Abstract

This paper explores the stylistic construction of the past in feature writing using as a case study the American Pulitzer Prize for journalism. Drawing on stylistic rhetorical criticism, this article will show how references to the past are framed within fixed syntactical and word arrangement schemes that produce meaning and sustain arguments through expressive and aesthetic effects. The stylistic devices identified include comparative parallelism, series, emphatic repetition and syntactic symbolism. This paper contends that references to the past in feature writing should be seen as literary artefacts constructed by following the rules of rhetoric. The understanding of the uses of history that we can obtain from reading references to the past in journalism cannot be separated from formal and structural aspects pertaining to sentence patterns. Embedding rhetorical schemes in the text pushes the force of language beyond its representational role by bringing forward its expressive and evocative characteristics and the role that these play in making the story unique and memorable. The use of history in journalism goes beyond representing a given historical fact; the form through which the fact is presented matters because it makes each historical record discursively unique, thus contributing to the news value of the story.

Key words: feature writing, Pulitzer Prize, stylistics, rhetoric, history, Fahnestock, White

Introduction

The study of the uses of the past in journalism, due to its polyvalent nature, has long been an object of fascination, especially considering the importance assigned to the values of novelty and timeliness in news making. Walter Williams and Frank L. Martin (1922), in an early twentieth-century treatise on journalism, wrote: “It is not enough for a newspaper to furnish its readers that which has never been in print before. The aim is to present it to its readers as soon as possible after it develops” (p. 174). However, it would be limiting today to restrict the notion of news, in both journalistic practice and theory, to a focus on the reporting of present and recent events only (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger, 2015). Throughout the twentieth century the number of references to the past in American newspapers increased in frequency due to the combined development of photojournalism and new long journalism (Barnhurst, 2011; Barnhurst and

Mutz, 1997). The extent to which long journalism affected the setting of temporalities in news must be contextualized within a culture where journalists, especially from the 1940s onwards, were encouraged to help readers to extract meaning from news by providing context and interpretation (Barnhurst and Mutz, 1997). In fact, approaches to temporalities in news can vary significantly depending on whether the story works within the parameters of either hard or soft news (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger, 2015). In the latter, journalists can deviate from the core principle of reporting as soon as an event has happened, prioritizing instead elements of human interest (Tuchman, 1978; Granato, 2002). Nonetheless, the extent to which the story is relevant to the public remains a key concern for journalists, as, for instance, historical journalism "must be topical" and "connect the past with the present" (Pöttker, 2011, p. 525). Building on existent studies on the uses of the past in journalism, this paper aims to focus on an often neglected aspect of journalistic writing: rhetorical stylistics. The theoretical aim of rhetorical stylistics is to recognize elements that perform a designated role in language that have a formulaic potential "so that given similar purposes, it is likely that authors will choose similar functional structures" (Fahnestock, 2011, p. 12). It follows that, any scrutiny and advice about style and differentiations among figures and devices are based on the assumption that language has essentially a communicative, rather than a representational role (Fahnestock, 2005). This paper draws on examples from the American Pulitzer Prize for feature writing to show how journalists use compositional techniques to frame references to the past. The examples will display how past events are presented by means of fixed syntactical schemes including: comparative parallelism, series, emphatic repetition and syntactic symbolism. The predictable nature of these constructs derives from a long historical tradition of rhetoric whose original classificatory schemes were exemplified in key ancient treatises[1] and that has been developed and used since then to use language effectively. The ancient Greeks called rhetoric *techné*, in other words, "an art form […] a body of principles that can generate an artifact, a work of creation" (Smith, 2013, p.1). Figures of style provide journalists with a range of formats to draw from in order to mediate the past and make it relevant for the present narrative of their works. The highly manufactured rhetorical nature of these extracts has implications pertaining to, not

[1] Key ancient works on rhetoric include Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (4th century BCE); *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (1st century BCE), and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (1st century CE).

only the epistemological value of the reference, but also the relationship between meaning and the aesthetic and expressive qualities of a text.

The uses of the past in journalism

In the terminology of literary theorist Gérard Genette (1980, p. 40), "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" is a narrative manoeuvre called analepsis. Throughout the Western narrative tradition, going back as far as Homeric poems, the use of analepsis has systematically performed structural functions to meet the technical and aesthetic requirements of the plot; for instance, the linear chronological arrangement of the events in a story can be disrupted to create drama and build expectation (Murphet, 2005; Fulton, 2005). The application of forms of poetics relates to non-fictional as well as fictional writing since literary journalism is a process of discovery that requires a certain compositional quality and eloquence (Greenberg, 2014). Anecdotal leads, personalized storytelling, and a range of narrative devices are profusely employed in journalistic narratives to attract readers' attention and engage audiences emotionally (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Interruptions of the chronological sequence of events to evoke the past enable reporters to compress time, establish connections between scenes and create expectation (Berning, 2011). According to Pöttker (2011) journalists use historical material through three modalities: a critical modality in which the present is observed in contrast to the past, an analogical modality in which the past and present are compared looking for similarities, and a genetic modality in which the present is reconstructed as something developing from the past. Historical references may have an augmenting effect, providing background and new pieces of evidence, revising the past, commemorating events or people and situating the story within a narrative context (Winfield, Friedman and Trisnadi, 2002). The use of history can reinforce national narratives, thus fostering a sense of community and national identity (Conboy, 2011; Griffen-Foley, 2011; Commager, 1965); and it can be employed to legitimate political activities (Lugo-Ocando, Guedes and Cañizález, 2011). References to the past in journalism can culturally contextualize actual events or a record of common memories; newspapers may engage with the past to ensure the continuity of their editorial identity and a connection with their audiences in the present (Conboy, 2011; Pöttker, 2011). The news construction of collective memory is also a way in which journalists sanction their own cultural authority (Hanusch, 2010). For example, appeals to history can be

strategically placed to redefine the professional and ideological standards of journalists (Wasserman, 2011). A presentation of real-world events that connects them in a storylike way enables journalists to "reify their authoritative status to audiences" (Zelizer, 1990, p. 366). The past can also be used non-commemoratively by emphasizing the novelty of a story, making available an explanatory context, and displaying how people behave in their everyday lives in modes that include an awareness of the past or future (Schudson, 2014).

Lee Gutkind (2012) frames the problem of the use of history in journalism in terms of the reconstruction/recreation dilemma, where the reconstruction is an attempt to rebuild the past through words as it was, while recreation implies using invention to make the narrative more compelling. The protagonist of Robert Penn Warren's novel, *All the King's Men* (1946), a history graduate and a political reporter, realizes that historical facts lack meaning until they are given order and made to comply with the logic of narrative by the shaping force of internal knowledge (Cullick, 2000). Since journalism is tied to narrative conventions, historical details that do not fit well with a story format, such as unsolved issues, are left out (Kitch 2005). In fact it has been suggested that a way to more accurately convey a sense of historical disruption is to give up on narrative order and restore the fundamentally fragmented nature of historical representation (Žižek, 1997; Humphries, 2006). As Slavoj Žižek (1997, p. 11) put it, history defies the system of principles within narration: "actual historical breaks are, if anything, *more* radical than mere narrative deployments […]" (emphasis in the original). History should be treated as both narrative and argument; in other words, it is a story and a connected series of statements to establish a position about the past (Gronbeck, 1995). As Bruce Gronbeck (Ibid.) argued, the use of rhetorical techniques can bridge the gap between past and present: "Historians set brackets and articulate causal connections between contexts and events in order to naturalize or make coherent the stories and interpretations they are offering" (p. 8). An analogy between the work of the historian and that of the journalist can be drawn by making reference to historian Hayden White. According to White (1986), the historical text should be treated as a literary artefact:

> The events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like – in short, all of the

> techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play (p. 84) (emphasis in the original).

White (1973) drew on Nietzsche's essay, 'The use and abuse of history', where, White argued, the German philosopher attempted to establish how history could be turned into a form of tragic art. The value of the historical work is not to be found in its power to make generalizations, but rather, in its ability to use inventiveness to vary common themes, elevating them to a universal symbol (Nietzsche 1957). Nietzsche wrote: "The fine historian must have the power of coining the known into a thing never heard before and proclaiming the universal so simply and profoundly that the simple is lost in the profound and the profound in the simple" (p.40). Barnhurst (2011, p.118-119) suggests an analogy between journalism and cultural habits. He argues: "If communication is a ritual, then journalism is a prime means of arresting time, akin to monumental architecture, the plastic arts, and myth". As such, by giving their stories "order and sequencing", journalists are engaging in practices that are comparable to performing arts like music and dance (Ibid.).

Feature writing and literary style

In the 1890s a new aesthetic of composition emerged in American journalism, as some authors wrote in a way that "looked a lot like fiction, read like fiction, and entertained like fiction but that was ultimately, they argued, better than fiction, because it was, after all, "real"' (Roggenkamp, 2005, p. xvi). However, when it was first established in 1917, the Pulitzer Prize for journalism was awarded for two categories only: Reporting and Editorial Writing. It was between the 1960s and 1970s that the New Journalism movement, with authors such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote and Gay Telese, promoted the use of a literary style that fused journalistic research with methods of fiction writing (Fakazis, 2016). But in the 1970s, narrative literary journalism, rather than a genre with its own identity, was considered an exception to the dominant putatively objective style of daily news reporting (Hartsock, 2007). Things changed between the 1970s and 1980s, when many writers were increasingly adopting the short-story form for their articles, and the Pulitzer board felt that a new category had to be created to give recognition to the new genre (Franklin in Garlock, 2003). In the period following the launch, in 1977, of a programme initiated by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) to help reporters to improve the clarity and accuracy of their writing, daily newspapers went through a

substantial re-evaluation of the elements of storytelling in journalism (Schmidt, 2019). This movement led to a re-consideration of the weight that narrative, reporting and literary techniques had in creating an emotional engagement with readers, thus challenging typical principles of neutrality (Ibid.). In 1979, the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing was established with the explicit aim of acknowledging not only the reporting but also the literary aspects of journalism (Fischer and Fischer, 2003).

Features are an approximate form of narrative that deploy an essential rhetorical framing in which a story follows a storytelling model structured into a beginning, middle development and ending (Hartsock, 2007). Like news reporting, feature writing is based on facts, but the latter tries to use detail, intimacy and the craft of writing to keep readers involved (Lanson and Stephens, 2008). With its power to provide analysis and context in an entertaining way, feature writing acquired greater commercial value when newspapers, with the advent of radio and television, found themselves in competition with media that could bring the audience to the scene through the use of audio-visual newscasts (Granato, 2002). In the first half of the 2000s, narrative literary journalism witnessed a revival; this was in part dictated by the editors' concern about the limitations imposed by trying to adhere to the ideal of journalistic objectivity (Hartsock, 2007). In the past decade, the American newspaper industry has increasingly acknowledged the significance of a more narrative and descriptive style (Hartsock, 2016).

Prospective feature writers are advised to deploy literary devices in order to create vivid images in the mind of the reader (Tankard and Hendrickson, 1996). In his *Steps into Journalism*, Edwin Llewellyn Shuman (1894) wrote that readers will excuse inaccuracy if the story has a stylistic sparkle, and that an overriding principle that reporters should bear in mind is that the story must be interesting. This echoes how inaugural Pulitzer winner Jon Franklin (in Williams, 2012) commented upon his winning feature by saying that feature writers should have good literary reasons for including details and be specific "only when it doesn't interfere with the story you're telling". Madeleine Blais explained that in thinking about how to write the lead of her Pulitzer winning feature she was trying to form "my own aesthetic, my own system of what I think works in prose and is both beautiful and powerful" (Howard, 2016). The word aesthetic here may broadly encompass a feeling of wanting to see a consistent, balanced and orderly whole (Miller, 2008). The aesthetic evaluation of a well-configured narrative is based on the extent to which its

assembly of events within the plot, the development of the action, and the representations of time and space conform with determined canonical narrative literary patterns (Coste, 2017). Although acknowledging that a disposition to tell the truth and trustworthiness are the core principles of journalism, it is important to recognize that journalism is also a performative discourse in which forms and style play a crucial role (Broersma, 2010). Representation through language not only depicts occurrences but also contributes to creating them, thus producing a meaning based on which the audience can take action (Ibid.). The strength of the media is not principally in its ability to present things as true, but in its capacity to make available the narrative forms in which facts are framed (Schudson, 1995).

This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion about the uses of the past in journalism by showing how the deployment of the rules of rhetoric can assist writers in fitting extracts of history into the present narrative, making those fragments self-sustaining in the story development. It highlights how the combinatory power of rhetoric can help arrest time and maintain aspects of stylistic uniqueness and topicality in a news feature, even when the reference is to something that has already happened or is already known. In particular, this article aims to address the following research questions: How do American feature writers use rhetorical stylistics to make references to an event that happened before the main action of the story? Which functions does rhetorical stylistics serve? What does the adoption of rhetorical schemes to quote historical facts tell us about the relationship between form and information in literary journalism?

Methodology

Feature Writing has been chosen as a case study, out of the 14 categories in which the Pulitzer awards made in journalism are divided, because it explicitly rewards literary aspects, giving "prime consideration to quality of writing, originality and concision" (Feat. Writ., 2020). The features cover a variety of topics ranging from culture to health, disability to crime, and geology to politics. There is no single thematic thread but they show uniformity in the attention the authors paid to writing, a characteristic for which the category was initially created. Out of the thirty-nine features, thirty-five were published in newspapers, one in a weekly magazine, one in a monthly magazine, one in a news agency and one in an online news outlet. All of the thirty-

nine features that have won the award over a period of forty years, since the category was first established in 1979,[2] contain short or extended narrative passages related to a time before the one when the main action of the story starts. A rhetorical analysis of the sample disclosed in twenty-one features schemes pertaining to word arrangement and sentence structure, which were embedded in parts of the text where references to the past were made. By virtue of their established syntactic pattern and predictable arrangement of components, these schemes can also be understood as "prepared iconic forms", fixed linguistic expressions which shape content (Fahnestock, 2011, p. 223). Drawing on the typologies and terminology pertaining to rhetorical stylistics laid out by Virginia Tufte (2006), Ward Farnsworth (2011) and Jeanne Fahnestock (2011), these syntactic patterns were divided into four schemes:

1. Comparative parallelism: sequential sentences showing a similar grammatical structure with a juxtaposition between the past and the present.

2. Series: listing of three or more sentence components in the same clause or in a series of successive clauses.

3. Emphatic repetition: reiteration of words and sentences in specific positions.

4. Syntactic symbolism: a technique whereby the author uses syntax to simulate action; in other words, the structure of a sentence represents its meaning.

After excluding duplicate cases showing similar syntactic patterns, the sample was reduced to fifteen features, each of which shows unique variants in the use of the aforementioned schematic patterns. Variants within each scheme were created by combining the four syntactic patterns with additional unique rhetorical devices, which will be discussed case by case in the findings section. The following limitations should be taken into account. These four rhetorical devices should not be seen as mutually exclusive categories; however a distinction was made for illustrative purposes, focusing on the rhetorical device that features more prominently in each example. In eighteen out of the thirty-nine features examined the aforementioned morphological and syntactic schemes were not apparent when references to the past were made, which is why the

[2] No award was given in 2004 and 2014.

findings of this research do not allow for making generalizations about the whole feature writing Pulitzer Prize category. The presentation of the results, where it does not follow a chronological order, prioritizes aspects of stylistic continuity and similarities between each extract.

Findings and Discussion

Comparative parallelism

The following extract from Jon Franklin's 'Mrs. Kelly's Monster' (1978), the first winner of the Pulitzer Prize when the category was created in 1979, captures through the very words of the protagonist of the story, Mrs. Kelly, the stark juxtaposition between past and present.

> "**Three years ago** a doctor told me all I had to look forward to was blindness, paralysis and a remote chance of death. **Now** I have aneurysms; this monster is causing that."

Each of the two successive sentences begins with a temporal adverbial to keep the two timelines connected. The adverb 'now' underlines the sense of medical emergency under the present circumstances and ties together the pair of sentences, giving the paragraph a cohesive force. The connotation of medical urgency, condensed in the emphatic placement of 'now' at the beginning of the second sentence, is expanded through a subsequent explanatory paragraph in which Franklin clarifies that Mrs. Kelly was born with a brain malformation. She calls it 'the monster' because, Franklin explains, the malformation has been increasingly causing her serious health complications, especially since 1942, when one of the abnormal arteries burst.

> **Now**, at 7:15 a.m. in operating room eleven, a technician checks the brain surgery microscope and the circulating nurse lays out bandages and instruments. Mrs. Kelly lies still on a stainless steel table.

The reiterated use of 'now' – the adverb appears ten times in the feature, of which five are at the beginning of sentence – can be interpreted as a perspective-setting word repetition performing two roles: it presents a topical event as the current viewpoint and outlines what happened

throughout this topical event (Altshuler, 2010; Kamp & Reyle, 1993). By carrying simultaneously in adjacent sentences details about the painful medical past of Mrs. Kelly with the current scene in the operating room, the reader's judgement is constrained by knowledge of the context.

> The unnatural junction was not designed for such a rapid flow of blood and **in 57 years** it slowly swelled to the size of a fist. Periodically it leaked drops of blood and torrents of agony. **Now** the structures of the brain are welded together by scar tissue and, to make his tunnel, Dr. Ducker must tease them apart again.

The parallel construction reminds the reader of what it meant for Mrs. Kelly to live with a brain malformation throughout her life and, therefore, why she was willing to take the risk of an operation. "I can't bear the pain. I wouldn't want to live like this much longer," Mrs. Kelly is quoted as saying before the operation.

The perspective set by putting 'now' in emphatic positions can be heightened by combining it with a climax, that is, an arrangement of words in ascending order of intensity, as seen in 'Death of a Playmate' by Teresa Carpenter (1980). The feature traces former playmate Dorothy Stratten's biography in parallel with that of her husband and manager Paul Snider: how they met, their involvement in showbusiness, how she subsequently left him and, finally, how he killed her.

> Her father, a Dutch immigrant, had left the family when she was very young. Dorothy had floated along like a particle in a solution. There had never been enough money to buy nice things. **And now** Paul bought her clothes.

In this case, 'now' cannot possibly be there to remind the reader of the current perspective, because the current perspective, in other words the present of the readers at the time the article was written, is when Stratten died. 'Now' here marks by contrast the shift in the past life of a former waitress who, after meeting her husband, becomes a promising presence in American show business. The paragraph presents one sentence hinting at the family background of Stratten, which is followed by two sentences of the same length, each counting ten words. The closing sentence ends abruptly with 'And now', opposing her father to the new male figure, the

future husband. The climax is achieved by shortening the final clause, thus abruptly interrupting the parallel structure. Farnsworth (2011) calls this device ‘abandonment’ because the disruption of the pattern gives an impression of release, putting in focus the last sentence.

A similar sentence architecture accompanied by ‘incrementum’, whereby the emphasis is signalled by a quantitative increase, can be found in ‘How Super Are Our Supercarriers’ by Steve Twomey (1986), a feature bringing under scrutiny the US Navy’s aircraft carriers.

> **Just 20 years ago**, Soviet ships spent a fleet total of 5,700 days at sea, according to U.S. estimates. **Last year**, they spent 57,000. The Soviets **now** have the world’s largest navy, with 283 major surface ships **and** 381 submarines, split between 77 ballistic missile-launching submarines (for delivering nuclear warheads to the Unites States) **and** 304 attack submarines (for sinking ships, such as U.S ballistic missile-firing submarines or the carriers). That is 664 warships, compared to the 541 the United States has at the moment.

The semi-final sentence of the paragraph with the repeated use of the conjunction ‘and’ is an example of polysyndeton. Farnsworth (2011) argued that polysyndeton in long cases can give a narrative a sense of advancement. In contrast to the previous example, where the opposition between then and now was emphasized by brief closure, in this case the parallelism is enhanced by situating the current perspective within a lengthy hypotactic sentence where added figures and details joined by conjunctions create a sense of forward motion. The above is therefore an example of the use of parallelism in inductive arguments where the parallel clauses support the conclusion, or a generalization (Fahnestock, 2011). The climax emphasizes the naval expansion undergone by the Soviet Navy between the 1960s and the 1980s in order to highlight the apparent inferior presence of US warships in the sea.

Saul Pett’s ‘Government Owned by Everyone, Run by No One’ (1981) presents the extra complication of a chiasmus to explain how much the cost of the government in the United States has increased in half a century. Chiasmus is a stylistic device in which words or other parts of a sentence are repeated in reverse order. The elements of the chiasmus in the example below are marked by the letters A and B.

> Before World War II **(A)**, the average man worked a month a year to pay for it; now **(B)** it takes four months. Now **(B)** it consumes a third of our Gross National Product. In 1929 **(A)**, it took a tenth.

Lexical or structural reversals might help to make the statement sound more convincing, suggesting a sort of closed circle that leaves no room for debate (Farnsworth, 2010). In this case, the ABBA pattern reinforces the underlying argument upon which the whole feature of over 7,700 words is built: how the US government has grown throughout the years into an extremely complex system that is large in size and difficult to handle. Another instance of reversal construction is visible in this extract from 'Snow Fall' by John Branch (2012):

> Before 1980 **(A)**, it was unusual to have more than 10 avalanche deaths **(B)** in the United States each winter. There were 34 **(B)** last season **(A)**, including 20 skiers and snowboarders.

Here the chiasmus is accompanied again by 'incrementum' as the sentences are arranged in such a way as to dramatically indicate, similarly to climax, how death-related avalanches have more than tripled over three decades. The meaning of this increment is the focus of the article, which explains how a cultural shift towards winter extreme sports, driven by a desire to take greater risks, is causing more and more accidents, like the one graphically recounted in the 14-page story.

These parallel structures highlight the functional interrelationship of events, in terms of either continuity or discontinuity. The use of comparative parallelism helps to integrate together phenomena that are distant in time and connect the past to the present. In addition, with their equalizing power of coordinating phrases, they reinforce the main line of argument (Fahnestock, 2011). Parallel sentence pairing enables the journalist to show the immediate connection between past and present and triggers assumptions in the readers, keeping the past instrumental to the present narrative.

<u>Series</u>

A series can be described as a list of three or more items in a sequence including grammatical elements such as words, phrases and clauses (Fahnestock, 2011). The series can be presented through parallel structures, but its scope is to emphasize the affinities between the items that are grouped together in the list. Enumerating facts in history, as in a list, can be the basis for formulating a general statement about the present, or on the contrary, extracting information for the future by looking at the past. In the example below, Jim Sheeler (2005) condensed in 73 words 90 years of history of war death notifications.

> **During World War I, World War II and the Korean War**, the message arrived in sparse sympathy letters or in the terse language of telegrams, leaving relatives alone to soak in the words. **Near the end of the Vietnam War**, the military changed the process, saddling stateside troops with the knock at the door.
>
> **On that day in October 2004**, inside an office at Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora, Beck's phone rang.

The opening list of three items is followed by a succession of adjacent sentences all starting with a temporal adverbial and arranged in ascending chronological order reaching a climax in the present, where the sound of the phone ringing interrupts the historical excursion. Using a list combined with a climax has two advantages. On the one hand it opens a historical parenthesis, serving epistemological purposes, a brief history of changes in war notifications, while on the other, the climax brings us directly to the bulk of the story: how two marines notify a woman of the death of her husband in Iraq.

The rhetorical power of listing can be strengthened by framing the list within a circular structure whereby the author begins and ends a paragraph with a similar wording.

> **Last March**, a baby was found dead next to a Tampa trash bin. **The previous fall**, a baby was left outside an apartment complex; he survived. **Before that**, another dead infant was found near a dumpster. **The year before**, a baby was found dead in a motel trash can. Across the state, near Fort Lauderdale, a police officer saved a baby thrown in a dumpster by sucking mucus out of its mouth; the same man had saved another baby **a year before** (James, 1990).

Here we have four parallel sentences starting with temporal adverbials. Afterwards comes a sentence starting with a location adverbial, followed by the poignant image of the police officer sucking mucus out of a baby's mouth. The whole paragraph starts and terminates with a temporal adverbial. By means of stylistic dramatization the author explains how widespread the problem of abandoned children had become in the mid-1980s. The calculated syntactic and semantic repetition and circularity of the text gives a sense of the extent of the problem and its recurrent nature.

Ron Suskind (1994) deployed a similar expedient enriched by antithesis, that is opposing different ideas in adjacent clauses. Antithesis can be used as a descriptive technique or to mark the advancement of a story with a passage from one situation to another that is in contrast to the previous one (Wolf-Knuts, 2003). The transition from one sentence to the next one is underlined by a climax featuring a series of crimes listed in order of ascending degree of graphic impact.

> **Recently**, a student was shot dead by a classmate during lunch period outside Frank W. Ballou Senior High. It didn't come as much of a surprise to anyone at the school, in this city's most crime-infested ward. **Just during the current school year**, one boy was hacked by a student with an ax, a girl was badly wounded in a knife fight with another female student, five fires were set by arsonists, and an unidentified body was dumped next to the parking lot.
>
> But all is quiet in the echoing hallways at 7:15 a.m., long before classes start **on a spring morning**.

The intensity of the sequence is increased by the use of temporal modifiers that suggest a movement from a general indication of time located in the past 'recently' and 'just during' to the narrow quiet present, which is 7.15 a.m. on a spring morning. The antithetic lead gives context, immediately sets the scene and gradually brings the reader from a generic not so distant past to the present moment in the hallways of Washington D.C., where the main protagonist of the story, a 16-year-old-boy with a disadvantaged socio-economic background whose ambition is to attend an Ivy League university, is introduced.

In order to emphasize the weight of each of the items in the list, Kathryn Schulz, in her 'The Really Big One' (2015), constructs a series in asyndeton listing powerful earthquakes in ascending order of magnitude and descending chronological order with no added linking conjunctions:

> Japan, 2011, magnitude 9.0; Indonesia, 2004, magnitude 9.1; Alaska, 1964, magnitude 9.2; Chile, 1960, magnitude 9.5—not until the late nineteen-sixties, with the rise of the theory of plate tectonics, could geologists explain this pattern.

The use of parallel clauses to build an argument by eduction is explained by Fahnestock (2011) as a way to use examples to "predict a new occurrence from similar preceding ones" (p. 229). The argument is further enhanced by omitting conjunctions. The asyndeton, in addition to accelerating the flow, might convey a sense of solemnity (Farnsworth, 2011). The device has an illustrative and dramatic purpose. On the one hand, it shows the seismic pattern of the Ring of Fire, a path along the Pacific Ocean running across the locations listed, characterized by extremely intense seismic activity. On the other, the list adds up evidence to sustain the argument made in the feature about a possibly overdue quake that could have a devastating effect on a large area of the coastal American Northwest. This area belongs to the same seismically active belt previously affected by the aforementioned earthquakes.

In the following extract from 'Pearls before breakfast' (2007), Gene Weingarten formulates a rhetorical question, which is then followed by a list of potential definitions connected in polysyndeton by the conjunction 'or', inserting in parentheses the originators of the answer.

> Plato weighed in on it, and philosophers for two millennia afterward: What is beauty? Is it a measurable fact (Gottfried Leibniz), or merely an opinion (David Hume), or is it a little of each, colored by the immediate state of mind of the observer (Immanuel Kant)?

The use of brackets to include famous names in the history of Western philosophy affords the possibility of referencing their ideas about beauty without grammatically affecting the sentence, thus containing the interruptions in the syntactic flow of words.

Presenting facts from history in a series, as loose sentences, without making explicit the causal connections between the items in the list gives those references an impression of factual historical records and a sense of completeness. This is especially evident when the series is closed in a loop by opening and closing it with the same wording, as we will see in some of the following examples.

Emphatic Repetition

Repetitions create patterns and therefore expectancy in the reader, and produce sound effects, making the expression more powerful and emotionally heightened (Fahnestock, 2011). Gene Weingarten used them in his 'Fatal Distraction' (2009), in order to explain why the number of cases of parents forgetting children in cars has significantly increased in recent decades. Weingarten included a reference to the early 1990s, when experts warned about the risk that front seat-airbags could pose to children and advised that children should ride in the back seat, which thus reduced the visibility of children. It follows a rhetorical question, 'What kind of person forgets a baby'?

> **It happens** to the chronically absent-minded and to the fanatically organized, to the college-educated and to the marginally literate. In the last 10 years, **it has happened** to a dentist. A postal clerk. A social worker. A police officer. An accountant. A soldier. A paralegal. An electrician. A Protestant clergyman. A rabbinical student. A nurse. A construction worker. An assistant principal. **It happened** to a mental health counselor, a college professor and a pizza chef. **It happened** to a pediatrician. **It happened** to a rocket scientist. Last year **it happened** three times in one day, **the worst day so far in the worst year so far** in a phenomenon that gives no sign of abating.

The verb 'happens' is repeated, alternating it in simple present, present perfect simple and simple past, either at the beginning of the sentence or right after the temporal adverbial. The whole reference to the past covering a decade includes a list of eleven items, leaving out conjunctions. By emphasizing the connection between the different items in asyndeton the author reinforces the underlying principle: forgetting babies in cars can happen to anyone regardless of class, education or personality profile. This point serves as the preliminary basis for the scientific

argument that unfolds subsequently, which is about how a change in routine and the way our brain is structured can impair the human ability to collect and connect information.

The following extract shows an example of anaphora, that is the repetition of a word or clause, in this case the temporal preposition ‘since’ followed by the year, at the beginning of each successive sentence:

> **Since 1802**, the population of the United States has multiplied 55 times while the population of government has grown 500 times. **Since 1802**, and most especially in the last 50 years, the government has been transformed, far beyond the ken of the men who started it, in size, power and function. The capital of capitalism now subsidizes rich and poor, capital and labor (Pett, 1981).

Anaphora, used in combination with repetition of the number five in its multiples, emphasizes how complicated and bureaucratised the American government became between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In conformity with the style utilised in the other extract from Pett, here again repetitions are inductively used to add up to the conclusion and emphasize, with the use of the antithesis, the transformation in size and capacity of the federal government.

In ‘The girl in the window’ (DeGregory, 2008), following the graphic description of the state of abandonment and mistreatment in which a little girl named Danielle was found in a house in Florida, the author introduces a section to explain that the definition of a ‘feral child’ comes from fictional or true historic accounts regarding children deprived of human nurturing:

> **It's** said that during the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick II gave a group of infants to some nuns. **He** told them to take care of the children but never to speak to them. **He** believed the babies would eventually reveal the true language of God. **Instead, they** died from the lack of interaction.

The repetition of pronouns at the beginning of the sentence helps to establish a perspective in relation to readers and convey informality, thus enhancing closeness with the readers and sustaining a sense of interrelation between clauses (Tufte, 2006). ‘It’s said’, as an appeal to common belief, marks the semi-factual tone of the whole sequence. But the aim here is not to

accurately reflect a fact from the past; rather it is to amplify the dramatic tension surrounding the decision by a couple who offered to adopt Danielle, thus facing the challenges of raising a mistreated child who had been deprived of comfort and food in her early years. In fact, later we find a similar construction repeating the same pronoun at the beginning of each successive clause:

> **Everyone** told them not to do it [adopt her], neighbors, co-workers, friends. **Everyone** said they didn't know what they were getting into.

Writers of both fictional and non-fictional writing are aware of the importance of lexical variety and the use of poignant and unique words to maintain readers' attention and curiosity, so a deliberately reiterated semantic or grammar unit often serves an expressive function. Repetitions make the story more memorable, leaving a lasting impression on the reader.

Syntactic symbolism

Tufte (2006) used the term 'syntactic symbolism' to refer to grammatical and compositional constructions conveying semantic meaning by their form. In other words, the syntax of a sentence strengthens or exemplifies its meaning (Fahnestock, 2011). The effect of syntactic symbolism can be enhanced by the combined deployment of parallel structures, emphatic repetition and series. Below is an example of syntactic symbolism from J. R. Moehringer's 'Crossing Over' (1999):

> Gee's Bend is where the Civil War **came and went**, but the slaves **stayed**, **and** their children **stayed**, **and** their grandchildren **stayed**, **and** their great-grandchildren, **and** so on, until today, Mary Lee and 700 of her kin cling to this bulb of bottom land their ancestors were chained to. **They** bear the surnames of the last slaveholders to live here. **They** grow corn near the slaveholders' headstones. **They come and go** amid the ghosts and dust devils that dance on the site of the old Big House.

This is a feature about human life around a river that kept separated black and white people for almost two centuries in an isolated community called Gee's Bend, in Alabama, through the account of Mary Lee Bendolph, a slave descendant.

The above paragraph presents the repetition of the verbs of motion 'come' and 'go' in alternation with the verb of state 'stay' conjugated in alternate tenses and connected by the reiterated use of the conjunctive 'and' to form a polysyndeton. The sequence, through its structure, alludes to the idea of intergenerational passages; their interconnection is reinforced by the closing elliptic clause "were chained to", a reminder of how captured Africans were chained before boarding slave ships during the transatlantic slave trade that took place across the Atlantic Ocean from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The whole sequence reminds the reader of a chain because it is built on a connected series of links joined together by means of polysyndeton and repetitions and anaphora of the pronoun 'they', which is placed at the beginning of three successive sentences to create rhythm. The whole reference conveys an oscillatory sensation that might allude to the swinging backwards and forwards of riverboats on water.

The following extract presents an instance of polysyndedon, which is used to reinforce the motion of the fast succession of memories chronicled by the families interviewed by John Camp (1985) and collected to depict life's struggle on an American farm in the 1980s.

> Memories grew fast.
>
> **Of** walking the beans. **Of** haying time. **Of** rebuilding the aging machinery. **Of** David on the John Deere, dragging a plow, Sally-Anne on the David Brown 990 with the disk, the wind whistling across them both, the sun beating down....

This constitutes an example of syntactic symbolism in that the sub-headline "Memories grew fast" is followed by a list of clauses whose rapid succession is enhanced by the omission of the main subject and verb with the repeated conjunction 'of' at the beginning of each sentence. This repeated use of 'of' produces a regular cadence and gives the impression that the author is creating the meaning as the succession of clauses goes along (Farnsworth, 2011). The accumulation of similar grammatical units metaphorically mimics the string of memories developing by degrees in rapid succession.

The use of parallel constructions can go as far as becoming the underlying thematic thread of a whole feature, like in 'Zepp's Last Stand' by Madeleine Blais (1979). The journalist documented the train journey of a dishonourably discharged World War I veteran who headed towards the Pentagon for a hearing before the Board for Correction of Military Records. The journey to Washington goes in parallel with a symbolic journey to the past, which is evoked through the words of the story's protagonist Edward Zepp. Blais is explicit about the use of the journey to the past metaphor: "The closer he got to the Pentagon, the closer he got to 1917", she writes. Below is an example of how this metaphorical parallelism is reiterated in the syntax through a corresponding grammatical clause including an anaphora:

> September 1979, Sebring, Fla.: Ed Zepp's light lunch has just been placed before him. September, 1917, Cleveland, Ohio: Ed Zepp's appeals to the draft board have been rejected twice.

A symbolic structure, as Hayden White stated (1986, p. 91), "tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences. The historical narrative does not *image* the things it indicates; it calls to mind images of the things it indicates, in the same way a metaphor does". The use of symbolism in past references should remind us that references to history in journalism should not be seen as the mere reproduction of what happened. They are also metaphors signifying a relation of resemblance between the past and the story formats that are conventionally deployed to give our lives a culturally sanctioned significance (White, 1986).

Conclusion

Taking as illustrative examples the American Pulitzer Prize for feature writing (1979-2019), this paper has explored how references to the past in literary journalism can be shaped by compositional techniques. A rhetorical analysis of thirty-nine features disclosed how references to the past are embedded in literary syntactic structures. Four stylistic schemes were identified in twenty-one features: comparative parallelism, series, emphatic repetition and syntactic symbolism. These schemes were used in combination with additional rhetorical devices in order

to variate patterns and augment their efficacy. The rhetorical devices recognized included: anaphora, antithesis, asyndeton, chiasmus, climax, parenthesis and polysyndeton.

The schemes at sentence and word level found in the features analysed serve a range of purposes. They enable journalists to compress time via sentence building, and state the essence of the meanings of a story and its relationship with the present, without opening up lengthy historical digressions. They bridge the gap between past and present in an orderly and cohesive manner, achieving an aesthetic result by giving a text succinctness, memorability, fluidity and organization. In addition, these rhetorical schemes assist the author in formulating an argument by embedding a line of reasoning into the structure. The use of rhetorical schemes offers journalists the opportunity to re-enact the past by means of syntactical structure, and by means of structure, connecting them to the specific subject of their features, making the past relevant to the present narrative.

The connection with the present account established through means of rhetorical schemes, however, is not limited to serving epistemological explanatory, interpretative and contextualising functions. Embedding rhetorical schemes in the text pushes the force of language beyond its representational scope by bringing forward its expressive and evocative characteristics and the role that these play in conveying meaning. In conclusion, the function of the past in journalism can be more comprehensively understood by taking into account the syntactic structures used to re-enact it. It follows that the use of history in journalism goes beyond representing a given historical fact; the form through which the fact is presented matters because it makes each historical record discursively unique, thus contributing to the news value of the story.

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