Abstract

This article examines a passage from Alessandro Manzoni's *Fermo e Lucia* (1821–23),the so-called digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’, where Manzoni pondered the appropriateness of writing of love in novels. By analysing Manzoni’s argument closely, in particular his statement that the danger lies in letting the readers identify with the feelings of the character and therefore confusing their world with that of fiction, the article aims to underline Manzoni’s perspicacity in realising, first, that the dynamic of identification is at the heart of the novel and, secondly, that the new mode of reading introduced by the novel and based on empathic identification was going to throw into crisis the pedagogical and moralistic conception of art, of Platonic origin, in which he believed. Hence, the article looks at the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ as the first manifestation of Manzoni’s rejection of the novel as a genre; not simply a formulaic repetition of the leitmotif of the novel as a corruptive genre but the beginning of a meditation that anticipated by almost thirty years the impasse declared by Manzoni in the essay *Del romanzo storico* (1850): a reflection on the novel within the novel which makes Manzoni’s work – intended in its complexity from *Fermo e Lucia* to *I promessi sposi* – not only one of the best examples of self-reflexive novels but also an antinovel in the most radical sense of the word, that is a novel that disavows itself.

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**‘Far consentire l’animo di chi legge’: Manzoni, the novel and the issue of literary identification. Analysis of the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ in *Fermo e Lucia***

Digressione

La Signora

Avendo posto in fronte a questo scritto il titolo di storia, e fatto creder così al lettore ch’egli troverebbe una serie continua di fatti, mi trovo in obbligo di avvertirlo qui, che la narrazione sarà sospesa alquanto da una discussione sopra principj; discussione la quale occuperà probabilmente un buon terzo di questo capitolo. Il lettore che lo sa potrà saltare alcune pagine per riprendere il filo della storia: e per me lo consiglio di far così: giacché le parole che mi sento sulla punta della penna sono tali da annojarlo o anche farli venir la muffa al naso.

— I protagonisti di questa storia, — dic’egli, — sono due innamorati; promessi al punto di sposarsi, e quindi separati violentemente dalle circostanze condotte da una volontà perversa. La loro passione è quindi passata per molti stadj, e per quelli principalmente che le danno occasione di manifestarsi e di svolgersi nel modo più interessante. E intanto non si vede nulla di tutto ciò: ho taciuto finora ma quando si arriva ad una separazione secca, digiuna, concisa come quella che si trova nella fine del capitolo passato, non posso lasciare di farvi una inchiesta: — Questa vostra storia non ricorda nulla di quello che gl’infelici giovani hanno sentito, non descrive i principj, gli aumenti, le comunicazioni del loro affetto, insomma non li dimostra innamorati?

* + Perdonatemi: trabocca invece di queste cose, e deggio confessare che sono anzi la parte la più elaborata dell’opera: ma nel trascrivere, e nel rifare, io salto tutti i passi di questo genere.
  + Bella idea! e perché, se v’aggrada?
  + Perché io sono del parere di coloro i quali dicono che non si deve scrivere d’amore in modo da far consentire l’animo di chi legge a questa passione.
  + Poffare! Nel secolo decimonono, ancora simili idee![[1]](#endnote-1)

These are the opening paragraphs of a much-discussed passage from *Fermo e Lucia* in which Manzoni, staging a dialogue between the narrator and a fictitious interlocutor, pondered the appropriateness of speaking of love in novels*.* This unpublished extract was first brought to the attention of the critics in 1886 by Ruggero Bonghi in his speech at the opening ceremony for the *Sala Manzoniana* room in the Braidense Library in Milan.[[2]](#endnote-2) A year later, in 1887, the topic was raised again by the writer Antonio Fogazzaro, who in a speech entitled ‘Un’opinione di Alessandro Manzoni’ criticised Manzoni’s refusal to speak of love.[[3]](#endnote-3) The passage, often referred to as the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’, has been a topic of discussion in Manzoni criticism. The first nineteenth-century critics speculated that Manzoni had actually described the love between his protagonists and had only at a later stage censured himself for moral and aesthetic reasons; they pondered the implications which a less restrained style would have had on Manzoni’s novel (speculations dismissed as pointless by Croce in 1930).[[4]](#endnote-4) Contemporary critics, including Danelon, Parisi, D’Angelo, read instead the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ as Manzoni’s indictment of the ‘romanesque’, a polemic particularly prominent in *Fermo e Lucia*. My reading begins from these recent studies and looks at this passage as the first manifestation of Manzoni’s refusal of the novel as a genre. Hence, the ‘discussione sopra principj’ of *Fermo e Lucia* becomes a reflection on the novel that anticipated by almost thirty years the impasse declared by Manzoni in the essay *Del romanzo storico* (1850): a reflection on the novel within the novel which makes Manzoni’s work – intended in its complexity from *Fermo e Lucia* to *I promessi sposi* – not only one of the best examples of self-reflexive novels but also an antinovel in the most radical sense of the word, that is a novel that disavows itself.

*The impasse*

Many pages have been written to explore what brought the founder of the Italian novel to rebuke the genre as a whole.[[5]](#endnote-5) It was indeed unsettling that Manzoni – as Anna Banti put it – ‘condannò il genere senza appello, dopo averne fornito l’esempio più miracoloso’.[[6]](#endnote-6) So unsettling that literary critics had tried, argued D’Angelo, to minimize the radicality of Manzoni’s position.[[7]](#endnote-7) The refusal of the historical novel, and more in general of any literary genre mixing fiction with reality, is famously elaborated in the essay *Del romanzo storico*. The essay was published in 1850 but it was the product of a long gestation that, as critics have reconstructed, started at least twenty years before.[[8]](#endnote-8) We know from a letter that Manzoni wrote to his friend Gaetano Cattaneo in 1829, that he had begun writing an essay in the form of a letter on the relationship between history and literary imagination, or ‘invention’, to use his own word, as a reply to the German review of *I promessi sposi* written in 1827 supposedly by Goethe.[[9]](#endnote-9) That this reflection would have implications beyond the genre of the historical novel was also made clear in another letter written in the period to Niccolò Tommaseo, in which Manzoni anticipated quite drastically his disillusionment with literature and art in general.[[10]](#endnote-10) Daniela Brogi argued that the genesis of Manzoni’s meditation on the relationship between history and invention should be dated back to an even earlier period so to include the years of the drafting of the novel (1823-26) and the years of the *Lettre à M. Chauvet* (1820-23).[[11]](#endnote-11) My close reading of the digression of ‘romanzi d’amore’ aims to bring further evidence to this reconstruction.

Manzoni’s position in *Del romanzo storico* is well known: the historical novel, as all the ‘componimenti misti di storia e invenzione’, is ‘un genere falso’, since it is undermined by a congenital flaw (‘vizio radicale’) for which ‘la storia’ and ‘la favola’, the real and the fictional, are combined together ‘senza che si possa né indicare in qual proporzione, in quali relazioni ci devano entrare’. This ontological ambiguity makes the novel ‘intrinsecamente contraddittorio’ and inevitably deceitful.[[12]](#endnote-12) What is interesting is that Manzoni’s discourse both in *Del romanzo storico* and, we will see, in the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’, pivoted around the reader’s perspective: ‘il romanzo storico contraffà e confonde […] la storia’ and in so doing deceives the reader and obstructs the process of knowledge;[[13]](#endnote-13) knowledge as the appreciation of the ‘vero positivo’ which was Manzoni’s primary concern and, according to his famous letter to D’Azeglio (the basis for his later essay on Romanticism), the aim of poetry and literature in general.[[14]](#endnote-14) The reader of novels is directly called into question: s/he is no longer the reader/spectator Manzoni had postulated many years before in the important theoretical piece, the ‘Prefazione al *Carmagnola’* (1923), as a ‘mente estrinseca che contempla l’azione’, a reader/spectator that does not identify or involve herself/himself emotionally with the characters but follows the action from a critical distance;[[15]](#endnote-15) instead, in *Del romanzo storico* the reader of novels is seen as a ‘mente soggiogata, portata via dall’arte’ that is unable to exercise her/his own critical judgement, because of being unable to distinguish between the real and the fictional, the ‘cose avvenute’ and ‘cose inventate’ as Manzoni says a few pages later.[[16]](#endnote-16) Manzoni’s intuition about the congenital ambiguity of the novel and the effects on the readers is confirmed by the fact that, as noted by Stefano Calabrese, ‘i libri proibiti sino a Ottocento inoltrato non vengono classificati in base a criteri tematici bensì epistemologici: “proibite” sono le letture che adulterano un naturale equilibrio tra invenzione e realtà sino al caso limite di una chiastica confusion’.[[17]](#endnote-17) By altering the equilibrium between reality and fiction the novel had conquered its first readers but also had motivated the first suspicions, generating the long-standing prejudice about the danger of reading novels which has always accompanied the genre.

Contemporary theory of the novel uses the same words as Manzoni to emphasise the novel’s intrinsic paradoxicality: Catherine Gallagher mentioned the ‘unique and paradoxical’ features of ‘novelistic fictionality’, for which ‘the novel [...] is said both to have discovered and to have obscured fiction’. By hiding fictionality ‘behind verisimilitude or realism’, by creating, through appropriate strategies – including the epistolary novel, the found manuscript, and many others – an invented reality perfectly similar to that of the reader, the novel ambiguously mixes reality with fiction and facilitates the reader’s identification.[[18]](#endnote-18) Marthe Robert wrote of the novel’s ‘congenital vice’ which consisted ‘in pretending that it is not lying while simultaneously consolidating the delusions it creates by wilfully exploiting its resemblance to reality’.[[19]](#endnote-19) Similar words but different perspective: the paradox of the novel that Manzoni abhorred is considered by contemporary theorists to be the novel’s most distinguishing and compelling feature and the reason for its ongoing success.

When in 1821 Manzoni set out to write *Fermo e Lucia* he was intrigued precisely by the capacity and flexibility of the novel to simulate and capture reality through verisimilitude. As he wrote to his friend Fauriel, he saw in the novel the possibility to achieve ‘una rappresentazione di una data società fatta attraverso vicende e caratteri così simili alla realtà che essa possa apparire una storia vera appena scoperta’.[[20]](#endnote-20) Manzoni, until then a poet and an author of tragedies, embraced with enthusiasm the new literary genre because he believed he had at last found the way to combine his main interests, poetry and history. The function of poetry, as the young Italian author advocated in his *Lettre à M. Chauvet*, is that of giving voice to what ‘è passato sotto silenzio dalla storia’, that of completing history, revealing that which documents cannot: the passions, feelings, inner conflicts, and psychological reasons behind human actions: ‘manifestare ciò che gli uomini hanno sentito, voluto e sofferto, mediante ciò che hanno fatto, in questo consiste la poesia drammatica.’[[21]](#endnote-21) This trust and enthusiasm did not last long: Manzoni was already tormented by doubts which he subsequently exposed in the essay *Del romanzo storico* but which already consumed him when at work at his desk of the villa in Brusuglio where, immersed among the books and documents of the period, he was reconstructing the life and society of the seventeenth century.[[22]](#endnote-22) This is exactly how I want to tackle Manzoni’s novel: as a novel imbued with these doubts and this reflection: a text at the same time in defence of and against the novel itself; in short a self-reflexive text par excellence.

*Self-reflection from* Fermo e Lucia *to* I promessi sposi

The first scholars to draw attention to the self-reflexive and metanarrative drive of Manzoni’s novel included Lanfranco Caretti (1971), Giovanni Macchia (1983), Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti (1986) and Ezio Raimondi (1990).[[23]](#endnote-23) The subsequent studies of Marco Arnaudo (2002), Marco Codebó (2007) and Massimiliano Mancini (2007) examined specific aspects which helped to complete the picture.[[24]](#endnote-24) The first thing to note is that Manzoni’s metanarrative vocation shows itself in different ways in the first draft of the novel, *Fermo e Lucia*, and the final version, *I promessi sposi*. In *Fermo e Lucia*, it has been pointed out by several critics, this reflection takes the form of metanarrative digressions in which the narrator discusses his methodology, makes comments on the act of narration and gives warnings to the reader.[[25]](#endnote-25) The privileged areas for this meditation on the novel, ‘genere proscritto nella letteratura italiana’, are the first introduction, from which the famous quote above is taken; the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ (chapter I, volume II) which I will analyse below; the digression on the state of literature in the seventeenth century after the description of Cardinal Federigo Borromeo (chapter XI, end of volume II) where Manzoni brings forward his polemic against purism and classicism and states his idea of the moral function of literature in society; and, finally, the description of Don Ferrante’s library (chapter IX, volume III): this description takes the form of a dialogue between Don Ferrante and an imaginary interlocutor, a certain Signor Lucio and becomes an ironic survey of the knowledge and beliefs of its owner, who is depicted as the prototype of a seventeenth-century intellectual, full of airs as well as ignorance. Much smaller in size but more frequent are the interpolations of the narrator, who, bantering and provoking the readers, involves them in a polemic against the ‘bella natura’, that is, an idealised and harmonic representation of reality.[[26]](#endnote-26) This is a continuation of the polemic against the classical rules (and the fictitious kinds of verisimilitude that had been produced) which Manzoni started while writing the tragedies and developed in the famous *Lettre à M. Chauvet.* Both in the *Lettre* and in *Fermo e Lucia* the polemic results in a critique of the fictional – Manzoni uses the French word ‘romanesque’ – made equal to the fictitious, the false, and the conventional.[[27]](#endnote-27)

These digressions – apart from the description of the library of Don Ferrante and the digression on seventeenth-century culture – are suppressed in *I promessi sposi* and yet the knotty problem of the function of literature, the self-reflexive meditation, does not disappear but is instead absorbed more deeply into the narrative texture in the form of allusions and metanarrative innuendos. As Muñiz Muñiz pointed out, the passage from *Fermo e Lucia* to *I promessi sposi* can be seen as a ‘processo di ridistribuzione (piuttosto che di eliminazione) della materia e della critica, in virtù del quale ciò che nell’abbozzo veniva dichiarato esplicito e diretto, viene diluito nella rappresentazione e reso obliquo’.[[28]](#endnote-28) And indeed the function of literature and the role of the intellectuals are the subjects of some of the crucially important episodes, reworked and enlarged in the final version: the epistolary correspondence between Renzo and Agnese, and Renzo’s speech in the inn in Milan.[[29]](#endnote-29) The epistolary correspondence between the two illiterate peasants becomes a metaphor for the literary process. The ‘letterato’, the literate man who agrees to be one of the intermediaries between the two, interprets and writes as best he can the thoughts of the other, and adds misunderstanding to the misunderstandings in the correspondence. The narrator himself draws attention to the parallels in the situation by saying that this ‘accade anche a noi altri che scriviamo per la stampa’ and raises concern for the intrinsic ambiguity and imperfection of words.[[30]](#endnote-30) Related to this passage, which is a reflection by the author on his function and reliability as a literary intermediary, is the second episode mentioned above, Renzo’s speech against the written language as a form of power and oppression that the dominant class exercises over the lower classes: ‘Grande smania che hanno que’ signori d’adoprar la penna’; as they hold the pen—the power—they use it to nail a poor man down: ‘le parole che dicon loro, volan via, e spariscono; le parole che dice un povero figliolo, stanno attenti bene, e presto presto le infilzan per aria, con quella penna, e te le inchiodano sulla carta, per servirsene, a tempo e a luogo.’[[31]](#endnote-31) Raimondi’s masterly examination of this episode, which he renamed aptly ‘osteria della retorica’, disclosed the metaliterary implications and brought to the foreground the novelty of a narrator who ‘dialoga con se stesso ed esplora, conosce la propria identità e il senso del suo rapporto con l’ordine e il disordine del mondo’.[[32]](#endnote-32) According to recent criticism, a self-reflexive drive is what characterises not only the episode of the inn but all the chapters which describe the riot in Milan.[[33]](#endnote-33) Both Mancini and Codebò see the ambiguous figure of the ‘notaio’ – the notary, the guarantor of the written text, here described as a ‘furbo matricolato’ – as a reflection, a mirror image of the writer who is aware of and ponders the fictionality and deception of the world he recreates in his ‘fogli bianchi’.[[34]](#endnote-34) For Codebò, Manzoni’s attack on the credibility of the notary has ‘un effetto destabilizzante sulla pretesa del romanzo di affermarsi come discorso di verità’: the swindler notary with his forged documents casts doubts on the very possibility of a narration based on the positive truths of the documents, and consequently on the possibility of combining ‘cose avvenute’ and ‘cose inventate’; if the documents are invented the whole project of Manzoni’s historical novel crumbles.[[35]](#endnote-35) This is confirmed by Mancini who sees these chapters as alluding ‘non solo alla dubbia fondabilità di un genere misto di storia e d’invenzione, ma a quello più generale e più radicalmente inquietante della scrittura letteraria, della significazione, della *creazione* di senso (che condurrà il Manzoni al silenzio poetico e alle tesi rosminiane del dialogo *Dell’invenzione*)’.[[36]](#endnote-36) A similar destabilizing effect, a similar attack on the core of the novel is that presented in the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’. Differently from the chapters on the Milanese riot the digression is suppressed in *I promessi sposi;* not because Manzoni’s doubts regarding the effects of the novel on the readers are resolved: in fact, it is the opposite: his silence, his omission opens a black hole that expanded and eventually took over the whole novel.

*Analysis of the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’*

The digression takes the form of a staged ‘discussione sopra principj’ between the narrator and a fictitious interlocutor. The principles under examination relate to the language of passion and love, which seems to be lacking or deficient in the story, so much so – laments the interlocutor – that the two ‘promessi’ don’t look like they are in love, ‘innamorati’. Actually, replies the narrator, the story in the seventeenth-century manuscript where he found it overflows with love and passion; it has been his own deliberate choice to skip these passages while transcribing the story, because he shares the opinion of those who think – and this is the crucial sentence – that ‘non si deve scrivere d’amore in modo da far consentire l’animo di chi legge a questa passione’. What would happen – urges the narrator – if the story was read by unsuitable readers, ‘per esempio [d’]una vergine non più acerba, più saggia che avvenente’ or ‘un giovane prete’ che há soffocato nei suoi gravi uffici questo sentimento?’ (p.173) After elaborating on the effects that reading, and the passion fuelled by reading, might have on the readers, the narrator calls into question the writers themselves by observing that it is ‘opera imprudente’ to stir the passion up (‘fomentando’) ‘con gli scritti’ (pp.173-4).

It would be a mistake to liquidate Manzoni’s objections as merely or simply moralistic: he is the first to observe, behind the mask of the interlocutor, that ‘queste sono idee meschine pinzocheresche, claustrali, e peggio’ (p.174). Luciano Parisi commented that Manzoni’s reluctance ‘can be partially explained by the historical context of his literary activity: in the first half of the nineteenth century (and also later) there was a widespread opinion that novels could have a detrimental effect on the morals of their readers, in particular the young and women.’[[37]](#endnote-37) Indeed, Manzoni was not the first to dwell on the pernicious effect of reading novels: the leitmotif of the novel as a fast route to corruption was already well established – and counted, among the many, on Rousseau’s famous declaration in the Preface to *La nouvelle Heloise* (1761) that ‘Never did a chaste maiden read Novels’ (Rousseau’s novel was a sensation in the Europe of the eighteenth-century and indeed foregrounded the phenomenon of literary identification as corollary of novel reading).[[38]](#endnote-38) Moreover, rather than simply reusing a cliché, Manzoni seemed genuinely aware of and concerned about the impact that his works may have on the readers. The attention to the reader is a leitmotiv in Manzoni’s meditation and emerges in all his important theoretical pieces: either when he spoke of the ‘spettatori’ in the ‘Prefazione al *Carmagnola*’ (the reader/spectator as ‘mente estrinseca’) and of ‘pubblico’ in the *Lettre à M. Chauvet* (a public that ‘si abbandona alle impressioni che un gran poeta sa suscitare’ and needed to be reminded by the critics of the power of illusion) or when he addressed specifically the readers of novels in *Del romanzo storico* (the reader as ‘mente soggiogata’).[[39]](#endnote-39) In these pages Manzoni demonstrated that he was very aware of the fact that his ‘venticinque lettori’ – to use his ironic and famous saying from *I promessi sposi* – were in fact a mixed and composite group, ‘non letterat[o], né illetterat[o]’ (as observed in the *Lettera sul Romanticismo*): in short a public that might not be prepared for the influences of fiction.[[40]](#endnote-40) His concerns were certainly founded if we consider that the nineteenth-century readers of novels constituted ‘un pubblico scarsamente alfabetizzato’, easily prey, as Stefano Calabrese described in his survey, to pathologies of reading that had serious consequences.[[41]](#endnote-41)

This concern for the reader informs the whole digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ and it is reinforced in the final paragraph where the narrator refuses categorically to rely on the love theme or any other sensational trick of the novel’s repertoire to attract readers; which puzzles his interlocutor: ‘Voi volete privarvi volontariamente dei mezzi più potenti di dilettare, di quei mezzi che anche in mano della mediocrità possono talvolta produrre un grande effetto?’ (p.177) Against the ‘dilettare’, the idea of literature as pleasure, Manzoni’s narrator was keen to emphasise the moral function of literature: ‘se le lettere dovessero aver per fine di divertire quella classe d’uomini che non fa quasi altro che divertirsi, sarebbero la più frivola, la più servile, l’ultima delle professioni’ (p.177). The concern for the reader is what brought Manzoni to reject all that is frivolous and hedonistic and refuse to represent the passion of love. Manzoni’s opinion here was rooted in the French moralist tradition. There was a long-standing polemic, mostly concerning theatre writing, on the role of passions which passed through Rousseau and dated back to the Jansenist treatises of Pierre Nicole (*Traité de la Comédie,* 1664) and Jacques Bossuet (*Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie*, 1694) which sanctioned the condemnation of theatre for stirring up unruly passions in the spectators.[[42]](#endnote-42) Applied to the novel this discourse became a criticism of the sentimental novel.[[43]](#endnote-43) The digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’, in which Manzoni dwelt on the role of passions, was omitted in *I promessi sposi,* but Manzoni’s concern grew stronger and stronger so much as to arrive, as Danelon has demonstrated, to a systematic erosion of the passion of love: ‘nei *Promessi sposi* Manzoni si impegna a togliere di mezzo ogni più piccolo spazio nel quale la passione avesse trovato voce nel primo getto narrativo del *Fermo e Lucia*’.[[44]](#endnote-44) In fact, the term ‘passione’ – continues Danelon – ‘è quasi esclusivamente riservato (fatta eccezione per il primo scalpitante Renzo) a Rodrigo e Gertrude, e poi a Ludovico, a Egidio .... all’area eticamente negativa dei personaggi.’[[45]](#endnote-45) The passion of love was a prelude on one side to the irrational element (and Manzoni abhorred the reader ‘istupidito nelle basse voglie, curvo all’istinto irrazionale’, p.483) and on the other to the ‘romanesque’, that which is not based on facts but is purely fictional, invented through the imagination, something that in *Fermo e Lucia* was regarded as straightforwardly deceptive and false.

Therefore, on closer inspection, under attack was not only the sentimental novel, not only the historical novel as ‘genere misto’, but the novel in general as work of fiction. What, in fact, the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ makes clear is that the danger lies in ‘far consentire l’animo di chi legge’ to the passion of love, in letting the readers identify with the feeling of the character, confusing their world with that of fiction. Hence, ‘consentire’, feeling with, is the key act. In Manzoni’s ‘consentire’ there is evidently a reformulation of the leitmotiv of the novel as corruptive genre, exposed in Rousseau’s Preface to *La nouvelle Heloise*. But there is more: in ‘consentire’, the readers ‘feel with’ someone else, that is, they experience another reality from their own which means two things: one, that literary imagination implies always the creation of another reality, parallel but not identical to the readers’ own; secondly, that it is through the dynamic of identification that readers access – and become part of – the parallel world of fiction. Manzoni here pondered the dangers in letting the readers be involved in the world of fiction: by focusing his attention on ‘consentire’ he exposed what just a few decades later was to be called the bovarystic tension underlying novelistic fictionality. Indeed a character in Manzoni’s novel who shows the symptoms of bovaryms is Geltrude. ‘Like an Emma Bovary avant la lettre, she hoped for a life corresponding to her fantasy world, a world of free romance’ noted Mary Ann McDonald Carolan.[[46]](#endnote-46) The young Geltrude had nothing, other than the pleasures of the imagination (‘vagare nel mondo ideale’, p.198) to relieve her from the oppressive reality: ‘Non restava a Geltrude la triste e funesta consolazione dei sogni splendidi della fantasia: perché questi sogni erano tanto in opposizione col suo stato reale’ (p.208). But, differently from Emma Bovary, no reading was available to trigger Geltrude’s imagination: the relief, the freedom, the pleasure that readers can experience, through identification, in the parallel world created by fiction is totally and deliberately absent in Manzoni. It is interesting to note that ‘delimitare il più possibile l’alienazione letteraria’, and giving it only a negative connotation is also, according to Marco Arnaudo, Manzoni’s aim in the episode of Don Ferrante’s library (Don Ferrante, the mockery of the literary man, closed in his study, lost in his books, which filled his head with false ideas and estranged him from reality, is indeed the other and most prominent bovaristic character). Arnaudo’s enlightening comparison between Don Quixote’s and Don Ferrante’s libraries reveals that ‘la letteratura e la cultura libresca in genere rivestono il ruolo negativo di potenziale svistamento dalle attività civili, e senza mai assumere le connotazioni di un elemento d’influenza generale (né il fascino segreto) che possedevano in Cervantes’.[[47]](#endnote-47) Manzoni omitted the love scenes, toned down the ‘romanesque’ and ultimately denied any function to literary identification (which is only conceived in the negative terms of alienation).

Today, instead, ‘l’estetica dell’immedesimazione’, writes Guido Mazzoni in his recent *Teoria del romanzo*, ‘sembra un presupposto ovvio del romanzo’; in elaborating his point Mazzoni quotes a passage from the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk: ‘La vera forza del romanzo sta nell’identificazione dell’autore con il personaggio da lui creato, un’identificazione talmente intensa che gli impedisce di pronunciare giudizi morali. L’arte del romanzo si fonda sulla capacità unica degli esseri umani di identificarsi con l’Altro.’[[48]](#endnote-48) Literary identification has not only been singled out by contemporary critics and writers, but is becoming a stimulating research topic among philosophers and narrative theorists, particularly in the developing and interdisciplinary field of cognitive studies. The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum’s *Poetic Justice* (1995) and *Cultivating Humanities* (1997) present novel reading as a requirement for a just society: by reading and identifying with the characters we develop our moral imagination, we expand our empathy to unknown others and as such we become better world citizens. Suzanne Keen, in her recent study *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), does not take for granted the salutary effects of novel reading, that is the idea that ‘empathy for fictional characters necessarily translates into […] “nicer” human behaviour’, but sets out to explore ‘the question of what a habit of novel reading does to the moral imagination of the immersed reader’.[[49]](#endnote-49) Keen devotes several pages to distinguishing between ‘feeling for’, sympathy, and ‘feeling with’, empathy, and focuses her research on unveiling the privileged but controversial relationship between empathy and the reading of novels.

In the digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’, Manzoni rejects not only, or not simply, the passion of love but the very same phenomenon of identification which today we accept as the ‘presupposto ovvio del romanzo’. What identification highlights is the dynamic at the base of literary invention, which is the creation of a parallel world, the fictional, which is not simply the mirror of the real but one which has its own truth, not right nor wrong according to its degree of realistic similarity, but believable or not believable according to its own internal coherency. Manzoni cannot legitimise a fictional world independent from the real, which means to say that he cannot legitimise literary invention *tout court*: as D’Angelo put it, ‘al fondo dei problemi di Manzoni sta [...] la sua incapacità di riconoscere i diritti della creazione poetica, il suo bisogno di legittimarla appoggiandola alla storia, la paura di addentrarsi nel libero campo dell’immaginazione.’[[50]](#endnote-50) Without the support of history, literary invention for Manzoni became equivalent to fiction and therefore intrinsically false. Hence, the condemnation of the novel. The fact that the digression appears within *Fermo e Lucia* confirms both the self-reflexive character of the novel and the fact that this meditation ran parallel to Manzoni’s experimentation with the genre. The fact that Manzoni’s argumentation focused on the mechanism of identification, is another proof of the radicality and at the same time coherency of Manzoni’s position: in Manzoni we see embodied that pedagogical and moralistic conception of art, of Platonic origin, which predominated until the nineteenth century, according to which art, or mimesis to use Plato’s terminology, was meant to reflect – not create – a reality and diffuse useful knowledge and virtuous patterns of behaviour. By introducing a new mode of reading based on empathic identification, the novel set itself on ambiguous ground. As underlined by the writer Pamuk, the intense identification triggered by the novel is what resets or neutralises moral judgement. The work of art no longer provides examples of virtue, the *exempla*, nor simply mirrors reality but it stands on its own ground and obeys its internal logic. It is this change of parameters, explains Mazzoni in his study on the novel, that freed literature from its pedagogical and moralistic function and introduced a new modality of reading (from allegorical reading to empathic reading) which is enacted by the novel and which characterises the passage to modernity.[[51]](#endnote-51) Manzoni’s dilemma reflects the troubled passage from the Romantic conception of art, based on its pedagogic and moralistic function, to the decadent conception of *l’art pour l’art* which claimed the autonomy of the artistic sphere. Manzoni rejected emphatic reading, opposed the legitimacy of literary invention and consequently, and very coherently, abandoned the novel. We have to credit Manzoni for the clarity with which he spelled out the terms of the question and for his coherency – more coherent in fact than several subsequent nineteenth-century Italian novelists who kept moving undecidedly between these two contrasting conceptions of art, most of them re-enacting inside their novels Manzoni’s dilemma and pondering, through their Bovarystic characters, the immorality of the novel and its dangerous effects on the readers.

Postil. The digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ starts with a disquisition on the lack of love between the two lover protagonists. However, the digression is there to serve as a preface to the story of Geltrude, a small novel within the novel, in fact, the most ‘romanesque’ story of Manzoni’s novel. No character of Manzoni’s story has attracted so much critical attention as that of Geltrude.[[52]](#endnote-52) And yet her story is successful for exactly the opposite reasons intended by Manzoni. Instead of embodying the felicitous combination of ‘cose avvenute’ (the real story of the Sister Virginia Maria, born Marianna de Leyva y Marino, who became involved in a scandal which took place in Monza at the beginning of the seventeenth century) and ‘cose inventate’ (the attempts on the part of the poet to complete the gaps in the documents, in this case the chronicle *Historiae Patriae* by Giuseppe Ripamonti), the story gets the attention of the readers – actually it is one of the most gripping of the entire novel – not because the invention is legitimised by history, but rather because Manzoni’s invention, his fictional reconstruction, is so believable, so persuasive, so vivid, in short so real for the readers. But the truth of Geltrude’s story does not depend on the degree of faithfulness to the real life story of Sister Virginia Maria, but rather on the fact that the world that Manzoni recreated is so emotively enthralling for the readers as to make them ‘consentire’ to the harrowing nightmare which is Geltrude’s childhood and forced vocation, to let them experience the silencing of a voice, the suppression of a desire. It is not the real, historical source which makes the story true but rather the ‘rinnovamento del mondo reale’, the ‘aumento di vitalità’ which, in the remarkable words of Elsa Morante, encapsulates the ‘verità poetica’ of a work of art:[[53]](#endnote-53) ‘al romanziere (come ad ogni altro artista) non basta l’esperienza contingente della propria avventura. La sua esplorazione deve tramutarsi in un valore per il mondo: la realtà corruttibile dev’essere tramutata, da lui, in una verità poetica incorruttibile. Questa è l’unica ragione dell’arte: e questo è il suo necessario realismo.’[[54]](#endnote-54)

**Notes**

1. Alessandro Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia*, a cura di Salvatore Silvano Nigro (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), pp.171-2. All further citations will be from this edition in the form of a page number in the main body of the text. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. It was only in 1905 that a collection of passages from *Fermo e Lucia* was published: as *Brani inediti dei ‘Promessi*  *sposi’*,edited by Giovanni Sforza (Milan: Hoepli, 1905). The integral edition of the first version of Manzoni’s novel was edited by Giuseppe Lesca and published with a title taken from the second draft: *Gli Sposi Promessi* (Naples: Francesco Perella, 1916). In 1954 as part of the complete works of Manzoni the critical edition of *Fermo e Lucia* was published: *Tutte le opere*, ed. by Alberto Chiari and Fausto Ghisalberti (Milan: Mondadori, 1954), second volume of the series. Finally, in 2002 Salvatore S. Nigro edited the most complete critical edition for the Meridiani collection: *Fermo e Lucia*, ed. by Salvatore S. Nigro (Milan: Mondadori, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Fogazzaro defended the theme of love provided that the passion represented was that of spiritual love, a ‘sublime unità ideale di due esseri umani [...] che dona una felicità eccelsa, superiore a tutte le altre puramente terrestri, simile, benché inferiore, a quella che l’uomo può trovare nel suo contatto interno con Dio’ (Antonio Fogazzaro, *Scritti di teoria e critica letteraria*, ed. by Elena Landoni (Milan: Edizioni di teoria e storia letteraria, 1983), p.114). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. According to Atene the first critics who analysed Manzoni’s extract on ‘romanzi d’amore’ are: Bonghi (1886), Fogazzaro (1887), Avancini (1898), D’Ancona and Bacci (1902), Reiner (1905), Momigliano (1907), Zumbini (1908), Pellizzari (1914), D’Ovidio (1928), and Croce (1930). See Paolo Atene, ‘L’opinione manzoniana sull’amore nella letteratura’, *Convivium. Rivista bimestrale di lettere, filosofia e storia*, 5 (1933), 273-280. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Among the monographs devoted to this issue see: Paolo D’Angelo, *Le nevrosi di Manzoni. Quando la storia uccise la poesia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2013); Daniel Brogi, *Il «genere proscritto». Manzoni e la scelta del romanzo* (Ghezzano (PI): Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2005); Giorgio Bárberi Squarotti, *Manzoni: le delusioni della letteratura* (Rovito, CS: Marra Editore, 1988); Gino Tellini, *Manzoni, la storia e il romanzo* (Rome: Salerno, 1979). Among the articles: Luigi Weber, ‘Il discorso “Del romanzo storico” e il dialogo “Dell’invenzione”: un crocevia, non un approdo’*, La Modernità letteraria,* 7 (2014), 55-65; Daniela Brogi, ‘Sul rapporto storia/finzione nella poetica manzoniana, *Otto/Novecento*, 23 (1999), 117-27; Marinella Colummi Camerino, ‘Manzoni teorico del romanzo’, *Nuova rivista di letteratura italiana*, 1 (1998), 403-35; Cesare Segre, ‘Alessandro Manzoni: il continuum storico, l’intreccio e il destinatario’, in *Notizie dalla crisi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), pp.144-75; Franco Suitner, ‘Perché Manzoni scrisse un solo romanzo?’, *Revue des Etudes Italiennes,* 32 (1986), 142-47; Fernando Di Mieri, ‘Problemi della seconda estetica manzoniana’, *Rivista di studi italiani*, 3 (1985), 11-23; Sandra L. Bermann, ‘Manzoni’s Essay “On the Historical Novel”: a Rhetorical Question’, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature,* 10 (1983), 41-53; Pietro M. Viola, ‘Il discorso manzoniano *Del romanzo storico’, Convivium* 36 (1968), 665-731. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Anna Banti, ‘Romanzo e romanzo storico’, *Paragone Letteratura*, 20 (1951), 3-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. D’Angelo, *Le nevrosi di Manzoni,* p.145: ‘[G]li studiosi di letteratura [...] si sono dati da fare per negare l’evidenza, e  sostenere che la condanna di Manzoni non è assoluta, ma riguarda solo certi tipi di componimenti, è la critica ad alcune tendenze della poesia che egli non ritiene più valide, ma in nessun modo un verdetto negativo sull’arte nel suo complesso. [...] Le pagine del *Romanzo storico,* e altri documenti persino più espliciti nel riportare le prese di posizione di Manzoni contro la poesia e l’arte in genere, hanno suscitato una schiera di minimizzatori.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For a reconstruction of the genesis of *Del romanzo storico* see D’Angelo’s chapter ‘Dov’era l’arte, la storia’ (pp.121-32) in *Le nevrosi di Manzon*i. Colummi Camerini (‘Manzoni teorico del romanzo’, p.418) spoke of a ‘lunga gestazione polarizzata da due fasi di scrittura, il 1828-29 e il 1848-49’; whereas Suitner (‘Perché Manzoni scrisse un solo romanzo?’, p.147) suggested that ‘la diffidenza di Manzoni verso il “romanzesco” è precocemente attestata, soprattutto alcuni brani della *Lettre à M. Chauvet’*. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Alessandro Manzoni, *Del romanzo storico,* in *Scritti di teoria letteraria*, ed. by Adelaide Sozzi Casanova with an introduction by Cesare Segre (Milan: Rizzoli, 1990), p.223. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Alessandro Manzoni, ‘A Niccolò Tommaseo’, 13 August 1833, in *Tutte le lettere*, ed. by Cesare Arieti, vol. 2 (Milan: Adelphi, 1986), pp.14-15: ‘Ma debbo confessare schiettamente che, da quelle pubblicazioni in poi, le mie idee sono andate oltre assai nella buona o nella cattiva strada in cui io era entrato; e che, se quella poté parer licenza, le mie opinioni attuali, in questo particolare, tendono affatto all’anarchia, per non dire alla distruzione dell’arte medesima.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Brogi, ‘Sul rapporto storia/finzione’, p.118*:* ‘I movimenti del pensiero e della scrittura manzoniana attorno alla polarità storia/invenzione si fissano come è noto in tre esperienze principali: la *Lettre* allo Chauvet (1820-23), *I promessi sposi* e il trattato *Del romanzo storico* (ultimato nel 1831 e pubblicato nel 1850.’ See also Daniela Brogi, *Il genere proscritto. Manzoni e la scelta del romanzo* (Pisa: Giardini, 2005), pp.224-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Manzoni, *Del romanzo storico,* in *Scritti di teoria letteraria*, p.210. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Manzoni, *Del romanzo storico,* in *Scritti di teoria letteraria*, p.210. But see also p.199: ‘Posto ciò, quando mai il  confondere è stato un mezzo di far conoscere? Conoscere è credere; e per poter credere, quando ciò che mi viene rappresentato so che non è tutto ugualmente vero, bisogna appunto ch’io possa distinguere. E che? volete farmi conoscere delle realtà, e non mi date il mezzo di riconoscerle per realtà? Perché mai avete voluto che queste realtà avessero una parte estesa e principale nel vostro componimento? perché quel titolo di storico, attaccatoci per distintivo, e insieme per allettamento?’ [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Manzoni, ‘A Cesare Taparelli D’Azeglio’, 22 September 1823 in *Tutte le lettere*, vol. 1, p.338: ‘Mi limiterò ad esporle quello che a me sembra il principio generale a cui si possono ridurre tutti i sentimenti particolari sul positivo romantico. Il principio, di necessità tanto più indeterminato quanto più esteso, mi sembra poter essere questo: che la poesia e la letteratura in genere debba proporsi l’utile per iscopo, il vero per soggetto e l’interessante per mezzo’. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Manzoni, ‘Prefazione al *Carmagnola*’, *in Scritti di teoria letteraria*, p.42. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Manzoni, *Del romanzo storico*, in in *Scritti di teoria letteraria,* p.202 and p.206. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Stefano Calabrese, ‘*Wertherfieber,* bovarismo e altre patologie della lettura romanzesca’, in *Il romanzo,* ed. by Franco Moretti, 5 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2001-2003), vol. 1, *La cultura del romanzo,* pp.567-598 (p. 569). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Catherine Gallagher, ‘The Rise of Fictionality’ in *The Novel*, ed. by Franco Moretti, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ;  Woodstock: Princeton University Press), vol. 1, pp.336-63 (p.337). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Marthe Robert, *Origins of the Novel* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p.15. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Manzoni, ‘Letter to Claude Fauriel’, 3 November 1821, in *Scritti di teoria letteraria*, p.298. For the original French  version of the letter see Manzoni, *Tutte le lettere*, pp.244-45. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Manzoni, *Lettera a Monsieur Chauvet sull’unita di tempo e di luogo nella tragedia*, in *Scritti di teoria letteraria,*  pp.59-153 (pp.111-12): ‘Ma, obietterà qualcuno, se si toglie al poeta ciò che lo distingue dallo storico, cioè il diritto di inventare fatti, cosa gli resta? Cosa gli resta? la poesia; sì, la poesia. Perché, in sostanza, cosa ci dà la storia? avvenimenti noti, per così dire, solo esteriormente; ciò che gli uomini hanno fatto; ma ciò che hanno pensato, i sentimenti che hanno accompagnato le loro deliberazioni e i loro progetti, i loro successi e insuccessi, i discorsi con i quali hanno fatto e cercato di far prevalere le loro passioni e le loro volontà su altre passioni e altre volontà, con i quali hanno espresso la loro collera, effuso la loro tristezza, con i quali in una parola, hanno manifestato la loro individualità, tutto ciò, tranne pochissimo, è passato sotto silenzio dalla storia, e tutto ciò forma il dominio della poesia. Eh! sarebbe ingenuo temere che manchi ad essa l’occasione di creare, nel senso più serio, forse il solo serio, di questa parola! Ogni segreto dell’anima umana si svela, tutto ciò che genera i grandi avvenimenti, tutto ciò che caratterizza i grandi destini, si rivela alle immaginazioni dotate d’una sufficiente forza di simpatia. Tutto ciò che la volontà umana ha di forte o di misterioso, e la sventura di religioso e di profondo, il poeta può indovinarlo; o,per meglio dire,scorgerlo,afferrarlo e esprimerlo.[...] Manifestare ciò che gli uomini hanno sentito, voluto e sofferto, mediante ciò che hanno fatto, in questo consiste la poesia drammatica; creare fatti per adattarvi dei sentimenti, è il grande compito dei romanzi, dalla Signora di Scudéry ai nostri giorni.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Manzoni’s doubts in fact were already in the *Lettra a M. Chauvet* when he warned against the danger of ‘invenzione’  and of the ‘romanzesco’, which here as well as i*n Fermo e Lucia* is presented as synonym of false and fictitious: ‘i romanzieri [...] a forza d’inventare storie, situazioni nuove, pericoli inaspettatati, contrasti singolari di passioni e di interessi, hanno finito con il creare una natura umana che non assomiglia in niente a quella che avevano sotto gli occhi, o, per meglio dire, a quella che non hanno saputo vedere. E ciò si è verificato così chiaramente che l’epiteto di romanzesco è stato consacrato per designare generalmente, a proposito di sentimenti e costumi, questo genere particolare di falsità, questo tono fittizio, questi tratti convenzionali che distinguono i personaggi da romanzo.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Lanfranco Caretti, ‘Romanzo di un romanzo’, in Alessandro Manzoni, *Fermo e Lucia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), pp.ix–xxviii; Giovanni Macchia, ‘Nascita e morte della digressione. Da *Fermo e Lucia* alla *Storia della colonna infame*’, in *Tra Don Giovanni e Don Rodrigo. Scenari secenteschi* (Milan: Adelphi, 1983), pp.21–55; Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, ‘La metaletteratura nel *Fermo e Lucia*’, in *‘Fermo e Lucia’. Il primo romanzo del Manzoni. Atti XIII Congresso Nazionale Studi Manzoniani. Lecco 11–15 settembre 1985*, ed. by Umberto Colombo (Azzate: Otto/Novecento, 1986), pp.139–82; Ezio Raimondi, *La dissimulazione romanzesca. Antropologia manzoniana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1990). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Marco Arnaudo, ‘Biblioteche, bibliofilia e alienazione letteraria nel ‘Don Quijote’ e nei ‘Promessi sposi’, in *Strumenti Critici*, 1 [98] (2002), 75-105; Marco Codebò, ‘Scomodi compagni di banco: Scrittori e notai fra Boccaccio e Manzoni’, *Italica* 84(2007), 187-98; Massimiliano Mancini, ‘Scrittura del tumulto e tumulto della scrittu[r]a: Aspetti metanarrativi e metalinguistici in Promessi sposi XI-XVI’, in *Italica* 84(2007), 708-22. But see also Olivia Santovetti*,* ‘Alessandro Manzoni and the Art of Digression’ in *Digression. A Narrative Strategy in the Italian Novel* (Oxford-Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp.29-68. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. For an overview of the critics’ positions on the transition from *Fermo e Lucia* to *I promessi sposi* see Olivia Santovetti*, ‘*From *Fermo e Lucia* to *I promessi sposi’* in *Digression*, pp.37-40. The diminuition of the self-reflexive digressions in *I promessi sposi* is evaluated in ‘Introducing the narrator’s comments on the narration and opening a dialogue with the reader’ in the same volume at pp.57-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. ‘Se noi inventassimo ora una storia a bel diletto, ricordevoli dell’acuto e profondo precetto del Venosino, ci guarderemmo bene dal riunire due immagini così disparate come quelle che si associavano nella mente di Fermo; ma noi trascriviamo una storia veridica; e le cose reali non sono ordinate con quella scelta, né temperate con quella armonia che sono proprie del buongusto; la natura, e la bella natura, sono due cose diverse.’ (pp.582-83) [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Manzoni, *Scritti di teoria letteraria*, pp.120-21: ‘i romanzieri [...] a forza d’inventare storie, situazioni nuove, pericoli inaspettatati, contrasti eccezionali di passioni e di interessi, hanno finito col creare una natura umana che non somiglia in niente a quella che avevano sotto gli occhi, o, per meglio dire, a quella che non hanno saputa vedere. E di conseguenza l’epiteto di romanzesco [*romanzesque*] è stato designato ad indicare generalmente, per quel che riguarda i sentimenti e costumi, quel tipo particolare di falsità, quel tono artificioso, quei tratti convenzionali che contraddistinguono i personaggi dei romanzo.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Maria de las Nieves Muñiz Muñiz, ‘Manzoni e la Spagna: revisione di un vecchio problema’, *Problemi*, Ancora per Manzoni, 75 (1986), 4–27; now collected in abridged form in Elena Sala Di Felice, (ed.) *Il punto su Manzoni* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1989), pp.158–162 (p.159). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. For a close reading of these two episodes, particularly focused on the problematic relationship between orality and writing and writing as a form of oppression of the illiterate classes, see Verina R. Jones’s articles: ‘Illiteracy and Literacy in *I promessi sposi*’ in *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, I (1983), 527-52 and ‘*I promessi sposi*: the Sources of Literacy’ in *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana* , 3 (1985), 335-63. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, ed. by Alberto Chiari and Fausto Ghisalberti (Milan: Mondadori, 1954), p.464, XXVII. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Manzoni, *I promessi sposi***,** p.250, XIV. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Ezio Raimondi, ‘L’osteria della retorica’, in *La dissimulazione romanzesca. Antropologia manzoniana* (Bologna: il  Mulino, 1990), pp.81-110. Another important reading of this episode that should be here mentioned is that of Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti in ‘La città terrena’ in *Il romanzo contro la storia* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1980), pp.202- 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Mancini, ‘Scrittura del tumulto’, p.709: ‘Ma ‘l’istanza metanarrativa e metaletteraria è attiva, col suo gioco di allusioni e di ammiccamenti, è attiva anche fuori dell’osteria della retorica, lungo tutto il racconto dell’avventura di Renzo in mezzo ai tumulti di San Martino.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, p.271 and p.277. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Codebò, ‘Scomodi compagni di banco’, p.192. See also p.193: ‘Situazione paradossale , nella quale il romanzo,  mentre da una parte fonda sulle carte d’archivio la propria rivendicazione di verità, dall’altra insinua che nel cuore  delle procedure di autenticazione del documento scritto possa annidarsi la menzogna.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Mancini, ‘Scrittura del tumulto’, p.716. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Luciano Parisi, ‘Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi:* A Chaste Novel and an Erotic Palimpsest’, *The Modern*  *Language Review* , 103 (2008), 424-37 (p.425). [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the new Heloise. Letters of two lovers who live in a small town at the foot of the*  *Alps,* translated and annotated by Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover [NH]: Dartmouth College: University Press of New England, 1997), pp. 3-4: ‘Never did a chaste maiden read Novels; and I have affixed to this one a sufficiently clear title so that upon opening it anyone would know what to expect. She who, despite this title, dares to read a single page of it, is a maiden undone.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Manzoni, *Scritti di teoria letteraria*: ‘Prefazione al *Carmagnola*’, p.42, *Lettre a M. Chauvet*, p. 102 and *Del romanzo storico*, p.202. On the importance of the reader in Manzoni see also Cesare Segre, **‘**Alessandro Manzoni: il continuum storico, l’intreccio e il destinatario’, in *Notizie dalla crisi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), pp.144-75. Manzoni’s observations on the reader in *Del romanzo storico* are examined by Giorgio Bárberi Squarotti, ‘Manzoni o l’impotenza della letteratura’ in *Manzoni: le delusioni della letteratura* (Rovito, CS: Marra Editore, 1988), pp.157-71. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Manzoni, ‘Sul Romanticismo. Lettera al Marchese Cesare d’Azeglio’, in *Scritti di teoria letteraria*, pp.159-91 (p.184). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Calabrese, ‘*Wertherfieber,* bovarismo e altre patologie della lettura romanzesca’ in Moretti, *Il romanzo.* [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. The influence of the French moralists on Manzoni is examined by D’Angelo, ‘Avvelenatori pubblici’ in *Le nevrosi di*  *Manzoni*, pp.169-82; but see also Parisi, ‘Alessandro Manzoni’s I promessi sposi’, pp.426-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Fogazzaro argued that behind Manzoni’s digression on ‘romanzi d’amore’ there is ‘la condanna, totale o parziale, di  quasi tutte le opere più famose che l′ ingegno umano ha prodotte nel campo della letteratura, di tante pagine, di tanti libri che a noi parevano consacrati da una bellezza immortale, che hanno rapito la nostra fantasia giovanile, che ci ristorano e ci esaltano ancora nell′età matura, sovente meglio intesi e meglio ammirati’ (Fogazzaro, ‘Un’opinione di Alessandro Manzoni’, *Scritti di teoria,* p.105). [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Danelon, “Se l’avessi a raccontare vi seccherebbe a morte”, p.246. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Danelon, “Se l’avessi a raccontare vi seccherebbe a morte”, p.249. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Mary Ann McDonald Carolan, ‘La monaca di Monza: Manzoni’s Bad Girl and the Repudiation of the Imagination’,  *Rivista di Studi Italiani* 19(2001), 65-85 (p.71). [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Marco Arnaudo, ‘Biblioteche, bibliofilia e alienazione letteraria nel “Don Quijote” e nei “Promessi sposi”’, *Strumenti critici,* 17 ([98]) (2002), 75-105 (p.96). [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Guido Mazzoni, *Teoria del romanzo (*Bologna: il Mulino, 2011), p.208. The Orhan Pamuk quote is taken from an interview with the writer by P. Holdengraper, *il Corriere della Sera*, 16 October 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.xxv*.* Other cognitive literary studies include: Lisa Zunshine*, Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel (Theory and Interpretation of*  *Narrative)*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2006), Keith Oatley, *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*, Wiley-Blackwell (Chichester ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) and Blakey Vermeule, *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. D’Angelo, *Le nevrosi di Manzoni*, p.71. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Mazzoni, *Teoria del romanzo*, 201: ‘La concezione pedagogica dell’arte difesa dal platonismo estetico cristiano  generava due famiglie di precetti: i primi diffondevano una morale normativa attraverso la giustizia poetica e la creazione di eroi esemplari; i secondi diffondevano *phronesis*, saggezza pratica delle cose umane.’ On the pedagogical and moralistic conception of art see in particular Mazzoni’s sections on ‘Il platonismo estetico’ (pp.123- 33), ‘Moralismo e allegoria’ (pp.133-37), and ‘Apparati moralistici, giustizia poetica, eroi esemplari’ (pp.137-44). [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Among the many scholarly contributions on the character of Geltrude/Gertude see: Pier Angelo Perotti, ‘Note sulla Gertrude manzoniana’, *Critica letteraria*, 151 (2011), 270-88; Daniela Brogi, ‘Il racconto di un terrore confuso. Gertrude (da “I promessi sposi”), *Allegoria* 60 (2009), 105-21; Federica Pedriali, ‘Onnipotenziali e monacati: Manzoni, Verga, Gadda’, in *Creating with Transvestism: from Bertolucci to Boccaccio*, ed. by Federica Pedriali and Rossella Riccobono (Longo: Ravenna, 2007), pp.87-97; Mary Ann McDonald Carolan, ‘La monaca di Monza: Manzoni’s Bad Girl and the Repudiation of the Imagination’, *Rivista di Studi Italiani* 19 (2001), 65- 85; Verina R. Jones, ‘Manzoni’s Dark Ladies’, *Romance Studies,* 19 (1991), 37-52; Umberto Colombo, ‘La Geltrude manzoniana’, in *Vita e processo di suor Virginia Maria de Leyva monaca di Monza*, ed. by Umberto Colombo (Milan: Garzanti, 1985), pp. 769-869; Omar Calabrese, ‘L’iconologiua della monaca di Monza’, in *Leggere i Promessi sposi,* ed. by Giovanni Manetti (Milan: Bompiani, 1989), pp. 299-312; Paolo Colussi, *La vera storia della monaca di* Monza (Mario Mazzucchelli, La *monaca di Monza* (Milan: Dall’Oglio editore, 1962). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Elsa Morante, ‘Sul romanzo’ in *Pro o contro la bomba atomica e altri scritt*i (Milan: Aldephi, 1987), pp.43-73 (p.72). [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Morante, ‘Sul romanzo’, pp.49-50.

    Biography

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