

Falling Short of Reading: Intention and Innovation in the Short Story

Abstract

Julio Cortázar defines the short story as a genre that creates unpredictable effects on the reader through its poetical dynamics. While this definition foregrounds the unforeseeable elements of the genre, Cortázar also emphasizes that the short story operates in fore-seen parameters. He draws our attention to the role of the reader in a particular form enabled by the brevity of the genre. In Cortázar's formulation, the sphericity of the short story posits the shortness as the basic fore-seen parameter of the genre in which the same sphericity creates a possibility of the unforeseen by forcing its parameters. In 2004, thirty five years after the publication of Cortázar's article, *The Oxford Literary Review* published a special issue on *The Blind Short Story*. The issue aimed to open a new discussion on the notions of enlightenment and epiphany in the short story, questioning the theoretical discussions that center on the visual images. Since the brevity of the short story has been conceived as a device to open gaps starting with the first theoretical attempts to define the genre in the nineteenth century, the reader of the genre has been expected to reach a totality from its episodic structure. Thus the reader's success has often been considered to depend on his/her visual abilities of foreseeing the plot. Departing from the tendency to look for truth and inspired by Cortázar's conceptualization of the unforeseen effects along with the discussions on „the blind short story”, this article attempts to understand the experience of reading the genre as ignorance and its readers as short-sighted detectives.

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1. Introduction

In his essay, *On the Short Story and Its Environs*, Julio Cortázar defines the short story as a genre that relies on poetical values such as „tension, rhythm, inner beat, the unforeseen within fore-seen parameter” (Cortazar 1983: 34-37). While drawing our attention to the unpredictable effects of the short story created by poetical dynamics, Cortázar at the same time underlines that the short story has a form. He deems this form to be spherical, denoting both the closed system of the genre and the unfolding of the narrative situation within the borders of this system. While the former implies the limits of the genre basically caused by its shortness, the latter refers to the possibility of pushing its limits for the purpose of creating unpredictable effects on the reader. For example, according to Cortázar, even the narrator should move within the „little world” of the short story as a character so that the tension can reach its maximum level (Cortazar 1983: 35). Thus, in Cortázar’s formulation, the spherity of the short story posits the shortness as the basic fore-seen parameter of the genre, in which the same spherity creates a possibility of the „unforeseen” by forcing its parameters.

In 2004, thirty five years after the publication of Cortázar’s article, *The Oxford Literary Review* published a special issue on *The Blind Short Story*. The issue aimed to open a new discussion on the notions of enlightenment and epiphany in the short story, questioning the theoretical discussions that center on the visual images. Since the brevity of the short story has been conceived as a device to open gaps starting with the first theoretical attempts to define the genre in the nineteenth century, the reader of the genre has been expected to reach a totality from its episodic structure. Thus the reader’s success has often been considered to depend on his/her visual abilities of foreseeing the plot. Even though the short story theorists have often emphasized the importance of effects, as Poe’s concept of the „single effect” exemplifies, these effects have also been considered as an important component of the process of interpretation.

Departing from the tendency to look for truth and inspired by Cortázar’s conceptualization of the unforeseen effects along with the discussions on „the blind short story”, this article will attempt to understand the experience of reading the genre as ignorance and its readers as the short-sighted detectives. By replacing the intention of the author and the reader by what Maurice Blanchot calls „unforeseeable innovation”, which may be defined as a gap between the intention and the result (Blanchot 1999: 371), the article will ask how a story becomes short. It will problematize the image of the detective reader, which finds an expression in Charles E. May’s description of Poe’s ideal reader: „The reader of such a story, like Poe’s famous detective, Auguste Dupin, focuses primarily on those clues or motifs that obsessively revolve around the central effect” (May 2002: 256).

As the image of the keen detective is either explicitly or implicitly based on the mastery of the writer, who plans his work with all its details, and that of the reader, who is able to trace the intentions of the writer, the article suggests that the author does not make a story short; instead it becomes short in so far as it has short-sighted readers. Only in a dialogical encounter, the borders of the genre can enable the readers to fall short of reading in the sense of decipherment and thus initiate an active thinking process.

2. From Episode to Unity: Openness of the Short Story

Although the discussions on the origins of the short story are basically divided into two, one dating back it to the oral tradition and the other to the nineteenth century, both views seem to be guided by Edgar Allan Poe's theory of the „single effect“. Claiming that the short story has a unified form despite its episodic nature, this theory assigns an important role both to the author and the reader. The author is expected to plan everything in advance to create a perfect unity, where every detail from the beginning to the end should have a function of arousing the single effect on the reader. The reader, on the other hand, is expected to realize the genius of the author and reach a sense of unity in a moment of enlightenment. The first group of scholars who attaches the genre to the traditional storytelling highlights the moment of mythological illumination, or epiphany, in the supposed unity. The second group of scholars who detaches the genre from the oral tradition underlines its openness to different readings through an emphasis on the artistic self-consciousness and on the formal experimentation; even when they argue against the notion of unified short story, their expectations of the reader, nonetheless, allude to a Poetic unity.

In *Review of Twice-Told Tales* (1842) Poe emphasizes the importance of brevity for the unity of effect. If the perusal of a piece cannot be completed at one sitting, he writes, this effect enervates. One can observe the mark of the authorial control behind Poe's notion of unity. In fact, comparing the short prose with the novel, Poe pronounces the writer's controlling power over the reader: „In the brief tale [...] the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control" (Poe 1994: 61). As Poe points out in *The Brief Article and Totality of Interest*, such control can be achieved by the creation of a totality of interest, enabling the reader to contemplate the picture as a whole (Poe: 65). Thus, the author has to pattern a good plot, whose no part can be removed without doing harm to the whole and whose *dénouement* must be planned in advance. In *The Philosophy of Composition* Poe maintains that „It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to develop of the intention" (Poe: 67).

Brander Matthews, in *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (1901), follows Poe in defining unity as the essential feature of the genre. According to him, „unity of impression" is the trait that distinguishes the short story from a story which is short. In order to stress this difference, he writes the *Short-story* with the capital S and a hyphen. Similar to Poe, Matthews also views the author as the ultimate figure behind the creation of this form: „The Short-story should not be void or without form, but its form may be whatever the author please" (Matthews 1976: 57). By „form" he means either a personal or an

impersonal narrative, or the combination of the two. However, in all cases the form of the genre is in congruity with Poe's theory: „The Short-story is the single effect, complete and self-contained, while the Novel is of necessity broken into a series of episodes. Thus the Short-story has, what the Novel cannot have, the effect of «totality», as Poe called it, the unity of impression" (Matthews 1976: 52).

Even though these first attempts to theorize the genre have been considerably developed in the later studies, the unity of effect has continued to inform most of them. For example, Charles E. May's studies, which date the short story back to the oral tradition, consider the single effect as an evidence of the mythical aspect of the genre. According to him, the single effect of the short story actually points to its mythic source. In his articles *Metaphoric Motivation in Short Fiction: „In the Beginning Was the Story"* and *The Nature of Knowledge in Short Fiction* May argues that the short story is an elementary form which embodies mythic perception (May 1989: 62-73; May 1994: 131-143). Through compression and concentration, it progresses toward a single goal, breaking up the profane everyday reality. The short story is bound up with the experience of the sacred which cannot be explained by the analytic mode of thought. According to May, the short story has been formed in what Ernst Cassirer calls „mythical thought":

It is that mode of thought which becomes predominant during the nineteenth century when the short story is developed, and it is that mode of thought which the Russian Formalists suggest characterize the essential artistic function and device. The nature of mythic thought within the framework of sacred, the attempt by the Romantics to recapture this mode of thinking in a secularized way, and the development of a critical approach which unites this mode of thinking with the essential nature of art itself –all help us to understand why the short story has been called both the most primitive mode of communication as well as the most artistic (May 2002: 138).

Indeed in *Language and Myth* Cassirer emphasizes the significance of compression and single impression in mythical formulation. He gives the examples of „momentary god" (Cassirer 1953: 33) and the name as a „magical word" (Cassirer 1953: 44). The common characteristic of these two examples is condensation. The encounter with the momentary god or the magical name results in an enthrallment, an immediate psychological experience: „The ego is spending all its energy on this single object, lives in it, loses itself in it" (Cassirer 1953: 33). This psychological experience, which is a result of the encounter with a condensed form, might be one way of explaining the supposed epiphanic enlightenment of the short story readers. Inspired by Cassirer, May argues that the single effect entails a sacred encounter, exposing the mythical origins of the short story. Reading then turns to be an experience of such an encounter, distancing the reader from the secular and practical life for a while.

Epiphany might be described as a revelation, sudden appearance of the spiritual in the encounters with the realities. The narrator in James Joyce's manuscripts of *Stephen Hero* describes epiphany when Stephen hears some fragments of a colloquy between a young lady and a young gentleman:

The Young Lady — (drawing discreetly)... O, yes... i was... at the... cha... pel...

The Young Gentleman — (inaudibly)... I... (again inaudibly)... I...

The Young Lady — (softly)... O... but you're... ve... ry... wick... ed...

This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments (Joyce 1963: 211).

According to Stephen, an object, for example a clock is epiphanised at a moment of a focus. It might be seen every day, even alluded to, but only the „glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus” will make this moment an epiphanic one (Joyce: 211). As Stephen goes on to observe, we recognize the object first as a thing, secondly as a thing in its composite structure, and finally as a thing whose parts concentrate on this thing. The object becomes epiphanic when it is „the thing which it is” (Joyce: 213).

While the object's becoming „the thing which it is” also implies the expectation of the short story reader who may possibly look for the unraveling of the condensed form, the scholars who insist that the short story is a „modern” genre also portray a similar image of the reader. For instance, Dominic Head's *The Modernist Short Story*, which detaches the genre from the mythological realm, while offering a new methodology to break away from the insistent notion of unity in the genre studies, proposes the „disunifying effects” as a formal characteristic. Describing the short story as a representative form of literary modernism with its ability „to capture the episodic nature of the twentieth-century experience” (Head 1992: 1), Head shows that this episodic experience is in fact the reader's. He adds, nevertheless, that this is not simply the matter of concentration on a short piece because of the time limit in the modern life. Referring to L. P. Hartley, who says „starting and stopping exhausts the reader's attention just as starting and stopping uses up the petrol in a car” (Head 1992: 2), Head argues that the short story theories have been dominated by its unity. The new methodology „which interprets the *disunifying* effects of ellipsis and ambiguity” (Head: 2), is nevertheless based on a formal conceptualization. He aims to show that in the short story one can see the modernist preoccupation with experimentation and formal innovation. Its form implies, for Head, the compression of time as a modernist response and the ensuing symbolism. The short story is „amenable to the artistic self-consciousness of the modernists” (Head: 7) as well as to „the consideration of the fragmented, dehumanized self” (Head: 8). In short, according to Head, the short story is a modernist form with its emphasis on artifice and the artistic detachment of the author from the characters. When he says that „the literary effects generated in modernist stories derive from a tension between formal convention

and formal disruption" (Head: 26), he challenges the dominant theories revolving around the concept of unity. Yet by pointing out a formal tension, he alludes to foreseeability of the unforeseen. The artistic artifice here assumes the subject behind the work as the ultimate creator, and „the effects of the short story, to be grasped fully, require an acknowledgement of artifice and a consciousness of technique in the reader" (Head: 192). The reader thus becomes an observer like a talented detective.

Likewise, Austin Wright, in *Recalcitrance in the Short Story*, highlights the importance of a formal tension for the short story. Wright further emphasizes that this tension includes a „resistance to both the author's creating process and the reader's recreating one" (Wright 1989: 116). When it comes to the discussion of ending, however, it becomes apparent that Wright conceives of the reader as a detective too. He suggests that „The normal effect of an ending is to reduce recalcitrance, as in most novels and much traditional short fiction. In many of our most significant twentieth-century short stories, however, the ending (temporarily) aggravates it, presenting a new challenge to the reader that can only be resolved by reflection after the reading" (Wright: 121). „Challenge" to be „resolved" by „reflection" implies a master reader even in a recalcitrant story, which Wright defines as a characteristic that „makes the formal unity more flexible" (Wright: 116).

Although there are a variety of approaches to the short story, at the same time the theoretical studies present a circular move, bringing similar concerns to the agenda through similar concepts. Despite some disagreements, the shortness of the genre has often been considered as the ruptures in the narrative, which assign a central role to the reader for reaching a unity from fragments, for solving the mysteries, for seeing the technical moves of the author, or for resolving the challenges. In all these more or less formalist theories, the basic idea is that the short story is waiting for its reader. Yet Walter Benjamin in *The Task of the Translator* puts forth a counter argument: „No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener". A literary work „tells" very little to those who understand it" (Benjamin 1968: 69). Benjamin's questions with regard to the relationship between the art work and the audience can be asked for the short story. In that case, one needs to understand what if the short story reader is a short-sighted detective. The article will attempt to pursue the traces of this question in the following part.

3. The Short Story as a Modern Experience: From *Lonely Voice* to *Boredom*

In *The Storyteller* Walter Benjamin presents a paradox, which may tell us how we can fail reading the short story. According to him, the art of storytelling has come to its end, whose apparent symptom is the rise of the novel. The novel as a modern form is the genre of the isolated people in contrast to the art of storytelling, through which people exchanged counsels and wisdom. In Benjamin's words, „The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life" (Benjamin 1968b: 87). In short, Benjamin does not consider the short story in the same category with the novel.

Yet there is one moment at which Benjamin names the short story. Just after quoting Paul Valéry's statement, „Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated” (Benjamin 1968b: 93), Benjamin suggests that even the storytelling has been abbreviated: „We have witnessed the evolution of the «short story», which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings” (Benjamin: 93). Then, for Benjamin, the difference between the art of storytelling and the short story is that the short story does not obtain different layers through the retellings from mouth to mouth, and therefore it is not revealed step by step in each telling. Beside this, however, Benjamin stresses the „story” rather than its length. „[A story] does not expend itself”, he suggests, „[i]t preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (Benjamin: 90). The paradox appears here, because Benjamin concludes his essay by naming Poe and Stevenson as storytellers in addition to Leskov and Hauff.

The meaning of this paradox can be found in Benjamin's article, *Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death*, where Benjamin suggests that „In the stories which Kafka left us, narrative art regains the significance it had in the mouth of Scheherazade: to postpone the future” (Benjamin: 129). This postponement implies „forgetting”, which renders retelling possible. Although the art of storytelling entails a good memory of the storyteller, the „self-forgetfulness” of the listener is a condition for the story's „impression upon his memory”. As Benjamin tells us in *The Storyteller*, this is what is lost in the modern life. Since „[b]oredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience” and since we lost boredom in the cities, even in the provinces, the „gift” of listening was also lost. It is a gift that turns to be a gift of storytelling naturally. In other words, boredom brings about such a mental relaxation that the listener forgets himself in the story, but impressed by the experience of the teller so much so that he begins to retell the story: „When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself” (Benjamin 1968b: 91). According to Benjamin, in Kafka's work everything is told as if they are retold because they are forgotten (Benjamin: 131).

Benjamin emphasizes basically the significance of experience, which is more than an individual experience. The art of storytelling is based on the exchange of the experience, and „rooted in the people” (Benjamin: 101), as Kafka exemplifies for Benjamin: „What has been forgotten is never something purely individual” (Benjamin: 131). Not only Benjamin's naming Poe and Stevenson as the artists of storytelling, but also his placement of the exchange of experience at the heart of Kafka's work contradict some fundamental discussions with regard to the „modern experience” which is assumed to be represented in the short story. There is a strong tendency to locate the short story in the place where Benjamin puts the novel: It is the genre of isolated people; it is the genre of „boredom” of lonely individual in the crowd of the large cities. Frank O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice*, for instance, is a peculiar work that underlines the „lonely voice” of the genre,

although his discussions considerably differ from Benjamin's. The differences between O'Connor's and Benjamin's approaches are provocative for reflecting on Benjamin's paradoxical attitude to the short story and how it informs the ignorant reading.

Frank O'Connor's basic assumption in *The Lonely Voice* is that the short story as a modern art represents the life of the modern men. As a repercussion of this scientific epoch, „plausibility” became one of the most important merits of the genre. By „plausibility” he means „an ideal action worked out in terms of verisimilitude” (O'Connor 1963: 13). Since it speaks to the individual reader, there is almost nothing completely inexplicable in it. According to O'Connor, what he calls „the little man” appeared for the first time in the short story. By „the little man” he means a „submerged population [which] changes its character from writer to writer, from generation to generation. It may be Gogol's officials, Turgenev's serfs, Maupassant's prostitutes, Chekhov's doctors and teachers, Sherwood Anderson's provincials, always dreaming of escape” (O'Connor: 18). According to O'Connor the short story characters are usually the people on the fringes of society. The short story distinguishes from the novel with its „intense awareness of human loneliness” (O'Connor: 19). This also explains the American precedence in the genre:

[...] of course there are several reasons, and one is that America is largely populated by submerged population groups. That peculiar American sweetness toward the stranger – which exists side by side with American brutality toward everyone – is the sweetness of people whose own ancestors have been astray in an unfamiliar society and understand that a familiar society is the exception rather than the rule; that strangeness of behavior which is the very lifeblood of the short story is often an atavistic breaking out from some peculiar way of life, faraway and long ago (O'Connor: 42).

O'Connor's attempts to theorize the short story revolve around an implicit idea of openness in terms of characterization. The short story is open in the sense that the characters are almost never determined. The impossibility of the elaboration of the characters in a short story in contrast to the novel renders its reading open as well since the expectations with regard to the character are not met in the short story:

If the novelist takes a character of any interest and sets him up in opposition to society, and then, as a result of the conflict between them, allows his character either to master society or to be mastered by it, he has done all that can reasonably be expected of him. [...] For the short-story writer there is no such thing as essential form. Because his frame of reference can never be the totality of a human life, he must be forever selecting the point at which we can approach it, and each selection he makes contains the possibility of a new form as well as the possibility of a complete fiasco (O'Connor: 21).

Therefore, considering the quality of shortness basically with regard to characterization, O'Connor argues that the short story does not permit any mastery of the society by the character, any mastery of the character by the society and finally any mastery of the text by the reader. He puts forward the unforeseeability of the character as the basic feature of the short story, approaching Benjamin, who thinks that the psychological analysis

is excluded in a story in contrast to the novel. However, this is a complicated similarity since while what Benjamin calls a story is any story, which is based on the exchange of experience and which is rooted in people, O'Connor prefers to differentiate between the modern short story and the traditional stories. Although, for O'Connor, like Benjamin, sharing of an experience is primary, his concept of „lonely voice” cannot be replaced by Benjamin's „boredom”, as the experience in O'Connor's notion of the short story is not an experience which creates a desire for storytelling. O'Connor's „experience” determines the places of the author and the reader. Even if there is not an essential form for the short story writer, according to O'Connor, he selects the form that fits the experience of any specific „little man” to present this man to the reader. He writes that „The folk storyteller, because his audience [...] can only apprehend a few sentences at a time, unlike a reader who can hold a score of details before his mind simultaneously, has only one method of holding its attention, and that is by piling incident on incident, surprise on surprise” (O'Connor 1963: 29). For Benjamin, on the other hand, listening to a story is not an easy task and that is why it constitutes the basis of the art of storytelling.

The postponement of the future in Kafka's stories like in Scheherazade's might be read as the postponement of the truth. While in O'Connor's approach to the oral storytelling, the listener's easy grasping of the truth, the messages, counsels, and moral anecdotes, is alluded, Benjamin considers it as a reciprocal operation. That is why according to him, Kafka's parables are more than parables. They „unfold into a blossom like a bud turns into a blossom” (Benjamin 1968a: 122). This is not an unfolding of a sheet out of which children make a boat, because in this kind of unfolding the reader finds the meaning ready in his hand (Benjamin 1968a: 122). On the contrary, in Kafka's parables the meaning is deferred till death.

It is here, in this deferral that the reader can fail reading. What Benjamin does with his paradoxical gesture of both including the short story to the oral storytelling and excluding the genre from it is to perform a reading that exceeds the frames of the genre. He strikingly refers to Kafka's novels to highlight Kafka the storyteller. Storytelling is not a matter of form and genre for Benjamin. It is rather a matter of postponement of narrative through the process of forgetting and remembering. The short story theories, even when they push the strictly formal concerns, try to find the ways of grasping the meaning as if the short story is a boat that the writer does by folding a paper. What Benjamin shows us is that the reader is suspending before the laws of literature. If Kafka's *Before the Law* can become both a parable and a fragment of a novel, we can only say the door of the law was there. Framing the literary texts with their genres may result in the framing of readings because of expectation, of what Cortázar calls „fore-seen parameters”.

4. Falling Short of Detection: Intention and Innovation

As long as there is literary history, criticism and theory we will have the categories. This is a natural result of being before the laws of literature. As Jacques Derrida states in *Before the Law*, „What matters here is that these obscure presuppositions are also the lot of „guardians”, critics, academics, literary theorists, writers, and philosophers. They all have to appeal to a law and appear before it, at once to watch over it and be watched by

it" (Derrida 1992: 215). The presupposition of this article is that there is a genre called the short story with its conventional attributes as well as recalcitrant resistances. The question is not whether we should categorize it under a generic title or not. The question is rather, what kind of possibilities its conventional or resistant traits may open for suffering before the law. Dwelling in its most conventional characteristic that it is a story which is short not necessarily in length but due to the gaps it opens in the narrative, one can suggest that the gaps are already intrinsic to the narrative. We do not read for the narration of events, but it is the narration itself, which is the event. The short story then can be understood as the unforeseen within the unforeseen.

In *Vast as the night* Blanchot suggests that „Reading is ignorant. It begins with what it reads and in this way discovers the force of a beginning. It is receiving and hearing, not the power to decipher and analyze, to go beyond by developing or to go back before by laying bare; it does not comprehend (strictly speaking), it attends" (Blanchot 1993: 320). Considering that most of the short story theories have been interested in the enlightenment of the reader, Blanchot's perception of „dark" reading might explain how one can stay in the unforeseen.

As pointed out before, according to Poe, a good writer plans everything in advance in order to provide a unity of effect. Blanchot's question in „Literature and the Right to Death" may well apply to the short story writer at this point: „But if the work is already present in its entirety in his mind and if this presence is the essence of the work (taking the words for the time being to be inessential), why would he realize any further?" (Blanchot: 362) The work, according to him, attains a value only through the process of writing itself, with the unfolding of the words line by line. In fact, it is this unfolding which connects the writer and the reader, since Blanchot argues that the words do not belong to the writer, but they are universal. Thus, while in Poe's formulation there is a certain distinction between the writer and the reader, Blanchot considers both as the active participants of creation. The literary work becomes an „unforeseeable innovation" (Blanchot: 371).

According to Blanchot, the writer is nothing before his work exists, but once the work exists it begins to disappear as it belongs to others. However, belonging to others does not mean that it is written to be read by a public as this kind of reading is not reading, but rather writing. The public writes the work when the writer considers the public during the act of writing. What is essential to literature is existence as disappearance, a force of negation, silence and nothingness, which creates the „unforeseeable innovation" (Blanchot: 371). Before such an innovation, which Blanchot calls „other" — as there is a gap between the writer's project and the result — the writer becomes other too. Even the former other is the latter's becoming other himself (Blanchot: 371). The literary power of transforming the things into other depends on language as negativity. It is a language freed from referentiality, giving the reader the „absence of being" or the destruction of existence. When the writer becomes everyone, he loses his/her authority paving the way for the work to speak. While literature speaks, death also speaks in literature: „I no longer represent, I am; I do not signify, I present" (Blanchot: 384). Literature „being" and „presenting", continuously finds itself in the undercurrents running against themselves, a condition which finds its expression in Blanchot's concept of „blind vigilance"

(Blanchot: 388). While this concept refers to an obsession that defines the depth of the literary work as a „bottomless abyss” (Blanchot: 388), it evokes the idea of death that is intrinsic to literature due to the possible analogy between death and ending of a literary work. As Blanchot observes in *Literature and the Original Experience*, „The end, in this perspective, would no longer be that which gives man the power to end — to limit, separate, and thus to grasp- but the infinite: the dreadful infinitude on account of which the end can never be overcome” (Blanchot 1982: 241). Literature suffers anonymity or what Blanchot calls „the force of an event” (Blanchot: 241).

When the „force of an event” becomes the event itself, the end of a literary work cannot be simply its closure. Timothy Clark’s article *Not Seeing the Short Story: A Blind Phenomenology of Reading* responds to this problem by replacing closure by enclosure. Clark defines „blindness of the short story” as the „lack of the trompe-l’œil effects of a lengthy context” (Clark 2004: 8). Taking realism as the object of his comparison, he proposes that the short story form tends to lack the realist observations which are true according to the conventions of realism due to its poetic nature. In other words, from the perspective of the reader response theories, the degree of „concretization” is less in a short piece than in a long one. The brevity of the short story, according to Clark, signifies fundamentally its boundedness, its „enclosure” more than its openness, its „closure”, as there are short stories with the anticipated ends in addition to the recalcitrant ones, but in all of them the readers strongly feel that they are „in” a text, whose end will soon come. The sense of immediacy here distinguishes the short story from the novel (Clark: 22). What he means by enclosure is the sense of finitude, but this does not mean that the meaning is in the borders of the narrative.

[...] there is an experience of, simultaneously, completion or saturation — achieved modes of reading and closure in the limited sense may well have been fulfilled — but also of finitude, of having reached a limit or a border but without being able to formulate what might be beyond it, for there is no secure alternative space from which the predicament could be overseen (Clark: 18).

One can argue that in such a predicament the reader becomes a detective similar to Sherlock Holmes in *The Final Problem* and *A Scandal in Bohemia* (Doyle 1965). In these two detective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, „reasoning and observing machine” meets his intellectual equals, Prof. Moriarty in *The Final Problem* and Irene Adler in *A Scandal in Bohemia*. Because the basic rule of his detection is the identification with the opponent’s intellect and act accordingly, in these two cases, his method fails. When Watson asks Holmes, what Moriarty will do, he replies, „What I should do” (Doyle: 172). The equality of the intellects limits his vision creating a dialogic action. The predicament that Clark puts forward in the short story might be analogized to Holmes’s helplessness in these stories. Holmes the reader of the intellects cannot see the whole, since he cannot transcend his own intellectual capacity.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the short story theories, which this article aimed to cover in the first part, have often engaged, either explicitly or implicitly, with the image of the detective reader. In spite of the variety of perspectives on the significance of the shortness, there has been a tendency towards the portrait of the reader as a vigilant observer who can understand the conventions and techniques of the genre and who has enough insight to reach a totality from the episodic structure of the short story. In fact, the genre has been elevated to a high art through a stress on its need to have qualified readers. The image of the detective reader implies an apparent mastery of the reader as a person who understands the intentions of the writer and deciphers the truth concealed in this concentrated form. In contrast to the general tendency, this article suggested that the short story becomes short in so far as it has short-sighted readers. Falling short of reading means suffering the short-sightedness in the unforeseeability of the unforeseen.

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