Fragment as a Storytelling Device

EVELINA SAPONJIC JOVANOVIC

Abstract

The hypothesis underlying this article is that Short Fiction as a genre perpetually in the process of positioning itself elsewhere. Short Fiction weaves unconventional and schematized forms of writing that open up allegorical interpretations and displace the integrity of the writing self. The crisp controlled sequences in short fiction produce a constellation of practices that multiply spatial contingency. Built on the dichotomy of the authentic self and its alienation, short narratives mobilize the zero degree of storytelling nd the ghost in the machine by manipulating spatiotemporal narrative structures. In doing this, they turn the narrative into a process of engagement and an act of performance on the part of the reader, thus altering the prior ways of storytelling. The short story becomes a way of practicing the fiction of identity at a time when the self is in constant change, vastly increasing the possibilities of transitory commitments and fragmented relationships.

Keywords: flash fiction, micronarratives, modernism, fragment, digitalization.

Introduction

The achievement of the short story is admittedly fragile. It is built upon semantic ambiguities, language games, paradox and irony; feeding upon a stolen presence acquired by dynamics of perpetual de-centring and manipulation. The quicksand substratum of short stories defines the unity of meaning as well as the identity of the self; that is, the telling of the story by the 'who' of discourse. The short story can be contemplated as a solution to the modern preoccupation with self-estrangement brought about by the accumulation of information and also by its speed, enabled by media technologies. In its openness to the reader, the short story offers an artistic response to the human need of narratives that make sense of their origins and destiny. Aesthetics and style can be seen as techniques that tell of how reality is accessed and recorded and serve to express cultural patterns or specific worldviews. Each style attaches value to certain properties of thought over others.

The reduplicated perspective of the Self forms part of a semiotic structure of multiplicity that overwrites the story's meaning-in-process. As a result of the interpretative dilemma, the reader is charged with the task of deciding. Identity is called into question in the divisibility of the 'I'. One part of the Self lives in a dream world, the other determines the corporeal reality by facing the devaluation of his/her own standards. The energy of creativity thus comes from the presence of Apollo-Dionysus polarities, transposed by the language-based memory of the historical past. The 'I' of the short story is no longer in control of language; it is not attached to the principle of traceability of a single subject. It dissolves in the multiplicative artistic play of Bakhtin's voices; of self-definitions (Park-Fuller, 1986). The formation of meanings in the short story is largely determined by the construction and deconstruction of these person positions, faces and voices that mobilize the text, and by the similarly non-identifiable spatiality of the contexts, creating indeterminacies and open articulations of the past and the future.

The Short Story uses different techniques in order to articulate this mutant narrative form that voices diverse textual realizations of the 'I', opening the writer to the reader. In a sense, Short fictions are forms of emphatic narratives that discipline poetry into objectivity while weaving subjectivity and affect into prose. Their structure in process overwrites the ideological nature of ossified meanings by scrutinizing the texts' indeterminacies and their topological paradoxes while simultaneously maintaining a certain contextual and biographical determinacy as meaningful factors (Juvan, 2008). Their unusual doubling destabilizes the territorial determinacy of self-identity and leaves behind the obviousness of a univocal form of narrative based on memory and experience, opening itself to reader response.

To these means, this article sheds new light upon the story of short stories and their development into their new online format as they maintain their transformative power. As the inquiry presupposes that the mapping of earlier short story formats onto their new online forms, a referential comparison to earlier examples is performed. Although there are references to earlier forms of the short story, as well as a brief study of the fragment as 'device' in the 19th century, the research is focused toward the 20th century, tracing the influence of the avant-gardes upon its evolution towards contemporary forms of Flash Fiction which tend to overcome the formal disposition towards closure of Modernism.

1. Methodological Concerns

At the end of the 19th century, literary fiction and criticism casted off the restrictions of space. With the introduction of steam-powered printing presses, pulp mills, automatic type setting there were many improvements in the printing, publishing and book-distribution, reaching all corners of the world with the increase of transportation networks. Inexpensive books bound in paper like pamphlets, yellow backs and dime novels were popular.

Serialization was another way in which longer narratives reached the public in the monthly instalments of popular journals. We are not often conscious about the fact of how the development of narrative fiction was indeed bound by strict publishing rules, as well as enclosed national paradigms.

It was only in the 20th century that stories embraced a spatial mobility beyond the bounded space of the printed page and the borders of the nation. For centuries, stories were ruled by space before they were able to traverse it. As Formalist and Structuralist critics realized, technique and style were the core tools for storytelling creation. Their struggle with the structural frameworks of artistic expression, and the engagement of authors in this process reminds that "Modernism is less a style than a search for style" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991, 29). In their guide to Modernism, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane deplore the use of a single term for a phenomenon that involved a variety of different artistic groups such as Impressionism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism and Surrealism. The term 'Modernism' is more a sort of stylistic abstraction of "forbiddingly intertwined and overlapped producing a doubtful synthesis of many movements radically different in kind and degree." (1991, 44-5) Indeed, this explanation shows the desire to move beyond comparison by linear contact to fractal and networked comparison across levels, characteristic of 20th century evolution of thought.

Modernist fiction subverts established modes of discourse. (2) It is interested in various states of consciousness. (3) As a result, introspection and other modes of introversion outweigh the significance of "external, 'objective' events essential to traditional narrative." (4) Due to its focus on individual experience Modernist novels have no real beginning and tend to have open endings. (5) The dissolution of narrative structures leads to "alternative methods of aesthetic ordering," such as the reference to "mythical archetypes and the repetition-with-variation of motifs, images, symbols." (6) Chronological ordering and the use of reliable narrators are replaced with fragmentating perspectives (1977, 45-6).

Let´s remember that the term 'Modernism' has been used retrospectively by critics who desire to identify, classify and reassemble a number of diverging avant-garde movements of early 20th century, all of which showed a desire to transcend the text and reimagine new textual configurations beyond the printed page as well as new geopolitical relationships in the comparison of themes. In the postmodern condition, as Lyotard would have it, art and criticism show a desire to move beyond the dominance of historization, searching for forms of inter-medial and trans-medial reading across space and time (López-Varela 2002). In spite of their problematic denominations, Modernism and postmodernism allude to common denominators among a myriad of artistic trends and movements. One of such is the claim that the 'modern' implies a "radical re-imagining" (Kermode 1971, 65) of the past, rather than the continuity of an obsolete state of affairs.

More to the point is the description by French sociologist of science, Bruno Latour, who indicates that:

> [t]he adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern,' 'modernization,' or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns. 'Modern' is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished (1993:10)

Such definition reveals the tensions and conflicts that arise between period categorization, akin to those that exist between genre divides. What Bradbury and McFarlane write about the sense artists have of participating in "totally novel times" and of an emerging "new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind" (1991, 22) could have been the description of similar feelings during the Romantic period. As Randall Stevenson observes, Modernism could be seen as a sort of utopian compensation for the dehumanising nature of daily life; "as a late extension of Romanticism" (Stevenson 1992,78). The problem of definition and categorization comes once more to the fore, simply because all human stories seek to capture attention; to be made unique. This leads us to a number of questions…is uniqueness about essentialism and singularity? Can infinity be captured? How do we make the world into a nutshell? Why do short stories attempt the impossible?

2. Spaces and Times of the Research

Recent developments in digital archiving and data mining are eroding not just the borders of conventional historical and literary periods. Infographics have change the way we do 'close' reading, focusing in the particular. Comparisons are now done using greater spectrum of times and spaces, including interdisciplinary, intermedial and even transmedial accounts. Franco Moretti's 'distant reading' is a revolution in storytelling (Moretti 2013). In a scenario of algorithmic change, we may wonder how our sense of novelty and uniqueness apply to these rapid changing human configurations. Indeed, the sense of 'the modern', as Charles Baudelaire noted while walking the city, revisions in world views are associated to rapidly changing environments.

While the pace of nature is slower, the significance of technological advance in the transfiguration of our world cannot be underestimated. As Theodor Adorno puts it, "[a]rt is modern when, by its mode of experience and as the expression of the crisis of experience, it absorbs what industrialization has developed" (1944,34), thus destroying and creating new

social, and even natural, environments. That is, the collapse of pictographic/ hieroglyphic language representations and the emergence of the domination of the eye in alphabetic writing is evident in early stories such as the fall of Babel, or the myth of Echo and Narcissus, a story of the fall into silence of the oral tradition.

Bradbury and McFarlane assert the immense impact of technological transformations and science (Darwin or Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle) upon modern art, as well as "[…] the destruction of traditional notions of the wholeness of individual character." (1991, 27) Alienation, displacement and exile (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991, 11) are possible the three most popular words to characterize the modern. The three have spatial connotations. When coming to the postmodern, frontiers are no longer in "dangerous flux" (13).

In a creative swift, long ago, back when the world was young - that is, sometime around the year1958 - a lot of artists and composers and other people who wanted to do beautiful things began to look at the world around them in a new way (for them).They said: "Hey! - coffee cups can be more beautiful than fancy sculptures. A kiss in the morning can be more dramatic than a drama by Mr. Fancypants. The sloshing of my foot in my wet boot sounds more beautiful than fancy organ music" And when they saw that, it turned their minds on. And they began to ask questions. One question was: "Why does everything I see that's beautiful like cups and kisses and sloshing feet have to be made into just a part of something fancier and bigger? Why can't I just use it for its own sake? (Dick Higgins 2009).

Moreover, the catastrophe of technological advance holds the seeds of a hypothetical power of 'self-repair'. The always provisional (new) architectures, both within and outside the computer, may be a "magnificent disaster", reinforcing the necessity to look at creativity not just as "the presence of sophistication, difficulty and novelty in art; it also suggests bleakness, darkness, alienation, disintegration" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991, 26). Short Fiction has found ways of looking beyond the notion of discontinuity, integral to the apocalyptic outlook advocated by some Modernisms.

The ontology of Short Fiction plays on the impossibility of reification, urbanization and mechanization of industrial society. Short Fiction, as we shall try to show, constructs a whole fictional world with the minimum amount of bricks and simultaneously destructs it. Thus, it transgressing any mournful or distressing sense of the fragment as unique and essential. The deconstructive work of Short Fiction posits alternative spatiotemporal frameworks that use forms of hybrid narratology to avoid locating textual meaning in a unit; not matter whether this unit is short or long. Consequently, a more complex alternative to contemporary characterization of the genre of Short Fiction remains to be developed; one that would read not just across or against periods within intra-historical micro-frames. Is it

possible to practice something like a trans-historical close-reading to supplement and complement distant-reading as we enter the big data era? My argument is that trans-historical comparison, as I attempt to do in this dissertation, does not involve reading across a wider time scale but thinking and performing comparison across category folds, including a number of variables that can be studied in their replication across structural levels.

By combining a close attention to these trans-historical concerns, the research also draws from Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's model of 'surface reading,' a critical practice that focuses primarily on the text's immediate properties instead of taking it as an opportunity for "symptomatic reading," plumbing the text for the meaning latent in its manifest content.

3. Short Fiction as 'device'

The word 'text' may be too broad of a term when talking about very brief forms of Short Fiction. Thus, the primary method of this analysis is to examine a single device. Drawing on Viktor Shklovsky's classic theorization in "Art as Device," I consider the Short Story as a trans-historical trans-literary device, staging an interaction between the fluidity of present, past and future in formal terms, and uniquely concerned with questions of the limits of memory and intermedial representation. The trans-literary here refers to two fundamental aspects. First, to the capacity of Short Fiction to create mental (also perhaps aural) images (beyond alphabetic writing). Second, to the possibility of replicating Short Fiction in digital electronic literature formats where letters are mobilized in such a way as to become images.

In order to speak of the term 'device', we need to go back to Viktor Shklovsky's essay "Art as Device" (1917). The essay is perhaps mostly known by the importance that the term *ostraniene*, translated commonly as "defamiliarization" acquired in Modernism. According to Shklovsks, art has the unique capacity to bring to life or reanimate the everyday world made invisible by habit:"after being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of 'recognition.' An object appears before us. We know [it is] there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can say nothing about it" (6). In the complex net of human memories, "recognition" is the key word that, with the right aesthetic devices, allows us to see the world anew again; to experience it perceptually. Art is a device that touches us affectively and allows the stone become "stony", as the author's famously put it.

Shklovsky asserts that art is thinking in images" and that these images are relatively static, crossing history "without change" (2). Shklovsky seems to present images as essences that endure and last," and "belong to 'no one,' except perhaps to 'God'" (Ibid.). He adds "The more you try to explain an epoch, the more you are convinced that the images you thought were created by a given poet were, in reality, passed on to him by others with hardly a change (Ibid.). Images are, thus, basic units, possibly invariant because of

the physical limitations of human perception and cognition. Aesthetics, for Shklovsky, is the use of identifiable techniques, structures, or manipulations of language that cumulatively produce the work of art. This he calls the "device," which is no other than *ostranenie* (9), later interpreted as "otherness". His argument reveals *ostranenie* to be not a device, but the possible effect or consequence of any device, since he illustrates his theory with an example from Tolstoy that focuses on the linguistic substitution of a verb with the literal description of the activity, injecting a bizarre character in the narrative. His second example involves *ostranenie* using the opposite technique that is, using figurative language to describe a sexual activity (10).

Repetition, that is, *experience within time*, is necessary for a perception to become both habitual and automatic (5) Automatic recognition, for Shklovsky, is an "algebraic method of thinking" in which "objects are grasped spatially" (5). The delayed perception produced by art reverse this process: "The object is perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity" (12). Indeed, through art, the spatial becomes the temporal, and recognition returns to vision. Shklovsky claims that "(the) life of a poem (and of an artifact) proceeds from vision to recognition, from poetry to prose, from the concrete to the general [. . .]. As the work of art dies, it becomes broader" (6). In Shklovsky's description, the transformation of artistic devices from perception to recognition moves first linearly, at the level of individual memory, only to transcend to a "broader" interpretative non-linear scenario; another level where, using the simile of poetry and music, Shklovsky claims that "we are dealing here not so much with a more complex rhythm as with a disruption of rhythm itself, a violation, we may add, that can never be predicted" (14). Such unexpected break takes the notion of the device from the linearity of perspectival vision to the aural temporal dimension of simultaneity, where the leap to another fractal level of representation can be possible.

Clearly, the notion *ostranenie* is related not just to the conditions in which perception moves beyond automatic recognition, but to the aesthetic devices that enable the flight of the mind, that is, the possibility of transcending the contingent by playing in non- linear scales. Furthermore, Shklovsky's oscillation between *ostranenie* as device and as phenomenon, between metaphor and metonymy signals it a powerful semiotic tool that seeks to transcend spatial levels and temporal frameworks by assuming specific, even if mutant, instantiations.

Shklovsky's account of the device enables us to pose new questions about Short Fiction and its shorter variations. What can they reveal about the nature of the genre and its transhistorical persistence? Short Fiction harkens back to earlier times and hybrid scenes of prose-poetry, generating an effect of both belatedness and originality. The oral tradition could be considered to be a primal scene of minimal forms of technologies of memory, as short narratives are, devices designed to capture both attention and recollection as kernels of information or memes to be passed on, as Jack Zipes (2008)

has claimed. Over time, this oral tradition was written down, first on the printed page; more recently digitized onto our screens. In this vein, our argument is that Short Fiction is a node in the aural/visual cultural network of memory and language.

Moreover, Short Fiction stages memory as "mediation", that is, as "strategic narrative", both in its instability in-between a fact-fictional function that attempts to capture attention and reduce it to an mental image, a device destined to be memorized and recollected, and in-between its spatial limitations that, as Jacques Derrida would have it, claim a presence that actually masks and evokes a loss. This reduction also produces an articulated silence, a deliberate gap at the heart of the story. For example, with narrative conflict minimalized, characters, as if suspended in time, become signs for the unnamed and the unnameable; spectral presences lurking beyond the spatial finitude of the readable text. These absences within Short Fiction may also indicate its deep relationship to the act of mourning that follows the loss; the breaking of causality; the void of the silenced text. Internal time in Short Fiction, that is, the links between the narrative situations presented, is almost obliterated. External time (on this see Genette as well as Ricoeur), which forges links between the text and the cultural situation it ostensibly represents, is activated on the surface of Short Fiction. The temporal gap enables a poetic-like rhythm that yields a ghostly trace behind the apparent simplicity, transparency and economy of the narrative structure. The void opens to the reader in the form of virtual interpretations to come, paradoxically saturated with plenitude. With this in mind, it can be claimed that the birth of Short Fiction is a ghost story.

4. On the Limits of Short Fiction: The Fragment as Device

We are at each instant only fragments deprived of meaning if we do not relate these fragments to other fragments. (Bataille 1989, 165). The ghostly presence of the fragment can be traced in aphoristic writings, present in the earliest historical accounts (for instance in the hybrid genre of chronicle); in the first philosophical wanderings, whereas in Chinese Confucian thought or in pre-socratic Western examples, developed from the Greek and Latin tradition in the form of apologues and epigrams. It is present in the short of the shortest fictional forms of oral storytelling in all cultural traditions. It served as a "stimulus to polite conversation" in the salon culture of the 17th and 18th centuries (Kubiak 1994, 413) and it contributed to public and oral popular culture as a mode of capturing attention, from the Romans to Oscar Wilde. Interestingly, Kubiak also notes, the aphorism pursued a mode of persuasion that lays outside the kind of rationalism typically associated with Cartesian logic. Rather than an appeal to reason, aphorisms were used to deliver moral lessons by directly affecting the senses of audiences. In other words, aphorisms were performative rhetorical devices. As such, they

followed a series of operations to challenge common sense meanings by introducing a main topic and a secondary one that contrasts with the first. What is left is the imaginative interpretation or the expression of possible latent meanings by means of additional commentaries, either on the part of the speaker, or in a dialogue with the audience.

Accordingly, Matthew Bell explains that the fragment may have become a particularly useful device for attacking the system of Enlightenment reason, particularly at the turn of the 18th century circle (1994, 389). However, unlike the aphorism, which was usually accompanied by a title, the fragment, as used by the Jena, constituted as polemic declaration of negativity, refusing resolution and unity (1994, 373) The influence the romantic fragment had on literature, poetry, and philosophical criticism was studied by Jean-Luc Nancy, with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in their *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism,*1988, a volume that explored the work of a group of German writers and critics, including Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schelling, and Novalis, who were all involved with the journal *The Athenaeum.* The group placed significant attention on the fragment as a process from which the idea of an integral work of art could emerge. Indeed, the romantic fragment made it possible to think of the work of art as productive of its own conditions rather than being evidence of something else.

To write in fragments risks producing a work that has been severed from its outside, that has lost all relation, that is at rest in the "blissful tranquility" of meanings that have been determined in advance, as Friedrich Schlegel observed (1991, Fragment 169). In this vein, this analysis suggests the possibility that the romantic fragment may not be exclusively a product of literary and philosophical analysis, but also might be a symptom of a broader cultural disposition that informed the origins of western modernity. One of the first things to remark is the lack of definition, explanation and even description of the fragment in the works of the Jena circle. The word itself seems to indicate a rupture, a resistance to complete meaning, almost like Short Fiction, as we shall see in the following chapter. If romanticism inaugurates a movement or gesture towards the fragment, Modernism can be understood as the anxious search for structural closure and formally limited totalities. In *The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Genre*, Camelia Elias suggests that "The modernist fragment repeats and rationalizes the process whereby it is achieved." (2004, 133),"[…]the composition forming around me was a prolonged present" as Gertrude Stein describes in *Writings and Lectures* (1971, 25) The economy of the fragment, its suspension, never involves a totality, and thus, it cannot shatter a unity that was never there. It is "forever becoming [*ewig nur werden*] and never perfected" (Schlegel "Atheneum Fragments" 1991, 32). The fragment is no longer and not yet; it is meanwhile and an in-between. It interrupts causality and sequence. "A fragment, like a miniature work of

art, has to be entirely isolated [*abgesondert*] from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine" (45).

In *The Unfinished Manner,* Elizabeth W. Harries offers another view on the fragment by focusing on English examples drawn from Sir Joshua Reynolds, Jonathan Swift or Sterne's *Tristam Shandy.* Her analysis focuses upon the sketchiness and digressive structure of the pieces, which became enormously popular in contemporary journals as they were accompanied by caricatures, political and moral jokes, calling into question rational unity with deliberate constructions of human folly. Harries argues that "[t]he lines actually on the canvas, the words actually on the page are synecdoches; the beholder or reader expands or "finishes" their suggestive, unfinished forms. The more indistinct or incomplete their forms, the more the reader is required to do." (Harries 1994, 44) For Marjorie Levinson, fragments direct audiences towards an absence and essential incompletion, a state of existential anxiety (1986, 26-33). In all these accounts, formal irresolution invites an interpretative reception on the part of the audience. The fragments is not an active device. It "subsides into textuality, patiently awaiting the next structural opportunism" (Levinson 1986,199).

Related to this, in her study on Pushkin, Monika Greenleaf mentions that the particular characteristics of the fragment make it cut "across the traditional boundaries between the arts" (1994, 14). Greenleaf assigns the fragment a particular place in the development of "culture's perception of itself as Modern" (Ibid.) Greenleaf argues that the early 19th century was an era of artistic production in which the fragment brought an essential problematisation to questions of the appearance, production and reception of works of art, and to the very idea of creation (Ibid.) Indeed, the fragment became the episteme of the tendency to fragmentation evidenced also at the turn of the 20th century by authors such as Nietzsche, and congruent later with the fractured identities of modernity and the artistic avant-gardes. When referring to the aphorism in his volume *On the Genealogy of Morals,* Nietzsche writes that it requires an "art of exegesis" (1989: 23) He draws attention to the fact that an aphorism seeks to *differ,* as Derrida would have it. Nietzsche insists that the aphorism "has not been '*deciphered*' when it has simply been read". (Ibid. emphasis in the original) Indeed, it is a singularity which becomes meaningful in the rational linguistic system in which it operates only when it is deferred beyond.

In *Meta-romanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (2003), Paul Hamilton discusses some of the characteristics of the fragment as suggestively incomplete longing in its failure to disclose an alluring unattainable wholeness; to reach a conclusion or map its object. The fragment displaces the authority of knowledge onto a momentary feeling. But does the fragment relate to any other larger items? Does it defeat transience? "Is it a metonym, or a metaphorical likeness? Is it a word in a language, or a piece in a puzzle? Is it a love-letter to its other half, or a philosophy of irony, a knowledge of

ignorance?" writes Hamilton in his study of Leopardi. He goes on to explore Novalis' re-evaluation of the relationship between poetry and prose in *Logolologie*, which based on a dialectical theory between the idea of the fragment and that of prose-poetry. Novalis arrives at the same conclusion that Zoltán Kövecses in his studies of cognitive metaphor (see for example 2009), that the very structure of human cognition, in particular those aspects more closely related to creativity, are typically poetic, because this is the way by which humans perpetuate themselves in new forms. Hamilton moves on to the trace Novalis leaves upon Walter Benjamins idea of the magical adequacy of a poem to its idea (*Sprachmagie*) which "works by the extension of its dynamic individuality into the prosaic sobriety of other discourses, an extension Benjamin will eventually call its reproducibility (*Reproduzierbarkeit*)." (Hamilton 2013, He adds that "for Benjamin, reproducibility is a democratizing of access to the work of art which, at one stroke, destroys its 'aura' by rendering the work's uniqueness fragmentary, only one part of the unfolding history of its continuing significance in different forms." (Ibid.) Poetry, in this sense, is a fragment of a larger creativity or craft (poïesis; on this see López-Varela 2017).

Indeed, the expansion of poetry into prose, a phenomenon that takes place particularly during the Romantic period, is akin to the expansion of the aphorism (the fragment) into philosophy. Hamilton concludes that "Then poetry's fragmentariness in a world of creativity gives it an afterlife in the ways in which its peculiar formative power is reproduced in other disciplines and activities for which it can still provide inspiration without dissociating itself from what they are doing." (Hamilton 2013: 161).

Through the nineteenth and the twentieth century, short writings, often shaped as fragments, whether literary (Charles Baudelaire, Franz Kafka, Ramón Gomez de la Serna, Edmond Jabès, Félix Fénéon), or historical and philosophical (Friedrich Nietzsche, Alain, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Wilhelm Adorno, Maurice Blanchot), became means of interrogating knowledge. To Giorgo Agamben, the fragment, alienated from its context, is "an alienating power" with "unmistakable aggressive force" (1999, 104) that emerges not just in the French Symbolism, but with particular strength in the explosion of fragmentary writing that takes place in Italian Futurism. The fragment, writes Maurice Blanchot is a new kind of arrangement not entailing harmony, concordance, or reconciliation, but that accepts disjunction or divergence as the infinite center from out of which, through speech, relation is to be created: an arrangement that does not compose but juxtaposes, that is to say, leaves each of the terms that come into relation *outside* one another, respecting and preserving this *exteriority* and this distance as the principle— always already undercut [*toujours déjà destitué*]—of all signification. Juxtaposition and interruption here assume [*de chargent ici*] an extraordinary force of justice.

5. Digitising the Fragment

Short Fiction writers show a concern with the linear model of time based on the principles of succession and the infinite divisibility of temporal fragments. In order to overcome the intellectual problems posed by linearity and divisibility, from the 20th century, Short Fiction writers begin to use models based on folds or networks and rhizomas. These models have the advantage of moving across structural levels because they take into consideration dynamic networked structures, that is, systems and processes. Some of the narrative strategies proposed in these models present alternative theories of linearity, with ideas taken from the theory of parallel universes or the one about forks in time, which derive from post-Einsteinian physics. The narratives of Lewis Carroll already show this concern with the problem of divisibility, illustrated with Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise, which also appears in Jorge Luis Borges' essay *The Perpetual Race of Achilles and the Tortoise*. Indeed, our way of relating to reality is based on the intellectual understanding of linear succession while our sensorial perception, which often experiences time as flux, also experiences the sameness of certain recurrent moments. This sameness, in the form of temporal simultaneity, is the object of much Futurist experimentation. The experience of a sense of sameness between past, present and their projection onto the future can be made into a feeling that time has not passed, building the individual momentary experience into a sense of eternity, as William Wordsworth does in his poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (also known as "Daffodils") or in his well-known recollection of "Tintern Abbey" in the *Lyrical Ballads.* By focusing on a natural object, with a longer time span, the human concept of time as duration loses its meaning, and the sense of interval between moments falls away completely, opening the aesthetic to the experience of the 'sublime'.

Nevertheless, spatial discreteness and the sense of divisibility attached to objects (matter in space) and their location is a pre-condition of human perception and understanding. To image object as metamorphic matter, able to change shape beyond the Euclidean three-dimensional world, requires moving to a higher level of cognitive abstraction. Writers have used different forms of representing infinite division in a way that it is easily understood. In Borges' story "Funes el memorioso" (1942), the protagonist develops an incredible capacity to remember every detail of past experiences as well as all the sensorial perceptions which accompanied them. His memory stores all the parts and perceptions which constitute a single moment of recollection, displayed as separate points on a sort of horizontal plane or surface which he sees all the time, similar to contemporary online infographic displays, but with a difference. Funes mentally maps all his memories made up of components in fixed positions. He does not remember through association of ideas, which would cross space levels. Unlike online maps, Funes' does not allow zoom in to see the networked structures across levels. This form of recollecting and imagining space has consequences, because Funes is

unable to see how an object call 'dog' can contain many different types and specimens; nor understand that viewed from different angles, 'dog' is the same animal. He can only see a multiform world which was instantaneously and almost intolerably exact. Funes is not able to think because to think is to forget difference, to generalize and abstract, writes Borges. Unable to zoom to another level of the network, Borges creates an alternative to the linearity of time and to sequential succession through the theory of forking paths, a labyrinth of infinite temporal pathways each of which forks in different lines or presents. This overcomes the problem posed by Zeno's paradox; that is how time can proceed over discreteness; how continuity is made up of fragments that fork, not derived from one single past moment only, since each present moment comes from different forking pasts and yields different forking futures.

Conclusion

We make ours Funes' concerns with types and specimens. How then does the fragment connect to the story of Short Fiction? The last part of this analysis explores the visibility of fragmentary (poetic) structures we call by many names –short stories, micro-narratives, Short Fiction; particularly as short stories approach short short stories and online formats, in what is known as Flash Fiction.

As we have shown, much of the appeal of the fragment to Romantics and Modernist alike was related to its indefinable pleasure (various authors (i.e. Schlegel, Nietzsche, etc.) use the term 'cryptic'; its 'aura', as Benjamin would describe it; grounded in a sort of poetic impalpability; an uncertainty that cannot be framed or systematized, rendering an instantaneous sense of fleeting shock and emptiness, without visible embodiment. Our argument here is that this foreign alterity is an intruding force in the space of the image. The uncanny nature of the image can only be told by means of a language that forces its limits, conveying the ineffable through a language device. In Borges' model, objects are approached as if from a bird-eye point of view; filled with superficial images mostly related to spaces and distances, yielding the vision of a whole geographical region in the horizon almost as a mode of surveillance. A contemporary theory, that of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, maps knowledge in a different way. The theory of rhizome proposes a model of knowledge as an assemblage or a multiplicity of discrete elements involved in a system of anti-hierarchical relations. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is essentially a map "entirely oriented toward [...] experimentation. [...] open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification." It also "has multiple entryways" and "it has to do with performance." (1987, 12) Performance is a way to trace the process of becoming by acting to connect nodes in the network of discrete elements. In a long narrative, visualized as an online hypertext, nodes function as pages in different

contexts. A click on a link to visit those pages can change the original course of action and thought. A new system of correspondences, alternative to the traditional causal referential process, is created. It is no longer based on linearity or sequence of thoughts in large strings of text. It may move in shorter spans of language units, like the digits of a hand.

My argument in relation to the above discussion on the 'fragment' is that its role is to open other possibilities of reading, insofar as the fragment is constructed as a space of tension, eschewing the principles of diurnal logic and rationality, and seeking an empathic 'tuning' of the reader in order to trigger his/her participation in interpretation of the silenced aspects which the fragment contains. For example, the fragment may be constituted by a string first of adjectival phrases without verbs and, hence, not much action. The economy of syntax proper of the fragment uses no coordination, offering a prime example of what is known as parataxis. One might argue that such a technique develops a superabundance of details or anecdotes, less designed to characterize objects and events exactly than to open up a large number of non-exclusive possibilities of disjunctive logic, each of which seems to point in a different direction. In this sense, a list or words, for instance, is a mysterious form that gives the impression of shapelessness, infinitely extendable. In interpretation, fragments are piled up at several levels, rather than mapped in a linear roll through time; that is, they are extendable through insertion between fixed limits. What is contradictory is only what happens at another moment, what would exist as if in another, different, little story.

Thus, the fragment, and by extension Short Fiction, is built upon an irreducible ambiguity which requires the reader to use not just reason but also other irrational devices. This form of reading reassesses discursive practices and dissolves the borders between languages, for instance those termed 'scientific' and those closer to 'the aesthetic'. In the case of fragment, which appear as disconnected details, interpretation may include the momentary abdication of reason, letting the intuition come to the rational mind as an unexpected flash, as in Flash Fiction.

Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

Works Cited

Bataille, Georges (1989). *The Tears of Eros*. Trans. Peter O'Connor. San Francisco: City Lights.

Agamben, Giorgio (1999). *The Man Without Content*, transl. by Georgia Albert. Stanford: Stanford University Press: 104-115.

Bell, Matthew (1994). The Idea of Fragmentariness in German Literature and Philosophy, 1760-1800. *Modern Language Review, Vol. 89*, 372-392

Blanchot, Maurice (1988). *L'espace littéraire,* Gallimard.

Bradbury, Malcolm, and James Mc Farlane, eds. (1991) *Modernism: 1890-1930.* London: Penguin.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Elias, Camelia (2004). *The Fragment: Towards a History and Poetics of a Performative Genre*, Comparative Literature Series XVIII, Vol. 112. Bern: Peter Lang.

Freud, Sigmund (1953-74). *Standard Edition*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols. London: The Hogarth Press, Vol. II.

Greenleaf, Monika (1994). *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*, Stanford University Press.

Juvan, Marko (2008). *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.

Kermode, Frank, ed. (1990). *Modern Essays.* Glasgow: Fontana Press.

Kövecses, Zoltán (2009). Metaphor and Poetic Creativity: A Cognitive Linguistic Account. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica,* 1, 2: 181-196.

Kubiak., Christopher (1994). Sowing Chaos: Discontinuity and the Form of Autonomy in the Fragment Collections of the Early German Romantics. *Studies in Romanticism, 33,* 411-449.

Hamilton, Paul (2003). *Meta-romanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hamilton, Paul (2013). *Realpoetic. European Romanticism and Literary Politics.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Harries, Elizabeth Wanning (1994). *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Latour, Bruno (1993). *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Harward: Harward University Press.

Levinson, Marjorie (1986). *The Romantic Fragment Poem: Critique of A Form*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe, Nancy, Jean-Luc (1988). *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Lodge, David (2002) *Language of Fiction*. New York: Routledge.

López-Varela, Asunción (2008). "Cultural Scenarios of the Fantastic." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 10.4 http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1391

Moretti, Franco (2013). *Distant Reading*. New York: Verso.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1999). *On the Genealogy of Morals*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Park-Fuller, Linda M (1986). "VOICES: Bakhtin's Heteroglossia and Polyphony, and the Performance of Narrative Literature," Literature of Performance 7," 1-12.

Schlegel, Friedrich (2013). *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991; *Athenäums-Fragmente und andere Schriften.* Edited by Michael Holzinger. Berlin: Berlin Ausgabe.

Shklovsky, Viktor (1991). Art as Device. *Theory of Prose*. Trans. Benjamin Sher. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive P, 1-14.

Stein, Gertrude (1967). *Writings and Lectures, 1909–1945.* Edited by Patricia Meyerowitz. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Stevenson, Randall (1992). *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction.* Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.