Creative Writing Course

Basic Concepts
Creativity, Inspiration, and Resilience

By:

Gordon McAllister



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Author: Gordon McAllister
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Carlos Alberto Gómez Acuña.

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"If the writer is interested in technique, he would be better off becoming a surgeon or a bricklayer. There are no mechanical devices, no shortcuts to writing a book. The young writer who follows a theory is a fool. One must learn by one's own mistakes; people only learn through mistakes." [1]

Interview with William Faulkner

[1]https://ciudadseva.com/texto/entrevista-faulkner/#:~:text=The%20young%20writer%20who%20follows,the%20old%20writer,%20wants%20to%20surpass%20him.

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Brief biographical sketch
Gordon McAllister (Pseudonimun)



Colombian writer, graduated in Business Administration from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, he also has a specialization in Marketing from the Universidad de los Andes and a diploma in Change Management from the same university in Bogotá.

For forty years, he held various executive and management positions in different companies in the industrial and commercial sectors, in the automotive, food, and mass consumer product distribution industries.

He studied a diploma in Short Stories, Narrative, and Literary Chronicle (Creative Writing) at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá.

He studied a diploma in Novel 1 at the Escuela de Escritores (School of Writers) of Madrid and has attended several literary workshops on creative writing and novels at Casa de Arte y Armonía in Bogotá.

Since 2007, he has been dedicated to literature—genres: essay, short story, poetry, and novel.

- He won first place in the XXIII RAMÓN DE ZUBIRÍA SHORT STORY CONTEST (2018), organized by UNIANDINOS in Bogotá, with the story: DE AMORES, TRAGEDIAS Y REVOLUCIONES (Of Love, Tragedies, and Revolutions).

- He also won first place in the XXV RAMÓN DE ZUBIRÍA SHORT STORY CONTEST (2020), organized by UNIANDINOS in Bogotá, with the story: LA HEREJÍA DE LOS MONJES GUERREROS (The Heresy of the Warrior Monks).

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END

Preface

Several people have asked me why I decided to write this textbook, given that my usual practice has been to write in various genres—novels, short stories, essays, and poetry.

To begin, I want to be clear: this is not a book written by a professor or academic. This is a book written by a writer. I am a writer who has accumulated the experience of publishing more than twenty five books, and I am still writing and learning. After more than seventeen years in this craft, I can confidently say that I must have learned something about writing along the way. But I can also affirm, with equal certainty, that I have learned far more from my own mistakes, failures, and daily efforts to improve, than from any supposed "technique" of writing—which, in truth, often obstructs imagination and the ability to create with originality.

What I can offer the student is some companionship along the way, a bit of guidance to help them learn to create their own texts, to stumble and rise again, to find their way out of the dead ends into which we writers so often fall, to confront that famous blank page we all dread, and to loosen both hand and mind until confidence grows in their own ability to write—not by technique, but through the cultivation of creativity, inspiration, and discipline.

So let me insist: this is not a book about special techniques or shortcuts. I do not believe that techniques should be taught as recipes for students to follow, when—following William Faulkner's advice—the serious student

must learn for themselves, from their own mistakes, walking the long, tortuous, and solitary path toward mastery in creative writing. It is a path of imagining, creating, and developing one's own style.

There are many reasons why I wrote this book, but the most important is this: in the courses I have taken, it was almost always assumed that students already knew the basic elements of creative writing, and were left to figure them out on their own.

The first part of this book seeks to gather that essential knowledge for the benefit of the student, so it is readily available. Its purpose is to provide a set of basic concepts about writing, literature, and the major literary genres—short story, novel, essay, and poetry—so that readers may orient themselves, find the genre that most interests them, and, above all, discover the joy of writing.

The second part of the book takes a deeper dive into the Creative Writing program, with topics such as creativity, inspiration, imagination, and discipline; content creation; the structure of short stories and novels; plot and subplots; the building of characters; atmosphere and setting; as well as practical exercises to help students develop both creativity and technical skill. Unlike many courses that center on analyzing and dissecting the classics, this book emphasizes practice and the writer's own creative process.

Some classmates from those creative writing courses eventually became excellent literary critics, sharp analysts of great authors and merciless judges of lesser works that fell into their hands. Yet very few of those fine critics ever achieved the level of imagination and creativity necessary to write a truly original book of their own. Excessive analysis

and erudition can, at times, suffocate creativity and the daring it takes to create something new. Instead of encouraging risk, they often fill students—already uncertain in their first steps—with even greater insecurities.

The guiding question of this book is: *How can I do it myself?* Not simply: *How do others do it?* Though of course it is also valuable to know how others have learned to write.

As for my own experience, I was fortunate to study Creative Writing, Short Story, and Literary Chronicle at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. I later completed an online specialization in Novel I at the Escuela de Escritores in Spain, led by writer Marisa Mañana. I also took another online course through Domestika—*Writing a Novel Step by Step*, with writer Cristina López Barrio—and attended workshops at Casa, Arte y Armonía in Bogotá, with professor Guillermo Zúñiga.

All of these courses were valuable, giving me tools and frameworks. Yet like most writers, I have learned above all that to write well you must read a lot and write a lot. But something else is required: you must also revise, correct, reread, and correct again.

I recall one anecdote. In a creative writing class, I once submitted a short story as homework, convinced it was the best story ever written. When it was graded and discussed in class, it was torn apart mercilessly, and my pride was wounded. But after the initial sting, I spent many days rereading and revising that story. Over time, I felt it was ready. In 2018, I dared to submit it to the Ramón de Zubiría Short Story Contest at Universidad de los Andes. I had no expectations—only a desire to challenge fate. At the award ceremony, the host announced the nine finalists, and

finally, the winner: *"Of Loves, Tragedies, and Revolutions," by Caballero Templario No. 0."* I was in shock. My wife nudged me sharply: *"That's your story. You won. Get up and go to the stage!"*

Two years later, in 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, I entered the contest again. On the day of the ceremony, I had nearly forgotten about it, until a friend called to remind me. Reluctantly, I joined the event via Zoom, and once again, to my astonishment, I won first place—this time with *The Heresy of the Warrior Monks*, a story that has since grown into a 227-page novel, recently published and available on Amazon.

Writing is like bread dough: once finished, it must be left to rest, to rise. After a prudent time, you return to it, reread, and cut without mercy. Never fall in love with your drafts; judge them with severity and allow others to do so as well. Even if you do not follow their advice to the letter, their critique will be invaluable. Then, revise again. Only then will the bread be ready for the oven—the book ready for the press.

Most of us are embarrassed by our earliest books. Borges himself refused to reread his first works. Why? Perhaps, when enough time has passed, you will understand the answer.

In my early books, I published under the pseudonym Christian Schneider. At the time, I was a corporate executive and did not want clients or colleagues to know I was writing. Later, as I neared retirement, I began to use my real name, Carlos Alberto Gómez Acuña, but soon realized it was too long and cumbersome for a book cover. More recently, after registering it legally, I adopted the

pseudonym Gordon McAllister—a name tied both to a family nickname and to a deeper, more personal connection with the Scottish Highlands.

Professionally, I studied Business Administration at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, specialized in Marketing and Change Management at Universidad de los Andes, and worked for over forty years as an executive in industries such as automotive, food, and consumer goods. This career made me pragmatic, cautious, and resistant to the many pitfalls of the publishing world.

Though as a young man I pursued business, psychology tests once suggested that my talents lay in literature and philosophy. They were right: even while I built a career in business, the muses eventually returned. In 2007 I began writing seriously, and by 2010 I had published my first book. Today, in 2024, I have around twenty books published, with more on the way.

I have also learned to distrust predatory vanity presses that charge authors large sums without investing in distribution or promotion. Instead, I have chosen to self-publish with care, handle my own editing and design—using tools like Canva and iStock—and outsource only when necessary. I work with proofreaders, style editors, and distributors who place my books in bookstores and libraries.

And so, I arrive at this book: *Creative Writing Course*. Here, I make no false promises that by following these guidelines you will quickly write a bestseller, as so many dubious ads suggest. Writing is a long apprenticeship; mastery comes only with years of reading, writing, and revising.

This book does not restrict creative writing to novels and short stories, whether realistic or fictional. It also embraces poetry and essays, whether philosophical, political, scientific, or professional. Above all, it is written in clear, simple language, so that readers can understand without struggling through needless jargon.

My hope is that this book helps you improve both your creative expression and your enjoyment of writing. May it serve as a companion in your journey, as you explore, experiment, and find joy in the act of creation.

Gordon McAllister

Chapter 1.
Initial Basic Concepts

To begin, in the first chapters we will mention some basic elements that make up the subject at hand, such as the definition of literature, texts, the different literary genres and subgenres, and so on.

LITERATURE:

Let us start by defining what literature is:

What Is Literature?

According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), literature is the "art of verbal expression, verbal meaning that which refers to the word or makes use of it," and therefore encompasses written texts (*written literature*) as well as spoken or sung texts (*oral literature*).

The term *literature* also denotes the body of literary works of a language, a nation, an era, or even a genre (Greek literature, eighteenth-century literature, fantasy literature, etc.), and the body of works dealing with an art or a science (medical literature, legal literature, etc.).

Written literature refers specifically to written texts. In general, the term *literature* is used to refer to any type of oral or written creation produced by people belonging to a particular culture. In addition, it is said that when literature is mentioned, it should also be related to an intellectual and aesthetic sense—that is, such creation should possess

artistic and cultural value; it is thus defined when beauty is pursued as an inherent part of literary expression.

When speaking of literature as a field of study, it is necessary to relate the term to what is known as Literary Theory, which can be defined as the series of rules, principles, ideology, doctrine, and standards that govern the method for studying and developing literature. It is also necessary to refer to Rhetoric, understood as the "science of discourse" for persuasive purposes. On the other hand, we must also refer to Poetics, understood as the art of composing verse, poems, and poetic prose, with rhythm and literary musicality, using tropes[2] and metaphors. Finally, we must take into account Literary Criticism as an important part of literature. Let us see what it is:

Literary Criticism

Literary criticism is understood as the analysis and evaluation of a literary work, with the aim of defining and assessing it. A piece of literary criticism consists of the opinion of an expert on the subject, who offers a personal judgment about the work.

Literary criticism begins with an in-depth analysis of a literary work in order to establish the author's technique,

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[2] A trope is a literary device in which a word or phrase is used to change its original meaning with a substitute. Example: Juan is a louse... Lice are actually very small insects, and the name is used to mean that Juan is extremely small. It is understood from the outset that a louse cannot be a person and that this is only a rhetorical emulation.

style, writing rhythm, the reader's interest in the plot, the originality (or lack thereof) of the content, and the relationship the author establishes with the reader—whether the reader is truly engaged and whether the text becomes a delightful art to read or, on the contrary, fails to establish that much-needed connection between author and reader.

At this point, it is necessary to touch on a complex issue related to the author's interest in writing for personal pleasure and the satisfaction felt toward one's own creation, or, on the contrary, whether the author is more interested in reaching readers with a text that they know will interest the public and, guided by that parameter, writes the book with the intention of pleasing readers—even despite the author's own taste for the subject and the work being created. Once, in a university class, I asked the professor about this topic.

The question was:

"Professor," I said, "as a writer who might want to become well-known and sell widely, what should one do? What should one write about?"

"Look," the professor told me, "if you want to sell a lot and have a multitude of readers, there's a simple combination to achieve it: First, think of a motivating factor such as sex—but unrestrained sex—as an important ingredient for your book. Then add some physically spectacular women and men. Next, a sensational topic—preferably a crime story or a major scandal. Finally, don't forget the ingredient of money and luxury to complete this best-selling work: an atmosphere of power and abundance. Don't complicate things with psychological themes or

ontological depths that the average person won't understand and will eventually cause them to toss your book aside at the first break. Just tackle light, easy topics and you'll have readers and sales. It will be one of those books sold in airport bookstores for people going on beach vacations to read while they tan in the sun.

"However," the professor continued, "in another scenario, there is a work of your own creation that will leave you tremendously satisfied with yourself; it is that work that comes from your soul, that moves you to the depths of your being, that work that—even while you are developing it—brings a tear to your eye or a gentle smile to your face.

That work will come from your heart, and even if it is not a best seller, it will be a work you hold very close to your heart, and you will feel great satisfaction for having created it. And the success it achieves may not even be on your radar, nor will you need it, because you will already have fulfilled your purpose. And someday you may say, "I truly enjoyed it."

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Chapter 2.
Types of Texts

In this chapter we will talk about texts—whether literary or non-literary.

Not everyone who writes is thinking about literature in the sense of poetry, short stories, or novels. Many people work in professions where clear and effective writing is necessary to express ideas—fields such as business, economics, administration, engineering, and even medicine—without necessarily being part of the intellectual or cultural world of literature. And it is precisely in these cases where knowledge and practice of creative writing become essential.

Others—myself included—have spent much of our lives in professions far removed from the world of letters, only to realize that something was missing, something tied to the heart or the soul. We may feel the presence of the soul, even if we often deny it, and suddenly we find ourselves drawn toward literature. One day we surprise ourselves writing poetry, inventing stories, beginning a novel, or perhaps venturing into philosophical essays.

This book may serve those who belong to the "real" world but feel an inner calling toward writing—those who, perhaps unexpectedly, are visited by the muses at 4:30 in the morning. These daring muses pull off the covers, throw us out of bed, and push us toward the computer or a sheet of paper. To our own amazement, we begin to write. And once we have crossed that threshold, there is no turning

back. We are already "contaminated" by literature, and, wonderfully, that enchantment lasts a lifetime. From that moment on, life is colored by writing and literature.

Texts

Let us begin by talking about texts. All of us, without exception, have written some kind of text in our lives, whether or not it was literary.

Non-literary texts are not limited to journalism; they include advertising, business communication, politics, and many other fields. Expressing ideas in written form—whether for print or digital media—requires prior knowledge and good style.

There is an old saying: *"Spoken words are carried away by the wind."* This refers to speech, where rhetoric can cover much. But there is also another saying: *"What is written, remains written."* That permanence makes writing serious. If we have any sense of dignity, it is important to express ourselves well—especially when leaving a record in writing.

Formal education in schools and universities, combined with the habit of reading, helps us learn to write properly and to express ideas clearly. In today's world, good writing reflects and demonstrates a person's cultural level. Others will inevitably judge us by the way we put ideas into words. This is why entering the world of creative writing is so important.

What Is a Text?

A text is a structure of written words—ordered, connected, and woven together—to express an idea coherently. A good text maintains proper interrelation

among ideas so they complement one another, with cohesion: a harmonious correlation between words, sentences, and meaning.

In simpler terms: a text is an ordered, coherent piece of writing.

Texts may be classified into three broad types:

1. Non-literary texts
2. Literary texts
3. Mixed texts

1. Non-Literary Texts

Non-literary texts aim to inform. They are not written with aesthetic flourishes or fictitious elements, nor are they designed to entertain. They are objective, realistic, and use precise, impersonal vocabulary.

Examples include: a news article, a scientific paper, or an administrative report.

The Journalistic Genre

Journalistic texts are intended for mass dissemination through media such as television, radio, newspapers, and the internet.

Journalism, as a profession, follows specific guidelines—not only to provide reliable information but also to express opinions responsibly, with professional rigor and ethical standards.

Although considered non-literary, some opinion pieces can reach the level of *literary journalism*, thanks to their refined style and narrative quality.

Main Journalistic Forms

- Editorials
- Letters to the editor
- Opinion articles
- Columns
- Reviews
- Cartoons
- News reports
- Features (reportajes)
- Surveys

Example of an editorial excerpt (El País, March 27, 2023):

"The closing of the XXVIII Ibero-American Summit in Santo Domingo once again showed the need to strengthen this regional coordination body, while also revealing its weaknesses and shortcomings. The agreements reached this time were minimal, especially regarding the fight against climate change, food security, digitalization, and its transformation into a core of integration in a region where, according to ECLAC data, less than 20% of trade is intraregional." [3]

Types of Journalistic Writing

[3] https://elpais.com/opinion/2023-03-28/una-nueva-cumbre-iberoamericana.html

- Opinion Journalism: Explicitly or implicitly subjective. The author's personal thoughts and feelings are evident.
- Examples: editorials, columns, opinion articles, interviews.
- Informative Journalism: Objective, factual reporting. Examples: news reports, features.
- Hybrid Journalism: Mixes information with the journalist's viewpoint. Example: the *chronicle*.

Workshop

Write an article on any topic of your choice. Even if your research is brief, create your own text based on that information. Writing articles will help you loosen your hand and open your mind.

If you cannot think of a topic, here is one suggestion: Do you believe in God? What does that mean to you?

Whatever your answer, argue it as though someone were debating you, and try to convince them.

Then practice: read your article several times, correct both your argument and your writing style, let it "rest" for a while, and then revise it again. Finally, if you feel confident, share it with a friend and ask them to critique it.

Other Types of Non-Literary Texts:

- Descriptive texts: Describe places, people, objects, landscapes, or situations (e.g., tourist brochures).
- Expository texts: Explain concepts or knowledge (e.g., lectures, presentations).

- Argumentative texts: Present arguments to persuade (e.g., political essays).
- Informative texts: Provide information (e.g., reports, memos, legal notices).
- Scientific texts: Present research findings (e.g., medical papers, academic articles).
- Technical texts: Explain systems or equipment (e.g., engineering manuals).
- Advertising texts: Persuade through slogans and promotional content.
- Legal texts: Laws, decrees, policies, and government documents.
- Epistolary texts: Letters, emails, or personal messages.

2. Literary Texts

Literary texts employ aesthetic language to please the reader. Words are chosen carefully to refine ideas and achieve style, in accordance with the chosen literary genre.

Examples: novels, poems, short stories, essays.

We will return to these in more detail in later chapters.

3. Mixed Texts

Mixed texts combine literary and non-literary elements—philosophical messages intertwined with lyrical expression, rhetorical figures, and poetic imagery. This hybrid style is rare, but can be found in the works of essayists and philosophers such as Kahlil Gibran, Rabindranath Tagore, and Ilie Cioara.

Examples of Mixed Texts

Kahlil Gibran

- *The Prophet*
- *Broken Wings*
- *The Madman*

Rabindranath Tagore

- *Chitra*
- *The King of the Dark Chamber*
- *Chandalika*

Ilie Cioara

- *The Silence of the Mind*
- *The Wondrous Journey*
- *I Am Boundlessness*

Example: From *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran

The Hermit Prophet

Once upon a time there was a hermit prophet who, every three moons, came down to the city and preached generosity in the marketplaces. His eloquence made him famous, and his reputation spread throughout the land.

One afternoon, three men came to his hermitage and greeted him.

"You preach giving and sharing," they said, "and you encourage those who have much to share with those who have little. Surely your fame has brought you riches. Come now, give us from your wealth, for we are in need."

"My friends," the hermit replied, "I have nothing but this bed, this mat, and this jar of water. Take them if you wish. I have neither gold nor silver."

The men looked at him with disdain and turned away. At the door, the last one shouted: "Impostor! Fraud! You preach what you do not practice." [4]

Example: From *The Silence of the Mind* by Ilie Cioara

A Poem

With global Awareness, the being is present "here and now."
All the senses are awake; harmony is inherent.
Detached completely from what "I was,"
I live only in the now;
I am "One" with life.
Like a burning flame that feeds itself,
I resolve whatever arises—I do not postpone for tomorrow.
In such a state, there are no problems, no conflicts.
In movement, everything resolves when faced perfectly.
Intelligence and Love appear endlessly, in silence.
The sacred within us constantly demands
that we create a climate of peace, without effort,
through this blessed encounter and perfect integration.

When the whole being remains awake
and completely independent,
when the "I" is absent,
we are the essential being.

One with the Divine—the Sacred Creative Force—
and a source of help for the whole world through integration. [5]

4

5 Ilie Cioara, (2011), *El Silencio de la Mente,* (p. 117). Málaga, España: Editorial Sirio.

Chapter 3.
Literary Genres and Subgenres

Literary Texts

Literary texts are subdivided into several genres according to structure, the type of text to be produced, the specific characteristics of the work, and the subject matter. Many different classifications of literary genres have existed.

However, we can identify four fundamental literary genres:

- Narrative–Epic
- Lyric
- Didactic
- Dramatic

They may also be divided into subgenres of various kinds, depending on the literary criteria used—discursive, formal, contextual, situational, semantic (meaning), syntactic (rules and principles), phonological (sound), etc.

Let us look in detail at the most widely known literary genres.

The Epic Genre

The epic genre generally refers to the feats and battles of ancient peoples—legends, stories of legendary heroes, their struggles and exploits. However, it does not refer only to the distant past; many epic works are set in far more recent times.

The Narrative Genre

Narrative begins from a real or fictional story created by the author and set in a specific place and time. It relies on a narrator, who recounts events in his or her own words, describing details of setting, characters, atmosphere, and the unfolding of the plot.

The Lyric Genre

The lyric refers to the expression of feelings and emotions inspired by a person, a situation, or an event. These are usually conveyed in poetry or poetic prose. The lyric genre expresses the author's (and sometimes the characters') subjective inner life.

The Dramatic Genre

The word drama comes from Greek and means "to act" or "to do." It concerns the theatrical performance of a work and the way the play unfolds through the dialogue of actors. It also refers to the script or text intended to be performed before an audience.

The Didactic Genre

This genre is concerned with teaching and the clear presentation of ideas for instructional purposes. Literary and philosophical essays that are expressed with aesthetic care and beauty belong to this genre.

Likewise, the genres above can be further classified according to the subgenres that compose each of them:

Subgenres

Epic and Narrative

Subgenres:

- Novel: adventure novel, historical novel, detective novel, young adult novel, works of fiction.
- Short Story: tale, legend, micro-story, fairy tale, folktale, literary tale, aphorisms, epistles, anecdotes, narratives, jokes, witticisms.

Lyric

Subgenres:

- Poetry: ode, elegy, satire, eclogue, epigram, song, hymn, poetic prose.

Didactic

Subgenres:

- Essay: literary, argumentative, scientific, philosophical, critical essay; literary criticism; biography; history; critical rhetoric; scientific treatises; legal treatises; etc.

Dramatic

Subgenres:

- Theatrical: comedy, drama, melodrama, tragedy, tragicomedy, opera, zarzuela, theater, film, stage show, soap opera.

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Chapter 4.
Literary Subgenres (1)

1. Epic–Narrative Genre

Subgenres: The Short Story and the Novel

Similarities and Differences Between the Short Story and the Novel

Both short story and novel are narrative texts—that is, they rely on a narrator to tell the story. In the short story, the narrative is concise and compact; in the novel, descriptions and development can be extended. Short stories usually feature few characters—only those needed to move the action forward in a simple, brisk way.

In a short story, events are concrete and economical, and characters are described briefly and relatively simply. There is little deep exploration of atmosphere, setting, or visual details. In the novel, by contrast, one can delve into the psychology of characters, and there are often multiple figures with diverse traits.

In the novel, one may also provide a detailed description of the surrounding environment; the goal is to portray, as fully as possible, what the narrator perceives from his or her vantage point.

In the short story, reality is presented only as much as necessary for the story to make sense. In the novel, an

entire little world is created—realistic and complete—so that the reader can vividly grasp what the characters feel and live through, and perceive the development of the story.

In both short story and novel, narrators are typically used to tell the story. These narrators provide different points of view from which they observe the scenes—whether omniscient, or first, second, or third person.

The Epic Genre
Characteristics of the Epic

- The epic exalts great deeds and struggles of heroes—their feats and the dramas of conquests, invasions, and conflicts, whether in ancient or modern times.

- The presence of a narrator is not strictly necessary, as dialogue may carry the text (though a narrator is by no means out of place).

- The hero is fundamental; the genre often makes a sustained apologia of the hero's exploits.

- Works are generally written in prose or poetic prose, though in antiquity epic lyric and heroic lays were common.

- The most ancient and representative epic works include Homer's Iliad and Odyssey and Virgil's Aeneid, among many others.

- Many subgenres exist within the epic: epic poem, tales and legends, myths, narratives, romances, heroic lays, etc.

- The interweaving of reality and fantasy is a hallmark of heroic lays, epics, and, in general, the expressions of the epic genre.

- As a genre characterized by longer narratives, epic often presents chapters, titles, epigraphs, and headings that allow the subject matter and narrative parts to be addressed in separate sections.

Example of Epic Poetry
The Aeneid
by Virgil

1. *Aeneas begins the account of the fall of Troy.*
All fell silent and, attentive, kept their gaze fixed on him.
Then, from the high couch, father Aeneas began to speak:
"It is impossible to express in words, O queen,
the painful story you ask me to revive:
how the Danaans brought low the wealth of Troy and that unhappy kingdom—
the greatest calamity I ever witnessed,
and in which I myself took no small part.
What Myrmidon or Dolopian, what soldier of stone-souled Ulysses,
could keep his tears in check while telling such things?
Already the damp night hastens down from the sky,
and the setting stars invite us to sleep.
But if you feel such desire to know our misfortunes

and hear in brief the agony of Troy—
though the recollection horrifies me and my grief recoils—
I shall begin." [6]

Let us mention another example of the epic genre, narrated in poetic prose. Nothing better than a fragment from The Song of My Cid:

From The Song of My Cid

"They would gladly invite him in, but none dared: King Alfonso bore him such wrath. The night before there arrived in Burgos his sealed letter, solemnly delivered, declaring that none should give lodging to my Cid Ruy Díaz; and whoever did so would lose his goods, and even the eyes from his face—and beyond that, both body and soul. Great sorrow weighed upon the Christian folk; they hid from my Cid, for they dared not say a word.

The Champion made for his lodging, but on reaching the door he found it barred tight—prepared so, in fear of the king. Unless he broke it down by force, none would open it. My Cid's men shouted loudly, but those within refused to answer a word. The Campeador spurred on and drew near the door; he slipped his foot from the stirrup and gave it a kick; the door did not open, for it was well shut." [7]

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6 https://www3.gobiernodecanarias.org/medusa/edublog/ieslasveredillas/wp-content/uploads/sites/82/2020/03/textos-epica-comentados-virgilio-y-ovidio-1.pdf

7 https://www3.gobiernodecanarias.org/medusa/ecoblog/miacomar/files/2018/09/el-poema-de-mio-cid--texto.pdf

It is worth noting that modern epic poems also exist—works that, in lyrical form, recount the battles and conflicts of human beings today.

Here is one such poem:

From the book Tales, Narratives, and Poems by Gordon McAllister
Epic Poem:

Kurds: A Moving Story

Dense cloud, swollen with sand,
a wall of dust whirling in coils—
storm winds blown by tragedies
waged in battles of millennial time.
Struggles born of urgent vengeance—
men convinced they have just cause
to sow their enemy's fields with death,
untroubled by remorse.
For a scrap of homeland, for a nation—
to found a Kurdish state,
an ancient people of immemorial origin—
and yet, as if by fate, an eternal edict persists:
to wipe out their people and their culture.
Kurdish Peshmerga ready for combat,
ISIS jihadists, Iranian commandos,
brigades of Turkish soldiers,
Armenian and Iraqi militias—

all thirsty for blood and battle,
in different times of atavistic memory.
Mothers on every side who suffer in silence,
losing sons in sanguinary clashes—
fratricidal wars, fevers of vengeance,
of blood and devastation.
The Turks launch their missiles;
the jihadists fire rifles and mortars;
Syrians, Iraqis, and Iranians strike;
and finally the Kurds' thirst for revenge
drives them to reprisals—deadly attacks
where perhaps innocents die.
A story without end or answer,
and a lost peace that never comes.[8]

The Narrative Genre
Characteristics of Narrative

Broadly speaking, narrative is characterized by the following:

- In the narrative genre there is generally a narrator, who recreates events and describes them in his or her own manner and style.

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8 Gordon McAllister, (2022), *CUENTOS, RELATOS Y POEMAS*, (pp. 205 – 206), Bogotá, Colombia. Calgom Ediciones.
Amazon.com / Gordon McAllister.

- Narrators are responsible for recreating events and describing the elements that compose the plot: setting, atmosphere, characters, time, and the vicissitudes or achievements of the protagonists.

- The plot develops as events occur and are recounted by a narrator. This gives life to the story and allows the reader to peer into the scene with interest. Sustaining the reader's interest depends on how the scenes and the narrative environment are told.

- What the narrator relates may be fiction or based on reality, but the narrator's voice should convey a sense of realism so the reader's interest is not lost.

- In complex narratives where the plot grows intricate, the narrator's importance comes to the fore; through the discourse, the narrator can make it easier for the reader to follow events and avoid getting lost.
- The narrative genre is rich in description—both of the "decorative paraphernalia" (the tangible details of the world) and of characters' traits, as well as the development of events themselves.

Next, we will look at the different types of narrators.

Types of Narrators:

- Omniscient Narrator:

Knows everything. Possesses full knowledge of events. Knows what characters think and feel—their plans, emotions, and intentions. May sometimes offer judgments or opinions.

- Observer Narrator:
  Reports only what can be observed. Like a film camera, shows what is seen. Does not participate in events and offers no opinions.

- Protagonist Narrator:
  The narrator is also the main character (novelized biography or fictional autobiography).

- Secondary-Character Narrator:
  A witness to events. Sometimes there are multiple witness-narrators.

- Second-Person Narrator:
  A splitting of the self. The narrator creates the effect of telling the story to himself or to a doubled "you." The narrator is part of the story as protagonist or witness. Although the grammatical you appears, it does not refer to the reader.

- Epistolary Narration:
  The story is told through letters exchanged between two characters.

Examples: Types of Narrators

From the novel
The Memory of Lost Years [9]
by Gordon McAllister.

(Omniscient Narrator):

The die cast, several of the condemned were sent to the same prison—a labor camp in the distant Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, in a squalid town at the country's center, Karaganda. Benjamín and Flavio, for their part, traveled with that other group of children toward that terrible end.

(First-Person Narrator):

"I was separated," Leandro said, "to be sent on another train to a different destination, in the far northeast of Siberia—to a town I later learned was called Pevek, on the Chukotka Peninsula—and that is another story."

(Omniscient Narrator):

At this point, Leandro fell silent… The memory returned of days traveling through frozen Siberia and the Kazakh steppe—following the tracks of tires laced with heavy chains, along white roads and endless snowy plains, as if no world existed beyond that polar scene. With various transports—trucks and trains—iron chains on hands and feet, meager, nearly nonexistent rations, the stench of dung and urine, freight cars on interminable trains, and rough planks where sleep fled—haunted by the terrors of an uncertain future and a vague remembrance… Distant families…

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[9] Gordon McAllister, (2022), *El Recuerdo de los Años Perdidos*, Barcelona, España, Ediciones Carena.

left behind.
A grim destination: Spassk No. 99, a Gulag in the province of Karaganda, in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic—a lost hole at the end of the world.

Another example —

Paragraph from the story/novel
The Heresy of the Warrior Monks
by Gordon McAllister

(First-Person Narrator):
"We were a large group of Templar Knights fleeing aboard a galleon of unknown flag, bound for Scotland. Among many others were I, Étienne Saint Claire, and my dear brothers, Bertrand McAllister and Pierre d'Aumont—the latter a commander of one of the Templar warrior-monks' regiments, recently quartered in France and now fugitives from inquisitorial ecclesiastical justice, pursued by the forces of the King of France.
I told my brethren about the execution of the Grand Master, which I had personally witnessed.
The execution of my most beloved Venerable Master, Jacques de Molay—who was the last Grand Master of the Order before it was abolished—had been decreed by that pair of scoundrels, in monstrous treachery and abominable ignominy. I remember it was March 18, 1314. The townspeople rose early to witness that terrible spectacle at dawn. The execution took place on a small island in the middle of the Seine, called the Island of the Jews, in the heart of Paris. It was a frigid day, painted a dull leaden gray—a clouded omen of

terrible, unforgettable consequences—where the fog mingled with the smoke of the pyre.

I continued my account:

'There, in front of Notre Dame Cathedral, still under construction, the pyre of burning logs crackled slow and inexorable. And amid it, bound tightly and dying in obedience to the terrible sentence, stood the Grand Master—gaunt as an unlucky stray dog, a shadow of a human remnant after seven years of continuous torture…'"

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Chapter 5.
Literary Subgenres (2)

2. The Lyric Genre
Subgenre: Poetry

According to the Royal Spanish Academy, poetry is a literary genre considered a manifestation of beauty or aesthetic feeling through words, whether in verse or in prose. Poetry belongs to the lyric genre and is expressed through feelings and emotions presented aesthetically. In poetry, though not always, writers often seek musicality and rhythm, creating repeating sound patterns. In contemporary free verse, however, greater liberties are permitted.

Characteristics of the Lyric Genre

- The author clearly and directly expresses feelings, reflections, and sensations, using aesthetic, lyrical language and devices such as metaphor and other literary figures.

- The author may use verse—either traditional forms with specific meters or free verse with no fixed scheme. Some writers prefer poetic prose, expressing feelings lyrically while contributing rhythm and musicality.

- Poems often employ complex language—intricate turns of phrase and metaphors that are difficult to parse (as in surrealist poetry).

- The use of literary figures—tropes and metaphors—introduces a delicate subtlety into the writing. These special resources make the reading of poetry a genuine pleasure.

A poem generally invites the reader into a particularly introspective experience aligned with what the writer expresses. Let us see an example:

Poem: Sad Mist
By: Gordon McAllister

Sad mist wandering among the mountains,
bringing remembrances of nostalgia,
a fleeting, melancholy longing
for, perhaps, blue pastoral memories.

Gray fog, bearer of memories—
failed dreams that wring the soul and chill it,
visions of ghostly scenes,
inner solitudes that flare.

Perhaps allusions to impossible loves,
or memories of indulgent pasts,
with ancient, indelible words
from times of comforting origin.

A steady rain falls and accompanies the mist,
painted in drowsy shades of gray
that crease even the steadiest soul
and slay the fairest hopes.

These are moments of pallid senses
and longings for far-off times,
with fleeting gestures—perhaps imperceptible—
and glances with sorrowful cast. [10]



Photo: "Sad Mist," by Luis Miguel Gómez.

If we add to the poem an evocative photograph, the sensation is complete. In such a case, the reader inwardly feels what the author is expressing and conveying.

[10] Gordon McAllister, (2022), *Cuentos, Relatos y Poemas*, (pp. 277 – 278), Bogotá, Colombia, Calgóm ediciones.

Other Lyric Subgenres

Alongside poetry, there are other lyrical expressions with specific aims and names, according to their content. Here are a few:

Ode

A composition intended to glorify a person, thing, or divine being.

Example: Ode to Aphrodite by Sappho of Lesbos

O you who sit enthroned, Aphrodite, queen,
daughter of Zeus—immortal, wily—
do not crush down my heart with anguish,
I beg you, august one.
Come as you came before, in days gone by,
hearing my voice and my burning plea;
leaving your father's golden house,
you came, and…

Elegy

A lyrical composition of melancholy tone in which the speaker laments the death of a person or some other misfortune.

Example: Elegy to Ramón Sijé
By: Miguel Hernández

(In Orihuela—his town and mine—
Ramón Sijé has died from a bolt of lightning,
he whom I loved so much.)
I want to be, weeping, the gardener
of the earth you occupy and enrich,
companion of my soul—so soon.
Feeding rains, snails, and organs
my sorrow—an instrumentless music—
I will give your heart to the disheartened poppies.
So much pain gathers in my side
that even my breath aches from aching.
A hard slap, an icy blow,
an invisible, murderous hatchet,
a brutal shove has knocked you down.
There's no expanse bigger than my wound;
I mourn my misfortune and all that comes with it,
and feel your death more than my life.
I walk on stubble made of the dead,
with no one's warmth and no consolation;
I go about my heart's own business. [11]

Eclogue

A poetic composition that idealizes the life of shepherds and the countryside in order to address universal human themes, such as love.

Example: Waska: An Eternal and Infinite Instant
By: Gordon McAllister

[11] Fuente: https://www.ejemplos.co/elegia/#ixzz7uMJrUyG6

Waska—ancestral land of fertile mountains,
ancient paradise of the Muisca gods,
cradle of valleys, lakes, and jagged ridges—
majestic heights, thin air, deep silence and peace.

I sat reflecting on my own soil,
in a quiet, peaceful moment
interrupted only by the warbling of wandering birds
and the occasional lowing of ruminants.

It was a moment of calm, intense attention
to the lovely, distant mountain landscape,
with floating wisps drifting slowly
across a clear, sky-blue evening.

And when the bright sun lit
the pastures, groves, and surrounding hills,
my soul expanded in blazing colors—
in instants of profound reflection.

The stillness and the silence of my mind
were the essential part of that moment,
where my soul found itself united
with the eternal in the infinite spirit.

What a sublime and crowning moment—
sensations nesting in the soul,
imprinting endless experiences
in earthly paradises that reach Olympus. [12]

[12] https://www.amazon.com/Gordon-McAllister-ebook/dp/B0BT8JGFXW?ref_=ast_author_dp

Epigram

A very brief poetic composition that expresses a single witty or satirical thought with great precision and sharpness.

Example: Poem by Ernesto Cardenal

In losing you,
you and I have both lost:
I—because you were
what I loved most;
and you—because I was
the one who loved you most.
Yet of the two of us,
you lose more than I:
for I will be able
to love others
as I loved you,
but no one will love you
as I loved you.
Girls who one day
read these verses moved,
and dream of a poet—
know that I wrote them
for someone like you,
and it was in vain. [13]

[13] https://diarioinca.com/poema-al-perderte-yo-a-ti-ernesto-cardenal

Satire

A literary composition in prose or verse that sharply criticizes someone's habits or vices with moralizing, playful, or purely mocking intent.

Example: Francisco de Quevedo, parodying Luis de Góngora's nose

"Sonnet to a Nose"

A man there was—a nose upon his face;
a nose supreme, a still, alembic thing;
a swordfish snout ill-bearded for the chase;
a sundial's shadow set askew in spring.

An elephant turned upward, mouth agape;
a clerkly, executioner's proboscis;
an Ovid Nasón with distorted shape—
a nasal flaw made monumental focus.

The prow and spur upon a galley's frame;
the pyramid of Egypt in his feature;
twelve tribes of noses gathered in one name;
a nose beyond all measure, godlike creature—

a frostbit, purple, monstrous nasal crest
that on Annas's face would be a jest. [14]

(Traditional public-domain text often appears in multiple English versions; the rendering above preserves the satiric hyperbole.)

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14 https://web.seducoahuila.gob.mx/biblioweb/upload/SONETO%20A%20UNA%20NARIZ.pdf

Chapter 6.
Literary Subgenres (3)

3. DRAMATIC GENRE
Subgenre: THEATER

The dramatic genre refers to a text that is generally intended to be transformed into a theatrical play, or, alternatively, a film script.

Its foundation lies in the dialogue between two or more characters who act within the play. The events represented are directly related to the interactions among the characters —who are the actors themselves— and the specific situations taking place on a stage, according to the structure and guidelines of the work.

The field of action in which the script unfolds is the stage, in the case of theater, or the film set (known as *platό* in Spanish), which is a space adapted for the filming of movies, where the final performance is brought to life on the cinema screen.

The author of a theatrical work is called a playwright, while the author of a film script is known as a screenwriter.

The Dramatic Genre is divided into several classifications:

Tragedy:

Originating from the Greek term *hamartia*—meaning error,

flaw, sin, or fatal mistake—it unfolds as a sequence of events that lead to a tragic, inevitable, and fatal outcome. The story becomes irreversibly sorrowful, generating a conflict that often culminates in the destruction or death of the protagonist, or in his imprisonment.

Comedy:

A joyful subgenre, opposite to tragedy, characterized by a light tone and a happy ending.

Auto Sacramental:

A religious-themed work, known as a *liturgical drama*, typical of medieval and Baroque Spain.

Interlude (Entremés):

A short, comedic play performed between the first and second acts of a longer play—very typical of classical Spanish theater.

Sainete:

A brief theatrical piece, both dramatic and comic, portraying Spanish popular customs, usually presented during intermissions or at the end of a larger play.

Tragicomedy:

Though a dramatic work, it combines both tragic and comic elements and often includes realistic touches, emphasizing sarcasm and parody. Its progression involves an increasing emotional tension, rich in feeling and conflict.

Melodrama:

A dramatic work characterized by exaggerated sentimentality and pathos. It is the basis for modern-day soap operas, designed to provoke strong emotions in the audience, often moving them to tears.

Zarzuela:

A light, comic Spanish musical performance in which dialogue and scenes are accompanied by songs performed by the actors.

Opera:

A theatrical work entirely sung, accompanied by classical instrumental music performed by a symphonic, philharmonic, or chamber orchestra.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DRAMATIC GENRE

1. Division:
   It is divided according to its subject matter into *realistic* and *non-realistic* drama.

2. Representation:
   It is conceived to be performed in front of an audience by a group of people—actors—each portraying a specific character in the story.

3. Theme:
   The subject can vary widely, but it usually focuses on aspects of daily life.

4. Interest:
   One of the fundamental goals of drama is to engage the audience—to make them understand the story and experience its resolution. The performance must effectively convey the message intended by the author.

5. Not synonymous with theater:
   Although often confused as synonymous, *drama* and *theater* are not the same. Drama is the *literary genre*, while theater is its *representation*.

6. Writing:
   The dramatic genre is always written in the form of a script, containing stage directions (known as *acotaciones* in Spanish), which indicate when each character enters or exits and provide instructions for the director.

7. Divisions:
   The dramatic genre has two primary divisions:

- Major Dramatic Genre: Includes tragedy, comedy, play, melodrama, tragicomedy, *force*, and didactic works.
- Minor Dramatic Genre: Includes *sainete*, *paso*, *auto sacramental*, opera, and zarzuela.

Example

Let's see an example of the Dramatic Genre:

Excerpt from Scene III

HAMLET

By William Shakespeare

Scene III

At the guard post. It is night. *Enter HAMLET and HORATIO.*

HAMLET: I feel cold, Horatio. The air wraps around me like a shroud.

HORATIO: Yes, it cuts like a knife.

HAMLET: What time is it?

HORATIO: The stroke of midnight.

HAMLET: Later than that. The bell has already struck twelve.

HORATIO: I did not hear it. Then the hour approaches when the specter is known to appear. *(Trumpets, drums, and cannon fire sound in the distance.)*

HORATIO: What is that noise, my lord?

HAMLET: The King makes merry. He fulfills his promise to fire a cannon for every toast he makes to the health of his beloved nephew and son.

HORATIO: Is that a custom of the court?

HAMLET: Indeed it is. Yet, though I was born and raised in this court and am heir to its customs, I believe this is a tradition more honored in the breach than in the observance. This barbarous revelry, heard far and wide—east and west alike—dishonors us and earns us ill repute among other nations. Because of it, they call us drunkards and swine, forgetting our many triumphs and virtues.

HORATIO: My lord! Look—there he comes! *(The ghost appears faintly, as a shadow at the back of the stage.)*

HAMLET: Angels of heaven, defend us! Tell me, art thou in grace, or art thou damned? Bring'st thou sweet airs from Paradise or pestilent gusts from Hell? Com'st thou with good or evil intent? I would speak to thee. I will call thee *Hamlet, King*—

Workshop

Try to create a short dialogue between two characters, a conversation that reflects a tense or urgent situation. Invent a dramatic setting and then turn the dialogue into a short theatrical scene that illustrates a conflict.

Example:

A fire breaks out, and several people are trapped inside...

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Chapter 7.
Literary Subgenres (4)

3. DIDACTIC GENRE
Subgenre: THE ESSAY

The didactic genre refers to the act of teaching and illustrating a subject before an audience. It implies the exposition of knowledge through a lecture, talk, or any other form of expression—whether verbal or written—using a serious and carefully structured language.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIDACTIC GENRE

The characteristics of the didactic genre vary according to the type of composition chosen. It can be literary, argumentative, scientific, philosophical, or critical in nature.

- The main characteristic is the expression of ideas and thoughts in a didactic manner, with the purpose of teaching or transmitting knowledge.
- It relies on research, reading, and bibliographical references to prepare, develop, and properly present the topic.
- Once the subject has been introduced, discussion and dialogue may follow, enriching the analysis through different perspectives.

- Sometimes, a moral reflection or lesson arises naturally as the conclusion of the presentation.
- In didactic essays, it is essential to reach a conclusion that completes and summarizes the analysis of the topic.
- This genre highlights the author's capacity for analysis, reasoning, and exposition, as well as their intellectual discipline and clarity of expression.

MAIN SUBGENRES OF THE DIDACTIC GENRE

The Essay:

An essay presents a topic or problem and expresses the author's personal opinion about it. The author attempts to persuade the reader of the validity and coherence of their perspective. While essays may include references and research to reinforce the argument, they are not strictly required to provide exhaustive evidence.

In a philosophical essay, the author simply expresses his or her own ideas without the obligation to prove their origin. Conversely, in a scientific essay, the author may strengthen the argument with formal research or empirical evidence.

The essay, in essence, is a didactic form of writing that seeks to convey ideas, explore concepts, and provoke thought in the reader. It can be serious, scholarly, or reflective, but also accessible and creative, depending on the intent of the writer.

Ultimately, it is about presenting a well-founded argument and expressing an idea convincingly.

OTHER SUBGENRES OF THE DIDACTIC GENRE

The academic world is the most natural environment for the didactic genre, given its focus on teaching and learning. The genre appears in lectures, seminars, workshops, talks, and classroom sessions, where a professor or lecturer presents a topic to an audience.

Dialogue:

This subgenre consists of the participation of several characters who, through dialogue, express opinions about a specific topic. A moderator or facilitator guides the discussion, coordinates interventions, and draws conclusions.

Such dialogues often include debate and discussion, which enrich understanding and provide diverse viewpoints.

Treatise:

The treatise differs from the essay in that it explores a subject in great depth. While the essay may only touch upon a theme, the treatise seeks to exhaust it completely—offering detailed research, evidence, and conclusions. A treatise is typically presented by a specialized scholar or expert and is aimed at an audience already familiar with the topic, such as an academic or scientific community.

Didactic Poem:

In this case, poetry is used as a means of teaching. The verses are written with mnemonic or moral intent, making it easier to learn or remember certain lessons. Didactic poetry is especially common in children's literature and educational verse.

Oratory:

According to the Royal Spanish Academy, oratory is the "art of speaking eloquently." It is the ability to communicate effectively—to delight, move, or persuade an audience through the power of speech. It may appear in political speeches, sermons, or formal addresses, where the speaker seeks to inspire or influence through rhetorical mastery.

Biography:

The biography, along with its related forms—the autobiography, memoir, and personal diary—also belongs to the didactic genre.

These works not only recount life events but also teach through experience, offering moral, philosophical, or emotional lessons drawn from a person's lived reality.

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Chapter 8.
The Short Story

What is a Short Story?

A short story is a literary composition that narrates a real or fictional account involving one or several characters, within a specific time and place, in which a series of events unfold as determined by the plot.
A short story is a brief narrative with a relatively simple structure—although this does not mean it cannot possess great depth or complexity.

For instance, The Aleph by Jorge Luis Borges is a paradigmatic example of how a short story can be profound and philosophical despite its brevity.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHORT STORIES

1. Brevity:
   A short story must be concise—no longer than necessary to tell a complete and coherent tale.

2. Real or Fictional Basis:
   The story may stem from real or imaginary events, but the narrative must feel vivid and artistic; otherwise, it would be more a chronicle or anecdote than a true short story.

3. Protagonist:
   There is always a central character around whom the entire story revolves.

4. Conflict or Antagonist:
   Usually, an antagonist or a difficult situation challenges the protagonist and creates the tension that drives the story forward.

5. Defined Time and Place:
   The story takes place in a specific location and time, which helps to anchor the reader in a believable setting.

6. Single-Sitting Reading:
   A short story should be able to be read in one sitting, maintaining its emotional and narrative intensity from beginning to end.

7. Helper or Ally:
   Often, there appears a supporting character—human or animal—who aids the protagonist in achieving his or her goal.

8. Plausibility:
   Even the most fantastical story must appear credible within its own logic. If the reader cannot suspend disbelief, the story will lose its impact.

9. Cinematic Imagination:
   The writer must make the reader see the story—visualizing the characters, the setting, and the era as if they were scenes in a film. The reader should feel immersed in the story's atmosphere and events.

STRUCTURE OF THE SHORT STORY

Short stories generally follow a three-part structure:

1. EXPOSITION – INTRODUCTION

This is the beginning of the story. Here, the writer introduces the characters—both main and secondary—establishes the setting (time and place), and defines the protagonist's goal or motivation. The introduction also suggests the direction the story will take.

A crucial element is the first line or opening paragraph, which must immediately capture the reader's attention. A good opening is the key to a good first impression—it hooks the reader and invites them to continue. The introduction should be engaging, evocative, and surprising.

2. RISING ACTION – THE CONFLICT

The conflict forms the core of the story—the moment when tensions rise and the stakes become clear. Here the central problem emerges, the protagonist's objectives are challenged, and the opposing forces come into play.

This is where the action unfolds, and it is vital to maintain

rhythm and emotional interest throughout the development.
The story must flow dynamically; if the pace lags, the reader's attention may wane.
The middle section should be compelling and intense, sustaining curiosity about how events will resolve.

3. CLIMAX AND RESOLUTION

This is the final phase, where the accumulated events, struggles, and emotions come to a head. The tension peaks and then gradually releases as the story reaches its resolution—whether positive, tragic, or open-ended.

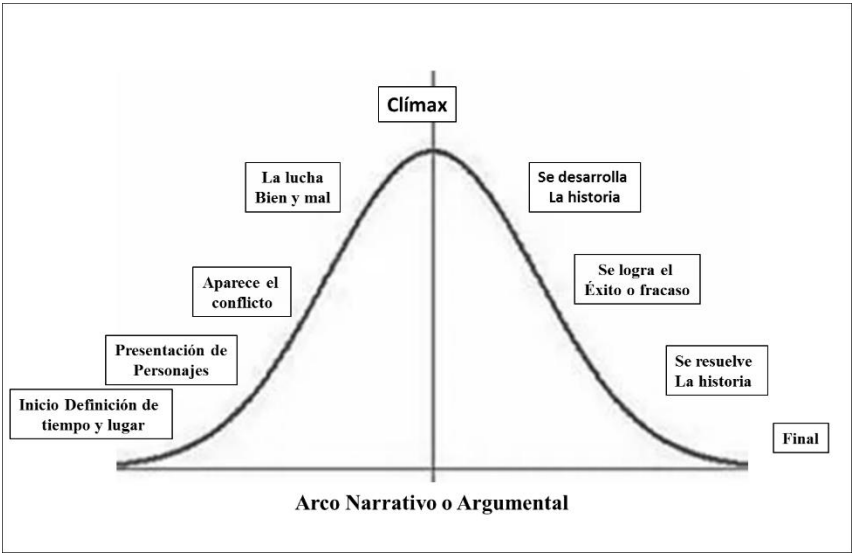
The ending must leave a strong impression; it is the reader's last emotional contact with the text. A great ending should be memorable, unexpected, and satisfying, leaving the reader with the sense of having witnessed a complete artistic experience.

THE NARRATIVE OR DRAMATIC ARC

The narrative arc (or dramatic arc) can be visualized as a Gaussian bell curve.

The story begins with a flat line—the exposition—where the setting, time, and characters are introduced. Then, as the conflict emerges, the curve rises: tension and complexity increase, leading to the climax, the most intense point of the story.

Afterward, the arc descends as the events move toward resolution, and the action slows down, concluding the tale.



This structure provides rhythm, coherence, and emotional progression to the narrative.

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Chapter 9.
The Beginning or Introduction

Advice About the Opening or Beginning of a Short Story

1. The beginning or introduction of a story should be seen as a brief yet magnificent opportunity to capture the reader's attention from the very start. If that moment passes, the opportunity is lost —and it will not return.

2. The opening of a short story or novel must be captivating. This means it should introduce a basic promise, one that the story will revolve around until the end. For example, love stories must fulfill the promise of leading toward a happy or tragic, but expected, ending. Likewise, detective stories must deliver the resolution of the case—whether successful or not—without leaving any loose ends.

3. No loose ends should remain. If, at the beginning of the story, certain facts or objects are presented, these must be resolved as the story unfolds. For instance: a loaded gun inside a drawer. If it is mentioned at any point, it must serve a purpose and eventually play a role in the narrative; otherwise, it should not be mentioned at all.

4. It is advisable for the initial approach of the story to be striking and highly engaging so as to fully capture the reader's attention. In this sense, it is not appropriate to start with descriptions of landscapes or weather conditions,

as these tend to distract rather than draw in the reader in a powerful way.

5. The length of the introduction or beginning of a story will vary according to the complexity of its plot. It may consist of a single paragraph or several, or even one or more pages. However, keep in mind that the longer the beginning stretches, the harder it will be to sustain the reader's attention.

6. It is important to make the reader ask questions as they begin reading. The most essential one is: What will happen next? A flat description at the start—such as the state of the weather—will not inspire this question. But if, from the very first paragraph, something truly moving occurs, such as the discovery of a corpse, an execution, or the death of a lover, the reader will immediately ask: What will happen next?

Examples of Famous Openings in Literature

Don Quixote of La Mancha, by *Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra*

"In a village of La Mancha, the name of which I have no desire to call to mind, there lived not long ago one of those gentlemen that keep a lance in the rack, an old buckler, a lean hack, and a greyhound for coursing."

One Hundred Years of Solitude, by *Gabriel García Márquez*

"Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice."

The Metamorphosis, by *Franz Kafka*

"When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect."

The Old Man and the Sea, by *Ernest Hemingway*

"He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish."

Chronicle of a Death Foretold, by *Gabriel García Márquez*

"On the day they were going to kill him, Santiago Nasar got up at five-thirty in the morning to wait for the bishop's boat to arrive."

An Example of an Overly Long Beginning of a Short Story

Short Story: *Of Love, Tragedies, and Revolutions*
By: *Gordon McAllister*

> "*October 2nd, 1968,*
> *Mexico City.*
> *That tragic day, if destiny had wanted a different outcome, Stjepan should have been thousands of miles away, safe at home in Paris; but by a conspiracy of fate, he found*

himself in the heart of Mexico City, right in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco.
A couple of days earlier, he had arrived to attend an engineering event that gathered students from several universities around the world—a workshop on Seismic Structure Calculation at the National Autonomous University of Mexico.
During a break, a Mexican friend, also an engineer, invited him to join a political demonstration that was to take place in that square. It was a time when major social changes were expected to be driven by the youth of that era, on a global scale, starting with France, where the revolts of May that same year were shaking the political and social foundations—at least, that's what they believed.

That day, young Stjepan, a final-year engineering student and assistant professor at the Pierre and Marie Curie University in Paris, happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time—caught in a human tide of demonstrators with turbulent intentions, suggesting the possibility of overthrowing the government of then-president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, who had already ordered the movement's repression by blood and fire.
At first, only the chanting of insurgent slogans could be heard, shouted by fervent voices in unison; then came the sound of gunfire that stunned everyone present. But fate, relentless as ever, had already signed its verdict. That day, a random bullet fired by a terrified infantry soldier entered through a clean hole in the occipital region and exited through the front, shattering the frontal bone after piercing meninges, brain tissue, gray matter, blood vessels, and more bone.
His name was Stjepan Serkovic, of Yugoslav-Croatian origin,

and he died instantly. His body remained sprawled on the asphalt, amid a smoky, chaotic scene of wood and debris, failed barricades already overrun by the public forces…" [15]

Workshop

Let's create the beginning of a story. Use your imagination to design that introduction or first paragraph; aim to invent a truly striking opening, one that holds the reader's gaze and does not allow them to look away from the text.

For example:

"At the very moment he fell, after the gunshot, the rain was pouring down, and he lay motionless in the middle of a muddy puddle that was slowly turning red with blood"

— O —

[15] Gordon McAllister, (2022), Cuentos, Relatos y Poemas, (pp. 11 – 12), Bogotá, Colombia. Calgom ediciones.

Chapter 10.
The Knot or Development

The *knot* represents the development of the story, and after the beginning, it is the section where the conflict appears—the dramatic situation that contains the heart of the dilemma. It signifies an obstacle for the protagonist and marks the difficulty they must face in opposition to the path that leads toward the goal they seek to achieve in the story.

The more complex the plot, the more interesting the short story or novel will be.

The development of the story presents the breaking of the initial equilibrium. Through a disruption, the protagonist and the antagonist come into confrontation. At this stage, the most important events of the story take place, and this marks the rhythm and direction of its evolution.

At the highest point of tension in the story or novel, we reach what is known as the *climax*—the key moment in the unfolding of the conflict. This is the crucial point the protagonist must face in order to restore balance and bring the story back to a sense of normality. It marks the beginning of the resolution of the plot, moving toward the denouement.

Emotional Arcs

Within the *knot* appear what we call *emotional arcs*—the emotional impact that the author's words and writing style produce on the reader, either positively or negatively.

Emotional arcs are the rises and falls in the reader's emotions throughout the development of the story, as things become harder or easier for the protagonist. Their effectiveness depends on how emotionally involved the reader becomes with that character.

Emotional arcs are more common in dramatic short stories and novels than in comic ones, and they are deeply connected to the author's particular style of storytelling.

There are several types of *emotional arcs*:

1. The Rise or "American Dream"

Many writers are drawn to stories in which the protagonist begins in poverty or despair and gradually ascends to success and prosperity.

It is an exaltation of work, perseverance, and the struggle to achieve goals—where after enduring hardship and effort, success is finally attained. This is the classic argument of the *American Dream*: stories where hope is the banner sustaining the struggle, and where a sense of justice is rewarded by triumph.

2. The Fall

This is the opposite case, characteristic of tragedy. Here, things go wrong, nothing works, and everything ends in disaster. The ending is sad and depressive, and death is often the only possible outcome.

A perfect example of this is *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, which culminates in the death of its protagonists.

3. The Reborn (The Redeemed)

In this emotional arc, the story begins with the protagonist in a favorable position. Then, for some reason, a downfall occurs—disaster strikes. After facing it and struggling, the character gradually recovers and manages to regain balance and good fortune.

4. The Icarus Arc

It begins with a setback that forces the protagonist to struggle and rise again, climbing toward success. However, a new negative circumstance emerges, leading to another fall and ultimately to complete ruin and a tragic ending.

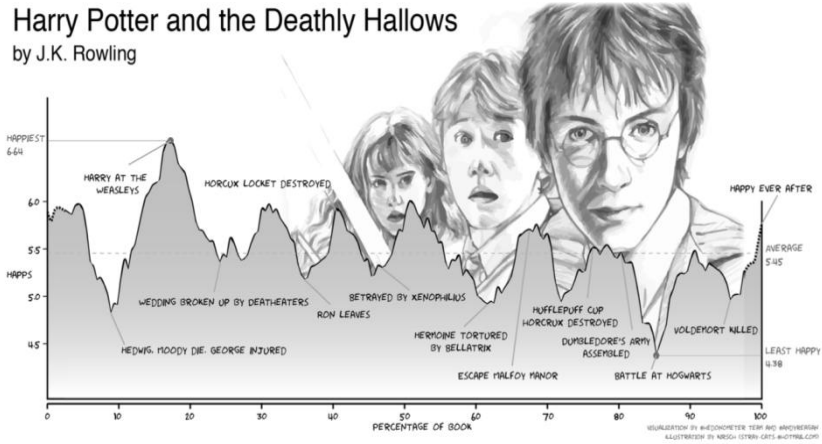
5. The Cinderella Arc

In this case, the emotional arc begins with a negative situation, but the character slowly climbs toward success. Yet, before achieving it, another fall occurs. Nevertheless, through perseverance and renewed effort, the protagonist rises again and finally reaches definitive success.

6. The Oedipus Arc

This is the case of multiple emotional arcs within the same story. It may begin with a fall, followed by success, then another fall—then a new victory, another defeat, and another triumph—yet ultimately it ends in disaster and tragedy.

It is the story of failed effort: no matter how hard the protagonist tries and insists, they always end up losing.



(Illustration: example of the emotional arcs of a novel such as "Harry Potter.")

The Knot or Development of the Narrative Involves:

- The Problem: the central issue that unfolds throughout the story.
- The Actions: the events that occur during the narrative's development.
- The Rising and Falling Tension: the emotional fluctuations experienced by the reader as the story's actions advance.
- The Solution: finally, the outcome that begins to emerge and toward which the ending of the story is directed.

Workshop

Imagine and write a situation that generates rising tension—a pressing moment that provokes an uncomfortable sense of anxiety.

As an example, let us consider the following scene:

"…*As he tried to get off the crowded bus—filled with people, smells, and discomfort—he tripped over another passenger's foot and stumbled headfirst toward the pavement, just as a motorcycle sped past at full speed…*"

What will happen next?

Now, invent a similar scene of your own with a different situation.

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Chapter 11.
The Ending

The ending is the natural consequence of everything that has happened since the beginning of the story and throughout the plot's development.

By the end, we must remain consistent with the storyline—it must preserve a certain logic. However, there are endings that are truly unexpected, and no matter how much the reader has tried to predict them, they could never have imagined how the story would conclude. Stories with surprising endings are usually very appealing to readers, though there are always those who dislike surprises.

Elements to Keep in Mind When Writing the Ending

1. Avoid leaving loose ends at all costs. Any matter or element mentioned during the story must be resolved by the end.

2. Make sure that the protagonist and other characters have fulfilled their objectives—and if they haven't, explain why those goals were not achieved, as in the case of stories or novels with sad or bittersweet endings. Do not leave things unresolved; provide a clear explanation.

3. In both short stories and novels, the development of the plot must in some way affect the protagonist and

the characters, for better or worse. It's important to show how, by the end, their attitudes or actions have changed. Just as in real life—time passes, but it leaves its mark on us. That is what makes a story believable.

4. If the story or novel has been written following a predetermined structure, planned in advance, ensure that each step of that structure has been fulfilled in its entirety.

5. Always remember the law of Cause and Effect: every action produces a consequence, a result. We must be aware that we are always responsible for our decisions, actions, and their consequences—whether for better or for worse.

TYPES OF ENDINGS IN SHORT STORIES AND NOVELS

Closed Ending:

The story concludes clearly and decisively. Everything is resolved.

Open Ending:

The story ends, but without a clear conclusion. The plot remains unresolved.

Happy Ending:

The protagonist wins the battle; the goal is achieved, and everyone lives happily ever after.

Sad Ending:

The story ends badly, disappointing the reader's expectations or hopes.

Tragic Ending:

The story concludes in tragedy, death, and destruction. Everything ends disastrously.

Hopeful Ending:

There is a sense in the air that the outcome will be good or appropriate, even if it remains open.

Surprising Ending:

An unexpected turn at the end of the story.

Natural Ending:

Unlike the surprising ending, the natural ending is the one that the reader would logically expect, based on the events that preceded it.

Moral Ending:

The story concludes with an ethical or moral lesson. This is common in children's fables or self-help books.

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Workshop

Imagine and write an ending that is astonishing, one that leaves the reader with a strong feeling of satisfaction—whether positive or negative.

As an example, let us look at the following excerpt taken from the book *The Heresy of the Warrior Monks*, by Gordon McAllister:

> *"—But darling," said the wife, "I'm a Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman woman. All my life I have followed, to the letter, the precepts of the Church and the mandates of Catholic faith, believing in what they have declared to be the truth… I think it's too late for me to change my way of thinking—and besides, it frightens me."*
>
> *"Well, you can go on believing whatever you wish," he replied, "but as for me, I stopped believing in those lies a long time ago… And please, turn off the light so I can sleep a little longer."*
>
> *Outside, the light in that small Parisian attic was still on. The writer remained awake, preparing and wrapping the manuscript to send it to a well-known publisher, hoping it would be accepted… without fear. Before sealing the envelope, he read the title once more: The Heresy of the Warrior Monks—and smiled.*
>
> *THE END*

***

THREE WAYS TO WRITE A SHORT STORY OR A NOVEL

When writing a short story or a novel, authors use different methods to conceive, plan, and develop their work, according to their personal preferences.

1. Structured Planning (The Architect)

Some writers behave like architects. They first design the project and create detailed "blueprints" of the story they are about to write, making sure to adhere to that plan. In this case, the author drafts an outline that defines the story's structure, establishes the details of each chapter, sets the parameters of the plot, and even knows the ending before starting to write. That roadmap will guide the author throughout the creative process.

2. Intuitive Writing (The Gardener)

In the second case, the author writes like a gardener. He plants a small *seed*—the initial idea of the story—and lets it grow freely as his intuition and inspiration unfold. Here, the author has only a general sense of what the story will be, then writes the first line and allows the story to flow almost autonomously, following instinct and imagination. There will be time later for polishing, revising, and refining the text.

3. Hybrid Writing (The Master Builder)

Other writers combine both approaches. In this case, they act like a *master builder* who doesn't draft an exhaustive plan but does create a general outline of the story. They then allow their mind to continue developing the idea intuitively, guided by their own experience and creative instinct.

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Chapter 12.
The Constituent Elements of the Short Story and the Novel

The elements that make up a literary work (whether a short story or a novel) are:

- The subject
- The theme
- The plot
- The argument
- The atmosphere
- The setting
- The action
- The characters
- The key question

In this chapter, we will briefly define these elements in order to form a general idea of each one. In Module 2, we will analyze them in greater detail.

1. The Subject

The subject is what the novel or short story is about. According to the *Royal Spanish Academy (RAE)*, the word "subject" (*asunto*) has several meanings:

1. The matter or topic being addressed.
2. The theme or argument of a literary or artistic work.

2. The Theme

The theme is the general, abstract idea developed throughout the story.
It arises from questions such as:

- What do we want to write about?
- What is it that we want to tell?
  There are many possible answers that stem from reflection.

Examples:
- We want to tell a love story.
- We want to tell a story about a tragedy.
- We want to tell a story of perseverance—about someone who succeeded through effort and determination.

María José Codes, from *Escuela de Escritores*, says:
"The theme of a novel is the main idea or core concept underlying it, which can be summarized in a single word or a short abstract phrase." [16]

If we want to explore the idea further, we can refer to the Russian writer, historian, and literary critic Boris Viktorovich Tomashevsky, who defined *theme* as:

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16 Escuela de Escritores – Curso: Novela 1 – Tema 1 Estructura y trama de la novela – Autora María José Codes. – www.escueladeescritores.com

"The theme is what the novel talks about; it consists of the unity of meaning across the various elements of the work."

Likewise, screenwriter and lecturer Robert McKee explains that when we speak of theme, we refer to the ultimate, most important, and transcendent meaning of the story—that is, what lies beneath the surface narrative, behind the accompanying rhetoric.

A Difficult Question

There is a nearly unavoidable question that every writer faces, often uncomfortably. Someone meets the author and asks:

—I've heard you're writing a novel, is that right?

—Yes, that's right.

—So, what is your novel about?

What is your novel about?

If we are unprepared, we may struggle to provide an explanation that is both complete enough to make sense and short enough not to bore our listener.

I have personally faced this situation. For example, when I wrote the novel *The Memory of Lost Years*, I used to stumble over this question: —What is your novel about?

At first, I didn't know how to respond and would usually go on for too long. But after some reflection, I managed to summarize it properly:

"*The Memory of Lost Years* tells the story of Spanish children, between eight and twelve years old, during World War II, under the regime of the autocrat Joseph Stalin, who were imprisoned for twelve years in a Soviet concentration camp in the Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan."

That short summary clearly portrays the theme of the novel.

3. The Plot

In the context of a novel or a short story, the plot is the sequence of interconnected events that unfold throughout the story, following a narrative pattern in a more or less chronological order.

This does not mean that a plot cannot contain anachrony, which is the alteration of chronological order—moving forward or backward in time, or even beginning from the middle or the end.

4. The Argument

The argument answers the question of what the story is about. It is the recounting of the events narrated in a literary work, written in a way that impacts the reader.

Difference Between Plot and Argument

According to *Escuela de Escritores* (Spain): [17]

Argument: The sequence of events narrated in temporal and causal order, imitating the natural flow of life.

Plot: The deliberate organization of events in a particular or strategic way to generate interest in the reader and to deepen the causal and emotional connections between them, with the purpose of conveying a deeper meaning.

5. The Atmosphere

In literature, the atmosphere is the emotional effect that reading the work produces in the reader.

As Julio Cortázar put it:

"The atmosphere (of a story) is the aura that endures in the tale and will possess the reader, as it once possessed, on the other side of the bridge, the author himself." [18]

6. The Setting

The setting refers to the presentation of the environment and location where the story takes place: the geographical location, whether it happens in a city, in the countryside, on a beach, or in a forest.

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[17] Escuela de Escritores – Curso: Novela 1 – Tema 1 Estructura y trama de la novela – Autora María José Codes. – www.escueladeescritores.com

[18] Julio Cortázar - Del cuento breve y sus alrededores (Último asalto, 1969).

It is also important to consider the time in which the story unfolds—the season, the climate, and the historical period in which the events occur.

7. The Action

The action refers to the description of events, deeds, and activities—whether heroic acts, achievements, or simple occurrences—that constitute the narrative movement of the story.

8. The Characters

The characters include the protagonist, the antagonist, and the secondary characters who appear as the story unfolds.

They are the ones who give meaning to the work, since it is through their circumstances, challenges, and accomplishments that the story develops and gains richness.

9. The Key Question

It is essential for the author to identify a key question—the central inquiry that gives the story its depth and purpose.

The author must ask:

- What is the core point of the story?
- What is its most profound and transcendent aspect?

Example:

In the story *Of Love, Tragedies, and Revolutions*, the central theme is the love and death of one of the characters and how it affects the others, within the historical context of the

revolutionary movements of 1968 in both Europe and America.
The underlying message of the story is to show how violence profoundly transforms and damages human lives.

10. The Synopsis

Although the synopsis is not necessarily one of the constituent elements of the story, it is important to mention it as a useful complement.

A synopsis is a concise and illustrative summary of the story—a presentation that offers a general overview of the literary work. Its purpose is to give readers or publishers a clear sense of the plot and its direction, serving as a preliminary introduction for those who might be interested in the work.

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Chapter 13.
Types of Narrative Texts (Short Stories)

There are several kinds of short stories. According to their focus, theme, and style, a story can be classified as:

- Folk tale
- Literary short story
- Realistic short story
- Surrealist short story

1. The Folk Tale

The folk tale belongs to the cultural heritage of a people. It generally arises from oral tradition and is closely linked to popular legends, myths, and fables.

A folk tale is based on imaginary events, many of which come from ancient oral traditions that narrate legendary stories, fables, and customs. Typically, the author of a folk tale is unknown, although sometimes the person who collected or recorded it is known.

Examples of types of folk tales:

- Fables
- Myths
- Legends

- Children's stories
- Tales of customs and traditions
- Fairy tales
- Animal tales

Examples of children's stories and fables:
- *Hansel and Gretel*
- *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*
- *The Vain Little Mouse*
- *Snow White*
- *The Ugly Duckling*
- *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*
- *Jack and the Beanstalk*

Nowadays, countless children's stories can be found in bookstores all over the world.

Types of Folk Tales

Myths

Myths express the ancestral beliefs of ancient peoples through imagined explanations for the mysteries that surrounded their lives. They sought to make sense of phenomena they found extraordinary or incomprehensible.

For example, if children got lost in the forest and could not be found, people might say that "the elves took them." Likewise, myths explain the origin of the sun, the moon, the stars, illnesses, healing, and other natural or mysterious events. These stories, passed down through

generations, form part of each people's cultural and spiritual identity.

Fables

A fable is a short narrative, usually intended for children, in which the main characters can be people, animals, plants, or even inanimate objects endowed with human qualities.

Fables are brief anecdotes that contain an implicit moral teaching, often expressed through a moral or lesson at the end.

Legends

Legends originate in the oral traditions of communities, based on their worldview and understanding of the world. They narrate strange or extraordinary events passed down through generations.

Often, a legend begins with a real event, which gradually takes on a mysterious or supernatural dimension as it is retold. Fear, mystery, and awe are common elements.

In Latin America, examples of popular legends include *La Patasola*, *La Llorona*, and *La Bola de Fuego* (The Fireball), among others.

2. The Literary Short Story

The literary short story belongs to the realm of cultivated literary works and possesses recognized artistic and literary value.

Unlike folk tales—which may have many versions or adaptations—a literary short story exists in a single, definitive version, created by a known author.

The literary short story is a concise narrative, with a limited number of key characters and an engaging plot, written in refined prose and crafted with high literary quality.

Types of Literary Short Stories

- Fantastic stories
- Suspense and mystery stories
- Detective stories
- Historical stories
- Flash fiction or micro-stories
- Realistic stories
- Magical realism stories
- Science fiction stories, and others

Literary short stories, being of great cultural value, are represented by some of the most distinguished writers of world literature—among them Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov, and Giovanni Boccaccio, to name only a few from an almost endless list.

In turn, both literary short stories and novels can be subdivided into:

- Realist stories and novels
- Surrealist stories and novels
- Magical realism stories and novels
- Noir novels
- Works of the "cursed poets" (*poètes maudits*) tradition

1. Realistic Stories

Realistic stories are written in a style that seeks to appear authentic and believable, even though their content is fictional.

The key characteristic of a realistic short story is that, while entirely imagined, it manages to convince the reader that it could have actually happened.

As mentioned earlier, the ability of a realistic story to sustain the reader's belief and attention depends on how convincingly it recreates the illusion of reality. Otherwise, the story loses credibility, and the reader's interest fades.

To achieve this effect, the author often incorporates real elements or factual references, giving the story a sense of authenticity that makes the fiction appear entirely real.

Examples of authors of realistic stories:

- Raymond Carver
- Ernest Hemingway
- Anton Chekhov, among others

Titles of some classic stories *(Available on the literary website "Ciudad Seva" —*
https://ciudadseva.com/calle-seva/algunos-de-mis-cuentos-clasicos-favoritos/)

- *To the Raft* — Horacio Quiroga
- *Bartleby* — Herman Melville
- *The Overcoat* — Nikolai Gogol
- *To Build a Fire* — Jack London
- *The Cloak* — Dino Buzzati
- *Hope* — Villiers de l'Isle-Adam
- *The Rain of Fire* — Leopoldo Lugones
- *The Metamorphosis* — Franz Kafka
- *A Celebrated Man* — J.M. Machado de Assis

In the following chapter, we will read a complete realistic (tragicomedy) short story written by Gordon McAllister.

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Chapter 14.
An Example of a Realistic Short Story

Short Story (Tragicomedy)

THE DISAPPEARED DECEASED
By Gordon McAllister

They couldn't find her. It seemed like the macabre game of a mysterious fate.
An old woman, lost in a nearly unfamiliar city—yet, to make matters stranger, she was a wandering soul, a deceased woman gone astray on the tortuous roads of a destiny half hidden in the esoteric shadows of the "Beyond."
It had all begun some twenty days earlier in the city of Medellín, where her children—Mario José, Jorge Alejandro, and María Jimena, all of them surnamed Rosero—had planned a family vacation trip to the coastal city of Manta, on the Pacific shores of neighboring Ecuador.
They never imagined the trick that fate had in store for them, like a mischievous juggler filled with secret tricks, eager to tangle up reality with heavy-handed jokes seemingly designed to irritate others.
Soon, they were traveling in a caravan of three vehicles, accompanied by their spouses and a brood of seven mischievous kids, aged between four and twelve. They also brought along a mutt that looked vaguely like a German shepherd but was more of a scrappy mixed breed, with a pretentious name meant to elevate its image—"Bihor of Transylvania."

Alongside him rode another "mastiff," though calling it that was a stretch. The creature looked like a pitiful scrap of something half-born from a Chernobyl experiment gone wrong, so disfigured that they decided not to give it a name at all. To call it, they simply whistled loudly or shouted, "Hey, you!" The poor beast, accustomed to the call, probably thought that was its name.

And, of course, they took Grandma along—almost a centenarian, a delicate porcelain figure who looked as if she were made of fine white ceramic. She was so quiet, so fragile, so pale, she could have passed for dead already, her cheeks devoid of color, her presence barely perceptible.

They drove the paved roads south from their hometown until reaching the Rumichaca border. But first, they made a "technical stop" in Cali—"to drain the radiator," as they jokingly said—and stretch their legs near the Country Club. Not at the club, of course, but nearby, at a small corner shop in a working-class neighborhood, saving money by skipping lunch.

They bought sodas and packaged cakes (Chocoramo) for the kids, while the adults ate from a pot of sticky rice with chicken—heavy on the rice, light on the chicken—accompanied by lukewarm lemonade from a thermos, trying to fool their hunger and pass the time.

Their next stop was in the Colombian border town of Ipiales, at a store beside a dubious brothel sporting a sign that read:

"Beautiful Girls – Cheap Drinks – Affordable Lodging – Decent Bathroom – Full Massage Included – Family Atmosphere! - Rate per night: $25,000. If the girl pays, lodging only $5,000."

This time, their meal consisted of dry bread, cheap sausage made of coagulated blood, cardboard pulp, and perhaps a whisper of pork—seasoned with artificial smoke and enough cumin to disguise the taste. They washed it down with lemon, cola, and tamarind sodas.

After the break, they crossed the border into Ecuador, descending slowly from the Andean highlands toward the Pacific coast, where the city of Guayaquil welcomed them with open arms.

Ah, Guayaquil… sun, heat, and the lively charm of a friendly tropical land.

They spent the first night there in a modest little hotel that offered a "suite"—a single large room filled with beds, bunkbeds for the adults, and mats on the floor for the children. Dinner consisted of leftovers from the rice and chicken, a few stray peas and carrots, bits of sausage wrapping that reeked of cumin, sticky soda bottles, crumbs of bread and cookies, and peels of tangerine and banana—all of which they piled in a corner near the door.

Around midnight, a sudden crash shattered the quiet: the door burst open and two enormous dogs stood in the shadows, snarling at the pile of food scraps. Screams, curses, shoes flying through the air. Then, sleeplessness—and open eyes in the darkness, haunted by flashes of joy and annoyance alike.

The next morning, they continued toward Manta, their final destination.

There they met Bertoldo Ramiriquí, a chubby fellow from Boyacá, who had long since acclimated to the tropical heat but still carried the rosy cheeks of his mountain homeland—and the smell of a wool poncho that had never known soap. It gave

off the damp scent of rain-soaked fabric from his long-forgotten plateau farm.

They all descended upon Bertoldo, who agreed to act as their local tour guide in that seaside town filled with the fragrance of fried fish freshly pulled from the ocean, seafood ceviche with lime, golden plantain patties, the smell of canned tuna from legendary factories, and the briny breath of the Pacific under the dusty heat of coastal streets.

Bertoldo took them to a hotel—but what a "hotel"!

It looked like an old two-story house, its tropical-colored walls peeling in layers, with about twenty rooms that smelled of humidity and heat. He assured them it was "the best in town," and so cheap that if they haggled a bit, they might even stay for free as long as they agreed to eat lunch there every day. The deal included free breakfast bread and yesterday's newspaper from the capital.

From then on, it was all beach and fun for the family—bathing suits, dazzling suns, beach balls, inflatable rings, pineapple chunks, diced papaya, fried fish of every kind: snook, snapper, mahi-mahi, and even shark—sold under the more palatable name tollo. And, of course, coconut rice, served at the beach stalls by elderly women with weathered hands.

The hotel kept its promise: the bread and the day-old newspaper were free.

Grandma was seated daily on a little chair, custom-made for her, right there in the sand. A large straw hat shaded her face—hiding her expression, her need to use the bathroom, and her silent wish to rest in a gentler shade. And so, under the merciless coastal sun, the old woman slowly dried up, like a piece of roasted meat left too long on the grill—parched, motionless, and speechless.

After eight days, she could no longer stand up. Grandma was stiff, dry, and warm—like an overbaked chicken left overnight in the oven. No one even noticed when she had passed on to a better world. They had been too busy enjoying themselves, soaking up the sun and spending the vacation money wisely.
But now—what to do?
In a foreign country, on a remote beach, with barely enough cash left for the return trip and the tolls.
"How much does it cost to send a body back home?" they asked Bertoldo.
"To repatriate someone's remains? By plane?"
"Impossible," he concluded.
The best idea came, of course, from Bertoldo himself—his mind sharpened by the crafty cunning of the Andes.
"Well," he said, "I can get some formaldehyde. We'll inject her with a good dose, wrap her up tight inside a refrigerator box I can get my hands on, strap it to the roof of one of the cars, and you take her back home—quietly. No need to tell anyone, no permits, nothing. Once you get to Medellín, you can give her a proper burial, ceremony and all."
"I agree with Bertoldo," said the eldest brother—and so it was.
That very night, before dawn, the caravan set out again—three cars, two dogs, and Grandma, securely packed in her cardboard coffin atop one of the vehicles. It was a thirty-one-hour trip, covering roughly 1,600 kilometers to Medellín.
Their first stop came three hours later in Santo Domingo de los Colorados, still in Ecuador. The car carrying the "special cargo" had overheated; the fan belt had snapped and needed replacement. They'd have to wait until the mechanic opened his shop at nine in the morning to fix it.

No one suspected a thing. No one asked questions. The mechanic began working right there on the sidewalk.
While waiting, the family went to a nearby diner for breakfast, dragging the two dogs, who barked plaintively at the box on the roof, as if they knew the grim fate that was about to unfold.
Two hours later, they returned—and to their shock, the box was gone. Not even the rope was left behind.
The mechanic had no explanation. He said that once he finished the job, he'd gone inside to eat breakfast and hadn't noticed anything unusual. They yelled, threatened, even grabbed him by the collar—but he could offer no answer.
They drove through every street in town, searching, but found nothing. The box—with Grandma inside—had vanished.
They couldn't file a police report, for fear of incriminating themselves. There were no witnesses, no culprits, no investigation. Resigned, they continued their journey back to Medellín at noon, accompanied only by the dogs' mournful howls.
There were no tears, no guilt, no remorse. They had done the best they could—and everyone agreed on that.
Some time later, an elderly woman from their neighborhood in Buenos Aires asked the youngest child:
"Tell me, my dear, what ever happened to your grandmother? She hasn't been seen in a long time."
"Grandma got lost on the way," the boy answered, "and we never heard from her again.
I think maybe the Baby Jesus took her up to heaven." [19]

— O —

[19] Gordon McAllister, 2022, Cuentos Relatos y Poemas, Bogotá, Amazón.com

Chapter 15.
Surrealist Short Stories and Novels

Surrealism

Literary surrealism seeks to reveal a way of perceiving reality—but from an angle entirely different from the ordinary—often guided by the parameters of the author's subconscious or unconscious mind.

In surrealism, the logic of traditional thought is deliberately transgressed in order to express a distorted version of reality—distorted only at first glance—yet following a clear internal logic known to the author and to those readers willing to read between the lines.

When speaking of surrealism, we must refer to its greatest figure, André Breton, who, together with Philippe Soupault, founded the Surrealist Movement.

André Breton (1896–1966) was a French writer and poet, the principal theorist of surrealism, and the author of the First Surrealist Manifesto, which stated:

> *"Pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express—verbally, through writing, or by any other means—the real functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, and beyond any aesthetic or moral concern."*

When surrealism is described as psychic automatism, it refers to artistic and literary creation free from conscious control—allowing the unconscious mind to flow freely into

expression through the method known as automatic writing (or *psychography*).

This method consists of writing without engaging the rational mind—simply holding the pen and letting the hand move on its own, without deliberate control over what is being written.

We must also mention Philippe Soupault (1897–1990), a French writer, political activist, poet, novelist, and critic.

Together with Louis Aragon and André Breton, he co-authored *Les Champs Magnétiques* (*The Magnetic Fields*), a groundbreaking work on automatic writing.

An Example of Surrealist Literature

Poem:

Toward the Night

By Philippe Soupault

It is late
in the shadow and in the wind
a cry rises with the night
I wait for no one
no one
not even a memory
It has long been past the hour
but that cry carried by the wind
pushing forward
comes from a place beyond
beyond the dream
I wait for no one
but here is the night

crowned by the fire
of all the dead men's eyes
silent
And all that was meant to vanish
all that was lost
must be found again
beyond the dream
toward the night.

Another Example of Surrealist Poetry

Fragment from the poem
FIVE POEMS FOR CRIS
By Julio Cortázar
Poem No. 2

Last night I dreamed of you
priestess of Sekhmet, the lion-headed goddess.
She, naked in porphyry,
your smooth skin unveiled.
What offering did you make to the wild deity
who gazed, through your eyes,
into an eternal and merciless horizon?
The cup of your hands contained
your secret libation—tears,
or your menstrual blood, or your saliva.
In any case, it was not semen,
and my dream knew
that the offering would be rejected
with a slow, disdainful roar,
just as you had always expected.

Then, perhaps—I no longer know—
the claws upon your breast,
filling you completely.

Now, a Poem Between Realism and Surrealism

The story itself is realistic, yet the atmosphere is surreal.

Poem:
A SAD MEMORY IN LISBON
By Gordon McAllister

It happened in Lisbon, long ago…
now only a poem, or prose,
or perhaps a prose poem—
what does it matter now, whichever it was...
In Coimbra we met,
as young students,
in our black attire,
our scholar's capes.
Then, years later,
with adult memories,
adult commitments,
adult restraints—
an unexpected reunion...
That night in Lisbon,
an inescapable fate…
that bench in Belém…
that solitary instant,

that autumn night,
that cold dawn…
A conversation between friends,
remembering old times,
so much left unsaid—
and hidden within it, a love long deferred,
and openly, an impossible passion...
Then came a forbidden vision,
a tender clandestine love,
an improper passion,
an outlawed experience—
a crossing of boundaries...
And then... that unforgettable kiss,
that mortal sin,
that unforgivable fault,
that unacceptable love,
and the memory that endured...
And came the terrible fear,
the dread of public scorn,
the harsh betrayal of the beloved,
the flight from what was done,
the retreat from the scene,
the denial of what had been true...
Then only a distant memory,
time rushing past,
perhaps forgetfulness with it,
and new layers of stories…
Another city, another world,
other lives, other tales,
and the soft arrival of oblivion,
and the slow fading away...

But—
I have returned to beloved Lisbon,
to the memories of long ago,
and the sadness returns,
and the images rise again,
like restless souls...
It is night, cold, and autumn,
almost dawn, and I am alone,
with my memories of long ago,
with my unyielding nostalgia...
And I claim in memory
those distant moments—
our student garb,
our prideful capes,
our youthful recklessness,
free from limits and restraint—
and in Coimbra, the Alma Mater,
the memories remain.[20]

Examples of Surrealist Short Stories in Spanish:

Below is a list of surrealist short stories with direct links where the reader can explore them online:

- La cena – Alfonso Reyes
  https://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/escritores/a_reyes/antologia/cena.htm

[20] Gordon McAllister, 2023, Antología Poética, Bogotá, Amazon.com

- El ramo azul – Octavio Paz https://narrativabreve.com/2013/11/cuento-breve-octavio-paz-ramo-azul.html

- Casa tomada – Julio Cortázar https://ciudadseva.co*m/texto/casa-tomada/

- Conejos Blancos – Leonora Carrington https://clauzzen.org/2011/07/13/cuento-corto-conejos-blancos-leonora-carrington/

- Un señor muy viejo con unas alas enormes – Gabriel García Márquez https://www.apocatastasis.com/senor-viejo-alas-enormes-garcia-marquez.php#axzz3r9ty9QKd

- Una bella película – Guillaume Apollinaire https://ciudadseva.com/texto/una-bella-pelicula/

- Viaje a la semilla – Alejo Carpentier https://ciudadseva.com/texto/viaje-a-la-semilla/

For more information and stories, readers can visit *Ciudad Seva – Index by Country of Authors*:

https://ciudadseva.com/indice-paises-cuentos/

Now here are a list of autors and surreal short stories in english.

1. J. G. Ballard (United Kingdom)
- *Vermilion Sands* (1971) — a collection of short stories set in a futuristic resort filled with fantasy, illusion, and surreal elements.
- *The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista* — from the same collection; a story about sentient architecture and mood-shifting houses.
- *Cry Hope, Cry Fury!* — another tale from *Vermilion Sands*, centered on decadent art and paintings that react to emotion.
- *Studio 5, The Stars* — also part of *Vermilion Sands*, featuring machines that automatically generate poetry.

2. Jen George (United States)
- *The Babysitter at Rest* (2016) — a collection of surreal, dreamlike short stories where the ordinary becomes strange and uncanny.

3. George Saunders (United States)
- *Tenth of December* — a collection blending the everyday with the bizarre and absurd, often with surreal undertones.
- *Pastoralia* — another collection featuring distorted realities and dark humor in surreal corporate or social settings.
- *Lincoln in the Bardo* — though a novel, it is deeply surreal and metaphysical in its structure and atmosphere.

4. Carmen Maria Machado (United States)
- *Her Body and Other Parties* — a powerful, surreal collection that blends the fantastic, the supernatural, and the psychological, exploring modern identity and gender themes.

Workshop

I have personally found it difficult to write surrealist texts or narratives, but little by little I have opened myself to the possibility that it *can* be done—with dedication, imagination, and good spirit.

I now propose that the student open their mind to the challenge of creating a surrealist piece, even if at first it seems to make no sense at all.

As an example, let us try something like this:

"It was an afternoon when Mother Nature's tears flooded roads lined with dung-filled mud, submerging pools of light whose shimmering reflections illuminated a sky painted in a thousand shades of gray…"

Now it's your turn. Give it a try.

— O —

Chapter 16.
Characteristics, Similarities, and Differences Between Short Stories and Novels

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SHORT STORY AND THE NOVEL

1. In principle, a novel is long, and a short story is brief. There is no precise rule defining how short a short story must be, nor how long a novel should be. However, a novel is generally allowed far greater freedom in length—it can even be short enough to blur the line between the two genres. In France, the term *nouvelle* refers to the short novel. It does not share the extreme economy of narrative resources typical of the short story, yet it does not extend itself excessively in detail either.
2. The short story usually contains a single, straightforward plot, whereas the novel can encompass multiple plots and subplots, often complex and expansive in scope.
3. The short story unfolds in a linear and unidimensional narrative space, following a single storyline from beginning to end. In contrast, a novel may pursue several narrative threads simultaneously, exploring different perspectives, times, and dimensions.

4. With few exceptions, a short story typically takes place in one setting and time, while a novel often moves across multiple places and time frames. It may even play with time itself—either stepping back (*analepsis*) or forward (*prolepsis*) in the narrative.
5. Short stories most often originate from fantasy or imagination (as in legends, fables, or literary tales), while novels generally draw from elements of real life, even when those elements are reimagined within a fictional framework.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHORT STORIES

1. In short stories, time and place are usually well defined in order to situate the narrative properly—even in surrealist works.
2. Short stories are brief and are generally meant to be read in a single sitting.
3. There is usually a central character (protagonist) and an opposing character (antagonist) who confronts them.
4. The protagonist must have a goal or objective, and the plot presents obstacles and conflicts—often caused by the antagonist—that make achieving that goal difficult.
5. Although a short story is a fictional narrative, whether or not it is inspired by real events, it must always feel entirely believable to the reader.
6. The actions in a short story create tension, while the narration evokes emotion, uncertainty, and expectation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NOVEL

1. The novel is rich in detail. Its length allows for elaboration and description whenever the style requires it. However, one should always remember the principle: *"Less is more."* Economy of words is a mark of narrative balance.
2. A novel features multiple characters—protagonists, antagonists, secondary figures, and even *offstage* or unseen characters such as an omniscient narrator.
3. In a novel, there can be parallel stories that relate to the main narrative. There are plots and subplots, sudden twists, and all these elements together give life to the work.
4. In the novel, character development is essential—both physical and psychological traits are carefully crafted, as well as the emotional context that surrounds them. Characters can be flat (simple) or round (complex), depending on their depth and evolution.
5. The narrative environment is crucial. It encompasses the space and time in which the story unfolds—weather, season, setting (open or enclosed), and social context (a poor neighborhood, a luxurious mansion, a beach, or a mountain). Equally important is the emotional atmosphere the author creates within each passage of the novel—where sadness, joy, pain, melancholy, or nostalgia lend special tones and texture to the story.
6. Although the events of a novel are fictional, born of the author's imagination, they often rest on a solid

base of real life or historical inspiration. In either case, it is crucial that the narrative feels real and authentic to the reader.

7. The primary purpose of the novel is to entertain the reader, whether in a sophisticated or popular context.

   In the historical novel, for instance, even though it meticulously portrays the historical setting in which the story takes place, it must still remain engaging and enjoyable to read—through the construction of a compelling plot that captures and sustains the reader's attention.

— O —

Chapter 17.
Magical Realism

Magical Realism

Magical Realism is a literary movement that portrays reality—but in an altered form. It differs greatly from Surrealism, which completely transforms reality, leading it into the realm of dreams or the unconscious. In Magical Realism, reality itself is present, yet it is infused with a sense of mystery—combined with imaginative, curious, and extraordinary elements that create a vivid, colorful, and luminous atmosphere.

Since this movement originated in a land already magical by nature—Latin America—it is understandable that its works often incorporate folkloric, social, political, and economic themes of the region.

When we speak of Magical Realism today, the image of Gabriel García Márquez and his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude* immediately comes to mind. However, going further back, we must also recognize other significant figures in this literary current, such as Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, Horacio Quiroga, Arturo Uslar Pietri, and Miguel Ángel Asturias.

Yet, for me personally, the greatest exponent of Magical Realism in Latin America was Jorge Luis Borges, both in his poetry and in some of his short stories.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LITERARY MAGICAL REALISM

1. In Magical Realism, the realist narrative is deliberately distorted toward an appearance of unreality by introducing fantastic or supernatural elements seamlessly into real events.
2. These fantastic elements are treated as natural and ordinary, as though they were an inherent part of everyday life.
3. Magical Realism, though distinct from Surrealism, often shares certain aesthetic similarities with it.
4. It frequently distorts the perception of time, altering the chronological order of events.
5. It is common to include myths, legends, and folkloric themes within the narrative.
6. Many works of Magical Realism become literary vehicles for political or socioeconomic reflection, serving as critiques of society, culture, or history.
7. Magical Realism often draws from metaphysics, exploring the structure and nature of reality itself, and embellishing it with elements of fantasy—achieving a unique and fascinating synthesis.

SOME NOTABLE WORKS OF MAGICAL REALISM [21]

[21] Fuente: https://humanidades.com/realismo-magico/#ixzz7v69x7B6t

- Arturo Uslar Pietri (1906–2001) – Venezuelan writer
  Work: La lluvia y las lanzas coloradas (1930)
  https://ciudadseva.com/texto/la-lluvia-uslar/
- Carlos Fuentes (1928–2012) – Mexican writer
  Work: Aura (1962)
  https://ciudadseva.com/texto/aura-fuentes/

- Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) – Colombian writer
  Work: One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967).

- Isabel Allende (1942–present) – Chilean writer
  Work: The House of the Spirits (1982)

- Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) – Argentine writer
  Work: The Aleph (1949)
  https://ciudadseva.com/texto/el-aleph/

- Juan Rulfo (1917–1986) – Mexican writer
  Work: Pedro Páramo (1955)

- Julio Cortázar (1914–1984) – Argentine writer
  Work: Continuity of Parks (1964)
  https://ciudadseva.com/texto/continuidad-de-los-parques/

- Laura Esquivel (1950–present) – Mexican writer
  Work: Like Water for Chocolate (1989)

- Mario Vargas Llosa (1936–present) – Peruvian writer
  Work: La Chunga (1986)

- Toni Morrison (1931–2019) – American writer
  Work: Beloved (1987)*

Here are a list of short stories or novels from autors who write magic Realism in English.

1. Angela Carter (United Kingdom)
- *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) — a collection of short stories blending the mythical, the sensual, and the fantastic, often considered magical realism in tone.
- *Nights at the Circus* (1984) — a surreal, symbol-laden novel where magic and reality coexist in the life of a winged woman.

2. Anna-Marie McLemore (United States)
- *When the Moon Was Ours* — a young-adult novel of magical realism that weaves Latin-American folklore, identity, and love into a poetic narrative.
- *The Weight of Feathers* — another beautifully written story that merges family drama with magical elements and lyrical realism.

3. Menna van Praag (United Kingdom)
- *The House at the End of Hope Street* (2013) — a modern work of magical realism set in Cambridge, where a mysterious house transforms the lives of the women who enter it.

- *The Dress Shop of Dreams* (2014) — a charming novel filled with wonder, where an enchanted dress shop helps people find love and meaning.

Examples of Magical Realist Texts

A Poem by Jorge Luis Borges

The White Doe

From what wild ballad of green England,
from what Persian miniature,
from what arcane region of the nights and days
that cradle our yesterdays,
came the white doe I dreamed this morning?
It lasted but a second. I saw her cross the meadow
and vanish into the gold of an illusory afternoon—
a slight creature made of a little memory
and a little forgetfulness—doe of a single side.
The powers that govern this curious world
let me dream of you, though never claim you;
perhaps in some hidden turn of the deep future
I shall find you again, white doe of a dream.
I too am a fleeting dream that endures
a few days more than the dream of the meadow and the whiteness.
— Jorge Luis Borges

Example of a Magical Realist Novel
Excerpt from the Novel:
AND HE WENT WITH THE WIND

(Story of a Refugee)
By Gordon McAllister

From afar, he looked like an exhalation, a sigh shaped into breath—perhaps visible only from a subtler dimension. At times, his figure blurred with the horizon, turning into a mirage stumbling forward, tangled in the shimmer of the burning asphalt.

The sky glowed upon the asphalt, and the asphalt itself was mirrored in a sky stripped of clouds and illusions.

He thought he saw an immense blue lake—clear, refreshing, within reach, just a few steps away—and believed that he had finally arrived at his temporary destination…

But how mistaken he was.

There was no lake, no celestial water, not even a roof or a tree to shelter his head beneath the imagined paper hat—long since blown away toward some uncertain fate. He staggered forward, driven by gusts of scorching wind, near the brink of delirium from the mortal sunstroke.

The many demons of a cruel nature took their vengeance upon him, eager to see him fall—defeated by the malice and neglect of humankind. And within him, only misfortune remained: a life laden with more obstacles than seemed necessary for one who sought merely to evolve toward wisdom and consciousness. [22]

— Gordon McAllister

[22] Gordon McAllister, 2024, Y SE FUE CON EL VIENTO, Bogotá, Amazon.com

Another Example of Magical Realism

Excerpt from the Short Story

Office of Darkness (Oficio de tinieblas)
By Alejo Carpentier

The year took on a grim appearance. Few noticed it, but the city was no longer the same. Objects no longer cast their proper shadows on the floor. More troubling still, those shadows seemed eager to detach themselves—as if the things themselves bore bad shadows. Moss crept darkly over rooftops, columns flaked overnight beneath strange humidity, and balcony railings cracked as if swollen by dew and sun.

Something had changed in the air. The pigeons of the courtyards stood on their pink feet without cooing, as though wishing to tuck their wings into invisible pockets.

Even the great cathedral bell seemed heavier, its tone dulled, as if the January rains had swelled its bronze into wood. Never had the termites and the woodworms traveled so far. Hawkers sang their street cries in funereal falsettos, and nothing white prospered. Bridal satin molded in the bottom of wardrobes, and clouds waited for night to flee toward the sea, following a schooner destined to perish in a solitary cove.

Such were the days in Santiago, when the funeral of General Enna was celebrated with pomp and medals and mournful grandeur.

One More Example

Excerpt from
One Hundred Years of Solitude
By Gabriel García Márquez

The house was filled with love.

Aureliano expressed it in verses that had neither beginning nor end. He wrote them on the coarse parchments given to him by Melquíades, on the bathroom walls, even on the skin of his arms—and everywhere appeared the transfigured image of Remedios:

Remedios in the drowsy air of two o'clock in the afternoon,
Remedios in the silent breathing of the roses,
Remedios in the secret hourglass of the moths,
Remedios in the vapor of bread at dawn,
Remedios everywhere, and Remedios forever.

Rebeca waited for love at four in the afternoon, sewing by the window. She knew the mail mule came only every fifteen days, but still she waited, convinced that one day it might arrive by mistake.

Workshop

Try writing a paragraph in the style of Magical Realism.

Here's an example:

"It was an afternoon when the ether carried the scent of tearful illusions and the faint, melancholy odor of a rain-soaked dog… as if the very air wished to torment the soul with memories of forgotten

sorrows. And suddenly, from the depths, a dark cry arose out of nothing—like a ghost summoned from the abyss."

Now it's your turn. Let your imagination breathe.

— O —

Chapter 18.
Noir Fiction, Dirty Realism, and the "Accursed" Writers

Noir fiction and Dirty Realism each deserve their own chapter.

NOIR FICTION

Let us begin with Noir, defined as *hard-boiled*—of a tough, unsentimental character—by the writer Raymond Chandler. It is the literature of the underworld: dark psychological settings, murky backdrops, suffocating atmospheres. It is also known as crime fiction. The dividing line between good and evil blurs, and both protagonists and antagonists are shadowy, defeatist, and decadent figures. The truth that underlies their world is raw and hard-won.

The pioneers of noir include Raymond Chandler, Carroll John Daly, and Dashiell Hammett.

Standout modes within the genre include:

1. The detective novel, with the investigator as protagonist.
2. The novel told from the criminal's point of view.
3. The novel from the victim's perspective.
4. The novel that presents the judge's perspective.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NOIR FICTION

1. It explores motivations for crime rooted in the basest human passions: anger, hatred, lust, greed, and the thirst for power.
2. Ironic, cynical turns of phrase are common; the protagonist's sharp wit and acerbic tone often make him compelling.
3. Protagonists—often detectives—are characterized as quiet, laconic, cool-headed, and bold.
4. The action tends to be violent, kinetic, and fast-paced—and, frequently, ruthless and cruel.
5. The environment is dark and murky; emotionally depressing, populated by failed and lost characters.
6. The atmosphere is suffocating; injustice, violence, insecurity, corruption, and fear prevail.
7. Stories typically unfold in marginal settings where social injustice is central and failure is part of everyday life.

Examples of Noir Fiction

Some noteworthy contemporary publications in the genre: -(Spanish exemples)

1. *Esperando al diluvio* — Dolores Redondo
2. *Nadie en esta tierra* — Víctor del Árbol
3. *Axel* — Luis García-Rey
4. *La dama y la muerte* — Greta Alonso
5. *Mindfulness para asesinos* — Karsten Dusse
6. *El misterio de la bala perdida* — Richard Osman
7. *El Libro Negro de las Horas* — Eva García Sáenz de Urturi

An Excerpt from the Noir Novel *La dama y la muerte* by Greta Alonso [23]

(1) *MATEO VALTIERRA*
Santander, Sunday, October 10

She was blonde, she had a birthmark on her thigh, and later I remembered her nails were painted. Burgundy, like wine; square, glossy, perfectly trimmed. Her skin is pale and cold—I know this as I brush her wrist, taking a faltering pulse, repeating to myself how much I hate Sundays.

That October Sunday will make the difference, and the origin of it all has to do with Rebeca. Nine in the morning; I'm still asleep, and when the phone rings I think I'm dreaming. I never stopped dreaming—each night I plunge beneath giant waves, keep beating through endless forests, still challenge violent, ferocious storms, somehow foreboding. I keep dreaming like I did as a kid, but now the dreams are like an egg without salt; it tastes like egg, but it's not much.

Rebeca calls at nine. I sit up in bed not knowing what day it is, unsure where I am or what I'm doing here. That fleeting instant when you feel blind, lost, like you're nobody. Distant sobbing, a strangled voice, a message that makes no sense.

—"They killed him," Rebeca sobs. "I think they killed him," she insists on the other end of the line. I sit up naked, tangled

[23] Greta Alonso (Pseudónimo), escritora Fantasma.
https://planetadelibroscom.cdnstatics2.com/libros_contenido_extra/52/51950_1_La_dama_y_la_muerte.pdf

in the sheets. I rub my eyes and ask the question:
—"Who did they kill?"
—"Lucas," Rebeca confirms. "They killed Lucas Cué."

I stumble out of bed. It doesn't occur to me to turn on the light, and I trip over something— the pile of books I went through last night. I curse everything, make my way to the window, raise the shutter. It's raining.

CLASSICS OF THE GENRE (AMERICAN HARD-BOILED AND NOIR)

The Maltese Falcon (1930) — Dashiell Hammett
Featuring detective Sam Spade, this is one of the foundational works of noir: cynical, lean, and driven by greed and deception.

The Big Sleep (1939) — Raymond Chandler
Introduces the iconic detective Philip Marlowe, a morally ambiguous antihero navigating Los Angeles's underworld.

Farewell, My Lovely (1940) — Raymond Chandler
Another Marlowe case, where crime mingles with the poetry of disenchantment. Elegant style, razor-sharp dialogue.

Double Indemnity (1943) — James M. Cain
A story of passion and murder between an insurance salesman and a femme fatale. Raw and direct.

The Postman Always Rings Twice (1934) — James M. Cain
Brutal and sensual, it portrays moral corruption in an atmosphere of desire and violence.

BRITISH AUTHORS AND NOIR VARIANTS

Brighton Rock (1938) — Graham Greene
A young criminal and the tension between good and evil in interwar England—a blend of realism and theological reflection.

The Third Man (1950) — Graham Greene
Set in postwar Vienna, a masterpiece of espionage and moral corruption.

CONTEMPORARY NOIR

L.A. Confidential (1990) — James Ellroy
Part of his "L.A. Quartet." A dense, cinematic portrait of police corruption in 1950s Los Angeles.

The Black Dahlia (1987) — James Ellroy
Based on a real murder, it stands as one of the darkest and most psychologically complex noirs of the modern era.

The Friends of Eddie Coyle (1970) — George V. Higgins
Naturalistic dialogue, streetwise language, and a bleak look at low-level crime in Boston.

The Long Goodbye (1953) — Raymond Chandler Often considered his masterpiece: a meditation on loneliness, betrayal, and friendship within the noir universe.

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2005) — Stieg Larsson Though Swedish, its English translation and dark tone place it within Nordic Noir, strongly influenced by the Anglo-American tradition.

DIRTY REALISM

Dirty Realism is a narrative subgenre in which the author portrays life and circumstance in a stark, almost brutal way, with minimal description and an almost total suppression of qualifying adjectives.

From the Dirty Realist perspective, life is a blunt and crushing reality—an everyday existence suffered through—but one that deserves to be told with the same weariness with which it is lived. Bitterness, irony, and misery stand out in lives hemmed in by concrete, in the suffocating routine of the big city.

Notable authors include Charles Bukowski, Raymond Carver, John Fante, and Dan Fante.

"Dirty Realism focuses on the ordinary lives of ordinary people—their daily diatribes and, often, their miseries." [24]

Examples of Dirty Realism

[24] https://www.actuallynotes.com/realismo-sucio-html/

A poem by Charles Bukowski (A brief biographical note appears at the end of this section.)

SO YOU WANT TO BE A WRITER? [25]

By Charles Bukowski

If it doesn't burst out of you
in spite of everything,
don't do it.
Unless it comes unasked from your heart
and your mind and your mouth
and your gut,
don't do it.
If you have to sit for hours
staring at your computer screen
or hunched over your typewriter
searching for words,
don't do it.
If you're doing it for money or fame,
don't do it.
If you're doing it because you want women in your bed,
don't do it.
If you have to sit there
and rewrite it again and again,
don't do it.
If the mere thought of doing it exhausts you,
don't do it.
If you're trying to write
like anybody else, forget it.
If you have to wait for it to roar out of you,

[25] https://www.zendalibros.com/los-mejores-poemas-de-charles-bukowski/

wait patiently.
If it never does roar out of you, do something else.
If you first have to read it to your wife
or your girlfriend or your boyfriend
or your parents or to anyone,
you're not ready.
Don't be like so many writers,
don't be like so many thousands
who call themselves writers,
don't be dull and boring and pretentious,
don't get eaten up by self-love.
The world's libraries
yawn themselves to sleep
over people like that.
Don't be one of them.
Don't do it.
Unless it comes out of your soul
like a rocket,
unless staying still
could drive you into madness,
to suicide or murder,
don't do it.
Unless the sun inside you
is burning your guts, don't do it.
When it's truly time,
and if you have been chosen,
it will happen by itself and
keep on happening until you die
or until it dies in you.
There is no other way.
There never was.

THE BURNING OF A DREAM [26]

By Charles Bukowski

The old Los Angeles Public Library
has been destroyed by flames.
That downtown library.
With it went a big part of my youth.
I was sitting on one of those stone benches
when my friend Baldy asked me:
"You going to enlist in the Lincoln Brigade?"
"Sure," I said.
But realizing I wasn't a political idealist or an intellectual,
I backed off later.
I was a reader then,
going from room to room: literature, philosophy,
religion, even medicine and geology.
Very soon I decided to be a writer,
thought it would be the easiest way out,
and the great novelists didn't seem
all that difficult to me.
I had more trouble with Hegel and with Kant.
What irked me about all of them
was how long it took them
to say something lucid and/or interesting.
I figured I had them all beat then.
I discovered two things:
a) most editors believed
that anything boring was profound.
b) I would spend decades living and writing
before I could set down a sentence

[26] https://www.zendalibros.com/los-mejores-poemas-de-charles-bukowski/

that even came close to what I meant.
Meanwhile while others hunted
for ladies, I hunted for old
books; I was a book-hound, though disenchanted,
and that and the world shaped my character.
I lived in a plywood shack
behind a $3.50-a-week rooming house
feeling like a Chatterton
trapped inside a kind of Thomas Wolfe.
My main problems were stamps, envelopes, paper, and wine,
while the world was on the brink
of the Second World War.
Women hadn't got me yet; I was a virgin and wrote
3 to 5 stories a week
and they all came back—rejected by
The New Yorker, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*.
I'd read that Ford Madox Ford used to wallpaper
his bathroom with rejection slips, but I had no
bathroom, so I stacked them
in a drawer, and when it got so full
I could hardly open it, I'd pull everything out—
all the rejections with the stories—
and throw them away.
The old Los Angeles Public Library
was still my home and the home of many other
drifters.
We used the restrooms discreetly,
and the only ones they threw out
were the ones who fell asleep at the
tables; nobody snores like a

drifter—unless it's someone you're married to.
Well, I wasn't really a drifter, I had a library card
and I checked out and returned
books, loads of books, always up to the limit:
Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, E. E. Cummings,
Conrad Aiken, Dos Passos, Turgenev, Gorky,
H.D., Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Steinbeck, Hemingway,
etc.
I always hoped the librarian would say: "You have fine
taste, young man."
But the old hag hardly knew
who she was—how was she going to know
who I was?
Still, those stacks held
a vast treasure: they let me discover
the ancient Chinese poets like Tu Fu and Li Po
who can say in a single line more than most can in thirty
or even hundreds.
Sherwood Anderson must have read
them too.
I also used to check out and return
The Cantos, and Ezra helped strengthen
the arms if not the brain.
The Los Angeles Public Library was a marvelous place—
a home for someone who'd had a hellish home—
streams too wide to jump, far from the madding crowd,
counterpoint,
The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, James Thurber,
John Fante, Rabelais, de Maupassant—
some did nothing for me: Shakespeare, G. B. Shaw,
Tolstoy, Robert Frost, F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Upton Sinclair hit me more than Sinclair Lewis,
and I considered Gogol and Dreiser
damned fools—but such judgments came more
from the way a man is forced to live than from reason.
The old Los Angeles Public Library
most likely kept me from becoming a
suicide, a bank robber, a wife-beater, a butcher, or a
motorcycle cop—
and while I admit that any of those might be grand, by
good fortune and by the road I had to take,
that library was there when I was
young and searching for something to hold on to,
and there didn't seem to be much.
And when I opened the paper and read the news
about the fire that destroyed the library and most
of what was in it, I told my wife:
"I used to spend hours and hours there…"
The Prussian officer, the daring trapeze boy,
To Have and Have Not, you can't go home again.

These two poems exist to dissuade any novice who wants to be a writer… If, after reading Bukowski, you still feel like becoming a writer, then I invite you to read the second part of this book: CREATIVE WRITING COURSE by Gordon McAllister.

Note. Brief biographical note on Charles Bukowski: [27]

[27] Henry Charles Bukowski (/ b uː ˈ k aʊ s k i / boo- KOW -skee ; nacido Heinrich Karl Bukowski , alemán: [ˈhaɪnʁɪç ˈkaʁl buˈkɔfski] ; 16 de agosto de 1920 - 9 de marzo de 1994) fue un poeta, novelista, y cuentista. Su escritura estuvo influenciada por el ambiente social, cultural y económico de su ciudad

THE "ACCURSED" POETS

While poetry has often been a precursor to beauty, aesthetics, and the exaltation of moral values—expressed through feeling and emotion—there arose a contrary current referred to as "malditismo" ("the accursed"), where the term "accursed" refers to writers who, far from idealized beauty, exalt the truth of reality—its harshness and tragedy. Some led bohemian lives of excess—alcohol, drugs, and sexuality outside puritan norms.

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adoptiva de Los Ángeles. [4] El trabajo de Bukowski aborda la vida ordinaria de los estadounidenses pobres, el acto de escribir, el alcohol, las relaciones con las mujeres y la monotonía del trabajo. El FBI mantuvo un archivo sobre él como resultado de su columna. Notas de un viejo sucio en el periódico clandestino de Los Ángeles Open City. [5] [6]

Bukowski publicó extensamente en pequeñas revistas literarias y con pequeñas imprentas desde principios de la década de 1940 hasta principios de la década de 1990. Escribió miles de poemas, cientos de cuentos y seis novelas, y finalmente publicó más de sesenta libros a lo largo de su carrera. Algunas de estas obras incluyen sus Poemas escritos antes de saltar de una ventana de 8 pisos, publicados por su amigo y colega poeta Charles Potts , y obras más conocidas como Burning in Water, Drowning in Flame . Estos poemas e historias fueron reeditados más tarde por Black Sparrow Press de John Martin (ahora HarperCollins / Ecco Press).) como volúmenes recopilados de su obra. Como señaló un crítico, "Bukowski siguió siendo, gracias a sus travesuras y sus actuaciones deliberadamente payasadas, el rey del underground y el epítome de los pequeños en las décadas siguientes, destacando su lealtad a los editores de la pequeña prensa que primero habían defendido su trabajo y consolidando su presencia en nuevos emprendimientos como el New York Quarterly , Chiron Review , o Slipstream ." [7]

Nota de: "Charles Bukowski, rey del metro de la oscuridad al icono literario" . Palgrave Macmillan. Archivado desde el original el 24 de septiembre de 2015. Consultado el 2 de abril de 2015.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Bukowski

Paul Verlaine, in his book *Les Poètes Maudits* (*The Accursed Poets*), introduced the term to describe a counter-current that broke with the poetic tradition of the time, venturing into a world of rawness, death, desolation, and truths uncommon in traditional poetry and lyric.

Among the so-called accursed writers and poets we may name Tristan Corbière, Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; later, the "club" came to include François Villon, Antonin Artaud, Edgar Allan Poe, Federico García Lorca, Alejandra Pizarnik, Fogwill, William Blake, Charles Bukowski, Roberto Bolaño, and Charles Baudelaire, among others.

Some Examples of Their Work
"THE NIGHT"
By Alejandra Pizarnik

I know little of the night,
but the night seems to know of me,
and more than that, it assists me as if it loved me,
it covers my conscience with its stars.
Perhaps the night is life and the sun is death.
Perhaps the night is nothing
and the conjectures about it are nothing
and the beings who live it are nothing.
Perhaps words are the only thing that exists
in the vast emptiness of the centuries
that scratch our souls with their memories.
But the night must know the misery
that drinks from our blood and our ideas.

It must hurl hatred into our gazes,
knowing them full of self-interest and disaccord.
Yet it happens that I hear the night weeping in my bones.
Its immense tear raves
and cries that something is gone forever.
Someday we will be again.

"THE AWAKENING"
By Alejandra Pizarnik
to León Ostrov

Lord,
the cage has become a bird
and flown away,
and my heart is mad
because it howls at death
and smiles behind the wind
at my deliriums.
What shall I do with fear,
what shall I do with fear?
Light no longer dances in my smile,
nor do the seasons burn doves in my ideas.
My hands have undressed
and gone to where death
teaches the dead to live.
Lord,
the air scourges my being.
Behind the air there are monsters
that drink my blood.
This is disaster.
It is the hour of the emptiness that is not empty.

It is the instant to lock the lips,
to hear the condemned cry,
to behold each of my names
hanging in the nothing.
Lord,
I am twenty years old.
My eyes are twenty years old,
and yet they say nothing.
Lord,
I have consumed my life in an instant.
The last innocence burst.
Now it is never or no more,
or simply it was.
How is it I don't kill myself before a mirror
and disappear to reappear in the sea,
where a great ship would be waiting for me
with its lights on?
How is it I don't pull out my veins
and make of them a ladder
to flee to the other side of the night?
The beginning has given birth to the end.
Everything will go on the same:
the worn-out smiles,
the interested interest,
the questions from stone to stone,
the gestures that mimic love—
everything will go on the same.
But my arms insist on embracing the world
because they have not yet been taught
that it is already too late.

Lord,
cast out the coffins of my blood.
I remember my childhood
when I was an old woman.
Flowers died in my hands
because the wild dance of joy
destroyed their hearts.
I remember the black mornings of sun
when I was a child—
that is, yesterday—
that is, centuries ago.
Lord,
the cage has become a bird
and devoured my hopes.
Lord,
the cage has become a bird—
what shall I do with fear?

Poem
"POSTHUMOUS REMORSE"
By Charles Baudelaire

When you have fallen asleep, my dark, beautiful one,
in the depths of a tomb of black marble,
and when you have for chamber and abode
a damp mausoleum and a hollow grave;
when the stone, pressing down your fearful breast
and your body slack with delicious indolence,
prevents your heart from throbbing with desire
and your feet from running their capricious course,

the grave—the confidant of my endless dream
(for the grave will always understand the poet)—
in those long nights when sleep is banished
will say to you: "Of what use to you, half-made courtesan,
was never having known what the dead lament?"
—And the worm will gnaw your skin like a remorse.

Workshop

Try writing a short piece in the style of the "accursed" writers or of Dirty Realism. Do it if you feel moved to—and if you can manage it—but attempt it with care; we wouldn't want you tempted toward dark extremes. There have already been too many cases of writers who ended their lives; we do not want one more.

— O —

Chapter 19.
Poetry

POETRY:
What Is It?

The lyric genre is one of the principal branches of literature, represented by poetry—the aesthetically conceived expression, through words, of thought shaped by emotion and feeling.

While poetry is the purest form of the lyric genre, there also exists poetic prose, which preserves the same emotional depth and expressive elements, though without adhering to the formal structures and rhythmic patterns of verse.

In that sense, poetry may be regarded as the crown jewel of literary expression—the exaltation of the word itself.

Types of Poetry

- Epic Poetry: Concerns the deeds of antiquity—the struggles of heroes, epics, and legendary feats.

- Lyric Poetry: Expresses personal feelings, moods, and emotional states.

- Dramatic Poetry: Used in dramatic works such as plays, conveyed through the dialogue of characters.
- Philosophical Poetry: Deals with themes of deep reflection on existence and the human condition.

Elements of a Poem

A poem may contain various formal elements—rhyme, meter, and musicality.

However, in modern poetry, with the rise of free verse, these structural elements may be omitted; the central idea or emotional core of the text becomes the true foundation of the poem.

Let us briefly explore these elements.

MUSICALITY, RHYME, RHYTHM, AND METER

1. MUSICALITY

The musicality of a poem—or even of poetic prose—arises from the combination of rhythm and rhyme, following a specific metrical pattern.

2. RHYME

Rhyme is the repetition of similar sounds, usually vowel sounds, at the end of verses—creating harmony between consecutive lines.

Example:

Everything I converse
turns into verse,
and what I say once more
rhymes as before.
Why keep on talking still
if rhyme obeys my will?

A playful, childlike verse with matching endings every two lines.

Types of Rhyme

- CONSONANT or PERFECT RHYME:

  Both vowels and consonants at the end of one line are repeated at the end of the next.

  Example:

Everything I converse
turns into verse,
and what I say once more
rhymes as before.

- ASSONANT RHYME:

  Only the vowels are repeated, while the consonants may differ.

This repetition occurs from the last stressed vowel of each line onward. [28]
Example — *Poem by Alfonsina Storni:*

A day shall come when humankind shall fade,
dried up like some vain plant from which light strayed,
and the old sun, in space, shall be
a cinder from a torch long lost at sea.
A day shall come when the chilled world below
shall lie in mournful silence, deep and slow;
a shadow vast shall clasp the lifeless sphere,
where spring shall never blossom year by year.
The dead earth, like a blind and sightless eye,
shall wander still, unrested, through the sky,
and in the dark, alone and trembling there,
no song, no sigh, no prayer shall stir the air.

- INTERNAL RHYME:

When a word within one line rhymes with another at the end—or within—the next line.

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28 https://www.escritores.org/recursos-para-escritores/19593-copias https://www.escritores.org/recursos-para-escritores/recursos-2/articulos-de-interes/29802-rima-consonante-y-asonante#:~:text=En%20la%20rima%20asonante%20se,verso%2C%20las%20consonantes%20pueden%20variar.&text=Carb%C3%B3n%20in%C3%BAtil%20de%20apagada%20tea.&text=Me%20morir%C3%A9%20en%20Par%C3%ADs%20con,cual%20tengo%20ya%20el%20recuerdo.

Example — *Poem by Blas de Otero:*

Mademoiselle Isabel, fair and French-born,
with a blackbird singing beneath her skin—
I know not whether she or it sings within,
my childhood princess, promise yet forlorn.
Princess of youth, you are still my morn,
promise with twin breasts like blooms of sin.

- BLANK or FREE VERSE:

A type of verse without rhyme, also called *free verse*, widely used by modern poets.

Despite its lack of formal rhyme, it can still achieve musicality and rhythm.

Example:
To a Stranger
by Gordon McAllister

I do not wish to know you,
I do not wish to hear who you are.
I would rather not learn of your wisdom or virtues,
though I believe I sense your art and your passions.
Yet truth be told, I do not wish to know you—
I prefer to imagine you.
I want to give meaning to your perfect image,
your silent aura of purity, of truth, of longing;
to discover the depth that lies within your quiet soul,
to find the source of that subtle remembrance,

of that melancholy that breathes through your face,
and that I can feel within your distant gaze.
Perhaps I want you to tell me
who was the one missing from your life,
who left without farewell,
who carved a hollow, irreparable space,
and who etched sadness upon your eyes,
weaving silver threads into your memory.
I do not wish to know you—
though I long to know something of you.
Yet I prefer to imagine you—
thus pure, beautiful, and melancholic. [29]

3. RHYTHM

Rhythm is the audible cadence produced when words, rhymes, accents, and pauses combine harmoniously. It gives poetry its musical flow, making it pleasing to the ear.
This rhythm emerges through vocal stress patterns within each line, shaped by the poem's metrical structure.

4. METER

Meter refers to the number of syllables in a line and the pattern of stresses and pauses that give it structure and movement.

- Verses of Minor Art

[29] Gordon McAllister, 2024, ANTOLOGÍA POÉTICA, Bogotá, Amazon.com

Verses containing between two and eight syllables are called *minor art verses:* for instance: disyllabic (2), trisyllabic (3), and octosyllabic (8).

Example:
"*The afternoon will break my voice*" — 8 syllables.

- Verses of Major Art

Verses containing nine syllables or more are called *major art verses*.

Nonasyllabic Verse (9):

In the tapestry lies a love,
and a shepherdess gives a dove
to the young swain who adores her.
A mouth in bloom is her sweet smile,
playing the clavecin all the while,
the cheerful hands of grandmother.
— *José de Espronceda*

But we see that in this case the example is useless…

Indeed, when poetry is translated between languages with such distinct prosodies as Spanish and English, syllabic meter can rarely be preserved literally. Spanish measures poetic lines by sound, including phenomena such as sinalefa, while English tends to

structure its verse according to rhythmic stress patterns rather than strict syllable counts.

Even so, within English poetic tradition there do exist nonasyllabic lines (nine-syllable verses), though they are less common than pentameter (ten syllables) or hexameter (twelve syllables).
An English nonasyllabic verse typically follows a 4+5 or 5+4 rhythm, with primary stresses on the second, fifth, and eighth syllables, for example.

Below are three clear and literarily correct examples of nonasyllabic lines in English:

Example 1 – Original (Nonasyllabic, 9 syllables)

The moonlight trembles on the silent sea.

(Syllables: the / moon / light / trem / bles / on / the / si / lent / sea → 9)

Approximate rhythm: da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM-da

Example 2 – Contemporary Lyric Composition

Her whisper fades beneath the autumn rain.

(Syllables: her / whis / per / fades / be / neath / the / au / tumn / rain → 9)

Fluid, natural, and melodic; stresses fall on syllables 2, 5, and 8.

Example 3 – Romantic Style

And dreams return to haunt the weary heart.

(Syllables: and / dreams / re / turn / to / haunt / the / wea / ry / heart → 9)

A classic line that combines balance and musicality, ending on a tonic closure with "heart."

Technical Note:

In English poetry, rather than a fixed syllable count, what truly matters is the accentual rhythm. Thus, a nonasyllabic line is perceived through its long-short-long cadence, not by an exact phonetic syllable count. An English poet—such as Tennyson or Rossetti—usually plays with the natural rhythm of speech rather than adhering strictly to a numerical metric structure.

Let's look at some examples of Spanish verses translated into English, and then we'll look at other examples of verses written directly in English...

- Decasyllabic Verse (10):

From the dark corner of the parlor,
perhaps forgotten by its mistress,
silent and covered in dust,
stood the harp.

— Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

- Hendecasyllabic Verse (11):

The dark swallows will return again
to hang their nests beneath your balcony,
and once more with their wings against the panes,
they'll call to you in play.
— Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

- Dodecasyllabic Verse (12):

And if to laughter your thought inclines,
as did that foolish painter of our time,
must we not also laugh whenever shines
the senile phrase of a novice rhyme?
— Rubén Darío

- Tridecasyllabic Verse (13):

A mournful sun pours out its purple gleam,
veiling the green woods in a fog's embrace.
A sweet, harmonious rhythm full of grace
awakens me… beside me, flowers dream.
— Juan Ramón Jiménez

- Alexandrine Verse (14):

The Alexandrine line contains fourteen syllables, divided into two hemistichs of seven, with stresses on the third and thirteenth syllables.

Example:
"Tonight I can write / the saddest lines."
— *Pablo Neruda*
Another example:

"The princess is sad… / What ails the princess?
Her sighs escape / from her strawberry lips.
She has lost her laughter, / she has lost her hue.
The princess grows pale / on her golden chair;
the keyboard lies silent / of her dulcet clavecin,
and in a vase, forgotten, / a flower faints within."
— *Rubén Darío*

Since Spanish verses do not always conform to the metrics when translated into English, we will now present examples with valid metrics in poems written directly in English:

- Decasyllabic Verse (10 syllables)

(Typically corresponding to the iambic pentameter, the most classic English line.)

The moon ascends behind the weeping hill.
Her silver breath awakens dreams in stone.

Comment:

This is the traditional English line used by Shakespeare and Milton—ten syllables, five stresses (da-DUM ×5).

- Hendecasyllabic Verse (11 syllables)

(A softer extension of the decasyllabic line, often used in lyrical and meditative poetry.)

Beneath the fading stars, my soul takes flight.
To trace the dawn's first blush across the sea.

Comment:

The extra unstressed syllable gives it a melodic lingering sound—common in Romantic and post-Romantic English verse.

- Dodecasyllabic Verse (12 syllables)

(Twelve-syllable lines, occasionally used in English formal verse, often with a caesura in the middle—6+6.)

Within the silent garden, memories sleep (6)
and time dissolves like mist upon the rose. (6)

Comment:

This line carries a gentle balance, often divided by a mid-line pause (*caesura*), giving it grace and symmetry.

- Tridecasyllabic Verse (13 syllables)

(A rare and expansive English line, best used for emotional or descriptive passages.)

A shadow drifts through corridors of light and thought, and whispers fade like petals in the wind of time.

Comment:
Its extended rhythm allows for rich imagery and a meditative cadence—used occasionally in modern free verse with measured flow.

- Alexandrine Verse (14 syllables)

(Fourteen syllables, typically two hemistichs of seven each, with a stress on the 3rd and 13th syllables.)

The heart remembers still / the song it never sung, a golden note that sleeps / where sorrow first was young.

Comment:
In English, Alexandrines are majestic and solemn. They often close long stanzas or epics—as in Spenser or Dryden.

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Note: On the Poet's Licenses

At the suggestion of my esteemed friend Juan Pablo Arango Restrepo, PhD, it is necessary to include the subject of Poetic Licenses.

POET´S LICENSES

Poetic or Metrical Licenses are techniques used to adjust the syllable count of a line.
In such cases, sound—not strict orthography—determines the measure.

1. Synaloepha (Sinalefa)

Occurs when the final vowel of one word merges with the initial vowel of the next, forming a single syllable.

Example:
Los hombres de antaño
("…bres dean…" merge as one syllable)

2. Syneresis (Sinéresis)

Occurs when two vowels that normally form a hiatus are joined into a single syllable, softening the weaker vowel sound to create an artificial diphthong.

(Hiatus: two adjacent vowels belonging to separate syllables. Diphthong: two vowels joined in one continuous sound.)

Example:

It is a winter's night.
Snow falls in swirling light.

("Cae" pronounced as one syllable: *cae* → *cae*)

3. Diaeresis (Diéresis or Dialefa)

Occurs when a diphthong is separated into two distinct syllables—marked by a diacritic (¨) over the weaker vowel.

Example:

"Oh! How smooth sounded in my ear
the bustle of the world and its noise cheer."
— José de Espronceda

— O —

Chapter 20.
Philosophical Poetry

PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY

Before concluding our discussion on poetry, I would like to devote a special section to philosophical poetry, a form that deserves its own place because of its apparent paradox.

At first glance, philosophy and poetry may seem entirely independent disciplines, since they arise from distinct conceptions of how to approach reflections on existence.

Philosophy, from its etymology, refers to the love of wisdom—from the Greek *philos* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom).

Philosophy is concerned with profound reflections that belong to the realm of reason: it explores existence, truth, ethics, knowledge, mind, morality, consciousness, and everything related to ontological inquiry—understood as the study of reality itself.

Poetry, on the other hand, pertains to feeling and emotion, to the heartfelt reflections on beauty, aesthetics, and love. One could say that poetry is the boarding pass to the vessel of emotion, to all that concerns the human heart, through the use of language that evokes the highest sentiments and sensations of the soul—expressed in verse and lyrical language.

Yet we may understand that deep reflections on the nature of being and its existential struggles inevitably give

rise to feelings and inner sensations that often touch the heart. Many times, such ontological meditations awaken powerful emotions within us.

The expression of those feelings—arising from meditations on existence, death, suffering, religion, evil, goodness, and all that concerns the human condition—naturally seeks a lyrical form through verse and poetry. Another equally lyrical form of expression is poetic prose, in which reflective thought and aesthetic beauty merge harmoniously, giving rise to a highly cultivated and artistic language.

Let us now look at a few examples of philosophical poetry.

Uncertainty
By Fernando Gutiérrez Almeira [30]

Uncertainty
with a faint tremor
a world may vanish
deep horizons
will die nearby
all that is known
will not suffice an instant
clinging to the boat
the waves will decide
we shall gaze afar
and find only shadows

[30] https://fernandogutierrezalmeira.wordpress.com/2015/04/30/diez-poemas-filosoficos/

the rhythm uncertain
the heart unaware
we shall stand firm
without knowing where
the journey continues
and never ends—
and only one thing is certain:
uncertainty?

To Melancholy
By Friedrich Nietzsche

Be not angry with me, Melancholy,
that I take up the pen to praise you;
and praising you, I bow my head,
seated upon a trunk like an anchorite.
Thus you beheld me yesterday, as many times before,
beneath the morning rays of the warm sun.
The vulture croaked greedily in the valley,
dreaming me carrion upon dead wood.
You were mistaken, ravaging bird—
though mummified, I rested on my log.
You did not see my gaze, full of delight,
wandering proudly through the world around;
and when it no longer looks toward your heights,
extinguished to the farthest clouds,
it sinks within itself
to illuminate the abyss of being.
Often, seated in profound solitude,
bent like some barbaric worshiper,

I thought of you, Melancholy—
penitent, despite my few years.
Thus I took pleasure in the vulture's flight,
in the thunder of the avalanche,
and you, vain chimera of mankind,
spoke truth to me—with a dreadful, severe face.
Bitter goddess of harsh nature,
my friend, you take pleasure in appearing near me,
showing me the threatening trail of the vulture,
and the joy of the avalanche, to annihilate me.
Around me breathes the lust for death,
bared teeth of desire—
a torturous hunger that threatens life.
Seductress upon the lifeless stone,
the flower sighs for the butterflies.
All this I am—and I tremble to feel it:
seduced butterfly, solitary flower,
vulture and rushing torrent of ice,
moan of the storm—all to glorify you,
fierce goddess, before whom I bow my head
and, sighing, intone a monstrous hymn of praise—
only to exalt you,
that I may thirst for life, life, life!
Be not angry with me, cruel divinity,
that I adorn you with gentle rhymes.
He whom you approach trembles, O terrible face!
He whom you reach is shaken, O wicked truth!
And here I am, trembling, stammering song after song,
convulsing in rhythmic forms;

the ink flows, the sharpened pen scatters—
O goddess, goddess, let me—let me have my will! [31]

Poem
Supra-Eternal Consciousnesses…
That is what we are
By Gordon McAllister

As through a dark, incoherent panorama I wandered, blind,
I now open my consciousness to the deep litany
of the eternal context—finding meaning
in the vast circles of turns and returns,
of joyous shadows playing in the afternoon,
lovers of swift and soaring flights,
like radiant arrows of infinite wonder,
merrily crossing the imagined horizon
of a fleeting yet real instant—
a dying present with the final gleam
of a melancholy dusk fading into night.
Moved by a breath that rises from the east,
I hear the murmur of the green multiforms,
their cries of plaintive, nostalgic sound;
it is the abundant grass growing in haste,
aided by the early rain that breathes new life
into the beloved daughters of the verdant mother earth,
revealing little by little the secret marvel
hidden in the voices of the forest's depth.

[31] https://culturainquieta.com/literatura/ocho-poemas-de-nietzsche-que-nos-instilan-pasion-por-la-vida/

I can see the motion of whispering woods,
dancing to the sway of the errant traveler,
telling unreal tales of sorrowful endings,
singing songs of mournful remembrance,
whispering distant, ancient secrets,
giving mankind lessons of profound reflection—
as counselors, guardians, and silent confidants.

I can also see, with deep emotion,
the battles of unconscious men,
in their foolish games of wandering teeth,
like careless children in their playgrounds,
quarreling for nothing, wasting fleeting hours,
unaware of their surroundings or of truth itself,
absent of reason and estranged from consciousness,
settling instinctive quarrels in mock disputes
with shouts and races filling the air.

I can sense the conflicts of distant warriors,
chasing deceitful, hollow truths
in the clamor of barren battles fought for nothing,
their useless struggles ending only in defeat—
foolish termites gnawing at beams of steel,
to no avail, driven by purposeless effort,
forever seeking what does not exist.

I can see the futility of fleeting things,
light travelers flying into infinite time.
Time moves in only one direction,
and beings seek precious treasures—
the false gold of deceptive glitter,
with which the vain and hollow boast,
lacking discernment and lost in their own minds,
innocent children who believe themselves greater

than the wise masters of vast understanding,
and thus waste their brief and fragile lives.
Opening my consciousness to the troubled mind,
I allow it to awaken to the resplendent light
of a transparent realm of infinite horizon.
I see the contrast between brightness and shadow,
as one whose mind was dark in night
but at dawn beholds the radiant sunrise
that floods his mind with brilliance.
I discern the difference between heaven and hell;
I find the discord between goodness and malice,
the real distinction between the dim and the shining,
the living contrast between the good and the perfect—
and thus I find the path to the great wonder:
a profound life of rational clarity and serene wisdom. [32]

***

The Essence of Philosophical Poetry

Philosophical poetry arises from the union of reason and emotion, from the meeting point where the intellect contemplates existence and the heart translates that contemplation into beauty. It is the moment when thought acquires rhythm, and reflection turns to music.

While philosophy seeks truth through logic and analysis, poetry seeks it through intuition, metaphor, and feeling. Yet both share the same yearning: to understand the

[32] Gordon McAllister, ANTOLOGÍA POÉTICA, Amazon.com 2023 USA.

mystery of being. In philosophical poetry, ideas are not abstract doctrines but living emotions, clothed in verse and illuminated by the light of inner consciousness.

This kind of poetry invites the reader to think and feel simultaneously—to sense the depth of human experience while touching the ineffable. It is neither cold speculation nor pure sentimentality, but the harmony between knowledge and wonder.

Thus, philosophical poetry is not merely a form of art; it is a way of awakening awareness—a dialogue between the so*ul and the universe, where thought becomes song and truth, a revelation.

— O —

Chapter 21.
Literary Devices

Every great piece of writing—whether a poem, a story, or an essay—rests upon the delicate art of form. Literary devices are not mere ornaments; they are the invisible architecture of beauty and emotion. Through them, language transcends its utilitarian purpose and becomes music, rhythm, and revelation.

Each figure of speech—metaphor, alliteration, irony, or hyperbole—serves as a bridge between thought and feeling, intellect and imagination. To master these resources is to learn the subtle grammar of the soul, the one that allows words to breathe, to resonate, and to endure beyond the silence of the page.

Although literary devices are often found in prose—such as in short stories, novels, or even in lyrical essays—it is in poetry where they are most frequently and powerfully employed. Let us look at some key examples.

What Are Literary Devices?

Literary devices are the stylistic tools that allow a writer to present ideas in a beautiful and imaginative way, often through expressive turns of phrase, metaphors, and rhetorical precision. They are the artistic fingerprints of language—the voice of creativity in written form. They are also known as rhetorical figures.

Rhyme

Rhyme is the repetition of similar sounds within or at the end of verses, creating a sense of musicality. Examples: *verse* / *converse*, *fame* / *flame*, *family* / *calamity*. As we have seen before, there are different kinds of rhyme—consonant, assonant, and internal.

Alliteration

According to the Royal Spanish Academy, alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds within a verse or sentence for expressive effect. Examples:

"The roaring rhythm of the restless rain." (Comparable to José Zorrilla's line: "El ruido con que rueda la ronca tempestad.")

Or:

"Her burning breath banished my broken heart."

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds within nearby words to create harmony or tension. Examples: *grace* / *fade*, *hope* / *stone*, *wide* / *light*.

Consonance

Consonance refers to the repetition of similar consonant sounds that produce a pleasing auditory effect. Examples: *mirror* / *terror*, *sleep* / *deep*, *gold* / *cold*.

Adjectival String (Adjectivization)

This is the use of several descriptive adjectives in sequence after a noun to enhance imagery.

Example:
"His face, pale, tired, and hollow-eyed, reflected the burden of years."
(Comparable to Juan Ramón Jiménez's *"Platero es pequeño, peludo, suave…"*)

Apostrophe

A direct address to a person, object, or abstract idea, usually with emotional intensity or reverence.
Example:
"O night, more gentle than the dawn, O sacred night that united lover and beloved!"
(From Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*.)

Metaphor

A metaphor expresses one thing in terms of another, transferring meaning through symbolic association.
Example:
"Her eyes were twin suns, her hair a river of gold."
(Comparable to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.)

Allegory

An allegory conveys a deeper idea or moral truth through symbolic figures, actions, or imagery.
Example:
A blindfolded woman holding a sword and scales represents Justice.

Hyperbole

An exaggerated expression used for emphasis or dramatic effect.

Example:
"His nose entered the room five minutes before he did."

Metonymy

The substitution of one term for another closely related concept.
Example:
"The brass drowned out the strings." (*Brass* = trumpets, horns; *strings* = violins, cellos.)

Personification

Attributing human qualities to animals, objects, or abstract concepts.
Example:
"Silent nostalgias wandered alone through cobbled streets, knocking on ancient doors before the dawn awoke." (Gordon McAllister, *A Lisbon Dawn.*)

Anaphora

The deliberate repetition of one or more words at the beginning of successive phrases or lines for emphasis and rhythm.

Example — From the poem *Felt Sadness Seemed To Be* by Gordon McAllister:

"Felt sadness seemed to be,
the rain upon a misty window,
a twilight killing nostalgia,
a gaze lost with the passing of time,
or a longing slowly fading away…"

Synecdoche

The substitution of a part for the whole, or the whole for a part.

Example:

"He must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow."
(Bread representing livelihood.)

Onomatopoeia

Words that imitate or suggest natural sounds. Examples: *buzz*, *clang*, *whisper*, *bang*.

Hyperbaton

The intentional inversion of normal word order for poetic or stylistic effect.

Example — From the poem *Why Boast in Vain?* by Gordon McAllister:

"A cloudy night beyond all cure,
tears that roll upon the face,
disillusion walking down the road,
gray despair at twilight's hour…"

Synesthesia

The blending of sensory perceptions, attributing one sense to another.

Example:
"A warm glance" — where warmth (a tactile sensation) is attributed to sight.

(From the novel And He Went with the Wind, by Gordon McAllister.)

Oxymoron

The juxtaposition of two contradictory terms within the same expression.

Examples: *deafening silence*, *sweet sorrow*, *midnight sun*.

Concatenation

The repetition of the last word or phrase of one line at the beginning of the next.

Example:
"Everything passes, and everything remains,
but ours is the passing—
passing, making paths,
paths upon the sea."
(Antonio Machado)

Antithesis

The contrast of two opposing ideas or phrases within the same sentence to enhance expression.

Example:
"When I wish to weep, I cannot,
and when I do not wish to, I weep."
(Rubén Darío)

Irony

The expression of meaning through language that signifies the opposite—often for humorous or critical effect.
Example:
"With your intelligence, you should run for President!"

Pleonasm or Redundancy

The unnecessary repetition of an idea already implied in the expression.

Examples:

- *"But nevertheless."*
- *"Interconnected with each other."*
- *"My own opinion."*

Asyndeton

The omission of conjunctions to create a sense of speed, intensity, or urgency.

Example:
"Work, move, strive to survive! Sweat, struggle, gasp for air! Such mystery and sweetness dwell in man's eternal laziness."
(Adapted from Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer.)

Euphemism

The substitution of a harsh or direct word with a softer or more polite expression.

Examples:

"*Military intervention" instead of war.*
"He's a bit overweight" instead of fat.

— O —

Chapter 22.
The Essay

The Essay: Considerations and Examples

Creative writing courses are generally focused on literary texts and creativity in genres such as the epic, narrative, lyrical, and dramatic. Within these, the short story, the novel, poetry, and drama are the traditional fields for the development of creative writing.

However, we shall now address the topic of the essay, understanding that the vast majority of people need to write within the didactic genre, to present topics that have little or nothing to do with the literary genres mentioned above. These individuals often find themselves compelled to produce didactic and argumentative texts related to the everyday realities of their lives and professions.

Let us begin, then, by asking ourselves:

What is an Essay?

An essay is the appropriate way to present an idea or thought in writing before an audience of readers in a structured, contextualized, and rigorously argued manner—truthful and of high quality—so that the idea may have a strong and credible impact on its recipients.

At this point, it is worth mentioning several types of essays.

Academic Essay

This type deals with academic topics, employing argumentative reasoning based on research or analysis of a subject of study. It usually follows a structure consisting of an introduction, the development of the topic, and a conclusion. The argumentation is supported by the presentation of reliable bibliographical sources used in the research. In accordance with academic rigor, speculation—meaning unfounded assumptions or conjectures based on weak sources—is avoided.

Scientific Essay

This type of essay seeks to argue the presentation of research, beginning with a hypothesis and proceeding through serious analysis toward the formulation of a thesis, the development of ideas supported by evidence, and finally a synthesis and conclusion showing the results. The scientific essay follows a discipline where proof and verification are essential. Speculation, again, is avoided.

Literary Essay

This form refers to essays about literary topics, including the development of critical studies and analyses of literary texts such as poems, novels, and short stories, as well as the presentation of biographies of writers, analyses of their style, and interpretations of their works.

Philosophical Essay

The philosophical essay deals with deep reflection and analytical thought about fundamental questions of existence. This form generally explores existential themes

and vital questions concerning the nature of being, distancing itself from the mundane and everyday.

Profane or Everyday Argumentative Essay

This is the type of essay most closely related to the creation of texts on everyday, non-literary subjects. It allows not only for the expression of ideas in writing but also for structuring arguments to give strength and persuasiveness to the text. Political, medical, and economic topics, among many others, belong to this category.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ESSAY

1. The essay generally follows a defined structure composed of an introduction, a thesis statement, the development of the argument, and a conclusion. However, the essay allows a degree of freedom depending on the author's intention. Some essays depart from the traditional structure, exploring new ways to present argumentation and reach onclusions.

2. The gathering of information and pertinent research must ensure that the truthfulness and solidity of the argument supporting the thesis become fundamental elements for credibility. The presentation may vary according to the writer's style, but the key to success lies in solid reasoning—otherwise, it becomes empty rhetoric.

3. Although the essay is aimed at a general audience, it should not be forgotten that among the readers there may be an expert who will judge the content with severity, weighing the argumentation and evaluating the clarity and strength of the thesis. For this reason, it is essential to conduct in-depth research and substantiate every claim supporting the thesis.

4. Although an essay is typically brief and the personal interpretation of the author prevails, it does not require the same rigor as a monograph, where arguments must be exhaustively supported by citations and bibliographies. Nevertheless, the strength of reasoning remains vital for credibility.

5. A wide variety of subjects may be approached through an essay: scientific, academic, political, legal, medical, and countless everyday themes. However, it is necessary to follow certain guidelines and a clear methodology, lest the intended essay become a mere narrative lacking depth or significance.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR SOUND ARGUMENTATION

During the research process, it is advisable to answer the following questions with precision:

- What are we going to write about? What do we intend to address?

- How will it be done? How does the thesis relate to the argumentation?
- When and in what temporal-spatial context does the topic occur?
- What are the fundamental ideas of the essay? Keep focus clear.
- Why is the proposed thesis important, and what is the purpose of developing this essay?

ELEMENTS OF THE ARGUMENTATIVE STRUCTURE [33]

We have previously mentioned these elements briefly; now let us explore them in detail:

1. Introduction:
   The essay must begin by introducing the topic. This involves expressing the motivations and reasons for addressing the chosen subject. It is also important to contextualize it, defining the time and space that influence it positively or negatively. Moreover, one must clarify what attracts the reader—whether it is an innovative idea or a profound question being explored.

2. Thesis:
   This is the core of the essay. The thesis presents a

[33] Fuente: Sergio Rodríguez, Universidad Sergio Arboleda – Bogotá. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfixQ1fawcI

central statement or assertion that must be sustained by solid reasoning.

3. Hypothesis:
   The hypothesis is formulated as a question, which the thesis eventually answers. At the end, a summary or synthesis of both the hypothesis and the thesis should be provided.

4. Argumentation:
   This section develops the reasoning that supports the essay's central idea. The arguments are organized from weakest to strongest, with relevant references and citations to reinforce credibility.

5. Conclusion:
   A general synthesis of the discussion is presented here. It must verify whether the thesis satisfies the hypothesis.

A Historical Reflection: Michel de Montaigne

At this point, it is worth recalling the words of a remarkable dissenter who reminds us that the essay can also be a deeply personal reflection, requiring no scholarly justification or scientific backing. The author himself—Michel de Montaigne, considered the creator of the modern essay—expressed this clearly.

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (Saint-Michel-de-Montaigne, near Bordeaux, February 28, 1533 – September 13, 1592) was a

French philosopher, writer, humanist, and moralist of the Renaissance. *He authored Essays, the work that gave birth to the genre in the modern age.* [34] *His writings, composed in the tower of his own château between 1572 and 1592, revolved around one central question: "What do I know?"* [35]

In *Book II, Chapter X – Of Books*, Montaigne writes:

"Whoever seeks knowledge here is not on the right path, for I make no profession of science.
These essays contain my fantasies; with them, I do not aim to explain things, but merely to make myself known." [36]

Example:
Philosophical Essay Example
A Reflection After Zazen Practice
By Gordon McAllister

September 8, 2021 – 4:06 a.m.

How can one express what cannot be said in words simple enough to be understood, without offending? How can one avoid offense when speaking of what cannot yet be comprehended?

There are times when silence is the best choice—to continue along that lonely and quiet path, even if very few dare to walk it.

How can I convey the deep disappointment that pierces my soul when I see people absorbed in a thousand trivial

[34] Bloom, Harold (1995). Canon occidental. Barcelona: Anagrama.

[35] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_de_Montaigne

[36] https://www.uv.mx/editorial/resenas/montaigne-ensaya-sobre-si-mismo/

matters, while hardly anyone seems to understand what a truly transcendent, profound, and complex experience is—unless they are already living it in their own flesh?

The vibrational frequency of the subatomic particles composing this entity I inhabit is accelerating to such a point that, little by little, I begin to lose materiality. And this occurs mostly within my thoughts—within the nature of my reflections—which are gradually ceasing to belong to this dimensional plane.

I cannot say that it is pleasant. It is not. It is not pleasant to be unable to speak to almost anyone, for instead of understanding, they would take offense.

It is difficult to explain what can never be understood by one whose field of experience remains tied to this dense material dimension—a viscous, opaque world, suited to the heavy lessons that must be learned within it. Painful experiences, yet necessary in this earthly curriculum.

There is no longer any point in debating what cannot be debated—it would be a waste of time. It is equally difficult to describe that which cannot be grasped, unless there has already been some slight dissolution of the dimensional barrier separating the material plane of existence from the higher plane of consciousness.

It is better to remain silent, to continue along the road of stillness and quiet, where the experience of emptiness becomes part of the transition toward the next dimension, and solitude is the inherent companion of that passage.

There is almost nothing left that once seemed interesting. Gradually, one begins to understand that the emptiness spoken of in Zazen practice is not only necessary—it is essential for accessing that new dimension where one

perceives the vision of a deep and luminous horizon, utterly unlike this plane where the dense heaviness of matter and mind reigns.

Finally, it has been necessary to strip away the masks, the disguises, and everything that bears the mark of illusion. Only then—naked of unnecessary distractions—can one begin to enter that realm where everything is truly radiant. — Gordon McAllister

Another Example of an Essay

The following text is another example of an essay—this time presented in the form of a dialogue between two individuals.

Although the tone and structure are not those of a traditional essay, the author allows himself the freedom to open his mind to a broader conception, narrating the reflection almost as a short novel, or even as an autobiographical account.

This, too, is a legitimate form of essay.

Essay:
We Are Pure Consciousness
By Gordon McAllister

In general terms, such topics were usually discussed within esoteric or occult circles, or sometimes in philosophical or theological contexts.
In this case, however, the conversation unfolded between two friends—both members of a Masonic lodge—who spoke freely, unconcerned that others nearby might overhear. For if anyone

did, without preparation or inner readiness, they would understand nothing.

It was a Thursday evening in late November. The iconic Café de Flore, located at 172 Boulevard Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris's Sixth District, was their customary meeting place—warm and inviting amid the glacial chill of early winter. Outside, the trees were bare, and a light snow had begun to fall, covering the sidewalks in white.

Seated together were Gordon McAllister and his friend Carlos Alberto Vallejo, engrossed in one of their endless conversations. As usual, they tackled difficult topics—not difficult for them, but for those still wandering the corridors of the unawakened mind. Their voices were calm, at a normal tone, audible to any nearby patron. Yet their subject was one that tradition reserved for quiet places—for discussions held "between Square and Compass."

Two glasses of Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial Champagne gleamed on the table—an unmistakable sign that this was an important meeting. For such a drink, like the subject itself, was not to be shared with just anyone.

At one point, Gordon recalled a passage from the Bible in which the Brother Joshua said:

"It is not right to cast the children's bread to the dogs."

(In ancient times, Jews referred to foreigners as "dogs.")

Though the phrase did not refer to food or drink, but rather to the subject at hand, it had often been the source of controversy. Yet, in truth, it bore a profound meaning—an invitation to reflection about the wisdom of offering sacred knowledge to those not ready to receive or interpret it properly.

Returning to their conversation, Gordon lowered his voice slightly:

— "Carlitos, let me tell you something that happened to me some time ago."

Then he began his story:

— "It was an October morning in 2004. That day, I had a transcendent experience—it happened in a park on a beautiful Sunday morning. I was alone, reading, while children played nearby with their parents. Suddenly, without any warning, everything was shining. A special light radiated from every element around me. The leaves of the trees emitted an extraordinary brightness, not of this world—or perhaps it was of this world, but of an aspect I had never perceived before. Everything made sense.

In that luminous, resplendent instant, all was as it should be. My mind was silent—there were no thoughts—only the total certainty that everything was perfect and immaculate. I knew, beyond any doubt, that infinite intelligence and the purest love were real and ever-present, visible through the veil of unconsciousness that had briefly been lifted so I might glimpse them.

I was fully aware that the surrounding world was part of my own being. There was no distinction between my personal consciousness and the sacred Consciousness pervading everything around me—even those things that showed no reasoning or awareness like mine. But reasoning? At that moment, reason was irrelevant.

I might have said that those observed objects were not intelligent—judging them by the old standards of human intellect—but now I perceived a different kind of intelligence,

deeper, purer, flawless: a Consciousness intertwined with infinite love.

Each object existed as an innocent form of Being, its mere existence a testament to its sacred participation in the universe. A brilliant radiance illuminated all things. I sensed that this light emanated from my own consciousness, vibrating at the same frequency as the consciousness of all that existed—resonating in harmony with the infinite intelligence of the Eternal Source.

My mind was absent. Thought was absent. I needed neither memory, reasoning, nor intellect. The subconscious and unconscious were also silent; they were unnecessary.

Only a profound inner peace remained—a peace arising from beyond the material world, from a higher dimension that I could no longer recall clearly, yet that was manifesting within me. I could not remember it fully because it had been veiled by the forgetfulness imposed when returning to this earthly plane. But for one brief instant, I had known that higher dimension to be utterly real, radiant, and alive.

*The veil had lifted just long enough for me to glimpse the wondrous reality that lies behind all appearances. It was a sublime moment—and that reality belonged to the true realm that exists beyond this mundane experience."**

Carlos Alberto listened in silence, then said:

— "I've heard that such experiences are called Kensho in Japanese—or Satori when they become permanent."

— "It happened to me too," Gordon replied. "Many years ago, in a church, during the funeral of a relative. I felt that same sensation—a strange, overwhelming joy and perfection that moved me to tears. After a while, everything returned to normal—the ordinary reality of this earthly plane.

Yet that moment marked an awakening in me, an opening of understanding toward subjects I had never given much thought to before. From that day on, they became profoundly significant."

Analysis of the Previous Essay

Although the previous essay may appear unconventional—its form resembling that of a simple narrative—if we examine it closely, we can see that it still follows the essential principles of the traditional essay.

1. Introduction:

The scene introduces two friends who begin a conversation from a somewhat esoteric and subtly Masonic perspective. This immediately creates an atmosphere of mystery and anticipation, suggesting the philosophical depth of the subject to come.

2. Hypothesis:

The central question (the implicit hypothesis), though not directly stated in the text, can be clearly inferred: Does there exist a parallel world of reality beyond the visible horizon that surrounds us? Perhaps a hidden or esoteric realm beyond the reach of our material senses?

3. Thesis:

The thesis proposes that such a realm indeed exists—a dimension of undeniable reality lying behind the limits of our ordinary perception. What might appear to be fantasy is, in truth, as real and present as a stone in one's hand.

4. Argumentation:

The author, speaking from a pragmatic and truthful standpoint, asserts that he has personally lived and experienced such realities, thus possessing the authority to bear witness to them. He reinforces his claim by referring to similar experiences described in Japan, where such awakenings are known as *Kenshō* (meaning "Epiphany"), and when they become permanent, as *Satori* (meaning "Enlightenment").

5. Development:

The development consists of the detailed narration of the lived experience itself, through which the reader can grasp the nature and depth of the *Kenshō* experience.

6. Conclusion:

The conclusion reaffirms that *Satori* and *Kenshō* are indeed real experiences—extraordinary, yes, but profoundly authentic manifestations of consciousness and spiritual perception.

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Chapter 23.
Thematic Differences

On the first day of a creative writing course, many years ago, I became confused by certain terms and decided to ask the professor about the differences between them. At that very moment, however, my attention drifted, and I missed part of the explanation.

I later had to investigate the matter on my own—and this was the result.

The Difference Between: Tale, Short Story, Fable, Anecdote, Chronicle, and Novel

The Tale

A tale is a literary narration, usually brief and simple, but it does not follow the structural guidelines of the short story. It merely recounts an event—without the need for an introduction, climax, or resolution—because it is not a short story.
However, in general usage, the word *tale* can refer to almost any type of narrative, whether historical, fictional, chronological, journalistic, or novelistic. Yet, each form possesses its own specific characteristics.

The Short Story

A short story is a brief and concise narrative that tells a fictional story, generally structured with a beginning, a development or conflict, a climax, and a resolution.

There are various types of short stories—popular, children's, or literary.

The Fable

A fable is a story primarily intended for children, characterized by simple narration and the frequent use of animals or fantastic beings as main characters.
It typically ends with a moral lesson that reflects the theme or ethical message of the story.

The Anecdote

An anecdote is a brief account of a curious, unusual, or amusing event that has happened to the narrator or to someone close to them.
It is often told in the first person and emphasizes personal experience.

The Chronicle

A chronicle is a narrative of past events that presents the facts in the exact chronological order in which they occurred.
It often combines factual information with interpretive or descriptive elements.

Some common types of chronicles include:

- White or Neutral Chronicle: Objective and informative, without personal interpretation.
- Opinion Chronicle: Presents the author's personal interpretation of the events.
- Black Chronicle: Deals with tragic or criminal events.

- Political Chronicle: Focuses on political events and debates.
- Sports Chronicle: Relates to athletic or competitive events.
- Social Chronicle: Centers on social life and public affairs.
- Judicial Chronicle: Covers legal or police-related cases.

The Journalistic Chronicle

A journalistic chronicle is a written report that recounts events in an orderly, detailed, and chronological manner, much like a literary story, though it does not follow the formal structure of fiction.

Characteristics of the Journalistic Chronicle:

- Detailed, meticulous, and sequential.
- Objective, despite reflecting the personal interpretation of the reporter.
- Uses clear and accessible language to connect with a broad audience.
- Strives not to omit relevant details.
- Based on thorough research into the events, their background, and consequences.
- Refers to real, factual occurrences.
- Chronological and realistic in nature.
- Though it may resemble a short story, it is grounded in factual reality and does not follow the same literary structure.

The Novel

A novel is a prose narrative, generally long and elaborate, that tells a fictional story, though it may be inspired by real or historical events. It usually follows a recognizable narrative structure—introduction, development, conflict, climax, and conclusion.

Although it may share a basic framework with the short story, the novel is much more extensive and complex, capable of encompassing multiple timeframes, perspectives, and subplots beyond the main storyline. It may also incorporate unexpected spatial or temporal shifts, giving it greater depth and richness than shorter narrative forms.

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Chapter 24.
The World of Publishing Houses

As we near the end of this first part of the book, I would like to revisit the topic of publishing houses, as mentioned in the preface. I believe it is essential for the aspiring writer to understand the environment he or she is entering, and the parameters under which the publishing world operates—a world that is exceedingly complex, where at times, the interests of writers, editors, distributors, and bookstores seem to collide.

The purpose here is not to discourage anyone, but rather to open the writer's eyes to reality—to encourage a pragmatic outlook before investing time and money in dealing with publishers and bookstores.

That said, it must also be acknowledged that a good editor can become a fundamental ally in a writer's career, since the success of a book often depends on the editor's management and efficiency. Finding a competent and reliable publisher is crucial—though more often than not, this depends as much on luck as on talent. Still, one must keep knocking on doors. Remember the cases of Dan Brown (*The Da Vinci Code*), J.K. Rowling (*Harry Potter*), and Stephen King, all of whom faced years of rejection before finding success.

Let us begin by understanding that the world of books is highly competitive—with far more writers offering manuscripts than publishers seeking them.

Then comes the bookstore—the showcase where thousands of books by different authors compete for space, visibility, and attention. Some buyers act on impulse, drawn by a title or cover that catches their eye. Others arrive with a specific purpose, asking the clerk for a particular book. Ironically, that sought-after title may not even be on display—yet it can still be purchased upon request. Such cases, however, are rare.

It must also be said that the best display spaces in major bookstores are reserved for the large publishing conglomerates that dominate the market—just as in supermarkets, the endcaps and premium shelves are bought and paid for by multinational corporations.

The Business Reality

The book industry involves significant financial investments, many of which result in losses rather than profits. Because of this, large publishing houses tend to play it safe, acting with extreme caution to ensure that their ventures remain profitable and that they can report positive outcomes to their boards of directors.

However, no one can predict whether a new release will be a financial success—or whether investing in an unknown author will yield a return. As a result, publishers take calculated risks, seeking a balance between publishing established, market-proven writers and discovering promising new voices. In the end, it all becomes a game of gains and losses, where the ultimate goal is financial survival. The publishing market, like any business, has little room for sentimentality; its guiding principle is economic sustainability.

Writers, on the other hand, often view this world through an entirely different lens. They believe their work must reach the public *no matter what*, confusing artistic passion with business pragmatism. Many of us writers, moved by art and culture, tend to see publishing houses as guardians of creativity and thought—forgetting that they are also companies, driven by business imperatives. This divergence of perspectives often sets authors, publishers, distributors, and bookstores on different paths.

The Diversity of the Market

Publishing houses know that the world of books encompasses much more than literature, philosophy, and art. It also includes non-literary texts such as self-help books, textbooks, cookbooks, travel guides, memoirs, and works written by public figures from non-academic backgrounds—politicians, entrepreneurs, celebrities, and others.

These, too, belong to the book business, and many of them achieve greater commercial success than literary works of high intellectual value that, despite their merit, fail to capture public interest.

This is something every aspiring writer must understand—to come down from the clouds and adopt a realistic view of what success truly means in today's book market.

Different Markets, Different Realities

Not all markets are the same. In the Spanish-speaking world, each region presents its own opportunities and challenges.

The publishing market in Spain differs greatly from that of Latin America. Even within Latin America, large markets such as Mexico and Argentina cannot be compared to smaller ones like Colombia, Peru, or Chile, which have far fewer readers, fewer bookstores, and limited distribution channels.

A Colombian author, for instance, must accept that his market is small and competitive. If fortunate enough to find a publisher willing to distribute his work, his book will likely end up shelved in the back of the store, away from prominent display tables, selling only when someone specifically asks for it.

By contrast, authors affiliated with the major publishing monopolies enjoy prime placement—since those companies purchase the most visible display areas. To make matters worse, these same publishers also import and translate foreign bestsellers, which occupy even more of the limited shelf space, leaving little room for emerging local writers.

Self-Publishing Houses

As mentioned in the preface, it is worth revisiting the topic of self-publishing companies, which now abound across the Spanish-speaking market.

These are small or mid-sized firms—both in Spain and Latin America—that, faced with the challenges of traditional distribution, have redirected their efforts toward selling publishing services to authors themselves. They appeal to writers' desires to see their books printed and "published," often promising what they cannot deliver: placement in major bookstores.

The truth is that most self-publishing houses lack the financial and logistical infrastructure necessary for large-scale distribution. Their work usually stops at editing and production—not marketing, distribution, or sales.

Their services typically include:

- Editing and proofreading (stylistic and orthotypographic).
- Cover and back-cover design, including spine layout.
- Interior formatting and typesetting.
- Small print runs (often 100–200 copies) shipped to the author.
- ISBN registration and uploading to digital platforms such as Amazon, which is free and straightforward.

For these services, they generally charge between US$950 and US$1,500, though some charge as much as US$4,000.

A Common Scenario

Imagine that an author pays for such a service and receives boxes filled with copies of his book, now stored in his home. He sells a few to friends and family, but most remain unsold. Over time, those boxes become a source of frustration—a reminder of how difficult and costly self-publishing can be.

My advice: learn to handle the editing process yourself. It is not as difficult as it seems once you understand the basics. Hire affordable freelancers for the tasks you cannot perform alone, and then learn to upload

your book to digital platforms such as Amazon KDP. It is free and simple to use, with clear step-by-step instructions.

Once your book is uploaded, you can order printed copies for yourself at the author's price—for example, about US$4.50 per copy, plus shipping. You can then purchase 50 or 100 copies to sell personally without maintaining a large inventory.

Print-on-Demand Platforms

Print-on-demand publishing has become increasingly popular. Several platforms now offer this service to independent authors as a way to avoid the cost of holding unsold inventory.

While the unit cost of printing small batches (say, 30–50 copies) is higher than mass printing 700–1,000, the overall expense and financial risk are far lower. In traditional printing, many authors lose money on unsold stock, especially after bookstores return unsold copies months—or even years—later.

Some of the main international print-on-demand platforms include:

BIBLIMANAGER, INGRAM SPARK, BUSCALIBRE, and MERCADO LIBRE.

Even major bookstores—such as Librería Nacional and Panamericana in Colombia, or Barnes & Noble in the United States—have entered the print-on-demand business. In such systems, a copy is printed only when a customer places an order, then shipped directly to the buyer.

Digital Marketing

Now comes the crucial question: How can I make myself—and my book—known in a catalog that contains hundreds of thousands of titles competing for attention?

The answer lies in digital marketing.

Today's book market operates on two main fronts:

- Printed books: approximately 70% of total sales.
- Digital books: about 30%, according to data from the Spanish market.

To achieve success in either, promotion is essential. A well-planned digital marketing campaign can make the difference between obscurity and visibility.

If your budget allows, invest in a professional campaign managed by an experienced freelancer. Large marketing agencies may charge exorbitant fees and will likely prioritize their major corporate clients—brands like Unilever, Puma, Nike, Chevrolet, or Renault—while giving your book minimal attention.

For an independent author, a freelancer will treat your project as significant, and every dollar you invest will be visible in your book's performance. Without marketing, your book will likely remain forgotten—either gathering dust on a hidden shelf or stored in a box in your garage.

Final Advice

- Do not print large quantities of your book with your own money unless a bookstore has already agreed to display and sell it. Even then, be conservative with the number of copies you consign—unsold books

will inevitably be returned, often years later, leaving you disappointed and financially strained.

- Ensure that your books are displayed prominently. If possible, allocate part of your budget to a digital marketing campaign that drives visibility and sales. A book promoted online or on social media is far more likely to be sought out by name at a bookstore counter.
- Continue sending your manuscripts to major publishers. One of them may eventually take interest in your work—and that single opportunity could open doors to a lasting literary career.

Still, you will encounter those who insist that submitting to big publishers is foolish—that surrendering your rights in exchange for small royalties (around 10%) paid irregularly is not worth it. But even then—keep trying. The potential reward outweighs the risk.

Finally, write constantly and read endlessly. This is a long and demanding path—a passion that must be nourished every day.

Never lose heart; you never know—success may be just around the corner.

— Gordon McAllister

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Creative Writing Course

PART II

Creativity, Inspiration and Resilience

By
Gordon McAllister

Preface
Part II

The purpose of this new module is to help the reader develop their own creative abilities. It includes a series of exercises through which the reader will be able to practice and enhance their capacity to create texts, to recreate scenes, to visualize environments and atmospheres, and to evoke emotion through writing.

Since no one will be supervising the proposed exercises or workshops, it will be the student's own responsibility to complete the tasks and keep them properly archived in order to benefit from their gradual progress. In the end, the result will be a short story, a novel, a narrative, or any literary creation of quality—something that will reveal to the world, and to oneself, how far one has come.

A secret: in my case, faced with the unbearable need to share what I write, I often show my drafts—even unfinished ones—to a few friends or acquaintances. Some may think they're good, others may not; but either way, the process helps me polish my work with greater precision, knowing that someone will actually read it—and that thought alone makes me feel responsible for presenting something well written.

There will almost always be a kind comment, though if it comes from someone close, it may not be entirely impartial—so I can't take it too seriously. Writing is a profoundly solitary profession, and no one but the wr

iter themselves can truly write, review, discard, or improve their work, except perhaps through the occasional opinion. Once the task is complete, the writer will submit it to a first reader, and from that moment on, it becomes subject to praise or criticism—but by then, the writer has already made the decision to share their work with the world, opening the door to all kinds of judgments, sometimes merciless ones.

It has happened to me that a story—once criticized and dismissed by some readers—later won a contest after I revised it again, cut, refined, and reworked it several times. If the work has not yet been edited or published, the student may still make improvements. But once it has seen the light of day, there is no turning back. One can only hope that the critics will be kind—and that God will bless them.

Let me share an anecdote: years ago, as a novice writer, I cautiously decided to publish my first books under a pseudonym, just to avoid unnecessary risks. The reason was simple: I wasn't sure I was writing well, and I felt embarrassed about what friends or colleagues—especially from my business life—might think.
And indeed, looking back now with more experience, those early books weren't bad, but they certainly lacked the refinement I would expect from myself today. Back then, I still had the audacity and vanity to believe I was already an accomplished writer—how wrong I was.
It took several painful lessons to face reality: I lacked experience, and that experience could only be built over time and through disciplined work. Now I know that preparation is essential for doing things well.

This book, *Creative Writing Course*, in its second part, is not about grammar, spelling, or literary criticism. It assumes that readers already possess a broad base of knowledge, allowing them to focus entirely on the art of writing—and writing well.
This is not a book that teaches one to read literature; it expects that the student already reads regularly and with discernment, since reading is the foundation for grammatical and linguistic mastery. Without it, one begins from zero—and on the wrong foot. The first part of this book was designed precisely to introduce those basic concepts and the early steps into the world of writing and literature.

It is not my intention to discourage anyone, especially at the beginning of this second part, but it is necessary to open one's eyes and approach the path ahead with realism. If you are an inexperienced student entering the world of letters and wish to become an accomplished writer, you must understand that it will take years of effort and discipline—writing and reading constantly. Only then can one write with skill, although even that does not guarantee success, for success depends on many factors. Don't expect luck—luck does not exist in this field. Competition is fierce. That's why I urge you to begin this journey with humility and great perseverance; you are embarking on a long marathon if you wish to become a professional writer.

Something else—this is a book about writing, not about literature. "Literature," in the academic sense, involves literary theory, criticism, philology, and the history of literature—subjects that belong in other fields of study.

Here, we won't analyze the works of major authors or study literature across historical periods such as Ancient, Medieval, Modern, or Contemporary. That's the work of university-level literary programs.

This book focuses instead on the **creativity** required in the act of writing. Still, I strongly encourage students to explore, on their own, the history of literature, its principal authors, and some of their works. Such knowledge will enrich their literary background immensely.

Here we will speak of **creativity and inspiration**—how to ignite the first spark that leads to a flowing flame of imagination. If you wish someone to read your work critically, it is worth hiring a professional and paying them fairly for an impartial review. Avoid relying on family members or loved ones for feedback, as their affection may cloud their judgment.
Be aware also that envy is common in this field. You may encounter other writers who read your work only to find fault and discourage you. Develop discernment to distinguish between constructive criticism and malice.

Above all, remember this: writing, though often ungrateful in financial terms, is one of the most fulfilling callings in life. Over time, as mastery comes with experience, you will feel a quiet joy in your work—perhaps even raising a glass of wine to celebrate it in solitude. And when that special moment arrives—when you open a box filled with your printed books, bearing your name or your pen name on the covers—you will not trade that feeling for anything in the world.

Now then, let's get to work.
Good luck. Gordon McAllister

Chapter 1.
Writing, Creativity, and Inspiration

To begin, let us define three essential concepts: *writing*, *creativity*, and *inspiration.*

Writing

Writing is a uniquely human way of conveying information through graphic symbols inscribed on a surface—paper, wood, stone, or typed on a computer—to represent thought in a visible and structured form, using the language and idiom characteristic of one's culture. Through writing, we are able to record and preserve what we think, giving visual and lasting form to what would otherwise be ephemeral speech.

Writing relies on an alphabet or system of symbols previously agreed upon and understood by the members of a community, who assign meaning to these symbols when they are arranged in specific sequences to form words, phrases, and coherent semantic units that convey meaning clearly and concretely.

Creativity

Creativity is the faculty of establishing connections and relationships between ideas, words, concepts, and contexts in order to generate new ways of perceiving reality and producing imaginative expressions. It involves the use of intelligence, memory, and imagination

to develop strategies that allow new associations of thought—resulting in original and meaningful creations.

It is essential to ensure the originality of one's work and to avoid at all costs imitation, plagiarism, or mere paraphrase of someone else's writing.

Diligent research, as a primary source of knowledge, gives creativity fertile ground from which to grow—providing a rich base of information, data, and ideas that broaden the writer's intellectual horizon. Not everything a writer produces must come solely from imagination or personal experience. A large part of one's knowledge arises from the process of research, which helps expand the scope of vision. Libraries, the internet, and field research all serve as valuable resources for developing creative and original writing.

Inspiration

Pablo Picasso once said:

"Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working."

Nothing could be truer—though each writer has their own particular way of seeking inspiration.

In my case, it often happens around 4:45 in the morning. I am awake, a hot cup of coffee in hand, my fingers resting on the keyboard before the glowing screen. My mind is clear, and I wait for the ideas to come—and they always do.

It is not at 9:45 a.m., after breakfast and comfort, that inspiration strikes me. No—it happens at 4:45 or 5:00 a.m., sometimes even 5:30, but rarely later.

That is the hour of inspiration. A single idea flashes by like lightning—I take note. Then a torrent of thoughts follows, and I must hurry to write them down. It is not the moment to worry about spelling or grammar—only to capture the flow of ideas.
I write and write until, glancing at the clock, I realize it is already 9:35 a.m., and I must force myself to stop. "My legs ache," I think. "I have to stretch."

A distant sound calls me—no, a voice. I keep typing. Someone is speaking about breakfast. It's my wife calling me to the table. But I can't stop abruptly; I must jot down one last thought. And first, of course, I must save the file—power cuts have cost me entire mornings of work before. Thankfully, my new computer has Microsoft 365 with auto-save enabled.

My doctor has advised me to set an alarm every hour to stand up, stretch, and walk for a few minutes. Writing three or four hours straight may be good for literature but bad for health.

After a while, I reread what I've written and tell myself:

"I like this."
"It needs some polishing, but it's good."
Then I wonder:
"Could it be that a Muse has passed by?"
"Was it a Muse of inspiration whispering in my ear?"
"Did she dictate what I just wrote?"

Sometimes I doubt whether the thoughts are even my own.

Reflecting on what I've read about the Muses, I recall that, according to Greek mythology, the Muses were divine feminine beings who inspired poets and artists through wisdom, intuition, and beauty emanating from their own essence.

Out of curiosity, I once looked them up. There were nine of them:

THE NINE MUSES

- Calliope: Muse of epic poetry, battles, and heroic tales, crowned with laurel.

- Clio: Muse of history and legend, chronicler of comedy and tragedy, symbolized by a scroll of parchment.

- Euterpe: Muse of music and lyric poetry.

- Polymnia: Muse of silence—her rhetoric arises from the voice within.

- Melpomene: Muse of tragedy and the dramatic arts.

- Erato: Muse of love stories, romantic and erotic poetry.

- Urania: Muse of didactic poetry, science, astronomy, and astrology.

- Terpsichore: Muse of dance and movement.

- Thalia: Muse of comedy, pastoral tales, and rustic poetry.

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Perhaps some of them know me and have found their way into my study to whisper ideas. Sometimes it's good to surrender to such reveries; other times, it's wiser to keep one's feet on the ground.

In truth, these so-called Muses are not external beings at all—they dwell within the writer's own mind. They represent the writer's discipline, persistence, and capacity for focus—the effort and experience that make inspiration seem almost effortless.

An aspiring writer who writes only occasionally or prioritizes other interests will likely excel at something else entirely. But if one truly wishes to be a writer, one must make writing a priority—establish a routine, stick to it faithfully, and write regularly.

Many writers must balance their craft with other professions. In such cases, one must make extra effort—perhaps waking an hour earlier each day and dedicating that time solely to writing. That may mean going to bed earlier and cutting down on evening distractions like television.

Writing involves far more than the act of putting words on paper. It requires time for revision, correction, and reading—not only of one's own work but also of other authors' books and literary classics. It also demands research.

Not everything a writer produces arises from imagination alone; the writer must expand their field of knowledge to understand the world that surrounds both themselves and their work.

I disagree with teachers who advise writers to "write only about what they know." I have heard it said:

"Write about your environment, your city, your family, your country—your own experiences."

I disagree. I believe it is essential to expand one's vision—beyond the frontiers of familiarity.

The key is research: to read, to verify, to explore new horizons. Travel if you can, discover worlds beyond your own, think big. The internet today offers an infinite gateway to new settings and perspectives—an invaluable tool for any writer willing to make the effort. And if you do it with genuine passion, it will not feel like effort at all.

In the following chapters, we will study the fundamental elements of narrative in short stories and novels: *characters, atmosphere, setting, plot, and story development.* We will also examine *narrative arcs* and *plot twists* as key components of storytelling.

Now let us see an example of writing, creativity, and inspiration in practice.

Imagine I am ready to write but have no ideas. Sometimes one must *force the mind* into motion—like jump-starting an engine.

So, I simply write a phrase… any phrase:

"It was 7:35 a.m. when the alarm went off."

And from there, the story begins to flow:

"It was 7:35 a.m. when the alarm went off. 'Damn it!' I shouted aloud. I had set the alarm for 4:00 a.m. so I could get up, shower, call a cab, and catch the 7:30 flight to New York. I had checked in the night before, and now not only had I missed the flight, but I'd also lost the cost of the ticket. That meant missing Monday's meeting—and with it, my last chance to defend myself from the accusations the HR manager had been preparing. They'll probably fire me now. Maybe that's for the best. I should start thinking about what comes next—perhaps that construction business in Naples, Florida, really is the right move. Outside, the rain poured down. People hurried by in heavy coats and gloves, shoulders bent inward as if seeking shelter within themselves.

Why rush now? The flight is gone. I'll just take the afternoon or evening one and show up tomorrow at headquarters—maybe with my resignation letter in hand. To hell with those bureaucratic bastards. I'm done playing their game. Maybe I'll even expose their shady dealings to the authorities. Yes, that will be my revenge."

EXERCISE

If you dare, continue this story—write at least five pages until it becomes a complete short story. It should include:

1. Introduction – The story setup (almost complete above).
2. Development – Build tension, introduce an antagonist or conflict, and create complications.
3. Resolution – Lead the story toward its conclusion.

At this point, you will have begun a new text. It could grow into a novel chapter, a realistic short story, a personal anecdote, or perhaps just a spark of inspiration for a future work.

When I return to my ongoing novel—which has already reached Chapter XX after four months of steady work—I often reread the last few paragraphs to reorient myself, then continue writing. Sometimes, I find that a spontaneous morning exercise like today's can be adapted and incorporated into the larger work with only minor adjustments.

This, then, is a useful technique for writing—even when faced with the dreaded *blank page syndrome.*

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Chapter 2.
The Narrative Structure

The structure of the story

Structure is the fundamental framework—the skeleton beneath the surface—that supports the body of the narrative, arranging the story's elements into a clear, orderly context so that the whole remains coherent. The author's conceptual blueprint for the work will be reflected in the novel's structure. Yet often, when the writer allows intuition to guide the unfolding of the tale, it can seem as if the characters themselves—almost autonomously—begin to generate the story's turns, yielding a structure that was not meticulously preplanned. Those are the stories that feel most surprising, curious, and compelling, where the turns are at their most inventive.

A word of advice: we should certainly trust our intuition and our nose for story—but without neglecting the rational architecture and structural clarity the work requires.

In any case, whatever method you prefer for writing a short story or a novel, you must define with clarity and depth both the theme and the tone of the narrative.

THE THEME

At the outset, as we establish the work's structural framework, we must define the theme—the subject the

story is about—which answers the question: *What are we going to talk about? What is this story really about?* When we attempt to answer those questions, we are identifying the theme. The response is not as simplistic as one might think—e.g., *"Oh, it's a romance."* What's needed is a much fuller, more specific answer that lets us visualize the complete context within which the story will unfold.

Example: We will explore the conflict between love and infidelity that arises when two married people enter into relationships with others in a puritanical milieu in the early twentieth century, in a small town in the American heartland. In this case, more than a simple love story, we might be dealing with a turbulent love. The theme would involve infidelity, puritanism, love and lovelessness, psychological pressure, the anger of those who are betrayed, and the longing of the lovers to attain happiness amid a storm of consequences.

The theme is the central idea around which the entire narrative revolves—the heart of the story. Throughout, there must be a unifying idea that gives the work its body, sense, and meaning.

In my novel From Palestine, a Violinist, the theme might at first seem to be the tale of a young Palestinian who rises from destitution to glory as the concertmaster of the Washington Symphony. More precisely, however, the theme is *resilience*: the capacity to rise after life's falls and setbacks—again and again if necessary—in order to continue one's life mission and reach the goal.

According to Robert McKee, the theme is the controlling idea, the story's ultimate meaning.[37]

According to Boris Tomashevsky, the theme is the unity of meanings arising from the work's various elements.[38]

Now let us consider the work's TONE.

THE TONE

Tone is the emotional register the writer impresses upon the narrative. It is the attitude inscribed in the text—the intrinsic emotional quality that pervades the writing and transmits a corresponding feeling to the reader. Tone arises from the work's atmosphere. It is the mood the author instills in order to awaken particular emotions through the sensations carried by the prose and perceived by the reader. (We will return to atmosphere in a later chapter.)

DEFINING THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

It was Aristotle who first articulated the basic structure of a narrative when he proposed the classic three-step pattern: Beginning, Middle, and End (often framed as Setup, Confrontation/Complication, and Resolution).

In Module 1 of this course, we examined that simple structure in detail. From that foundational model emerge

[37] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_McKee

[38] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boris_Tomashevsky

multiple variants, particularly those that play with time. Here are a few:

1. LINEAR NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Events are presented in sequential, chronological order as they occur.

2. NONLINEAR NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Here, the story leaps about in time. Within this broad mode, we find the following variants:

We might, for example, begin by transgressing the normal temporal flow:

- In extrema res: We begin the story at the end.

- In media res: We open somewhere in the middle.

Within nonlinear handling of time, we also have:

a. Prolepsis (flashforward): We advance a future event, presenting it earlier than its natural place in the chronology.

b. Analepsis (flashback): In the midst of the narrative, we return to an earlier moment to recount something related to what has already been told, often to clarify what was previously left implicit.

3. CIRCULAR STRUCTURE

This is a structure in which the opening of the story foreshadows or directly references its ending—and the conclusion returns to or mirrors that opening.

An example appears in my novel The Memory of the Lost Years. In the first chapter, we reference an event that takes place many decades later (sixty-one years, to be exact): a ceremony honoring the prisoners of the Karaganda gulag in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. At the end of the book, we return to that event.

Example:
Excerpt from:
The Memory of the Lost Years
By Gordon McAllister.

OPENING PARAGRAPHS

Chapter 1
A Ceremony in Honor of the Fallen and the Survivors
2015
Barcelona, Spain

Many years had passed, but the news struck like a storm full of thunder and lightning, reviving painful memories and tearing open wounds that had nearly healed. There it was, on the front page—impossible to ignore… Benjamín Azcárraga, an octogenarian, saw the article with a start, as if he had been slapped. On the surface it was an inconsequential note about agreements signed between Spain's president, Arturo Rajoy, and Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, concerning Spanish investments in a country ranked ninth in the world for gas, oil, and mining resources—the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The surprise, the article explained, came when President Nazarbayev presented President Rajoy with a pair of blue–leather-bound volumes containing the personal records

of a great number of Spanish citizens who had lost their freedom between 1939 and 1954 and had been imprisoned in the gulags—concentration camps—maintained by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in this case in one of its satellites, the former Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.

As a result, the Spanish and Kazakh governments decided to hold a ceremony honoring the Spanish citizens who had died or survived after long years of captivity in the Kazakh prison system. Survivors and their families were invited, travel expenses paid, to attend the tribute in Astana, the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Benjamín Azcárraga and some of his friends—fellow survivors of that tragedy, among them Leandro Acuña and Flavio Ayerbe—were invited and traveled with the delegation to be present at the ceremony.

May 2015

Astana, capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan

It was the day of the official ceremony. Sixty-one years had passed since that day in 1954 when they were released. The tears drawn from the depths of their souls did not quite spill; they remained caught in their eyes, muffled. It was time to remember a past that seemed to roll down the weathered cheeks of those elders. A dull ache cried out in silence as the trumpet sounded a hymn in honor of the fallen—many of them children, their former companions—who had died in those conditions.

Groups of elderly survivors and their families had come from various provinces at the invitation of Kazakh and Spanish authorities, to represent themselves or those who perished in what had once been the infamous Gulag Spassk No. 99 in

Karaganda Province. It was a story that, far from unique, had repeated itself again and again across the vast Soviet expanse, and not only with Spaniards but with prisoners of many other nationalities—including Russians enslaved by their own government.

CLOSING PARAGRAPHS

Finale / Epilogue of The Memory of the Lost Years

2015 — Astana, capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The three crosses provided by the Spanish government stood planted on the Kazakh plain in honor of the Spanish prisoners. It was a sunny morning, May 31, 2015, the end of spring, and a poignant ceremony was being held in memory of those who had fallen in the Spassk No. 99 and Kok-Uzek gulags. A group of elderly survivors gathered more than six decades after their liberation, accompanied by family members of both the living and the absent, as well as by the highest authorities of Spain and Kazakhstan. They were inaugurating a monument in memory of the fallen and the imprisoned of Spanish nationality—a tribute to the victims, among whom were prisoners of the Spanish "Blue Division," republican anarchists, Spaniards branded spies by the Soviet regime, and many dissident nationals of Russia and other countries, opponents of the government of the time, as well as several of those known as "the Spanish children of Russia." [39]

[39] Gordon McAllister, 2023, EL RECUERDO DE LOS AÑOS PERDIDOS, Barcelona, Carena Ediciones.

WORKSHOP

Write a narrative—say, a short story or an anecdote—of whatever length you choose, but begin with the ending of the story; in other words, practice in extrema res.
Below is an example of one of my own stories that opens in extrema res and thus employs a circular structure.

Short Story:
His Name Was Protacio Tapasc
By Gordon McAllister

FIRST PARAGRAPH

"The day they killed him, no one saw a thing—no one knew he had been murdered, except the killers themselves—and no one found his body. A week and a half later, on a moonless, pitch-black night, a social outcast—a homeless alcoholic with neither shelter nor a life to call his own—rummaging through a nearby trash bin, caught a fetid odor and grew suspicious. He ventured deeper into the alleyway and saw him. The body lay on the ground, soaked in urine and feces, already putrefying, the face greenish from decomposition and a dark stain spread around the knife that remained buried in his chest. There he was, atop a darkened patch beneath his torso that showed where the pool of blood had formed as he died in his final death throes. The man who found him would never know that in life he had been called Protacio Tapasco…"

FINAL PARAGRAPHS

Epilogue of the story

"He died within minutes, soaked in his own blood in that dark alleyway, with no witnesses but a few watchful rats that soon crept close to sniff the corpse, glancing at one another as if commenting on the madness of these humans—so absurd in their acts and in their lives.

No one knew who he was; no one claimed the body; no one missed him; no one recognized him. When at last he was found, a week and a half later, he was buried in a pauper's grave in a far corner of the cemetery. His tomb was marked with a laconic epitaph—devoid of words, of philosophy, of any trace of spirituality. Only an 'N.N.' for a name, and nothing more. His mother never learned officially of his death. She had heard nothing from him for thirty years and assumed he was still with the guerrillas—the damned guerrillas who had taken him. Yet on the day he was killed, she felt a sudden foreboding, a kind of unease, and said to someone, 'I have the feeling my son died today—I don't know why. I've thought of him so much today. His name was Protacio, and I remember him above all as a child. He was a good boy.'"

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Chapter 3.
Selected Narrative Structures

Now let's look at several additional types of narrative structures.

THE DAN WELLS SEVEN-POINT STRUCTURE

Here is the framework:

1. Hook – Show the story's initial state and the protagonist's first arc just as the plot begins to move. We start from a position of equilibrium—"the comfort zone."

2. Plot Turn 1 – Something happens that shatters the equilibrium and forces the protagonist to react. He or she is compelled to move and respond.

3. Pinch Point 1 – Pressure closes in. Discomfort rises; the goal is threatened. Either the protagonist responds and clears the obstacle, or gives up.

4. Midpoint – The protagonist has no way out. They must act decisively and proactively to prevail. Forward motion toward a solution begins.

5. Pinch Point 2 – Another obstacle strikes. Things worsen; the situation becomes nearly insurmountable. The antagonists appear to be achieving their aim of destroying the protagonist. Defeat seems imminent. All appears lost.

6. Plot Turn 2 – An abrupt development: a light appears, an element that saves the situation and breathes new life into the protagonist. He or she realizes there is still a path to victory and takes the necessary steps to reclaim it.

7. Resolution – The story's end. We see the protagonist emerge and achieve the stated objective—or, conversely, die in a tragic final scene.

In practice, narrative structures admit countless variants, with more numerous and complex complications as fresh obstacles arise for the characters, new turns emerge, and distinct solutions are found for each crisis.

In such cases, the author's imagination sets the course. One might expand from the seven points to nine—or more.

ANOTHER STRUCTURAL DESIGN: THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Another widely used structure is The Hero's Journey, articulated by American anthropologist and mythologist Joseph Campbell.[40]

[40] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monomito

The hero's path is shaped by a series of narrative circumstances that determine the trajectory and, ultimately, the outcome.



(Diagram of Joseph Campbell's structure)[41]

In Module 1 of this Creative Writing Course, we explored several narrative (or character) arcs, which you can think of as models for the story's "ups and downs"—that is, how fortunes rise and fall across the length of the narrative.

Example of a narrative arc in the structure of one of my novels:

Novel:

Gone with the Wind… (A Refugee's Story)

By Gordon McAllister

[41] Reconocimiento del autor: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monomito#/media/Archivo:Heroesjourney-es.svg

1. BEGINNING – INTRODUCTION

- In media res: The protagonist trudges along a blazing desert road on the way to exile, having fled his country. His life is a tragedy lived in destitution. He suffers hunger, captivity, and physical and psychological torture in a Venezuelan prison.

2. DEVELOPMENT

- Analepsis (flashback): We return to tell his family story, his arrest, the torture, the hunger, the unlivable nation, the tyrannical, corrupt regime clinging to power. He is released and decides to escape the country.
- He begins the journey into exile: the long trek through multiple countries; incidents and hardships along the way; the crossing of the Darién Gap; Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico.

3. FIRST TURN

- A first mentor appears. He offers work. A period of labor, peace, and calm follows—a comfortable lull in which little happens.

4. SECOND TURN

- A young woman enters; attraction and romance.
- A motivation to change: a challenge—resume university studies.
- He studies, excels, and stands out academically.

5. A SECOND PLOTLINE

- A strong job offer arrives, thanks to his academic success.
- Life begins to shift: good income, upward mobility, better positions. He becomes a rising executive.

6. THIRD TURN
- In parallel, he co-founds a business—a credit firm and a brokerage. Everything turns positive and his prospects flourish.

7. NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND ENDING
At this point, many outcomes are possible. The protagonist might continue to rise until he becomes wealthy. Or a dramatic reversal could strike—his girlfriend's death, a period of grief and depression, fresh hardships. After this new blow, he recovers again and rises once more.

This is an example of a story marked by alternating highs and lows according to the chosen narrative arc.

GUIDELINES TO CONSIDER WHEN BUILDING A NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Let's look at elements drawn from screenwriter Blake Snyder's book *Save the Cat*, a set of principles for screenwriting that also apply neatly to novel writing.

1. Save the Cat. Above all, you must "save" the protagonist from alienating the reader—create empathy. The goodwill your main character earns will carry the narrative. This includes a "bad" protagonist: a villain who wins the reader's sympathy can make for a riveting story.

2. Double Mumbo Jumbo. One dose of "magic" is enough. In a fictional work, a single extraordinary element can set the terms of the world; a second, unrelated magical device risks irritating the reader and undermining the story's credibility.

3. Too Much Marzipan. Don't smother readers with repetitive explanations. Be sparing—excess rhetoric cloys.

4. The Pope in the Pool. When you need to deliver background exposition, do it in an engaging, entertaining way—distract the reader with something lively while you slip in the facts.

5. Too Many Wires. Again, beware of overexplaining. A snarl of backstory and setup will tangle (and lose) your reader.

6. The Glacier Is Gaining on You. Don't overstay tension. If a slow-burn suspense scene drags on too long, the reader grows impatient; they're ready for consequences.

7. The Arc of Change. Your protagonist must change. By the end, the journey should have transformed them from who they were at the start.

8. Don't Jam the Press into the Plot. Avoid adding journalists—unless you're telling a story about journalists.

WORKSHOP

Your task is to write a short story or other narrative that begins with a simple structure and gradually becomes more complex. You only learn by tackling the text yourself and building confidence as you go.

In a class at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, the professor offered a prompt to start a narrative. The example he gave was:

"In the last runway show she walked, it happened that when she misstepped, her ankle twisted, the heel snapped on the catwalk…"

The assignment: continue the story, create a setting, add one or more turns, give it literary shape, and turn that line into a short story—or even a novel.

In my case, long after submitting a modest class assignment, I expanded that seed into a finished short story.

Short Story:
The Girl on the Runway
By Gordon McAllister

At that moment I glanced at the phone whose glow treacherously lit my face against the darkness of my bedroom. It was 2:35 a.m. A sharp, insistent chime had jolted me awake. Then a voice—slurred by the lateness of the hour and, no doubt, the usual excess of liquor—crept through the line.

"Carlitos?" someone asked—a voice I recognized at once…

It was my friend Jaime Londoño, bright as a bulb at that hour, tormented by a thought that wouldn't let him go—and obviously a few drinks in, judging by the way he sounded.

"Hey, man—what's up?" I asked.

"She died," he said, tearful.

"Who died?" I asked again. I was half-asleep and not catching on.

"The girl died."

"What girl? What are you talking about?"

"The girl I spent the night with last week," Londoño said. "I was really into her—maybe even falling in love."

"Right, I remember a bit," I told him. "You said she seemed off—depressed."

"Yeah. Her name was Mabel, and she was a famous model. Tonight I was told what happened."

"All right—tell me. What happened?"

"Her best friend told me the story. Here's what she said:

At the last runway show she walked, when she misstepped, her ankle twisted, the heel snapped on the catwalk—and she felt something ominous stir in her soul. But even before that, she was already in a bad place…

The $2,500 shoes—'Christian Louboutin Maralena Flame'—were the hit of the season, but they brought the model neither satisfaction nor happiness. Diets, grueling workouts, and every kind of sacrifice were grinding her down. She felt like a disaster despite the

aura of perfection, the immaculate makeup, the stage lights focused on her, the cameras trained on her every move. She had already decided Paris would be her last show.

Her flawless image—poised, untouchable—clashed with her own harsh self-image. How far she was from genuine happiness. How far she would have to travel through shadows and fog before she could find a clear path, or even a fleeting moment of confidence in herself—anything other than the false façade of nonexistent perfection that made her feel the futility of a life wasted on a shallow semblance crafted by others to exploit her commercially, with no regard for the delicate interior that silently screamed. She couldn't go on. The absurdity of it all was cornering her against a dark wall of unrest that was eating her from within.

She sought professional help. A psychiatrist diagnosed chronic depression and prescribed pills that dulled her, blurring her identity; she stopped the treatment. If she was "crazy," at least that craziness belonged to her complex, murky personality—better that than becoming a caricature of a person suspended in the fog of an uncomfortable, benumbed mind. She could not bear to watch her mind die while her body lived—to remain in a limbo between life and death, enduring a terminal agony that never ends, and destroy the only real thing she had left: her mind, twisted and flawed though it was. It served her at least to recognize the puerility of her existence. Perhaps a true, releasing suicide would end her present torment. And so it did.

One dawn she woke with a start, seized by the sense of standing at the lip of a bottomless chasm from which there was no return, and saw only one path to freedom: to step into that unfathomable darkness of unanswered riddles and uncertified hopes. Perhaps there she would find a light—or, at least, the total darkness of peaceful nonexistence.

She moved slowly toward the edge and took the fatal step… the floating linens of her wide dress whipped in the wind, driven by the

dizzying speed of a certain death, plunging toward the void. And now—at last—she was at peace."

"That's what they told me," Londoño said.

In the days that followed, it was clear Jaime suffered quietly from the girl's absence, and I watched him change. Once he had been superficial, freewheeling, a loud, irreverent Caribbean who loved to tease his friends; now he grew quiet and reserved.

The greater surprise came months later when he told me he had applied to medical school—and been accepted. I never imagined that my friend Jaime—who once seemed a good-for-nothing—would end up studying medicine at one of the nation's most prestigious universities.

He never returned to who he'd been before, and some years later he graduated with honors, Magna Cum Laude, from that university's psychiatry program.

Today we are close friends, as ever. One day I asked him about her… He told me he had never been able to forget the girl.

I should add: a story like this does not spring from nowhere. I'm no genius; I have to work my texts relentlessly before I even think of publishing them. For a university assignment it was necessary to submit solid work—but for the piece to reach the standard of a finished short story, ready to publish, I had to write it many times, polish it, correct it, reread it—many times, I repeat—let it rest, then return to it, cut what was unnecessary, and rebuild, until I was fully satisfied.

This is the writer's real labor. It is not a matter of rushing and publishing immediately. No—do it carefully; make it impeccable. Only then—perhaps—it will be ready.

— O —

Chapter 4.
Beginnings in Short Story and Novel

We touched on this topic in Part One; now we return to it in greater detail.

When it comes to narrative structure, the opening can be decisive—and you can approach it in several ways. First lines entice, seduce, and hook the reader. At the outset they are the most important part of a novel because they determine whether the book will be read at all. They are the first nudge that invites the reader to ke*ep going.

That said, those first lines—the appetizer of the narrative—must be followed by a continuity of purpose: they create an expectation that the book will deliver on its promise. As Víctor Sellés notes, your opening is your calling card to the reader.

Openings should feel dynamic—charged with motion, even if it is emotional motion—something that stirs you, that pulls you out of your armchair, that jolts you so the act of reading becomes lively from the very first moment. Static sentences tend to lull the reader; that somnolence is a poor way to begin. A disquieting first sentence will push the reader out of their comfort zone and awaken that delicious, slightly voyeuristic curiosity we all try to hide. I like my first lines to unsettle.

Example:
First paragraph of the short story: *Of Love, Tragedy, and Revolution* - By Gordon McAllister

"On that tragic day—had fate wished a different ending—Stjepan should have been thousands of kilometers away, at home in Paris; but through a conspiracy of misfortune he found himself in the heart of Mexico City, right there in the Plaza of the Three Cultures in Tlatelolco."

Notice how the paragraph frames the scene in a fully realist context—Mexico City, the Plaza of the Three Cultures in Tlatelolco. From the outset the reader is grounded in the real world, not distracted by the thought that this might be a purely fanciful tale. In any case, the reader is already involved and wants to continue.

Opening paragraphs of the short story The Heresy of the Warrior Monks
By Gordon McAllister

"A raging wind blew in from the east, lifting great fans of frigid water and shining foam from the crests of the waves, driving them who knows where, only to smash without mercy against faces and stoke the fears of sailors and migrant passengers alike. It was a timeworn vessel, tossed about by a demonic sea. With every blow of the waves, the frail craft looked ready to splinter into a thousand pieces, putting lives at risk and threatening to fling them into the deepest dominions of Neptune."

Opening paragraphs of the novel And They Called It Vinland
By Gordon McAllister

" 'Man overboard! … Man overboard!' people shouted—but there was nothing to be done, and in an instant the man had disappeared, swept from the deck by a murderous wave. Their pale faces, lit by constant lightning, betrayed their fear of doom; any fatal outcome could strike again. They had already lost one comrade to the sea."

An opening line cited by John Cheever:

"The first day I robbed Tiffany's, it was raining."

I love it. The subtlety makes me smile.

Opening of the novel *The Memory of the Lost Years* By Gordon McAllister

2015 — Barcelona, Spain
"Many years had passed, but the news hit like a storm full of thunder and lightning, reviving painful memories and tearing open wounds that had almost healed. There it was, on the front page—impossible to ignore"…

Now let's encourage the reader to invent a strong beginning for a story or a novel. Here is one I've just made up:

"He was blind with rage. He grabbed the phone from the little table by the window and hurled it through the glass, which exploded into a thousand shards. Everything fell to the street, four floors below, at the very moment a distinguished lady was walking by. The phone fractured her skull; the slivers of glass disfigured her face. She was the mayor's wife."

It's almost impossible for a reader to stop there; most likely, stunned, they will ask: "And then what happened?" That is the magic question every writer longs to hear.

On the other hand, that shock at the start spurs the continuation of the story; the writer, too, feels motivated to press on, and ideas begin to flow in torrents. Suppose the assailant flees and a thousand complications ensue—that's fertile ground.

The Length of a Short Story or a Novel

There is no fixed rule for the length of a short story or a novel beyond the writer's judgment—or, in the case of a short-story contest, the contest's rules.

On length, consider this exchange from an interview with Jorge Luis Borges on why he did not write novels (available at Ciudad Seva:

https://ciudadseva.com/texto/por-que-no-escribe-novelas/).

Here is the transcript in English:

Why don't you write novels? *Jorge Luis Borges*

"Student: Professor, your poems and short stories are well known abroad, but I think you haven't written any novels. If that's true, is there a specific reason?

Borges: I think there are two specific reasons: first, my incorrigible laziness; and second, the fact that, since I don't trust myself much, I like to keep a close watch on what I write. And of course it's easier to keep watch over a short story, given its brevity, than over a novel.

That is, a novel is written successively; those successive parts are later organized in the reader's mind—or in the author's. By contrast, one

can oversee a short story almost with the same precision with which one can oversee a sonnet: you can see it as a whole.

A novel is perceived as a whole only when you've already forgotten many of its details—when memory (and even forgetting) have done the organizing.

Besides, I think there are writers—and two inevitable names come to mind here, Rudyard Kipling and Henry James—who managed to pack a short story with everything a novel can contain. In other words, I believe Kipling's late stories are as densely loaded as many novels. And although I have read, reread, and will keep rereading Kim, I think some of Kipling's last stories—for example, "Dayspring Mishandled," or perhaps "Unprofessional," or "The Gardener"—are as saturated with humanity and human complexity as Kim and as many novels.

So I don't think I'll write a novel. I know our era seems to demand novels from writers. People constantly ask me when I'm going to write one. But I console myself by thinking there was a time when writers were asked, "And when will you write an epic?" or "When will you write a five-act drama?"—questions nobody asks now.

I also think the short story is a form older than the novel, and perhaps it may outlive the novel.

And here I realize I'm repeating what another favorite author of mine, Wells, said—and in Wells's case I'd say what can be said of Henry James: I believe his short stories are far superior to his novels, and no less rich.".

— Jorge Luis Borges

— O —

Chapter 5.
Elements of Narrative (1): Characters

Characters

In short stories and novels, "characters" are not necessarily real people; by definition, in these genres they are creations of the writer's imagination. While characters must feel entirely real—their behavior should simulate that of people in the world outside the page—even when they are inspired by real individuals, they remain literary constructs.

In folk tales—especially children's stories and legends—authors often exaggerate traits, rendering characters almost caricatural. This is not typical in literary short fiction or the novel, where characters should read as convincingly real.

At the outset, characters in a work can be classified in several ways, according to the following criteria: by degree of participation, by narrative role, by temperament, and by the changes they undergo over the course of the story.

1) By Degree of Participation

Classification based on how prominently a character participates in the work:

1.1. Main Characters

These embody the work's central roles and are typically the story's protagonists. The development, interest, and emotional voltage of the narrative largely depend on them.

1.2. Secondary Characters

These include co-protagonists and antagonists who play important roles, though not as central as the leads, and whose functions revolve around the main characters.

1.3. Tertiary Characters

These figures occupy the background of principal scenes. They help furnish the descriptive and atmospheric "set dressing." Example: the butler, or the waiter serving dinner at a grand table who perhaps spills wine on a grande dame's bodice. The lady may be crucial; the waiter might be merely the incident that triggers a plot beat—significant to the scene but not to the broader arc.

2) By Narrative Role

Classification based on what role a character plays and how consequential that role is:

2.1. Protagonist

In a short story, this is the principal figure around whom everything turns. In a novel, there may be multiple protagonists, matching the number of plots and subplots.

Example: in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, both Romeo and Juliet are protagonists.

2.2. Antagonists

These are the figures who generate opposition and conflict. They confront the protagonists, creating tension and unease—adding the "salt and heat" that heighten the reader's interest in how things will play out. Example: in *Romeo and Juliet*, Tybalt functions as an antagonist; he kills Mercutio while the latter defends his friend Romeo.

2.3. Tritagonists

These are the third-most important figures—key to the story's development but less central than the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s). Example: in *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio—Romeo's friend and counselor—serves as a tritagonist.

3) By Temperament and Psychological Complexity

Classification based on disposition and personality—stoic, nervous, sanguine, choleric, passive—often grouped into flat versus round characters.

3.1. Flat Characters

These possess simple, predictable psychologies. They are "good," just, heroic; or they are ordinary, with

steady, uncomplicated behavior. Flat characters do not evolve meaningfully across the text; they tend to act in consistent ways. Classic examples include Superman; Alfred, Batman's butler; and Robin.
A flat character is defined by a dominant trait that persists over time; the role they play always relates to that trait. In other words, their personality is static. Note that "flat" does not always mean "good": the fool, the bumbler, the apathetic functionary, or the generic henchman who obeys orders without question are also flat. Many servants, waiters, and background "bad guys" who carry out instructions belong here. In short, these figures play static roles; they do not change over the course of the narrative.

3.2. Round Characters

These are the most narratively enriching figures—complex, changeable, difficult, often to the extreme. Think of the ruthless killer; the commander who sends his own soldiers to needless deaths; or the contradictory hero who, despite his virtues, behaves like a pitiless terrorist, sacrificing anyone who stands in his way. Consider the quarrelsome drunk who provokes a fight by flirting with the prettiest woman in the room in front of her partner. Such characters are not usually "the good guys"; they are the abrasive, troublemaking personalities that populate fiction and continuously complicate the protagonist's life.
Round characters add realism—less fairy-tale sheen, more lifelike texture. A striking round figure often diverges from social norms—a distracted scientist lost in his speculations,

seemingly mad yet more lucid than those consumed by trivialities.
Equally compelling are "good" characters with rough edges—prone to lapses, dissonant outbursts, or off-putting habits—whom the reader nonetheless comes to love, forgiving their missteps in light of their virtues. And, conversely, a "bad" character may display flashes of kindness that win the reader's favor in spite of everything.

4) By Degree of Change

Classification based on a character's development—whether they undergo meaningful transformation:

4.1. Static Characters

These remain essentially the same throughout the work. They neither flinch nor metamorphose; their defining quality is passivity or fixity. They are often secondary figures or part of the scene's decorative fabric. Many antagonists (though not all) are static: they start out "bad" and stay that way; their function is not to change. Think of the classic Western antihero: a man with an icy stare and an impassive face. He kills the outlaws without blinking and is the same taciturn, controlled, imperturbable figure at the end as at the beginning—a type made famous by actors like Dirk Bogarde, Clint Eastwood, and Charles Bronson. Static, yes—but still compelling.

4.2. Dynamic Characters

These change across the span of the work. They are affected by events and undergo a genuine metamorphosis. Example: a gentle, law-abiding bank clerk at the start of the novel suffers the death of his wife and child in a terrorist attack. He transforms into a remorseless soldier—a precision sniper—who hunts down the perpetrators one by one in a series of operations. That is a radical, consequential change.

Workshops

Workshop A

Develop a character sketch for a static antagonist—a "bad" character—who nonetheless reveals a moment of humanity. Then place him in a narrated accident scene in which he is at fault.

Workshop B

Write a dramatic scene from a short story in which the protagonist—good-hearted, upstanding, and largely static—suffers a terrible event and becomes vengeful and fearsome. The change should be genuinely startling.

Workshop C

Compose a scene featuring a dying man in a blind alley as the protagonist. Describe his physique, temperament, and personality, and let the reader glean—through implication—what life brought him to this point. The priority is vivid character description, exercising your imaginative faculties. — O —

Chapter 6.
Archetypes and Stereotypes

Let us consider another classification:

CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO ASSIGNED ROLES

This is a classification based on each character's image model and the role they represent—whether that role is typical or atypical.

1. ARCHETYPES

An *archetype* is a character model whose behavioral pattern has specific, distinctive traits that define it—its way of thinking, acting, and reacting—according to the features predetermined for that type. Examples include: *the friend*, *the hero*, *the rebel*, and so on.

The psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, who made significant contributions to psychoanalysis, identified twelve archetypes that can be applied to narrative characters based on their behavioral traits. These are:

1. The Innocent – Excessively kind, naïve, inexperienced; a form of negative innocence.

2. The Friend – Loyal, honest, helpful, companionable, and faithful.

3. The Hero – Strong, determined, just, brave, and risk-taking.

4. The Ruler – A leader, powerful, controlling, imposing, sometimes tyrannical or autocratic.

5. The Sage – Intelligent, profound, curious, insightful, intellectual, and erudite.

6. The Magician – Possessor of secrets; universal, phenomenal, surprising, and unexpected.

7. The Creator – Inventive, talented, imaginative, productive, a maker of things.

8. The Caregiver – Generous, compassionate, empathetic, devoted, and service-oriented.

9. The Rebel – Revolutionary, activist, seeker of change, justice-oriented, sometimes anarchic.

10. The Lover – Harmonious, peaceful, romantic, tender, affectionate; sometimes fickle and emotionally unstable.

11. The Jester – Cheerful, humorous, witty, jovial, sometimes irreverent.

12. The Explorer – Adventurous, seeker of new experiences, independent, wandering, nomadic.

2. STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are mental images we form about how certain groups of people behave, based on the distinctive traits with which they tend to represent their roles. These patterns lead to generalized assumptions and habitual ways of judging or responding to others in everyday life—often resulting in prejudice.

We frequently build an image of a person's behavior based on stereotypes—images that may be true or false depending on our level of bias.

As Robyn Quin and Barrie McMahon write in their book *Stories and Stereotypes*:

"With stereotypes, the law of cause and effect rarely applies; more often, the reverse is true. They may appear logical, but upon examination, they prove irrational and implausible. The image created tends to express a value judgment about a group—usually based on race, profession, or gender."

Examples of Stereotypes

Stereotype of the Strong Man
Strong, brave, daring; men don't cry; he is the head of the family, the provider of the household.

Stereotype of the Fragile Woman
Delicate, maternal, tender; dependent on her husband, a

homemaker who does not work outside the house—fragile and submissive.

Racial Stereotypes

Black people are lazy or devious. Chinese people eat "strange" food. Latinos are unattractive. Indigenous people are cunning. Coastal people are idle.

Socioeconomic Stereotypes

The rich are arrogant. The wealthy are miserable. The poor are unproductive. Lower- and middle-class workers are mediocre. The poor are thieves.

LGBT Behavior Stereotypes

Gay men are "deviant." Homosexuality is an illness. All homosexuals go to hell. All effeminate men are gay.

Stereotypes of Older People

Older people are finished, useless, and unproductive. They waste time, are always sick, and depend on others.

STEREOTYPES IN LITERATURE

In literature, it is common to encounter situations where stereotypes become evident—scenes in which prejudice and discrimination naturally emerge as part of the plot's conflict and tension.

These tensions often create the very *peaks*, *turns*, and *knots* that make a story engaging.

Common examples include:

- The Poor but Beautiful Servant Girl – She falls in love with the master of the house, faces social rejection, and ultimately marries him after much struggle—a well-worn but enduring narrative.

- The Self-Made Man – He starts at the bottom, works tirelessly, overcomes obstacles, and triumphs in life despite envy and betrayal from supposed friends.

- The Betraying Friend – The protagonist's best friend seduces his girlfriend, causing heartbreak and despair, but eventually the protagonist finds resilience and begins anew.

- Detective Fiction – Crime novels often follow familiar patterns: the detective, the villain, and the seductive but morally ambiguous woman.

- The Western Hero – The rugged man with a cold stare, dust-covered clothes, and a hat shading his eyes; ready to kill without hesitation. He rides a horse, has deadly aim, drinks bourbon in the saloon—or the town brothel—and lives by his own brutal code.

WORKSHOP

1. Create a round character based on any archetype.
2. Create a female stereotype—a typical family woman, preferably complex and difficult rather than purely "good."
3. Write a one-page character sketch describing every trait, defect, and contradiction. Then condense it into a single paragraph of about ten lines.
4. Write a micro-story based on a stereotypical situation.
5. Develop a one-page scene featuring the archetype of *The Innocent*. Think of someone who fits this role.
6. Once finished, share your work with a friend or relative for an unbiased opinion—and, if you dare, post it on social media.

A NEW ARCHETYPE:
The Mystical Ascetic

Let us now consider a stereotype not listed by Jung but created by the author of this book: The Mystical Ascetic.

He is a solitary, spiritual man whose vast inner world prevents him from being distracted by the banalities and burdens of earthly existence. His soul is already rooted in the higher realm of the spirit, detached from this land of mystery, hardship, and sorrow.

This archetype is inspired by a photograph of a monk published in the Italian press upon the death of Pope John

Paul II, when the white smoke rose from the Vatican chimney announcing the election of the new pope, Francis.

That day, among the crowds in St. Peter's Square, a beggar monk stood out—an image evoking *Saint Francis of Assisi*. His silent presence seemed to offer a humble salute to the new pontiff who bore the same name.



Photograph

That day in St. Peter's Square, Rome, hundreds of photographers captured the image of a monk from the town of Assisi waiting for the white smoke to appear—a living echo of the saint whose name the new pope would bear.

This imagen inspired th autor to make a poem.

Poem
THE MONK OF ASSISI
By Gordon McAllister

Lonely, he watched the dancing reflections
On the rain-soaked streets,
Barefoot, treading feverish puddles,
Avoiding the languid lights
That swayed in silence.

They were subtle gleams,
Drawn by chance on the drenched ground;
And in his mind he cradled
The hush left between his thoughts.

That damp, dying evening
Faded into a pale horizon,
Its light retreating
Before the insolence of the encroaching dark.

With solitude sown deep in his sorrowful entrails,
He knew this was the glorious path
To his ethereal destiny.
In his conscience, he beheld the dreamt-of retreat,
Drifting away from his weary fate—
Tired of tragedy, tired of struggle.

He withdrew from the earthly clamor
Of restless moments,
Always haunted by the noise of men,
Of contraptions, engines,

And the strident pulse of the city—
Their anguished cries,
Their trivial chatter,
Their endless oscillation
Between demons and angels.

He walked in slow, measured rhythm,
Tracing the echoes of his vanished paths,
His spirit searching
For a sacred horizon,
A celestial destiny.

His life was fixed upon divine purpose;
With enlightened conscience
He sought the surest way
To reach that transcendent realm
Of subtle dimension.

He entered silently,
Hidden and brief,
Into the tiny space of his cell.
He lit three candles of symbolic essence
And pondered the secret
That must remain concealed
From twisted minds
And idle tongues.

He burned incense of virtuous smoke,
Fragrant with sandalwood and honey,
And fixed his gaze

On the silent flame of the candles,
Closing his eyes for a moment.

He willed his restless mind
To still its senseless chatter,
To listen instead
To the whisper of higher consciousness—
Seeking peace within.

Exhausted eyes,
Weary of the world's trivial parade,
Saw no more purpose, no reason, no aim;
And so, without pain,
He departed this earthly life.

In an infinite plane of awakened mind,
Knocking softly at Heaven's door,
He sought his ancient home—
The source of his being,
His truest dwelling,
Forever and always.

That day he died,
In calm surrender,
Feeling no sorrow for crossing that veiled threshold.
He left nothing behind—
For he had nothing left to lose.

He passed into the realm of sacred things,
Of golden virtues and quiet grace,
Carrying the wisdom of his mystical practice.

And a moment later,
With eyes gently closed,
He had already entered
The eternal domain.

— *O* —

Chapter 7.
Implicit, Not Explicit Character Sketches

The Implicit Character in Narrative Writing

An implicit character is one whose presence is unmistakable and whose personality is fully defined, even though the author never describes them directly. We may not know their face, their clothing, or even the tone of their voice, yet we can grasp who they are — their nature, their thoughts, their emotions — through what they do, say, or fail to say.

In this narrative approach, the writer abstains from external or psychological description, allowing action itself to become the revelation. Every gesture, every silence, every reaction turns into a window into the character's soul.

The reader, by interpreting these subtle signals, reconstructs the character's essence within his or her own imagination — thus becoming an active participant in the creation of meaning.

Such a character is not shown; they are revealed. They emerge between the lines — a presence more felt than seen — brought to life through atmosphere, dialogue, and consequence. This type of construction gives the story a deeper literary resonance, because the reader becomes a collaborator of the author, completing the portrait with imagination and intuition.

In modern fiction — particularly in the works of Ernest Hemingway, Anton Chekhov, and Raymond Carver

— the implicit character embodies the timeless rule: *"Don't tell—show."*
A man who refuses to meet someone's eyes, who pauses before speaking, or who crushes a cigarette in silence tells us far more about himself than any paragraph of psychological analysis. Through restraint, the writer achieves truth.

Hemingway's "The Killers" (*Los Asesinos*) is one of the most brilliant examples of this technique. Nowhere in the story are the assassins described in detail — we never know the color of their eyes, the shape of their hands, or even their exact age. Yet through their terse dialogue, their ironic detachment, their casual cruelty, and their quiet menace, we fully understand who they are. Their personalities emerge entirely through behavior, not description. The same occurs with Ole Andreson, whose resignation and silence reveal more about his inner defeat than any exposition could express.

That is the art of suggestion — of showing without naming, of making presence out of absence.

Therefore, the implicit character is not built through adjectives but through actions; not by description but by conduct; not by what is said about them, but by what the reader perceives in what they do.

It is one of the most refined forms of narrative art, because it appeals to the reader's emotional intelligence and aesthetic sensitivity. The skilled writer does not impose a closed image of the character but merely hints at it — and in that delicate act of suggestion, the character becomes truly alive.

"The Killers" – resume.

Nick visits Ole Andreson at his boarding house and finds him lying on the bed, fully dressed, staring at the wall. Ole already knows he's marked for death and refuses to flee; he's "tired of running." Nick returns to Henry's shaken. George guesses Ole crossed someone in Chicago; both men accept that the killers will eventually find him. Nick, disturbed by the idea of a man waiting for his own end, says he's going to leave town. George tells him that's probably for the best.

After the reading, several questions arise:

Do we clearly understand who the killers are? Are the characters in the story well defined?

Is their behavior precise and distinctive, even though their appearance is not described but shown through action?

Is the tension generated through dialogue well established?

Is the cook's fear convincingly portrayed?

Is the personality of the man about to be killed clear?

In this marvelous story by Hemingway, although we scarcely learn the characters' names, their portraits are fully defined by their actions—and all of it through dialogue.

WORKSHOP

Try to create a short narrative in which a situation is shown rather than described.
In doing so, portray one or more characters whose emotional state, inner tension, and behavior are revealed through action, without relying on descriptive passages or explicit characterization.

Another Example

Let us now look at another example of a short story that shows rather than describes.

The characters are implicit in the scene; they are never portrayed through direct description, yet their emotions and the tension of the moment are perfectly clear.

A Micro-Story

AT THE BUS STOP
By Gordon McAllister

"He looked at his watch… then turned his gaze toward the bus stop… and waited. Barely two minutes passed before he looked again, then once more toward the stop… He repeated this every two or three minutes for the next twenty-five. His palms were sweating. "She'll arrive any moment," he thought to himself, "and I must be ready for the worst. What if she reacts?"

He touched his side for the umpteenth time to make sure the gun was still there — it was. That comforted him, though

a sudden pang in his stomach told him he needed to use the restroom. Perhaps the wait, the tension, had upset his bowels. "I have to calm down," he murmured inwardly.

At that instant, the bus appeared. He noticed the size of the wide front window and how small the driver seemed behind it… almost as if the vehicle were driven by a dwarf.

A moment later, the bus vanished from sight, and then he saw the man — walking fast, his half-bald head unmistakable. The same man who had violated his daughter. Rage welled up again.

He walked eighteen steps to reach him. The man had not yet realized someone was behind him. Without a single word, he drew the gun and fired four shots straight to the head.

Even the sound of the gun startled him, as though it had not been his own hand that pulled the trigger.

Then he walked away calmly, almost solemnly, despite the chaos erupting behind him. People were shouting and running. The man on the ground, caught in his final spasms, bled rapidly, while the shooter walked away as if none of it concerned him.

Two blocks ahead, he stopped a passing taxi, climbed in, and disappeared — from the scene, and from the dying man's life, forever.

No one ever discovered who the victim was; he was new in town.

Nor did anyone find the man who had taken his life. The expected investigation was never completed, and the case was quietly closed and filed away. Vengeance had been fulfilled.".

END

Gordon McAllister

Chapter 8
Elements of Narration

The environment of a narrative is composed of:

- The Atmosphere
- The Setting
- The Climate
- The Time

THE ATMOSPHERE

What is atmosphere in literature?

The *literary atmosphere* refers to the emotional realm that the author seeks to transmit to the reader through the sequence of events, characters, structure, plot, and all other creative devices that surround the narrative.

Although some authors define atmosphere differently, for the purpose of this book I prefer the traditional concept — that is, the emotional climate through which the author influences the reader's inner world.

Every word, phrase, or paragraph — along with its intention and meaning — can generate an emotional effect in the reader.

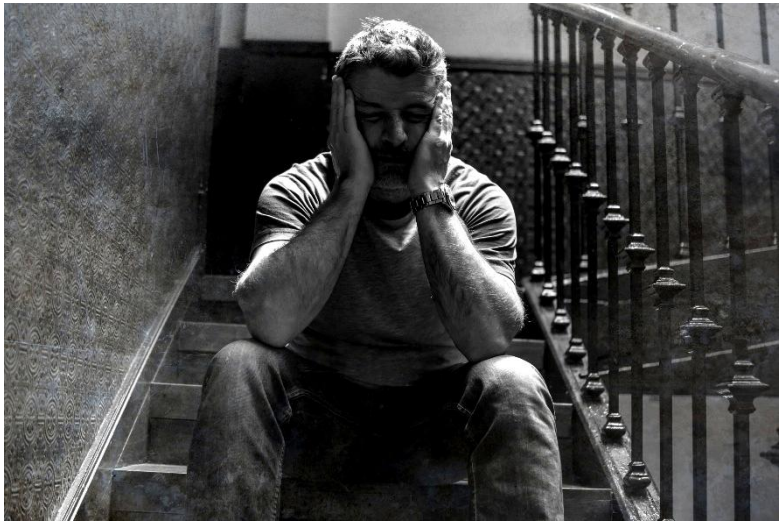
A single sentence can hold tremendous power to evoke feelings, whether positive, negative, or neutral.

For example:

"He was so downhearted that even breathing was difficult."

This simple sentence immediately evokes the feeling of a deep depression.

Now imagine it accompanied by a photograph, and the image becomes complete.



The sensations of sadness and hopelessness can be transmitted through such a phrase, especially when it forms part of a broader emotional context. Let's see:

Juan Piscitello had just received the devastating news of his beloved fiancée's death — the woman he was to marry at the end of the month. A car accident in distant Buenos Aires had, in a single blow, destroyed all his dreams. He was finishing a postgraduate degree in English literature in London, and that very weekend he was to deliver his doctoral thesis. Only yesterday he had bought his ticket home, back to Argentina, back to her.

What he felt was worse than a knife in the soul — something sharp tearing his insides apart, with no one to comfort him in that moment of unbearable solitude. He was so downhearted that even breathing was difficult. For a brief, terrifying instant, he considered ending his life.

The atmosphere here is a profoundly dramatic setting through which the author seeks to convey tragedy, despair, and a crushing sadness so intense that it flirts with the thought of suicide.

Another Example
A tense phrase:

"At that instant, a sinister figure appeared, freezing the blood in his veins."



With a matching photograph, the effect is immediate — a tightening in the solar plexus, a chill of fear, anxiety, and tension.

Now let's read the rest of the story:

"At dusk, in a high-mountain forest, the atmosphere was ghostly — the landscape painted in cold gray tones, under a steady drizzle that seeped into the soul.

The wet leaves released the pungent scent of damp foliage, mingled with the stale fragrance of rain-soaked moss, weeping willows, and lichens glistening with dew from the hidden peaks.

A dense, spectral fog had begun to descend from the summit, covering everything in a chilling, impenetrable haze. Something in the air — intangible yet undeniable — made him feel that something terrible was about to happen.

*At that instant, a sinister figure appeared, freezing the blood in his veins, as if her very presence were the embodiment of terror. A pale girl dressed in a thin, dirt-stained linen garment — her hair matted across her face — hid her features. Her body seemed rigid, as though death itself had already claimed her.**

There was no way to run down the mountain — visibility was gone, and the edge of the cliff loomed dangerously near.".

(And now, let's introduce an unexpected twist…)

A faint, desperate voice broke the silence of that dreadful apparition:

"Help me, for God's sake! Please, help me!"

"Who are you?" he asked, still trembling.

"I'm the only survivor," the girl replied. "The plane crashed on the mountaintop. My whole family is dead."

The young man approached carefully and saw that blood was seeping from her right leg.

"I was just married this morning," she whispered. "And look what happened… we crashed… they're all gone."

End.

Gordon McAllister

Once again, this passage demonstrates the narrative technique of generating a powerful emotional atmosphere — moving the reader through fear, tension, and compassion.

Notice how the gray hues evoke urgency; how the smells of the forest and the visual elements of mist, rain, and cold give realism and texture to the scene. Compare that to the flatness of simply writing, *"It was cold, rainy, and foggy in the mountains."* Such a plain description fails to touch the reader's soul.

When we write:

"The wet leaves released the pungent scent of damp foliage, mingled with the stale fragrance of rain-soaked moss, weeping willows, and lichens glistening with dew from the hidden peaks,"

We add olfactory and sensory impressions that heighten realism and immerse the reader fully in the atmosphere.

Another Example of Narrative Atmosphere

From the novel:
"The Memory of the Lost Years"
By Gordon McAllister

"From the prison camp "Spask No. 99" in Karaganda, the journey began toward the shores of the Caspian Sea.

In the pitch-black hours of early morning — 2:30 a.m. — a storm of curses and the infernal wail of alarms tore the prisoners from their sleep. They were awakened with shouts and blows. Such treatment was customary in the camp, but what was unusual that morning was the hour — they were never summoned this early.

Moments later, dressed in their ragged prison clothes, they were ordered to climb into the freight cars waiting on the miserable station platform inside the prison compound.

They carried no luggage, no belongings of value. As expected, they owned nothing but the clothes on their backs. Yet, hidden among the folds of their garments were tiny treasures of immense sentimental worth: photographs of loved ones, cherished letters, or some trinket that had acquired a sacred emotional meaning.

Some concealed objects of relative material value — a piece of rope, a faded photograph of a half-naked actress, a worn religious card that had accompanied someone since the beginning of captivity, or a poem scrawled on yellowed paper stained by the years. Others carried a bit of wire, a shoelace, a small stick sharpened over months, a stolen metal spoon, or perhaps a "stone of gratitude" — a talisman to remind them of the need to keep their minds united with the Creator, just to survive one more day.

Crammed inside the freight train, standing shoulder to shoulder or taking turns sitting on the filthy floor, they began their long

journey. None knew their destination. One guard — perhaps out of pity, or perhaps with cruel intent — let slip a rumor that spread like wildfire: they were headed for freedom. No one believed it, and the general uncertainty remained.

After more than forty-two hours of travel, sustained only by black bread and water, the train had covered nearly 2,916 kilometers. Through small cracks beaten into the wooden boards with their fists, a few prisoners managed to glimpse a port on the edge of an immense body of water.

Someone recognized it as the port of Aktau, on the shores of the Caspian Sea — a vast lake so large they called it a sea. There they were unloaded to the sound of shouting and truncheon blows, separated by nationality, and herded onto different ships and ferries that belched apathetic clouds of smoke from their blackened chimneys, mingling with the mist of another sunless, loveless dawn.

Exhausted by hunger, fatigue, and uncertainty, they continued on, still prisoners and treated as such. The faint hope of freedom seemed only a cruel illusion.

They crossed the Caspian Sea from Aktau to the port of Baku, in Azerbaijan. From there they were loaded onto another freight train — this one in better condition — and the food improved slightly: rice with a few bits of vegetables.

By land they traveled again, in several buses, passing through Tbilisi, the capital of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, and then boarded another train that took them roughly 1,600 kilometers to the port of Odessa, Ukraine, on the shores of the Black Sea. There, new ships awaited them. One of them bore a name painted in white across its hull: Semiramis.

They were never told their destination. Lost hopes were replaced by a growing, uneasy expectation.

Soon they noticed that the new organizers of their voyage wore armbands marked with the symbol of the International Red Cross. Among the prisoners, a breath of life and hope began to stir.

At last, they dared to believe that liberation might be real. The courteous treatment they received seemed a good omen. They were now under the responsibility of the Red Cross — being treated as human beings once more, something almost forgotten, almost miraculous.

They knew they were far from the gulag of Karaganda, though their final destination remained unknown. Another prison, perhaps… or perhaps freedom. No one could say.

Once the Semiramis set sail, it passed through the Bosphorus Strait — silently gliding past Istanbul — without stopping. Only then did the men begin to breathe freely, leaving behind the dreadful thought that they might still be executed or, at best, returned to some new prison. At least now, they knew they were entering the West.

They were later told that they were crossing the Aegean Sea, and in the distance they saw islands with names like Santorini, Corfu, Milos, and Mykonos.

When they saw a flag of blue and white stripes, with a blue cross in the upper left corner, someone whispered the word Greece — a maritime country, a sacred word, and their first image of freedom.

***

This is a powerful example of an emotional atmosphere: the fragile hope of men being liberated after years in a Soviet gulag, at the end of Stalin's regime in 1954.

WORKSHOP

Readers are encouraged to practice creative exercises by developing a paragraph or short story that conveys a specific narrative atmosphere, starting from one of the following phrases:

- *I was on the beach… it was the end of a sunset painted with beautiful colors… "I stayed behind, digging in the sand, searching for my childhood."*

- *It was a rainy afternoon, a lonely road, and an uncertain future… I was lost among my conflicting emotions.*

- *Through the window I watched the world go by. I was no longer in a hurry — time had run out… and what could I do?*

- *That day I walked along the beach at dawn, alone with my thoughts, remembering that April afternoon when I first saw her…*

- *It was a new day full of hope, a wide horizon rich in good omens. At last, life was beginning to smile at him…*

- *It was the end — perhaps a farewell. A rainy Thursday afternoon filled with hard confessions… everything had been said. And now, what remained?*

To enhance the creative process, it is suggested to play music that matches the emotional atmosphere of the

narrative and, if possible, find photographs that visually reflect the text's message. This will help awaken deeper feelings and new ideas.

— O —

Chapter 9.
The Narrative or Literary Environment

THE ENVIRONMENT

In courses and essays on creative writing, when we speak about the story's environment, three common senses are usually mentioned:

- Physical Environment
- Psychological Environment
- Social Environment

That said, I believe there are additional, useful senses for the narrative environment, such as:

- Cultural Environment
- Political Environment
- Climatic Environment
- Economic Environment

For now, let's first define what we mean by the narrative or literary environment:

You might say that the environment is the sphere or contextual frame—whether physical, emotional, psychological, or socioeconomic—that provides a reference backdrop for the literary narrative of the story being told.

In other words, it is the environmental surround in which the story in progress unfolds.

TYPES OF NARRATIVE OR LITERARY ENVIRONMENT

1) PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment is the place where the narrated events occur—regional, civic, directional, or geographic—or the concrete surroundings of a specific location in which a story takes place. It is a tangible locale that lends the story a degree of realism.

Example

Opening of *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*
by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

"In a village of La Mancha, the name of which I have no desire to call to mind, there lived not long since one of those gentlemen who keep a lance in the rack, an old shield, a lean hack, and a greyhound for coursing…"

Example

Excerpt from the novel:
And He Went with the Wind (A Refugee's Story)
by Gordon McAllister

"One day, a minuscule opportunity rose up from the depths of life—a trifling thing with the potential to become glorious if one would

only seize it—and the wretched young man took it as his lone plank of salvation.
He had already crossed the Mexican border with little trouble and arrived, exhausted, in a strange mountain town, delivered there by a kindly trucker in a rickety box truck, worn thin by a lifetime of battering roads, trails, and remote places at the ragged edges of existence.

On a piece of tin lettered in red he managed to read a name: Tapalpa.

A Christian priest living in that far-flung village, tucked away down a road lost to distance and far from any path to progress or to life itself, listened to him attentively… and, seeing the young man's need and his contagious lack of prospects or promise, offered him a chance to serve as altar boy, apprentice sacristan, and caretaker of the tiny parish in that forgotten backcountry.

For the wretched young man, it felt like brushing the very heavens with the tips of his fingers…".

The physical environment can also refer to the specific place where a scene unfolds: the furnishings; the floor, walls, and spatial contours; the bustle of patrons (or their absence); glasses, dishes, meals; cigarette smoke; the smells of wine and spirits, and so on.

Example
Excerpt from the short story:
A Teenage Love Story
by Gordon McAllister

Paris — 2017

In late January, Alejandro Giovanelli sat with his friends in that traditional haunt, the Café de Flore in Paris, on the right-hand side of the Boulevard Saint-Germain-des-Prés—an ancestral café to which time had bestowed a patina of lustrous dark brown over an entire milieu steeped in venerable literary tradition, tinged with rampant existentialism, pre- and post-revolutionary temperaments, unmistakable streaks of indomitable intellectual defiance worthy of Kafka and the absurdists, and an underlying fervor for philosophical and literary debate.

Even after more than a century of cultivated tradition, the air still seemed perfumed with the spirits of choice libations—whiskies, brandies, cognacs—coffees from many origins, wines of the world, champagnes, and every manner of liqueur; the smoke of so many cigars and cigarettes; and the heady intellectual delirium of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of philosophers and writers. To evoke the environment, it is enough to name a few: Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Jacques Prévert, Léon-Paul Fargue, Georges Bataille, Raymond Queneau, Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Ossip Zadkine, the Giacometti brothers, Ernest Hemingway, Truman Capote; stars of cinema and society such as Brigitte Bardot, Alain Delon, Yves Montand, and Annie Girardot; or the eternal chess matches between Apollinaire and Trotsky—along with countless others, famous and obscure: literati, painters, musicians; several intelligent and captivating ladies; professionals across fields; genuine revolutionaries and common rabble-rousers; noted attorneys and petty pettifoggers with dubious public relations; literary critics who fancied themselves indispensable and were anything but; many shaggy bohemians; the occasional incorrigible drunk; successful entrepreneurs; and a surplus of the ordinary down-and-out, eager to bask in reflected importance over a modest cup of coffee—costly in its way—or, should their pocket allow, a respectable glass of wine, branded or unbranded.

2) PSYCHOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

This refers to human behavior and emotion, as well as psychological pathologies; states of mind—conscious, subconscious, unconscious; interpersonal dynamics like manipulation; and the entire range of fear, anxiety, joy, happiness, resentment, hatred, and so on.

Some writers specialize in narratives thick with psychological tension—human behavior in all its variation. In my particular case, I tend to write historical narratives, and my research leans more toward geography and history than psychology; even so, when a story involves dissimilar characters with different interests, trauma, and tendencies, it becomes necessary—at least tangentially—to address the psychological environment that surrounds the narration.

Examples

Poem: *That Is You…*
by Gordon McAllister

(full text preserved)
How are you?
You are ethereal, a passing mist,
fleeting as a delirious breath,
weightless as a momentary sigh,
furtive as a suggestive shadow,
and almost real as a bewitching illusion.
You are like illusory intentions,
like transitory dreams,

like an imagined profile,
like the soul's own images.
You are life passing in an instant,
the shadow of a fleeting moment,
the interval between two dreams,
the space between the real and the dreamt.
You are a lightened-foot shadow,
a wavering idea,
a subtle, nebulous delirium,
a state of the soul with no return.
You are fragile as porcelain,
almost real, enraptured,
an ethereal, delicate love—
the last imagined dream:
that is you.

Poem: *The Sadness I Felt Seemed*
by Gordon McAllister
(full text preserved)

The sadness I felt seemed
like rain against a wet pane of glass,
a dusk that killed with nostalgia,
a gaze lost to the passage of time,
or a longing that gradually vanished.
Yes, the sadness I felt seemed
a tear that rose without leave or comfort,
a dream cut short by hostile fate,
and Don Quixote's fevered, fruitless struggle.
It seemed a music that summoned ancestral desolation,
a bitter, gruesome feeling,

a life racing by without rest,
or the merciless arrival of old age.
It seemed life's adverse circumstance, baseless,
overwhelming solitude without remedy,
a bed with neither company nor shelter,
and Proust's search for his lost time.
It seemed a melancholy that choked the heart,
a life without meaning or horizon,
a rain that lashed the soul,
or Brutus's treachery against Julius Caesar.
It seemed a bleak, languid thought,
a sudden, freezing winter,
a pain that wrung the spirit,
or a little girl's grief for a missing doll.
The sadness I felt seemed
a mother's undying memory of her dead,
the sobs of a child abandoned,
the feeling of a colonel with no one to write to him—
and all of that seemed to be hopeless sadness of the soul.

Prose poem:
The False Savant and the Hermit Sage
by Gordon McAllister
Prose Poem

Bereft of the light of wisdom,
that false savant darkened the blackest night,
painted it with a horizonless future,
and made it empty of knowledge and awareness.
His reality, absurdly presented,
without the hope of intelligible rhymes,

and they were almost growing accustomed
to his silent screeches,
cast sterile and fatuous
into the void of a life without meaning.
But who did he think he was? A great man? A prodigy?
A scholar of science, letters, and learning?
Who, in truth, was that stubborn notable
who fancied himself special without being able to be so?
Perhaps only an image of supposed realism,
or else a fallacy, a sham of impossible certainties.
Perhaps a mere mannequin?
Yes—that was it: a mannequin offering pallid answers,
material replies that seemed correct
yet were nothing more than the fledgling gloss
on a routine life without meaning,
one that never reached even the meagerest ontological reflections,
but only muddled responses
larded with superfluous, bombastic phrases.
Nothing but stray phrases issuing
from media-made, counterfeit thinkers,
born of an electronic viewing machine
that convinced, with scant argument,
television audiences of meager comprehension.
And across the street stood the other—
the other one, quiet, withdrawn, solitary—
they called him the pilgrim madman—
far from circles of false commentary,
from supposedly weighty themes
that seemed real without managing to be so,
like the immediatist churn of current politics.

He did not concern himself with false transcendence,
with distorted, contingent events
that, every twenty-four hours, poured filth
into the minds that had lost their way,
minds consumed with commonplace or fatal thoughts,
fashioning souls unfit for their own transcendence,
immersed in a hollow life bereft of firm convictions,
far from what a balanced existence requires.
And from afar they pointed and said:
"There he goes—that one—a strange type, and perhaps a bit mad."
Yes, a strange type whom no one could understand,
perhaps touched by an excess of profound and undeniable
cosmological, transcendent visions,
or perhaps brimming with incomprehensible philosophical certainties.
"Yes,"—they said from a distance—"a strange type
who apparently cannot string his words together."
So thought those with the poor
comprehension of the ordinary,
and thinking, without grasping what he said,
that he spoke only of senseless things,
without coherence or palpable reality.
And others said of him as well:
"He doesn't understand politics—and doesn't care to—
for he debates with no camp and sides with none.
Besides, he is not even a believer,
nor does he follow any church's tenets,
and most surely he will be damned in hell
for his lack of faith, of fervor, of beatitude,
and of the requisite apostolic devotion."
"But,"—thought the wiser ones—
"perhaps he is saner than anyone;

perhaps he is a hermit sage, already decontaminated."
Yes—that is what the most lucid believed.
For that supposed madman was truly absorbed
in philosophies of great depth,
or in quantum physics with its infinite probabilities,
or in the reality of strange subatomic particles,
or in a cosmology that opened entry
to worlds of fleeting fantasies,
or to other dimensions of existence,
beyond everyday rationales,
amid galaxies and parallel universes
and curious theoretical physics.
Yes—that was his world,
a solitary world on far peripheries.
What's more, he paid no mind to such absurd remarks,
did not even turn to look at his mistaken critics,
nor did he care for their reproachful looks.
He simply continued on his way,
lost in his profound reflections,
where boundless wisdom was the only light upon his path.
And soon he was far away—
far from the everyday noise—
very far, with his measured, solitary stride.

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3) SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Many videos and courses on creative writing fold various environmental facets into what they call the "social

environment." Let's tease some of them apart: beyond social life as such, we can isolate economic, cultural, political, religious, and work environments. Briefly, a social environment in its simplest sense points to social customs: the moral scruples of a society, social prejudice, class differences, and the value judgments attached to social norms. Literature has a fertile field here for exploring and staging narratives about the social environment.

A quick example of youth culture: a café full of young people yields an unmistakably everyday scene.

Excerpt from the novel:
In the Café of Lost Youth
by Patrick Modiano (Anagrama, p. 11)

"And as time went by and everyone called her Louki, I think she felt relief at having that new name. Yes, relief. Because the more I think about it, the more I return to my first impression: she was taking refuge here, at Le Condé, as if she wanted to flee something, to escape a danger. It occurred to me when I saw her alone, in the very back, in that spot where no one could notice her. And when she mixed with the others, she didn't draw attention either. She remained silent and reserved and confined herself to listening. I even told myself that, for greater safety, she preferred the loudmouths, because otherwise she wouldn't almost always have sat at the table with Zacharias, Jean-Michel, Fred, and la Houpa… Next to them, the surroundings swallowed her up; she became an anonymous extra of the sort the captions call 'Person not identified,' or, more simply, 'X.' Yes, in those early days at Le Condé I never saw her speaking alone with anyone. And of course, it posed no problem that one of the loudmouths called

her Louki when he was speaking to everyone, since in reality she wasn't called that at all."

Another example of a social environment—this time in Tokyo, perhaps unfamiliar to many Western readers.

Short Story
The Dance Party
By Ryūnosuke Akutagawa

Example: The Social and Cultural Ambience in "The Ball" by Ryunosuke Akutagawa

Ryunosuke Akutagawa's short story "The Ball" offers a vivid portrayal of Japan's transition between tradition and Western modernity during the Meiji Era. Through the young Akiko—a seventeen-year-old girl attending her first Western-style dance—the author captures the psychological unease of a nation caught between two identities.

"Under the harsh light of the chandeliers, the large chrysanthemums seemed artificial, arranged in three rows along the banisters. Their petals quivered like drifting leaves while the music overflowed from the ballroom—a sigh of irrepressible joy."

This opening scene already defines the social and aesthetic environment. The vivid description of flowers and light serves not merely as decoration but as a reflection of Japan's fascination with Western elegance and its

simultaneous loss of simplicity. The ball becomes a metaphor for a society learning new dances while forgetting its own rhythm.

Akutagawa, with his characteristic psychological precision, paints Akiko's inner turmoil with delicate strokes. Her beauty—admired by diplomats and officers—stands as a symbol of a culture being objectified and reshaped by external influences. The young girl's nervousness, her awkward gestures, and her "pleasant unease" represent the fragile balance between admiration and alienation.

"She had been taught the French language and Western dancing, but this was her first formal ceremony. She felt consumed by a strange, unstable sensation—a kind of pleasant anxiety."

The psychological ambience merges with the cultural atmosphere: every sound, every fragrance, every gesture reflects the tension of transformation. The European-style ball, with its chandeliers and foreign guests, embodies Japan's rush toward modernization—an embrace of the foreign that risks erasing its own identity.

By the end, Akutagawa leaves the reader in a state of reflective ambiguity. The story is not about romance or social success, but about the fragile interplay between appearances and authenticity, between imposed modernity and lost innocence. In just a few pages, he transforms a glittering ballroom into a mirror of an entire civilization in flux.

4) SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

When addressing the social environment, we must also touch a thorny, controversial point: social class and strata, intertwined with the living conditions of the narrative's characters. In writing a novel or short story, authors should be clear about the socioeconomic sphere their characters inhabit. A milieu of prosperity dictates certain contours; a milieu of poverty dictates others. Hardship has marked literature across history. Many novels suggest sordid socioeconomic environments, whose descriptions reveal the depths of deprivation experienced by characters. Yet even without describing the poverty explicitly, a story can make the harsh socioeconomic pressure felt through action, dialogue, and narrative tone.

A classic example

Short story: *Anyuta*
by Anton Chekhov

"In the worst room of the dismal Hotel Lisbon paced tirelessly third-year medical student Stepan Klochkov…

Example:
Socioeconomic and Psychological Ambience in Chekhov's "Aniuta"

Anton Chekhov's short story *"Aniuta"* offers a masterful glimpse into the intersection of poverty, human resignation, and social inequality. The setting is reduced to

the bare essentials—a shabby rented room, threadbare clothes, the faint smell of soap water, and the fatigue of two young souls bound by survival rather than affection.

"In the worst room of the wretched Lisbon Hotel, the third-year medical student Stepan Klochkov was pacing restlessly, studying aloud. His throat was dry and his forehead covered with sweat. By the frozen window, Aniuta sat sewing a man's shirt—thin, pale, and silent."

This short passage already establishes both the physical ambience and the psychological tension. The room becomes a metaphor for the decay of dreams and the constraints of social class. The chipped furniture, the dirty washbasin, and the lack of warmth echo Aniuta's emotional exhaustion.

Chekhov's realism does not rely on grand descriptions but on minute, almost surgical observations. His prose dissects the ordinary life of common people, revealing profound truths beneath trivial details. The reader perceives the environment not through adjectives but through actions and sensory impressions—the cold fingers, the chalk lines drawn on Aniuta's ribs, the faint embarrassment of the student as he practices medicine on her fragile body.

Later, when Klochkov contemplates abandoning her, Chekhov subtly shifts the emotional tone from physical deprivation to moral poverty:

"He looked around the poor, dirty room and felt a kind of disgust. In the future, he thought, he would receive patients in a fine office, dine with his respectable wife… but for now—this dirt, these dishes, these cigarette butts—what a disgrace!"

Here, the social ambience defines the moral dynamic. The man dreams of a "better life," but his ambition rests on denying the woman who supported him through hardship. Chekhov exposes the cold pragmatism of a society that measures human worth by success and appearances.

In the end, Aniuta remains by his side—not out of love, but because she has nowhere else to go. The silence of the closing scene, with her quietly removing her coat and resuming her sewing by the window, encapsulates both resignation and strength. Through a few strokes, Chekhov transforms a cramped, sordid room into a universal symbol of inequality and emotional solitude.

Another example

Excerpt from the novel: *Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky*

Example:

The Psychological and Moral Ambience in "Crime and Punishment" by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *"Crime and Punishment"* opens not with action but with atmosphere—an oppressive, suffocating psychological environment that mirrors

Raskolnikov's inner decay. In just a few lines, Dostoevsky captures the claustrophobic misery of poverty, guilt, and alienation.

"He was lucky not to meet his landlady on the stairs. She lived on the floor below, and her kitchen door was always open. Whenever he had to pass, he felt humiliated, as though walking under enemy fire. He owed her money and dreaded meeting her at any moment. Yet what truly troubled him was not misfortune itself, but an irritability bordering on madness…"

This passage illustrates how Dostoevsky constructs psychological ambience through concrete, everyday sensations: the open kitchen door, the narrow staircase, the shame of debt. The external world functions as an echo chamber for the protagonist's guilt and self-loathing. The moral atmosphere is equally stifling. Raskolnikov's avoidance of his landlady symbolizes his evasion of responsibility, a theme that will dominate the novel. His alienation is not merely social but metaphysical—he feels exiled from humanity and from God.

The narrative style, blending realism with psychological introspection, allows the reader to inhabit the protagonist's fragmented consciousness. Dostoevsky doesn't describe Raskolnikov's torment—he **immerses** the reader in it. The tension between intellect and conscience, reason and despair, creates a moral environment as dark and labyrinthine as the narrow streets of St. Petersburg.

Ultimately, this fragment exemplifies Dostoevsky's genius: transforming a mundane situation—a debtor avoiding his landlady—into a symbol of the human

condition, where guilt, pride, and redemption coexist in perpetual conflict.

Another example

Excerpt from the novel:
"The Memory of Lost Years"
By Gordon McAllister

"Some girls appeared and sat at our table. Next to me was a brunette—I can't recall her face or her name. We drank heavily, and little by little the atmosphere began to close in, the mind to blur, the world to darken and vanish. Then came total darkness—a deep plunge into emptiness, into nothingness.

Some time later—I couldn't tell how long—I heard a distant sound, like water falling. In the dimness, I struggled to clear my mind, to understand what was happening. It was water running, but not rain.

Slowly, I opened my eyes. It was a decrepit place of dreams, with scarcity clinging to the walls, the stench of decay left by things long rotted, the plaster peeling and stained with ancestral filth. Unidentifiable colors and smells filled the air—not only because of the darkness, but from the accumulated grime that gave life to that rancid, dying room. It was an old hotel where one could sense the malignant energy of sadness and failure. Through a slit of light filtering in, I saw a naked figure in a precarious shower—a dark-haired woman, absorbed in washing herself—and then I understood.

My wristwatch read 5:15 a.m. I touched my body and felt my clothes still on; nothing serious had happened. To my relief, I even had my shoes on. I sat up slowly in the gloom; my head throbbed, my throat was dry and pasty.

I searched my pockets and checked my wallet—empty. It couldn't be. The night before, at the tavern, I had $350 from a business deal, and I remembered being the guest of honor. They hadn't let me pay for anything.

I looked around. There was a handbag on the floor—surely the girl's. Instinctively, I opened it and checked inside. I found exactly $350, and a bit more. Dizzy and enraged, I grabbed the money in a single motion and slipped away into the shadows of the dawn, seeking refuge in distance—thinking only of escaping…"

A friend a me, Carlos Vallejo, gave me the follow paragraph explaining my work.

English Literary Analysis: The Moral and Existential Ambience.

This passage from *The Memory of Lost Years* encapsulates Gordon McAllister's signature style: introspective realism infused with existential tension. The atmosphere is dense, heavy with decay and moral ambiguity. The narrative begins in drunken oblivion and awakens in the ruin of consciousness—both literal and metaphorical. The setting is not merely a place, but a mirror of conscience. The filthy hotel, with its "ancestral grime" and "rancid sadness," becomes a physical manifestation of the protagonist's inner emptiness.

The psychological ambience is constructed through sensory precision: the smell of rot, the dim light through a crack, the pounding headache. These are not just descriptions—they are emotional coordinates that locate the reader within the narrator's moral vertigo.

When the protagonist finds the stolen $350 in the woman's purse, McAllister transforms a trivial moral dilemma into an existential crossroad. His act of taking the money is not mere theft; it is a desperate attempt to reclaim control amid the chaos of guilt and self-loathing. The "escape into the dawn" becomes symbolic of both evasion and awakening—a paradox that defines the human condition: running from one's fall while recognizing its depth.

The tone remains restrained, reflective, cinematic. The writing never moralizes—it reveals. In this way, McAllister aligns himself with the lineage of Dostoevsky and Camus: authors who understood that the true crime of the soul is indifference.

5) CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The cultural environment emerges from the customs that humans adopt as accepted patterns of conduct—habits crystallized by usage. A society's shared values form part of its cultural environment. The excerpts above, in their own way, richly display the cultural milieu surrounding each scene.

6) ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

This is determined by the variables that shape a specific financial and economic environment: inflation,

economic growth, GDP, interest rates, the agility of the economy, recession when present, the public's confidence climate, and so on. All of these directly affect a population's life and can, when the author deems it necessary, exert real pressure on a narrative.

Two examples of economic environment would be the novels "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbek and "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevsky.

7) POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The political environment—ever swollen with excessive rhetoric—refers to the governmental, parliamentary, and legal surroundings in which a political class attempts to steer a nation's destiny. Literature feeds (often excessively) on political subjects, especially the mid-20th-century Latin American novel's penchant for the Left, and the communist and existentialist narratives of 1960s Paris and Europe—Sartre, de Beauvoir, Camus, to name a few.

Example

Excerpt from the novel: *And He Went with the Wind (A Refugee's Story)*

by Gordon McAllister

"It was an unworkable country, power in the hands of corrupt rulers…

Excerpt from the novel
AND HE WENT WITH THE WIND
By Gordon McAllister

"It was an unlivable country, where power rested in the hands of corrupt rulers who no longer even tried to hide the malice of their actions. There was no separation of powers; the institutions were controlled by unscrupulous gangs of looters who persecuted anyone possessing something of value to seize, or anyone who dared to raise their voice against their dark intentions. There was no way out, no future, not even the faintest ray of hope that things might change in the distant future. Yet, at least, there remained the dubious, inalienable right to protest—though it was inevitably repressed by armed forces of questionable origin and even more questionable constitutional authority.

On the day of the protest in which the young man took part, he rose early, around 5:30 a.m. He dressed in the only pair of jeans he still owned—the ones he washed every weekend so they might at least appear clean—and put on one of the three shirts he had managed to hide when the militiamen stormed the house to steal the family's belongings on the day of the expropriation.

After tasting a broth of bone and potato, with a piece of bread for breakfast, he set out toward the city center, guided by those silent voices that had their secret ways of spreading the word about where protests would take place. Everyone arrived at the appointed hour.

That January 24, 2015, around 11:30 in the morning, the crowd was already ablaze with anger, marching and shouting in what was called The March of Empty Pots. The demonstration advanced toward Las Mercedes, descending from Francisco Miranda to El Tamanaco, in Caracas—a movement that was spreading like wildfire through many other Venezuelan cities.

In the midst of the protest, the cries of the marchers grew louder, the incendiary chants filled the air, and more and more people joined the tide. As they passed a construction site, with plenty of loose material scattered about, the great stone-throwing began."

Another example (political environment)
Excerpt from the short story: *Of Loves, Tragedies, and Revolutions*
by Gordon McAllister

"Sitting at a corner table in the café, André listened intently to the surrounding conversations — in solitary silence, accompanied only by a steaming cup of coffee, tainted with a double shot of Cuban rum that, sip by sip, warmed his insides and filled him with a rare, unfamiliar euphoria.

He listened and absorbed what was happening in the world. In those days, the great revolution that would erupt explosively in May of 1968 was already simmering, though no one yet knew it. Yes, no one could foresee that powerful Parisian sneeze that would infect all of Europe with its insurgent fever — a fever soon to spread across the entire world.

At the tables of that emblematic café, people spoke of their discontent with President De Gaulle's government, citing many reasons — among them, the merciless and repressive colonial policy of France in Vietnam, aided and abetted by the American government, which had secretly supported the French while deceiving the Vietnamese independence leaders with flattering messages, denying them any real chance at sovereign freedom. This duplicity had ignited the infamous Vietnam War, then raging at its height, and which the French youth fiercely opposed.

Still vivid in the minds of the younger generation was the memory of France's colonial cruelty toward the Algerian people — particularly the brutal repression of the peaceful demonstration in Paris

in 1961, when the police massacred the protesters and, worse yet, threw their lifeless bodies into the Seine to conceal the crime.

The first spark had been struck by the prudish and outdated policy of the Université Paris Nanterre, which forbade male students from visiting the women's quarters. Meanwhile, both in Europe and in North America, the age of Free Love had already begun. When the university administration tried to quell the protests by closing the campus, the response was far worse — an act that metastasized into a full-scale uprising at the Sorbonne, pouring more fuel onto an already burning rebellion with far-reaching consequences.

The youth also rebelled against the academic system itself: universities that merely supplied cheap, well-trained labor to capitalist industries, serving the interests of profit rather than their social purpose. Meanwhile, the government's economic policy continued to protect the wealth of the powerful, allowing low wages and perpetuating miserable living conditions for the working class.

At the Café de Flore, André — a writer by trade, always eager to gather material for his chronicles and stories — took careful notes on everything he heard. Suddenly, his eyes fell upon a very particular girl, seated about five meters away at a table surrounded by loud young men with a distinctly hippie appearance, shouting insurgent slogans and Marxist ideals, puffed up with courage and eager to justify taking to the streets in revolt.

He observed her attentively. Her body was slight, almost weightless, yet perfectly proportioned — a petite creature, delicate as a butterfly, but with a strong, determined character, judging by the tone of her voice. Her hair was tied in a simple bun with a rubber band; her face was fresh and unadorned, as though she had never known the touch of makeup. Yet there was something indefinable about her — something in the liveliness of her eyes, her smile, her quick movements, and the radiant aura of energy and sharpness that seemed to emanate

from her simplicity. She appeared to be the one leading the group with firm resolve.

Although André had planned to stay only briefly, he decided to remain a little longer — and ordered a glass of Devaux D Rosé Champagne.".

8) RELIGIOUS / SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT

"Religion," typically, points to spiritual interests and the behavioral norms prescribed in so-called sacred texts. In recent years, as far as Catholicism is concerned, a steady stream of reports about the sins and lapses of certain clergy (sadly, not a few) has stained the institution's public face. Yet spiritual life—of capital importance to many, even those with no formal religious affiliation—remains a vital feature of literature. There are countless exponents of religious and spiritual writing. A short, eclectic list: Eckhart Tolle, St. Paul, St. Augustine, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the Dalai Lama, Krishnamurti, and many more. Often these are essays and philosophical texts; sometimes it's best to treat "religion" and "spirituality" separately, especially where spirituality clashes with religious trappings.

Excerpt from the book
THE AWAKENING OF QUANTUM CONSCIOUSNESS
By Gordon McAllister

"And then, one fine day, the dawns begin to arrive earlier… Morpheus flees from my pillow before the rising of the sun.

It is 4:07 a.m. I have already tasted the first sip of morning coffee, and the meditation proceeds — the candle standing guard, its flame alive and trembling, vibrant and oscillating; the glowing tip of the incense releasing its subtle fragrance of sandalwood and honey.

And the mind, now disciplined, lets the recurrent thought drift away — like a cotton cloud, floating high above the mountain, slowly vanishing with its burden of seemingly important matters which, in truth, are not important at all, except for allowing life to flow…

Yes, to let life flow as it will, while I, here… simply here… seated in Zazen posture… with no other effort than to be sitting here… still and silent… engaged solely in the act of being seated in Zazen… and nothing more.

Ah… I almost forgot: I am breathing… breathing deeply… breathing, fully focused on the breath itself… and nothing else.

And suddenly… I have entered the deep state, in connection with my Higher Consciousness… there, in the midst of silence. In that moment, everything has meaning — and, curiously, at the same time, nothing has meaning. It might have meaning only if one believed that the void possessed significance within the mundane density of this low-vibrational reality; yet, in that sense, the void has no meaning — for it is the void.

And yet, that void is brimming with everything, and at the same time with nothing. Nothing? Perhaps nothing — except for the immense potential of the void contained within Consciousness… and the infinite potential of silence itself contained within Consciousness… and I relate Consciousness to the Logos.

And a memory comes to mind, a deeper context: In the Gospel of John, in John 1:1, it is written:

'In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.'

In the beginning was the Word — the *reasoned* Word — and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And I also recall a reading:

"Heraclitus was the first to theorize using this term, in the fifth century B.C. He said: "Not by me, but having listened to the Logos, it is wise to say in harmony with it that all is one." Taking the Logos as the great unity of reality — perhaps the very essence of the Real — Heraclitus urges us to listen to it, that is, to listen to the discourse of reality itself. Instead of hearing the speeches of men, founded upon appearances, we must listen to the Logos of nature. The being of Heraclitus, understood as Logos, is the Intelligence that directs, orders, and gives harmony to the flux of changes born from the conflict that generates existence itself. It is a substantial intelligence, present in all things. When a being loses the meaning of its existence, it departs from the Logos."

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WORKSHOP

Draft a narrative—a story or anecdote—with any human plot you like, but place it within a specific contextual frame (social, political, socioeconomic, or religious) that directly affects and shapes the story's development. The idea is to highlight how the surrounding environment exerts pressure on the lives of the people in your narrative.

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Chapter 10.
Narrative Time

NARRATIVE TIME

To define narrative time, it is necessary to understand that there are several meanings to consider:

1. Historical time.
2. The narrator's time.
3. Time shifts.
4. Internal and external time.

1. HISTORICAL TIME

This refers to the historical context of the story — the time period in which the narrative unfolds, including all the distinctive elements of that era.

Example: a novel set during the Battle of Waterloo on June 18, 1815.

Another example: the time of the French Revolution, between May 5, 1789, and November 9, 1799.

As an example, let us look at the following synopsis:

Synopsis
A Tale of Two Cities
By Charles Dickens

"In A Tale of Two Cities, Dickens recreates the beginnings of the social and political upheaval that gave rise to the French Revolution. The story unfolds between London and Paris.

London, in some way, symbolizes peace and tranquility — an orderly, simple life — while Paris represents turmoil, defiance, and chaos: the clash of two worlds in an age that heralded drastic social change. The onset of the Revolution is narrated so vividly that the pages seem to reek of blood and filth, of sweat and tears, of rage and hatred… 'Seven bloody heads, seven prisoners carried in triumph; the keys to the eight towers of the cursed fortress; some letters, some mementos of former captives who had died in despair — such was the procession that accompanied, on July 14, 1789, the roaring steps of the Saint Antoine suburb.'

It is unsettling to think that if Dickens were alive today, he might rewrite it and once again set it between London and Paris — in the London of Brexit and its tense calm, and the Paris of the yellow vests. And, should there be any doubt, Dickens rejects violence in both its forms: both the popular form — mob violence — and its institutionalized form — fear and subjugation. He finds both senseless, which he illustrates beautifully in the final encounter between Mrs. Pross and Madame Defarge, representing the struggle of 'the people against the people,' the greatest absurdity of all."

2. THE NARRATOR'S TIME

This refers to the temporal moment in which the narrator is situated — whether omniscient, first-person, or second-person. It is the moment or era from which the story is being told.

For example, in the novel *The Heresy of the Warrior Monks*, although the story unfolds across different periods — beginning with the execution of the Grand Master of the Templar Order on March 18, 1314 — the omniscient narrator positions himself in the present to recount events connected to that death, occurring in 2015.

Excerpt from the novel:
The Heresy of the Warrior Monks
By Gordon McAllister

"…And something that had been hidden for a long time would come to light as the centuries passed... Much later, someone would remember what was to be discovered in the desert of Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. There, among other texts, appeared an apocryphal gospel — hidden and lost for centuries — attributed to the apostle Thomas, containing the very words of the Master himself.

Brother Jesus said:

'Recognize what is before your eyes, and what is hidden from you will be revealed, for there is nothing hidden that will not become manifest.'

Centuries later came the infamous fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, on April 15, 2019, when the famous "Spire" that crowned its roof collapsed.

To the surprise of many, amid the smoking ruins of the cathedral's spire, a metallic plaque was found bearing a curious inscription with the names of its builders and the unmistakable symbol of the Masonic lodges.

The plaque read:

'This spire was built in the year 1859. M. Violet-le-Duc was the cathedral's architect. Built by Ballu, carpentry firm, with Georges, foreman of the Compagnons du Devoir de Liberté.'

The inscription concluded with the carved image of the Square and Compass — the eternal emblem identifying all Masonic lodges throughout the world.

And thus arises the question: What was the symbol of the excommunicated Masonic order doing inside a Catholic cathedral? The Masons were the heirs and custodians of the Templars' ancient secrets, and in Notre Dame, the builders' signature seemed to proclaim that this was the work of Masons — as if reminding the world never to forget the infamous execution by fire, ordered by the Catholic Church eight centuries earlier, against the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Jacques de Molay.

Perhaps their intent was to raise that architectural spire heavenward as a silent demand for divine justice, in honor of their most illustrious champion — condemned and executed for fulfilling his sacred mission of safeguarding the Holy Grail, the Sangreal, the Royal Blood, the Blood of the lineage of Jesus, descended from the House of King David of Jerusalem — blood that flowed through Jesus and his descendants across generations, up to our own day."

3. TIME SHIFTS

The previous passage serves as a clear example of time shifts in narration, a topic discussed extensively earlier in this book.

In previous chapters, we referred to *analepsis* and *prolepsis* — flashbacks and flash-forwards — as techniques for moving backward or forward in time within a narrative.

In the excerpt above, the story references an execution that took place in 1314, ancient texts discovered in 1945, and narration by an omniscient voice situated in the modern era, beginning in 2015.

WORKSHOP

Write a short story in which there are time shifts — one being the time of the story itself, and another the time from which the narrator recounts it.

To begin, if the student does not have another idea, we suggest starting with the following paragraph and continuing from there:

The day before yesterday, I was told that the story of N.N. had taken place six years ago, during one of the riots of an enraged people rising against the government of Nicolás Maduro…

The student may go back in time to narrate imagined antecedents or move forward to recount what happened next.

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4. EXTERNAL TIME AND INTERNAL TIME

EXTERNAL TIME.

External time refers to the historical moment when the narrated events take place — the date, year, or era.

Example:
Let us consider a historical event whose dates have caused some confusion due to differences in calendars.

The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, for instance, was called the October Revolution.
According to the old Julian calendar, it began on October 25, 1917. However, according to the modern Gregorian calendar — used today throughout the Western world — the revolution actually began on November 7, 1917.

Another example of external time:

The Battle of Bannockburn for Scotland's independence from the British army — mentioned in The Heresy of the Warrior Monks by Gordon McAllister — took place between June 23 and 24, 1314.

In my case, since I tend to write historical novels, it is crucial to manage dates accurately when narrating historical events.

INTERNAL TIME

Internal time refers to the duration that passes within the story itself — from beginning to end. Regardless of time shifts, every novel or short story has an identifiable internal duration: it may span a few hours or an entire lifetime.

Examples:

- The novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has an internal time that extends over several generations.

- James Joyce's famous novel *Ulysses*, though complex and voluminous — in some editions spanning two volumes — unfolds within a mere 24 hours, encompassing all its narrated events.

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Chapter 11.
Procrastination, Discipline, and Patience

To conclude, I want to say that although this book covers a solid compendium of topics, there are surely some I may have overlooked. However, as I said at the beginning, writing is a long-distance endeavor, and readers can continue researching many other subjects they will encounter along the way.
In this final chapter, it occurred to me to address a few principles that I consider crucial for anyone who wishes to begin—or give continuity to—their writing career: procrastination, discipline, and patience.

PROCRASTINATION

At a recent gathering, someone asked about the word *procrastinate*…
I knew what it was and, at first, I said: it means to postpone. However, seeking a more official definition, I opened Google (which they say knows everything) and looked up the definition of *procrastinar* from the Royal Spanish Academy:
According to the RAE, it is a word originally formed from the adverb cras (tomorrow, the following day), from which *procrastinar* derives the meaning "to leave until tomorrow, to postpone, to delay."

Now then, why is procrastination important in writing?

It is essential to understand procrastination as the most dangerous enemy a writer faces when sitting down to write—getting ideas to flow on the chosen topic and not giving up until finishing.

Consider the following scene:

(The writer sits down in front of the computer, opens Word, and there is the document where they left off, the very file they've been working on…).

Then they look around, scratch their head, a soft sound pings on the phone and they turn to see who messaged them; next they open Facebook to check what's new… then they open Spotify to put on some music, thinking music is very important for writing (and it is), yet it is very easy to slide into procrastination with music, just as with Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

I have to confess that I've often fallen into this mistake, and when I realize it, I send the phone to blazes, close Facebook, and lower the music volume so it won't distract me, and I restart the writing at the point where I left it. Very often I must make the effort to sustain the discipline of writing.

Another enemy—not only of writing but also of excess weight—is the refrigerator… How many times does it happen that we are writing with great focus and suddenly, as if by magic, we find ourselves standing in front of the open fridge door, not knowing why or when we got there… There's that piece of cake from last night's get-together… we thoroughly enjoy it, but what has happened? We've lost the thread of what we were writing and, by losing concentration, we waste time before getting back into our text.

Procrastination is the reason so many people tell me, quite often:

— "You know what? I've wanted to write a book my whole life—a novel or a short story or why not, I think I'm good at poetry… But I haven't started yet… I know I'll do it someday…"

Weeks, months, years go by and these people still don't start; and if they do, most of the time they abandon writing after a few days because—so they say—they are very busy. Time passes and they keep dreaming eternally of writing a book… admiring writers for something they don't understand… since seasoned writers have managed to conquer procrastination.

On the other hand, there is also the one who tells me: "I'm just about to finish my book… I'm writing the epilogue… but man, what a tough slog! It's taken me eleven months, but I've got it by a thread." This one also resembles me, and yet, as of now, I have written fifteen books, four relaunches, one translation, one as a ghostwriter, and another two novels that I am writing at this very moment.

Summary: procrastination is the writer's number one danger.

DISCIPLINE

The antidote to procrastination is discipline… Recently I saw a YouTube video, a talk by the Colombian-Japanese speaker Yokoi Kenji, about discipline. (I include the link at the bottom of the page.)

Among other things, Yokoi Kenji spoke about approaches to discipline such as cleanliness and tidiness in

one's own environment—cleaning done by oneself—or washing dishes not as a compulsory chore but as a fundamental discipline… also achieving order, with a specific place for each thing, and avoiding clutter at all costs. All of this serves to cultivate discipline within ourselves with genuine diligence.

Yokoi said: Colombians are very accustomed to procrastinating, while the Japanese learn everything about discipline from a very early age (from kindergarten) and carry discipline in their veins throughout their lives… In the last World Cup, one of the curious things the global press highlighted was the discipline and cleanliness of the Japanese… The players on Japan's team cleaned, mopped, dusted, and left the locker room completely spotless after their matches on the scheduled dates. But not only that… the Japanese spectators at the games not only picked up papers and trash; they also swept and mopped the stadium floor in the area where they had been.

Sometimes discipline is truly exhausting and we would like to forgo it and surrender to idleness, but by imposing discipline on ourselves, we achieve great things.

Speaking of the experience and discipline of some writers, consider the Spanish author Arturo Pérez-Reverte, who has the routine and discipline of writing every morning until midday, then usually goes out in the afternoon to meet with friends or engage in other activities. In my case, I generally write under different circumstances and at different times. One of them is to write very early, before sunrise, and I do so until 11:00 a.m.; on some days I take a one-hour break between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. for a walking routine. In the afternoons I almost always go out

to run errands or do some shopping. At other times, I do a second writing session around 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m., when it's time for dinner, reading, or watching TV.

Other examples of writers' experiences can be found in the book *Escritores en su Tinta* (Advice and Techniques from Expert Writers), by Fernando Vásquez Rodríguez, where the stories of several writers are told—cases in which discipline is strikingly evident.

However, as the writer Lorena Amkie points out, we must understand that when we talk about dedicating time to writing, we are not necessarily referring to advancing chapters. The work involves other aspects of writing, such as research, rereading one's own texts, the tasks of correction and revision, orthographic and typographical corrections, and time to consult reference pages that help refine the work in progress.

Even so, we should understand that, in terms of discipline, there are three kinds of writers:

1. Those who write very occasionally.

2. Those who write with some regularity.

3. Professional writers, who write permanently and with strong discipline.

The above helps us see the difference between writing with or without discipline—or perhaps, if we broaden our perspective, we might recognize that many aspiring writers have daily occupations to support themselves and their families, which fill the hours

mentioned; they can only write as their available time allows. That must be understood, since there are many cases of occasional writers.

PATIENCE

This third point arises when we try to impose deadlines, dates, and timing on the results of our writing, and here patience plays an important role. First of all, there is the time we consider adequate and normal to write a book. This timeframe is entirely variable and depends on several factors: the scope of the topic, the time available to write, the availability of information coming from parallel research, and, as noted earlier, the discipline to dedicate time to the manuscript. In addition, there is the necessary and essential time to let the book rest for a prudent period so that, with fresh eyes, we can revisit the text and review it again in search of new corrections—always so necessary to achieve mastery in the writing.

In my case, a book can easily take several months or even years, as is the case with some novels. In such cases, it is essential to muster patience so as not to rush the development of the story just to see it finished quickly. Some writers prefer to devote themselves to short stories rather than novels because they wish to see their work completed without having to wait so long. The most notable example is the magnificent Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, who said that a short story, by virtue of its brevity, was more available for revision and control than a novel.

Furthermore, with respect to patience, there is the novelist who must wait months or years before seeing the work finished and, in turn, must have enough patience to wait—sometimes for years—for the work to be evaluated or published by a publisher, even a small one.

In this regard, the writer should maintain contact with various publishers who might potentially take on the work, and send many query letters to as many publishing houses as possible. Even then, one may encounter the obstacle of not having a recognized name which, regardless of the work's literary value, can be a negative factor when seeking acceptance by a reputable publisher. Patience means continuing to write with dedication even in the face of multiple rejections from different publishers. In my personal case, it was necessary to have a great deal of patience, since during the first twelve years I was unable to spark interest from any publishing house. Nevertheless, I managed to find a couple of distributors who placed my print books in some bookstores. I also quickly learned how to upload books to the Amazon platform and succeeded in publishing them there.

After a long time writing, I managed to get a publishing house in Mexico interested in distributing one of my novels, although both the edition and the print run were paid for by me. They handled the distribution of the books to bookstores in the country and to libraries, schools, etc.

Then, a year later, a Colombian publisher showed interest in doing a lithographic print run at their own expense and distributing one of my novels. That novel had been edited by me.

In 2023, a Spanish publishing house based in Barcelona expressed interest in editing and launching another of my novels.

Likewise, the same Colombian publisher once again showed interest in bringing another of my novels to market, and in December its publication was achieved. Now, in 2024, I am finishing the market launch—through Amazon—of two more novels that had been in reserve, and I am awaiting news from other publishers.

The truth is, this is a never-ending story, and patience is one of the virtues we must cultivate; meanwhile, we must continue writing.

Finally, I want to express my best wishes that the readers of this book achieve their goals of writing and publishing their works.

THE END