

The early reception of *Pequeñeces*: putting a hermeneutic tropology into practice¹

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Abstract

According to Hayden White, the basic cognitive strategies for dealing with symbolic forms match several major tropes. This article proposes to fundamentally rephrase White's typology and use it as a template for a taxonomy of literary hermeneutics. The validity of this classification, as well as its nuances and specificities, is shown in the analysis of 43 letters in which ordinary readers commented in 1891 on the publication of Luis Coloma's novel *Pequeñeces*. These letters can namely be classified into at least four groups, depending on how they connect fiction with reality. For some readers, the protagonists stand for their social class; for others, they represent a vice or a virtue. Also, for some, the novel distorts social relations, while for others, it reveals, between the lines, actual scandals.

Keywords: Hermeneutics; reading research; reading strategies; tropes; Luis Coloma (1851-1915).

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La primera recepción de *Pequeñeces*: aplicación de una tropología hermenéutica

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Resumen

Según Hayden White, las estrategias cognitivas básicas para tratar con formas simbólicas corresponden a una serie de tropos fundamentales. El presente artículo propone reformular fundamentalmente la clasificación de White y utilizarla como plantilla para una taxonomía de la hermenéutica literaria. Se demuestra la viabilidad de esta clasificación, así como sus matices y particularidades, en el análisis de 43 cartas en las que lectores ordinarios reaccionaban en 1891 a la publicación de la novela *Pequeñeces*, de Luis Coloma. En conjunto, esas cartas pueden clasificarse en al menos cuatro grupos, en función de cómo articule la ficción con la realidad. Así, para algunos lectores los protagonistas representan a una clase social; para otros, un vicio o una virtud. Además, para unos la novela distorsiona las relaciones sociales, mientras que, para otros, desvela, entre líneas, escándalos auténticos¹.

Palabras clave: Hermenéutica; investigación en lectura; estrategias de lectura; tropos; Luis Coloma (1851-1915).

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INTRODUCTION

This article aims at bringing together under the heading ‘hermeneutic tropology’ a series of fundamental modalities that guide the interpretation of literary works. In this article, ‘interpretation’ shall be understood as the establishment of a certain type of analogy between a Gestalt of the literary work (that is, between the perceived form that the text acquires in the mind of each individual reader) and some aspect of extratextual reality. In the hermeneutic sense, interpretation occurs when – for example – we say that a specific novel talks about the risks of jealousy in a romantic relationship, or that a particular play criticises labour relations in late capitalism. Of course, the hermeneutic or interpretative gesture represents only one of the many facets of our relationship with literature and, more broadly, with fiction; it constitutes its translation into a discourse about the world and is therefore equivalent to its most intellectual aspect. Our argument is based on the pragmatic thesis that such discursive syntheses are not inscribed in literary texts but rather result from generally unconscious pragmatic decisions (Fish, 1980; Rorty, 1992).

This hermeneutic tropology will be established in the study of the reception of *Pequeñeces*, a late 19th-century novel for which there is a small corpus of reading comments dating from the months immediately following its first edition. Those interested in the empirical reception of literature know how difficult it is to find clues that allow us to reconstruct historical ways of reading, and how fragmentary, random and ambivalent these clues tend to be. Hence the interest of this corpus of reception, despite its modest size.

A SCANDALOUS NOVEL

Within the subgenre of Spanish aristocratic novels, which includes notable works such as *La Montálvez* by José María de Pereda and *La espuma* by Armando Palacio Valdés (Ragala, 2004; Penas, 2015), *Pequeñeces* is unique in that it was written by a priest, Father Luis Coloma, of the Society of Jesus. It first appeared in serial form in the magazine *El Mensajero del Corazón de Jesús* between 1890 and 1891, and from February of the latter year also in book form (Benítez, 1999). According to Emilia Pardo Bazán, ‘the third edition of *Pequeñeces* (seven thousand copies) sold out before it was finished; it didn't even make it to the bookshops; it disappeared from them as if by magic’ (Pardo Bazán, 1891, p. 85), adding: ‘The fourth edition, which [...] will consist of ten thousand [copies], has also been dispatched before leaving the presses’ (p. 85). A contemporary historian estimates that 50,000 copies were sold in bookshops in 1891 alone (Serna-Galindo, 2017), although Father Blanco-García, in *La literatura española en el siglo XIX* (Spanish Literature in the 19th Century), also published in 1891, claimed that the four editions printed up to that point totalled 30,000 (1891, vol. II, p. 470). Whether it sold 30,000 or 50,000 copies, *Pequeñeces* was one of the best-selling and most talked-about novels of the 19th century in Spain, a country where literacy rates at the time were around one-third of its 18 million inhabitants². Considering that copies were shared, lent or read aloud, Jean-François Botrel has estimated that the novel had around 70,000 or 100,000 readers – in the year or years of its first publication, it is understood – arguing that this popularity was helped by a particularly affordable price: six reales for each of the two volumes, or 3 pesetas in total, almost half the price of other novels of comparable length at the time (Botrel, 1999).

The plot of *Pequeñeces* revolves around a marquise, Curra de Albornoz, who had several close friends and, in the context of the democratic six-year period, became suspected of supporting the claim to the Spanish throne of Duke Amadeo of Savoy (while most of the nobility backed the Bourbons). After many scandals and vicissitudes, following the deaths of her suitors and one of her children, Curra de Albornoz repents of her sins and embraces a life of seclusion and piety.

Public opinion was immediately divided into several camps: those who read the novel as a fierce satire of the aristocracy; those who believed it was a novel with a hidden meaning; those who considered it a Jesuit pamphlet; those who saw it as a nauseating product of naturalism... *Pequeñeces* had as many

supporters as detractors, so it is no exaggeration to compare the debate it sparked with the trial of *Madame Bovary*, with the exception that in the former case the trial was not judicial, but exclusively journalistic.

Although Coloma's novel was heavily criticised for many different reasons, few dared to deny that it was one of the most entertaining works written in those years. It contains adultery, espionage, conspiracies, betrayals, lies, murders... and a good number of colourful and unforgettable characters. *Pequeñeces* is set between 1871 and 1878, a particularly turbulent period in Spanish history: a bourgeois revolution had recently ousted Queen Isabella II of Bourbon and crowned Amadeo of Savoy in her place, who soon renounced the throne; in 1873, a federal republic was proclaimed that would last less than a year before the Bourbon dynasty was restored, all of this against the backdrop of a civil war against the seditious Carlists, supporters of the Old Regime in Spain.

Coloma's documented intention was to regenerate the Spanish aristocracy by denouncing some rotten apples, fruits that end up returning repentant to the fold of the church and atoning for their sins with a life of penance and seclusion (Coloma, 1942; Elizalde, 1987). If for some readers this medicine becomes poison – moral poison, that is, temptation or a bad example – ‘the fault will be theirs [...], because the malice will not then lie with the writer, but with the reader's own will.’ Coloma wrote this in the prologue to the novel, present since the serialised version (Hornedo, 1951, p. 460), a prologue that is all the more interesting in that it anticipated different perspectives on the work, assuming that it would not be read in the same way by ‘an audacious man’ as by ‘the pious and fearful soul’³.

A DIVERSE RECEPTION

The wide range of interpretations anticipated by Coloma can be seen in the small corpus of historical reception that exists on *Pequeñeces*, consisting of 43 letters from readers published by the newspaper *El Heraldo de Madrid* between 3rd and 17th April 1891 (one of which spans two issues; on the 2nd and 18th, two articles open and close the reception of originals, respectively; almost all of the issues can be consulted in the Digital Newspaper Library of the National Library of Spain (<https://hemerotecadigital.bne.es>); the rest can be consulted, for example, in the Municipal Newspaper Library of Madrid). It was the newspaper itself, in response to the commotion caused by the Jesuit's work, that offered to publish impartially any opinions that the general public might wish to send in.

Among those who entrusted their impressions to the *Heraldo*, Botrel (1999, p. 215) states that ‘there is no doubt of the participation of readers – including women – from all over Spain and from different walks of life, unaccustomed to writing in newspapers’; four or five of the signatures are recognisable as belonging to prominent figures in political or cultural life, such as Felipe Ducazcal, Emilia Pardo Bazán and Narciso Campillo. The newspaper claimed to have received testimonies that were too long to be published; on 18th April, when it closed the window for criticism, the editorial team wrote: ‘We can fill write more columns [...] with the works received [...] but after careful examination, we have found that they add nothing new to those already published’ (Heraldo, 1891).

‘Reception studies do not usually have as much data or documentation as that generated by the communication process organised around *Pequeñeces*,’ wrote Botrel (1999, p. 205); but despite the exceptional nature of this corpus, its argumentative rhetoric has not been studied systematically until now. Its importance is all the greater given that there are hardly any accounts of the first ‘ordinary’ reception – that is, outside of journalistic criticism and academia (Rohrbach, 2018) – of this particular novel or of novels from the same period in general.

FUNDAMENTALS OF HERMENEUTIC TROPOLOGY

Each of those readers in 1891 linked the novel to the world through an analogical process akin to one of the main tropes – the name given in rhetoric to what is also known as ‘figures of thought’. In *Tropics of Discourse* (1978), Hayden White identified four tropes that he considered basic – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony – as elementary mental operations, which in turn maintained a

fascinating parallelism with the four phases of cognitive development in children described by Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1973; White, 1978). White's reflection is cognitive in nature and foreshadows Hofstadter and Sander's more recent conception of analogy as the fundamental principle of thought, an analogy which, in each case, if we follow White, would choose a topological axis of displacement.

Hayden White briefly refers to a well-known 1956 article in which Roman Jakobson identified metonymy and metaphor as two basic types of poetics. According to Jakobson, cubism would be metonymic, surrealism metaphorical; the realist narrator, who moves from the setting to the action and from there to the mental world of the characters, progresses through metonymic movements, while metaphorical constructions predominate in romantic lyric songs. David Lodge would return to this principle with considerable fidelity in *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977). Both are thinking about internal relationships within the artistic document, about the type of objects or characters that come together in the same literary text. Thus, for Lodge, surrealism assumes the metaphorical principle not because it proposes symbols or metaphors for human passions, but because 'it combines objects non-contiguous in nature' (Lodge, 2015, p. 99). However, on other pages, Lodge adopts a perspective closer to the one that interests us here; for example, when he writes that 'the metonymic text [...] – *Emma*, say, or *The Old Wives' Tale* – seems to offer itself to our regard not as a metaphor but as a synecdoche, not as a model of reality, but as a representative bit of reality' (Lodge, 2015, p. 134). Therefore, unlike Jakobson, who uses tropes to characterise relationships between textual elements and therefore adheres to a poetic (formalist, textual) perspective, Lodge oscillates between this and another hermeneutic (pragmatic, extratextual) perspective, in which tropes serve to identify relationships between the literary text and the referent that readers choose for it in the real world.

More recently, and independently of these theoretical traditions, science fiction author Lola Robles described a series of mechanisms of symbolisation through which literature (she limits her reflection to 'non-realistic' genres) represents certain aspects of the real world. Alongside what she labels 'strangeness' and 'alternatives for the better,' she astutely points to analogy (metaphor), inversion, and hyperbole.

In these pages, we aim at expanding and systematising these latter approaches, classifying each historical account of reading *Pequeñeces* according to the trope defining the articulation between the text and extratextual reality, since, if anything stands out from the initial reception of this novel, it is the diversity of perspectives it managed to bring together.

Synecdoche

Eighteen of the 43 readers who expressed their opinions in the pages of *El Heraldo de Madrid* understood that *Pequeñeces* portrayed the aristocracy in a very negative light, or at least that sector of the Spanish aristocracy that supported the Bourbon dynasty during that turbulent period of revolutions and wars of succession. The main characters of this novel, nobles with dissolute lifestyles, represent their social class as a whole.

Narciso Campillo, professor at one of Madrid's leading secondary schools and author of a renowned manual on poetics and rhetoric, described it in *El Heraldo* as a 'gallery of paintings depicting [aristocratic] customs' (hereinafter, each testimony will be identified by the date of publication and a letter that distinguishes it within the same issue; this is the second from 9th April: 9b). It should be noted here that not only did realistic novels originate in the genre of essay of manners in the early 19th century, but for decades they were subtitled with the phrase 'novel of manners'. Coloma's novel could certainly be like so many other realistic novels: the fictional plot can be considered a particularising synecdoche of reality, in the sense that each character – or many of the main characters at least – represents the socio-professional category to which they belong, and the relationships they maintain with each other represent the dynamics that can be observed in society. Born at a time when sociology did not yet exist as an academic discipline, realist novelists found a formula that allowed them to explore complex and rapidly evolving societies.

The aesthetics of literary realism were already hinted at in Rembrandt's portraits and Vermeer's paintings (Moretti, 1994) and would radically transform Western fiction from the 18th century onwards. Its

narrative function is more complex than it appears at first glance. Several contemporary accounts attest to the initial confusion of readers faced with these texts, which appear to recount factual events that no one could have physically witnessed (Watt, 1957; Nablo, 1990; Furst, 1995).

In Coloma's novel, the uninhibited Countess of Alborno, or her lover, Jacobo Téllez, Marquis Consort of Sabadell, involved in murky crimes and plots, offer readers – according to a realistic interpretation – characters and scenes that were commonplace among the Spanish aristocracy. This is evidenced by comments such as the following, originally written in verse: ‘¡Currilla de Alborno! How many like her recklessly display their charms at dusk on the wide promenade of the Retiro park! / How many *Jacobos* of noble birth conceal their infamies behind a title!’ (14b). Curra and Jacobo become prototypes of their class. Another reader revealed this same perspective when writing that Coloma had dipped her pen ‘in the wound of a particular class’ (13b).

In the opinion of approximately half of the readers of the corpus, the characters and their vicissitudes are an image of something more extensive: a diverse group that they sometimes identify with the aristocracy in general, other times with the Bourbon aristocracy, and there are even those who argue that the nobility of blood is often confused with an upstart plutocracy (12a and 17a)⁴.

Sometimes this synecdochical reading is revealed in the criticism of episodes or characters that are ‘not considered sufficiently representative’ (5c), or in the rejection of episodes that are not understood as characteristic of the referent (6a), or in the identification of implausibilities, such as: ‘Ladies in Madrid do not smoke cigars or drink whisky’ (7d).

Syllepsis

Nine of the 43 works listed in the *Heraldo* go a step further, or closer to home, assuming that the fictional characters masked the identities of nobles or businessmen of the time. *Pequeñeces* would be a novel with a hidden meaning for those readers, and unravelling that meaning would have been, according to Juan Valera, one of the great attractions of reading it. I will not go into detail here about these powers, which have already been discussed by Hornedo (1951) and Elizalde (1987). The novel itself contains authorial footnotes which, while insisting that no real characters have been portrayed, identify certain episodes as historical, which may have encouraged this interpretation despite everything. The author himself rejected this interpretation in private, stating that he didn't even know many of the people mentioned [...] by sight⁵.

The first of the testimonies of 7th April contained the oral commentary of a man ‘eminent in letters’ for whom *Pequeñeces* was a libel, a slanderous writing against the royal personage who belonged to the commission that had offered the throne of Spain to the Duke of Aosta, Amadeo of Savoy. If this royal personage had heirs, the anonymous commentator argued, they would have every reason to denounce Coloma.

Another reader was scandalised that the novel had brought to light ‘secrets of private life torn from the conscience at the foot of the confessional’. She thus stated one of the *topoi* of the historical reception of this novel: its author, a Jesuit priest, is said to have written a novel about the sins that some of the faithful had confided to him in confession. From now on, this reader continued, many of the faithful will shy away from approaching the feet of a spiritual director, fearful that his secrets will serve as a basis and plot to write another novel like *Pequeñeces*.

The type of relationship of *pars pro toto*, the part for the whole, characteristic of the particularising synecdoche, is not present here. Rather, it is a bijective function in which every character, every situation – at least within the most prominent cast of situations and characters – has a single concrete referent in the real world: ‘individualities’ (17d), and no longer collective categories.

The *roman à clef* ceases to understand fiction as such and returns it to a pragmatic, verifunctional, refutable contract. Even so, a somewhat more uncertain or oscillatory position – it is tempting to call it ‘quantum’ – between the realist reading and the key reading cannot be ruled out: the text would be the truthful, albeit masked, account of real events, but would nonetheless contain fictionalised elements,

illustrative of broader social trends. In rhetoric, syllepsis is a variant of ellipsis, where a signifier lends itself simultaneously to two different senses. For example, this happens in stanza 118 of *The Book of Good Love*, when the narrator recruits a messenger to seduce a baker and it ends up being the messenger who eats ‘the sweetest bread’, that is, the sweetest bread, in the literal sense – the baker would have given him her best products – and in the figurative sense.

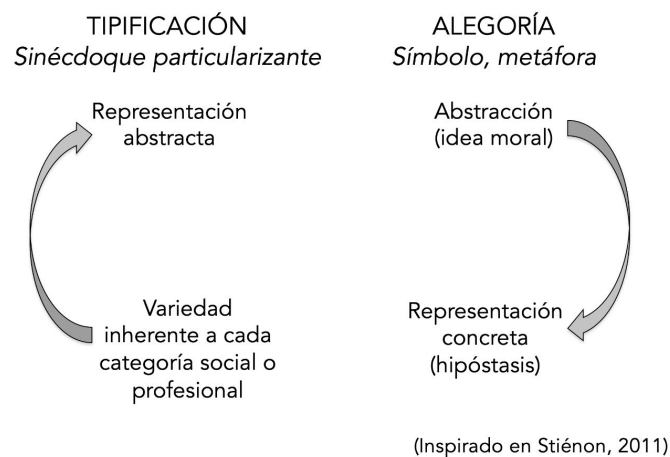
Allegory

We will now see what happens in the following reading assessment: ‘the characters in *Pequeñeces*, rather than belonging to a particular class, belong to the inextinguishable breed of bad men and bad women, who abound everywhere, with or without well-known or illustrious names’ (12a). Obviously, here the novel is detached from any social class (the reader went on to claim to have known women like those in *Pequeñeces* who wore shawls and scarves, garments associated with women of the working class). In the same vein, on the same day, another person added that Coloma's novel ‘does not attack with fury a class, but vices [sic] that [...] exist everywhere, because they are products of human frailty’ (12b).

We call this type of reading ‘allegorical’, since it encodes dialectical relations in terms of abstract notions, in the manner of fables. In other words, the characters or actors are moral, not social, types. Stiénon has explained this difference with singular ingenuity: if in the realist paradigm the variety of concrete exemplars is abstracted in a synthetic, supposedly representative exemplar (for example, the loose aristocrat, or the uneducated priest), in the allegorical paradigm the abstract – the moral ideas – is enshrined in an exemplar of material attributes (for example, a mean old man who gives body to avarice, or a shirtless and energetic girl called Liberty); this mode of representation is traditionally known as ‘hypostasis’.

Figure 1.

Synecdoche and allegory as hermeneutical modalities



Source: own elaboration based on Stiénon (2011).

THE IDEA OF HERMENEUTIC MODALITY

We propose to call these variations of analogy, applied to the holistic evaluation of a literary work, ‘hermeneutic modalities’. Although the notion of modality is not new, it does not seem to enjoy the popularity it deserves – apart from the propositional modalities in formal logic (epistemic, alethic, deontic...), which classify the degrees of certainty of an utterance, and which therefore refer to a use

quite different from the one we are discussing here –. In biblical exegesis, the levels of interpretation envisaged by Augustine of Dacia in the 13th century (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical) are sometimes referred to as ‘modes’ or ‘modalities’. Kingsley Amis, in *New Maps of Hell*, spoke of science fiction and fantasy as two modes (Amis, 1961). A treatise on satire from the 1970s defined modalities as ‘*une manière intuitive globale de percevoir ou de vivre la représentation*’ (Duisit, 1978, p. 11). In 1982, Alastair Fowler considered modes the adjectival variants of genres; several of his favourite examples, such as ‘heroic’, ‘tragic’ or ‘comic’, hypothesised a reading appraisal of the subject matter read, a dialogue with extratextual situational stereotypes. In Fowler’s wake, the theorist Claudio Guillén (1985) wrote shortly afterwards:

It is a modality, for example, irony, or ironic attitude, or ironic narration [...]. They are modes of writing, for example, using adjectives for clarity, satirical, or grotesque, or allegorical, or fantastic, or parodic, or realistic. These modalities qualify, colour and decisively orientate the most diverse genres.

In these usages, the term ‘modality’ sometimes alludes to tenuous architextual properties, and sometimes to some form of correspondence between text and world. It is this last meaning that links with White’s tropology and is the most interesting for classifying the production of discursive meaning from literary works, which are defined as such precisely insofar as their referent is left to the discretion of the readers. The modality is not the discursive meaning itself, the message that is ‘believed’ to be extracted from the literary work – this way of describing the interpretative moment of reading falsifies what really happens, presenting it as a mere decoding – but the analogical interface which, given the non-referential character of the literary text, is essential to generate statements about extratextual reality from it.

In principle, this hermeneutic tropology is independent of formal and thematic textual properties (even if these favour some modalities over others). Different readers may interpret the same text in different ways, and the case of *Pequeñeces* offers clear proof of this. The fact that no less than half of the readers of *Pequeñeces* understood it as a synecdochic representation of the aristocracy is due to the fact that the novel was published when the realist aesthetic had already achieved full hegemony and fictions tended to be perceived as stereotypes of social categories, situations and dynamics existing in the real world.

There are certainly many of us who read dystopias or satires through the hyperbolic mode, as if what is represented exaggerates attributes or dynamics of our present (or, to put it more precisely, many of us who qualify as ‘satirical’ or ‘dystopian’, depending on the case, fictions that, in our opinion, exaggerate certain dynamics or personal attributes). This is also how some read *Pequeñeces*, by the way: as a collective portrait that overemphasised certain defects (pejorative hyperbole, 8b) or, on the contrary, softened the harshness of reality (meliorative hyperbole): ‘If he [Coloma] is guilty of anything, it is prudence’ (4b); “he is very restrained” (8a). Emilia Pardo Bazán confirms the frequency of this reading, beyond what is reported in the pages of *El Heraldo*: ‘The strongest concept I have heard about Father [Coloma] is that he exaggerates’ (4a).

Of course – and this brings us to the last of the modalities proposed here – one could also understand the universe represented in fiction as an inversion of the natural order (or of what a historically situated reader would consider to be the natural order). This would be the antiphrastic mode, a reading strategy also often favoured by satire and privileged by the upside-down worlds of folklore⁶. The antiphrastic reading is not historically verified in *Pequeñeces*, perhaps because its cast of characters is not sufficiently polarised; It is true that, alongside characters who are at the antipodes of an honest and loyal nobility, we also find others who are supposedly exemplary – the pious Marquises of Villasis and Sabadell, or Father Cifuentes – but we know that some readers found these characters repulsive or boring (9b; Valera, 1891), which is another interesting phenomenon of reception. However, even if the plot of the novel makes an antiphrastic reading difficult, and this cannot be documented in the corpus studied here, we are not prevented from imagining it, inferring that the nobility should avoid the extremes represented in *Pequeñeces*, and be neither excessively unsympathetic nor excessively pious.

Hermeneutic modalities and reading experience

Is there any correlation between the reading mode chosen to read the novel and the pleasure it brings to its readers? To find out, one can try assigning valences between -2 and +2 to the reading experience associated with those comments in the corpus from which a hermeneutic modality can be inferred (totalling 33); this numerical labelling is supported by the formulations – some more critical, others more laudatory – present in the letters to the *Heraldo*. For example, this assessment of 17th April is an outright reprobation and would receive a score of -2: '[*Pequeñeces*] does not reveal in its author any imagination, feeling, fantasy or any quality of a great novelist. As for the style, it is mannered, heavy, pedantic, unfunny'. At other times, judgements are more nuanced, so that intermediate valences (-1, +1, or zero in the case of no apparent evaluative reactions) would correspond to them; the following passage might illustrate this: 'I find the book perfectly written, full of grace and wit, and its sparkling scenes admirably described; but the ending is tragic and implausible beyond belief, and I am not happy with it' (10d, +1).

Needless to say, this type of analysis should be taken with extreme caution, given the difficulty of rating the overall reading experience on the basis of data that are hardly standardised, barely comparable and which use highly discretionary evaluation criteria. Rarely is the judgement of the reading experience as developed as that of Narciso Campillo, trained by his craft to take an analytical look at printed material:

Coloma's book is not one of the common ones, but one of those that deserve to be read, because it has excellent chapters, I would like to see it cleansed of some defects, not of the incurable ones that throb in its very depths [...] but of those external and superficial defects that tend to spoil the style (9b, +1).

The evaluative passages do not usually rest, like the latter, on purely aesthetic criteria, but are marred by moral considerations (6a, 13b) or ideological sympathies (13a, 17e). On the other hand, it should be noted that the same feature of the novel, such as its mordacity, can be the object of an opposing appreciation, either positive (14b) or negative (7a, 12c).

Having made all these considerations, the corpus of readings yields a suggestive result: the average satisfaction rate for those comments that attest to the particularising synecdoche reading mode is clearly higher than for all the others (1.05 compared to -0.53). The assertiveness of this less than recreational experiment may be rather low, but it invites us to rethink the dialectic between architextual repertoires, communities of interpretation and hermeneutic modalities.

To put it very simply, when applied to *Pequeñeces*, the synecdochic or representative mode implied a model of society with a corrupt aristocracy. Perhaps those who were reluctant to read *Pequeñeces* as synecdochic fiction – because they did not believe that the entire Spanish aristocracy was as shameless as Curra de Albornoz and Jacobo Téllez, or because they believed it was even worse, or because they did not believe it was worse or better than other social classes – also presupposed, in fact, that any such novel would be synecdochic. The foregoing implies that – despite this assumption – they read the novel badly, but rather that they had no choice but to read it differently, in many cases to their regret, because the realist (synecdochic) reading was incompatible with their conception of society or their values. The novel would have collided both with the horizon of expectations of readers educated in realism – often, as some testimonies in *El Heraldo* reveal, in that idealist realism prior to naturalism – (Jauß, 1970) and with the image that these same readers had of society.

There were non-synecdochic and yet to some extent satisfying readings – 'I find it sympathetic' (3a), 'good novel' (12a) – but overall the reading experience seems to have suffered under the conflict between the dominant hermeneutic mode for the genre of the nineteenth-century novel and the principle and belief systems of some readers. The adoption of alternative interpretative modalities would be a subsidiary solution to make sense of an uncomfortable text, which means that, ultimately, it is the ideological conceptual modelling of the readers that modulates the interpretative modalities.

CONCLUSION

As Hayden White (1978) suggests, tropes allow us to identify basic types of cognitive strategies for dealing with symbolic objects. This proposal is to substantially reformulate White's classification by proposing it as a template for a taxonomy of literary hermeneutics. The hermeneutic gesture is a complex cognitive exercise – so much so that some philologists devote their entire professional careers to it –; its first phase consists in the transformation of the literary text into a mental form, whose constitution involves syntactic, generic and social stereotypes; only afterwards, and by virtue of one of the tropes considered here, can the literary work be translated into a discursive statement about some aspect of the real world (Ceballos-Viro, 2019, p. 33).

Figure 2.

Table of tropes and associated genres

Modalities	Associated architexts
Syllepsis	<i>Roman à clef</i>
Particularising synecdoche	<i>Costumbrismo</i> , realism, naturalism
Allegory	Fables, marvellous, fantasy
Hyperbole	Dystopias, utopias, satires, upside-down world
Antiphrasis	

The historical reception of *Pequeñeces* shows the operability of this approach, which extends the number of tropes to no less than five. In the tropological tradition of thought, analogy of the *pars pro toto* type is usually identified as ‘metonymy’, for which the more precise term ‘particularising synecdoche’ is preferred here. Metonymy could be, however, the kind of reading which, by virtue of causal contiguity, sees the literary work as a quintessential expression of the author; not the biographical reading – which would be a form of *à clé* reading – but the reading of those who believe they recognise in the literary work an expression of the empirical author's ethos, or that [reading] which could be made by someone who has an intimate knowledge of the author.

These hermeneutical tropes are not mutually exclusive. An allegorical reading does not prevent us from feeling that the characters are ‘flesh and blood’, that they seem ‘torn from reality’, or to perceive some details as implausible (12a); a realistic reading (synecdochic) is not at odds, as we have seen, with the belief that some names in fiction conceal real identities (17d); hyperbole, in turn, can cover socio-professional categories (synecdochic mode, 8a) or veiled portraits of real individuals on whom the inks have been loaded (syllepsis, i.e., *à clé* reading or personal satire, 8b).

Finally, it has been suggested that the selection of hermeneutic modalities could respond to a practically deterministic logic: the interpretative process starts from the premise that the result will be, in substance, compatible with the readers' model of the world – which it completes or, eventually, qualifies –. In case of blatant incompatibility, another modality would be selected that better fits that model of the world. The corpus of ordinary reception gathered around *Pequeñeces* in 1891 is too small and too *wild* to provide conclusive confirmation; it is to be hoped that less ecological but much more controlled experiments will test this hypothesis.

NOTES

¹ Translator's note: as most of the quotations are not translated into English, they are translated herein for general ease of understanding.

² In 1877, illiteracy rate amounted to 62.7% for men and 81% for women (Marco, 1986, pp. 129-130). Botrel has similar data: '12.5 million illiterates and 5 million illiterate' (1999, p. 209).

³ Please see also another reflection by Coloma on the different types of reading in 1942, pp. 26-27 and 29.

⁴ Nowadays, historian Miguel Artola has described the intersections between the aristocracy, the grand bourgeoisie and the upper political spheres during the Restoration (Artola-Blanco, 2015).

⁵ The famous letter that Coloma sent in 1891 to Emilia Pardo Bazán can also be read in this sense: 'At the end of April the Duke of Granada came to see me and told me that among the originals assigned in Madrid to the characters in my novel, Don Pablo Morales was cast as Diogenes. I, very surprised, asked him who Don Pablo Morales was, because it was the first time I had heard of such a person. Of course, this Morales may have something of Diogenes in him when they hang the *mochuelo* on him; but what this indicates is that I have portrayed his vices, but not his person, because I was not even aware of his existence. The same has happened with the other characters' (reproduced in Coloma, 1942, p. 36).

⁶ For a review of this interdiscursive genre, see Ceballos-Viro, 2020.

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Appendix

Day (April 1891)	Contribution	Synecdoche		Hyperbole		Silepsis	Allegory	Overall assessment
		Plausible	with implausibilities	Pejorative	Improvement measure			
3	a					X		+1
4	a	X						+2
	b				X			0
5	a							
	b							
	c	X						0
	d							
6	a	X						+2
	b			X				-2
	c							
	d		X					0
7	a					X		-1
	b							
	c					X		-1
	d							
8	a	X			X			+1
	b			X		X		-2
	c							
9	a	X						+2
	b	X						+1
10	a					X		-1
	b	X						+1
	c	X						+2
	d		X		X			+1
11	a	X						+2
	b							
	c	X						0
	d							

Day (April 1891)	Contribution	Synecdoche		Hyperbole		Silepsis	Allegory	Overall assessment
		Plausible	with implausibilities	Pejorative	Improvement measure			
	e					X		-1
	f	X						0
12	a		X				X	+1
	b						X	0
	c					X		-1
13	a	X						+2
	b	X						-2
14	a							
	b	X						+2
15	a	X						+2
16	a	[Continuation of day 15]						
17	a		X					-2
	b	X						+1
	c					X		0
	d	X				X		+1
	e	X						0

Note. In grey, contributions with no apparent hermeneutical operation.