Conceptualization of Cultural Competence in Narrative Fiction

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'Competence'[1] is the necessary (naïve) target for all discursive practices, because it points to the social consensus, exploited by classic pragmatism too, that empiric truth and textual trust are the result of evidence and context. Cultural rhetoric, and implicitly 'competence' in achieving and decoding such practices, is necessary for social unity. Cultural skill is implemented by means of tradition and education, to be further advanced as knowledge acquisition in political and professional environments.

'Competence' is a social fact, culturally learned through imitative action, formal education or coercion. "A political aesthetics structures and mediates the individual's relationship (and the group's) to the popular and the everyday lifeworld" (Denzin 1992: 134).The narrative literature conveys such an awareness and helps readers find common social ground for conflicting claims of whatever nature (cultural, ethnical, etc.), without any commitment to other ideology than that of the literary 'competence,' which makes political use of the cultural 'competence'. The latter formalizes the rules of social interaction through collective narrative and rhetorical procedure, acting, in popular terms, as foundation of public normativity and assessment.

What I argue for is that the functional requirements of fictional output derive the narrative proficiency, characteristic of a reader who needs to come to terms with (in)competent writing. For instance, the dissociation between perception of ideology and ideology at work in narratives is the showmanship most twentieth century narratives have already appropriated. Consequently, the narrative understanding of ideology ends up as actual rhetorical practice in the contemporary novel genre. Rhetoric patterns and subjective meanings are shaped by ideological representations of functional plot requirements that are organized in a system which reminds of 'competence' (in the sense of procedure by which agents know, represent and use

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[1] Competence, in the manner of truly universal buzzwords, such as 'reality,' 'truth,' etc., is the worn-out catchword of my thesis. I think that it fully deserves the inverted commas which should signal its status, i.e., its critical, and even, ontological flimsiness.

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information about their social reality). The fictional existence of cultural 'competence' comes down to language use, devising closed narrative meaning systems, discursively recommended as literariness by universal, basic appreciation of the story. Readers employ assumptions of rationality and cognitive structure that render communication coherent with respect to competent calculations about the functional, social attributions one might envisage for the narrative literature. Fiction defines a pragmatist cultural statement about social truth, namely, its coherence and correspondence with communal practice and, as a result, with notions of social propriety:

> there is no epistemological difference between truth about what ought to be and truth about what is, nor any metaphysical difference between facts and values, nor any methodological difference between morality and science (Rorty 1982: 163).

The verisimilitude of the plot is rule-based rhetoric action, taken in accordance with the knowledge of social practice in terms of plausibility. It involves matching previous perception of identity with the events in the story. By convention, stories are understood in formalized interpretation patterns, pertaining to empirical 'competence' and its folk terms expression. The narrative literature produces (physiological) reaction expressed in opinion, attitude, behaviour that all rationalize cultural experience and social reality. Readers understand standards of 'competence' (cultural standards, that are universal for all socialized individuals, versus literary ones that are exclusive, proper to trained receivers of fiction) as the method that allows them to decide in particular cases whether plots, formulated in the logic of the communicative tradition of the story, can be recognized as culturally produced within the requests of a generic rhetoric 'competence' meant to secure meaningfulness, or, better said, the intelligibility of all public discourses.

The plot development – of fiction and, sometimes, of interpretation (with given agenda) – is assessed in terms of its linguistic ability to express/formalize persuasive strategies. In order for the text to achieve such intelligibility, the reader has to believe that rhetoric and semantic aspects of communication are coherently linked within codified lines of reasoning (i.e., literary language). Actually, the successful aesthetical expression brackets together popular expectancies and the particular story the reader is exposed to. The constructivist and pragmatist strategies go along with materialist beliefs, in a paradoxical, narrative manner that underpins what I think is the cultural statement of the contemporary novel: use-value of truth, relativity of ideological position, social escapism, and political disengagement.

The rationality of story-telling presupposes awareness of contemporary, influential, folk 'philosophy'. Namely, of the one which states the collective construction of cultural facts – including narration and identity (agents and structures are mutually constitutive while norms determine self-perception). I mean, what criticism called the realist manner of narrative fiction, simplistically summarized as interaction of characters engaged in prescriptive behaviour (they are doing what is supposed to be done). The daily routine, best fits the empirical conviction that biological/objective limitations are here to stay. The (constructed) belief that narratives confirm social procedures and standards, which, in their turn, define objectives and functions of the self, institutions or actions, is also culturally

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perceived as literary realism. As such, fictional narratives are functionally-ordered and rule-based closed-meaning systems, conditioned to convey logically consistent versions of a 'reality' that embraces cultural and literary 'competence'. Utilitarian as it may be, this view on aesthetical narration explains in what terms literature is constitutive for the reader's identity, instituting and validating norms of sociability. These norms are essential for public communication and, probably, social cohesion. In the words of the late 20th century American symbolic interactionism, the inheritor of the pragmatist tradition, cultural practices:

> become political when the actions and emotions they express connect to the political economies of everyday life in ways which reinforce class, race, and gender stereotypes. In the aesthetic experience turned political, the individual experiences heightened feelings of moral worth, often coded in masculine-feminine, in-group, out-group terms. Such moments produce feelings of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility. Conduct is directed to the salient political stereotypes of the culture, and an exaggerated sense of self-worth is experienced (Denzin 1992: 135).

The novel genre is ideologically organized – because it still preserves a communicational, unsuspecting 'aboutness,' at least in the eye of un-professionalized readers – and openly reflects social organization. Both novel and its reference pretend to be taken as being objective, structurally crafted on some communal meanings and practices. They amount to narrative formation of identity and institutions. Fiction delineates the identity of agents (individual or collective) by codifying empirical actions and conditions into cultural verisimilitude.

The plot and the message are accidentally or intently constructed to signal the social value of the 'natural' (in fact, political) manner by which the (professional/social/aesthetical) community – of the writer, of the author, of the narrator(s), or at least the community they think to belong to – and nominal subject experience the dominant culture of their society. Such meaning is narrative (difficult to invest with consistency) due to the rhetorical layering of the story and to the necessary choice to be made between the above mentioned possible interlocutors (writer, author, narrator) when actual reading takes place.

The social construction and construal of public stories (of fictional narratives too), is crosschecked by shared norms and meanings that validate their immediate cultural meaningfulness. The narrative literature is normative and contextual cultural practice with indeterminate social consequences. The plot is built on a shared definition of suspense, on a mutual understanding of narrative development, on valued modes of report, on commonly anticipated and accepted discursiveness, all implemented by rhetorical rules which channel all other competent public communication. The fictional text conveys, with professional skill, structures of social perception and cultural knowledge as shown in staging 'reality' as everyday life. Literature is not in the least social research, yet advertises what populism identifies in terms of its conclusive results: externalization and objectification of social environment in the stereotypical public language of folk terminology. Assumptions of meaning – and their effective spell cast on normative culture – are the probable, corroborating background of particular stories which, narratologically, already fit into some formalist morphology of narrative plots.

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Consequently, the individual authorship recognizes and circulates collective mythology, to be read, for example, in the tales of the late twentieth century novel. The employment of popular standards of communication and meaning in literature is done with a view to secure cultural intelligibility and commercial success of published books, which happen to be fictional. Once the plot is circumscribed to these determiners, notions of empirical truth and textual trust constrain reading to act in accordance with the process. Putnam (1988: 22) described it as social deputation of knowledge acquisition. The mentioned process is determined by division of 'linguistic labour': my in-group carries out nine tenths, while I deal with the remaining one tenth. The translation of honesty (central to moral rationalization of interpersonal behaviour) into literary convention (confidence in the aesthetical or/and cultural purposefulness of aesthetical writing/reading) is administered in rhetorical procedures, specifying states of dis/belief which determine social self/perception. The cultural narrative of identity is thus personal investigation (10%) of institutionalized representations of social reality (90%): the interpretive proficiency in decoding public narratives (that deposit community's historically constructed knowledge) results in competently performing functional distinctiveness. The meaning is inherent to the procedure which, once more, positions literature within such rhetoric: "The division of linguistic labour rests upon and presupposes the division of nonlinguistic labour" (Putnam 1973: 705).

The narrative fiction is the (aesthetical) version of culturally formalized social knowledge and designates values, practices and prescriptions that all link readers with their customary identity. Literature is institutional context, or, at least is informative of it. Namely, the plot and the message are culturally validated and constituted by notions of social duties and responsibilities, staging public action and individual existence as part of plausibility and propriety. Fictional texts are made out of the narrative replication of perceived attitude and behaviour in, or with regard to society. The focus of attention, caused by the junction of narrating, respectively, commentating functions of the text, conveys anticipated discursive conditioning of the reader and authorial position, which both are indexes of wanted or incidental endorsement/conversion of specific behaviour and value.

The story line rehearses behavioural responses and social skills, establishing reports through which attribution of meaning to plot ('real') circumstances is realized. Claiming its differentiation in terms of language and communication, texts that are openly recommended as aesthetical intensify awareness of the self and of the 'reality'. Such credentials motivate and elicit intellection and sensorial appraisal, whenever the anecdote engages in similar practices. As a result, narratives are psychoanalytical means to gain control or insight over individual insertion in social reality.

Plot determiners reframe experience in associations of story and discourse with empirical sequence and causality. I presume that fictional narratives rhetorically play on gullible wishful thinking which re-enacts states of physical and psychological comfort, brought about by the representation of successfully achieved goals and well-being. They are all sociologically entrenched in the convention of the happy-end. The above mentioned view means that fictional texts may structure self-perception in social environment, yet they do not determine interpersonal behaviour.

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Anyway, conceptions of truth and trust, probably shared by the public and the narrator, authenticate interpretation of fiction and 'reality' in the metafictional discourse of contemporary novels, to the extent to which, such expository communication of the author accounts for acknowledged social generation of meaning, incidentally employed in reading. This opinion of cultural 'competence' is constitutive for the community in which the writer sets up his/her story and for the community the writer targets as a reading public. Historic narrative texts cannot be fully understood in the absence of the social practices out of which the writer borrowed his/her contextualizing rhetoric. The narrative literature negotiates social action and forms cultural meaning, much in the manner of language mannerisms which are taken for granted by members of the same community and, concomitantly, brand them in the eyes of other groups. For example, the contemporary novel is ideological means to advance visions of political and social equality, whenever the plot, characters and message achieve the lay reader's conviction in the candidness of the story, which dramatizes perception of a post-capitalist social reality. On the other hand, if professional readers approach culturalist investigation of fictional rhetoric, they are ultimately engaged in the same ideological effort to either confirm or oppose their current social reality. There is empirical consensus on the existence of 'competence' in the reading process (for instance, in the aesthetical fiction as validating procedure of the plot). 'Competence' is displayed and accredited by readers each time they pass judgement on books.

The debate on the notion of 'competence' can be reduced to a Marxist struggle, between what is thought to be commonsensical evidence and relativist beliefs. The latter is somewhat favoured because of a polite dismissal of the opportunity to expose cultural, or, bluntly said, educational inequalities among readers – which correspond to our hierarchical society – a condition politically defused in an allegedly classless, already revolutionized, ideology of public communication.

The ideology of a communicative tradition, commonly required from the novel genre in folk terms, offers normative arguments for why a cultural standard of rhetorical plausibility should be met by particular texts, recommended as novels. Such concerns frame the plot and all readers are aware of them when addressing fiction. The preconceived expectations on the part of the 'common reader' is usually targeted by the writer in order to contextualize and, thus, authenticate his/her production. They (the normative arguments) are particularly present in the opening of stories which need to position the thematic focus and its rhetorical means of bringing about anticipated response.

For example, my recognition of a realist mode, generally, employed in contemporary fiction – with the result of highlighting a pragmatist and constructivist ideology thriving in the materialist manner of authorial discourse – is explained with respect to utopian identification of the reader's class:

> realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen. To achieve such effects, the novelists we identify as realists may or may not be selective in subject matter […] but they must render their materials in ways that make them seem to their readers the very stuff of ordinary experience (Abrams 1999: 269−261).

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Conventionally enough, the notion of the naïve reader is sufficient (even if unnecessary) for devising the understanding of narrative proficiency, as delivered by the construal of cultural meaning in fictional contexts. Furthermore, rhetoric 'competence' in projecting instant textual meaningfulness is still thought to be a matter of popular perception and cognition, executed in two-dimensional (timeplace) formats of representation. The analogical translation of significance between 'reality' and texts seems to be, in fact, universal access to a public, collective narrative sense of the environment, which allows social possession of denotation. Although there may not be retraceable literary-empirical correspondence behind every plot, there is public recognition of mutually corroborated grounding in reasoning and persuasion. The most direct form of cultural 'competence' is distinguishable in explanatory narratives that decode social reality and, implicitly, invest the narrator with assimilation and accommodation abilities as far as conflicting needs and interests are concerned.

Cultural 'competence,' as presented by narratives, is a term used for a process of discrimination with predictable results, meant to rationalize self-interested choice and survival instinct and, somehow, to establish equivalence between reasoning and persuasion. The conflation of the two is cultural practice and brings about a realization of 'competence' as structural control over public communication, aimed at maintaining literary convention and commonsensical social perception. The widespread use of the term proves its functionality in revealing shared beliefs and ideas, which turn out to be reason enough for considering the practicality of its employment.

The word 'competence' pursues systematic ideological meaning and connotes rhetorical action plus political intent. Although analysis procedure, contextual disciplines and particular goals may differ, the concept of 'competence' reinforces specific cultural expectations, mainly circumscribed to logical and rhetorical manipulation of discourse. My belief is that 'competence' can be regarded as, and is being used as, the legitimizing device in all discursive practices. The recourse to 'competence' is frequent, calculated and effective, in fact showing how authority is attained by means of claiming or displaying knowledge of language and of its epistemological implications.

'Competence' gives plenty of leverage in order to understand the socio-cultural embeddedness of language use and political ends, grossly summarized in taxonomic plots by narrative fiction. Individual stories convey such concerns in degrees which vary according to class and culture of the narrator, respectively, of the target public. Acts, beliefs and behaviours involve the acquisition of a story line and thematic topic, not the other way around. I.e., the fictional text is to competently transmit the meaning of morphologically classified tales that readers are usually exposed to.

The literary effects of mentioning specific acts, beliefs and behaviours boast validating functions in cultural terms, because readers are already empirically accustomed to them. Implicitly, the aesthetical is normalized and rendered less artistically significant and more politically relevant. Cultural 'competence' states that society is defined by distinct rules of behaviour and narrative contextualization of any and all topics possible. This demands basic representational skills in their

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ideological mediation. Up-to-standard narrative modes of report demonstrate that ordinariness (or, for that matter, marvelousness) is a question of how biased normative values and customary prescriptions become. This is a process which is said to conceptualize empirical observation, being realistically acknowledged as such for its rhetoric utility.

Relativist views are alien to competence-based assessment because of its perception of value as fixed and universal, a perception that allows the notion of empirical truth to be reliably translated into that of textual truthfulness. The cultural and the literary 'competence' are historically and politically contingent, that is, they are constructed in relation with the responses of particular communities, whose social notions of 'competence' are produced within the narrative logic of the same historical and political contexts. Anyway, such hierarchies of social dominance and cultural control (transmogrified in linguistic persuasion) are constructed when stating existence of gender, class, status, etc., and when decoding their constant political negotiation in public narratives, characteristic of structured communities ('structured' stands for easily recognizable shared standards of behaviour and sets of values). Interestingly, evaluation of 'competence' may very well be taken for granted, because 'competence' is sometimes perceived as not necessarily entailing the speaker's opinion.

'Competence' is exploited/abused in order to coherently legitimize narrative cognition and to socially celebrate coherent (objectivist, scientific) communication, which makes it entirely consistent with constructivism as process and action. Once more, the use of the notion in narrative fiction is a way of reaffirming values and beliefs that are shown to shape cultural construction of literature and the way characters or communities think, act and perceive the social world. The strategic purpose is to promote the identity of the one producing authorial discourse and his/her sense of belonging to a community.

'Competence' is constructed through transactions that are perceived as particular to ideological rhetoric: the language of 'competence' is something agents employ, rather than analyse in terms of nature and functionality. Yet, the notion is founded on assumptions of power, domination and cultural construction of social reality, acting as exertion of control through expressive language and forcing narrative contextualization on empirical circumstances.

'Competence' is associated with power and worth in folk psychology and readers are institutionally trained to adhere to such definition. The acceptance of a popular notion of the term stands for producing or maintaining, if not just displaying, the cultural language which endorses conventionalized social construction of reality, in accordance with historic exploitation, exclusion, violence, etc., alongside equality, inclusion, harmony, etc. Taking sides in respect of what to focus on is in the very logic of public communication. Yet, everything seems to boil down to know-how: in what way to 'see,' and most importantly, how to convey your visual choice. The manner (i.e. knowledge) is ascribed meaning because it ultimately states implementation and distribution of power relations. This essentialist understanding of 'competence' (the concept would be intrinsically hierarchical, rationalist, volitional) may be 'scientifically' vulnerable. However, it carries such easily recognisable meaning when mentioned or alluded to in public

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communication. On the other hand, this logic of 'competence' development is both stable and unchangeable, description which amounts to a deterministic view, affirming the universality of the notion.

Similar conceptualization of 'competence' is thereby made more complex because it is no longer seen as distinctive characteristic or general standard, but as educated attribution of excellence or sophistication. 'Competence' is meant to function culturally in the discriminative terms which commonly grade social reality. The appropriation of this function is neither incidental nor private. More likely, it is collective routine serving the ideological purpose to send and receive cultural meaning within social hierarchies. The narrative construal of 'competence' is identity-building procedure as well as structure. They are both present in the nature of cultural conceptualization that is ideologically charged more than ever, because of constructivist suspicion (circumscribed to idealist philosophical tradition which denies existence of reality independent from the mind) and determinist consciousness (of empirically-proven, materialist extraction).

'Competence' is political property of readers and, generally, of socialized agents, who settle disputes and signal their status by publicly communicating mastery of particular interpretations of it. Agents read texts and social reality according to the logic of a system of signs, corresponding to culturally externalized rules that legitimize them to advance convenient closure of contending 'reality' versions.

The ability to respond to and to circulate popular myths, in a rhetorically qualified manner, which suggests morally advantageous rationalization of individual/collective welfare pursuit, is social routine and cultural politics promoted by public and fictional narratives. The organized structure of rhetoric 'competence' is representative of cultural and political skills that are widely considered indexes of social success and standing. 'Competence' is a means of enforcing prescriptive culture (with its pervasive use – morality) in the natural-causal world, by confiscating time and resources, unallocated to biological survival, with a public agenda regarding freedom and responsibility, duty and gratification, etc. Penalizing transgression is again related to notions of 'competence,' which ideologically sanction both social authority and cultural legitimation. They are part of all educational processes, instrumental for attaining 'competence,' namely, knowledge gained by means of education. The result is judged with respect to capability to perform to a required standard – most of the times, socially imposed. 'Competence' develops patterns of narrative logic, specifically designed for fiction, which is perceived as effectively conveying social meaning in 'unpoliticised' language that alleges disengagement from what is popularly perceived as ideological concerns, such as oppression or exploitation, circumstantially acknowledged in the otherwise escapist practice of reading or writing literature.

The narrative fiction exemplifies that in order to express and define social respectability (and to demonstrate control over its collective representation) claims of fictitious appropriateness (only rhetorically documented) are effective and culturally influential. The symbolic identity of 'competence' is coupled with narrative exposition, best typified by literary plots, which are shortened versions of grand cultural narratives and their simultaneous dominant modes in particular

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historic translations (for example, the validating relation between late twentieth century Western popular culture and the novel genre).

Irrespective of rhetorical assertion of competency (which is practical and proves the competent ideological positioning of the interlocutor), actual 'competence' is highly functional in literary (and public) communication. It facilitates the immediacy of meaning by increasing the sense of adequacy of the reader; it signals the intention to remain within boundaries of respectability or, at least, reasonable expectations (truly revolutionary attempts on society or language are impractical because communities do not relate to experimental rhetoric); it provides cultural and social benefits to those in the position to use it or claim this condition; it shows the narrative 'mechanics' of producing symbolic value. The cultural 'competence' is manifest in collectively recognized narratives of identity, determined by its literary counterpart. Namely, the literary 'competence' devises fictional strategies needed to render coherent the social meaning of identity.

'Competence' claims (rhetorically produced) are a social construction with specific political consequences: power and status become legitimate and bestow authority on those who assume such institutionalized positions. Specialized (efficient in the eye of the public) addresses in public context (narrative fiction qualifies as such) are socio-cultural markers, maintaining and promoting the ideology of 'competence' by means of a communication pattern, irrespective of the actual knowledge of rhetorical proficiency. The discursive confirmation of alleged or factual knowledge is a way of ascribing power to producers and decoders of such messages, with the result of political empowerment: conclusively, 'competence' is a means to emancipate.

Essentialist and structuralist explanatory accounts of social reality perfectly go along with 'competence' and its narrative conceptualization, because they entail an object of study both static and unchangeable. Essentialist approaches discuss it from the perspective of expert agents, while structuralist ones define it by describing makeup and procedure of 'competence'. On the other hand, my favourite social constructivist conceptualization, competently arranged in and by public narrative's standards, focuses, in a pragmatist manner, on how rhetoric 'competence' may be regarded as a negotiation of symbolic identity between agents and cultural narratives of 'competence,' socially construed and situated. The strategic effects of 'competence,' as advertised by public communication, are, firstly, concerned with the social identity of agents (characters) and, secondly, with the narrative cultural pattern of 'competence,' metafictionally present in the literary and the literal stories which largely determine social reality.

Nevertheless, what I find particularly informative, in my previous narrative of 'competence,' is that the representational transactions between the identities of the object of perception (competence) and of the agents performing this perception are entirely symbolic and psychoanalytical. Thus they are sociologically narrative and anthropologically literary. The constructivist interaction between phenomenon and agent hopes to explain a comprehensive narrative 'reality' and also why 'competence' is a desired mode of social instantiation. The literary 'competence' is visible in the rhetorical manner which packages this mode of politically situating social relations, as part and parcel of its cultural correspondent. The effects and

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consequences of ‘competence’ and claims of ‘competence’ are not given: they surface narratively in accordance with, say, essentialist, structuralist, or constructivist vocabulary and faith. They are relative, yet the narrative pattern of ‘competence’ seems to be universal (a statement which, once more, rationalizes the choice to discuss rhetorical ‘competence’ as representative of any other skill).

The conceptualization of ‘competence’ contends a decisive role for culture in devising an adequate concept of the narrative (and implicitly of perception and knowledge). This may very well lead to a cultural narratology of communal reality whenever the literary text signals its involvement with (popular) culture in order to convey social meaning.

Of course, my treatment of the relation between ‘competence’ and fictional narratives is asymmetrical in that it primarily considers the question of the importance of rhetorical action for social meaning and cultural recognition. The aim of narrative fiction is to develop and confirm a concept of ‘reality’ that surfaces from the rhetorical ‘competence’ of socially situated language-use and cultural institution. My premise is that the narrative fiction is politically committed collective practice, only packaged (for escapist ideological reasons) as aesthetical knowledge and tradition, allegedly produced by individual creators, while, in fact, it is social campaigning. The essential historicity of narrative literature is verified by the contextual understanding of stories, relative to the extent to which interpretation seems to reveal primarily the reader’s situated perception rather than universality of meaning.

The cultural communication is the inconstant result of a prevailing cultural phenomenon which displays political consistence – ‘competence’. Anyway, beyond the assessment of successful meaning transmission, as a means to establish ‘competence,’ a specific form of it results from basing its interpretation on didactic texts, which scientifically classify expertness of persuasive acts. Implicitly, communicational competence is subject matter for poetics and rhetoric, yet the traditional disregard of such structural investigation for cultural (even ideological) context is blatant. Therefore, similar opinions that construct ‘competence’ on academic tenets may very well result in a distorted, pedagogical construal of communication, which above all dwells on its use-value and less on self-conceptualization of expressive practice.

The competent social and aesthetical communication primarily takes place among members of the same community. In short, culture should provide the meaning for all public narratives that formalize awareness of social reality. This view entails the conviction that competent understanding of the above mentioned relation should itself be practiced in essentialist/structuralist, self-consistent manner. This manner rescues ‘competence’ synopsis from the perils of critical relativism (as in constructivist, pragmatist, or loosely postmodernist theories). Cultural ‘competence’ is part of critical common sense and, implicitly, a rhetoric site of ideology in which partisan narratives of social reality are unravelled.

The practicality of ‘competence’ in narrative context is neither cultural knowledge nor social skills, yet it approximates socialization. The rhetoric of fiction is not just descriptive but also normative, and, thus, it conveys cultural meaning and promotes social interaction. Cultural and literary competencies are a pragmatic

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argument for using narratives to understand social reality: reasoning with explicit denotation and implicit connotation forms the basis for understanding relations between representation and belief. As a result, the narrative fiction is 'natural' when it expresses meanings that can be rhetorically exploited and suggests data from past in order to validate the plot.

The cultural 'competence' confirms conventional narrative coherence as the means to publicly state the past and the future social inquiry, that is, it validates reductionist literary language which ideologically communicates the present of historically determined audiences. The literary 'competence' is rhetorically standardizing methodological features, shared with its social counterpart which is over-coded and subsumed by rhetorical messages. The narrative order and hierarchies of values and norms organize the perception of cultural identity socially, while inventing and renewing the ideological sense of belonging to your community, by means of cognitive and habitual practices.

The public communication is social meaning, i.e. a function of linguistic systems which argues that significance is constructed by responsive agents. They amount to a network of rules and oppositions whose mastery guarantees expository logic and cultural plausibility to narratives. The social expectation of 'competence' does not simply reflect the object of scrutiny: it engenders states of dis/belief with respect to cultural representation.

The cultural 'competence' also stereotypically limits communicational options and determines social validation of (literary) texts when rhetorically appealing to concepts of rational practicality. However, these concepts are neither actually agreed upon nor at least publicly specified, so that they belong to a normative language that ideologically aspires to becoming commonsensical. They typically vilify any other communicational option (that may suggest any sort of fuzziness similar to human intelligence) if by any chance such options were to be really considered seriously. The rhetoric 'competence' (generally narrative and specifically literary) is a collective norm, a generalised cultural image uncontroversial within the society. It is unifying ideology meant to identify and accomplish consensual views on social reality as a result of communal interaction with the already mentioned actuality.

In a pragmatist manner, the narrative of 'competence' in fictional discourse is directly involved in articulating collective interests and perceptions, as on-going social practice packaged by the ideology of public communication. The result is that competent narrators (readers also) are facilitators of social stability and, sometimes, of social change, which makes 'competence' general cultural policy and, consequently, specific social course of interaction. In social communication (for instance, in novels) rhetoric 'competence' envisages realist narratives of corroborative action, consistency, abstractive exposition and, surprisingly – honesty.

Pragmatically, such policy is positive when considering that even knowledgeable readers do not always distinguish between facts and values. Accordingly, social practice and public communication are complementary and conducive to normative cultural narratives (political, moral, aesthetical, etc.). The effects of cultural 'competence' on narrative literature are in the nature of its rhetorical counterpart. What I mean is that literary 'competence,' anticipates, under

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a political name, that of propaganda, social interaction and argues for premeditated ways to deal with actual circumstances. 'Competence' is empirically true and textually trustworthy because it legitimizes conceptualizations based on the honest, circumstantial ability of asking questions, respectively giving answers, in the appropriate cultural, social or literary context. Actually, culturally competent agents are able to show the relations between universal principles of discourse and their historical, social or literary forms. Practically, the narrative 'competence' is the metaphysical principle which proves the possibility of mutual understanding between communities, without relying on other metaphysics besides that of mundane rhetoric skills.

Conclusively, narrative conceptualization of competence is acceptable because of its problem-solving capabilities and because it provides a probable structural and functional pattern of public communication. 'Competence' is congenial to common sense 'philosophy' and implicit in social action. Social ideas and cultural images produce conceptual convergence, explainable as narrative conceptualization of rhetorical 'competence' which culturally guides the community towards notions of common history and social memory.

The cultural 'competence' verifies the adequacy of statements to pre-existing social conceptualization of 'reality,' which does not mean that it aims at some kind of truth, beyond that of narrative logic – i.e., textual trust (cultural 'competence' is a story itself). Its task is to produce and examine: it ends up as a test for the narrative validity of literary texts that, accordingly, are rhetorical evidence for the acceptability of social construction of 'reality'. Such process is collectively shared and, actually, conceived of in apocryphal terms, which recall of 'mythicization' of culture as, finally, both social facts and goods. 'Competence' is envisaged as methodological pattern, uniform action, logical consistency and causal consensus (Archer 1996).

'Competence' is the ideological construct which displays the constitution of popular construal of culture, its conceptualization being socially institutionalized, if only for the instrumental value of being defined by what it excludes: intellectual fuzziness and rhetorical failure, readily labelled incompetence. To some extent, both competence and incompetence match up ideology in the sense that, paradoxically, they are concomitantly pervasive and educational as rhetorical forms of cultural expression and social action: commendation or swearword, 'in/competence' communicates that the speaker and his/her public are socially in a position to form and address agreement over values and norms.

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Abstract

The paper attempts to prove that 'competence' is a social fact, culturally learned through imitative action, formal education or coercion. Literature produces reaction expressed in opinion, attitude, behaviour that all rationalize cultural experience and social reality. Fictional existence of cultural 'competence' comes down to language use, devising closed narrative meaning systems, discursively recommended as literariness by universal, basic appreciation of the story. Cultural 'competence' formalizes the rules of social interaction through collective narrative and rhetorical procedure, acting in popular terms as foundation of public normativity and assessment.

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