

Chapter 7

Pandemic and Literary Creativity: The Spanish Case of *Relatos de Confinamiento*

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ABSTRACT

*The essay proposes the analysis of some stories included in the digital collection *Relatos de Confinamiento*, published on the internet page of the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* between March and April 2020. The stories, of about 2-3 pages in length, composed by contributors to the newspaper, utilize the pandemic experience about COVID-2019 in a creative way and reflect on the typical circumstances of the first wave and the period of confinement. After a brief introduction to the project, the chapter offers a critical analysis of selected texts focusing on the following topics: isolation and loneliness, isolation and fear, isolation and dystopia.*

INTRODUCTION

It is now known that the Covid-19 pandemic has had and continues to have important physical, behavioral, cognitive, psychological, as well as economic, political and social impacts on the lives of the entire world community, which is dealing with the virus, as evidenced by scientific studies to date (Schimmenti, Billieux & Starcevic, 2020; She, Jiang, Ye, Hu, Bai & Song, 2020; Casagrande, Favieri, Tambelli & Forte, 2020).

Perhaps the main feeling that characterized the months of the first “wave”, as virologists have called it, that is the months of spring 2020, was fear, with which human beings have gradually learned, and not without sacrifice, to live with, remodeling and reshaping their spaces and their time, adapting with great resilience to new, complex circumstances. In this new dynamic and evolving scenario, a central role has been covered by the figure of the artist, a category heavily threatened and questioned by the pandemic,

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which, however, has been able to react with a strong creative impulse, transforming the new reality into an artistic object, in all its declinations. In the field of art, cinema, photography, literature, theater, music, among others, in fact, it has begun a process, still ongoing, of flourishing and rich creation that revolves around the theme of Covid-19. Art thus becomes expression and image of a new context, but also reflection, reasoning, instrument of knowledge of the human soul and, last but not least, therapy and catharsis, interiorization and exorcization of evil, individual and collective. In the forced isolation to which we have all been subjected to protect ourselves, defend ourselves and “save our skins”, technology, the network and social networks have not only represented a window on the world, a useful tool for union, solidarity and human empathy, but also a space for artistic sharing of new and varied cultural products, all strictly accessible.

Within the academic field, the “COVID-19 LiTraPan” project has been conceived, where the present contribution is part of, aimed at the study and diffusion of humanistic knowledge related, in terms of themes and time of creation, to the pandemic scenario and in regard to which one may refer to Veronica Orazi’s article, published in this volume.

Circumscribing the investigation to the wide literary sphere, we can appreciate, limited to the first phase of the epidemic, which we spent locked up in our homes, creative manifestations of various kinds: diaries, poems, dramatic texts, even hyper-short ones, short stories and micro-stories. And to further narrow the field of research to short fiction, among the many praiseworthy virtual initiatives promoted in this period of time, there is the one carried out by the cultural section of the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia*. I am referring to the project called *Relatos de confinamiento*, which collected narrative texts composed by the newspaper’s collaborators, all with previous literary experience, based on fiction and created from the specific context of the pandemic. The initiative, which ran between March and April 2020, involved the writing of 2-3 page stories, some in a double Castilian-Catalan version and, in this case, self-translated by the authors themselves. Forty-four short stories, drawing inspiration from the lockdown period and transforming it into literary material, were published on the newspaper’s website and will be the subject of this study proposal.

Therefore, the essay intends to proceed with the systematization of the published stories, which offer an interesting cross-section of reality, taking into account the different themes, narrative modes, writing techniques, literary treatment, and language adopted.

RELATOS DE CONFINAMIENTO: FORM AND CONTENT

Since *Relatos de confinamiento* is a very wide collection, it is possible to identify some recurrent thematic axes, which can be traced, at least, to the following categories: stories that focus on the macro-theme of love, put to the test by forced cohabitation and the danger of disease, and developed in all its forms – sentimental love, marital crises and adulterous relations, family love, love for animals, etc. –; tales of a fantastic tone, which exploit the use of the agnition, revealed through confinement or even the motif of metamorphosis; dystopian stories, which imagine a new world populated by ghosts of men careful to survive and forced to abandon contact with each other; autobiographical reflections, where the author’s experience is reworked with irony and imagination; tales about loneliness and illness, also explored from a humorous treatment, always present when dealing with the subtopic of hypochondria; histories that arise from the memory of the past or that, on the contrary, predict a “new normal” made of restraining measures, restrictions, remodeling of habits and lifestyles and finally texts that describe the difficult

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