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Confessions of the Hydra. Variations on the Concept of Fiction in Latin America

According to a version given by Friar Marcus of Nice, it is claimed that Esteban of Azemmour, a slave that accompanied Cabeza de Vaca in his “shipwrecks”, saw at the beginning of the 16th century that “*further North of New Spain, there were immensely rich Indians living in the seven cities of Cibola: houses had eleven floors and their facades were covered with turquoises...*” Antonio Pigafetta, Magellan's Vicentine diarist, asserts that he has discovered a village inhabited by giants, only dressed in the skin of an animal “*whose head and ears are as big as those of a mule; its neck and body, those of a camel; legs of a stag and tail of a horse, whose neigh it imitates*”.

These visions were more than frequent in those days of early divergences with respect to Latin American reality. German soldier Utz Schmidl, who was travelling with Pedro de Mendoza on occasion of the first foundation of Buenos Aires, describes in his chronicles the existence of ferocious Amazons living in the deepest corners of the Paraguayan forest, who used to cut off one of their breasts in order to be able to shoot their arrows in a more skilful way. Schmidl is not the only one to have this image. Also, Christopher Columbus himself mentions rare beings, “*Amazons of an old kind*”, dwelling in Martinique. He believes having seen three mermaids jumping out of the ocean, and in November 1492 he heard of “*cannibals resembling a monster: a single eye and a dog snout.*” Actually, canine obsessions are already rooted in travellers' time and space. Besides, faced with the inability of receiving the Other, the first thing that comes to mind is the mythical strategy of describing the helplessness generated by a reality that prevails over the already known.

This was the reason why perception of Latin American reality has been often translated as fiction, being labelled as “delirious”, “magnificent”, or rather, as “magic”, based on the works of a number of writers from the 60s, with very different backgrounds and styles (including, without limitation, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Carpentier, Roa Bastos, Donoso). Reality would then be imitating fiction.

However, in 1939, Borges publishes an article whose title becomes a definition in itself: *Fiction nourishes from fiction*. Taking into consideration a series of literary examples (beginning with *The Thousand and One Nights*), the Argentine writer intends to show that every literary fiction is supported by a tradition guarded by a previous tradition.

Finally, in 1991, another Argentine writer, Ricardo Piglia, coins a new concept: “the paranoid fiction.” Taking the study of Borges's work and the detective novel as a starting point, Piglia assumes that fiction arises from an obsession that eventually becomes real.

This research attempts to account for the concept of fiction in Latin America's literary output and creative sensitivity.