

Christopher Korten

Faculty of History, Adam Mickiewicz University;
Department of English, Nicolaus Copernicus University
Chriskorten@yahoo.com

Cognitive Narratology and its Benefits for the (Archival) Historian

Abstract. While literary theory in general is not employed by historians to any great extent, cognitive narratology presents the historian with tools to appreciate texts more fully. With an emphasis on the mind, cognitive narratology focuses on the emotional side of history, as it were, and can elicit an understanding of the text which would otherwise and normally be overlooked. By examining language, and in particular, metaphors and deictics, in order to script the narrative, historical texts can as well produce cognitive clues about the author's intent and mindset. For this first time, cognitive narratology is employed in the study of unpublished (archival) letters.

Keywords: cognitive narratology; modern european history; archival documents; naming; deictics.

By recognizing texts as historically-specific records of human minds
in action, we can achieve new insights into both individual texts
and the cultural milieus in which they exist.
(Zunshine *et al.* 1998)

Cognitive narratology, which combines the study of narrative and the mind, has till now played almost no role in refining the historian's trade. Historians have generally looked askance at the tools employed by literary theorists, in part because it is believed that these applications are somehow convoluting the interpretive process or providing only sophistry in lieu of common sense

and critical reading (Kunsteiner 1993: 286; Carr 2008). Even narrative theory itself (minus the cognitive aspect), a common feature of both literature and history, has developed along parallel but separate paths (Fulda 2014). One-time historian Hayden White's foray into the structuralist-narrative discourse more than forty years ago bore this out as he attracted more support (and criticism) from literary critics than historians. He even subsequently transitioned into the literary field (Vann 1998). Historians largely rejected his relativist notions found in *Metahistory* (1973), which served to confirm their hunch about the dangers of literary theory's application to history. English historian Lawrence Stone wrote passionately:

I agree in denouncing the appalling corruption of style in the writing of history by social science jargon and linguistic and grammatical obfuscation. I also agree that we should fight to preserve from the attacks by extreme relativists, from Hayden White to Derrida, the hard-won professional expertise in the study of evidence that was worked out in the late nineteenth century. (Kunsteiner 1993: 286–7)

At issue for Stone and others was White's belief that historians employ a trio of practices, deliberate or not (most often not), in developing their storyline. Behind every historical text are three essential elements: a type of emplotment or narrative technique; a type of argument or explanation; and a type of ideology or ethical position. The historian, White goes on to argue, cannot avoid these three phenomena, which occur during the process of taking a list of facts and converting them into the form of a story. The consequence of this is significant: historiography is infused with personal preferences and bias in order to fill in the narrative gaps. Thus, historiography is preceded or accompanied by metahistory: that which is concerned with the structure of historical narrative, which in White's case constitutes semi-factualisms or outright fictionalizations.

At the heart of White's scepticism, where historical accuracy is concerned, is language. There exist four "distinct tropes of consciousness" which carry out historiographical exposition. They include metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony¹. These in turn reflect or "determine the secondary,

¹ For more on White's later ideas, in which he focuses more on narrativity and problems in literary criticism, see: Kunsteiner 1993: 284–85. For White's latest intellectual developments, see: Domańska, Ewa (2008) "A conversation with Hayden White", *Rethinking History*, 12:1, 3–21.

conceptual level of the historian's representational framework," outlined in the previous paragraph (Kunsteiner 1993: 277–85).

If we look to the field of political philosophy, language has also been a focus, in this case, to outline improved ways to interpret political texts. Quentin Skinner in his now famous article "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" places emphasis on language and its context (1969). And if we consider such political writings or speeches as historical acts and not merely ideas, then the discussion alongside White becomes more germane. Previously, the two main schools of thought within the field of political science claimed either that various empirical methods applied to texts could unlock their meaning without the need for historical context, such as what New Criticism offered to the interpretation of a poem, or that speeches or writings were best understood through their historical contexts. What Skinner proposes, in addition to the historical context, is a linguistic context, or rather, a linguo-historical context, which he felt is crucial to the understanding of a writer's intentions (Pocock 2008). In other words, writers "act in and upon" the language. Thus, in order to ensure the most accurate understanding of a given text, it is necessary to collect the full complement of possible meanings, based on what others said at the time. "The Other" – that is, the response or competing ideas (using similar language) made against the text under review – was necessary to consider in order to delimit the possible meanings for a given passage or word. Until the wider linguistic context is understood, Skinner argued, arriving at a correct interpretation is either elusive or only fortuitously conceived (Hsiao).

And just as for White, so too the historian of political thought constructs historical narratives. For Skinner, narrative was paramount to his theory, in order to unlock truer meaning; for White, narrative was "imposed on a non-narrative world, distorting it and thus concealing rather than revealing it" (Carr 2008: 27). He was not concerned with understanding how storytelling could assist the historical interpretation, but with ascribing it literary features which inevitably placed a gap between it and the real world. For White, the construction of historical narratives was executed in a predetermined, semi-fictional manner; historians of political thought from the so-called "Cambridge School," such as Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, believed that narrative in fact helped to remove fiction from the story by observing changing "conditions" or "contexts" and processes surrounding the utterance of political statement (Pocock 2008: 165).

In spite of the differences, both Skinner and White affirm the existence of "gaps" in the narrative, which cognitive narratology seeks to address

and narrow. In utilizing cognitive approaches, I am suggesting that there is an opportunity to address the problems which White determined were unable to be addressed in his textualist approach, and to complement Skinner's theory of interpretation.

As its name suggests, cognitive narratology is derived from studies of the mind (psychology) and of narratives. On the narrative side, it owes its heritage to postclassical theories, which in turn draws from classical structuralists, such as R. Barthes, G. Genette, and T. Todorov (Herman 1999). White was influenced early on by Barthes. On the cognitive side, this science, formerly a separate endeavour in psychology, began to be applied to literary narrative in the 1990s (Duchan *et. al.* 1995). This became what is known as the "cognitive turn". The mind was now considered "a core property of narrativity," and experience or "subjective awareness" became an object of interpretation (Herman 2013) or at times, speculation. In terms of language, textual signals within the "narrative discourse" which acts as prompts for cognitive-based analysis, were examined by Ryan (1991) and Werth (1999). And M. Turner (1996) began discussing metaphors as a cognitive-linguistic model to understand the human mind through "parabolic projections" and the "mapping of source stories onto target stories."

What this article proposes is to identify cognitive clues within archival documents and use these (clues) to project greater meaning onto the historical frame, already resident in the historian's mind. In other words, I am suggesting that instead of placing cognitive clues strictly (and only) into a narrative frame or script in order to produce understanding, the historian is in a unique position to overlay another – historical – frame or script based on his or her historical expertise. By framing I mean a story within a story; while scripting "generate[s] expectations about how sequences of events are supposed to unfold" (Herman 2013). By its very definition, scripts are more applicable to cognitive aspects of narrative than framing (Olson and Fludernik 2011)². And concerning the historian, the greater the degree of knowledge one possesses in one's field of study, the clearer and more refined these historical frames and scripts will be, and the more meaning and insight can be drawn from the material under examination, which in this case are archival letters.

² On the limits of framing, see Sternberg, Meir (2003). "Universals of Narrative and Their Cognitivist Fortunes (I)." *Poetics Today* 24, 297–395. Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik discuss the division between 'frame-abiding' and "frame-shattering" – in the postclassical era of narratology.

Applying cognitive narratology to letter writing is appropriate for several reasons. Personal letters are by their very nature emotional, and thus represent an important, but neglected area of study. And in terms of framing the size of letters written in Europe in the early 19th century approximate dimensions of a picture frame (see Photo 1.)³. Thus, the letters conform both physically and instrumentally to the notion of framing. Each successive letter mirrors the “frame by frame” approach of narratologists. And gaps in these episodic or interrupted narratives are observable.

Despite encompassing a large and diverse “narrative corpora,” including transmedia forms of analysis, cognitive narratology has not included the sort of non-fictional examples that this paper proposes to examine, that is archival correspondence. Personal letters comprise, in nearly all cases, micro-stories which somehow intersect with the author’s life. In this manner, personal letters meet the minimum criteria established by experts in cognitive narratology, since they contain “at least some degree of narrativity” (Herman 2013; Fludernik 1996).

And while cognitive narratology has not been employed by historians, Natalia Zemon Davis’ celebrated work, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* does employ narratology (1987). This historian of early modern France uses sixteenth-century pardon tales located in French archives “to examine the storytelling arts of ordinary people” (Halttunen 1999: 169). Davis is handicapped somewhat by the uncertainty of authorship (whether legal scribes or the petitioner) as well as the lack of biographical information of each of the petitioners of these plea narratives, obstacles that this present work does not have. Alberto Bellenghi (1757-1839), the author of the letters which this article will study, possessed a (minor) noble background from the province of Forli-Cesena in the region of Emilia-Romagna in central Italy (Pignatelli 1970). He joined the Camaldolese order, a branch of the Benedictines, in 1773. Monks who entered the profession before the turn of the 19th century, as Bellenghi did, were often socially privileged and well educated, as Bellenghi was. He published two books each in the fields of archeology and canon law during the 1780s and 1790s. The recipient of Bellenghi’s correspondence was nobleman Count Girolamo Possenti. How they first met is unclear, but they were intimately acquainted; Bellenghi often sent greetings to or enquired into members of Possenti’s immediate family. Thus, the contribution here is not as it is in Davis’ case, to give voice to lower social castes (and a few

³ Berlatsky (2009) rejects the picture frame metaphor in favor of the comic book layout instead.

women), but to suggest research in a new genre, personal letters, digitally or traditionally archived. In European repositories alone, the number of such letters surely runs into the millions and therefore represents a large academic area for consideration.

A. C. S. Romualdo Roma li 17. gbre 1814.

Bisogna che mi facciate il piacere di chiamare D. Sulpizio, e persuaderlo a partire subito per Roma, consegnandogli la bacchia se ne va di obbedienza. So li ho dato in nota per questa famiglia alla sacra Congregazione stante l' esibizione sua di venire: se non viene, e non si presenta potrebbe avere anche l' esclusiva dalla Religione, e non poter più rientrare. Fare dunque che subito venga, perché ancora ne abbiamo bisogno, e la di lui mancanza troppo ci scancerà, avendo sino ad ora per tal cosa stati danneggiati per circa 40. scudi.

Ho pensato al trovarli la somma se ne va. Avevo ad esso congregatori 7:50 per i singoli, ma intendendo che voi li avete delegati dai 7:50 li ho rinviati.

Le cose nostre cominciano ad andare meno male. Sia sino dai 14. del corrente che siamo in S. Romualdo, e si è dovuto aprire per vin dalla prima sino all'ultima porta: non ostante il Palombi viene la metà della Cava le bonoghe sono, e ci mostra con progre, e citazioni: ma ora noi siamo in possesso. L'ammunizione ci ha accordati 7500 per i rinvii di S. Gregorio, ed inoltre 7150 di averiani per lo stesso oggetto da rinvii per a comodo. La prima in vero benché bellissima è di 71500. Ci ha accordato pure un annuo Canone rimesso a S. Romualdo di 7100. Tutto sta nella misericordia. In S. Romualdo ci hanno danneggiati per dispendio di circa 7100 in muri, servante, porte, finestre &c. Per questo ancora è necessaria la pronta venuta di D. Sulpizio per riparare.

Spiccammi la parola che temere di Lanterna. Vedere una donna che era molto affezionata alla Cava.

Vi compiego la vicenda delle Absse. Due saglio comandamenti. Salvarammi tutti di Cava, il Compare e la Congregazione. Questa mattina spontaneamente la S. C. mi ha con Vigliano spedita la riprova del Monio dell' Avolana, e per questo de suoi beni coll' ordine di sparare col V. G. di Cayli, sulla riforma di quel Monio rimessa a noi due dal S. P. Vedo, che per ora non può aver luogo nel riprova, e per questo per gli introppi che vi sono, e voi sapere. Sono che saviamo dunque, se può lo savanno ci vivremo, e mai più vicino a Roma. Addio.

V. Affid. Amico e D.
D. A. Bellanghi.

Photo 1. Letter from A. Bellanghi to G. Possenti, 17 Nov. 1814. State Archives of Rome

Personal letters are different in still other ways to Davis' pardon tales. Concerning the latter, the story is "complete" in that it is composed with a beginning, a middle and an end. And their purpose is understood: to induce mercy from the king. Personal letters, on the other hand, are written for a different purpose – to convey the happenings in one's life or to report on affairs of mutual interest, between writer and receiver. In terms of narrative, each letter is comprised most often of a series of incomplete micro-plots or stories. They have large gaps in terms of both information and time, especially given the pace of travel and transport in the early 19th century; as well, these epistolary narratives do not always contain proper character development nor introductions and denouements. In the story narrated by Bellenghi, which deals with a property dispute, he begins rather suddenly, with no introduction of the main antagonist. Such gaps in the narrative provide special challenges for the historian; they also, I believe, provide opportunities and a rationale for the use of literary and cognitive theories.

This present study stands out within the field of cognitive narratology in two important ways that the reader must bear in mind throughout. First, as mentioned, this epistolary genre represents a specific "medium," to borrow David Herman's terminology, which has hitherto been unexamined. The second difference deals with the objective of this inquiry. While both the historian and the literary theorist endeavour to interpret and understand whatever it is that they are examining, the goal at the lower levels is different. The late, renowned legal philosopher and theorist, Ronald Dworkin, made a compelling attempt to reconcile contrasting interpretations of a particular text or painting or whatever else two people can disagree about when forming an interpretation. A literary or legal interpreter, he argued, adopted an approach known as "collaborative interpretation". That is to say, the interpreter forms a "partnership" with the creator of the work. For the legal interpreter, she collaborates with Thomas Jefferson when analyzing the Declaration of Independence; for the literary interpreter, he works in tandem, as it were, with Lord Byron to form meaning. By contrast, the historian is primarily interested in an explanatory interpretation. Dworkin continues: "[The historian studies] the meaning of the events or data and take[s] what they deem to be important and important for their audience." This helps explain why Hayden White was so roundly criticized by historians of nearly every ilk; for his ideas contravened one of the historian's core values, effectively saying in *Metahistory* that "valid historical explanation is dead." Incidentally, this quotation, purloined and adapted from Nietzsche, was not so far removed from what the great German philosopher and philologist

himself believed. The nature of language becomes debased over time, and truth becomes a rather empty collection of figures of speech.

Thus, I intend to use the theoretical applications and in particular these cognitive and narrative findings in order to explain more fully what happened. Hence, this article will examine one story in the Bellenghi correspondence and analyze it structurally and linguistically in order to find cognitive clues. I will look at the story's various frames and (internal) contexts and the significances of their merging with and separating from other stories within each letter. What is more, I will look at instances of shifts in naming and deictics. In all three cases, the goal is to gain insights into Bellenghi's mind; for he is both author and protagonist in the story.

The story in question is derived from a cache of a 100 or so letters from Bellenghi to Possenti housed at the State Archives of Rome. They cover nearly 19 years of friendship, from 1799 to 1818. Individually, the letters contain numerous micro-narratives. I have decided to focus on one particular story that took place between 1814 and 1815 and is found in 15 of these letters. The setting is Rome; the period is known as the Restoration (1814-30), which followed the (first) defeat of Napoleon in the spring of 1814. As was generally the case, the property of religious orders had been sold or otherwise confiscated following the military conquests of Napoleonic France. This was especially so in Italy. Monasteries and non-diocesan properties were easy targets for pillage by the French and their local collaborators. The residence and property which Procurator General Bellenghi and others in leadership for his order occupied in Rome (i.e. S. Romualdo) was sold in 1812 to a private (wealthy) citizen of Rome, Francesco Palombi. The fate of property was, in fact, the most controversial aspect of the Restoration. Bellenghi's story, thus, represents a much wider problem occurring at the time. The story which will be examined here discusses Bellenghi's struggle to reobtain the building from its new owner (Palombi).

The Palombi affair is positioned within each letter alongside other micro-narratives, some larger, some smaller, some related, some not; and the letter itself, and its collection of stories, in turn is framed within the context of Bellenghi's life. (I will not be taking into consideration the paratext of the letter, i.e. the address page, the headings and salutations, which Genette made so much of; Berlatsky 2009). The degree to which the larger history or backdrop is known is dependent upon the historian's knowledge of the individual and their circumstances (*Sitz im Leben*), as well as the amount of the extant material. This represents a sort of merging of horizons between the background of the reader and those of the text/author in what H.G. Gadamer spoke of in his famous theory *Horizontverschmelzung*. Herman simplifies

Gadamer's model in explaining the presence of these so-called "gaps" in the story: "The dynamics and interpretation of narratives depend on the absence of information and on discrepancies between the reader's knowledge and the knowledge possessed by narrators and characters. As narrative theory teaches us, narratives come into being through the interaction between minds and narrative gaps" (Bernaerts, *et al.* 2013: 3).

In each of the fifteen letters written between October 1814 and May 1815, the physical placement or location of the Palombi story differs. Firstly, in none of the letters is the story ever the lead, that is, the first story discussed after the heading. Instead, stories and issues that directly involve both Possenti and Bellenghi are related first; and they nearly always involve money, or the lack thereof in the case of Bellenghi. Thus, in terms of collective interest between Possenti and Bellenghi, the Palombi story is less important. But in terms of Bellenghi's own life, the story is often the first story discussed that does not directly involve Possenti. So critical is the story to Bellenghi that at one point he even tries to involve Possenti in the Palombi dispute by asking for his help in finding alternative housing, should Bellenghi be forced to leave the residence (letter #12).

It comes as no surprise that Bellenghi would be concerned with securing stable housing. Yet this fear or concern varies during the eight months of the affair and can be observed by how Bellenghi structures his letter. In nearly half of the missives to Possenti which deal with the topic, i.e. 6 of 15, Bellenghi gives the affair its own paragraph, suggesting a great preoccupation with it. There were three occasions when Bellenghi merges a story within the Palombi affair. This, to my mind, signifies the affair's overshadowing presence in relation to other events taking place in Bellenghi's life. What is revealing here are the other issues that Bellenghi associates with the Palombi story. One can even suggest that, to Bellenghi's mind, there must be causal relationships to events that he places within the same paragraph, when leading with the Palombi story. In one letter he mentions his pecuniary status, rhetorically asking Possenti how it will be possible for the monks to live on 400 lire (letter #5); and while the temporary loss of their residence did not directly contribute to their poverty, it represented instability in key areas of his life. The Church set a fixed yearly allowance for the monks, which Bellenghi considered insufficient and as unsettling as the Palombi affair. On another occasion, he fuses the problems related to the order's flagship monastery, S. Gregorio, just a 10 minute walk from S. Romualdo, to the troubles with Palombi (letter #6). In both cases Bellenghi illuminates the larger, background issues which were playing out during the Restoration. Religious clerics, i.e. monks and nuns, lacked the resources

not only to prepare their former monasteries for re-entry, but in many cases, merely to provide for themselves.

What is also interesting in terms of story placement are the occasions when the Palombi narrative is located within an existing paragraph or story, as was the case in nearly half of the letters (6 of 15). At such times, it seems that the affair is less of a concern for Bellenghi. For example in his letter from 15 November 1814, he begins the second of three paragraphs reporting on payments received and those which will be made. This is followed by a matter of fact statement that he and the other monks are planning to move back into S. Romualdo “within the week” (letter #4). The statement is reported with no emotive language. On this occasion he held a more positive and confident attitude regarding the outcome of the Palombi affair. More often – on at least four of the seven occasions – the Palombi story is woven into the larger narrative of the Restoration. For Bellenghi it seems then, in contrast to the above paragraph when the concerns of the Restoration were of secondary importance to his ability to find a permanent accommodation, on these occasions, the more general concerns of the Restoration and his order overshadowed his own individual concerns: “Here [in Rome] affairs go very badly and nothing is concluded. All superiors of monastic orders believe that they must return [to their original monastic residences], just as they came” (letter #3). On such occasions he draws solace from knowing that he is not alone in these struggles for survival, as he views it. But in fact many others are feeling similarly. This communal attitude which Bellenghi describes is a common coping mechanism among those who are feeling persecuted or targeted in some way.

Turning to the analysis of naming and renaming within a narrative, much can be gleaned cognitively, informing the reader of Bellenghi’s state of mind and his changes in attitude. In our story, which is carried along through fifteen letters, Bellenghi refers to Palombi in four different ways: Palombi, Mr [*Signore*] Palombi, buyer [*Compratore*] Palombi, and simply acquirer or purchaser [*acquirente*]. In Bellenghi’s first letter which discusses the story, he refers to the antagonist as simply “Palombi,” a referent as opposed to a description⁴. Palombi’s sudden entry, without a first name or a description, suggests that Possenti was familiar with him. In what context that might have been is unknown. But it is very possible that the two friends had discussed the situation in person some time between Palombi’s purchase of S. Romualdo in 1812 and Bellenghi’s return to Rome in the middle

⁴ For the use of referents in the theory of naming, see R. Ronen (1994). *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 131.

of 1814. Palombi is referred to by name in the first nine letters, in the form of “Palombi” (six times), “Mr Palombi” (twice) or “Buyer Palombi” (once). In two of the early letters, from October 1814, he refers to him as “Sig.r Palombi” or Mr Palombi, which from the context would seem to denote a more official and respectful disposition on the part of Bellenghi (letters #2/#3). However, in subsequent correspondence detailing the problems that Palombi is causing, Bellenghi drops the “Mr” in front of his name. He attributes damage of the residence to Palombi: “But Palombi has done much damage to the walls, doors, and windows, out of spite” (letter #5). Additionally, Bellenghi hears of rumours that Palombi will seek financial reimbursement from the order for the capital improvements made on the building (letter #4). In terms of the renaming which occurs in the story, John Frow believes such instances “[signal] a change of social status” (Frow 2014: 185). Whether or not this change by Bellenghi is social in nature, it certainly represents a more negative attitude toward Palombi⁵.

There is a separate context involving Bellenghi which correlates with his use of referents and his fluctuation of attitude. In a letter dated 8 February 1815, in which he transitions from using “Palombi” to simply “buyer” [*acquirente*], Bellenghi also expresses his desire to leave Rome, and thus, remove himself from the story: “I am determined to leave Rome” [*sono fisso di partire da Roma*] (letter #10). Associating these two concomitant facts (the change in reference and the desire to quit Rome), the dispirited Bellenghi seems to be reflecting a desire to detach himself from the problems caused by Palombi – a sort of psychological protective mechanism. Even more revealing and symbolic of his capitulation is his refusal to refer to Palombi by name in the final six letters of the story; feelings of ill-will and associations with a troubled existence seem to account for the change.

But beyond any cognitive insights – what Nesselroth (1996) might refer to as a change in attitude – there is as well a descriptive element to calling Palombi simply “acquirer.” In doing so, Bellenghi is acknowledging that Palombi purchased the property in a legal sort of way. If not, Bellenghi could have referred to him using any number of less respectful appellations. This concession conforms as well, to his actions of retreating – from Rome (physically) and from the fight (emotionally). Why challenge for the rights to a residence someone else owns?

⁵ On the relationship of names and experiences or attitudes, see P. R. Nesselroth, (1996). Naming Names in Telling Tales. In C. A. Mihailescu and W. Hamarneh (Eds.) *Fiction Updated: Theories of Fictionality, Narratology, and Poetics*. Toronto–Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 133.

The evolution of Bellenghi's attitude to a more defeatist one is revealed in the text in still other ways. His use of personal pronouns reveals a sort of deictic shift which takes place as the narrative progresses. Deictic shifting is traditionally understood through the changes of who, where and when, that is the pronoun "I" or "he," "here" or "there," or "coming" and "going" (Duchan *et. al.* 1995). I will consider forms of deictic shifts dealing with whom and where – Bellenghi's position of himself or "I" within the story and the physical referent of where (i.e. the order's former house [*casa*]).

In the early letters, Bellenghi refers to the battle (or "war") with Palombi over control of the building as his own, often using the first person pronoun "I" [*io*]. On 3 October 1814, he writes: "you cannot comprehend the war that I must sustain with Palombi, who has powerful protectors" (letter #1). In the following letter he again positions himself in the centre of the story: "I hope of going to live in the house of Mr Palombi" (letter #2). His optimism or "hope" early on is based on the reports that he had been given concerning the order's imminent return to the residence. As events begin unfolding unpredictably, the focus of the story begins to shift slightly. Bellenghi begins to omit himself from the story – or at least, he narrates as part of a group of monks, not desiring to stand alone on the parapet, as it were. He still has hope, in a letter the following week, but it is less pronounced. "I have hope" is mentioned at the end of the three-line entry, not at the beginning. Instead he begins by using the communal first person plural possessive "our" without reference to himself: "Our affairs go very badly, and nothing is concluded" (letter #3). He contextualizes this affair within the larger Restoration taking place, which I noted earlier, in an effort to align himself with others undergoing similar hardships.

What is also interesting to note is that, as the affair takes an unexpected turn and a final decision on the fate of the residence is further delayed, Bellenghi begins to invoke (or at least mention) "God." And in the sense of narrative, he creates a new character to replace himself within the story, as if to suggest that his efforts failed and someone more capable is needed. After one former monk returned to take up his former profession, following a long period of forced secularization, Bellenghi exclaims idiomatically: "Let's hope that he [Torelli] won't lose it all" [*Dio voglia che non s'abbia a spogliare*] (letter #3). *Dio*, Italian for "God," is used idiomatically here, but within the context of the Restoration and within the same paragraph as the Palombi affair. Perhaps the idea here is more compelling if the story is looked at differently. Bellenghi never invoked "God" in the narrative when the outcome appeared at hand or at least predictable. So whereas his "hope" from a week earlier lay in his understanding of how events would favorably unfold, a week later,

he invoked the “support” of his colleagues, who themselves were in similar situations, as well as God, as a basis of his “great hope” [*molto speranza*] (letter #3).

By the end of 1814, Bellenghi shifted the responsibility of the outcome, i.e. his fate, solely onto “God.” Four months in the affair it was no longer his “war:” “The Holy Father has remitted the supplication to the Cardinal. May God bring us good [results] and not leave us homeless another time” (letter #8). And again in March 1815, Bellenghi is no longer a key part of the narrative, or if so, only in a passive manner: “The affairs of the house are still prolonged, and I see that it will be delayed further until the owner comes to take possession of it again. May God’s will be done” (letter #11). Bellenghi’s reaction and reliance upon divine intervention was not uncommon at this time, especially when situations appeared hopeless or dire. During the impending French invasion of Rome in 1796, it was clear that the undermanned and undertrained papal guards would be no obstacle for the French. At once there appeared in various cities of the Papal Legations, instances of a “moving-eyed Mary,” which locals, clerics and lay, interpreted as God’s promise for divine intervention and protection⁶.

Finally, Bellenghi’s nomenclature when referring to the residence in question, provide cognitive clues into Bellenghi’s thinking. His use of “house” [*casa*] in its various forms project certain attitudes and assumptions. When Bellenghi initially arrives to Rome the spring of 1814 to find the building with a new owner, he refers to it as “the house of Mr Palombi” (letters #2/#3). A week later, when he thought that he and his colleagues would be moving back in, he referred to the building, revealingly, as “the house of S. Romualdo” (letter #5). S. Romualdo was the founder of the Camaldolese order to which Bellenghi belonged and was the name assigned to this house prior to Palombi’s purchase of it. In this letter Palombi is mentioned separately, no longer identified as the owner of the house, but now as simply an actor in the narrative. With his presumed imminent return, Bellenghi wrote, “Within a week I will be in S. Romualdo” (letter #4). The sole use of “S. Romualdo” to identify his house served to link ever more closely in Bellenghi’s mind his right to inhabit the building. However, as matters become complicated, Bellenghi refers to the building as simply

⁶ For more, see: M. Cattaneo (2000). *L’Invidia Appagata: de’ prodigi avvenuti in molte sagre immagini specialmente di Maria Santissima in Rome*. In *Roma negli anni di influenza e dominio francese*. Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 133–58, and (1995). *Maria versus Marianne. I “miracoli” del 1796 ad Ancona*. In *Cristianesimo nella storia*. 16, 1: 45–77; L. Fiorani (1992). *Città religiosa e città rivoluzionaria*. In *Ricerche per la Storia Religiosa di Roma*. 9: 110-118.

“casa” with no attachment either to Palombi or to his order. This choice of wording occurs in the four middle letters (letters #8-11). And then as fear grips him, he adopts a more formal approach in ascribing the residence to Palombi: “One fears that the buyer of the house will return in a few days” (letter #12).

In his final four letters about the affair, between 25 March and 24 May 1815, Bellenghi avoids reference not only to Palombi but as well the house (except for one reference in the final letter). The story instead focuses on Bellenghi’s unfortunate situation, but in such an oblique manner that he seems to confirm Barthes’s idea that the writing obstructs the origin of meaning and the subject somehow slips away (Barthes 1970). There is no reference point in physical or personal terms (letter #13). The narrative becomes almost unintelligible, subsumed by the emotional stress of uncertainty. Or when there is a focal point of sorts, it centers around the act of being removed: “the alienation affair” (*L’affaire dell’alienazione*) (letter #14). In the final letter of the story, the deictic shift is complete: “The house has been rented... and it costs us 5.50 lire. The petition for us has still not been decided... . Meanwhile we are here” (letter #15). The story concludes but one gets the feeling that there is no closure for Bellenghi. The feeling of uncertainty looms – as Bellenghi never writes “our house.” In fact he does not associate the building with either party, reflecting perhaps as well the divided nature of the building itself – with Palombi occupying part, the monks, part. Nonetheless, there is what can be referred to as a deictic conclusion to the story – “Meanwhile, we are here.” The reader understands where “here” is and which “house” is being referred to. They are the same. But not in the mind of Bellenghi, who throughout his narration altered his understanding of *casa* based on the ebbs and flows of the narrative, which, unlike fictional accounts, he was never in control of despite being its author. His abrupt conclusion leaves the reader with a feeling of incompleteness through the use of “meanwhile;” in a similar way, I believe, this is how Bellenghi himself felt.

As alluded to at the outset, historians may bridle at the notion of the use of such theories as cognitive narratology which necessitates at times the use of “perhaps,” “might/maybe” or “seems.” These words of uncertainty, purists would argue, are better left out of the historical record until more proof is found. Philosopher of history David Carr (2008) argues persuasively about the need to exercise caution when applying “rigid formal [cognitive] structures” to texts, for he believes that they might “well restrict meaning and interpretation.” Carr’s fear is understandable: scholars should not abandon their common sense formed through scientific inquiry and mindlessly conform to “a certain worldview” or theory. In the process he

expresses scepticism about the efficacies of cognitive science on narrative interpretation. He believes that cognitive narratology will eventually give way to other newer fads or theories, rendering it, in effect, obsolete. Not coincidentally, Carr had critical words for Hayden White's theories as well, one of which was mentioned at the outset of this article. And on this point, Carr unwittingly justifies the need for such a study. He believes that the narrative structure is not "arbitrarily imposed on the events of the past, but inherent in them. For Carr, our narratives reflect a fundamental property of human consciousness; they are part of the fabric of human life." (Halttunen 1999: 170–71) Cognitive narratology is also concerned with the human consciousness.

The future of cognitive narratology, however, is not my concern presently. More critically is whether or not the questions related to theories such as cognitive narratology lead us closer to "truth." In this sense, the use of cognitive narratology is, I believe, justified because literary theorists ask more questions about the author and the text. And more questions inevitably lead to better questions. In this article I asked a series of cognitive-leading questions, in relation to Bellenghi's uses of several referents, including himself, as "I", and the residence. As well questions related to the evolution of Bellenghi's language over the eight months during which these letters were written – from "hope" to "God" – is suggestive of his views and feelings.

My initial examination of these letters, as part of my doctoral dissertation of 2006, led to a general understanding of the event. I understood that Bellenghi and his order struggled to gain re-entry into the house, but lost on me at the time were the psychological aspects of the struggle. And these aspects can in turn inform the historian about the historical setting. In addition, the very notion of time – such a crucial element of narrative and historiography – was less appreciated in 2006 than in 2016. The ups and downs, the high points and low points, are particularly felt during a cognitive analysis of language, referentiality and reader reception. As a result, the duration of the Palombi affair lengthened, as if were. I also have a greater sense of Bellenghi's perspective, his state of mind and the uncertainty of these times, which are revealed through his language. Just as for White and Skinner, language in our case, reveals cognitive qualities of the author which in turn unlock more meaning of the event.

Bellenghi's projection of events onto the larger canvas of the Restoration, which are revealed in the structure of his letters, provides justification for the historian to do the same. Contrary to what its name suggests, the Restoration was a period of forlorn hopes and great uncertainty. Bellenghi's fears related to money and housing and career were experienced by all of those men and

women who desired to return (many did not) to their former professions following the defeat of Napoleon. That Bellenghi desired to give up the fight so quickly not only reveals a personal characteristic of his, but as well an insight into a rather privileged and uncontested past which certain monks had previously enjoyed.

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