

## The narrative formulas in cinema and literature: a paradigmatic proposal

Las fórmulas narrativas en cine y literatura:  
una propuesta paradigmática

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### Resumen

En este trabajo retomo la tradición académica orientada a plantear la existencia de estrategias narrativas comunes a todos los soportes semióticos. Propongo la creación de un sistema de fórmulas narrativas que permiten precisar la naturaleza estructural de estrategias narrativas fundamentales, como el suspenso, la sorpresa, la transferencia de culpa y la narrativa conjetural, así como las estrategias distintivas del inicio y el final de naturaleza clásica, moderna y posmoderna. Para el análisis se utilizan películas de Alfred Hitchcock y novelas y cuentos del siglo XX.

### Palabras clave

Fórmulas Narrativas, Teoría Inchoativa, Teoría Terminativa, Cine, Literatura.

### Abstract

This paper presents a general overview of the narratological tradition in order to pose the existence of narrative strategies that are common to every narration. Terminative theory has received much more attention than inchoative theory. This paper presents a system of narrative formulas which are useful for studying the structural nature of fundamental narrative strategies, such as narrative suspense, surprise, guilt transference, and conjectural fiction, as well as the structural strategies of classic, modern, and postmodern beginnings and endings. The examples belong in Alfred Hitchcock's films and 20th century novels and short stories.

### Keywords

Narrative Formulas, Inchoative Theory, Terminative Theory, Film, Literature.

## 1. Introduction

The objective of this work is to propose the creation of a system of universal narrative formulas that facilitate the analysis of common structural strategies found in all narrations (cinema, literature, graphic narrative, journalism, etc.). These formulas will be supported with examples from canonical texts from literary and cinematographic traditions.

The strategy used to create these formulas consists of studying the key concepts of narrative tradition, especially the theory of the novel, the theory of the story and the theory of cinema, as well as studying the inchoative theory (which is to say, the theory of the narrative beginning) and the terminative theory (which is to say, the theory of the narrative ending) all of them framed by the paradigmatic approximation (which is to say, in the distinction between classic, modern, and postmodern narrative). Thus, these formulas are useful to analyze any narrative material in any format or medium.

There are at least three disciplinary and interdisciplinary reasons to justify the creation of these formulas: their logical antecedents in semiotics, the linguistic origins of semiotics, and the demand for legitimization of all interdisciplinary approximation. In the case of semiotics, their logical antecedents are evident in the work of the creator of this discipline, Charles S. Peirce. He himself was a philosophy professor specializing in modern logic, although his academic work was "notably well-rounded" (T. Sebeok & J. Sebeok, 1979: 87). In the case of structural linguistics, this is found in the methodological basis of a large part of classic narrative, with which structuralism has become the most productive linguistics theory in the study of the narrative (Valles-Mingo, 2009: 21). And the creation of formulas in the field of humanities and social sciences (like that which occurs in Lacan psychoanalysis, structural anthropology and the Theory of Design), although it has been no stranger to controversy, responds to a demand for legitimization when these disciplines take on an interdisciplinary nature (Klein, 1996: 128).

At the same time, the production of formulas in narratology satisfied at least three disciplinary objectives: methodological utility, universal scope and practical applicability. The methodological utility of creating narrative formulas is evident due to the need to have models of analysis that have the highest accuracy possible. Its universal scope consists of formalizing of a series of strategies that are present in any narrative

material. And its practical applicability consists of its possible use in narrative production processes, in other words, in the creation of movies, novels, stories, video games and other forms of narration.

## Narratological Background

Narratological tradition is based on the elaboration of conceptual systems of universal utility. This tradition goes back to the first works of Russian formalism. In particular, it was Viktor Sklovski who in 1913 proposed the concept of *ostrannenie* or defamiliarization to distinguish the formal trait that distinguishes any work of modern art, and this foundational concept continues to be pertinent in the study of the most experimental forms of contemporary narrative (Van den Oever, 2013: 12). In 1938, Bertolt Brecht proposes in dramatic theory the concept of *Verfremdung* or distancing, as a strategy leading to ideological awareness via stimulating the capability of astonishment of spectators.

The first system of narrative formulas was proposed in 1928 by Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, where the Russian researcher deviates from the genetic tradition (in other words, the study of the origins of the traditional folk tale), which dominated at that time, and proposes a synchronic approximation (Propp, 1928: 17). Half a century later, these formulas were used to study the structural evolution of the classic western, in its modern versions, which is a reflection of the ideological universe of its spectators (Wright, 1976: 27). Although this is a field of narratology that is far from literature, it is an important antecedent in the search for a system of formulas of universal nature.

In 1928, Boris, in his *Theory of Literature*, proposed the original distinction between the story and discourse, which is to say, between the content and structure of the narrative sequence, a distinction supported by the syntactic construction and the existence of structural units in all narrative material (1928: 64).

In 1935, Sergei Eisenstein proposed, in his theory of cinematographic montage, the distinction between logical order (*vorschlag*) and chronological order (*nachslag*) of all narration, which constitutes a notable contribution to the universal definition of narration.

During the second half of the 20th century, French structural narratology produced notable theoretical proposals. In 1966, Algirdas J. Greimas proposed, among many other concepts, that of narrative isotopy, which is semantic in nature, or in other words, of linguistic origin. Afterwards, Gérard Genette establishes the distinction between order, duration, and frequency in the study of narrative time (Genette, 1972: 33). On the other hand, in 1958 Roland Barthes established the distinction between knots and catalysts in all narration. While knots are essential for the existence of a story, catalysts between knots perform a connective function. A few years later, Barthes himself indicated the existence of what he called the "strategies of narrative seduction" (Barthes, 1970b: 26), those such as suspense, dilation, alteration, suspense and the blocking of the solution to the narrative enigma, all of which maintain the attention of the reader or spectator.

This century has produced various panoramic compendiums on the state of the narratology. In 1999, Suzanne Keen published her *Narrative Form*, and during that same year appeared *Lingüística de textos narrativos*, by Jean-Michel Adam and Clara-Ubalina Lorda. In 2001, an English version of the Dutch *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, by Luc Hermann and Bart Vervaeck, was published and in 2009 another work of Dutch origin, *Film Narratology*, by Peter Verstratten, was translated. Both discuss the proposals created in 1995 by Francois Jost and André Gaudreault in their *Cine y narratología*.

As you can see, until now no system of narrative formulas has been proposed that would determine the structural nature of any narrative product. The formulas to be presented are derived from the theory of the novel (for the study of suspense and narrative surprise); the theory of the folk tale (for the study of conjectural narrative); the theory of cinema (for the study of guilt transfer), and the inchoative theory (for the study of the beginning and end of all narration).

## First Narrative Formulas

A first group of narrative formulas belongs to what can be considered general structural strategies: suspense, surprise, guilt transference and the detective story. The following contains the introduction of these formulas and their examples in cinema and literature.

In *narrative suspense*, what is suspended is the moment in which narrative truth is revealed to the protagonist, who during the story ignores this truth, and frequently ignores that he is victim of deceit. It is about a truth that determines the meaning of the narration itself, like the uncovering of the real identity of a criminal or the revealing of a family secret or any other substantial truth for the existence of the narration itself. *Suspending* the revelation of a truth, that generally is kept a secret, does not mean canceling this revelation, but rather the discovery of this truth is postponed (in other words, suspended) to be revealed to the protagonist at a specific time in the story, which generally coincides with the end. This final revelation is called a *character epiphany*.

In other words, the narrative suspense consists of the spectator (or reader) knowing something that the character does not. This narrative principle, particular of classic narrative, is the first of the narrative formulas, precisely the Formula of Narrative Suspense: (S s, C -s), which is read in the following manner: the Spectator (S), knows something (s) that the Character (C) does not (-s). The narrative instance (which we could consider as the implicit author of the story) thus creates a type of complicity with the reader or spectator, upon confiding in him a secret that is kept unknown to the character (or characters).

For Roland Barthes, the narrative suspense is the most important strategy of the process of narrative seduction that establishes the 19th-century realist narration, as he demonstrated himself in the study of the novel *Sarrazine* de Balzac (Barthes, 1970: 28). Narrative suspense is already present in the classic tradition (like in the plot of *Oedipus Rex*, by Sofocles) and defines the narrative structure of narrative of genre cinema (especially in the cases of fantasy, detective, horror and science fiction). In the case of *Oedipus Rex*, we the spectator know that the protagonist has sex with his mother and kills his father, but he will only come to know it later on, and it is this knowledge that will cause the tragedy.

In some canonical films of detective cinema, like *Rope*, *Blackmail* and *Sabotage* (all directed by Alfred Hitchcock), the first minutes show the spectator, on the screen, which character or characters deliberately commit a crime and sometimes with very detailed planning. However, the rest of the characters ignore this fact during the entire plot, and on occasions, like in *Blackmail*, they ignore it completely.

In the film *Wait Until Dark* (1967), the protagonist is blind and receives the unexpected visit of various strangers in her own apartment, who try to trick her, taking advantage of her disability. We the spectators know things that she ignores (like the mobiles that these characters have) and we can see things that she cannot see, all of which creates a permanent feeling of suspense.

In *Marnie* (1964), we see the protagonist enter an office, after hours, and take an important document. When she gets ready to leave the office, the camera moves to the left, and while we see her in the right half of the screen, we see in the left half a woman mopping the floor and who has her back to us. At that moment, the protagonist drops an object that makes a lot of noise and only afterwards will we know that it doesn't matter because the cleaning lady is deaf.

Narrative suspense is always accompanied by *narrative surprise*. In this case, it is the narrator who knows something that the spectator (or reader) does not. The resource is called the Formula of Surprise: (N s, S -s), which is read in the following manner: the Narrator (N), knows something (s) that the Spectator (S) does not (-s). The spectator may know something is going to happen, but ignores *what* it will be or *when* it will happen. The spectator will be surprised by the narrator (or the narrative instance, in general).

In *Rope*, although we know who committed the crime of the student (because we saw this crime being committed in the first minute of the film), it will surprise us to know who discovers it and how he discovers it. In *Marnie*, the thief surprises us by discovering, in a conversation between characters, that the cleaning lady is deaf.

But the surprise of the reader or spectator does not always occur when there is suspense. A large part of the attraction that detective stories have for their readers or spectators consists of knowing how the private detective discovers the secret that we couldn't figure out, although we had access to all the clues. This revelation is a surprise for the reader or spectator. Surprise is the main element in horror

films, where new strategies of surprise are being continuously created. This genre is defined by the existence of all types of threats and we often ignore the *where*, *when*, and *why* they originate.

Films directed by Alfred Hitchcock, during 48 years of his career (from 1926 to 1974) are essential examples when studying narrative suspense (that hides a truth from a character) and surprise (that hides a truth from the spectator). In these films, the suspense is often construed based on a *transfer of guilt*. The Formula of Transference of Guilt (C s (a), S c (b) ) means that the characters (C) believe that someone (a) is guilty of a crime (c), but the Spectator (S) knows that the real guilty party (c) is another (b).

At the beginning of *Saboteur* (1942) we see a man planting a bomb in a building and setting the timer to program its explosion. The next day, at breakfast, this same man sees an article about the explosion on the front page of the newspaper and acts surprised about it in front of his wife. But we know that he is guilty of the crime. In *Strangers on a Train* (1951) we know the pact that two strangers make when they meet by chance during a train ride. This pact consists of, precisely, that each one of them will commit a crime that the other wants to commit without being discovered. Being a movie of the *film noir* genre, there are different degrees of moral ambiguity in each of the characters, which ends up causing more than one transfer of guilt.

In the detective story, which is to say, in the *conjectural narrative*, the reader (or spectator) knows that there is a crime and knows some circumstantial elements (like the victim's identity, the place and time of the crime), but completely ignores who committed it (the *whodunit*). In this type of story we find an epiphanic truth, in other words, a truth that should be revealed at the end of the story. In the Formula of *Whodunit* (N s (c), E -s (c) ), the Narrator (N) knows (s) who committed the crime (c), but the Spectator (S) does not (-s), and will try to find out during the process of the reading. The detective story engages the reader's abductive reasoning ability, in other words, his ability to develop a hypothesis based on signs, clues, and figures of speech (Eco, 1983: 275).

Narration that proposes an enigma to resolve goes all the way back to Voltaire and other writers. However, it was Edgar Allan Poe who created the fundamental rules that are valid for all texts of this genre. Other detective story writers have developed other, more elaborate rules, like W. S. Van Dine, Ronald A. Knox, Jorge Luis Borges, Raymond Chandler and Patricia Highsmith (Zavala, 1995: 309-428). In all cases, the end usually presents the revealing of the epiphanic truth that resolves the enigma. This is the narrative mechanism that we find in detective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Allan Poe and Bustos Domecq, as well as the novels of Agatha Christie, G. K. Chesterton and others. These strategies are used in TV series of the first decade of the 2000s like *Dr. House* (on medical research) and *Lie to Me* (on body language research).

## The Beginning and End in the Classic Narrative

The following are the formulas for the beginning and ending of classic, modern and postmodern types. Here it is important to remember the paradigm of the classic that refers to all that is timeless and conventional, and whose efficacy is universal. On the other hand, the modern is all that is opposite of the classic, which is to say, that comes from an individual vision, and to that extent is unique and unrepeatable. In this sense, the classic narrative is the most accessible and didactic (like in the case of genre cinema). Meanwhile, the modern narrative is the most experimental and vanguard, demanding and difficult to access. While classic narrative is based on tradition, the modern narrative is based on the personal vision of the author. While a classic narration is structurally similar to any other classic narration, each modern narration, in structural terms, is different from any other narration.

The postmodern narrative is paradoxical and tends to be ironic, as it consists of the simultaneous presence of classic and modern aspects in the same text or the presence of simulations of the classic and the modern. The simultaneity leads to using strategies like genre hybridization. Simulations lead to using resources like metaparody, which is to say, the parody of genre aspects. In general terms, the postmodern narrative is a form of extemporaneous recovery or ironic recycling of the conventions of classic narrative.

The inchoative theory is the branch of narratology that studies the beginning of the narrative. It is based on the principles that support the terminative theory. In other words, it is the field of narratology that studies the end of the narrative. In other words, the study of the strategies used to begin a narration come from the study of the strategies used to end the narration. Both theories are inseparable in the same way that all narration that ends is a narration that begins. Inchoative narratology is a strategic field to study any form of narration. In the following, I propose a series of formulas derived from narratological tradition. Among the most outstanding work on the inchoative theory is that by Frank Kermode (1986), Richard Neupert (1995), Marco Kunz (1997) and James MacDowell (2014).

## Classic Inchoative Formulas

The *classic beginning* of a story consists of going from background (B) to foreground (F) in terms of time (t) and space (e). Therefore, the Classic Beginning Formula is  $(B(t, e) \rightarrow F(t, e))$ . The Background (B) is a panoramic vision, overall, that allows one to know the context where the story will occur and who the characters are. The Foreground (F) is a perspective where a detail is observed, in other words, something very particular that could not be perceived accurately if observed in the Background. This is to say that the classic beginning goes from the most general to the most specific in a narrative movement that goes from the general context until arriving at the specific text. The classic beginning is often accompanied by narrative resources such as the explicit cataphora (when what is going to be narrated is announced); the intrigue of predestination (when the end of the story is announced at the beginning), and the establishment of the narrative suspense (when complicity is established by the narrator offering the spectator knowledge of something that the characters ignore). The classic beginning is characteristic of the realist novel, genre cinema and the detective story.



Let's examine for a moment the first scenes of the movie *Psycho* (1960), by director Alfred Hitchcock. Immediately after the opening credits we see a panoramic view of the city observed from a considerable height. While the camera begins moving over the city and starts to focus in on one particular building, the name of the city and the state (Phoenix, Arizona) appear on screen. After that, the day and the month (Thursday, August 24th) appear on screen. And finally, just before the camera stops in front of the building window, the exact time (4:23 pm) appears. In this way, in just a few seconds, we have gone from B (background) of time and space (the city in the month of August) to F (foreground) of time and space (a specific window of a particular building, observed at 4:23 pm on Thursday, the 24th).

Going from Background to Foreground is didactic in nature, as it gives the spectator or reader the chance to identify the place and the moment in which the story will occur. Thus, for example, 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels by Balzac, Stendhal and Zola (Levin, 1974: 71), the stories of Poe (Meyers, 2000: 124) and the romantic comedies of Hollywood (Echart, 2005: 87) tend to begin showing a situation of general nature (in terms of time and space) where the story is set. This principle is applicable to any type of narration, like the case of classic documentary cinema. Thus, for example, *Nanook of the North* (John Flaherty, 1922) begins showing a map of the region where the family lives. Then we see each one of the Nanook family members get out of the kayak, including the wife, children, grandparents and the dog that accompanies them on their journeys.

The *classic final* is epiphanic, in other words, resolves all the narrative enigmas introduced throughout the story. This type of ending is often surprising and also coherent with the rest of the story. The classic final is closed and unique. It is an ending that is necessary to resolve the enigmas introduced and gives the reader a sense of inevitability in retrospect. In other words, it gives them a sense that this ending was necessary and inevitable (Hills, 1987: 24). The Formula of the Classic Ending is: (C (e) = T (1)). This formula establishes that the ending (e) that is classic (C) is equivalent to a sole (1) truth (T). Of course, it is a fictional truth, which is to say, a truth that depends on the context of enunciation, in this case of narrative nature. The classic ending corresponds to the solution of the circular labyrinth. This means the type of construction (in this case, a narrative construction) where there is only one entrance and

one exit. In the classic ending, the fictional truth is revealed giving the story sense and coherence. For this reason, the ending can be considered as the space of the fictional epistemic revelation.

Here it is useful to remember the proposal by Borges that states that every story (or every film) always tells two stories: an evident story that is dominant throughout the text and another story that is hidden and only revealed at the end, in a surprising way. The classic ending is surprising to the extent that it materializes the eruption of the story that has been recessive and a guest throughout the tale, and is thus revealed as the real, dominant, host story (Borges in Zavala, 1993: 39). Based on this idea, it can be stated that the classic ending is an anaphoric ending, in other words, an ending that gathers together the elements that were introduced throughout the story. This means that this ending makes sense thanks to the reading of the rest of the text.

Finally, upon studying the classic ending you can see the importance it has, what the musician John Cage called the Paradox of Host. This paradox is produced in a situation where an element that is originally only a guest –in this case, the hidden story– ends up being revealed as the real host –in this case, the element that contains the narrative truth – (Ulmer, 1985: 136). All of these aspects of the classic ending are found in *Madame Bovary*, *Don Quijote de La Mancha*, *The Odyssey*, at the end of each one of the stories by Boccaccio, in detective stories and in musical comedies. The classic ending resolves all the enigmas introduced throughout the story.

The end of *North by Northwest* (1954) by Alfred Hitchcock is exemplary because all the narrative enigmas of the 5 stories introduced in the plot are resolved in the final seconds of the last minute: the protagonist saves his own life and that of his partner; he is able to recover the lost microfilm; he also recovers his own identity, materialized in his name (that he can now give to his new wife); the side that the woman he is in love with belongs to is revealed, and he reaches the maturity that being married means. Thus, after two hours of setbacks and the introduction of numerous narrative enigmas, the adventure story, the political story, the espionage story, the Oedipal story, and the romance story are all resolved simultaneously.

The prestigious novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), by John Dos Passos, narrates the stories of numerous characters that live in Manhattan. In the last pages of the book, all of them meet in the train station (Manhattan Transfer), offering the image of a diverse city, full of life and with many tales worth telling.

## Modern Inchoative Formulas

The *modern beginning* is one that distances itself from the rules of the classic beginning. While the classic narrative is based on tradition, the modern narrative is casuistic (each case is unique), unrepeatable (cannot be defined by a sole strategy) and depends on the vision of each creator (like that which occurs in auteur cinema). The Formula of the Modern Beginning is  $(M(i) \neq C(i))$ . This formula means that the modern beginning,  $M(i)$ , is equivalent to all that which is different from or opposite ( $\neq$ ) the classic beginning,  $C(i)$ .

The modern beginning is often expressionist (expresses some form of anguish) and is frequently complex, enigmatic and confusing. The modern beginning is many times anaphoric, meaning that the most important part of the story (usually the end) occurs before the initial sequence. In other words, the modern beginning often takes place *in medias res*, in the middle of the story or even when it is over. When the film begins, the most important part of the story has usually occurred.

The modern beginning usually starts showing Foreground, which is to say, something very particular that occurs at an undetermined time and space, which introduces an enigma that is not always resolved during or at the end of the story. Where did the action we see onscreen occur? Who are the characters and why are they there? How did this particular situation happen? These and other questions are inevitable when watching a modern beginning. If the narration has a modern ending none of these questions will be answered at any moment. For this reason, each modern narration is different from another.

*The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka has a modern beginning, because when Gregorio Samsa wakes up having been converted into an insect (from the narrator's perspective), the most important part has already occurred, that is, everything that caused this deplorable situation. The first chapter of *Ulysses* by James Joyce is enigmatic, confusing and complex, and the rest of the novel will emphasize these aspects.

The first lines of *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust are focused on the memory of a very specific experience in the life of the narrator (the experience of eating a certain type of bread), which will lead him to initiate the narration of the most memorable moments of his personal life.

The *modern ending* is open, undetermined and multiple. The possible conclusion or narrative denouement is left up to the reader's imagination. The indetermination puts emphasis not on the text and its epistemic or moral meaning, but on the reader and his personal and reading experience. The Formula of the Modern Ending is  $(M(e) = \sum(e))$ , which means that the modern ending,  $M(e)$  has more than one ending,  $\sum(e)$ , in which the symbol  $\sum$  should be read as *many or more than one*. The modern ending is an open ending, and therefore can be described in this other way:  $(M(e) = \sum(T(n)))$ , which means that the modern ending,  $M(f)$ , contains a multiplication ( $\sum$ ) of possible truths, in which (n) is equal to any whole number. In other words, the modern ending is open to the interpretation of each reader. It is an undetermined ending that is ambiguous, open, and incomplete.

The modern ending corresponds to a tree-shaped labyrinth, which is to say, the type of architectonic or textual construction where there is a sole entrance (the introduction of determined narrative enigmas) and multiple exits or valid solutions, whether they are simultaneous or alternating. It is a cataphoric ending, and therefore, promotes the reader to carry out an ironic rereading of the text.

*The Lady with the Dog* is the story that Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov considers as paradigmatic of modern literature. In the *Course on Russian Literature*, that contains the notes of the course that he taught for various years at Princeton University, the modernity of this story is explained. Written in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this story has an undetermined end. The protagonists are happily married with their respective couples, but they meet and fall in love, and have secret encounters for several years. In the final paragraph of the story they speak about what they should do with their lives. But we will never know for sure what decision they make. So it will be the reader (if he so decides) that will conclude the story in his imagination. This type of ending is known as the *open ending*.

## Postmodern Inchoative Formulas

The *postmodern beginning* is produced by the juxtaposition of the aspects of the classic beginning and the modern beginning. This paradoxical nature creates two characteristic mechanisms of postmodern aesthetic: simultaneities and simulations (both classic and modern). The Formula of the Postmodern Beginning is  $(PM(b) = \sum [C(b) + M(b)])$ , which means that in the postmodern beginning, PM (b), a classic beginning, C (b), and a modern beginning, M (b) coexist ( $\sum$ ). The postmodern beginning is classic and modern at the same time; closed and open; contains traditional and experimental aspects; resolves narrative enigmas and at the same time introduces new enigmas. It has, like all postmodern aesthetic, a playful, paradoxical, and self-referencing beginning.

The postmodern beginning can be read as a classic beginning or as a modern beginning, either alternately or simultaneously. This means that it can be read as conventional and allegoric at the same time. This is to say that it is didactic and enigmatic, conventional and unrepeatable. The postmodern beginning has identifiable aspects that are classic, but it is sufficiently ironic and ambiguous so that the spectator can play with it in his imagination.

The postmodern beginning tends to be hybrid and metafictional, making a theme out of its own inchoative nature and using narrative resources from opposing traditions. For example, the first seven minutes of the Chicano film *Zoot Suit* (1982) has fixed and in-movement images; images in color and others in black and white. This beginning alludes to a historical past and the present of the characters. It establishes a distinction between to see and to be seen (as spectators of this film we see spectators arriving to the theater at the beginning of the show and taking their seats, but we also enjoy the show that they observe from their theater seats). It mixes elements of documentary cinema and fiction cinema; juxtaposition strategies of more spectacular musical cinema and reflexivity strategies of Brechtian theater of artistic and political vanguard.

The novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980) by Umberto Eco begins with the story of the apocryphal narrator that reveals how the manuscript was found that is going to be read. This is to say, it makes a theme out of (it becomes the theme of the narration) the act of reading this novel. This novel has a metafictional beginning. In the first paragraph of the Italian novel *If on a winter's night a traveller*, by Italo Calvino

theme is made out of reading the first paragraph:

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveler*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, "No, I don't want to watch TV!" Raise your voice--they won't hear you otherwise--"I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed!" Maybe they haven't heard you, with all that racket; speak louder, yell: "I'm beginning to read Italo Calvino's new novel!" Or if you prefer, don't say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone. (Calvino, 1980: 9).

In the first line of the novel *The Old Gringo* (1986) by Carlos Fuentes, it says: "Now she sits alone and remembers". This sentence is simultaneously anaphoric and cataphoric. It is cataphoric (in other words, announces what's to come) because the woman sits down to remember, and those memories will be the material of the rest of the novel. But at the same time, this first line of the novel is also anaphoric (in other words, refers to something that happened previously), because all that is about to be told occurred before, and now is part of a memory.

The initial sequence of the film *Amélie* (2001) has a postmodern beginning, presenting Foreground and Background at the same time. It is Foreground of chronological nature when showing the precise moment in which Amélie was conceived. And it is a Background of spatial nature when showing some of the events that are occurring in the universe at that particular moment in time (a fly is crushed by a car; some glasses dance in the wind without anyone observing them; a man erases from his agenda the name of a friend who has recently died).

The first two minutes of *The Woman Next Door* (1981) by Francois Truffaut are made like a system of simulations: one classic beginning simulation ("You could say this story began 10 years ago, but no: it began 6 months ago"); a modern beginning simulation ("The ambulance arrived too late, because it came from Champfleury"); a simulation of identity ("If you think I am a tennis player, you're wrong; back the camera up so that you can see well"); a simulation of spontaneity ("Let's go sit over there; no, over here"), and a simulation of register ("The family is posing in front of their house for a photographer who never arrived").



The postmodern ending is paradoxical and ironic because it has, as simulations, the coexistence of a true, unique ending (classic) and an open, multiple ending (modern). The ultimate meaning of a postmodern ending depends on the interpretation that each reader makes of it and it can change with each reading. The Formula of the Postmodern Ending is  $PM(e) = \sum (C(e), M(e))$ . This means that the postmodern ending,  $PM(f)$ , is the sum ( $\sum$ ) of a classic ending,  $C(e)$  and a modern ending,  $M(e)$ . The postmodern ending is a simultaneous open and closed ending, which is to say,  $PM(e) = \sum (T(1), T(n))$ , where there is a unique truth,  $T(1)$ , any many possible truths,  $T(n)$  at the same time.

The postmodern ending corresponds to the rhizomatic or reticulated labyrinth, where there can be simultaneously one and many exits (like a network). This ending tends to be parodic, and uses a generic intertextuality. This means that the postmodern ending tends to use ironic allusions to rules of classic narrative genres. The story "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1944) by Jorge Luis Borges has an ending that closes the spy story, but at the same time, it leaves open the philosophic argument regarding real nature and imaginary of time in the collective history. "Continuity of the Parks" (1959) by Julio Cortázar is the best example of a postmodern ending. While this ending remains open (given that it is not written into the story), at the same time, each reader, inevitably, imagines a denouement for the story (Zavala, 2007: 299-311).

The Chicano film *Zoot Suit* (1982) is the fictionalized reconstruction of a historic event. The story reconstructs what occurred in the real life of the protagonist. But after hearing the happy ending set to equally glorious background music, the character that represents the Spirit of the Race says to Henry Reyna: "Great! *Happy Ending* and everything. But that is not the way life is, Hank". When this symbolic character cracks his knuckles we know the different versions of what could have happened in the life of this Chicano, from the perspective of American law; socialist party activism; the struggle for human rights, and the girlfriend who waited for him for various years while he finished his prison sentence (Zavala, 1993: 66-68).

## Conclusion

Having a system of narrative formulas can contribute to the study of specific fields of contemporary narratology, such as: the theory of adaption, the theory of semiotic translation, the theory of genres, and the incipient theory of medical narratology. In the theory of adaption, the utility of narrative formulas consists of the possibility to compare the inchoative and terminative nature of the original literary text and the filmic text, thus determining the way the conditions of cinematographic production contribute to preserving or modifying the original nature of the literary material. In the theory of semiotic translation, the formulas can be used to study the conditions in which it works within a same semiotic system, like cinema (in the cases of *remake*, *retake*, tribute or parody) or upon studying the translation of a semiotic system to another (like changing from the literary to the cinematographic format).

In the theory of genres, narrative formulas are useful for determining resources used when changing from one narrative system (like the daily press or the graphic narrative) to another narrative system (like the documentary or the novel). In medical narratology (an instrumental variation of narratology), the narrative formulas can be at the service of a typology of resources that are useful for supporting the treatment of different cases with particular needs.

On the other hand, the existence of a system of narrative formulas like the one presented in this article can contribute to a systemization of workshops for the training of story narrators (in film or literature), thus showing where theoretical models belong in the preparation of story writers. The narrative formulas presented come from the observation of different theoretical traditions and the study of the canonical textual production in film and literature. These proposals leave the road open to continue exploring this relatively new field of contemporary narratology.

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### How to Cite:

Zavala, L. (2016). "The narrative formulas in cinema and literature: a paradigmatic proposal". *Comunicación y Medios*, 25 (34), 70 - 81.