

Discovering Humanistic Patterns through Manzonian Lenses – A Phenomenological Excursus

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Abstract

The values of philosophy, theology, and history, as intertwined with the psycho-social, political, and cultural lives of humans at any given time, are incontestable. The extent to which ideas influence humanity's realization bears this out. It appears that there are fairly identifiable patterns in the humanistic life craft. The problem is that these patterns are almost always well-cloaked at each moment. The value vectors retain their desirable validity while their contingent appearance – their givenness – a phenomenological reality, hinders their actualization. One notices this shine out from great literary and artistic patrimonies, which play a significant and inspiring role in revealing historical precedents. It appears something blinds thinkers and leaders from identifying these patterns regarding state crafts for a better global humanism. Humans seem to be forever lost in an ocean bed under a colossal mountain. This discovery is nowhere better methodologically mirrored than in the phenomenalization of the Manzonian and the contemporary worlds. This write-up proposes, exposes, and relates these to provoke the search for clear patterns in the ideal desire for a better humanistic organization of the world.

Keywords: Manzoni, philosophy, humanism, history, theology, worlds, patterns

1. Introduction

It is beautiful to penetrate the mindset of an era that is different from one's own. Different players in varied sectors of life have identified recurrent patterns. This happens through diligent and patient indefatigable and persistent study. Such patterns are found in the blood flow like waves and in market behaviours. The latter is what is used most by stock exchange, forex and bitcoin traders. Thus, one finds these specific modes, repetitions, and apparently given formats. They permit explicability, fair predictability and a given measure of control when deeply mastered and understood to a significant measure as it permits. This is the type of thing that appears to be manifest when one studies history, philosophy, theology, and the underlying mindset of great authors through their writings. This is all the more evident if the researcher can, through effective comprehension of the native tongue of the representative of an era, pierce his world and his vision. The need for a deeper understanding of the native tongue of historical figures is crucial to fully comprehend their world and vision. Lessons to draw constitute a world of their own. The English-linguistic perspective has so overwhelmingly draped the contemporary mindset. This makes the study and identification of the patterns in psycho-social, religious, cultural, and political reality difficult. The global that appears, is given as perceived.

Consequently, too many seekers are unconsciously blind to the rich variety in life and the underlying matrix in patterns that can only be human. The dominant anglo-ponic inclination coerces other alternatives to either disappear or realign for relevance.¹ This has the implication of leaving almost every present reality to be seen through the same lenses. The result of this is that at a more profound humanistic level, it is mankind that is impoverished. The present appears so different from the past that the patterns are missed. It seems that mankind is on a linear straight-line path. The 'now' appears better and more advanced, more moral and better evolved, higher and more human, wiser and safer than the 'then'. Victims fail to realize their victimhood in this form of received givenness or appearance. This stifles the potency latent in the past which naturally is the womb of the present and the future.

The ancient and medieval periods manifested clear and evident superiority in matters of philosophy, architecture, and closeness to nature. Yet, contemporary scientific and technological developments appear to suggest the inadequacy and futility of the wisdom of the past. In fact, the controversial nomenclature of the Dark Ages for the medieval period bears testimony to this. The reality could never be more different.

This is the background of the current write-up. It draws its inspiration from the observation that as much as the Egypto-African civilization prevailed, it ceded its place with so much loss. As much as Greek civilization dominated the world of its time, it gave way, in a manner that humanity could have had something better. As much as the Latin civilization ruled, it caved in unceremoniously. All these could have followed definite patterns of a-thematic humanistic organization that are tap-able into. Unfortunately, so missed, the work remains something still

¹ A typical example will be meeting a normal ordinary Italian who refers to a moslem religious ritual as la messadeimussulmani, the mass of the moslems or a typical British who thinks of every religious worship as service.

to be done. Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* specifically, is like a key to a special padlock. It lends itself to series of patterns with the contemporary world that can help in the direction of this discovery. In popular imaginary presumption, it would probably show up a world so different from the current one. More critically, it reveals more of a pattern that even the present consciously or unconsciously, willy-nilly seems to follow. One also notes that in the numerous names, allusions, analogies, contrasts, and identification that Dante Alighieri insinuates in his poems. One can only comprehend those poems by knowledge of the events reported by classic authors of various times and cultural background both from biblical worldview and Greek mythological matrix. But this comprehension is only possible because of the patterns.² That is what we are trying to exhume through Manzoni. He had many writings. But the special key into his world in this articulation, is his work *I promessi Sposi*.

The present write-up will serve to show all the structures of the Manzonian Italian versus European 17th Century³ world as he represents it. It will then outline so many parallels of the same realities in the contemporary period. The point and fact are that as grotesque and ridiculous, as obscure and outlandish, as inhuman, unjust, deplorable and execrable as the practices he satirizes, so much and so similar are the events of our days. The physical geographical worlds are the same. The psycho-socio-cultural, religious, and political ones are not. They are ex-rayed and the lessons he had for his generation are presented. The most important issue here is the paradigm sample. The reality behind the prism is contemporary, while the assisting lens is Manzonian in every sense. But the reality behind the prism is contemporary while the prism is Manzonian in every sense. That is the given. Givenness can be rightly identified as a phenomenon. In fact, it has been identified that the primary subject matter of phenomenology is “the world *as given* and the givenness of the world” (Smith2024). Pierre-Jean also makes a distinction between what he calls real and unreal givenness as well as authentic and inauthentic givenness (Renaudie, 2024). He goes ahead to comment that “Phenomenology does not deal with the given (*das Gegebene*) but only with the very fact that the given is given, with its givenness (*das Gegebenheit*) understood as a mode of phenomenality and not as an ontic given” (Renaudie, 2024). The expression ‘ontic given’ suggests a relationship between ontology and the phenomenology of gift and its givenness. The givenness of the Manzonian and the contemporary worlds revalidates the enterprise at hand.

2. The Circumstances of Manzoni's Gist in *I Promessi Sposi*

The setting of the novel is the 17th century, in the period around 1628. He is even more specific with some data on his principal character's walk on the 7th of November, with which he starts his story. Although, super commented on by many literary artists,⁴ and with varying

² See Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Comedia*, a cura di Natalino Sapegno, Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1985, all the comments on all the great names.

³ See, Alessandro Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi*, Ch XXVI, line 416, p. 583.

⁴ We have used as base, Alessandro Manzoni *Commento Critico* di Luigi Rossi, Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 20' Ristampa, 1986. This has the advantage of incorporating and commenting on several earlier versions and comments. It corrects some misunderstandings and updates some misinformation.

interpretations, it is evident that the work is a complex one. It involves facts and fiction, moral philosophy, history and art, religion and politics, statecraft and civil life, reflection and criticism, satire and exhortation, aristocracy, ordinary daily life, and many literary devices.

It tells of events in a given geographical zone. That is also the lens through which we peep at this Manzonian world under review. The zone is some part of today's Northern Italy. But it is historically, at this point, under the sovereignty of Spain. The period shows that several dukedoms were dislocated, and there was a different monarchical and feudal governance system. Democracy of the Western type, which Aristotle regarded as the worst form of government,⁵ was still far from the table. The Milan region is the principal focus. The exact locations include Lecco, Monza, Milan, Bergamo, and the surrounding towns. It was at this time under and a fraction of the Spanish Don Carlo of Aragon, who happened to also be the Prince of Castelvetro, Duke of Terranuova, Marchese of Aviola, Conte of Burgeto, Great admiral and great Constable of Sicily, Governor of Milan, and the general Captain of His Catholic Majesty in Italy, Philip II of Spain.⁶

The novel involves extensive geographical and historical descriptions. It comments on the weather, meteor status, terrain, Flores, skills, political opinions, social beliefs, superstitions, presumptions, and scientific, philosophical, theological, and cultural prejudices of the time. What is said so far remains valid for the entire piece.

The next place of relevance mentioned in the book is the surrounding locations of Milan, the Venetian kingdom, and especially the city of Bergamo. In collocating his principal story in this region, the rivers, the lakes, the topography, bridges, the custom of hospitality and restoration, the security situation, general order, law enforcement, diplomacy, power tussle, hope, the management of health and the common good are all brought into play. They make the novel realistic, holistic, comprehensive, incisive, and representative.

The author's vision is not exhausted in the two principal places mentioned but takes them as the launching pad. Other areas that are intertwined with the principal story or the period's significant events are efficiently mentioned and abundantly explored. So, places like Mantova, Austria, Germany, the Vatican, England, and, in fact, Western Europe are adequately captured in this microcosmic presentation of a given world of a time.

3. Relevant Observations from what is Presented Hitherto

Today's readers may wonder where the rest of the world is since they are not mentioned in the treatise. But one has to remember that while Africa is the oldest continent, sub-Saharan Africa was at this time, unknown to Europe. However, what is unknown to Europeans is often labeled as undiscovered. So, for instance, they arrive somewhere in Africa where people have lived for centuries, find a river, give it a name, and claim to have discovered it. Thus, knowledge of the existence of the American continent, though extant since 1492, does not

⁵ See Thomas R. Martin et al., Democracy in the Politics of Aristotle, in https://www.stoa.org/demos/article_aristotle_democracy@page=all&greekEncoding=UnicodeC.html accessed at 10.50am on 26th June, 2024.

⁶ See, Alessandro Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi*, 13.

seem to be impressed in his mind. So, Manzoni does not mention it. Oceania, Asia, and the rest do not receive any direct or indirect references in the novel. This is not just because they have nothing to do with the principal story of Manzoni. It is instead because he was a child of his time. Therefore, the general eclipse of ignorance of these places and their peculiar details hanged over the entire generation and civilization. One can safely say that mentioning these places would not have disrupted the work because the work involves so many detours and digressions, so varied off-course investigations and reports, etc. He would have mentioned them if the author had known them remotely. This is why we have considered the image of the novel's reality as a world of its own.

4. The Art Value in Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*

The *drammatis personae* of *The Betrothed* would ordinarily appear to be the various individuals mentioned in the novel. However, commentators seem to be unanimously convinced that the novel's main subject is the century instead. When the latter is accepted, the novel is considered a comedy. On the other hand, when the human individual actors are focused on, the work reveals a sad tale of human reality, misery, injustice, wickedness, exploitation of the powerless and less privileged, the abuse of authority, gross ignorance even in the highest places, the general human contingency, facticity, mortality, weakness and an almost evident end of all in futility. From this point of view, the work could be considered a tragedy. Comedy could also be a medieval and renaissance title that almost all such literary works bore, like divine comedy.

Although a satire, the main story of the principal characters would constitute a tragi-comedy for many. The novel tells a story of genuineness, naturalness, nobility, suffering, endurance, persistence, survival, intrigues, passion, power play, manipulation, cowardice, pettiness, politics, conversion, stubbornness, resilience, innocence, spiritual purity, dedication, faith, hope and especially of love.

5. The Characters in Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*

One could start with the personal characters in the epic. The first personality to be mentioned in the novel is Don Abbondio. He is the local parish priest. Somehow, the whole story revolves around the consequences of his actions and reactions. He is depicted as a cowardly type, selfish, self-justifying, feeble, subservient to the powerful, indifferent to the harmless, evasive, and self-doubling. His thoughts and words often go contrary ways but lend themselves to ambiguous interpretations. One could say that he lacks a profound personality.

Then, at his wake, the main protagonists of the drama come immediately. These are Renzo and Lucia. Renzo is painted as an enthusiastic, reflective, sometimes impulsive, creative, hot-headed, hardworking, and harmless mountain local gentleman – in the seventeenth-century sense of being a peasant or silk worker. He is in love with Lucia. The latter is identified as a pious, shy, reserved, prayerful, religious, almost naïve, trusting, simplistic village girl betrothed to Renzo. She is thoughtful, imaginative, charitable, Christian, soft, sweet, gentle, trusting and contemplative. She speaks last in the novel.

Agnese and Perpetua are the next closest to the characters presented. The first is the mother

of Lucia. She is presented as a chattering, lively, imaginative, and very loving village person. She is pretty rural and native, with a lot of tact and practical wisdom. Perpetua is the parish priest's domestic assistant. She is practical, intuitive, available, and almost serves as the pastor's alter ego. She is not good at keeping secrets but also has her own dominating personal story. She is simply the pastor's confidant. She is involved in the major actions of Renzo Tramaglino and Lucia Mondella (Manzoni, 1986, 17). These five, so far, constitute the nucleus of the whole novel.

Other very important characters include Don Rodrigo, the novel's primary antagonist. He is the major persecutor of Lucia and Renzo. He is surrounded by the Conte Attilio, the notary, Azzecagarbuglio, the podesta, who is the mayor, the zio (uncle) Conte, and his retinue of bodyguards and faithful security apparatus including Griso and Nibbio – convicted criminals elsewhere enjoying freedom under his protection.

Padre Cristoforo is also the spiritual director of Lucia and the protector of Lucia, Renzo, and Agnese. He is a Cappuccin religious. He was once a knight, the son of a very wealthy noble, who got converted after murdering his opponent in the usual manner of the duel of those days. He is linked to so many other friars and religious mentioned in the novel.

The next figure is Cardinal Federigo Borromeo. He is presented as almost a saint. He is humble, intelligent, meek, down to earth, caring, self-denying, charitable, intellectual, refined, and a really spirit-filled pastor who cares deeply for his flock. He animates the whole novel from an ecclesiastical point of view.

In spite of the number of other characters who lace the novel, the last significant one to be mentioned is a figure named the anonymous. He is presented as a powerful, fearless, callous, above the law, crime Boss who respects neither God nor man. In the novel, he is presented as undergoing the most extraordinary conversion that turns the whole novel into its climactic direction. Other minor characters include Tonino, Donna Prassede, Don Ferrante, the tailor and his family, Marchese, Padre Michele, and the widow.

6. The Story Summarized

Renzo and Lucia are about to wed. The date is fixed for the next day. *Omnia parata!* An eve before, on the 6th of November, 1628, while reciting his breviary along the way, the parish priest is intercepted by two thugs. He is ordered to suspend the wedding or go in for it. The groom comes to the pastor early the next day to ask for the time of the ceremony. Stories begin. The priest makes up evasive tales. He cites some Latin phrases about impediments and succeeds in annoying the groom, who gives up, frustrated and lost about what to do next.

The fact is that Don Rodrigo, the local crime boss and the pre-eminent bully of the Lecco area, encountered Lucia and became interested in her. He learned of her impending marriage and vowed to truncate it. That occasioned the elusive attitude of the Pastor. After his being menaced by the thugs of Don Rodrigo, he was so petrified that the house help, Perpetua, had to investigate what was wrong. On being importuned, he reluctantly told her the whole issue. Perpetua advised him on a number of ways to remedy the situation. He always found counter arguments each time against whatever she said. He was pessimistic. The confidence to

Perpetua lets the cat out of the bag. Renzo now knows the real reason behind his reluctance to preside over the marriage. Meanwhile, in the house, Lucia was with her friends and bridesmaids, getting ready to go to the altar. Her mother was in the house getting everything ready for the ceremony. On Renzo's arrival with his information, the whole group was shaken. They were so disappointed and had to be dismissed. A solution had to be found.

At this turn of events, Lucia sobbed. As a solution, she trusted in confiding in Padre Cristoforo, who was her spiritual director, to come to their aid, for things had gone awry and needed urgent attention (Manzoni, 1986, 62-66). In between, Agnese is too confident that the justice system will bring some order and correct things. She advises the son-in-law-to-be to go and visit Azzecagarbugli, the notary, and that he would see justice restored to him. The advice is promptly acted upon.

He meets a different reality. Disappointed, he returns home to Agnese and Lucia and recounts his failure. They are filled with consternation because of how unjust the commoner is treated and how the poor cannot quickly obtain justice. On his part, Padre Cristoforo got the message and firmly resolved to meet the tyrant, Don Rodrigo, and get things set in order. Meanwhile, he is very annoyed against the feeble-mindedness of the pastor but does not criticize him. Both never meet in the novel.

True to his word, he goes to Don Rodrigo in his castle dotted with all the security apparatus of the men of the underworld of the 17th century. The friars enjoyed a good rapport with the nobles, and he gained entrance easily. There happened to be a banquet in the place. Present were Azzecagarbugli, the podesta, the conte Attilio, and Don Rodrigo himself. The meal was sumptuous with a lot of wine and loud revelry. Padre Cristoforo was sober, patient and mild. They tried to drag him into the heated discussions, stoking his history and provoking him.

He remained calm. The men at the table, especially Don Rodrigo and Attilio, constantly tickled him. After much delay, Don Rodrigo made room for a private discussion between them. It did not end well. He left disappointed but intrepid in his decision to bring justice and threaten Don Rodrigo with divine wrath. An old servant had eavesdropped on everything. He assured Padre Cristoforo that he would let him know if anything came up since he also wanted to save his soul (Manzoni, 1986, 107). He promised to go and see the frater the next day and update him on what was happening.

At home, Agnese had devised a new plan. She quoted that the requirement of the law was only for consent to be expressed before the pastor in the presence of two witnesses. They did not need the consent of the pastor, but he was present. Consequently, though not very acceptable to Lucia, who was reluctant and wondered why the idea had not occurred to Padre Cristoforo, Agnese and Renzo decided to go on that path. Not without much remonstrance from Lucia (Manzoni, 1986, 111).

In return, Padre Cristoforo hastened to the anguished but expectant promised spouses and announced his failed mission. He advised them to trust in God. Agnese had hurriedly forbidden Lucia from leaking their plot to pursue the marriage through the extraordinary form.

So, he did not know. Renzo found a twelve-year-old boy, Menico, whom he commissioned to get information the next day for him from Padre Cristoforo. Agnese promised the boy some gifts and recommended that no one should know of his mission (Manzoni, 1986, 123).

Meanwhile, disgusted by the friar's visit to his house and his intervention in the matter, Don Rodrigo reacted. He detailed his best thugs in executing malice with deadly precision to go and kidnap Lucia. They were to bring her safely to his residential fortress, palazzotolo. Renzo had put some plan into motion for the realization of the advice of Agnese. He found Tonio, a debtor of Don Abbondio, and convinced him to act as his witness. Tonio offered his brother, Gervasio, as the second witness. They would use the excuse of the debt to get themselves into the Rectory. The deal was sealed. Agnese proposed to act as a distraction to get Perpetua out of the way and make it possible for the couple to infiltrate the room. The plan was perfectly sketched out for execution (Manzoni, 1986, 113 - 118).

Don Rodrigo's men put themselves to work. They spread spies all around the town. Some in the guise of mendicants made intrusions into the house of Agnese for reconnaissance. They had planned to hit at night. Some others, like real hoodlums, had seen Renzo and his little planning group of Tonio and Gervasio at the local restaurant. They got informed about his identity and regretted not having orders to grab and assassinate him there and then. Renzo had also noticed how strange they were, inquired after them, and tried to keep his cool. Things were getting frenetic. They completed their plans in whispers and left to put them to work.

On arrival, the little party headed to the rectory. Don Abbondio, with his trumped-up excuse of being ill and not wanting to see anyone since after the threat, was already indoors. Perpetua was doing a few things in the garden. Tonio exploited well the excuse of coming to clear his debts with the pastor to make himself be admitted, though the Cure' complained about the hour. But he wondered if the opportunity for the debt repayment would present itself again soon. Neither Perpetua nor him could resist the allure of that occasion. As they entered, Agnese emerged, luring Perpetua away, and kept her distracted while Renzo and Lucia sneaked into the building.

As all these went on at the Rectory, Griso, Don Rodrigo's thug with his men, had gone to Agnese's house for their own business. They were surprised that there was no one. They turned the house upside down, searching everywhere and amazed that they could not feel any sense of life or find anyone. Simultaneously, Menico had met Padre Cristoforo, who informed him to hurry and inform the spouses that there was a plan for their kidnapping. He advised that they should escape immediately to Monza. He would get everything arranged for their escape till more auspicious times.

At a point in the discussions at the rectory, Renzo and Lucia emerged before the pastor. Renzo uttered his part of the marriage formula. Before Lucia could utter hers, Don Abbondio raised an alarm and called for help, cutting her off. This made the sacristan get up and hurriedly ring the Church bells. This awoke and summoned the entire neighbourhood. Renzo, Lucia, and their companions had to escape from the living room hurriedly. The little group had hardly left the scene when Perpetua rushed in to know what was happening. People

started gathering to find out what was happening.

This moment corresponded with the time of Menico's return. He went straight to Agnese's house as agreed. There, he instead met the Bravi, Don Rodrigo's thugs. They held him and started torturing him, only to be interrupted by the church bells' commotion. They left him more by alarm and confusion than by intent. He escaped. In panic themselves, they also left.

On his way fleeing, Menico met the promised spouses. He delivered the message of Padre Cristoforo. He equally recounted having met the kidnappers in Agnese's home, the mayhem they were creating there, and how he was fortunate to escape alive. Agnese rewarded and dismissed him instantly. Their counseled flight started right there on the road as well.

Padre Cristoforo organized everything perfectly. Agnese and Lucia found themselves in Monza, while Renzo had to trek to Milan from there. The details could be spared. The point remains that in Milan, Renzo ran into public protests. He entered into trouble, was made a scapegoat, and was declared wanted. After some time in Monza, Agnese had to return home. Lucia met with the favours of Sr. Gertrude, who had her own shadows, secrets, and history but took her nearly to confidence.

At Lecco, too frustrated by the failure of the mission, Don Rodrigo had been informed of the fugitives' whereabouts. He swore to get back his desired jewel at all costs. To this effect, first, through his uncle, the Conte at Milan, he ensured that Padre Cristoforo was transferred to far away Rimini, where he became utterly inaccessible to his proteges. Don Rodrigo then engaged the anonymous services. This latter is described as the worst of the worst in the criminal world, for whom no crime appeared to be impossible. This latter got his men to work. He had news on how to kidnap Lucia so quickly from the convent in the shortest possible time. Gertrude's blackmail through her secrets paved the way for this. She quickly sold out Lucia, and before one could bat an eyelid, Lucia was already a hostage of the anonymous.

Lucia prayed and protested all the way, fainted, woke up, and got exhausted, meanwhile praying to God and to Mary all the time. The anonymous was also tormented as he waited for the outcome of the operation. Floods of ideas about the afterlife, death, the crimes of his youth, eternal loss, etc., assailed him. He could not wait to see the girl arrive. On arrival, he tried to get informed and dispatch the hostage immediately to the sender. But he also appeared to be stopped by some superior force. He tried to treat Lucia gently, but she remained inconsolable and softly indomitable. She only prayed and cried. She vowed to Mary that if she ever got out of there alive, she would remain a perpetual virgin and give up every hope of ever marrying Renzo again to remain hers alone (Manzoni, 1986, 396).

In the midst of all these, the anonymous, heard a loud commotion in the environs, inquired what was happening and learnt of the visit of the cardinal, Federigo Borromeo. As if ordered by a superior force, he hastily decided to go and see him, though unprepared for it. He went alone, unaccompanied. He succeeded. After a conversation with him, he was converted. Like Zacchaeus, he decided to amend his ways. The first of such acts was to free and release his hostage (Manzoni, 1986, 424-427). It was done. The anonymous also later sent a lot of money to them in reparation.

In the meantime, Renzo, passing through a lot of obstacles of no mean measure, succeeded in arriving at Bergamo which happened to be outside the jurisdiction of Milan. But the warrant for his arrest also arrived there. Consequently, he had to change his name to Antonio Rivolta and change both his residence and workplace. His uncle Bortolo was of immense assistance to him on this. Initially, he found it so difficult to assume his new identity that they thought he was deaf since he never reacted or responded when they called him Antonio.

This was the state of things, while famine, political turmoil, military sackings, and pestilence ravaged the land. The military invasions in the midst of the famine left communities devastated, and people lost their sources of livelihood in both farm produce and mobile property. On one of the occasions of these incursions, Agnese, Perpetua, and Don Abbondio had to flee and take shelter at the house of the anonymous. There was a huge refugee movement on course. He hosted them well and made himself a good name by helping dislodge some of the soldiers who lurked menacingly in a nearby neighborhood.

The pestilence, on its part, generated so much diversity of opinions that it delayed handling it. As a result, several thousands of people perished. More than half the population reduced in the territory. It affected the rich and the poor, the aged and children, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the righteous and the profane, etc.

Renzo caught the pestilence. He was fortunate. He recovered. He had to go in search of his Lucia. He went first to his native home. There, he discovered that a lot of havoc had been done. So many people had died. His witness, Tonio, had gone berserk. The podesta' had died. Agnese was nowhere to be found. Don Abbondio caught the epidemic and was recovering. Perpetua had died. The world had changed.

Renzo Bodly went to Milan in search of Lucia. Love! He suffered terribly in the search. But he was rewarded in the end. He learned that she was alive. She was recovered at Lazaretto, the pestilence hospital where people died in droves. Unknown to both, Don Rodrigo, who had caught the pestilence, was recovered too. Renzo bumped accidentally but happily into Padre Cristoforo (Manzoni, 1986, 655). This allowed him to reconcile with his anger toward Don Rodrigo, whom he saw in a pitiable dying state. Finally, he found Lucia. Padre Cristoforo also assisted them in getting her absolved from the private vows.

A heavy downpour occurred as he returned to make preparations for their wedding. Like a deluge, the downpour swept away the epidemic (Manzoni, 1986, 684). He arrived and found Agnese, who had never caught the pestilence. Finally, finally, with the death of Don Rodrigo announced, assured by the entrance of his inheritor, the Marchese, Don Abbondio felt freer to assist at the wedding. He appealed to the Marchese who helped in the absolution of Renzo from the arrest warrant over him. The cardinal sent his wishes across. Padre Cristoforo had died. The wedding held. The newly married started a totally new life in Bergamo.

7. The Resemblances or Are They Not Patterns?

There are several resemblances between the Manzonian world and ours. One could ask, but are they not the same world? Yes, they are. But time has so changed. Developments and evolutions in every sphere of human endeavour and comprehension have also been so

replicated that something could be said not to be the same again. So, the principle of identity seems to collide with both that of excluded middle and non-contradiction when examining these epochs. Phenomenologically, the given supersedes the being in these phenomena, and interpretation conditions the perceivers. So many realities are alike but have only mutated forms. Others have undergone such radical and profound changes that while man remains the same in many aspects, he appears not to be in so many others. The resemblances and repetitions, albeit morphologically reorganized, keep to the principle of identity. The differences refer to that of the excluded middle. Both the similarities and differences respond to that of non-contradiction. However, like good stock marketers who know when the market is bearish or bullish, so may be found with all the characteristics of these market movements in these psycho-sociological and politico-cultural processes.

One significant similarity is that of imperialism. In the Manzonian epoch, it is stark, justified, operative, and accepted. It was the order of the day. Spain ruled over Milan and Mantova. Power tussles make the leaders of the day nearly care more about battles and conquests than about the preservation of human life threatened by an epidemic and famine (Manzoni, 1986, 575). Unfortunately, ecclesiastical princes (Manzoni, 1986, 537-540) are involved in this tussle, and the masses suffer like the grass under the elephant. Fast forward to the 21st century, you could fit in the various wars in the various countries, reported and unreported, the pandemics and epidemics into the same scheme. This would happen in such a way that put in market movement format, the patterns would emerge very clearly.

Interestingly, Manzoni saw eras of useless wars. One doubts if there are ever any absolutely useful ones. But he saw the very opprobrious ones, epidemics, and conspiracy theories on their origin. He saw institutional frame-ups, famine, mass deaths, exploitation, and an abysmal thirst for power and influence. He witnessed very corrupt and inefficient public officials and law enforcement agents who only cared about serving the system and not doing what was right (Manzoni, 1986, 579). Compared to today, how many cases of wrongly condemned and imprisoned innocent fellows are still recorded? Does one not find several unlawful and corrupt law enforcement agencies and agents?

Fast-forward to modern times! What is evident? First, there was organized slavery. Then, oppressive colonialism followed. Now, one sees subtle neo-colonialism. What one finds in the contemporary world is even worse than what Manzoni lived in his era. Manzoni saw documentary hoaxes. He saw fictitious certifications. But he also saw on the positive side extra-ordinary charity by some of the religious of his day. Some factors are so similar. The genocide in Biafra land is a page that extolled the superlative charity of the Holy Ghost Fathers. It remains muted in historical references to avoid highlighting the atrocities of the then-ruling powers and their role in that genocide. The burning of witches and sometimes of the innocent mistakenly suspected to be such can be compared to the summary executions and reckless killings in Nigeria and several other countries of the world under marionette leaders that are not reported or to wanton judicial capital punishment and gun craziness in the present US. Today, when it appears that the oppressed have acquired some level of independence and liberty through self-governance, in several places, what happens in reality is only that the tact and style have changed. The facts remain even worse.

The new local leaders are only puppets. They oppress their people at the instance of the dictating powers who remain invisible to the oppressed but very present to the instrumental leadership of oppression. Almost all African countries and the consequent constant internal accusations of failure of leadership fall into this optic. Achebe (2000), for instance, wrote a book in which he erroneously claims that the problem with Africa is squarely that of leadership.⁷ So, what Western colonialism and neo-colonialism are to Africa today, Spanish feudalism and medieval monarchism, in general, were to some parts of Milan and Europe in the Manzonian era. The more things appear to change on the surface, the more they remain the same in substance. History is repeated in new clothing. If the few were too powerful for the many then, it is worse now. A groaning majority in the world mutters, I cannot breathe under the knee suffocation of a very little over powerful minority.

8. The Justice System

One of the issues that Manzoni satirizes is the justice system of the time. He shows the zio Conte serving his family's interests more than his office's. The Cappuccin superior acted on his orders only for interests that did not fit into any acceptable public social canon. Don Rodrigo roams freely and has as bodyguards criminals condemned elsewhere but roaming freely in his territory and under his protection. Impunity is made flesh in this era. The anonymous (*innominato*) story, incidentally, through the comments, is shown to be based on historical figures. So, between his mixture of facts and fiction, one gleans a picture of maximal injustice in the world of that day. Even Renzo suffered it at the hands of Azzecagarbugli. Don Rodrigo alluded to it and Manzoni himself comments on it through his narrator. Many functionaries of the apex body for global health and peace, in a depersonalized graph, would fit perfectly into this image as a repeated pattern.

Ours as men of today is to look at the contemporary world. There is more theory than practice. There are more words than deeds. There is too much talk of justice and too little justice in operation. The giant of the age professes democracy. But behind, it wields it only as a tool of self-conservation and subtle manipulation. This results in so many unjust verdicts, sentences, and proceedings. Double standards and mass deceptions! The contemporary era appears to be a paradox. The more you look, the less you see. This is at a global level. The media becomes the tool of the bigwigs. Even governments run on this invisible multi-national blackmail. This creates a discrepancy between the promises of intending politicians and the evident results of their decisions when in power. The contradictions keep beating every sane imagination.

A clamorous example is the hypocrisy of the assumption of a free press. Yet, there are so many classified diplomatic pieces of information. Should anyone chance upon these and make them known, he is treated as Renzo was after he fell into the case of the revolt in Milan. The cases of Julian Assange and that of Khashoggi and so many other journalists point to this fact. Governments perpetuate injustice, and the justice system serves the interests of the government. In the end, like Renzo, only the simple citizen appears to be the victim and strict subject of the law. Labels change everything. Take Nigeria or Ukraine, for instance. The

⁷ Achebe, The Trouble with Nigeria, at <https://www.amazon.com/Trouble-Nigeria-Chinua-Achebe/dp/9781561475> accessed on 10 July, 2024 at 3.44pm.

masses elected a candidate. The justice system subverted it. They used the excuse of technicalities to install the current governments. Against mass perceptions and feelings, the intentions of the globalist hidden influencers prevail and major injustices are meted out on the people. The masses suffer. The leaders stay safe.

9. Speculation on the Pandemic

Profiteering out of disaster seems to be a crime of the present day. It is so well hidden that the masses rarely know about it. Manzoni highlights his worry about pests and famine during his time. But he does not fail to indicate some profit-interested personalities who saw these disasters as opportunities to enrich themselves. The Monatti and Biri cases are explicit (Manzoni, 1986, 600).

The same is true of the contemporary era, with so many recent epidemics, pandemics, and scandals of pharmaceutical companies. The ebola pandemic, various bird flus, and especially the covid-19 pandemic all reveal disgusting paranoiac human interests in lucre and gain. It is so shameful that people could want to decimate the human population for whatever reasons there might have been. The worst thing is that some terminologies are coined to protect and shield, to hide and disguise these inhuman attitudes of the 21st century. These include the idea of conspiracy theory, the idea of fake news and the demonization of any alternative idea to the mainstream media projected ideas. To be different appears only valid for immorality and irreligiosity. One wonders why the governments of developing nations are almost forced to adopt LGBT laws but are hardly made to provide basic education and infrastructure to their citizens.

These lead to the idea of unipolarity and narrow-mindedness in the world. One would have thought that lessons would be learned from history to benefit mankind. Instead, almost all the international organs for the maintenance and procurement of peace have been turned into exploitative tools of a deep secret agenda.

10. Commonness in Difference

Literature, like all human art, not only expresses but also condenses man's interiority. It encapsulates several aspects of the human spirit. It thematizes the unthematized philosophy that lurks within, reveals the perceived theology, indicates the desired hopes, and betrays the disappointing frustrations, but more than all these, it communicates that which is essentially human. Any literature would do this. However, being able to penetrate it in the language that expressed the inner emotions and captured the author's mental feelings is probably not thoroughly and exhaustively communicable. But its richness cannot be lost as well. Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*, like Dante's *Divina Comedia* or any of the classical epic writings, does this. One would gain a lot by reading the book and having the mind on the contemporary happenings to see how, to the human chagrin of this day, before our very eyes, history is repeating itself, and the patterns are so clear but at the same time elusive to the mindset of the class that can turn it to good.

There are evident differences between that world and this. The transport system seems to have come from a different world. In Manzoni, only horses and carts are mentioned. Today,

transportation can only be better lived than described. There are bicycles, cars, electric motors, trains, flying objects, and all the modern means of transportation. Similarly, the abuse of the environment and pollution through oil spillages, gas flaming, industrial emissions, radioactive waste, and nuclear emissions never knew the measure that the civilized world has exposed the ecosystem to hitherto.

Communication-wise, these are very different worlds. The invention of the telephone, electricity, supersonic and nuclear realities had not seen the light then. The internet and so many realities of private, social, diplomatic communication and globalization were very far from the imaginations of the time. The Agricultural and industrial revolutions had not occurred, not to talk of the technological and artificial intelligence revolutions. These are the issues that make the world to be very different. Yet, in the overall qualitative assessment of man as humanity, a lot is wanting. There are more homeless, miserable, depressed, sadder, hungrier and less hopeful humans at a global level today. This disqualifies the current generation from boasting about being more humanistic than the past. In pattern, they are the same on the lower axis of historical spectrum.

Not all differences translate into superiority. For all the transformations, growth, and revolutions in the areas of science, medicine, technology, communication, and globalization, one may not say that humans have become better at being human. The number of deaths manufactured in the name of freedom is colossal. This comes through abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, monstrous wars, secret experimentation, weapons of mass destruction, etc. It is unprecedented in history. What could account for this?

11. Philosophical and Theological Underpinnings

A good look at the two worlds lends some insight. Humanity seems more impoverished at the psycho-spiritual, ethical, and philosophical qualitative levels. It appears more enriched at the material-physical, scientific, and technological levels. The equilibrium of healthy organic development is missing. The question of why this discrepancy exists would be valid if it was first established that this is the case. That is the task of a phenomenological approach to this quasi-metaphysical lacing on history.

There is proof of an indubitable psycho-spiritual, moral, and qualitative decline in man. The ever-present threat of global auto-destruction since the end of the Second World War is one. No serious, educated contemporary mind is ignorant of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁸ One knows the urgent call for nuclear disarmament in the 80s, '90s, and 2000s. Lee H. Hamilton (2024) strongly underlines the possibility of a nuclear war. Only one willingly denying would refuse the fact of the present threat of nuclear catastrophe hanging like the sword of Damocles on the contemporary *psycho-sphere* occasioned by the so-called civilized world through very hazy motives.⁹ However, the idea of George Santayana (2024)

⁸ Since this work is in the 21st century, any online search of the names plus atomic bomb will give more than enough results. See https://www.icanw.org/hiroshima_and_nagasaki_bombings accessed on 10 July, 2024 at 3.54pm

⁹ All the wars and bombardments and change of governments except in Africa where they are predicated on the

that those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it comes to mind here.

The next indicator of the impoverishment of the current generation in genuine human spiritual sensitivity comes as a flipside of science and technology. The capacity and growth of science have shown so much ability on the positive spectrum. But because of this, there are mindless experimentations without moral restrictions in several spheres. There is a very high rate of organ trafficking, clandestine human trafficking for the slavery of the modern era,¹⁰ prostitution, the maximal exploitation of the less privileged in this question of organ trafficking, the manufacture of viruses and biological weapons and still worse, the secret sterilization and impoverishment of the masses most especially from the third world.¹¹

In short, the primitive strain in man remains. The un-evangelized aspect of him keeps threatening to return. Atheism knocks constantly on his door. Good sense blows like the occasional fresh air and dominates him only for a while. Manzoni seems to have perceived all this. Thus, his novel does not lack a mention of some useless casuistic philosophical arguments on whether entelechy or act is prior or posterior, on whether the zodiac controls the ways of men, pestilences, and disasters, or whether they are free (Manzoni, 575 – 602). In the end, proper growth and progress can only be arrived at by carefully appraising the evident knowledge of history and the deeper philosophical and religio-theological underpinnings of history. Manzoni made a blend of this and succeeded in converting his tragic-comic novel into an epochal comedy.

It could be safely held that where society is today is where the underlying philosophies that gave birth to the current civilization have led it. In that case, the dominant philosophies would be said to be analytic philosophy and pragmatism. Has this led man to an upward pattern of greens and hopes? The answer is no. The risk is a shipwreck of contemporary civilization without hope of the recovery of any items. Good metaphysics which would embrace the speculative and sapiential dimension have been missing. There is a great need for a conscious deepened study of patterns in civilizations from all ramifications. The Manzonian lenses strongly indicate this.

12. Conclusion

I Promessi Sposi presents patient readers with a rare opportunity to learn from the historical past of an epoch. Those able are called to benefit from the ideas in this timeless work. Those unable are provided the opportunity through this brief for the growth, benefit and especially peace of mankind. Socrates is one of the philosophers who believed in man constantly

interest in the natural mineral reserves, point toward this escalation especially NATO's provocation of Russia to invade Ukraine and its lack of will power to get the conflict ended immediately.

¹⁰ The BBC ran a documentary a few years ago on the slave markets in the middle east involving Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa who wanted to cross through there to Europe. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42038451> accessed on 10 July, 2024 at 10.24ET.

¹¹ There are more evidences of this in real life than on print. But see for instance <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/win-victims-forced-sterilization-namibia> accessed on 10 July, 2024 at 10.35ET.

reflecting on himself. One of the founding fathers of Ancient Greek philosophy, his philosophical submissions are still reverberating in this 21st century. He was a deep thinker who inspired and still inspires many philosophers today. Socrates left a lot of life-changing advice, capable of helping man to discover his authentic being by releasing him from a lot of negative existential realities of life. His unwavering determination to create a just society where the common welfare of all would be entrenched compelled him to postulate that: "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Socrates in Brickhouse, T. C., Smith, N. D., 1994). He believed that constant reflection on one's life will engender a qualitative life and peaceful coexistence among men in the society.

Constant self reflection enables man to take a good stock of his life by weighing both his past mistakes and good decisions objectively for a better future. Man can only discover his true being better by learning from history, and especially trying as much as possible to avoid his past mistakes. Deep reflection and full knowledge of self gives one a proper sense of direction as one navigates through some deplorable and challenging aspects of the world. Socrates kept advising the Athenians like an affectionate father who never wanted his wayward children to repeat his own past youthful mistakes. His age long admonition: "man know thyself" keeps agitating human conscience and consciousness till date (Socrates in Odukoya, A. T., 2009). This Socratic injunction implies: man, know thy frailties, spiritual potentials, abilities, physical strength and limits. Self-knowledge and selfless goodwill are among the keys to growth in all facets of human endeavours and existence. One can only attain a full knowledge of oneself by objective appraisal of one's past, reflection on the present, and making good and overall pragmatic resolutions for the future.

In the light of the above, constant references to human histories and learning from them are the keys towards building an egalitarian society. No race, tribe and nation can grow economically, socially, politically, morally, and religiously without intermittent references and reflections on their historical pasts. History does not repeat itself. Rather, man repeats history. This compelled a renowned American philosopher and satirist, George Santayana, to avow that: "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana in Gordon, S., 2000). Lessons of the past should be able to guide man to the future.

Unfortunately, humans have often failed to learn adequately enough from past history. Individuals seem no longer eager to learn from their past mistakes. People as a group hardly come together to build a harmonious and prosperous society by learning from the historical past of their society. They have become opinionated and individualistic within the society to the extent that patriotism for many is sacrificed on the altar of selfish and personal interests. Many in the position to handle things have tried dictating the pace of growth and progress to the detriment of the common good of all and sundry.

Delanty sums it up by asserting that "the past is one obvious place to look for a guide to the future" (Delanty, 2024). He further avows that "the evolution of the human mind, culture, and societies created the conditions of the very possibility of the future. In many ways, the possibility of the future is a product of the human capacity to learn from history and the Darwinian conception of evolution is itself a process of cumulative learning" (Delanty, 2024). This implies that learning from the past history should be part and parcel of human existence.

Manzoni, in his literary ingenuity, offered his world and through it ours, the opportunity to learn through his classical work *I Promessi Sposi*. This beautiful piece of art is imbued with intrigues, rat race, unhealthy competitions, comedy, romance, nemesis, retribution, karma, etc. It is beautifully crafted. Man remains the same in every epoch with very similar modes of rationality, feeling, expectation, temptation, etc. The wealth of experience and knowledge shared by Manzoni in *I Promessi Sposi* reveals a pattern of socio political relationships involving criminality, injury, injustices, terrorism, hate, and acts of cruelty. These destroy civil development and the human rational and spiritual consciousness. It exposes a repetitive trend of righteousness, moral rectitude, justice, and love on a lower scale. But these are such as have the force to strengthen the symphony of universal brotherhood and sisterhood in the human society.

This makes understanding the underlying formats to be worth exploring. The historical experiences shared in the *I Promessi Sposi* along with the parallels, contrasts and apparent structural repetitions in both past literature and contemporary happenstances are strong invitation signals for social and humanistic scientists to get to work about understanding patterns of psycho-social, philosophico-cultural and religio-political tendencies of societies at a cosmic level.

On a purely phenomenological viewpoint, Manzoni's world is given. He could only notice that it was so. His observations reflect a comic fragrance that the contemporary world seriously needs to understudy purposely. It must seek to recreate something better and more human for the good of mankind as a whole. So, even if Mark Twain had intuited that every civilization bears the seeds of its destruction with the same cycle showing in them all,¹² that ought not to be a fatal and ominous condemnation of man. Destruction could be double-directional. It could be positive. That is when evil is destroyed. It should rather be a warning and alarm system. The day the so-called civilized world civilizes destruction for all negatives would be remarkable.

One would expect better action where governments do not provide basic amenities, like water, basic infrastructures like good roads, basic education, etc. Purported interventions should not only be just against the non-acceptance of moral depravities as being different. A new humanism requires more than clinging to exclusive rights on the presumption of possessing superior morality. It requires more than trying to export and impose particular political systems and conditioning them to one's ideas and interests. It requires an openness to a process, welcoming what appears as it appears. Such new humanism will mark a new trend and a world different from the Manzonian and pre-2nd millennium CE worlds. This advocates for a new method of reflection that would transcend the contemporary world since it is still philosophically running on outmoded ones. Following Jean-Luc Marion's version of the phenomenological approach would help in this. That is what the phenomemological excursus on the Manzonian epic would offer.

¹² See Mark Twain Quotations – Civilization, in Directory of Mark Twain Maxims, quotations and various opinions at https://www.azquotes.com/quote/860634#google_vignette accessed on 10 July, 2024 at 10.35ET.

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