

Subjectivity and the Fourth Estate: Modalities of interior representation in Realist and Naturalist Literature

“Epic fiction is the sole epistemological instance where the I-originary (or subjectivity) of a third-person *qua* third-person can be portrayed.” This is the central proposition in Käte Hamburger’s *Die Logik der Dichtung* (1957), later adopted by Dorrit Cohn as the basis for *Transparent Minds* (1978). In their view, the most definitive characteristic of narrative fiction is its ability to render the epic or novel hero’s interiority transparent, thus allowing the reader to access the characters’ subjectivity. Through this lens, these two scholars analyze the modalities through which consciousness is manifested in narrative form. These are the fundamental concerns, for years overlooked by criticism, which constitute the theoretical basis of this thesis. Through close readings of Realist and Naturalist literature, this thesis argues that “serious” representation (in the Auerbachian sense) of individual consciousness is not reserved exclusively to upper-class characters, but is also granted to the men and women of the *popolo*, with necessary differences in degree and form. The emergence in the diegesis of a subjectivity socially distant from that of the author’s is an essential issue without which such works could not be fully understood. However, some preliminary conditions are necessary, which concern the type of the character entrusted to mediate the story to the reader.

These principles emerge in the first case study: *I promessi sposi*, Italian literature’s foundational text for the representation of the poor in the novel. Although Manzoni’s masterpiece may appear to be the exemplary omniscient novel, there are many instances found in the text in which the narrating voice withdraws, entrusting the central perspective to a character. Although these diegetic instants do not eschew their typical didactic flourish, interiority is reproduced through extensive formal techniques. This is notably applied to Renzo, the peasant silk-weaver compelled in his journey from the countryside to Milan into a sort of *Bildungsroman*: he is a figure from the periphery who becomes a small landowner. However, he does not ultimately undergo an acculturation which might estrange him from his original social strata and rescue him from aivety. It is mainly to characters similar to Renzo that rustic literature writers and naturalist writers reserved the “serious” representation of character’s subjectivity. These are characters who embody the idea of social mobility (downgraded, parvenus, etc.) or who exceed the dimension of everyday life (intellectual heroes, orphans, etc.).

I promessi sposi, along with *Scènes de la vie de campagne* by Honoré de Balzac and the *Les veillées du chanvreur* cycle by George Sand, demonstrate the scope of mimetic representation of the poor. More than a cistern of themes and style, these works form the canon of subjectivation in rustic literature, which spread in Lombardy and Veneto during the long eve of the *decennio di preparazione*. These works were severely beholden to moderate safeguards, which appear, notably in Giulio Carcano’s narratives, in the restricting forms of the idyllic. A new demand had materialized. Intellectuals needed to make the rural masses function in the hegemonic framework of the bourgeoisie, from which these texts directly emanated. However, in their writings, these authors do not restrict their representation of the peasantry as a vehicle for general emotions, to a token populism. Often, they portrayed their material conditions with an objective lens. Most notably, they utilized techniques to represent psychic life, with which they granted their characters’ subjectivity expression: their pains, their emotions, and their hopes betrayed.

It becomes a question of other-directed characters. Despite employing countless devices to simulate authentic interior lives, the author gave the poor an artificial and tendentious narrative autonomy. The contents of their thoughts instrumentally serve the purpose which the writer aims to communicate. However, there are significant, individual exceptions: in some stories by Caterina Percoto, the introduction of popular characters' voices implicitly challenges the heterodiegetic narrator's value system, and by extension the bourgeois *Weltanschauung*. Meanwhile, in the *Novelliere campanguolo*, Ippolito Nievo assigns the *récit* to a yokel, who expresses his class grievances in the first person. This narrative phenomenology is later revived, from a bourgeois perspective, in *Le confessioni d'un Italiano* (1867).

The final section of this thesis examines Verist and Naturalist literature, which constitute an excellent *specola* for observing a turning point in 19th century narrative at large. From *Madame Bovary* (1857) onwards, the author increasingly withdrew into the backdrop of the text, entrusting a subjectivity other than their own with mediating the story's consciousness to the reader. It becomes a matter of one or more characters who, despite being described in the third person, focalize the narrative; in Franz Karl Stanzel's terminology, this is an instance of *figural narrative situation*. The world depicted in the text is the world as it appears to a certain character, observed from their point of view, and tinted by their emotions; authors adopt a variety of stylistics to render this perception, the reality reflected in the gaze of this *third person*, uncoincidentally named the "reflector" by Stanzel. He discussed this concept in the age of the psychological novel, when the «psychological analysis» was considered by many, in France as in Italy, as a legitimate methodology of naturalism. Writers, on the other hand, conceived that it was only suitable to employ it for specific characters (primarily the bourgeoisie, artists, and aristocrats); this is the price of disparity and a class prejudice.

Nevertheless, in these authors' writings, numerous points of discontinuity emerged. The delegation of the *reflector* was not precluded to figures from the Fourth Estate. Moreover, marginal subjectivities are individualized through pronounced traits, silhouetted on a narrative or choral background. Through analysis of some representative French texts – *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) by the brothers Goncourt, *La fortune des Rougon* (1877), *L'assommoir* (1877), *Germinal* (1885), and *La terre* (1887) by Émile Zola – and a survey of the narratives of Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, and Federico De Roberto, it is shown how the naturalists attributed a "soul" to each character, with which the reader is encouraged to sympathize.