

“...and you could hear the whole village chattering”
I Malavoglia as figuralized novel¹

Paolo Giovannetti
 IULM, Milan

Abstract

The essay explains Giovanni Verga's *Malavoglia* according to the narrative theory of Franz Karl Stanzel, arguing that the novel provides an example of the *figural narrative situation*. The figuralization (or reflectorization) of *Malavoglia* is achieved mainly by the so-called (the definition is Ann Banfield's) *non-reflective consciousness*, that is, by the perceptive interplay of characters, independent of the intervention of an actual narrator. Such a methodological point of view implies a revision of some typological features of modernist novel, which has been too often interpreted only through texts of the “northern” Flaubert-James-Joyce-Woolf line.

Keywords

Verga, *I Malavoglia*, narratology, Stanzel, reflectorization

Contact

paolo.giovannetti@iulm.it

1. In Italy, the narratological theory by the Austrian anglicist Franz Karl Stanzel² is scarcely known despite its widespread fortune in international, and even global, scholarship. Starting in the 1980s,³ it has enjoyed the status of high scientific impact. This is perhaps also due to its consonance with the so-called cognitive turn and with the principles of “post-classical narratology” (Fludernik and Alber, *Postclassical Narratology*) that is, with the newest trends of research. This phenomenon, seen from afar (from the viewpoint of a country in which – to be honest – a real interest for narrative theory no longer seems to be alive) is all the more striking due to the more

¹ We publish the English translation of Paolo Giovannetti's essay, which will be published in Italian on *Allegoria* (69) 2014. We think that, while contributing in particular to the Italian literary debate, the essay also offers significant insights to the international debate on literary theory.

² The theory is summarized in the following works: *Die typischen Erzählsituationen im Roman. Dargestellt an Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses u. a.* (1955, Eng. transl., *Narrative Situations in the Novel. Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses*, 1971); *Typische Formen des Romans* (1964); *Theorie des Erzählens*, 1979 and 1982 (the latter is an extended edition on which the English translation is based, *A Theory of Narrative*, 1984); *Untenwegs. Erzähltheorie für Leser. Ausgewählte Schriften mit einer bibliographischen Einleitung und einem Appendix von Dorrit Cohn* (2002). One must keep in mind that the 1984 volume is not only a translation, but an adaptation for the benefit of the English language readership; in fact, certain differences can be found between the two texts, albeit of negligible theoretical importance. As for the Italian reception of Stanzel's thought, see Meneghelli (XII-XIII and 183-211; on page 192 there is a no definite version of the translation of the typological circle); and Giovannetti (2012).

³ The mediation of Dorrit Cohn, American (but of Austrian origins) Germanist, was crucial, in particular her well-known essay, “The Encirclement of Narrative. On Franz Stanzel's *Theorie des Erzählens*.”

evident decline in fortune of Stanzel's colleague and rival Gérard Genette. Both scholars – as has been claimed – are “low structuralists,”⁴ moderate structuralists: and yet they differ greatly in their ability to cope with a vision of literary events centered on what precedes the text, on the virtuality of reception, and on the specific kind of “precedent” embodied by the mind and perception of the narrative's recipients. While, as I will show later, Stanzel's thought is a kind of anticipation of literary cognitivism, Genette's tends to appear outdated: too formalist, too abstract, too alien to the text-reader dialectics.

But let us proceed with order. Undoubtedly, one of the strong points of Stanzel's discourse is that it attempts to join a long-standing international debate that originated back in the 1850s. To those years date the oldest, well-known claims by Gustave Flaubert about the author of *Madame Bovary* merging into the text, and also the certainly lesser known theories of the German realist Otto Ludwig. In his brief work *Formen der Erzählung*, he conceived the existence of a “scenic narrative” (“szenische Erzählung”), in which the narrator “is living the story and allows the reader to live it with him”, thus generating “actual theatrical effects” (203)⁵. It is well known that these ideas were spread and underwent further developments over time in various ways, and that within the Italian context they conditioned Verismo. Further, through the work and reflections of Henry James, between Great Britain and the United States, the familiar “typological” distinction between telling and showing was outlined: that is, the distinction between a way of telling a story that is subjective but dominated particularly by an overt narrative figure (the classical author-narrator of pre-Flaubertian realism) and another that is objective but characterized especially by the disappearance of the author, by his death, and by the subsequent re-evaluation of the characters' point of view. Back in 1948 it was still possible for René Wellek and Austin Warren to sketch the debate that had been exemplarily summarized in Percy Lubbock's essay *The Craft of Fiction*, at a time by then long gone – 1921.

Now, in Italy these facts do not seem to have received the attention that they deserved. Wayne C. Booth's 1961 work (which has an opposite title to Lubbock's: *The Rhetoric of Fiction*) is apparently the dismissal of the perspectival illusionism according to which for over a century authors and scholars alike had been talking about novels without author – and even, more radically, *without narrator*. Too often overquoted, Booth actually tackles such issues only partially. To be sure, in 1959 Émile Benveniste, in his famous article “Les relations de temps dans le verbe français,” had referred to *histoire* (as opposed to *discours*) as that kind of third person enunciation resting upon the use of the aorist tense (of the *passé simple*, in short) thus abolishing the presence of the self. It is equally undoubtable, however, that the very possibility of conceiving a narrative without a speaker, in Italy, has been limited until now by the fact that many scholars who – like Stanzel – championed the cause of narrative impersonality are scarcely known.⁶

Therefore, when Stanzel published the results of his doctoral dissertation, *Die typischen Erzählsituationen im Roman* in 1955, his method followed perfectly in the wake

⁴ On this definition, by Robert Scholes, and on its meaning, see Cornils.

⁵ “Der so Erzählende erlebt die Geschichte und läßt sie den Leser mit erleben”; “eigentliche theatralische Effekte.”

⁶ I am referring, on the one hand, to Hamburger of which an excellent French edition exists (Hamburger, *Logique*) and on the other hand to Banfield (*Unspeakable Sentences*).

of this debate (which he had observed closely while residing at Harvard in 1950, shortly after Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* had been published).

Of the three *typical narrative situations* described by Stanzel – first-person, authorial and “figural” – the *personale Erzählsituation* undoubtedly proves the hardest to define, which is also due to some features of Stanzel's discourse. I mean that the narratological notion that has remained a constant in Stanzel's thought is “mediacy”: the German term for it is *Mittelbarkeit*, generally translated into English as *mediacy*, but in the original (see the suffix *-bar*) it conveys a possibility, a potentiality. That is, the possibility of mediating, of conveying narrative contents: the specific case of the epic macro-genre, as it is represented by the novel differs from another analogously *mimetic* genre like theatre – *drama* – for the presence of a representational filter providing its contents with form. As we know, this filter is referred to as the *narrator*. However, as early on as the introduction to his first discussion of the matter, Stanzel has specified that it is *not* necessary for mediacy to be guaranteed by the presence of a personal narrator (which in the later English version of the text will be referred to as a “teller character”: regardless of whether it be in first or third person), because “the concept of mediacy will also be viewed from the perspective of the reader” (*Narrative Situations in the Novel* 6).⁷ Paradoxically, the theorist of narrative mediacy is also the one who has brilliantly enhanced the *apparent* lack of mediacy. This comes to the fore with great clarity in the introductory chapter of his essay, in which the presence/absence of a narrator figure in the “reader's imagination” is discussed with great perspicuity. Over the course of the narration, that is, during the act of reading, it is possible for the reader to end up blotting out the presence of the narrator, because of the reader's illusion “of being present on the scene in one of the figures.” The illusion, that is, of identifying with a narrative and of experiencing the events that are being told. Due to its crucial importance, I will quote the entire passage, complete with a part of Stanzel's argument that I have not yet commented on:

Inasmuch as the presence or absence of the author in the reader's imagination can only be known approximately, it is more useful to speak of the author either emerging or withdrawing in the course of narration. If the author emerges by addressing the reader, by commenting on the action, by reflections, etc., the reader will bridge the gap between his own world and fictional reality under the guidance, so to speak, of the author. This is authorial narration. If the reader has the illusion of being present on the scene in one of the figures, then figural narration is taking place. If the point of observation does not lie in any of the novel's figures, although the perspective gives the reader the feeling of being present as an imaginary witness of the events, then the presentation can be called neutral. (*Narrative Situations in the Novel* 23)⁸

⁷ I will only occasionally quote Stanzel's works in the original German versions, but I have carried out a comparison of English and original texts.

⁸ To be thorough, I will quote the German version as well, in which *Gestalt* stands for the English *figure*; in both cases, obviously, the visual factor plays an important part, but in the original it bears a greater number of psychological consequences. So: “Da die Grenze zwischen Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit des Autors in der Vorstellung des Lesers nur ungefähr bestimmt werden kann, ist es zweckmäßiger, von einem Hervor- bzw. Zurücktretten des Autors in der Erzählung zu sprechen. Tritt der Autor durch Leseranreden, Kommentare zur Handlung, Reflexionen usw. hervor, so übersetzt der Leser die Kluft zwischen seiner Welt und der dargestellten Wirklichkeit sozusagen geführt von der Hand des Autors, es wird a u k t o r i a l erzählt. Glaubt sich der Leser in eine der auf der Szene anwesenden Gestalten versetzt, dann wird p e r s o n a l erzählt. Liegt der Standpunkt der Beobachtung in keiner der Gestalten des Romans und ist trotzdem die Perspektive so

The fact that the notion of author and not of narrator is being used in this case should not be a problem. The point is rather the type of *imaginative investment*: in the authorial narrative situation, this determines an act of mediacy effectively comparable to that of the author, while in the opposite case not only does it efface the presence of the author but it also generates the *identification with a character*. Further, equally noteworthy is the fact that alongside "figurality" a *neutral* situation also seems possible. Such a solution is allowed by the fact that at times the dramatization does not happen by means of a character but rather determines a sort of homodiegeticization of both the narrator and the reader, by which the latter is "forced" to enter directly into the story, witnessing it from the inside *without* the aid of a personal intermediary. This kind of "technique" is referred to as *camera-eye*, inherently cinematic by necessity, which generally occurs within a heterodiegetic narration with external focalization – to use Genette's terminology.

I am not interested in dealing with the misfortune of this last notion, which Stanzel explicitly disavowed only forty years after its first formulation; what matters instead is to notice how his cognitivistic and *reader-oriented* approach *avant la lettre* implies the possibility of "seeing" events and exists not only through a single reflector character, but at times also through a character-zero of sorts, a perceptive focus placed within the storyworld, albeit not coinciding with a fictional entity. Stanzel's theory thus contains in potential form a slightly different idea of figural narrative situation, far *broader*, that is, than the one he later developed.

The final version of Stanzel's "typological circle"⁹ (fig. 1), intended for an international readership, may prove helpful.¹⁰ It is obviously not possible to illuminate its complex structure in detail here.¹¹ I will limit myself to pointing out that the arc of the circumference (a sixth of the whole) in the lower part, circumscribing the area of figural narrative situation, contains novels that achieve figuralization in a very homogeneous way. The two works by Franz Kafka, James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and even *Jealousy* (which in any case appears only hypothetically) are novels in which *Mittelbarkeit* is activated through a *single* reflector character (*Mrs Dalloway* being the exception¹²). Nor is the *camera-eye* effect truly significant. Let us consider the placement of Ernest Hemingway's two short stories, which better interpret it (*Fifty Grand* and *The Killers*): the former is located to the left, in the area of first person narration leaning towards figurality, the latter to the right, where authoriality is beginning to undergo a

eingerrichtet, daß der Beobachter bzw. Leser das Gefühl hat, als imaginärer Zeuge des Geschehens anwesend zu sein, wird n e u t r a l dargestellt" (Stanzel *Erzählsituationen Im Roman* 23).

⁹ The first appearance of the typological circle occurred on pages 163 and 166 of *Die typischen Erzählsituationen* (pp. 164 and 167 of *Narrative Situations*) and it entails an actual *mise en abyme*, within the broader circle of the three main literary genres: lyric, epic, drama. The authorial novel corresponds to the epic genre, the first person novel to the lyric genre and the personal novel to drama. On the genesis of the *Typenkreis*, see Schernus.

¹⁰ The English version can be found in Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (xvi). The German version of the circle does, in fact, present significant variations, which can be attributed, surely, to the different recipients: e.g. among the titles exemplifying figural narrative situations, Hermann Broch's *The Death of Virgil* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* also appear. See *Theorie des Erzählens*, chart outside of the text.

¹¹ See, beside the already quoted essays, also Filippo Pennacchio's clear illustration of Stanzel's theory and of the typological circle (translated into Italian) in Giovannetti (217-38). The circle is at page 229.

¹² As stated in footnote 10, also *To the Lighthouse* appears in the German "circle": Stanzel, however, specifies that he is referring exclusively to chapter 5.

transformation, becoming more and more impersonal. When the *camera-eye* is explicitly referred to – in the arc adjoining the area of figural situation on the left – it is exemplified by a varied array of texts (by Arthur Schnitzler, Joyce and Alain Robbe-Grillet) especially apt to showing the fluidity of the distinction between first and third person.¹³

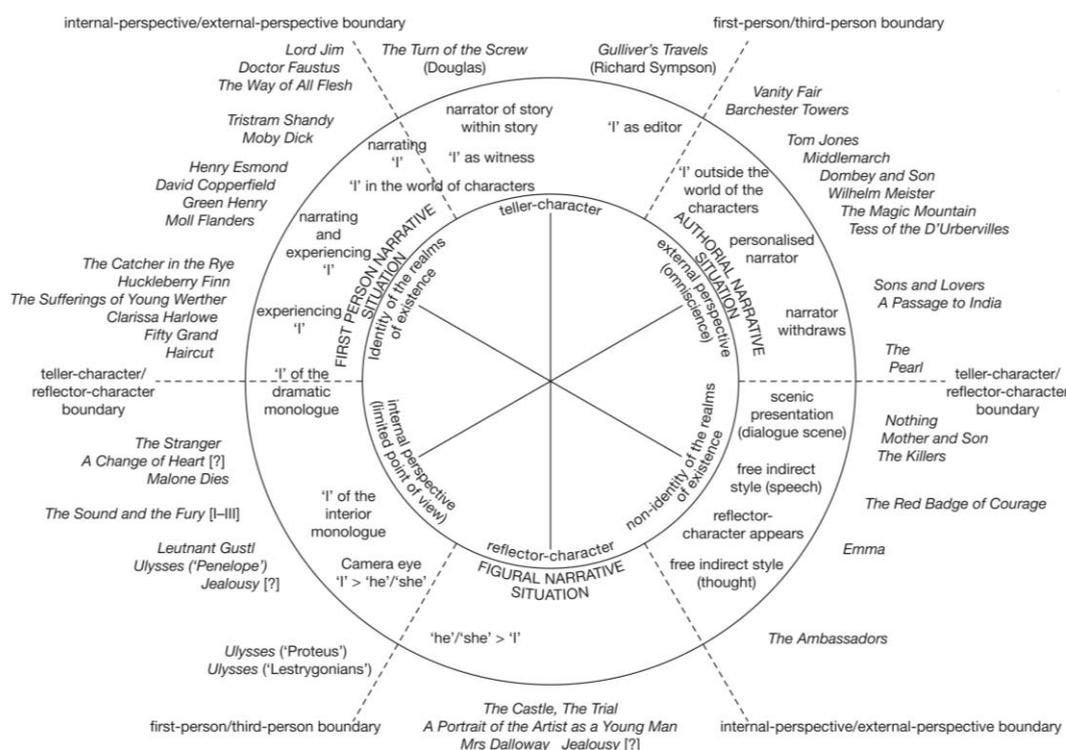


Fig. 1 – Franz Karl Stanzel's typological circle

Figural narration is ultimately linked to a rather limited canon of works: not so much in terms of quantity but rather in terms of actual quality, the quality of *figuralization* to be exact. The perspectival restructuring of the story seems to occur mainly by means of a *single character*, a single *reflector character*. Upon closer inspection, Stanzel seems reticent on this very matter (a decisive one, from my point of view). If, for example, we examined in detail the eleven qualifying elements of his idea of *reflector mode*,¹⁴ we would actually never find – at least if we were looking for an explicit declaration – a theoretical justification of such perceptive monism: anyhow, the main markers posited by Stanzel seem to demand a multi-perspective *récit*. I am referring to point 3 of the list, concerning the fact that the story unfolds through the characters'

¹³ On such a controversial topic, suffice it to say that Cohn (*Encirclement*) challenges certain aspects of the typological circle, concerning the problem of person, in particular: she refuses the first-third person continuum, also because Stanzel in a few instances – a typical one is his analysis of *Ulysses* – confuses the narrator's third person and the first person of the character who speaks or thinks in free indirect style.

¹⁴ See Stanzel (*Theory of Narrative* 169-70).

perception; to points 4 and 7, which underline the even incidental concreteness of what is represented (the perceiver encounters a reality that is not hierarchically ordered); to point 5, which posits the possibility of interior monologue as something that contributes to the shaping of the narrative act; and to the merging (point 9) of deictic centers, which – generally through the free indirect technique – line up to the *here-now* of the one “seeing,” stepping away entirely from the so-called *I-Origo* of the narrator (the traditional *teller character*).

Actually, Stanzel does offer an answer to objections of this kind, albeit only indirectly. Dealing with the crucial topic of transition from the authorial narrative situation to the figural one, he must at some point take into consideration hybrid texts in which the withdrawal of the so-called omniscient narrator produces curious perspective effects. Stanzel provides an analysis of Katherine Mansfield’s *The Garden Party*, in which the representation of relationships between the well-to-do family of the protagonists and its proletarian and very uncouth neighbors is achieved through a perceptive medium that implies the evaluating point of view of a collectivity, of a family group. In these cases, according to Stanzel, a “teller-character” is indeed present, as a kind of “heterodiegetic zero-focalization” narrator, who nevertheless temporarily accepts to take on the point of view of a group of characters. But why – in these cases – is it not possible to imagine a different narrative situation, to allow for a leap to an entirely different position such as the *personale Erzählsituation*? The answer to this question can be found in the passage to which I referred earlier: “For these cases, the concept of the empathic¹⁵ transfer must be modified. The reader’s identification with a collective “they” is not really conceivable” (*Theory of Narrative* 162).¹⁶ In actual fact, this seems to happen for two reasons: the first is that a plural character has almost by definition very indefinite contours corresponding to a vague orientation in space and time; the second is that these cases involve a form of irony, which often translates into a free indirect discourse linguistically and stylistically different from the one expressing thoughts.

This second problem is crucial, since Stanzel considers as *authorial* all reflectorizing sentences *not* implying reader-character empathy. When the textual meaning is antiphrastic, that is, every time the *implied author* is in contrast with the “voice” speaking within the work, it would be in fact impossible to produce a figural narrative situation.

Italian readers will get a clearer view on this point by tackling it from a Verghian outlook, since they all know that the two above-mentioned criteria often converge seamlessly. The opening of *Rosso Malpelo*,

Malpelo si chiamava così perchè aveva i capelli rossi; ed aveva i capelli rossi perchè era un ragazzo malizioso e cattivo, che prometteva di riescire un fior di birbone.¹⁷

implies both the *reflectorization of a community* (the entity “seeing” things this way is a plural historically and geo-socially determined subjectivity) and the *antiphrastic-ironic*

¹⁵ The English edition I possess reads *emphatic*: but it is evidently a misprint: see p. 215 in the German original, where the compound *Versetzungstheorie* occurs.

¹⁶ Mansfield’s story is analysed in greater detail on pp.170-72.

¹⁷ “He was called Nasty Foxfur because he had red hair. And he had red hair because he was a bad, malicious boy, who gave every promise of ending up a complete villain” (translation by J. G. Nichols).

motion generating the image of a "critical" *implied author* and of a corresponding *reader* able to detect authorial intentions. In other words, we have to identify with a specific worldview and at the same time distance ourselves from it. I will examine this matter in greater detail further on.

The argument according to which this is a crux (a gap? a flaw?) in Stanzel's theory can be supported in many ways. The very insistence on the same short story by Mansfield a few pages later is a clear symptom for this. But the strongest evidence is provided by what Stanzel's most brilliant disciple has written on this very matter, even resuming the analysis of the same short story by Mansfield. In her work *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, in 1996, Monika Fludernik included a chapter entitled "Reflectorization and Figuralization," in which the two eponymous concepts – which in Stanzel, at least in the English translation, may seem to be synonyms¹⁸ – are actually kept separate. Let us set aside the notion of figuralization (which could prove to be useful, however, for example in studying certain choral Verghian sequences, such as the openings of *Mastro-don Gesualdo* or *Libertà*, told from the perspective of one or more *virtual*, if not absent, characters¹⁹), and let us look at how *reflectorization* works. Fludernik claims that in this type of text the narrator brings to the fore a *summarizing and descriptive* intentionality, assuming as his own opinions and discourses belonging to the identities on the scene, without however leaning entirely towards a figural narrative situation. The narrator, in short, expresses an internal point of view: not in real time, however, since she is limiting herself to summarizing an opinion generally shared by the protagonists ("typicalized story-internal opinions", 182). After this observation, Fludernik – in a curiously deductivist fashion – goes as far as denying the nature of free indirect discourse of the second part of a passage such as the following one (the speaker of the direct discourse is Laura, who is arguing against the organization of the garden party, which the rest of her family supports):

"But we can't possibly have a garden party with a man dead just outside the front gate."

That really was extravagant, for the little cottages were in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of a steep rise that lead up to the house. A broad road ran between. True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore, and they had no right to be in that neighbourhood at all.

Regardless who is defining the decision as "extravagant," the link between the passage in direct speech and what follows has a lot to do with a (kind of) paraphrase in which – following the same reasoning – an Italian reader *sees* an instance of free indirect discourse. Just like he *sees* free indirect discourse in, say, the second part of this passage from *Malavoglia*, taken from chapter 6 (lines 284-93),²⁰ in which zio Crocifisso reiterates what he has just explicitly declared:

¹⁸ Moreover, Fludernik herself mentions that the German word *Personalisierung* had been translated in 1984 with a questionable *reflectorization*, which substituted the more consistent *figuralization*. Indeed, if the *figural* narrative situation coincides with a *Erzählsituation* so-called *personal*, one would expect *figuralization* as the translation of *Personalisierung*. See Fludernik, *'Natural' Narratology* 179; the chapter at issue is at pages 178-221, under the subtitle of "The Malleability of Language."

¹⁹ On this topic, as Fludernik (*'Natural' Narratology* 192-207) observes, the reference to Banfield ("Describing the Unobserved") is fundamental.

²⁰ I am using the following edition: Giovanni Verga, *I Malavoglia*, edizione critica a cura di Ferruccio Cecco. Il Polifilo: Milano 1995. For the English translation: Giovanni Verga. *I Malavoglia (The House*

- Io voglio i miei danari, ripicchiava Campana di legno colle spalle al muro. Avete detto che siete galantuomini, e che non pagate colle chiacchiere della *Provvidenza* e della casa del nespolo.

Egli ci perdeva l'anima e il corpo, ci aveva rimesso il sonno e l'appetito, e non poteva nemmeno sfogarsi col dire che quella storia andava a finire coll'uscire, perchè subito padron 'Ntoni mandava don Giammaria o il segretario, a domandar pietà, e non lo lasciavano più venire in piazza, per gli affari suoi, senza metterglisi alle calcagna, sicchè tutti nel paese dicevano che quelli erano danari del diavolo.²¹

Actually, Fludernik herself notices the presence of free indirect discourse in other parts of Mansfield's text. What strikes her is precisely the fluctuation of the uttering source:

[i]n the case of reflectorization either there is a particular character available who is indeed the topic of the passage [...] or the viewpoint relates to a complex of attitudes that may not be attributable to any one specific person but are characteristic of a fairly well-defined group of characters. (*Natural' Narratology* 202)

The effect, as we noticed before, is a *dissonant* relationship between narrator and characters (an *implied author* who is critical of what the perspectival filters feel and think emerges almost inevitably); at the same time, the typical *embodiment* of the figural narrative situation is avoided. According to Fludernik, this would result in a narratological no man's land in which both narrator and characters, by means of their strong subjectivity and common tendency towards expressivism, favor arbitrary situations, susceptible even to opening the way for the *postmodernist* novel.

As some (Italian) readers may have noticed, however, Fludernik's last definition in quote seems to almost perfectly fit the typical condition of a Verghian “impersonal” text, and the narrative mode of *Malavoglia*, in particular. By denying the strong reflectorizing nature of a certain narrative technique, Fludernik actually achieves the opposite result: she persuades us that it is worth including a great Modern tradition (the Southern Modern one) within the area of Modernism, to which it has every right to belong.

Two clarifications are necessary, however. The first one – crucial from a methodological point of view – concerns the process through which the reader homologates the text and that Stanzel refers to as *perseverance* (*Perseveranz*) (*A Theory of Narrative* 66). There is a large number of novels – and within the figural narrative situation they are the majority – that display evident internal inconsistencies, being equally composed of parts told by means of a rigorous reflectorization cheek by jowl with passages that could be read as “authorial.” Stanzel even considers certain changes in narrative rhythm, certain *dynamizations* within the novel, as assets; and he never judges necessary for an entire work to be traced back to a single narrative situation in

by the Medlar Tree), translation by Judith Landry. Dedalus: London 1985. All references are to these two editions unless otherwise stated.

²¹ “‘I want my money,’ repeated Dumb bell, his back to the wall. ‘You said that you were decent folk, and that you wouldn’t make me idle offers about the Provvidenza and the house by the medlar tree.’ / He had put body and soul into the whole business, and lost sleep and appetite over it, and couldn’t even let off steam by saying that the whole matter would end with the bailiffs, because padron 'Ntoni would immediately send don Giammaria or the town clerk to ask for mercy, and they wouldn’t let him back on to the square, for his own affairs, without trailing after him, so that everyone in the village said that the money involved was devil’s money.”

all of its parts.²² Apart from the borderline case of Joyce's *Ulysses* (simply note how many of its episodes appear in different sections of the typological circle), we all know the inherent impurity of *Madame Bovary*, the novel that paved the way to Modernism. It is an almost paradigmatic example of the beginning of figurality, and yet, in its first pages, we find a homodiegetic narrator.

Obviously, this is still an open issue (and we can already say that the apparently *emic*²³ opening of *Malavoglia* is the origin of many difficulties involved in reading it as a figural novel). Still, the idea of a reader's perseverance within his apperceptive act is certainly a pre-figuration of a cognitivistic mindset, in that it indicates the basic foundation of any act of reading in the building of a *frame* (something along the lines of Stanzel's *ideal type*), and its inertial preservation despite infractions to the model. Scholars such as Meir Sternberg²⁴ and Manfred Jahn have shown that the protean nature of narrative techniques (and in this we can find an objection to Genette's "pure" formalism) requires a focus on something very similar to Paul Grice's *conversational maxims*, transposed in a narrative setting. Jahn calls them "preference rules" that the reader applies during reception and that enable him to activate the frame best suited to a specific context, but also to perform a *tweening* action, that is, to interpolate different frames or to build sub-frames. However – and it is an important fact, in a cognitivistic perspective – the most general frame, active in unmarked conditions, always preserves, by default, its explicative force.

While a frame's defaults enable us to access normal-case assumptions and deal with expectations, a frame's exception conditions prevent us from discarding it prematurely when faced with unexpected data. (Jahn 449)

Last but not least, it must be underlined that the theoretical framework of the figural narrative situation is heavily informed by the preference given to *states of consciousness* as opposed to two other conditions in which a character is obliquely represented: his words and his "unaware" perception. Once again: Joyce, Kafka and Woolf are the most important textual references for the theory. This fact is in itself so significant that it biases the interpretation of a mere technique – indifferent in principle to the representation of consciousness – such as free indirect discourse. As I have already

²² The topic is a broad one, but it is worth mentioning at least that Stanzel clearly distinguishes historical *prototypes* and theoretical *ideal-types*: the former are made up of the literary works as they have manifested themselves in the positively knowable literary reality; the latter are "pure" forms that are postulated by theory but can never acquire a fully concrete form as prototypes. The typological circle, among other things, expresses the fluid relationship between real works (that can occupy infinite positions within the continuum) and abstract model. See Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative* (7-8, 77-78, 185-186 and *passim*).

²³ According to Stanzel (but by now it is a widely shared terminology) *emic* (from *phonemic*) is the name given to more traditional openings of the novel, in which a generally authorial (but also first person) narrator gradually inserts the story-world; conversely, *etic* (from *phonetic*) is the name given to openings of novels with figural narrative situation that inevitably refer to something preceding the beginning of the text, presenting a scene in which the reader suddenly "enters" (*A Theory of Narrative* 164-68).

²⁴ Of this author, see in particular the groundbreaking "Proteus in Quotation-Land. Mimesis and the Form of Reported Discourse" (1982). On Sternberg's narratological reflection, a very useful resource in Italian is Franco Passalacqua's introductory essay to "Narrare nel tempo II."

noted in part, according to Stanzel and Fludernik²⁵ (but obviously to a certain extent it is an undisputed observation) some forms of free indirect discourse can have a *dissonant* function: in particular, free indirect discourse containing spoken words tends to be ironic; and in any case, this kind of utterance does not seem able to convey real empathy. In other words, while free indirect discourse materialized by thoughts and consciousness can invite identification with the character, the same does *not* hold for free indirect discourse used to express inaudible voices. In this case, the only alternative to ironic antiphrasis is a so-called "neutral" tone. The obvious consequence is that a figural narrative situation *cannot* come about where *spoken* free indirect style prevails.

The interesting thing, in any case, is that Fludernik justifies an interpretation of this sort the very minute she argues, in her massive volume on free indirect discourse, that theorists such as Banfield – who built a rigorous linguistic theory of narration based on the description of forms of free indirect discourse holding *only* for the representation of consciousness – made a theoretical mistake. According to Fludernik, Banfield's description, originating within a generative-transformational framework, in *Unspeakable Sentences* does not adequately account for the representation of speech nor for those novels and short stories in which the internal point of view is connected to changing, variable deictic centers (*The Fictions of Language* 378). Novels and short stories – I wish to mention right away – whose nature appears "Verghian," as it were.

Even more striking, however, is that Banfield offers a linguistically very rigorous (and innovative) description of an aspect of narrative subjectivity that is generally rarely dwelled upon: so-called *free indirect perception*. Banfield defines it as "non-reflective consciousness" (183-223),²⁶ since it is an involuntary and unaware (what Sartre called "non-thetic" consciousness) psychic phenomenon. It is not a coincidence, either, that in her work Banfield quotes passages of French naturalist literature, Zola in particular, in order to exemplify free indirect perception:

Maintenant, il entendait les moulineurs pousser les trains sur les tréteaux, il distinguait des ombres vivantes culbutant les berlines, près de chaque feu. (*Germinal*)

And especially a kind of evaluative-expressive adjective (*pauvre*), that is very frequent in Verga:

Ce pauvre diable d'ouvrier, perdu sur les routes, l'intéressait. (*Germinal*)

This cannot be a coincidence because non-reflective perception, as Fludernik herself points out (*The Fictions of Language* 377), often occurs in texts that render *speeches*, spoken words, and not states of consciousness. The example that Banfield presents, taken from *A Room with a View* is very similar to something that readers of *Malavoglia* are familiar with (think, for example, of the collective chat about mice at lines 150-51 of chapter 2: "così il discorso si fece generale" ["and at that the conversation became general"]), that is, a conversation expressed in free indirect discourse:

²⁵ See Fludernik's seminal (regarding the matter of free indirect style) *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction. The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness* (1993).

²⁶ The following quotations from Zola and James can be found at pages 200, 202 and 207 respectively.

A conversation then ensued, on not unfamiliar lines. Miss Bartlett was, after all, a wee bit tired, and thought they had better spend the morning settling in; unless Lucy would at all like to go out? Lucy would rather like to go out, as it was her first day in Florence, but, of course, she could go alone.

After all, as scholars have pointed out since the beginnings of research on free indirect style (which focused mainly on Zola), the use of French and Italian *imperfect tenses* favors this kind of reflectorization, able to connect the cognitive sensitivity of the all the characters involved in the story. A trait that Charles Bally observed as early as 1912 ("Le style indirect libre") is the so-called "imparfait par attraction": an imperfect tense used instead of *passé simple* in parentheticals, that is, in the tags accompanying free indirect discourses. An example is a sentence such as:

L'ennemi, *disait-il*, serait là.

In *Malavoglia* this can occur – albeit in a less radical form – in the following passage (chapter 5, lines 110-112; italics are mine):

Egli [zio Crocifisso] andava a sfogarsi con Piedipapera, il quale l'aveva messo in quell'imbroglio, diceva agli altri; però gli altri dicevano che ci andava per fare l'occhiolino alla casa del nespolo [...].²⁷

More often, however, Verga uses a so-called *imperfetto*²⁸ *descrittivo* within parenthetical sentences completing direct speech, even in contexts where the "aorist" form would be preferable. Let us have a look, for example, at a crucial dialogue such as the one in which the Malavoglia family reacts to the order of payment delivered by the bailiff in chapter 6 (lines 342-46; italics are mine):

[...] quel giorno dell'uscire non si misero a tavola, in casa dei Malavoglia.
- Sacramento! esclamava 'Ntoni. Siamo sempre come i pulcini nella stoppa, ed ora mandano l'uscire per tirarci il collo.
- Cosa faremo? diceva la Longa.²⁹

Now, what must be viewed as a flaw within, so to speak, mainstream narratological theory actually accounts for the over-analytical attention towards anything making up the representation of consciousness, to the detriment of other kinds of experience.

The always extremely perceptive Dorrit Cohn claimed something similar when in 1978 she declared that "figural narration can be used for quite different purposes than can the narration of consciousness; meaning that one can tell a story figurally without

²⁷ "He went to let off steam with Piedipapera, who had got him into that scrape, as he told other people; but others said that he went there just to gaze at the house by the medlar tree [...]."

²⁸ The observations about some Italian tenses – in particular [*indicativo*] *imperfetto* and [*indicativo*] *passato remoto* – would require a long explanation for the reader who does not know Italian linguistic structures and the metalanguage of Italian grammar. Suffice it to say that *passato remoto* is similar to French *passé simple* and *imperfetto* to French *imparfait*; the English translation of Verga's text may help grasp the difference between both forms and the English forms of simple past and continuous past.

²⁹ "[...] the day the bailiff called, there were no meals at all in the Malavoglia household. / 'Damn it,' exclaimed 'Ntoni. / 'We're sitting ducks, and now they've sent in the bailiff to wring our necks.' / 'What shall we do?' asked la Longa."

basing it solely on the characters' inner motions and thoughts" (*Transparent Minds* 111). Nevertheless, in the noteworthy and recent (2011) volume edited by David Herman, *The Emergence of Mind*,³⁰ useful notions such as the "continuing consciousness frame," offered in particular by Alan Palmer, seem to be aiming once again at the "monism" of consciousness. Herman's very questioning of the modernist paradigm (the so-called "inward turn") re-interprets the relationship between internal and external experience blurring its boundaries, but it does not question the canon of works and topics, which keeps revolving around the Joyce-Woolf axis. Surely, it is useful to state that the existence of a *mind* is an interpretive hypothesis enacted by the reader, and not by a mere textual datum; yet, in this way, the existence of a perceptive process that has only partly to do with the interiority of the fictional characters is neglected (or at least undervalued).

2.1. I believe that a twofold theoretical and critical operation is needed at this point. On the one hand the heuristic fruitfulness of Stanzel's theory for the interpretation of crucial aspects of Western narrative between the 19th and the 20th centuries must be fully acknowledged – at least provisionally. By this I mean that the fact that impersonality, the objectivity of the narrative, is achieved first and foremost by focusing on a story as it is "filtered" by a predominantly individual *experiencing* is undoubtable and constitutes the true common thread of modernity, if not of Modernism. On the other hand, we must verify whether or not the blatant neglect of Southern European narratives – and, in perspective, also of narratives of the Southern part of the world in general³¹ –, can be repaired while still remaining within that interpretative framework. This means verifying whether or not the use of free indirect discourse, free indirect perception, in contexts other than the *mainstream* ones, can be analyzed in order to define a new, *broader* meaning of "figural narrative situation."

The test bed for this attempt will be Giovanni Verga's most important novel, *I Malavoglia*. I am convinced that in the work that best represents Italian late-19th century narrative modernity – by now widely read in relation and not in opposition to novelistic *Novecentismo*³² – it is possible to find a different but congruent accomplishment of Stanzel's *reflector mode*. Were this to be fully argued, there would be at least two consequences: a new way of reading *I Malavoglia* ("new" at least from an Italian perspective); and an updating of critical theory. In cognitivist terms, the point would be to define something similar to a *sub-frame* within the overall *frame* of figural narrative situation that the international scientific community has recognized for more than half a century (and that writers and critics have actually discovered and been practicing since the mid 19th century).

The best way to start off on the right foot, in this perhaps overly ambitious feat, is to let Verga speak for himself; let us look, therefore, at something he wrote to Felice

³⁰ Herman's argument on Modernism is at pages 243-272; Palmer's on Post-modernism is at pages 273-297.

³¹ As Vittorio Coletti claims, Verga's is "the greatest case of experimental language in the history of our narrative, the only Italian equivalent (and precedent) of that kind of writing (so much more expressionistic and metaphoric) emanating from the voice of a multiple, collective subjectivity that we find today in masterpieces by García Márquez or Manuel Scorza" (324).

³² On this complex matter, see Luperini (*Verga moderno*), who in any case keeps Verga far from Modernism, strictly speaking. Pellini, instead, is inclined toward such an operation in *Naturalismo e Verismo*.

Cameroni on February 27, 1881, shortly after the publication of *Malavoglia* and of a review by the same Cameroni, who had criticized Verga's "scenic" extremism rather thoroughly:³³

My only merit is perhaps to have had the courage and the integrity to give up an easier and wider success, in order not to go back on that form that seems absolutely necessary to me. Aside from that, the compensation I am offered through your encouragement and the encouragement of those intelligent people who take art seriously and not as sometimes they read in their spare time consoles me greatly of the coldness with which my attempt will be greeted by a large majority of people. This and not another seems to me the starting point for an exact representation of reality. I knew that you and all the others who see the matter with similar eyes agree with me on this point. All that was needed was to get there, and I'm glad to hear you answer yes. A partial yes, of course, because a lot still needs to be done, especially in Italy. Right from the beginning I put myself entirely among my characters and I took the reader there too, as though he had already met them all and had always lived with them in that place. This seems to me the best way to achieve a complete illusion of reality; that's why I purposefully avoided that kind of profile that you suggested for my main characters. I obviously knew that a certain confusion would necessarily enter the mind of the reader from the first pages; however, as my actors gradually established themselves through their actions, they would gain relevance and make themselves known more intimately and without artifice, the way living people do. The book as a whole would have gained the feel of something that actually happened (106-07).³⁴

These claims are crucial to our argument, since they prove that Verga had conceived a "szenische Erzählung," to quote Otto Ludwig, and especially that this mimetic intent required a cognitive collaboration by the reader (by his very "mind"), invited to occupy his place within the narrative and to empathically share its space-time.

³³ See the review that appeared on "Rivista repubblicana" and then on "Sole" in February 1881, that now can be found in Viazzi. The friendly reproaches are explicit: "[t]he author may perhaps have achieved the effect of stronger evidence, had he not exceeded in dialogues and had he condensed in a few pages the characterizing marks of each main character, in the form of a profile" (103); "[e]ven the greatest celebrities of the Naturalist novel [...] accompany descriptions and dialogue with physiological studies of the main characters in their novels, and Verga wants to do without this wool, in every circumstance?" (103-104).

³⁴ "Il mio solo merito sta forse nell'aver avuto il coraggio e la coscienza di rinunciare ad un successo più generale e più facile, per non tradire quella forma che sembrami assolutamente necessaria. Pel resto, il compenso che ne ho col vedermi incoraggiato da te e dagli intelligenti che pigliano l'arte sul serio, e non come una lettura fatta per passatempo mi consola ampiamente della freddezza con cui i più accoglieranno il mio tentativo. Il punto di partenza per arrivare alla rappresentazione esatta della realtà parmi quello, e non un altro e in questo sapevo d'essere d'accordo con te e tutti quelli che vedono la questione coi nostri occhi. Restava l'arrivarci, e son lieto di sentirmi rispondere sì da te. Sì in parte, ben inteso ché ancora moltissimo abbiamo da fare, specialmente in Italia. Io mi son messo in pieno, e fin da principio, in mezzo ai miei personaggi e ci ho condotto il lettore, come ei li avesse tutti conosciuti diggià, e già vissuto con loro e in quell'ambiente sempre. Parmi questo il modo migliore per darci completa l'illusione della realtà; ecco perché ho evitato studiatamente quella specie di profilo che tu mi suggerivi per i personaggi principali. Certamente non mi dissimulavo che una certa confusione non dovesse farsi nella mente del lettore alle prime pagine; però man mano che i miei attori si fossero affermati colla loro azione essi avrebbero acquistato maggior rilievo, si sarebbero fatti conoscere più intimamente e senza artificio, come persone vive, il libro tutto ci avrebbe guadagnato nell'impronta di cosa avvenuta."

Technically speaking, the main artifice of Verga's overall accomplishment is not free indirect speech as much as free indirect perception, the only way for him to realize an effectively narratorless story, a product of the mere interaction among the characters' cognitive experiences. The threadbare image of "the choir of Aci Trezza" – which incidentally contains an essentially correct intuition – should be rephrased in terms of intertwining plural, polycentric, perceptive spheres, founding *Malavoglia's* narration, its narrative act.

Right from its very opening (lines 1-22), chapter 2 represents a good example of what I've been arguing so far:

Per tutto il paese non si parlava d'altro che del negozio dei lupini, e come la Longa se ne tornava a casa colla Lia in collo, le comari si affacciavano sull'uscio per vederla passare.

- Un affar d'oro! - vociava Piedipapera, accorrendo colla gamba storta dietro a padron'Ntoni, il quale era andato a sedersi sugli scalini della chiesa, accanto a padron Fortunato Cipolla, e al fratello di Menico della Locca che stavano a prendere il fresco. - Lo zio Crocifisso strillava come se gli strappassero le penne mastre, ma non bisogna badarci, perchè delle penne ne ha molte, il vecchio. - Eh! s'è lavorato! potete dirlo anche voi, padron 'Ntoni! - ma per padron 'Ntoni ei si sarebbe buttato dall'alto del *fariglione*, com'è vero Iddio! e a lui lo zio Crocifisso gli dava retta, perchè egli era il mestolo della pentola, una pentola grossa, in cui bollivano più di duecento onze all'anno! Campana di legno non sapeva soffiarsi il naso senza di lui.

Il figlio della Locca udendo parlare delle ricchezze dello zio Crocifisso, il quale a lui gli era zio davvero, perchè era fratello della Locca, si sentiva gonfiare in petto una gran tenerezza pel parentado.

- Noi siamo parenti, ripeteva. Quando vado a giornata da lui mi dà mezza paga, e senza vino, perchè siamo parenti.

Piedipapera sghignazzava.³⁵

The use of so-called *imperfetto descrittivo* (or *descrittivo-narrativo*)³⁶ is the clearest symptom of what in such cases is materialized in the act of reading. Internal focalization (to use Genette's terminology) on an entire perceiving community immediately triggers a

³⁵ "The whole village was talking of nothing but the lupin deal, and as La Longa came home with Lia in her arms, the neighbours stood on their doorsteps to watch her pass. / 'What a deal!' bawled Piedipapera, clumping along with his twisted leg behind padron 'Ntoni, who had gone to sit down on the church steps, alongside padron Fortunato Cipolla and Menico della Locca's brother, who were enjoying the cool of the evening. Old zio Crocifisso was squawking like a plucked fowl, but there was no need to worry, the old man had plenty of feathers to spare. 'We had a hard time of it, didn't we, padron 'Ntoni?' — but he would have thrown himself off the top of those sharp rocks for padron 'Ntoni, as God lives, and zio Crocifisso paid heed to him, because he called the tune, and quite a tune it was, more than two hundred onze a year! Dumb-bell couldn't blow his own nose without Piedipapera. / La Locca's son, overhearing mention of zio Crocifisso's wealth - and zio Crocifisso really was his uncle, being la Locca's brother - felt his heart swell with family feeling. / 'We're related,' he would say. 'When I work for him by the day he gives me half-pay, and no wine, because we're relatives.' / Piedipapera snickered."

³⁶ I prefer to make use of this certainly dated definition (in fact, it would be more correct to argue in terms of *imperfetti* that are in turn *progressivi* or *continui*, always in relation to their potential *narrative* dimension), only because it is the most widespread in grammar texts. The opposition between this type of imperfect and the one expressing habitual actions – *iterative* imperfect – is at play here. The point is that Verga scholars have at times reduced to iterative imperfects that are actually of a different nature, in my opinion, emphasizing excessively the image of *Malavoglia* as a novel of cyclic temporality.

deictic shift. In short, the expression *si parlava* determines the emersion of a perspective point that – distancing itself from that of the authorial narrator – registers a scattered chitchat, and takes active part in it. Not only this. The feeling that something is “in the air,” in turn, tends to involve the reader, drawing him by force within a dramatized story. Right now people are speaking and hearing speech, and “in our minds” we are among them.

Banfield’s “non-reflective consciousness” – the impression of proximity – is an unaware experience occurring without explicit verbalization. Yet, we are made aware of this experience through the literary language that *represents* it. It happens in front of us readers. The text thematizes this deviation of sorts from a hazy confusion of events to a distinct perception; and it does so through the “irrational” conjunction *and*³⁷ (“*e come la Longa*” [“*and as La Longa*”]), that abruptly introduces the first two specific agents of the present experience: Maruzza’s “chat,” subject of gossip, and the nosey neighbors who are *now* watching her pass by. A positive and a negative pole, ready to switch roles – at least potentially.

Having defined the common perceptive frame and suggested a first potential “dialogue,” the following lines introduce mainly passages of speech. Always relying on the *imperfetto*, the characters talk to and listen to each other – if necessary in free indirect discourse; they see and they are seen, communicating their presence with their bodies as well.³⁸ In short, from a narrative point of view, they exist as individuals inasmuch as they are “perceived” by the rest of the town – and at the same time they perceive themselves – through the entire range of physical possibilities of perception.

The narrative of *Malavoglia* is essentially made up of this extremely dense and changing *web of simultaneous perceptions* that substitutes the voice of the authorial narrator. We acquire our knowledge of the story-world inasmuch as the characters’ cognition offers it to us. In the passage that we have just read, loud and sneering Piedipapera dominates the scene. Among other things, he acts as substitute of padron Crocifisso – who is physically absent – by expressing his impressions through direct discourse or perhaps free indirect discourse.³⁹ In short: Fortunato Cipolla, padron ‘Ntoni and Locca’s son grasp the (verbal and non-verbal) behavior of Piedipapera who knows (feels, perceives) that Campana di legno is complaining about such an such... In the same way, Locca’s son’s speech, be it free indirect or direct, is filtered by the sensitivity of those present, and especially by Piedipapera’s. In paragraph 2.2 I will better explain how Verga represents interior, invisible content (see Menico’s brother’s: “*si sentiva gonfiare in petto*”): however, it is already evident that we are witnessing a particular kind of perception, a *self* perception.

The climax of this representational *virtuoso* is to be found a few pages later, when the reflectorization actually seems to falter for a moment. For now, let us verify one of

³⁷ On this matter, see Spitzer (297).

³⁸ Tactile perception is not ruled out either, as we will see in a moment. And even smell and taste related indications are possible: again in chapter 2, see lines 406-408 (the smell of don Giammaria’s “*vermicelli fritti*” [“fried vermicelli”] effectively make Piedipapera’s mouth “water” [“*aveva tuttora l’acquolina in bocca*”; “his mouth was still watering”]).

³⁹ Contrary to the opinion of some commentators, even “Lo zio Crocifisso strillava [...]” [“Old zio Crocifisso was squawking”] could be a free indirect speech: “[Piedipapera said that] Old zio Crocifisso was squawking [...]” More exactly: “[Those present heard that] Piedipapera was saying that] Old zio Crocifisso was squawking [...]” On the ambiguous use of reported speech signals (dashes), and on the subsequent ambiguous “fluid area” that it determines, see Cecco’s *Introduzione* to the critical edition of *Malavoglia* (XV).

the many auditory counterpoints between parts of the story occurring simultaneously. On the Saturday evening preceding the day of the Provvidenza's shipwreck, in the dark, the loudly chattering neighbor ladies overhear both the dialogue between don Giammaria and zio Crocifisso and the one between don Silvestro and the chemist (lines 305-13):

La Longa si sentiva sullo stomaco il debito delle quarant'onze dei lupini, e cambiò discorso, perchè le orecchie ci sentono anche al buio, e lo zio Crocifisso si udiva discorrere con don Giammaria, mentre passavano per la piazza, lì vicino, tanto che la Zuppidda interruppe i vituperi che stava dicendo di lui per salutarlo.

Don Silvestro rideva come una gallina, e quel modo di ridere faceva montare la mosca al naso allo speziale, il quale per altro di pazienza non ne aveva mai avuta, e la lasciava agli asini e a quelli che non volevano fare la rivoluzione un'altra volta.⁴⁰

Once again, let us set aside the discussion about Maruzza's "introspection" (however, it is worth noting at least the repetition of the verb *sentire* [feel] that equates *internal* and *external* events). Crucial here is the fact that three moments and three places within the story are connected through hearing: the *balcony* of the house by the medlar tree (neighbour ladies' dialogue), the side of the *square* in which the *pharmacy* is located (don Silvestro-don Franco dialogue), and – approximately – the *center of the square* in which don Crocifisso and the priest pass by, chatting. A fourth space will emerge later on: the one in which padron 'Ntoni and Fortunato Cipolla are talking. Verga's mastery is his ability to reflectorize types of comments that in another setting would be considered authorial. Suffice it here to note the observation about the chemist's touchiness ("il quale per altro di pazienza non ne aveva mai avuta" ["in fact the chemist had never been endowed with much patience anyway"]), which we spontaneously attribute to a collective judgment ("*everybody in fact knew that [...]").

And there is more to it. For later in the text Verga even achieves a "vision in the dark" (lines 342-61):

Nel calore della disputa don Giammaria aveva perso il battuto, sul quale avrebbe attraversato la piazza anche ad occhi chiusi, e stava per rompersi il collo, e lasciar scappare, Dio perdoni, una parola grossa.

- Almeno l'accendessero, i loro lumi!

Al giorno d'oggi bisogna badare ai fatti propri, conchiuse lo zio Crocifisso.

Don Giammaria andava tirandolo per la manica del giubbone per dire corna di questo e di quell'altro, in mezzo alla piazza, all'oscuro; del lumaio che rubava l'olio, di don Silvestro che chiudeva un occhio, e del sindaco "Giufà", che si lasciava menare per il naso. Mastro Cirino, ora che era impiegato del comune, faceva il sagrestano come Giuda, che suonava l'angelus quando non aveva nulla da fare, e il vino per la messa lo comperava di quello che aveva bevuto sulla croce Gesù Crocifisso, ch'era un vero sacrilegio. Campana di legno diceva sempre di sì col capo per abitudine, sebbene non si vedessero in faccia, e don Giammaria, come li passava a rassegna ad uno ad uno diceva: - Costui è un ladro - quello è

⁴⁰ "La Longa felt the forty onze from the lupin debt weighing her down, and changed the subject, because even walls have ears, and you could hear zio Crocifisso talking nearby with don Giammaria, as they walked through the square, so that even la Zuppidda broke off the vituperations that she was casting in his direction, to greet him. / Don Silvestro was cackling away, and his way of laughing got on the chemist's nerves, though in fact the chemist had never been endowed with much patience anyway, and he left that virtue to donkeys and people who were satisfied with the revolution as it stood."

un birbante – quell’altro è un giacobino. - Lo sentite Piedipapera che sta discorrendo con padron Malavoglia e padron Cipolla?⁴¹

Technically, everything goes as usual: a sort of perceptive shot reverse shot joins don Giammaria and zio Crocifisso, guaranteed by the fact that the priest’s voice is heard by others as well (but in this passage it is of secondary importance). Don Giammaria, having lost his way (“il battuto,” the path crossing the square), is most likely leaning on the other speaker, and in any case he has physical contact with him (he jerks him during their conversation). And this would explain the potentially authorial insertion that in this perspective must – perhaps – be seen as a “tactile” reflectorization. I am referring to the following passage: “Campana di legno diceva sempre di sì col capo per abitudine, *sebbene non si vedessero in faccia*” [“Dumb bell kept on nodding out of habit, *though they couldn’t see each other*”⁴²], where the concessive clause seems to be the product of an omniscient voice. But maybe it is not, considering that Campana di legno’s movement could have been sensed by don Giammaria through his body. And in a short while we will see that something of the sort happens in chapter 8 to Mena who, speaking with Alfio, will “sense” her own – otherwise invisible – blush.

Such a technique, meant to emphasize the closeness, even in terms of affection, that the characters have for each other, allows us to interpret apparently well-codified situations quite differently. The beginning of chapter 5 offers two valuable examples. The first one concerns the figuralization of what the character “does not know.” Stanzel claims that if in a narrative work it is said that a character “does not know that...” (*A Theory of Narrative* 266, note 69), the one saying it can only be an authorial narrator (a narrator who, by definition, can penetrate the areas of inner life that are outside the character’s awareness). But in *Aci Trezza*, in a milieu of mischief-makers and gossipers, *the others* are the ones who know what the character ignores. If I read the opening of chapter 5 (lines 1-9),

La Mena non sapeva nulla che volessero maritarla con Brasi di padron Cipolla per far passare la doglia alla mamma, e il primo che glielo disse, qualche tempo dopo, fu compare Alfio Mosca, dinanzi al rastrello dell’orto, che tornava allora da Aci-Castello col suo carro tirato dall’asino. Mena rispondeva: - Non è vero, non è vero - ma si confondeva, e mentre egli andava spiegando il come e il quando l’aveva sentito dire dalla Vespa, in casa dello zio Crocifisso, tutt’a un tratto si fece rossa rossa.

⁴¹ “In the heat of the dispute don Giammaria, missed his usual way across the square almost tripped and, God forgive him, let slip a bad word. / ‘If only they’d light their precious light, at least!’ / ‘In this day and age you have to look after yourself,’ zio Crocifisso pronounced. / Don Giammaria tugged him by the sleeve of his jacket every time he wanted to say something disparaging about this person or that, in the middle of the square, there in the dark; about the lamplighter who stole the oil, about don Silvestro who turned a blind eye to it, about the catspaw of a mayor who let himself be led by the nose. Now that he worked for the municipality, mastro Cirino was a most unreliable sexton, ringing the angelus only when he had nothing else to do, and the communion wine he purchased was reminiscent of the kind which Jesus Christ had had on the cross, it was a real sacrilege. Dumb bell kept on nodding out of habit, though it was completely dark and they couldn’t see each other at all, and don Giammaria reviewed his victims one by one, saying that so and so was a thief, so and so a villain, so and so a fire-brand. / ‘Have you heard Piedipapera talking with padron Malavoglia and padron Cipolla?’”

⁴² The English translation tries to explain the setting, with a surplus of authorial intrusion which I omit.

Anche compare Mosca aveva un'aria stralunata [...].⁴³

I can be fairly sure that the one sensing Mena's unawareness is not the “narrator” but Alfio. Furthermore, the sight of her sensing his “aria stralunata” [“looked distraught”] mirrors Alfio seeing the girl's discomfort. From here on, the dialogue proceeds with the usual *imperfetto* playing a pathemic role, marking the physical closeness of the two. But let us read the ending of the sequence and the beginning of the following one (lines 19-35; italics are mine, except for the last one):

- E poi, se non è vero, perché vi fate rossa? Ella non lo sapeva, in coscienza, e girava e rigirava il nottolino. Quel cristiano lo conosceva soltanto di vista, e non sapeva altro. Alfio le andava snocciolando la litania di tutte le ricchezze di Brasi Cipolla, il quale, dopo compare Naso il beccaio, passava pel più grosso partito del paese, e le ragazze se lo mangiavano cogli occhi. La Mena stava ad ascoltare con tanto d'occhi anche lei, e all'improvviso lo *piantò* con un bel saluto, e se ne *entrò* nell'orto. Alfio, tutto infuriato, *corse* a lagnarsi colla Vespa che gli dava a bere di tali bugie, per farlo litigare colla gente.

- A me l'ha detto lo zio Crocifisso; *rispose* la Vespa. Io non ne dico bugie!

- Bugie! bugie! *borbottò* lo zio Crocifisso. Io non voglio dannarmi l'anima per coloro! L'ho sentito dire con queste orecchie. Ho sentito pure che la *Providenza* è dotale, e che sulla casa c'è il censo di cinque tari all'anno.⁴⁴

Everything is expressed in the *imperfetto* (even in those cases in which a *passato remoto* could have been used: try to substitute “andava snocciolando” with “snocciolò”⁴⁵), until the moment Mena gets angry and leaves. Actions expressed in the aorist form follow. The fact that the *imperfetto* marks a proximity that can be seductive is reinforced by Vespa's answer to zio Crocifisso (lines 35-39; italics are mine):

- Si vedrà! si vedrà! un giorno o l'altro si vedrà se ne dite o non ne dite delle bugie, - seguitava la Vespa, dondolandosi appoggiata allo stipite, colle mani dietro la schiena, e intanto lo guardava cogli occhi ladri. - Voi altri uomini siete tutti di una pasta, e non c'è da fidarsi.⁴⁶

⁴³ “Mena had no idea that they wanted to marry her to padron Cipolla's Brasi to help her mother get over her grief, and the first person to mention it to her, some time later, was compare Alfio Mosca, by the gate to the vegetable patch, when he was coming back from Aci Castello with his donkey cart. Mena said that it just wasn't true; but she was embarrassed, and while he was explaining how and when he had heard this news from la Vespa, at zio Crocifisso's house, she suddenly became quite red in the face. / Compare Mosca too looked distraught.”

⁴⁴ “And anyhow if it wasn't true, why have you gone so red? She couldn't say, in all conscience, and kept fiddling with the latch. She knew the fellow by sight only, that was all, Alfio reeled off a long list of Brasi Cipolla's possessions; after compare Naso the butcher, he passed for the village's biggest catch, and the girls feasted their eyes on him. Mena stood there listening wide-eyed, and then marched off abruptly with a firm goodbye, and went into the vegetable patch. Alfio, furious, ran off to complain to la Vespa who had fed him such lies, just to make him quarrel with people. / ‘It was zio Crocifisso who told me,’ replied la Vespa. ‘I don't tell lies.’ ‘Lies, lies,’ grumbled zio Crocifisso. ‘I wouldn't damn my immortal soul for that lot. I heard it with these very ears. I also heard that the *Providenza* is part of Maruzza's dowry, and the house has a rateable value of five tari.’”

⁴⁵ In translation, “reeled off” [“snocciolò”] substitutes the more literal “was reeling off” [“andava snocciolando”].

⁴⁶ “Never mind, we'll see. Sooner or later we'll see whether you're lying or not,” continued la Vespa, lolling to and fro as she leant against the doorpost, with her hands behind her back, watching him with those devouring eyes of hers. ‘You men are all the same, untrustworthy.’”

Her *imperfetto* reciprocates his *passato remoto* (once again, in theory the two forms are interchangeable: *imperfetto* for him and *passato remoto* for her...). This signals Vespa's desirous and "thieving" attitude, as opposed to Campana di legno's curt storytelling.

That these – at times not very evident - shifts in perspective focus play a crucial role can be argued in many ways. For the sake of conciseness I will mention only two of the possible arguments. The first is the frequent use of what Banfield refers to as "evaluative adjectives" (*Unspeakable Sentences* 55 and *passim*) or expressive adjectives: typically in *Malavoglia poveretto* and *poveraccio* ["poor creature," "poor man" and so on]. Their function is well known to linguists: it is to figuralize deixis by emphasizing the speaker's point of view. However, in a text like *I Malavoglia* there is no real *speaker* (a traditional narrative enunciator) but rather – we could say – a series of *selves* (according to Banfield's use of the term): their implicit "subjectivity" manifests itself, setting itself within the text, almost automatically, every time the modified nouns in question are used. Trivializing Banfield's thought, we could speak of *cancelled* subjects whose trace remains visible in linguistic effects.

The following is a typical situation (chapter 4, lines 316-322; italics are mine):

La cugina Anna, *poveretta*, aveva lasciato la sua tela e le sue ragazze per venire a dare una mano a comare Maruzza, la quale era come se fosse malata, e se l'avessero lasciata sola non avrebbe pensato più ad accendere il fuoco, e a mettere la pentola, che sarebbero tutti morti di fame. "I vicini devono fare come le tegole del tetto, a darsi l'acqua l'un l'altro" Intanto quei ragazzi avevano le labbra pallide dalla fame.⁴⁷

It is self-evident that from *poveretta* onward the deixis – and the evaluative perspective as well – is that of cousin Anna, through whose perceptions and feelings the story is told. She is the one who feels the need of that family, of "quei ragazzi" ["those children"]. There are very few exceptions to this rule of sort (shift of perspective in relation to pathemic epithet).⁴⁸ This is also due to the fact that extreme cases are possible within this path. One is the following, taken from chapter 3 (lines 65-71), in relation to a character that no reader – I imagine – feels sympathetic toward:

La Santuzza, all'ultimo tocco di campana, aveva affidata l'osteria a suo padre, e se n'era andata in chiesa, tirandosi dietro gli avventori. Lo zio Santoro, *poveretto*, era cieco, e non faceva peccato se non andava a messa; così non perdevano tempo all'osteria, e dall'uscio poteva tener d'occhio il banco, sebbene non ci vedesse, chè gli avventori li conosceva tutti ad uno ad uno soltanto al sentirli camminare, quando venivano a bere un bicchiere.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Cousin Anna, poor creature, had left her linen and the girls to come and give comare Maruzza a hand - because it was as though Maruzza were ill, and if they had left her to her own devices she wouldn't even have remembered to light the fire, and put on the pot, and they would all have died of hunger."

⁴⁸ As often happens (see *infra* par. 3), an exception is offered by a passage concerning Maruzza. Chapter 1, lines 197-200: "per compassione della Longa, la quale, *poveretta*, non si dava pace, e sembrava una gatta che avesse perso i gattini" ["out of consideration for La Longa, who couldn't seem to resign herself, and was like a mother cat that has lost her kittens"]; the point of view, in this sentence, is either Bastianazzo's or padron 'Ntoni's (and it is also apparent that the two men empathize with Longa).

⁴⁹ "At the last toll of the bell, Santuzza had put the wine shop into her father's care and had gone into church, bringing the customers behind her. Zio Santoro, poor man, was blind, and it was no sin for him not to go to mass; that way no time was wasted in the wine shop, and he could keep an

As sometimes happens, characters that are “not positive” express themselves through narrated monologues (free indirect discourses, bordering on soliloquy) to justify their at times not entirely legitimate stances. Here, zio Santoro’s point of view, his self-perception, is clearly paired with the sight of his daughter in a second person plural of sorts (see *perdevano* instead of the possible “direct” form *perdiamo*).

Longa’s meeting with the alleged plague-spreader in chapter 11, related in a sort of intradiegetic narrative, is a lot more disturbing. I will come back to it in paragraph 3 (lines 317-326; italics are mine):

La Longa una volta, mentre tornava da Aci Castello, col paniere al braccio, si sentì così stanca che le gambe le tremavano, e sembrava fossero di piombo. Allora si lasciò vincere dalla tentazione di riposare due minuti su quelle quattro pietre liscie messe in fila all’ombra del caprifico che c’è accanto alla cappelletta, prima d’entrare nel paese; e non si accorse, ma ci pensò dopo, che uno sconosciuto, il quale pareva stanco anche lui, *poveraccio*, c’era stato seduto pochi momenti prima, e aveva lasciato sui sassi delle gocce di certa sudiceria che sembrava olio. Insomma ci cascò anche lei; prese il colera e tornò a casa [...].⁵⁰

Plague-spreaders are *not* worthy of compassion. But if we think that, at least until *insomma*, we are dealing with an originally first person narration (told entirely from Maruzza’s point of view), then the narrated self of this supposed homodiegetic narrator could for a moment have referred pityingly as *poveraccio* [“poor thing”] to the wanderer, who is exhausted just like her.

Instead, it is not necessary to verify by means of further examples forms expressing distance through the use of deictics such as “quei poveretti.” This expression often refers to the Malavoglia family as an indistinct group and implies the well-known perceptive filter of the community that for the most part pities them (though their hostility takes on several nuances).⁵¹ If anything, it is important to point out – but especially to verify from the point of view of its quantity – the impact of what English-speaking narratologists call “Uncle Charles principle.” This principle can be equated to what Stanzel defines as *Ansteckung* (“contagion”): the apparently abnormal use of

eye on the counter from the doorway, even though he couldn’t see, because he knew the customers one by one just by their footsteps, when they came to drink a glass of wine.”

⁵⁰ “Once, while she was coming back from Aci Castello, with her basket on her arm, la Longa felt so tired that her legs were shaking and seemed as if they were made of lead. So she let herself be overcome by the temptation to rest for a couple of minutes in the shade of the wild fig which is just near the little shrine, just before you enter the village; and she didn’t notice at the time, but she did remember afterwards, that a stranger who seemed tired too, poor thing, had been sitting there a few moments before, and had left drops of some nasty substance which looked like oil on those stones. Anyway, she slumped down there too; she caught cholera and when she got home [...].”

⁵¹ A passage from chapter 3, lines 171-72 is a typical example: “La piccina piangeva, e quei poveretti, dimenticati sulla sciara, a quell’ora, parevano le anime del purgatorio” (empathic effect) [“The baby was crying and the poor creatures looked like lost souls, all alone on the sciara, at that hour”]. Also see chapter 6, lines 359-61 and 456-57 respectively): “Quei poveracci rimasero ad aspettare seduti sul muricciolo, e senza aver coraggio di guardarsi in faccia; ma gettavano occhiate lunghe sulla strada d’onde s’aspettava Piedipapera” (neutral intonation); “Quei poveri ignoranti, immobili sulle loro scranne, si guardavano fra di loro, e don Silvestro intanto rideva sotto il naso” (mocking, hostile perception) [“Those poor creatures sat waiting there on the wall, and they hadn’t the heart to look one another in the eye; but they cast long glances on the road where they expected Piedipapera to appear”]; “Seated motionless on their chairs, those poor ignorant things looked at one another, and meanwhile don Silvestro was laughing at them behind their backs”].

individual words or phrases consistent with the dominant focus of the context.⁵² If, for example, we ask why at the end of chapter 13, lines 790-797, 'Ntoni is referred to by name and "surname" (actually nickname):

Don Michele si spolverò la montura, andò a raccattare la sciabola che aveva persa, e se ne uscì borbottando fra i denti, senz'altro, per amor dei galloni. - Ma 'Ntoni Malavoglia, il quale mandava un fiume di sangue dal naso, vedendolo sgattaiolare, non lo potevano tenere dal gridargli dietro un mare d'improperi dalla porta dell'osteria, mostrandogli il pugno, e asciugandosi colla manica il sangue che gli colava dal naso; e gli prometteva che voleva dargli il resto quando l'incontrava.⁵³

the best answer is that this is the very definition 'Ntoni gives of himself. All we have to do is to imagine an implied direct discourse addressing don Michele, such as: "Io, 'Ntoni Malavoglia, ti prometto / ti giuro che..." ["I, 'Ntoni Malavoglia, promise/swear that..."].

2.2. Figuralization in *Malavoglia* can, obviously, occur in a more canonical way, following the practice of what we can define as *mainstream* modernism. There are episodes of significant length (up to two or three pages) in which the point of view of the single reflector-character, through whom the entire story is told, is active. And perhaps it is not by chance that the most demanding (and the longest) episodes of this kind concern the two main male characters, the two 'Ntonis. The grandfather is the protagonist of the trial scene toward the end of chapter 14 (lines 531-595), where one of the greatest virtuositities of the novel is displayed: the subjectified account, by means of free indirect discourse, of a direct speech ("Questa era buona! questa che diceva l'avvocato valeva da sola cinquanta lire: diceva che poichè volevano metterlo colle spalle al muro [...]"; lines 559-561⁵⁴). Here the perceiving character is responsible for the speech tags, as well. When at lines 565-66 we read:

- Chi dice che gliel'ha data 'Ntoni Malavoglia? predicava l'avvocato.⁵⁵

the parenthetical clause "predicava l'avvocato" is "said" by Padron 'Ntoni: it is (re)produced by his experience as a subject who feels fully involved in the pleading.

The other sequence is the ending of the novel. It is impossible here to analyze it in detail. Suffice it to say that Verga is almost perfectly consistent: apart from "singulative" transitions expressed in *passato remoto* (which are, in any case, essential: I

⁵² This figural contamination called "Uncle Charles Principle" (from a passage of the second part of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where the movement of a pompous character, the eponymous uncle Charles, is described by means of a pompous verbal predicate: "repaired"), is commented on by Stanzel (*Theory of Narrative* 192-93).

⁵³ "Don Michele brushed down his uniform, went to retrieve the sabre he'd lost in the fray and went out muttering between his teeth, without further ado, for love of his braided cap. But 'Ntoni Malavoglia, whose nose was pouring blood, seeing him sneak off like that, couldn't restrain himself from mouthing a sea of curses after him from the door of the wine shop, showing him his fist, and using his sleeve to wipe away the blood from his nose; and he promised he'd give him his come-uppance next time he met him."

⁵⁴ "That was good stuff! What the lawyer was saying right now alone was worth fifty lire; he was saying that they wanted to get him with his back to the wall [...]."

⁵⁵ "'Who says that 'Ntoni Malavoglia gave it to him?' spouted the lawyer."

will address this issue shortly), the narrator is careful to reflectorize all the events exclusively within 'Ntoni's perspective, using techniques that we know well, such as free indirect perception ("quando fu lontano, in mezzo alla piazza scura e deserta, che tutti gli usci *erano* chiusi,"⁵⁶ lines 656-658: where the polyvalent *che* reinforces the shift to inner perception). Alongside this technique, and aside from free indirect discourse, Verga uses both the so-called "quoted monologue" (consciousness: "Fra poco lo zio Santoro [...]," lines 68357) and direct discourse in form of soliloquy (last three lines). The problem arises from the fact that 'Ntoni is alone (nobody perceives him), and that some sentences could be interpreted as an "introspection" in his thoughts by an authorial narrator. The most problematic passage is the following (lines 667-670):

Allora 'Ntoni si fermò in mezzo alla strada a guardare il paese tutto nero, come non gli bastasse il cuore di staccarsene, adesso che sapeva ogni cosa, e sedette sul muricciuolo della vigna di massaro Filippo.⁵⁸

Daniele Giglioli goes as far as basing a crucial part of his (brilliant, for that matter) reading of *Malavoglia* focusing on these words as "extradiegetic comment" (20-21). Instead, the critical reading that both text and context invite depends on the deictic anomaly of "adesso che sapeva" ["now that he knew"] defining the typical *now in the past* on which, according to Banfield, the *representation* of spoken and thought discourses is based. 'Ntoni repeats to himself (thinks) the words he has previously uttered ("ma ora che so ogni cosa devo andarmene"; lines 651-652⁵⁹). There is *no* narrator showing us 'Ntoni's thoughts; but there is a diegetic world that *takes shape* within the limits of what the character knows and thinks about it. Even the psycho-narrative expression (that therefore tends towards authoriality) "come non gli bastasse il cuore" ["as though he hadn't the heart to"] ends up looking like a narrated monologue of sorts (let us imagine it, in direct form, as: "I can't go") and not an omniscient form of intrusion.

Be it as it may, this issue is not to be overlooked, since there are several passages in *Malavoglia* with a strong introspective effect. Verga himself appears slightly uncomfortable, at times. For example at the end of chapter 2 (lines 473-82), the well known lyrical-"descriptive" passage, in which Mena beholds the landscape and gradually combines her own thoughts to the unconscious perceptions of things, is closed by a tag that is almost too curt and explicit – in the guise of Manzoni in a way – "così pensava Mena [...]"⁶⁰

Nevertheless, parentheticals of this type affect the enunciative dominant of the novel only incidentally. The devices employed should lead us to interpret the text *reversing* the perspective that we usually assume in the presence of an authorial text or, even more, of a first person narration. Traditional narrative modes outline a path from the outside world to the interiority of characters; the *reflector mode* invites, instead, a perception of the story that moves from the subject to the outside world (*from inside*

⁵⁶ "[...] when he was some way off, in the middle of the square which was dark and empty because all the doorways were closed."

⁵⁷ "Soon zio Santoro [...]."

⁵⁸ "Then 'Ntoni stopped in the middle of the road to look at the village, all black as it was, as though he hadn't the heart to leave it, now that he knew everything, and he sat down on the wall of massaro Filippo's vineyard"

⁵⁹ "[...] but now that I know everything, I have to go'."

⁶⁰ "[...] as Mena thought."

and not *from without*).⁶¹ Fictional reality manifests itself because a character *thinks* and/or *perceives* it, and not because a heterodiegetic voice is *narrating* or *describing* it. To put it simply, even reflections and feelings relegated to the sphere of consciousness are part of reality: because they interact with reality. Thought is displayed inasmuch as it is linked to things.

Earlier, I mentioned Mena’s blush as an emotional *Leitmotiv* of *Malavoglia*: while in chapter 5 we have just seen that Alfio witnesses its existence (by seeing Mena blush), in chapter 8 we recognize an apparently “omniscient” manifestation during the conversation in the dark with Alfio (lines 35-40; italics are mine):

- Se ve ne andate alla Bicocca chi sa quando ci vedremo più! disse infine Mena che le mancava la voce.

- O perchè? Ve ne andate anche voi?

La poveretta stette un pezzetto senza rispondere *sebbene fosse buio e nessuno potesse vederla in viso*.⁶²

Within an authorial context, the two coordinate concessive clauses would suggest a zero-focalization; however this passage demands a different reading. For the subject of the reflectorization is clearly Mena (even in a physical sense “che le mancava la voce”⁶³), which is reiterated by the usual empathic “poveretta.” This requires that we activate a *frame* connected to Mena’s thought (“he can’t see me, but ...”) in turn linked to the feeling of blushing (“she felt she was blushing”, “I’m blushing”). And the fact is even more relevant because in the so-called manuscript A (the final draft of the novel before the first printing) Verga had suggested a thought related not to a visual, but to an *auditory* sensation, nevertheless expressed by means of thought (a “fear”):

La poveretta non poteva rispondere perchè temeva che si sentisse come le batteva il cuore.⁶⁴

In my opinion – and I am aware that I am running the risk of overstating the case – there are good reasons to suppose that a reflectorized reading of the novel would mainly affect the interpretation of certain passages featuring zio Crocifisso. I am referring in particular to the beginning of chapter 4; but there are many passages (e.g. in chapter 6, as mentioned in paragraph 1) in which Campana di Legno’s “justifications” take on a hybrid form and the free indirect style – rendering both thoughts and uttered words – borders on description, and therefore on something that

⁶¹ Fludernik (*The Fictions of Language* 324-32) argues that the classical opposition between voice and point of view (or focalization) is susceptible to generating various types of dualism (typically: narrator’s voice and point of view / character’s voice and point of view). One can avoid this impasse by imagining (as Stanzel does, as well as Banfield, in part) that reflectorizing techniques, namely free indirect style, can “establish a notional subjectivity (a SELF) [...] evoking a character’s “voice” (325). As much occurs, precisely, in the figural narrative situation which, hinging on the experiencing subject’s spatial-temporal deixis, subordinates all other factor at play to this deixis.

⁶² “‘If you go to Bicocca there’s no knowing when we shall meet again,’ Mena said at last, in a voice that was barely audible. / ‘Now why is that? Are you going away too?’ / The poor creature didn’t answer for a bit, although it was dark and no one could see her face.”

⁶³ The English translation – “in a voice that was barely audible” – does not grasp that the focus of perception is Mena.

⁶⁴ See the critical edition of *Malavoglia* (124) [“The poor creature didn’t answer because she was afraid someone might hear how fast her heart was beating” (translation mine)].

is – almost – *authorial*. The very opening of chapter 4, lines 1-39, is interpreted by Luperini as “the only portrait of a character in the novel” (“Introduzione” 60):

Il peggio era che i lupini li avevano presi a credenza, e lo zio Crocifisso non si contentava di “buone parole e mele fradicie,” per questo lo chiamavano Campana di legno, perchè non ci sentiva di quell’orecchio, quando lo volevano pagare con delle chiacchiere, e’ diceva che “alla credenza ci si pensa”. Egli era un buon diavolaccio, e viveva imprestando agli amici, non faceva altro mestiere, che per questo stava in piazza tutto il giorno, colle mani nelle tasche, o addossato al muro della chiesa, con quel giubbone tutto lacero che non gli avreste dato un baiocco; ma aveva denari sin che ne volevano, e se qualcheduno andava a chiedergli dodici tari glieli prestava subito, col pegno, perchè “chi fa credenza senza pegno, perde l’amico, la roba e l’ingegno” a patto di averli restituiti la domenica, d’argento e colle colonne, che ci era un carlino dippiù, com’era giusto, perchè “coll’interesse non c’è amicizia.” Comprava anche la pesca tutta in una volta, con ribasso, e quando il povero diavolo che l’aveva fatta aveva bisogno subito di denari, ma dovevano pesargliela colle sue bilancie, le quali erano false come Giuda, dicevano quelli che non erano mai contenti, ed hanno un braccio lungo e l’altro corto, come san Francesco; e anticipava anche la spesa per la ciurma, se volevano, e prendeva soltanto il denaro anticipato, e un rotolo di pane a testa, e mezzo quartuccio di vino, e non voleva altro, chè era cristiano e di quel che faceva in questo mondo avrebbe dovuto dar conto a Dio. Insomma era la provvidenza per quelli che erano in angustie, e aveva anche inventato cento modi di render servizio al prossimo, e senza essere uomo di mare aveva barche, e attrezzi, e ogni cosa, per quelli che non ne avevano, e li prestava, contentandosi di prendere un terzo della pesca, più la parte della barca, che contava come un uomo della ciurma, e quella degli attrezzi, se volevano prestati anche gli attrezzi, e finiva che la barca si mangiava tutto il guadagno, tanto che la chiamavano la barca del diavolo - e quando gli dicevano perchè non ci andasse lui a rischiare la pelle come tutti gli altri, che si pappava il meglio della pesca senza pericolo, rispondeva: - Bravo! e se in mare mi capita una disgrazia, Dio liberi, che ci lascio le ossa, chi me li fa gli affari miei? - Egli badava agli affari suoi, ed avrebbe prestato anche la camicia; ma poi voleva esser pagato, senza tanti cristi; ed era inutile stargli a contare ragioni, perchè era sordo, e per di più era scarso di cervello, e non sapeva dir altro che “Quel che è di patto non è d’inganno”, oppure “Al giorno che promise si conosce il buon pagatore.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ “The worst thing was that the lupins had been bought on credit, and zio Crocifisso said that fine words buttered no parsnips; and he was as un giving as a dumb bell, which was how he got his name, because he became pig-headed and mulishly obstinate when anyone tried to repay him with chatter, and he would say that credit always led to trouble. He was a good enough fellow, and lived by lending money to his friends, and had no other job, and that was why he hung around all day long with his hands in his pockets, or leant up against the wall of the church, wearing that ragged jacket of his looking for all the world like a pauper; but he had money, and to spare, and if anyone went to ask him for twelve tari he would lend them immediately and with security; because ‘giving credit without a pledge, loses you friends, the goods and the edge,’ and it would be understood that the money would be repaid by Sunday, in good, hard money, and with one extra carlino, as was only fair, because ‘interest knows no friendship’. He would buy up all the catch at one go, at a discount, when the poor devil who had done the fishing needed the money fast; but they had to weigh it out on his scales, which were as false as Judas, according to certain habitual malcontents who said they had one arm longer than the other, like Saint Francis; and he would also advance the expense for the crew, if they wanted, and take back no more than the money advanced, and the price of a couple of pounds of bread per head, and a drop of wine, and he didn’t want anything more, because he was a good Christian and would have to account to God for his doings in this world. In a word he was a godsend to those in distress, and he also dreamed up a hundred ways of helping his neighbors out, and without being a seafaring man himself he had boats, and tackle, and everything, for people who didn’t have any, and he loaned them out, making do with a third of the

Perhaps the most economic interpretation is the one that considers the first lines as a self-perception, as a monologue: this is how Campana di legno *perceives himself*. It is true that, when we “see” him in the square, a different kind of gaze comes into play, one which scholars usually attribute to the village’s *chorus*. This version of the facts is far from being incorrect: provided that the *conflictual dynamism* through which the narrative develops (crucial for a social and ideological evaluation of *Malavoglia*, as well) be made explicit. The dizzying fluctuation between one kind of evaluation and its opposite (which becomes almost illusionistic in the passage centered around the scale, where the two perspectives face each other within the scope of a few words, so much so that we run the risk of not distinguishing them) causes an actual battle of values, far, I believe, from a genuine descriptivism. Indeed, the nature of the *imperfetti percettivi* in these cases tends to reveal *iterative* undertones as well, marking habitual behaviours and thoughts. In these cases there is no doubt that reflectorization weakens (Fludernik⁶⁶ agrees with this, actually considering it simple authoriality). We are not within a scene; rather in the presence of a mixture of description (portrait), summary and “conflictual” monologue. It is true, nonetheless, that the context moves the frame toward this last interpretation; considering that the lines immediately following (lines 40-44) bring back a *now* (and a *self*) *in the past*:

Ora i suoi nemici gli ridevano sotto il naso, a motivo di quei lupini che se l'era mangiati il diavolo; e gli toccava anche recitare il *de profundis* per l'anima di Bastianazzo, quando si facevano le esequie, insieme cogli altri confratelli della Buona Morte, colla testa nel sacco.⁶⁷

3. In order to be convincing, our interpretative experiment requires the greatest possible intellectual honesty, that is, a comparison with the parts of *Malavoglia* that could *disprove* our hypothesis.

All in all, we need to play down two issues, since they are false problems (but, for sure, this point demands further research). The first one concerns *singularive* verbal predicates that often accompany the characteristic *imperfetti percettivi* (and those of consciousness). Apart from extreme cases (in my comment on the “second shipwreck” of the Provvidenza I will illustrate one of them), the action of a simple progressive

catch, plus the share for the boat, which counted as a member of the crew, and for the tackle, if they wanted that loaned too, and in the end the boat ate up all the profit, so that people called it the devil’s boat. And when they asked him why he himself didn’t risk his skin like everyone else, but took the lion’s share of the catch without any danger to himself, he would reply: ‘Now just a minute: what if something were to happen to me at sea, God forbid - if I were to leave my carcass there, who would look after my business?’ He minded his own affairs, and would have loaned out the shirt on his back; but then he wanted to be paid, and without any shilly-shallying; and it was pointless to quibble, because he was deaf, and short of brain-power into the bargain, and all he could say was ‘what’s been agreed is fair indeed’ and ‘you will know the good payer on the promised day.’”

⁶⁶ *Natural' Narratology* (203-204), where she reiterates that reiterates the idea that a true reflector mode is impossible in the presence of “habitual thoughts and opinions” (203).

⁶⁷ “Now his enemies were openly enjoying his discomfiture because of those lupins the devil had snatched away from him; and he even had to say the *de profundis* for Bastianazzo’s soul, when they held the funeral, along with the other members of the Confraternity of the Good Death, with that foolish hood on his head.”

movement⁶⁸ can be observed: the linking to an external time (external to the characters' perceptive realm), which is, obviously, the main method for determining a recognizable timeline.⁶⁹ The *passé simple*, guarantees the necessary structure, the temporal skeleton for the conditions of “simultaneity” that is the sphere of figuralized perception. Furthermore, as previously noticed, Verga is often led, “by attraction,” to bring certain potential aorists back to the level of descriptive imperfects in his parentheticals.⁷⁰ This topic, however, must be re-examined shortly.

The second question is certainly less crucial: I am referring to the insertion of instances of *gnomic present*, usually attributed by theory to omniscient narrators who in this way *comment* on the events. Such instances may be similarly “normalized” by highlighting the reflectorization implied in a deceptive “authorial” frame. In the fourth line of the novel we find a “come dev'essere” [“as is the case”] and at line 63 the text states that “pezzi grossi del paese [...] son quelli che possono aiutarci.”⁷¹ Not only: it is well known that rather long descriptive-gnomic generalizations are possible, which may appear to be part of an authorial discourse even from a lexical point of view. Here (chapter 7, lines 129-139) is one of the best known ones:

Padron 'Ntoni, se la godeva anche lui, colle mani dietro la schiena e le gambe aperte, aggrostando un po' le ciglia, come fanno i marinai quando vogliono vederci bene anche al sole, che era un bel sole d'inverno, e i campi erano verdi, il mare lucente, e il cielo turchino che non finiva mai. Così tornano il bel sole e le dolci mattine d'inverno anche per gli occhi che hanno pianto, e li hanno visti del color della pece, e ogni cosa si rinnova come la *Provvidenza*, che era bastata un po' di pece e di colore, e quattro pezzi di legno, per farla tornare nuova come prima, e chi non vede più nulla sono gli occhi che non piangono più, e sono chiusi dalla morte.⁷²

⁶⁸ It is that “typical aspect of romance languages” according to which “the ‘propelling’ force – relating to the advancement of the plot – is generally entrusted [...] to the sequence of perfective Pasts (usually Simple Pasts, since it is a written text)” (Bertinetto).

⁶⁹ See in chapter 4 the way the sequence in which the collective discussion during the “u' visitu” (“the wake”) for Bastianazzo's death is rhythmicized – between lines 76 and 265. Eight aorists are present, recurring on average once every thirty lines (but this number can be expanded to fifty lines and compressed to barely ten).

⁷⁰ The fact that the main function of *passato remoto* is to afford a frame to the “simultaneity tenses” can perhaps be argued by the fact that *passato remoto* is used in *Malavoglia* also to express the *non-in-the-past*. E.g. see in chapter 7, line 232: “In questo momento si udì il fischio della macchina” (see also the quotation, later on, from chapter 10) [“At this juncture the engine whistle sounded”]. On the much debated question of the supposed impossibility of this form and more precisely on whether or not it is able to determine an actual deictic shift, see Banfield (*Unspeakeable Sentences*, 51-52; Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language* 50-51 and 69, footnote 43; Bertinetto).

⁷¹ “[...] as is often the case, the village bigwigs, who are the people that can help.”

⁷² “Padron 'Ntoni enjoyed the sight too, hands behind his back, and legs apart, frowning slightly as sailors do when they squint against the sun, which was a fine winter sun, and the fields were green, the sea was glittering and the endless sky was deep blue. So the warm sun and the kind winter mornings become so again even for eyes which have wept, and which have found them the colour of pitch; and everything is born anew, like the *Provvidenza*, and all she needed was a bit of paint and pitch, and a few planks, for her to seem brand new, and the only ones who don't see anything anew are those eyes which have stopped weeping, and are closed in death.”

In this case, from “Così tornano” onward, the strong *commentative* (Weinrich)⁷³ “lyricism” has led Luperini to claim that the passage is characterized by the “melancholic gaze of the author” (“Commento” 112). Still, it is not difficult to imagine the passage as an actual free indirect discourse *in the present tense* (“[Padron ’Ntoni thinks-thought//says-said that] Così tornano [...]”).⁷⁴ But even more importantly, in these cases, which also include the two previous ones, the moral, typifying evaluation closely resembles the enunciative stance of *proverbs*. This further clarifies our first hypothesis. For proverbs are by definition a discursive genre requiring the use of the *presente indicativo*. In short, it is as though sentences like these were simply extensions of the proverbs told by the grandfather, which allows us to include them in what padron ’Ntoni *might* say or think.

More complicated is to assimilate to the reflectorizing dimension the most “adventurous” parts of the novel, in which, alongside collective or individual perceptions, we find external facts, precise occurrences, that is, actual *actions*. In such cases the rhythm of the events, the *eventfulness*, tends prevail on the exchange of glances and feelings. There are some bizarre phenomena, however; one of them occurs in the passage relating the second shipwreck of the *Provvidenza*, in chapter 10 (lines 233-56):

In questo momento s’udi uno schianto: la *Provvidenza*, che prima si era curvata su di un fianco, si rilevò come una molla, e per poco non sbalzò tutti in mare; l’antenna insieme alla vela cadde sulla barca, rotta come un filo di paglia. Allora si udi una voce che gridava: - Ah! come di uno che stesse per morire.

- Chi è? chi è che grida? domandava ’Ntoni aiutandosi coi denti e col coltello a tagliare le rilinghe della vela, la quale era caduta coll’antenna sulla barca e copriva ogni cosa. Ad un tratto un colpo di vento la strappò netta e se la portò via sibilando. Allora i due fratelli poterono sbrogliare del tutto il troncone dell’antenna e buttarlo in mare. La barca si raddrizzò, ma padron ’Ntoni non si raddrizzò, lui, e non rispondeva più a ’Ntoni che lo chiamava. Ora, quando il mare e il vento gridano insieme, non c’è cosa che faccia più paura del non udirsi rispondere alla voce che chiama. - Nonno, nonno! gridava anche Alessi, e al non udir più nulla, i capelli si rizzarono in capo, come fossero vivi, ai due fratelli. La notte era così nera che non si vedeva da un capo all’altro della *Provvidenza*, tanto che Alessi non piangeva più dal terrore. Il nonno era disteso in fondo alla barca, colla testa rotta. ’Ntoni finalmente lo trovò tastoni e gli parve che fosse morto, perchè non fiatava e non si moveva affatto. La stanga del timone urtava di qua e di là, mentre la barca saltava in aria e si inabissava.

- Ah! san Francesco di Paola. Ah! san Francesco benedetto! strillavano i due ragazzi, ora che non sapevano più che fare.⁷⁵

⁷³ Made even stronger by the specification “come fanno i marinai [...]” [“as sailors do”] whose authorial nature is undoubted, although it could interpret the point of view of those who, in the village, are not sailors.

⁷⁴ See the incidentally numerous indications on free indirect speech in the present – within a context made up of preterites – offered by Fludernik (*The Fictions of Language* 195-96).

⁷⁵ “At that moment there was a sudden splintering sound: the *Provvidenza*, which had been bowed to one side, shot up like a spring, and almost threw the lot of them into the sea; yard and sail fell on to the boat, broken as a bit of straw. Then a voice was heard moaning, like someone at death’s door. / ‘Who is it? Who’s shouting?’ asked ’Ntoni, using teeth and knife to cut the cord at the edges of the sail, which had fallen on to the boat along with the mast and was covering everything. Suddenly a gust of wind took it right away and carried it off, hissing. Then the two brothers were able completely to free the stump of the yard and throw it into the sea. The boat righted itself, but not so padron ’Ntoni, nor did he answer ’Ntoni when he called him. Now, when sea and wind shriek together, there is nothing more frightening than not receiving an answer to your own call. /

A traditional narrator seems to prevail. At least one sentence ("Their grandfather was stretched out on the bottom of the boat, his head broken") appears *before* the sensory reference accounting for 'Ntoni's and Alessi's perception of padron 'Ntoni's fainting *in the dark*. But if the sentence were placed *after* the one currently following it, that is, if we read:

* 'Ntoni finally felt his way towards him and thought he was dead, because he wasn't breathing or moving at all. Their grandfather was stretched out on the bottom of the boat, his head broken.

we would find a consistent figuralization. Moreover, it is also true that the real author has taken great care to render everything as impersonally as possible: a sign of this is the opening now-in-the-past phrase "In questo momento s'udi" ["At this moment there was a [...] sound"]. However, an action sequence does not easily lend itself to reflectorized collective perception, because the control and direction from the outside – in charge of defining an articulated chronology – represent a hindrance to the subjective re-perception of events, their setting within a web of simultaneous experiences.

Similarly, an impression of omniscience derives from sequences exhibiting *analectic* "montage" effects that evoke the intervention of a "demiurge of narration": typically, at the beginning of the novel (I will talk about this later); in chapter 14, when 'Ntoni's criminal actions are intertwined with the movements of don Michele, who is trying to warn the young man's relatives (see the junction at line 238); in chapter 15, when padron 'Ntoni's death is told retrospectively (lines 552-571), and when there is even time for a very brief summary (a repetitive, internal analepsis: "Come aveva detto Alfio Mosca, Alessi s'era tolta in moglie la Nunziata, e aveva riscattato la casa del nespolo"; lines 515-516⁷⁶).

It is true that in some cases (as we have already noticed in part) Verga could easily have avoided certain forms of omniscient intervention. After all, the study of variants reveals that the author modified some passages in the very last minute, choosing to reflectorize them.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, a few slightly melodramatic authorial comments,

'Grandfather,' Alessi shouted too, and as they heard nothing, the hair stood up on the two brothers' heads. The night was so black that you couldn't see from one end of the Provvidenza to the other, so that Alessi actually stopped crying from sheer shock. Their grandfather was stretched out on the bottom of the boat, his head broken. 'Ntoni finally felt his way towards him and thought he was dead, because he wasn't breathing or moving at all. The tiller kept banging hither and thither, while the boat first leapt into the air, then plummeted into the abyss. / 'Blessed St Francis of Paola, help us,' the two boys shrieked, now that they didn't know what else to do."

⁷⁶ "As Alfio Mosca had said, Alessi had taken Nunziata as his wife, and had bought back the house by the medlar tree."

⁷⁷ The certainly most telling is the conclusion of chapter 1, lines 284-285. Maruzza sees the Provvidenza leaving and hears Bastianazzo repeating Menico's words that she had not grasped before. The final parenthetical clause in manuscript A was: "aggiunse Bastianazzo, e questa fu l'ultima sua parola" ["added Bastianazzo, and this was his last word"]. This passage is susceptible of a non-perspectivized, omniscient interpretation. Verga - evidently - realized this problem: and in fact in *Malavoglia* we find (italics are mine): "e questa fu l'ultima sua parola *che si udì*" ["and this was the last word *they heard him speak*"]. In this way, it is made clear that an internal perception is at work. Verga's expression "non so d'onde" ["whence I don't know"], which can be found in manuscript A in the place of the line (477) of chapter 2 is less precise but also symptomatic of Verga's uncertainties. Here Mena's thought about "qualche carro che [...] andava pel mondo" ["the

witnessing Verga's Romantic heritage, are still evident. Something noteworthy happens toward the end of chapter 3 (lines 185-189), in the narration of the way in which Longa learns about her husband's death .

La poveretta, sgomenta da quelle attenzioni insolite, li [i compaesani presenti] guardava in faccia sbigottita, e si stringeva al petto la bimba, come se volessero rubargliela. Finalmente il più duro o il più compassionevole la prese per un braccio e la condusse a casa.⁷⁸

Obviously only a narrator can say: "il più duro o il più compassionevole" ["the toughest or most compassionate"] in a fairly judgmental tone. In the same way, only an author-narrator can state, concerning Maruzza's illness (chapter 11, lines 342-344):

In quel tempo non andavano intorno nè medico nè speziale dopo il tramonto; e le vicine stesse si sprangavano gli usci, per la paura del colera [...].⁷⁹

However, I do not believe it to be fortuitous that these last two anomalies have to do with Longa: a character in whose presence reflectorization tends to waver at times. But almost always in a very peculiar, and therefore significant, way. The most evident fact is the recurrence of four actual *prolepses* concerning the character: 1. in chapter 1, lines 119-120; 2. in chapter 7, lines 20-23 and 27-29; 3. in chapter 11, lines 293-297; 4. in chapter 11, lines 374-377. It is also noteworthy that the three sons are always involved: in the first and third instances 'Ntoni, in the second Luca and in the last one Alessi. Let us look at the first occurrence (lines 111-120; final italics are mine):

- Addio 'Ntoni! - Addio mamma! - Addio! ricordati! ricordati! - Lì presso, sull'argine della via, c'era la Sara di comare Tudda, a mietere l'erba pel vitello; ma comare Venera *la Zuppidda* andava soffiando che c'era venuta per salutare 'Ntoni di padron 'Ntoni, col quale si parlavano dal muro dell'orto, li aveva visti lei, con quegli occhi che dovevano mangiarseli i vermi. Certo è che 'Ntoni salutò la Sara colla mano, ed ella rimase colla falce in pugno a guardare finchè il treno non si mosse. Alla Longa, l'era parso rubato a lei quel saluto; e *molto tempo dopo*, ogni volta che incontrava la Sara di comare Tudda, nella piazza o al lavatoio, le voltava le spalle.⁸⁰

The passage is extremely difficult to analyze, because – as happens constantly in *Malavoglia* – empathic perception and malevolent perception go hand in hand. One

odd cart [...] going round the world"] was originally expressed through an authorial "veniva non so d'onde, e non si sapeva dove andasse" ["whence it was coming I don't know, and nobody knew where it was going"]. See, in the critical edition of *Malavoglia*, pp. 17 and 37, respectively.

⁷⁸ "Frightened by these unaccustomed attentions, the poor creature gazed at them in distress and clutched her child to her, as though they wanted to steal it away. At last the toughest or most compassionate of them took her by the arm and led her home."

⁷⁹ "At that time neither doctor nor chemist were to be found about after sunset; and even the neighbourhood women had bolted their doors, for fear of the cholera [...]."

⁸⁰ "Goodbye, 'Ntoni! 'Goodbye, mother! 'Goodbye, and remember what I told you.' And there at the roadside was Sara, comare Tudda's girl, apparently cutting grass for their calf; but comare Venera, known as 'la Zuppidda', the lame, was spreading the rumour that in fact she had come to say goodbye to padron 'Ntoni's 'Ntoni, who she used to talk to over the garden wall, she herself had seen them as sure as she would wind up before God her maker. Certain it is that 'Ntoni waved goodbye to Sara, and she stood there with her sickle in her hand staring at the train until it moved off. La Longa felt she personally had been cheated of her own goodbye; and for a long time afterwards, every time she met Sara in the square or at the wash-place, she turned her back on her."

could even guess that Zuppidda's gossip is filtered by a maternal sensitivity (her perspective could be the one of "Certo è"); even the prolepsis could, therefore, be the product of Maruzza's consciousness, suddenly shifted further back in the past. Are we therefore witnessing the cognitive "life" of a character as it happens – and this is definitely uncommon – between *two different times*, the second being a non-"natural" one?

Setting aside the full quotation of the events taking place in chapter 7, which in any case do not contradict what I have just stated, albeit in the framework of greater late-Romantic conventionality ("[...] quando giunse più tardi la notizia che era morto, alla Longa le rimase quella spina [...]"; "E quelle parole Maruzza non le dimenticò finché non le chiusero gli occhi [...]"⁸¹); and disregarding also the fourth occurrence, in which Longa is not focalizing but rather being focalized ("Alessi non se la levò più davanti agli occhi [...] nemmeno quando arrivò ad avere i capelli bianchi anche lui"⁸²), I think the third prolepsis is the most intriguing one (lines 287-297; italics are mine):

'Ntoni, da quel giorno innanzi, non parlò più di diventar ricco, e rinunziò alla partenza, chè la madre lo covava cogli occhi, quando lo vedeva un po' triste, seduto sulla soglia dell'uscio; e la povera donna era davvero così pallida, stanca, e disfatta, quel momento in cui non aveva nulla da fare, e si metteva a sedere anche lei, colle mani in mano, e il dorso diggià curvo come quello del suocero, che stringeva il cuore. *Ma non sapeva che doveva partire anche lei* quando meno se lo aspettava, per un viaggio nel quale si riposa per sempre, sotto il marmo liscio della chiesa; e doveva lasciarli tutti per via, quelli cui voleva bene, e gli erano attaccati al cuore, che glielo strappavano a pezzetti, ora l'uno e ora l'altro.⁸³

Initially, we are faced with a shot-reverse shot, which is typical of *Malavoglia*: 'Ntoni's mother gloats over her son, and he becomes aware of her haggardness. From "Ma" onwards, we find a prolepsis, again reinforced by "non sapeva." The inertia of the reflectorizing frame can lead us here to consider the anticipation of the facts a sort of *ex-post* reflection; such a reading is supported by the undoubtdable fact that from "e doveva" to the end the narrated monologue is placed within a temporality synchronized with the "natural" course of the story (it conveys Maruzza's feelings as she exchanges glances with 'Ntoni). Therefore, the most interesting interpretation is that in such cases the prolepsis concerns the state of consciousness of a dead woman, of a perceiving and thinking sensitivity placed in an *achronic* temporal setting. Something of a Proustian sort, we could say, although originating in the popular values of catholicism and of an archaic – Southern, Mediterranean – worship of the dead. Be

⁸¹ "[...] when later, the news came that he was dead, la Longa was left with the hurtful memory [...]"; "And Maruzza remembered those words until her dying day [...]."

⁸² "And that picture of his mother, with her white hair and face as yellow and sharp as a knife, remained in front of Alessi's eyes until his own hair whitened."

⁸³ "From that day onward 'Ntoni stopped talking about getting rich, and gave up the idea of leaving, and his mother kept a watchful eye on him, when she saw him gloomily sitting on the front steps; and the poor woman really was so pale, tired and haggard, that as soon as she had a spare moment she too would sit down, with her hands folded and her back already bent like her father-in-law's, so that she was a truly moving sight. But she didn't know that she too was going to have to leave when she least expected it, on a journey after which you are at rest for ever, under that smooth marble in the church; and she was to leave them all in mid-journey, those she loved, those who were so dear to her that they seemed to tear her heart from her in little pieces, now one of them and now another."

it sufficient to recall what Mena tells 'Ntoni in the same chapter, at lines 522-529, when the time has come for him to leave:

[...] Mena gli corse dietro colle braccia aperte singhiozzando ad alta voce, quasi fuori di sè, e dicendogli: - Ora che dirà la mamma? ora che dirà la mamma? - Come se la mamma avesse potuto vedere e parlare. Ma ripeteva quello che le era rimasto più fitto nella mente, quando 'Ntoni aveva detto un'altra volta di volere andarsene, e aveva vista la mamma piangere ogni notte, che all'indomani trovava il lenzuolo tutto fradicio, nel rifare il letto.⁸⁴

So if we stick to strict narratological analysis,⁸⁵ when facing prolepses of this sort, we could even use the term *parallepsis*, meaning an infraction of the type of focalization consistent with the text in its overall features: given a figural narrative situation, the reflector character who "sees" the world *after his own death* does not follow that type of primary "naturalization" that the dominant frame requires.⁸⁶ In any case, as I suggested previously (par. 2.2), the story of Maruzza growing ill – the *unreliable* story of a woman suffering unctio – exhibits the features of intra-diegesis: more precisely, it is the perception of a story, its being relived by part of the family and perhaps also by part of the village community.⁸⁷

But the novel *begins* with an intradiegetic passage (and with an analepsis). And the greatest obstacle to a figuralized reading of *Malavoglia* evidently resides in its very *appearing* "emic" and not "etic", in the patina of popular speech that covers it in the beginning (lines 1-13):

Un tempo i *Malavoglia* erano stati numerosi come i sassi della strada vecchia di Trezza; ce n'erano persino ad Ognina, e ad Aci Castello, tutti buona e brava gente di mare, proprio all'opposto di quel che sembrava dal nomignolo, come dev'essere. Veramente nel libro della parrocchia si chiamavano Toscano, ma questo non voleva dir nulla, poichè da che il mondo era mondo, all'Ognina, a Trezza e ad Aci Castello, li avevano sempre conosciuti per Malavoglia, di padre in figlio, che avevano sempre avuto delle barche sull'acqua, e delle tegole al sole. Adesso a Trezza non rimanevano che i Malavoglia di padron 'Ntoni, quelli della casa del nespolo, e della *Provvidenza* ch'era ammarrata sul greto, sotto il lavatoio, accanto alla *Concetta* dello zio Cola, e alla paranza di padron Fortunato *Cipolla*.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ "Mena ran after him with her arms outstretched sobbing aloud, almost beside herself, and saying to him: / 'Now what will mother say?' for all the world as though mother had been able to see and speak. But she was repeating what had remained clearest in her mind when 'Ntoni had first said that he wanted to leave, and she had seen her mother cry every night, and had found the sheet all wet the next morning, when she was making the bed."

⁸⁵ It is impossible to disregard the fact that the beloved mother of the *real* author of *Malavoglia* died in 1878 while Verga was in the midst of writing the novel. On the relationship between Giovanni Verga and his family, see Luperini, " 'Immaginarmi il ritorno.' Sull'autobiografismo 'en travesti' di Giovanni Verga." (*Verga Moderno* 20-34).

⁸⁶ On the concept of *naturalization* and its opposite (unnatural narrative), see, besides Fludernik, *Natural Narratology* (10-11), the recent contribution by Alber and Heinze (2011).

⁸⁷ Maruzza's narration is introduced by a "collective" free indirect discourse, not focalized on a recognizable figural identity: "Questa [meaning, the fact that cholera would ruin the anchovie trade] non ce l'avevano messa nel conto i Malavoglia!" (lines 308-309) ["The Malavoglia hadn't reckoned with that!"]

⁸⁸ "At one time the Malavoglia had been as numerous as the stones on the old Trezza road; there had been Malavoglia at Ognina too, and at Aci Castello, all good honest sea-faring folk and, as is often the case, quite the opposite of their nick-name, which means 'men of ill-will'. Actually, in the parish records they were called Toscano, but that didn't mean anything because they had always

However, we have the illusion of a popular – or “di veglia”⁸⁹ – storytelling, since the supposed narrator never calls for a narratee;⁹⁰ even more so if Verga’s text clearly states – resorting to a *non-in-the-past* – that no one is actually telling, nobody is speaking *hic et nunc*: “Un tempo i *Malavoglia* erano stati numerosi [...]. *Adesso* a Trezza non *rimanevano*” [“At one time the *Malavoglia* had been numerous... But now the only ones left in Trezza *were*...”] A “real” narrator would say: “rimangono.” About sixty years ago, Giacomo Devoto suggested that a similar structure could rationally be resolved like this: “only the *Malavoglia* are left now – this is what they said at the time.” I believe Banfield to be right in her interpretation of such phenomena,⁹¹ which perhaps not by chance is equivalent to the one she applies to the opening of a masterpiece of mainstream Modernism such as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Just as at the beginning of Joyce’s novel we read the words that the reflector-protagonist’s father says, through the protagonist’s perspective, similarly, at the beginning of *Malavoglia* we are offered the synthesis of what a de-personalized *bearer* (not *addressee*) hears. Verga’s text renders what we may define a “third person-listening,” a completely alienated *you*, outside itself, trickling under the eyes of the real reader a *narration* placed elsewhere.

I suppose, therefore, that we are faced with something different from the retelling of a tale. First of all with an *in actu* reception of a narrative action (especially when the tenses are pluperfect), whose origin however is simply virtual, *de facto* absent; and

been known as the *Malavoglia* from generation to generation, ever since the world began, in Ognina, in Trezza and in Aci Castello, and they had always had sea-going boats and a roof over their heads. But now the only ones left in Trezza were padron ’Ntoni and his family from the house by the medlar-tree, who owned the *Provvidenza* which was moored on the shingle below the public wash-place, next to zio Cola’s boat *Concetta* and padron Fortunato Cipolla’s fishing-boat.”

⁸⁹ The hypothesis that the speaker in *Malavoglia* is a popular narrator – anonymous witness of facts using “di veglia” narrative modes – has been argued in particular by Luperini, in “I *Malavoglia* e la modernità.” (*Verga moderno* 35-57).

⁹⁰ The only exception can be found in chapter 12 (lines 298-99), in the following context (italics are mine; lines 292-300): “Padron ’Ntoni non rispondeva nulla; ma tutto il paese sapeva che ’Ntoni doveva tornare ricco, dopo tanto tempo ch’era andato a cercar fortuna, e molti già lo invidiavano, e volevano lasciar ogni cosa e andarsene a caccia della fortuna, come lui. Infine non avevano torto, perchè non lasciavano altro che delle donnicciuole a piagnucolare; e solo chi non gli bastava l’animo di lasciare la sua donnicciuola, era quella bestia del figlio della Locca, che aveva quella sorta di madre che sapete, e Rocco Spatu, il quale ce l’aveva alla taverna l’animo.” [“Padron ’Ntoni said nothing; but the whole village knew that ’Ntoni was to come back rich, after having been away so long seeking his fortune, and many were already envying him, and wanting to leave everything and go off in search of their fortunes, like him. And indeed they were right, because all they were leaving behind was silly whimpering women; and the only one who hadn’t the heart to leave his woman was that blockhead, la Locca’s son, who had the sort of mother you know her to be, and Rocco Spatu, whose heart was in the wine shop.”]

Furthermore, one cannot rule out entirely that this construct contains a reference to a plural you within the reflectorization, in terms that are not very different from those discussed in the following footnote. It is true that for these cases Fludernik (*The Fictions of Language* 125-26) suggests the possible presence of an impersonal form (“che sapete” = “as you know=as is known, “as all the characters in the story know”).

⁹¹ See *Unspeakable Sentences* (122-33). Taking the cue from so-called “echo questions,” Banfield argues that one can find forms of “represented speech [...] transposed into the thought of the listening consciousness” (130). In these cases, an internal addressee of the representation system would be generated, homologous to that self, a self who does (not) speak and that the narrative representation evokes obliquely. Just like the self, in the story, is separated from the I of the communication, the so-called represented hearer is separate from the addressee of ordinary discursive situations.

secondly a perception of ongoing events. If we want to highlight the potential of the narrative (even in terms of chronicle), we may re-write the text in this way: "[In Trezza (at the time padron 'Ntoni decided to begin his lupin trade) everyone had heard the tale according to which] At one time the Malavoglia had been as numerous [...]. [But everyone by that time sensed (knew) that] the only ones left in Trezza were [...]." The dominant element in the second one, – as I have repeated several times – which we can define, with Banfield, as *representational*. Of the two, the first is indeed most properly "narrative"; it shares with the second the common perceptive origin; except that in this case it is the perception of a story told by another – a *quilibet* or *anyone*, not other people, as in *omnes* or *everyone*. We could call him the "prototypical" Trezza resident, any villager. It is not a chorus, a unanimous totality, but any one person, a statistical mean, amidst a buzzing of feelings and voices. In other words, we learn about facts that anyone could know.

The two moments are separate at the beginning of the novel, to the point that the flashback on the Malavoglia and on 'Ntoni's departure requires more than 200 lines (218, to be exact). Over the course of the novel, however, things change quite a bit; it is clear if we turn to the opening of chapter 3:

Dopo la mezzanotte il vento s'era messo a fare il diavolo, come se sul tetto ci fossero tutti i gatti del paese, e a scuotere le imposte. Il mare si udiva muggire [...].⁹²

The anteriority of pluperfect is only a backdrop (in a way comparable to the aorists' function) against which the story in the imperfect tense unfolds.

4. Many consequences arise from this series of considerations. In listing them, doubts and uncertainties indeed remain, as well as the feeling that there are still many issues demanding further clarification. It is true that the – so to speak – pre-cinematic nature of Verga's work represents its most striking feature: in *Malavoglia*, in many of his veristic short stories, and in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, one can experience first hand the actual "spatialization of time" that Keith Cohen⁹³ considers as the great cognitive breakthrough brought about by cinema. The interaction between Verga's characters is always grounded in the need to situate them within a specific space well defined by their mutual perceptions. You must see (hear etc.) and be seen (heard etc.) in order to have a narrative existence. Everything has to be *perspectivized*, – another notion dear to Stanzel, – placed within a chronotope that all the *dramatis personae* share, and within which the reader can move comfortably. And this does not appear so anachronistic if we think that, according to Gombrich for example, the contemporary spectator of impressionist paintings had to carry out similar reconstruction operations to those the reader of *Malavoglia* is asked to perform – not without effort, as the author himself admitted: "The willing beholder responds to the artist's suggestion because he enjoys the transformation that occurs in front of his eyes" (202).

⁹² "After midnight the wind began to raise merry hell, as if all the cats in the village were on the roof, shaking the shutters. You could hear the sea lowing [...]."

⁹³ "Space that cannot be perceived without development in time, time that cannot pass without embodiment in space: these are seemingly paradoxical coordinates that define the contours of cinematic experience" Cohen (67).

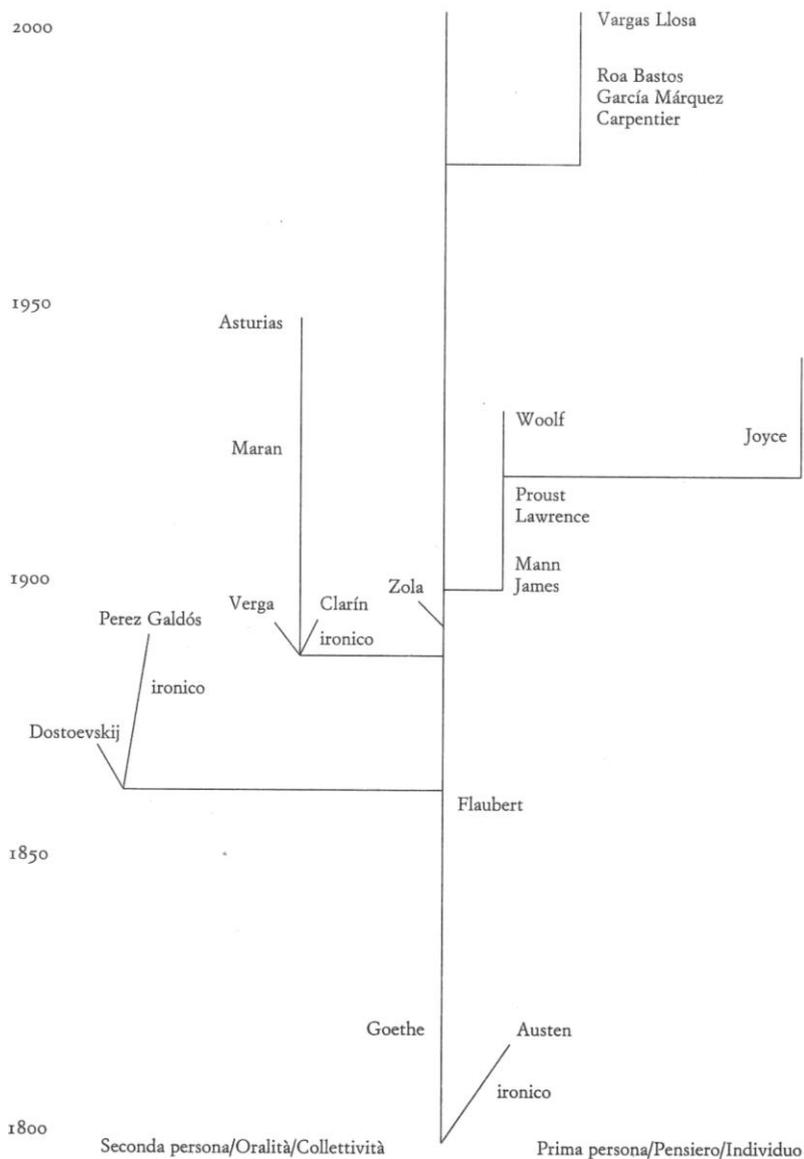


Fig. 2 – Franco Moretti: an outline of the development of free indirect technique (85).

But this issue would take us too far, just like a “revision” of Stanzel’s circle would, since we would have to expand the area of figural narrative situation toward the right (see figure 1 again). In fact, since it is likely that the ideology of mainstream Modernism leans, historically, toward the section of the circle that is to the left, it is probable that the arc adjacent to the authorial narrative situation on the right may have been neglected by the author of the *Typenkreis* and by his followers, all of them working in the Northern part of the world. Franco Moretti (see fig. 2)⁹⁴ had a similar

⁹⁴ Diagram taken from Moretti (85).

intuition a few years ago, when he proposed an outline of the development of free indirect technique with a clear divide – at least until the mid 20th century – between two opposite typological realizations: on the one hand (here it is on the right) we have the expressions of consciousness, of thought; on the other (on the left) the expression of words uttered “out loud”, the expression of speech. On the one hand, the South of the world, along with Russia; on the other, English and German Modernism. There are good reasons to guess, therefore, that those events that Stanzel has only partially described must occur in that sixth part of the typological circle placed to the right of the figurally “marked” part of the circumference. Even more important, the majority of narrative events that can be inscribed there is *not* to be considered external to the arc of the figural narrative situation.

The possibility for a novel of being reflectorized by means of an “uttered” free indirect style and through free indirect perception definitely requires further examination: a good starting point could be the analysis of what happens within in so-called magical realism.

It is true that a question, or better: *the* critical question *par excellence* is still awaiting an answer (or at least, an attempt at it). why is that until now we were only able to come close⁹⁵ until now to such a structural interpretation of *Malavoglia* without fully arguing for it? Why – acceptable or not – has this interpretation been given so late? The different reading of the novel that I have attempted to offer has been under everyone’s eyes all along; even so, its potential pervasiveness (being based, as it is, on a frame) has not been grasped, if not tangentially. Why is this so? There are many possible answers. One of the most interesting ones is certainly the tendency among Verga scholars, active between the 1960s and the 1980s, to underline the internal dialectics of the text, the *conflicts* in point of view and even in ideology implicit in the writing: that is, the alienating tension deriving from the strategic choice of making the values of the real writer “regress” to the dimension of a different, popular world. The story-world of *Malavoglia*, and of Verga’s major works in general, is precisely built upon the staging of contrasts, which originate in the total immersion and subsequent elimination of the (real) *author* from the facts and places represented.

This is precisely the point. Scholars have generally made reference to the author and only rarely to to the *reader*. This is all the more true in a literary and critical context such as the Italian one, in which “authoriality” almost inevitably implies applying criteria useful for the description of a *poetic text* to a *narrative work*. Paradoxically, even scholars who pay special attention to the referential materiality of Verga’s works have actually dealt with a problem typical of modern poetry rather than with a problem typical of the world of fictionality. Furthermore – as has often happened over the past forty years – the more one speaks about the disappearance of the Author, the more “the Author” will keep haunting us, through every possible path, under every imaginable form. The halo of “lyrical prose” has always hovered over *Malavoglia*, at

⁹⁵ The new and important work by Alessio Baldini (*Dipingere coi colori adatti*, 2012), that not incidentally makes use of up-to-date narratological references (among which Stanzel’s work itself), is valuable in its grasp of the proliferation of points of view. However, this entails a “multiperspective” reading of *Malavoglia* that does not in effect express its dramatizing and engaging effect. I believe this is due to the fact that a notion of figural narrative situation is not involved, but also that the concept of point of view is perhaps too ideological, and undervalues the sensorial and perceptive interplay.

least potentially, favouring the impression that somewhere a poetic self exists, albeit hiding behind the *lachrymae rerum*.⁹⁶

In short – to use an important concept of Stanzel's for the umpteenth time – *narrative mediacy* has been overlooked: that is, the fact that between authorial realm and represented world a third element (belonging to literary storytelling *per se*) necessarily acts, making narrative contents opaque and at the same time highlighting them. Moreover, in this specific case, *Mittelbarkeit* is elusive and demands the reader's intervention. The *experiencing* of the representation demands the *experiencing* of those approaching it: i.e. the readers. While this is true for any narrative text, it is all the more so for a text in a figural narrative situation. Here, everything is more fragile and even fragmented, if approached superficially: only a reader-spectator who is able to become a character among others can recompose something that, otherwise, escapes in every direction. Impersonality, which fulfills its mediacy as it pretends to abolish it, demands a rather passionate and acute recipient. An empathic and dialectic one. The reader must be able to accept and certainly love the indistinct chatter of the community (that great family that Ntoni bids goodbye to at the end of the novel: "tutti lì, al chiaro di luna, che si sentiva chiacchierare per tutto il paese, come fossimo tutti una famiglia";⁹⁷ lines 648-649). On the other hand, he must be able to outline the many webs inhabiting the novel. The suggestion that this kind of reader has been scarce can be certainly read as an ironic and even paradoxical and provoking statement, in keeping with the ironic halo that surrounds many things Italian, well beyond - alas! - the realm of literature. It would be like saying that *Malavoglia*, a work that has been in national syllabi for decades (even in middle school unfortunately), is a novel that never had truly involved *readers*.

Translation by Silvia Guslandi

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⁹⁶ Even recently, in Edoardo Esposito's important book, *Elio Vittorini, scrittura e utopia* (2011), the "intonation" of *Malavoglia* is favourably defined "lyrical" (15).

⁹⁷ "[...] all there, in the moonlight, and you could hear the whole village chattering, as if we were one big family."

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