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Narration as argument

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I explore the possibilities of acknowledging the argumentative character of (at least some cases of) narration. Two basic models will be revised: 1) *primary* (core) narratives, regarding issues and facts under discussion, which may work as implicit arguments about the coincidence between discourse and reality *via* their own internal plausibility and 2) *secondary* narratives, imaginatively inserted in discourse, and serving as evidence for diverse lines of (either stated or unstated) analogical or exemplary argumentation.

KEYWORDS: argument from analogy, argument from example, Cicero, legal speech, *narratio*, narrative, narrative plausibility, Quintilian, rhetoric, Rudolph Agricola.

1. INTRODUCTION

Or again what difference is there between a proof <*probatio*> and a statement of facts <*narratio*> save that the latter is a proof put forward in continuous form, while a proof is a verification of the facts coherent with the statement?¹

In this intriguing passage of the *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian questions the neat, substantial and functional distinction between the narrative and argumentative parts of legal speeches, somehow challenging one of our best established intuitions as presented in informal logic textbooks regarding the task of identifying arguments. This paper is an essay within a bigger project aiming at revising the interest, for argumentation theory, in taking a closer look at the argumentative virtues of non-explicitly-argumentative discourse, i.e. of (merely) narrative, descriptive or expository discourse, the usual suspects of *nonargument* types (Govier, ⁵2001, p. 14).² As I have come to realize, it is an endeavour that is, for many different reasons, engaging now a number of scholars in our field and for which it seems to be ready.

¹ “Aut quid inter probationem et narrationem interest nisi quod narratio est probationis continua propositio, rursus probatio narrationi congruens confirmatio?” Quintilian (1985), *Inst. or.* IV.2.79. I have used two translations of Quintilian published in the collection Loeb Classics: H.E. Butler’s (1980/1985) and D.A. Russell’s (2001). Depending on the paragraph I have found a better and more useful translation in either of those. I will cite the source in each case.

² Although T. Govier herself has recently tried to account for the possibility of reconstructing parables and other brief narrations as potential arguments (Govier & Ayers, 2012), this is done with a rather reluctant spirit and with the final conclusion that: “One can offer arguments through narrative, but doing that has more risks than benefits, from an epistemic point of view”.

In fact, my interest in this type of inquiry began with a personal examination, for very particular and rather unrelated reasons, of the attention paid by ancient Latin rhetorical textbooks to *narratio* as a canonical speech part –especially important and significant in the case of legal speeches, according to the traditional division of rhetoric into speech genres. This research resulted in the publication first of a selection of the more relevant Latin texts with their Spanish translations (Olmos, 2011) and then of a more elaborated commentary and assessment of the particular precepts presented by these texts, and of the coincidences and variety found in them about this particular aspect in rhetorical tradition (Olmos, 2012). In this paper I will use material from these previous works, although my intention is to draw on them in order to make certain claims useful for contemporary theory of argumentation.

2. THE TRADITION ABOUT LEGAL *NARRATIO*

In the Latin classical and post-classical rhetoricians, I discovered an extremely rich, nuanced and at times contentious and diversified account of the argumentative interest of the narratives included in persuasive speeches. Such an interest determined the inevitability for the rhetorician to offer instructions and precepts about the way to construe sufficiently good and adequate, i.e. persuasive *narrationes*. The traditional triad –clarity, brevity, and plausibility–³ of the rhetorical virtues (normative standards for achieving persuasion) demanded from narration is rather well known, but there are other important and more sophisticated contributions that could profitably be revised. For example, the preparatory role –expressed by the Greek term *proskataskeuos* or the Latin *praestructivus*– assigned by Quintilian (*Inst. or.*, IV.2.54-57) or Fortunatianus (*Artis rhetoricae*, II.20)⁴ to narration, as preceding the explicitly argumentative part of legal speeches;⁵ or Cicero’s (*De inv.*, 30) characteristic *golden rule* for a legal *party* or *side* narration, which acts, in fact, as a contextualized limit to the application of the virtuous triad:

The narrative is not presented in the manner required by the case when a point which helps the opponent is explained clearly and elegantly, or a point which helps the speaker is presented obscurely and carelessly,⁶

³ The triad is of Greek origin: a statement of facts should be brief (*syntomon*), clear (*saphes*) and plausible (*pithanon*). Quintilian attributes this triad to Isocrates and his followers (*Inst. or.*, IV.2.31). In Latin, except for *brief*, which is always *brevis*, we find certain terminological variations: *clear* might be *lucida*, *dilucida*, *perspicua*, *manifesta*, besides the more extended *aperta*; *plausible*, might as well be *veri similis*, or *credibilis*, in addition to the more widespread *probabilis*.

⁴ Fortunatianus’ text is in Halm (ed.), 1863, pp. 79-134. The comments on narration occupy pages 110-113. See, Olmos, 2012.

⁵ It is a very interesting idea which is taken on by several rhetorical texts, but it is never truly developed. It could be well worth revising in subsequent papers.

⁶ “Non quemadmodum causa postulat, narratur, cum aut id, quod adversario prodest, dilucide et ornate exponitur aut id, quod ipsum adiuvat, obscure dicitur et neglegenter.” Cicero (1976), *De Inv.*, I.30.

A *golden rule* that was assumed, repeated, and commented by most Latin later rhetoricians, although noticeably mocked by a rather original Quintilian:

If anyone needs to be told to avoid damaging or inconsistent points in a narrative, it is pointless trying to teach him the rest, although some textbook writers produce this piece of advice as a secret unearthed by their own wisdom.⁷

As to the either relatively or absolutely different character or treatment of the narrative discourse with respect to the argumentative one, which is our main point of interest here, these ancient textbooks contain a variety of alternatives. Thus, Marius Victorinus' decided differentiation (*Explanationum in rhetoricam M. Tullii Ciceronis*, I.19)⁸ which attributes rational persuasion (*fides*) to the argumentative part and emotional adherence (*adfectus*) to the narrative part,⁹ contrasts with Quintilian's (and, in general, the rest of the Latin rhetorician's) much more nuanced approach, as evidenced in the quotation at the head of this paper.

There seems to be, nevertheless, a widespread interest (a strategy common to all) in making relevant distinctions between different kinds of narratives usually found in legal speeches and which may or may not deserve a different treatment in this respect. Thus, Quintilian, on one hand, is willing to acknowledge, in several aspects, the argumentative interest of the narration "containing the cause under judgement", but in this case he is also counting on the fact that the material exposed in it will be revised, reconstructed and, bit by bit justified in the confirmation part or proof, properly speaking. He thinks, nevertheless, that both elements are always necessary,¹⁰ both share the goal of persuasion and there is a kind of redundancy between them (the narration as the proof "put forward in continuous form") which is finally beneficial. On the other hand, he also mentions the kind of narrative inserted in a legal speech but not exactly dealing with "the cause under judgement", the so-called *digressio* type, which is there precisely for argumentative purposes

⁷ "Nam id quidem, ne qua contraria aut repugnantia in narratione dicamus? Si cui praecipendum est, is reliqua frustra docetur, etiam si quidam scriptores artium hoc quoque tamquam occultum et a se prudenter erutum tradunt." Quintilian (2001), *Inst. or.*, IV.2.60.

⁸ Marius Victorinus' text is in Halm (ed.), 1863, pp. 153-304.

⁹ Halm (ed.), 1863, pp. 201-208.

¹⁰ Even in cases where other rhetoricians recommend avoiding narration. See especially Quintilian (2001), *Inst. or.* IV.2.66: "Since we have now inadvertently arrived at the more difficult kind of narratives, let us now speak of those in which the facts are against us. Some have held that, in this case, the narrative should be omitted. Nothing is easier –except of course not taking the cause on at all! But if you do take on a case of this kind for some good reason, what sort of art is it that admits the weakness of a cause by silence? Or is the judge going to be stupid enough to give judgement in line with something which he knows you did not want to put before him?" ("Sed quatenus etiam forte quadam pervenimus ad difficilium narrationum genus, iam de iis loquamur in quibus res contra nos erit: quo loco nonnulli praetereundam narrationem putaverunt. Et sane nihil est facilius nisi prorsus totam causam omnino non agere. Sed si aliqua iusta ratione huiusmodi susceperis litem, cuius artis est malam esse causam silentio confiteri? Nisi forte tam hebes futurus est iudex ut secundum id pronuntiet quod sciet narrare te noluisse.")

(*Inst. or.*, IV.2.15-17). Of these, Julius Severianus (*Praecepta artis rhetoricae*, §7)¹¹ explicitly says that they do not contain the matter of the litigious question, but are “put forward as arguments or placed among the arguments.”¹²

3. STRUCTURAL AND PRAGMATIC CRITERIA

Now, all these suggestions encourage us to go beyond the standard way of disregarding narrative discourse as simply non-argumentative. We see, moreover, that there is a possibility to analyze the relative argumentative character of narratives (and the particular way that argumentative character is put to work) in relation to a contextual assessment of what is or is not in question, is or is not brought for argumentative purposes, in a given situation.

This strategy reminds us of the one used in informal logic to differentiate between argumentation and explanation. In contrast with the standard discounting treatment of the kind of discourse where, in principle, no explicit and recognizable “support” between statements is found (namely “descriptions, jokes, stories, exclamations, questions”, Govier, ⁵2001, pp. 12-14), informal logic textbooks usually dedicate some paragraphs to the discrimination of arguments and explanations, for it is usually admitted that this is a distinction which is not so easy to make, as discursive means of explicit support between statements are used in both cases.¹³ The main key is whether the (explicitly stated, suggested, or just pointed at) claim or conclusion is or is not contextually in question for the arguer and her interlocutor(s). It is not unusual, by the way, to find clarifying examples with a contrast between possible future events, obviously undetermined, which an argumentation may justify, and known and shared past or evidently present events, which may ask for an explanation. Of course, there could also be unknown or yet undetermined past events –which is the usual context of legal speeches as conceived by classical rhetoricians.

So, here a structural criterion is first used to define argumentation: the evidently suggested or better explicit presence of discursive means of support between reasons and claims, but then a pragmatic criterion (what is contextually in question) is used to somehow discard explanations. Some have found it more

¹¹ Julius Severianus' text is in Halm (ed.), 1863, pp. 353-370.

¹² “The narrative is the presentation of the case made in the manner required by the cause: the exposition that is not directly issued from the case, instead <...> cannot be simply considered a narrative, but the presentation of a circumstance which helps to build the case but does not contain the matter of the litigious question, but is put forward as an argument or among the arguments” (“Narratio insinuatō est totius causae, quem ad modum facta est: expositio vero quae non de causa nascitur <...> non potest videri narratio, sed expositio alicuius rei, quae causam adiuvat nec dat quaestioni materiam, sed pro argumento ponitur vel inter argumenta.”) Halm (ed.), 1863, pp. 358-359.

¹³ “Some passages seem to be classified either as arguments or as explanations, depending on what you assume about the situation or contexts in which they are made,” Govier (⁵2001, p. 22).

coherent to stick to the structural criterion. H. Marraud (2007) does this.¹⁴ After exposing the contrast between argumentation and description as different kinds of speech acts in structural terms (acknowledging, though, the practical difficulties for a neat distinction in real cases with characteristic *long* texts,)¹⁵ he presents the additional contrast between “justification” and “explanation” as two different uses for argumentation, admitting the existence of both justificatory and explanatory arguments. In any case, here I will explore the more suggestive alternative to start with the pragmatic criterion and then see with what different discursive means we contribute to fill the contextually opened “space of reasons”. If we do it this way, certain narratives and descriptions, in the adequate context, would be considered closer to arguments than are explanations and the sense of the gradation towards unquestionable argument would change.

Now, allow me again to borrow from older (though not so old this time) texts and traditions to present this very possibility. Rudolph Agricola’s [1444-1485] *De inventione dialectica*,¹⁶ chap. II.16, acknowledges, in principle, that there are two basic types of discourse which may be differentiated and which he calls: *expositio* and *argumentatio*. But his initial way of discriminating between them is explicitly pragmatic and based on the contextual attitude of the (either already won over or doubtful) audience and the arguer’s conscience about this:

Now, a discourse may just aim at presenting the object, whatever it is, about which it talks, sure of the commitment and opinion of those who listen to it, or be intended for obtaining the persuasion of a hesitant audience. The former is done through exposition, the latter through argumentation.¹⁷

For Agricola, moreover, these alternative procedures should not be identified with the characteristic parts of the *perfect oratio* as defined by the rhetorical tradition (preamble, narration, confirmation and epilogue): narration may include arguments and confirmation, the exposition of facts and, of course, both can appear in the preamble or the epilogue.¹⁸ It is the actual presence of the intention to persuade an audience about something which, in a particular context, cannot be assumed as directly evident or assumed, that will determine there being an argumentation. For example, Agricola claims that the following passage from the *Aeneid* (II, 130-1) is argumentative:

¹⁴ Johnson (2000, p. 123) also mentions the definition of argument provided by Thomas (1973): “an argument is a sentence or sequence of sentences containing statements some of which are set forth as supporting, making probable or explaining others,” which would as well include explanations.

¹⁵ Marraud (2007, pp. 21-26).

¹⁶ The writing of this text is dated around 1479. It was first printed in Louvain in 1515, but its most successful edition, by Agricola’s pupil, Alardus of Amsterdam, was printed in Köln, in 1539, and is the basis of the modern critical text, edited by L. Mundt (Agricola, 1992 [1539]), from which all quotations.

¹⁷ “Sic et oratio aut satis habet explicare rem de qua dicit, cuiusmodi sit, secura fidei opinionisque eius qui audit, aut talem esse pervincere etiam renitente auditore conatur. Illud expositione fit, istud argumentatione”, Agricola, 1992 [1539], p. 302.

¹⁸ Agricola (1992 [1539], p. 302).

Assensere omnes et quae sibi quisque timebat,
Unius in miseri exitium conversa tulere.

John Dryden's translation (1697) of this passage verges towards, at least, the explicative by means of the characteristic apposition of the second clause:

All praised the sentence, please'd the storm should fall
On one alone, whose fury threaten'd all'.

Theodore C. Williams' version (1910) chooses, instead to separate completely both clauses by a stop, what makes it more purely expository:

Nor did one voice oppose. The mortal stroke
horribly hanging o'er each coward head
was changed to one man's ruin,
and their hearts endured it well.¹⁹

But Agricola justifies his argumentative analysis not in such kind of linguistic traits but in the assessment of the pragmatic context in which the verses are inserted and in which he feels there is a question to be answered. According to Agricola, the poet wants to convince us of the fact that all had sincerely assented (something about which, he thinks, we could be in doubt) and his *proof* consist of giving us the psychological reason for this sudden agreement. It liberates them from fear, concentrating all misery upon one individual: "What could be more convincing of their collective assent than the fact that it would offer them security?"²⁰, says Agricola. The passage, though, bears no structural sign of including an argumentation or inference. It is an example of what Agricola calls an argumentation cast into an exposition: "sometimes we find an argument presented as an exposition."²¹ And that is the interesting part for us, regardless of what we may think of the clarity or adequacy of the particular example chosen.

Agricola's pragmatic criterion is moreover refined in a successive classification of different types of exposition with an increasing argumentative import, arriving thus at a real gradual theory of argument.²² There are, in this sense three "degrees" of exposition verging towards argument. A speaker, a writer, can use "structurally" discursive exposition in order to: a) please an audience; b) simply to develop a sequence of events or finally c) to seek conviction through the manifest plausibility of

¹⁹ Both translations are offered in the Perseus web page: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>

²⁰ "Quo magis enim potuisset probare omnes assensisse, quam quod gaudebat securitate sua?", Agricola, 1992 [1539], p. 306.

²¹ "videtur nonnunquam in expositione venire argumentatione", Agricola, 1992 [1539], p. 304.

²² P. Mack (1993, pp. 191-2) has characterized these distinctions between the different degrees of exposition as: "a matter of linguistic texture [...] the distinction depends on the presence or absence of connections between the sentences, on the density of the material and on the vehemence of the expression". In my opinion, though, such stylistic criteria are clearly and explicitly subordinated by Agricola to the real conditions of discursive use, and the different positions of speaker and audience regarding the contents of speech.

what is presented; and this is called *probabilis expositio*. With this classification Agricola is defending a kind of gradual continuum from mere exposition seeking mere pleasure, passing through a more attentively organized and ordered narrative, to plausible exposition with persuasive ends and finally (chapters II.18-21) explicit (both discursively and pragmatically speaking) argumentation, in which we will identify certain traditionally assessed forms of argument (namely, in the case of Agricola, the traditional four: induction, syllogism, example and enthymeme).

Now, the third degree of exposition, allegedly the more interesting in argumentative terms, complies with the pragmatic criterion for argumentation. It would be typically delivered in a setting where the matters exposed are somehow in question or, at least undetermined, and the audience is expecting to be reassured and convinced, i.e. is expecting reasons to be so. But the terms of the classification also help us in another respect as they point out to the specific discursive means of persuasion used in the case of *expositio*, which differ from explicit support between statements, i.e. from what is indubitable *argumentatio*. A concept, that of explicit “support”, which is, by the way, also present in Agricola’s text as distinctive of the more evident and traditionally acknowledged cases of argument: “We call argumentation that <sc. kind of discourse> which at the same time contains what we want to prove and the invented <sc. grounds> on which we try to prove it.”²³

The specific means of persuasion used by exposition (description, narration) when presented in the adequate pragmatic situation for argumentative purposes is its manifest (intended, proposed and emphasized by the arguer; expected and scrutinized by her audience) *probabilitas*, credibility or plausibility.

4. NARRATIVE *PROBABILITAS*

This is not the relative plausibility (in terms of reasonableness) accorded to a specific argumentative scheme among the usually acknowledged relations of inference (logical, causal, normative). It is a more *distributed* concept in which the pieces support each other in a kind of unstable balance, until the assessment is given to the whole and the audience finds a “credible account”. This idea is more or less equivalent to what Plumer (2011) uses in his assessment of narrative fiction (novels, in his case) as potential arguments about the real world: “*Believability* is the central element”.

So what we need in order to evaluate narration as argument, given the adequate pragmatic context, is a theory of what such distributed credibility/believability amounts to. Agricola has his own (characteristically triadic) one: *probabilitas* is obtained by means of an exposition which is “rich in argumentative content” (*argumentosa*), “consistent with phenomena” (*consentanea rebus*) and “free from contradiction” (*per se consequens*).²⁴ But also Cicero (*De inv.* I.29) had presented his own, extremely influential one, when commenting on the third and most important of the narrative virtues, namely, that same *probabilitas*:

²³ “Id vero, quo simul complectimur rem, quam probare volumus, et illud inventum, quo probare conamur, eam argumentationem esse dicimus”, Agricola (1992 [1539], p. 314).

²⁴ “Probabilis fit expositio, si sit argumentosa, si consentanea rebus, si per se consequens”, Agricola (1992 [1539], p. 350).

The narrative will be plausible if it seems to embody characteristics which are accustomed to appear in real life; if the proper qualities of the characters are maintained, if reasons for their actions are plain, if there seems to have been ability to do the deed, if it can be shown that the time was opportune, the space sufficient and the place suitable for the events about to be narrated; if the story fits in with the nature of the actors in it, the habits of the ordinary people and the beliefs of the audience. Verisimilitude can be secured by following these principles.²⁵

That our narrative should embody the usual characteristics of real life, that it be *consentanea rebus*, seems to be the main point in both cases, although we see that Cicero develops a sense of what is consistent with reality which takes in account the effective beliefs of the audience. Something which is interestingly emphasized by Marius Victorinus in his commentary:

But Cicero, while taking in account the nature of the facts and the times and agents involved, adds an eighth²⁶ element which is opinion, and rightly so; because things taken as a whole are not valid just *per se*, nor on account of their nature alone, but through the mediation of opinion.²⁷

These formulae might seem somehow naïve to us, but in any case they try to provide what is needed, i.e. a normative theory of narrative plausibility. Plumer (2011, pp. 1554-1555), on his part, thinking about fiction and its aiming at verisimilitude to attain believability, talks about an “internal coherence” (that events in the narrative be fully connected) and an “external coherence” (that they also “cohere with our widely shared assumptions about how human psychology and society [...] work”).

But Plumer also makes an assumption with which I cannot fully agree and through which he restricts these ideas to fictional narratives. He says: “The novel aims at verisimilitude, while nonfictional narration (history, biography, etc.) aims at veracity”. And so, all his proposals about the argumentative character of novels would not really be applicable in the case of nonfiction. This idea has a long tradition and is also, somewhat surprisingly, present in Agricola, who attributes his second species of exposition (in which a sequence of events is developed) paradigmatically to history, stating, moreover, that the historian just tells the truth, however implausible, not really caring to convince the reader of it: “they <sc. historians> do not feel they should consider diligently how to convince their readers of what they

²⁵ Cicero (1976), *De inv.* I.29: “Probabilis erit narratio, si in ea videbuntur inesse ea, quae solent apparere in veritate; si personarum dignitates servabuntur; si causae factorum exstabunt; si fuisse facultates faciendi videbuntur; si tempus idoneum, si spatii satis, si locus opportunus ad eandem rem, qua de re narrabitur, fuisse ostendetur; si res et ad eorum, qui agent, naturam et ad vulgi morem et ad eorum, qui audient, opinionem accommodabitur. Ac veri quidem similis ex his rationibus esse poterit.”

²⁶ The loose enumeration made by Cicero of the objective elements of a narrative was traditionally systematized in the so called “seven circumstances”: agent (who), fact (what), cause (why), place (where), time (when), mode (how), and faculty or capacity (what with).

²⁷ “Verum Cicero rerum ac temporum personarumque considerans naturam, addidit aliis omnibus octavam opinionem, et recte. Res enim omnes non per se sunt neque ex natura valent, sed opinione.” Halm (ed.), 1863, p. 207.

convey to them.”²⁸ And this is said in stark contrast with what happens with the third species of exposition, attributed to orators and philosophers, where “it is not enough that what is put forward should be true. It also needs to be firm and bring conviction by itself.”²⁹

The most extreme account of this idea about historical writing I have ever found is the famous late renaissance logician Jacopo Zabarella’s [1533-1589] contention, made in his treatise *On the Nature of Logic (De natura logicae*, Venice, 1578), that history is the lowest possible kind of discipline or research field (below poetics, explicitly) as it uses neither logic nor reasoning: “but History does not examine any issue, but is a mere narration of facts, which has no artifice <sc. no logical art> in it.”³⁰ What takes us again to a vision of narration, of historical, allegedly truthful, narration at least, as a mere apposition of statements with no support between them and no need at all of either punctual or distributed plausibility.

But I do not find these ideas at all realistic about what the practice of the chronicler, either historical or journalistic, is about. There have always been competing accounts of facts and historians and chroniclers have had to try and be believable, in the terms we have been reviewing here, much more in the case of strange or unbelievable events. Truthfulness is, surely, a (defeasible) presumption in nonfictional narration. And faced with it, we are also encouraged to presume that, in Quintilian terms (*Inst. or.*, II.4.2), it will be “tanto robustior quanto uerior” (“appear more solid as it is more truthful”). But this is not always so easy to achieve, as we all know, and so, nonfictive narrations in the adequate context –given the pragmatic conditions of a speaker willing to make her narrative version prevail and an audience expecting her to try it– could be analysed as argumentative and their plausibility be weighted according to our (prospective) theory of narrative verisimilitude.³¹

²⁸ “neque sollicite quaerendum putent, quomodo fiat lectori eorum quae recensent”, Agricola (1992 [1539], p. 347).

²⁹ “non satis est esse vera, quae exponentur, sed et firma et velut fidem sibi ipsis facientia oportet esse”, Agricola (1992 [1539], p. 348).

³⁰ Zabarella (1966 [1597], col. 100-101).

³¹ Quintilian, while giving precedence to legal *narratio* as the privileged situation to treat narratives in argumentative terms (that’s why the quotations we have been using come from chapter 2 in Book IV, which deals with legal discourse), yet, in a previous classification of *narrations* (Book II, chap. 4) talks about other genres: “Now there are three forms of narrative, without counting the type used in actual legal cases. First, there is the fictitious narrative as we get it tragedies and poems, which is not merely not true but has little resemblance to truth. Secondly, there is the realistic narrative as presented by comedies, which, though not true, has yet a certain verisimilitude. Thirdly, there is the historical narrative, which is an exposition of actual fact. Poetic narratives are the property of the teacher of literature <*grammaticus*>. The rhetorician therefore should begin with the historical narrative, whose force is in proportion to its truth” (“Et quia narrationum, excepta qua in causis utimur, tres accepimus species, fabulam, quae uersatur in tragoediis atque carminibus non a ueritate modo sed etiam a forma ueritatis remota, argumentum, quod falsum sed uero simile comoediae fingunt, historiam, in qua est gestae rei expositio, grammaticis autem poeticas dedimus: apud rhetorem initium sit historica, tanto robustior quanto uerior.”), Quintilian (1980), *Inst. or.*, II.4.2. As

Another parallel, apparently of a more psychological character, between certain fictive (allegedly the most sophisticated) and non-fictive narratives is their exploitation of the persuasive efficacy of implicitness. Plumer insist that, in opposition to fables, parables and other genres which by definition “have a point” i.e. lead to a conclusion and are more easily identified as arguments (Hunt, 2009; Govier & Ayers, 2012): “if indeed a novel can be an argument, it would have to be indirectly or implicitly conveyed. For otherwise, the piece’s literary status [...] would be called into question” (Plumer, 2011, p. 1553). I have also claimed (Olmos, 2012, p. 64, note 8) that, in certain settings, narrative accounts of reality, admittedly proposed as plausible versions of it, work better if there is no explicit protestation of veracity.³² I will just try to support this intuition with a particular experience. Some years ago, we had a TV news presenter in Spain who chose to finish all his broadcasting programmes with the sententious and fully unrequested claim that “such were the facts, and so have we told them to you.” For a large sector of the audience this made him precisely highly suspicious of manipulation. The basic and extremely naturalized mechanism of trying to achieve conviction through a plausible account in the adequate pragmatic situation makes both vacuous and suspect the express articulation of the aimed at conclusion.

I’m not suggesting at all that history and fiction work in the same way, although certain specific kind of narrative plausibility, based on the assumed notions about what is usual in “real” or “experienced” life, might be essential in both. But they are precisely better distinguished if we analyse them in argumentative terms. In fiction –at least the paradigmatic, realistic fiction envisaged in Plumer’s paper–, the believability and coherence of the fiction is put forward as a means to persuade the readers that certain principles operating in it are applicable in real life, and so a concrete argument about e.g. the consequences of a line of conduct or of a social position, is proposed in analogical terms. That would be the thesis or *message* of such a fictional work, verisimilitude making plausible the analogy.

In non-fictive narratives there would be no real analogy traced because we do not have two realms to make a parallel, and that is why it is more difficult to see them as argumentative. But if the pragmatic criterion applies and these narratives are discursive means to make us decide about facts under discussion, their believability would be put forward just in order to defend their being good (the best available) portraits of reality. There would be no further *message* and the conclusion would be just something like “this is really what happened”. Veracity, initially a presumption, would be the desired conclusion, achieved through verisimilitude.

Of course, we may also use real events and not only fiction to support all kinds of conclusions in more or less explicit argumentative moves that would be, in such case, more exemplary than analogical. These narratives would also bear a further *message* and their conclusion would not be the story’s veracity alone. That is why I suggest that our classification of different kinds of narratives according to

we see, history is already the realm of the rhetorician what means it should be assessed in rhetorical and argumentative terms.

³² I would say that the legal requirement for an oath acts somehow outside the testifier’s discourse, but it is, in any case, a very institutionalized setting which requires a more profound reflection.

their argumentative uses should not bear on the distinction fiction/nonfiction as a primary criterion.

5. NARRATION AS ARGUMENT

Now, there would be a number of widely acknowledged argument types in which narratives may be involved in significant ways. Arguments from example (Walton, Reed, & Macagno, 2008, p. 314) and from analogy, especially “practical reasoning from analogy” (*ibid.*, pp. 315-316), are the first obvious choices and have been so recognized ever since Aristotle’s account of the rather confused conglomerate he gathers under the label *paradeigma*, including narratives taken from real events, fables and parables (*Ret.* 1393a27-1394a18). Arguments from precedent (Walton, Reed, & Macagno, 2008, p. 344) could also belong within this group. In these cases, the speaker introduces a story which does not have to contain anything that is particularly in question in the given situation. Through the development of the argument, the speaker should show how such *secondary, digressive*, stories relate to the conclusion, claim, or position she is aiming at. Sometimes this is fully expressed, as in the classical fables’ *morals* and sometimes it is left to the audience to draw. Plumer’s account of novel as a kind of implicit analogical argument counts on this second possibility.

Now, the question is whether there is anything characteristic of narration which makes narrative “arguments from example” or “from analogy” different from other such arguments. For Govier & Ayers (2012), it is finally their characteristic weakness in epistemological terms, as providing not-so-good reasons for their claims. Traditional rhetorical accounts emphasized, instead, the persuasive virtues of vividness (*evidentia/enargeia*),³³ which obtains a peculiarly strong kind of personal commitment from the audience. This idea has been recovered in modern models of deliberative assessment where the degree of “narrativity” of a collective argumentative discussion is even seen as an index of effective participation (Steffensmeier, 2008).³⁴ From the perspective I have been developing here, the main characteristic of these narrative-based arguments would have to do with the peculiar and highly naturalized way we assess the narrative plausibility of stories as coherent wholes and the centrality, within our cognitive resources, of such a capacity. Fisher’s narrative model of rationality (1987) could well be at the basis of

³³ Quintilian (2001), *Inst. or.*, IV.2.64.: “Others add vividness, in Greek called *enargeia* [...] As to vividness, it is, to my understanding, undoubtedly an important virtue of narrative, when a truth requires not only to be told but in a sense to be presented to the sight” (“Sunt qui adiciant his evidentiam, quae *enargeia* Graece vocatur [...] evidentia in narratione, quantum ego intellego, est quidem magna virtus, cum quid veri non dicendum sed quodammodo etiam ostendendum est.”)

³⁴ Steffensmeier adds “narrativity” to other criteria proposed by Steiner *et al.* (2004) for deliberative Discourse Quality Index (DQI) such as open participation, sufficient justification of claims, consideration of common good, respectful treatment of others or effective achievement of a rationally motivated consensus. The same idea was recently presented by C.R. Lee and J. Burnside-Lawry, in Copenhagen’s Conference “Rhetoric in Society 4” (January 15-18, 2013), with a paper called “Voice, listening, and telling stories: the communicative construction of rhetorical citizenship in small groups” in which they claimed that “narrative helps people enact rhetorical citizenship”.

it, but we certainly need an argumentative theory of narrative *probabilitas* made in terms of our modern theories of argumentation.³⁵

When facts themselves are under discussion or are unknown to the audience and someone has the contextually acknowledged mission of giving a plausible account of them, we will be dealing with *primary* or *core* narratives (“which contain just the case and the whole reason for a dispute.”)³⁶ Still it may well be in a situation where either the same person (as in ancient legal procedures) or someone else (as in modern ones) is formally required to use the material exposed in a subsequent explicitly argumentative discourse, allegedly “coherent with the statement”. In these cases, although the narrative part should undoubtedly have argumentative virtues (in the sense of being adequately “preparatory”), the audience and especially those who have their own significant and decisive mission in the procedure (namely juries and judges) will count on the explicit arguments to assess their position. Here, in addition to narrative plausibility, we should also take into account the particulars of arguments from testimony or from a position to know (Walton, Reed, & Macagno, 2008, pp. 309-310).³⁷

Narration, purely narration as argument with no other recognized “argument scheme” associated, in the case we admit it as complying with our pragmatic terms, would be the matter of discursive genres such as history, biography or journalism (which, of course, may also include, explicit arguments). In them, under the adequate circumstances, we may be able to conceive the statement of facts –presented with the contextually acknowledged intention of obtaining the audience’s adherence (*fides*)– as conveying an implicit meta-argument about the coincidence between discourse and reality *via* their own internal plausibility. The story’s veracity would be the suggested conclusion and its justificatory measure, just its manifest narrative plausibility.

Now, not all narratives would be delivered in a pragmatic context which may easily allow their (interesting) argumentative assessment. In his classificatory paragraph (*De inv.* I.27) about *narratio*, in addition to those we have here called *primary* and *secondary* narratives, Cicero allows for a third type which does not have to do with rhetoric –which, for him, is the art of civic discourse–: “The third kind is wholly unconnected with public issues, which is recited or written solely for amusement but, at the same time, provides valuable training.”³⁸ And yet, as we see, he finally admits its pedagogical rhetorical interest, at least as exercise in narrative skills. If those who call our species *homo narrans* are right, this is in fact something

³⁵ T.A. Hollihan and K.T. Baaske’s textbook on argumentation theory (1994; 2005) is allegedly based on Fisher’s narrative paradigm. Yet, this does not reflect so much in its content, beyond chapter 2, in which such paradigm is clearly explained and developed. In particular, it does not reflect at all in the types of argument contemplated.

³⁶ “in quo ipsa causa et omnis ratio controversiae continetur”, Cicero (1976), *De inv.*, I.27.

³⁷ I have dealt with testimony elsewhere (Olmos, 2007; 2008).

³⁸ Cicero (1976), *De inv.*, I.27.: “Tertium genus est remotum a civilibus causis, quod delectationis causa non inutiles cum exercitatione dicitur et scribitur”.

we keep doing since the moment we are born. We learn to narrate, to listen to narratives, to assess their plausibility and use it in infinite ways.

6. CONCLUSION

M. Carel (2012) has recently tried to show that the distinction between argumentation and narration is not so easy to make at a merely linguistic (syntactic or semantic) level. From the point of view of the ADL approach which she embraces, she finally concludes that it is only in their “enunciative mode” (having to do, especially with the speaker’s position with respect to the contents) that these types of discourse are finally distinguishable. This is one among many studies within the sphere of argumentation theory which are today trying to explore the not-so-clear boundaries between argumentative and narrative discourse. Here, we have chosen a more pragmatic setting to assess the substantial and characteristic contribution of narrative discourse to argument in at least two possible senses. First, as part of a complex interchange in which eventually explicit arguments will be exposed, which allegedly do not exactly work in the same way as similar non-narrative argument schemes. Second, and more interestingly, within a context in which, there being facts under discussion, the only visible support or evidence presented for a certain version of them, would be the manifest plausibility of the narrative sequence.

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