People who have no connection with writing, pure readers, all those naïve readers who still have a genuine look at literature, believe that writing good consists in having a precise, ornate prose and a talent with words. Nothing could be further from the truth. What we do has no relation with that. The fiction writer today can't just write whatever he or she wants. In fact, I would say that we do precisely the opposite: we spend hours thinking of concrete, accidental circumstances that help us to say what we want to say without having to say it.

That's why writing fiction now is more difficult than ever. What we are forced to do is true alchemy.

If you write a diary, an essay, an opinion piece, you can say unambiguously what you think. Writing philosophy, in this sense, is easier because you only have to worry about the coherence of your ideas, but you can put them directly on paper. The narrator, on the contrary, cannot over-explain what is going on in the story. Nothing would be more exhausting than a narrator who takes the reader by the hand and plays him for a fool.

Once upon a time, in less educated and less literate times, the writer could afford to place himself on this plane of superiority. At the beginning of a story, in the first paragraphs of a chapter or a short story, it was common to find long explanatory introductions where the author theorised about what he was about to tell us. Digressions and soliloquies were very frequent. And even the intentions of the characters were almost always explicit, indicated and suitably adjectivised. The scenes left no place for ambiguity, the author rarely relied on the simple action of the characters to show us anything on their own, and he was usually tempted to explain everything that was happening. And, finally, as if all that were not enough, the stories usually ended with a moral, an explicit final message explaining letter by letter what was to be thought, the true meaning of the story and the moral learning.

Fortunately for literature, this is no longer the case. The reading level has allowed us to evolve and leave behind all these obvious narrative mechanisms.

On the other hand, the writer's work is more complex than ever. It may be among the most complex that human beings can do. To say without saying. To show without explaining. To make others feel things without any of them being literally written on paper, but between the lines and in the margins. Playing with the reader's mind, with his psychology, suggesting, manipulating, activating internal springs and mechanisms. Writing without writing.

How to achieve all this? It is not just a matter of aspiring to subtlety. Being more subtle is only the first step in this whole process. The transformation of fictional texts from the second half of the 20th century to the present day has been much more profound. But we have a handful of narrative tools that allow us to shift to the new paradigm: writing between the lines.

Firstly, there is what some people call synecdoche and others call situational metaphor. It is perhaps the central mechanism in our stories to tell without telling and to send to the reader a subliminal message. We place an object at the epicentre of the story, very close to the protagonist's conflict; then we load it with meaning, we gradually endow it with a sense and a symbolism in the service of what we want to convey; and finally we make everything turn around it. So we create a whole metaphorical situation. The main scene or all the scenes of the story will end up having a very calculated meaning. This is our first tool for encoding the text. The characters and circumstances gathered there fulfil the function of speaking to us of something beyond, they are a metaphor that can be extrapolated to many other similar situations. Their circumstance becomes universal, because it has been written and conceived so that any of us can feel challenged. It is a representative, transferable situation, and the prefigurative clues for the metaphor to penetrate the reader's mind have been scattered throughout the text in such a way that they are not noticed but act in a univocal direction.

Secondly, an even more advanced and comprehensive possibility is what the Argentinean writer Ricardo Piglia called the "theory of two stories". From this perspective, in each short story we tell not one but two different stories. On one side, what we write on paper, black on white, is the visible story, the one full of concrete details that serves as an excuse to tell what we really wanted to tell. However, our original idea, what we were really dying to say, remains underneath, and this is what we call the hidden story. To write with these two levels in mind —visible story and hidden story— is to realise that our work is cryptographic. Moreover, in classical literature this was not so marked, and the visible story was opening up the gaps from the beginning so that the clues of the hidden story could appear. Everything was a little more obvious and simpler: a porous visible story and a game of clues that the reader knew how to play. In the modern narrative, however, from Chejov, Salinger or Hemingway onwards, the visible story becomes thicker and barely allows the story that beats underneath to peep through. Today's literature increases the precise details of the story above and rejects the obvious clues of the story below. The result is a less obvious, more sophisticated text, where most of all the reader is left more space for interpretation. The reader now has a much more active role in the story. And those open endings characteristic of our times, which leave us full of hypotheses and questions, are the result of writing in this key: the visible story continues to be elaborated until the final point, and the blanket never leaves our feet uncovered.

And thirdly and finally, all of this can be applied in an almost fractal way to every aspect and passage of the narration. This is something I work with my writing students every day, and that' s why I liked the theme of this year's Reunion so much. Every little scene, every character, every dialogue, can and should hide more than say, suggest more than explain, it is much more interesting to work with over-understandings than with too much data, this will make conversations more interesting and natural, and will keep the reader active and involved. But, above all, if we are able to disarrange and cross all the subplots written in this way, if we weave the narrative threads in such a way that the visible ones interweave with each other and the hidden ones form an equivalent tissue underneath, we will be telling not one, not two, but many stories in each short story.

Writing between the lines is not making the reader's task impossible. Reading must remain fluid and pleasurable. Writing without saying is more about letting the real story, the essential idea we wanted to transmit, emerge on its own above the text, dimensional and rich in sensations. Just as our mind emerges from the brain being and not being at the same time the same thing.

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