

THE MICRO-STORIES OF NERY ALEXIS GAITÁN:
A HONDURAN AUTHOR IN MODERN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

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(Under the Direction of José B. Álvarez IV)

ABSTRACT

The literature of Honduras has received little critical attention in comparison to other Latin America literatures. This study has several parts. First, I review how Central American literature in general and Honduran literature in particular has been presented in selected reference books published since 1990. Next, I present the literary generations of Honduran authors and place them in context to other Latin American writers. Third, I review the development of the micro-story as a subgenre of Latin American narrative. Lastly, I analyze Nery Alexis Gaitán's writing. As a member of the most recent generation of Honduran authors, Gaitán is known for his micro-stories. Therefore, after a brief bio-bibliography of the author, I analyze the micro-stories in his collection *La vida menor* (1990), looking for the linguistic precision and unexpected endings which are hallmarks of this format.

INDEX WORDS: Nery Alexis Gaitán, Honduran literature, Micro-story, Micro-cuento, *La vida menor*

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“Nuestra Literatura es pobre y quizás nunca se haya elevado a las regiones del arte puro; pero contiene muchas páginas de verdadero mérito literario, que es una injusticia mantener en el olvido, y más que injusticia, es el repudio de nuestros propios esfuerzos.”

—Miguel Navarro h.¹

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Central American literature has not been well known among general reading public in the United States. Two notable exceptions to this state of affairs are the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío (1867-1916)² and the Guatemalan Miguel Angel Asturias (1899-1974). Darío, considered one of the leading men of letters from the late nineteenth-century, is closely connected with the Modernist movement which helped to revitalize Spanish-language poetry. Asturias won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1967. His novels include the satiric *El señor presidente* (1946) and the mystical *Hombres de maíz* (1949), a work that evokes the images associated with magical realism and the writings of Gabriel García Márquez (1928-) that followed later. As political struggles in the region broke out into open warfare during the last part of the twentieth century, the public’s attention was again focused on this little known area. The literature from Central America began to be more widely distributed as people read the revolutionary poetry of Salvadoran Roque Dalton (1935-1975), the novels of Nicaraguan Gioconda Belli (1949-), the Afro-Costa

¹ Martínez (17).

² In order to give context, I am including dates of all literary authors, whether Honduran or not. However, I have not been able to find dates for some authors, especially those writing at the extremities, either very early or very recently. Finally, I have included dates for Hondurans who are cited as critics, but who are also literary authors.

Rican commentaries of Quince Duncan (1940-), among others. One Central American country's literature, though, continues to remain relatively unfamiliar to the reading public in the United States: Honduras.

José Francisco Martínez (1915-1991) presented a hopeful voice for the literature of Honduras to become more widely known: "Honduras tiene su propio Arte y su propia Literatura. Sólo ha faltado quien la recopile y la muestre a los ojos del mundo universal de las letras, para que ocupe su legítimo puesto en el pensar y sentir universales del hombre" (*Literatura* 20). Yet, in the same year, Roberto Sosa (1930-) writes: "El desconocimiento del trabajo literario de los hondureños se hace evidente desde cualquier ángulo que se analice" (*Generación* 185). Five years later in an interview with Roberto Sosa, Helen Umaña (1942-), a widely respected Honduran literary critic, responded to his question that Honduran literature still had not found its place in the wider literary universe:

[Sosa]: ¿Se conoce la obra literaria hondureña en el extranjero?

[Umaña]: En términos generales creo que no. Es raro que en una antología de literatura hispanoamericana se incluyan muestras de la literatura hondureña. Asimismo, en las historias de la literatura, el país ocupa un lugar marginal. Sin embargo, poco a poco, ese aislamiento se ha ido rompiendo, por lo menos en círculos académicos especializados en la región centroamericana que cada vez demandan mayor información.

(Sosa, *Diálogo* 283)

In the present study, I will expand the knowledge about Honduran letters and claim a legitimate place for this country's literature. I will begin by reviewing how Central

American literature in general, and Honduran literature in particular, too often has been neglected entirely or barely represented in standard reference works found in North American university library reference collections.³ Next, I will discuss Honduran literature from the perspective of literary generations. Through this process, the importance of the shorter genres of poetry and short stories in the literary production of the country will be delineated. Of these two genres, I will look at the development of the short story in the country's literature and in particular the recent advance of the micro-story, or very short story, especially in the works of Nery Alexis Gaitán (1961-), a contemporary Honduran author and literary critic. First, there will be a short bio-bibliography of the author followed by an analysis of the stories included in his second published collection, *La vida menor* (1990). The purpose of this examination is to demonstrate, using a specific Central American author, that the writers from this region are creating a body of literature that is as innovative, progressive, layered and complex as any you will find in nations either to the north or south of them and that have received much wider international attention.

Central American Literature in Standard Reference Works

Why look at how authors or regions are represented in reference books? If one considers a university library's reference collection to be a primary site for students to obtain a quick introduction to any new concept or area of study, the information found there tends then to have a strong impact and authority. After all, these resources have been placed in an area where, in general, they cannot be taken away for extensive periods of time because they are the best or most important sources of information. For the

³ In this case, I am considering reference collections found in libraries for the general undergraduate and graduate student, not in specialized Latin American collections such as those found at the University of Texas at Austin or Tulane University.

undergraduate encountering Latin American writers for the first time, these works are crucial; the impression they leave about the relative importance of a region and its literature may well be a lasting one. The titles reviewed here have been published during the last twenty years. The reference collection at the University of Georgia is predominately English language, but it contains a few Spanish language items as well. There are many other wonderful Spanish-language reference works, but those publications tend to be in more specialized collections such as the separate Latin American libraries at the University of Texas at Austin and Tulane University mentioned earlier, or in the extensive but integrated collections at University of California, Los Angeles or University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, among others. Finally, this overview does not pretend to be a comprehensive evaluation of all resources about Latin American literature to be found in major libraries; however, it is representative of the field.

Leonard S Klein's *Latin American Literature in the 20th Century: A Guide* (1986) is typical of the treatment of Central American literature. He includes a three-page general article by Richard J. Callan, "Central American Literature," with one brief paragraph (95) dedicated to Honduras. Ironically, Callan does not mention any native Honduran author, but focuses on the Spanish-born dramatist Andrés Morris (1928-1987). As the founder of the Teatro Nacional de Honduras in 1965 (González 46; González and Chávez Mayorquín 102), Morris certainly is worthy of attention, but one wonders why at least one of the other seven Honduran-born dramatists identified in Tony A. Harvell's *Latin American Dramatists Since 1945* (2003) could not have been included as well. In contrast, see Richard F. Allen's 1987 publication *Teatro hispanoamericano: una*

bibliografía anotada = Spanish American Theatre: An Annotated Bibliography which includes entries for all six Spanish-speaking Central American countries (Belize is not included). Guatemala has the most entries at forty-seven (271-282) and Nicaragua the fewest at seven (433-434). The ten entries for Honduras emphasize the national preference for historical drama (283-287). Panama (435-439), Costa Rica (168-171), and El Salvador (496-498) are represented with twenty, fifteen, and eight entries respectively. Despite the limited picture of Central American literature presented in his article, Callan's concluding commentary is significant:

Political turmoil, lack of publishers, and poor distribution contribute to the inaccessibility and relative obscurity abroad of many Central American writers and their works. Nevertheless, the recent joint publishing venture of Central American universities, Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana (EDUCA), which is publishing important new books and reprinting out-of-print older ones, promises a wider scope for the many fine literary creations of the area. (95)

As a professional librarian, it has been my experience that this cooperative venture added as many problems for appropriately identifying Central American authors as it solved for distribution of their literary production. Frequently the books were published without any biographical information about the author. Consequently, fledgling authors often were presumed to be Costa Rican because San José was the largest production center for EDUCA. This publishing outlet eventually had to declare bankruptcy, but "was once more in a process of restructuring" in 1999 according to Nicasio Urbina and Laura Barbas Rhoden (360). Their article appears in the three-volume

set *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History* edited by Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir published in 2004. One rightly would expect significant coverage of the varieties of literatures throughout Latin America in such an extensive publication. The comparisons, though, are complexly structured in broad themes making it difficult to extract specific information about a country or a region. As far as I can tell from the indexes and the section titles, for example, there is little mention of poetry (volume 2, sections 21 and 22) and no indication of the importance of the short story to Latin American literature. The only reference to post-independence Honduras is in Urbina's and Rhoden's article. However, their analysis sheds light on how the historic publishing trends in Honduras have aggravated the scarcity of knowledge about Honduran writers outside of the region:

Book production has been seriously limited in Honduras, which has shown a preference for the publication of journals and literary pages in the daily newspapers. The Editorial de la Universidad Autónoma de Honduras has been one of the principal publishing houses. During recent years Editorial Guaymuras has begun to publish some Honduran literary works of merit and to increase their circulation. (Urbina and Rhoden 360)

Both of these houses have increased the number of titles published in Honduras, but Urbina and Rhoden miss one of the leading factors for the continuing lack of awareness about Honduran authors outside of Central America: extremely small print runs.

According to a 1992 essay by Segisfredo Infante (1956-) about the Editorial Universitaria of the Universidad Autónoma de Honduras the standard print run is about 1,000. He notes that between 1979 to 1992 approximately 320 titles were published “que van de los 500 a

los 2,000 ejemplares, con un promedio de 1,000 ejemplares para cada libro” (50). Infante goes on to underscore the tentative situation for Honduran publications: “eso no obstante aquella persistente precariedad del mercado de libros hondureños, con escasos lectores y escasísimos promotores a nivel de publicidad” (50). As was seen with EDUCA, Central American publishing is financially risky; therefore the publishing houses tend only to print as many copies of a work as they can easily and quickly sell. These titles go out of print very fast with the result that few copies reach the North American market.

Returning to earlier sources, Carlos A. Solé’s 1989 three volume *Latin American Writers* only includes eight Central American authors, two of which are from Honduras: Juan Ramón Molina (1875-1908) and Rafael Heliodoro Valle (1891-1959). Solé’s 2002 *Supplement* has three Central Americans, but none are Hondurans. Bryan Ryan’s 1991 *Hispanic Writers* has “major literary figures ... social and political figures ... and lesser-known writers not well covered in other sources” (vii) among his criteria for including authors. While there are twenty-two authors included, only Roberto Sosa appears to represent Honduras (444-445). The 1994 *Hispanic Literature Criticism* edited by Jelena O. Krstović does not include any Hondurans among the three Central Americans discussed in the two volumes. Its 1999 two volume *Supplement* edited by Susan Salas increases the coverage of Central Americans to eight, but still excludes Hondurans. Of course this work only includes criticism written in English. It is with this criterion of English only that the basis of much of the lack of knowledge about Honduran writers may be found. As was previously indicated, since their works do not tend to reach North America even in Spanish editions, rarely are they translated into English. While there are some articles, chapters, dissertations, and books written in English about Honduran

authors, there is only a handful from which Krstović and Salas could have chosen. As of February 2006, a search of the Modern Language Association's International Bibliography database using the subject phrase "Honduran literature" yields a mere sixty-four entries. Of these, only nineteen meet Krstović's and Salas' criteria of being in English. Once the one book and four dissertations are removed from this group, there are only twelve articles (one printed in two different journals) and two chapters from books that Krstović and Salas could have reprinted in their compilations.⁴

The two-volume set *Diccionario de literatura española e hispanoamericana* published in Madrid in 1993 under the direction of Ricardo Gullón has surprisingly good coverage of Central American authors in comparison to other works reviewed here. Just in the A's alone there are seventeen entries for Central Americans, including Hondurans Oscar Acosta (1933-) (1: 10) and Ramón Amaya Amador (1916-1966) (1: 62). In contrast, the 2002 *Diccionario de escritores hispanoamericanos: del siglo XVI al siglo XX* compiled by Aarón Alboukrek and Esther Herrera only has four Central American authors filed under "A": two from Guatemala, one from Costa Rica, and Oscar Acosta for Honduras (4).

The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature (1996) edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker describes itself as "by far the most comprehensive and authoritative work of its kind ever written ... The *History* is unique in its thorough coverage of previously neglected areas" (iii). If you look up Honduras or Central America in its indexes, you might easily conclude that no literature is produced

⁴ As a comparison, the phrase "Guatemalan literature" yields 646 entries, of which 220 are in English. However, 11 of those are books and 21 are dissertations. "Venezuelan literature" produces 1,029 entries, of which 127 are in English. In this group, there are 9 books and 15 dissertations. I did not look for articles that were republished in more than one journal as I did with the Honduran examples, but the significantly larger numbers speak for themselves.

there: Central America has no entries; Honduras is listed five times, but most entries lead to data about the Spanish conquest. The only Honduran authors mentioned in this work are the nineteenth-century essayists José Cecilio del Valle (1777-1834) (1: 598-599) and Ramón Rosa (1848-1893) (1: 599-600), and the modernist author Juan Ramón Molina (2: 22). Knowing that Honduran authors have tended to write poetry and short stories rather than novels, I looked in vain for some reference to them in Daniel Balderston's article on twentieth-century short story (2: 465-496). Balderston's article is erudite, touching on the major issues surrounding the debates of the day about the genre and clearly written for his literary colleagues. A student hoping to gain foundational or introductory information about the short story in Latin America would be lost. Balderston's initial description of his approach gives warning:

It is not even very certain that a "history" of the short story genre in Spanish America could be written: the notion of the short story as genre has been vigorously debated internationally, and in Spanish America the constitution and preservation of such a genre is problematized by the uncertain relations between the "short story" and the *costumbrista* sketch, the "*tradición*," and the "*crónica*." (Twentieth-Century 465)

His closing paragraph reinforces his ambivalence for the genre:

If this essay has been marked by a refusal of the history of narrative, a refusal to tell the story of the so-called evolution of a disputed genre, that is due to my skepticism that the short story has a "history" in Spanish America, since history would imply continuity and change. I have fragmented my account and traced a variety of paradigms and images, but

if there is a story to be told about them I cannot tell it ... Metanarrative, so characteristic of modern fiction in Spanish America, is thus more possible than narrative itself. (Twentieth-Century 496)

Another typical presentation of Honduras and its literature is found in the 2004 publication *Encyclopedia of Latin American and Caribbean Literature, 1900-2003* edited by Daniel Balderston and Mike Gonzalez. Again, all the Central American countries are lumped together as homogeneous and interchangeable (Gonzalez 125-128). Gonzalez begins by describing all the Central American countries as “[e]ntirely agricultural” (125). However, Honduras’ wealth was traditionally based on silver mining. The capital city, Tegucigalpa, derives from the Pre-Columbian name of the area Teguz-galpa meaning silver mountain (Meyer and Meyer 616). In the section titled “Silver” (588-589), Harvey and Jessie Meyer note that 53 percent of the country’s exports in the 1880's were from silver (589). Only in the twentieth century were the export of banana and the dominance of the United Fruit Company a source of income for Honduras. Of course Gonzalez is distilling this information from his entry “Honduras” (2: 737) from the three-volume set *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures* edited by Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana M. López. His information is based on the modern view of Honduras “as the original ‘banana republic’.” While he correctly describes “[t]he historical experience of exploitation” of the country, he appears to lay it strictly at the feet of North American conglomerates, ignoring the more complex history of the country and the region in relation to both the Spanish conquest and the later independence struggles.

In the earlier work, Gonzalez only cites Ramón Amaya Amador, Julio Escoto (1944-), Roberto Sosa, and Clementina Suárez (1902-1991) for literature. In the later

rendition, novelist Amador (126) and poet Sosa (127) appear with the Central American entry; Sosa also has a separate entry by Nicasio Urbina (546); the famous female poet Suárez has her own entry written by Linda J. Craft (550-551); and Escoto, one of the three most anthologized Honduran short story writers, disappears entirely. Craft also has a separate entry for short story author Oscar Acosta (2). Finally, Daniel Balderston includes an entry for Rafael Heliodoro Valle (584). In the 2004 *Encyclopedia*, Central American literature is presented either as provincial, focusing on the *costumbrismo* (descriptions of ordinary rural life) and *criollo* (regional) aspects, or as a narrow reaction to social upheaval. Gonzalez describes the other Central American countries and their literatures with, generally, a paragraph each, including a short paragraph on the English-speaking Belize. However, the two Honduran authors seem to be added only as afterthoughts to support a particular theme. Amaya Amador's novel *Prisión verde* (1950) is used as another example of "documentary social realism" that predominated in Costa Rica (126). Gonzalez later writes in a paragraph about authors influenced by the Cuban revolution that "[d]ictatorship informed the later work of the Honduran poet Roberto Sosa" (127). Interestingly, while it seems to be standard in these encyclopedias to note when an author has been the recipient of awards or literary prizes, none of the entries for Roberto Sosa in these two encyclopedias record that in 1968 he won the prestigious Spanish Premio Adonais for poetry for his collection *Los pobres* (1969), a work that presents the results of governmental indifference, that may or may not be a product of dictatorship.⁵ It is telling that not a single one of the compilers for the *Encyclopedia of Latin American and Caribbean literature, 1900-2003* comes from a Central American

⁵ For a fuller, but concise description of the post-independence history of Honduras, which creates the setting for its literature, see Kenneth V. Finney's entry "Honduras" (vol. 3, 202-206) in the five volume *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture* (1996) edited by Barbara A. Tenenbaum.

country, while there are several from Caribbean island nations for example. This may account for the rather scanty coverage of Central Americans.

There are reference sources that do more justice to Central American and Honduran authors. Several of these were published in 1992. The description of Angel Flores' posthumously published *Spanish American Authors: The Twentieth Century* states that he "planned ... to include all of the major novelists and poets from Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America [and] selected 330 writers as exemplars of the literature of all of the countries of Spanish America" (xiii). While the focus of this work is novelists and poets, four of the five authors Flores includes are as well known for their short stories as for any of their other writings: Eduardo Bähr (1940-) (80-81), Marcos Carías (1905-1949) (167-168), Argentina Díaz Lozano (1912-1999) (254-255), and Augusto Monterroso (1921-2003)⁶ (558-560). The poet Roberto Sosa (825-828) is the final Honduran entry. A sample from the description for Eduardo Bähr indicates the high esteem that Flores holds for the quality of Honduran authors:

Eduardo Bahr has exercised an enormous influence on the development of Honduran letters. Two fundamental reasons account for this. First, his work as a teacher ... In addition, along with Julio César Escoto and Marcos García [i.e., Carías] Zapata, he represents a generation whose eagerness for renewal is expressed in a break with custom. They were the people who sought to actualize popular speech, playing with its picturesque character and returning to its fundamentals in the construction of narrative and characterization. (80)

⁶ Monterroso was born in Honduras, but lived most of his life either in Guatemala or in exile in Mexico and is considered with the literatures of all three countries.

Daniel Balderston's compilation *The Latin American Short Story: An Annotated Guide to Anthologies and Criticism* appeared in the same year, 1992, as Flores' work. His section on Honduran anthologies (233-234) only has three entries: *Antología del cuento hondureño* (1968) edited by Oscar Acosta and Roberto Sosa; *El nuevo cuento hondureño* (1985) edited by Jorge Luis Oviedo (1957-); and *Honduras, fábulas y cuentos: antología* (1970) edited by Antonio de Undurraga (1911-). He did not include the first edition of Oviedo's *El nuevo cuento hondureño* published by Ediciones AELUNAH in 1983, or his 1988 *Antología del cuento hondureño*. Balderston's section on secondary literature about Honduran short story authors really only includes two entries since Manuel Salinas Paguada's (1942-1999) 1981 study "Breve reseña del cuento moderno hondureño" was published in three different places. The only other critical work Balderston includes is Longino Becerra's (1931-) "Cinco problemas sobre el nuevo cuento hondureño" published in *Presente* (1976). Unfortunately, he missed the 1973 publication by Ramón Augusto Hernández, *El origen del cuento en Honduras*. Since he "excludes studies of single authors" and does not include unpublished theses or "ephemeral newspaper articles" (xvi) admittedly he undoubtedly would have had little data to work with unless he did extensive research at the Colección Hondureña at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras in Tegucigalpa.

Since the publication of Balderston's *Guide*, there have been several critical works that would have fulfilled his criteria. As a sampling, about the same year the *Guide* appeared Ana Gertrudis de Ramírez published *Antología de cuento hondureño* (1992). Professor Ramírez opens the compilation with a brief essay on the history of the short story in Honduras. She then uses the examples from the various literary periods as a basis

for teaching literary analysis and criticism. Included are descriptions of the characteristics and corresponding time periods of traditional stories, romanticism, realism, and modernism (including vanguard and post-vanguard literature). Also in 1992, Pedro Pablo Viñuales published “Intimidad de tierra y agua: en los orígenes del cuento hondureño” in *Anales de literatura hispanoamericana*. This article focuses on the works of Juan Ramón Molina and Froylán Turcios (1872-1943),⁷ touching briefly on works by Luis Andrés Zúñiga (1878-1964) and Rafael Heliodoro Valle. And finally, Salinas Paguada contributed “El cuento hondureño contemporáneo” to Jorge Román-Lagunas’ *La literatura centroamericana: visiones y revisiones* published in 1994. After a brief introduction to Honduran stories covering the 1920’s through 1950’s, the generational groups of the 60’s (Orlando Henríquez (1923-), Eduardo Bähr, and Julio Escoto), 70’s (Bähr, Escoto, Marcos Carías Zapata (1938-), and Miguel R. Ortega (1922-)), and 80’s (Roberto Castillo (1950-), Edilberto Borjas (1950-), Jorge Medina García (1948-), Jorge Luis Oviedo, Horacio Castellanos Moya (1957-), Nery Alexis Gaitán, Roberto Quesada (1962-), Pompeyo del Valle (1929-), Galel Cárdenas Amador (1945-), Rubén Berríos (1950-)) are discussed. He briefly mentions the latest authors beginning to publish in the early 90’s, Longino Becerra and Alejandro Barahona Romero (1934-2003).

1992 also saw the publication of the second edition of David William Foster’s *Handbook of Latin American Literature* in which is included the entry “Honduras” by María A. Salgado (347-355). This essay is significantly expanded from the original version published in 1987 which barely mentioned women authors, noting only Argentina Díaz Lozano’s 1950 publication *Mayapán* and *Peregrinaje* published in 1944 (324).

⁷ Helen Umaña has corrected a long-standing error about Turcios’ dates: “R[oberto] Sosa puntualiza que la publicación de la partida de bautizo de Turcios, por Víctor Cáceres Lara, comprueba que el escritor nació en 1872 y no en 1875, como se apunta en los textos de literatura hondureña” (*Novela* 31).

Salgado's essays are the first really favorable presentations in English of Honduran literature. She indicates that Honduran culture suffered not only from its mountainous geography, isolating communities one from another, but also historically because of "the centralized viceroyalty system that had established in Guatemala the only university in Central America" (347), thus leaving Hondurans without a nucleus around which to develop its own intellectual base. It was not until 1847 that Fray José Trinidad Reyes (1797-1855), one of Honduras' first important writers, founded the University of Honduras (347). Salgado gives a fuller description of the history of publishing in Honduras than do Urbina and Rhoden:

an added problem has been the scarcity of printing presses and publishing houses. To remedy this situation, at least in part, there has been a proliferation of periodicals, literary journals, and in more recent years, anthologies. One result of this tendency has been that most of the literary production of the country remains unavailable, scattered in an assortment of shortlived publications. A second result has been to promote those genres that lend themselves to being fitted into the restricted space of a magazine; poetry, short stories, folkloric tales, and journalistic articles. By and large, most novels have remained unpublished or have appeared abroad. (347-348)

In the next chapter, I will discuss more of the history of Honduran literature.

Finally, M. J. Fenwick's two-volume set *Writers of the Caribbean and Central America: A Bibliography* also appeared in 1992. Described as "a tool for discovering the tradition of Caribbean-area and Central American literature" (xv), this is a very good,

though now somewhat dated, starting point for researching Honduran literature. The section on Honduras (662-699) includes 330 authors. Each entry indicates the genre of literature the author writes (poetry, novel, short story, etc.), records pseudonyms the author has used, and includes a chronological listing of their publications followed by “magazines and anthologies in which the author’s work appears” (xv).

Iván E. Calimano published his *Index to Spanish Language Short Stories in Anthologies* in 1994. He reviewed “more than 200 anthologies of Spanish language short stories published in Spanish America, Spain, and the United States from 1979 to [1994]” (1) while compiling the *Index*. The definition Calimano used to describe an anthology was “a publication representing the works of three or more authors” (1) consequently he does not include compilations of stories by one author. Even with this limitation, he lists twenty Hondurans, including two women, Argentina Díaz Lozano and Blanca Antonieta Flores (1953-), who are represented with one story each. The twenty authors have forty-one stories among them published in fifteen anthologies. Had Calimano also included anthologies with English translations, we would have seen more works. For example, Rosario Santos included “Anita the Insect Catcher” (Anita, la cazadora de insectos) by Roberto Castillo (13-25) and “Confinement” (Encierro) by Horacio Castellanos Moya (27-34) in her 1988 anthology *And We Sold the Rain: Contemporary Fiction from Central America*. In the 1996 second edition, she added stories by Roberto Quesada, Jorge Medina García and Julio Escoto. Nery Alexis Gaitán has compiled statistics of Honduran books of short stories that show 253 books by 134 Honduran authors were published between 1901 and 2003 (*Índice bibliográfico* 25-26). However, this does not even begin to show the complete extent of short stories written by Hondurans. My

research done between 1993 and 1999 show that at least 1,580 short stories have been published in various venues including newspapers and magazines as well as in books. Furthermore, I am aware that I have not yet consulted and confirmed all possible sources.

Janet N. Gold's entry for "Honduras" (424-427) in Verity Smith's 1997 *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature* is one of the best available to the non-Spanish speaking community.⁸ Gold's own 1995 work on the Honduran poet Clementina Suárez affords her a deep appreciation for the country's literature. She has very positive commentary about twentieth-century prose authors Víctor Cáceres Lara (1915-1993), Marco Antonio Rosa (1899-1983), Daniel Laínez (1908-1959), Medardo Mejía (1907-1981), Paca Navas de Miralda (1900-1969), Marcos Carías Reyes, Ramón Amaya Amador, Argentina Díaz Lozano, Marcos Carías Zapata, Eduardo Bähr, Julio Escoto, Roberto Castillo, Horacio Castellanos Moya, and Jorge Luis Oviedo (425-426), poets Claudio Barrera (1912-1971), Jacobo Cárcamo (1916-1959), Pompeyo del Valle, Oscar Acosta, Roberto Sosa, Rigoberto Paredes (1948-), José Luis Quesada (1948-), José Adán Castelar (1941-), David Díaz Acosta (1951-), José González (1953-), and Juan Ramón Saravia (1951-) (426-427), women authors Clementina Suárez, Victoria Bertrand (1907-1952) who published under the name Alma Fiori, Eva Thais (1931-2001), Ángela Valle (1920-2003), María Eugenia Ramos (1959-), Aída Ondina Sabonge Gutiérrez (1958-), Aleyda Romero, and Yadira Eguiguren (1971-) (427), and a group she calls "writer-scholars" Rafael Heliodoro Valle, Rómulo E. Durón (1865-1942), and Helen Umaña (427).

⁸ This article is duplicated in Smith's 2000 abridged version titled *Concise Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*.

Based on the above list, with the exceptions of Salgado and Gold, the other reference works reviewed here barely touch the depth of the literature produced by Honduran writers. Given the paucity of information available, especially in English, in the next chapter I will present a generation-based history of Honduran literature in order to fill in the sketchy picture that has been presented so far.

CHAPTER 2

BRIEF HISTORY OF HONDURAN LITERATURE

As seen from the previous review of reference sources, Honduran literature is not well known in North America. My purpose in this study is to remedy that deficit. Accordingly, in this chapter, I will review the history of Honduran literature. The preponderance of the shorter genres of poetry and short stories in the literary production of the country will become apparent.

There are two possible approaches for discussing literature in Honduras: by genres or by eras. Each approach has its benefits and difficulties. If one chooses to discuss the literature based on the various genres, several problems arise. Most Honduran authors are poets. The number of entries in the category for poetry would be excessively large and would need subcategories to facilitate an understanding of the development of the genre. Also, what does one do with authors whose literary production includes several forms of writing? Oscar Acosta, for example, is as equally well known for his poetry as for his short stories, and his literary essays and criticism are fundamental for a thorough appreciation of Honduran writers. In order to fully grasp his contributions to Honduran literature, one would need to jump from section to section. The other approach is to divide the authors by eras or generations. This method is not without its drawbacks. Prolific and long-lived authors are very difficult to place within a particular generation. The poet Clementina Suárez is such an example. Her earliest poems appeared in the 1930s and she lived until 1991, but she is generally placed with the authors whose works

predominated in the 1950s. Clearly, however, there were authors of other generations that influenced her writings and on whom she had an influence.

Several authors have discussed the idea of literary generations for Honduran writers. Some examples were already discussed in the first chapter (Salinas Paguada, *El cuento hondureño* and Ramírez). Segisfredo Infante in his 1991 essay “Recuento literario” refers to the early efforts of Rafael Heliodoro Valle and Ramón Oquelí (1934-2004) (24-25) to establish Honduran literary generations. Galel Cárdenas Amador presents an expanded discussion of this process in his essay for the *Primer simposio de literatura hondureña*. Using the strict methodology of José Juan Arrom (1910-), José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), and Julián Marías (1914-2005), Cárdenas Amador attempts to align Honduran literary development with the socio-economic condition of the country. “Según Arrom, Ortega y Marías, el recuento deber ser sistemático, regular sobre la base de 30 años con sus ascensos de 15 y descensos de 15” (Cárdenas Amador 103). He then proposes eight generations that are significant for a worldwide perspective of literature (107).⁹ Nonetheless, Cárdenas Amador concedes that “todavía no se ha esbozado una visión global dialéctica de la [literatura nacional]” (104). He also notes the importance of a society’s “dinámica propia” (105) with regard to the formation of its cultural aesthetic.

Both Ana Gertrudis de Ramírez and Helen Umaña (*Panorama* and *Novela*) seem to have adopted Cárdenas Amador’s generations as the basis for their analyses of Honduran narrative. However, I believe that the more traditional generations assigned to

⁹ Cárdenas Amador’s proposed generations are: Inicios de la literatura nacional (1474-1773); Neoclasicismo (1774-1803); Pre-Romanticismo (1804-1834); Romanticismo (1834-1863); Post-Romanticismo y Modernismo (1864-1893); Post-Modernismo, Prevanguardia y Realismo Regional (1894-1923); Vanguardia y Realismo Social (1924-1953); and Post-Vanguardia: Los Contemporáneos (1954-1983).

Honduran literature are a better reflection of both the country's specific social development and the development of all the literary genres in Honduras, not just narrative which is the focus of the studies by Ramírez and Umaña.. Also, by maintaining a structure that demonstrates a country's own idiosyncrasies, I believe a system then can show better how that country's literature fits into the broader world context. Where, for example, does it anticipate or lag behind stylistic movements? There is no need to force the literary culture into a rigid model such as the 30 year pattern proposed above.

In 1959, Luis Mariñas Otero published "El ensayo en Honduras: formación de la literatura hondureña" which appeared in the *Suplemento de artes y letras* of the journal *Universidad de Honduras*. Although from the title the article appears to be just about the essay as a literary form, Mariñas Otero critically discusses the development of Honduran literature in general and comments on proposed literary generations for Honduran authors (8).¹⁰ He notes ironically that "la idea de establecer generaciones literarias en los países hispanoamericanos ha fascinado a los estudiosos, que no han vacilado en forzar situaciones y abusar de la denominación" (8). Mariñas Otero continues:

En Honduras se ha hablado de una generación de 1918, de 1926, de 1935, 1940, 1944 y de 1950. Esta enumeración solo tendría lógica si hablamos en sentido cronológico, ya que cada uno de aquellos años representa alguna realización de trascendencia dentro del panorama literario hondureño, el momento de la revelación de algún escritor o la aparición de una importante revista literaria. (8)

¹⁰ This article, under the more general title "Formación de la literatura hondureña", was re-issued twice: February 1970 in *Presente*, and in 1973 as part of *Panorama crítico de la literatura hispanoamericana*.

Given that Mariñas Otero does not give any generations prior to the twentieth century, other sources are needed to create an overall picture of the literary development of Honduras.

Oscar A. Flores (1912-1980) (31) uses dates similar to those of Mariñas Otero in his 1967 article “Letras contemporáneas de Honduras”. Both Rigoberto Paredes and Roberto Sosa examine twentieth-century generations in their contributions to the 1987 *Literatura hondureña: selección de estudios críticos sobre su proceso formativo*. Also from 1987 is the extensive study by José Francisco Martínez (1915-1991), *Literatura hondureña y su proceso generacional*. Despite its title, however, Martínez does not provide information for defining the generations. Even when he reaches the “generación literaria del 14” (*Literatura* 237), he just has the names of the generations as chapter headings. He includes a brief section, “Escuelas o movimientos literarios” (*Literatura* 61-66), in which he gives an overview of neoclassicism, romanticism, the Parnassians, symbolism, modernism, and vanguardism, then he goes on to present a chronological bibliography of the authors included. More recently, Juan Antonio Medina Durón (1944-) uses the idea of generations to structure his *Historia general de la literatura hondureña*. These last two are among the few which investigate the early Honduran authors. Unfortunately, none of these works completely agree about the generations, the dates that define them, or who belongs in each group. Some authors break the generations by decades, including Salinas Paguada (*El cuento hondureño*) and Gaitán (*Índice bibliográfico*), while others combine both historical and literary events to characterize the generations.

Since Mariñas Otero confined his discussion to generations of the twentieth-century, I must use other sources to assemble a list of generations relevant to Honduran literature. Beginning with Teresa Cerrato's discussion of the pre-colonial period, I will use the generations presented by Roberto Sosa in his "La Generación del la Dictadura" (173-174),¹¹ combining information from others to construct a set of generations that reflect a consensus from the various studies done previously. In this way, I hope to combine the most representative literary designations for a clear description of the development of the literature of Honduras.

The Pre-Colonial Period

It is always difficult to decide the beginning point for any of the literatures of the Americas. Does one start with the compositions written after the date of independence? If so, how much does the colonial experience influence that writing? Or, should one go back to the pre-Colombian cultures to determine if there are features that contribute to later writings. In her study of three novels by the Honduran author Jorge Luis Oviedo, Teresa Cerrato notes that Honduran literature "no es muy diferente del resto de la literatura latinoamericana. El primer contacto, la colonia, la lucha por la independencia y las dictaduras son todos elementos comunes a la mayoría del continente americano" (1). She begins her overview of Honduran literature discussing the cultural richness of the indigenous groups from the area: the Maya, the Lenca, the Lempa, the Sumo, among others (1-2). She informs the reader that due to the oral traditions (2-3) of these peoples,

¹¹ The generations of Sosa are: La Generación del Padre Reyes (1830-1876); La Generación Romántica, o La Generación de Joaquín Palma (1876-1895); La Generación de la Juventud Hondureña, o La Generación Modernista (1895-1915); La Generación de 1915, o La Generación Post-Modernista (1915-1929); La Generación de la Dictadura, o La Generación de 1935 (1935-1950); La Generación de 1950 (1950-1965); La Generación de 1965 (1965-1980). Note that when Cárdenas Amador discusses Sosa's generations he mistakenly combines the Generación de la Juventud Hondureña with the Generación de 1915 (102-103) resulting in six groups, not seven.

their own literatures unfortunately are almost totally lost, leaving Spanish as the predominant language: “la fusión casi completa de lo español con lo nativo influyó la pérdida de una gran parte de la literatura indígena, la literatura con la cual debiera iniciarse la historia literaria hondureña” (3). While one might like to discuss the indigenous literary history of Honduras, the reality remains that there are few sources to support such a history. Roberto Sosa states the situation succinctly: “la literatura indígena hondureña brilla por su ausencia” (La Generación 174).

The Colonial Period (16th, 17th, and 18th Centuries)

From the first stages of colonization, Hondurans were at a distinct disadvantage with regard to access to any intellectual or cultural environment that might lead to an early development of their own literary traditions. As was indicated in the first chapter in Salgado’s commentary, the first university in Honduras was not established until 1847 (347). While the lack of locally available higher education certainly would impede intellectual development for the new nation, there is evidence of a lack of adequate education of any sort prior to independence. This long-standing problem was rooted in the earliest period of the colony. Rafael Heliodoro Valle, one of Honduras’ best minds from the twentieth century, wrote in his 1944 essay “Historia intelectual de Honduras”:

[e]n Honduras, como en el resto de la América Española durante el régimen de cuatro siglos la Iglesia tuvo a su cargo las empresas de la cultura, y de modo especial, cuanto se refería a la educación y evangelización de los aborígenes y de los colonos ... pero Honduras no recibía los beneficios de la evangelización. (4-5)

Valle quotes from a letter written in 1555 by Fray Pedro Ortiz¹² to the King of Spain, Carlos V, about his concerns due to having had “noticia de la poca doctrina que había en esta Provincia de Honduras” (5). Ortiz goes on to complain that the Indians have had no instruction yet the clerics are eating well at the expense of the Church (5-6). He ends “de que hay mucha necesidad, y si vienen frailes poblaré, en los pueblos de españoles donde no hay menos necesidad que, entre indios, de doctrina” (6). Ortiz clearly describes one of the basic problems that have plagued Honduras: corrupt officials who work to their own benefit while disregarding the necessities of the people in the country. In this case, the clerics are failing to meet the educational and spiritual needs of the fledgling colony. Certainly, the lack of basic education would inhibit the development of a uniquely Honduran literary tradition.

It is generally agreed that the colonial period was a cultural and literary wasteland for Honduras. Valle describes the results of this depressing situation thusly:

La Provincia hondureña era una de las más atrasadas, si no la más, en todo el cuadro histórico de la Capitanía General de Guatemala. Aunque era valiosa por sus minas, éstas no eran dignas de compararse con las de México o el Perú; su Iglesia contaba con modestísimos recursos; su despoblación, las enfermedades tropicales, lo reducido de sus ingresos, la incuria de sus gobernantes, sus difíciles vías de comunicación, la mantenían alejada del mundo, abandonada a sí misma, a pesar de encontrarse situada estratégicamente en una de las comarcas centrales del hemisferio, henchida de riquezas que más tarde aprovecharía el extraño con técnica y ambición. Si en algún país de América habían de agudizarse

¹² In his article, Valle spells the name as Ortíz. I have modified the spelling to the modern form of Ortiz.

la mala política española y más tarde el poderío imperialista, ese ha sido el de Honduras; y así se explica que en el panorama de su existencia, a lo largo de los tres primeros siglos que siguieron al descubrimiento, apenas sobresalgan unos cuantos hombres que han podido reivindicarla. (9)

These few would have had the typical education of affluent young Honduran men during the early years of the 19th century which would have been taught by a private tutor and would have consisted of a basic level of reading, printing, and mathematics. If one wished to learn to write in script, other arrangements were necessary, generally meaning that the boy had to study abroad (Valle 10-11). For Hondurans, this usually meant going to the university in Guatemala. Valle indicates that there is no evidence that any Honduran was able to go to Havana, Cuba, much less to Madrid, to gain higher education (11). Ironically, many of the contemporary texts read by these young men, who would be in the forefront of the independence movement to break from Spain, were in books written in English and French (Valle 11), often reflecting the revolutionary ideals of period and coming to them through the British colony in Belize.

José Francisco Martínez gives another concrete reason why so little is known of the intellectual development of the colonial period:

las constantes guerras civiles que asolaron a Honduras desde los días de la Independencia, cuyas hordas, en cada período de las mismas, destruyeron gran parte de los archivos coloniales de Gracia, Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, Juticalpa, San Pedro Sula, Copán y otros más en regiones dispersas del país, perdiéndose en esta manera mucha documentación de valor histórico. (*Literatura* 34)

However, Martínez goes on to list six Honduran-born writers, all of whom were members of the Church and wrote religious texts (*Literatura* 37-39).¹³ Among these is the author considered to have written first Honduran book (Argueta 80): Fray Francisco Carrasco del Saz was born in Trujillo (date unknown), educated at the Universidad de Lima, and died in either 1650 (Martínez, *Literatura* 37) or 1659 (Argueta 80). His “Comentarios sobre algunas leyes de la Recopilación o Compilación de Castilla” is attributed to have been written in 1620 (Argueta 80), and printed in Seville (no date given), then reissued in Madrid in 1648 (Martínez, *Literatura* 37). Martínez describes Carrasco del Saz as “un incansable estudioso de Historia, Jurisprudencia y Literatura” (Martínez, *Literatura* 37). He is also attributed the 1630 “De los casos de Curia”. The only other author from this group who would merit attention for literature is the *presbítero* Juan Ugarte. Born July 22, 1662 in Tegucigalpa, he became a Jesuit priest in Mexico (probably in 1679) and volunteered to be part of an expedition to California. At his death in 1730 he was named “Apostol de las Californias” (Martínez, *Literatura* 38). Both Martínez (*Literatura* 38-39) and Argueta (402) list his travel literature as significant literary contributions. These include “Noticia del viaje de la balandra nombrada e Triunfo de la Santa Cruz en 1700 al Golfo de California y costa del Sur de la América Septentrional” and “Diarios y relaciones y cartas de las cosas de California”.

Pre- and Post-Independence and the Generación del Padre Reyes (1830-1876)

The Central American republics went through a tumultuous phase between declaring their independence from Spain in 1821 and finally settling into the basic

¹³ Medina Durón, on the other hand, completely disregards these authors as part of the history of the literature of Honduras stating: “todos eminentes eruditos y autores de tratados teológicos, apologéticos y académicos. Pero no se daba la recreación poética, ni el juego con la ficción les preocupaba” (12). He waits to include essay as part of Honduran literature until the writings of José Cecilio del Valle.

divisions that are today's independent nations. Honduras ultimately established itself as independent from the other parts of the failed Central American federation in 1839, but the intervening years saw the beginnings of a cultural milieu that was specifically Honduran. The first printing press in Honduras arrived in 1829 which led to the publication of Honduras' first newspaper *La Gaceta del Gobierno* in 1830 (Gold, Honduras 424). Among the contributors to the nascent intellectual community was the neoclassical essayist José Cecilio del Valle who began the country's the first periodical *El Amigo de la Patria* (Gold, Honduras 424). Rafael Heliodoro Valle describes him as the "ilustre hondureño" (10) and Mario R. Argueta (1946-) extols him as "el más grande intelectual que ha dado Centro América en toda su historia" (410). Gold reminds us that del Valle was "known as 'El Sabio' [The Sage]" (Honduras 424) and places him on par with Andrés Bello (1781-1865), the Venezuelan essayist and poet. Ramírez calls this the "Generación de 1804" (8) and includes José Trinidad Reyes with Valle.

Fray José Trinidad Reyes was the other significant Honduran author who bridged the colonial and independence periods. He was fundamental in creating a strong cultural milieu in the country: besides starting the first university in Honduras, he is credited with bringing the first piano to his native city, Tegucigalpa (Gold, Honduras 424). According to José González he is the first Honduran poet and his name is associated with the first generation of poets, the "Generación del Padre Reyes" (González 62-63; González and Chávez Mayorquín 127). He is also considered the country's first playwright (Argueta 344), having written more than sixteen "pastorelas", nine of which survived and were compiled in a 1905 publication by Rómulo E. Durón (González 63; González and Chávez Mayorquín 127). Padre Reyes' love of and accomplishment with music can be found in

the scores he wrote to accompany the pastorelas (Gold, Honduras 424). Finally, he is also known for his essays, in particular his “Ideas de Sofia Seyers” (Gold, Honduras 425) in which he defends the argument for the education for women. Oscar Castañeda Batres (1925-1994) (129) identifies three other members of the “Generación del Padre Reyes”, poets all: Carlos Gutiérrez Lozano (1810 (Oqueli 205) or 1818 (Argueta 183) -1892), Teodoro Aguiluz (1927-1883), and Justo Pérez (no dates available). Finally, the first published female poet from Honduras belongs with this group. Ana Irbazú de Guardiola’s (d. 1903) poem “Elegía” was published in the *Gaceta Oficial* for August 22, 1865 (Pineda de Gálvez 27).

La Generación Romántica, or La Generación de José Joaquín Palma (1876-1895)

As I stated earlier, there is dissention among the experts concerning the specifics of each generation. Beginning with the Romantic Generation this disagreement becomes more apparent. Most literary critics agree that 1876 is the beginning date for this generation, but both Ana Gertrudis de Ramírez (7, 9) and Helen Umaña (*Panorama* 17 and *Novela* 17) place the beginning date of the Romantic period in Honduras as 1864 based on the generations of Cárdenas Amador. However, in *La novela hondureña*, Umaña seems to contradict this date when she writes “los primeros textos narrativos románticos proceden de 1881 y corresponden al género del cuento” (19). After commenting on the 1841 publication date of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s (1814-1873) *Sab*, Umaña continues “es pertinente considerar un desfase de casi cincuenta [i.e., cuarenta] años. Tiene razón Juan Antonio Medina Durón cuando afirma que el romanticismo hondureño es tardío respecto al patrón universal” (19).¹⁴ Because of this

¹⁴ The reference is to Medina Durón’s 1993 *Literatura hondureña*, but he makes the same point in *Historia general de la literatura hondureña* (28).

contradiction, I am continuing with the tradition of using the 1876 date to mark the beginning of the “Generación Romántica” in Honduras.

Even though Honduras had gained a semblance of independence, according to Salgado the country “continued to exist in isolation and to be ravaged by continuous bloody civil strife until 1876, date of the Liberal Reform” (348). Martínez confirms that “[l]as guerras civiles (64 en 113 años de Independencia) fueron, en realidad, y lo serán siempre, una verdadera calamidad nacional en lo referente al conocimiento y desarrollo de nuestra cultura” (*Literatura* 34). Consequently, the budding intellectual community failed to flourish, and was not revived until the reforms made during the presidency (1876-1883) of Marco Aurelio Soto (1846-1908). During this period, education was expanded and the government created the National Library and Archives (Gold, Honduras 425). The essayist and poet Ramón Rosa (1848-1893) and the journalist Adolfo Zúñiga (1836-1900) were ministers in the Soto government and were responsible for the establishment of public primary and secondary schools. Gold’s essay goes on to describe the profound effects of these changes resulting in the fact that “[t]he late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a proliferation of literate individuals” (Honduras 425). Ramón Rosa was the president of the country’s first literary society. According to Martínez (*Literatura* 23-24), the “Amigos de Tegucigalpa” was constituted on July 28, 1878. It is a fitting tribute to Rosa’s dedication toward creating an environment in which the literary arts could thrive that the country’s Premio Nacional de Literatura is named for him (González 67). Unfortunately, due to his early death, Rosa’s own poetry remained scattered and unedited until the mid-twentieth century when first Rafael Heliodoro Valle in 1954, then Marco Carías Zapata in 1980 rescued Rosa’s works from obscurity (González 66).

Rosa is not unique among Hondurans for having his poetic works remain dispersed. Janet Gold explains that the poets of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries shared their verses “through literary periodicals of mostly ephemeral existence ... and by giving copies of one’s poems to friends or composing verses as gifts” (Honduras 425). She goes on to name five late-nineteenth-century poets who probably would have followed this practice. Of these, only Carlos Federico Gutiérrez (1861-1899) has books published: *Piedras falsas* (1898), a book of poetry, and his novel *Angelina* (1898). Adán Cuevas (1852-1895) does not seem to have had his poetry collected. The two women Gold includes, Lucila Estrada de Pérez (1856-1949) and Josefa Carrasco (1861-1899), have poems that appear in at least two publications: *Antología* (1991) compiled by Efraín López Nieto (1948-), and *Honduras, mujer y poesía: antología de poesía hondureña escrita por mujeres, 1865-1998* (1998) compiled by Adaluz Pineda de Gálvez (1952-). Finally, Manuel Molina Vigil (1853-1883) is also included in the 1991 *Antología*.

The “Generación Romántica” is also known as the “Generación de José Joaquín Palma” (1844-1911). Medina Durón explains why in a footnote: “Palma ... introdujo en Honduras el gusto por el Romanticismo ... Su *Poesía*, fue el primer libro de versos publicado en el país (prologado por [Ramón] Rosa ...); impulsó, además, las primeras tertulias literarias” (*Historia* 27).¹⁵ Poetry was the predominant literary form of this generation, although the short story was beginning to appear. Umaña includes Marco Aurelio Soto, Ramón Rosa, Carlos Alberto Uclés (1854-1942), Liberato Moncada (1855-1886), and Carlos Federico Gutiérrez in her section on romantic writers in *Panorama*

¹⁵ Martínez identifies the members of the literary group Amigos de Tegucigalpa, listing “Poeta José Joaquín Palma” as the “Secretario 1o.” (24).

crítico del cuento hondureño (1881-1999) (19-23). Gutiérrez also represents the romantic novel in Umaña's *La novela hondureña (19-24)*.

The majority of critics use 1895 as both the ending of the “Generación Romántica” and the beginning of the “Generación Modernista”. Again, Umaña (*Panorama 27* and *Novela 27*) and Ramírez (7, 9) begin their next generation with 1894, presumably ending romanticism with 1893. Medina Durón divides the romantic generation into two groups: “una está formada por los autores nacidos en la década de los sesenta, y que encabeza José Antonio Domínguez (1864-1903); la otra, integrada por los nacidos en los setentas” (28). The authors in this second group were the first to incorporate the modernist style of Rubén Darío, giving Medina Durón his most persuasive argument for a different ending date, 1887, to the romantic period.

La Generación Modernista, La Generación de la Juventud Hondureña, or La Generación de novecientos (1895-1915)

In his discussion about “modernismo”, Medina Durón (33) emphasizes the importance of three of Rubén Darío's works in shaping this movement in Honduras: *Azul* (1888), *Prosas profanas* (1896), and *Cantos de vida y esperanza* (1905). Since he uses Darío to define the age, Medina Durón also ends the “Generación Modernista” with Darío's death in 1916. Both Ramírez (7, 9) and Umaña (*Panorama 27* and *Novela 27*) call this the “Generación de 1894” without connecting it to any specific event as does Medina Durón. But while he and most other critics end the period in either 1915 or 1916, Umaña (*Panorama 69* and *Novela 91*) and Ramírez (7,10) extend this group until 1923.

This period also carries the name “la generación de la Juventud Hondureña”. It is the founding of this literary group in 1895 which institutes the beginning date for the

generation for most critics. While the society included poets from the previous generation, such as Carlos Alberto Uclés and José Antonio Domínguez, it also included the authors who would guide Honduras' literature toward other literary forms: Juan Ramón Molina, Froylán Turcios, Augusto C. Coello (1882-1941), Luis Andrés Zúñiga, and Jorge Federico Zepeda (1883-1932). Coello and Zepeda are known for their poetry, while Zúñiga also wrote short stories and plays. With the exception of Zepeda, all of these authors, often more than once, were responsible for creating literary journals in Honduras.

The predominant authors of this group, however, are Juan Ramón Molina and Froylán Turcios. While a law student in Guatemala, Molina “conoció a Rubén Darío y trabajó con él fuertes lazos de amistad” (González and Chávez Mayorquín 99). González and Chávez Mayorquín also write that in 1906, Molina again met with his friend in Brazil. “Ahí, se encontró con Darío nuevamente y elaboró su magnífica y conocida composición poética ‘Salutación a los poetas brasileiros’, que el mismo Darío consideró como superior a la suya” (99-100). Of Molina, Castañeda Batres writes “es, indudablemente, el más destacado poeta hondureño, uno de los más significativos del modernismo americano” (143). While José González and Leda Chávez Mayorquín refers to Molina as “[p]oeta ante todo” (99), Nery Alexis Gaitán states “Juan Ramón Molina y Froylán Turcios, quienes son los padres de la narrativa hondureña, ... cultivaban ya, aparte de la poesía, la narrativa” (*Índice bibliográfico* 30-31). Ironically, Molina, who committed suicide¹⁶ in 1908, never had a book published during his lifetime although he was a prolific essayist, poet and short story writer (González and Chávez Mayorquín

¹⁶ Roberto Sosa (La Generación 174) comments on the “hilo trágico-visible” of Honduran letters: “El suicidio, el accidente mortal y la locura en ciertos casos, constituyen las vías de la desaparición física de la mayor parte de los intelectuales hondureños, y cosa extraña, de sus mejores intelectuales”.

100). Froylán Turcios rectified this situation, editing the first compilation of Molina's stories, published in 1911 under the title of *Tierras, Mares y Cielos* (Gaitán, *Índice bibliográfico* 20).¹⁷

Turcios, according to González and Chávez Mayorquín “[e]s, junto a Molina, el intelectual hondureño más importante de principios del siglo XX” (145). Among his most important contributions were the literary journals he founded. González and Chávez Mayorquín (145) lists six, among them *Esfinge* (founded in 1905) and *Ariel* (founded in 1925). Turcios also directed six newspapers, three each in Guatemala and Honduras. Describing Turcios' poetry, Castañeda Batres writes “[g]ustaba este poeta del alarde de riqueza verbal y del empleo de raros vocablos—característica ésta tan propia del primer modernismo” (142). Martínez describes Turcios as “poeta, cuentista, ensayista y cronista distinguido” (*Literatura* 227). According to Gaitán's research (*Índice bibliográfico* 32-37), Turcios published compilations of his stories in each of the first four decades of the 20th century. His novels, along with those of Lucila Gamero de Medina (1873-1964), are representative of the move toward the longer literary form, although novels do not begin to flourish in Honduran literature until the 1920's.¹⁸

Finally, this generation is also sometimes referred to as “La Generación de novecientos” reflecting a vagueness about the beginning date for this group. Mariñas Otero puts the modernist period as 1898-1918 noting that “los países iberoamericanos tienen muchos puntos de contacto con la generación española del 98” (10). He goes on to indicate that for Honduran authors these parameters do not exactly fit, however:

¹⁷ Helen Umaña gives the date of Turcios' compilation as 1913 (*Panorama* 39).

¹⁸ In her study of the Honduran novel, Helen Umaña includes only 10 novelists from the Romantic through the Modernist eras (*Novela* 19-88), but with her “generación de 1924”, which covers 1924-1953, she identifies twenty-nine Honduran novelists (*Novela* 93-239).

Por lo que a Honduras respecta, no es posible emplear el término modernismo de un modo absoluto y exhaustivo y como un compartimiento estanco para colocar en el mismo a los escritores del período 1898-1918. En mucho de ellos predomina el romanticismo apuntando apenas al modernismo, como [el poeta] Ramón Ortega, mientras que en otros como Froylán Turcios, la etapa modernista es muy pronto superada. (10)

Discussing the literature of Honduras in terms of generations becomes much more difficult after the modernist period. In general, the development of poetry using the various post-modern and vanguard techniques does not closely correspond with the development of narrative techniques.¹⁹ For this reason, beginning with the post-modernist period there can be significant differences between poetry and narrative when discussing general dates of the generations. However, since more Honduran authors begin to write in both verse and prose, generations provide a way to look at an author's work in relation to contemporaries without creating a large rupture between the genres.

La Generación Post-Modernista (1915-1929)

The social upheaval in many areas around the world, including the First World War and the revolutionary movements in both Mexico and Russia, had also been a prevailing characteristic in Honduras during the early years of the twentieth-century. Medina Durón writes “en Honduras la situación política inestable del siglo anterior desembocó en conflictos y luchas intestinas que se agudizaron de 1903 a 1932” (39). The concrete results on the literature of the age caused by the horrors of warfare “anularon

¹⁹ Drama is so poorly developed in Honduras that there is no pressing need to consider it in this discussion. There are individuals who have plays in their body of work, but, in general, they can be contextualized based on other writings. The author who is strictly a dramatist is rare. Essayists also, after the Generación Romántica, can almost always be placed through their other writings.

cualquier posibilidad de continuar creando un mundo concebido en función de la belleza formal” (Medina Durón 39). By 1915, the modernist movement was clearly receding, and the death of Darío in 1916 put a close to it in Honduras. The new style called for a simpler vocabulary that reproduced a localized flavor to the literature. With this generation, I have moved away from the standard groups presented by most Honduran literary critics, combining the “generación de 1915” and the “generación de 1924”. These groupings really seem to be to be two aspects of the same movement.

The Generation of 1915 is dominated by the poets. Martínez refers to them as “antimodernistas, o simplemente neomodernistas” (*Literatura* 71), and confirms that they are “todos ellos poetas”(*Literatura* 71). As with earlier generations, there was a literary society to which most authors of the period belonged. The “Ateneo de Honduras” met during the years 1913-1926 (Martínez, *Literatura* 27). Of the literature of this generation, Martínez writes that it

va dirigida a exaltar la sencillez aldeana, las virtudes populares y humanas, a todo aquello que representa como el sufrimiento de las clases más pobres, la amistad, la fidelidad, la bondad, etc., y en la exaltación superior de tales valores, claman la ayuda y protección del hombre de acción y de Dios. (*Literatura* 71-72)

Once more a literary group is the focal point for the “generación de 1924”. “Renovación” was formed in 1926 (Gaitán, *Índice bibliográfico* 33) and includes authors who primarily work with narrative forms: mostly short stories, but also novels. For stories, two of the most representative authors of the period are Federico Peck Fernández (1904-1929) (a *criollista*) and Arturo Martínez Galindo (1900-1940) (a *cosmopolita*),

while Marco Carías Reyes' novels are exemplary of the period. The founding date of this group explains María A. Salgado's use of the name "the Generation of 26" (350). She also highlights that "social concerns were to become the main topics" for these authors "who searched for Honduran identity and who criticized the divisions and civil strife" that typified the Honduran political scene. The majority of the writers are *criollistas*, with the settings for their work being rural or agricultural. *Criollismo* is also known as *costumbrismo*²⁰ or *regionalismo* per Manuel Salinas Paguada (Breve reseña 385-386).²¹ Two exceptions are Arturo Martínez Galindo and Arturo Mejía Nieto (1900-1972) who represent the *cosmopolita*, or metropolitan elements of the period. Both of these writers traveled extensively outside of Honduras which was a major influence for the urbanization of their writing (Salinas Paguada, Breve reseña 386 and Oviedo, Breve 9-10).

While I have maintained the name "Generación de 1924" for the authors working primarily in narrative in deference to the strong connection with the research on this genre done by Ramírez, Umaña and Gaitán, I believe that the system they use for their generations ignores the profound effect on the Honduran intellectual community of the political environment produced by the dictatorship of General Tiburcio Carías Andino (1876-1969). Clearly social problems abounded in the country during most of the first half of the century. Focusing solely on regionalism as a writing style to define the generation does not give a complete picture of the interaction of the Honduran authors.

²⁰ Helen Umaña points out that *costumbristas* utilize folklore in their writing. Whereas, *regionalismo*, and presumably *criollismo*, "hacen uso del paisaje, de las costumbres, de los personajes y del lenguaje nativo" (*Panorama* 70 and *Novela* 92) to achieve the telluric style.

²¹ This information is also quoted (9) in Jorge Luis Oviedo's "Breve panorama del cuento hondureño" which introduces his *Antología del cuento hondureño*. Unfortunately, the difference in punctuation from the original gives the impression that *cosmopolitismo* is also a variant of *criollismo*.

Therefore, I am preserving Roberto Sosa's structure and ending the post-modernist generation in 1929.

La Generación de la Dictadura, or La Generación de 1935 (1930-1950)

Roberto Sosa writes that “la Generación de la Dictadura se desprendió culturalmente del Grupo Renovación, el cual, más tarde, se convirtió en la Asociación Nacional de Cronistas, centro de discusión intelectual que tuvo como órgano de divulgación la *Revista Tegucigalpa*”(1987, 176-177). This confirms a direct connection between the earlier post-modernist generation and the authors impacted by the political atmosphere created when Carías Andino assumed power in 1933. Sosa began his discussion about this generation of writers stating:

He preferido el término Generación de la Dictadura, acuñado por Oscar Castañeda Batres, miembro de ese grupo, porque el marco socio-político-económico en el cual se gestó el movimiento literario de 1935 fue la época de gobierno del señor general Tiburcio Carías Andino. (La Generación 176)

Part of the social-political mark of the period was the limitation of free-speech and thought. Sosa tells of the imprisonment of the author and literary critic Medardo Mejía following a polemic exchange with Fernando Zepeda Durón, a politician who backed the Cariato, as the 1933-1949 dictatorship was called. This was a concrete demonstration of Carías Andino's method of keep peace in the country: “Encierro, destierro y entierro” (Sosa, La Generación 178). Sosa's analysis of the generation links this lack of freedom with the uneven quality of the poetic works produced by authors living under a regime that compromised their personal and collective aesthetic (La Generación 186-187).

Further, he notes that any criticism of the government by these authors “se ejecutó a nivel verbal, aislado y en abstracto” (La Generación 187). Clearly the name “Generación de la Dictadura” is descriptive for this group.

Why, then, the name “Generation of 1935”? Since the generation covers almost twenty years, some subdividing would seem appropriate. Sosa considers this generation to include the first two phases of *vanguardismo* and all of the variations found in this literary movement (La Generación 173, 180). The works of Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) and Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) are the strongest influences from the literary *vanguardia* on the Honduran authors of the period. According to Sosa, 1935 becomes a key date for naming this generation. It falls at a point which allows for distinguishing the two *vanguardismo* phases: “a) hacia atrás con una duración de siete o diez años, y b) hacia adelante en la misma proporción. Este marco temporal circunscribe la llamada Generación de 1942” (Sosa, La Generación 176).²² The result is the “Primera Etapa del Vanguardismo” as more or less 1930-1942, and the “Segunda Etapa” as 1942-1950 (implied from Sosa, La Generación 173). According to Mariñas Otero’s 1959 article the authors from the Generation of 1942 (or 1945 depending on the perspective) are in their “etapa formativa y creadora en busca de su estilo propio” (12). He cites as the most acclaimed authors of this group the poet Jorge Federico Traveso (1920-1953), and the novelists Ramón Amaya Amador and Paca Navas de Miralda.

²² Note how the ten year span takes you back to 1925, which would help connect this generation to the narrative Generation of 1924. Taking it forward 10 years, gives 1945, the date referenced in Salgado (354). Going forward another 10 years, would connect the whole group to the next narrative Generation of 1954 (Ramírez, 7, 10 and Umaña, *Panorama* 223 and *Novela* 243).

La Generación del 1950 (1950-1965)

The third phase of *vanguardismo* identified by Roberto Sosa is also known as the Generation of 1950, spanning the years 1950-1965 (La Generación 173). Of this period, Rigoberto Paredes writes:

Aunque el contexto histórico-social que prevalecerá en el país a partir de los años 50 no difiera en lo esencial respecto del que le tocó vivir a la ‘generación del 35’, lo cierto es que al concluir la dictadura de Tiburcio Carías, en 1949, se empieza a respirar una atmósfera diferente dentro del proceso social hondureño. (Honduras 73-74)

Clearly the end of the dictatorship marked the end of an era. Salinas Paguada notes that “se inicia entonces una cierta liberalización política que favorece culturalmente al país” (387). Medina Durón confirms that for poets of the generation the decade mark is of great consequence: “sus obras tempranas se publican en la misma” (44). In contrast to Sosa, though, Paredes assigns the dates 1955-1970 for this generation (Honduras 76 and Anexo B 75), demonstrating a short lapse before the full freedom of literary expression took hold. Still following the outline of Cárdenas Amador, both Umaña (*Panorama* 223 and *Novela* 243) and Ramírez (7, 10-11) have the dates of this generation as 1954-1984, corresponding somewhat with Paredes, but extending much longer. The 1954 date takes on more significance with Cárdenas Amador’s comment that the “gran huelga de 1954 marca una etapa decisiva en la literatura nacional, pues allí en esa gesta nacional donde se fundan las bases de una nueva literatura de vanguardia y del realismo social” (116). Other literary critics have noted the stress on political commitment found in this generation. Janet Gold writes that one of the dominant themes for this generation is “social justice”

(Honduras 426), while Umaña indicates that the content of these authors' works "gira en torno a problemas sociales extraídos de la realidad" (*Panorama* 224). Certainly Roberto Sosa's collection *Los pobres* (1969) is an outstanding example of this tendency.

La Generación de 1965 (1965-1980)

The last of the generations outlined by Roberto Sosa (La Generación 174) is his "primera etapa de postvanguardismo", the Generation of 1965. Jorge Luis Oviedo gives a clue as to the origin of the beginning date for this generation: "[con] el Golpe de Estado de 1963 se inicia en Honduras una nueva etapa en el ejercicio del poder" (Breve 15). Clearly such a radical change in the political atmosphere would begin to mark a change for the previous generation. Oviedo goes on to indicate that the military government instituted reforms which caused social unrest. The same situation was building in El Salvador. The war which broke out between the two countries was an "ocasión en que los gobiernos de ambos países aprovecharon el conflicto para detener la ola de descontento y protestas" (Oviedo, Breve 15). The 1965 date falls in the middle of these two important political events in Honduran history. Finally, by this time, the influence of the Latin American "boom" writers were appearing in Honduran literature (Paredes, Honduras 79). Ramírez (7, 11) and Umaña (*Panorama* 397 and *Novela* 373) maintain that the Postvanguard Generation begins with the "generación de 1984" as they call it. The writers they include in this group tend to constitute the authors other critics place in the generation who began to publish in the 1980s.

The Post 1980 Generation

At this time, no defining name has emerged for the writers who began publishing during the last two decades of the twentieth-century. However, for the critics that do not

follow the generations outlined by Cárdenas Amador, 1980 is the turning point toward a new generation. Rigoberto Paredes (Honduras 81) highlights Roberto Sosa's 1980 study of "la novísima poesía hondureña" as well as the publication of Roberto Castillo's first collection of stories in the same year. In his 1995 essay for Medina Durón's *Historia general de la literatura hondureña*, Paredes comments further of Sosa's study noting that the poets of this generation are using concepts that make them universal (*Anexo B 77*). Concerning prose writing, Medina Durón says that "la década de los ochenta es rica en producción narrativa" and that the authors have "[us] afán de experimentación verbal y compromiso social en lo medular" (*Historia 54*). Helen Umaña's studies of both novelists (*Novela*) and short story authors (*Panorama*) confirm that these two genres are well developed in the country, and also substantiate that the short story is the more popular narrative form. In *La novela hondureña*, she presents information about 85 Honduran novelists (13), while in *Panorama crítico del cuento hondureño (1881-1999)*, she describes the work of 189 short story authors from Honduras (13). Finally, Umaña's research regarding the literary production of short story authors corroborates my own mentioned in chapter one above. She states that the authors she includes have produced the "cantidad de dos mil quinientos cuentos. Cifras significativas que demuestran la importancia que, al cuento, han dado los escritores hondureños" (*Panorama 13*).

Now that the history of the literary development in Honduras has been given a framework within which it can be placed in comparison with other world literatures, and with other Latin American literature in particular, I would like to look more closely at the development of the short story in Honduras.

CHAPTER 3

THE SHORT STORY IN LATIN AMERICA AND HONDURAS

Historical Development of the Short Story in Latin America

In the first chapter of this work, I discussed Daniel Balderston's article about the short story genre in Latin American literature which appeared in *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*. There he raised the issue that "the notion of the short story as genre has been vigorously debated internationally" (Twentieth-Century 465). His comment refers to the debate among literary critics²³ who have been trying to find a definition for exactly what constitutes a short story. Depending on the point of view taken, their descriptions include writings that range from literary fragments to novellas. The single point on which these critics all seem to agree is that one of the initial works in the study of the short story is Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) 1842 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1804-1864) *Twice-Told Tales*. While I do not intend to enter into the deliberations surrounding the theories about the short story, I do want to note Poe's significance not only to that discussion, but to the development of the short story genre in Latin America, and consequently his relationship to this study.

Poe established himself not only as an author, but also as a literary critic, a model that often has been followed among Latin American writers. In his introductory essay "Apuntes para una teoría del cuento" (33-34), Luis Barrera Linares forges the intellectual

²³ For an overview of the development of this debate, see Lohafer, Susan, and Jo Ellyn Clarey, eds. *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989; May, Charles E., ed. *The New Short Story Theories*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994; and, Winther, Per, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei, eds. *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004.

connection between Poe and the Argentine author Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), referring to Cortázar as one of Poe's "discípulos latinoamericanos" (34). *Del cuento y sus alrededores*, for which Barrera Linares provides his commentary, also contains articles by Latin American author-critics including two by Cortázar (379-396 and 397-407), and one each by Horacio Quiroga (1878-1937) from Uruguay (325-339), Juan Bosch (1909-2001) from the Dominican Republic (363-370), and another Argentine, Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) (437-446), all of whom are known for their short stories. Poe's influence is felt among the Honduran writers as well. When describing the prose works of Froylán Turcios, Juan Antonio Medina Durón refers to the "rasgos narrativos de Edgar A. Poe" (*Historia* 46). Among the newest generation of Honduran authors to maintain the tradition of author-critic is Nery Alexis Gaitán, a short story author, literary critic, and professor of language at the famous Pan-American Agricultural School, also known as Zamorano.

Just as the early nineteenth century saw the short story beginning to flourish in the United States by authors such as Poe and Hawthorne, a similar literary development was occurring in Latin America. Margaret Sayers Peden's "Chronology" in *The Latin American Short Story: A Critical History* lists the first Brazilian newspaper to publish short stories, *O cronista*, starting in 1836 (x). Two years later, in 1838, Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851) is believed to have written his "El Matadero" in Argentina, considered to be the first Spanish American short story (Sayer x; Lindstrom 35). While Peden has indicated that short stories appeared early in Brazil, David William Foster indicates that Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908) "may be identified as virtually the initiator of the short story in Brazil" (Major Figures 3). This is because, as

Foster notes, until Machado's writings appeared, Brazilian authors were dependent on literary models from Europe (Major Figures 2). According to Peden's "Chronology", Machado²⁴ published his first collection of stories, *Contos fluminenses*, in 1870 (x). In the 1870s in Peru, Ricardo Palma (1833-1919) began publishing his *tradiciones*, a series of short narratives or anecdotes that are not exactly short stories, but not strictly folklore either (Lindstrom 43). Still following Peden's timeline, the Mexican author Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-1895) is recorded for his 1883 publication *Cuentos frágiles* (x). Lindstrom describes his works (62-65) in the section on modernism, noting that his work may be too sentimental for modern readers (62). This sentimentalism could be seen as a hold over from the romanticism that was dominant earlier in the century.

The 1880s also saw the first short stories being published in Honduras. According to Umaña, "Carlos Federico Gutiérrez ... escribió el que, probablemente, sea el primer cuento hondureño" (*Panorama* 23). This appeared as an untitled work in the "Variedades" section of the periodical *La Paz* on August 24, 1881 (*Panorama* 18, 23). The story is reminiscent of the melancholic, the fantastic, and the moralistic tendencies found in the writings of Poe. The protagonist, having fled from a murder, returns to his home and laments his loss. Umaña describes the criminal "evocando su primer delito—cometido allí mismo—cree ver el fantasma de su víctima y—execrando de sí e imprecando el castigo divino—muere ahogado" (*Panorama* 23). Clearly the style is evocative of the early nineteenth-century, demonstrating the late arrival in Honduras of romanticism. On December 17 of the same year, Marco Aurelio Soto published his story "Cabañitas" also in *La Paz* (*Panorama* 18-19). This is written more in the style that

²⁴ Machado has his connection to Poe as well. He is known for his translation into Portuguese of Poe's "The Raven" (Bagby and Bagby 186).

Naomi Lindstrom describes as transcribing “reality with clinical objectivity, sparing the reader neither the banality nor the horror of everyday life” (47). As an example, here is Soto’s description of how the bandits, intent on sacking the town, attack Cabañitas, the local judge who has come into the town square to fight off the raid:

Cabañitas recibe en el brazo izquierdo tres balazos y cuatro machetazos, una puñalada en medio del pecho, una herida en la nariz, otro *machetazo de a gema* en la espalda, e innumerables golpes y heridos en la cabeza. Pero aún así, despedazado, tinto de sangre, heroico, se sostiene en pie.²⁵
(*Panorama* 20)

Umaña also includes commentary about the three other authors publishing in the romantic style. While Liberato Mondaca published his “Comedia y drama” in *La República*, February 28, 1885 (*Panorama* 19), the other two authors’ stories were probably not published during the their lifetimes. Carlos Alberto Uclés wrote “La noche buena” in 1890, and Ramón Rosa, in 1892, wrote “Mi maestra Escolástica” (*Panorama* 19).

As indicated above, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera’s works are considered among the modernists, but with overtones of romanticism. This tendency was also true of the modernist short story authors in Honduras. Umaña writes “[e]n Honduras, el modernismo no se practicó en estado puro. En sus mejores representantes—Juan Ramón Molina y Froylán Turcios—el sentir romántico aún impregna las obras” (*Panorama* 28). Before discussing these two authors, however, I would like to examine some of the issues surrounding the works of Lucila Gamero de Medina, a pioneer of Honduran literature and one of only a handful of Honduran women publishing at that time. Umaña says of her

²⁵ The italicized emphasis is Soto’s.

stories “el signo dominante es la presencia de un romanticismo a ultranza” (*Panorama* 30), yet of her novels Umaña indicates “[e]stas obras denotan que la autora conoció otras tendencias literarias (realismo y modernismo, especialmente)” (*Novela* 48). The early works of Gamero de Medina have been the focus of a debate about who wrote the first Honduran novel. For several years, Carlos Federico Gutiérrez was credited with this distinction for his *Angelina*, which was accepted for published in 1894 under the pseudonym of Mariano Membreño. However, the government of Policarpo Bonilla objected to the novel. According to Umaña, Gutiérrez “aunque conservó el nombre de la obra y de los personajes, elaboró un relato completamente distinto que fue publicó en 1898” (*Novela* 19). A further objection to this being the first novel is that “[l]a mayoría de estudiosos califica a *Angelina* como una novela breve” (*Novela* 20). Umaña continues stating that for “Arturo Alvarado [*Angelina*] escapa a las categorías del cuento y de la novela y propone que se la considere como *nouvelle* o relato” (*Novela* 20). As can be seen, the debate about the criteria for what constitutes a novel is widely spread. In her analysis of Gamero de Medina’s novels, Umaña (*Novela* 48-49) lists three works that also pre-date Gutiérrez’s *Angelina*: “Amelia Montiel” (written in 1891 and published serially in 1892), *Adriana y Margarita* (1893) and *Páginas del corazón* (1897). The first of these three works has its own genre questions. “En el propio texto, la autora lo califica de cuento. Años más tarde, en entrevista concedida a Luis Hernán Sevilla, lo define como su primera novela” (*Novela* 49). Finally, Umaña writes that Gamero de Medina’s short stories have yet to be completely compiled despite the 1997 publication *Cuentos completos de Lucila Gamero de Medina*, noting that she has found twelve texts written between 1894-1895 that are not included (*Panorama* 30).

For Juan Ramón Molina, two of the characteristics which place him in the modernist era are “sensualismo, voluptuosidad” (*Panorama* 39), but these are coupled with the “melancolía, hastío de vivir” (*Panorama* 39) which reflect the romanticism which was still prevalent in Honduran literature of the period. Umaña also notes that Molina’s stories could also present the modernist search for the exotic citing “La muerte de Dionisio” (set as a Greek bacchanalia) and “La rosa” (set in the Garden of Eden) as two examples (*Panorama* 41). Finally, she highlights her earlier comment that Hondurans did not write in the purely modernist style by demonstrating how “Molina también practicó formas deudoras del realismo-naturalismo” (*Panorama* 42). The story “La niña de la patata” is Umaña’s example. She summarizes the harsh reality of the story: “una débil niña que, para calmar su hambre, mordisquea una dura y caliente patata lanzada despectivamente a un cubo de desechos” (*Panorama* 42). Given that the story is set in the United States and the girl is an immigrant, it also expresses Molina’s antagonism toward this country.

I indicated earlier that Molina’s stories were never compiled during his lifetime and that the task fell to Froylán Turcios, the other well known Honduran modernist. Ironically, Umaña’s research shows that Turcios’ own stories have yet to be completely compiled. While Turcios published five compilations of his own stories (1904, two in 1911, 1929 and 1932), and even though Oscar Acosta edited a 1995 version of Turcios’ *Cuentos completos*, Umaña has found other stories originally published in magazines directed by Turcios that so far have not been included in any collection (*Panorama* 44-45). Her analysis focuses on the 1929 compilation *Cuentos del amor y de la muerte* (published in 1930) and the 1932 *Páginas del ayer* as well as selected stories from the

anthology edited by Acosta. While she writes that “Turcios conoció las interioridades del modernismo” (*Panorama* 44), the majority of her commentary underscores the characteristics of romanticism that prevail in his works, including an emphasis on the somber and the macabre (*Panorama* 44-45). This emphasis is also found in his novels, for example *El vampiro* (1910) and *El fantasma blanco* (1911), the latter Umaña connects directly with the influence of Poe (*Novela* 42). Interestingly, Umaña alludes to how Turcios anticipates the micro-story. She writes that some of the stories included in Acosta’s compilation “son de brevedad extrema. De gran densidad semántica—fino estilete que penetra las ambigüedades del alma humana” (*Panorama* 48). Umaña includes thirteen authors total in her section on Honduran modernist writers; it is to Turcios, though, that she attributes that “la narrativa hondureña se enrumba por el camino de la profesionalización: él es un hombre en posesión de las llaves teóricas y técnicas del oficio y que emprende sistemáticamente su utilización” (*Panorama* 50).

In some ways, it should not be a surprise that *romanticismo* characteristics seem to extend well into the twentieth century in Honduran literature. José Miguel Oviedo explains that literature is full of examples that are “difíciles de encasillar y que demuestran que la historia literaria nunca es lineal” (*Siglo XIX* 16). This is particularly true of what John S. Brushwood calls the “realist-naturalist tradition” (72). In his introduction to an anthology of nineteenth-century Latin American short stories, Oviedo describes an important link from romanticism through realism which would eventually manifest itself in *criollismo*:

El elemento común del romanticismo y el realismo es el interés por la descripción de costumbres y tipos curiosos. Pero mientras el primero dio

preferencia a lo pintoresco y singular de la observación, el segundo se interesa más en el comportamiento habitual de los individuos y en los problemas que encaran al insertarse en la sociedad. (*Siglo XIX* 17)

This desire to view society and its problems in a realistic manner was evident in the story “Cabañitas by Rosa, a work clearly with realist overtones. Previously, I noted Umaña’s references to the realist-naturalist aspects of the works of both Gamero de Medina and Molina. These tendencies arise again with the Honduran authors of the Generation of 1915. Based on Oviedo’s comment above, a connection is revealed between the earlier romanticism phase and the post-modernists who wanted to promote the virtues and expose the suffering of the common people.

As I wrote in chapter two above, the Generation of 1915 was the poetic precursor of the Generation of 1924 where the *criollista* movement was developed fully in Honduras. To compare this movement in Honduras with the shifts in literary developments in the rest of Latin America, note that both José Miguel Oviedo (*Siglo XIX* 26-27) and John S. Brushwood (72, 76-77) present evidence that the early works of Uruguayan Horacio Quiroga demonstrate the mixture of the modernist vocabulary with the *criollista* elements that highlight the tropical or local atmosphere, similar to the works of Molina, for example. While the stories of Quiroga that Oviedo and Brushwood refer to were written during the first decade of the century, it was not until 1917 that they were compiled and published as *Cuentos de amor, de locura y de muerte*. It is evident from these dates that the literature of Honduras, as early as the first quarter of the twentieth century, was beginning to parallel the literary movements and influences driving the authors in the rest of Latin America.

In his companion anthology for twentieth-century Latin American short stories, José Miguel Oviedo discusses at length the impossibility of definitively categorizing literary movements for Latin America, especially for the twentieth century (*Siglo XX* 16-28). He begins by stating that for Latin America “1920 es la fecha alrededor de la cual se produce el primer impacto de la vanguardia europea” (*Siglo XX* 12). However, Oviedo specifies a separation from the European model of *vanguardismo*, observing that “su desarrollo en Hispanoamérica es autónoma, divergente y profundamente creador” (*Siglo XX* 13). His description of *vanguardismo* as “una red que se abre en múltiples direcciones interconectadas” (*Siglo XX* 13) supports Roberto Sosa’s depiction of the phases of the movement in Honduras that I presented in chapter two. Oviedo reiterates the point made in his earlier compilation stating “[l]os casilleros bastante nítidos que podían usarse para el siglo XIX—‘romanticismo’, ‘realismo’, ‘modernismo’—no existen en verdad para el XX” (*Siglo XX* 16). To demonstrate this point, Oviedo contends that the classifications normally referred to as *criollista*, *indigenista*, or *vanguardista* should not be ignored so much as accommodated to reflect how authors’ works shift among several aesthetic lines (*Siglo XX* 18). Brushwood’s essay is exemplary of this idea as he follows the flow of the locally descriptive vocabulary used by Quiroga mentioned above through the tension created in the rural versus urban settings found in Guatemala’s Miguel Angel Asturias and Argentina’s Eduardo Mallea (1903-1982) and Roberto Arlt (1900-1942) (78). The variations on the *criollista* theme include Asturias’ folkloric impressions as well as the focus on indigenous peoples found in the works of Mexican Francisco Rojas González (1905-1951) or Peruvian José María Arguedas (1911-1969) (84-86). Brushwood ends his essay with a discussion about the return to the cosmopolitan aspects of *criollismo*,

including the stories of Jorge Luis Borges that emphasize regional settings (90-96).

Despite the localized vocabulary, however, Brushwood repeatedly finds that these stories have themes which are universal, such as a character's alienation from other members of the community as presented in "El árbol" (90-91) by Chilean author María Luisa Bombal (1910-1980) or "El encuentro" (94) by Mexican José Revuelta (1914-1976).

As can be seen, there is a blending and an overlap of styles from the late modernists through the post-modernists and into the *vanguardia* in Latin America. This tendency was also shown in the literary generations of Honduras as discussed in chapter two. Federico Peck Fernández was listed there as one of two Honduran authors that are representative of the post-modern regionalists. Both Helen Umaña and José Francisco Martínez comment on the *criollista* aspects of Peck Fernández' story "Vaqueando", which was published in *Ariel* sometime in the 1920's.²⁶ Umaña focuses on the violence portrayed in the story, describing it as "descarnada y brutal" (*Panorama* 106). Martínez refers to the brutality, but puts it in the context of the countryside, highlighting the fact that the story "presenta una de las regiones más duras de la tierra hondureña, Olancho, en donde la exuberancia del paisaje contrasta con la aridez y la brutalidad en el trato humano" (*Literatura* 263). For Umaña, the stories of Peck Fernández demonstrate that, by the end of the 1920's, Honduras had definitively left behind *romanticismo* (*Panorama* 107).

The other author from this generation mentioned in chapter two, Arturo Martínez Galindo, is considered to be among the *cosmopolita* authors. His stories from the 1920s and 1930s often contain sexual elements including lost or frustrated love, irresistible sexual attraction, incest, or homosexuality (*Panorma* 75-76), and have "una compleja

²⁶ Neither Umaña nor Martínez provide an exact date of publication for this story.

temática de corte psicológico” (*Panorama* 80). Paca Navas de Miralda, an author associated with the later Generación de la Dictadura and publishing in the 1940s, also is considered by Umaña with regionalism because of her “[h]onda preocupación y rechazo a las situaciones injustas, especialmente cuando tocan a la mujer” (*Panorama* 97). As with Martínez Galindo, the stories by Navas de Miralda that Umaña analyzes often focus on sexual aggression, seduction or incest as part of the marginality of women (*Panorama* 98). The underlying theme of sexuality is also noted by Brushwood in his analysis of Bombal’s “El árbol” published in 1939.

By the 1950s, according to George R. McMurray, the stories of Latin Americans “convey a stronger awareness of the political and social problems plaguing much of Spanish America” (105). The description of the Honduran Generation of 1950 in chapter two shows those authors were also addressing the socio-political issues of the day. Adolfo Alemán (1928-1970) is one of the this generation’s authors that Helen Umaña admires. She uses his story “El jefe” to illustrate the insecurity of employees, especially in the face of changes in the workplace (*Panorama* 237). Unfortunately she does not provide a date which would anchor this work in the decade. At the end of the 1950s, Mimí Díaz Lozano (1928-) published the collection *Sendas en el abismo* (1959) which Umaña says emphasizes “la problemática del hombre urbano” (*Panorama* 237). One last work significant for this presentation is Oscar Acosta’s 1956 compilation *El Arca* which is comprised of eighteen “auténticos minicuentos o micro relatos” (*Panorama* 265). Umaña spotlights the universality of these stories which have “una temática abierta a inquietudes del hombre de cualquier época y circunstancia” (*Panorama* 265). In David William Foster’s essay on Brazilian short stories, he includes a section on the microtext,

as he calls it. While obviously he is giving an overview of the development of this format, among the publications he presents as representative are the 1952 *Confabulario* by Mexican Juan José Arreola (1918-2001) and Jorge Luis Borges' *El hacedor* (1960) which bracket Acosta's work (Major Figures 23). The presence of the micro-story in Honduras in the same timeframe refutes the idea that Hondurans lag behind the literary trends.

As George R. McMurray's essay portrays, the Latin American short stories of the 1960s and 1970s are strongly characterized by irony and ambiguity, calling them "major aesthetic ingredients" (116). McMurray highlights aspects of the works published during the four decades that are reviewed in his essay, including the "linguistic precision" of the stories which had "rejected traditional realism for surrealism, fantasy, metafiction, the Absurd, or the grotesque" (136). Adolfo Alemán, whose publications span the 1950s and 1960s, includes two stories that fall into the realm of the fantastic in his 1963 compilation *Tierra abierta* according to Umaña (*Panorama* 233). One is a story for children, but the other, "La orquídea", Umaña describes as "fluctuando entre realidad e irrealidad" (*Panorama* 233), the presence of the orchid giving substance to a character that might or might not exist. Two prominent Hondurans whose first compiled stories appeared in the second half of the 1960s are Eduardo Bähr and Julio Escoto. Escoto's first book was *Los guerreros de Hibuera* (1967), but it is of the 1969 *La balada del herido pájaro y otros cuentos* that Umaña says "representa un nuevo jalón en el desarrollo de la cuentística hondureña" (*Panorama* 332). She demonstrates how the various stories in this collection include contemporary techniques such as non-linear time and interior monologues, both of which are found in the title story (*Panorama* 332), and linguistic playfulness found in

“Preparatoria para un examen de lógica” (*Panorama* 334), among others. Bähr’s first compilation, *Fotografía del peñasco*, also appeared in 1969. It is the two narratives inspired by the so-called “Soccer War” of 1969 between Honduras and El Salvador, however, that Medina Durón considers to be fundamental and representing “un verdadero punto de partida para la narrativa hondureña” (*Historia* 52). *El cuento de la guerra* by Eduardo Bähr won the Honduran Premio Nacional de Cuento “Arturo Martínez Galindo” in 1971, and was later published in 1973. Both Medina Durón (*Historia* 52) and Umaña (*Panorama* 302-303) emphasize the point that the linguistic manipulations found in the stories are a reflection of the official versions of the government’s actions in 1969 for what was apparently was a war based on pretense. In Medina Durón’s opinion, the stories reflect a skillful assimilation of the techniques of the “boom” writers such as Mario Vargas Llosa (1936-), Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), and Gabriel García Márquez (*Historia* 52). Escoto’s reaction to the “Soccer War” is in the form of a novel, *El árbol de los pañuelos*, which appeared in 1972. Set in the 19th century, the crux of the story is identity, both personal and national (*Historia* 53; *Novela* 312). This issue is emphasized through the multiple points of view presented in the novel, a technique which makes this undoubtedly the first really contemporary novel from Medina Durón’s perspective (*Historia* 53).

Helen Umaña lists the variation in point of view, constant rupturing of the narrative thread, an auto-referential process, and a metaliterary method among the techniques utilized by the postvanguard Honduran authors who begin publishing after 1980 (*Panorama* 397-398). Ana Rueda supports that this could be applied to other current Latin American authors in her article “Los perímetros del cuento

hispanoamericano actual”. Additionally, Rueda underscores the importance of applying these techniques in order to invoke the reader to be an active participant in the creation of the narrative when she writes “nos invita a considerar la escritura como un ‘hacerse’ y no como algo ‘hecho’” (564). Umaña agrees: “el lector no es tábula rasa ... el autor sólo da a sus temas una nueva vestidura que el receptor se encarga de actualizar en el momento de la lectura” (*Panorama* 397-398) Finally, Rueda presents four structures (565-569) in which contemporary stories might fit: fragmented (in which each section creates a break with any organized totality); a story cycle (in which the whole has some relation, but each story stands on its own); tandem stories (in which each of the two stories is independent, but together present a new relationship); and, a transformed or metamorphed story (in which a normal situation is inserted into a world that is irrational and full of surprises for the reader). The micro-stories found in works like Gaitán’s *La vida menor* are examples of the story cycle technique.

In the introductory chapter, I discussed some of the implications of small print runs, which are typical for Honduran publications, and economics of the publishing industry in Central America in general. José Luis Martín Nogales raises the economic aspect of publishing and its effect on the short story in his essay about the genre in Spain during the 1990s. He manifestly shows that publishers are in the business of making money and that “no les permiten editar libros que *a priori* van a tener una repercusión escasa en ventas. Los grandes grupos editoriales aplican al libro un tratamiento estrictamente comercial: racionalizar la gestión, reducir riesgos y aumentar beneficios” (36). Specifically, any book which is not going to sell 5,000 copies is prohibited by the large publishers such as Planeta or Anaya, while smaller, independent publishing houses

can survive selling only 3,000 copies per title (37). Three thousand copies, however, is twice the number of a well-selling book in Honduras. Martín Nogales mentions that because of these requirements on the part of publishers, both poetry and theater, as well as short stories, tend to be marginalized. Consequently, only the works of well-known authors, who already have a following, will tend to be published. Other writers might be included in anthologies, which have proliferated during the past years. The implication for all authors, but in particular those writing in the marginalized genres, is obvious: in order to be included in books that will sell, write what the public is willing to buy. Martín Nogales, however, points out an alternative. Since short stories are outside of the mainstream of publishing anyway, once an author chooses to accept the non-commercial nature of his writing, he is free to experiment fully with the genre (37).²⁷ As a result of this freedom, the Spanish short story of the 1990s is diverse and eclectic according to Martín Nogales (38). While the particulars in this article pertain specifically to Spain, the current globalized economy would suggest that these same trends would be found in Latin America.

The Micro-Story

Above I state that Nery Alexis Gaitán's book of micro-stories, *La vida menor*, is an example of the experimentation in narrative composition which characterized the 1980s. It is now time to review this variation on the short story. As I wrote earlier, David William Foster included commentary about what he terms the "microtext" which he describes so:

²⁷ In the six years since Martín Nogales wrote his article, though, the World Wide Web has radically changed the publishing and distribution possibilities for authors who now should not have to make the decision between creativity and economics.

The microtext is not to be confused with equally brief examples of the *crónica*: the chronicle is an essay or journalistic form that may encapsulate personal commentary in a mini-narrative to illustrate a point. ... The microtext is exclusively a narrative statement, without pragmatic commentary. It may run from a few lines to a maximum of one or two pages, and the 'event' described may be so schematic that the text simply reminds one of the tradition of biblical parables, although again the parable usually relies on a particular point to carry it. (Major Figures 23)

As with so many features of the short story in general, critics are not in accord about several aspects of the micro-story. To begin, there is the issue of what to call the format. I have used two of the English terms here: micro-story and microtext. Marta E. Altisent also identified other English expressions that have been used to describe this form of mini-narrative, including sudden fiction, minute stories, short-shorts, and flash fiction. (20). She also lists several of the Spanish phrases such as *minicuentos*, *cuentos en miniatura*, *cuentos simples*, *historias mínimas*, *cuentos breves*, *relatos ultracortes*, and *historias hiperbreves*, as well as some more imaginative names like *textículos* and *texturologías* used by Julio Cortázar (19-20). I also encountered *minificción*, *microcuento*, *cuento brevísimo*, *arte conciso*, *cuento instantáneo* in the study by Edmundo Valadés (28-29) and *ficciones relámpago* in Rhonda Dahl Buchanan (180) to add to the terminology under which these stories might be found.

Not only is there uncertainty about what to call this subgroup of narratives, but as with the short story in general, there is a question about the upper limit for the length of a micro-story. Foster allowed two pages, but Juan-Armando Epple (Brevísima ...

Hispanoamérica 31; Brevísima 18) and Violeta Rojo (566) both restrict the micro-story to one page. Epple presents this more as a suggested criterion than does Rojo who states that for a *minicuento* “su longitud máxima no debería sobrepasar la de una página impresa” (566). Altisent allows up to three pages (19), but refers to author Fred Chappell’s comment that “two thousand words are almost too many” (qtd. in Shapard and Thomas 227). In their 1996 *Sudden Fiction (Continued)* Shapard and Thomas touch on the “flash fiction” sub-group of the micro story which are “stories of no more than 750 words” (12).

On one facet of the micro-story, however, the critics do agree. The micro-story “has its roots in forms that antedate the classic modern short story” (Major Figures 23). Altisent supports this pointing to oral traditions, folktales and anecdotes among other forms that appear as parts of works as early as the mid-thirteenth-century (21). She establishes a link for the micro-story to the writings of Juan Ruiz, the Archpriest of Hita (ca. 1283-ca. 1350), Juan Boscán (1490?-1542), Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) (21-22). Eppel also indicates that “es en la Edad Media cuando se empiezan a discernir, en las expresiones narrativas, formas diferenciadas de ficción breve, especialmente en la literatura dicáctica” (Brevísima ... Hispanoamérica 32; Brevísima 13). However, he indicates that the micro-story as it appears today was born at the end of the nineteenth century. “La demanda que tuvo la ficción breve cuando los editores de revistas descubrieron que era más atractivo y práctico publicar relatos en vez de las tradicionales series folletinescas” (Brevísima 16), Eppel then refers to the micro-stories of Rubén Darío as fulfilling this requirement. Given this perspective and Darío’s death in 1916, the 1917 date must be reconsidered as the “primera manifestación” for the Latin American micro-story as stated by Graciela Tomassini and Stella Maris Colombo (641) or as “la

fundación del cuento brevísimo moderno en México y demás países de Latinoamérica” as indicated by Edmundo Valadés (30). During the twentieth century authors such as “Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Cristina Peri Rossi, Eduardo Galeano, Luisa Valenzuela, etc., han renovado las opciones expresivas de la ficción breve” according to Eppel (Brevísima 12), and in particular the micro-story.

What are these renovations to the short story? What are some of the criteria that distinguish this shorter format? Obviously, an author of micro-texts must be an agile manipulator of language in order to maintain the “economy of expression” that Buchanan (180) indicates is a hallmark of the genre. She also writes that “synthesis and conciseness [are] two essential elements of the micro-story” (180). Altisent records various linguistic ploys authors use to achieve this conciseness including “puns ... ellipsis and elision, defamiliarization” among others (27-28). She also discusses the use of contrast, juxtaposition and contradiction of themes (27) as a tactic which the author might employ. As with all forms of the short story, Altisent (28) and Buchanan (181) both reinforce that the unexpected ending is vital. Because “there is no time to develop plot, characters or theme” in these stories, the reader, “who must supply the context, decipher textual codes and, at times, suspend belief in reality”, becomes an active partner in the creation of the story (Buchanan 181). Altisent identifies both other literature and “artefacts of contemporary culture as frames” which help the reader place the story within a context and add meaning (32). In the next chapter, I will examine how Nery Alexis Gaitán approaches the micro-story in his collection *La vida menor*.

CHAPTER 4

NERY ALEXIS GAITÁN AND *LA VIDA MENOR*

Bio-Bibliography of Nery Alexis Gaitán

Nery Alexis Gaitán was born on March 19, 1961 in Danlí (*Índice bibliográfico* 106), a city in the northern part of the Department of El Paraíso, Honduras. Danlí is also the birthplace of the novelist and short story author Lucila Gamero de Medina (*Índice bibliográfico* 107). While located almost due east of Tegucigalpa, Danlí is isolated from that cultural center by the rugged, mountainous terrain and lack of roads, conditions that are typical for about eighty percent of the country. Gaitán received his undergraduate degree, a licenciatura en Letras, from the Universidad Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH) and later studied literature in México. He is currently a member of the Academia Hondureña de la Lengua (*Índice bibliográfico* 106).

According to the cover of his first book, *Reloj de arena* (1989), Gaitán's first stories appeared in *Tragaluz*, a Honduran literary review directed by Helen Umaña and published by Editorial Guaymuras in Tegucigalpa. These were "El cristal" and "El regreso" which are both on page 11 of issue number 13 in 1986. These two stories are also included in *Reloj de arena* along with fifteen others that are described by Honduran poet David Díaz Acosta as "literatura fantástica" (*Reloj* cover). During the second half of the 1980s, Gaitán served on the editorial board of *SobreVuelo*, another literary journal published in Tegucigalpa and directed by Roberto Quesada (González and Chávez Mayorquín 72). There he published "El nombre de la bestia es" in the 1988 issue number

4 (*Panorama* 511).²⁸ Finally, his stories also appeared in *Arte*, a magazine dedicated to Honduran art and culture, and he contributed during this period to the literary sections of two daily newspapers, *El Herald*o (Tegucigalpa) and *Tiempo* (San Pedro Sula) (*Reloj* cover).

Díaz Acosta also provides the introductory essay to Gaitán's 1990 *La vida menor*. This version includes twenty micro-stories centered on the theme of the youth of Honduras. Gaitán tends to republish his stories in different combinations. Because of this the reader familiar with Gaitán's work can reevaluate each story within the new context. An example is the 1998 *Pretextos para bien dormir*, where the section that represents *La vida menor* has ten more stories interspersed among the originals.

In 1991, Gaitán received two literary prizes. First, he won the Premio de Narrativa "Ramón Amaya Amador" from the Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales, UNAH (*Índice bibliográfico* 106). Next, he received the Premio Centroamericano de Cuento "Froylán Turcios" (first prize for narrative) in a competition sponsored by the Honduran Ministry of Culture (González and Chávez Mayorquín 72) for the collection of stories that would be published in 1992 as *Laberinto último* (*Laberinto* cover). In his introduction to this collection of thirty-four stories, Segisfredo Infante writes:

en el ánimo de autores como Gaitán, anida el poderoso deseo de universalizar la literatura nuestra, y este afán podría ser "una de las características que define a la última generación de escritores" nacionales. Es tal la trascendencia temática y formal del joven Nery Gaitán, al incursionar en el asunto de la ciencia-ficción. (*El mundo* 9).

²⁸ I have not seen this story, but it may be an early version of "La señal de la bestia es" which appears in his 1998 *Pretextos para la eternidad*.

Infante identifies authors who clearly influenced the writing of these stories including Miguel de Cervantes, Rubén Darío, Froylán Turcios, Jorge Luis Borges, Ray Bradbury (1920-), Brian Aldiss (1925-), and Theodore Sturgeon (1918-1985), among others (El mundo 10-11). Noting that “la ciencia-ficción en América Latina ha sido hasta la fecha escasamente abordada ... Sin embargo, podríamos admitir que es una de las variables del *cosmopolitismo* contemporáneo, un fenómeno narratológico peculiar a la pos-modernidad” (El mundo 11), Infante infers that it is through the employment of the speculative fiction genre that Gaitán moves toward the universalization of Honduran literature so desired by the new generation of authors.

I referred earlier to Gaitán’s inclination to reissue his stories in new combinations. The 1993 *Extraña cosecha* is the first example of this practice. With forty-four stories, it is a partial anthology of his works to the date of publication. It includes all of *Reloj de arena*, seven of the stories from *La vida menor*, twenty-one of those from *Laberinto último*, and one new story. Leonel Alvarado (1967-), a poet as well as a professor of literature at UNAH, introduces this anthology as “[u]n libro-suma-de-libros o un libro-de-libros. Un texto que para ser precisa negar a aquellas obras de las que parte, y sin las cuales no podría llegar a ser” (9). He describes the three previous books as “libres ya de sí mismos para ser lo que ahora son” (10) and the reader as “[l]ector en movimiento. Lectura desintegrada y reconstruida: forma deformada y reformada” (11). Consequently, a reader will interpret the stories read here differently from the same stories read within the contexts of previous or later publications.

With *El reclamo de las horas* (1995), Gaitán embarked on a literary variation that sparked a great deal of discussion among Honduran authors. Is this work a novel or just a

longer compilation of stories? In his own introduction to the work, Gaitán writes “sostengo que es una novela que aparenta ser un libro de relatos” (*El reclamo* i), but he notes that his friend Segisfredo Infante believes that it is a collection of short stories. In her argument for supporting Infante’s position, Helen Umaña writes “[p]or razones estructurales, aunque en algunas historias se establecen correlaciones, creo que ello no es suficiente para considerar a este libro como novela” (*Panorama* 430). Prior to this statement, she had quoted from Gaitán’s introduction where he writes “en ningún momento desestimo que sea un libro de diversas historias que con nostalgia busque el arduo sendero de la novela” (*El reclamo* i qtd. in *Panorama* 430). However, Umaña left out the phrase “al no poseer la verdad última” (*El reclamo* i) which preceded the section she quoted. Gaitán goes on to caution the reader to not be detained by the form of the work (*El reclamo* i-ii). Taken as a whole, I believe that Gaitán is engaging in a game with the reader who will make the final decision about what the work is. This also reinforces one of the the essential characteristics of the micro-story: active reader participation.

Gaitán uses an oriental setting in his 1996 *A la sombra del loto* to emphasize a universal reality. While the setting is outside of daily life, Juan Ramón Martínez (1941-) finds that “nos introdu[cimos] en el interior de los cuentos maravillosos y renegando del narrador, los reconstru[imos]” (*A manera* v) thus putting these stories in the broader human context. Umaña describes the collection as having “gran madurez y coloca la narrativa de Nery Alexis Gaitán dentro de una línea de interés general y universal” (*Panorama* 432).

Earlier I mentioned the 1998 publication *Pretextos para bien dormir* which includes a total of one hundred fifty-four stories. Among these are the works from *El*

reclamo de las horas discussed above, as well as the stories from *Reloj de arena*, *Laberinto último*, *A la sombra del loto*, and *La vida menor*. As I mentioned earlier, the section containing *La vida menor* includes ten stories not included in the original 1990 version. It also includes two essays about Gaitán. The first, “Gaitán, hombre de letras” by Juan Antonio Medina Durón serves as the introduction. Medina Durón reinforces Juan Ramón Martínez’ idea that Gaitán’s stories have “coincidencia con nuestra propia realidad” (Medina Durón, Gaitán ii). The second, serving as an afterword, was originally a speech given by Litza Quintana (1932-)²⁹ on the occasion of the publication of *El reclamo de las horas* and concentrates on that work. Gaitán’s *Índice de cuentistas hondureños* also appeared in 1998.

In recent years, Gaitán has focused on writing new material rather than recombining texts in new ways. In 2000 he published *Fulgor de otoño*, a collection of twenty-four stories about adults, while in 2001 he produced twenty-eight stories based on the theme of dreams, published under the title *Arrullos a la orilla del ensueño*. The theme was love in his 2002 collection of twenty-five stories titled *Melodía en primavera*. Finally, in 2003 Gaitán returned to the topic of childhood in the twenty stories included in *Este volver a la infancia*. 2003 also saw the publication of his *Índice bibliográfico del cuento en Honduras* in which he described himself as “[n]arrador, antólogo e investigador literario” (106).

La Vida Menor

I noted above that during the 1990s Gaitán tended to reissue his stories in various combinations. Here I will analyze the twenty stories originally issued together under the

²⁹ Litza Quintana is the pseudonym of Elvia Castañeda de Machado. However, she is often listed in reference works under Castañeda de Machado. See, for example, both González and Chávez Mayorquín (46-47) and Argueta (81).

title *La vida menor*, looking at some of the techniques the author uses. For example, Gaitán's choice of words and verb tenses help to shape some stories, while his juxtaposing of varying realities or illusions drive others. Every one of the vignettes is complete in itself and can stand alone. However, when the stories are taken together, they produce a more complex image. They can be considered as one of the types of story cycles described by Ana Rueda (566) in which either a character or group of characters appears in the stories, or the stories focus on a particular theme. While Gaitán's stories do not center around one character, they do have a unifying theme: childhood in Honduras. What happens to this theme when the stories are presented differently, using either more or less of them together? After reviewing each of the stories in the original 1990 publication, I will discuss the reissue of only seven of the stories as part of *Extraña cosecha* in 1993. Do the stories have the same impact when there are only a few of them? Finally, I will look at the 1998 variation which inserts ten more vignettes into the mix. Does the expansion add significantly to the picture created originally? Do these stories fit into the original flow of the work, and if so, how?

As part of her critique of *La vida menor*, Helen Umaña states “[s]u estructura gira en torno a dos polaridades: la visualización de una realidad posible—anhelada e inalcanzable—y el choque contra la brutal realidad del medio” (*Panorama* 423). Marta Altisent writes that one of the ways the “elements that contribute to the dramatic force of the microstory are manifested” (26) is through the type of contrast that Umaña highlights. At the end of the last chapter, I identified some of the other characteristics of micro stories, including how language is used. Umaña notes that one of Gaitán's writing techniques that is evident in this group of stories is his use of adjectives and the frequent

reversal from their normal order in Spanish: “la anteposición del adjetivo” (*Panorama* 425). Her list includes some of the examples from the first story in the collection: “*luminoso palacio, cálidos colchones, fantásticas tramas, fantástico viajar, oscura calle*” (*Panorama* 425), to which could be added “hermosa doncella” (Gaitán, *Vida* 19)³⁰ from the beginning of “Historia de un soñador”. I find it interesting that once the boy is within his fantasy, the placement of adjectives returns to the normal order: “encontraba *reinos ocultos*, rescataba *princesas cautivas*, buscaba tesoros en *tierras extrañas*”.³¹ This linguistic technique strengthens the reality of the fantasy from the boy’s perspective: the normal order only appears in his illusion, while his reality must be described in an unnatural way to be tolerable. Another characteristic of the micro-story that was noted by Altisent (27) is ellipsis. Gaitán puts this to good use in this first story. At the beginning, he uses incomplete phrases to create the illusion: “La oscura calle, la entrada a un luminosa palacio de amor. La acera, una cama de cálidos colchones...”. In an incongruous grammatical twist, he uses a complete sentence at the end to describe the real world of the boy. Consequently, the incompleteness of the fantasy world is emphasized through the use of phrases, while the completeness of reality is heightened by use of a full sentence.

In the second and shortest of these stories, “La limosna”, the choice of verb tense intensifies the drama. The complete text reads:

En la cafetería, una madre acariciaba a su hijo. Desde la calle, él miraba la escena; contento, se dirigió al lugar donde el otro niño le sonreía feliz a su

³⁰ Because most of the stories are printed on one page only, I will give the citation for each story just once from this point forward. If the story is longer than the one page, I will cite to the appropriate page. All subsequent references to elements of the story will be to the given citation unless otherwise noted.

³¹ Italicized emphasis is mine.

madre... La señora lo miró, sacó una moneda y se la puso en la mano. El niño sonrió y esperó: las caricias nunca llegaron. (Gaitán, *Vida* 23)

The contrast between the boy and the mother and child is increased by the use of the imperfect verbs for the caressing and smiling of the family members, activities that have both a past and a future in this context. There is, therefore, continuity between the mother and child, whereas the street boy is a one time event for this pair as shown by the use of the preterit. The mother took out a coin, put it in his hand; the street boy smiled and waited, yet the caresses never arrived. The giving of the coin is the end of the activity as far as the mother and child are concerned. The irony is, of course, that the circumstance of the caresses not being received is a continuous situation for the street boy, not just that once. The pathos of the story is also increased by the title. The alms given as one-time charity is thoughtless in comparison to the true charity of the loving caresses given to the other child. Clearly the street child is in greater need of the more spiritual charity than of the typical alms.

The title “Rutina” for the third story is ironic also. Routine implies the mundane, the ordinary, the uninteresting as well as a sense of repetition. But, what is normal or ordinary about giving a child one piece of buttered bread for an entire day’s sustenance? Yet this is the standard situation for this group of young boys: “así es siempre” (Gaitán, *Vida* 27). Gaitán begins and ends the story with movement which amplifies the sense of continuity and repetition: the cars flow down the street at the start and the boys dance into forgetfulness of their hunger at the end. Beyond the title, Gaitán infuses the story with the irony of “la ilusión del apremio”. The people passing the man and children do not have to see the reality of the situation while they have the illusion of their own need to rush on.

The man then tells the children “¡Apúrense que es tarde!” (Gaitán, *Vida* 28), but to what do the children need to hurry? While at the end Gaitán uses the term “olvido”, forgetfulness, for their destination, the reader can easily take the step to envision oblivion instead.

Food is also part of the next story “En el mercado” since it takes place in a fruit and vegetable stall. Another aspect of the story that connects it to the previous one is the idea of indifferent rushing: “Un joven pasa con la prisa de la vida e indiferente” (Gaitán, *Vida* 31). This story has a twist at the end that is the classic trait of the short story. At the beginning, the story seems to be about a box, but at the end the reader finds out that there is something (or in this case, someone) in the box. The choice of the verb *yacer* (to lie) instead of the more common verb *estar* (to be in a place) foregrounds the lack of identity or essentialness of the baby in the box. *Yacer* implies passivity on the part of the box, and hence the baby. *Estar*, on the other hand, would have given a sense of life, of being, to the box and, therefore, its contents. Since the box/baby is just lying around, it is easily and quickly forgotten. The baby’s state as a non-entity is reiterated by the fact that its cries are unheard and lost in the noisy bustle of the marketplace. Umaña, when writing about *Laberinto último*, indicates that Gaitán’s works often have “omisión de nombres propios para dar un carácter más impersonal—más general y abarcador—al texto” (*Panorama* 425). Only one of the characters in any of the stories in *La vida menor* has a proper name. In the case of the baby in the box, the lack of a name is another factor which contributes to the sense that she is a non-entity to be easily forgotten in the commotion of the market.

“Al pasar”, the fifth story, uses juxtaposition as part of the story-telling technique. A homeless boy dreams of a home, a home that he seems to be in front of, but not a part of. In his imagination he becomes a part of that home and has an instant of happiness. However, the reader can imagine that in the next instant the illusion will be shattered by other passing people as it was earlier in the story when the couple passing him commented on the beautiful house. For the boy, “[l]as palabras le sonaron lejanas, su casa eran las calles y los rincones de las esquinas” (Gaitán, *Vida* 35). His dream being able to live in the house someday is clearly out of synchronization with his reality of living in the streets, but in synchronization with the constant reminders of the people passing by him.

The title of the next story, “Mínima hazaña”, again sets an ironic tone for the story. There is obviously nothing heroic about the actions of the policemen. Their small exploit over a child means nothing to them, but it will have large consequences for the boy. He has already been hit and humiliated by the police officers, yet all he can anticipate is punishment for both the destruction of the basket and the lost income since he cannot sell the ruined candies that are now scattered in the street. This story of heartless and irresponsible behavior on the part of officials contrasts well to the generosity shown in the next story titled “Fábula”. The title holds some irony, however, since it is only in a fable that real virtue occurs in this collection. This is the one story with a named character. Doña María displays the kindness so lacking in the policemen from the previous story. She repays the boy’s help gathering wood by giving him a meal far beyond his normal expectation. The boy “no recordaba la última vez que saboreó la carne: en su casa no se comía” (Gaitán, *Vida* 43). Based on the earlier description of his one old, but much-loved toy, the reader can conclude that this was undoubtedly not by

choice, but because his family could not afford meat. In this fable, the boy wants to thank doña María for her kindness and shows an exemplary generosity of his own by leaving his one prized possession as payment for what he considers an “exquisita comida”, a bowl of beef soup. Given the positive trend of the story, the reader could engage in actively extending the story and anticipate that doña María will return the toy the next time she sees the boy, and perhaps explain to him that he had no need to leave a gift for her since she was repaying him for his original help. This, of course, changes the current end in which the boy leaves happy, but crying.

The next story, “La inmensidad estelar”, is out of context from the rest of the stories in this collection for two reasons. First, at 180 words, this story is almost twice as long as the average story for this collection. The average number of words in the stories in this collection is ninety-two words. Second, the other stories in this grouping all deal with marginalized people: the very poor or the homeless. The protagonist in this story obviously comes from a middle class household, or at least a modest home. The child lives on the sixth floor of a building. The family has a television set and has been able to afford to get a birthday present for him. These elements of affluence are conspicuous by their absence in most of the other stories. Only in “Soledad” and “Vuelo detenido” is it clear that the children live in a house of some sort. That “La inmensidad estelar” takes place in a more affluent atmosphere does not diminish the tragedy of the story, however. In this particular tale, Gaitán employs the metafictional device of inserting the Superman character into the plot. Helen Umaña offers this piece as an example of “la alienación y muerte causadas por la influencia negativa de las revistas de historietas” (*Panorama* 424). She may be basing this on the phrase “la mentira de su existir” (Gaitán, *Vida* 48)

which describes the special effects used to make the television character fly. I have to disagree, however, that the influence is necessarily negative. For the boy, “el Hombre de Acero” is “su héroe ... su campeón [que] borraba la maldad, destruía la delincuencia y ayudaba a construir la sociedad ideal donde el rico vivía en armonía con el pobre” (Gaitán, *Vida* 47). Certainly these are all positive activities which would improve any community, but especially one like the Honduras presented in the other stories in this collection. The boy dies because of his enthusiasm to emulate a positive, if fictional and fantastical, role model. His death is the result of his innocence of the reality of physics, not because of any negative influence of the fictional character.

“Pasaje al olvido” is the first of the stories in *La vida menor* to address the issue of drug addiction. As is so often the case with drugs, the ticket to forgetfulness is only temporary and not entirely successful. While the beginning of the story tells that the protagonist grasps for satisfaction, the end indicates that the illusion is incomplete. The vapors of the glue are not strong enough to completely obliterate “una sensación de frustración y muerte” (Gaitán, *Vida* 51). This story does not have to be read as applying only to a child. The reference is to “su alma infantil”, but a body that needs illicit drugs to maintain it through its existence would not have a strong or developed soul either. The protagonist could easily be an adult who has been abandoned and lacks the tenderness and well-being of family or friends. This ambiguity about the protagonist allows for the universalization of the story: this could take place anywhere.

The presentation of the girl in “A la escuela” is an excellent example of how contrast helps to shape the story. At first, the reader would be inclined to think that the girl is reluctant to go to school. She has seen the other smiling children entering the

school, but “[e]lla se aproxima con paso lento al edificio” (Gaitán, *Vida* 55). Has she not done her homework? Does she not like her teacher? Why does she move so slowly toward the building? The bell sounds, and the other straggling children rush to enter. “[E]lla también adelanta su caminar en un acto reflejo”. Ah! So she does want to get to school. Maybe she was just sleepy or day-dreaming. But, then she slows down again and “[l]a alegría por la escuela desaparece de su rostro”. Clearly there is something bad about going to school. Is there a bully? No. School is forbidden to her because she must work selling the tortillas in her basket. Now the contrast between the actions of the other children and the girl’s reluctance to go by the building that she cannot attend is poignantly clear.

I mentioned “Soledad” earlier as one of the few examples in the collection that specifically mentions that the protagonists live in a building or house. Gaitán defamiliarizes the concept of home, however, to create a condition in which the security of a home is really no security at all. The children are locked in the room, while the mother is out; working, one hopes. The oldest child is only nine years old, yet she has the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings. The situation is frightening and the reader can interpolate that the sounds of the night must indicate that the neighborhood is not very good. As the mother never arrives during the story, one can imagine that perhaps she never will. The reader is left to contemplate the unresolved fate of the children.

In “El límite de la ilusión”, the day-dream of the protagonist could be that of any child, not necessarily just a marginalized one. However, it is made clear that the child is poor with the reference to “los dos únicos juguetes que había tenido” (Gaitán, *Vida* 63). The reader knows from the beginning that the seed for the rest of the story is a toy fire

truck. Almost half of the tale is an elaborate fantasy in which the child is a hero, a fireman who saves children and all of their toys. These children are so happy that they give the fireman some toys because of his bravery. Then in return, he stays and plays with them for a while before going back to the fire station to receive the congratulations of his fellow firemen. There is a psychological trend in the story that is indicative of its modernity. The details that play out in the child's imagination show that the child craves attention and positive reinforcement that he may not be getting. In his imaginary setting, he creates a situation in which he is esteemed, he has companions who value him, and in which he can demonstrate generosity and compassion by returning all of the toys to their owners, then staying to play with them. Then the limit of this illusion interjects reality: "El frío cristal de la vitrina se interponía entre el niño y sus sueños" (Gaitán, *Vida* 64).

"Ronda infantil" is another of the stories that concentrate on addiction. Like the earlier "Pasaje al olvido", this story does not specifically indicate that the protagonists are children. The main character shines shoes for a living, but he spends his earnings purchasing "aguardiente" (Gaitán, *Vida* 67). The group of friends meets "abajo del puente" which gives the reader familiar with life in Tegucigalpa, for example, a key that this is also most likely their home. In the first half of the 1990s in the capital city, the streets were not safe because of the thousands of homeless people who lived along the river banks and under the bridges. Again, in this story, the respite provided by a drug, alcohol in this case, is tenuous. The group feels "una sensación de bienestar". The reader knows that the group does not have any real well-being because they live in "un mundo sin redención" according to the end of the story.

The next story, “Vuelo detenido” could have followed directly after “Soledad”. I indicated that the end of “Soledad” was unresolved. Had “Vuelo detenido” followed immediately after, it would have diminished the impact of “Soledad”. I say this because the very fact that the children’s fate was unknown, and would remain unknown as far as the reader knew, tended to increase sympathy for them. There is no information in “Vuelo detenido” that confirms the children taken from a room are the same ones locked in a room in “Soledad”, but it is obvious that their detention by the authorities would be a natural outcome if the mother never returned. In stories, the whereabouts and fate of the mother is a mystery. If the reader takes the position that these are the same children, the shock value of the story was increased by having other stories in between. Even if the reader believes this is a completely different group of children, an idea that would be less likely if the two stories followed one another, it is impossible to forget the earlier situation. Even though “Vuelo detenido” is separated from “Soledad”, the earlier story asserts itself unbidden into the reading because the circumstances of both sets of children are so closely aligned. Viewed in this fashion, the two stories becomes an interesting reworking of the “[a]nticipation and patterned repetition” concept that Marta Altisent says “is a primary source of tension in stories concerned with the arduousness and futility of existence” (27). One last point about “Vuelo detenido” is the irony of the title. These children are detained by the authorities. Normally, flight from officials indicates some crime. Yet these children’s only crime is their existence. However, the bars of the cell “les impedían volar hacia la vida” (Gaitán, *Vida* 71), for them, there can be no positive liberating flight either.

Helen Umaña comments on “la negligencia hospitalaria” (*Panorama* 424) that is obvious in “La última visita”. Here again, familiarity with the primary medical facility available for the poor in Tegucigalpa adds a layer of texture to this story that is not readily apparent from the words as written. In the story, the mother arrived with the sick child in the morning, yet at mid-day she was still waiting to be seen. What is not obvious from this description would be visible to anyone who had ever driven past the main social security hospital. The mother would have had to get through several official detention points before even getting into the hospital. It is not unheard of for people to miss appointments because they could not get past the guards in time. If you miss an appointment, though, you have to make a new one and start over. This is not the situation in the private hospitals, but I doubt that the mother in this story could afford such a luxury. While Umaña seems to focus on the “indiferencia del personal” of the hospital, she does not comment on the unusual attitude of the mother. As her child dies, “su último gemido” brings a smile to the mother’s face as she realizes that she now does not have to pay for medicines (Gaitán, *Vida* 75). I would consider not only the mother’s lack of mourning, but her obvious joy in the situation to be an indifference of a very serious nature. Consequently, I believe that through this story Gaitán very aptly lays bare the dehumanized conditions of the country.

“Ceremonias del morir” is the last of the stories associated with drugs. Here, the participants are very clearly described as children, unlike “Pasaje al olvido” or “Ronda infantil”. Both glue sniffing and smoking marijuana are included. The oldest child “induce a los pequeños a fumar marihuana” (Gaitán, *Vida* 79) which the younger ones do with delight. One has to wonder if the older child will later be selling them other,

harder drugs if they live long enough to acquire more debilitating habits. However, since the title labels their actions as ceremonies of death, the reader can assume that they will not live that long. Another way of looking at this story is to consider how a “normal” family gets ready for bed. Children would brush their teeth and be tucked in with blankets. Here, “niños aspiran resistol; luego se preparan a dormir y se cubren con cartones”. Again, the defamiliarization of a daily task heightens the impact of the story.

In “El deber diario”, the reader is caught by the hopelessness of the child who has his daily duty to perform. He works to help support his family, but the only work he is qualified to do is to beg. Obviously he has not been able to go to school. Unlike the girl in “A la escuela”, who may or may not have had some education, this boy does not seem to have had any opportunity for the legitimate work of selling something. However, he is a dutiful son. Despite having “earned” some money, he does not use even a little to buy himself some food, “sabe que si gasta el dinero su madre lo castigará. Él debe ayudar al sostenimiento de la familia.” (Gaitán, *Vida* 83). What about his own sustenance? How could a mother begrudge a meal to her child who is working for the benefit of all of the family? Yet these questions now seem out of place given that the reader has encountered a mother who smiles at her own child’s death. Read as a single entity, the story is poignant, but not necessarily gripping. Read, however, with the introductory frame of the other stories, in which both good and evil have a similar negative outcome, the story takes on a bleakness that would not otherwise be seen. No matter how well this child performs his “deber diario”, it will never be enough. His life is hopeless.

The child in the next story, “Faena de amor” has had to take one step farther down the road of humiliation than did the boy in “El deber diario”. Her circumstances have

forced her into prostitution in order to gain the money she needs to take care of her younger siblings. Umaña points out the deeper meaning in the title: “el llamado *acto de amor* (mercenario) es también un acto de amor hacia los hermanos que tienen hambre” (*Panorama* 424). Here the reader knows that the mother “los había abandonado” (Gaitán, *Vida* 87). But, consider this story as if it had appeared directly following “Soledad”. As it stood, “Soledad” was unresolved, but with this as the next story to be read each vignette would have a different feel. The children in “Soledad” would find a resolution other than the possibility of ending up in a barred room without the possibility of escape. The resolution offered by “Vuelo detenido” is perhaps safer, but presents no possibility of getting out of the system. With the resolution as “Faena de amor”, perhaps the younger children would have a chance to gain a better life. Also, if “Faena de amor” is the resolution to “Soledad”, the reader would know something more about the girl in this story. As it is written, the girl is described as having had to resort to sex “a su corta edad”, an ambiguous phrase and rather vague. But, if this is the girl from “Soledad”, the reader knows that she was nine; hardly an age to be having sex, but certainly not unheard of, especially in the desperate circumstances described. Here again, connections with the earlier stories open other possibilities for deeper interpretations of this story.

For me, “Tiempo para vivir” is the least satisfying of the group. Given all of the other stories that came before, I find it hard to make a connection with this child whose emotional reaction is so normal in comparison to the stories that came before. The character is presented as having positive desires which result in negative feelings: “deseó dibujarlo con amor en sus pensamientos pero no pudo” (Gaitán, *Vida* 91). This boy has every reason not to fully love a step-father who insults and beats him, but at least he tried.

The ending is ambiguous. Does he die? Does he cry himself to sleep? Clearly his existence is fragile. Why are the stars buried in his soul? Does this mean that he buries his goodness? If yes, then there is a possibility for redemption, but it is a possibility that is very thin. The one positive part of this story for me is the title gives an ironic push to the last story in the set. “Anhelo del mañana” is about the thoughts of a baby inside the womb. But, he will never have “tiempo para vivir” because his mother aborts him. With this ending, one has to consider all of the earlier stories. Would those children have been better off if they had not been born? If the children were only born to parents who wanted them and who could afford to cloth, feed, and house them, would there have been the suffering that formed the basis for these stories. It would seem that the only story that could still have been written is “La inmensidad estelar”. It was not indifference or abuse that caused the boy’s death; rather, it was his lack of knowledge about the effect of gravity on the human body that was at fault. This is not to say that Gaitán advocates abortion. I would think the contrary to be true given the language in the story. All of the positive images point to life: “El amor lo ha hecho vivir y la plenitud por la existencia invade su ser ... y desea aspirar la fragancia de la vida” (Gaitán, *Vida* 95). The abortion itself arrives as an appalling break from the hopeful beginning of the story. Of the deaths in the whole story cycle, this is the only one that is deliberate. Following her analysis of “Anhelo del mañana”, Umaña writes “hay, en Nery Alexis Gaitán, sensibilidad por los valores trascendentes: el amor, la belleza, la bondad, la solidaridad” (*Panorama* 424). By this she emphasizes Gaitán’s spiritual connection to the baby in the womb rather than to the act of abortion.

In 1993, Gaitán republished seven of these stories in his collection *Extraña cosecha*: “Historia de un soñador”, “La limosna”, “A la escuela”, “Soledad”, “El límite de la ilusión”, “El deber diario”, and “Anhelos del mañana”. It is clear that these are among the most technically well-crafted of the twenty original stories. “La limosna”, in particular, demonstrates Gaitán’s ability to get the most impact out of the fewest words. However, these few stories as a unit lack the strength of the complete arc that is created by the interaction of all twenty stories. None of these seven stories has the positive reinforcement of goodness found in “Fábula”. Nor is the situation of young women in Honduras as effectively portrayed as it is in “Faena de amor”. Gaitán must have felt that there was some merit to the complete collection given that he released it as a whole again in 1998.

In *Pretextos para la eternidad*, not only are the original twenty stories published again, but ten more have been added. The question remains, what value do these new stories give to the original set? “Arlequín callejero” was inserted between the first two stories in the series, “Historia de un soñador” and “La limosna”. These two did not necessarily have any direct connection, but the reader could have readily assumed that the boy with the strong imagination from the first story would also have the sensitivity of the child in the second. The story that is inserted disrupts this connection. The protagonist in “Arlequín callejero” could be the same one from “Historia de un soñador”, but, since he works, he is clearly not the boy in “La limosna”. The title of the new story alludes to the Harlequin character from the Italian Commedia dell’arte. He is a clown and often portrayed as acrobatic. The image of a jumping clown is frequently connected with the bobbing figure in the child’s toy called the “jack-in-the box” because the doll inside is

often dressed as the Harlequin. The vision of this character popping up easily comes to mind based on the description of the protagonist jumping up to wash the car windows: “él salta, salta, salta...” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 52). On the other hand, there is another famous image of the clown from the 1892 opera *Pagliacci* by Leoncavallo, Ruggiero (1858-1919) which overlays this story. The idea of a silently (or internally) crying clown can be superimposed on the boy in “Arlequín callejero”. How difficult is it to hide the pain caused when he receives “regaños e insultos” instead of “monedas” for his services? How can he still “juega y salta” given the circumstances described?

The next new story is “Espera”, which was inserted between “La limosna” and “Rutina”. Unlike “Arlequín callejero”, “Espera” adds a connection between the two original stories. As with “La limosna”, the text is very short:

Estaba en su lugar favorito desde donde los veía llegar. A las dos de la tarde ellos llegaban a dejarle su comida. Fueron puntuales, como siempre. El auto llegó y dejó su encargo. Con sus manitas ávidas él tomo uno de los bultos y lo abrió. Los desechos resplandecieron en el sol de la tarde.

(Gaitán, *Pretextos* 54)

In “La limosna”, the protagonist’s expectation and hope was not fulfilled, but in “Espera”, the character receives exactly what he is waiting for: his meal which will come out of the daily trash delivery. Gaitán again demonstrates his ability to defamiliarize daily practices. From the beginning of the story, the reader is expecting a positive action, perhaps an employer delivering lunch to field workers, for example. Instead, Gaitán gives a completely unexpected image of a different routine activity. This activity also connects “Espera” to “Rutina” in which the reader finds out that the only reason the three children

are fed is because their father “encuentra algo bueno entre las cosas que recoge en el basurero municipal y después lo vende” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 55). “Rutina” makes very clear the relative position of the boy in “Espera” with regard to the larger picture of the marginalized community in which they all live. A man as desperate as the father in “Rutina” would not allow a child to acquire anything valuable that could be sold. Therefore, the family members in “Rutina” have the luxury of eating bread and butter that was purchased, while the boy in “Espera” eats directly from the garbage dump.

“Alabanza del otro” adds an emotional and psychological dimension not previously seen in the collection. None of the earlier stories have any close companions who are mutually-supportive and maintain a positive relationship. The girls from “Soledad” and “Faena de amor” are taking care of their younger siblings, but neither story gives clues as to what, if anything, the smaller children do for their older sisters. The boy in “El deber diario” is helping to support his family, but his fear of castigation for not fully submitting to his duty to them makes clear that the level of care is not necessarily mutual. The irony is that the emotionally bolstering relationship that the child maintains is with a dog, not another human being. In this instance, the reader must fill-in the animal that “movía la cola” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 56), but there is little likelihood that it would be something other than a dog. With regard to the placement of this story in relation to the others in the series, the upbeat nature of “Alabanza del otro” requires that Gaitán insert it closer to the beginning, where the stories are more touching, than near the end where the darker elements of a marginalized life have been emphasized. By putting between “Rutina” and “En el mercado”, the invisibility of the human protagonists in the three stories is subtly underscored. In “Rutina”, the people with their self-imposed

illusion for the need to hurry can ignore the man and his three children as if they were not there. I discussed earlier the characterization of the baby in “En el mercado” as a non-entity. She is never seen, and her cries are drowned by the noise of the marketplace. Inserting between these two stories another character that “[n]adie lo miraba y no se percataban de lo que pedía” emphasizes the marginality of all of these people.

The new story of “El festín” was put between “En el mercado” and “Al pasar”. On first reading, the connection to the surrounding stories eluded me. It was clear that the feast of the title was in reality a dream, but how was the protagonist connected to the baby in the box or the boy in the next story? One interpretation could be that he is the same boy in each story. If he is the boy in the marketplace who kicks the box, there is some cosmic justice that he should be awakened from his dream by a blow. That he is sleeping outside is revealed by the fact that the wind blows away the newspapers and cardboard boxes he is using to cover himself. From the earlier reading, it is known that the boy in “Al pasar” lives in the streets. In the original collection, there was no real reason to think that the boy from the market was the same boy looking at the house. There is another thread, however, which connects these stories to the larger context of the new collection. In his introductory essay to *Pretextos para la eternidad*, Juan Antonio Medina Durón writes “[e]n este libro, el autor sustancia, con madurez y evidente experiencia, lo que en sus textos anteriores sólo se insinuaba: el sueño, como ‘una inquietud difusa, una de las formas de la realidad’” (Gaitán, iii). He goes on to comment about how the work in the new collection, *Pretextos para la eternidad*, is structured around dreams. This provides another basis for viewing these three stories as a unit. The boy’s dream-state versus his reality can be seen as the bridge between linking the three

stories. The boy in “El festín” is dreaming about food. In his dream, his injury comes from hot food dropping onto his hand, which jolts him into his reality of homelessness and hunger. The setting for the previous story, “En el mercado”, was a stand that sells food, while the thrust of “Al pasar”, which follows, is the dream of a real home. With this reading of the stories, the idea is strengthened that only one boy is portrayed in this group.

In doing this particular analysis of the interconnection of the stories, I realized that Gaitán had rewritten “Al pasar”. Unfortunately, I do not think that his changes have substantially improved the story. The first version begins “Sus ojos miraban el edificio” (Gaitán, *Vida* 35), which he changes to read “Sus ojos inquietos miraban el edificio” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 59).³² If *inquietos* is read as restlessness, it reinforces a sense of longing. However, this emotion is already clear in the complete first version. If it is read as nervous or worried, the theory that he is engaging in a negative behavior is introduced, giving the introduction to the story a different feel. Is he worried that someone will see him? Since he obviously does not live there, will they think he is looking at the house in order to plan a robbery or other mischief? One of the people that passes him in the original story says “Es una hermosa casa”. In the revised version, this line reads “¡Es una casa muy hermosa!” The new wording does not substantially alter the original view of the house. The next variations are more extensive, but, in my opinion, do not enhance the story in any significant fashion. The original appeared as “[I]as palabras le sonaron lejanas, su casa eran las calles y los rincones de la esquinas”. In the new version, Gaitán not only reworks this sentence, but adds a complete new phrase: “Las palabras le sonaron

³² While it is not unheard of for authors to make minor revisions to stories that have been previously published, in the case of micro-stories any change in wording can be significant because of the minimal number of words used. Consequently, I will note any changes I encountered in Gaitán’s stories.

lejanas porque su casa eran los rincones oscuros de las calles; y pensando en lo agradable que sería vivir en un hogar, una sonrisa llegó hasta su corazón”. I agree that the first section of the new version is better grammatically and presents a more evocative imagery than does the original. However, I think that Gaitán underestimates his reader by adding the new ending to the sentence. Since the emotion stated in the new phrase is already obvious in the original story, he diminishes the reader’s ability to actively participate in the creation and interpretation of the story by including this phrase. The next change also lessens Gaitán’s writing technique by making an unusual construction revert to a standard grammatical phrasing. The original reads: “la señora que venía con ellos, en tono cariñoso les dijo...” The importance of the loving quality of the woman’s comment is increased by coming before the verb and being positioned so closely to the “ellos” to whom this love is directed. The new version is much more ordinary: “la señora que venía con ellos les habló en un tono cariñoso”. The last change is insignificant. Gaitán changes a semicolon to a comma, and adds “y”. The original is “...la señora le hablaba a los niños; por un momento...” while the new version is “...la señora le hablaba a los niños, y por un momento...”. Overall, I prefer the fresh approach of the original version to the changes in the 1998 version which makes it more mundane.

“El juego de nunca acabar” is a disturbing insertion at this point in the collection. The harshness of the story would seem to indicate that its placement should be closer to the end of the series where hopelessness and deliberate death were originally present. The story itself panders to the rumors that plagued Central America in the 1990s: North Americans adopting abandoned children for economic gain by harvesting their organs to sell for transplantation. When I lived in Honduras in 1993-1994, the State Department of

the United States issued a warning against traveling in Guatemala because of reported attacks on U.S. citizens due to rumors of this sort. Gaitán takes this idea a step farther in the ending to this story: “finalmente rellenarían sus cuerpecitos con el codiciado polvo de la cocaína” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 60). As cocaine is so closely associated with the indulgences of rich *norteamericanos*, it is not clear to me if this story is intended as an anti-American tale or as an indication of the corruption of Honduran officials. There is no direct indication of any North American character in this story, but the timing of its publication is suggestive. The story appears, however, directly in front of “Mínima hazaña”,³³ in which the Honduran police are shone in a poor light. This points to the idea of internal Honduran corruption instead of an overtly anti-American position on the part of Gaitán. I do not want to sound like an apologist, but I also do not want to attribute to Gaitán a view that he may not hold. Given the time frame in which the story was written, however, and my personal experience described above, I believe it is important to note that cocaine use is as widely destructive in European countries as it is on the North American continent.

“Un señor que deseaba ser bueno” is also disruptive to the general arc of the original collection. In *Pretextos para bien dormir*, this story is between “Mínima hazaña” and “Fábula”. Consequently, in the new setting, the contrast is not so strongly seen between the officials, who would normally be expected to help children, and an ordinary citizen, who might be viewed as neutral. There is a new contrast, though, between the

³³ Gaitán also made minor changes to “Mínima hazaña” between the original and the 1998 publication. He reverses “[L]os caramelos y confites” (Gaitán, *Vida* 39) to read “[l]os confites y los caramelos” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 61), and changes “la venta perdida” to “la venta que ha perdido”. Finally, there is a typographical correction from “los policíán” to “los policías”.

actions of the main character in the new story and doña María in “Fábula”.³⁴ Given that the protagonist in “Un señor que deseaba ser bueno” is a homosexual pedophile, the interpretation presented earlier, that virtue only appears in a fable, is increased because of this new story.

Unfortunately, “El carrito de las delicias” is flat and does not add new insight to the collection as a whole, nor does it present any innovation in Gaitán’s writing technique. “Mínima hazaña”, “El deber diario” and “La última visita” already impart the idea of a parent whose economic concerns outweigh his or her emotional connection with their child. The story’s placement between “Fábula” and “La inmensidad estelar”³⁵ is indifferent at best. There is no novel connection to the characters or theme of “Fábula”. A contrast can be made between the family in which there is not enough money for the small treat of an ice cream and the family that can afford a television and frivolous birthday presents, but that contrast was already evident in the original series.

In contrast to “El carrito de las delicias”, the next new story, “El dolor de los días”, does supplement the view of the brutal environment in which most of these children live. The presentation of deliberate cruelty to a child by a parent or a caretaker has not been explicit in the stories that came before. There has been reference to punishment in “Mínima hazaña” and “El deber diario”, but the reader’s worst expectation would be that the child might be whipped. The punishment in “El dolor de los días” is beyond any reasonable probability. To burn a person’s hands so that “no podría tomar

³⁴ Again, Gaitán has changes a few words in the story. In this case, the change adds a suddenness that was lacking in the original. He rewrites “[s]us ojos miraron el carrito” (Gaitán, *Vida* 43) to be “[s]us ojos se detuvieron en el carrito” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 63).

³⁵ Gaitán has reworked part of this story to more closely parallel the vocabulary of the original *Superman*: he changes “borraba la maldad” (Gaitán, *Vida* 47) to be “combatía la maldad” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 65). There is no real significance to his change of “la escena siguiente” to “la siguiente escena”.

con sus manitas ni dinero, ni comida, ni nada” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 66) is to condemn that person to death. The context for the completely unreasonable punishment must also be made clear: two Honduran lempiras, at that time, was the equivalent of not more than ten cents in terms of the United States dollar. One criticism, though, is that this story seems to be inserted too early in the cycle. Its brutality fits better with the stories that appear later in the collection.

“El dolor de los días” was inserted between “La inmensidad estelar” and “Pasaje al olvido”. Gaitán made a change to this second story which I believe decreases its universality. In the earlier analysis of this tale, I noted the ambiguity about the protagonist. The reader does not know if this person is a child or an adult, a male or a female. In the new version, Gaitán inserts “Él” at the beginning (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 67), thus eliminating some of the ambiguity which was appealing in the original. The other vocabulary substitutions do not have the same impact on the overall story. In the original, he wrote “ingresa en el universo de sus sueños, plenos de ternura” (Gaitán, *Vida* 51), but changed it to read “acude al universo de sus sueños que siempre están plenos de ternura” in the new version (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 67). Also, he reworked “como estrella que le brinda el pasaporte” to read “como una estrella que le concede el pasaporte”.

Following the new version of “Pasaje al olvido”, Gaitán inserts a work that is significantly different from any of the others in this series and which, unfortunately, does not fit well with the rest of the collection in terms of either theme or style. It is the only work with a dedicatory line: “A Richard Matheson” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 68), and, at 413 words, “Nacido de hombre y mujer” is much more extensive than any of the other works in this series. It becomes clear that the protagonist is insane, but there does not seem to be

anything in the plot or the characterization that connects this story with “Pasaje al olvido” or “A la escuela” which are on either side it. Nor do any of the other stories in *La vida menor* justify the inclusion of this tale in this place. The child in the story seems to be as much of an aberration to his parents as this story is to the rest of this collection.

The last new story to be included comes between “El límite de la ilusión” and “Ronda infantil”. With only seventy-two words, “Y en este encuentro no hay amor” returns to the extremely short format of the majority of the other works in the *La vida menor* series. Thematically, there is no linkage to the stories on either side, but it does present a new twist on the issue of child labor that is found in other stories in the collection. Here, the girl is injured, and perhaps killed, in a random car accident while crossing the street to sell her bread to a customer who has called to her. Of course, she could have been hit while crossing the street to see a friend, but Gaitán emphasizes the commercial facet of the situation by returning at the end of the story to the product that was for sale: “Los panes yacen por doquier, y ahora hay sangre en ellos” (Gaitán, *Pretextos* 73). Unlike some of the other new stories, this one fits well into the overall development of the series. It is placed near the middle where the stories begin to exhibit a darker vision of the life of children in Honduras.

The insertion of the new stories into *La vida menor* changed the feel of the collection more than did merely excerpting the stronger stories as was done in *Extraña cosecha*. Some of the changes opened the stories to fresh interpretation as was seen with the insertions of “Espera”, “Alabanza del otro” and “El festín”. Other additions, such as “El carrito de las delicias”, were less successful in providing a deeper understanding of the entire collection.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It is my belief that Honduran literature is not widely known in the North American literary market because so few of the authors from that country have works that are available outside of Central America. The weak publishing infrastructure throughout Central America limits production and distribution of the works by the authors of the region. Honduran poet Roberto Sosa and Honduran literary critic Helen Umaña discussed this continuing dilemma in the early 1990s, a period when there was strong world-wide interest in learning more about the region that appeared so predominantly in the news. Umaña noted that while examples of Honduran literature were still not often included in anthologies of Hispanic American literature, there was increasing pressure from the academic community to obtain examples of Honduran writing. She implied that as more Honduran authors were studied by academics in other countries, there would be less isolation of the literature from the region. The purpose of the present study was to contribute to the expansion of knowledge about Honduran literature by presenting an extensive overview in English to the literature of that country.

I began by reviewing how Central American authors in general, and Honduran authors in particular, are only indifferently represented in standard reference works found in many North American university library collections. I limited the review to works published since 1990, but it remained that even when Central Americans were included among the authors studied in these works, Hondurans were less likely to appear than

were other Central American authors. I believe that there are two elements which contribute to the underrepresentation of Hondurans in these publications. Both factors are associated with the historical publishing trend of the country. First, Hondurans tend to write in the genres of poetry and short stories. Consequently, their works have historically been dispersed and uncollected thus increasing the likelihood that little published evidence of Honduran literary expertise would be found by an author or editor of a general reference work. Second, even for Honduran authors whose poetic or short prose works have been collected, or for authors who write novels, the number of examples printed for distribution is extremely small in comparison to the printings of publishers either in some of the other Spanish-speaking countries. The result is that few copies of Honduran books are disseminated outside of the Central American region. Again, with so few examples on which to base any comparison to other authors writing in Spanish it would be difficult for editors of reference works to appropriately attribute skills and proficiency of Honduran writers. Finally, with so few examples available even in Spanish, there is not much incentive to translate unknown authors into English which would increase the readership in the North American market.

How, then, can the rich history of Honduran literature be opened to this readership? In the second chapter of this study, I looked at the profile of Honduran literature through the lens of literary generations. In the process, it became clear that poetry and short stories were foregrounded in the literary production of the country, especially in the initial stages of Honduran literary development. Secondly, this process showed that while a national literature occurred late in the country due to poor educational opportunities, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Honduran authors

were as enmeshed in the same literary movements as their Spanish-speaking counterparts around the world. Hondurans were as likely as any authors to experiment with the writing techniques that these movements offered. Because Hondurans who write narratives tend to write in the shorter genre of the short story, chapter three was dedicated to a review of the development of the short story in Latin American literature. One interesting trait of most short story authors is their inclination to also study and critique the genre. This was evident in the writings of the North American author Edgar Allan Poe, and has been continued by Latin American authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar. Finally, within the short story, there is a sub-category known as the micro-story. In my review of the history of Honduran literature, I noted that Honduran writers began experimenting with this narrative style in its very early stages of development.

Lastly, I analyzed selected literary works of a contemporary Honduran author and critic, Nery Alexis Gaitán, whose narrative works exemplify the micro-story. He also maintains the tradition set by Poe, and has contributed to the study of Honduran literature through his compilations of information about the short story authors of the country. I began with a short bio-bibliography of Gaitán, followed by an analysis of the micro-stories included in his second published collection, *La vida menor* (1990). I also looked at how the presentation of this collection varied over time. The modified arrangement of the stories tends to result in the reader having divergent interpretations of the overall work. The interaction of author and reader is one important feature of the micro-story which is manipulated in an interesting way by Gaitán's early tendency to republish his stories in different combinations.

Central American authors are creating an innovative and complex body of literature worthy of more critical attention than they have received thus far. I hope that the examination of one contemporary Honduran author will inspire more investigations written in English about the authors of this region. As more research is done in this area, and more critical analyses of the literary production of these authors are disseminated among the North American academic community, I believe that there will be a push to acquire more of these books in Spanish and to have them translated into English, thus making this literature available to a wider audience.

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