

## **THE TIME OF READING: THE FIRST PERCEPTION OF CHARACTERS IN NARRATIVE TEXTS**

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**ABSTRACT.** When a character is introduced in a narrative text, his/her aspect and personality are constructed by the reader on the basis both of information found in the text and of inferences actively produced by the readers. The first perception of a character is likely to change in the course of reading, as the reader encounters new information and activates relevant inferences: these changes in the state of the mind are components of reading pleasure.

The type of the information given by the narrator depends on his/her priorities. Therefore, the reader receives information on the character and, at the same time, on the narrator's priorities. In the course of his/her act of reading, the reader activates, in his memory, material to be used in his concretization. In this way, s/he introduces new information; what is not explicitly described may be concretized differently by different readers. At the same time, the act of reading is very selective, removing information that is considered irrelevant. If the reader is then asked about information which has not been maintained in memory, s/he may be unable to recover it in full and may be forced to draw inferences that lead to results that are different from the text's surface.

In this paper we examine the way in which six characters are introduced in Italian novels by Gadda, Manzoni, Moravia, Svevo, Tarchetti and Vassalli. Participants were asked to read passages from the texts where the characters were presented for the first time and then summarize the passages and answer some questions. In our examination of the answers, every time we find information that was not given in the texts, we have evidence of material coming from the readers' inferences and world knowledge. This study shows how characters can be concretized differently by different readers, particularly in relation to gender and education.

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Frow (1986: 227), 'the concept of character is perhaps the most problematic and the most undertheorized of the basic categories of narrative theory. It is also perhaps the most widely-used of all critical tools, at all levels of analysis; and its sheer obviousness disguises the conceptual difficulties it presents'. Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 36) writes that 'character is a construct, put together by the reader from various indications dispersed throughout the text'. According to Van Peer (1988: 9) 'character [...] is what readers infer from words, sentences, paragraphs and textual composition

depicting, describing or suggesting actions, thoughts, utterances or feelings of a protagonist'. Jouve (1992: 13) remarks that 'les figures construites par le texte ne prennent sens qu'à travers la lecture. Le sujet lisant est, en dernière instance, celui qui donne vie à l'œuvre [...] Il est donc temps de remplacer le point de vue du poéticien par celui de lecteur; une description formelle, voire fonctionnelle, du personnage n'est plus suffisante. A la question de savoir ce qu'est un personnage de roman doit succéder cette autre: qu'advient-il de lui dans la lecture?' In Culpeper's words (1996: 336), 'in general, and even in literary texts, the causes of a person's actions have to be *inferred* from observable behaviours'.

In particular, Stanzel (1981: 9) remarks that 'the narrative opening usually establishes the mode of narrative transmission which will prevail throughout the story'. According to Gerrig and Allbritton (1990: 385-386):

Having observed an individual's behavior in one instance (or having received summary information about that individual), we are inclined to structure future interactions so that they elicit the behavior we expect. The processing bias toward assimilating new behavior to the impression formed through initial interactions makes it important (for most purposes) that the first impression be an accurate one.

We can imagine, thus, that the reader's act of constructing a literary character is initially one of trying to assimilate the character to some well-known category [...] one of the dangers of anchoring our processing in first impressions is that it causes us to overlook the import of evidence that is inconsistent with that impression.

Jouve (1992: 52) writes that 'l'imagination du sujet joue un rôle très important au début du roman, lorsque le personnage, apparaissant pour la première fois, est encore peu déterminé par la narration'.

Emmott remarks that 'only a subset of the total information that we know about a character is true at any one time [...] information that is not true at a particular time may still be relevant to our overall assessment of a character' (Emmott, 1997: 181).

Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 59) writes that

Character, as one construct within the abstracted story, can be described in terms of a network of character-traits. These traits, however, may or may not appear as such in the text. How, then, is the construct arrived at? By assembling various character-indicators distributed along the text-continuum and, when necessary, inferring the traits from them.

According to Jouve (1992: 40-49):

C'est donc au lecteur qu'il appartient de construire la représentation à partir des instructions du texte [...] le portrait du personnage tel qu'il est progressivement construit dans la lecture est tributaire de la compétence du destinataire dans deux registres fondamentaux: l'extra-textuel' et l'intertextuel'.

La dimension extra-textuelle du personnage est indiscutable: le lecteur, pour matérialiser sous forme d'image les données qui lui fournit le texte,

doit puiser dans l'encyclopédie de son monde d'expérience [...] Ainsi, du point de vue du lecteur, la figure romanesque est rarement perçue comme une créature originelle, mais rappelle souvent, de manière plus ou moins implicite, d'autres figures issues d'autres textes [...] La dimension intertextuelle du personnage demeure, on le voit, assez libre et relative à la compétence de chaque lecteur.

Bortolussi and Dixon (2003: 140-142) write that

even though literary characters and real people are ontologically distinct, they are processed much in the same way. In other words, literary characters are processed *as if* they were real people. [...] There are many possible determinants of the strategies that people use. Some of these include the values imparted through past child rearing and educational practices, personal beliefs and preferences, dominant patterns in one's immediate social circles, and so on.

In particular:

Readers by default assume that they will encounter real-life characters and make a concerted effort to fill in the schematic gaps to produce human-like constructs. In fact, we believe that the constructive operations of readers are so significant that they render it difficult, if not impossible, for readers to distinguish between what is actually said about characters in the text and what they themselves have supplied [...] It is entirely conceivable that some readers impose on the text character constructions that are discordant with the text (Bortolussi and Dixon, 2003: 152-153).

Concretizations after reading passages introducing characters for the first time in a novel were examined through an empirical study (Nemesio, 2002a, 2002b, 2008). The answers to the questions that followed the reading showed differences in the readers' constructions. In order to explore general trends in reading behavior, in the present study we considered six different characters, checking concretizations that are discordant with the texts and divergencies in different readers' constructions that are based on the same text. Differences in concretizations are examined in relation to readers' gender and education. Every time we find information that was not given in the texts, we have evidence of material coming from the readers' inferences and world knowledge.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

### **Participants**

Six hundred and twenty-five students (285 males, 340 females) participated in the present study. Their age ranged from 18 to 35 (average 21.3; *SD* 2.39; 3.4% older than 26). They attended either faculties of humanities (*N* = 347) or of applied sciences (*N* = 278) of the university of Turin.

## Material

Six passages introducing characters for the first time in six Italian novels were used. The characters were: Lucia in Manzoni's *The Betrothed* (1840), Fosca in Tarchetti's *Passion* (1869), Angiolina in Svevo's *As a man grows older* (1898), Carla in Moravia's *The time of indifference* (1929), Francesco Ingravallo in Gadda's *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana* (1957), and Cris in Vassalli's *Living in the Wind* (1980). Since they are all natural texts, the passages are of different length (Manzoni: 220 words, Tarchetti: 230, Svevo: 74, Moravia: 59, Gadda: 151, Vassalli: 85).

## The characters

Manzoni's **Lucia** is presented when she is meeting her friends after her mother has just finished dressing her up for her wedding day. She is a 'peasant girl' of 'modest beauty'. Various emotions appear in her face: in particular 'a great happiness'. She has 'dark young hair'. Details of her wedding apparel are given.

**Fosca** is presented as an extraordinarily ugly woman. In addition, she is very ill. But, on the basis of her description, we know very little for certain: the text contains several evaluations, to be interpreted according to the readers' criteria and expectations. Her 'ugliness' is mainly due to her illness, that devastated her face ('all of her horror was in her face').

**Angiolina** is described as a very pretty woman. The reader finds information on the character's aspect: in particular her hair, eyes, height, figure, face and health. She is 'a tall, healthy blonde, with big blue eyes and a supple, graceful body, an expressive face and transparent skin glowing with health'. Angiolina is presented in the open air, while she walks with an 'elegant parasol'.

**Carla** is introduced in the beginning of Moravia's novel. Her description centers around her clothing, emphasizing her sensuality. She is wearing 'a brown woolen frock'. Her skirt is 'so short that the movement she made in shutting the door was enough to pull it up several inches over the slack wrinkles her stockings formed about her legs', but she is 'unaware of this'. Her bearing is awkward: she moves 'clumsily and uncertainly forward'.

**Francesco Ingravallo** is introduced in the first lines of Gadda's novel. His nickname is 'don Ciccio'. He is an 'officer', assigned to the homicide division. He is 'one of the youngest and [...] most envied officials of the detective section'. He is thirty-five. Information is given about his aspect and personality: 'of medium height, rather rotund as to physique, or perhaps a bit squat, with black hair, thick and curly [...] he had a somnolent look, a heavy, lumbering walk'. He is 'dressed as well as his slender government salary allowed him to dress, with one or two little stains of olive oil on his lapel'.

The introduction of **Cris** in Vassalli's novel is very curious. It is the character who is speaking (without quotation marks) in the beginning of the novel, telling the author how he would like to look like: 'No moustache. Ten years younger. A few centimeters smaller: the exact height in the identification marks is one meter and seventy-five. Lighter hair, almost blond. Clear skin is ok. A few old freckles in my face,

this way. Summer shirt and jeans or denims'. In this way the text gives us information about the character's appearance.

## **Procedure**

The test was administered in university classrooms during normal classes. Each student was given one of the texts. The participants were told that it was the introduction of a character in a novel, but were not given any further information, such as title, name of the author or year of publication. They were told that the test was aimed at studying reading behaviour, but did not aim at evaluating their skills. They were asked to read at their normal speed. Each participant read one of the texts (Manzoni: 103, Tarchetti: 104, Svevo: 104, Moravia: 95, Gadda: 111, Vassalli: 108).

After reading, the participants returned the copies of the texts and were asked to summarize them. Then they were asked to list the parts of the character's body mentioned and to estimate the character's age. Other questions followed, concerning the character's physical aspect, socioeconomic status, emotional condition and personality. Lastly, the subjects were asked in what season of the year the novel was set. The questionnaire also contained a five-point appreciation question, asking whether they would like to continue reading the book (1 = very low interest; 5 = very high interest) . The participants were also asked if they had already read the passage on some other occasion. We did not consider the answers coming from subjects who were already familiar with the text or were not native Italian speakers. The test was anonymous: the participants were only asked to indicate their age and gender. In this paper we examine readers' responses concerning interest in the passages, characters' age and season of the year.

Since the questions also concerned information that was not explicitly stated in the texts read, the subjects were asked to answer making use of their inferences. If the subjects thought that the text read did not contain any information that could lead to an answer to a specific question, they could choose not to answer it.

## **RESULTS**

### **Interest in the passages**

An ANOVA was carried out on the scores concerning the interest experienced in the text read with two factors between subjects: the gender of the readers and the type of undergraduate studies (humanities vs. applied sciences). The two factors yielded significant effects: readers' gender ( $F_{1,601}=29.34$   $p<.001$   $\eta_p^2=.05$ ), with women being more interested than men and type of studies ( $F_{1,601}=7.10$   $p=.008$   $\eta_p^2=.01$ ), with students of humanities being more interested than students of applied sciences. No interaction between factors resulted to be significant. Tables 1 and 2 show the average interest in the text read in male and female students and in students attending faculties of humanities and of applied sciences.

Table 1. Interest experienced by male and female readers.

Text	Male		Female	
	M	SD	M	SD
Manzoni (N <sub>M</sub> =41; N <sub>F</sub> =62)	2.05	0.74	2.66	0.96
Tarchetti (N <sub>M</sub> =46; N <sub>F</sub> =58)	2.61	0.95	3.24	0.71
Svevo (N <sub>M</sub> =57; N <sub>F</sub> =47)	2.35	1.01	2.91	0.86
Moravia (N <sub>M</sub> =49; N <sub>F</sub> =46)	2.65	1.16	3.00	0.94
Gadda (N <sub>M</sub> =49; N <sub>F</sub> =62)	2.31	0.77	2.40	0.86
Vassalli (N <sub>M</sub> =43; N <sub>F</sub> =65)	2.40	1.07	2.98	0.84
Average (N <sub>M</sub> =285; N <sub>F</sub> =340)	2.40	0.98	2.86	0.90

N<sub>M</sub>: number of males; N<sub>F</sub>: number of females; Maximum score = 5

Table 2. Interest experienced by students of humanities and of applied sciences.

Text	Humanities		Applied Sciences	
	M	SD	M	SD
Manzoni (N <sub>H</sub> =59; N <sub>AS</sub> =44)	2.69	0.84	2.05	0.91
Tarchetti (N <sub>H</sub> =61; N <sub>AS</sub> =43)	3.07	0.79	2.81	0.98
Svevo (N <sub>H</sub> =55; N <sub>AS</sub> =49)	2.76	0.96	2.43	0.98
Moravia (N <sub>H</sub> =48; N <sub>AS</sub> =47)	2.90	1.08	2.74	1.07
Gadda (N <sub>H</sub> =62; N <sub>AS</sub> =49)	2.48	0.82	2.20	0.79
Vassalli (N <sub>H</sub> =62; N <sub>AS</sub> =46)	2.85	0.85	2.61	1.13
Average (N <sub>H</sub> =347; N <sub>AS</sub> =278)	2.79	0.90	2.47	1.01

N<sub>H</sub>: number of students of humanities; N<sub>AS</sub>: number of students of applied sciences; Maximum score = 5

*Fosca* generated the highest interest, but the difference may be at least partly due to the fact that Tarchetti's description is the longest: since the six texts have different length and come from different parts of the novels, in our study we shall only compare the concretizations of the same text.

### Characters' age and season of the year

Only Gadda's text tells us the exact age of the character: Francesco Ingravallo is 35. This is remembered by 86.5% of the subjects and is confirmed by the average age attributed to the character (35).

The other five passages do not indicate the characters' ages explicitly. *Fosca* is generically presented as youthful ('her still youthful person'), but not very young ('one could not possibly believe that she had ever been beautiful, but it was evident that her ugliness was for the most part the effect of the illness, and that, when a girl, she was perhaps pleasant'). In another part of the novel we are told that she is 25. But, on the

grounds of her first description, the readers attribute her an average age of 35. The character is very ill and illness is often associated with old age: in a few cases this association overshadows the text's explicit information, so much that 12 readers (11.5%) think that Fosca is older than 50. On the whole, the concretizations of Fosca's age are very divergent: from 18 to 55. Differences of this type produce very different expectations, that have strong consequences when, in order to reconstruct the world presented in the text, the readers have to choose relevant information in their world knowledge.

Also Angiolina's age is not explicitly stated. The text, however, contains several indications of health, strength and beauty, that are usually associated with youth: 'a tall, healthy blonde, with big blue eyes and a supple, graceful body, an expressive face and transparent skin glowing with health'. The readers think that she is between 17 and 37 (average: 24). The divergence is smaller than the one found for Fosca, but it is still remarkable.

Moravia's passage tells us very little about Carla. However her apparel ('a brown woolen frock with a skirt so short') and her bearing ('she moved clumsily and uncertainly forward') are normally associated with youth. According to our readers, her age is between 15 and 40 years (42.1% between 15 and 20; 31.6% between 30 and 40; average: 25). Also these ages lead to different concretizations.

Manzoni's Lucia is a young woman on the day of her marriage. Our readers attribute her an average age of 22 years, ranging from 16 to 30.

The age of Cris is not indicated in the passage taken from Vassalli's novel: Cris asks to be 'ten years younger' than an age we are not told. However his apparel may look youngish ('summer shirt and jeans or denims'). According to our subjects, he is between 19 and 60 (33.3% between 19 and 30; 50% between 40 and 60; average 37).

An ANOVA was carried out on the age attributed to each character (with the exception of Gadda's text, that indicated the character's age explicitly) with two factors between subjects: the gender of the readers and the type of undergraduate studies (humanities vs. applied sciences). Main effects and interaction between factors resulted to be not significant. Therefore table 3 shows the average characters' age in each text, without taking into account the factors gender and type of Faculty.

Table 3. Characters' age\*.

Text	Min	Max	M	SD
Manzoni (N=102)	16	30	21.75	3.43
Tarchetti (N=99)	18	55	34.56	8.40
Svevo (N=101)	17	37	24.26	4.34
Moravia (N=95)	15	40	24.61	6.55
Gadda (N=96)	35	35	35.00	0.00
Vassalli (N=108)	19	60	37.35	9.36
All texts (N=601)	15	60	29.65	8.82

\* 24 outliers were excluded

With the exception of Vassalli's text, the passages used do not contain explicit information about the season of the year. Also in this case we find different concretizations. Svevo's description was set in spring by 47.1% of the subjects, in summer by 25% and in autumn by 17.3%, while no respondent chose winter and 10.6% did not provide any answer. As far as Moravia's passage is concerned, 29.5% of readers hypothesized that the season was spring, 36.8% suggested autumn and 18.9% winter (only 3.2% said 'summer' and 11.6% said they did not know). In response to Gadda's passage, we have 16.2% spring, 27% summer and 18% autumn (2.7% winter and 36% 'I do not know').

The concretization of the season may be related to the perception of the character. It has important consequences on the type of material the reader activates in his/her memory in order to reconstruct the situation presented in the text, since different seasons entail many differences, like different clothing, hours of daylight and types of possible actions.

A Chi-square test showed no significant interaction between the season proposed by the readers and their gender or type of university education.

## DISCUSSION

The choice of which parts of the body are described and which are omitted depends on the narrator's priorities: when we read the description of a character, we receive information on the character's body and - at the same time - on the narrator's priorities. When a part of the body is not described, it may be concretized differently by different readers.

The introduction of a character may be evaluative rather than descriptive. In *Fosca* we find adjectives such as: '*brutta*' (ugly), '*regolari*' (regular), '*eccessiva*' (excessive), '*inconcepibile*' (inconceivable), '*spaventosa*' (frightening), '*bella*' (pretty), '*giusta*' (harmonious). The meaning of such adjectives depends on the narrator's criteria: in order to understand them, we need to know his/her mentality. When we do not have this information, the adjectives remain indeterminate and allow the readers to concretize them in a way that fits their expectations or their desires.

Our readers' answers show differences in the readers' concretizations. In the course of his act of reading, the reader activates, in his memory, material to be used in his concretization: in this way, he introduces new material. At the same time, his working memory is very selective: it often removes information that is considered irrelevant. If the reader is questioned later about removed information, he may be unable to recover it in full and may be forced to draw inferences that may lead to results that are different from the text's surface.

Women were more interested in the texts read than men and students of humanities were more interested than students of applied sciences. Characters' age and season of the year were concretized differently, but this was not related to the subjects' gender or university education.

## APPENDIX

### Texts used.

Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (1840)

Lucia usciva in quel momento tutta atillata dalle mani della madre. Le amiche si rubavano la sposa, e le facevan forza perché si lasciasse vedere; e lei s'andava schermendo, con quella modestia un po' guerriera delle contadine, facendosi scudo alla faccia col gomito, chinandola sul busto, e aggrottando i lunghi e neri sopraccigli, mentre però la bocca s'apriva al sorriso. I neri e giovanili capelli, spartiti sopra la fronte, con una bianca e sottile dirizzatura, si ravvolgevan, dietro il capo, in cerchi molteplici di trecce, trapassate da lunghi spilli d'argento, che si dividevano all'intorno, quasi a guisa de' raggi d'un'aureola, come ancora usano le contadine nel Milanese. Intorno al collo aveva un vezzo di granati alternati con bottoni d'oro a filigrana: portava un bel busto di broccato a fiori, con le maniche separate e allacciate da bei nastri: una corta gonnella di filaticcio di seta, a pieghe fitte e minute, due calze vermiglie, due pianelle, di seta anch'esse, a ricami. Oltre a questo, ch'era l'ornamento particolare del giorno delle nozze, Lucia aveva quello quotidiano d'una modesta bellezza, rilevata allora e accresciuta dalle varie affezioni che le si dipingevan sul viso: una gioia temperata da un turbamento leggero, quel placido accoramento che si mostra di quand'in quando sul volto delle spose, e, senza scompor la bellezza, le dà un carattere particolare.<sup>1</sup>

Tarchetti, *Fosca* (1869)

Né tanto era brutta per difetti di natura, per disarmonia di fattezze, - ché anzi erano in parte regolari, - quanto per una magrezza eccessiva, direi quasi inconcepibile a chi non la vide; per la rovina che il dolore fisico e le malattie avevano prodotto nella sua persona ancora così giovine. Un lieve sforzo d'immaginazione poteva lasciarne travedere lo scheletro, gli zigomi e le ossa delle tempie avevano una sporgenza spaventosa, l'esiguità del suo collo formava un contrasto vivissimo colla grossezza della sua testa, di cui un ricco volume di capelli neri, folti, lunghissimi, quali non vidi mai in altra donna, aumentava ancora la sproporzione. Tutta la sua vita era ne' suoi occhi che erano nerissimi, grandi, velati - occhi d'una beltà sorprendente. Non era possibile credere che ella avesse mai potuto essere stata bella, ma era evidente che la sua bruttezza era per la massima parte effetto della malattia, e che, giovinetta, aveva potuto forse esser piaciuta. La sua persona era alta e giusta; v'era ancora qualche cosa di quella pieghevolezza, di quella grazia, di quella flessibilità che hanno le donne di sentimento e di nascita distinta; i suoi modi erano così naturalmente dolci, così spontaneamente cortesi che parevano attinti dalla natura più che dall'educazione: vestiva con la massima eleganza, e veduta un poco da lontano, poteva trarre ancora in inganno. Tutta la sua orribilità era nel suo viso.<sup>2</sup>

Svevo, *Senilità* (1898)

Angiolina, una bionda dagli occhi azzurri grandi, alta e forte, ma snella e flessuosa, il volto illuminato dalla vita, un color giallo di ambra soffuso di rosa da una bella salute camminava accanto a lui, la testa china da un lato come piegata dal peso del tanto oro

che la fasciava, guardando il suolo ch'ella ad ogni passo toccava con l'elegante ombrellino come se avesse voluto farne scaturire un commento alle parole che udiva.<sup>3</sup>

Moravia, *Gli indifferenti* (1929)

Entrò Carla; aveva indossato un vestitino di lanetta marrone con la gonna così corta, che bastò quel movimento di chiudere l'uscio per fargliela salire di un buon palmo sopra le pieghe lente che le facevano le calze intorno alle gambe; ma ella non se ne accorse e si avanzò con precauzione guardando misteriosamente davanti a sé, dinoccolata e malsicura.<sup>4</sup>

Gadda, *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957)

Tutti oramai lo chiamavano don Ciccio. Era il dottor Francesco Ingravallo comandato alla mobile: uno dei più giovani e, non si sa perché, invidiati funzionari della sezione investigativa: ubiquo ai casi, onnipresente su gli affari tenebrosi. Di statura media, piuttosto rotondo della persona, o forse un po' tozzo, di capelli neri e folti e cresputi che gli venivan fuori dalla metà della fronte quasi a riparargli i due bernoccoli metafisici dal bel sole d'Italia, aveva un'aria un po' assonnata, un'andatura greve e dinoccolata, un fare un po' tonto come di persona che combatte con una laboriosa digestione: vestito come il magro onorario statale gli permetteva di vestirsi, e con una o due macchioline d'olio sul bavero, quasi impercettibili però, quasi un ricordo della collina molisana. Una certa praticaccia del mondo, del nostro mondo detto 'latino', benché giovine (trentacinquenne), doveva di certo avercela: una certa conoscenza degli uomini: e anche delle donne.<sup>5</sup>

Vassalli, *Abitare il vento* (1980)

Via i baffi. Via una decina d'anni. Via anche qualche centimetro: la statura esatta come risulta dai dati segnaletici è un metro e settantacinque. Una schiarita ai capelli che devono tendere al biondo. La pelle chiara va bene. In faccia un'ombra di lentiggini trascorse, così. Camiciola estiva e jeans o comunque pantaloni di tela. Società, ambienti eccetera: riproduzione in scala uno a uno, senza scenografie e senza trucchi. Il mondo visto dalla finestra insomma. O dall'altezza di un metro e settantacinque centimetri guardando dritto davanti.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At that very moment Lucia's mother had finished dressing her in all her finery, and she came out to her friends. Each of them wanted Lucia all to herself; they tried to force her to let them see her properly; and she was warding them off with all the somewhat brusque modesty of a peasant girl, shielding her face with one arm, or ducking it down against her bosom. The long dark line of her eyebrows was gathered in a frown, but her lips opened in a smile at the same time. Her dark young hair was divided in front by the narrow white line of her parting; at the back of her head it was twisted up into a series of concentric rings, secured by long silver pins arranged in a pattern like the rays of a halo - a fashion still followed by peasant girls in the territory of Milan. She wore a necklace of alternate garnets and filigree gold beads; a smart bodice of flowered brocade, and sleeves laced with coloured ribbons; a shirt skirt of rough silk with many small, fine pleats; scarlet stockings; and embroidered slippers, also of silk. But besides the special ornaments that she had put on for her wedding morning, Lucia had one which she wore every day - a modest beauty, which was thrown into relief and enhanced by the various emotions which appeared in her face - a great happiness, qualified by a faint air of confusion, and that calm melancholy which appears

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from time to time on the face of a bride, not detracting from her beauty, but giving it a special character [transl. by Bruce Penman].

<sup>2</sup> Nor did her ugliness stem so much from some natural defect, a disharmony among her features (which in fact were somewhat symmetrical), as from an excessive thinness which I would almost call inconceivable to anyone who had not seen her - it was the ruin that physical pain and illness inflicted on her still youthful person. A slight effort of imagination would permit a glimpse of her skeleton. Her cheekbones and temples protruded fearfully, and her slender neck formed the most striking contrast with the bulk of her head, whose rich mass of hair, black, thick, longer than I had ever seen on a woman, further augmented the disproportion. All her life was concentrated in her eyes, which were jet black, large, veiled - eyes of a surprising beauty. One could not possibly believe that she had ever been beautiful, but it was evident that her ugliness was for the most part the effect of the illness, and that, when a girl, she was perhaps pleasant. She was tall and stood erect. She also displayed some of the pliancy, grace, flexibility that distinguishes women of sentiment and gentle birth; her manners were so naturally sweet, so spontaneously courteous that they seemed to be drawn more from nature than from education. She dressed with a great deal of elegance, and seen from a distance, she might even deceive. All of her horror was in her face [transl. by Lawrence Venuti].

<sup>3</sup> Angiolina walked beside him. She was a tall, healthy blonde, with big blue eyes and a supple, graceful body, an expressive face and transparent skin glowing with health. As she walked, she held her head slightly on one side, as if it were weighed down by the mass of golden hair which was braided round it, and she kept looking down at the ground which she tapped at each step with her elegant parasol, as if she hoped there might issue from it some comment on the words that had just been spoken [transl. by Beryl de Zoete].

<sup>4</sup> Carla came into the room. She was wearing a brown woolen frock with a skirt so short that the movement she made in shutting the door was enough to pull it up several inches over the slack wrinkles her stockings formed about her legs; but she was unaware of this, and advanced cautiously, peering in front of her as she moved clumsily and uncertainly forward [transl. by Angus Davidson].

<sup>5</sup> Everybody called him Don Ciccio by now. He was Officer Francesco Ingravallo, assigned to homicide; one of the youngest and, God knows why, most envied officials of the detective section: ubiquitous as the occasion required, omnipresent in all tenebrous matters. Of medium height, rather rotund as to physique, or perhaps a bit squat, with black hair, thick and curly, which sprang forth from his forehead at the halfway point, as if to shelter his two metaphysical knobs from the fine Italian sun, he had a somnolent look, a heavy, lumbering walk, a slightly dull matter, like a person fighting a laborious digestion; dressed as well as his slender government salary allowed him to dress, with one or two little stains of olive oil on his lapel, almost imperceptible however, like a souvenir of the hills of his Molise. A certain familiarity with the ways of the world, with our so-called 'Latin' world, though he was young (thirty-five), must have been his: a certain knowledge of men: and also of women [transl. by William Weaver].

<sup>6</sup> No moustache. Ten years younger. A few centimetres smaller: the exact height in the identification marks is one meter and seventy-five. Lighter hair, almost blond. Clear skin is ok. A few old freckles in my face, this way. Summer shirt and jeans or denims. Setting, ambience, etc: reproduction in scale one-to-one, without scenery and make-up. In short, the world seen from a window. Or from the height of one meter and seventy-five centimetres watching straight ahead [our translation].