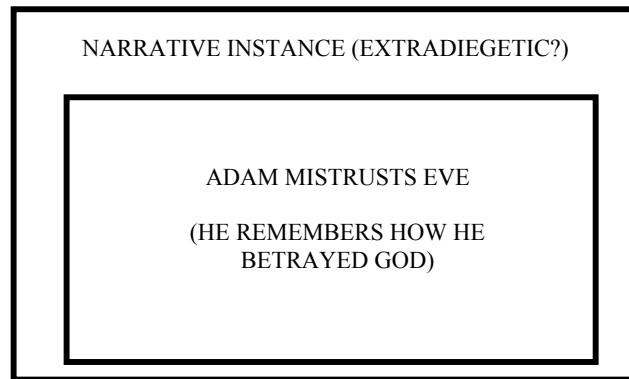
Again, if we assume the piece to be narrative, and with knowledge of the Book of Genesis, we can infer an extradiegetic narrator who is relaying an event and its consequence, or perhaps a ‘change of state’, in the form of Adam’s altered attitude towards Eve. As such, it is possible to graphically construct the extradiegetic and diegetic levels with events and actors in the manner depicted in diagram 9:



12: *Adán y Eva* Narrative Levels 1

²⁵⁶ Denevi, Marco, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:65).

However, such a ‘story’ can only be constructed through the reader’s prior knowledge of the Book of Genesis. In this fashion, the story is created by the reader, not recounted by the narrator. Remembering again that the diegetic level is always a result of that which is uttered by the narrator, what is actually being reported is closer to that depicted in diagram 10:



13: *Adán y Eva* Narrative Levels 2

The narrator is actually referring to what at best can be described as an iterative event that will be taking place in the future, as perceived from his extradiegetic standpoint, in an almost prophetic fashion (Adam *will* mistrust Eve again and again – i.e., ‘prior’ narrating). However, I feel that such a reading is again an attempt to explain a non-narrative as a narrative, and what is actually being described as an event really appears to be indicial information pertaining to Adams static attitude towards Eve and the *knowledge* he has of an event that happened in the past. As such, the piece is essentially descriptive, although this description is in some manner given by a fictional ‘narrator’.

To quote one last example of *reescritura* that has been erroneously classified as narrative by critics, we have the following *minificción* by Arreola, titled “*El mundo*”²⁵⁷:

*Dios todavía no ha creado el mundo; sólo está imaginándolo, como entre
suenos. Por eso el mundo es perfecto, pero confuso.*

²⁵⁷ Arreola, Juan José, quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:62).

Drawing again on the Book of Genesis, Arreola's fictional 'narrator' offers an alternative for the creation story, suggesting that the world has in fact not yet been created at all, still existing only in God's imagination, which explains both its 'perfection' and its 'confused state'. Again, it is difficult to abstract any form of event from this piece; the nearest that we can come to one is the reference to the *non-event* of God's physical creation of the world. As such, Arreola's piece is purely descriptive, offering an alternative, fictional explanation of the 'creation' of the world.

In summary, *reescritura* can come in the form of narrative (for example "*A Circe*"), although in its shortest forms the story is often projected onto the text due to the reader's prior understanding of the intertextual frame of reference. As such, each piece needs to be analysed individually to see if they truly contain narrative fundamentals, as often they do not.

5.4 Generic Hybridisation

In this final subchapter of analysis, I will turn my attention to the often mentioned to but ultimately elusive concept of 'generic hybridisation'. The phenomenon of generic hybridisation plays a role of some importance in the theories of both Koch and Zavala, as both consider it to be one of the fundamental characteristics of *minificción*. Unfortunately, neither critic offers a satisfactory explanation as to what exactly they understand under the term.

Zavala, it would appear, views two different styles of generic hybridisation, one that is seen as a cross between 'narrative' and other 'literary or extra-literary forms'²⁵⁸, the other the parody of already established archaic or defunct literary forms of narrative (such as the fable or the bestiary). This in itself is problematic, as two completely different techniques are now housed under the same terminology. Indeed, one may ask what the 'parody' form has in common with

²⁵⁸ Cf. Subchapter 3.1.3.4.

the idea of ‘hybridisation’ in a general sense, as the term hybrid suggests a ‘mix’ or a ‘cross’ of some form, whereas the parody of a particular style of literary writing need not necessarily be considered a ‘cross’ at all. In any case, it is clear that narrative must play a central role in any generic hybrid; as Zavala puts it:

*“el cuento brevísimo se entremezcla, y en ocasiones se confunde, con formas de la escritura como la crónica, el ensayo, el poema en prosa y la viñeta, y con varios géneros extra-literarios.”*²⁵⁹

Koch, however, considers the “*rescate de formulas de escritura antigua*”²⁶⁰ to be a separate phenomenon altogether, describing generic hybridisation as the combination of “*en distintos grados, elementos del cuento, del poema en prosa y del ensayo*”²⁶¹. Therefore, the ‘pallet’ with which to mix is considerably smaller according to Koch’s definition. Both critics, however, concur on the importance of a narrative basis in generic hybrids. Lagmanovich, for his part, disregards the idea of generic hybridisation outright, stating that examples that are described as such actually remain narrative texts in the truest sense of the word²⁶².

Although the concept of generic hybridisation is not defined clearly by the critics who employ the term, given the fact that it in essence involves the experimentation with generic characteristics, it appears that it can be compared to the form of transtextuality that Genette termed *hypertextualité* (Eng: ‘hypertextuality’) and defined in the introduction to his 1982 work “*Palimpsestes*” in the following manner:

*“toute relation unissant un texte B (hypertexte) à un texte antérieur A (hypotexte) sur lequel il se greffe d’une manière qui n’est pas celle du commentaire.”*²⁶³

As such, in hypertextuality, the ‘hypertext’ derives from another already existing ‘hypotext’ through what Genette refers to as a process of transformation. This

²⁵⁹ Zavala (2004:86).

²⁶⁰ Cf. subchapter 3.2.2.4.

²⁶¹ Koch (2000a:9).

²⁶² Cf. subchapter 3.3.2.2.

²⁶³ Genette (1982:12f).

transformation can be direct, i.e., where the action of the hypotext is transposed into that of the hypertext (the example quoted by Genette is Homer's "*Odyssey*" being transformed into James Joyce's "*Ulysses*"), or indirect, where a new story is created in imitation of a previous generic model (the example quoted here by Genette is again the transformation of "*Odyssey*", but this time the adoption of its generic characteristics in Virgil's "*Aenid*"). It would seem, therefore, that generic hybridisation could be considered a form of indirect hypertextuality, in which the generic characteristics of not one but two forms of 'hypotext' are 'crossed'. These generic characteristics being those of the 'narrative' text, and those of the other 'literary or extra-literary' forms mentioned by Zavala, or of the essay or poem as stated by Koch.

Such an approach does not clear up all the confusion regarding the nature of generic hybridisation – for example, must all the generic characteristics of both hypotexts be evident in the hypertext or may certain characteristics be absent? What exactly does it mean to cross 'narrative' with other 'archaic' forms of narrative, thereby crossing two forms of narrative? Can there be hybridisation of more than just two textual forms in any one piece? - Neither does it account for the 'parody' class of hybrid mentioned by Zavala. However, it does provide a basis on which to approach generic hybridisation systematically. Therefore, for the purposes of this work, I propose the classification of the so-called 'generic hybrids' into two large groups. Assuming that one 'hypotext' (H_a) is always considered 'narrative' according to the discussions above, one can then presumably attribute the second (H_b) to one of two of the following broad classes: either texts that are normally considered 'literary', and those that draw on 'extra' or 'non'-literary (pragmatic) texts. Each of these groups can then be further divided in two, namely into those where the H_b is already traditionally a narrative, and those where it is not. Therefore, generic hybridisation equals H_a plus one of the following (H_b):

- Literary Hypotext:
 - Literary & Narrative: e.g. the fable, the parable.
 - Literary & Non-narrative: e.g. the epigram, the poem.
- Non-literary Hypotext:
 - Non-literary & Narrative: e.g. newspaper reports.
 - Non-literary & Non-narrative: e.g. instruction manual.

It would appear to me that, given that this analysis is concerned with establishing whether or not certain forms of *minificción* can or cannot be classified as narrative, it is unnecessary to examine those texts that take the literary and non-literary narrative forms as their H_b , as their narrative qualities should already be evident. However, those where the H_b is non-narrative are of interest to our analysis, as in the transformation process to a hypertext, these should supposed ‘inherit’ the narrative qualities of H_a and as such also be classifiable as narratives.

5.4.1 Hybridisation with Non-Narrative Literary Forms

Examples of literary forms that are not traditionally considered narrative texts, but which are frequently considered to be similar to *minificción*, include the aphorism and the epigram²⁶⁴. In both cases, the frequent recourse to devices such as rhyme, alliteration or the use of anaphora mean that they are often considered to be a compressed form of the poetic genre²⁶⁵. However, their nature is essentially non-narrative: neither aphorisms nor epigrams ‘tell a story’.

Despite frequent references to the aphoristic or epigrammatic writing in *minificción*, it is remarkably hard to find where the qualities of either are clearly evident. If one considers that the aphorism is essentially a statement in the present tense that distils an observation about the world, then the following *minificción* by

²⁶⁴ “[The] **epigram** [is] a statement in verse or prose, which is terse, pointed and witty. The epigram may be on any subject and in any mode, amatory, elegiac, meditative, complimentary, anecdotal, or (most often) satiric [and is] to be distinguished from the **aphorism**: a pithy and pointed statement of a serious maxim, opinion, or general truth.” Abrams (2005:85f), bold own.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Lagmanovich (2006: 89).

Adolfo Bioy Casares titled “*Escribir*”²⁶⁶ can be considered as containing these generic characteristics:

Cada frase es un problema que la próxima frase plantea nuevamente.

It is instantly clear from this text that what is being presented here –as is typical of the aphorism– is presented as a fact; however, the difficulty arises in trying to locate the generic characteristics of the H_a i.e. narrative: In contrast to narrative texts, there is no possibility here to identify a sequence of temporally successive events. Indeed, one may be inclined to ask in what way such a piece actually differs from the genuine aphorism, i.e., why should we consider this a *minificción*? How do we know that Bioy Casares was not genuinely trying to summarise a problem that he perceived in the real world? Why should we consider this piece to be ‘fictional’?

Similar problems exist with *minificciones* which are epigrammatic in their style – i.e., a short text which is pointed, witty or terse – such as the following piece by Orlando Enrique Van Bredam titled “*Las últimas noticias*”²⁶⁷:

Serán aquellas que escucharemos o leeremos poco antes de morir, poco antes de convertirnos, también nosotros, en una mala noticia.

In terms of temporal succession, one could perhaps view this as prior narrating, i.e., predicting an event that will occur at a point in the future as perceived from the narrating. However, as in the previous example, one could also view the substance of this text as a factual statement of logic, and again go so far as to call into question its fictional nature. The question then once more becomes: why should we consider this piece a *minificción* at all? And, as follows naturally from such a question, why should we consider this piece as literature?

²⁶⁶ Bioy Casares, Adolfo (1959) quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:75).

²⁶⁷ Van Bredam, Orlando Enrique (1994) quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:63) .

Such considerations fall outside the scope of this work, but ultimately answers to such problems may lie with an investigation into the nature of fiction in *minificción* itself. However, one thing that can be ascertained here is that such texts are not narrative in nature, and therefore ‘generic hybridisation’ in *minificción* cannot be described as a simply the ‘narrativisation’ of typically non-narrative textual forms: the need for a fuller exploration of ‘generic hybridisation’ is already clear.

5.4.2 Hybridisation with Non-narrative, Non-literary forms

As stated in subchapter 5.4, another form of indirect hypertextuality often found in *minificción* is the recourse to the generic characteristics of non-literary, non-narrative textual forms. The first example I would like to address is that of the classified advertisement, and I would like to offer two examples by different authors.

The first is a piece by René Avilés Fabila, a *minificción* titled “*Anuncio*”²⁶⁸, in which we are presented with the folklore figure the Pied Piper of Hamelin, advertising his services as flautist who can either ‘remove the rats from a city or the children from an overpopulated country’:

Oriundo de Hamelin, soy flautista y alquilo mis servicios: puedo sacar las ratas de una ciudad o, si se prefiere, a los niños de un país sobrepoblado.

The second piece is a *minificción* by Ana María Shua, titled “*Clases de gimnasia*”²⁶⁹, in which aerobic classes are offered to trees:

²⁶⁸ Aviles Fabila (1986:137).

²⁶⁹ Koch (2006:45).

Para aumentar la flexibilidad del tronco y ramas, evitando así quebraduras provocadas por ráfagas intempestivas, clase de gimnasia para árboles se ofrecen, individuales y a domicilio. Precios especiales para bosques.

With regards to the identification of the narrative instance in these two pieces, in the case of “*Anuncio*” the narrating is clear from the outset of the first piece, as the first person ‘narrator’, the Pied Pier of Hamelin, refers to himself by name and then goes on to state the services he has to offer. In the second example, Shua’s “*Clases de gimnasia*”, one can also perceive the presence of a fictional ‘narrator’, due principally to the clearly fictional subject matter of the text and the fact that on some level this text must have been produced on a fictional level. The issue at hand here is whether or not these narrative instances can be considered ‘narrators’, as what we again see here are texts which do not contain a sequence of temporally successive events: neither the former or the latter piece can be considered stories. This fact is clear for Shua’s piece – even on a fictional level the text is appellative, i.e., designed to provoke an action (buying) from the ‘narratee’ – and no sequence of events is included in bringing that appellative message across. Fabila’s “*Anuncio*”, however, clearly alludes to an established and well known narrative, “*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*”, and without knowledge of this intertextual reference this piece is perhaps nonsensical. With knowledge of the “*The Pied Piper of Hamelin*”, one may mislead oneself into considering it – and therefore its events – as part of the piece with which one is faced. This would, however, be erroneous: as with Shua’s piece, “*Anuncio*” is also a text that has an appellative function on a fictional level that does not incorporate any events in itself: the projection of the events onto this text may guide the reader in the interpretation of the text, however, to also project them onto the text when performing a narrative analysis would be extending beyond the limits of the object of analysis, as discussed in subchapter 5.3.

The final example to be analysed in this work, Julio Cortázar's "*Instrucciones para llorar*"²⁷⁰, poses similar problems to those posed by the previously quoted examples of Avilés Fabila and Shua. This time, the H_b which is undergoing an indirect transformation is the 'instruction manual', and in this particular example – as is clearly stated in the title of the piece – the instructions given pertain to 'how to cry'. Some form of fictional narrator is clearly evident in the piece, making its presence felt through the use of the first person plural (not typical of the genuine instruction manual) in the opening line: "*Dejando de lado los motivos, **atengámonos** a la manera correcta de llorar, [...]*." Equally, this piece also has clear references to an addressee through the relation of a pair of imperative statements:

"[...] **dirija** la imaginación hacia usted mismo, [...] **piense** en un pato cubierto de hormigas [...]."

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Once again, however, although a fictional 'reality' is perhaps being presented, there is no opening of a diegetic level by the 'narrator'; instead, the text is again pragmatic, containing the stated instructions, and lacking any of the events essential to a narrative text.

Such non-literary, non-narrative 'generic hybrids' do differ clearly from their literary equivalents in subchapter 5.3.2, namely through the fact that the fictional content is more evident, either due to intertextual references as seen in Avilés Fabila's "*Anuncio*", or due to thematic content which clearly cannot be considered a 1:1 representation of reality. However, all 'generic hybrids' appear to stand in a relationship of parody to their H_b , showing no evidence of generic crossing with a posited narrative H_a . Thus, introducing narratological considerations as a central, defining basis in the analysis of such forms appears exaggerated (although not entirely superfluous, as it is entirely conceivable that some examples may indeed contain narrative elements), and to classify these texts broadly as 'narrative' is erroneous.

²⁷⁰ See subchapter 7.4 for full text.

²⁷¹ Cf. subchapter 7.4, bold own.

6 Summary and Conclusions

The object of study in this work was a new form of literary writing that has gained popularity in Latin America over the past century. This form of writing is recognisable principally through its extreme brevity, and is referred to in this work using the term *minificción*. The aim of this study was to establish whether or not *minificción* can be considered a ‘narrative’ form of writing, as is put forward to varying degrees by contemporary critics of the form.

The first step in this work was to examine *minificción* along the diachronic axis, in order to place it in its historical context and to offer a fuller idea of what exactly this new form is. This was the subject of chapter 2, in which I traced *minificción*’s beginnings in the Latin American literary movement known as *modernismo*, through to the appearance of *minificción* in the work of some of the leading authors of the Latin American ‘boom’, and then onto *minificción* in the contemporary era: a form that is now practiced widely by many authors in the Hispanic literary sphere while receiving increasing critical attention.

Following this, in chapter 3, I presented the descriptive models developed by three of the leading critics of the form, namely Lauro Zavala, Dolores Koch and David Lagmanovich, in order to demonstrate how they view *minificción* along the synchronic axis, i.e., where they situate *minificción* in the larger sphere of literature, and how they describe *minificción* and its different varieties. In chapter 3 it was also established that the three critics consider *minificción* to be predominantly a form of narrative writing, although the extent to which they agree upon this differs. Dolores Koch places the least emphasis on the narrative nature of *minificción* as a whole, referring to a variety of *minificción* that she calls the *minitexto* and which is not narrative in nature. Unfortunately, Koch does not go into detail on this form, while at the same time many of the examples of *minificción* that she deals with as narrative appear to be erroneously categorised as such. Zavala frequently emphasises the narrative nature of *minificción* in his model, although he too concedes that not all *minificción* must necessarily be

narrative. Zavala, however, also fails to explore non-narrative *minificción* or to offer concrete examples of such texts. David Lagmanovich is a staunch proponent of the view that all *minificción* is narrative in nature, a position which he describes as *narrativista*.

Having established the opinions of the critics, in order to challenge these it was first necessary to have a full understanding of what it means for a text to be narrative. Chapter 4 was therefore dedicated to examining the term ‘narrative’ and the field of scholarly research that takes narrative as its object of analysis, namely ‘narratology’. It was ascertained that in order for a text to be considered a narrative text, it must demonstrate two fundamental features. These are the presence in the text of a sequence of temporally successive ‘events’, and the presence in the text of a ‘narrator’ who recounts these events. The concept of the narrative event was then explored in detail, paying particular attention to the work of Roland Barthes and his theories on the smallest narrative units. This was followed by an examination of the concept of the narrator, with particular attention given to the work of Gerard Genette and his theories on narrative voice and narrative levels.

Having established an understanding of the fundamentals of narrative, this knowledge was then applied practically in the analysis of examples of *minificción* in chapter 5. All the examples analysed within this chapter are considered to be narrative texts by at least one if not all of the critics whose models were described in chapter 3, and were organised for analysis in groups that correspond to some of the classes of *minificción* described by these critics: The first of these groups contained *minificción* that can clearly be recognised as stories, and as such whose narrative qualities are not in dispute; The second of these groups contained *minificción* where the evidence of narrative fundamentals is debatable, such as examples of pure dialogue or monologue – which therefore lack narrating – and examples of *reescritura*, where the heavy use of intertextuality means that frames of reference are often built rendering the use of events unnecessary for the reader to be able to distil a story; The third and last group consisted of texts that are

referred to as ‘generic hybrids’, and which are posited to be a blend of narrative with other literary genres. It was established that this latter group of texts are the least likely to demonstrate narrative qualities, and that rather than blending narrative elements with the generic characteristics of their ‘hypotext’, tend to parody it, which has no requirement for the introduction of narrative qualities. It should also be pointed out that, particularly in the groups of *minificción* that were analysed in subchapters 5.3 and 5.4 (*reescritura* and generic hybrids), the shorter the text, the less likely it appeared show narrative qualities. In such cases, the extreme brevity of the text means that intertextual and hypertextual strategies are heavily relied upon to complete their meaning.

Therefore, this work has shown that narrative is certainly not a defining feature of *minificción*, hence invalidating the *narrativista* position which holds that all *minificción* is unequivocally narrative in nature. It is my opinion that this work has also shown that narrative is in general a much less common characteristic in *minificción* than is held by the critical community at present, as much *minificción* that is classified as narrative simply does not show the necessary fundamentals. But what does this mean for the study of *minificción* in general?

For one, this demonstrates that the true fundamentals of *minificción* – if shared fundamentals even exist – have yet to be found. Not only has current criticism failed to offer a convincing typology of *minificción*, but more importantly it has failed to show what characteristics all *minificción* shares in common. Indeed, even *minificción*’s most fundamental aspect – its extreme brevity – has not been shown to be anything more than an arbitrary distinction, therefore rendering the classification of a text as *minificción* also arbitrary by extension.

To address such problems, it is my belief two approaches have to be taken: Firstly, the foggy use of terminology has to be cleared up, and clear definitions for terms such as ‘generic hybrid’ and ‘*reescritura*’ have to be provided. Secondly, and in my opinion most importantly, a renewed attempt to classify *minificción* has to be undertaken, which explores not only its generic characteristics, but also how

phenomena such as fictionality, intertextuality and parody express themselves in the form. In order to do this, fundamental questions need also to be fully investigated that seem to have been missed, dealt with insufficiently or ignored by the critics – questions that have been raised at various points in this work – for example: is *minificción* really different from other forms of short writing? If so, then how? What are the structural effects that extreme brevity has on fiction in its various manifestations? How do we decide if a text is fictional or not? How do we even decide if a text is ‘literature’ or not? It is my belief that such an approach may – while showing the great variety and creativity in *minificción* – also reveal not just one but perhaps several characteristics which are, either individually or in combination, unique to and therefore defining for this fascinating form of writing.

7 Appendix : Examples of longer minificción

7.1 Naturaleza Muerta

He visto ayer por una ventana un tiesto lleno de lilas y de rosas pálidas, sobre un trípode. Por fondo tenía uno de esos cortinajes amarillos y opulentos, que hacen pensar en los mantos de los príncipes orientales. Las lilas recién cortadas resaltaban con su lindo color apacible, junto a los pétalos esponjados de las rosas de té.

Junto al tiesto, en una copa de laca ornada con ibis de oro incrustados, incitaban a la gula manzanas frescas, medio coloradas, con la pelusilla de la fruta nueva y la sabrosa carne hinchada que toca el deseo: peras doradas y apetitosas, que daban indicios de ser todas jugo y como esperando el cuchillo de plata que debía rebanar la pulpa almibarada; y un ramillete de uvas negras, hasta con el polvillo ceniciento de los racimos acabados de arrancar de la viña.

Acerqueme, vilo de cerca todo. Las lilas y las rosas eran de cera, las manzanas y las peras de mármol pintado, y las uvas de cristal.²⁷²

7.2 Sentimiento espectacular

Los peroódicos de la gente hablan de algunos muertos y heridos. Es que, teniendo un arma en la mano, la tentación es grande. Y apedrear tranvías es un instinto como el de apedrear conejos. Aparte de que el vidrio y la piedra son enemigos de suyo. Todos los cantos están clamando por caer sobre todos los tejados de vidrio.

Salvo en el crimen pasional, los demás delitos no tienen relación ética; son amorales, inocentes, casi extraños a la noción del bien y del mal. Yo tengo un cañon: frente a mí se yergue una torre. ¿Cómo desistir de hacer blanco? Yo tengo unos buenos puños que Dios me dio: hacia mí adelanta un guardia, etcétera.

²⁷² Darío, Rubén (1888), quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:90f).

Muchos desmanes se cometen por el puro gusto de hacer blanco. La prueba es que se siente alegría al oír un disparo: ¿Le dio? ¿No le dio?

*Y es lástima que la gente sufra cuando la hieran o se muera cuando lo matan. Porque sería agradable ensayar...*²⁷³

7.3 El Eclipse

Cuando Fray Bartolomé Arrazola se sintió perdido aceptó que ya nada podría salvarlo. La selva poderosa de Guatemala la había apresado, implacable y definitiva. Ante su ignorancia topográfica se sentó con tranquilidad a esperar la muerte. Quiso morir allí, sin ninguna esperanza, aislado, con el pensamiento fijo en la España distante, particularmente en el convento de Los Abrojos, donde Carlos Quinto condescendiera una vez a bajar de su eminencia para decirle que confiaba en el celo religioso de su labor redentora.

Al despertar se encontró rodeado por un grupo de indígenas de rostro impasible que se disponían a sacrificarlo ante un altar, un altar que a Bartolomé le pareció como el lecho en que descansaría, al fin, de sus temores, de su destino, de sí mismo.

Tres años en el país le habían conferido un mediano dominio de las lenguas nativas. Intentó algo. Dijo algunas palabras que fueron comprendidas.

Entonces floreció en él una idea que tuvo por digna de su talento y de su cultura universal y de su arduo conocimiento de Aristóteles. Recordó que para ese día de esperaba un eclipse total de sol. Y dispuso, en lo más íntimo, valerse de aquel conocimiento para engañar a sus opresores y salvar la vida.

—si me matáis — les dijo —puedo hacer que el sol se oscurezca en su altura.

Los indígenas lo miraron fijamente y Bartolomé sorprendió la incredulidad en sus ojos. Vio que se produjo un pequeño consejo, y esperó confiado, no sin cierto desdén.

Dos horas después el corazón de Fray Bartolomé Arrazola chorreaba su sangre vehemente sobre la piedra de los sacrificios (brillante bajo la opaca luz de

²⁷³ Reyes, Alfonso (1937), quoted in Lagmanovich (2006:171)

*un sol eclipsado), mientras uno de los indígenas recitaba sin ninguna inflexión de voz, sin prisa, una por una, las infinitas fechas que los astrónomos de la comunidad maya habían previsto y anotado en sus códices sin la valiosa ayuda de Aristóteles.*²⁷⁴

7.4 Instrucciones para llorar

Dejando de lado los motivos, atengámonos a la manera correcta de llorar, entendiendo por esto un llanto que no ingrese en el escándolo, ni que insulte a la sonrisa con su paralela y torpe semejanza. El llanto medio u ordinario consiste en una contracción general del rostro y un sonido espasmódico acompañado de lágrimas y mocos, estos últimos al final, pues el llanto se acaba en el momento en que se suena enérgicamente.

Para llorar, dirija la imaginación hacia usted mismo, y si esto le resulta imposible por haber contraído el hábito de creer en el mundo exterior, piense en un pato cubierto de hormigas o en esos golfos del estrecho de Magellanes en los que no entra nadie, nunca.

*Llegado el llanto, se tapará con decoro el rostro usando ambas manos con la palma hacia dentro. Los niños llorarán con la manga del saco contra la cara, y de preferencia en un rincón del cuarto. Duración media del llanto, tres minutos.*²⁷⁵

7.5 Diálogo sobre un diálogo

A - Distraídos en razonar la inmortalidad, habíamos dejado que anocheciera sin encender la lámpara. No nos veíamos las caras. Con una indiferencia y una dulzura más convincentes que el fervor, la voz de Macedonio Fernández repetía que el alma es inmortal. Me aseguraba que la muerte del cuerpo es del todo insignificante y que morir se tiene que ser el hecho más nulo que puede sucederle a un hombre. Yo jugaba con la

²⁷⁴ Monterroso (2006:53ff).

²⁷⁵ Cortázar (2004:14).

navaja de Macedonio; la abría y la cerraba. Un acordeón vecino despachaba infinitamente la Cumparsita, esa pamplina consternada que les gusta a muchas personas, porque les mintieron que es vieja... Yo le propuse a Macedonio que nos suicidáramos, para discutir sin estorbo.

Z (burlon). - Pero sospecho que al final no se resolvieron.

*A (ya en plena mística).- Francamente no recuerdo si esa noche nos suicidamos.*²⁷⁶

7.6 El collectionista ambicioso

*Un hombre ambicioso se propone coleccionarlo todo. Reúne en su casa, convertida en sala de exposiciones, una colección de semillas, otra de objetos encontrados en la calle, otra de agua de la canilla (brotada de diversas canillas, a diversas horas del día). Colecciona pulóveres, pensamientos célebres y banales, boletos de colectivo, hojas de diarios elegidas rigurosamente al azar. Colecciona agujeros, panes, envases de desoderantes vacíos. Cada año de ve obligado a mudarse a una casa más grande y luego cada seis meses. Finalmente comprende que sólo renunciando a toda clasificación podrá obtener la colección más completa, la colección de colecciones. La exhibe en el mundo entero.*²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Borges, Jorge Luis (1960), quoted in Brasca (2000:3f).

²⁷⁷ Shua (2004:2).

7.7 La Bailarina

*Estoy profundamente enamorado de una bailarina. Su tez es blanca, pálida, piel suave y tersa, piernas hermosas y senos pequeños, labios rojos y los ojos oscuros, como sus cabellos largos y sedosos. Su cuerpo esbelto gira y danza vestido con mallas negras, lo mismo música de chaikovsky que rock and roll. Ignoro si me corresponde, si ella siente algún afecto para mí. Parece un enigma desentreñable. Me mira tristemente y nunca ríe, en ocasiones me dedica una sonrisa apenas esbozada, cuando en la soledad de mi casa se le termina la cuerda y vuelvo a guardarla en su caja de cristal.*²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Aviles Fabila, René (1986), quoted in Koch (2000a:23).

8 Resumen en Español

8.1 Introducción

El tema de este estudio es una nueva forma de escritura literaria que va ganando popularidad, particularmente en América del Sur, desde los comienzos del siglo XX. Esta forma de escritura se destaca sobre todo por su brevedad extrema, y el término que se utiliza aquí para referir a ella es *minificción*. El propósito principal de este estudio es establecer si se puede considerar la *minificción* como una forma de escritura *narrativa*, como lo hace la mayoría de la crítica literaria contemporánea, aunque a distintos grados. Para conseguir esto, este estudio se divide de la manera siguiente: En el capítulo 2, se analiza la historia de la *minificción* – o sea, se traza el desarrollo de la *minificción* en el eje *diacrónico*. Esto sirve para familiarizarse al lector con esta forma de escritura que queda difícil a definir y a describir. En el capítulo 3 se esbozan los modelos analíticos desarrollados por tres críticos prominentes de la forma, para revelar la opinión corriente acerca de la *minificción* y dónde estos críticos la sitúan en el universo literario más grande. En hacer eso, el capítulo 3 constituye una análisis de la *minificción* en el eje *sincrónico*. En este capítulo se demostrarán también cómo la crítica contemporánea tiende a concentrarse en los aspectos narrativos de la *minificción* – a menudo hasta clasificar mucha *minificción* como narrativa propiamente dicha aunque no lo es. Para razonar acerca de este punto de vista, hace falta tener un buen entendimiento de exactamente lo que es la narrativa; por eso, el capítulo 4 se dedica a investigar la naturaleza de la narrativa y el campo académico que se especializa en su estudio – la *narratología*. Esto se conducirá a discutir las teorías de, entre otros, Roland Barthes y Gérard Genette, dos nombres muy destacados en esta esfera. En el último capítulo grande de este trabajo, el capítulo 5, se aplican los conocimientos ganados en el capítulo anterior en un análisis narrativo de ejemplos de *minificción*. Aquí se verá que, aunque mucha *minificción* muestre características narrativas indiscutibles, esto no es el caso por

una gran parte. Este estudio termina con el capítulo 6, que contiene un resumen de lo contenido y las conclusiones del análisis.

8.2 La Historia de la *Minificción*

La mayoría de la crítica vigente conviene que los raíces de la *minificción* se encuentran en los últimos decádos del siglo XIX, y que la apariencia de estos raíces coincide con el advenimiento del movimiento literario que se llama el *modernismo* – un movimiento que representó la primera gran contribución latinoamericana al mundo literario mayor. Este movimiento, que comenzó con la publicación en 1888 de la obra “Azul...” por el escritor nicaraguense Rubén Darío, representó una:

“[...] reacción contra el romanticismo y contra la filosofía positiva que había convertido a la obra literaria en un testimonio documental y científico de aberraciones sociales [...],”²⁷⁹

y favoreció un retorno al estético del ‘arte por arte’. En la obra de algunos practicantes del modernismo, por ejemplo, los escritores Alfonso Reyes, Leopoldo Lugones y el propio Darío, se puede encontrar unos textos narrativos de una extensión extremadamente breve en comparación con el resto de la producción literaria de la época. Estos textos acercan mucho al poema en prosa en el caso de Darío, y al ensayo en el caso de Reyes, y forman solamente una parte menor del volumen total de su obra. Además, hay pocas indicaciones que la cortedad fue una consideración central en su escritura. Por eso, el crítico David Lagmanovich considera estos ejemplos como ‘precursores’ de la *minificción* propiamente dicha.

Una excepción se encuentra en la escritura del Mexicano Julio Torres, cuya obra no muy grande constituye exclusivamente de textos de una reducida extensión. Torri, un buen amigo de Alfonso Reyes, consideró la brevedad como “*una extrema forma de la cortesía*”²⁸⁰, y entre se producción se puede leer un corto

²⁷⁹ Cf. Oseguera de Chavez (2000:213).

²⁸⁰ Zavala (2004:111).

texto narrativa, que se acerca mucho al poema en prosa en su estilo, titulado “*A Circe*”. Este cuento aparece en su totalidad en el subcapítulo 2.1.2, y debido a la similitudes que este texto demuestra con la *minificción* moderna, se lo considera frecuentemente como el primer ejemplo de verdadera *minificción*.

La próxima etapa en el desarrollo de la *minificción* llega con el acontecimiento del ‘boom’ latinoamericano – un período que comenzó a partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XX y que fue testigo a una ‘explosión’ de interés en el mundo occidental por las obras y las técnicas renovadoras de los escritores latinoamericanos de la época. Aunque el ‘boom’ no se reconozca como un período en el cual la extensión de la obra literaria juega un papel de gran importancia, fue precisamente en este período cuando se exploraron los límites de la brevedad y cuando algunos textos se destacaron por ello. El ejemplo paradigmático de la *minificción*, “*El dinosaurio*” del autor guatemalteco Augusto Monterroso, apareció en el año 1959, y la atención investida en la formas más cortas de la escritura por autores de gran renombre como Julio Cortázar y Jorge Luis Borges significaba que estas formas llegaban a un público mucho más grande. Fue también en este período cuando se establecieron muchas de las técnicas que se encuentran en la *minificción* de hoy en día, como la parodia de diversas formas textuales, la ‘reescritura’ de historias antiguas, el empleo de diversas estrategias de intertextualidad y la llamada ‘hibridación genérica’. Lagmanovich refiere a este período como el de los ‘clásicos’ de la *minificción*.

A partir del ‘boom’ latinoamericano, la producción de la *minificción* va incrementando, estimulada sin duda por la aparición de revistas y concursos literarios dedicadas a la forma. A pesar de eso, tardó hasta que la crítica empezó a analizar la *minificción* como un fenómeno individual. Los primeros trabajos académicos sobre el tema comenzaron a aparecer hacia la mitad de los años ochenta, y las primeras antologías alrededor de los principios de los años noventa. La crítica de la *minificción* queda en sus inicios, donde todavía no hay respuestas aceptadas ni siquiera para las preguntas más básicas acerca de la forma como, por

ejemplo, cómo describirla y cómo nombrarla. Es en este contexto que este estudio sobre la *minificción* se produce.

8.3 Modelos Descriptivos de Tres Críticos de la *Minificción*

En este capítulo se explican los modelos descriptivos desarrollados por tres críticos de la *minificción*. Todos estos críticos han hecho importantes contribuciones al entendimiento y reconocimiento de la forma, y se llaman Lauro Zavala, Dolores Koch y David Lagmanovich.

Lauro Zavala define la *minificción* como “*la narrativa que cabe en el espacio de una página*”²⁸¹, una definición que indica la importancia que Zavala proporciona a su llamada naturaleza narrativa. Para Zavala, se puede distinguir la *minificción* de las otras formas del ‘cuento breve’ por su extrema brevedad, que no rebasa a las 200 palabras. Esta extrema brevedad crea las características genéricas de la *minificción*, que suele acercarse más a la escritura epigramática y en la cual se notan diversas estrategias de humor, ironía ‘inestable’ (inestable por no ser siempre evidente), ambigüedad semántica y intertextualidad ‘moderna’ y ‘posmoderna’. Esta última característica – la intertextualidad ‘posmoderna’ – se conoce también como la ‘hibridación genérica’, que refiere a la parodia de las reglas genéricas de distintas formas textuales.

El modelo de Zavala resulta problemático a causa de su afirmación que el número de palabras produce las características genéricas. Zavala no ofrece suficiente evidencia para apoyar esta teoría, y parece ilógico aceptar que la subtracción de una mera palabra de un cuento de 201 palabras de extensión resultaría en la súbita aparición de humor, ironía, intertextualidad o cualquier de las citadas características de la *minificción*.

²⁸¹ Zavala (2004:69).

Aunque Zavala hace frecuente referencia a la naturaleza narrativa de la *minificción*, concede que puede haber ejemplos que no son necesariamente narrativos.

Dolores Koch define la *minificción* como un “*sub-género experimental del cuento*,” una descripción que también subraya aspectos narrativos de la forma, aunque Koch acepta, como Zavala, que la *minificción* no debe ser una forma de escritura narrativa. Para Koch, todo texto breve que consiste de prosa se puede considerar *minificción*, de las prosas breves tradicionales – como el aforismo o el epigrama – hasta los textos narrativos muy cortos de los últimos años. Koch dedica la mayor parte de su análisis al especie de *minificción* que ella llama el *micro-relato*. Estos son los textos narrativos muy cortos que se distinguen de los cuentos tradicionales muy cortos (los *minicuentos*) mediante la naturaleza de su enlace: En los *minicuentos*, la historia termina con algo que ocurre en el mundo de la narración; pero, en los *micro-relatos*, no ocurre nada en el mundo ficcional del cuento, sino en el mente del escritor (y a veces en la del lector). En sus propias palabras:

“El minicuento resulta en lo que ocurre a alguien, mientras que el micro-relato resulta en lo que se le ocurre a alguien.”²⁸²

Hace falta constatar que esta teoría queda muy problemático; pues, no se debería construir una teoría literaria en supuestos de lo que piensa ni un autor ni un lector.

Por su parte, David Lagmanovich toma una posición que él describe como ‘narrativista’: para él la *minificción* (o sea, el ‘*microrrelato*’) es una forma de escritura indiscutiblemente narrativa – sin excepción – y rechaza todo concepto de hibridación con otros géneros textuales. Sin embargo, Lagmanovich explora con poca profundidad el concepto de ‘narrativa’, y además, clasifica muchos textos no-narrativos (según su propio modelo narrativo) como textos narrativos.

²⁸² Koch (2000a:24).

8.4 La Narrativa

Como se ha leído en el capítulo anterior, todos los críticos considera que la *minificción* es principalmente – o fundamentalmente en el caso de Lagmanovich – una forma de escritura narrativa. Sin embargo, ningún de estos críticos parece haber analizado la *minificción* desde una perspectiva narrativa para determinar si esto es verdaderamente el caso. Este es el objetivo de este trabajo, y para poder determinar si un texto posee las características esenciales de la narrativa, hace falta averiguar exactamente lo que éstas son. Esto es el tema de capítulo 4.

Comenzando con una definición sencilla del término ‘narrativa’ sacada de la “*New Oxford English Dictionary*” y progresando a comentar las definiciones de unos teóricos de la narratología, se puede isolar dos elementos que quedan íntegros a cualquier texto narrativo. Estos son:

1. Una secuencia de ‘eventos’.
2. Un ‘narrador’ que narra estos eventos.

Partiendo de las ideas del teórico literario francés Roland Barthes sobre las unidades más pequeñas de la narrativa, se investigó la naturaleza del ‘evento narrativo’. Se determinó que todo texto narrativo se puede reducir a unos eventos – o ‘cambios de un estado al otro’ – básicos, que se abstractan del texto que transmite la narrativa. Estos eventos se llaman aquí ‘funciones’, y las funciones de un texto narrativa se pueden representar en forma de una paráfrasis. Pos eso, la paráfrasis es una abstracción del texto.

Unas funciones son más fundamentales que otras, sin las cuales la historia resulta incomprensible. Estas se llaman las funciones ‘cardinales’, y éstas forman el esqueleto de la narrativa. Se ha determinado también que hace falta poder organizar los eventos de la historia según un principal cronológico: Si no se puede representar los eventos según un esquema temporal y secuencial, no se puede considerar el texto como un texto narrativo.

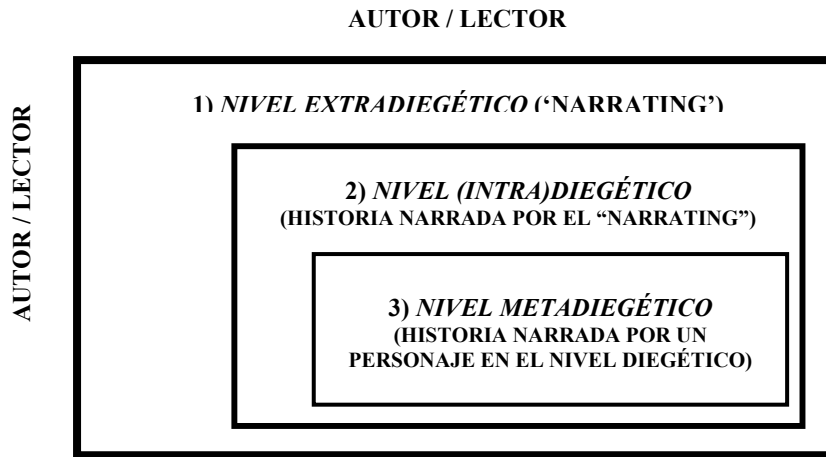
En cuanto al narrador en narrativa, en primer lugar hace falta decir que este narrador no refiere a él que escribe el texto, a saber, al autor; el narrador de un texto narrativo refiere a él que relata los acontecimientos de la historia: en efecto, el narrador refiere del acto mismo de narrar, y este se sitúa dentro del texto mismo. Aquí se utiliza también el término ‘narrating’ para este fenómeno, partiendo de la obra crítica del teórico francés Gerard Genette.

El ‘narrating’ importa principalmente para una razón: si no hay presencia de un narrador en el relato de los eventos, se trata de *mimesis* en el sentido platónico, y no se trata de narrativa – o sea, los eventos se representan o se ‘imitan’, y no se los narran.

El narrador se separa del cuento que narra mediante dos fenómenos: el del *tiempo*, y el del *nivel*. El primero, el fenómeno del tiempo, refiere a la distancia entre el momento en que el narrador narra los acontecimientos del cuento, y el momento en que estos acontecimientos pasaron, pasan o pasarán. El tipo de ‘narrating’ más común es el posterior, en que el narrador relata unos eventos que pasaron en su pasado – aunque no hace falta revelar cuánto tiempo existe entre estos dos momentos. Otros tipos de narrating incluyen el *anterior*, en el cual el narrador cuenta algo que va a pasar, el *simultaneo*, un narrating que da la impresión de ocurrir al momento de lo narrado, y el *interpolado*, un narrating complicado en que el narrating y lo narrado alternan en el tiempo.

El segundo fenómeno que separa al narrador de lo que narra, el del nivel narrativa, refiere a una forma de ‘barrera’ que se establece entre el narrador y lo narrado – una barrera que se establece mediante el acto de narrar. Debido al hecho de que también los protagonistas de historias pueden narrar historias, se establece así una jerarquía capaz de explicar la ocurrencia de historias dentro de otras historias, y estos son los niveles diferentes: El ‘narrating’ inmediate superior a y responsable por la primera historia narra desde lo que se llama el nivel *extradieético*, y la historia que este cuenta se llama el *diegético*. Si un personaje dentro del diegético cuenta una historia, esta historia se clasifica como una historia *intradieética*, y si

un personaje dentro del nivel intradiegético cuenta una historia, esta historia se conoce como el nivel *metadiegético*.



14: Los Niveles Narrativos de Genette

También se puede clasificar el narrador según el nivel desde el cual narra; por ejemplo, el narrador *extradiegético* es el narrador inmediato superior a y responsable por la primera historia, y el narrador *intradiegético* es el narrador que cuenta desde el nivel diegético.

El tipo de narrador se clasifica no solamente según el nivel del cual narra, sino también según el grado de participación que tenga en lo que cuenta. Por ejemplo, el narrador que aparece (en cualquier forma) en el cuento que narra, se clasifica como un narrador *homodiegético*. Por contraste, el narrador que no juega un papel dentro de lo que narra se llama un narrador *heterodiegético*.

8.5 Análisis de Minificción

En este capítulo se analizaron ejemplos de *minificción* para averiguar si se puede considerarlos como textos narrativos, o sea, se los examinaron para revelar si demuestran una secuencia temporal de eventos narrativos, y si hay un 'narrating' que relata estos eventos.

Los ejemplos se organizaron en grupos que correspondieron a algunos de los tipos de *minificción* descritos por los críticos en el capítulo 3. Se analizaron aquí unos ejemplos de *minificción* que son claramente historias, y por eso cuyas cualidades narrativas no se disputaron. Sin embargo, se examinaron en este capítulo también unos grupos de *minificción* que la crítica vigente considera como textos narrativos, pero cuyos rasgos narrativos son discutibles, o que simplemente no demuestran características narrativas. Estos grupos se constituyeron de la *minificción* que consiste del uso predominante del *estilo directo*, la *minificción* que representa una forma de ‘reescritura’ de historias ya bien conocidas, y la *minificción* que juega con la llamada ‘hibridación genérica’.

En el caso de la *minificción* que consiste mayormente del estilo indirecto, se notan casos donde parece haber la ausencia de un narrador; debido a que el discurso (o bien diálogo o bien monólogo) esta representado en estilo directo sin algun otro tipo de elemento textual, estos textos corresponden a una forma de *mimesis* según los criterios establecidos por Genette, lo que significa que no se los puede considerar como textos narrativos propiamente dichos.

En lo que concierne la ‘reescritura’ en la *minificción*, ocurre a menudo que los ejemplos de una brevedad extrema no contienen una secuencia de eventos. En lugar de esto, consisten de un sólo comentario relacionado a una historia conocida. Este comentario amplía la historia original, ofrece una perspectiva nueva de ella o la reinventa de una manera diferente. Sin embargo, para hacer esto, sólo hace falta que el lector tiene conocimiento de lo que se ‘reescibe’ para completar el sentido del ejemplo de *minificción*, y por eso, muchas veces la reescritura muy corta no necesita consistir en una secuencia de eventos (pues, estos existen ya en el texto al que alude). Pero eso significaba que no se pueden clasificar estos ejemplos de *minificción* como textos narrativos.

Respecta a los ejemplos que representan la llamada ‘hibridación genérica’, el problema principal consiste en identificar cuales son los híbridos genéricos: una definición suficiente del fenómeno no existe. No obstante, parece que la

hibridación genérica refiere a los textos en los cuales se encuentran mezclados los rasgos de la narrativa y los rasgos de otros géneros literarios (una forma de intertextualidad *posmoderna* según Lauro Zavala). Dado esto, debería resultar fácil localizar características narrativas dentro de estos textos. Sin embargo, es evidente que muchos de estos textos (en su formas más cortas) o bien hacen recurso a las estrategias de la intertextualidad en lugar de describir un secuencia de eventos (como se ve en algunos ejemplos ‘reescritura’) o bien son sencillamente parodias de formas no-narrativas (literarias o no-literarias) y no pretenden narrar una historia. De hecho, la clase de *minificción* que parodia los textos no-narrativos es una clase en la cual resulta muy raro encontrar tramas narrativas.

8.6 Conclusiones

En conclusión, se ha mostrado en este estudio que, aunque la crítica contemporánea sostiene que la *minificción* es una forma de escritura predominantemente narrativa, esto no es el caso. La posición narrativista de Lagmanovich queda insostenible; pues, hay muchos ejemplos de *minificción* (o de *microrrelatos*) donde la ausencia de rasgos narrativos queda muy claro. Tanto Zavala como Koch admiten que hay *minificciones* que no son necesariamente narrativas, pero no exploran la naturaleza de estos textos, y parece que consideran que estos textos forman solo una pequeña parte de la producción total de *minificción*. Sin embargo, la *minificción* no-narrativa constituye una parte considerable de la totalidad de la *minificción*, y si se desea construir una tipología fiel a la diversidad de esta forma de escritura, hace falta emprender una investigación adecuada de éstas clases.

9 Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

Der Untersuchungsgegenstand dieser Arbeit war eine neue Form literarischen Schreibens, welche im Laufe des vergangenen Jahrhunderts im lateinamerikanischen Raum zunehmend an Bekanntheit gewann. Das augenfälligste Charakteristikum dieser Form ist die extreme Kürze der Texte, weshalb sie im Rahmen dieser Arbeit mit dem Terminus *minificción* bezeichnet werden. Ziel dieser Studie war es festzustellen, ob *minificción* als narrative Form des Schreibens betrachtet werden kann, wie dies von ihren zeitgenössischen Kritikern zu unterschiedlichen Graden vorgeschlagen wird.

In einem ersten Schritt wurde in dieser Arbeit *minificción* entlang der diachronen Achse untersucht, um sie in ihrem historischen Kontext einzuordnen und dadurch eine vollständigere Idee dessen zu präsentieren, was genau diese neue Form ausmacht. Zu diesem Zweck wurde in Kapitel 2 zunächst dem Ursprung der *minificción* in der als *Modernismo* bekannten lateinamerikanischen Bewegung nachgegangen. Danach wurde über das Auftreten von *minificción* in den Werken von einigen der führenden Autoren des lateinamerikanischen *Boom* berichtet und zum Abschluss über *minificción* in der Gegenwart: eine heute von vielen Autoren des hispanischen Raums verwendete literarische Form, welcher zunehmende Aufmerksamkeit von Seiten der Kritiker zuteil wird.

In Kapitel 3 wurden daraufhin deskriptive Modelle vorgestellt, welche von drei der führenden Kritiker dieser Form entwickelt wurden, nämlich: Lauro Zavala, Dolores Koch und David Lagmanovich. Es wurde dargestellt wie sie *minificción* entlang der synchronen Achse betrachten, das heißt, wo sie *minificción* im heutigen literarischen Kontext einordnen und wie sie *minificción* und ihre verschiedenen Spielarten beschreiben. Hier wurde festgestellt, dass die drei Kritiker *minificción* als eine vorherrschend narrative Form des Schreibens betrachten, wobei sie in ihrem Grad der Zustimmung zu diesem Punkt voneinander abweichen. So legt Dolores Koch am wenigsten Nachdruck auf die narrative Natur dieser Textsorte und verweist auf eine Spielart von *minificción*

welche sie *minitexto* nennt und welche ihrer Natur nach nicht narrativ ist. Bedauerlicherweise geht Koch bezüglich der Form des *minitexto* nicht ins Detail, während gleichzeitig viele der von ihr als *minificción* angeführten Beispiele fälschlicher Weise als narrativ klassifiziert sind. Zavala betont in seinem Modell häufig die Narrativität von *minificción*, räumt jedoch gleichzeitig ein, dass nicht jede *minificción* notwendigerweise narrativ sein muss. Allerdings verabsäumt auch Zavala eine Untersuchung von nicht-narrativer *minificción* und bietet auch keine konkreten Beispiele solcher Texte. David Lagmanovich ist ein überzeugter Befürworter der Ansicht, dass jede Art von *minificción* ihrer Natur nach narrativ ist. Eine Position welche er als *narrativista* bezeichnet.

Nach der Darlegung der Meinungen dieser Kritiker, war es notwendig ein umfassendes Verständnis dessen zu erlangen, was es für einen Text bedeutet narrativ zu sein. Kapitel 4 wurde daher der Untersuchung des Terminus „narrativ“ gewidmet und jenem Bereich der wissenschaftlichen Forschung, welcher Narrativ zu seinem Analyseobjekt erhoben hat: die „Narratologie“. Es wurde festgestellt, dass ein als narrativ charakterisierter Text zwei grundsätzliche Eigenschaften aufweisen muss. Dies ist zum einen die Abfolge von zeitlich aufeinanderfolgenden „Ereignissen“ und zum anderen die Präsenz eines „Erzählers“ im Text, welcher diese Ereignisse nacherzählt. Das Konzept des narrativen Ereignisses wurde auf Basis von Roland Barthes Werk und seinen Theorien über die kleinsten narrativen Einheiten im Detail untersucht. Dem folgte die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Konzept des Erzählers, anhand von Gerard Genettes Werk und seinen Theorien zur *voix* (Stimme) des Erzählers und den narrativen Ebenen.

Das so erarbeitete Wissen über die Grundlagen von Narrativik wurde daraufhin in Kapitel 5 in der Analyse von Beispielen von *minificción* praktisch angewendet. Alle in diesem Kapitel analysierten Beispiele werden von zumindest einem, wenn nicht allen, der Kritiker, deren Modelle in Kapitel 3 vorgestellt wurden, als narrative Texte eingestuft. Die Beispiele wurden zum Zweck der Analyse in Gruppen gegliedert, die sich mit einigen der Kategorien von *minificción*, welche

von diesen Kritikern beschrieben wurden, decken: Die erste dieser Gruppen enthält *minificción* welche klar als Geschichte erkannt werden kann und deren narrative Qualitäten demnach außer Frage stehen; Die zweite Gruppe widmet sich *minificción* deren narrative Grundlagen strittig sind, wie zum Beispiel Texten, welche aus reinem Dialog oder Monolog bestehen oder Beispiele von *reescritura*; Die dritte und letzte Gruppe besteht aus Texten welche als „*hibridación genérica*“ („gattungsmäßige Hybride“) bezeichnet werden und welche eine Mischung aus Erzählung und anderen literarischen Genres darstellen. Es wurde festgestellt, dass diese letzte Gruppe von Texten in den seltensten Fällen narrative Qualitäten aufweist. Vielmehr als dass sie narrative Elemente mit den gattungsmäßigen Charakteristika ihres „Hypotextes“ vermengen, neigen sie dazu diesen zu parodieren, was nicht den Einsatz von narrativen Elementen verlangt. An dieser Stelle soll auch hervorgehoben werden, dass, je kürzer ein Text ist, desto geringer ist die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass er narrative Eigenschaften aufweist. Dies gilt besonders für die Gruppen von *minificción* welche in den Unterkapiteln 5.3 und 5.4 (*reescritura* und „gattungsmäßige Hybride“) analysiert wurden. In ihrem Fall wird darauf gebaut, dass die intertextuellen und hypertextuellen Strategien die Bedeutung dieser Texte vervollständigen.

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