






An Approach to Mimesis and Analogic Hermeneutics and their application on Juan José Arreola's Narrative Fiction

Aproximación a la mimesis y a la hermenéutica analógica y su aplicación a la ficción narrativa de Juan José Arreola.

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Abstract: The term analogic mimesis is exemplified as a literary resource, and it is set apart from the Platonic conceptualization of *copy*. Likewise, analogic mimesis is based on the very notion of mimesis developed in Paul Ricoeur's theories. The concept here conveys the author's thinking in the manner of a doxography and carries a *metaphorical truth* within itself. These reflections are illustrated in the short stories of Juan José Arreola, where the author develops his own thinking and portrays it in his narratives. The method to be used is Mauricio Beuchot's analogic hermeneutics.

Keywords: mimesis; short story; analogy; recreation; approach

Resumen: Se ejemplifica el término de Mimesis analógica como recurso literario, y marca la diferencia con respecto a la conceptualización platónica como copia. Asimismo, la Mimesis analógica se apoya en la Mimesis que Paul Ricoeur desarrolla en su trabajo teórico. El concepto por tratar conlleva el pensamiento del autor a manera de doxografía y encierra una *verdad metafórica*. Lo anterior se expone en relieve con la cuentística de Juan José Arreola, donde el autor elabora una recreación de su pensamiento y lo manifiesta dentro de su narrativa. El método que se utiliza en la aplicación es la Hermenéutica analógica de Mauricio Beuchot.

Palabras clave: Mimesis; cuentística; analogía; recreación; acercamiento.

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In his *Dialogues*, Plato discusses the term mimesis, and uses it to describe the device that poets put into practice when creating their literary work. However, this device must follow a copy-like pattern, an imitation as a duplication of reality, since the latter must be shown to the individual in their attempt to find what's good. It is with Aristotle that mimesis adopts a new dimension. It is, then, more related to invention than to production with training purposes. Mimesis is then understood as a *re-making*, and it acquires a dynamic and creative sense (Barbero, 2004).

The contributions of Ricoeur (1991) explains this concept and applies it in a different way. Mimesis is recreation and is carried out in three moments: mimesis I, the recreation that the author makes of subjective reality and which is directed to the text; mimesis II, the plot of the written work, with its symbols and metaphors, characters, motifs and circumstances; and mimesis III, the one that occurs by means of the reader's reconfiguration.

Analogic mimesis stems from Ricoeur's very own concept of mimesis, since it is a recreation of human actions developed through a narrative text. This concept can be seen inside the field of literary creation when the author wants to structure a plot representing the human occurrence: a vision or thought, interwoven within the action performed by the characters. Thus, analogic mimesis can contain, inside the plot, the author's thinking and worldview regarding certain aspects of their interest (Castillo-Merlo, 2011).

Through this re-creative process, the writer uses the narrative fiction as a means to express their thinking while being a part of the world but lying in the dark in the meantime as expressed by Nuñez-Ramos (2010). This characteristic is analogous inside the text and finds itself under the

guise of the plot itself. The author, with their insight displayed in their narrative, has the ability to adjust and balance their thinking through what we know as *poiesis* and lets it develop into a game in which symbolism and metaphors wrap together ideas of the world created by the author himself, covering and sheltering them. This is why mimesis is not presented as a mere copy, but as a re-creation of the author's thinking displayed inside the narrative.

Analogic mimesis has been defined as the "Representación de una realidad construida, pero que se refiere indirectamente también a las cosas del hombre, a las realidades humanas, a los hechos antropológicos. Sentimientos, ideas y valores se plasman en la poesía". (Beuchot, 2013 p. 145). artist's need to express their vision of the world produces diverse interactions resulting in an artistic perception of a subjective reality, which will be later transformed into a narrative.

The author's truth or subjective reality is shown through the narrative act throughout the text. That's where the fertile field is found. This literary discourse and the one that holds the vision of the world are found inside a kind of symbiosis sheltered by poetic language. We find then that, by getting into this literary game, we can come across a metaphorical truth, "Podemos aventurarnos a hablar de verdad metafórica para designar la intención 'realista' que se vincula al poder de redescrición del lenguaje poético" (Ricoeur, 2001). Through the narrative, this analogic mimesis brings us closer to a message, an idea or discourse from the narrator, proposing other ends and purposes that can be interpreted beyond the aesthetic level.

How can this thinking lie within the narrative? Through narrative argumentation, this thinking is hidden inside the symbol and the metaphor. Both literary devices are constructions based on referential elements, in what we can find *at first sight*. However, in order for our approximation to be well founded, we must find the other, hidden side, the one that will help us have a better understanding of the intentions of the text and the author. To achieve

such closeness, we suggested here to follow the steps proposed by analogic hermeneutics: To imply, explain and apply. We can manage to present certain approaches towards what the literary text and its creator say, but we must not forget that we would be proposing: "Quasi-juicios', cuya función consiste en presentar de los objetos representados un mero aspecto de realidad sin que los acuñe como verdaderas realidades" (Nyenhuis, 2009, p. 35).

Everything that has been said previously has, among others, the objective of establishing a literary dialogue with the active reader of the work. The narrative work teaches, and it teaches human conflicts and realities. This author explains that the analogy can explain art since both art and reason

share the same origin, which is the world (Beuchot, 2010, p.101). Thus, literature displays its world through the plot, which, as it was mentioned above, shelters symbols and metaphors that help the author materialize his vision.

If we consider the literary work as the bearer of a symbolic plot, we can then make good use of hermeneutics and delve into the meanings kept inside its polysemy.

A work of art is a symbol. The symbol is what needs the most interpretation, which is the object of hermeneutics. The symbol has, at least, two meanings: one apparent, and another one deep and hidden, but it can get to have more: in principle, it can have infinite meanings. However, our mind is finite, which is why we always have to take the symbol to a specific limit and it is also why not every kind of hermeneutics can be applied to it (Beuchot, 2010, p.102).

Analogic hermeneutics as mentioned Beuchot (2022) lies between univocal and equivocal interpretations. There are texts that come close to being teachings or indoctrinations; at the same time, there are other texts whose structure is full of metaphors. Both can make the reader lose their connection with them and fail in establishing a dialogue. The interpretation and explanation will be carried out within a literature that presents polysemy but that is re-created by analogic mimesis. In what follows, we will show how analogic mimesis lies within narrative texts as it interplays with the symbolic dimension of the narration.

In order to do so, we will look at three narrative texts by Mexican writer Juan José Arreola. The works of the author of *Confabulario* are more than suitable to illustrate this phenomenon. By means of a series of intricate and playful mechanisms, Arreola interweaves his worldview as mimesis develops in narrative action; his short story writing is built upon the use of symbols leading to richer interpretative activity. His literary promptness displays a wide spectrum of symbolic charge which unfolds in a murky horizon featuring, among other elements, the insane relationship amongst the characters (Farfán-Gómez & Suárez-Turriza, 2020).

Along with authors like Juan Rulfo, Juan José Arreola belongs that group of writers that are fundamental to the literary development of the Mexican tradition. In his narrative, Arreola presents us an endless list of universal cultural references as well as references to local folklore. Arreola talks to everyone and about everyone; he starts from the familiar and takes us to higher, more complex spheres through an exquisite use of the language which in turn provides us with a striking imagery of the Mexican people, their towns, traditions and, probably the most impressive of all, their mindset and ways of interpreting the world (Alemany, 2018).

In a series of interviews conducted to Juan José Arreola by Fernando del Paso (*Noticias del imperio*), and in *Memoria y olvido*, included in *Confabulario*, the author of *La feria* tells about his birth and upbringing "Nací el año de 1918, en el estrago de la gripa española, día de San Mateo Evangelista y Santa Ifigenia Virgen, entre pollos, puercos, chivos, guajolo-

tes, vacas, burros y caballos. Di los primeros pasos seguido precisamente por un borrego negro que se salió del corral" (Arreola, 2006, p.5). Making a reference to a popular saying, the author compares himself to a black sheep, similar to what he was to become after *La Feria* was published, the black sheep of Zapotlán, his hometown.

The environment in which Arreola grew up is constantly reflected in his works. The Mexican Revolution and the Christian Revolution did not allow him to go to school or receive a proper education, however, he surrounded himself with books and absorbed the situations around him, impregnating himself with local stories and sayings and guiding himself through the names of classical and modern writers "soy autodidacto, es cierto. Pero a los doce años y en Zapotlán el Grande leí a Baudelaire, a Walt Whitman y a los principales fundadores de mi estilo: Papini y Marcel Schwob, junto con medio centenar de otros nombres más y menos ilustres... Y oía canciones y los dichos populares y me gustaba mucho la conversación de la gente de campo" (Arreola, 2006, p. 6).

The influence of the authors Arreola read and of the society in which he developed as a writer are clearly seen in his work. The themes of his stories, the sophistication of the language he uses, the peculiar sense of humor, the symbolic elements in his work and the poignant observations he makes are all part of everything he experienced, and it provides us with a wide-ranging source for analysis (Evangelista-Ávila, 2023).

There are two recurrent themes in Juan José Arreola's work. Such themes encompass the vast production of the author's literary discourse. These are 1) the relationships between a woman and a man, and 2) science and technology and the absurd in them (Mendoza-Negrete, 2018).

It must be noted from the outset that there is only one text by the author where there seems to be some kind of harmony in a couple's relationship: "Un pacto con el diablo". In this story, the protagonist is tempted by the devil in a movie theater hall. As the film comes to its end, the protagonist leaves the movie theater in a hurry: first walking, then running. He seems to be seeking

shelter in his wife. The dialogue between the protagonist and his wife does not appear until the end of the story. As she welcomes him home, she notices there is something wrong with him. He seems agitated. She suggests him that, perhaps, everything that happened was nothing but a dream. She even tells him, as he finishes narrating his experience/dream, that what he has just told her was the best story for a film he had ever narrated. The wife is thus presented as a confidant and as a protective figure. Another salient feature of this story is that it exhibits a narrative structure that departs significantly from the rest of the author's work; in other words, this text is closer to the traditional short story and differs greatly from the playful literary artifacts that established the author's literary figure (Zamudio & Pavón, 2023).

In spite of this exceptional case, we can positively establish a central theme within Arreola's work: the conflict in the relationship between a woman and a man. In the texts where this is a prominent theme, the characters interact in different settings and scenarios where they reveal a clear antagonism. Regardless of the characters, the settings, the problems they face, this antagonism is always present (López-Medel, 2021).

To illustrate this, two stories by the author will be briefly analyzed: "Insectiada" and "Prometeo a su buitre predilecta". Analogic hermeneutics will guide the process of interpretation to avoid falling into univocal and equivocal extremes.

In her article "La nueva alegoría de Juan José Arreola", Heusinkveld (1986) discusses the idea that Arreola's narrative deepens into other ends inside the architecture of the narrative: "El alegorista emplea imágenes, situaciones, y personajes ficticios para representar

simbólicamente una verdad o un suceso histórico o un concepto abstracto" (Heusinkveld, 1986, p.46). It is precisely in this part where the proposed analysis can be applied: the narrative fiction as the author's ideological vehicle.

"Insectiada" presents a certain kind of insects characterized, among other traits, by sexual cannibalism. Early in the text, the narration warns us about the parodic nature of the situation: "Pertenece a una triste especie de insectos, dominada por el apogeo de las hembras vigorosas, sanguinarias y terriblemente escasas. Por cada una de ellas hay veinte machos débiles y dolientes" (Arreola, 2004, p. 18). The plural "we" establishes a point of view in which everything being said, comes from the mind of all males at once. It is a choir that excludes the voice of the "scarce" females. We, therefore, only have access to one version of the story. (Arreola, 1962)

The text follows thus: "La mujer: reina en todos los juegos de la vida y de la muerte. Porque ahora nos enfrentamos cada uno, solitarios, ante una mujer que nos está dando un jaque a la mentira que ya no podemos encubrir" (Arreola, 2002, p. 41). Death is presented as something imminent for each and every one of the males that partake of the scene. They are aware of it, but cannot do anything to prevent it.

The story goes on giving us parallelisms, winking at us about our irrational behavior, thus developing the author's discursive scheme: "Vivimos en fuga constante. El espectáculo se inicia cuando la hembra percibe un número suficiente de candidatos. Uno a uno saltamos sobre ella. Con rápido movimiento esquiva el ataque y despedaza al galán. Cuando está ocupada en devorarlo, se arroja un nuevo aspirante"(Arreola, 2004, p.18) The slaughter is presented as a show, both enticing and terrible. (Valdés et al., 2019)

Arreola presents a playful scheme in his narrative. But nothing is to be taken literally. It is all a trick presented through symbols which have to be interpreted in order to approach the intention of the story. Underneath the fireworks lies a sharp understanding of the world, his very own vision. "Insectiada" brings back the image of the praying mantis. Fernando Vite in his work "Sexo en insectos" offers an account about the behavior of a pair of mantis, in which the males fight against one another not knowing that the other one was a female. He still manages to mate after he finds that out; however "Pero a estas alturas, la hembra ya le había comido el brazo derecho, la cabeza y casi todo el tórax (...) Al menos no es obligado que el macho muera" as stated Vite (2012, p. 7) In Vite's text, we can observe the analogy of the insects that is portrayed in the story in *Bestiario*. In the mating stage, the female devours the "candidate" as part of their sexual intercourse. It is important to highlight the "ignorance" of the male since, at the beginning, he thought he was fighting against another "candidate" for the female but once he realizes his "mistake" the impulse wins over and prefers mating over saving his life. The story seems to complement the entomologist's description. The narrator proceeds: "La unión se consuma con el último superviviente, cuando la hembra, fatigada y relativamente harta, apenas tiene fuerzas para decapitar al macho que la cabalga, obsesionado en su goce" (Arreola, 2004, p. 18). The female devours the male hence concluding the mating cycle.

In "Prometeo a su buitre predilecta" we find the following passage: "Más arriba a la izquierda, tengo algo muy dulce para ti. (Ella se obstinó en el hígado y no supo el corazón de Prometeo)"

(Arreola, 1992, p. 69). The vulture is introduced as a female character. Even when the narrative is short, way too short, the antagonism is clearly established again.

In both narrations we see the way the female characters are responsible for the annihilation of the male characters. There is another situation in which Fernando Vite emphasizes: the annihilation of the male is not, to a certain extent, *necessary* – “Al menos no es obligado que el macho muera” (Vite, 2012, p. 3) since he can escape and move on with his reproductive life at another time.

In the work of Arreola we find that the annihilation of the male character, in a parallel fashion, is not necessary either. In the second story, Prometheus does not die. There is also cannibalism, but the life of the protagonist continues, to his misfortune, in an awful suffering. The female vulture is delighted with the insides of the hero avoiding the heart, the universal symbol of love, but focusing on the liver, which is commonly known for containing the strong emotions (going from rage to melancholy), in this case, of the male character.

The misfortune of the male characters seems to be totally permissive since we are never told, within the narrative, of the tragedy preceding torture. On the contrary, the male insects are the ones asking for it: “Detrás de cada hembra perfumada hay una hilera de machos suplicantes” (Arreola, 2004, p. 18), and the demigod is, at the end of the day, the one who “suggests” and “recommends” the heart. He is submissive to the (female) vulture’s own pleasure. They have the possibility to liberate or, better, save themselves; however, they themselves empower the female figure to “finish” them, “devour” them, in a sort of love offer, a sacrifice to honor the executioner: “La mujer es una trampa estática de arena movediza que espera, como la araña inmovil en su tela, al hombre, quien por acercarse está perdido. El hombre enamorado pierde sus rasgos, se vuelve coloidal y gelatinoso porque se está diluyendo en la mujer” (Arreola, 2002, p. 15).

These male protagonists wish for a certain “exclusivity” regarding the female. By giving themselves to their counterpart they get the premiere of the other one. In a sort of monstrous union, with this type of macabre dance, they reflect a kind of courtship to claim the companionship of the female: “Las mujeres han sido trampas temporales y accidentales. Y tengo la necesidad de ser devorado. Desearía volver a ser incluido anímicamente: que una mujer me pusiera la mano protectora sobre la cabeza y me dijera con el gesto de san Vicente de Paul: ‘Ya estás conmigo en el reino de la caridad’. Porque el amor es eso” (Arreola, 2002, p. 19).

In spite of all this, we cannot set aside the formulation of a cannibalistic love, which, in metaphorical terms, is one of the ways to fuse with the beloved other: “nibbling someone else’s

lips”, or the “tip of the toes of the beloved one”, or just “eating the other up”, among others, are expressions that are directly related to food ingesting.

For its part Almodóvar (2013) in *El crimen caníbal en su expresión de amor supremo* mentions that there exist:

Personas que, llevadas de un potente impulso amoroso, dieron muerte a los objetos de su pasión y posteriormente se los comieron de manera civilizada y exenta de la compulsión voraz que domina a otro tipo de asesinos caníbales. Siguiendo el aforismo del biólogo Faustino Cordón, que además da título a uno de sus libros más conocidos, *Cocinar hizo al hombre*, estos criminales matan para incorporar al otro a sí mismos, en una ritualidad que, pese a su brutalidad y aparentemente salvajismo, permanece en estrecho contacto con el cariño afectivo humanista y la espiritualidad del sacramento de la Eucaristía (Almodóvar, 2013, p. 22).

Likewise, the act of cannibalistic love means to fuse oneself with the other, becoming one with the beloved one again, in such a way that the lovers return to the platonic idea of *androgyny*. This notion suggests that, originally, there was only one being, but due to its

arrogance, was split in two. Arreola said: "No es misoginia lo mío; es el drama de la separación. La cosa no es tan simple, la cosa es platónica y viene desde el origen del pensamiento. Éramos un solo ser y estamos separados. Somos partículas de un todo que buscan desesperadamente integrarse otra vez a la unidad" (Campos, 2002, p. 172).

The interpretation of the symbolic elements allows us to understand certain intentions in the text. Underlying the cannibalistic figure of the insects in this story, there are certain behaviors that are displayed in a woman-and-man relationship. We thus reconfigure the cannibalism in the story as a kind of love that is anthropophagous. The theme is thus scattered throughout the story. The duel that makes up the man-woman relationship is referred to and recreated by Arreola in the story as one fought by *monstrous* beings trying to become a couple, killing and mutilating each other, not in a literal and direct sense but in a metaphorical and literary one. And, as Arreola himself expressed it, "de pronto hacemos responsable de todo a una sola mujer, por el simple hecho de que estamos enamorados de ella" (Arreola, 2002, p. 15).

To illustrate the theme related to science and technology and the absurd in them, we will focus on a passage taken from "El guardaguasas", from which we will establish certain parallelism with everyday situations. Among the several anecdotes offered by the story, there is one in particular in which the text presents the transformation of humanity, since in different occasions, science and technology, more than progress or advances, produce setbacks for humankind.

Between the lines, we find a critique of both printed and broadcast media. The management (to which the old switchman makes a reference) distributes schedules containing make-believe information about the different routes and destinations of the railroad system. The propaganda is thus spread as a simulation; this makes the inhabitants believe that they are in a well communicated and connected country. The "management" is in charge of providing this service, whose main purpose seems to be, offering quality service to the users, creating with it an ambiguous landscape between what is offered and the shortages that users really go through.

Moreover, there is an allusion to the control mass media holds over their audience:

Las ventanillas están provistas de ingeniosos dispositivos que crean toda clase de ilusiones en el ánimo de los pasajeros. No hace falta ser débil para caer en ellas. Ciertos aparatos, operados desde la locomotora, hacen creer, por el ruido y los movimientos, que el tren está en marcha. Sin embargo, el tren permanece detenido semanas enteras, mientras los viajeros ven pasar cautivadores paisajes a través de los cristales (Arreola, 2006, pp. 82-83).

This subjugation through the presentation of these moving images keeps inhabitants in an almost absolute inactivity and deceit. They are given "fake" information and are entertained through processed images. This device becomes so successful that keeps population captive: nothing is happening in the country. Everything is under control even though progress is on hold and the management, far from solving any of their troubles, seems to be making them worse. Through press and television, the audience is being lied to. A different reality is presented to them and people, due to their "patriotism", prefer to remain in silence. This "simulated reality" attracts more attention and even seems to be better up to a certain point, since it offers the spectator a more noble and harmonious life where delight and pleasure work as immediate means. This captive state keeps the inhabitants of the place subjugated under the influence of these devices, without realizing that reality is quite different out there.

Even though users are lied to, and are given something quite different from what they have paid for, the management is even said to have done it all with the sole purpose of protecting the users: "Todo esto lo hace la empresa con el sano propósito de disminuir la ansiedad de los viajeros y de anular en todo lo posible las sensaciones de traslado. Se aspira a que un día se entreguen plenamente al azar, en manos de una empresa omnipotente, y que ya no les importe saber a dónde van ni de dónde vienen" (Arreola, 2006, p. 83).

Through analogic mimesis, the recreation that the artist makes of their context, along with that narrative competence (*poiesis*), houses the feelings and the thoughts of the writer. It is one of the responsibilities of the artist, to transmit, from their subjectivity, the reality of the world. This is all put into paper, received and then created again. It is the job of the reader to assemble all the pieces together, to solve the puzzle and follow the path all the way to the heart of the matter. In these pages we showed how Arreola's intention is revealed through a complex and cleverly designed literary framework. The narrative as a means to show the vision of the artist is a fundamental part of the story: "Todo arte es social: expone todas las virtudes y todas las anomalías. El arte es entonces escuela y espejo" (Arreola, 2002, p. 148). With these statements, Juan José Arreola promotes the idea that experience and commonplace situations are a fundamental part of art.

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