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POSSIBLE WORLDS: NON MIMETIC CREDIBLE FICTION

So far none of the classifications for the literary fictions has admitted the possible existence of a non mimetic but credible kind of fiction. That is to say, the credible, probable and convincing fantasy has not been given any role within fiction.

It is not taken into account by either the famous Aristotelian distinction between history and poetry, or the three kinds of fiction considered by Quintilian: historical, exposition of real events; realistic, characteristic of comedies; and fabulous or fictitious, peculiar to tragedies and poetry¹. Baumgarten only considers the veritable and heterocosmic fictions as poetic just because the other are utopian, impossible and improbable. Baumgarten makes the concepts of verosimilitude and poetic value almost coincide, so that, in his opinion, the representation of more probable and more credible events is more poetic².

Therefore the non mimetic representation becomes far from the consideration of poetic value and is, of course, always improbable. It is clear why he does not even discuss the credible non mimetic fiction. But Baumgarten deals with an important aspect: internal coherence, which is present in heterocosmic fictions, but absent in the utopian and impossible ones. However I believe this is a requirement for all kinds of fictions because their actions must happen logically and necessarily, and their character must behave according to their personalities.

Neither is a credible mimetic fiction distinguished by those scholars who have dealt with non mimetic fictions in particular. So, Andrzej Zgorzelski³ classifies fiction within five different kinds:

1. *MIMETIC LITERATURE*, in which the reader recognizes the empirical reality since fiction is a copy of this reality.

¹ M. F. Quintiliano, *Institution oratoire*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1975-1980, 6 vols., ed. by Jean Cousin, vol. II, pp. 36-46.

² A. Baumgarten, *Reflexiones filosóficas acerca de la poesía*, Buenos Aires, Aguilar, 1975 (1735), LIII

³ A. Zgorzelski, „On Differentiating Fantastic Fiction: Some Supragenological Distinctions in Literature”, in *Poetic Today*, vol. 5:2, pp. 299-307, particularly, 302-303.

2. *PARAMIMETIC LITERATURE*, in which the fictional order is allegorically changed to the empirical one by a reader who Knows the reality.
3. *ANTIMIMETIC LITERATURE*, where the author creates a new reality in a magical or supernatural sense as the real empirical reality.
4. *FANTASTIC LITERATURE*; here the reader compares this FANTASTIC ORDER with another order, both represented in the text.
5. *NON MIMETIC LITERATURE*, which involves the reader's speculation about other possible models of reality, which are represented without being collated with the empirical reality.

The distinction made by Zgorzelski pays more attention to the textual comparison of worlds than to any other aspect. And the fact is that, as Stefan Morawski says⁴, no work of art can exist completely separated from the real world, nor even the antimimetic, paramimetic, fantastic or nonmimetic literature.

It is true that the mimetic fictional texts - always credible - present a mixture of real elements and some other elements similar to them, but not to a lesser extent than in non mimetic fictional texts, where we also find real elements, unreal elements similar to the real ones, and, moreover, elements which are neither real nor even similar, so transgressing our reality in any of its rules.

That is exactly the main characteristic that defines the fantastic constructions, that is, the non mimetic fictional texts. But this is not a valid reason to concede them less poetic value than to the mimetic fictional texts. I guess it won't be necessary to give many examples; let's remember *La invención de Morel*, by the Argentine writer Adolfo Bioy Casares; *A Brave New World*, by Aldoux Huxley, or *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley. Baumgarten was not right but his opinion is still important nowadays as the realistic is preferred to the fantastic, the known to the unknown, the credible to the incredible.

But we should not beat about the bush any longer. Almost everybody reaches here the end of the definition of the kinds of fiction: mimetic fiction and non mimetic fiction. Mimetic fiction is, of course, credible, and non mimetic fiction is always non credible; that is why problems start this point.

It seems obvious that mimetic fiction gets verosimilitude, appearance of truth, by bringing the world of text deliberately closer to the empirical real world, introducing a

⁴ S. Morawski, „*Mimesis y realismo*”, in *Fundamentos de estética*, Barcelona, Ediciones Península, 1977, pp. 223-271, especially 235-236.

great number of existing beings, states, processes, actions, places and ideas to its referential structure. I take it for granted that all the literary representations, both mimetic and non mimetic, as I stated above, have inner coherence, I mean, all the elements in the story follow each other in a logical way according to the general plan of the work; for instance, that happens in *Viaje a la semilla*, a tale in *Guerra del tiempo*, by Alejo Carpentier, despite showing life developing backwards, and not just a syntactic-temporal artistic skill.

I wholly disapprove of the statement that all the fantastic works are always non credible, even though that is their prevailing tendency, because, on introducing any (one, few, or many) fantastic element in its referential structure, the world of text moves away from the real empirical world. However the author's intentions are others...

There are some evidences supporting my idea. The very Aristotle admits in his *Poetics* the introduction of the improbable in the literary works if it is credible or convincing⁵, and even the fact that "it is credible that things happen out of the credible"⁶.

Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz supports my idea as well; we can read in the first volume of his *History of Aesthetic*⁷ that mimesis is the representation of beings, objects, actions, etc, that are close to reality and - adding something novel to his concept of mimesis - also the representation of those beings, objects, actions, etc, which have no real model, including the impossible and the marvellous, whenever are convincing, that is, credible.

I think that credibility is a inner quality of mimesis, so that any mimetic construction is credible. But I also believe that this characteristic is not exclusive of mimesis, because there are may be credibility in fictional non mimetic constructions since credibility is not only what is similar to reality but also that which seems real according to some definitions⁸. This is the case of science-fiction and some gothic literature. In some of these texts this continuous appearance of truth is essential so that the reader notices the effect the writer aims at: amazement, doubt, surprise, terror...

⁵ Aristóteles, *Poética*, ed. by Valentín García Yebra, Madrid, Gredós, 1988, 1460a: 26-27, 1461b: 9-12.

⁶ Ibid, 1461b: 15.

⁷ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia de la estética. La estética antigua*, Madrid, Akal, 1987, pp. 145-163.

⁸ P. Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. II, Paris, Seuil, 1983-1986, p. 261; G. Genette, „*Vraisemblance et motivation*”, in: *Figures III*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, pp. 71-99; VV. AA., *Lo verosímil*, in *Comunicaciones*, 11, Buenos Aires, Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1970.

Besides I am of the opinion that the writer of this kind of constructions has to make one more effort to make the reader believe as possible some events that are actually impossible. It is an attempt to add outward verosimilitude to the inner coherence of that work as an artistic item.

There is an appearance of truth in the events written in *The War of the Worlds* by Herbert George Wells, and the sign of its verosimilitude was shown by Orson Wells when he adapted this novel for a radio programme which made millions of citizens become horrified as they believed the story was true, and, therefore, left their houses because aliens were about to land on Earth.

What I mean is perfectly exemplified in the field of Science-Fiction. There are some works which show fantastic stories where the fantastic or supernatural element (what goes beyond the rules of the author's empirical rules) is explained by means of a hypothesis or a scientific principle so as to make it credible. Really, science fiction deals with situations that very seldom happen, but which are shown as real thorough science, which has the responsibility of making that fantasy look possible, real and attainable⁹.

Science is one of those devices, maybe the most convincing and the strongest, that the author uses to make fantastic events credible and non mimetic fiction probable. Science itself is not important; science-fiction does not refer to fantastic fictions related to science or scientists. I am not referring to narrative texts full of products with strange names, figures with many numbers, etc. The importance of science lies on the fact that it makes one or more fantastic events credible (the more events to become credible, the greater the difficulty).

The plot in the short story *Paté de Foi-Gras* by Isaac Asimov is paradigmatic and explanatory. It is a version of the hen (goose) of the golden eggs. Here a scientific explanation is the centre of the composition so that a fantasy is proved probable. Science can turn fantastic events into credible ones, rationalizing a transgression. Let's see another example: *Jurassic Park*, by Michael Crichton (the book, not the film). This novel bases its plot on an unfeasible scientific discovery and, however, it is shown as real, as something feasible. The greater part of the novel aims at making readers believe that the reconstruction of the DNA chain is possible (actually the explanation of how to

⁹ D. Suvin, *La metamorfosis de la ciencia ficción*, Méjico, F. C. E., 1984; J. Gattégno, *La ciencia ficción*, Méjico, F. C. E., 1985; Y. Kagarlitski, *¿Qué es la ciencia ficción?*, Madrid, Labor, 1977; F. J. Rodríguez Pequeño, *La ciencia ficción: una definición semántico-extensional*, in *Diacrítica*, 5, 1990, pp. 53-78.

do it is found at least three times before reaching the page one hundred and fifty). There are continuous useful references to scientists, for example, Richard Owen, Kurt Gödel's theorem, Werner Karl Heisenberg's principle (Physics Nobel Prize in nineteen thirties), and one of the discoverers of Quantum Physics), and the list of acknowledgments, and, above all, detailed scientific bases.

On the other hand, we have to mention the discussion, more or less artificial, that the film has brought about scientists. Independently of whether the events in this work could become true or not, the fact that they are dealt with out of the very text supports its literary credibility, which is based on an attempt to create an effect of reality that is strengthened by the lack of scientific-genetic competence in most readers. Because probability is a question more within the context of the *doxa* than within the one of the *episteme*.

So, for example, any one would believe something like this: „I have to take my insulin pill because I am diabetic“; and however, it is impossible to have insulin through the mouth today; it is taken internally by means of an injection. It is curious.

My student's reaction is also curious if I tell them (and actually I have and the reaction was loud) in the classroom that travelling through time is possible. Laughter would not have been their response to the same statement being uttered in that very place by Stephen Hawking, for example. By the way, is it possible? I think that theoretically, according to Einstein's Theory of Relativity, it is.

In *The Invisible Man*, Herbert Wells is determined to apply verosimilitude to an impossible action. A man becoming invisible. That is why he does not make the man invisible by means of an enchantment, the magic spell of a witch or a mysterious brew sold cash on delivery by the yellow press, but inventing a main character, Griffin. He is an ambitious scientist who is making some researches and experiments based on the investigations of W.C. Röntgen, the recent discoverer of X rays. These researches lead him to become invisible, which is encouraged by his albinism and lack of pigmentation in his skin and hair. He uses his Biology and Physics studies - acquired from Huxley's teaching - in favour of literature and creates a character that is credible for the readers, who are watching the increasing development of science at the end of nineteenth century. The reader's context is very important to achieve the verosimilitude of something that today is still unreal and fantastic.

Nobody would believe that a person can become invisible just by being touched with a fairy godmother's magic wand or by drinking a witch's brew, but at the turn of the century, when science was turning the habits of society upside down, the author

needs just a little effort to make this transformation credible. The verosimilitude in *The Invisible Man* is entrenched by the great number of real and fictional mimetic credible elements that protect the fantastic event. It would have been different if the invisible man had been tracked down by ghosts, winged horses or monsters from beyond the grave, instead of policemen, common citizens and tramps.

Visitor from the Space by John Campbell, a real masterpiece within this genre, supports my ideas as well. The greater part of this work, in which dialogue prevails, is based on several scientists' discussions, whose target is to convince the reader not only that he is facing a real story but also that they are in the Antarctica and have found an alien. The following arguments focus on whether it is convenient to defrost him or not, using scientific reasons made according to rhetorical organization. The reader is surrounded by so many data and scientific reasons that his incredulity fails, he accepts the fantasy and, consequently, doubts not about his existence but about the convenience of defrosting it; afterwards, he will suffer the consequences of having done it.

It is clear that achieving the real appearance of something fantastic is not easy; it is difficult without boring the reader, who seldom knows about science and perhaps is not very interested in it. Verosimilitude is not always searched and achieved by means of science. That is the case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where verosimilitude is reached through the continuous confessions of the protagonist doctor. In the preface, written by Percy Shelley, it is said that „the story on which this novel is based is not considered impossible by Doctor Darwin and some other German essayists on Physiology”, and in the Letter Four there are confessions such as this: „Be ready to know about events that are usually believed fantastic (...) There can be no doubt that this work will provide the intrinsic proof of the veracity of the events that make it up”, so that literature would be useful in this particular case to confirm a scientific suspicion. Finally, in chapter four, we can read: „Remember that I am not narrating the illusions of a madman. The truths stated here are as certain as the sun rising every morning”.

In any case, the verosimilitude I am referring to literary verosimilitude- does not depend on its capacity to become real, but on the appearance of literary truth that the author tries and achieves. This does not mean that the reader should convince that what is being told could become real. He has just to receive as possible some events that the writer has created as such. It is a kind of literary agreement similar to the one which leads the reader to accept an omniscient narrator or similar to that other which is established with probable fictional events: they are more easily perceived by the reader as real although he is aware that they have never happened nor even will.

As regards probable fantastic events, they need special attention since verosimilitude is not inherent in themselves; such verosimilitude is achieved by attracting the reader, making his incredulity fail - at least during the reading -, and making them look backwards with fear while they are reading *Dracula*, although, in some cases, it goes on longer and they look under their beds before falling asleep.

According to this, and taking into account the concepts of *mimesis*, *fictionality*, and *verosimilitude*, I make the difference between the textual constructions. On the one hand, we have mimetic constructions, on the other non mimetic constructions. Into the mimetic constructions I distinguish those whose referential structure is totally formed by beings, states, processes, actions and ideas belonging to the objective real world. They are non fictional constructions because there is no difference between the empirical world and the textual world; for the same reason they also are non literary.

Into the mimetic constructions we can also find those whose referent is composed by beings, states, processes, actions and ideas belonging to the effective reality and also by beings, states, processes, actions and ideas with a fictional character, real only into the text created by an author who give them their existence. These constructions are called fictional mimetic construction. Tomás Albaladejo distinguishes between those presenting a high degree of verosimilitude and those presenting a low degree of verosimilitude¹⁰.

On the other hand we have the non mimetic constructions, always fictional, in which we make the difference between those presenting a certain degree of verosimilitude and those presenting a degree zero of verosimilitude. One must keep in mind that verosimilitude must be considered according to the relationship between reality and referential structure, that is to say, in its contextual and cotextual relations.

According to Antonio García Berrio and Tomás Albaladejo there is a lack of verosimilitude in non mimetic fictional constructions, because the character of similarity with the real world, as well as the credible character of this creation are considered inherent to mimesis.

In my opinion, verosimilitude does not come from reality but from the relationship kept with the text, the author and the recipient. But mimesis and verosimilitude do not have such a narrow relationship as to not to allow them their own independent existence. My conviction that not every non mimetic fiction is a non credible one, forces me to make an addition to the theory of the possible worlds

¹⁰ T. Albaladejo, *Semántica de la narración: la ficción realista*, Madrid, Taurus, 1991.

previously developed by Tomás Albaladejo; a theory which I totally accept apart from this little detail.

In 1986, Tomás Albaladejo published his well-known book entitled *Theory of the possible worlds and narrative macrostructure. An analysis of Clarín's short stories*¹¹, where Leibniz's and Baumgarten's thought on possible worlds is retrieved. For these two authors - and this idea is also important for fictionality - the marvellous worlds, even those existing far from reality, are poetic creations perfectly genuine¹².

Tomás Albaladejo starts out from the idea of world as „the semantic construction consisting in the whole series of directions ruling the referent represented in a text”¹³; this definition is as valid in the field of effective reality as in the field of textual reality¹³. Depending on its relationship with objective reality he distinguishes three types of world models, defined by the rules that created them.

1. Type I of world model, that of reality; the rules of this type of world model as well as the literary referential structure that depends on them, are a section of effective reality.
2. Type II of world model, the credible fictional, whose rules are not the same to those of the objective reality but are similar, producing a literary referential structure in which beings, states, processes, actions and ideas do not belong to empirical reality but could do so. In this world model Tomás Albaladejo distinguishes the high-degree verosimilitude constructions and the low-degree verosimilitude constructions.
3. Type III of world model, the non-credible fictional, whose rules are neither those of the real world nor those that are similar to them, involving a transgression of these

¹¹ T. Albaladejo, *Teoría de los mundos posibles y macroestructura narrativa. Análisis de las novelas cortas de Clarín*, Alicante, Universidad de Alicante, 1986.

¹² A. Baumgarten, *Reflexiones filosóficas acerca de la poesía*, op. cit.; G. W. Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée*, in C. Fernández (ed.), *Los filósofos modernos. Selección de textos*, Madrid, B. A. C., 1976, vol. I, pp. 313-327.

¹³ T. Albaladejo, *Teoría de los mundos posibles*, cit., p. 74. Vid. moreover, L. Dolezel, „*Extensional and Intensional Narrative Worlds*”, in *Poetics*, 8, 1-2, 1979, pp. 193-211; L. Dolezel, „*Truth and Authenticity in Narrative*”, in *Poetics Today*, 1:3, pp. 7-25; L. Dolezel, „*Mimesis and Possible Worlds*”, in *Poetics Today*, 9:3, pp. 475-496; L. Dolezel, „*Possible Worlds and Literary Fictions*”, in S. Allen (ed.), *Possible Worlds in Humanities, Arts and Sciences*, Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 85, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 1989, pp. 221-242; Th. Pavel, „*Possible Worlds in Literary Semantics*”, in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34, 2, 1975, pp. 165-176; U. Eco, *Lector in fabula*, Barcelona, Lumen, 1987; A. N. Prior, „*Possible Worlds*”, in *Philosophical Quarterly*, 12, 46, 1962, pp. 36-46.

rules and producing a referential literary structure composed by non-credible beings, states, processes, actions and ideas¹⁴.

This theory is mainly semantic and syntactic but, as his author has repeatedly demonstrated, also affects the pragmatic level, controlling it because the recipient must reach, through the semantic and syntactic informations, the world model to which the rules used by the producer on the making of the referential structure belong. In this respect Antonio García Berrio writes:

... for the adequate realization of the communication of the fictional text it is necessary that both the producer and the recipient possess identical models, belonging to the same type.¹⁵

As far as I am concerned, I totally agree with Albaladejo's ideas about types I and II of world model but I believe that non mimetic fictional texts must not be necessarily non credible.

I think that verosimilitude is an inherent quality for mimesis, so every mimetic construction is credible, at least in its relation with reality. But it is not exclusive to it because the credible is similar to the real as well as the appearance of truth. According to this it could be possible to find verosimilitude in non mimetic fictional constructions as in the case of science-fiction or gothic literature, in which the obtaining of this appearance of truth is essential for the reader to perceive exactly the effect that the producer pretends to achieve.

In addition I think that the producer of this kind of referential structure must do an added effort for the recipient to believe possible facts that are impossible; this is an effort to obtain the verosimilitude in that work as an artistic object. This is the only way to succeed in achieving his objective, connected with the persuadere (persuade) of rhetoric.

The distinction, in Albaladejo's type III of world model, between credible non mimetic fictional constructions and non credible non mimetic fictional constructions, drives me to set up a little development in this theory, concerning either the splitting of

¹⁴ T. Albaladejo, *Teoría de los mundos posibles y macroestructura narrativa*, op. cit., pp. 58 passim; T. Albaladejo, *Semántica de la narración: la ficción realista*, op. cit., pp. 52 passim.

¹⁵ A. García Berrio, *Teoría de la literatura*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1989, p. 338. Edition of 1994, augmented, pp. 429 passim.



non mimetic constructions or the creation of a new type of world model, the credible mimetic fictional, which in another place I have called credible fantastic¹⁶.

I propose a system of possible worlds essentially based on Albaladejo's; I only notice that there are two macrotypes of world model; the macrotype of real world and the macrotype of fantastic world, differentiated by both mimesis and the transgression of the rules of the objective and, empirical, real world.

In the macromodel of real world there would be the type I and the type II of Albaladejo, that is, the real (mimetic, non fictional and non literary) and the credible fictional (mimetic, fictional and credible).

In the macromodel of fantastic world there would be the new type III, the credible fantastic (that could be defined as credible, non mimetic and fictional) and the former type III, now type IV, the incredible fictional (fantastic, non credible, or fictional, non mimetic and non credible). The schematic representation would be the following:

transgression

MODEL OF THE REAL WORLD		MODEL OF FANTASTIC WORLD	
type I	type II	type III	type IV
the	the	the	the
real	credible	credible	incredible
	fictional	fantastic	fantastic

The difference between type I (the real) and type II (the credible fictional) is fictionality. The difference between type II and type III (the credible fantastic) are transgression and mimesis. The difference between type III and type IV (the non credible fantastic) is verosimilitude.

Finally, this addition on world system does not essentially affect the semantic maximum law, a theoretical and literary formulation ruling fictionality. The highest semantic and extensional level possessed by one of the rules forming the world model determines its type. So, the highest semantic and extensional level belongs to type IV and the lowest to type I, determining the maximum and the minimum level of fictionality. This addition does not affect the restrictions of this law, which harmonize the possession of these rules to their corresponding world models¹⁷, except in the

¹⁶ F. J. Rodríguez Pequeño, *Ficción y géneros literarios*, Madrid, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1995.

¹⁷ T. Albaladejo, *Teoría de los mundos posibles y macroestructura narrativa*, op. cit., pp. 61-62 and 72-73; T. Albaladejo, *Semántica de la narración: la ficción realista*, cit., pp. 52 passim.

resulting development respecting the new type of world model, if we consider it such a model and not as a section of Albaladejo's type III.