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These fifty-three papers from the International Conference on the Short Story in English are excellent examples of the more than 200 scholarly papers given at the conference in Lisbon in June, 2018. The theme of the conference, "The Radiance of the Short Story: Fiction from around the Globe" is reflected in these articles. The diversity of these articles is reflected through a variety of windows. From country to country, East and West, through gender, race, class, and culture, these articles go in depth to showcase this broad diaspora. Whether Melville, Munro, Kincaid, Dybek, Davies, Li, Blaise, or Mukherjee, these articles allow both the casual reader and the serious scholar an opportunity to experience the short story genre more broadly than ever before. I invite you to enjoy this wonderful collection of scholarly works.

The Radiance of the Short Story:  
Fiction from around the Globe

Edited by Maurice A. Lee  
and Aaron Penn

# The Radiance of the Short Story: Fiction from around the Globe

*Selected Conference Papers*

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## Short Story and Cognition: Effects in Literary Studies and in the socio-cultural evolution of a robust narrative genre

Juani Guerra

Categorization as a way of knowing things, of reducing the limitless variations in the world to manageable proportions, has always been at the core of Poetic and Linguistic Theory; and correspondingly at the core of Short Story Theory since Poe and Brander Matthews. Many inexplicit definitions have been constructed in the literary field that have suffered from the equivocal constraints that a word like “short” imposes on “story” as a compound noun, which projects an image of small, less, or worse (as in the expression “short-minded,” or in the enunciation “How good was the story? Too short.”) From a cognitive experientialist view, the way it has been cognitively embodied and conceptually entrenched in English should have evolved as a vigorous and well-defined biocultural categorization that has been deteriorated by adding “short” to the compound. To revert this incongruent conceptual and linguistic evolution in English, I here propose to go back to the initial conditions of its semantic organization,<sup>1</sup> to the original enaction<sup>2</sup> of “short” to categorize a certain (literary) type of “story,” and determine its healthy or unhealthy sociocultural evolution by mapping the conceptual relation of these two lexical-semantic elements at a cognitive level. To do this, I apply the most advanced principles and models from Cognitive Semantics, particularly those theories that propose that our verbalizations of the world encode

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<sup>1</sup> I follow Maturana’s (1989) distinction between a system’s organization and its structure in relation to living systems. By “organization” he understands the central relations which constitute a system as a whole and which determine its type, so that systems of the same type have the same organization. Structure refers to the actual manifestation of a particular example, to its actual components and their interactions.

<sup>2</sup> “Enactive” cognition, as defined by Varela et. al., is concerned with 1) Skillful know-how in situated and embodied action; 2) Human capacity to make mentally visible optically invisible static and dynamic entities.

abstract image schemas or cognitive schemas grounded in our early experiences of having a body and moving in space. My goal is to find an approach that constructs or reworks the generalized confusion about the accurate meaning of *Short Story* as literary genre. I believe that looking back in search of possible incongruities in its English sociocultural concept could open a new realistic biocultural way to frame it as genre.<sup>3</sup>

I will analyze *short story* as sociocultural cognitive construction and as conceptual metonymic compound. To map the concept “short story” as anomalous metonymy I will apply some basic Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) from Cognitive Semantics.

### **Methodology. Cognitive principles and models.**

As ICMs, image schemas and conceptual metonymies and metaphors provide knowledge structure to complex social experiences, actions and abstract ideas such as those associated to the short story. They are advanced tools to explore how the cognitive evolution of *Short Story* as concept is organized in the English language from a mapping of how its spatial schematization prompts an incongruent metonymic conceptual model. This allows for a future comparison with its structure in other languages/cultures, and for a congruent restructuring of form/meaning; and thus for a more comprehensive understanding that implements a realistic full-bodied evolution of Short Story Theory and Criticism.

Any linguistic structure utilizing complex and abstract ideas reveals the ICMs that influence the way we reason about complex experiences and social issues, and the way we quest for further knowledge about them. Even the subtlest meaning of a word like “short-story” can have a powerful influence over how people see and attempt to solve social problems and how they gather information to make well-informed decisions. I believe that the highest social value of the short story has been diminished by this powerful influence. Metonymies in language are not mere adornments; they are robust cognitive mechanisms that instantiate

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<sup>3</sup> Besides, the semantic category *short story* is a concept of debatable cultural universality. though we are concerned with instantiations of the short story as concept in as many languages/cultures as possible, I here map the English form as showing a radically different incongruent conceptualization process. Think of the Spanish expression “Relato Breve” (literally “Brief Relation/Narration”), framing time and temporal interval.

frame-consistent knowledge structures and invite structurally consistent inferences. This means that they have profound influences on how we conceptualize and act with respect to important societal issues like the present sociocultural global situation of the literary genre *Short Story*. Exposure to even a single metonymy can induce substantial differences in opinion about how to understand and solve communicative and social problems related to a cultural entity.

In English, the meaning of *short story* as a conceptual, semiotic, and linguistic construction displays an image which provides both the use of short as an adjective and short as a noun. Further, this metonymic anomaly mentally triggers impaired projections, fostering precarious conceptual metaphors like SHORT IS SMALL / SMALL IS LESS / LESS IS WORSE that do not adequately represent the high value of this literary genre in English. (Above I have cited how the expression “short-minded,” or the enunciation “How good was the story? Too short” evoke pejorative values). This argumentative hypothesis is now being tested with the tools of Cognitive Psychology and Neuroscience,<sup>4</sup> to enhance the significance of “short story” in human cultural evolution as framed in the most robust prototypical category *story*.

### **Biocultural premises in the conceptualization of *story* and *short story***

Biocultural premises in complex adaptive dynamics of meaning construction and conceptual structures can be altered by the activation of new mappings of ICMs prompted by the introduction of a new subcategory that may fit one's understanding of the world “either perfectly, pretty well, somewhat well, pretty badly, badly, or not at all” (Lakoff 70).

As biopoetic construction,<sup>5</sup> the superordinate category *story* encompasses all stages in the biocultural organization of human societies

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<sup>4</sup> Research currently held at the *IUIBS Research Institute of Biomedical and Health Sciences* in Gran Canaria, Spain.

<sup>5</sup> Human reality is inherently sociocultural, its action is indivisible of individual activity; therefore, the morphodynamics of language is a biocultural complex system in its assembly of structures (conceptual structures) and processes (conceptualization). In the context of bridges between Science and Humanities, Cognitive Linguistics and Cognitive Poetics shape a bond, not lacking tension and disagreement, necessary to go deep into a more dynamicist approach to these cognitive processes of meaning configuration,

grounded on the fundamental experience of exchanging communal information to improve social life as a cultural system. It is a key vehicle and primary mode of culture. The anthropological and biocultural robustness of *story* as concept is such that the English form “short story” augment its semantic incongruency in the context of a collaborative understanding of such a primary, healthy and rewarding experience like sharing living information among human groups. The reason is that foregrounding and projecting stories, concepts and linguistic material, constitutes the basis of individual and social practices. Essentially, to integrate these vital practices in our sociocultural lives we need concepts to accumulate and process stories when we apparently forget them. Though we take it for granted in the literary studies, favoring the *what* over the *how* inquiry, these cognitive dynamics correspondingly operate in the literary evolution of the *short story* as genre, as also grounded in the biopoetic reality that without stories there are no concepts and that without concepts there are no short story texts. This situation makes it necessary to focus on the cognitive organization of the lexical-semantic structure to designate the artful result of this process as a modern literary genre, in English of “story” as “short-story,” and further globally measure its degree of culture-specificity or universality.

From this cognitive perspective, coming to terms with local expressions instantiating the meaning (semantic cognition), emotion (affective cognition), and social value (axiological cognition) of the short story in different communities of practice, needs an ICM modeling showing how these premises constructing the historical/synergic radiance of the modern *Short Story* are well-lit or veiled, and to what extent they are realistically foregrounded in the above-mentioned experiential evolution of *story* as the fundamental human’s mode and medium to culture. This first premise implies a second: that *storyness* (process) and *semiotic representation* (structure) configure human cultural

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towards Biopoetics. Our Research Group *PoCo* at the *IUIBS* investigates Biopoetics as the interdisciplinary continuum of Cognitive Sciences, an inclusive approach to create a more dynamicist (meta)cognitive theory which integrates embodied biocultural interactive reality of mind and language in the framework of Complex Systems Theory. The language and cognition integration mechanism shows a pre-conceptual level where concepts and emotions are still undifferentiated; its integration dynamics develop from local complexities to global complexities, which continuously affect each other.

interactive/communicative dynamics in distant groups to make human evolution possible. This action affords a third one: that all our lives have been and are bioculturally sensed and transformed on-course by stories. Counterintuitively, every biocultural advance in human evolution is 98% unconsciously organized by *stories*, and only 2% by conscious instrumental representations like languages/linguistic or narratological structures, and fossilized lexicalizations like “short story” or “short fiction.” But once they are cognitive-cultural fossils its lexical-semantic construction further modifies the way we think about it. Future search for cultural divergences and commonalities in the conceptual-linguistic construction of this vital genre in different cultures could help to reorganize those that, like the case of English, show up some cognitive-schematic unfit (Lakoff 70). In this paper I initially map in detail a cognitive anomaly prompting a conceptual incongruity in the semantic categorization of *short story* in English.

**Short story as semantic category constructed on a cognitive unfit schema, on an anomalous conceptual metonymy, and on a pejorative conceptual metaphor.**

We can analyze the category evoked by the word *story* in different ways. The classical approach would be to try to find the features that characterize the category. Given the variety of actions, persons, instruments, results, etc. that we classify as *a story* we could end up in the same problems as Wittgenstein when he analyzed the category *game*, i.e. it would not be possible to find a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that defines the category, given the difficulty for instance to measure shortness in intangible entities like stories. One of the solutions to Wittgenstein’s problem was to consider the category as knowledge organized around a prototype with central and more peripheral members (Rosch); for instance, for the category *bird*, *sparrow* would be a prototypical member, whereas *penguin* and *ostrich* are peripheral. However, the category *story* seems to be organized in a very different way from categories like *bird*, *vegetable*, etc. This becomes clear if we look at the subcategories of *story*; here we find compounds like *love story*, *instagram story*, *tragic story*, *fantasy story*, *travel story*, or *short story*. This shows that *story* as a term is mainly used in relation to a *micro*

*domain* of experiential knowledge, for instance the domain of living an **event** of love (*love story*), the domain of cellphone applications and information technology **instrument** (*instagram story*), the domain of suffering a dramatic **result** (*tragic story*), etc. What distinguishes it is that for each of the cognitive domains we can refer to specific subjects, events, and objects of framing a specific story that fall under the given subcategory; for instance, the human imagination and unreal **subjects**/human bodies would frame *fantasy story*. Just listing a set of items cannot exhaust these subcategories; for instance, *medical story* refers clearly to a domain of knowledge as well as to the specific instantiations of this knowledge. We might say that the word *story* specifies cognitive or knowledge domains together with the subjects, actions, events, institutions, instruments or objects, etc. that are used to realize the given knowledge. So far we have seen how the cognitive domains that frame our knowledge of a category are fundamental to define the category in a realistic biophysical and sociocultural model of how we understand it. Accordingly, the starting question at this point would be: **What cognitive-cultural domain of knowledge is enacted when English speakers think of and enounce *short story*?** The answer is far from being simple due to the lack of affordances that could trigger a well-defined understanding of it.

On a first look at linguistic data in the BYU Corpora, “short” in the enunciation “short-story” does not work as regular compound noun in that it does not construct a metonymic projection inside its domain of knowledge (story); rather, it directly prompts a fuzzy reference frame where short can be understood in 2 different ways; 1) as a conceptual metaphor (TIME IS SPACE) projecting space onto time, i.e. spatial/physical measure (short) as time interval; 2) as a conceptual metaphor (SHORT IS SMALL/LESS/WORSE) with a pejorative implicature. This means that “short story” as semantic category critically eludes framing subjects, actions, events, institutions, or instruments that are the vital elements of the cognitive-conceptual domains used to realize the given knowledge. If we tried to find an answer to what is, under this assessment, the difference between “long story” and “short story,” our cognitive process would frame book and pages as the only reference points, thus leaving out all other human experiences referring to *story* as the most robust biopoetic and

cultural action in human evolution. Noticeably, our online cognitive process would baffle the first of the biocultural premises: *story is* the fundamental human mode and vehicle to culture.

All these cognitive-conceptual domains constructing *story* have their origin in basic human needs: the need for housing, communicating, energy supplying, entertaining, etc. And they have been there for centuries; but the term *story* is newly used in English since Edgar Allan Poe to refer to a domain of shortness which, in its high semantic, affective, and axiological fuzziness between framing the material text, the time the reader takes to finish it, and less value, reflects its anomalous deteriorating conceptual extensions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and onwards. It is critical that *short* does not refer to the vital domain of fictive life/story in any experiential-cognitive-conceptual mode that refers to living human beings. Rather, to the attribute of page-numbering, so that short story narrows in on the material extension and leaves every fundamental knowledge of the category *story* unspecified. Simple as it might seem in terms of human cognitive evolution, it is rather a complex case of semantic bifurcation onto a precarious conceptualization process that has driven many great literary scholars face to face against a blind wall. This mapping anomaly has produced considerable confusion about this genre over the years, and the technical reason is this: In the conceptual-linguistic construction ***Short Story***, *short* is not in a metonymic relation to the intangible but vital domain of knowledge *story*, but to the tangible number of pages in a book that are much less than those in a novel.

The reason for this unusual relation between the two terms is evidently the novel use of the term *story* itself. Story profiles the literary process in a fictive life event frame, but what is the prototypical process? The real thing in human cognition is that prototypicality is foundational if we want to understand/produce any kind of knowledge. Recent advanced psychological studies on dynamics of categorization and category construction highlight prototypicality (typicality) as determining the associative robustness between a category/concept and members of the category. In this sense, as we saw in the introduction, it measures how representative of a category is an object. Moreover, this measure of representativeness, this prototypicality, varies among different cultures. If we consider short story as member of the category *story*, being unable to

map or diagram the prototypical process and the metonymic relation with story is a blunder.

### **Conclusions**

Nowadays, with the spectacular cognitive advances in the study of culture, language, or literature, lacking an analysis of the cognitive dynamics of meaning construction in any attempt at defining “short story” is a sound reason for the ceaseless ill-definition of the *Short Story* as genre, affecting all other approaches from non-cognitive literary theory and criticism. I claim that incorporating its real cognitive-cultural will implement a realistic progress of advance literary approaches.

Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) provide knowledge structure to complex social experiences, actions and abstract ideas. As a solution to the ill definition of the category *short story* in English since Poe and Brander Mathews, and to its extension onto other cultural constructions as if it was a universal rather than culture-specific conceptualization, I have presented a first cognitive diagram of the conceptual organization of the category “short story” in English. I have demonstrated that the compound “short story” is an English cognitive, cultural and linguistic construction that activates a conceptual schematic unfitness and an anomalous metonymic conceptual projection, which is further metaphorically nurtured by pejorative implicatures. I have proposed to consider this anomalous categorization as responsible for the ill-definition affecting the theory and criticism on this leading modern literary genre. I consider this biopoetic evidence realistic enough to implement all previous approaches mainly from Literary Criticism to answer the main question (“What is a Short Story?”) bringing in genuine diversity to the intercultural way human cognition produces complex knowledge and transversal biocultural evolution. In this framework, I propose that what is today highly misunderstood as “short story” could find a constructive conceptual and lexical-semantic equivalence integrating the most optimal cognitive conceptual constructions as seen in the lexicalizations already conceptually entrenched in languages different from English. I believe that inaugurating an integral intercultural cooperative strength to define this modern genre, so thoroughly adapted to the experience of brevity in modern life, could be a creative reenactment of main old assets of human

story's social paramount healthy, educational, and artful living representational form, revaluing cultural diversity at a conceptual and theoretical level. As late Theories of Complex Dynamic Systems have evidenced, at a global level such local constructions evolutionarily transform both selves and societies, both human beings and human cultures.

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