



III Sección: Sobre conceptos categorías, mitos y realidades

Violence in the language of popular tales: myths, reality and emotions

Pilar Úcar Ventura
Universidad Pontificia Comillas, España
Departamento de Traducción e Interpretación y Comunicación Multilingüe
pucar@comillas.edu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7030-198X>

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Abstract: All through History, many authors have been the ones to reflect the popular imaginary as midpoint between myth and reality. Some traditional tales and contemporary narrations invite us to a more profound reading below the formal surface and show us a mosaic made from past times realities that nowadays are still present. Language is the mean of expression to make patent certain distortions that have been taking place throughout time: verbal violence, anomalies in idiomatic registers, polysemic ambiguity; fantasy and reality, emotions, magic, dreams and definitely, culture which is transported to well-known texts. Maybe, it would be convenient to approximate even more myths to reality in order to pull aesthetic pleasure and popular wisdom out. In order to do that, we are going to analyse in which way the linguistic force is shown in some literary examples.

Keywords: Violence; tales; myth; reality; emotion

La violencia en el lenguaje de los cuentos populares: mito, realidad y emociones

Resumen: A lo largo de la historia, muchos autores han reflejado el imaginario popular como el punto medio entre el mito y la realidad. Algunos cuentos tradicionales y narraciones contemporáneas nos invitan a una lectura más profunda debajo de la superficie formal y nos muestran un mosaico hecho de realidades de tiempos pasados que hoy en día todavía están presentes. El lenguaje es el medio de expresión para hacer patentes ciertas distorsiones que han tenido lugar a lo largo del tiempo: violencia verbal, anomalías en los registros idiomáticos, ambigüedad polisémica; Fantasía y realidad, emociones, magia,





sueños y, definitivamente, cultura que se transporta a textos conocidos. Tal vez, sería conveniente aproximar aún más mitos a la realidad para sacar el placer estético y la sabiduría popular. Para hacer eso, vamos a analizar de qué manera se muestra la fuerza lingüística en algunos ejemplos literarios.

Palabras Clave: Violencia; cuentos; mitos; realidad; emociones

1. Introduction

The violence in the language used in tales and folk narratives is something actually present and we can noticed it through the reading of those stories, beyond the period of time in which we are; more than an open secret, it is the scream of a bounded voice. There have been no few efforts to protect the state of mind of the reader, giving these type of stories certain political correction to hide the real toughness transmitted by its lines.

It would be interesting to investigate if younger readers, and also the no so young ones, are pleased by these new versions, or if, on the contrary, they prefer to forget about innovations and go back to the origins: to the tradition which is already part of their cultural background. It may be a good idea for another study.

2. Objectives

We want to provide certain notes about the violence of the language used in folk stories, going through tradition to analyse its presence in our culture and how do they insert in reality, coming from “mythological” texts to provoke different emotions.

We are going to make a virtual tour around certain titles to exemplify linguistic violence and the survival of myths in written pages.

The choice of the titles we will use is due to the popularity of the classics and the impact of some mythic topics still present today: politics, youth, and the big city, amongst others.



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We are aware that in some of them subsists the paradox of mixing the traditional structure followed to provide a moral lesson at the end of the story, with literary scenes of mutilations, sex, transformations... a conglomerate which is so difficult to unify and so diverse as life itself, according to the vision transmitted by the eyes of its authors.

3. Stories and folk narrations

Before continuing with our analysis, it is appropriate to make this reflection: maybe the inclusion of the scenes we just pointed out has been decided according to the calendar, the opportunity and convenience of creative, national, international or even editorial criteria, amongst others; maybe the objective was to control or even to void referents and references and therefore to propitiate a bigger tolerance with force and violence in those traditional narrations, creating in those lines a guide for readers who want to find themselves and others, to show them how does literary action and the processes of characterization work.

What we commented before is valid for the titles we will work with:

- Tale XXXV in *Count Lucanor* (Barcelona Casals, 2010) of Don Juan Manuel.
- *Little Red Riding Hood* (Madrid, Alianza, 2004), Grimm brothers.
- *Cinderella* (Madrid, Alianza, 2004) Grimm brothers.
- “Language of butterflies” in *Qué me quieres amor* (Madrid, Alfaguara, 1996) of Manuel Rivas.
- “The trajectory of the ball” in *Ella maldita alma* (Madrid Alfaguara, 2010) of Manuel Rivas.

In all of them, even when they appear in other formats of entertainment, such as videogames, we can find, to some extent, processes of implicit and antagonistic competition where both the receptors of this reading and the content of the reading



itself appear as descriptive thoughts, a complex structure intertwined with a very specific linguistic style for its intention: not only articulating the rules of the plot, but also the rules of narrative game.

From this point onwards, we can derive the intra-lecture and the inter-text which will surely represent a complete process of learning of each one's own universe and of the one surrounding us.

3.1 Characteristics of stories

As some specialists affirm, such as Gregorio Marañón¹ “a tale must always be a short story, because it is nearly only argument and schematic argument”, or as Medardo Fraile² said “a tale is something short, which requires high intensity”. We believe that, differently from a novel, a tale hits sensitivity with just a strike, it is a glimpse which suddenly appears in the look and the memory of the reader.

From a formal point of view, children literature is characterised by the use of dialogues, against the presence of descriptions.

This way, we share the opinion that tales please (*docere et monere*) and enrich the mental and affective intricacies of the reader while strongly talking of impulses which can be understand unconsciously and without prejudice of the internal combats which every human fights, as they can offer solutions or show resources to face certain difficult or conflictive circumstances.

Not all tales refer to the external world, lived and known, even when their stylistic start is made in a realistic way or if they seem to have everyday characters. What really happens is that, the same way fairy tales do, a tale has more the intention of telling the individual internal process than providing practical information of the external reality. We will therefore look for patterns which show common marks and which give light to correct asynchrony between tales and realty. We propose a review of the reading and the interpreting which has derived from tales.

¹ Marañón, G. *Cuentos madrileños*, Madrid: Castalia Prima, 2002, p. 45.

² Fraile, M: *Cuentos madrileños*, Madrid, Castalia Prima 2002, p.47.





4. Myth/ Reality/Emotions

At this point, it appears convenient to make a brief review of the dichotomy: *Mythos/logos*. Duch³, with his concept of “logo mythic” and the search of the truth for the complete understanding of the world and the human condition, overcomes Sophists and Platoon, understanding that Mythos is a narration –the essence-, a memorable and traditional story of paradigmatic action done by extraordinary beings (gods and heroes), while “logos” is formed by words, logics and reasoning. As he affirmed, with Homer, mythos and logos were understood as synonymous.

Paraphrasing Losada⁴, the myth refers to an explanatory story, dynamic and symbolic, of one or various extraordinary personal events with a transcendent referent, without a historical evidence, with invariable elements which can be reduced to just topics and which are submitted to a crisis; while a myth presents a conflictive, emotional, functional or ritual nature, it also refers to an absolute cosmogony or scatology, particular or universal. We will find this in more than one of the examples we will use hereunder, expressed abruptly in language.

Some analysis, which affirm every culture has its own mythological tradition, are really useful to this work, such as the ones made by Georges Dumézil, who maintains that “a country without legends will die of cold” and that “a nation without myths is dead”, while “myths live in the memory of a nation” and therefore, we consider they belong to community’s memory, giving deep sense to reality. Myths give human beings the hope and comfort they spend their lives looking for⁵.

Myths enter social culture and they usually resort to their own symbols and to express themselves in a lively way, using powerful images. Myth and reality

³ Duch, L. *Aproximación a la Logomítica*. Barcelona: Herder, 2015, p. 123.

⁴ Losada, J.M. *Nuevas formas del mito. Una metodología interdisciplinar* (Hrsg.) Logos Verlag Berlin 2015

⁵ [Dumézil](#), G. “Los mitos siguen vivos”. *El país*. 24 nov 2012.



overlap one another, they need and help each other to find an explanation to justify the violence which appears both in oral and written speeches.

Fantasy and reality, magic and dreams, become part of culture, which is translated into present narrations more or less adapted to specific circumstances of each reader. When myth approaches to reality, aesthetic pleasure and popular knowledge is found.

4.1 Language and Emotions

We start this point with the concept of “emotion”, a more or less new term⁶, according to Oatley, as 200 years ago it would hardly been used. Today it is used both in science and literature and it contributes to the imbrication of the narrative warp, as we think in the intimate union stablished between emotion and language, sometimes because emotion is found in language and sometimes because through language we access emotion. If we stop to review etymology, we find that *emotion* comes from Latin *emotio*, which means “movement or impulse”, “what moves you towards”; this will be what “moves” our characters to act following different “mythic” models of behaviour.

From the behavioural point of view just mentioned, emotions are useful to stablish our position regarding our environment. Emotions impulse us towards certain people, objects, actions and ideas, while they move us away from others, without forgetting that emotions act also as the storage of innate and learned influences. Emotions possess certain invariable characteristics and others which show certain variations depending on individual, groups and cultures⁷, remembering what Levenson already said.

⁶ Oatley, K., & Jenkins, J. M. (1992). Human emotions: Function and dysfunction. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 43, 55-85.

⁷ Levenson, R.W. “The search for autonomic specificity”. En P. Ekman y R.J. Davidson (Eds.), *The nature of emotion* (pp. 252-257). New York: Oxford University Press., 1994





In addition, language, which is the reflection of the human mind, a channel of transmission for thoughts and feelings, appears as an instrument to make our actions tangibles⁸, according to Austin.

4.2 Examples

Language constitutes the method of expression to make evident certain distortions which have occurred during time: verbal violence, anomalies in idiomatic registers, polysemic ambiguity.

Thus, when talking about verbal attacks, an insult may be a manifestation of verbal aggression. However, there are forms of language, such as threat, which are as negative as insults and which many times go unnoticed.

Insults have their origin in disdain or hate; as the philosopher Emilio Lledó stated, they have as objective “the disqualification and the annulation of the other”. Insult is a slap in the face, an attempt to putt the others down, even to blackmail them. We recover here certain ideas of Bettelheim⁹ while agreeing on the fact that the majority of tales deal with the topic of sublimation of emotional conflicts and existential problems, but through violent and abrupt ways, what immediately affects the reaction of characters regarding their behaviour and emotions.

Let’s review now some examples of what we just said:

In *Cinderella*, in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm version, there are some really truculent details about the size of the foot of the stepsisters:

“...then her mother gave her a knife and said, "Cut off your toe. When you are queen you will no longer have to go on foot." The girl cut off her toe, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to the prince. He took her on his horse as his bride and rode away with her. Then he looked at her foot and saw

⁸ Austin, J. L. *Cómo hacer cosas con palabras: Palabras y acciones*, Barcelona: Paidós, 1982.

⁹ Bettelheim, B., 12. 1995: *Psicoanálisis de los Cuentos de Hadas*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2.^a edition.



how the blood was running from it... (<http://www.cuentosdegrimm.com/009-cenicienta.htm>)

The expressiveness of language hits senses and emotions; it is a scream without nuances, acute pain. We can interpret it as a patent example of how the Stepmother degrades Cinderella, even attacking her daughters to just to favour them instead of Cinderella because of a fraternal rivalry, while the hostility of the stepsisters is because they are jealous of the young girl. The language used is therefore appropriate to the emotional mix of the main characters (Bettelheim)¹⁰.

This mash of feelings is also reflected in a physical and aesthetical detail, as are the “big feet” of the stepsisters, clear reference to their masculinity, in contrast with the tiny foot of Cinderella as a symbol of femininity: a very plastic language with a stark style; violence appears with extreme toughness in the auto-mutilation done by the stepsisters to try to achieve the royal favour of becoming prince’s wives.

We can find another example in the “*Little Red Riding Hood*”:

“Grandmother, what big arms you have! -All the better to hug you with, my dear! -
Grandmother, what big legs you have! -All the better to run with, my child -
Grandmother, what big ears you have! -All the better to hear with, my child -
Grandmother, what big eyes you have! -All the better to see with, my child -
Grandmother, what big teeth you have got! -All the better to eat you up with!”
(<http://www.cuentosinfantiles.net/cuentos-caperucita-roja.html>)

We can imagine the terrifying conversation between both characters and also what feelings appear in the popular imaginaries thorough the language used. Question, answer, question, answer, in a chain which grows in tension until the end. The myth of the sweet and nice grandmother disappears.

¹⁰ Ibidem.



In the story XXXV, from “*Count Lucanor*”, we can read:

- ¡How now, Mr. Horse! Do you imagine because I have only you, that I shall respect your live if you do not obey me? You are wrong, because, to your own grief, if you do not obey my orders, I swear to God I will kill you as I did with the others, because there is no living thing I have in the world, which I will spare, if I am not to be obeyed!

He sat down and looked at each side, with the sword covered in blood over his lap; when he had looked everywhere, not seeing anybody alive but his wife, he looked at her with anger and shouted furiously, showing his sword “stand up and give me water for my hands”.

The woman, who expected nothing but to be horribly killed, stood up quickly and brought the water he had asked for. Then he said: -Ah! Thank God you did what I ordered you! If you hadn't done so, and with the displeasure those stupid cause me, I would have done the same to you I did to them (<http://ciudadseva.com/texto/conde-lucanor-35/>).

This conversation shows an incredible cruelty, rather the monologue of a madman, the husband, in front of his wife, who stands scared or even paralyzed by the threats of her husband and his absurd behaviour. The myth of the strong man at home, common by the time the story was written, maintains itself, even if the wife tries to subvert it.

In more recent times, XX century, we have selected other examples quite relevant with regard what we have being commenting; for example, in “*The trajectory of the ball*”:

“You son of a bitch! shouted the beggar between her plastics.

She was really ugly, with the face of a flabby potato, with warts in the skin. But the eyes, suddenly clear, teary and red due to anger, gave her the look of an angry girl in the school recess.



Run Román! I heard the voice of Uri: She is going to suck your blood!

Those sons of a bitch! And she mumble what seemed to be a curse: Hope their tears dry in the eyes' spring! (<http://m.litfile.net/read/92639/95817-96935?page=14>)

In addition to the violence of language, there is also the violence of action, the shock of the main character, the running away of the children, the rush and acceleration, insults and the dominance over the weak one. But in this case, the elderly woman answers with the same verbal strength as the aggressors.

In another story, this one also from Manuel Rivas, "*The language of butterflies*", which has a strong filmic repercussion and which remembers the reality of a fratricide war, the Spanish civil war, the ideological conflict is also mentioned.

"¡¡¡Tilonorrinco!!! ¡¡¡Espiditrompa!!! He had never learned insults... In reality, "tilonorrinco" refers a weird insect living in Australia and "Espiditrompa", to the language of butterflies. Words of the Master. "If he said, it is true. There are many things that appear to be fake but they are real. You like the school?" "A lot. And he does not hit us. The Master doesn't hit". And then I heard how my father said "Traitors!" with thin voice. And later, each time stronger "Criminals!" "Red ones!" He released my mother's arm and approach the soldiers, with his angry eyes looking towards the Master. "Murderer! Anarchist! Child-eater!" Now mum was trying to retain him and pull him from the jacket. But he was furious. "Arsehole! Son of a bitch!" I had never heard him calling those things to anybody, not even the arbitrator during football matches".

(<http://laussy.org/images/b/ba/Lengua-de-las-mariposas.pdf>)

Two generations are faced through language, fathers and sons with contrary feelings and emotions and different perceptions of the same character. The young man feels so much anger, disappointment and fear that he is unable to insult, so he invents, recreated what we thinks he knows but really ignores and he adopts a more virulent attitude toward the more common insults between adults.



5. Conclusions

With the analysis we have just made, readers of tales and popular narrations can appreciate the capacity to see, read and write as something scientific, as if it was pure calculation, an analysis to defeat onerous enemies arrived through language and, this way, to revalue real and mythical aspects in most receptive people, to show them language is both an heritage and a responsibility.

With language we do not only express a temporary message, even an instantaneous one, but a whole cosmo vision, a concept of “being” and “being in the world”. It is important not to forget the fundamental character of Word as it is already announced in the Bible: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1, 2).

Thus, what are we able to do with words? We promise, threaten, love, approach and move away with words, but above all, we direct the attention of our partners to those behaviours which benefit us.

If we use words with violence, to scare or encroach others, we create situations of danger or aggression which do not favour the sharing of emotions.

In many modern stories, for example, in the titles we presented in this work, we can appreciate the deep internal conflicts arisen from our primary impulses, as well as certain emotions which lead us to investigate about existential issues, crucial ones, and sometimes even compelling ones, for everyone; issues such as death, time, aging, slander, envy... And we believe language does not spare aggression in its descriptions.

Narration provides strategy, the calm of moral lessons: if you follow the rules, you will do well, what shows there is justice. However, this does not always happen in reality; and we grasp to the fact that, as it is not fair, it cannot happen, even when reality denies this though (who does it, pays it); therefore, the bigger values blurred themselves by the virulence of language and we guess in narrations a undermined scene: myths such as the woman who masters (or wants to do so) at home, the



city which creates monsters or politics, get blurred and manipulated in a perverse way. Canons and the mythological paradigm are subverted, falling from their pedestal.

Maybe it is convenient to look towards the ethics of speech to recover those values recognised as exemplary in a myth and which expert voices have already comment.

Therefore, the relationship between the function of an element and its place inside a tale also seems to offer some kind of systematic pattern, if we attend to the relations of statistical relevance. This would be more literary, in the sense of an analysis of narrative structures themselves, which maybe could be develop later on.

Traditional tales have changed with time. From an ensemble of tales orally transmitted from generation to generation, in European culture nearly all elements of the process have been modified: the method of communication (oral, written or audio-visual), the public (adults and children), and the creator (minstrels, poets, anonymous authors, recognised writers, cinema studies or editorial lines). In a parallel way, contents have also been transformed. By different methods and resources, these narrations deal with important issues for human cohabitation: moral, social and ethic indications which are updated through time and multiple changes in society.

Nowadays, popular legends tell readers about the most important values for the society of the moment, such as the independence of criteria, sacrifice, perseverance, interpreting social and human reality, ecology or the role of women. Consequently, it is interesting to see how the past evolution of these tales is being reverted, adapting them to the needs of today's world.



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