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THE WRITING RULES OF THE FICTIONAL PROTOTYPE

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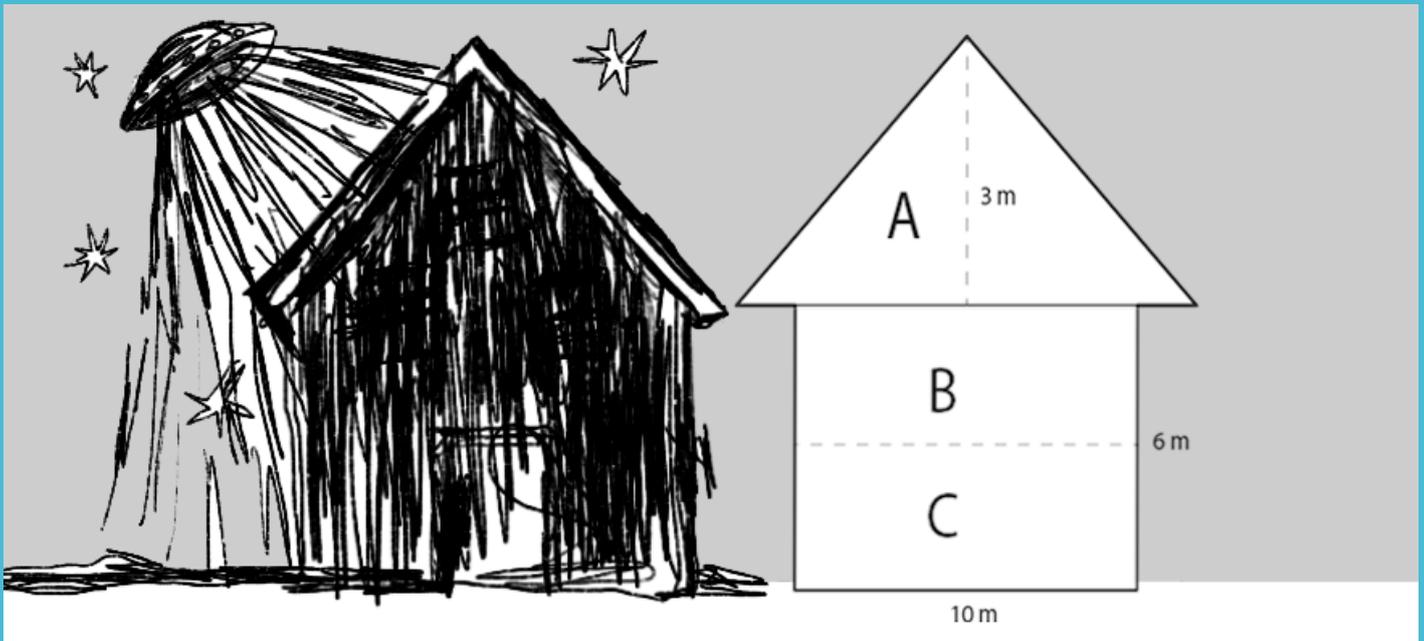
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Abstract || Here we propose a new perspective regarding the difference between literary fiction and nonfiction: the very different nature of the writing rules they admit. Although with some limitations, non-fictional narratives admit more or less rigid writing rules because they are obligated to maintain a certain correspondence scheme with the real world. However, fictional literary narrations, freed from any strict or systematic correspondence with reality, do not admit these fixed rules. Given that in fiction it is not possible to have such a text-word correspondence scheme, we defend that the only rules (or rather, the only *guidelines*) fictional literary narrations admit are those which affect the very creation of the text—that is, those which affect the subjective attitude of the writer.

Keywords || Fiction | Fictionality | Fictional narrations | Non-fiction narrations

Les regles d'escriptura del prototip ficcional

Resum || Proponem una nova perspectiva respecte a la diferència entre la ficció literària i la no ficció: la diferent naturalesa de les regles d'escriptura que admeten. Encara que amb algunes limitacions, les narracions de no ficció admeten regles d'escriptura més o menys rígides perquè estan obligades a mantenir certs esquemes de correspondència amb el món real. No obstant això, les narracions literàries fictionals, alliberades de qualsevol correspondència estricta o sistemàtica amb la realitat, no admeten regles fixes. Com que en la ficció no és possible tenir un esquema de correspondència text-paraula, defensem que les úniques regles (o millor, les úniques pautes) que admeten les narracions literàries fictionals són aquelles que afecten a la creació mateixa del text, és a dir, les que incideixen en l'actitud subjectiva de l'escriptor.

Paraules clau || Ficció | Ficcionalitat | Narracions fictionals | Narracions de no ficció

Las reglas de escritura del prototipo ficcional

Resumen || Aquí proponemos una nueva perspectiva respecto a la diferencia entre la ficción literaria y la no ficción: la naturaleza muy diferente de las reglas de escritura que admiten. Aunque con algunas limitaciones, las narraciones de no ficción admiten reglas de escritura más o menos rígidas

porque están obligadas a mantener un cierto esquema de correspondencia con el mundo real. Sin embargo, las narraciones literarias ficcionales, liberadas de cualquier correspondencia estricta o sistemática con la realidad, no admiten estas reglas fijas. Dado que en la ficción no es posible tener tal esquema de correspondencia texto-palabra, defendemos que las únicas reglas (o más bien, las únicas *pautas*) que admiten las narraciones literarias ficcionales son aquellas que afectan a la creación misma del texto, es decir, las que inciden en la actitud subjetiva del escritor.

Palabras clave || Ficción | Ficcionalidad | Narraciones ficticias | Narraciones de no ficción

0. Introduction

In recent years, the efforts of many fiction theorists have moved away from what has traditionally been their object of study, the fictional literary text. Since 2007, with the publication of *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, by Richard Walsh, and particularly since 2015, with the publication of the article/manifesto *Ten Theses about Fictionality*, by Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh, there has been an immense amount of scientific bibliography that, in general terms, tended to conceive of fiction (or rather “fictionality”) not as an exclusive communicative characteristic of fictional literary works, but as a linguistic “mode” (2015: 62), absolutely transversal and generalized. And such a linguistic mode, like irony, was likely to be found in potentially any communicative expression and socio-cultural sphere.¹ For example, in the aforementioned 2015 text, the authors used a non-literary (and only to a certain point, narrative) text, a 2013 speech by Barack Obama in which he invented a small fiction for self-parodic purposes, to exemplify this vision of fiction.

This is not the place to describe the complex theoretical cartography that underlies this approach (Pratt, 1977; Grice, 1975; Sperber and Wilson, 1995, etc.). Suffice it to say, in very general terms, that fiction thus understood is conceived not in semantic terms, or even in exclusively pragmatic terms, but in rhetorical terms. Assuming the general communicative paradigm represented by the “inference model” (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 249), according to which the act of communicating is not based on the distinction between *true information* and *false information*, but rather *relevant information* and *non-relevant information*, fiction would be a general rhetorical possibility aimed at achieving a more effective communication. Thus, for these authors, the fictional nature of the aforementioned Obama speech resided less in the fact that he was not expressing real events and more in the circumstance that using a small invented story was an effective resource to capture the attention of the receivers (persuading them of the relevance of what is narrated), thereby achieving a real and effective communicative mode.

What we want to emphasize here, however, is that this tendency starts from the more or less explicit premise (as did previous approaches of a pragmatic nature, particularly Searle’s [1975]) that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction (and more specifically, between *literary fiction* and other type of discourses) is overcome: the distinction functionally collapses in this context. Its object of study, fictionality, is not the exclusive domain of fictional texts but, as has been said, an element that is absolutely transversal to all kinds of linguistic expressions and seeks to build effective rhetorical strategies. Despite the fact that this rhetorical tendency recognizes a series of specificities to canonical literary fictions, some even of a formal type, this distinction has limited relevance since, at most, literary fictions would suppose a particular and intensive use of a communicative resource “ubiquitous in our culture” (Nielsen, Phelan, Walsh, 2015: 62).

<1> In addition to the works just cited, which are pioneering in terms of establishing the rhetorical approach to fiction, there are other more recent works that delve into this paradigm. Noteworthy are the compendia by Fludernik and Nielsen (eds.) (2020), Aaen Maagaard, Schäbler and Lundholt (eds.) (2020), Ryan and Fludernik (eds.) (2020) or Franzen *et al.* (eds.) (2018). To this should be added the entries on the concept of “Fiction” in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (Simona Zetterberg-Nielsen and Henrik Zetterberg-Nielsen, 2019) and *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (Gjerlevsen, 2016).

In this article, however, a possibility that goes against this last premise (which is probably dominant in the field today) will be explored. The very fact of fiction thus understood is not questioned; we believe that fiction can be conceived as a generalized rhetorical-communicative resource and therefore be present not only in literary works, but also in what could be considered well-established non-literary fictions (forecasts of all kinds, legal fictions, mathematical models, working hypotheses, jokes, etc.) and even fictitious entities (imaginary numbers, etc.). What is defended here is that, in the field of literary fiction, certain communicative aspects work in a radically unique way. These radical (and structural) singularities make literary fiction possess a series of structural specificities that affect it on many levels and differentiate it from any other type of discourse, including non-literary fictionalities.

We are aware that in this area we must be especially careful with the use of terms, since there are few concepts more equivocal, polysemic, historically changing and epistemologically elusive than *fiction*². The fact is that *fiction* and *non-fiction*, as conceptual categories, are so broad, variable and full of exceptions that it does not make much sense to make a rough comparison between them. Instead, we will limit ourselves to explore certain differences between two categories that, despite their vastness, do admit a more rigorous and operative comparison: *factual narratives* (in this instance, as a paradigmatic case, journalistic narratives) and *fictional literary narratives*. However, we will not try to delve into this distinction through the usual perspectives (semantic, pragmatic, syntactic-stylistic, narratological) developed since the second half of the 20th century by theorists such as Genette (1990), Cohn (1999), Schaeffer (2013) or Hamburger (1973). Nor will we adjust to the perspectives that the members of *GRK 1767. Faktuales & Fiktionales Erzählen*, a research group from the University of Freiburg which has specialized precisely in the study of convergences and divergences between factual and fictional narratives, have developed for years³. Instead, we will adopt another, less explored (and, above all, less theorized) approach: the very different types of norms that, in our contemporary time⁴, factual (and, in particular, journalistic) narratives and fictional literary narratives admit.

Here we will start from the general premise, developed in detail by Amores (2018 and 2019), that one of the fundamental differences that generally exists between literary fiction and other discourses is that the former has a virtually unlimited expressive potential, while the rest will always show some kind of limitation with respect to what they can express. As will be seen in the second section, the fact that literary fiction lacks any type of rigid or systematic subjection to the states of affairs of the real world means that its enunciation also lacks any *a priori* limitations, in both form and content. However, in all other types of speech, including non-literary fictions, the traces of fiction present in fundamentally factual speeches (such as Obama's

<2> This conceptual instability explains to a large extent there being no consensus as to since when one can speak of literary fiction in the West in a modern sense (that is, as a communicative mode that basically consists in the representation of fictitious worlds that clearly lack a practical purpose and that, despite their untrue character, do not intend to deceive the audience, but rather place them on a plane that goes beyond truth and lie). There is a line of thought that starts in Watt (1957) and that has been prolonged by authors such as Gallagher (2006) or Paige (2011) who argue that the appearance of fiction in this modern sense is parallel to that of the appearance of the modern English novel, so we could speak of fiction from the eighteenth century onward. Other authors, such as Fludernik (2018) or Reuvekamp-Felber (2013) push this date back to the Middle Ages, while others such as Rösler (2014) go even further back, to Classical Greece.

This diversity of opinions about the origin of the modern concept of fiction in the West helps to explain the great diversity of theories about what fiction is. Thus, for example, fiction can be conceived as the imitation of a series of human actions that could have happened within the limits of probability and necessity of a certain literary genre, as Aristotle says in his *Poetics*. In the same way, literary fiction can be interpreted as allegorical metacodification (Heraclitus, 2005 and Porphyry, 1983); as a certain plane of existence subject to a series of specific ontological dependencies (Thomasson, 1999); as the intentional elaboration of a series of modal structures (Doležel, 1998); in terms of illocutionary pretense (Searle, 1975); as a mimetic display of illocutionary force (Ohmann, 1971); as a succession of indirect speech acts (Genette, 1993); in terms of games of make-believe (Walton, 1990) or as a non-referential narrative that presents a series of differentiated stylistic and narratological features (Cohn, 1999), among others. To this should be

or even hybrid genres such as essays, memoirs or autofictions, will always be more or less subject to real-world states of affairs, which implies limits on their enunciation. It is true that we can find a great variability within the group of non-literary and non-fictional texts. An essayist, for example, will have much more freedom to write than the author of an economic report. However, total expressive freedom (and thus the total impossibility of rigid writing rules, or of any rules at all) is only really possible in literary fiction.

We will start from this general point of view and then reduce the scope to the comparison between fictional literary narratives and factual narratives. First we will try to demonstrate that the virtually infinite character of the enunciation of fictional narratives means that their texts cannot be purely considered *examples* of the general discursive category to which they belong (fictional literary narratives), given that the very notion of *example* presupposes general limits of which a determined case is a sample. Instead, it will be argued that fictional literary narratives are *prototypes* (that is, singular expressions with a vocation to break the established schemes of their field) with respect to the discursive category in which they are framed.

Regardless of other profound theoretical consequences, here we will underline a certain difference that, in the realm of the actual writing process, exists between factual narratives and fictional literary narratives. Through the comparison of a journalistic style manual (*The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage* [1999]) and a creative writing book (Stephen King's *On Writing* [2000]), the differing natures of the norms applicable to each type of text will be shown: while the first set of rules generally tries to establish a certain framework of text-world relations, the second, given the impossibility of subjecting a universe of virtually infinite expressive potentialities to a proposed rule set, consists not of rules but of a heterogeneous set of guidelines and advice about the appropriate subjective dispositions that should guide a fiction writer.

1. The virtually unlimited expressive potential of fiction

There are four major types of differences between fictional narrations and factual narrations according to Schaeffer (2013, §1):

Factual and fictional narratives are generally defined as a pair of opposites. However, there is no consensus as to the rationale of this opposition. Three major competing definitions have been proposed: (a) semantic definition: factual narrative is referential whereas fictional narrative has no reference (at least, not in "our" world); (b) syntactic definition: factual narrative and fictional narrative can be distinguished by their logico-linguistic syntax; (c) pragmatic definition: factual narrative advances claims of referential truthfulness whereas fictional narrative advances no such claims. One could add a fourth definition, narratological in nature, where in factual narrative the author and the narrator are the same person whereas in fictional narrative the narrator (who is part of the fictional world) differs from the author (who is part of

added the so-called "rhetorical paradigm" (see Introduction and Note 1), which considers literary fiction a determined case of fiction since the latter is conceived as a mechanism that is absolutely transversal to all linguistic modalities. On the other hand, the different meanings that many authors give to terms such as fiction, fictionality or fictiveness (which sometimes not only overlap, but are even contradictory) (Fludernik, 2018: 73) also complicate things.

In this article, and despite the fact that we will focus on narrative fictions, we can easily assume Fludernik's definition of fiction: "The invention of fictive worlds which are presented in textual, dramatics (i.e., performative), or visual (and audiovisual) form for the entertainment, diversion, intellectual stimulation, and (moral) instruction of recipients. These recipients, in turn, recognize that the truth claims proffered by these texts or artifacts are predominantly universal, moral, and philosophical rather than historical or factual. However, fictionality is not restricted to literary or aesthetic production" (2018: 77-78). To this should be added the consideration that Amores (2018 and 2019) makes in relation to literary fiction, which highlights that the characteristic that distinguishes it from other discourses, including the rest of imaginable fictional modalities, is the potentially unlimited character of its expression.

<3> In this sense, it is worth highlighting the *Faktales und Fiktionales Erzählen* series, which currently has eight published volumes. The first volume of the series (Fludernik, Falkenhayner and Steiner [eds.], 2015) and the eighth (Breitenwischer, Häger, and Menninger [eds.], 2020) are particularly suited to this question.

<4> See second paragraph of Note 1.

the world we are living in) [...]. But this fourth definition is better seen as a consequence of the pragmatic definition of fiction.

Here we will begin from the premise that there is at least one additional difference to those described by Schaeffer. It is a difference that cannot be purely circumscribed to semantic, syntactic, pragmatic or narratological fields, but is in some way transverse to all of them. In fact, we talk about an aspect that very often is taken for granted by the different analytical categories of literary theory, which may even seem trivial at first glance. However, in our opinion it supposes a defining feature of literary fiction of great importance. We are referring to the fact that fictional literary narrative, whose contents have virtually no correspondence obligations with real world, is potentially infinite. On the contrary, factual narrative contents (or, as stated above, hybrid narratives such as essays, memoirs, or autofictions) are limited to a greater extent by a series of real-world factors (truth and error criteria, thematic limitations, certain stylistic obligations, etc.) that limit their expressive potential in multiple ways.

We can find solid indications of the existence of this potentially infinite character of fictional literary narratives even before entering a properly theoretical sphere. For example, and limiting ourselves to the specific field of contemporary novels, a look at the shelves of any library that ordered the works not by theme, but by the authors' last names, would offer us a variety of plots, styles, subgenres, narrative strategies, autobiographical elements, ideological intentions, textual extensions, intertextualities, projections of the literary posture, etc.—practically impossible to systematize. We would find romance novels, but also science fiction ones; we would find first-person narratives, but also third-person, second-person and even so-called “we-narratives”; there would be omniscient narrators and unreliable narrators, baroque prose and aseptic prose, fixed focalizations and multiperspectivism, linear and non-linear stories, politically compromised texts and entertainment ones, autofictions and historical novels, books of more than 1,000 pages and others of just 100, conventional narratives and others that would imitate factual forms, such as a personal diary...

Of course, it would be possible to extract a series of abstract categories (with their corresponding variations) that would serve to order such heterogeneity; the discipline of narratology (and, by extension, the whole of literary theory) is based on the premise that the latter is possible. However, it is one thing for it to be possible, for example, to capture in a dozen categories of narrative focalization the whole set of possible points of view that a literary narrative can adopt, but quite another (and this is what we want to emphasize here) to extract from the observation of 20 or 30 novels chosen at random a set of basic, more or less fixed, norms on how to write a fictional narrative. For practically every norm that we try to make into a general rule (for example, the use of what Hamburger calls “epic preterit” [1973]) we could find a counterexample that would deny the universality of that rule (there are novels written in the present tense, or even in

future tense). It is clear that most factual narratives (historical, legal, etc.) also possess enormous heterogeneity and variability that can be found in multiple levels and in numerous ways. However (and as it will be seen in section 4.1 with a type of factual narration not specially formalized, the journalistic narrative), there will always be a wide margin for establishing structural writing norms.

Without abandoning the pre-theoretical sphere, it should also be noted that in our contemporary times, and with the possible exception of some extremely authoritarian regimes, there are no explicit regulations a fiction writer must comply with when they begin to write. Or put more simply: at the present time, there is nothing that prevents authors from writing *what* or *how* they want. Ultimately, they are not even bound by basic spelling or grammar rules, as we see in many experimental narratives. It is not only that, unlike in the past, today there are no rigid academic norms that determine how a fiction should be properly written; the point is that the right to creative freedom, in most countries, gives legal guarantees to authors so that they can write fiction with no *a priori* limitations. So, it could be said that the only extratextual obstacles to the freedom of writing are factors such as self-censorship or the prospect of editorial rejection. Needless to say, all these skills are impossible in factual narratives such as newspaper articles, history books or police reports.

Now entering into a properly theoretical sphere, another example of this feature of fictional narratives is the normalization, both in artistic and academic terms, of so-called “unnatural narratives”. As it is well known, one of the main features of this type of text is that they fully function as fictional narratives despite the fact that they may not respect many of their own basic norms of internal coherence. Thus, for example, in the context of an apparently realistic fictional world, the protagonist could die on page two and then appear on page three walking down the street, perfectly alive, without any kind of explanation. This and other features of unnatural narratives show that the category of fictional literary narration is not limited even by the obligation to respect the internal coherence of its imaginary worlds. Logical impossibility (or even “inconceivability”, in the words of Umberto Eco [1989: 353]) is a perfectly conceivable possibility in the field of fiction. And again, needless to say, none of this is possible (or at least not in such a radical way) in any kind of factual narrative.

Amores (2018: 54-65) has tried to give a theoretical articulation to these ideas, in addition to considering literary fiction as a phenomenon of significance that would have the exclusive characteristic of choosing with potentially complete freedom the terms in which it generates meaning (2018: 163-231 and 2019: 150-153), through its comparison with the concept of “unamendability” developed by the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris.

According to Ferraris (2015), one of the biggest problems of our postmodern era is our inability to distinguish what is truly real. In a world in which virtual environments are increasingly present, the Italian philosopher denounces that we give credit to the false belief that reality is a sociocultural construction and therefore infinitely manipulable. For Ferraris, Nietzsche's famous phrase "there are no facts, only interpretations" is completely false. The maximum representative of New Realism argues that reality pre-exists and is completely independent of our mental processes. Reality, in essence, is what says "no" to our frequent temptation to confuse our conceptual schemes with what actually exists. Ferraris uses the term "unamendability" ("a contrastive principle which manifests the real as not-I" [2015: 151]) to emphasize the primacy of reality, both natural and social, over our desires and thoughts.

The expressive limitation of factual discourses would come from this unamendability of the real⁵. If reality is unamendable (that is, if it preexists our thinking and is not altered by any cognitive activity alone), it means that reality is also limited. The truly existent is finite and does not correspond to the potentially infinite arbitrariness of the states of affairs conceivable by our imagination. This is the reason why factual narratives are also limited. A factual narrative cannot speak seriously about elves and cannot pretend that the narrator is a mythological creature. Factual narratives must reflect reality, which is not arbitrary (or at least not *completely* arbitrary). Despite its enormous variability, reality is limited and specific.

The fictional space, however, would be, in the words of Ferraris, absolutely "amendable". Literary fiction is not pre-existent to our cognitive activity; it is a direct result of it and is also totally permeable to the arbitrariness of our thoughts. Literary fiction implies a radical "yes" (although articulated by numerous and culturally variable conventions) to our natural tendency to give credibility to our mental representations. The pragmatic base of literary fiction is what Schaeffer calls "ludicrous pretense shared" convention (2010: 147), which establishes that, under some socio-cultural circumstances, both the writer and the audience pretend that some fictional contents are somehow real although they know perfectly well that they are not. So, in the case of literary fiction, the unamendability of the real does not work as an anchor that limits the contents of its texts. Literary fiction is absolutely amendable and, therefore, potentially infinite. The only limit of the fictional space is marked by what is conceivable by the writer's mind and what is knowable by the audiences. Literary fictional expression, therefore, is not subject to the restrictions of the real, so it is virtually infinite.

Searle indirectly highlighted this circumstance when he stated, in his famous article "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse", that "any sentence whatever can occur in a work of fiction" (1975: 324). Indeed, could there be any sentence that, for any reason, due to its content, its form or any other reason, had no place at all in a fictional work?

<5> Ferraris considers it easy to demonstrate the unamendability of natural objects, and with regard to social objects (abstract objects that strongly depend on contextual social conventions, such as a mortgage), he maintains that their reality comes from their nature as inscribed acts. That is to say, the reality of social objects—the certainty that they are real despite not having a measurable physical corporeity or being ultimately (inter)subjective—is constituted by the registration of (SOCIAL) acts in valid registers. For more information on the concept of documentality, see Ferraris 2015.

Could we imagine a sentence that, due to any of its characteristics, could be considered incompatible with literary fiction or completely unacceptable for it? It is true that certain sentences (such as “the square of the hypothesis is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides”) may be difficult to fit into a literary fictional text. But that is not the question we are dealing with here; the question here is whether there exists any sentence that could compromise the fictionality of a text (in the same way that talking about Minotaurs as real creatures would compromise the factuality of a text). The question is whether there could be something, such as a sentence, incompatible with literary fiction or totally unacceptable to it. There are, for instance, numerous examples of novels that in certain passages imitate the style of non-fictional texts such as scientific articles or legal reports. However, they do not lose their status as novels, that is, their status as fictional literary works. In other words, the absolute creative freedom that, at least at present and in democratic countries, is presupposed for literature, makes it so that any kind of sentence can potentially have a place in a fictional work.

Hence, the key point to the virtual infinity of the expressive potential of literary fiction should not be sought at the level of the sentence, but in its natural expressive unity, that is, the text. Or using Searle’s words: could it be said that *any text* can occur in a work of fiction? This is undoubtedly a more complex issue than the previous one. Just saying “yes” would be equivalent to affirming that absolutely any text could be considered a work of fiction, something that is certainly false. It cannot be simply stated that any text can occur in a work of fiction, since it is obvious that not just any text (a washing machine instruction manual, the preamble to a Constitution, etc.) can be considered a fictional text.

However, it could be said that *potentially* any text can occur in a work of fiction. Because fictional narrations, as we have seen, are freed from any subjection to the real world and therefore from any predefined limit about what they can express, they have no predetermined limitations to what they can say. Whether it was imitating its discursive characteristics (a novel that presented itself totally or partially as a police report, the transcription of a conversation, the transcript of a flight recorder, etc.) or simply embedding the text within the main narrative, fiction would have the ability to integrate any kind of text. There is no doubt, of course, that certain texts would have a better fit than others within it. But that is why we say that the fictional literary expression is not *infinite*, but *potentially infinite*. In any case, if we defend that the expressive potential of fiction is virtually infinite, it is because it does not possess any *a priori* expressive limitation, not because it can *de facto* encompass all kind of texts.

The key point is that a literary fictional narrative not only creates an imaginary world with absolute freedom but that it also creates in a completely free way the conditions for generating meaning. As Adams states (1985: 12-14), in the pragmatic structure of literary

communication, the message, and not only the textual content itself, is fictional; other communicative elements (sender, receiver, context) are also fictional, they do not exactly correspond with their real and empirical counterparts. Thus, it could be said that the capacity of fictional communication to create certain meaning conditions is potentially unlimited; such capacity is just not affected by the limits necessarily imposed by (the amendable) reality. Because of such flexibility, any textual content could potentially be part of a work of fiction. This virtually unlimited ability of fiction to invent its own conditions for generating meaning allows us to say that the expressive potential of fiction is virtually infinite.

In light of the above, it could be said that this virtually infinite expressive potential is what—beyond semantic, syntactic, pragmatic or narratological issues—distinguishes narrative literary fiction not only from factual narrations, but also from any other communication modality. Any sentence can occur in a fictional literary narrative, and any text can (potentially) occur in a fictional literary narrative. Literary fiction is the only communication modality capable of establishing with almost complete freedom the terms by which it generates meaning, and this allows it to (potentially) express any type of content, without limits of any kind. No other communication modality (including non-literary fictional and hybrid texts) can achieve this type of freedom.

2. The fictional prototype

The fact that literary fiction narratives are characterized by a potentially unlimited expressive potential has a series of extremely deep theoretical consequences. These consequences ultimately reach the primary semiotic stage of all communicative acts, which, as stated above, is signification (see Amores 2018: 163-231 and 2019: 150-153). In this section, however, we will focus on the impact that the virtually unlimited expressive potential of fiction has on the epistemological status of its texts. Specifically, we will focus on a question that, again, may seem trivial, but which is greatly relevant in our opinion: the type of epistemological link that exists between a specific fictional literary narration and the general category of *literary narrative fiction*.

To better understand this approach, we will use an example of factual narration, Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Extremes* (1994). What is this work in relation to the general communication modality to which it belongs, the historical discourse? In our opinion, *The Age of Extremes* is a more or less representative *example* of a work of History. Historical discourse, as a factual communication modality, predetermines a set of correspondence norms between its textual contents and the real world (including enough documented facts, etc.), and Hobsbawm's book fulfills them. Regardless of the quality or relevance of the text, the *historicity* of *The Age of Extremes* relies on the fact that it complies with a set of norms that structure historical discourse as such. And these norms, flexible and changing as they are, limit the expressive potential of historical discourse. Not just

any sentence can occur in a work of History; and not every text can (potentially) occur in a work of History. Historical discourse, however diverse it may be, constitutes an expressive potential limited by norms. Hobsbawm's work exemplifies a certain expressive possibility subject to those expressive rules.

In the case of narrative fiction, however, the scheme is different. How would a novel like Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974) be considered with respect to the general category of *literary narrative fiction*? Could it really be said that *Carrie* is an *example* of literary narrative fiction? Apparently yes, since it is a text that complies with many of the semantic, pragmatic, syntactic and narratological characteristics of narrative fiction stated by Schaeffer (see above). Furthermore, the tradition of literary studies and the need to establish minimally solid conceptual categories compel us to do so. But the chief point is to what extent a specific fictional work can fully exemplify the general category of *literary narrative fiction*. If, as stated in section 2, the expressive potential of fiction is virtually unlimited, and if fictional enunciation has a virtually infinite expressive variety, how could a single work like *Carrie* be a *full* example of it? If we assume that an example is a more or less representative case of a general category, how could we exemplify with a single and limited work a category defined by its potential lack of limits? In other words, could an infinite (or, at least, a potentially infinite expressive potential) be really and fully exemplified with a specific case?

An example can be considered as such as long as it illustrates something minimally determined and subject to a series of stable patterns. The expressive potential of historical discourse, enormously varied but not unlimited, can be exemplified by determined texts. The set of finite expressive possibilities invoked by historical discourse can have a valid exemplification in a determined and limited historical work, like Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes*. However, literary narrative fiction, whose expressive potential is virtually unlimited, and in which all kinds of sentences and potentially all kinds of texts can occur, would be largely incompatible with the idea of the *example*. Neither *Carrie* nor any other individual fictional narration could fully exemplify, represent and/or capture the potentially infinite expressive possibilities of literary narrative fiction.

So, how could one consider a determined fictional narrative with respect to the general category of *literary narrative fiction*? Here we propose to consider individual fictional works *prototypes* with respect to the general category of *literary narrative fiction*.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a prototype is "a first or preliminary version of a device or vehicle from which other forms are developed"⁶. There is a second meaning: "The first, original, or typical form of something; an archetype"⁷. Here we are interested in the term *prototype* not in its sense of paradigm destined to be imitated,

but in its etymological sense of *first type*, that is, as a radically new creation that, as such, does not comply (or complies only minimally) with previous general schemes.

There are two fundamental reasons that lead us to defend that every fictional text must be considered a *prototype* (and not an *example*) with respect to the general category of *literary narrative fiction*. Firstly, the potentially infinite expressive possibilities of literary fiction make it difficult to establish clear structural rules about the composition of its texts. That is to say, the fact that literary fiction implies an almost total expressive freedom restricts the possibility of explaining and classifying its texts in terms of rules (or at least, in terms of precise and systematic schemes). This calls into question the relevance of the example as an epistemological category, since, by definition, every example embodies, in an individual, limited and determined case, a series of fundamental norms and schemes that constitute the general category it represents. It is true that there are many theoretical categories capable of ordering fictional expression, from the “principle of minimal departure” (Ryan, 1991: 48-60) to literary genres. However, the ordering capacity of these categories is limited in relation to the virtually unlimited expressive potential of narrative fiction. In a word, the unlimited expressive power of fiction leaves little room for the existence of truly structural rules about it, which means that, in a certain way, every fictional literary work has to make up its own expressive path, the exact way in which it means and generates meaning. Thus, every fictional literary work can be considered an *expressive prototype*.

The second reason to consider fictional literary works as prototypes is closely linked to the first, and refers to the special requirement of novelty that all its texts have. The key is, however, that this requirement goes beyond the explicit novelty of the narrative contents, where a literary work should not just literally copy passages, plots, situations or characters from previous works. The novelty is not limited to a mere stylistic-rhetorical question. It also must be considered in more subjective terms, very difficult to systematize into solid theoretical categories (style, narrative voice, etc.).

It is true that, since the very origin of literary theory, there have been numerous narratological studies defending the existence of narrative archetypes repeated over and over again (see, for instance, Propp, 1968). And it would be easy to find similar narratological patterns in many works. But the novelty demanded of a fictional work is not necessarily in these macro-structural levels, but in more specific ones: contents, plots, forms of expression, or aspects that are even more difficult to systematize and conceptualize, such as the “tone” of the story. Elements, in short, are difficult to capture in specific theoretical categories owing to their subjective, non-systematic nature.

<6> <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/prototype>>.

<7> <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/prototype>>.

Given these two circumstances (the potential expressive infinity that impedes the establishment of definitive paradigms and the constant demand for novelty), we believe that every fictional literary narration constitutes a *prototype* (and not an *example*) with respect to the general category of *fictional literary narration*. In fact, this could be considered another difference between fictional and factual narrations: the first produce prototypes, while the second produce more or less representative cases, that is, examples.

3. Writing rules

Our intention is to exemplify what was defended in the two previous sections through a specific comparison: *The New York Times' Manual of Style and Usage* (1999) and Stephen King's partially biographical book *On Writing* (2000). Both works prescribe certain norms (or, at least, they suggest certain general guidelines) on two types of writing: journalistic and fictional literary narration. Now then, this choice would raise at least two questions: a) Why these two types of texts (a newspaper manual of style and a partially autobiographical essay on creative writing)? and b) Why only this style manual and only this creative writing text?

The answer to question a) is perhaps the easiest. The aim is to compare the guidelines provided by a creative writing manual with those provided by other texts focused on factual writing. And when it comes to this last field, there were not many suitable possibilities different from a journalistic style manual. Indeed, it would be possible to find similar guidelines with regard to the writing of reports, legal documents, academic texts, protocol documents of all kinds (congratulations, condolences, acceptance or rejection responses, etc.). But in our opinion, the established norms were rather simplistic—attending to fewer registers and levels of expression—and often focused on formal aspects, without trying to fully standardize the type of relationship between the text and the world.

Regarding question b), the answer is probably less satisfactory. Ultimately, it depends on the representativeness of both works in their respective fields. We are talking about, on the one hand, the style manual of what is considered the most important and prestigious newspaper in the world and, on the other, a creative writing manual written by one of the most widely read and adapted living writers. We cannot deny the arbitrariness of this choice (the hierarchies of value and representativeness of this type of work are much less developed than in other discursive fields), but we do deny its partiality; we really believe that the choice of other works would have also supported our thesis.

3.1. Factual narrative writing rules

Although verbal communication always implies multiple ways of expressing messages, we have already seen that in the case of factual narrations this expressive freedom, however broad, will always be limited. We will see this circumstance in a paradigmatic example of factual narrations, journalistic narrations. As it is well known, these kinds of texts are regulated (at least in the most important newspapers) by guidelines contained in style manuals. These guidelines are a set of rules which aim to guarantee the quality and homogeneity (and by doing so, the credibility) of the different texts that make up a newspaper. Thus, in a style manual we can find topics ranging from which words to avoid for being too informal to the obligation of impartiality when covering a controversial piece of news.

It is important to clarify that we are aware of the limited role a newspaper's style manual often has. Despite the fact that these texts require things such as objectivity or varying sources, on numerous occasions we will find biased and false information in what is published. Still, the values that are advocated in these texts, regardless of the degree to which articles actually comply with said values, will have to coexist with the determined editorial line of the newspaper. In other words, as much as the *NYT* style manual demands objectivity, its liberal editorial line will make it much more common to find favorable information about members of the Democratic Party than about members of the Republican Party (even though reality may not be compatible with this view). Additionally, these rules are designed for conventional information and will sometimes encounter problems governing texts such as opinion columns, which may have literary or fictional features.

We reiterate that we are aware of the limited role of a style manual with respect to the actual contents of a newspaper. But the mere fact that these rules exist (no matter how much they may be breached in practice) and their wide presence and influence within newspapers show the possibility of existence of a regime of relationship between the journalistic text and the world that can be translated into a set of specific rules.

The New York Times' Manual of Style and Usage (1999), for instance, is an extensive compendium of norms that covers many different levels of writing. For example, it prescribes certain orthographic rules such as capitalizing the names of political parties (Democratic Party, Republican Party, etc.) (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: 265). Similarly, it discourages the use of terms that are considered too colloquial; for instance, instead of “phony”, it recommends using a synonym such as “counterfeit”, “fake” or “false” (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: 259).

However, what we want to emphasize here are the rules the manual prescribes at a deeper level. According to the manual, all texts must have “a fluid style, be easygoing but not slangy and only occasionally colloquial” (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: viii). In order to achieve such a style, the manual prescribes to writers the use of powerful images

capable of capturing the essence of complex issues. It gives more importance to verbs rather than adjectives, recommends the use of short sentences and only the exceptional use of long ones and the avoidance of using commonplaces (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: vi-vii).

The manual also gives advice and prescribes obligations that go beyond the formal aspects of the texts. There are sections, for example, which refer to content structure issues, such as the entry on “fairness and impartiality” (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: 127-128):

The news columns take no sides and play no favorites, in what they cover or what they omit. When reporting on conflict, they give all parties a chance to be heard. If a person or institution is criticized in an article, the subject must have an opportunity to reply. If the attack is detailed or occurs in a deeply researched article, time and space must be allowed for the subject’s thoughtful comment. A reporter must take every effort to reach those criticized. If they cannot be found, the article should say what effort was made, over how long time and tell why it did not succeed.

and the entry on “obscenity” (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: 242);

The Times writes unblushingly about sexual behavior, arts censorship, science, health, crime and similar subjects, opening its columns to any newsworthy detail, however disturbing, provided the approach is dignified and the vocabulary clinical rather than coarse. In these situations, the paper rejects evasiveness and euphemism, which would be a disservice to readers who need to understand issues.

Although the rules described are not absolutely rigid (as stated in its prologue, the book should not be considered “a catalog of bans on words or phrases” [Siegal and Connolly, 1999: vii-viii]), the key point is that *The New York Times* manual wants the journalists to write texts that, to a greater or lesser extent, and in spite of their immense variability (reports, chronicles, news, etc.), meet certain general guidelines when reporting real-world facts. And these general guidelines, as the very existence of the manual shows, can be translated into norms that pursue the goal of narrating reality objectively. In spite of the fact that the newspaper values aspects such as “the freshness a writer may infuse into a phrase” (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: viii), its priority is to occupy a solid enunciative position by narrating real-world facts in a truthful, homogeneous and clear way. Put succinctly, *The New York Times* manual could be considered a set of guidelines for building a determined correspondence scheme between the newspaper contents and the real-world states of affairs described. And it is precisely the non-arbitrariness of the real world, the “unamendability” described by Ferraris, which allows this correspondence scheme to be subject to relatively restrictive norms.

3.2. Fictional narrative writing rules

The first paragraph of *The New York Times* style manual summarizes some of the key differences that, in terms of writing rules, exist between factual and fictional narratives (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: 5):

There is Style and there is style. This book will traffic in the second kind, but must reach its territory by way of homage to the first. Style, with a capital S, achieves what a rule book never can: it lights the page, draws the reader, earns their delight, makes them gasp or weep and sometimes captures a place in memory.

In effect, according to the manual, *style* (in lowercase) is “a set of tricks [...] the ingredient that enables any single issue of *The New York Times* to supply the minimum daily requirement of crisis and struggle and triumph without homogenizing the insights and wit of scores of individual writers” (Siegal and Connolly, 1999: 5). However, *Style* (with a capital S) is composed of a set of writing qualities that cannot be translated into fixed rules.

This is the implicit premise most of the books on creative writing (including Stephen King’s *On Writing*) start from. King compares the process of writing narrative fiction with the use of the different tools in a toolbox. The first two shelves of the toolbox are roughly equivalent to what *The New York Times* manual defines as *style* (in lowercase). In this part of the book, we can find recommendations on vocabulary and grammatical construction in which King defends the importance of naturalness and simplicity in writing (2000: 111-136). The third shelf, however, would be equivalent to what the *NYT* manual defines as *Style* (with a capital S), and which the author identifies as where one can “begin to write real fiction” (King, 2000: 136).

And what rules (or better, what *guidelines*) have to be followed to “begin to write real fiction”? We must start from the basis that all advice given by King on writing (like those given by any other writer) is deeply subjective. That is, King describes *what works for him* when writing fiction texts although in many cases he recognizes that there are alternative (or even opposing) methods. This could be considered an unnecessary clarification, but not in our opinion, since it points to a basic aspect of fictional writing: with the exception of some advice on certain stylistic or formal aspects of a text, most of the guidelines are focused on the subjectivity of the author. When writing a fictional text (that is to say, a fictional prototype), the rules cannot be systematic in prescribing *how to write*, but rather contain advice on *what subjective disposition should be taken when writing*.

For instance, let us recall King’s initial advice given to anyone wanting to be a fiction writer: “read a lot and write a lot” (King, 2000: 145). The author is inflexible in this regard. He argues that there is no possible shortcut to these two simple and interconnected norms, to the point that “if you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write” (King, 2000: 147).

With these two rules, however, King does not refer only to the need to become familiar with a specific activity to be good at it. For the author, reading and writing a lot is important to become a fiction writer because it allows one to achieve a determined mental state, a determined subjective situation, which is essential when writing fiction (King, 2000: 150-153):

The real importance of reading is that it creates an ease and intimacy with the process of writing; one comes to the country of the writer with one's papers and identification pretty much in order. Constant reading will pull you into a place (a mind-set, if you like the phrase) where you can write eagerly and without self-consciousness. It also offers you a constantly growing knowledge of what has been done and what hasn't, what is trite and what is fresh, what works and what just lies there dying (or dead) on the page. The more you read, the less apt you are to make a fool of yourself with your pen or word processor.

We believe that this fragment illustrates well our hypothesis that the rules of writing fictional narration affect the subjectivity of the author. When King talks about what he considers the "Great Commandment" of a writer of fiction (reading and writing a lot), he is not referring to a mere question of improving through practice (something that could also be applied to any other writing modality). For King, reading and writing are means of achieving a certain mental state marked by enthusiasm and inspiration; a mental state outside of which writing fiction would be impossible.

There are other similar recommendations, such as what King calls "closing the door". With this phrase the author refers to the need to have a physical space isolated from the world in which one can write for long periods of time. However, the idea of closing the door does not only refer to the practical need to have a place to write without distractions, a "room of one's own"; for King, it also implies a serious commitment to writing. Closing the door implies loneliness and long hours of dedication to the task of writing fiction, and hence it can be considered the physical manifestation of the writer's deep mental determination. As King says: "The closed door is your way of telling the world and yourself that you mean business; you have made a serious commitment to write and intend to walk the walk as well as talk the talk" (King, 2000: 155).

In this respect, King recommends that a text be revised only twice once the original manuscript has been finished. And the reason, again, has to do with the preservation of an optimal mental state for writing. Once basic errors of narrative coherence have been corrected, not revising a text further has two main advantages in that it allows the writer to both "be faithful to the initial enthusiasm and overcome the doubt that is always on the lookout" (King, 2000: 231).

4. Conclusions

As noted in the introduction, in recent years the main trends in this field have been focused on research avenues that do not problematize the difference between fiction and non-fiction. The study of fiction(ality) (which is essentially the study of fiction beyond literary fiction) starts from the premise that it is a transversal resource to any linguistic modality, so it gives little importance to the aforementioned difference.

However, we still think that it has a lot to offer in theoretical terms. Perhaps not through the classical ways in which this difference has been investigated, but through what in our opinion is an attribute that radically differentiates literary fiction from any other type of discourse: its potential expressive infinity. The absence of rigid correspondence rules with regard to the real world, together with the absence of almost any obligation to internal coherence (or, at least, with its virtually unlimited capacity to establish the logics and procedures through which it can mean, implies that, taking Searle's words, any phrase whatsoever can occur in fiction (and potentially any text can be accepted as fictional). The contents of the factual modalities, however, more or less bound to correspondence obligations with real world, and required to meet some basic internal coherence standards, will always be limited in some way.

The paradoxical task of theorizing the virtually infinite expressive potential of literary fiction (Amores, 2018) is one of the areas in which our discipline can deepen. Moreover, such a task is fully complementary to fictionality studies. In fact, it could be said that the approach of unnatural narratology (many of whose representatives, on the other hand, are also fictionality theorists) works in this direction, that is, in trying to explain the eccentric logic that governs some fictional texts which present anomalies in terms of internal coherence. And in this complex cartography of non-natural fictional expression, the comparison with the limited expressive possibilities of factual (natural) narratives, more or less bound to systematic and stable norms, is enormously productive and enlightening.

Beyond the four classic perspectives mentioned by Schaeffer and the works of the *GRK 1767. Faktuales & Fiktionales Erzählen* group, we have tried to approach the difference between fictional narration and factual narration from another point of view: the very different natures of the writing guidelines that each of them accepts. The working hypothesis was that the profound expressive difference between fictional and factual narratives (which, as explained in section 3, makes it more appropriate to speak of *prototypes* rather than *examples*) would translate into mutually antagonistic writing guidelines.

The reasoning was limited to two specific possibilities (modern literary narrative fictions, in one case, and journalistic narratives, in the other), and two specific normative texts were compared: *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage* and King's creative writing book *On Writing*. The result of this comparative analysis revealed that the journalistic style manual proposed a series of specific guidelines across all aspects of writing, from capitalization rules to requirements of objectivity and a neutral perspective in the information itself. However, King's book, beyond a series of brief advice on formal issues, barely spoke of scriptural aspects *per se*; it focused its pieces of advice on issues related to the attitudes that a person who wants to become a true fiction writer must follow.

Our hypothesis contends that the underlying reason for this disparity would be the difference between the limited universe of expressive possibilities of journalistic discourse and the potentially infinite universe of expressive possibilities of literary fictional discourse. In the first case, and given that there are pretty clear notions about *what* a journalist can say and *how* he or she can say it, it is possible to give a series of writing rules on form and content. So, the limitation of what can be said in journalism is what enables journalistic style manuals to exist. But in the case of literary fiction, which can refer to potentially any text, the expressive possibilities are virtually endless. Additionally, the prototypical nature of fictional narratives tends toward a search for novelty and a break with previous traditions. Considering all of these factors makes it extremely difficult to establish general, stable and systematic rules on how fiction can (or should) be written. Despite the ancient treatise tradition of the West, which extends from Classical Greece to Romanticism, the limited validity that the vast majority of these documents maintain today would be proof of what we defend.

Given this circumstance, what would have been King's normative strategy in his book? If we are right and the infinite nature of fiction makes it impossible to apply minimally fixed rules, what could be effectively regulated in relation to writing fiction? The conclusion drawn from King's book (which would extend to other similar books, and even to many creative writing courses), is that the only thing that can be minimally systematized when writing fictional narratives is the attitude that the writer must have. The true fiction writer, according to King, must be a voracious reader, must write several hours every day, must not fear loneliness, must take his work seriously although never see it as an obligation... Does this mean that there is only one valid attitude to be a fiction writer? Of course not. A brief look across the literary landscape shows us that there are writers who barely meet any of these standards. In fact, King himself warns that, though this specific set of dispositions and attitudes works for him, it may not be effective for others.

So, to what extent are we really talking about writing rules? In our opinion, and in the case of something as immensely complex as fiction writing, the problem is precisely that it is impossible to find more normativity than that. Or in other words: it is easier to identify patterns of attitudes among fiction writers, however varied they are, than to try to determine the improbable writing patterns that could govern the infinite potential of literary fiction, made up of millions of prototypes in constant evolution.

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