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DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY

VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE CITIES:

LITERARY JOURNALISM AND LITERARY FICTION

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KEY WORDS

SUMMARY

This thesis has been prompted by a number of beliefs and assumptions whose (in)validation process has required research into different but related fields, namely journalism, semantics and narratology. Hence one of the major challenges of our attempt, which has consisted in collecting enough relevant data from each of these fields to allow us a balanced answer to the main question raised by our original hypothesis, which was whether or not we can talk about a continuum between factual and fictional forms of narration.

One of the reasons for choosing journalism as a testing ground for this kind of hypothesis is the shared idea that research in the field of journalism is still far from reflecting its multiple dimensions, limited as it mainly is to the aspect of "hard news" production and analysis, to the detriment of what professionals call the "softer" version, consisting of human interest stories and contextualised informative accounts. Moreover, constrained by economic and editorial considerations, professionals themselves tend to ignore the more poetic or ambitious forms of journalism, such as its literary, or narrative, variety. The immediate effect of these limited practices is the fact that, even as the domain of journalism expands and diversifies in form and content, its place in the social imaginary is still insufficiently, whenever not entirely negatively, defined.

Lack of consensus as to the best conceptual approach to understanding journalistic practices has led to a more or less "natural" appropriation of it as an object of study by sociology, whereas other theoretical options have remained largely unexplored. That is why recent proposals suggest that the domain of journalism should be reconsidered as a form of art. Instead of seeing its practices as an effect of sociological phenomena, this alternative perspective might focus on its narrative and interpretive rituals. Such a humanistic interdisciplinary approach was strongly supported in France by the efforts of structuralists such as Roland Barthes or Gérard Genette, whose studies did inaugurate a fresh perspective on journalism from a literary-narratological standpoint. However, within the structures of the academia, the journalistic curriculum has remained, to the dismay of many, anchored in the fold of "communication studies," rather than being re-instated among the literary disciplines, which, in turn, have proved too elitist to accept being associated with this "poor relative," even when it seemed to display literary features.

The different scholarly communities that have taken up the study of journalism (sociology, historiography, linguistics, political or cultural studies) have produced their own descriptions of it, depending on their specific focus of interest, whether this happened to be journalism as a profession, as an institution, as text, as a set of individual attributes or as a set of practices. Since our own interest resides in the textual and referential features of the journalistic accounts, it is important to note that the typical report format has been complemented, and sometimes challenged, by the evolving notion of the news "story," which underlines the narrative discursive qualities of a journalistic account and the fact that, unlike

the written record that defines a report, such a model is also able to transmit the information as lived experience.

Unlike other theoretical approaches, linguistic studies focusing on the texts of journalism have underlined the fact that, contrary to what journalists themselves present as strictly informative, true-to-life reports, these imply the constructed nature of reality. The hypothesis that the language of journalism is far from neutrally reflecting the state of affairs in the world has been approached from different angles, including content analysis and semiotics, while the formal aspects of the journalistic discourse, such as its morphological, syntactic and lexical features have been taken up by sociolinguistics, critical linguistics and discourse analysis. The same hypothesis is investigated in our thesis with the instruments of the semantics of possible worlds.

Apart from these studies, a type of research focusing on the pragmatic use of language in the discourse of journalism emphasises those aspects related to the act of storytelling: narrative techniques and rhetorical devices. The influence of the work of the Russian Formalists on stylistics and narratology, the ongoing interest of American scholars in the way in which language and narrative are employed in the representation of reality and the already mentioned French structuralist model of narratological analysis have constituted some of the main sources inspiring the rhetorical approach to the discourse of journalism. Choosing this approach has allowed us not only to take advantage of all these contributions but also to discuss alternative forms of journalistic narrative such as the texts of literary journalism by evaluating them against other types of factual (historiographical) and fictional (literary) discourse.

The storytelling side of journalism has not only brought it closer to the practices of fiction authors but also spurred the problems and contradictions related to this kind of kinship. To many fiction writers such as Orwell or Hemingway journalism was a reliable source of income, if not always a source of pride or inspiration. Besides the fact that the urgency of reporting felt like writing at command, they often complained that it was difficult to write fiction when one was constantly motivated to keep abreast of the latest news and report on ongoing events in the real world. Nevertheless, despite feeling "smothered under journalism," both George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway produced a prolific body of work as journalists. Moreover, in their case, as in the case of other fiction authors, the intensive practice of reporting and commenting news had a significant impact on the highly personal style that later informed their fictional output, as well as on their thematic choices. On the other hand, the persistence of this kind of testimony in the case of many other fiction writers from Charles Dickens to Norman Mailer seems to justify some concern about the fact that their conjoined literary and journalistic activities may have led to a blurring of the lines between the factual and the fictional, especially when the effect appeared to be that features of the latter may have been borrowed into the first.

This is, in fact, the hypothesis that has prompted our interdisciplinary research: the question whether factual narrative accounts that display a high degree of literariness can actually "cross the line" into fictional accounts, a question which is unlikely to get a solid enough answer unless the instruments of traditional narratology are supplemented by the conceptual tool set provided by the semantic theory of possible worlds. On the other hand, the assumption we started from is not entirely new. As our research made its way through journalistic, semantic and narratological arguments, it became increasingly clear that the problem had been debated in all these fields, more or less successfully. However, we felt that recourse to the perspective of possible world semantics was the most appropriate method and the one most likely to guarantee the required degree of accuracy to the results of an inquiry that seeks to account for a borderline type of discourse such as that of literary journalism, illustrated by its most recent and best known American "school," New Journalism.

The structure of the thesis reflects the interdisciplinary and essentially theoretical nature of our approach. The first part introduces the reader to the evolution of American journalism from a historical and stylistic point of view. It is followed by the exposition of the main semantic arguments provided by the theory of possible worlds in support of a decision concerning the fictional or nonfictional nature of the discourse of literary journalism. The final part of the thesis discusses the rhetorical and narratological aspects of this type of discourse, with a view to establishing whether its literariness may or may not justify its occasional classification as fiction. Throughout the thesis, whether the specific topic is the possible worlds of fiction or the rhetoric of nonfiction, constant references are made to the texts, representatives and main theoretical tenets of literary journalism in general and of American New Journalism in particular. More specifically, a fragment of a nonfictional novel is analysed to illustrate the theoretical concept of "true fiction," while literariness is exemplified by comments on a series of fragments of New Journalistic texts, using the theoretical devices of classical narratology as compared to those provided by the main theorist of the movement.

The division into chapters reflects the main focus of the thesis, with most chapters addressing the crucial question of defining fiction from the perspective of possible world semantics. Before this extensive report, Chapter 1 outlines the historical background against which a literary journalistic form emerged, and the tensions leading to those developments in journalistic practices, including the change in style and format of the journalistic narratives, which underlie the divide between a classic journalistic report and its literary version. Moreover, as these developments show, inventing news was, at certain historical moments, a common practice in newspapers, so the assumption that journalistic reports such as those of New Journalism may sometimes include imaginative elements justifies our attempt to verify it from a semantic and rhetorical point of view.

Chapter 2 takes up a series of essential theoretical questions related to the literary as opposed to the fictional. The fact that the two categories are commonly associated has often led to the assumption that they are identical, which implies that texts of literary journalism would be, by default, also fictional. By means of comparing and contrasting the concept of literariness with those of fictionality and narrativity, we intended to achieve a higher degree of accuracy in defining these terms. Having established, as a result, that literariness and fictionality are two discrete categories, we set out to explore, in Chapter 3, the definition of fiction from the perspective of speech acts theory, starting from David Lewis' seminal article on truth in fiction and following a series of scholarly reactions to John Searle's proposal that fiction be regarded as a pretended illocutionary act, by contrast to which the assertions of literary journalism follow the pragmatic rules of communication. It is also Lewis' account of story worlds that introduces the topic of Chapter 4. The theory of possible worlds is presented from the point of view of several of its proponents, in its actualist and possibilist versions, with particular regard to a few of its most important points: the ontological status of possible worlds and the question of transworld identity. Access to the conceptual instruments provided by the theoretical model of possible worlds has been felt as essential to our thesis. Within a multiple-world framework, the definitions of fictional literature take on a semantic dimension that enables the correct assessment of a variety of literary and non-literary genres, of fictional and nonfictional texts.

That is why some of the main contributions to the development of a theory of fictional worlds have been summed up in Chapter 5, with a view not only to determining the way in which each of them approaches the question of nonfiction, but also to identifying the proposal that offers the most relevant and the most challenging interpretation of literary fictional and nonfictional genres. Chapter 6 is therefore the direct consequence of such a choice, discussing the semantic arguments that oppose the genre of "true fiction" as defined by Marie-Laure

Ryan to nonfictional genres defined either by a strong rhetorical component (such as certain historiographical accounts) or by exaggeration (such as accounts of personal experience). In fact, the brief analysis of a fragment of New Journalistic text using Ryan's arguments makes the transition to the final chapter, Chapter 7, which is entirely devoted to this movement. Here we discuss the main literary devices that distinguish, in the opinion of its representatives, this form from mainstream journalistic discourse and bring it closer to literary fictional accounts such as those of literary realism. Such "indexes of fictionality" may be enough, according to some scholars, to grant the status of fiction to the texts of literary journalism. However, the semantic possible world approach provides, in our opinion, arguments that cannot be ignored. Even though such texts may display features of literariness, lack of fictive intent and the absence of fictional relocation may prevent us from adhering too hastily to this position.

To sum up by paraphrasing David Lewis, this paper set out to account for "truth in fact" by attempting a reversed definition: of nonfiction by means of theories of fiction, of a factual type of narrative by means of descriptions of its opposite, fictional equivalent. Even if the dividing line between factual and fictional narration ought, in principle, to be clear, certain types of factual discourse such as that of literary journalism may raise questions as to the correct way of interpreting them. Within the field of journalism itself, the adoption of a literary discursive model rich in narrative structures and rhetorical devices has been equally hailed and shunned, just as, within historiography, a discourse that displayed a high degree of narrativity found itself competing with a scientific, historicist model. Thus, our initial question was whether a strongly subjective form of reporting reality, such as the one which finds its most recent expression in the writings of the American New Journalists and whose discourse is abundant in "indexes of fictionality," justifies the conclusion that we are in the presence of fiction.

To this end, we approached the hypothesis from two different angles, the semantic and the rhetorical. While rhetorical kind of arguments such as those brought by Genette or (although in a manner that is less clear than enthusiastic) by Tom Wolfe seem to justify a view of literary journalistic discourse as placed on the narrative continuum connecting nonfiction and fiction, we need to balance this perspective with a semantic approach that considers the matter of fiction and nonfiction as separated by the borderlines of distinctive worlds. To this effect, the theory of possible worlds, with its literary fictional spin-off, the theory of fictional worlds, provides a set of logical and theoretical instruments indispensable to our debate. On the other hand, despite some valid arguments from this semantic perspective to the effect that literary journalism is a "true fictional" genre, as Ryan suggests, the same perspective advocates the importance of the authors' solid grounding in actuality and prevents us from embracing her conclusion without reservation.

While in the case of accurate nonfictional genres such as the texts of journalism in general, it would be hard to speak of any departure, however minimal, from the structures of the actual world, literary journalism seems, according to Ryan, to register a slight variation from the actual world from the point of view of properties and inventory. However, these variations, in our opinion, are due not to a covert fictional gesture of relocation to a possible, textual reference world on the part of the author, but to the rhetorical qualities of a text characterised by exceptional "tellability" and comparable, in this respect, to other factual narratives of personal experience. If fictive intent is the necessary and sufficient gesture constitutive of fiction, we believe that the presence of rhetorical devices in the discourse of literary journalism does not constitute sufficient proof of its fictional nature in the absence of such intent. The authors may be lying, or exaggerating, or both, but lying about the actual state of affairs or adding to it for the sake of dramatic effect does not result in a change in the truth conditions these facts are subject to. In other words, as shown by the analysis of Truman

Capote's text in response to Ryan's proposal, we believe that literary journalists are telling stories about this world in a manner that may render them likely to be "read as fiction."

However, as pointed out by Umberto Eco, such cases, far from demonstrating that writers can travel freely between fictional and nonfictional modes whose division is not as drastic as it is made out to be, prove that, as unwilling as readers may be in distinguishing between fact and fiction, there are paratextual features acknowledged by the writers or displayed by the text that clearly mark this distinction.

Literary journalism describes the domain of the real. Despite the fact that it avails itself of all the rhetorical instruments usually associated with fiction, the purpose of such texts is not to project fictional worlds but to make this world of ours more visible. If we are to paraphrase Italo Calvino by comparing the possible domains of fiction to the textual realms of literary journalism, the latter are built to be "visible cities" situated on the border with the "invisible cities" of literary fiction.

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