

2 Freeing Impersonality

The Objective Subject in Psychoanalysis and *Sense & Sensibility*

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It is a truth universally acknowledged that consistent free indirect discourse (FID) constitutes an astonishment in the history of literary form. However widely heralded this truth, much dispute encircles its meaning. We can start with a brief example from one great origin point of FID: in the middle of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, one of the protagonists learns of a grievous social complexity, sufficiently complicated as to prevent her sharing the grief with her sister and mother.

From their counsel, or their conversation, she knew she could receive no assistance, their tenderness and sorrow must add to her distress, while her self-command would neither receive encouragement from their example nor from their praise. **She was stronger alone[.]**

Although the first sentence starts with Elinor's mental action ("she knew"), the sentence moves toward assessments that exceed her self-reflection and acquire the quality of generalized evaluation of how her mental state will interact with the mental states of others. Then this general quality is grammatically enacted in the second sentence, which issues a decisive assessment with no mental attribution: who is saying Elinor is stronger alone? Herself? The narrator? Both? Everyone who considers the situation? Where does this social shrewdness come from? FID, the representation of unattributed mental action, foments this set of questions.

Critics of many persuasions, ranging from feminist to narratological to historicist to Marxist, consider FID a technique for the relay of thoughts and feelings that results in unprecedented intensification of interiority. Connected thereby to the development of protocols for characterization alongside the elaboration of the modern individual, FID appears central to the rendering of the psychological subject and to the empathogenic function of literature; it is indeed often umbrellaed under "psycho-narration" (Cohn, 11). Quite opposed to all this, many other critics, including especially prominent ones like D.A. Miller, Deirdre Lynch, Franco Moretti, and Mark Seltzer, propose that FID is better understood as a cunning *depersonalization*, an exteriorization of

perspective that actuates ideology, the market, and surveillance. Omniscience as insidious discipline tracks the subject, policing her consciousness and unconscious in literature in the same fashion as Michel Foucault argues psychoanalysis does in discourse. Thus a genuine divergence: the first pole celebrates the personalizing depth psychology effect, while the second pole censures the depersonalizing panopticon.

In the following pages, I endeavor to supersede this divergence by valorizing the impersonal. I make this case through resonating FID with psychoanalytic theory, through revisiting *Sense and Sensibility*, and through gesturing toward some socio-political benefits of objectivity. Austen's is a text whose drive toward this formal innovation has demonstrably little to do with promoting depth psychology or legitimating dominant ideology, and importantly much to do with criticizing self-interestedness and proprietary selfhood, offering in its place an impersonal consciousness at once socially collective and psychoanalytically astute. I argue that the formal impersonality of FID performs the objectivized mentation which psychoanalysis both discovers and prescribes. FID's literary activation of subjectivity limns the objective subject, the social conscious, the political unconscious—all those fundamental topoi of psychoanalysis.

The divergence between readings which laud the affective sophistication of FID and those which reprove its treacherous politics hinges on a disagreement about voice, one which cuts to the quick of grammatical specification. Despite a minimal consensus that FID is lacking a tag clause, and may grammatically include “exclamations, questions, expletives, imperatives, repetitions and similar emphases, interruptions, the words yes and no, colloquialisms” (Chatman, 202), dissensus arises around how to mark when and where the mixing or obliterating of perspective begins. hilariously, critics even regularly negate each other's purportedly uncontroversial identifications of FID.¹

The empathogenic account favors the grammatical designation dual voice, while the ideological account does a different math, hearing a

1 The scholarship is consumed with proliferating alternate names for the phenomenon. “Free indirect” is the oldest name, credited to the Swiss linguist (and de Saussure colleague) Charles Bally in 1912. In the German tradition in the 20s “*erlebte Rede*” (experienced speech) comes in to currency, and then Volosinov proposed “quasi-direct discourse.” Then Cohn proposes the umbrella of psychonarration, Bal counters with focalization. Nomenclature aside, critics often think that their predecessors simply do not understand what free indirect looks like on the page. Monika Fludernik, for example, calls out Henry Louis Gates for erroneous identification of FID and consequent misdefinition (*The Fictions of Languages*, 82); Ann Banfield challenges Marguerite Lips's misidentifications (*Unspeakable*, 240). The origins are also disputed, since for most critics FID is inextricably tied to the rise of the novel, but some claim medieval origins. Similar debates exist over whether FID is constitutively written language, and therefore “unspeakable” (to use Ann Banfield's term) while others claim colloquial examples exist and even prefigure the written.

third voice. Dual voice layers character and narrator to access interiority; first person content, third person form.² This layering affirms depth psychology by submersing the narrative in the character's mental actions, melding the *recit* (the narrative discourse) and the *histoire* (the events relayed). Through this enhanced focalization technology, the novel can "get inside a character's head" and propagate psychological ascriptions of subjectivity: a person is her innermost thoughts and desires which she cannot express to herself, let alone to another person; FID awards expression to this private property. The dual expression has bidirectional affective purchase: the double perspective creates greater access to the character's consciousness, and in turn promotes greater readerly understanding.

The ideological camp audits not two voices, but rather the genesis of an unprecedented "*third voice*, intermediate and almost neutral... the slightly abstract, thoroughly socialized voice of the achieved social contract" (Moretti, 96). In its diffuse ubiquity, this third consciousness reportedly topologically enacts coercive social dynamics. D.A. Miller's study of "the novelistic panopticon" (32) reads in FID the workings by which "the master discourse of monologism...secures its own (authority)" (25) and enforces "normalization" (137).³ Moretti elaborates that the third voice is ideology itself speaking through the subject: "commonplaces, collective myths, signs of the social that is inside her...the composite discourse of bourgeois doxa" (99). The novel polices and disciplines through many of its features, from plots to settings, but FID ranks the most formal of such technologies. For John Bender, FID creates a "transparency" of the subject "correlative" and "parallel" to the supersurveillance of "the penitentiary" (203) and "modern forms of bureaucratic control" (211). FID thus looks impersonal because impenetrable, generic because hegemonic, and abstract because aligned with discursive tendencies of aggregation and classification.

Since the critical schism I have outlined suggests that old classic binary of the personal (FID produces interiority and promotes empathy) versus

2 Frances Ferguson writes:

free indirect style – that mode in which a narrator seems to be able to represent the thoughts and sensations of a character without the benefit of the character's overt speech...free indirect style enables us to do what we might think of as over-knowing characters.

("Now It's Personal," 526–527)

Relatedly, Jameson claims: "free indirect discourse and the feeling that the individual subject of perception and experience is an intelligible entity in its own right whose boundaries need to be respected" (*Antinomies*, 181).

3 See also Finch and Bowen referring to it as a "form par excellence of surveillance... (an) ultimately coercive narrative or social matrix" in "The Tittle-Tattle of High-bury," (3–4).

the political (FID produces the panopticon and promotes discipline), the temptation will be strong to try overcoming this opposition through mutual identity: the personal *is* the political; FID generates an innovative interior whose tax is its subjection to hegemonic governmentality. No doubt many critics would ultimately espouse such ambivalence. But I would like, in the interest of tying greater knots between the literary and the psychoanalytic, to propose something slightly different: FID instantiates in literary form the psychoanalytic theory of the subject—operating a political personality, a transindividual realm of relationality of which the subject is the precipitate.

“Who Is Speaking?”

We will note that the split as to the number of the voice and as to its social effect (empathogenesis versus hegemony) encompasses a discrepancy about FID’s source. For psychonarratology, there can be no question that FID ultimately gives us the character’s own perspective, refined and refracted. For the political paradigm, FID decidedly gives us narration’s perspective, the fictive omnipotence of omniscience. For neither school then, does attributing mentation pose a problem. Nonetheless, some quite perspicacious, if unsystematic, accounts of FID have contrastingly highlighted a crisis of attribution—a crisis whose embrace as unanswerable might go a long way toward shifting the critical impasse. Strikingly, Eric Auerbach and Roland Barthes seem to have independently arrived in their studies of FID at the same pressing question: “who is speaking?”⁴ Ann Banfield famously called FID “unspeakable sentences,” naming the gap between written language and everyday speech, but this “un” could also be accorded to the lack of a proper speaking subject, to the unlocatability of the voice. FID neither offers magical access to transparent minds nor secures invincible authority; it poses a gaping question as to the sources of language and the sources of mentation. In which case, FID invites a rendezvous with the immersive obduration of language as medium.

Auerbach reads Woolf, Barthes reads Balzac. *To the Lighthouse*: “Never did anybody look so sad. Bitter and black, half-way down, in the darkness, in the shaft which ran from the sunlight to the depths, perhaps a tear formed.” Auerbach: “Who is speaking in this paragraph? Who is expressing these doubtful, obscure suppositions?” (531). In answer, he only repeats “no one”: “there is no one near...it cannot be either of them...no one is certain of anything here” (531) and he finally lands upon the fantastic formulation “nameless spirits” (532) whose indefinite plurality creates epistemic pluralism: “not one order and one

4 Barthes and Auerbach.

interpretation, but many" (534). *Sarrasine*: "This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility." Barthes:

Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story? Is it Balzac the individual? Is it Balzac the author? It is universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite oblique space where our subject slips away.
(“Death of the Author,” 142)

For Barthes indeed, nothing less than his entire theory of “writing,” his movement “from work to text,” and the death of the author follow as consequences from the elementary questions incited by FID. In his line by line reading of the same Balzac text a few years later, Barthes points out that “modern” fiction is distinguished by the indistinctness of its voice, what he calls “the dissolve”: “who is speaking?...it is impossible to attribute an origin, a point of view, to the statement...in modern texts the voices are so treated that any referent is impossible: the discourse, or better, the language speaks: nothing more” (*S/Z*, 41). What is dissolved by the dissolve is attribution itself, and what results is a fluid whose current evinces the superagency of language to any putative non-linguistic origin. Language speaks. We do not speak language, it speaks us.

The echoing “who is speaking?” stands structurally unanswerable, fashioned of a grammar which disallows distinction between character and narrator, and implies indistinction between author and reader, everybody and nobody, private and public, introducing into literary experience, Kevin Ohi perceptively notes, “an effect of groundlessness” (91). The vertigo of this groundlessness, the reverberations of these questions of essential relations, phenomenology of consciousness, being and nothingness, eventuate neurosis as defined by Jacques Lacan: “neurosis is a question that being poses for the subject” (*Ecrits*, 168); “the structure of a neurosis is essentially a question” (*Seminar III*, 174). At once symptom and cure—insofar as hystericization is the indispensable precondition for the enunciation of the analyst’s discourse—this radical doubt of the subject’s symbolic positioning, including ideological interpellation, the alienation in the name, and what she signifies to/for the other, proliferates other questions: “what do you want? What do you want with me? Why?” Thus, the questions punctuate the objectivity of all psychic being: “desire is the desire of the Other” (*Seminar XI*, 235). The hysteric’s questions, Jacques Alain Miller elaborates, amount to “a rejection of suture, if we call suture this relationship, which enables the subject to be represented by a signifier” (J.A. Miller). FID rejects the sutured representation of a subject, through advancing this

desubjectifying mentation. It stages a confrontation with a void of subjectivity, with the stew where desires are the desires of, by, for others.

Objectivity cannot itself be dissolved into the surveillance or hegemony functions critics accord it, since objectivity demands to be fathomed dialectically, with openings to aleatory, even emancipatory, trajectories. Synthesizing mentation at a register beyond the person and before the law is an act of abstraction that contributes to social mapping. Timothy Bewes marvelously accentuates this social quality of FID, implicitly repudiating both of the poles I have laid out in favor of a more dialectical notion of the social property of language. Bewes associates FID with an opening of “possibilities...(for) authors, narrators, readers, scholars, or characters, for resisting, refusing or dissolving the conventional subject positions associated with these identities” and thus with:

problematizing, even dismantling the expressive dimension of the literary utterance as such...producing an utterance that is devoid of hierarchy, any privileging of one sense or perspective over another; an utterance in which all normative values or orienting ideologies are merely latent or ineffective.

(Bewes)

This emancipation of an intersubject from proprietary subjectivity is for Bewes an indication of the social quality of language, the historically contingent, context-dependent, tissue-of-quotations that inflects all signifying acts, which can never be reduced to purely constative communication or expression. Freeing brings in to relief the medium of language as relationality and differentiability prior to and at odds with the proprietary logics of enclosed subjectivity. As Frances Ferguson distills this repeal of ownership, “Free indirect style is the commonest of common novelistic literary property. It is not impersonal merely out of a surfeit of personality – the narrator’s and the character’s...it seems impersonal because it seems always to be returned to language itself” (“Now It’s Personal,” 528).

Such freeing of language into the common sparks other emancipations. For Bewes, individuals are liberated from regimes of interpellated subjectivity, and other subject positions, free indirect subject positions, become possible. For Rancière, who associates these freedoms less with FID than with third person narration *tout court*, the effect of literary language which “expresses not the thoughts, sentiments, and intentions of the characters, but...the impersonal and unconscious conditions of speech itself” (40; 38) is freely distributing to virtually anything the “capability of signification” (34). Impersonal conditions of speech that thereby promise surplus of meaning comprise, for Rancière, the connection between the revolutionary aesthetic practice of the novel and

the revolutionary advent of psychoanalysis. Just as anything can be the bearer of signification for the novelist, anything can be fruitfully interpreted by the analyst. Rancière's linkage draws upon an oft-feted intimacy between literature and psychoanalysis, while adding the new, more formal twist that this intimacy rests less in the psychic intrigue of a characterological personation than in an overarching hospitality toward overmuchness of meaning.

Honing this claim toward FID more precisely, we might thus say that the confabulated impersonality of FID represents and theorizes the condition of subjectivity in a manner akin to psychoanalysis: as social. The unattributable mentation of FID evokes Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic formulations of the objective subject, evinced in such concepts as fantasy, projection, the gaze, and the symbolic. Far from an expression of interiority, FID performs the exteriority, the curiously plural and ambiently social structure, of the psychoanalytic subject. Moreover, FID is a new discourse, a syntactic configuration unavailable to ordinary phenomenal experience or ordinary intersubjective relations, and as such it gives an indication or practice of the new signifying relation that the analysts's discourse aims to bring about. FID effectuates a theory of distributed consciousness which psychoanalysis also articulates: acts of mental representation are not the property of a personal individual, but the operation of a collective medium. What is "free" in FID is the mental activity itself, unowned, autonomous, expansive.

"I Do Not Mean that We Use Language. It Is Language that Uses Us. Language Employs Us"

We are now in a position to resonate this account of objective subjectivity more expressly with psychoanalysis, which offers a similar theorization both descriptively and prescriptively. The indeterminacy of who is speaking reveals how constitutively public—how socially configured and symbolically activated—mentation already is. Far from the representation of interiority, FID might be better understood as a disturbance in the order of personalization, a ripple in the attribution of speech, that makes language palpable as social medium. What appear to be intimate thoughts and desires issue in truth, that grammar illustrates, from an impersonal relational field. Objectivity instills subjectivity. The realm of the impersonal and intersubjective which FID conjures is coextensive with the register of the symbolic as defined by psychoanalysis: the autonomous field of meanings, laws, customs, and relationality within which a subject takes shape. For psychoanalysis, the subject does not express herself in language, but rather the subject is activated by and through speech. An effect of language, the subject's interiority instantiates gaps in the medium. As Alenka Zupančič puts it,

the unconscious is not a subjective distortion of the objective world, it is first and foremost an indication of a fundamental inconsistency of the objective world itself...Psychoanalysis is not here to help us come to terms with 'our' problems (in relation to society for example), or to help us cultivate the ideal of our personal treasure and singularity. It has an intrinsically social, objective, and critical dimension.

(15; 4)

The "free" of free indirect, in all its limning of the extruded zone of an objective subjectivity, a zone where consciousness thinks us, externalizes an agential force of consciousness without qualities, of subjective processing without property, of truths universally acknowledged. This "free," this freedom from banal phenomenality and ordinary ownership, this unfettered transcorporeal impersonal play, shares much topologically and ethically with the first principle of psychoanalysis, what Sigmund Freud called its "fundamental rule": free association. The analysand must make themselves "an attentive and dispassionate self-observer, merely to read off all the time the surface of his consciousness" and is especially directed not to overlook anything "disagreeable," "nonsensical," "unimportant," or "irrelevant." ("Two Encyclopedia Articles," 238). The injunction to "read" and to "self-observe" and above all to freely articulate installs a creative distance between the subject and itself, a distance which allows the unconscious to emerge into spoken language. In defining this impartial approach of free association, Freud explicitly analogizes it to objectively narrating a counterfactual scenario, a fiction of the clinic, which he conspicuously renders as reported speech. Imparting this rule requires the analyst to speak substantively at the beginning of a treatment, as a precondition of the analysand speaking substantively *as* the treatment. To call attention to this irony, Freud's written text marvelously becomes a direct quote of his regular rule:

One more thing before you start. What you tell me must differ in one respect from an ordinary conversation. Ordinarily you rightly try to keep a connecting thread running through your remarks and you exclude any intrusive ideas that may occur to you and any side-issues, so as not to wander too far from the point. But in this case you must proceed differently. You will notice that as you relate things various thoughts will occur to you which you would like to put aside on the ground of certain criticisms and objections. You will be tempted to say to yourself that this or that is irrelevant here, or is quite unimportant, or nonsensical so that there is no need to say it. You must never give in to these criticisms...So say whatever goes through your mind. Act as though, for instance, you were a traveler sitting next to

the window of a railway carriage and describing to someone inside the carriage the changing views which you see outside.

(“On Beginning the Treatment,” 134)

In this stunning passage of “On Beginning the Treatment,” Freud reports in writing the speech he regularly relays in dialogue to initiate psychoanalysis. Free association is free in the sense that FID is free—liberated from a subject, liberated from an ego and super-ego enforcer of “criticisms,” liberated from the interior confines of the mind itself and traveling instead on a railway train through the rapidly unfurling exterior landscape, liberated from normal selfhood and taking on the fabulous formal contrivance to “act as though...you were a traveler.” The analysands take up a literary posture toward their own mind to host the freedom of the unconscious—a posture that resembles greatly the freedom of FID, the making of consciousness into shared impersonal objectivity.

Sharing is the crucial dimension here: clinic design accommodates the objective and relational character of the subject. We cannot analyze ourselves, Freud often reminded us—not even trained psychoanalysts can produce a new discourse of their own desire without an interlocutor: “genuine self-analysis is impossible” (“Letter 75,” 270). The presence of an other is required; “knowledge gained objectively (like an outsider)” is the sine qua non of analysis (270). Specific trappings of the clinic invite the other’s presence: signature conventions like money payment (to dispel relationship fantasies), the analyst’s posture of passivity, and the analysand’s posture of recumbency (to dissipate relational expectations and externalize the unconscious) all convoke the other. Parallel to the fundamental rule enjoining the analysand to free association, the analyst themselves cultivates passivity and an impersonal consciousness. Freud instructs the analyst to “surrender himself to his own unconscious mental activity, in a state of evenly suspended attention...to catch the drift of the patient’s unconscious with his own unconscious” (“Two Encyclopedia Articles,” 239). Lacan refers to this drift-catching suspense as “free-floating”:

with our free-floating attention we hear what the analysand said, sometimes simply due to a kind of equivocation, in other words, a material equivalence. We realize that what he said can be understood completely differently. And it is precisely in hearing it completely differently that we allow him to perceive whence his thoughts emerge: they emerge from nothing other than the ex-sistence of language. Language ex-sists elsewhere than in what he believes his world to be.

(quoted in Fink, 37)

Clinic infrastructures like the free floating passive posture of the analyst and the free associating recumbent posture of the analysand make space

for the volume of desiring discourse. From behind the couch, the analyst repeats key signifiers, charting a spatial elsewhere or other scene of mental life, one only indirectly perceptible, of uncertain origin. And as Lacan's depiction of thoughts emerging from an other scene of language vividly suggests, this space, this externalization that the clinical situation supports, strategically repeats the external inculcation of the subject's desire via their speech. When we encounter our own language in the clinic as something other—associatively streaming, transferentially inflected, and passively punctuated—we encounter the incontestable truth that “language speaks us.” As Lacan indelibly objectivates, “I do not mean that we use language. It is language that uses us. Language employs us” (*Seminar XVII*, 66). Psychoanalysis elementalizes this objective quality of language, theorizing the universality of language (“The symbolic order from the first takes on its universal character. It isn't constituted bit by bit. As soon as the symbol arrives, there is a universe of symbols” (*Seminar II*, 29)), and theorizing the subject not as cause of language, but as its effect.

Within the structured freedom of the analytic dyad, the impropriety of speech reveals the ego to be, as Arthur Rimbaud memorably phrased it, “an other.” Freud thus formulates the ego as “borrowed forces” (“The Ego and the Id,” 25), and Lacan in turn avers that “the ego is the signifier,” arising from signifying acts: “it speaks” (*Seminar VII*, 206).⁵ Lacan makes this connection of language and the psyche the gravitational center of his return to Freud.

If you open a book of Freud, and particularly those books which are properly about the unconscious, you can be absolutely sure – it is not a probability but a certitude – to fall on a page where it is not only a question of words – naturally in a book there are always words, many printer words – but words which are the object through which one seeks for a way to handle the unconscious. Not even the meaning of the words, but words in their flesh, in their material aspect.

(“Of Structure,” 187)

The unconscious asserts itself through linguistic effects; it is a cause present only in its effects, which pertain to the extrasignifying material aspect of words. In their material texture, words exceed exclusive provenance in the subject. Speaking does not emanate from a subject; speaking always raises the question “who is speaking,” for that is “the

⁵ In *Seminar VII*, for example: “it speaks”/ca parle (206). See also in *Seminar IV* “the Es that is involved in psychoanalysis is the signifier / Le Es don't il s'agit dans l'analyse, c'est du signifiant” (49).

question of the subject. The subject cannot simply be identified with the speaker or the personal pronoun in a sentence” (“Of Structure,” 188).

The burning questions initiated by FID—who is speaking? is there an authority? where does language come from? are mental events private property?—echo the questions that psychoanalysis endeavors to pose and sometimes even to answer. Lacan after all described the position of the analysand as that of a necessary hystericization, a bringing of everything into question, especially authority and the desire of the other. And part of why psychoanalysis has an ameliorative effect is because it poses the questions of being-in-language as questions that arise and unsettle everyone—it contextualizes the individual’s suffering within the mesh of socialibility, whose medium is language. The answers psychoanalysis provisionally offer to these questions concern less the secret defections of our private being than the systemic workings of the relations into which we stumble when our name is first pronounced, when the voice first hails us, when we utter our first signifiers, when we wonder what the grownups are talking about.

Speaking raises the question of the subject, of who is speaking, and Lacan expounds that psychoanalysis answers the question, albeit unexpectedly. Who is speaking is not the subject *en propre*, but “this other subject,” the subject of words themselves, the other:

the question that the nature of the unconscious puts before us is in a few words, that something always thinks...But the unconscious has nothing to do with instinct or primitive knowledge or preparation of thought in some underground. It is a thinking with words, with thoughts that escape your vigilance...the question is to find a precise status for this other subject.

(“Of Structure,” 2)

Who is this other subject but the nonsubjective otherness of words themselves, that very dynamic dramatized by FID:

Analysis... enunciates the following, which is the very backbone of my teaching – I speak without knowing it. I speak with my body and I do so unbeknownst to myself. Thus I always say more than I know. This is where I arrive at the meaning of the word subject in analytic discourse. What speaks without knowing it makes me ‘I’ the subject of the verb.

(*Seminar XX*, 119)

It would be so easy to answer “who is speaking?” with “I am speaking,” but unfortunately the psychoanalytic cure has nothing to do with taking up an authoritative ownership over one’s language. Neither self-understanding nor self-expression, the aim of psychoanalysis

entails instead the construction of a new relation to the other who speaks in me: to the autonomy of language, to the enigma of desire, to the social field of the other as such. Psychoanalysis pursues the emancipation of this subject without a subjectivity, this inhabiting of the impersonal. The talking cure and its culmination in the analyst's discourse, that acephalic new signification, might thus be thought of as a species of FID: the subject must objectively narrate herself, including ironizing her symptoms, destituting her preciousness, and assuming the contingency of her suffering.

Now that we have seen that FID comports with a psychoanalytic theory of the social character of the psyche, we can more greatly appreciate the brilliance of *Sense and Sensibility*, whose FID Austen conscientiously constructs not out of some compulsion to the personal, but out of the social insights and social critique her work advances. This novel's use of FID works for something other than the revelation of private thoughts: it works for practicing social consciousness of capitalism's private properties and privations. Far from individual self-expression, FID models a collective sensibility, an objectivity indispensable for contextualizing the apparently personal desires propelling bourgeois relations.

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“Nobody Could Tell”

Quite deliberately structured to feature FID, *Sense and Sensibility* nicely delineates what such objective narration affords. Originally written in the late 1790s in epistolary form, the book was reworked into third person narration and published in 1811 as Austen's first novel. Epistolary novels take as their form the self-expression of character. Objectively narrated novels take as their form the representation of character.⁶ Fiction in our own era is often conflated with expression, but FID demands that we recognize it as representation: a production rather than an emanation, performative rather than descriptive, enfolding selfhood within perspectival refractions and impersonal abstractions. Reforming the book as third person with systematically objectivated FID, and including a newly abstracting title (the original *Elinor and Marianne* proved too personalizing) provided, I argue, a formal obverse to the social issues this novel thematizes. The production of impersonality in *Sense and Sensibility* articulates a political critique of proprietary selfhood, a

⁶ I borrow this distinction between expression and representation from Frances Ferguson, although she does not develop it regarding epistolarity. See, “Jane Austen, Emma, and the Impact of Form.” *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2000, p. 168.

critique which formulates on the literary plane the psychoanalytic theory of social subjectivity.

Across numerous passages of FID in *Sense and Sensibility*, we can read its consistent impetus far beyond the expression of personhood, toward the representation of sociability itself as an interpersonal faculty and psychic reality. The formal innovation of FID serves this novel intrinsically: not simply an adornment of story, it provides a formal solution to the social and conceptual problems the novel emplots. Foremost among these problems, in the economy of the insurgent bourgeois, is the fueling of events by *will*, a promissory marker of freedom perilously proximate to greed, selfishness, inconsiderateness. The occasion of the action, prompting social dislocation and social uncertainty, is the death of the Dashwood father, who declines to stipulate in his will his gentleman's agreement with his son to provide for his daughters. The son in turn takes great license with the connotations of "provide," rationalizing his avarice with the notion that his sisters and stepmother would be burdened by too much income, in an opening sequence that literally inscribes "will" as determinative force (my bolding throughout):

He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed... His wife... Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself;—more narrow-minded and selfish.

When he gave his promise to his father, he meditated within himself to increase the fortunes of his sisters by the present of a thousand pounds a-piece... 'Yes, he would give them three thousand pounds: **it would be liberal and handsome! It would be enough to make them completely easy.**'

(7)

The FID in this initial ratiocination underscores the general judgment of an appropriate fulfillment of the will and adequate provision for the women. But quickly the conditional will of what Mr. John Dashwood would do is actualized by the emphatic will of the "selfish" Mrs. John Dashwood. The Mrs. converts the Mr.'s conditional into an ordinary future tense throughout her victorious argument that he drastically reduce the financial share, a treachery contrastingly marked by direct discourse:

Do but consider, my dear Mr. Dashwood, how excessively comfortable your mother-in-law and her daughters may live on the interest of seven thousand pounds, besides the thousand pounds belonging to each of the girls, which brings them in fifty pounds a year a-piece, and, of course, they **will** pay their mother for their board out of it.

Altogether, they **will** have five hundred a year amongst them, and what on earth can four women want for more than that? They **will** live so cheap! Their housekeeping **will** be nothing at all. They **will** have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they **will** keep no company, and can have no expences of any kind! Only conceive how comfortable they **will** be! Five hundred a year! I am sure I cannot imagine how they **will** spend half of it; and as to your giving them more, it is quite absurd to think of it. They **will** be much more able to give *you* something.

(13–14)

With the percussive quality of “will” across the long measures of these establishing sequences of mental and verbal acts, the novel underlines the selfishness of the will as its chief source of conflict, with the representation in dialogue reinforcing the “narrow-minded” individualist perspective the text condemns. Against this backdrop for the action, “sensibility,” the receptiveness to others and to aesthetic experience, offers itself as an embodied abstraction practiced by the more upstanding of the characters, and FID offers itself as the formal mitigation of a world lacking sensibility; its grammar performs sensibility as the catapult out of the narrow mind of the bourgeois self.

Vectored toward critique in this way, the use of FID in *Sense and Sensibility* can scarcely be accommodated in the prevailing paradigms we’ve examined: it functions neither for personalization nor for discipline, but for the formalization of alternative sociality, in which the objective conditions of personal consciousness sustain equality among persons. A few different moments spread throughout the text should suffice to demonstrate how consistently FID emerges in this text for reasons other than promoting identification with character’s personalities, such as ironizing their narrowness, relaying communal wisdom, contextualizing desire within the socio-symbolic order, and sharply criticizing self-interestedness.

Mrs. Dashwood the mother is wonderfully rendered in all her pride and her efforts to broker her daughters: “[s]hyness, coldness, reserve... **were quite overcome by the captivating manners of Mrs. Dashwood. Indeed, a man could not very well be in love with either of her daughters, without extending the passion to her**” (89). The distance here points to the inflated ego and perverse surety of Mrs. Dashwood, while also performatively interpellating an abstract perspective where such foibles are communally legible and sympathetically audited. Too, the thought itself concerns not a specific man, but “a” man, an indefinite, hypothetical, universal subject.

Such impersonal inclinations of FID reverberate in its use for objectivating not just an individual’s perspective, but also multiple perspectives at once. Take for example the Miss Dashwoods out shopping:

On ascending the stairs, the Miss Dashwoods found so many people before them in the room, that there was not a person at liberty to attend to their orders; and they were obliged to wait. **All that could be done was, to sit down at that end of the counter which seemed to promise the quickest succession;** one gentleman only was standing there, and it is probable that Elinor was not without hopes of exciting his politeness to a quicker dispatch. **But the correctness of his eye, and the delicacy of his taste, proved to be beyond his politeness...**he had no leisure to bestow any other attention on the two ladies, than what was comprised in three or four very broad stares. (208)

For both the sisters as well as the narrator as well as any ordinary shopper, all that could be done was to wait, and someone such as Elinor might have thought a man would be polite, but a man, for want of polite attunement to others, would not. The FID conjures polite attunement and the expectation of its reciprocity; it conjures a general wisdom, a sentiment shared not only by character and narrator but by multiple characters and indeed the reader, a sentiment which would make sweet commerce more sweetly transpire.

The general sensibility cultivated by this novel crests in the critique of proprietary self-interest it remarkably enunciates. At that climax, several focalizations and FID impressively propel a single lengthy sentence comprising a notably off-set paragraph:

Elinor was soon called to the card-table by the conclusion of the first rubber, and the confidential discourse of the two ladies was therefore at an end, to which both of them submitted without any reluctance, **for nothing had been said on either side, to make them dislike each other less than they had done before;** and Elinor sat down to the card-table with the melancholy persuasion that Edward was not only without affection for the person who was to be his wife; but that he had not even the chance of being tolerably happy in marriage, which sincere affection on *her* side would have given, **for self-interest alone could induce a woman to keep a man to an engagement, of which he seemed so thoroughly aware that he was weary.**

(144–145)

Elinor has been made a somewhat unwitting confidant of Lucy, who asks her opinion whether she should break off an engagement that has proven mutually infelicitous, mostly for financial reasons. Elinor refuses to give her opinion, though Lucy insists “‘I know nobody of whose judgement I think so highly as I do of yours...’Tis because you are an indifferent person...that your judgment might justly have

such weight with me” (143–144), and the conversation is brought to a merciful end when the card game requires Elinor. The mental events which the narration at this point relays are the mutual détente at the unsatisfactory end of the conversation (Lucy unsatisfied because judgment has been withheld, Elinor unsatisfied because judgment has been asked), the mutual feelings of unlesened dislike, and Elinor’s reflections not upon her own feelings, but upon Lucy’s feelings and Edward’s probable feelings, and the free indirect consensus as to the social force of self-interest behind these mental events. Here yet more, impersonal subjects occasion the content: “a woman,” “a man,” and even the circumlocutious “the person who was to be his wife” all pitch the content of these thoughts toward the general before the form of FID reinforces it. Self-interest is the social problem which the narrative’s polyinterest can identify, relativize, and ameliorate; FID vehiculates that objectivized consciousness which steers the social in better directions.

In this same vein, we can also include layered focalizations that model sensibility, such as the FID that collectivizes Elinor’s thoughts about Willoughby’s thoughts at one of the novel’s climaxes. Here where distance and judgment might be most called for, in the final reckoning of the rake’s progress, Elinor and the narrator inhabit Willoughby, extrapolating his mentation to a common insight shareable by reader and general intellect:

Her thoughts were silently fixed on the irreparable injury which too early an independence and its consequent habits of idleness, dissipation, and luxury, had made in the mind, the character, the happiness, of a man who, to every advantage of person and talents, united a disposition naturally open and honest, and a feeling, affectionate temper. **The world had made him extravagant and vain – Extravagance and vanity had made him cold-hearted and selfish. Vanity, while seeking its own guilty triumph at the expense of another, had involved him in a real attachment, which extravagance, or at least its offspring necessity, had required to be sacrificed.**

(308)

The form of impersonal consciousness affirming Willoughby’s process redoubles the content of the affirmation, which contextualizes Willoughby’s innermost dynamics as products of broader culture, “the world.” In no sense an agent, he instead passively receives general forces; his lusty pursuits mint his culture’s mindset.

These passages in Austen illustrate several functions of FID: conceptualizing the beyond of individual will, or representing the ethos of sensibility which consciously recognizes the laminating of feeling for other’s feeling (of desire as the desire of the other), evoking a general

wisdom of superegoic and ideological qualities, or staging a genuine universal. Each of these conceptualizations that flow from the unusual grammar of unspeakable sentences elevate fiction as a medium in which it is possible not only to transcend the echo chamber of individual consciousness but also to confront the existence of a collective unconscious. FID gives us to think the general will, ideology, and the commons. It palpates the seam where unattributable sentiments become everyone's, where the private interior of the subject bespeaks its own always already exterior quality.

Let us consider one final passage, which contains perhaps the most dense use of FID in this novel. Elinor has learned of a long, unhappy engagement between her acquaintance Lucy and the man she had thought to be her lover, Edward. Where the empathogenic paradigm would expect profound sentiment from this protracted interiorization at this pivotal plot juncture, we find instead deliberate processing, an effort of the suffering subject to meter her response to implied others.

What Lucy had asserted to be true, therefore, Elinor could not, dared not longer doubt; supported as it was too one very side by such probabilities and proofs, and contradicted by nothing but her own wishes. Their opportunity of acquaintance in the house of Mr. Pratt was a foundation for the rest, at once indisputable and alarming; and Edward's visit near Plymouth, his melancholy state of mind, his dissatisfaction at his own prospects, his uncertain behavior towards herself, the intimate knowledge of the Miss Steeles as to Norland and their family connections, which had often surprised her, the picture, the letter, the ring, formed altogether such a body of evidence, as overcame every fear of condemning him unfairly, and established as a fact which no partiality could set aside, his ill-treatment of herself.—Her resentment of such behavior, her indignation at having been its dupe, for a short time made her feel only for herself; but other ideas, other considerations soon arose. Had Edward been intentionally deceiving her? Had he feigned a regard for her which he did not feel? Was his engagement to Lucy, an engagement of the heart? No.

(133)

As the language moves through its catalogue of "fact," it uses indirect discourse for attributed mental events, notable especially when Elinor "feel(s) only for herself." Free indirect, though, counters this self-feeling, and the overwhelming majority of the mental action anchors Elinor's feelings to the deductions anyone else would make from "such a body of evidence." *Sense and Sensibility* proffers mental processes of an unattributable, impersonal, common tenor, and it does so to both dramatize the embeddedness of subjective experience within the objective field of

the socio-symbolic other and criticize the scaffolding of that social upon mores of greed and inequity. Its use of FID directly opposes the logics of personation and property it clearly indicts. The formal contrivance of FID thrusts the text away from intimate interiors, and toward the question of what objective expansiveness adequately apperceives the problems of property, of what can be held in common in an economy of the self, of how mentation refracts through the other.

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The decisive advent of FID in *Sense and Sensibility* crafts objective narration as the literary riposte to the bourgeois psychology of proprietary subjectivity. This immanently critical operation enfolds this novel's own theorization of the social benefits of impersonality and the psychodynamics of socially mediated mentation. Psychoanalytic literary knots tie not only in the depiction of character or the desire for plot, but in the constellated perspective of objective narrativity, at once the gift of FID and the end of analysis. Together the two modalities of literature and psychoanalysis allude to the emancipations in objectivity—a stark corrective for our expressivist, instrumentalist, brazenly privatizing era.

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