

Facing the text.

Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction

Elena Madrussan

Università di Torino

Abstract

L'articolo intende proporre alcune analisi a proposito dei modi con cui la lettura del testo letterario può diventare un'esperienza formativa. A partire dal punto di vista della Filosofia dell'educazione europea e focalizzando l'attenzione sulle più rilevanti relazioni tra opera letteraria e interiorità, queste considerazioni preliminari fanno riferimento all'idea che la ricerca della forma soggettiva può trovare nell'ambito delle narrazioni uno strumento riflessivo utile a comprendere la complessità del rapporto soggetto-mondo. Fin dal modello del *Bildungsroman*, il ruolo pedagogico della letteratura è diventato sempre più fecondo, ma in particolare alla fine del Novecento, la letteratura, non dovendo più fare del protagonista un modello per cercare l'identificazione, diventa il luogo di quella rappresentazione della realtà e del pensiero capace di chiamare in causa direttamente le convinzioni, i dubbi, le sensibilità del lettore, contribuendo a una maggiore consapevolezza di sé e a una più disincantata visione del mondo. Dall'analisi di alcune di tali figure autoriflessive emergono, quindi, nuove convergenze per fare della letteratura uno strumento di formazione della personalità soggettiva.

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



This paper intends to propose some analysis on how reading a literary fiction may become an educational experience. Starting from the point of view of the Philosophy of education and focusing on the main connections between literary work and inner-Self, these preliminary considerations refer to the idea that the search for individual shape can find in the narrative field a thoughtful instrument to understand the complexity of the relationship subject-world. Since the *Bildungsroman* model, the pedagogical role of literature has become increasingly fruitful, but especially in the late twentieth century, as it no longer had to make the main character a model to seek identification, Literature became the place of that representation of reality and thought capable of directly calling into question the beliefs, the doubts, the sensitivities of the reader, hence supporting a growing Self-awareness and a more disenchanted worldview. From the analysis of some of these self-reflective figures, therefore, new similarities emerge so as to make Literature an instrument to build the shape of each one's personality.

Parole chiave: esperienza educativa; narrazione letteraria; educazione interiore; conoscenza personale; formazione.

Keywords: educational experience; literary fiction; inner-education; self-knowledge; education.

1. Between Philosophy of Education and Literature

The educational experience of literary fiction may be considered as a rather broad theme: it can be analysed from various pedagogical and philosophical approaches, considering the analytical or the hermeneutic level of discourse, taking it as an interdisciplinary trace or as a specific implementation of a disciplinary field. In this article the priority will be given to some perspectives of Italian, French and German Authors that had included literature as meaningful key of knowledge of inner-Self. In these cases, the educational experience of literary fiction originates from an historic depth through which the connections between life and culture, search for each own existential shape and knowledge, can take root in everyday life (Bertin, 1974; Madrussan, 2014a). Then, it also raises some important practical issues, for both the secondary and the university educational environments, but here it will be only marginally taken into consideration.

What it seems to be mostly interesting it's to bring out the ways through which the relationship between literary representation of life and life itself, in the individual experience, can suggest to the reader several disclosures to different worldviews. In other words, when the literary work shows to the reader something he/she's not according with, or something unexpected, or something strongly close to his/her own experience, it also raises questions about the ordinary way of thinking about them and about the way the subject takes place into the world. This reflective instance, that increases the connection with the text, can be pinpointed as a pedagogical one, almost if we consider that as a meaningful instrument for the search for each own shape. In this regard, from Bildung Theory to phenomenological-existential approach, the European Philosophies of Education suggest several opportunities to rethink the particular situation engendered from the match within the Self and the text.

Posing the matter from a general, educational and cultural point of view, that can be condensed into a couple of questions:

- a) what links can the Philosophy of education currently have with literature?
- b) what is the educationally meaningful consequence of reading a literary work?

The answer to the first question may be obvious: a large part of the great Classics of pedagogy have represented their educational model through literary writing. These might

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



include Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus*, written in 1699; Rousseau's *Emil* of 1762; or *Leonard and Gertrude* by Pestalozzi, written between 1781 and 1787; Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* of 1774 and *Wilhelm Meister* of 1801; or Manzoni's 1827-novel *The Betrothed*, or Makarenko's *The Pedagogical Poem* published between 1933 and 1935.

Of course, the pedagogical, artistic and cultural meaning, as well as the expressive force of these texts take on a different meaning today. Especially as regards the figure of the man that emerges from them and their explicitly didactic and edifying purpose.

Thinkers of the calibre of Gyorgy Lukács, who comments on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in his *The Theory of the Novel* (Lukács, 1920/2004), as well as scholars of the *Bildungsroman* such as Franco Moretti (Moretti, 1987/1999) have shown that this literary tradition has worked on reproducing a pedagogical model – precisely the *Bildung*. And this model, as well known, is based on the conscious pursuit of a precise objective, i.e. the individual's or protagonist's search for and conquest of the balance between action and contemplation, between interiority and sociality. And this means that the persuasiveness of literature has accompanied the refinement of the idea of education, constantly forced to reckon with the dialectics between Self and the world (Gennari, 1995). Then, Lukács pinpointed the weak point of this pedagogical and literary genre as basing its solidity on two key elements: on the one hand, a "robust sense of security" (Lukács, 1920/2004, 129) expressed by the young protagonist and, on the other, the faith in the possibility of attaining a community of destiny (Lukács, 1920/2004, 125-136). The sense of the genre's historical and pedagogical persuasiveness and of the relationship between education and literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lies in this pairing.

According to Franco Moretti, the decline of the *Bildungsroman* comes with the first decade of the twentieth century when writers such as Mann, Musil, Walser and Joyce, began to reject the legitimation of the social system within the individual's mind (Moretti, 1987/1999, 258). That is to say, when inner education breaks its ties with social education, then, the world becomes foreign and violent, repellent and, at times, regressive.

So, the first element to take into consideration on the relationship between the Philosophy of education and Literature is the *form taken by the relation between subject and world*. The change in this form is the result of the reciprocal action of two opposing forces. On the one hand, the action of the context of culture that expresses the effective-

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>

ness of some educative needs, rather than others. On the other hand, the desired or feared action of change that education stamps on the environment of culture.

This rift between subject and society comes to literature in exactly the same way as it comes to pedagogy and, in our specific case, to the philosophy of education. Emblematically, in the late *Bildungsroman*, the traumatic event no longer emerges in a moment of development and reciprocal exchange, but it becomes the object of a disconcerting and revelatory introspective search. But we should not think of this a nihilist closure. On the contrary, the world remains the preferential object of the protagonist's enquiring gaze, but that world becomes *excessively* charged with meaning. Indeed, if we think of Rilke and *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910/1982), what disconcerts the protagonist and causes him to live in a state of bewilderment and with feelings of death, is not the meaninglessness of life or death, but their excessive presence. Productive, vitalistic, ingenious, life is always already-given, already-encoded, already-meant.

In short, far removed from that reflexive ability to plan, uncertain and ready for the undefined, which the young protagonist, committed to his own internal journey, goes in search of. The atmosphere of Rilke's novel is, in short, something that places the young developing protagonist and his separated personality in the cultural climate of twentieth-century Europe. So much so, that this new manner of the relation interiority/sociality is suggestive of useful dissonances and assonances with the present. Yet, if fragmentariness takes the place of harmony and if the human ideal of unity is substituted by the dissolution of the Self and the amplification of the uncertainty of identity, what remains of the formative novel?

Does the rift talked of by Moretti and, indirectly, Lukács, simply concern the historical transformations – the end of an era?

Not really and not only, in particular bearing in mind the other point of the question, that concerns literature as a didactic instrument. Considering literature as an educational practice, as a means for reproducing the model of man, is something that can be said of all pedagogical fiction: according to Fénelon and Makarenko, the pedagogical novel was a synthesis of educational speculation and artistic representation, and it had a dual purpose: describing in order to train the reader and training in order to persuade.

Today, in our schools, the place where students first encounter literature, the formative function of the pages is more like a residual hope than a reality: fiction is more often used as a tool for acquiring knowledge and know-how that go to complete the historical-humanistic preparation of the students. And, as we well know, these competences

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>

aim to be directly spendable and explicitly productive in the ‘real’ world, beyond the school gates. Thus, since it ceased to be a formative practice, literature has been in danger of becoming either an art for its own sake, or a tool for learning certifiable notions. In particular, in this second instance, what is at stake is not the relationship between the reader and literature, but that between the School and Art. At least, because an idea of learning as the opportunity to accumulate more useful competences, commodifying them, says nothing about the educative relevance of the aesthetic experience of literature¹. But, above all, because this rooted belief doesn’t answer the formative request for meaning and for self-shaping which concerns students, teachers, and, perhaps, the school too.

But starting from a different and, for some aspects, more direct perspective, it is really about asking ourselves what happens – or may happen – to a student when he/she reads a novel.

With this second question, indeed, the Philosophy of education does not only suggest its traditional topics – which subject? Which idea of education? Which possibilities for existential meaning? – but it also involves the most general issue of cultural agreement with the main worldview. Rather, the Philosophy of education would have the ethical need to transcend its disciplinary/epistemological borders, to become itself cultural engagement.

In the light of these brief considerations, then, the question becomes: when literature ceases to be an instrument of persuasion does it lose all its formative and existential functions? Or does it detach itself – through education – from a function that is predominantly one of training, to recover its questioning, reflexive and philosophical nature (Gadamer, 1988)?

Because if this is the case, the contemporary philosophical-educational reflection should not feel orphaned of ‘paper models’, but, if anything, it should begin to interpret ‘lifestyles’. If educational thought is no longer capable of indicating its purpose with the descriptive certainty of Schiller, Comenius or Rousseau, perhaps it ought to make its own the individual and collective question of uncertainty and the search for identity of its own times. And, like all other forms of culture, the Philosophy of education, through literature, could become a fruitful interlocutor in understanding and acting its own times.

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



2. The chance of the reader. The search for shape in some literary examples

According to phenomenological-existential perspective – that describes the *Erlebnis* as an enlightening tool of knowledge (Husserl, 1954/1960; Merleau-Ponty, 1960/1967; Sartre, 1946/1978) –, if we look at the relationship between person and literature starting from the need for shape that each human subject feels like an uncanny primal lack (Kierkegaard, 1965; Heidegger, 1927/1976; Sartre, 1943/1970), the reading can become a significant experience for self-shaping.

It may seem easy for any young reader to feel the existential closeness to the restless of the young protagonists of pedagogical novels, who are challenged by the situations of life. Thereby, a sort of interior storm, made of intense relations and eerie solitudes, mixed feelings, overlaps with the normality of everyday life (Moretti, 1987/1999). However, according to Blanchot (1955/1975; 1959/1969), the process of identification with the character can have some drawbacks. Above all, for example, the final exclusion of some text that doesn't match with the reader's self-representation, or current situation, or with his/her tastes. Hence the risk that Kirillov's cry, Castorp's suffering courage, Madame Bovary's obstinate passions, Dorian Gray's tragic demonism or Pavese's "absurd vice" become unapproachable.

On the contrary, if we think of learning pure subject content related to novels or the Authors in question, the events can be rationally understood, scrupulously learnt and properly codified into the correct historical-critical and philological-literary criteria. Nevertheless, they are not considered outside the symbolic and fictional field and, therefore, they are not transposed to the critical comprehension of the human condition.

It is exactly in that ambivalent place of distance/proximity from the page that enacts one of the most important pedagogical functions of literature. It involves, in particular, the idea of education as critical-cultural opportunity (Cambi, 2010; Erbetta, 1994; Mariani, 2008): education as an exercise in intelligence, which considers culture as the main instrument of interpretation of the present, personality, the relational dynamism with the other and the world.

From this pedagogical point of view, the "interest" for the reader is made by the openness to new knowledge, which *becomes* a new horizon of sense: a different worldview. This directly concerns the reader because it involves his/her own capacity to "extract"

problems and questions from the text which are to be interpreted and correlated with each other.

The relationship between education and literature cannot underestimate the special charm or strangeness of reading a novel, but personal preferences need to be accepted and attributed to a critical-explorative reflection able to work on what determines these effects. But this critical overview, acted by the teacher and by the student, has to precede the approach to the text, becoming a *preliminary attitude* to education, to teaching and to reading as well (Madrussan, 2012, 2014b).

The formative knot of literature as a formative experience can thus become significant again only starting from a reconsideration of the relation between what the reader is searching for and sees in the text and what the text suggests to him/her.

In this context, from a methodological point of view, every text can be, above all considered as a *medium* between the author and the reader, but it's also a medium between culture and life. In fact, all narrative elements of the plot – events, characters, storylines, environments, situations, details – give back an example of the meaning of that tension. To adopt this point of view means overturning the main paradigm for another. In other words, this means implementing a transition from the paradigm of accumulation of knowledge to the paradigm of understanding meanings by acquiring knowledge as a lived experience. This second option supports the idea that strong, enduring and fruitful knowledge has to be considered relevant and engaging by students. So that, as Testa says, the identification is no longer “a psychologistic misery, but the first step towards understanding a possibility. [...] Both the text and its protagonist are then an ‘as if’ of our situation and, as such, they define the cognitive – and ethical – horizons of our habitability of the world” (Testa, 2009, 4-5)².

Aldo Gargani, one of the most important Italian scholars of Wittgenstein and of German literary culture, wrote of Thomas Bernhard that the writer “writes and speaks and each time it is as if we had said it ourselves, except that often, despite knowing his words [...] we were unable to say them at the right time” (Gargani, 1990, XIII)³. According to Gargani, in fact, it is of no importance which author or which character we have identified with: when we experience that affinity, we understand that “one man’s existence has the same dignity of any other man; because whatever story is told us, in the end we discover that that story always talks about us” (Gargani, 1990, XIII)⁴. What is interesting for us is that this affinity or ‘solidarity’, this intimate tie with the text – “intimacy” was exactly what Blanchot called it (Blanchot, 1955/1975, 172-180) – is also a correspon-

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



dence with the other. That is to say, it works in a pedagogical sense on self-knowledge as a relationship with the other, often most effectively and in an articulated manner, even when that other is a text.

As an example, let's take a twentieth-century literary text that deals with the passage from adolescence to adulthood. An obviously crucial passage from the formative viewpoint. Indeed, this is the moment that sanctions the impossibility of finally fulfilling the individual personality, that is that adulthood is not simply the consolidation and reproduction of a permanent life shape. In short, a life experience in which it would seem easy to identify and bring into play your own experience in a comparison with the protagonist's.

In the novel under examination, right from the opening pages, the thoughts of the protagonist – a young philosophy teacher – involve his sense of ageing. He is tired of a life he already knows, he is tired of his unaligned political commitment, and he is used his partner, who he affectionately cares for without, however, allowing her any exclusive rights.

But what is even more important is that the pivot around which the protagonist's life and his conception of life revolve is freedom. A freedom that he feels to be a moral obligation, but more particularly, a distinctive condition of his own personality. Here, the character *is* his freedom and his conception of freedom. Even when his partner reprimands him because he vaunts his freedom like a vice, he cannot conceive any other possibility (when he says “Ça n'est pas un vice: c'est comme ça que je suis” she replies “Pourquoi les autres ne sont-ils pas comme ça, si ça n'est pas un vice?” (Sartre, 1945/1981, 403). In a jarring existential and conceptual contradiction (a philosophy teacher!), freedom becomes the prison the protagonist locks himself up in.

A few pages further on, life takes charge and confronts him with this contradiction: she is pregnant. He is about to become something different from what he is. Something different from what he wishes to be, too, because he wants to remain 'faithful to himself'. The interference of life is unacceptable for him. Yet, the truth imposes itself on him as a condition. What has happened cannot be undone. It is at this point that he has to choose, not out of his own desire, not out of his own convictions. He is denied the chance to remain himself by the simple, but immovable fact that he is forced to take a decision. Even more: this decision does not only concern him, it concerns two other people – the woman, who can express her own will, and the child, who cannot and who may never be able to.

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



It is absolutely obvious that nothing is, nor will be as it was.

It is the old theme of the inevitability of change, but it is also the focalisation of the need for continuity of Self, in open contrast with existential dynamism. In other words, the text raises an issue that is pedagogically fundamental: the development of the personality as a contrast to worldly conditions, the desire for continuity in one's own identity as a contrast to the fragmentation of Self.

Nevertheless, there are also many questions already on the table in this first brief summary of the first part of the novel. From the formative point of view, it would be possible to work on the idea of youth and its stereotypes; on freedom within interpersonal relationships; on just freedom; on choice and responsibility as typical existential situations facing youths; on the construction of personal identity at the time of difference; on the modern and on the real meaning of adulthood. However, if we stop for now and focus on the processes of identification in order to take them as an opportunity for reflection and interpretation, we must notice two essential elements in particular: on the one hand, the protagonist's egotism, compared to which his relationships with others and with reality are and must remain secondary. On the other hand, how the worldly intrudes on the personal: "une conscience de plus, une petite lumière affolée" (Sartre, 1981, 440).

Again, it is in the complexity of the relationship Self-world that education plays its part, divided as it is between giving individuals shape and constructing life for individuals and the world. And, as scholars of education know, and as can be seen from this novel, it is a relationship connoted in the moral sense.

Nowadays, such reciprocity forces the educational sphere to relate more closely and more explicitly with disquiet, both as an interpretative category and as an existential experience (Madrussan, 2017). But, according to Beck (2007/2008), Bauman (2006/2016) and Morin (2014/2015), it is a relationship that, first of all, compels an uncertain, disenchanted subjectivity to become aware of the fact that the sense of loss and disenchantment are timeless conditions, which the differing historical situations force us to interpret *immer wieder* (Badiou, 2003/2006, 2015/2016; Castoriadis, 1998, 97-132). Solitude, risk, a sense of powerlessness and, at the same time, a sense of fullness that life today appears to impose forcibly, are effectively only what the novelist was writing about: "exister, c'est ça: se boir sans soif" (Sartre, 1945/1981, 443), together with "Je ne veux pas, je ne veux pas vieillir" (Sartre, 1945/1981, 425).

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



At this point, to quote Enrico Testa, the literary experience shows “a mosaic of fiction in which the cognitive *intention* takes precedence over the imitative one” (Testa, 2009, 3)⁵.

And there are the “possible life” and the “cognitive intention” that can also be considered as two of the main topics of the self-shaping practice.

So that, basically, the text can be considered: *a)* as a *sign* of what is written, with its particular *style* – a path which is guided by the narration itself; *b)* as a *meaning* of what is written – as *Bedeutung* which reaches the reader through the writing; *c)* as, finally, *what the text hints at* – the other meaning of the text, *between the lines* (Derrida, 1967/1990, 3-38; Gadamer, 1988, 140-143).

According to these three different levels of resonance – the evidence of the text and its style, the reference to the meaning, the allusiveness to inner meaning –, literary fiction continues to suggest different and renewable paradigms. Literature becomes, thus, an *explorative* and *cognitive* exercise, and education becomes a *practice of going through meanings* (Madrussan, 2012, 81-99).

From the perspective of the reader, reality and fiction can be intertwined: the experience of such meaningful possibilities acquire interaction. Even every single word becomes significant because of its living presence in representing what is described. And it is indeed this mingling that provides access to imagination and to overcoming the ordinariness of already thought thoughts.

In fact, if we think of how far learning depends on the perception of the connection with what is read or studied, it is also possible to grasp more clearly the explicitly formative function of culture in general, and of literature in particular (Brockmeier, 2014). In the same way, what is also clear is the importance of the direct relationship with the text in which its poetics and his allusiveness are the primary terms that act as a channel for a reflexive relationship, as well as for a truly complete, integrated learning.

Hence, education for understanding allows us to *learn* the textual content and its implied suggestions. Also, this kind of *analytical-cognitive moment* makes of textual contents as many contents of the self-educational path. Ricœur writes that “la littérature narrative, parmi toutes les œuvres poétiques, modélise l’effectivité pratique aussi bien par ses écarts que par ses paradigms” (Ricœur, 1983, 120). From this point of view the experiences of fictions like identification, distance, or (more problematically) indifference are real opportunities for self-knowing, in which the text becomes a questioning pretext. So, if literature is an exemplary *exercise in self-knowledge*, then the text becomes

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>

a real self-explorative tool. So much so that we can conceive an education for *self-revelation* (Madrussan, 2012).

3. Exceeding Literature: the formative overview

The novel examined as an example is Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'âge de raison*. A text that many commentators hold in particular consideration for the Author's intention to demonstrate how committed literature should be intended among writers. Especially considering the period of its development – from the immediate pre-war period to the French Resistance – a period in which Sartre experimented with literature bringing into the narrative *mise en abyme* his own life, his friends, his experiences, reading the passages might have been misleading (Tortolone, 1993; Wormser, 1999/2005). In fact, focusing on Sartre maybe we would have shifted our attention away from the questions of ethical and formative experience that, as we have only glimpsed here, are in the text called into play by Mathieu, the protagonist, prisoner of his own freedom.

However, without pushing the questions raised into the background, the richness of the text cannot be appreciated only in terms of the exploration of an important and interesting world of culture: it must be taken, first, as a process of discovery and an exercise in Self.

Hence the idea that narrative contents can be employed in the *experiential*, *existential project* or *reflexive* perspective. These three directions feed the relationship between subject and text by a movement of formative and mutual involvement.

Firstly, going through narrative fiction there are so many forms of *experiential perspectives*: contingency – as in Camus or Nizan; feelings and emotions – as in Flaubert, Balzac, Emily Brontë –; tricks of illusion and lies – as in Dostoyevsky or in Pirandello; reverie and imagination – as in Rodari and Buzzati. All these, and more than these, reveal several connections with different lived experiences and with different ways of living.

Secondly, being a representation of world, the novel becomes a tool of knowledge and imaginative genesis. After all, literature itself offers many brilliant examples in this sense. In the great novels of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, relations between many characters are articulated in very complex plots and end up structuring the shape-of-life of each one of them. But the same happens, in other ways, in Rilke's or in Sartre's novels, where the existential possibilities are strictly connected with choice. Or the hidden and ambivalent

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



sides of the *condition humaine* observed by Kafka's visionary point of view; by Pessoa's disquiet; by Moravia's aloofness.

Within this framework, it is not difficult to picture the pedagogical wealth of the literary texts, that particularly in the twentieth century, represented a turning point in the reflection on subjectivity, its dissolution, its impossibility, its plurality, its necessity.

For the sake of brevity, I will only mention a couple of passages that can be emblematic with regard to this indecisiveness.

The quotations come from Paul Valéry's short masterpiece, *Monsieur Teste*: "C'est ce que je porte d'inconnu à moi-même qui me fait moi. C'est ce que j'ai d'inhabile, d'incertain qui est bien moi-même" (Valéry, 1946, 42). "M. Teste dit: 'Mon possible ne m'abandonne jamais'. Et le Démon lui dit: 'Donne-moi une preuve. Montre que tu es encore celui que tu as cru être'" (Valéry, 1946, 88).

Valéry's is another philosophical/literary suggestion from the many possibilities, so that the Philosophy of education might reconsider the processes of subjectification in the relationship between self-knowledge and the lack of self-knowledge, between what is possible and what is impossible. And this can be achieved through the third dimension, concerning the *reflexivity* offered to the reader by the need for *shape* of experience. This movement of thought, becomes a real barycentre of literary experience, increasingly involved in the possible-self.

Finally, the educational point of view goes beyond the forms of literary *representation* of the complexity of Self-experience. The most interesting formative aspect, in fact, is the *query* for meaning suggested by the text. In this sense, literature becomes a *reflexive questioning exercise*, which means an *existential exercise*, where education is the search for self-form. "Exiting" from the text is, then, a pedagogical time, which becomes *formative* engagement. This formative emancipation from the text, which leads our reflexivity to question the plot, requires us to observe ourselves as we read. The distance which separates the subject from the novel is the most efficient way of grasping meanings. In this framework, unlike the previous ones, the seductive action of the tale begins when the fiction is fully perceived. In such a strong proximity between subject and word, the fiction can no longer be a foreign cultural representation of the world.

Aldo Gargani wrote in an illuminating manner, and as a scholar of logic, that "to grasp is to cease understanding, and the greatest emotion that we feel is intelligence that [...] moves in the opaque area of existence. Understanding, in a given moment, constitutes one's own paradox. Intelligence is, then, found in the circumstance of having to surpass

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



oneself and to accomplish the most courageous act, that allows oneself to be carried where one does not expect to go, in order to finally place oneself in front [...] of the destiny of complex internal events that are *acts of existence*” (Gargani, 1992, 119-123)⁶.

And so, an exercise in intelligence that implies abandoning the reassurance of already-known logical sequences, in order to go towards a reflexivity that, out of the object of experience, causes other, distant, not yet wholly grasped thoughts to spout.

And Vladimir Jankélévitch goes further, maintaining the semantic importance of the “rest” (“the wastes” about which Ricoeur told). The “rest” is what exceeds the current meaning of narration and that no one can know before that moment of one’s own, unique relationship with the text. Jankélévitch called it “presque-rien” and he defined it as “une connaissance à laquelle il manque quelque chose”. This knowledge that is missing something “peut être vraie, et une connaissance à laquelle il ne manque rien peut être fausse! [...] Tout de même, il manque quelques chose! Il manque quelque chose et il ne ‘manque’ rien; il manque quelque chose qui n’est rien; qui n’est rien et qui est tout; qui est donc *presque rien*. Car le presque-rien est justement ce rien qui est tout” (Jankélévitch, 1980, 18-19)⁷.

So that, I think, in the self-formative path the literary writing remains one of the richest semantic fields. A field of disquiet, of course. Because Literature not only no longer translates the educative ideal into narration, but it no longer even represents only one reality that the Philosophy of education interprets. Rather, Literature and the Philosophy of education think and interpret what is real by causing the most urgent questions of our time to emerge from there.

This is why, quoting Blanchot, “dans l’œuvre l’homme parle, mais l’œuvre donne voix, en l’homme, à ceux qui ne parle pas, à l’innommable, à l’inhumaine, à ce qui est sans vérité, sans justice, sans droit, là où l’homme ne se reconnaît pas” (Blanchot, 1955/1975, 242)⁸.

Is it not a critical-formative task too?

1 About this topic, see at least the full issue of “Studi sulla formazione”, n. 2-2014; Gennari, 1995; Dallari, 2005; Tognon, 2014.

2 “Una miseria psicologica, ma il primo passo della comprensione di una possibilità. [...] Sia il testo che il suo protagonista sono dunque un ‘come se’ della nostra situazione e, in quanto tali, definiscono gli orizzonti conoscitivi (ed etici) della nostra abitabilità del mondo”. English translation is mine.

3 “Scrivo e parlo e ogni volta è come se l’avessimo detto noi, soltanto che spesso noi, pur conoscendo le sue parole [...] non siamo stati capaci di dirle al momento giusto”. English translation is mine.

4 “L’esistenza di un uomo ha la medesima dignità di qualsiasi altro uomo; perché qualunque storia ci venga raccontata alla fine scopriamo che è sempre di noi che quella storia parla” English translation is mine.

5 “Un mosaico della finzione in cui a prevalere è l’*intentio* cognitiva su quella imitativa”. English translation is mine.

6 “Capire è cessare di capire, e la più grande emozione che proviamo è quella dell’intelligenza che [...] muove i propri passi nella zona opaca dell’esistenza. Capire costituisce ad un certo punto il proprio paradosso. Così l’intelligenza si trova nella circostanza di dover oltrepassare se stessa e di compiere il più coraggioso atto che è quello di lasciarsi portare dove non si aspetta di trovarsi, per rimettersi alla fine di fronte [...] al destino di complesse vicissitudini interiori che sono *gesti dell’esistenza*”. English translation is mine.

7 “A knowledge that is missing something”. This knowledge that is missing something “can be true, and a knowledge that is missing anything can be false [...]. And yet, something is missing! Something is missing and nothing ‘is missing’; something is missing that is nothing; which is nothing and everything; which, then, is *almost nothing*. In fact, this almost nothing is really this nothing that is everything”. English translation is mine.

8 “Man speaks through the work, but the work gives a voice to the human side which does not speak, to the unmentionable, to the inhuman, to what is without truth, without justice, without rights, the place where man cannot recognise himself”. English translation is mine.

References

- Adorno, T. (2012). *Note per la letteratura* (A. Frioli, E. De Angelis, G. Manzoni, E. Filippini, Trans.). Torino: Einaudi (original work: *Noten zur Literature*, Frankfurt am Mein: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969-1974).
- Badiou, A. (2006). *L'etica*. Napoli: Cronopio (original work: *L'étique*. Nous: 2003).
- Badiou A. (2016). *Alla ricerca del reale perduto*. Milano: Mimesis (original work: *À la recherche du réel perdu*. Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2015).
- Bauman, Z. (2016). *Modernità liquida* (S. Minucci, Trans.). Roma-Bari: Laterza (original work: *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press & Oxford: Blackwell Beck, 2006).
- Beck, U. (2008). *Conditio humana. Il rischio nell'età globale* (C. Sandrelli, Trans.). Roma-Bari: Laterza (original work: *Weltrisikogesellschaft. Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sicherheit*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2007).
- Bertin, G.M. (1974). *L'ideale estetico*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Bertolini, P. (1988). *L'esistere pedagogico. Ragioni e limiti di una pedagogia fenomenologicamente fondata*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Blanchot, M. (1969). *Il libro a venire* (G. Ceronetti e G. Neri, Trans.). Torino: Einaudi (original work: *Le livre à venir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1959).
- Blanchot, M. (1975). *Lo spazio letterario* (G. Zanobetti, Trans.). Torino: Einaudi (original work: *L'espace littéraire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1955).
- Brockmeier, J. (2014). *Narrazione e cultura*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Cambi, F. (2006). *Metateoria pedagogica. Struttura, funzione, modelli*. Bologna: Clueb.
- Cambi, F. (2010). *La cura di sé come processo formativo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Castoriadis, C. (1998). *L'enigma del soggetto*. Bari: Dedalo.
- Dallari, M. (2005). *La dimensione estetica della paideia*. Trento: Erickson.
- Derrida, J. (1990). *La scrittura e la differenza* (G. Pozzi, Trans.). Torino: Einaudi (original work: *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967).
- Erbetta, A. (1994). *Luoghi di crisi. Per una pedagogia come critica della pedagogia*. Torino: il Segnalibro.
- Gadamer, H.G. (1988). *Persuasività della letteratura*. Bologna: Transeuropa.
- Gargani, A.G. (1990). *La frase infinita. Thomas Bernhard e la cultura austriaca*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>



-
- Gargani, A.G. (1992). *Il testo del tempo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Gennari, M. (1994). *L'educazione estetica*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Heidegger, M. (1976). *Essere e tempo* (P. Chiodi, Trans.). Longanesi: Milano (original work: *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1927).
- Husserl, E. (1960). *La crisi delle scienze europee e la fenomenologia trascendentale* (E. Filippini, Trans.). Milano: il Saggiatore (original work: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. Haag: Martinus Nihoff, 1954).
- Kierkegaard, S. (1965). *Il concetto dell'angoscia. La malattia mortale* (C. Fabro, Trans.). Firenze: Sansoni.
- Jankélévitch, V. (1980). *Le je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque-rien. La méconnaissance. Le malentendu*, Paris, Editions du Seuil.
- Lukács, G. (2004). *Teoria del romanzo*. Milano: SE (original work: *Die Theorie des Romans*. Berlin: Cassirer, 1920).
- Madrussan, E. (2012). *Briciole di pedagogia*. Roma: Anicia.
- Madrussan, E. (2014a). Appuntamento con il senso. Costruzione della personalità ed esperienza estetica in Giovanni Maria Bertin, in M. Contini, M. Fabbri (Eds.), *Il futuro ricordato* (419-432). Firenze: ETS.
- Madrussan, E. (2014b). Education, subjectivity, literature, in *Studi sulla formazione*, 2, XVII, 37-44.
- Madrussan, E. (2017). *Educazione e inquietudine. La manœuvre formativa*. Como-Pavia: Ibis.
- Mariani, A. (2008). *La decostruzione in pedagogia*. Roma: Armando.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1967). *Segni* (G. Alfieri, Trans.). Milano: il Saggiatore (original work: *Signes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1960).
- Moretti, F. (1999). *Il romanzo di formazione*. Torino: Einaudi (original work: *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London: Verso, 1987).
- Morin, E. (2015). *Insegnare a vivere*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina (original work: *Enseigner à vivre*. Arles: Actes Sud/Play Bac, 2014).
- Ricœur, P. (1983), *Temps et récit. Tome I*, Paris, Editions du Seuil.
- Ricœur, P. (1993). *Sé come un altro* (D. Iannotta, Trad.). Milano: Jaca Book. (original work: *Soi-même comme un autre*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990).

Elena Madrussan – *Facing the text. Some considerations about educational experience of literary fiction*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1970-2221/9122>

-
- Rilke, R.M. (1982). *I quaderni di Malte Laurids Brigge* (F. Jesi, Trans.). Milano: Garzanti (original work: *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, Frankfurt am Mein: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1910).
- Sartre, J.-P. (1970). *L'essere e il nulla* (G. Del Bo, Trans.). Milano: il Saggiatore (original work: *L'être et le néant*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943).
- Sartre, J.-P. (1978). *L'esistenzialismo è un umanismo* (F. Fergnani, Trans.). Milano: Mursia (original work: *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. Paris: Nagel, 1946).
- Sartre J.-P. (1981). *L'âge de raison*, in *Œuvres romanesques*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 389-729 (original work edited in 1945).
- “Studi sulla formazione”, n. 2-2014.
- Testa, E. (2009). *Eroi e figuranti. Il personaggio nel romanzo*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Tognon, G. (2014). *Est-etica: filosofia dell'educare*. Brescia: La Scuola.
- Tortolone, G.M. (1993). *Invito al pensiero di Sartre*. Milano: Mursia.
- Valéry, P. (1946). *Monsieur Teste*, Paris, Gallimard.
- Wormser, G. (2005). *Sartre* (C. Pasquini, Trans.). Milano: Marinotti (original work: *Sartre*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1999).

Elena Madrussan

Università di Torino

Contatto: elena.madrussan@unito.it