

# The Feather Pillow and Vocabulary

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## Section Objectives:

- Make inferences from details
- Identify main idea
- Synthesize information from several sources
- Analyze symbols
- Identify and interpret similes
- Identify word denotations and connotations
- Understand word origins
- Use context clues

Besides short stories and poetry, Horacio Quiroga wrote a collection of children's stories titled *Jungle Tales*, featuring animals and set in the rainforest. In addition to Edgar Allan Poe, Rudyard Kipling, author of *The Jungle Book*, was an influence on Quiroga's writings.

## *"The Feather Pillow" – Horacio Quiroga*

### *Before You Read...*

#### *Horacio Quiroga (1878–1937):*

Quiroga was born in Uruguay in South America. Throughout his career, Quiroga wrote over 200 short stories, many of which are considered horror stories. Due to the number of selections written, the content of the stories, and the troubling incidents throughout his lifetime, Quiroga is frequently compared to the American author Edgar Allan Poe.



Flag of Uruguay

Tragedy in Quiroga's life began early when his father was accidentally shot. Afterward, his stepfather committed suicide when Quiroga was still 22. Two years later, in 1902, Quiroga accidentally shot his own friend. Soon after these occurrences, Quiroga was introduced to symbolist literature including the works of Poe. Like Poe, tragedy continued to follow Quiroga when his wife committed suicide in 1915. After a second failed marriage and learning he was suffering from cancer, Quiroga ingested cyanide in 1937 subsequently resulting in his death.

### *Literary Focus – Symbolism:*

Quirgoa's "The Feather Pillow" is a tragic tale that uses **symbolism** to make its point. **Symbolism** uses objects, characters, settings, events, and even character relationships to represent deeper and more complex meanings. **Symbolism** is one of the literary devices more frequently used by writers – especially by those focusing on short stories. Often times, the overall intent of a writer's use of **symbolism** is not explained but must be inferred, or guessed, by the reader.



### *Introduction:*

Quiroga's "The Feather Pillow" details the young marriage of Alicia and Jordan. Alicia is a young beautiful girl married to a stoic character in Jordan. Each loves the other very much, but communication of one's love for the other is minimal.

After battling influenza, Alicia is again bedridden by a mysterious illness that cannot be explained. Each day she exhibits signs of improving, but her condition worsens each night, and she awakes paler and paler every morning. The local physician has no explanation as to the cause of the illness or what will remedy her sickness.

Alicia's illness is compounded by hallucinations and delirium. After five days of being confined to her bed, Alicia is found dead by the couple's servant. The servant discovers a blood-soaked pillow and shows it to Jordan. Jordan rips open the pillow to discover a monstrous blood-sucking parasite underneath the pillow's feathers.

### *Vocabulary Development:*

Much of Quiroga's **diction** uses words with a dark and dreary **connotation** to heighten the horror of his text. While **denotation** refers to the meaning or definition of the word, **connotation** refers to the emotion evoked by the word. Words such as "thin" and "scrawny" have similar **denotations**, but the **connotation** of "scrawny" is not nearly as complimentary as "thin" or even "skinny."

Vocabulary: **furtive**, **insidiously**, **anaemia** (also "anemia"), **anthropoid**, **crepuscular**, **monotonous**, **vertiginous**

Research definitions for the above terms. It is best to remember **synonyms** for each word. **Synonyms** are words that have similar meanings to one another. For example, "surprise" and "shock" are **synonyms**.

### *While You Read:*

Use **context clues** to guess the meanings of the above vocabulary words.

Make inferences, or educated guesses, about the character's motivations, thoughts, and feelings throughout the story.

Recognize examples of **symbolism** throughout the text. How does Quiroga's use of **symbolism** enhance his writing?

What do the characters and events reveal about Quiroga's views of life, love, and human relationships?

### *After You Read...*

#### *Reading Check: Basic Comprehension*

1. What is the name of Alicia's husband?
2. Why was it not odd that Alicia grew thin?
3. At what time of the day does Alicia look the sickliest?
4. Who discovers Alicia's dead body?

#### *Thinking Critically: Extended Comprehension and Analysis*

1. Why is it symbolic that the house Alicia lives in is described as being overly white and wintry?
2. What is ironic about Quiroga writing "This was the last day Alicia was well enough to be up" in only the sixth paragraph of the story?
3. Quiroga writes that the parasite had "drained Alicia's life away." Do you agree with this? Does the parasite kill Alicia or is it symbolic for something else?
4. In your mind, what is Quiroga's overall purpose or argument in writing this text? Based from events in Quiroga's lifetime, can you infer what this text symbolizes?

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## Vocabulary Development:

Match the following terms with the appropriate definitions. Use *context clues* from the story to help you define each term.

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|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. _____ furtive     | a. lack of vitality or colorfulness |
| 2. _____ insidiously | b. dull; repetitive                 |
| 3. _____ anaemia     | c. intended to trap                 |
| 4. _____ anthropoid  | d. spinning                         |
| 5. _____ crepuscular | e. secretive                        |
| 6. _____ monotonous  | f. pertaining to dimness            |
| 7. _____ vertiginous | g. human-like figure                |