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**HORACIO QUIROGA'S "CUENTOS DE LA SELVA PARA LOS NINOS":  
ADVENTURES IN THE PERILOUS GARDEN**

*The University of Oklahoma*

**Ph.D. 1984**

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HORACIO QUIROGA'S CUENTOS DE LA SELVA PARA LOS NIÑOS:  
ADVENTURES IN THE PERILOUS GARDEN

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

By  
TERESA M. LUBRANO  
Norman, Oklahoma  
1984

HORACIO QUIROGA'S CUENTOS DE LA SELVA PARA LOS NIÑOS:

ADVENTURES IN THE PERILOUS GARDEN

A DISSERTATION

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF

MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

By

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Horacio Quiroga's Cuentos de la selva para los niños:

Adventures in the Perilous Garden

Through an analysis of Horacio Quiroga's Cuentos de la selva, their importance to the psychological and sociological maturation of a child can be seen. The stories in this collection have been examined in the light of the history of children's literature and the criteria experts have suggested that is paramount for the creation of children's stories. Authorities such as Bruno Bettelheim and Jean Piaget, among others, have been consulted.

The Cuentos de la selva, like most good literature written especially for children, evidence a continuation of the oral tradition and fulfill the child's psychological and sociological need for role models, love, a sense of belonging, competence (which will allow him to survive in an adult society), meaning, order, and beauty in life. In addition, Quiroga uses the animal characters in his stories to embody various aspects of the child's own personality which might otherwise be too complex, unacceptable and contradictory for him to handle were they not set in the framework of fiction.

The recurring themes in the Cuentos de la selva attempt to gently, and at times humorously, teach the type of psychological and social attributes that will allow the child to become a mature, successful and happy adult. Among these themes are those of

compassion, understanding, selflessness, perseverance, loyalty and friendship. Another pervasive theme in the stories is that of death which allows the child to deal with and understand this universal phenomenon according to the various stages of his psychological and sociological development. Within each story, the animal hero or heroes teach explicit and implicit lessons which the child can understand and emulate in his social relationships with his parents, siblings and pets. Also, they show the child positive and social attributes which will enable him to feel psychologically at peace with himself and with those around him.

In the final analysis, Quiroga not only contributes to the child's psychological and social maturation through these stories, but also reveals the often overlooked tender part of his nature--experienced perhaps only by his children and his pets.

## HORACIO QUIROGA'S CUENTOS DE LA SELVA PARA LOS NIÑOS:

### ADVENTURES IN THE PERILOUS GARDEN

#### CHAPTER I

##### QUIROGA'S ENTRANCE INTO THE GARDEN

Almost everyone who has ever lived in the jungle has sensed, on either a conscious or subconscious level, the paradox of existence that it embodies. It is both the infernal, potential deathtrap and the miracle of life constantly renewing itself. Within its dense green foliage, there exists an enormous variety of plants and animals. It has been observed that "At least a third of all earth's species are believed to live within this complex habitat, only a fraction of which have yet been given scientific names."<sup>1</sup>

Horacio Silvestre Quiroga, whose middle name was perhaps a portent of things to come, must have begun to become fascinated with and to understand the beauty and the horror of the jungle at least on a subconscious level as early as 1903. In June of that year, according to his biographers, José Delgado and Alberto Brignole, he accompanied Leopoldo Lugones on an expedition to study and photograph the jungle-choked ruins of the empire the Jesuit missionaries had carved in the Argentine territory of Misiones.<sup>2</sup> At the time, Quiroga was twenty-five years old and his prime motivation for joining

Lugones' expedition seemed to have been the search for adventure. He entered the Misiones territory a pampered, dyspeptic dandy and seems to have thriven in the hostile jungle atmosphere. Delgado and Brignole allude to the long-range effect of this expedition: ". . . este viaje por las Misiones, emprendido por simple amor a la aventura, vendría a señalar, en la historia de Quiroga, el punto trascendental en que un hombre se encuentra con su alma. . . ." <sup>3</sup> On a conscious level, there can be little doubt that Quiroga understood that something of profound importance had happened to him in Misiones. Some outward manifestations of change readily observable at this time were his lack of care in dress and in the grooming of his beard which now took on the wild, ragged look that was to be his trademark for the rest of his life; another drastic change was a very noticeable reticence in polite society and his ever-increasing penchant for monosyllabic responses. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, thenceforth, life in the isolated jungle of Misiones with its struggle for survival and its freedom from the conventions of civilized society became an ideal, a dream and a goal that was to dominate the rest of his days.

Between 1904 and 1905, Quiroga returned to the jungle, establishing himself as a cotton farmer in the Chaco region of northern Argentina. Although this enterprise was an economic disaster, he had begun and survived an apprenticeship in self-reliance and self-sufficiency which was to bear fruit just a year later. In 1906, Quiroga returned to Misiones and purchased 185 hectares of land on the outskirts of San Ignacio, the ancient subcapital of the Jesuit empire. <sup>5</sup> Just before the purchase, he had written to his cousin, José

María Fernández Saldaña, expressing his irresistible desire to return to Misiones:

Por mi parte voy a Misiones el próximo domingo con Gonzalbo. Estaremos dos meses. Tenemos idea de comprar una chacrita, so pretexto de propiedad divertida. Si lo hacemos, Gonzalbo volvería a allí a establecerse; y yo iría cuando pudiera. Estoy loco por hacer un poco de vida brava.<sup>6</sup>

From 1906 to 1909, Quiroga, who at the time was employed as a teacher of Spanish and Literature in Buenos Aires, spent every vacation in San Ignacio until he had cleared and cultivated the land and built a bungalow on a rise overlooking the banks of the Paraná.<sup>7</sup> At last, he was able to escape from the constricting urban existence and to realize his dream of carving a new world, his own world, from the ever-encroaching jungle. He was free to realize the vida brava he had so intensely desired. During this time, Quiroga also became intimately acquainted with the landscape: "Los grandes árboles, el río, las picadas, la tierra roja, el sol, entran a formar parte de su vida."<sup>8</sup>

Soon Quiroga experienced an even greater incentive to put the finishing touches on his jungle paradise. Sometime during 1908, Quiroga found himself becoming increasingly attracted to one of his students, Ana María Cirés. Attraction soon matured into passionate love, but the courtship was not a smooth one for several reasons. Ana María was about sixteen years younger than he, and she was a pampered spoiled only child who was the center of her parents' existence. Naturally, the Cirés were immediately concerned with the age difference, and they were opposed to anything that would threaten

their sedate, well-ordered family life. They were perhaps justifiably concerned about the rather violent mood alterations which Quiroga often exhibited since, ". . . Quiroga no podía dejar de manifestar tal como era: capaz de encantar a una alma femenina por sus notas de ternura y sus reverberaciones espirituales, mas al mismo tiempo celoso, lunático, dominante."<sup>9</sup> In addition, Quiroga made it very clear that he intended to settle on his property in Misiones after the wedding, and Ana María, despite her delicate upbringing, showed a singular and quite stubborn inclination to follow him anywhere, even into the jungle. The wedding finally took place on December 30, 1909, and the newlyweds began the journey to San Ignacio almost immediately. Quiroga felt he had achieved the apex of his desire in life--a terrestrial paradise fashioned by his own hands and someone he loved with whom to share it. Someone, he believed, who would love it as much as he.<sup>10</sup>

However, the reality of daily life without the comforts to which she was accustomed began to quickly impinge upon the romantic idyll Ana María had no doubt imagined she would experience at Quiroga's side. In addition, she found that he insisted upon dominating every phase of their lives and imposing a spartan existence upon her. As Emir Rodríguez Monegal observed, a mutual disenchantment was inevitable even though the love remained:

Aunque Quiroga estaba muy enamorado de Ana María cuando se casó con ella, había en esa relación muchos elementos que el tiempo desnudaría. La muchacha había sido criada con todo el mimo de unos padres blandos. Era hija única. Nunca había vivido en la selva. Su casamiento con un hombre mayor, aparentemente maduro y fuerte pero en realidad casi tan niño como ella en sus reacciones afectivas, es el deslumbramiento de la chiquilla ante la aventura

romántica. Pero la realidad se encarga de desenmascarar las cosas. Quiroga solo maduro exteriormente, estaba sometido a los cambios más capriciosos de humor, llevaba a los demás (como a sí mismo) hasta el límite del esfuerzo humano. Vivir con un hombre así era como vivir con un tigre.

Impulsado a construir todo con sus manos, sometió a su mujer a las torturas de la vida primitiva a pesar de que, a pocos metros, en el pueblo, estaba la civilización. Sus exigencias eran tiránicas e incomprensibles para quien no compartiera su mística de la vida salvaje. La resistencia inevitable de Ana María engendra disputas, llantos, escenas, o un silencio atroz.<sup>11</sup>

The tension between them increased with Ana María's first pregnancy and the arrival of her mother and a female friend of the family. Quiroga's reaction to the pregnancy was quite predictable. He decided that the birth process, which was natural for animals, would be of no great risk or consequence for Ana María. Hence, he rejected all forms of advice and assistance. When the time came for the birth of their first child, Quiroga acted as the midwife while Ana María suffered through a natural childbirth in their bungalow. Eglé was born on January 29, 1911. Although in the Latin culture it is well known that every couple hopes that its first child is a male heir, Quiroga rationalized his engendering a female by an interesting analogy in a letter to his cousin, Saldaña: "Tengo una infanta de 48 días, nombrada Eglé. Aprendí que las abejas pueden engendrar sin macho, pero dan únicamente machos. Para hacer hembras, se requiere cópula con un macho. De aquí mi satisfacción al hacer una hembra. . . ."<sup>12</sup> This rather arrogant announcement of his male prowess is a very marked contrast to the more emotional and immediately paternal reaction described by Delgado and Brignole:

Pero la angustia de los instantes en que se espera un hijo, y los tremendos ecos que su primer gemido despierta, eran algo nuevo



cuya profundidad jamás había sospechado. ¿Cómo podía un ser tan minúsculo, inmediatamente de arribar a la vida, ocupar tan sitio en el alma. . . ? El sentimiento de la paternidad constituía una especie de nacer: dulzuras antes ignoradas corren por la sangre, miradas nuevas salen de los ojos, las caricias, repentinamente, conocen modos de expresarse nunca usados y la existencia revela motivos hasta allí ocultos que dan otro sentido a su dinámica. Todo tan fuerte e inesperado que el rudo hombre del bosque al alzar por primera vez aquel pedazo de carne, aún oliente a entraña, sintió miedo de no poder con él, porque los brazos se le habían puesto blandos como los musgos. . . .<sup>13</sup>

The birth of Eglé was responsible for a new stage in Quiroga's life. He had already progressed from a carefree dandy to a lover and a husband, and now at the age of thirty-three, he found himself thoroughly enjoying the role of father. Quiroga seemed to be a normal parent in his joys, fears and in the pride he felt toward his infant daughter. His passion for photography now had a very special object, and even his unpretentious allusion to the photograph of four-month-old Eglé, which he included in a letter to his cousin, does little to veil his paternal love.<sup>14</sup> By the time Saldaña received this letter, Ana María was again pregnant, and Quiroga had made his final commitment to the primitive life by resigning his teaching position in Buenos Aires and accepting the duties of Justice of the Peace and Civil Registrar for San Ignacio. Perhaps by now Quiroga had realized that even a normal birth was not totally without risk to both mother and child. Perhaps the death of Ana María's father reminded him of the fragility of life. Perhaps the continued presence of his mother-in-law augmented the strain between him and Ana María, and he was eager to avoid additional scenes at an already trying time. Whatever the case might have been, as Ana María's pregnancy neared its end, the family moved to Buenos Aires where, on January 15, 1912,

Darío Quiroga was born.<sup>15</sup> In contrast to his rather arrogant announcement of Eglé's birth, Quiroga mentioned the birth of his son almost as an aside: "Desde el 15 tengo un machito feo y ridículo."<sup>16</sup> It almost seems as if he were stating the cause of an inconvenience rather than a happy event or an occurrence that marks the culmination of any Latin family--the birth of a male heir. This less than joyous attitude may have resulted partly because of the added expense and the dislocation that Quiroga felt the birth had caused. In the years between 1909 and 1912, Quiroga had found that his intimate contact with the jungle had done nothing to lessen his fascination with it. In fact, he was, if anything, an even more ardent advocate of the kind of life he led in Misiones, and he was constantly encouraging his friends to join him and experience Misiones for themselves.

Unfortunately, the birth of a son did little to lessen the domestic discord which was partly caused by Quiroga's insistence on making every decision about the upbringing of his children. Regarding this matter his biographers, Delgado and Brignole, have written:

Quería criarlos al amparo de la ternura y el consejo, pero curtidos como cachorros del monte. No existía en tal deseo ningún romanticismo de panida literario, sino la profunda convicción de que el mayor bien que podía hacerles era el de dejarlos crecer en el seno áspero y fuerte de la naturaleza. La madre y la abuela tenían, es claro, otras ideas, por lo cual con frecuencia chocaban agriamente; pero Quiroga no admitía ninguna intromisión en lo que consideraba deber paterno trascendental. Desde el principio actuó a este punto, dictatorialmente: vestidos, mamaderas, género de vida, todo se llevaba a cabo según sus órdenes y enseñanzas.<sup>17</sup>

When the domestic tension erupted into violent, bitter altercations, Quiroga would simply retreat into the refreshing oblivion of the jungle leaving Ana María feeling increasingly more desperate and

alone. Neither she nor her family could ever really understand Quiroga's philosophy of life, and this lack of ideological rapport eventually impinged upon their passionate physical bond. Many of the arguments centered around Quiroga's views and practices of educating the children. In contrast to the refinements of education which Ana María and her mother advocated, Quiroga's insistence was that their children should be allowed to develop naturally, like the animal cubs in the jungle of San Ignacio. Like them, they were to gain knowledge through experience and obedience.<sup>18</sup> He believed they should be inured to the dangers of life in the jungle so they would be unafraid. Of this matter, Delgado and Brignole have observed:

Temprano, en cuanto pudieron sostenerse sobre los pies, los llevaba de acompañantes en sus internaciones monteses o en los "raids" de su piragua. Los arrimaba al peligro para que, a un tiempo tuviessen conciencia de él y aprendieran a no temerle. Y, sobre todo, les exigía una obediencia absoluta. Ya más grandes, los sometía a pruebas temerarias, con una confianza no tan completa, sin embargo, como para sosegar totalmente a la inquietud que, a veces, saltando subitamente de entre sus fibras paternas, venía a lanzarle tremendos reproches. Eran, en efecto, experiencias inauditas, como la de dejarlos largo tiempo solos en una espesura del bosque, o la de sentarlos en el borde de los acantilados con las piernas balanceándose sobre el abismo. Madre y abuela, al tanto de tales prácticas educativas, solían pasar horas angustiosas con las pupilas fijas en el sendero que iba al río o en los que conducían a la selva. Y cuando Ana María osaba alguna reconvención le respondía con sequedad: "No has de ser tú la que los quiere más entrañablemente."<sup>19</sup>

During the years between 1912 and 1915, the family discord escalated continuously. The same man who could commit his infants to the most frightening of tests in jungle survival could relate an anecdote to his cousin, Saldaña, just like any other parent reporting the latest amusing thing that his two-year-old has said.<sup>20</sup> This letter contained

the last allusion to domestic contentment in his correspondence to his cousin. The daily quarrels, often not in themselves grave, kept undermining the relationship. Although it has been impossible to reconstruct the actual state of affairs at the bungalow, it was obvious that the initial paradise had become a purgatory for both of them. Reputable witnesses, such as friends and acquaintances, have alluded to violent altercations which became increasingly more frequent.<sup>21</sup> On December 6, 1915, after one of these bitter episodes, Quiroga retreated to the haven of the jungle wherein he could always regain his equanimity. Ana María, in a state of total desperation, decided to resolve the situation by attempting suicide. When Quiroga returned from his mentally and physically refreshing forray, totally at peace and oblivious to any possibility of his wife ever attempting such a drastic action, he was met by a peon who related the shocking news. Ana María had ingested a strong dose of corrosive sublimate. The eight days of agony she endured before she died evoked a series of contradictory responses in both of them. According to his biographers,

Pasado el estupor inicial, cayó Quiroga en un confuso estado de espíritu, a un tiempo colérico contra su esposa, hasta no querer verla más, y anheloso de que se revolviera el cielo y la tierra para salvarla. Actitud paradójica, reflejo sin duda de su rencor contra la amargura inmerecida que la esposa le hacía beber y de la angustia real que afligía a su alma desesperada. En Ana María fué al revés: a la consecución del acto suicida, sucedió un arrepentimiento ansioso y una exaltación patética del amor. Más que por la vida, suplicaba por el perdón de aquel a quien amaba sobre todas las cosas y cuyo martirio verdadero veía claramente en el fondo de su actitud implacable. Aquello no podía durar, y cuando la duda sobre el desenlace fatal no pudo ya mantenerse, el dolor lo llevó totalmente vencido al lado de la esposa moribunda.<sup>22</sup>

On December 14, 1915, just a few weeks before Quiroga's thirty-seventh birthday, Ana María died. Another stage in Quiroga's life was over, and the jungle of Misiones, which had held such promise for conjugal happiness, suddenly took on infernal aspects. Now, Quiroga found himself virtually alone and faced with the frightening responsibilities of being a widower and a single parent to three-year-old Darío and four-year-old Eglé. As is typical of children that age, they were not able to understand what had happened to their mother, and they were more eager to go play with their peers than to submit to the impassioned caresses of a grieving parent. Quiroga's initial reaction to the entire situation was perhaps best described in the short story, "El desierto," which he published in 1923<sup>23</sup>, seven years after his wife's tragic death. As in the past, Quiroga was very interested in the continued education of his children. His early lessons in the jungle, though they appeared harsh at best, had taught the children valuable skills for survival; hence, while he discharged the duties of both mother and father, they were well able to take care of themselves. Now, he felt the need for them to have a more formal education than he had been giving them in the jungle, and, of course, Quiroga believed that nobody could teach them better than he. The biographers have said of him,

. . . solía transformar la arena en pizarrón donde, pintados de rojo al minio o dibujados en relieve, les daba a conocer los signos de la escritura; ensayándolos en el deletreo. Como casi siempre los tenía a su lado, las ocasiones para ilustrarlos en los misterios del cosmos y en las artes industriales del hombre no escaseaban. Era una educación esencialmente práctica y libre de prejuicios, en la que, es natural, dada la índole del maestro, menudeaban las intervenciones de la fantasía.<sup>24</sup>

Quiroga remained in the jungle for a year after the death of Ana María. During the evening hours and the long rainy days, he spent time in the company of his children and one or two close friends. It seems that at this time he also continued the practice of telling the children stories primarily for their amusement. Two of these stories which have been dated as early as 1915 ("La tortuga gigante" and "Las medias de los flamencos") were later to be included in the collection, Cuentos de la selva para niños, first published in Buenos Aires in 1918. Two other stories published in the periodical, Fray Mocho, during May and June of 1916, also appeared in the Cuentos de la selva: "La guerra de los yacarés," which had appeared originally as "Los cocodrilos y la guerra," and "La gama ciega," which had appeared as "La jirafa ciega." Two other stories in this collection were also first published in periodicals in March and June of 1917: "El loro pelado," which appeared in Fray Mocho, and "El paso del Yabebirí," which appeared in El Hogar. There seems to be no prior publication date for the two remaining stories in the collection: "La abeja haragana" and "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre." Quiroga did not mention some stories in the personal chronology he had written, a fact which leads one to believe that they had not been published previous to their inclusion in a specific short story collection. Evidently, he continued the practice of telling the children stories populated with some of the animals among which they had lived and had even kept as pets in San Ignacio even after he had accepted a position in the Uruguayan Consulate in Argentina and had moved the family to Buenos Aires in February, 1917.

Perhaps these jungle stories were an unconscious effort on Quiroga's part to both educate his children and to provide them with an unforgettable link with the primitive habitat of San Ignacio within which they had first begun to experience the beauty, fragility and danger of life. There can be no doubt that he also fashioned these stories with the same love and care with which he had fashioned a jungle paradise for Ana María. And, since there was much of the child in Quiroga himself,<sup>25</sup> he no doubt enjoyed the mixture of reality and fantasy which these evoked in their conception, refinement and intention.

In a culture wherein children are considered God's greatest blessing on a marriage, it is unusual to find very few collections of stories written exclusively and expressly for children, yet this phenomenon exists in Hispanic American and Peninsular Spanish literature. Horacio Quiroga and Gabriela Mistral share the distinction of being the first internationally acclaimed artists from South America to value children so highly that they wrote short stories with their interests in mind. Of the two, Quiroga, with his publication of Cuentos de la selva, seems to be the very first Hispanic American writer to dedicate an entire collection of stories to children. And, it is obvious from his addition of the phrase, "para los niños," that Quiroga wanted his future critics as well as his future readers to make no mistake about his intentions in writing the stories. One cannot help noting that in Peninsular literature also, only two names seem to stand out when children's literature is discussed: Juan Ramón Jiménez and Ana María Matute. Why does this

phenomenon continue to exist even in the later part of the twentieth century? There is no easy answer to such a paradoxical situation. However, the Cuentos de la selva merit closer attention as children's literature because of their uniqueness, because they are the products of Quiroga's beautiful and sad experiences in Misiones and because they may reveal much about the unconscious lessons contained in these innocent "jungle tales" which nurtured the fantasy of his two ultimately tragic cachorros, as he was so fond of calling them.



## Chapter I: Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Peter T. White, "Nature's Dwindling Treasures: Rain Forests," National Geographic, 163 (1983), 19.
- <sup>2</sup> José M. Delgado and Alberto J. Brignole, Vida y obra de Horacio Quiroga (Montevideo: Claudio García, 1939), pp. 141-42.
- <sup>3</sup> Delgado and Brignole, pp. 153-54.
- <sup>4</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p. 154.
- <sup>5</sup> Delgado and Brignole, pp. 171-72.
- <sup>6</sup> Roberto Ibáñez, "Cartas a José María Fernández Saldaña," in Vol II of Cartas inéditas de Horacio Quiroga, Buenos Aires, December 24, 1906, Letter XXXVI (Montevideo: Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones y Archivos Literarios, 1959), p. 117.
- <sup>7</sup> Delgado and Brignole, pp. 171-73.
- <sup>8</sup> Pedro G. Orgambide, Horacio Quiroga: El hombre y su obra (Buenos Aires: Editorial Stílcograf, 1954), pp. 70-71.
- <sup>9</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p. 179.
- <sup>10</sup> Emir Rodríguez Monegal, Genio y figura de Horacio Quiroga, 2nd ed. (1967; rpt. Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria, 1969), p. 74.
- <sup>11</sup> Rodríguez Monegal, Genio y figura, p. 92.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibáñez, "Cartas a José María Fernández Saldaña," in Vol II of Cartas Inéditas de Horacio Quiroga, San Ignacio, March 16, 1911, Letter LXVI (Montevideo: INIAL, 1959), pp. 141-42.
- <sup>13</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p. 208. The text is quoted exactly as it appears.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibáñez, "Cartas a José María Fernández Saldaña," in Vol II of Cartas inéditas de Horacio Quiroga, San Ignacio, June 22, 1911, Letter LXVII (Montevideo: INIAL, 1959), p. 142.
- <sup>15</sup> Delgado and Brignole, pp. 208-9.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibáñez, "Cartas a José María Fernández Saldaña," in Vol II of Cartas inéditas de Horacio Quiroga, Buenos Aires, January 20, 1912, Letter LXX (Montevideo: INIAL, 1959), p. 144.
- <sup>17</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p. 209.

- <sup>18</sup> Dix Scott Coons, "Horacio Quiroga--The Master Storyteller: A Study of the Creative Processes," Diss. Univ. of Texas 1964, p. 37.
- <sup>19</sup> Delgado and Brignole, pp. 209-10.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibáñez, "Cartas a José María Fernández Saldaña," in Vol II of Cartas inéditas de Horacio Quiroga, San Ignacio, February 16, 1913, Letter LXXXVII (Montevideo: INIAL, 1959), p. 151. In this letter Quiroga retells an anecdote involving his daughter, Eglé:  
 "El otro día estaba sentado rascandome el brazo distraido, y mi chica que comienza a hablar, me miraba atentamente, a mi lado.  
 --¡Ti pica!--me dijo con grave convencimiento de experiencia propia."
- <sup>21</sup> Rodríguez Monegal, Genio y figura, pp. 98-99.
- <sup>22</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p. 212.
- <sup>23</sup> Emma Susana Speratti Piñero, "Hacia una cronología de Horacio Quiroga," Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica, IX (1955), 367-382. All subsequent references to the chronology of Quiroga's works are based upon this study unless otherwise indicated.
- <sup>24</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p. 216.
- <sup>25</sup> Gordon B. Ray, "Infancia, niñez y adolescencia, en la obra de Horacio Quiroga," Revista Iberoamericana, 19 (1954), 307.

## Chapter II

### Quiroga's Cuentos de la selva

#### Acquire a Place in Children's Literature

When Horacio Quiroga began to tell stories to Eglé and Darío, he was probably unaware of the unique contribution he was making to Hispanic-American literature specifically, and to children's literature in general. His primary purpose in telling the stories, he no doubt would have avowed, was to entertain his children by creating stories whose main characters were many of the creatures they were accustomed to seeing daily in their jungle habitat of San Ignacio. Since Quiroga tended to be rather prosaic, he might have added that the eventual publication of the tales as a collection of children's stories was a way to acquire much needed income. However, there is evidence that the publication of the stories became a project very dear to Quiroga's heart as can be seen in a letter to José María Delgado wherein he refers to a proposal by Dr. Rodolfo Mezzera, then Minister of Public Education in Uruguay, that he publish a book of children's stories to be used in the Uruguayan primary schools. Regarding this matter, Quiroga wrote: "Me interesa mucho también que el otro Mezzera guste del libro. Tengo bajo sus auspicios un negocio de libro de lectura --los cuentos para chicos, de que creo te he hablado-- que no desearía dejar enfriar para nada."<sup>1</sup>

It was during the compilation of the Cuentos de la selva that Quiroga unknowingly became a member of a relatively new international movement in children's literature--a phenomenon about which James Steel Smith has observed that, ". . . literature specifically for children is a fairly recent development; it is a product of the past three hundred years, and it is only during the past century that children's books have become an important element in the publishing trade."<sup>2</sup> Before this development, the history of the children's story may be briefly told. From the time when humans first started banding together, the tribal storyteller has been the historian, poet and actor of the culture. Children, no doubt, were entertained and instructed in tribal history and customs as they participated in an oral tradition which took no notice of their special sentiments or needs. Even in Classic times, there really did not exist any literature specifically designed for children, although the Greek and Roman classics and myths were easily adapted for children. Until the Renaissance, riddles, precepts, fables, legends, myths, folk poems and folk tales were created primarily for the entertainment and education of adults. Indeed, with the exception of Aesop's fables, it may be said that until the Renaissance, and for many years thereafter, the main sources for children's literature in the Western World were the Bible and the Greek and Roman classics. This literature tended to be highly didactic in nature, a trend which was to continue well into the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> A milestone in the development of children's literature was the publication of Charles Perrault's compilation of eight folk tales entitled Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des

moralités, or "Contes de ma Mère l'Oye" (the original Mother Goose tales).<sup>4</sup>

When Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, two philologists, began to collect sagas, ballads and popular tales, their only interest was to trace the roots and development of the German language. The compilation of a body of tales which would be of possible interest to children was of secondary importance. And yet, when the first and second volumes of Kinder--und Hausmärchen appeared in 1812, the tales were very enthusiastically received by children. Many reprints and translations of Grimm's Fairy Tales have followed.<sup>5</sup>

From the folk and fairy tale, there arose another genre of children's literature, the beast fable or animal tale, which was later to develop into the modern or contemporary children's story according to Roger Sale who observed that:

. . . "animals," is a crude label to signify the strongest link between fairy tales and modern written children's literature. The animals in question are creatures who talk or in other ways act like human beings. They are present in most children's literature, ancient and modern, and they are a major source of the best children's literature, a source that other kinds of literature had abandoned and forgotten well before the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that during the nineteenth century there was a virtual flowering of literature written for children. During the years between 1822 and 1900, there appeared children's stories and poems that are still read and appreciated in this century. Among these are as follows: Clement C. Moore's A Visit from St. Nicholas (1822); Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol (1843); Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865); Mark Twain's The Adventures of Tom

Sawyer (1876); Joel Chandler Harris' Nights with Uncle Remus (1883); Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio (1891); and Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Books (1894). Many of these stories contain fantastic or semirealistic portrayals of animals, and their primary purpose is to entertain. In his analysis of this new trend in the history of children's literature, James Steel Smith observed that:

Always the pleasure part of the instruction-through-pleasure idea of literature had been considered instrumental, a means, quite secondary and not to be worried over too much. But now, with more concern for the happiness of the child, the pleasure aspect came out of its secondary position and became of equal importance and in some types of reading all but supplanted the former. The aesthetic pleasure was no longer just a sugarcoating to the pill. It was the pill. The child reader became a selective reader to be entertained; through the reading he might be made a better-informed better-behaved child, but this latter good was no longer the primary purpose of his reading. In short, the instructional motive became less prominent than it had long been in children's literature, and the literature was now free to develop into a tremendous fair of kinds of juvenile entertainment.  
 . . .<sup>7</sup>

Between the middle of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, a tremendous variety of children's stories were produced. These may be listed under the general categories of fantasies (including fairy tales), adaptations of folk tales and myths, adaptations from famous adult literature, historical fiction, adventure stories, and stories about other children, nonsense tales and verses, realistic stories of domestic life, animal stories and poetry.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, the popularity of the animal story seemed to increase. In 1901, Beatrix Potter published the Tale of Peter Rabbit. In Spain, in 1917, Juan Ramón Jiménez published a tender and poetic story, Platero y yo, about the

life and death of a donkey.<sup>9</sup> And, a year later, Quiroga published the Cuentos de la selva, not in Uruguay as he had originally intended, but in Argentina. With the publication of Platero y yo and the Cuentos de la selva, Spanish literature joined the international mainstream of the development of children's literature.

## Chapter II: Notes

<sup>1</sup> Roberto Ibáñez, "Cartas a José María Delgado(I a XXXVII)," in Vol II of Cartas inéditas de Horacio Quiroga, Buenos Aires, June 8, 1917, Letter XI (Montevideo: INIAL, 1959), pp. 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> James Steel Smith, A Critical Approach to Children's Literature (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> For a more in-depth history of children's literature please consult Mary Hill Arbuthnot and Zena Sutherland, Children and Books, 4th ed. (Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1972), pp. 82-106.

<sup>4</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, Children and Books, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, pp. 162-63.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Sale, Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E. B. White (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1978), p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, p. 50, gives an extensive documentation of these categories.

<sup>9</sup> Maxim Newmark, Dictionary of Spanish Literature (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, 1956), p. 176.



### Chapter III

#### Children and Children's Stories

Enduring children's stories contain some of the same characteristics and are the continuation of an oral tradition which began in pre-recorded times. They ellicit the same wonder and successfully survive the same repetition as myths, folk tales and fairy tales. Perhaps one reason for their success is that they consciously fulfill the same needs that the earlier myths, folk tales and fairy tales fulfilled unconsciously. Obviously, the twentieth century child is much more sophisticated than the child who listened in awe while the storyteller told his tales around a pre-historic campfire. Perhaps modern technology has made it increasingly more difficult to instruct and entertain a child; nevertheless, as Arbuthnot and Sutherland have ascertained from their studies:

Despite social change, certain basic needs seem to be common to most peoples and most times. A child's needs at first are intensely and narrowly personal, but, as he matures, they should broaden and become more widely socialized. The direction they will take depends a great deal on the experiences the child encounters in his crucial early years before school.<sup>1</sup>

The needs to which Arbuthnot and Sutherland are referring are those of physical security, love, a sense of belonging, a need for competence, a need for play which is directly related to a desire for constructive

change, a need for knowledge, and, finally a need for beauty and order in life.<sup>2</sup>

It seems that children between the ages of two and seven are more interested in stories which describe and incorporate the daily routine occurrences of life than the fantastic events of fairyland.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Arbuthnot and Sutherland have observed that: "The interests of primary children are easily identifiable. They are interested chiefly in themselves, their families and their pets."<sup>4</sup> Obviously, Quiroga, as a teacher and a parent, understood these interests at least on a subconscious level when he began to create stories for his own children. Since their world--the only world they had known since birth--was that of Misiones, the animals and adventures of the Cuentos de la selva were, in many cases, a loving reproduction of the possible reality of their daily experiences with the many pets which surrounded their jungle home. Also, the stories were to serve another purpose of which Quiroga was probably unaware. In this regard, Arbuthnot and Sutherland have noted that, "Fine animal stories of all kinds will undoubtedly contribute to breaking down the young child's unwitting cruelties toward animals and to building up his sensitivity to their needs."<sup>5</sup> And, indeed, a lesson in tolerance and love would have been of importance to Quiroga since he himself had slowly replaced his love for the hunt with a love for the care and raising of all kinds of animals, many of which appear in the Cuentos de la selva.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Arbuthnot and Sutherland have concluded in their analysis of the value of animal stories:

. . . children read animal stories avidly even though they are often filled with sadness or downright tragedy. Such stories call

forth the young reader's desire to nurture and protect, and this is one of the values of the well-written animal tale for children.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to meeting the immediate needs of children for entertainment, children's stories fulfill various purposes which are important to the psychological and social development and growth of the child. These stories make it possible for the child to encounter characters with whom and situations with which he is acquainted, or at least partially acquainted, thus fulfilling the child's need for familiarity and security. Children's stories also enable the child to learn more about the physical environment within which he exists, while at the same time, they allow him paradoxically to escape temporarily from everyday reality. Stories give the child a chance to encounter strange, frightening and threatening situations which offer him a vicarious enjoyment of danger and excitement. In addition, children's stories provide the child with role models--characters with values and personal characteristics he can admire or dislike. Also, children's literature in general introduces the child to the beauty of the language.<sup>8</sup> Finally, it has been observed that children can make the same discoveries about what motivates human behavior, what the nature of society is, what its motivations are, and what the impact of nature upon human behavior may be by reading children's literature, that adults make from a study of psychology, sociology and anthropology.<sup>9</sup>

Through his experiences as an educator and therapist of severely disturbed children, Bruno Bettelheim realized that his main task was to restore meaning to the lives of his young patients.<sup>10</sup> The

acquisition of a secure understanding of what the meaning of one's life may or ought to be is a gradual process which is different for every individual. For some, it is a fast and relatively painless process, while for others it may become a life-long quest. Nevertheless, only when this understanding is attained may one claim to be psychologically mature. Bruno Bettelheim's observations enabled him to reach the conclusion that:

Today, as in times past, the most important and also the most difficult task in raising a child is helping him to find meaning in life. The child, as he develops, must learn step by step to understand himself better; with this he becomes more able to understand others, and eventually can relate to them in ways which are mutually satisfying and meaningful.<sup>11</sup>

Bettelheim became very dissatisfied with much of the literature written for children which intended to develop the child's mind and personality because it failed to meet the child's needs for meaningful constructs with which to deal with his inner conflicts.<sup>12</sup> He believed that the folk fairy tale was best able to meet a child's needs at the various stages of his development, and he maintained that by:

Applying the psychological model of the human personality, fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time. By dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child's mind, these stories speak to his budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures. As the stories unfold, they give conscious credence and body to id pressures and show ways to satisfy these that are in line with ego and superego requirements.<sup>13</sup>

It is Bettelheim's belief that fairy tales state an existential dilemma briefly and pointedly.<sup>14</sup> Here is where Bettelheim's theory

may begin to illuminate Quiroga's Cuentos de la selva. Just as it is stated in the folk fairy tale, Quiroga states the essence of a problem in its most essential form: survival in a hostile environment, survival in the face of human intrusion, survival within the community, love and the varied ways it is expressed. The plots of the Cuentos de la selva are rather simple, the figures are clearly drawn, and only the most important details are included in the stories. In addition, good and evil are as omnipresent in the Cuentos as they are in life--an attribute which Bettelheim considers important to the psychological development of the child because this duality in man's nature poses a moral problem which requires a solution if the child is to mature psychologically. Following in the tradition of many European folk tales, Quiroga's jungle symbolizes the nearly impenetrable world of the unconscious. As will be seen by a closer examination of the individual stories in the Cuentos de la selva, the way out of the jungle paradoxically demands a growth in personality as well as in humanity which is exemplified by the actions of the animal heroes. Finally, the Cuentos speak to the child's subconscious by placing animals in many of the same moral dilemmas that the child himself faces on a subconscious level. Jean Piaget has shown by his investigations that a child's thinking remains animistic until the age of puberty, that is, the child believes that animals feel and think as humans.<sup>15</sup> Hence, there can be little wonder at the personal identification which most pre-adolescent children feel with the animal hero. Here it is important to note that when children search for answers to questions such as "Who am I?" "How ought I to deal with

life's problems?" and "What must I become?" they tend to do so on the basis of their animistic thinking.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the value of the well-written animal tale in general and of the Cuentos in particular is evident.

In conclusion, if the ultimate purpose of the well-written story for children is to enable the child to acquire an understanding of the meaning of his life, or what the learning of his life ought to be, congruent with his age and circumstances, it would seem that the Cuentos do, indeed, qualify as legitimate children's literature.

## Chapter III Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, pp. 6-15.
- <sup>3</sup> Smith, p. 127.
- <sup>4</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, p. 648.
- <sup>5</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, p. 9.
- <sup>6</sup> Coons, p. 210.
- <sup>7</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, p. 36.
- <sup>8</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the reason why children read, please consult James Steel Smith, pp. 73-75.
- <sup>9</sup> Rebecca J. Lukens, A Critical Approach to Children's Literature, 2nd ed. (Dallas: Scott, Foresman, 1982), p. 8.
- <sup>10</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1976), p. 4.
- <sup>11</sup> Bettelheim, p.3.
- <sup>12</sup> Bettelheim, p.4.
- <sup>13</sup> Bettelheim, p.6.
- <sup>14</sup> Bettelheim, p.8.
- <sup>15</sup> Jean Piaget, The Child's Concept of the World (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), as cited by Bruno Bettelheim, p. 314, n. 15.
- <sup>16</sup> Bettelheim, p.47.

## Chapter IV

### "La tortuga gigante" and "Las medias de los flamencos"

One of the more moving and rewarding experiences in life is to watch a child's expression once his attention has been captured by a story one is telling him. For a time, during the narration, he participates in the action so completely that he suspends all disbelief and eagerly waits to hear what will happen next and how the story will end. As James Higgins has noted, "there is a great deal of magic that accompanies a story well told, or read aloud, that a silent reading fails to capture."<sup>1</sup> Hence, in the twentieth century, the oral tradition is still an indispensable vehicle in stories written for and told to children.

There is little doubt that Quiroga was conscious of and sensitive to the effects his narratives had on his children as he prepared the plots in his mind and then later re-told them many times, perhaps changing a few words here and there. By the time the stories included in the Cuentos de la selva were published, many of them had already withstood the test of countless re-tellings to Eglé and Darío, who may have unknowingly served as both audience and critics for the nascent stories. A process similar to that which Quiroga followed in creating the Cuentos was later described by C.S. Lewis in an essay in which he observed that, "The printed story grows out of a story told to a



particular child with the living voice and perhaps ex tempore."² In addition, Quiroga, like most truly great authors of children's literature, had a child-like quality that allowed him to ". . . enter the stream of childhood, not through the door of memory, but by immersing . . . [himself] presently in the current of child experience."³ As a result, he was able to produce an ultimate gift of love in the Cuentos de la selva which was to survive the years in Misiones, his tragic cachorros, and ultimately become an important contribution to Hispanic-American children's literature--a gift which school children enjoy today in many Spanish-speaking countries including Quiroga's native land, Uruguay. His biographers, Delgado and Brignole, predicted very accurately when they wrote:

Sin embargo, hoy sus fábulas y cuentos son lectura obligada en los liceos de la República, y dentro de cien años, cuando la mayor parte de nuestros ases literarios contemporáneos, se desprecien por anodinos o anacrónicos, sus relatos seguirán teniendo el interés eterno y la frescura de lo que recién acaba de nacer, y no sólo serán deleite de nuestros escolares, sino de todos los niños del mundo.⁴

There are eight stories in the Cuentos de la selva: "La tortuga gigante," "Las medias de los flamencos," "El loro pelado," "La guerra de los yacarés," "La gama ciega," "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre," "El paso del Yabebirí," and "La abeja haragana."⁵ This is not the chronological order in which these stories were written, but it is the order in which Quiroga arranged them for publication. In deference to his arrangement, the stories will be discussed in this order.

Although there seems to be little agreement regarding the existence or lack of existence of didactic or moral purpose in the Cuentos de la selva, Quiroga's stories do, indeed, contain many valuable lessons which may help a child to gain social and moral insights indispensable to his attainment of psychological maturity. These lessons are not always stated explicitly; however, their spirit permeates the narratives on a subconscious level. Perhaps Quiroga, as a father and teacher, instinctively understood that showing a child what one wants him to learn often produces happier results than simply telling him.

### "La tortuga gigante"

#### I: Content

Quiroga establishes the narrative tone of the Cuentos de la selva from the very beginning in "La tortuga gigante," a story which demonstrates the necessity of the many nuances of friendship, compassion and love for survival and ultimate happiness. In fact, in the opening sentence of this story, Quiroga's didacticism is perhaps more evident than in some of the other stories as he equates happiness with health and hard work: "HABIA una vez un hombre que vivía en Buenos Aires, y estaba muy contento porque era un hombre sano y trabajador" (p. 9). This type of introduction immediately captures the child's attention because it follows the traditional fairy-tale formula of "Once upon a time," thus satisfying the child's need for familiarity. However, it also prepares the child for a complication or change in the anonymous man's condition in "La tortuga gigante,"

since human life does not remain static. The complication appears in the form of an illness which may only be cured by the man's spending some time alone in the wilderness. Quiroga implies the importance of a sense of duty to family when he says, "El no quería ir, porque tenía hermanos chicos a quienes daba de comer . . ." (p. 9). And, he shows the quality of friendship in action when the zoo director facilitates the man's move to the jungle:

--Usted es amigo mío, y es un hombre bueno y trabajador. Por eso quiero que se vaya a vivir al monte, a hacer mucho ejercicio al aire libre para curarse. Y como usted tiene mucha puntería con la escopeta, cace bichos del monte para traerme los cueros, y yo le daré plata adelantada para que sus hermanitos puedan comer bien (p. 9).

Later in the story, when the man is in the jungle and seems to be cured of his illness, he himself has the opportunity to show kindness and compassion. Although he is very hungry and could easily savor the flesh of a wounded turtle, he not only saves her life, but also cares for her until she is completely cured. He is a model of charity as he binds the turtle's wounds with strips of cloth torn from his only shirt, cares for her daily, and gives the wounded animal that which is indispensable for life--love: "El hombre le curaba todos los días, y después le daba golpecitos con la mano sobre el lomo" (p. 11). Quiroga continues the story by showing how, in exchange, the turtle responds to the man's desperate need. The man gradually becomes ill again and is soon totally incapacitated. In his delirium, he states his predicament: "--Voy a morir. . . . Estoy solo, ya no puedo levantarme más, y no tengo quién me dé agua, siquiera. Voy a morir aquí de hambre y de sed" (pp. 11-12). Hearing this and understanding

the situation, the turtle resolves that she must help the man. To show her gratitude, she reasons that: "El hombre no me comió la otra vez, aunque tenía mucha hambre, y me curó. Yo lo voy a curar a él ahora" (p. 12). Quiroga shows how the turtle willingly assumes the responsibility of caring for the man by bringing him water to drink and roots and weeds to eat. The man's condition does not improve, but while he is in a brief state of consciousness, he again talks about his desperate condition: "--Estoy sólo en el bosque, la fiebre va a volver de nuevo, y voy a morir aquí porque solamente en Buenos Aires hay remedios para curarme. Pero nunca podré ir, y voy a morir aquí" (p. 13). The turtle's response is an instant resolve to carry the man to Buenos Aires even though she has no idea where the place might be: "--Si queda aquí en el monte se va a morir, porque no hay remedios, y tengo que llevarlo a Buenos Aires" (p. 13). The turtle travels for weeks and weeks with the man tied to her back, spurred on by the man's half-conscious complaints: "Voy a morir, estoy cada vez más enfermo, y sólo en Buenos Aires me podría curar. Pero voy a morir aquí, solo en el monte" (p. 14). Finally, even though she sees lights upon the horizon, the turtle collapses from complete exhaustion thinking she has failed in her mission of mercy: "Se sentía cada vez más débil, y cerró entonces los ojos para morir junto con el cazador, pensando con tristeza que no había podido salvar al hombre que había sido bueno con ella" (p. 15). At this point, another animal character has a chance to be helpful to both the man and the turtle. The little city mouse whose name may be Pérez, informs the sad, weak turtle that she has already arrived in Buenos Aires. This news gives the turtle renewed

strength to finish her journey and save the man: ". . . se sintió con una fuerza inmensa porque aún tenía tiempo de salvar al cazador, y emprendió la marcha" (p. 16). Hence, the turtle is able to complete a journey of 300 leagues, and, in exchange for her compassion and bravery, she receives the love and gratitude of the man and a secure home at the zoo, where she is free to roam at will. At the end of the story, one may see a mutual exchange of friendship and love as the man visits the turtle every afternoon and never leaves before patting her on the back--as they all live happily ever after. Although Quiroga is not openly didactic in this story, he shows, through the charitable actions of his human and animal characters, the importance of the attributes of love, compassion, friendship, perseverance and hard work for a happy life.

## II: Characters

In "La tortuga gigante," the characters are anonymous, for the most part. Quiroga never gives a name to the main characters, the giant turtle and the man. He refers to the man's friend by his official title, el director del Jardín Zoológico, and even when he talks about the mouse, Quiroga leaves its identity a conjecture by adding that it was, ". . . posiblemente el ratoncito Pérez . . ." (p. 15). The jaguar that has wounded the giant turtle and that the man shoots is also anonymous.

Quiroga uses very few descriptive details to paint his characters. He never provides any physical details about the man, so he remains an "Everyman" figure. One knows more about the ethical

character of the man than anything else, and, surprisingly, it is enough to make him come alive. The only other details Quiroga includes are that he provides a living for his little brothers, or possibly brothers and sisters, that he is a sharpshooter, and that he lives in a very small house. Regarding the man's friend, again Quiroga relies on the essence of the character to bring him alive. He is known by his title "director del Zoológico." One recognizes him as a character, not by any physical detail, but by his qualities of friendship toward the man and his ultimate loving treatment of the turtle who has saved his friend: ". . . el director del Zoológico se comprometió a tenerla en el Jardín, y a cuidarla como si fuera su propia hija" (p. 16).

In contrast to the human characters, Quiroga does provide a few physical details to describe the animals in the story. The turtle is the best described of all the animals both physically and ethically. The first direct physical description of the turtle shows a severely wounded animal that is close to death: ". . . estaba ya herida, y tenía la cabeza casi separada del cuello, y la cabeza colgaba casi de dos o tres hilos de carne" (p. 11). Then, one learns that the turtle, ". . . era inmensa, tan alta como una silla, y pesaba como un hombre" (p. 16). In addition, Quiroga shows the children hearing or reading this story some very important social attributes of the turtle. She feels compassion and gratitude toward the man; she is clean, as one may see from her careful cleaning of the small turtle shell with sand and ash before she gives the man water to drink from it. Her intelligence and thoughtfulness are evident in the way she prepares

for the journey to Buenos Aires:

. . . cortó enredaderas finas y fuertes, que son como piolas, acostó con mucho cuidado al hombre encima del lomo, y lo sujetó bien con enredaderas para que no se cayese. Hizo muchas pruebas para acomodar bien la escopeta, los cueros y el mate con víboras, y al fin consiguió lo que quería, sin molestar al cazador, y emprendió entonces el viaje (p. 13).

In addition, the turtle has the attribute of perseverance as she bravely crosses mountains and fields, swims across rivers, and wades through swamps to save the man's life. Although the child may later doubt the physical possibility of the turtle's actions, it is not at all difficult to suspend his disbelief during the reading or listening. Perhaps this is because Quiroga shows a basic humanity in this character's actions, even though she is an animal. The jaguar in the story also receives more physical description than the human characters even though he remains merely a symbol of the constant danger existing in the jungle. He is "un tigre enorme;" he has "un rugido espantoso," and his hide, after the man kills him, is ". . . tan grande que él solo podría servir de alfombra para un cuarto" (p. 10). Finally, a few details are included about the mouse. He is a small city mouse living on the outskirts of Buenos Aires that is curioso, and he is the only character that is given a name.

### III: Setting

In "La tortuga gigante," the setting is two very distinct places: la ciudad and el campo. The city is Buenos Aires, a place which would have been foreign and exotic to Quiroga's children. In this city, one

finds the Jardín Zoológico which becomes an earthly paradise for the turtle at the end of the story. The rain forest or jungle presented, like the city, acts as a mere backdrop for the action. Perhaps his children had no immediate need for a concrete description of rivers, swamps animals and the struggle for survival in the wilderness which was, to some degree, a part of their daily life in Misiones. In fact, the setting of the main part of the story remains a remote, unknown region: ". . . más lejos que Misiones todavía" (p. 9), where storms strike suddenly and savagely as observed in the following description of the man's solitary life in the jungle:

Dormía bajo los árboles, y cuando hacía mal tiempo construía en cinco minutos una ramada con hojas de palmera, y allí pasaba sentado y fumando, muy contento en medio del bosque que bramaba con el viento y la lluvia (p. 10).

This passage is highly reminiscent of Quiroga's initial trip into the territory of Misiones and its therapeutic effects. The savagery of the jungle may be contrasted later in the narrative with the peace and safe haven of Buenos Aires represented by the shining lights which the turtle does not recognize at the end of her arduous journey: ". . . vio una luz lejana en el horizonte, un resplandor que iluminaba el cielo, y no supo que era" (p. 15).

Finally, although Quiroga uses minimal description when he presents the setting in the story, the effect the narration produces is that it gives one the feeling of being an unseen character within the setting. It is an effect that is highly compatible with the child's willingness to empathize with the characters and their predicament. Quiroga intensifies this effect by speaking directly to



the child hearing or reading the story and by suggesting an intimate climate of familiarity when he speaks of the turtle toward the end and says that she is: ". . . la misma gran tortuga que vemos todos los días comiendo el pastito alrededor de las jaulas de los monos" (pp. 16-17).

#### IV: Style

Quiroga's narrative style in "La tortuga gigante" is very direct, clear and conversational. He remains the third person, anonymous, limited narrator as he tells the tale of how the giant turtle first arrived at the zoo. In order to hold the child's attention, he varies the length of his sentences. This variation promotes the narrative effect of a storyteller narrating his tale for actually present children who are eagerly listening for his next words. Quiroga's sentence length in this story varies from two words to fifty words, the most frequent sentence length being fifteen words. The action is linear, and follows normal chronological time from the past to the present.

Perhaps the most noticeable stylistic device which Quiroga uses in this tale, which seems to be one of his favorites,<sup>6</sup> is the device of repetition of certain words--usually action words, nouns and adjectives:

El cazador comió así días y días sin saber quien le daba la comida, y un día recobró el conocimiento (p. 12).

La tortuga cargada así, caminó, caminó y cominó de día y de noche (p. 13).

Así anduvo días y días, semana tras semana (p. 14).

--¡Ah, zonza, zonza! --dijo riendo el ratoncito--. ¡Nunca vi una tortuga más zonza! (p. 16).

In the man's speeches, while he is delirious and during his one brief period of lucidity, there is much repetition of ideas; for example:

--Voy a morir --dijo el hombre--. Estoy solo, ya no puedo levantarme más, y no tengo quien me dé agua siquiera. Voy a morir aquí de hambre y de sed (pp. 11-12).

--Estoy sólo en el bosque, la fiebre va a volver de nuevo, y voy a morir aquí, porque solamente en Buenos Aires hay remedios para curarme. Pero nunca podré ir y voy a morir aquí (p. 13).

--Voy a morir, estoy cada vez más enfermo, y sólo en Buenos Aires me podría curar. Pero voy a morir aquí, solo en el monte (p. 14).

Quiroga's use of repetition in all its forms appeals to the child's need for familiarity.

Another device which Quiroga uses to advantage in this story is parallelism which results from connecting two adjectives with the conjunction "y." This technique has the effect of intensifying the descriptive power of the adjectives used, and because it appears at the beginning and then reappears at the end of the story, it tends to prepare the child, perhaps subconsciously, for the happy ending. At the beginning of "La tortuga gigante," one learns that the man is "sano y trabajador" and "bueno y trabajador" (p. 9). By the end of the story, the emphasis shifts from the man to the turtle that is also a good, hard-working creature; hence, like the man, she merits the happiness she attains. She is shown "embarrada y sumamente flaca,"

and, finally, as "feliz y contenta" (p. 16). Thus the turtle becomes the counterpart of the man since both suffer illness, but because of perseverance and hard work, tempered with compassion and love, they not only become healthy, but also find peace and happiness in a secondary world where good is rewarded in the end.

#### V: The Theme of Death

Some of the themes found in "La tortuga gigante" are concerned with friendship, love, courage, compassion, perseverance and the struggle for survival. Another theme which permeates is that of death, either threatened or actual. This is a theme that the reader encounters repeatedly in Quiroga's works, so it is not too unusual that it appears in his stories for children. While some adults might object that there is too much violence, bloodshed and death in many of the Cuentos de la selva, the existence of these thematic complications serves a very valuable purpose toward the child's psychological maturation in a world where the reality of physical death must be acknowledged. A child's concept of death develops and changes as he matures; hence, the understanding he will have at age three will be very different from the understanding he will have at age ten. In a study of 378 children between the ages of three and ten concerning their feelings about death, Maria Nagy found that the child's conceptual understanding of death varies according to three major developmental stages which vary with each individual.<sup>7</sup> Nagy included children between the ages of three and five in the first stage. During this period, the child tends to deny death as a final process;

and, indeed, he cannot recognize its irreversibility. Nagy found that at this stage, the child believes that death, ". . . is like sleep; one dies for a while and then wakes up again."<sup>8</sup> Between the ages of five and nine, the child appears to realize the permanence of death. However, he does not accept its universality, particularly as it applies to himself.<sup>9</sup> At this stage, the child tends to personify death, perhaps in an attempt to de-mythify it. Between the ages of nine and ten, the child begins to recognize the universality and inevitability of death.<sup>10</sup> In the light of these facts, the predominance of death in Quiroga's stories offers the child a chance to mature in his understanding of death as he reads and re-reads the stories or has an adult tell and re-tell them during the various developmental stages of his life.

In "La tortuga gigante," death is a constant threat to the man in his unsuccessful flight from the city to the remote jungle in search of a cure for his failing health. Death is an immediate danger to the turtle being stalked by the jaguar, and the physical hardships posed by the hostile terrain are a continuous threat to both their lives as the turtle journeys toward Buenos Aires. In contrast, the death of the jaguar paradoxically serves to reassure the child that evil cannot exist without final retribution. The child, instead of being shocked by the description of the jaguar's death, feels that justice is being meted out when Quiroga says that the man ". . . le apuntó entre los ojos, y le rompió la cabeza" (p. 10). This reaction is in accord with Bruno Bettelheim's observations about violence in the traditional fairy tale:

Adults often think that the cruel punishment of an evil person in fairy tales upsets and scares children unnecessarily. Quite the opposite is true; such retribution reassures the child that the punishment fits the crime.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the violence and death in "La tortuga gigante" and in Quiroga's other stories for children paradoxically provide the child with the security that evil, regardless of the form it takes, will not go unpunished.

### "Las medias de los flamencos"

#### I: Content

In "Las medias de los flamencos," Quiroga offers a whimsical, yet believable explanation of how the flamingoes acquired their distinctive red legs, of why they prefer to stand in water most of the time, and of why they sometimes stand on one leg while the other remains tucked under them. This story is reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories, written in 1902, which are a collection of tales influenced by the Indian Jatakas and which follow the pattern of the "why" story, or explanatory tale.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Rebecca J. Lukens' comments on one of Kipling's tales in the Just So Stories may also be applied to Quiroga's "Las medias de los flamencos":

. . . we play along with Kipling's "facts" about how the elephant got his trunk. The tone here is the feeling resulting from elements working together--the mock-serious situation Kipling is reporting, the tongue-in-cheek characterization, the playful language, the deliberately overplayed, pretentious style. The humorous tone is the result of all of these.<sup>13</sup>

"Las medias de los flamencos" opens with a gala ball hosted by the vipers. The guests include the frogs, the toads, the flamingoes, the caymans, and the fish. Each species adorns itself as imaginatively as possible except for the flamingoes who, being rather dim-witted, have not known how to adorn themselves for the occasion:

Los yacarés, para adornarse bien, se habían puesto en el pescuezo un collar de bananas, y fumaban cigarros paraguayos. Los sapos se habían pegado escamas de pescado en todo el cuerpo, y caminaban meneándose, como si nadaran. . . .

Las ranas se habían perfumado el cuerpo, y caminaban en dos pies. Además, cada una llevaba colgada como un farolito, una luciérnaga que se balanceaba.

Pero las que estaban hermosísimas eran las víboras. Todas, sin excepción, estaban vestidas con traje de bailarina, del mismo color de cada víbora. . . .

Y las más espléndidas de todas eran las víbras de coral, que estaban vestidas con larguísimas gasas rosas, blancas y negras y bailaban como serpentinatas. . . .

Sólo los flamencos, que entonces tenían las patas blancas, y tienen ahora como antes la nariz muy gruesa y trocida, sólo los flamencos estaban tristes, porque como tienen muy poca inteligencia, no habían sabido como adornarse (pp. 21-22).

In this description of the festive apparel of the animal guests, Quiroga satisfies the child's inquisitiveness and, at the same time, presents a very imaginative scenario of various animals co-existing in peace and harmony at the beginning of the story as they assemble for a gala ball. The scene is reminiscent of the terrestrial paradise before the appearance of the fatal sin of envy. In fact, the downfall of the flamingoes is precipitated by this very human failing: "Envidiaban el traje de todos, y sobre todo el de las víboras de coral" (p. 22). This intense envy causes them to decide they must imitate the elegance of the coral snakes by wearing stockings that match their opulent colors so that the snakes will fall in love with

them. In their search for the very special stockings, they visit many village shops where they are treated with scorn and where they fail to find the special red, white and black stockings. Finally, at the advice of an armadillo, who in reality wishes to make fun of them, the flamingoes visit an owl who assures them she can easily obtain the desired stockings. Indeed, she does provide them with stockings which are in reality skins taken from coral snakes she has recently hunted. At this point, the owl gives the silly flamingoes a warning very reminiscent of the warnings given in fairy tales:

No se preocupen de nada, sino de una sola cosa: bailen toda la noche, bailen sin parar un momento, bailen de costado, de pico, de cabeza, como ustedes quieran; pero no paren un momento, porque en vez de bailar van entonces a llorar (p. 25).

As might be expected, the flamingoes are so happy with their beautiful, striped stockings that they do not pause to reflect upon the possible consequences that might follow if one of them should stop dancing and if the true nature of their adornment should be discovered.

The flamingoes return to the ball where they immediately attract the attention and envy of all the other guests, including that of the vipers, and especially that of the coral snakes. In fact, the coral snakes feel very anxious about the flamingoes' stockings. When the flamingoes start becoming very tired from their continuous dancing and begin to slow, the coral snakes borrow the frogs' fire-fly lanterns so they can see them better. Soon, a flamingo trips over a cayman's cigar, and the coral snakes immediately run to him with their lanterns for a closer look at the finery he is wearing. They immediately

realize that what the flamingoes are wearing are not stockings, but, instead the skins of their own sisters. The coral snakes hastily conclude that the flamingoes have killed their sister snakes in order to adorn themselves; and, the flamingoes can neither defend themselves against the charges, since they are wearing the evidence, nor can they fly away and save themselves because they have danced all night and are too exhausted. Hence, the coral snakes are able to avenge the death of their sisters: "Entonces las víboras de coral se lanzaron sobre ellos, y enroscándose en sus patas les deshicieron a mordiscones las medias. Les arrancaron las medias a pedazos, enfurecidas, y les mordían también las patas, para que murieran" (p. 27). Even though the intention of the coral snakes is to kill the flamingoes, their poison is not fatal to them. However, the flamingoes do suffer an unbearable burning in their legs and feet which immediately turn red from the poison of the coral snakes. In an attempt to obtain some relief, the flamingoes run to stand in the cool waters of the river. To this day, their legs, colored by the venom injected by the coral snakes, hurt so much that they can usually be seen standing in the water, and sometimes the burning sensation is so acute that they must tuck one leg under them and are unable to stretch it. The only revenge they can exercise on the little fish who mock them is to eat the ones who come too near while they vainly try to assuage their pain. In this story, Quiroga is clearly showing the consequences of envy and how thoughtless action, spurred on by envy, may conclude in very painful results. While the story is not openly didactic in nature, the underlying lesson cannot be missed--especially for the



child who enters the secondary world of the story with an eagerness to know just why the flamingo, even today, acts and looks as he does.

## II: Characters

The flamingoes are, of course, the protagonists of "Las Medias de los flamencos." There is no doubt that the story revolves around the animals found in a jungle habitat: flamingoes, frogs, toads, caymans, snakes of all kinds, fire-flies, an armadillo, and an owl. Humans play a very minor and brief role in this story; Quiroga mentions them only when the flamingoes go in search of the much desired and seemingly unavailable stockings. The humans are portrayed as unsympathetic shopkeepers who dismiss the flamingoes' inquiries with insults, or who conclude that they are either crazy or stupid because they ask for such a bizzare article of clothing. The author makes no attempt to describe the shopkeepers physically. On the other hand, the flamingoes are described as having "patas blancas," "la nariz muy gruesa y torcida," and "muy poca inteligencia" (p. 22) at the beginning of the story; and at the end of the story, they are described as they are today with "patas . . . coloradas por el veneno de las víboras" (p. 27).

The most carefully described animals in "Las medias de los flamencos" are the vipers, especially the coral snakes. These animals are dressed in ballerina costumes which match their predominant coloration:

Las víboras coloradas llevaban una pollerita de tul colorado; las verdes una de tul verde, las amarillas, otra de tul amarillo; y las yararás, una pollerita de tul gris pintada con rayas de polvo

de ladrillo y ceniza, porque así es el color de las yaras.

Y las más espléndidas de todas eran las víboras de coral, que estaban vestidas con larguísimas gasas rojas, blancas y negras, y bailaban como serpentinas (p. 22).

In addition to the flamingoes and the snakes, the other animal guests are described according to the festive attire they have chosen for the gala ball. The reader's immediate reaction to such descriptive details is the evocation of colorful, unusual, and amusing mental pictures mixing reality with fantasy. Quiroga's children were certainly very well acquainted with the actual physical appearance of the animal characters in the story. However, the mental image of a poisonous viper in a tulle or gauze skirt, of an aggressive and dangerous caymen wearing a banana necklace and smoking a Paraguayan cigar, of toads wearing fish scales, of frogs walking on their hind legs and smelling of perfume, and of the gawky flamingoes dancing in their red, white, and black stockings is evocative of some of the animal characters found in many contemporary children's television programs such as Sesame Street and in the Saturday morning cartoon shows. The situation created by envy and resulting in an unforeseen and irreversible change in the flamingoes is also reminiscent of the types of lessons contained in the contemporary Dr. Seuss series written by Theodore Seuss Geisel, even though the animal characters in this specific series are not physically modeled from real life like Quiroga's animals, but rather from the author's unique imagination. The animal characters predominate in this story and are an amusing and non-threatening blend of reality and fantasy which easily captures the

child's attention, while it suggests a possible answer to satisfy his inquisitiveness.

### III: Setting

As in "La tortuga gigante," the setting serves only as a backdrop for the action of the story. The gala ball takes place "a la orilla del río"--an unnamed river which may be the Paraná or any other river in the jungle. Even though the flamingoes go to the unnamed village in search of the much desired stockings, they are never too far from the river even when they meet the armadillo after their unsuccessful shopping trip: "Entonces un tatú, que había ido a tomar agua al río se quiso burlar de los flamencos y les dijo, haciéndoles un gran saludo: --¡Buenas noches, señores flamencos! Yo sé lo que ustedes buscan" (p. 24). As soon as they don the coral snake skin stockings, they immediately return to the ball by the side of the river where they, in turn, excite the envy of all the invited guests, especially since the flamingoes had previously been so negligent of their appearance: "Cuando vieron a los flamencos con sus hermosísimas medias, todos les tuvieron envidia. Las víboras querían bailar con ellos, únicamente. . . ." (p. 25). Finally, the flamingoes are forced to return to the river's waters when the poison of the coral snakes begins to make their legs and feet burn with almost unbearable pain.

In this story, the establishment of a specific geographic location is unnecessary. Quiroga's children were obviously well aware of the physical appearance of a jungle river bank from their excursions into the jungle and from their daily experiences around the

bungalow overlooking the Paraná, so they would not have been interested in a minute description of terrain; however, like the modern child, they would have been eager to discover why and how the flamingoes they saw wading in the river had acquired their distinctively colored legs. Therefore, it seems natural that the setting is subordinate to the action in this story.

#### IV: Style

The purpose of the third person, limited, anonymous narrator in "Las medias de los flamencos" is to satisfy the child's curiosity about the physical characteristics and the behavior of flamingoes, Quiroga begins the story, as he did in "La tortuga gigante," with the formula: "CIERTA VEZ las víboras dieron un gran baile . . ." (p. 21). He then enumerates the guests, briefly describes their attire, and quickly proceeds to the central conflict of the story which is caused by the envy of the flamingoes and their subsequent resolve to impress the coral snakes by acquiring stockings that mimic their colors.

In this story, there is much repetition, especially in the constant reference to the colors of the coral snakes:

. . . las víboras de coral. . . estaban vestidas con larguísimas gasas rojas, blancas y negras . . . (p. 22).

Vamos a ponernos medias coloradas, blancas y negras, y las víboras de coral se van a enamorar de nosotros (p. 22).

¿Tienes medias coloradas, blancas y negras? (p. 23).

¿Coloradas, blancas y negras? (p. 23).

Mi cuñada, la lechuza, tiene las medias así. Pídanse las, y ella les va a dar las medias coloradas, blancas y negras (p. 24).

Venimos a pedirte las medias coloradas, blancas y negras (p. 24).

This use of repetition follows the tradition of children's stories in which repetition is used for its rhythm and its pleasing effect upon the listener.

Another literary device which Quiroga does not often use, but which he employs quite successfully in this story, is the simile:

Los sapos . . . caminaban meneándose, como si nadaran (p. 21).

Las ranas. . . . cada una llevaba colgada como un farolito, una luciérnaga que se balanceaba (p. 21).

. . . las víboras de coral . . . bailaban como serpentinas (p.22).

Cuando las víboras danzaban y daban vueltas apoyadas en la punta de la cola, todos los invitados aplaudían como locos (p. 22).

In addition to the use of the simile in this story, Quiroga creates a play on words as he describes the coral snakes' initial enticement of the flamingoes with their sinuous dancing: "Cada vez que una víbora pasaba delante de ellos, coqueteando y haciendo ondular las gasas de serpentinas, los flamencos se morían de envidia" (p. 22). This is an example of Quiroga's subtle sense of humor in the children's stories. It has been said that not much humor may be found in Quiroga's children's stories;<sup>14</sup> however, perhaps Quiroga's humor has been misunderstood because it tends to be subtle and also because it has not been designed to amuse the adult reader, but to amuse the child who is infinitely more receptive to the humor of unusual or incongruous situations than is an adult. In this regard, Rebecca J. Lukens' observations about humor in the children's story are also applicable to Quiroga's style in this story: "Humor is an important

tone in children's literature. Much of the humor comes from situation, that is, incongruous happenings that make children laugh."<sup>15</sup>

In "Las medias de los flamencos," the sentence length tends to be shorter than that of "La tortuga gigante." It ranges from the one-word sentence to the forty-six word sentence. The most frequently used sentence lengths consist of five and six words, and the second most frequently used lengths consist of eight and eighteen words. This shorter sentence length is a stylistic device which helps maintain the interest and curiosity of the child because it keeps the story moving at a fast pace. In its frequency of short sentences, its repetition of the words "tan-tan," and its use of the color words, red, white and black, this story shows Quiroga's understanding of the child's need for fast paced action and repetition in a story, and further demonstrates Quiroga's mastery of the oral tradition in the children's story. This is definitely a story which must be read aloud in order to enjoy the full effect of Quiroga's style.

#### V: The Theme of Envy

The predominant theme in "Las medias de los flamencos" is envy. In this story, Quiroga uses the figure of the gawky flamingo to show the child who is listening or reading the story an example of the sad consequences of being so envious of what others have that, without considering the possible long-range consequences, one is willing to risk possible disaster in order to attain that which is envied. This is not done in any openly didactic manner; however, while providing an

answer to the questions: Why do flamingoes have red legs?, Why do flamingoes stand in the water most of the time?, and Why do flamingoes often stand only on one leg?, Quiroga shows clearly and humorously that envy is something to be avoided if one wishes to live happily.

In addition, there are two secondary themes in the story: revenge and death. The coral snakes act quickly and instinctively to avenge the supposed murder of their own kind. Their intention is not only to tear the "stockings" off the flamingoes' legs, but also to bite their legs and feet so that the flamingoes will die from their potent venom. This is a rather violent scene that Quiroga presents; however, once again, the child is waiting for and expects the eventual punishment of the flamingoes for their thoughtlessness and envy. Therefore, the child is not shocked by the revenge of the coral snakes. Also, since death is a constant part of life in the struggle for survival of both man and animal in a jungle environment, the presence of death probably made the story more believable to Quiroga's children. Finally, the happy ending in which the flamingoes are punished, but cheat death, reminds one of Bagheera's admonishment to Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's story, "Kaa's Hunting," when Bagheera says: "One of the beauties of Jungle Law is that punishment settles all scores."<sup>16</sup>

## Chapter IV: Notes

<sup>1</sup> James E. Higgins, Beyond Words: Mystical Fancy in Children's Literature (New York: Columbia University, 1970), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," in Only Connect: Readings in Children's Literature, ed. Sheila Egoff, G. T. Stubbs, and L.F. Ashley, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> Higgins, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p. 253.

<sup>5</sup> Horacio Quiroga, Cuentos de la selva: Para los niños, 21st ed. (1954; rpt. Buenos Aires: Losada, 1973). All textual references to the individual stories will be taken from this edition.

<sup>6</sup> M. A. Feliciano Fabre, Horacio Quiroga: Narrador americano, Diss. Madrid 1961 (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Cordillera, 1963), pp. 173-74.

<sup>7</sup> Maria H. Nagy, "The Child's View of Death," in The Meaning of Death, ed. Herman Ferfel (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Nagy, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> Nagy, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> Nagy, p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> Bettelheim, p. 141.

<sup>12</sup> Arbuthnot and Sutherland, p. 225.

<sup>13</sup> Lukens, p. 156.

<sup>14</sup> Feliciano Fabre, p. 115.

<sup>15</sup> Lukens, p. 158.

<sup>16</sup> Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Books (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 54.



## Chapter V

### "El loro pelado" and "La guerra de los yacarés"

#### "El loro pelado"

##### I: Content

The predominant tone in "El loro pelado" is humor. The story centers around the daily life, adventures and misadventures of Pedrito, a parrot. It shows man and animal living together amicably and helping each other. Quiroga uses an accurate and humorous reproduction of parrot behavior and language to demonstrate the value of caution--an attribute which is very important for survival and which Pedrito is lacking at the beginning of the story.

When "El loro pelado" begins, a band of parrots are enjoying a feast of green ears of maize and oranges with Pedrito acting as sentinel. A worker shoots Pedrito who, though he fights valiantly, is finally captured. The worker takes the wounded parrot home and entrusts him to the care of his master's children. The children care for his broken wing, and Pedrito becomes so attached to them that he not only continues living with them after he is well, but he also learns to talk: "Tanto se daba con los chicos, y tantas cosas le decían las criaturas, que el loro aprendió a hablar. Decía '¡Buen día, lorito! . . .' '¡Rica papa! . . .' '¡Papa para Pedrito!' . . ."

(p. 32). In fact, Pedrito leads a very happy and privileged life at the ranch because he can come and go as he pleases, he has the companionship of the children, and he is even allowed to join the family for tea in the afternoon. Quiroga describes Pedrito's ideal daily existence in the following passage:

Vivía suelto y pasaba casi todo el día en los naranjos y eucaliptos del jardín. Le gustaba burlarse de las gallinas. A las cuatro o cinco de la tarde, que era la hora en que tomaban el té en la casa, el loro entraba también en el comedor, y se subía con el pico y las patas por el mantel, a comer pan mojado en leche. Tenía locura por el té con leche (pp. 31-32).

When it rains, Pedrito, like most birds, remains in a sheltered place with his feathers ruffled, and as soon as the sun comes out, he immediately begins to fly about, happily chattering to himself. One afternoon, after five stormy days, the sun comes out and Pedrito is so happy that he flies quite a distance from the ranch into Paraguay. He stops to rest in a tree and his curiosity is aroused by what he sees: ". . . dos luces verdes, como enormes bichos de luz" (p. 33). These are, of course, the eyes of a jaguar. In his happiness, the parrot neither feels any fear nor uses any caution as his curiosity makes him get closer and closer to the jaguar. Since he has forgotten that wild animals do not drink tea, he invites the jaguar to join him for some tea with milk. This makes the jaguar furious because he thinks Pedrito is making fun of him. Since the jaguar is hungry and considers the parrot a tasty morsel, he very cleverly feigns deafness in order to get the parrot within pouncing distance:

--¡Bueno! ¡Acérca-te un po-co que soy sordo!

--¡Mās cer-ca! ¡No oi-go!

--¡Mās cer-ca toda-vía! (p. 34).

However, when he pounces, he fails to kill Pedrito. Instead, he tears off Pedrito's back feathers and his tail. With the loss of many of his feathers, Pedrito finds it very difficult to fly home. When he at last arrives home and looks at himself in the cook's mirror, he flees to hide in a hole in the trunk of a eucalyptus tree. He remains there shivering with cold and shame. The children cry because they are certain that Pedrito is dead after he fails to appear for tea and after they cannot find him anywhere. Pedrito's daily life changes considerably as he hides while he waits for his feathers to grow back:

Pero Pedrito no había muerto, sino que continuaba en su cueva sin dejarse ver por nadie, porque sentía mucha vergüenza de verse pelado como un ratón. De noche bajaba a comer y subía en seguida. De madrugada descendía de nuevo, muy ligero, e iba a mirarse en el espejo de la cocinera, siempre muy triste porque las plumas tardaban mucho en crecer (p. 36).

Because Pedrito has learned a painful lesson, he displays caution during his self-imposed exile. Finally, the day comes when he can appear for tea again without being ashamed of his plumage:

. . . por fin un día o una tarde, la familia sentada a la mesa a la hora del té vio entrar a Pedrito muy tranquilo, balanceándose como si nada hubiera pasado. Todos se querían morir, morir de gusto cuando lo vieron bien vivo y con lindísimas plumas (p. 36).

Pedrito remains silent, refusing to answer everyone's questions regarding where he has been, but the next day, he confides in the master of the house punctuating his story with the phrases: "--¡Ni una pluma en la cola de Pedrito! ¡Ni una pluma! ¡Ni una pluma!" (p. 37).

He concludes by inviting the man to go hunt the jaguar with him: "Convidieron en que cuando Pedrito viera al tigre, lo distraería charlando, para que el hombre pudiera acercarse despacito con la escopeta" (p. 37). Here Quiroga shows the child how man and animal may work together for mutual gain. The man wants a jaguar skin for his dining room, and the parrot wants revenge. As Pedrito teases the jaguar and chatters, he also makes comments about where the jaguar is, so the man may secretly approach him:

--!Rico, pan con leche! . . . ¡ESTA AL PIE DE ESTE ARBOL! . . . (p. 38).

--¡Rica papa! . . . ¡ATENCIÓN!

--¡Rico, té con leche! . . . ¡CUIDADO, VA A SALTAR! (p. 39).

The jaguar, who has sworn that the teasing parrot will not escape this time, feigns deafness thinking that he can once again fool the parrot. At this point, Quiroga shows how the jaguar displays a fatal lack of caution. Though he becomes suspicious when he hears Pedrito's warning comments, he is so determined to catch the talkative parrot that he springs at Pedrito. The man shoots the jaguar when it jumps. Thus, by working together, the man is able to obtain a free jaguar skin, and Pedrito is able to obtain his revenge. At the same time he recovers his honor since everyone considers him a hero when they learn what has happened to him and how he has helped the master obtain a beautiful rug for the dining room.

The story ends with everyone living happily ever after, especially Pedrito, who, every afternoon, steps close to the jaguar skin rug and invites the jaguar to join him for tea: "¿Querés te con

leche? . . . !La papa para el tigre! . . . (p. 40). Everyone laughs, including Pedrito.

## II: Characters

In "El loro pelado" the main character is Pedrito. As in many of the other stories in this collection, Quiroga provides very few details about Pedrito's physical appearance. In fact, the only description one finds in the story concerns Pedrito's new plumage: ". . . lindísimas plumas," and "¡Qué plumas brillantes que tiene el lorito!" (p. 36). A minute physical description of Pedrito would have been superfluous for Quiroga's children because they would have been accustomed to seeing all types of brilliantly plumed parrots flying around the bungalow and perched on tree limbs when they accompanied their father on forays into the jungle around San Ignacio. On the other hand, Quiroga does include many details about Pedrito's behavior and preferences:

Aprendió a dar la pata; le gustaba estar en el hombro de las personas y con el pico les hacía cosquillas en la oreja (p. 31).

Cuando llovía, Pedrito se encrespaba y se contaba a sí mismo una porción de cosas muy bajito. Cuando el tiempo se componía, volaba entonces gritando como un loco (p. 32).

El loro hablaba siempre . . . como todos los loros, mezclando las palabras sin ton ni son, y a veces costaba entenderlo (p. 33).

. . . era muy curioso. . . (p. 33).

. . . el loro no pensaba sino en el gusto que tendrían en la casa cuando el se presentara a tomar té con leche con aquel magnífico amigo (p. 34).

Pero el loro, ¡qué gritos de alegría deba! ¡Estaba loco de contento, proque se había vengado --¡y bien vengado!-- del feísimo animal que le había sacado las plumas! (p. 39).

. . . el loro no se olvidaba de lo que le había hecho el tigre. .  
 . (p. 40).

In addition, Quiroga makes many true-to-nature observations on the behavior of parrots in the story. He begins by showing their behavior in the wild:

De mañana temprano iban a comer choclos a la chacra, y de tarde comían naranjas. Hacían gran barullo con sus gritos, y tenían siempre un loro de sentinela en los árboles más altos, para ver si venía alguien.

Los loros son tan dañinos como la langosta, porque abren los choclos para picotearlos, los cuales, después, se pudren con la lluvia (p. 31).

Quiroga then makes a comparison between the behavior of parrots and children which appeals to the adult reading the story:

Tanto se daba Pedrito con los chicos, y tantas cosas le decían las criaturas, que el loro aprendió a hablar. Decía: "¡Buen día, lorito! . . ." "¡Rica la papa! . . ." "¡Papa para pedrito! . . ." Decía otras cosas más que no se pueden decir, porque los loros, como los chicos, aprenden con gran facilidad malas palabras (p. 32).

He also shows a knowledge of the aerodynamic structure of parrots when he describes Pedrito's plight after he has barely escaped death:

El loro, gritando de dolor y de miedo, se fue volando, pero no podía volar bien, porque le faltaba la cola que es como el timón de los pájaros. Volaba cayendose en el aire de un lado para otro, y todos los pájaros que lo encontraban se alejaban asustados de aquel bico raro (p. 35).

In "El loro pelado," Quiroga describes the jaguar by the color of his eyes, by the harsh and threatening tone of his voice and by his deceitfulness:

. . . aquellas dos luces verdes eran los ojos de un tigre que estaba agachado, . . (p. 33).

Y por fin [Pedrito] sintió un ruido de ramas partidas, y vio de repente debajo del árbol dos luces verdes fijas en él: eran los ojos del tigre (p. 37).

¡Más cer-ca! ¡No oi-go! respondió el tigre con su voz ronca (p. 34).

. . . el tigre lanzó un rugido y se levantó de un salto (p. 38).

Finally, the jaguar is an impressive specimen of animal life because of his agility, ". . . dio un terrible salto, tan alto como una casa. . ." (pp. 34-35), and because of his dying roar, ". . . lanzando un bramido que hizo temblar el monte entero, cayó muerto" (p. 39).

As in many of the other Cuentos de la selva, Quiroga does not spend any time describing the human characters in "El loro pelado." He mentions that the master of the ranch has children, but he never specifies how many, of what gender, or what ages they may be. They are referred to as los hijos and as los chicos. Of course, rather than detracting from the plot, this lack of details about the children makes it easy for the child to put himself among the ranch owner's children in the secondary world of the story. Also, it is notable that there is no mention of the existence of the master's wife. From a biographical standpoint, it seems natural that there is no mother figure in the story. According to Speratti Piñero's chronology, "El loro pelado" appeared in print in 1917, and one may suppose that it was probably created for Eglé and Darío after the death of Ana María in 1915. Hence, Quiroga's children would have been used to a household which contained a strong father but no mother. The father who is referred to as the patrón, as el dueño de la casa, and simply

as el hombre, remains in the background until he goes hunting with Pedrito. Finally, the only things one may be sure of about the man is that he is a good marksman and that he evidently must like Pedrito because he allows him to sit on his shoulder and talk to him, and he agrees to go hunting with Pedrito.

### III: Setting

In "El loro pelado," the increasing domesticity of the parrot, Pedrito, is reflected in the setting. He evolves from a wild creature to a member of the family who enjoys his five o'clock tea. However, he retains his freedom to wander around at will, even into Paraguay. In fact, in this story, the rain forest and the dining room represent the two worlds in which Pedrito lives. It is obvious from his initial reaction to the jaguar that Pedrito has begun to forget what life is like in the wilderness: "El loro se había olvidado de que los bichos del monte no toman té con leche, y por eso lo convidó al tigre" (p. 34). At the same time, he seems to be trying, unconsciously, to integrate his two worlds because ". . . no pensaba sino en el gusto que tendrían en casa cuando él se presentara a tomar té con leche con aquel magnífico amigo" (p. 34). Finally, Pedrito does succeed in at least figuratively joining the two worlds when he not only has his revenge on the jaguar, but also has the pleasure of seeing the jaguar's hide stretched out in front of the stove in the dining room--a guest for tea after all. As in the other stories, though, the setting exists only as a background for the action.



## IV: Style

Quiroga once again uses the formula so popular in fairy tales to begin the story: "HABIA una vez . . ." (p. 31); and, he ends the story with another popular way of ending the children's story: "Vivieron en adelante muy contentos" (p. 40). The point of view Quiroga uses is once again the third person, limited anonymous narrator.

An amusing device used in the story is that of mimicking the speech of parrots which consists of much repetition:

--"¡Qué lindo día, lorito! . . . ¡Rica papa! . . . ¡La pata, Pedrito! . . ." (p. 32).

--"¿Qué será? . . . " "¿Qué será eso? . . . " "¡Buen día, Pedrito! . . ." (p. 33). --"¡Buen día, tigre! . . . " "¡Rica, papa! . . . ¡rica, papa! . . . ¡rica, papa! . . . ." (p. 33).

--"¡Lindo día! . . . ¡Rica, papa! . . . ¡Rico té con leche! . . . ¿Querés té con leche? . . ." (p. 38).

--"¡Rica, papa! . . . ¿Querés té con leche? . . . ¡La papa para el tigre! . . ." (p. 40).

Not only does Quiroga accurately record the tendency of parrots to repeat a logical stream of words, mixing them with nonsense, but he also repeatedly shows the habit of parrots who repeat things three times in imitation of the same tendency in humans.

In "El loro pelado," Quiroga uses both the correct and the colloquial form of the verb querer which adds local color to the narrative. When Pedrito first invites the jaguar to join him for tea, he uses the familiar but correct form of the verb: "¿Quieres tomar té con leche conmigo, amigo tigre?" (p. 34). However, the next time Pedrito sees the jaguar, he uses the informal but colloquial form of

the verb, which is popular in the Rio Platte region: "¿Querés té con leche? . . ." (p. 38). And he repeats the same verb form at the end of the story: "¿Querés té con leche? . . ." (p. 40). In addition, Quiroga makes good use of the diminutive in the story. It accurately mirrors a habit which many people have when they talk to their children and pets and want to show them affection. In fact, the children in the story use diminutives when they call or talk to Pedrito. One may find several repetitions of the diminutive including: Pedrito, lorito, bajito, and despacito. Also, to show the jaguar's enormous size and his menacing voice, Quiroga uses the augmentative zarpazo to describe his large paw, and he not only uses italics for the jaguar's speech, but also hyphenates the words syllabically to allow the listener or reader to hear and see the jaguar's harsh, hoarse, growly voice: "--iBue-no! Acérca-te un po-co que soy sor-do!" (p. 34).

The sentence length in "El loro pelado" varies more than in "La tortuga gigante" or in "Las medias de los flamencos." The monologue and dialogue sections in which Pedrito is chattering have sentences of two and three words which accurately mimic the speech patterns of trained parrots. In the narrative sections wherein there is the passage of time or the climax, there is a tendency to use long sentences which seems to be a characteristic of Quiroga's style in the Cuentos de la selva. For example, he uses a sixty-two word sentence, including Pedrito's monologue, when he describes his happy flight into Paraguay:

Ahora bien: en medio de esta felicidad sucedió que una tarde

de lluvia salió por fin el sol después de cinco días de temporal, y Pedrito se puso a volar gritando: --"¡Qué lindo día, lorito! . . . ¡Rica, papa! . . . ¡La pata, Pedrito! . . ." --y volaba lejos, hasta que vio debajo, el río Paraná, que parecía una lejana y ancha cinta blanca (pp. 32-33).

This is the longest sentence in the story. The second longest sentence of fifty-eight words occurs at the climax with the death of the jaguar:

Pero también en ese mismo instante el hombre, que tenía el cañón de la escopeta recostado contra un tronco para hacer bien la puntería, apretó el gatillo, y nueve balines del tamaño de un garbanzo cada uno entraron como un rayo en el corazón del tigre, que lanzando un bramido que hizo temblar el monte entero, cayó muerto (p. 39).

The style, then is appropriate to and compliments the narrative content of the story.

#### V: The Theme of Caution

Some secondary themes in "El loro pelado" such as those of love, revenge and death are also present in "La tortuga gigante" and "Las medias de los flamencos." However, the principal theme of the story shows the value of caution and the unpleasant and sometimes fatal consequences of overconfidence. Pedrito's lack of caution is at least a contributing factor in his being wounded and captured. His further lack of caution coupled with his curiosity make him determined to befriend the jaguar. In his eagerness to be heard by the jaguar, he unthinkingly advances toward him until he is within range of the jaguar's claws. Pedrito's subsequent loss of his back and tail

feathers is a painful lesson in the value of caution, and he does not have a chance to forget it because he is reminded of his foolish curiosity and overconfidence every time he looks in the mirror and sees his ragged, sad appearance. Since Pedrito is an intelligent parrot, he uses the knowledge he has so painfully gained to obtain his revenge. In his second meeting with the jaguar, he ostensibly acts as spontaneously and incautiously as during the first encounter. However, now Pedrito displays caution in two ways. First, he makes sure he does not get so close to the jaguar that he cannot safely escape his attack; and, second, he has an ally with him who is stalking the jaguar, while the jaguar is stalking him. In contrast to Pedrito's calculated strategy, the jaguar is so angry that the chattering parrot is still alive, that he is ruled by his emotions. Even though he clearly hears Pedrito's warnings, "ESTA AL PIE DE ESTE ARBOL! . . ." (p. 38), and immediately roars, "¿Con quién estás hablando? . . . ¿A quién le has dicho que estoy al pie de este árbol?" (p. 38), he not only believes Pedrito's response, "¡A nadie, a nadie! . . ." (p. 38), but also seems to quickly forget his suspicion, which proves to be a fatal mistake. The jaguar's ruse of feigning deafness and Pedrito's constant light-hearted chatter provide some comic relief in a situation which might otherwise be potentially frightening to a child, while teaching him the value of the attribute of caution through the adventures and misadventures of the lovable parrot, Pedrito.

## "La guerra de los yacarés"

### I: Content

In contrast with the first three stories in the Cuentos de la selva, "La guerra de los yacarés" is much more serious in its tone and in its purpose because it attempts to show the noble but futile resistance of the natural world against the encroachment of civilization as it is symbolized by the steamboat, the ironclad, and man. While in the first three stories man is either of little significance in the life of the animal characters or serves as a friend and ally, in this story man is an adversary who is a definite threat to survival. In keeping with the more serious nature of this story, the beginning sentence does not use the fairy tale formula of "Once upon a time." Instead, it immediately establishes the setting and introduces the protagonists in a very factual manner: "EN UN RIO muy grande, en un país desierto donde nunca había estado el hombre, vivían muchos yacarés" (p. 43).<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the story, the daily life of the caymans seems to be an ideal existence:

Comían pescados, bichos que iban a tomar agua al río, pero sobre todo pescados. Dormían la siesta en la arena de la orilla, y a veces jugaban sobre el agua cuando había noches de luna.

Todos vivían muy tranquilos y contentos (p. 43).

However, one afternoon, a strange noise shatters the tranquility and awakens a cayman from his siesta. He alerts his companions who immediately become alarmed with good reason: " . . . no era para menos su inquietud, porque el ruido crecía, crecía. Pronto vieron como una nubecita de humo a lo lejos, y oyeron un ruido de chas-chas en el río

como si golpearan el agua muy lejos" (p. 44). At this point, the oldest and wisest cayman tries to calm the younger ones, who are hysterical with fear, by telling them the source of the strange noise must be a whale and a thing not to be feared since whales are afraid of caymans. However, the calm is once again shattered when the caymans see that what is coming down the river is not a whale:

. . . el humo gris se cambió de repente en humo negro, y todos sintieron bien fuerte ahora el chas-chas en el agua. Los yacarés, espantados, se hundieron en el río, dejando solamente fuera los ojos y la punta de la nariz, y así vieron pasar delante de ellos aquella cosa inmensa, llena de humo y golpeando el agua, que era un vapor de ruedas que navegaba por primera vez por aquel río (p. 45).

In the cayman's reasoning about their situation, Quiroga creates a good description of the ecological imbalance which results when civilization, represented by the steamboat, intrudes upon the natural order in the wilderness. This is clearly seen in the following passage: "--Bueno-- dijeron entonces los yacarés--; el buque pasó ayer, pasó hoy, y pasará mañana. Ya no habrá más pescados ni bichos que vengan a tomar agua, y nos moriremos de hambre. Hagamos entonces un dique." (p. 46).

In an attempt to stop the passage of the steamboat, the caymans build a dike across the river, and the steamboat is forced to turn back while the caymans celebrate, thinking, "Ningún vapor iba a pasar por allí y siempre, siempre, habría pescados" (p. 48). However, the celebration is short lived when the next day the caymans are confronted with a more menacing intruder, an ironclad: ". . . un buque de color ratón, mucho más grande que el otro" (p. 48). The ship

stops, and a small boat is sent out. The officer asks the caymans to remove the dike, and when they refuse, he tells them that he will blow it up. Suddenly, the old cayman recognizes that the ship is a warship equipped with cannon, and he urges his fellow caymans to hide quickly. The following description of the dike blowing up is a good example of how Quiroga uses details to give the child a vivid mental picture:

En este mismo momento, del buque salió una gran nube blanca de humo, sonó un terrible estampido, y una enorme bala de cañón cayó en pleno dique, justo en el medio. Dos o tres troncos volaron hechos pedazos, y en seguida cayó otra bala, y otra y otra más, y cada una hacía saltar por el aire en astillas un pedazo de dique, hasta que no quedó nada del dique, Ni un tronco, ni una astilla, ni una cáscara. Todo había sido deschecho a cañonazos por el acorazado (pp. 49-50).

Undaunted, the caymans build a larger and stronger dike. The following day the scene is repeated as the official asks the proud caymans to remove the dike and they once more refuse thinking the dike is too strong to be blown up this time. The scene of the second attack on the dike is as vividly portrayed as the first:

. . . el buque volvió a llenarse de humo, y con un horrible estampido la bala reventó en el medio del dique, porque esta vez habían tirado con granada. La granada reventó contra los troncos, hizo saltar, despedazó, redujo a astillas las enormes vigas. La segunda revento al lado de la primera y otro pedazo de dique voló por el aire. Y así fueron deshaciendo el dique. Y no quedó nada del dique; nada, nada, nada. El buque de guerra pasó entonces delante de los yacarés, y los hombres les hacían burlas tapándose la boca (p. 51).

Because they are discouraged and saddened by the crying of the hungry baby caymans, the caymans decide to listen to the old cayman's sage advice:

Vamos a ver al SURUBÍ. Yo hice el viaje con él cuando fui hasta el mar, y tiene un torpedo. Él vio un combate entre dos buques de guerra, y trajo hasta aquí un torpedo que no reventó. Vamos a pedirselo, y aunque está muy enojado con nosotros los yacarés, tiene buen corazón y no querrá que muramos todos (pp. 51-52).

In this story, the surubí is very reminiscent of the owl in "Las medias de los flamencos" because both live in a cave and both possess something that is needed and desired, and this particular one is a magnificent specimen according to Quiroga: "Hay surubíes que tienen hasta dos metros de largo y el dueño del torpedo era uno de éstos" (p. 52).<sup>2</sup> The surubí wants nothing to do with the caymans until he hears the voice of his old friend who succinctly tells him what has happened. Although the surubí cannot forget that in the past the caymans ate his little nephew, he agrees to give the caymans his torpedo, and even says he will go back with them since he alone knows how to detonate it. The description of the subsequent transportation of the torpedo is detailed, vivid and imaginative:

Los yacarés se ataron todos unos con otros; de la cola de uno al cuello del otro; de la cola de éste al cuello de aquél, formando así una larga cadena de yacarés que tenía más de una cuadra. El inmenso Surubí empujó al torpedo hacia la corriente y se colocó bajo él, sosteniéndolo sobre el lomo para que flotara. Y como las lianas con que estaban atados los yacarés uno detrás del otro se habían concluido, el Surubí se prendió con los dientes de la cola del último yacaré, y así emprendieron la marcha. El Surubí sostenía el torpedo, y los yacarés tiraban, corriendo por la costa. Subían, bajaban, saltaban por sobre las piedras, corriendo siempre y arrastrando al torpedo, que levantaba olas como un buque por la velocidad de la corrida (pp. 53-54).

Approximately an hour after the caymans have finished building a bigger dike, the warship again comes down the river. This time the officer in the small boat says that not only will the dike be blown



up, but that every cayman will be destroyed if the dike is not removed. He also insults the old cayman in the process, speaking very disrespectfully. In return, the old cayman predicts that he will feast on the officer with the few teeth he has left. Meanwhile, the surubí, with the aid of the caymans, places the torpedo. The warship aims a cannonball which breeches a hole in the middle of the dike, and the surubí releases the torpedo. The explosion of the warship is exaggerated, perhaps to soften the violence: "Reventó, y partió el buque en quince mil pedazos; lanzó por el aire, a cuadras y cuadras de distancia, chimeneas, máquinas, cañones, lanchas, todo" (p. 56). Quiroga describes the cayman's view of the fate of the men of the warship very realistically: "Desde allí vieron pasar por el agujero abierto por la granada a los hombres muertos, heridos y algunos vivos que la corriente del río arrastraba" (p. 57). While this is a very violent description, somehow Quiroga is able to present a realistic yet non-shocking description of the aftermath of the explosion.

Finally, the old cayman keeps his promise when he sees that the arrogant officer who has made fun of him is still alive: ". . . cuando pasó uno que tenía galones de oro en el traje y que estaba vivo, el viejo yacaré se lanzó de un salto al agua, y, itac! en dos golpes de boca se le comió" (p. 57). This episode shows the child that arrogance, unkindness and disrespect toward one's elders does not go unpunished, even though in this story it is a cayman. The punishment of the officer reassures the child that justice does triumph not only in the secondary world of the story, but also, by extension, in his own daily existence.

In "La guerra de los yacarés," the surubí willingly parts with the torpedo he has guarded for so long in order to help his old friend, and he returns to his cave very happy because he has come into possession of the officer's gold stripes, sash and cordon, which he proudly wears.

However, although the caymans win a battle with the help of the surubí, their victory is short lived because the steamboats with their cargoes of oranges eventually return as do the fish, who have grown accustomed to the noise and the disturbance. Hence, the caymans are forced to adapt to the new way of life brought about by the changed ecosystem. In the child's parting glimpse of the caymans, there is an implicit lesson in survival: one must change with the environment in order to survive. And there is also an implicit comment on the futility of war in the fact that the caymans have adapted to the existing conditions, and they do not want to hear about warships.

## II: Characters

Man has a predominant role as the enemy of the caymans in "La guerra de los yacarés." For the first and only time in the Cuentos de la selva, Quiroga portrays the human characters as invaders who do nothing more than threaten and destroy in the name of progress and wealth. On the other hand, he portrays the caymans as creatures with intelligence, ingenuity and sentiment as they try desperately and unsuccessfully to protect themselves and their offspring against the threatened destruction of their habitat and their quiet way of life.

As in his other stories, Quiroga chooses his descriptive details

very carefully when he comments on the caymans. Perhaps the best described of all the caymans is the old cayman who seems to be the sage of the community. Quiroga describes him as ". . . un viejo yacaré, a quien no quedaban sino dos dientes sanos en los costados de la boca, y que había hecho una vez un viaje hasta el mar. . ." (p. 44). When Quiroga tells how the caymans fell the trees to make the first dike, he mentions a specific detail of their anatomy, easily observable in real life: "Los cortaron con la especie de serrucho que los yacarés tienen en cima de la cola. . ." (p. 46). Quiroga also comments on another habit of the caymans, which is to remain submerged with only their eyes and nose above water:

Los yacarés desaparecieron en un instante bajo el agua y nadaron hacia la orilla, donde quedaron hundidos, con la nariz y los ojos únicamente fuera del agua" (p. 49).

. . . . .

En seguida, los demás yacares se hundieron a su vez cerca de la orilla, dejando únicamente la nariz y los ojos fuera del agua" (p. 55).

Aside from these few, carefully chosen details, Quiroga leaves it up to the imagination of the child to form a picture of the caymans.

In his references to the physical appearance of the surubí, Quiroga uses the same approach that he uses with the caymans. Hence, the child learns that the surubí is very large because: ". . . vivía en una gruta grandísima . . ." and ". . . tiene hasta dos metros de largo. . ." (p. 52). Later, at the end of the story, Quiroga gives more physical details about the surubí when he asks for and receives the officer's sash and cordons:

El Surubí se puso el cinturón, abrochándolo por bajo las aletas, y del extremo de sus grandes bigotes prendió los cordones de la espada. Como la piel del Surubí es muy bonita, y las manchas oscuras que tiene se parecen a las de una víbora, el Surubí nadó una hora pasando y repasando ante los yacarés, que lo admiraban con la boca abierta (p. 58).

In "La guerra de los yacarés," the humans who invade the cayman's quiet river with their steamships are portrayed as arrogant men who obviously do not care about the disturbance they may be causing. This fact is evident from the first time the humans speak to the caymans:

. . . los hombres gritaron:  
 --¡Eh, yacarés!  
 --¿Qué hay? --respondieron los yacarés, sacando la cabeza por entre los troncos del dique.  
 --¡Nos está estorbando eso! --continuaron los hombres (p. 47).

When the ironclad arrives and finds a new dike barring its passage, an officer who is very arrogant toward the caymans, inspects the dike:

El oficial gritó:  
 --¡Eh, yacarés!  
 --¿Qué hay! --respondieron éstos.  
 --¿No sacan el dique?  
 --No.  
 --¿No?  
 --¡No!  
 --Está bien --dijo el oficial--. Entonces lo vamos a echar a pique de cañonazos (p. 49).

The next day, the boat returns to find an even larger dike barring the way, and the officer repeats his threats. When the ironclad returns a third time, the officer is both arrogant and derisive:

--¡Eh, yacarés! --gritó el oficial.  
 --¿Qué hay! --respondieron los yacarés.  
 --¿Otra vez el dique?  
 --¡Sí, otra vez!  
 --¡Saquen ese dique!

--¡Nunca!

--¿No lo sacan?

--¡No!

--Bueno; entonces, oigan --dijo el oficial--.

Vamos a deshacer este dique, y para que no quieran hacer otro los vamos a deshacer después a ustedes, a cañonazos. No va a quedar ni uno solo vivo --ni grandes, ni chicos, ni gordos, ni flacos, ni jóvenes, ni viejos-- como ese viejísimo yacaré que veo allí, y que no tiene sino dos dientes en los costados de la boca (pp. 54-55).

There is little doubt that the child hearing or reading this story sympathizes with the caymans, who are being mocked and mistreated by the uncaring adult humans, and feels very amicable toward the surubí who is able to forgive a past injury and help his old friend's companions.

### III: Setting

The action in "La guerra de los yacarés" takes place in and on the shores of an unnamed river. Here the caymans live an idyllic existence until the advent of man and his technology. The only specific allusion to geographical location describes the habitat of the surubí who lives, it seems, about a half day's journey away from the caymans' settlement in a cave on the bank of the Paraná river. There are no details about the flora and fauna of the river because the action of the narrative and not the setting is important. Also, no description of the setting was needed for the child who has no first-hand experience with the jungle and who cannot form clear, vivid mental pictures of the setting anyway. The cayman's predicament, their persistence, their bravery and their resourcefulness are enough to hold the child's attention.

## IV: Style

In "La guerra de los yacarés," Quiroga uses exaggeration perhaps to soften the seriousness and the many frightening aspects of the plot. The frequent use of hyperbole begins with the sentence which describes the number of caymans living on the shores of the river: "Eran más de cien o más de mil" (p. 43). This kind of exaggeration is very appealing to children, and, at the same time, it accurately conveys the idea of the many caymans residing on the peaceful shores of the river. In describing the construction of the first dike, again, Quiroga uses hyperbole: "Fueron todos al bosque y echaron abajo más de diez mil árboles. . ." (p. 46). When the ironclad attacks the third dike, "La granada reventó justo en el centro del dique, e hizo volar en mil pedazos diez o doce troncos" (p. 55). Soon after this last shelling, the surubí arms the torpedo and aims it at the ironclad which explodes, ". . . en quince mil pedazos. . ." (p. 56).

Another device which Quiroga employs and which complements his use of the hyperbole is the augmentative to denote size, strength or power:

Y el bote volvió al vapor, mientras los yacarés, locos de contentos, daban tremendos colazos en el agua (p. 48).

El oficial gritó:

--¡Eh, yacarés!

--¡Qué hay! --respondieron éstos.

--¿No sacan el dique?

--No.

--¿No?

--¡No!

--Está bien --dijo el oficial--. Entonces lo vamos a echar a pique a cañonazos (p. 49).

Todo había sido deshecho a cañonazos por el acorazado (p. 50).

--¡Eh, yacarés! --gritó el oficial.  
 --¡Qué hay! --respondieron los yacarés.  
 --¡Saquen ese otro dique!  
 --¡No lo sacamos!  
 --¡Lo vamos a deshacer a cañonazos como al otro! . . . (p. 50).

--¡Eh, yacarés! --gritó el oficial.  
 --¡Qué hay! --respondieron los yacarés.  
 --¿Otra vez el dique?  
 --¡Sí, otra vez!  
 --¡Saquen ese dique!  
 --¡Nunca!  
 --¿No lo sacan?  
 --¡No!  
 --Bueno; entonces, oigan --dijo el oficial--.  
 Vamos a deshacer este dique, y para que no quieran hacer otro los  
 vamos a deshacer después a ustedes, a cañonazos (pp. 54-55).

Finally, Quiroga's fondness for repetition is again evident in "La guerra de los yacarés." It's rhythmic quality not only appeals to the adult, but it also appeals to the child who can identify with such a narrative technique because he, himself, uses much repetition in his daily speech. The following passages contain examples of the various types of repetition found in the story:

. . . el ruido crecía, crecía (p. 44).

. . . un yacaré viejo y sabio, el más sabio y viejo de todos, un viejo yacaré. . . (p. 44).

--¡Es una ballena! ¡Ahí viene la ballena! (p.44).

--¡Sí, un dique! --gritaron todos, nadando a toda fuerza hacia la orilla--. ¡Hagamos un dique! (p. 46).

Ningún vapor iba a pasar por allí y siempre, siempre, habría pescados (p. 48).

Y no quedó nada del dique; nada, nada (p. 51).

The onomatopoeic chas-chas, chas-chas-chas of the river paddle steamer's engines is an evocative and rhythmical repetition. In

addition, Quiroga uses a series of three consecutive verbs to show the passage of time:

El vapor pasó, se alejó y desapareció (p. 45).

. . . el buque pasó ayer, pasó hoy, y pasará mañana (p. 46).

La granada reventó contra los troncos, hizo saltar, despedazó, redujo a astillas las enormes vigas (p. 51).

Subían, bajaban, saltaban por sobre las piedras. . . (p. 54).

. . . el torpedo llegó, chocó con el inmenso buque bien en el centro, y reventó (p. 56).

And finally, when the ironclad blows up the first dike, its men mock the caymans, and there is a parallel situation at the end of the story when the caymans mock the ironclad's men after blowing up their ship:

El buque de guerra pasó entonces delante de los yacarés, y los hombres les hacían burlas tapándose la boca (p. 51).

Se treparon [los yacarés] amontonados en los dos troncos que quedaban a ambos lados del boquete y cuando los hombres pasaban por allí, se burlaban tapándose la boca con las patas (p. 57).

In "La guerra de los yacarés," Quiroga's favorite sentence length seems to be the five-word sentence; it appears twenty-two times in the story. His second favorite is the three-word sentence which appears nineteen times. Nevertheless, the story contains a great variety of sentence lengths ranging from the one word sentence, which appears nine times, to the sixty-six word sentence which appears once. In it Quiroga describes the old cayman, mentions his trip to the sea, and notes his initial assessment of the nature of the intruder at the beginning of the story. As in his other stories, the longer sentences seem to contain the greatest amount of descriptive or narrative detail



while the shorter, more rapid sentences appear as dialogue or mark the passage of time. The tremendous variety of sentence lengths in "La guerra de los yacarés" is, no doubt, a mark of Quiroga's understanding of the child's need for fast-paced, diverse action and his effort to capture his attention and his interest, especially since this sixteen-page story is the second longest story in the Cuentos de la selva whose average story length is 9.83 pages. The longest story, "El paso del Yabebirí," is seventeen pages long; this story, like "La guerra de los yacarés," contains a much more serious tone and message than the other six stories in the collection.

#### VI: The Theme of Survival and Other Themes

Although the salient theme of "La guerra de los yacarés" is the survival of the caymans in the face of the ecological imbalance brought about by man's intrusion, there are many other minor themes which may help teach a child the value of perseverance, friendship, adaptability and respect for one's elders. The theme of respect is especially noticeable in Quiroga's treatment of and comments upon the old cayman. Even though he is old and deaf, he has the experience which the younger caymans do not have. Hence, when the situation seems hopeless, the younger caymans who have hitherto dismissed the elder's advice, realize that he alone, through his friendship with the surubí and the knowledge that both of them have gained from their past experience at sea, may be able to prevent the intruding ships from permanently frightening away the fish which are their main source of food. Therefore, they defer to the old cayman's advice and accept the

old surubí's help. On the other hand, the child sees the consequences of disrespect toward and mockery of one's elders in the officer's fate at the end of the story.

Friendship is another underlying theme exhibited by the actions of the surubí who, although a member of his own family has been a victim of the caymans in the past, acknowledges and honors his friendship with the old cayman above his private feelings. The old surubí not only gives up his torpedo ungrudgingly, but also volunteers to help the caymans by directing its position and detonation.

In this story, it is very evident that the caymans have perseverance because when their dikes are repeatedly blown up, they are willing to trust their fate to the weapon and to the expertise of the surubí. This perseverance is rewarded when the fish return to the river. Also, the caymans exhibit adaptability because, ". . . los yacarés vivieron y viven todavía muy felices, porque se han acostumbrado al fin a ver pasar vapores y buques que llevan naranjas" (p. 58). It is clear that in "La guerra de los yacarés," the mutual enemy is man and his technology. Even though the caymans and the surubí are not successful in their attempts to impede and discourage the passage of the ships, they serve as very good models for the child because they are examples of the abstract attributes of respect, friendship, perseverance and adaptability. And in some ways, the child may subconsciously be able to identify with the personified animals in their struggle against the people who come to destroy their paradise.

## Chapter V: Notes

<sup>1</sup> Juan Carlos Guarnieri, Nuevo vocabulario campesino rioplatense (Montevideo: Editorial Florensa y Lafon, 1957), p. 189. The yacaré, or Caiman latirostris is a crocodilian relative of the alligator which abounds in the swamps and rivers of Central and South America. It has a reputation for being much more aggressive than the alligator; therefore, it is a worthy opponent to man.

<sup>2</sup> Guarnieri, p. 168. The surubí, or Seudoplatysoma gouruscaris, is a fish common to the rivers of the Rio Platte region.

## Chapter VI

### "La gama ciega" and "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre"

#### "La gama ciega"

##### I: Content

"La gama ciega" is the fifth story in the Cuentos de la selva, and the first of two stories in the collection which contains a mother-figure. The story which follows it, "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre," also presents a mother-figure, but the role of the mother coatí is not as developed as that of the mother doe in "La gama ciega." Because there is a notable absence of the female/mother figure in the majority of the Cuentos de la selva, Quiroga's treatment of the mother doe is especially pleasant and poignant. According to Speratti Piñero, "La gama ciega" appeared for the first time in print as "La jirafa ciega" in the June 9, 1916 publication of Fray Mocho; hence, the story was most probably conceived, written, and revised for inclusion in the Cuentos de la selva after the death of Ana María. If this is an accurate deduction, then the characterization of the mother doe, at a time when Eglé and Darío no longer had a mother, may have been Quiroga's unconscious memorial to Ana María and a way to remind his young children of the

gentleness and protectiveness of a mother's love. In addition, both "La gama ciega" and "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre" have main characters who are cachorros, and these are very appealing to children because they can readily identify with them. As Gordon B. Ray points out, baby animals appear throughout the Cuentos de la selva, and Quiroga presents these cachorros in a very loving manner; he further observes:

Muchos cachorros hay en las páginas de estos cuentos para niños (de todas las edades); no sólo cachorros de hombre sino también cachorros de animalitos, y todos tienen la fascinación de los jóvenes de cualquier especie. Si Quiroga supo aprovecharse de la simpatía que sentimos casi todos hacia los jóvenes, debemos agradecerse. Truco sentimental si se quiere; pero de un sentimentalismo que en él tiene más de simpático que de empalagoso. Casi nos parece razonable que estos animalitos piensen como seres humanos, y es un deleite ver con qué amor habla Quiroga a sus criaturas de aquellas de los animales del campo, del bosque y del río.<sup>1</sup>

While it is certainly true that one may find many baby and young animals throughout the Cuentos de la selva, nowhere is there a more explicit statement of parental love and care than in "La gama ciega." In the second paragraph of the story, one immediately learns that the doe has her fawn repeat the oración de los venados every day. This oración consists of the following four rules for survival:

## I

Hay que oler bien primero las hojas antes de comerlas, porque algunas son venenosas.

## II

Hay que mirar bien el río y quedarse quieto ante de bajar a beber, para estar seguro de que no hay yacarés.

## III

Cada hora hay que levantar bien alta la cabeza y oler el viento, para sentir el olor del tigre.

## IV

Cuando se come pasto del suelo, hay que mirar siempre antes los yuyos para ver si hay víboras (pp. 61-62).

Only when the fawn has learned these important rules thoroughly is she allowed to roam without parental supervision, and, like most children, she immediately forgets or disregards everything she has been so carefully taught. The mischievous fawn butts a beehive and is pleasantly surprised by the sweet honey that drips from it. Upon her return home, she tells her mother who warns her that though honey is sweet to the taste, it is very dangerous to go in search of it because some bees sting. However, even though she agrees to obey her mother and to be careful, the fawn is convinced that bees and wasps do not sting. The doe's admonishment sounds like that of a loving, concerned human parent when she gives her fawn the following advice:

--Ten mucho cuidado, mi hija . . . con los nidos de abejas. La miel es una cosa muy rica, pero es muy peligrosa ir a sacarla. Nunca te metas con los nidos que veas.

--Estás equivocada, mi hija. . . . Hoy has tenido suerte, nada más. Hay abejas y avispas muy malas. Cuidado, mi hija; porque me vas a dar un gran disgusto (p. 63).

Of course, the very next day the fawn again goes in search of honey. She briefly remembers her mother's warning, and then dismisses it when she spots a nest larger than the one of the previous day. In the fawn's reasoning, Quiroga shows a genuine understanding of a child's reaction: "Se acordó de la recomendación de su mamá; mas creyó que su

mamá exageraba como exageran siempre las madres de las gamitas" (p. 64). This time, though, the hive the fawn butts belongs to a colony of wasps who do sting. They attack her and sting her eyes so badly that she can no longer see. The doe begins to worry when her fawn does not return home, so she begins searching for her and is sadly surprised:

Su madre que había salido a buscarla, porque tardaba mucho, la halló al fin, y se desesperó también con su gamita que estaba ciega. La llevó paso a paso hasta su cubil, con la cabeza de su hija recostada en su pescuezo, y los bichos del monte que encontraban en el camino, se acercaban todos a mirar los ojos de la infeliz gamita (pp. 64-65).

Like a human mother who sees the child she loves in pain, the doe feels so helpless that she is willing to do anything to obtain relief and help for her blind fawn. Although she fears to seek the aid of the only one who can help because he is human and a hunter, she decides to ask for a carta de recomendación from her friend the anteater, who just happens also to be the man's good friend. Through the inclusion of this detail, Quiroga points out a type of social interaction which is considered proper and even necessary in the Hispanic culture--that of asking for and using the influence and help of one's friends to achieve a goal, as seen in the doe's words to the anteater: "--Vengo a pedirle una tarjeta de recomendación para el cazador. La gamita, mi hija, está ciega" (p. 66). Hence, this carta or tarjeta which consists of a dried viper's head complete with poisonous fangs becomes perhaps an unconscious symbol of the social culture about which Quiroga wishes to instruct his children and those who will read the story thereafter.

When the doe and her fawn arrive at the hunter's lodge, she immediately informs him, "¡Tenemos la cabeza de víbora!" (p. 66). The hunter proves both compassionate and helpful as he examines the fawn and makes a diagnosis:

. . . salió . . . con una silla alta, e hizo sentar en ella a la gamita para poderle ver bien los ojos sin agacharse mucho. Le examinó así los ojos, bien de cerca con el vidrio redondo muy grande, mientras la mamá alumbraba con el farol de viento colgado de su cuello.

--Esto no es gran cosa --dijo por fin el cazador, ayudando a bajar a la gamita--. Pero hay que tener mucha paciencia. Póngale esta pomada en los ojos todas las noches, y téngale veinte días en la oscuridad. Después póngale estos lentes amarillos, y se curará (p. 68).

The hunter's good nature is further accentuated by his refusal to accept any remuneration for his services and his warning that the doe and her fawn should be very careful of his neighbor's dogs who have been trained to follow the scent of deer. The doe takes the hunter's advice, and after the prescribed twenty days have elapsed, the fawn is elated that she can once again see, while her mother gives way to tears of joy and relief, much like a human mother: ". . . la gama, recostando la cabeza en una rama, lloraba también de alegría, al ver curada su gamita" (p. 69). This is the last mention of the mother doe and of her relationship with her fawn.

At this point in "La gama ciega," the focus of the narrative shifts entirely to the growing friendship between the fawn and the hunter. It begins when the fawn recovers and wishes to find some way to repay the hunter. She gathers some heron feathers, and, on a rainy night when the dogs cannot smell her scent, she takes them to the hunter who laughs with affection at the gift. The fawn misunderstands



the man's laughter and resolves to bring him bigger and better feathers the next time. In a week, she returns, and the hunter gives her a bamboo cane full of honey to show his appreciation. With this exchange, a mutual friendship begins which Quiroga describes in the following passage:

Desde entonces la gamita y el cazador fueron grandes amigos. Ella se empeñaba siempre en llevarle plumas de garza que valen mucho dinero, y se quedaba las horas charlando con el hombre. El ponía siempre en la mesa un jarro enlozado lleno de miel, y arrimaba la silla alta para su amiga. A veces le daba también cigarros que las gamas comen con gran gusto, y no les hacen mal. Pasaban así el tiempo, mirando la llama, porque el hombre tenía una estufa de leña mientras afuera el viento y la lluvia sacudían el alero de paja del rancho (p. 70).

It is evident in the concluding paragraph of "La gama ciega" that Quiroga cannot resist a last chance to instruct as well as entertain his audience when he mentions that deer like to eat cigars and how cigars do not harm them. The implied lesson, of course, is that although deer may safely eat cigars, they are not healthy for children. Perhaps Quiroga was thinking of the humorous story he had written and published in 1913 in Fray Mocho as "El cigarro pateador" and then later included in Cuentos de amor de locura y de muerte with the new title, "Nuestro primer cigarro." The urge to instruct is also implicit in Quiroga's lesson on hospitality as the hunter sets the table in anticipation of the fawn's visit: "Y cuando caía la tarde y empezaba a llover, el cazador colocaba en la mesa el jarrito de miel y la servilleta. . . (p. 71). The story appeals to the child because he can empathize with the fawn and can perhaps recognize in the mother doe the same love and concern that his own mother shows him daily.

## II: Characters

Quiroga keeps the characters in "La gama ciega" to a minimum. There are only four characters in the story: the mother doe, the fawn, the hunter and the anteater. As in the other Cuentos de la selva, he does not describe the characters physically. Instead, Quiroga chooses a few details to make the characters come alive for the child. From the opening sentence of the story, for example, Quiroga wants his audience to know that the doe is a very special doe, so he includes the detail that she is the mother of ". . .dos hijos mellizos, cosa rara entre los venados" (p. 61). In keeping with the reality of the ever-present possibility of death in nature, he states in a rather matter-of-fact way that the male twin is eaten by a mountain cat, and this, then, makes it plausible that the mother doe lavishes all her attention on the remaining female twin as she supervises her fawn's daily recital of the oración de los venados. The doe shows firmness and kindness as she explains to her daughter that it is extremely dangerous for her to search for honey. Her way of addressing the fawn as mi hija reveals her love since this is a term of endearment very common to Hispanic culture. Like any good parent, the doe goes in search of her child when she does not return home. And, to further show the power of a mother's love, Quiroga tells his audience that the doe fears to visit the hunter, but as a last recourse decides to obtain a letter of recommendation from the anteater and thereby use the only means she knows to help her child. When the hunter examines the fawn and prescribes a regimen that will cure her, the doe's reaction is like that of any mother in her circumstances: "--¡Muchas

gracias, cazador! --respondió la madre, muy contenta y agradecida--. ¿Cuánto le debo?" (p. 68). And when the fawn recovers her eyesight, the doe's relief again echoes that of a human mother: ". . .lloraba también de alegría, al ver curada su gamita" (p. 69).

The main character of "La gama ciega" is the fawn. One learns in the opening sentences of the story that she is much loved: "Las otras gamas, que la querían mucho, le hacían siempre cosquillas en los costados" (p. 61). The next detail Quiroga provides is extremely important because it explains why she is so adventurous by making the reader or audience aware that she is muy traviesa (p. 62). In addition, the fawn is very ingenuous because she is convinced that bees do not sting, as she tells her mother: "--¡Pero no pican, mamá! Los tábanos y las uras sí pican; las abejas no" (p. 63). However, when she finds a wasp's nest the next day and is stung by the wasps as she butts their nest to get some honey, she finds to her painful surprise that her mother was correct in her warnings. When she is totally blind, like any child in trouble, she immediately begins calling for her mother. Another indication of how much the fawn is loved may be seen in the anteater's reaction when the doe tells him of her fawn's misadventure: "¡Ah, la gamita? --le respondió el oso hormiguero--. Es una buena persona. Si es por ella, sí le doy lo que quiere" (p. 66). Quiroga shows how thoughtful and grateful the fawn is by her attitude toward the hunter whom she wishes to repay for the recovery of her eyesight: ". . .ella quería a toda costa pagarle al hombre que tan bueno había sido con ella. . ." (p. 69).

In "La gama ciega," the hunter is a benevolent human, who, though

he hunts for a living, still has a compassionate heart. No mention is made of his existence until the distraught mother doe is looking for a cure for her fawn: "Ella sabía bien que en el pueblo que estaba del otro lado del monte vivía un hombre que tenía remedios. El hombre era cazador, y cazaba también venados, pero era un hombre bueno" (p. 65). When the doe takes her daughter to the hunter's lodge, his kindness shows in the way he talks to the fawn: "--¡Hum! . . . Vamos a ver que tiene esta señorita. . ." (pp. 67-68). He gives the doe a pomade to put in the fawn's eyes and a pair of yellow glasses that she is to wear when she goes out after staying in the dark for twenty days. The hunter refuses payment and warns the doe to beware of the neighbor's dogs. Although Quiroga gives no details about the man's physical appearance, the few details which he includes about the hunter's ethical and moral character are more than sufficient to create a believable character. His reaction to the fawn's first gift of feathers is plausible because the author has already established him as a sympathetic character whose laughter is just a cover for the affection that he feels toward the fawn. The man's thoughtfulness is also revealed by his gift of honey to the fawn the next time she comes to visit and bring him heron feathers.

Finally, in Quiroga's description of the hunter's happiness because, even though it is raining, he has been able to patch his roof so it no longer leaks, one is reminded of Quiroga's own experiences when he built his bungalow. This is clearly seen when one compares the reference to the hunter's work to make his roof rainproof and Quiroga's similar efforts:

. . . una noche de lluvia estaba el hombre leyendo en su cuarto, muy contento porque acababa de componer el techo de paja, que ahora no se llovía más; estaba leyendo. . . (pp. 69-70).

La paciencia que gastó Quiroga en corregir sus errores no tiene paragón. Gran parte de sus días se lo pasaba tapando agujeros y rendijas en el techo de la casa, soportando estóicamente un sol que sólo por milagro no lo fulminaba.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, in the midst of a story for children, the figure of the hunter provides an insight into Quiroga, the man. Like the hunter, he was kind toward the animals he kept as pets, and he experienced the hardships inherent to life in a jungle habitat.

In "La gama ciega," there is one more character who serves an important function. He is the anteater who is the hunter's good friend. As is so typical of Quiroga, he again chooses to provide a rather detailed physical description of a minor character in contrast with his total lack of physical description of the main characters. Quiroga provides the following vivid physical description of the anteater:

Este amigo era, como se ha dicho, un oso hormiguero; pero de una especie pequeña, cuyos individuos tienen un color amarillo, y por encima del color amarillo una especie de camiseta negra sujeta por dos cintas que pasan por encima de los hombros. Tienen también la cola prensil porque viven siempre en los árboles, y se cuelgan de la cola (pp. 65-66).

Since almost everyone likes a mystery, especially children, Quiroga does not explain why the anteater and the man are such good friends: "¿De dónde provenía la amistad estrecha entre el oso hormiguero y el cazador? Nadie lo sabía en el monte; pero alguna vez ha de llegar el motivo a nuestros oídos" (p. 66). This is quickly followed by the anteater's counsel to the worried doe as he gives her ". . . una

cabeza de víbora, completamente seca, que tenía aun los colmillos venenosos" (p. 66) and tells her, "--Muéstrole esto. . . . No se precisa más" (p. 66). Although the anteater's role is rather brief, he is an important character because he makes it possible for the doe to obtain the much needed help which only the hunter can provide.

Finally, Quiroga provides a very brief and not too detailed description of the bees and later of the wasps whom the fawn encounters. The bees are described simply as "mosquitas rubias de cintura muy fina" (p. 62) and as "abejitas que no pican porque no tenían agujón" (p. 63). In contrast to the harmless bees, the wasps are described as "abejas oscuras, con una fajita amarilla en la cintura" and as "avispas que la picaron [a la gamita] en todo el cuerpo . . . en los mismos ojos" (p. 64).

### III: Setting

As in many of the Cuentos de la selva, the setting is not as important as the action of the story. Any description of setting is merely incidental to the story line. For example, a common sight in a jungle habitat becomes the source of the fawn's first adventure:

Una tarde, sin embargo, mientras la gamita recorría el monte comiendo las hojitas tiernas, vio de pronto ante ella, en el hueco de un árbol que estaba podrido, muchas bolitas juntas que colgaban. Tenían un color oscuro, como el de las pizarras (p. 62).

Quiroga gives an intimation of the incursions which humans have made into the jungle in the fawn's irresistible urge to seek out more honey: "Pero lo primero que hizo a la mañana siguiente, fue seguir los

senderos que habían abierto los hombres en el monte, para ver con más facilidad los nidos de abejas" (p. 62).

There are two mentions of the doe's den, but no attempt is ever made to describe it. Even the hunter's lodge is not described in any great detail. Quiroga says that the hunter has a wood-burning stove and that he has successfully patched his roof so it no longer leaks when it rains. The child needs no further details because he can imagine enough of the setting to satisfy him. Moreover, he is so interested in the interaction between the hunter and the fawn that he has no need to hear a detailed description of the hunter's cabin. Finally, it is important to remember that these children's stories were originally created for two little children who lived in the selva of San Ignacio and who therefore did not need a detailed description of a leaky roof or of the interior of a home which might very well have been their own bungalow.

#### IV: Style

In "La gama ciega," Quiroga again begins the story with the familiar "Había una vez" formula. He then quickly passes to an enumeration of the tenets of the oración de los venados which the mother doe uses to teach her fawn the principles of survival. Then, by mixing narration and dialogue, as he has done in the other Cuentos de la selva, Quiroga unfolds a story which teaches the importance of filial obedience and the social value of generosity as well as that of gratitude.

The sentence length in this story tends to be shorter than that

of the majority of the other stories in this collection with an average length of six words. Even the longest sentence is considerably shorter at forty-four words than the longest sentence in the majority of the stories. This reduced length makes the story move more quickly and thus satisfies any impatience the child may feel in ascertaining the final outcome of the fawn's disobedience and her success in befriending the hunter.

Since the main character is a baby animal, the recurrence of diminutives in the narrative seems especially appropriate. The most frequently used diminutive, gamita, refers to the fawn herself and serves to identify her in the absence of a specific, given name. Other examples of the diminutives found throughout the story are as follows: hojitas, bolitas, despacito, abejitas, fajita, señorita, plumerito, and jarrito. In addition, Quiroga uses much repetition in the story:

Despacito, entonces, muy despacito, probó una gota. . . (p. 62).

--Ten mucho cuidado, mi hija. . . (p. 63).

--Estás equivocada, mi hija. . . (p. 63).

--¡Sí mamá! ¡Sí mamá! --respondió la gamita (p. 63).

La gamita, loca de dolor, corrió y corrió. . . (p. 64).

--¡Mamá! . . . ¡Mamá! . . (p. 64).

--¡Tan! itan! itan! --llamó jadeante (p. 66).

--¡Veo, mamá! ¡Ya veo todo! (p. 69).

The story is narrated in the third person limited point of view wherein the storyteller does not have any privileged insight regarding



why certain events in the story happen. For example, the obvious debt that the hunter owes to the anteater centers around the dried viper's head, but neither the narrator nor the other people of the area really know when or under what circumstances the friendship developed. Finally, "La gama ciega" reflects not only Quiroga's great love for his children, but also provides an insight into his understanding of children in general.

#### V: The Theme of Filial Obedience

A few important themes may be found in "La gama ciega": the necessity of filial obedience, the strength and beauty of a mother's love, and the value and necessity of friendship. The theme of filial obedience is the dominant theme which shapes the narrative. From the oración de los venados to the warning of the mother doe which foreshadows the fawn's continued disobedience which will lead to her blindness, to the fawn's forced obedience when she must stay in the dark for twenty days before she can see again, the child observes a process of growth and of becoming an adult. The innocent baby doe is tempted to disobey her mother's warnings and is thus blinded symbolically as well as physically. She must consequently spend a period of time in the dark so she can regain her eyesight which symbolizes knowledge as well as the responsibility to obey the laws of survival. Hence, with her expulsion from the jungle, which is the garden of her infancy, she is forced into the literal darkness of the hollowed-out tree trunk which clearly symbolizes a return to the womb and a rebirth. She emerges as a young doe who feels an adult

obligation to repay the generous hunter by giving him something of value. As a further indication that the little fawn has changed into a young doe, one notices the absence of the mother doe at the end of the story, and that the young doe is as careful of the dogs when she visits the hunter as her mother had been when she initially consulted the hunter to find a cure for her fawn.

The minor theme of maternal love is important because it is such an infrequent theme in the Cuentos de la selva. It is especially important because throughout the Cuentos, the presence of females as mothers, human or animal, is noticeably lacking in favor of the far greater instance of the appearance of the strong, if silent, man as father. Therefore, the mother doe embodies all that a mother should be. She very obviously loves her fawn and takes her maternal duties very seriously. In her warnings to the little fawn, a child may easily recognize the same love and concern that he hears in his own mother's voice as she instructs and admonishes him.

Finally, the minor theme of the value and necessity of friendship is not a new theme in the Cuentos de la selva. In fact, it appears as either a major or a minor theme in all the stories included in the Cuentos de la selva. Friendship is essential to survival in the jungle. Quiroga intimates that the great friendship between the man and the anteater has something to do with survival. The friendship between the mother doe and the anteater does not seem to be as strong as it is between the anteater and the man, although a certain degree of friendship must exist in order for the doe to ask him for a letter of recommendation. Finally, the friendship between the young doe and

hunter is shown as it develops. With these three views of friendship in action, Quiroga shows the different stages of a friendship and how it can be fostered by unselfish mutual sharing. Hence, this recurring theme is an invaluable aid in the growth and maturity of the child reading or listening to the story.

"Historia de dos cachorros de coatí  
y de dos cachorros de hombre"

I: Contents

As a companion piece to "La gama ciega," the "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre" has the distinction of again presenting a mother figure in the character of the mother coatí. In addition, this sixth story of the Cuentos de la selva and "La abeja haragana," are the two stories for which Speratti Piñero could find no verifiable magazine publication date before its inclusion in the Cuentos de la selva. From my studies, it has become evident that its thematic similarities with "La gama ciega," which was published in 1916, makes it plausible that Quiroga may have begun the story at that time. Since he refers to a story entitled "Historia de tres cazadores de coatís" in his personal chronology and dates it 1916, he was obviously already using coatís as characters in this year. Finally, it is plausible that he began the story in 1916 and finished sometime in 1917 because the children in the story are five and six years of age, and these ages correspond to those of Darío and Eglé for whom the stories were initially created.

The plot line of "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos

cachorros de hombre" is more didactic than any of the previous five stories in the collection, but the didacticism is not obtrusive since it gives the narrator a chance to make many comments about the similarities in the nature and behavior of human children and those of their animal counterparts. In this sense, "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre" is the most complete and well written story for children in this collection since it contains many empathic points of reference even for the child who has never had an intimate experience with coatís and who has never lived in the tropics.

The story opens with the immediate presentation of the mother coatí and her three cubs. At first, in "La gama ciega," the time has come for the coatís to forage on their own, and once again the mother teaches her children rules for survival by advising them as to where to forage for each one's favorite food and by teaching them the importance of avoiding dogs and men.

As the story progresses, the elder coatí finds so many insects to eat that he becomes sleepy, and the middle coatí eats as many oranges as he pleases since nobody discourages him. However, the youngest coatí is not so fortunate as his older brothers. Like the youngest son in many traditional fairy tales, he is destined for adventure. In fact, he goes in search of food and finds only five small eggs by the end of the day; hence, like the pícaro in Spanish literature, he is as hungry in the evening as he had been in the morning. At this point in the narrative, the coatí makes a decision that will permanently alter his life. He hears the crowing of a rooster and remembers that where

there is a rooster, there are many chickens and consequently many eggs. He waits until dark, and then goes to the henhouse where he cannot resist immediately eating a large egg which he sees in the doorway, and he is caught in a trap.

Now, the story flashes back to what had been happening inside the main house while the youngest coati was waiting for darkness. The reader or listener is introduced to a very congenial and playful family consisting of a father and two small, blond children. In this section, the reader also learns that the father has set the trap at the entrance to the henhouse in the hope of catching a weasel who has been killing the chickens and stealing their eggs.

When Quiroga returns to the initial story line, the children successfully intercede for the coati's life, and he becomes their pet. They treat him so well that although he is initially inconsolably sad, he soon decides to remain with the family because he enjoys the children's attention and the food and because he feels a bond of love with the children who have christened him Diecisiete. However, one evening, when his mother and older brothers visit him as is their custom, they find that he has been bitten by a rattlesnake and is mortally wounded. Because Diecisiete has kept his family current with the occurrences at the house, the mother coati and his brothers have also developed a special love for the children. Hence, they decide that the middle coati will take the place of his unfortunate younger brother so that the children will be spared the grief of finding their much loved pet dead. The middle coati is able to replace his brother, as may be seen in the concluding sentence of the story:

Formaron la misma familia de cachorritos de antes, y, como antes, los coatís salvajes venían noche a noche a visitar al coaticito civilizado, y se sentaban a su lado a comer pedacitos de huevos duros que él les guardaba, mientras ellos le contaban la vida de la selva (p. 85).

## II: Characters

There are many characters in "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre." The main characters are divided into two families of animals and humans. The animal family consists of the mother coati and her three cubs. Two of the cubs prove to be obedient and tractable, but the youngest has a demanding taste in food and a mind of his own. In fact, on his first expedition alone, he immediately begins to question his mother's advice when he has been unsuccessful in his foraging: "--¿Por qué no querrá mamá --se dijo-- que vaya a buscar nidos en el campo?" (p. 77). And, just as he is thinking this, he hears the song of a bird coming from the forbidden field, and reasons very much like the little fawn in "La gama ciega": "¡Que huevos tan grandes debe tener ese pajarito!" (p. 77). When he advances for a closer look, his mother's instructions enable him to recognize the bird as a rooster, and he imagines: "¡Si yo pudiera comer huevos de gallina! . . ." (p. 77). The little coati again remembers his mother's warning to stay away from the cleared fields, but, ". . . el deseo pudo más, y se sentó a la orilla del monte, esperando que cerrara bien la noche para ir al gallinero" (pp. 77-78). As he steals toward the henhouse, his mother is completely forgotten as he imagines he is soon going to eat ". . . cien, mil, dos mil huevos de gallina" (p. 78). Only when he is caught in the trap does

he call for his mother's aid like any other child who suddenly finds himself in pain, and when he is later locked in a cage, he again seeks his mother's aid: "--¡Mamá, mamá! --murmuró el prisionero en voz muy baja para no hacer ruido--. ¡Estoy aquí! ¡Sáquenme de aquí! ¡No quiero quedarme, má . . . má! . . . --y lloraba desconsolado" (p. 80). However, only three days later, the little coatí reacts very differently since he has realized that living with the "cachorros de hombre" is a form of terrestrial paradise for him: "--Mamá: yo no quiero irme más de aquí. Me dan huevos y son muy buenos conmigo. Hoy me dijeron que si me portaba bien me iban a dejar suelto muy pronto. Son como nosotros. Son cachorritos también, y jugamos juntos" (p. 82). Since Quiroga was a father and a teacher, it is not unusual that he had an understanding of the importance of play in the development of the child.

The human family consists of the father, who is a single parent, and his two blond children, a boy and a girl, who are five and six years old. The happiness and love among the family members is evident from the very first reference to them:

. . . el hombre de la casa jugaba sobre la gramilla con sus hijos, dos criaturas rubias de cinco y seis años, que corrían riendo, se caían, se levantaban riendo otra vez, y volvían a caerse. El padre se caía también, con gran alegría de los chicos. (pp. 78-79).

After the man returns from setting the trap at the entrance to the henhouse, a very clear picture of a rather indulgent father emerges: "Y fue y armó la trampa. Después comieron y se acostaron. Pero las criaturas no tenían sueño, y saltaban de la cama del uno al otro y se

enredaban en el camisón. El padre, que leía en el comedor, los dejaba hacer" (p. 79). In this passage, as in the previous one, any child who reads or listens to the story can immediately identify with the little boy and girl in the story because their actions reflect normal childhood behavior for those in their particular age group. After the coati is captured, the children show the same immediate fascination toward him that an adult sees in a contemporary child who finds a stray animal or who finds himself in a pet store.

The children's choice of a name for the little coati is another detail which shows Quiroga's understanding of the types of things that may prompt a child's actions:

--¿Qué nombre le pondremos? --preguntó la nena a su hermanito.  
 --¡Ya sé! --respondió el varoncito--. ¡Le pondremos Diecisiete!  
 ¿Por qué Diecisiete? Nunca hubo bicho del monte con nombre más raro. Pero el varoncito estaba aprendiendo a contar, y tal vez le había llamado la atención aquel número (p. 81).

Finally, the father's reaction to his children's pleading that they be allowed to keep the little coati as a pet shows a knowledge of the fact that very often children will forget to care for their pets daily, and his reaction is also a way to instruct the children listening to or reading the story about kindness toward their pets. The father's instructions are explicit as he tells the children:

"--Bueno, se lo voy a dar. . . . Pero cuídenlo bien, y sobre todo no se olviden de que los coatís toman agua como ustedes" (p. 80).

Two other characters play an important though minor role in the story. The first one is Tuké, the human family's dog whose barking frightens the little coati caught in the trap and later interrupts



his family's attempt to free him from his cage. The most frightening character, though, is the rattlesnake who is described as: ". . . una enorme víbora que estaba enroscada a la entrada de la juala" (p. 83). Since he is responsible for the death of the little coati, Quiroga shows him receiving a quick retribution from the coati's grieving family, and this reassures the child and teaches him that evil does not remain unpunished.

### III: Setting

In "Historia de dos cachorros de coati y de dos cachorros de hombre," the setting is divided between the habitat of the coatis and the habitat of man at the beginning of the story. These two worlds are joined when Diecisiete decides to remain with the "cachorros de hombre," and they remain joined even after his death when his middle brother replaces him in the cage. As in the other Cuentos de la selva, there is no detailed description of the setting. In fact, only a small clue is given to the possible location of the story when the narrator says that the orange grove where the middle coati forages is within the rain forest or jungle: ". . . como pasa en el Paraguay y Misiones. . ." (p. 76).

For the child, the setting serves only as a backdrop for the events narrated in the story. Because Quiroga recognized this attitude toward setting in children, he did not spend much time providing visual details. However, when there is something in the story which merits comment or explanation, he is careful to satisfy the child's curiosity. The following excerpts explain how coatis

walk, what a file is, and why Diecisiete dies even though coatis are supposed to be immune to snake venom:

Todos se bajaron entonces y se separaron, caminando de derecha a izquierda y de izquierda a derecha, como si hubieran perdido algo, porque así caminan los coatís (p. 76).

--¡Vamos a buscar las herramientas del hombre! Los hombres tienen herriaientas para cortar fierro. Se llaman limas. Tienen tres lados como las víboras de cascabel. Se empuja y se retira. ¡Vamos a buscarla! (p. 81).

Los coatís son casi refractarios, como se dice, al veneno de las víboras. No les hace casi nada el veneno, y hay otros animales como la mangosta, que resisten muy bien el veneno de las víboras. Con toda seguridad el coaticito había sido mordido en una arteria o una vena, porque entonces la sangre se envenena en seguida, y el animal muere. Esto le había pasado al coaticito (p. 84).

The effect of these explanations is to create a feeling of participation in the child which draws him into the setting of the story as an ally of the cachorros de coatí and the cachorros de hombre.

#### IV: Style

The narrative style in "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre" is clear, direct and easily captures and retains a child's attention as effectively as the other stories in the collection. However, the structure of this story is somewhat more sophisticated than the structure of the other stories. Until the little coati is caught in the trap, the story proceeds chronologically, but then as perhaps a cue to the reader or to the narrator who must please his audience and keep its attention, Quiroga separates the text with a dotted line. The next paragraph presents a

flashback in which the child not only meets the members of the human family, but also learns that the father has set the trap which has sprung on the little coati. Chronological order is resumed at the point where the children hear the trap spring and alert their father.

In this story, the repetition centers around the copious use of diminutives throughout the narrative. The most frequently used diminutives are coaticito and cachorritos. Other diminutives used are: pajaritos, chiquitos, gatito, pedacitos, and varoncito. The diminutives usually refer to either animals or humans. As in the other stories, metaphors and similes are scarce. Quiroga's favorite device is to create images that the reader or listener may imagine according to his own individual experiences. For this reason, he provided very few concrete details. Finally, Quiroga uses foreshadowing in the story to prepare the child for the inevitable demise of the lovable little coati. The first reference is a comparison between metal files and the rattles of rattlesnakes: "Tienen tres lados como las víboras de cascabel" (p. 81). While this explanation creates an image of a file and its purpose, it is also a subtle reminder that poisonous snakes exist everywhere in the jungle and are an ever-present danger. This fact is reinforced when the father of the children insists that they wear shoes when they are out at night because he fears they will be bitten by a snake. On the night of the little coati's death, the foreshadowing is much more explicit: ". . . una noche muy oscura, en que hacia mucho calor y tronaba, los coatís salvajes llamaron al coaticito y nadie les respondió" (p. 83). This ominous picture prepares the child for what

the uneasy coatis find next:

Se acercaron muy inquietos y vieron entonces, en el momento en que casi la pisaban, una enorme víbora que estaba enroscada a la entrada de la juala. Los coatís comprendieron en seguida que el coaticito había sido mordido al entrar, y no había respondido a su llamado porque acaso estaba ya muerto (p. 83).

Finally, the average sentence length in this story is 12.50 words, however, the sentences vary in length from one word to fifty-two words. Another stylistic feature, observable at a glance, is that there is more narrative and less dialogue than in many of the other stories in the collection. There is no doubt that this aspect of the narrative helps the story move along more quickly, and thus satisfies the child's curiosity and impatience to know the outcome of the story.

#### V: The Theme of Compassion

Some of the themes found in the other stories in the Cuentos de la selva such as love, death, revenge, friendship and the consequences of disobedience are found in "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre." Two other themes which make this story especially conducive to the teaching of values to young children are the compassionate concern for the happiness of others which the coatis exhibit, and the sensitive presentation of the affinity existing among young creatures.

There is no doubt that there is great love among the members of the coati and the human families. The mother coati very obviously loves her cubs; the reader sees this in her careful instructions and

warnings given so the coatis may survive successfully on their own when they are grown. When the little coati disobeys his mother's warnings and fails to return home, the mother coati like the mother doe in "La gama ciega," and the coati's two brothers search for him and try to free him from his cage. When the little coati decides to stay with the children, his family is sad, but its members henceforth visit him every night. And finally, when the little coati dies, his mother and brothers shed many tears for him and avenge his death by killing the rattlesnake who has bitten him. The father of the human family is the counterpart of the mother coati. He plays with his children, instructs them on the compassionate care of animals and is concerned for their safety when the trap springs and the children ask to go outside with him at night: "El padre consintió, pero no sin que las criaturas se pusieran las sandalias, pues nunca los dejaba andar descalzos de noche, por temor a las víboras" (p. 79). By the way the children address their father, the child sees that they have a loving and comfortable relationship with them. And finally, the children seem to get along well with each other since they easily agree on the name they will give to their new pet. Especially in their treatment of Diecisiete, they show that they are good-natured children: "Le dieron pan, uvas, chocolate, carne, langostas, huevos, riquísimos huevos de gallina" (p. 82).

The theme of freindship is developed in the relationship between Diecisiete and the children. Diecisiete tells his mother and brothers: "Son cachorritos como nosotros. Son cachorritos también, y jugamos juntos" (p. 82). Also, the narrator says about Diecisiete:

"El y las criaturas se querían mucho. . ." (p. 83). Closely linked with the theme of friendship is that of concern for the happiness of others. This theme is seen in the reaction of the children when they beg their father to spare the little coati. It is even more forcefully presented in the reaction of the coatis after the death of Diecisiete:

Pero los tres coatís, sin embargo, iban muy preocupados, y su preocupación era ésta: ¿qué iban a decir los chicos, cuando, al día siguiente, vieran muerto a su querido coaticito? Los chicos le querían muchísimo, y ellos los coatís, querían también a los cachorritos rubios. Así es que los tres coatís tenían el mismo pensamiento, y era evitarles ese gran dolor a los chicos.

Hablaron un largo rato y al fin decidieron lo siguiente: el segundo de los coatís, que se parecía muchísimo al menor en cuerpo y modo de ser, iba a quedarse en la jaula, en vez del difunto (pp. 84-85).

Even though the coatis mourn the death of Diecisiete, they are able to put aside their grief long enough to be preoccupied with the children's feelings. The middle coati's sacrifice of freedom in the jungle so he can take the place of his dead brother is an excellent lesson in selfless compassion.

Finally, the theme of death is present in some form or another in every story in the Cuentos de la selva. In this particular story, the references to the poisonous snakes reminds one that death is always a part of life, everywhere, not only in the jungle. The first actual reference to death in the story, though, is made by the narrator when he talks about the little mountain cat who had once been the children's pet: ". . . los chicos habían tenido una vez un gatito montés al cual a cada rato le llevaban carne, que sacaban de la fiambarrera, pero nunca le dieron agua, y se murió" (p. 80). Then, when

the coati family finds Diecisiete, Quiroga creates a very realistic and certainly not pretty picture of the dying little coati: ". . . allí estaba en efecto el coaticito, tendido, hinchado, con las patas temblando y muriéndose" (p. 83). Quiroga describes his death briefly and clearly: "El coaticito abrió por fin la boca y dejó de respirar, porque estaba muerto" (p. 84). The theme of death in children's stories may seem violent and inappropriate at first glance: however, since children understand and deal with the phenomenon of death in different ways at various stages of their maturation, an inclusion of the reality of death is not only proper, but also necessary in the normal development and acculturation of the child. Finally, "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre" provides the child with animal and human characters whom he can love and whose human and humane attributes he can emulate in his own life.

Chapter VI: Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ray, pp. 289-90.

<sup>2</sup> Delgado and Brignole, p.200.



## Chapter VII

### "El paso del Yabebirí" and "La abeja haragana"

#### "El paso del Yabebirí"

##### I: Content

One of the first things which captures one's attention at the beginning of "El paso del Yabebirí," published individually in 1917, is the unusual preciseness of location lacking in the other stories of the Cuentos de la selva. Next, one is reminded of the pedagogical aspect of Quiroga's personality by the definition of the name, Yabebirí, and by the careful description of the magnitude of the pain a stingray inflicts upon its victim. As the reader sees in the following excerpt, which is the beginning paragraph of the story, Quiroga wastes no time in localizing the story and introducing what will be very important characters in the narrative:

En el río Yabebirí, que está en Misiones, hay muchas rayas, porque "Yabebirí" quiere decir precisamente, "Río-de-las-rayas". Hay tantas que a veces es peligroso meter un solo pie en el agua. Yo conocí un hombre a quien lo picó una raya en el talón y que tuvo que caminar renqueando media legua para llegar a su casa: el hombre iba llorando y cayéndose de dolor. Es uno de los dolores más fuertes que se puede sentir (p. 89).

In the second paragraph, Quiroga makes the reader or listener aware of a fishing method which Quiroga obviously disapproves, namely, the use

of dynamite to kill fish. These two paragraphs provide valuable information and a good introduction to the actual story which begins after the third paragraph where one meets the unnamed man around whose plight the story is centered. Here the reader learns something about his ethical and moral character, and is made aware of the friendship and gratitude which the stingrays feel toward him. What follows is an adventure story which gives the child the opportunity to participate in the battle between the stingrays, who clearly represent friendship in action and all that is good, and the jaguars, who represent brute force and all that is evil. Another aspect of this story which makes it different from the other stories in the collection is the frequent and detailed description of the man's physical state, especially his loss of blood. In fact, "El paso del Yabebirí" is the bloodiest story in the Cuentos de la selva.

The conflict which dominates the narrative is announced by a fox who comes to warn the stingrays that their friend is wounded and is being pursued by a jaguar whom he has fought. He advises the stingrays to allow their friend to pass across the Yabebirí unharmed so he may save himself from the jaguar. The stingrays' immediate response sets the mood of the story because it demonstrates their loyalty to the man and their unswerving resolve to help him: "--iYa lo creo! iYa lo creo que le vamos a dar paso! --contestaron las rayas--. iPero lo que es el tigre, ése no va a pasar!" (p. 90). And, indeed, the wounded jaguar is easily prevented from crossing to the island. He is attacked as soon as he puts a paw into the water:

Pero apenas hubo metido una pata en el agua, sintió como si le

hubieron clavado ocho o diez terribles clavos en las patas, y dio un salto atrás: eran las rayas, que defendían el paso del río, y le habían clavado con toda su fuerza e aguijón de la cola (p. 92).

Even though the jaguar tries to outwit the stingrays by jumping midway across the river where there are no stingrays, he is painfully outsmarted because: ". . . apenas dio un paso, una verdadera lluvia de aguijonazos, como puñaladas de dolor, lo detuvieron en seco. . ." (p. 93). Once the jaguar is completely incapacitated, his infuriated mate appears and unsuccessfully demands to be allowed to cross to the island. The exchange between the female jaguar and the stingrays is reminiscent of the one between the caymans and the officer in "La guerra de los yacarés." Finally, when the female jaguar tries to reach the island by fording the river where there are no stingrays, she is as unfortunate as her mate because: ". . . las rayas se abalanzaron contra sus patas, deshaciéndoselas a aguijonazos" (p. 96).

When the female jaguar is also incapacitated, the stingrays consult with their wounded friend who finally suggests that the only way to defeat the jaguars, who will soon appear to continue the battle, is to send someone to bring his winchester and a carton of shells. As luck will have it, the man mentions a capybara who was once a family pet, and the stingrays are able to send him a message which the man has written in his own blood. However, just as the man finishes his message, the jaguars return to continue the onslaught. Since every stingray in the Yabebirí has been summoned to the aid of the wounded man, the jaguars again ask for safe passage. When it is denied, the final battle begins:

Con un enorme salto los tigres se lanzaron al agua. Y cayeron todos sobre un verdadero piso de rayas. Las rayas les acribillaron las patas a aguijonazos, y a cada herida los tigres lanzaban un rugido de dolor. Pero ellos se defendían a zarpazos, manoteando como locos en el agua. Y las rayas volaban por el aire con el vientre abierto por las uñas de los tigres (p. 100).

As the battle continues, the stingrays begin to weaken. However, just as they are about to be defeated, the capybara appears:

. . . en ese momento un animalito, un pobre animalito colorado y peludo cruzaba nadando a todo fuerza el Yabebirí: era el carpinchito, que llegaba a la isla llevando el winchester y las balas en la cabeza para que no se mojaran (p. 104).

The capybara's timely appearance makes it possible for the man to shoot all the jaguars who attempt to swim across the Yabebirí to the island. Finally, the story ends happily because the stingrays reproduce so rapidly that they soon become numerous again, and the man, who is completely healed, decides to live on the island in the middle of the Yabebirí permanently, so that he may be close to his friends, the stingrays. After all the violence, bloodshed and death, the reader is left with a sense of peace and contentment in the concluding sentence of the story:

Y allí, en las noches de verano le gustaba tenderse en la playa y fumar a la luz de la luna, mientras las rayas, hablando despacito, se lo mostraban a los pescados, que no le conocían, contándoles la gran batalla que, aliadas a ese hombre, habían tenido una vez contra los tigres (p. 105).

## II: Characters

In "El paso del Yabebirí," the main characters are the man, the stingrays, and the jaguars. As in "La tortuga gigante," Quiroga

shows the child that the compassion and friendship which the man shows toward wild creatures is acknowledged and reciprocated at a crucial time in the man's life. The unnamed man in the story has earned the friendship and loyalty of the animals inhabiting the shores and waters of the Yabebirí, especially that of the stingrays, because of his opposition to the indiscriminate killing of fish: ". . . no quiso que tiraran bombas de dinamita, porque tenía lástima de los pescaditos. El no se oponía a que pescaran en el río para comer; pero no quería que mataran inútilmente a millones de pescaditos" (pp. 89-90). Evidently, the man's moral and ethical character is so strong and his personality so forceful that he is able to prevail over the men who use the dynamite, as Quiroga shows in the following description:

Los hombres que tiraban bombas se enojaron al principio, pero como el hombre tenía un carácter serio, aunque era muy bueno, los otros se fueron a cazar a otra parte, y todos los pescados quedaron muy contentos (p. 90).

No information is given regarding the man's physical appearance; however, his physical condition is described often and with considerable detail when compared with descriptions in the other stories in the collection. The excerpts which follow show that Quiroga wanted the child reading or listening to the story to understand clearly the gravity of the man's physical state:

. . . el hombre . . . apareció todo ensangrentado y la camisa rota. La sangre le caía por la cara y el pecho hasta el pantalón, y desde las arrugas del pantalón, la sangre caía a la arena. Avanzó tambaleando hacia la orilla, porque estaba muy herido, y entró en el río. Pero apenas puso pie en el agua, las rayas que estaban amontonadas se apartaron de su paso, y el hombre llegó con el agua al pecho hasta la isla, sin que una raya lo picara. Y conforme llegó, cayó desmayado en la misma arena, por la gran

cantidad de sangre que había perdido (p. 91).

El hombre estaba siempre tendido, porque había perdido mucha sangre, pero podía hablar y moverse un poquito (p. 97).

. . . el hombre disolvía una gota de sangre seca en la palma de la mano, para hacer tinta, y con una espina de pescado, que era la pluma, escribió en una hoja seca que era el papel (p. 98).

El hombre herido exclamó entonces, contento:

--¡Rayas! ¡Ya estoy casi por morir, y apenas puedo hablar; pero yo les aseguro que en cuando llegue el winchester, vamos a tener farra para largo rato; esto yo se lo aseguro a ustedes! (p. 102). El hombre dio un gran grito de alegría, porque le quedaba tiempo para entrar en defensa de las rayas. Le pidió al carpinchito que lo empujara con la cabeza para colocarse de costado, porque él solo no podía; y ya en esta posición cargó el winchester con la rapidez de un rayo (p. 104).

While the man seems to live alone, he does reveal something about his past as he remembers: "Yo tuve un amigo . . . un carpinchito que se crió en casa y que jugaba con mis hijos. . . (p. 98). And, finally, the man's response to the stingray's brave defense reveals the emotional side of his character: "El hombre herido se enterneció mucho con la amistad de las rayas que le habían salvado la vida, y dio la mano con verdadero cariño a las rayas que estaban cerca de él" (p. 97).

The stingrays are portrayed as brave, resourceful and loyal creatures whose response to the jaguar is the only touch of local color in the Cuentos de la selva and one of the very few examples of local color in Quiroga's works as a whole; hence, Quiroga feels he must explain the stingray's language in the following section:

--¡Paso! --rugió por última vez el tigre.

--¡NI NUNCA! --respondieron las rayas.

(Ellas dijeron "ni nunca" porque así dicen los que hablan guaraní, como en Misiones).

--¡Vamos a ver! --bramó el tigre (p. 92).

The physical features of the stingrays are not given; however, the reader is told that they cannot swim very fast and that they like to swim close to the muddy river bottom. Their ethical character, like that of the man, is what really makes them believable, and it is summed up in their decision to defend their friend to the death:

"¡Mientras haya una sola raya viva en el Yabebirí, que es nuestro río, defenderemos al hombre bueno que nos defendió antes a nosotras!" (p. 102).

In the story, the roar of the jaguars is always heard before they appear. Before the wounded male jaguar arrives on the river bank, the stingrays hear ". . . un terrible rugido. . ." (p. 91). As the stingrays fear, the female jaguar comes looking for her mate, and, ". . .el monte bramó de nuevo, y apareció la tigra. . ." (p. 94). Later in the story, the return of the jaguars in full force is heralded by a really frightening roar: ". . . un inmenso rugido hizo temblar el agua misma de la orilla, y los tigres desembocaron en la costa" (p. 99). Although Quiroga gives no physical description of the wounded jaguar in the narrative, he reports his physical condition as accurately as that of the man: "El animal estaba también muy herido y la sangre corría por todo el cuerpo" (p. 91). Finally, the capybara or carpincho, which is a large rodent indigenous to the area, is briefly described as ". . . un pobre animalito colorado y peludo. . ." (p. 103), while the dorados, who are the stingray's friends and messengers, are simply described by their speed: "¡Ellos nadan más ligero que nadie!" (p. 95).

## III: Setting

In "El paso del Yabebirí," the setting is extremely important to the action of the story. This makes it different from the other stories in the Cuentos de la selva where the setting tends to serve merely as a background for the action. In fact, Misiones is mentioned three times in the narrative, and the Yabebirí river is mentioned eleven times, a fact which produces the effect of constantly reminding the reader or listener where the battle is taking place. The clarity or turbulence of the river reflects the changing moods in the narrative. At the beginning, the scene on the Yabebirí is peaceful as the stingrays placidly swim along its banks and the man strolls along the shore smoking his pipe. Later, when the jaguar attempts to cross the river, the stingrays attack him, and the water becomes ". . . turbia como si removieron el barro del fondo. . ." (p. 92). Again, when the female jaguar tries to cross the river, the stingrays are literally thrown into a frenzy because they can see no way to warn the stingrays upriver of what is happening: "Y se revolvían desesperadas entre el barro, hasta enturbiar el río" (p. 95). After the battle between the jaguars and the stingrays begins, the waters of the river reflect the tremendous carnage: "El Yabebirí parecía un río de sangre" (p. 101). Then, when the jaguars attack for the second time, the reader learns that, "Todo el Yabebirí, ahora de orilla a orilla, estaba rojo de sangre, y la sangre hacía espuma en la arena de la playa" (pp. 102-03). At the end of the story, the Yabebirí becomes tranquil again.

While the animal characters in the story are all, in real life,



indigenous to the Argentine province of Misiones, Quiroga is able to transform them into thinking, feeling, talking creatures who are very human in their reasoning and emotions. The careful blend of reality and fantasy, as in the other Cuentos de la selva, makes the story and its characters extremely plausible.

#### IV: Style

"El paso del Yabebirí" is an adventure story narrated in chronological order. The action takes place in the course of an afternoon, a compression of time seen in only one other story in the collection, "Las medias de los flamencos." As in "La guerra de los yacarés," the story does not begin with the traditional fairy-tale beginning of "Once upon a time"; instead, it begins with a definition of the meaning of the word "Yabebirí".

There is a great deal of repetition of words and phrases in the dialogues, especially those between the stingrays and the jaguars. This device creates suspense and keeps the reader's attention. The examples which follow are only a brief sampling of the extensive use of repetition:

--¡Ah, ya sé lo que es! ¡Son ustedes, malditas rayas! ¡Salgan del camino!  
 --¡No salimos! --respondieron las rayas.  
 --¡Salgan!  
 --¡No salimos! . . . (p. 92).  
 --¡Rayas! Quiero paso!  
 --¡No hay paso! --respondieron las rayas.  
 --¡No va a quedar una sola raya con cola, si no dan paso!  
 --rugió la tigre.  
 --¡Aunque quedamos sin cola, no se pasa! --respondieron ellas.  
 --¡Por última vez, paso!  
 --¡NI NUNCA! --gritaron las rayas (p. 94).

As befits the subject of the narrative, the reader finds examples of military vocabulary in the story such as: "ejército de rayas," "el plan de su enemigo," "ocho o diez filas de dorados," "un verdadero ejército de dorados." "torpedos," and "los dorados . . . estaban esperando órdenes." This is the only story where Quiroga uses military vocabulary. In addition, Quiroga makes good use of exaggeration to indicate the seriousness of the battle because when the jaguars return in full force, the reader learns that ". . . parecía que todos los tigres de Misiones estuvieron allí" (p. 100), and when the stingrays find themselves exhausted, they send the dorados for reinforcements: "¡Que vengan en seguida todas las rayas que haya en el Yabebirí!" (p. 101).

"El paso del Yabebirí," with a length of seventeen pages, is the longest story in the Cuentos de la selva, and it also shows a tendency in Quiroga to write some short stories whose length makes them almost novelettes. It's average sentence length is 13.50 words; however, the sentence length ranges from one word commands to a sixty-five word sentence which forms its own paragraph at the climax of the story when the man begins to shoot the almost victorious jaguars:

Y en el preciso momento que las rayas, desgarradas, aplastadas, ensangrentadas, veían con desesperación que habían perdido la batalla y que los tigres iban a devorar a su pobre amigo herido, en ese momento oyeron un estampido y vieron que el tigre que iba delante y pisaba ya la arena, daba un gran salto y caía muerto, con la frente agujereada de un tiro (p. 104).

Finally, the fast-paced narrative, filled with danger and suspense, keeps the child interested in the outcome of the story and allows him

to fight vicariously on the side of the stringrays in what may be considered a children's mock epic.

## VI: The Themes of Friendship and Loyalty

Many of the same themes in the other Cuentos de la selva are also in "El paso del Yabebirí." In this story, Quiroga shows that compassion, friendship, loyalty and perseverance, as embodied in the man and the stringrays, are eventually rewarded. However, the negative attributes of brute force and blind revenge eventually end in defeat and death, as in the jaguar's case. The principal theme is, of course, the value of friendship. The child can clearly see that at a crucial moment in the man's life, a good and compassionate deed which he has once done is not forgotten and, in effect, saves his life. Therefore, the implied lesson is that if the child has compassion, he, too, may be able to count upon the loyalty of his friends when he needs them.

Another very important and pervasive theme is that of death. From the very first page, the child is made aware of the senseless killing of little fish in a manner which reminds one of a modern environmentalist's exposé of modern-day crimes against the natural world. After the man reaches the island, Quiroga describes him as being moribundo (p. 91), and, later in the narrative, the man himself says, "estoy casi por morir" (p. 101). During the battle, the stringrays suffer heavy losses as the reader sees in the following short quotations: "morían a centenares" (p. 101), and "la mitad había muerto ya" (p. 103). Finally, the death of the jaguars is reminiscent

of the fate of the men in the ironclad in "La guerra de los yacarés:"

Uno tras otro, como si el rayo cayera entre sus cabezas, los tigres fueron muriendo a tiros. Aquello duró solamente dos minutos. Uno tras otro se fueron al fondo del río, y allí las palometas los comieron. Algunos boyaron después, y entonces los dorados los acompañaron hasta el Paraná, comiéndolos y haciendo saltar el agua de contentos (pp. 104-05).

Although there is an excessive amount of violence, bloodshed and death in the narrative, it must be acknowledged that while these may have been a bit excessive when the Cuentos de la selva were first published, now the modern child reading or listening to this story will probably not be too shocked because his television and video game screens contain the very same type of violence, bloodshed and death, to which he has become accustomed--without the literary value. Finally, though "El paso del Yabebirí" contains much violence and bloodshed, it is a very well-written children's story because throughout the narrative the positive attributes which will promote the child's social adjustment are emphasized.

#### "La abeja haragana"

##### I: Content

"La abeja haragana" compares very favorably with traditional children's stories. In fact, it is the only story in the collection which openly teaches a lesson, and the only one wherein violence and bloodshed are absent. While Quiroga uses animal characters who are indigenous to Misiones, they are relatively harmless creatures. The lazy bee who is the protagonist is just a common, non-stinging honey

bee, and Quiroga refers to the snake as a culebra which implies that it is a non-poisonous snake.<sup>1</sup>

Speratti Piñero was not able to assign a definite publication place or date for "La abeja haragana"; therefore, she tentatively dated it 1917. Although she gave no reason for her choice, she surely must have noticed two clues in the story which make the date at least plausible. These clues are in the explanation of how the little bee is able to disappear:

¿Qué había pasado? Una cosa muy sencilla: la plantita en cuestión era una sensitiva, muy común también aquí en Buenos Aires, y que tiene la particularidad de que sus hojas se cierran al menor contacto. Solamente que esta aventura pasaba en Misiones, donde la vegetación es muy rica, y por lo tanto muy grandes las hojas de las sensitivas. De aquí que al contacto de la abeja, las hojas se cerraran, ocultando completamente al insecto (pp. 117-18).

The first clue is in the phrase, "aquí en Buenos Aires." While taking into account that this reference may simply be a literary device to personalize the narrative, it is a fact that Quiroga moved his family to Buenos Aires in the early part of 1917 when he accepted a position at the Uruguayan Embassy in that city; hence, it is very possible that he wrote or at least revised the story while living there. The second clue is found in the phrase, "esta aventura pasaba en Misiones," because it implies that Quiroga is not in Misiones when he tells the story.

The story itself is a straightforward, simple apologue. In it, Quiroga presents a young bee who instead of gathering honey prefers to fly in and out of the hive and go indolently from flower to flower. She is, therefore, a non-productive member of the hive even though she

enjoys its shelter and protection. The first sentence of the story begins with the traditional "Once upon a time" formula and immediately states the problem:

HABIA una vez en una colmena una abeja que no quería trabajar, es decir, recorría los árboles uno por uno para tomar el jugo de las flores; pero en vez de conservarlo para convertirlo en miel, se lo tomaba todo (p. 109).

This irresponsible behavior is not tolerated for very long before some bees who guard the entrance to the hive reprimand the young bee by saying: "Compañera: es necesario que trabajes, porque todas las abejas debemos trabajar" (p. 110). Although the little bee is finally given an ultimatum when the guard bees tell her: "Hoy es 19 de abril. Pues bien: trata de que mañana, 20, hayas traído una gota siquiera de miel" (p. 111), she appears the next day without even one drop of honey, and she is denied entrance to the hive. All her promises and pleading are of no avail because, as the guard bees tell her, "--No hay mañana para las que no trabajan. . ." (p. 112). After her expulsion from the hive, the little bee is at the mercy of the elements because a cold wind begins to blow and she has nowhere to hide for the night. She tries to enter the hive again by pleading, "¡Me voy a morir!" (p. 112) and is told, "No, no morirás. Aprenderás en una sola noche lo que es el descanso ganado con el trabajo. Vete." (pp. 112-13). Their prediction soon proves true because the cold, wet bee falls into a hollow tree trunk which serves as a shelter for a non-poisonous snake who nevertheless likes to eat bees. Since the snake is determined to eat her, the bee confronts her saying, "--Usted hace eso porque es menos inteligente que yo" (p. 114), and the snake thereupon suggests

that they have a contest to see who is more intelligent. She agrees to let the bee leave unharmed the next day if she is defeated. The observant bee tells the snake she can disappear, and she does. Hence, the bee saves her own life, and when she is allowed to return to the hive the next day, she becomes a model worker from thence forward. Finally, when she becomes old, she shares her learning experience with the young bees:

--No es nuestra inteligencia, sino nuestro trabajo quien nos hace tan fuertes. Yo usé una sola vez mi inteligencia, y fue para salvar mi vida. No había necesitado de ese esfuerzo, si hubiera trabajado como todas. Me he cansado tanto volando de aquí para allá, como trabajando. Lo que me faltaba era la noción del deber, que adquirí aquella noche (p. 119).

The frightening, cold night which the young bee is forced to spend with the snake proves that for recalcitrant types such as she, the best teacher is experience; and when she becomes old and is about to die, she wishes young bees to be spared a similar experience.

## II: Characters

Unlike the other stories in the Cuentos de la selva where there are many characters, "La abeja haragana" has only two principal characters: a bee and a snake. The lazy young bee, who is never described physically, displays the unthinking selfishness of all young creatures who do not realize the importance of a sense of duty and who have not yet embraced the work ethic which exists in some form or other in all societies:

Todas las mañanas, apenas el sol calentaba el aire, la abejita se asomaba a la puerta de la colmena, veía que hacía buen tiempo, se

peinaba con las patas, como hacen las moscas, y echaba entonces a volar, muy contenta del lindo día (p. 109).

Her intentions are good, but she is full of excuses when she is confronted about her lethargic behavior. First, she excuses herself by saying, "--Yo ando todo el día volando, y me canso mucho" (p. 110), and then when she is told that she must work, she responds: "¡Uno de estos días lo voy a hacer!" (p. 110). The next day, in an attempt to placate the guards at the entrance to the hive, she says that she remembers her promise to start working; "--¡Sí, sí, hermanas! ¡Ya me acuerdo de lo que he prometido!" (p. 111). Finally, when she is denied entrance into the hive, she promises, "--¡Mañana sin falta voy a trabajar!" (p. 111). Like a spoiled human child, the young bee expects an unlimited number of chances to correct her behavior, and she is very unpleasantly surprised when the weather changes and when she cannot gain entrance to the hive because her excuses are no longer accepted. However, as soon as she is left to fend for herself, she begins to use her intelligence and her powers of observation to save herself from becoming a meal for the snake. During the cold night in the tree trunk, she remembers the safety and warmth of the hive and realizes what she has lost because of her laziness: "Recordaba su vida anterior; durmiendo noche tras noche en la colmena, bien calentita, y lloraba entonces en silencio" (pp. 118-19). When she is allowed to return to the beehive, she is obviously a changed bee:

Las abejas de guardia la dejaron pasar sin decirle nada, porque comprendieron que la que volvía no era la paseandera haragana, sino una abeja que había hecho en sólo una noche un duro aprendizaje de la vida (p. 119).



The second important character in the story is the snake who is the antagonist. Quiroga gives a physical description of the snake from the bee's viewpoint: ". . .una víbora, una culebra verde de lomo color ladrillo, que la miraba enroscada y presta a lanzarse sobre ella" (p. 113). The snake's attitude toward the bee is described by the adjective burlona and by the following phrases: "se echó a reír," which is repeated twice, and "se reía." Another characteristic is the snake's curiosity about the bee's sudden appearance at a time when hardworking bees would normally be safely resting in their hives: "¿Qué tal, abejita? No has de ser muy trabajadora para estar aquí a estas horas" (p. 113). In addition, the snake makes a value judgment about the lazy young bee when he comments: ". . . voy a quitar del mundo un mal bicho como tú" (p. 114), which implies that those who do not contribute to the common good of the society by working have no right to live. Also, the snake believes she is much more intelligent than she actually is because her curiosity about seeing if the bee can indeed disappear allows the bee to hide and, in effect, disappear; so she wins the trial:

--¡Un momento! Yo no puedo hacer eso; pero hago una cosa que nadie hace.  
 --¿Qué es eso?  
 --Desaparecer.  
 --¿Cómo? --exclamó la culebra, dando un salto de sorpresa--.  
 ¿Desaparecer sin salir de aquí?  
 --Sin salir de aquí.  
 --¿Y sin esconderte en la tierra?  
 --Sin esconderme en la tierra.  
 --Pues bien, ¡hazlo! Y si no lo haces, te como en seguida  
 --dijo la culebra (p. 116).

Finally, it is evident that the snake would like to eat the bee even

after the bee has won the trial, but here the child is shown that when one gives his word, he must sometimes restrain his impulses as the snake does:

La culebra no dijo nada, pero quedó muy iritada con su derrota, tanto que la abeja pasó toda la noche recordando a su enemiga la promesa que había hecho de respetarla.

· · · · · Hacía mucho frío, además, y dentro reinaba la oscuridad más completa. De cuando en cuando la culebra sentía impulsos de lanzarse sobre la abeja, y ésta creía entonces llegado el término de su vida (p. 118).

The only other characters in the story are the old bees guarding the entrance to the hive and the young bees to whom the reformed bee leaves an admonition to work hard for the good of the society to which they belong. No detailed description of the adult bees is given other than that they are "muy serias" (p. 109), and the guard bees are: ". . . muy viejas, con gran experiencia de la vida y tienen el lomo pelado porque han perdido todos los pelos de rozar contra la puerta de la colmena" (p. 110). The old guard bees' duty is to teach the young bee a lesson, and she, in turn, becomes old and shares her wisdom with the young bees who will soon take her place as workers. The regenerative cycle is thus complete, and the continued successful existence of the hive is assured.

### III: Setting

In no other story in the Cuentos de la selva is the setting less developed and of less importance than in "La abeja haragana." The fact that "la aventura pasaba en Misiones" (p. 118). is mentioned almost in passing, and there is no further allusion to Misiones in the

rest of the story. There is no physical description of the beehive. The only concrete fact ever mentioned about it is that it is warm and dry. When the bee falls into the agujero, the reader learns that: "En verdad, aquella caverna era el hueco de un árbol que habían trasplantado hacía tiempo, y que la culebra había elegido de guarida" (p. 113). Also, the reader knows that a plant with leaves sensitive to touch lives in the hollow tree trunk:

. . . la abeja había tenido tiempo de examinar la caverna y había visto una plantita que crecía allí. Era un arbustillo, casi un yuyito, con grades hojas del tamaño de una moneda de dos centavos (p. 116).

Finally, when night comes and the storm grows in intensity, "el agua entraba como un río . . ." and furthermore "Hacía mucho frío . . . y adentro reinaba la oscuridad más completa" (p. 118). The few details given are very carefully chosen and leave the child just an impression of the setting that he can imagine more or less concretely depending on his age and experience.

#### IV: Style

Quiroga writes "La abeja haragana" in a clear, direct style that will appeal to children of all ages, but it is especially appropriate for younger children because of its lack of violence. Since the purpose of the narrative is to teach children the value of hard work and the cooperative effort, it figuratively takes the child by the hand and shows him the consequences which a young bee suffers because of her laziness. In fact, the lesson promulgated by the story is one which actively attempts to instill the type of social behavior which

will make the child, like the bee, a productive and therefore successful adult member of his society.

The average sentence length in "La abeja haragana" is 6.60 words which keeps the action of the story moving at a rapid pace, and therefore easily captures and holds the child's attention. On the whole, the sentences are shorter in length in this story when compared with the sentence lengths in the other Cuentos de la selva. The shortest sentence consists of one word and the longest consists of forty-seven words. In addition, there is very little repetition in the story, and the best examples are in the following parallel sentences which contain the guard bee's answers to the excuses of the lazy young bee:

--No es cuestión de que te canses mucho --respondieron--, sino de que trabajes un poco (p. 110).

--No es cuestión de que lo hagas uno de estos días --le respondieron--, sino mañana mismo (p. 110).

--No es cuestión de que te acuerdes de lo prometido --le respondieron--, sino de que trabajes (p. 111).

The most salient characteristic of this story is its didactic purpose. Yet, it is a type of didacticism which teaches a moral gently and by degrees. The first sentence of the story shows the young bee's errant behavior. In case the reader does not recognize the bee's fault, it is clearly stated in the sentence, "Era, pues, una abeja haragana" (p. 109). Then when the bee is not allowed to enter the hive, the child is again reminded of the bee's lack of productivity by what the snake says: "No has de ser muy trabajadora para estar aquí a estas horas" (p. 113). Finally, when the older bees

readmit her to the hive, they respect her because ". . . ninguna como ella recogió tanto polen ni fabricó tanta miel" (p. 119). When the bee becomes old and sees that her days are almost at an end, her advice to the young bees sums up what Quiroga has so carefully tried to teach the child throughout the story: "Trabajen compañeras, pensando que el fin a que tienden nuestros esfuerzos --la felicidad de todos-- es muy superior a la fatiga de cada uno" (pp. 119-120).

While the majority of the Cuentos de la selva do not contain much humor, "El loro pelado" and "La abeja haragana" do evidence a certain type of dry humor which elicits a smile instead of a laugh. In "La abeja haragana," the young bee's fall is amusing because when she reaches the bottom of the cavern and finds herself face to face with a snake, her reaction is a bit melodramatic: ". . . murmuró cerrando los ojos: --¡Adiós me vida! Esta es la última hora que yo veo la luz" (p. 113). An adult reading this story can appreciate the humor because he already knows the little bee will survive. The older child, in turn, may smile because he may have experienced a similarly precarious situation in his life when he has stumbled into more trouble than he has known how to handle.

#### V: The Theme of the Value of Work

Although many of the stories in the Cuentos de la selva show the value of mutual cooperation between animals and between animals and man, nowhere is the theme of the value of work and the cooperative effort more developed than in "La abeja haragana." In many ways, this must have been a very personal story for Quiroga because he himself

believed in hard work. This is evidenced by his year as a pioneer cotton planter in the Chaco region, and later by his years in Misiones as he cleared and cultivated the land he had acquired. He also enjoyed building his own furniture, and he felt equally at home in the workshop hollowing out a piragua or at the typewriter creating a story. Hence, when the guard bees warn the lazy young bee to begin producing honey for the hive, they are echoing the Quirogian work ethic: "No hay mañana para las que no trabajen. . ." (p. 112). The advice which the bee gives to the young bees surrounding her when her days are drawing to a close sums up Quirog's beliefs about the value of work. It also provides the child with a very clear philosophy which he may adopt and thus become a productive adult who can make a positive contribution to the society in which he lives:

Trabajen, compañeras, pensando que el fin a que tienden nuestros esfuerzos --la felicidad de todos-- es muy superior a la fatiga de cada uno. A esto los hombres llaman ideal, y tienen razón. No hay otra filosofía en la vida de un hombre y de una abeja (pp. 119-20)

In addition, the underlying theme of duty appears a few times in the narrative; for example, the guard bees try to make the lazy bee recognize her duty to the community when they admonish her, "--Compañera: es necesario que trabajes, porque todas las abejas debemos trabajar" (p. 110). Then, when the bee is old and is giving advice to the young bees, she comments on the importance of a sense of duty which she lacked as a young bee: "Lo que me faltaba era la noción del deber, que adquirí aquella noche" (p. 119). Finally, "La abeja haragana" is a didactic story. In fact, it is crafted to be the

perfect vehicle for instilling the virtues of duty, and hard work while keeping the child amused and interested.

The mastery of short fiction is not only appealing to the adult reader's aesthetic sensibilities, but also intimate to the child's development of values. In each story of the Cuentos de la selva, Quiroga teaches the child lessons instructing him in proper social behavior. The social attributes appearing as themes in the stories show the child the types of behavior which will help him grow into a psychologically and sociologically mature adult.

## Chapter VII: Notes

<sup>1</sup> Horacio Quiroga, Anaconda, 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1963). A more detailed explanation of the difference among the terms culebra, serpiente, and víbora may be found in the short story, "Anaconda," which was first published separately in 1918 and gives the title to this particular collection of stories.



## Chapter VIII

### Conclusion

In his book entitled, The Uses of Enchantment, Bruno Bettelheim suggested that literature is important in the maturation process of all those who have been fortunate enough to have been introduced to it in early life. From this point of view, literature is enormously important in the lives of children who are passing through those impressionable and formative years of childhood. Quiroga, who had children of his own, like any parent faced with the responsibility of rearing children, would have been sensible to the importance of literature for children, especially since he himself was a writer. In this light, it is probable that the Cuentos de la selva was written as consciously created fables intended for the purpose of instructing his children, who, being motherless, must have needed these stories.

Bettelheim comments upon the importance of the child's attaining psychological maturity by suggestion in his introduction to The Uses of Enchantment that:

An understanding of the meaning of one's life is not suddenly acquired at a particular age, not even when one has reached chronological maturity. On the contrary, gaining a secure understanding of what the meaning of one's life may or ought to be--this is what constitutes having obtained psychological maturity. And this achievement is the end result of a long development: at each age we seek, we must be able to find, some

modicum of meaning congruent with how our minds and understanding have already developed.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, Bettelheim makes some valid observations about the child's gradual attainment of sociological maturity which enables him to become a well-adjusted member of the society. Moreover, the attainment of psychological and sociological maturity makes it possible to encounter adversity with confidence, dignity and hope. Bettelheim's comments are evocative of the lessons taught through the adventures and misadventures of Quiroga's human and animal characters in the Cuentos de la selva. Bettelheim also suggests:

To find deeper meaning, one must become able to transcend the narrow confines of a self-centered existence and believe that one will make a significant contribution to life--if not right now, then at some future time. This is necessary if a person is to be satisfied with himself and with what he is doing. In order not to be at the mercy of the vagaries of life, one must develop one's inner resources, so that one's emotions, imagination, and intellect support and enrich one another. Our positive feelings give us the strength to develop our rationality; only hope for the future can sustain us in the adversities we unavoidably encounter.<sup>2</sup>

What Bettelheim found through his studies of children, children's stories, and the effect which folk fairy tales have upon the psychological and sociological maturation of children is congruent with what Quiroga realized as a teacher and a father and with the implicit and explicit lessons he imparted to his children and to children of succeeding generations in the stories he so carefully and lovingly created. Moreover, during his lifetime, Quiroga was to feel the satisfaction of knowing that his gift of love--his children's stories--had been translated into several foreign languages among

which one may find Arthur Livingston's 1923 English translation, South American Jungle Tales, and Francis de Miomandre's 1927 French translation, Contes de la forêt vierge.<sup>3</sup> In addition, individual stories from the collection were subsequently translated into Czechoslovakian, Russian and Swedish.<sup>4</sup> Why would the eight stories included in the Cuentos de la selva have appealed to children who had never lived in the wilderness of Misiones and who had never seen many of the animals with which Quiroga populated his narratives? Perhaps Quiroga's characteristic lack of concrete depiction of setting and characters in the Cuentos de la selva is a device which allowed his stories to have a wide appeal to various children of sundry backgrounds regardless of their nationality, social circumstances, or the time when and the place where they read the stories. Bruno Bettelheim's comments on the importance of keeping concrete pictures, whether they be verbal descriptions or actual illustrations, to a minimum are relative to Quiroga. Bettelheim suggests, and it is probable that Quiroga knew, that the child is better able to personalize a story if his imagination is allowed free reign rather than his being confined to a rigidly detailed story structure where every detail about the characters and setting is depicted as if on a canvas. With regard to this point, Bettelheim notes that in the absence of such rigidity, "The unique details derived from his own [the child's] particular life, with which a hearer's mind depicts a story he is told or read, make the story much more of a personal experience."<sup>5</sup> Because each child has an opportunity to feel a unique personal experience in Quiroga's stories, he is able to understand and

internalize the many lessons in the stories which will allow him to mature psychologically and sociologically, and therein lies the universal appeal of the Cuentos de la selva.

The animal and human characters in the Cuentos de la selva embody various aspects of the child's own personality which might otherwise be too complex, unacceptable and contradictory for him to handle were they not set in the framework of fiction. This is more clearly seen in the stories where Quiroga's didacticism is more evident, but it is nevertheless an integral part of every story in the collection. In "La tortuga gigante," the child learns that if he is to live happily in society, he must also learn how to interact with compassion, understanding and selflessness. While some children seem to be born with these attributes, the majority must learn them through example and experience. "Las medias de los flamencos" speaks to the child's possible feelings of envy toward his siblings and older brothers or sisters. While the story does not openly condemn these feelings within the child, it shows that jealousy and envy are anti-social feelings which may lead one to foolish actions whose long term effects are indeed sad. Hence, the child is gently and humorously convinced to avoid the behavior of the silly flamingoes. Quiroga uses the figure of Pedrito in "El loro pelado" to depict the ingenuous curiosity normally exhibited by children. The parrot's lack of caution and false sense of pride at imagining how impressed his human adoptive family will be when he arrives home with the jaguar, teaches the child the value of caution and the unfortunate consequences which may accompany false pride. Therefore, the child is shown that he will

mature into a happy person if, like Pedrito, he learns the value of caution and avoids excessive pride. "La guerra de los yacares" shows the child the social value of mutual cooperation in adversity allowing him to put aside his personal differences, like the surubí, in the battle for survival which is evocative of the child's own battle for psychological and sociological maturation enabling him to survive in adult society. "La gama ciega" reminds the child that he must learn to obey the rules for survival his parent or parents teach him if he wishes to avoid the type of headstrong blindness which will prove painful if not fatal--as the little doe shows him. In addition, the child is again shown in this story not only the value of cooperation in society, but also the value of friendship as well as how he may foster it, attain it, and preserve it. In the "Historia de dos cachorros de coatí y de dos cachorros de hombre," the social attributes of kindness and compassion are presented to the child in a manner that he can understand and emulate in his relationships with his parents, siblings and pets. The lesson to be learned here is that the development of these attributes enables one to feel psychologically at peace with himself and with those around him. Moreover, the selflessness of the coatí family reinforces the importance of avoiding self-centered behavior if one wishes to find happiness among others. In "El paso del Yabebirí," the social attributes of perseverance and loyalty are brought to life in the actions of the stingrays. The child is also shown that one must have values and uphold them as did the man in the story who opposed the dynamiting of little fish. Quiroga, no doubt, wishes to show the

child that he too will receive the aid of his friends if he internalizes the very important social attributes which he sees in this story. Finally, in "La abeja haragana," the child's preference for shirking the responsibility of growing up is echoed in the little bee's aimless wandering and in her lack of interest in contributing to the society of the hive. Like the little bee, the child has no chance for the future if he refuses to accept adult responsibility and to become a productive member of his society. In her comments to the young bees, the bee who had been so lazy in her youth is really addressing the child and instilling in him a respect for the work ethic.

It seems that in these Cuentos de la selva, Quiroga wished his children, as well as the children of future generations, not only to learn many useful lessons for surviving in a hostile world, whether it be that of Misiones, or Buenos Aires, or some foreign land, but also used them as an outlet to express his love. In his book, Pedro G. Orgambide comments on the Quiroga one sees through the Cuentos de la selva by saying:

En la vida de Quiroga este libro es algo así como un oasis. Le sirve para reencontrar lo ingenuo de su propia infancia, para dar a sus hijos--y a todos los pequeños lectores de su libro--la parte de ternura que tantas veces escondió detrás de su perfil huraño (p. 115).<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, this oasis has provided many lessons for children and for parents to give to their children beyond the immediacy of the purpose for which the stories were originally written.

## Chapter VIII: Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Bettelheim, p. 3.
- <sup>2</sup> Bettelheim, pp. 3-4.
- <sup>3</sup> Coons, pp. 295-96.
- <sup>4</sup> Coons, pp. 296-97.
- <sup>5</sup> Bettelheim, p. 60.
- <sup>6</sup> Orgambide, p. 115.

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