RECONFIGURACIONES DEL HÉROE CLÁSICO EN LA ERA DIGITAL: *LA RED SOCIAL* Y *STEVE JOBS* DE AARON SORKIN

RECONFIGURATIONS OF THE CLASSICAL HERO IN THE DIGITAL AGE: AARON SORKIN'S *THE SOCIAL NETWORK* AND *STEVE JOBS*

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Resumen:
Las películas *The Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010) y *Steve Jobs* (Danny Boyle, 2015) son biografías de dos figuras relevantes de la revolución digital: el joven multimillonario Mark Zuckerberg, cofundador y CEO de Facebook, y el famoso cofundador y presidente ejecutivo de Apple Inc. Escritas por el reconocido guionista Aaron Sorkin, estas dos películas tienen en común que presentan diferentes estratos o capas de significado, permitiendo ir más allá de la vida de sus protagonistas en la interpretación. Sorkin, en ambas historias, ahonda en los rasgos psicológicos del genio. Por otro lado, y en ambos casos, crea un personaje dramático universal, al que cabe identificar con arquetipos y figuras reconocibles en la narrativa occidental, como el héroe trágico y el narciso. Pero además, trabaja a estos personajes como iconos de nuestro tiempo y a través de ellos da pie a una reflexión sobre el tiempo presente y el impacto que supone la revolución digital en las últimas décadas.

Abstract:
The movies *The Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010) and *Steve Jobs* (Danny Boyle, 2015) are biographies of two outstanding figures in the digital revolution: the young multimillionaire Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook co-founder and CEO, and the famous co-founder and executive chairman of Apple, Steve Jobs. Written by the renowned screenwriter Aaron Sorkin, what these two movies have in common is that they present different orders or layers of meaning, allowing us to see beyond the life of the protagonists in the interpretation. Sorkin, in both stories, delves deeply into the psychological characteristics of the geniuses. In addition, in both cases, he creates a dramatic character, which can be identified with archetypes and familiar figures from western narrative, the tragic hero and the narcissist. But additionally, he shows these characters as icons of our times and through them presents a reflection on nowadays and the impact the digital revolution has had in the last few decades.

1. Adapting real lives

Like any other serious film biographies, *The Social Network* (David Fincher, 2010) and *Steve Jobs* (Danny Boyle, 2015) are based on the documented lives of their protagonists, so they have a significant referential level, and deal with such "real-life" material. Although a biopic does not reproduce a person's life literally, it uses sketches from his/her real life, such as some events, actions and relationships (Rosenstone 2006, pp. 109-110). Nevertheless, this genre presents a process of dramatization which implies interpretation, design and focus. As Heilbrun states referring to literary biographies: Who can write a biography without inventing a life? A biographer, like a writer of fiction, imposes a pattern upon events, invents a protagonist, and discovers the pattern of her or his life (1993, p. 297).

In other words, a biographer is not a historian who deals with facts and documents as evidence. A biographer, instead, interprets the facts creatively both in literature and in cinema:

> Biographer and filmmaker both appropriate some of the trace details left by a life and weave them into a story whose theme infuses meaning into the days of their subject. The resulting work is ultimately based less on the raw data than on that data incorporated into a vision created by the literary (or filmic) skills of the biographer (Rosenstone, 2007, p.14).

Aaron Sorkin, the screenwriter for both movies, implies this when, in several interviews, he says that his main idea on writing the screenplays was to tell a story, over and above giving shape to the rich documentation to which he had access (Harris, 2010; Connelly, 2015). He used multiple sources on both occasions. Both in the case of the *The Social Network* and that of *Steve Jobs*, Sorkin built on literary biographies which had either been published or were in press. For example, in 2008, when he signed the contract with Sony as the screenwriter for *The Social* Network, he used The *Accidental Billionaires*, the story of Mark Zuckerberg and the birth of Facebook which was being written at the time by Bez Mezrich. And in 2012, the extensive biography of Steve Jobs written by Walter Isaacson was a solid documentary foundation for the screenplay on the Apple founder. This material was valuable to Sorkin for

two reasons: firstly, he was ensured of acting within the law because of having properly acquired the copyrights. Secondly, because the literary biographies already contained a great deal of verified information that would serve as a fair starting point. But to these biographical literary sources Sorkin added his own research by carrying out new interviews with people who were close to Zuckerberg and Jobs, and also used news items, blogs, diverse articles or interviews from the media, together with other public documents such as lawsuits and hearings. Through all of these channels of information, Sorkin finds that the base for dramatic conflict comes, in both cases, from problematic relationships, so he decides to build the dramatic premise around them. In fact, the screenwriter uses the intimate knowledge of parental relationships, of friends and colleagues which he gained from personal interviews, to structure each script. Of all these channels of information, the key to finding the idea and dramatic premise on which Sorkin structured and wrote each script was the intimate knowledge of parental relationships, of friends and colleagues which he gained from personal interviews. This brings us to the conclusion that these movies were not adaptations of earlier bibliographical texts (Mezrich's *The Accidental Billionaires* or Isaacson's *Steve Jobs*) but rather a marriage of different sources which might also be called an adaptation, but is not exclusively literary (Deutelbaum, 2016, pp.29-44). While Sorkin's initial work for these movies may have had a certain similarity with the work of a documentalist or a literary biographer who collects earlier material, as soon as he had the idea of how to articulate the scripts and began to structure them, his work became that of a storyteller, of a poet (from poiesis: the Greek to make), and was no longer that of a documentalist, as defined by authors from antiquity:

> The true difference (between the historian and the poet) is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. (Aristotle, 1451b 1-7).

In the end, and as works of fiction, The Social Network and Steve Jobs adopt a dramatic form based on real material, thus permitting them to be "larger-than-life" biographies, which not only allude to the lives of their subjects but

to further meanings. Thus, referring to the movie *Steve Jobs*, the reviewer A. O. Scott concludes: "Cinematic biographies of the famous are not documentaries. They are allegories: narrative vessels into which meanings and morals are packed like raisins in an oatmeal cookie" (2015). And Scott Foundas, the critic from *Film Comment*, states that *The Social Net*work "is devoted to larger patterns of meaning" (2010, p.40).

It is widely accepted that all narrative fiction is to a certain extent symbolic. For Northrop Frye, in literary works we can establish up to "four levels of meaning: the literal, the allegorical, tropological or moral, and the anagogic" (1950, p. 246). From a different perspective and with another reach, David Bordwell makes the case that in cinematographic texts also there are levels of meaning. (1989, pp. 1-13). And, from the area of hermeneutic phenomenology, Paul Ricoeur states that there is a possible symbolic interpretation by the reader/viewer of a story, precisely because there are metaphorical levels which allow it. In this way one can go from the most literal to the most symbolic level, in an exercise which in practice becomes one single interpretative movement. (1975, pp. 7-12).

As the dramatic fictions that they are, we defend the thesis that the two biopics written by Sorkin have different levels of meaning, which go beyond the referential or literal level (representation of real specific people), and for this reason they may be interpreted symbolically. In addition, the way in which Sorkin organizes data and tells these stories is, to our mind, what makes them most alike and converts them into "larger-than-life" biopics.

2. Paradox as premise

The premise or central idea in which each of these stories has its roots is the first element which must be inspected. Aaron Sorkin, in both biopics, begins with the premise in the form of paradox. That is, with a contradictory approach whose starting point is a conflict which results in a contradictory resolution (Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2014, p. 123).

In *The Social Network* the paradox of the story can be seen in both the poster and the trailer for the movie: "You don't get 500 million friends without making a few enemies". In the film, Mark Zuckerberg makes his business grow at the same time as he weakens and exploits his friendship with Eduardo Saverin ("Wardo"), without whom he could not have created Facebook, going so far as to betray him. In an interview after the premiere of the movie, Sorkin commented that the real contrast in *The Social Network* lies in "the fact that someone with enormous and almost inchoate social awkwardness creates a vision for this network of social interaction, a public commons, essentially, in which people never have to be in the same room to communicate" (Sorkin, 2010a, p. 2). There is then, a contradiction between the action which has given the protagonist celebrity (in this case, the creation of Facebook to make virtual friends and to be socially accepted) and has brought about his misfortune (he has very few social skills and scarcely any friends). Exploring the character's backstory, Sorkin finds an inner motivation that is deeper and more radical than the simple practicality of creating a new social network: Zuckerberg's need to be socially accepted. This motivation impregnates the dramatic writing of the movie.

Likewise, fame and character are in opposition in the biopic on Steve Jobs. While Jobs is well known and admired for his work in Apple (so much so that he is known as the father of the brand), in the movie his parent-child relations are shown to be very flawed. The character does not accept the fact of being rejected by his biological parents, and, on the other hand, nor does he accept his obligations as the father of his daughter Lisa. Herein lies the contradiction: the father of technology who cannot manage actual parenting.

Sorkin exploits the character's ultimate motivation as a motor for the rest of the story. To the scriptwriter, Job's character felt deep down to be flawed and unworthy of being liked or loved which is why he sought to put into his products more than mere utility or commercial success. The perfection of these products –continues Sorkin– would provoke an attraction and devotion of the users towards them from which Jobs would then obtain certain comfort and fulfillment (Bunbury, 2016).

Thus, both films show the concept of an ironic inconsistency between the success of these geniuses in their work and vision, and the limitations and deficiencies they show in their characters and their interpersonal relationships.

In fact, the paradoxes that Sorkin sets out in these biopics connect with the long literary tradition referring to tragedy, which –in Sorkin's own words– refers back to Aeschylus and reaches Paddy Chayefski, with Shakespeare in between (Verini, 2010, p. 54). In fact, tragedy, from ancient times, has presented paradoxical characters, with strengths and grandeurs which ironically bring about their very ruin. As Moss points out, these tragic characters,

> Instigate their own disgrace, shame, and guilt, an unexpected diminishment. They are victimized by a magnificent obsession, a fantasy of unalloyed authority and excellence, a dream of perfect self-sufficiency or trust. Yet they cannot always distinguish between virtue and vice so they become fixed in incongruity, suspended between glory and humiliation or innocence and brutality. (2012, p. xii).

Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs, in the hands of Sorkin, connect with tragic characters of myths and classical works since in both films they are heroes whose fame hides a disgrace. The premises of each film already contain this aspect. Henceforth, we will broaden on the aspects of how the scriptwriter expands this premise to the full script. He does so leading the characters towards the traits of the classical tragic hero as well as to those of Narciso's arquetype; yet he also adds other psychological traits that are more contemporary. Through this process, as we will see, the real Zuckerberg and Jobs are, in good measure, replaced by archetypical characters with wider and more universal dimensions.

3. Fame, people and archetypal characters

Both The Social Network and Steve Jobs handle the fame of its protagonists like a mask which hides the individual; thus these movies create an illusion of unmasking, of showing what lies "behind" the popularity and recognition of

the celebrity. It is no accident that the two films barely show well-known public spaces, which is where the popular imagination places Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs. In The Social Network, the Facebook offices in Palo Alto have very little footage time, and, in Steve Jobs, the stages of the Flint Center of the Performing Arts, the War Memorial Opera House and the Davies Symphony Hall, where the Apple Macintosh, the Next and the iMac were respectively presented, are a mere excuse to tell another story. On the contrary, *backstage* is the real setting in these movies. In *Steve Job*s this is literal, as the action occurs behind each stage, behind the scenes, always just moments before each presentation. On the other hand, in *The Social Network* the *backstage* is private places: rooms in the student housing in Harvard, lecture rooms and facilities exclusive to students; the deposition room where Zuckerberg's claimants give their testimony, etc. In the two movies, these spaces or stages that are hidden from the general public are where Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs's characters are revealed, creating a clear contrast between the dark side of their behavior and the social recognition they receive for their work.

It must be said that traditionally the film biography genre has connected inherently with narratives and images of fame (Minier and Pennacchia, 2014, p.22). As Custen points out, many biopics respond to the question: What lies behind fame?

> Part of any mythology of fame consists of the biographee coping with the misfortune that can level any elevation. Is the hero the agent of his or her own suffering, or merely the recipient of blows from Olympus? The way fame is linked to misfortune and, in turn, happiness, is one of the most powerful instructive lessons biopics display (1992, p.75).

However, these two biopics written by Sorkin do not follow the most trodden path to which Custen refers: that of so many movies that show that famous characters always pay a price for fame, even if they deserve it (family opposition or family complications, loss of friends, the hard climb to the top, the envy of others with the imbroglios and intrigue that occur, amongst others). Nor are the biographees in these movies presented as antiheroes

discrediting the fame they have obtained, making it seem "false" or "undeserved". The singularity of these biographies by Sorkin lies in the fact that they follow a middle path between these two positions. In both cases their fame is valid, but is based on a specific point: the creative and technological revolution which they have brought about. In contrast, their portrayals as men and citizens are difficult, complex and irregular We do not find the usual recourse to "normalizing genius", nor are we shown someone who, in spite of their fame, is ordinary and just like everyone else, and has to face up to different problems. Sorkin goes further by linking Zuckerberg and Jobs with tragic archetypal characters, referring more to universal patterns than to the unique people they represent. Thus, the viewer subconsciously connects them with larger-than-life references and makes inter-textual readings which bring them closer to other works of western narrative in which the characters –within their plots– may be understood, pitied, and finally recognized or identified. If the tragic hero and the archetypal narcissist can be seen in these two characters it is because Sorkin has extracted them, to a certain extent, from the pantheon of mythology.

This is important because the connection between the real person and the character is mediated by a third factor: the classic tragic archetype; thus the reference to the real person is never direct. Consequently, we defend the hypothesis that, in spite of the problematical and negative behavior of Zuckerberg or Jobs in these films, they do not make a judgment on the real person but rather a poetic judgment of the archetypal character. This poetic judgment, in as far as it leads to compassion and comprehension, lessens the negative effect and does not go so far as to destroy their good reputation.

3.1. *The Social Network*

Let us begin with the case of Mark Zuckerberg in *The Social Network*. The analysis of the character is inseparable from Sorkin's narrative strategy. Zuckerberg's biographical profile derives from the depositions taken from the plaintiffs who sued him for stealing their idea for Facebook (the Winklevoss brothers and Divya Narendra), and from Eduardo Saverin, a friend of his and co-founder of the original *Thefacebook*, who also sued Zuckerberg as his

ownership share in the company was drastically diluted from 34% to 0.03%. The plaintiffs' depositions, the attorneys' questions and Zuckerberg's answers are the core pieces to work out the jigsaw puzzle of the image of the Facebook CEO in the movie: that of a complex and contradictory personality where it is difficult to distinguish the limits between intelligence, vice and misfortune.

Because of the use of multiple perspectives, with narrators who tell their version from different subjective standpoints, the movie has been compared to the story of Rashomon by Kurosawa, or, more frequently, to *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles. The portrayal of Zuckerberg, far from seeming photographic or objective, adopts an impressionist look, on which the filmmakers do not have the last word on what "really happened".

This said, the reconstruction of the facts depicts the Facebook creator as an antihero. During the brilliant opening scene of the movie, in which Mark argues and breaks up with his girlfriend Erica (a fictional character invented for the movie portrayed by Mara Rooney), she berates him:

> But you're going to go through life thinking that girls don't like you because you're a nerd. And I want you to know, from the bottom of my heart, that that won't be true. It'll be because you're an asshole. (Sorkin, 2010a, p. 9).

Erica reacts this way because, in their nonsensical discussion, Mark shows brightness but also self-absorption and great petulance up to the point of reproaching her for her intelligence and education. In the movie, Mark's first reaction when his girlfriend breaks off their relationship, is to publish personal aspects of his intimate life with Erica on his personal blog, where he insults her in a jumble of revenge and resentment. Then, continuing with his obsession to become a member of an elite Harvard club and to prove to Erica that he is capable of socializing with more people than just with her, he sets up "Facemash". He does so after hacking the Harvard College directories, using the algorithm that his friend Wardo lends him. That night "Facemash" turns out to be a small stroke of genius, a diversion which allows the students to reject, vote for and choose "the hottest girl" on campus. It is sent and re-sent with a viral effect which reaches 22,000 visits, making the network crash, which results in Zuckerberg being put on probation for six months by

the university. This is the starting point, on page 25 of the screenplay: we are introduced to a complex personality, someone who is exceptionally gifted and resentful who does not curb his decision to "be someone special", capable of creating his own "private club" and become now none other than the president (Verini, 2010, p. 55). The price to pay for this decision is shown scene after scene, particularly after the launch of Facebook: a friendship in decline which finally breaks up as a result of his betrayal; colleagues who become angry and sue; people who use him as the business grows and expands. The approach to Zuckerberg throughout the film is somewhat pathetic: Behind Sorkin's ingenious dialogue, the shadow of tragedy looms. The success of the protagonist, after the Facebook platform goes live, little by little becomes the screen that hides his misfortune. At the end of the story, as Sorkin says, the protagonist has become an archetype: Zuckerberg "an anti-hero for the first hour and 55 minutes of the movie and a tragic hero for the last five." (Harris, 2010).

Indeed, in the final scenes of the film, when Wardo is describing the moment in which he was "removed" from the company for the attorneys, he looks Mark in the eye and says: "I was your only friend. You had one friend" (Sorkin, 2010, p. 145). It is a short cathartic moment, as Mark remains silent. After this, the central character is left on his own in the room after the witnesses' depositions are finished. Marilyn, a law intern, comments as she leaves: "You're not an asshole, Mark. You're just trying so hard to be." (Sorkin, 2010, p. 162) Marks reaction goes directly to the idea of the tragic hero:

> MARK sits down at the computer. He logs on to Facebook.
>
> He types a name in the search box: "Erica Albright".
>
> Erica's name and picture come up, along with Boston University, '07. Mark smiles. She's on Facebook.
>
> He moves the mouse back and forth between two boxes: "Send a Message" and "Add as a Friend".
>
> He clicks on "Add as a Friend".

> A box comes up that reads: "Your request to add Erica Albright as a friend has been sent".
>
> Then MARK clicks to his homepage and waits for the response. And waits... then hits "Refresh". (Sorkin, 2010, p. 162).

This final image of the movie shows us someone who has brought about his own misfortune, a Zuckerberg in whom nostalgia to return to the beginning of the story merges with the fact that there is no going back. So, the Zuckerberg character goes beyond the person and embodies one of so many tragic heroes in western literature who, led by excess, by the Greek "hubris", find their retribution (Rodríguez Adrados, 1962, pp. 11-35). Erica explains the meaning of this excess when telling Zuckerberg off: "You write your snide bullshit from a dark room because that's what the angry do nowadays." (Sorkin, 2010, p. 78) In this final image, the character is no longer an arrogant individual, but rather someone who is enslaved by his own arrogance. In this way the screenplay itself makes an evaluation of the character and, to a certain extent, redeems him.

3.2. *Steve Jobs*

In the biopic *Steve Jobs*, Sorkin also establishes some archetypal relationships that allow for separation of the portrayal of the person from the fictional character. And again we find that the structure of the screenplay helps to establish the new interpretative level we are refferring to. In the movie, Sorkin's narrative strategy, very unconventionally for a biopic, condenses the dramatic material into three major scenes, three major acts around the three aforementioned presentations of Apple products. During the 40 minutes preceding each event, we see important relationship conflicts between Jobs and his daughter Lisa; Jobs and Wozniak ("Woz", the co-founder of Apple whom Jobs befriended in high school); Jobs and the Apple CEO, John Sculley (who fired him from the company); Jobs and Andy (an early Apple engineer who stayed friends with Jobs). Throughout these relationships, the arrogance and egomania of the character stand out. The effect is very theatrical and a sort of artifice, so the whole structure bridges the true facts and the fiction. As Sorkin explains in an interview:

> Obviously Steve didn't have confrontations with the same four people forty five minutes before every product launch, that's a writer's conceit. I think the movie announces itself pretty quickly as being impressionistic in that way. The content of the confrontations is real, they are not fictional. (Connelly, 2015).

Within this dramatic structure Sorkin presents a new tragic hero in whom genius and misfortune go hand in hand. In the character there are direct references to Julius Caesar's ambition and paranoia: "I'm like Julius Caesar," the Jobs character insists to Sculley. "I'm surrounded by enemies." (Sorkin 2015, p. 23) Like Zuckerberg in *The Social Network*, the Steve Jobs character goes from being an antihero to a tragic hero. The relationships and conflicts between Jobs and the characters who repeatedly visit him before each presentation drift towards catastrophe and show him to be an antihero. But there is an exception in the conflict with his daughter Lisa. During the biopic, this relationship develops upwardly, thus saving the character in the viewer's eyes because it gives him the opportunity to confess his troubles and to redeem himself in a way. The *Steve Jobs* biopic begins with Jobs' adamant rejection of his paternity, which hurts five-year-old Lisa (first act). This is followed in the second act by an ambivalent relationship with her, which mixes the admiration and pride of a father who notices her intelligence and sensitivity with the harshness and detachment he shows towards her. In the final act, the apparently broken relationship between father and daughter shifts at the last moment to a point of synthesis and climax. It occurs at the end, when Lisa decides to leave the theatre after arguing with her father. Jobs follows her outside and asks her not to go. Lisa berates him and demands an answer to a question he had never answered: Why had he never admitted that the name of one of his creations, the LISA computer, was a reference to her? A stark "I don't know," from Jobs, followed by a silence and another stark sentence, "I'm poorly made," (Sorkin, 2015, p. 182) make an evident link to the tragic hero we have referred to. For Sorkin, this comment by Jobs is, "the most important line (…) But that still has a flourish of poetry to it. "I honestly don't know" is just stripped bare of any poetry, any pizzazz. It's just a bare confession" (Wallace-Wells, 2015).

The clear admission of his imperfection, "I am poorly made", clashes with the petulance with which he has continuously expressed himself and which made him compare himself with Julius Caesar, Stravinsky or Bob Dylan. "By saying, "I'm poorly made," Jobs confesses that he understands that fundamental flaw; that perhaps all his achievements were borne out of his need to escape his own weaknesses", as Opam states (2015).

This volte-face from antihero to tragic hero also brings Jobs closer to the archetype. As in the case of Zuckerberg, he is still defective and still a genius who can be understood and pitied.

4. A psychological sketch of the genius

Apart from drawing on the most classical theatrical tradition, the leads in *The Social Network* and *Steve Jobs* also adopt the typical psychological tone of 20th-century narrative. In the two films Zuckerberg and Jobs are represented through a careful exploration of the psyche. The subject of the "disturbed genius" or "mad genius" is very obvious. And although the references to the mental disorders among creative geniuses go back to Aristotle and Seneca, Sorkin's approach is also close to the psychological and psychiatric studies based on the works of Freud which connect creative genius with neurosis. Here we enter another level of interpretation. The two biopics specifically allude to possible "mental disorders". In *The Social Network*, Erica comments to Mark on the possible obsessive-compulsive disorder he suffers from, during the argument at the start of the movie: "You're obsessed with finals clubs. You have finals clubs OCD and you need to see someone about it who'll prescribe you some sort of medication. You don't care if the side effects may include blindness." (Sorkin, 2010, p.5). Again in *Steve Jobs*, Joanna (the marketing director who is always with him in the movie) mentions a syndrome coined by Job's own colleagues to explain strange methods of convincing people about his own perception, although it had no basis in reality. It was "Steve's reality distortion field". (Sorkin, 2015, p.141).

What is true is that the two films, and Jobs' biography written by Walter Isaacson, immediately attracted the interest of psychiatrists and psychologists, to judge from the number of articles and posts published on some professional websites and blogs at the time of the premiere. Some stated that both figures had symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder, or that the Zuckerberg in *The Social Network* had Asperger's Syndrome. (Holland, 2010). There were many more authors who diagnosed the so-called Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) in both characters. Joseph Burgo finds that the protagonist of *The Social Network* suffers from this narcissistic pathology which, in general, "is characterized by grandiosity, a lack of empathy, poisonous envy, a sense of entitlement and a tendency to manipulate and exploit other people." (2011). And of the lead character in the Steve Jobs biography by Walter Isaacson, Gregg Henriques writes:

> There is no doubt in my professional judgment that Jobs met criteria for a Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). He was preoccupied with his sense of importance and his brilliance, he consistently damaged others by exploiting and bullying them and could be completely unempathetic to their feelings, he was envious of other's attention, he was arrogant and haughty, and he was controlling and manipulative (2012).

For Henriques, more important than these reactions is the root of the NPD, which is "a fundamentally insecure sense of self", so that, in those who suffer from it, "their constant displays of superiority and power are attempts to compensate for their underlying insecurities." (2012).

We must not forget, however, that "narcissism" has its own Greek myth, which later was readopted by Ovid who immortalized it in his "Metamorphosis". This myth has given rise to the narcissist archetype that has been portrayed again and again in western art and narrative and was very common in 19th century literature. The story of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own face reflected in the water and drowned, describes a mistaken search for knowledge of oneself. It is a superficial search, limited to examination of external appearances, of the physical countenance, which never looks inwards. But above all, it implies an incapacity to see 'otherness',

to understand that another person is different. The archetypal narcissist, therefore, remains isolated in the mirage of the self, without any possibility of properly distinguishing his own identity, in an attitude has traditionally been linked with pride (Barbosa, 2011, pp. 75-83).

To return to the two films, in the presentation of Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs the echoes of the classical myths of Narcissus are added to the modern categories which appeared after Freud's interpretation of the myth to describe the narcissistic personality. In our opinion, here is where part of the originality of Sorkin's work lies, in that he blends traditional and modernity by creating ambivalent portraits of the two central characters. On the one hand, the tragic resonance of the classical myths lead to the most universal side of the character, while the psychological and behavioral treatment of the Zuckerberg and Jobs characters in these movies simultaneously brings them closer to the reality of the unwell mind, typical of so many antiheroes in the popular culture of our times. As modern antiheroes they show the dark triad of personality (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy), described by authors such as Jonason and Schmitt (2012, pp. 192-199).

Because of the psychological reading that the portrayal of these characters contains, their flaws can be interpreted as a problem or an illness before being seen as a vice; and, in consequence, there is a comprehension and a lessening of the character's guilt in the eyes of the viewer. At the same time, the mythological interpretation of the films conveys the cathartic effect of the tragedy: The spectator goes from confronting the character to confronting his/herself regarding the extremes that arrogance can reach as a vice of the human condition.

5. From the character to the social icon

There is yet another interpretive level which must be mentioned, through which the characters in these films become archetypes or icons of our times. Since they are movies about two important protagonists of the digital revolution of the last few decades, the paradox that the characters show can

be taken as a paradox which is typical of our era. Nowadays, the technological progress is irrefutable; the generalized access to the new technologies and social networks is a reality and a triumph. However, as different authors have stated, there is a social cost that alters the perception of the coordinates of time and space, escapism from reality, limitation of social skills, or fragmentation of knowledge, among other aspects (Carr, 2011, 2015; Goleman, 2013; Turkle, 2011). These biopics reflect similar contrasts.

Jones, in Sight & Sound writes about *The Social Network*: "It is often said that social networks are changing the way we think, but this is the first movie that's ever held the idea at its emotional core." (2010, p. 35). And Foundas comments: (it) "offers a despairing snapshot of society at the dawn of the 21st century (…)" (2010, p. 42). And on *Steve Jobs*, Scott in The New York Times says: (It) "is a rich and potent document of the times, an expression of both the awe that attends sophisticated new consumer goods and the unease that trails in the wake of their arrival" (2015).

5.1. On social isolation

The protagonists of both *The Social Network* and *Steve Jobs* have something in common. This is the above-mentioned contrast: their achievements are a contribution to the global communications which we now enjoy, but in the private sphere they are presented as lacking in social skills, with evident flaws in interpersonal communications. They are both solitary characters, isolated, cold and apparently lacking in sentiment regarding the people closest to them. There are numerous situations and images in these movies which emphasize their solitude, reserve and lack of communication. It could be said that they suffer from one of the symptoms of what has been called an "illness of our times", which has to do with narcissism and the isolation it entails (Lowen; 1997, pp.11-12).

In the two films there are scenes that show these technological geniuses totally absorbed in the computer screens where their creations appear and, at times, the machines show their reflections. They look at themselves or look at their creation in the same way as a narcissist studies his own reflection in the water. In *The Social Network* in particular, Zuckerberg seems to be engaged

in a dialogue with Facebook in the last few minutes when he is absolutely alone in the room. In his rented house in Palo Alto, while his companions are having fun and messing around, Mark remains "wired in" to his computer, engrossed, and distant from his surroundings. This is also so when his friend Wardo hits him in the Facebook offices, finally disillusioned after discovering that he is no longer a significant partner. But Zuckerberg and Jobs' isolation becomes even clearer in their cold and distant, sometimes harsh, way of dealing with the people closest to them.

Each time Jobs comes out onto the stage, where his fans and virtual followers are emotionally waiting for the presentation of his new stroke of genius, the applause contrasts with his failure as a father, a friend or colleague, as can be seen in the conversations before these moments of personal triumph.

"We recreate ourselves as online personae and give ourselves new bodies, homes, jobs, and romances. Yet, suddenly, in the half-light of virtual community, we may feel utterly alone", explains Turkle regarding the virtual life new technologies offer us. (2011, p.12). And the Zuckerberg and Jobs characters in these movies seem to point deictically in that direction.

5.2. The digital world as escapism and substitution

Another point the two movies have in common is that their leads convert their passion for technology into an experience that absorbs their lives, so much so that it becomes a substitute for affection. This, precisely, is a problem which, according to experts, we may find nowadays due to an excessive use of the virtual space offered by the new technologies.

We have already commented that the premises of these films are based on this defect: Facebook becomes the substitute for a social club for Zuckerberg, as he has not managed to belong to one in real life; and the applause and admiration that Jobs receives for the gadgets he creates are a substitute for the affection and love which he has not received and does not know how to give.

The use of space in these movies shows how unsound the protagonists' contact with the exterior is. The *Steve Jobs* biopic almost exclusively uses

indoor areas as its arena. There, just as happens with the computer, what is seen and enjoyed is on-screen (in this case the stages on which Jobs makes his presentations to an ecstatic multitude), but what makes these moments of success work is the hard disk and the innards of the machine, with its complicated system of connections (here, everything that happens to a Jobs backstage). There are only two brief scenes outside these convention centers. One in the first act, when Jobs and Wozniak are walking behind the premises. In this conversation Jobs comes face-to-face with the past, with memories of the time when they were friends and were working in Jobs' parent's garage. Now he and Woz are no longer friends and there is no going back. The second outdoor scene comes at the end of the third act in an open-air parking lot at the top of the building. Here, Jobs attempts to stop his daughter from leaving full of resentment and manages to do so, thereby opening a door to better mutual understanding. This moment, then, points to the future. Thus, the spatial architecture of this film becomes a metaphor for the character's limited relationship with reality outside himself, outside his dedication to what is strictly technological and digital. Moreover, there is a scene in which Steve tries to control his imagination and, by repeating algorithms, blocks the images of Lisa trying to attract his affection (Boyle, 2015). The scene is revealing in that it visualizes Jobs' flight from a painful reality that he does not wish to confront.

The spatial dimension in *The Social Network* also has a metaphorical reading. In this film too, the indoors is more important than the outdoors. The work and the contacts that Zuckerberg makes for the creation of Facebook occur in enclosed areas: college rooms, bars, the apartments in Palo Alto, the Facebook offices, and so on. In the very few outdoor scenes, Zuckerberg is not enjoying himself or contemplating; he is running or talking because the only thing he thinks about is his project. For example, after splitting up with Erica, in the first scene, he runs off to his Harvard apartment, stumbling on the way and leaving the pleasing panorama of the university campus for the viewer's eyes only. His aim is different: he is plotting his digital revenge. Another example can be found in the

conversation he has with Wardo outside in the cold and the snow for which they are not properly dressed. The conversation is difficult and fast. Metaphorically, Wardo was enjoying a Jewish party set in the tropics when Mark drags him out tell him about his Facebook idea in a desolate townscape at 20 below. "You'd have to know the people on the site to get past your own page. Like getting punched", Mark explains to his friend who cannot even feel his legs because of the cold; "Wardo, it's like a Final Club except we're the president" (Sorkin, 2010, p.40).

This is a way of underlying the escape from reality that lies behind Mark's obsession, which Sherry Turkle and David Carr have diagnosed as the social problem of our era: "Digital connections (…) may offer the illusion of companionship without demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other" (Turkle, p.1); and, "As screens have proliferated, the amount of actual, unencumbered reality we experience seems endangered" (Carr, 2015).

5.3. Fragmentation of knowledge

Finally, the films we are analyzing also reflect another point which the authors underline on the cognitive effects of the digital era: the speed in acquiring a great amount of information on the net, without order and almost simultaneosly, and the resulting fragmentation of knowledge. In *The Social Network* in particular, this aspect is suggested both in the aesthetics of Fincher's movie and in the disjointed rhythm of the conversations Sorkin imposes in the screenplay. The shots and dialogues seem to imitate the fragmented and disorderly rhythm of our reading and procurement of information on internet. Going back to the initial scene of the film, we observe that the conversation between Mark and Erica is not linear. Mark hops from one subject to another again and again. The way he manages the conversation brings to mind how we read so many hyperlinked articles or pieces of information on the web which lead to other marginalia. Erica says to him: "…it's exhausting. Dating you is like dating a Stairmaster" (Fincher, 2010; Sorkin, 2010, p. 7). The conversation is intelligent but extremely fast and unmanageable; thus personal and informative items clash in every

paragraph. The camera shots and movements accompany this agitation visually. Likewise, the sequence on the launch of *Facemash* gives a close-up of the frantic rhythm in the use of the computer which does not allow the protagonist to stop and think about the consequences. The flashes about an imaginary party at the prestigious Porcillan social club in Harvard are interspersed in the sequence. Visually it is an exploration of the past made by Mark's undisciplined mind, which, far from only concentrating on what he is doing, is imagining and confabulating at the same time.

In Steve Jobs, although the approach is different, the conversations also occur at a frantic and disjointed rhythm. Jobs interrupts one conversation to take up another with the same intensity, and handles a great deal of information at the same time, like someone who was working on a Mac with multiple windows open. This vertiginous sensation comes from Danny Boyle's decision to shoot Steve Jobs in continuous movement and talking with different characters while he walks as well as the common use of Steadycam in the film.

The impression of surfing minds, in which time and space are not adapted to their natural rhythm, can be found in the portrayal of the leads in The Social Network and Steve Jobs. They remind us of those movies we lived through in times of change, in which paying attention (the focus) and devoting oneself to a sole activity becomes more difficult, as Daniel Goleman points out in his book Focus (2013). In addition, the way in which information is processed and knowledge is acquired also varies and inclines towards fragmentation. In the words of Carr: "The linear mind is being pushed aside by a new kind of mind that wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts - the faster, the better." (2011, p. 10).

6. Conclusion

All in all, the two biopics allow a broad interpretative reading that goes beyond merely adhering to the life of the people they represent. Although they do contain abundant data and real documentation, these biographies are structured as works of fiction. They establish tragic repercussions given

that they start from a contradictory premise in which the fame and character of the protagonists clash.

In this way, further than a realist portrayal of Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs, these movies paint the archetype of the tragic hero in which greatness (in this case genius) and misfortune go hand in hand. This archetype, in short, supplants the real character, transforming him into an icon. And given that these protagonists also reflect the myths of Narcissus, modernized and filtered by psychological studies, we see a vision of what causes their misfortune. Arrogance and pride are the problem, and are the true subject of these films. And although it is treated as weakness rather than a vice, (due to being linked to trauma or previous psychic issues in these characters), it doesn't cease to be the flaw that ruins them. Through these modern tragic heroes, arrogance is also depicted to the viewer as akin to the human condition and, going one step further, as the possible dark side of our times, a digital and technologized era to which geniuses like Zuckerberg and Jobs belong.

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