



# Is There an Unconscious in This Text? On Italo Svevo's "La Coscienza di Zeno"

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# 11 Is There an Unconscious in This Text? On Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno*

Alessandra Diazzi

## Introduction

Close to the Triestine psychoanalytic circles and, at the same time, sceptical towards the effectiveness of the talking cure, Italo Svevo published in 1923 Italy's first psychoanalytic novel, *La coscienza di Zeno*.<sup>1</sup>

In *La coscienza*, psychoanalysis constitutes one of the principal themes of the novel, while it acts at the same time as a fundamental narrative device.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, the text stems from a reflection on psychoanalysis and Freud's theories shape the book as a whole. Affirming the same for the dimension of the unconscious is, though, far more problematic. Although Svevo disseminates ubiquitous references to Freudian thought throughout the book, the literary elaboration – and portrayal – of the unconscious is less straightforward, if at all present. To the extent that, I believe, the reader is left wondering: is the unconscious actually present in *La coscienza di Zeno*? Or Svevo's attempt to polemicize against the talking cure results, at the same time, in an almost complete erasure of Freud's most perturbing discovery?

My contribution moves from the hypothesis that the irony Svevo shows towards psychoanalysis and, more broadly, the resistance against the discipline the book consciously exhibits, result in a mode of narrative in which the unconscious finds no place whatsoever. Zeno's story systematically contradicts the unsettling discovery the Ego is no longer the master in its own house, in being the text narrated by a character that is, to say it with Briosi and Genco, 'condannato alla coscienza' [condemned to consciousness].<sup>3</sup> The narrator presents to the reader a plot entirely mastered by his conscious 'I', even – and I would say above all – in those passages where the unconscious seemingly takes control over the narrator's conscious voice. What follows intends therefore to demonstrate that, although Svevo's novel is a text wherein psychoanalysis is ubiquitous, yet the unconscious is almost totally absent. By so doing, my analysis situates itself in the path treaded by Genco's reading of *La coscienza* as a narrative that lies its roots 'nella coscienza (onnipresente) e non nell'inconscio' [in the (ubiquitous) consciousness and not in the unconscious] to the extent that, every time 'le irrompenti pulsioni della psiche' [the bursting urges of psyche] seem to affect Zeno's account,

‘queste sortite [...] entrano anch’essere nel cosciente sistema formale del testo. Zeno insomma *racconta* delle finzioni coscienti’ [these outbreaks [...] also enter the conscious formal structure of the text. In sum, Zeno consciously *tells* fiction].<sup>4</sup>

By arguing, with Genco, that a programmatic erasure of the unconscious dimension takes place in *La coscienza di Zeno*, my analysis intends in no way to diminish the crucial influence the knowledge of Freudian theories had on Svevo’s book. *La coscienza di Zeno* owes a fundamental and undeniable debt towards Freud, whose theories shape the plot and act as the fundamental trigger for the narrative. Svevo’s book is, I believe, inextricably interwoven with Freud’s thought. I therefore share with scholarship the conviction that it can be, by all means, considered the first Italian psychoanalytic novel. As such, it will be hereby analysed as a paradigmatic example of the way Italian culture has confronted with – and resisted against – psychoanalysis’ challenge to the primacy of the Ego.

Before proceeding with the analysis, though, a methodological premise is necessary. Every time I will refer to the notion of unconscious in *La coscienza di Zeno* I will be not implying in any way the possibility to read the text as the mirror of the author’s most inaccessible realm of psyche. Not even I intend to attribute to Zeno any kind of unconscious, whatever this may mean for a literary character. On this score, I share Baldi’s idea that ‘Zeno è pur sempre un personaggio di carta e le sue libere associazioni non nascondono alcun inconscio da decodificare, solo strategie narrative da interpretare’ [Zeno is, after all, a literary character, and his free associations do not conceal any unconscious to be deciphered, only narrative strategies to be interpreted].<sup>5</sup> When speaking of the unconscious in the book I therefore refer to a purely fictional portrayal of this dimension of psyche. Accordingly, the analysis that follows is aimed to detect the author’s attempt – or rather the lack thereof – to reproduce the unconscious’ functioning and its interferences in the narrator’s discourse, on a purely literary level.<sup>6</sup>

## Conscience

The first clue signalling the lack of the unconscious dimension in Svevo’s story is, to say it with Proust, one of ‘those objects that can escape the most minute search and are actually staring everybody in the face where nobody notices them, on the mantelpiece’.<sup>7</sup> The analysis of the unconscious in *La coscienza di Zeno* – Zeno’s consciousness – sounds in fact, literally, a paradox and, even, an oxymoron. An autobiographical collection of memories that, according to the preface, has been written by the character in order to facilitate his treatment – ‘un buon preludio alla psico-analisi’ [a good prelude to psychoanalysis]<sup>8</sup> – does not present itself as the privileged access to the Zeno’s unconscious. Surprisingly, a book that is explicitly inspired by

psychoanalysis and inextricably interwoven with this theme, does not put in the spotlight the unconscious, the psychoanalytic ‘buzzword’ *par excellence* and, by then, a word in fashion. Rather, it lays stress on the rational and controlled subjectivity, on the dimension of psyche that embodies the Cartesian counter-part of the unconscious sphere.

Interestingly, the emphasis on the domain of consciousness, explicit already on a paratextual level, is even more evident when one looks at the first English translation of the book. Beryl De Zoete, the English translator of *La coscienza di Zeno*, transformed in fact Svevo’s title into *Confessions of Zeno*.<sup>9</sup> Far from being a neutral choice, this change clearly orients the reader towards a pre-determined reception of Zeno’s monologue, as a narrative controlled by the dimension of reason and rationality. Through the term ‘confession’, the translator makes in fact explicit reference to a well-defined genre of memoirs, an autobiographical and intimate – but ego-oriented – investigation of the speaking subject’s life and psyche. In his second translation of the book offered to the Anglophone world, William Weaver meant to restore a title that might be closer to the original. Nevertheless, he opted for *Zeno’s Conscience*, instead of choosing the more literal version ‘consciousness’. By so doing, Weaver as well seems to see in Zeno a moral – rather than a psychological – conflict.<sup>10</sup> The erasure of any reference to ‘consciousness’ in the title, in fact, results in the suppression of the dichotomy ‘conscious’/‘unconscious’ as the crucial interpretative framework to understand the protagonist’s narration.<sup>11</sup> These choices should not be exclusively interpreted as editorial decisions, aimed to make the book more easily assimilated by the foreign book market. The two English titles stem from an ambiguity intrinsic to Svevo’s text, which is worth to further investigate.

The book’s preface, allegedly written by Zeno’s psychoanalyst, presents the narrative that follows as a *novella* [story], an *autobiografia* [autobiography], and a collection of *memorie* [memoirs] (5). It is therefore Svevo himself, through Doctor S.’s voice, to provide an explicit interpretative framework to the audience, which is invited to read what follows as a conscious elaboration of the character’s memories. Svevo defines Zeno’s narrative through I-led modes of storytelling, which De Zoete has limited herself to subsume under the umbrella-term ‘confession’.

Accordingly, the character’s first-person diary takes the shape of an elegantly orchestrated story of the speaking ‘I’ and his social posture, rather than of the eclipse of a conscious subject. Giuliana Minghelli is right when she observes that, far from representing the subject’s relapse into an attitude of introjection, *La coscienza’s* story grounds on an inter-relational and extroverted understanding of the subject: ‘The narrator unravels the arrhythmic story of consciousness, which, as the chapter headings suggest [...] unfolds as the story of Zeno’s various associations with his others’.<sup>12</sup> Pierpaolo Antonello goes in the same direction proposing an analysis of the novel ‘non basata su una dimensione

del rimosso, ma dell'*apparente*, di quello che l'autore stesso ha da dirci in fatto di desiderio e di autonomia individuale' [that is not grounded on the sphere of what has been repressed, but of what is patent, of what the author is telling us about desire and individual autonomy]: the idea that, in *La coscienza*, Zeno's desire is not shaped by unconscious forces but instead 'eterodiretto' [other-directed] and led by the mechanism of imitation or, in Girardian terms, mimesis.<sup>13</sup>

The supremacy of an extroverted model of subjectivity is inextricably interwoven with the hegemony of the conscious I over the unconscious sphere that pervades Zeno's narrative. The dominion the Ego imposes on the narrative plot is suggested in Doctor S.'s prefatory note. Although he explains to the reader the importance the diary holds for analytical purposes, Doctor S. adds that Zeno has combined in his story 'tante verità e bugie' [much truth and lies] (5). A statement that, in itself, disallows the possibility that the unconscious may have shaped the narrative. It is therefore the implied reader himself – Zeno's psychoanalyst – to suggest that the narrative Zeno has provided resists the possibility to interpret it analytically. To the extent that he publishes the patient's writing in order to take revenge of his conscious manipulation of psychological material. Within the fictional universe of the book, the analyst turns the notes Zeno wrote in preparation for his analysis into a piece of literature. By so doing, he declares the fictional nature – and therefore the analytical uselessness – of his patient's narrative.

Zeno's unreliability is therefore not attributable to a lack of control over his narrative, nor he is trapped in a psychological dimension wherein imagination and reality are not discernible. If we exclude, as I believe we should, that Zeno's act of writing takes place in a condition of semi-consciousness wherein the boundaries between real and imagined facts blur,<sup>14</sup> we cannot but attribute to the protagonist a conscious control over his narrative. By making Zeno claim 'inventare è una creazione, non già una menzogna' [to invent means to create, not to tell lies] (496), Svevo explicitly frames the act of lying within the domain of creativity and free will. He therefore reiterates the fictional and rational nature of the material Zeno offers to his reader, presenting the character's lies, *lapsus*, and mistakes as a conscious strategy adopted by the narrator, in no way attributable to the interferences of the unconscious. As Pouillon observes, and Albertocchi also believes, 'Zeno mente per essere capito: i dubbi sulla sua presunta malafede, sono varianti elargite *consapevolmente*' [Zeno tells lies in order to be understood: doubts about his alleged bad faith are *willingly* given possibilities].<sup>15</sup>

## Dreams

In *La coscienza*, dreams and lies are inextricably interwoven. Critics categorize Zeno's dreams into two broad categories: those that have been

invented by the analysand, which in no way mean to actually reflect the narrator's oneiric experience; and those that, instead, are presented as they were actually dreamt by the protagonist.

All dreams that are entirely made-up by the protagonist are included in *La coscienza's* last chapter, 'Psico-analisi' [Psycho-analysis]. Here, Zeno 'sferra l'attacco finale con una sequenza di cinque sogni inventati a bella posta per farsi beffe dell'analista' [launches his final attack through a sequence of five dreams he willingly invents from scratch in order to mock his analyst].<sup>16</sup> This sequence is aimed not only to deceive the analyst but also to demonstrate that whoever holds basic psychoanalytic knowledge can easily imitate a Freudian dream-like imagination. The series of dreams belongs to those voluntary lies that the protagonist consciously embedded in his story and must be therefore treated as the product of the narrator's conscious mind. Zeno reduces Freud's language of dreams to a parodical juxtaposition of trivial symbols, a compendium of psychoanalysis that ironically mimics its hermeneutic process. In other words, these dreams lucidly and strategically 'fakes' unconscious mechanisms. By so doing, Svevo discredits the notion of unconscious itself, at the same time showing the shortcomings of the psychoanalytic method. He shows in fact psychoanalysis is grounded on the analysis of irrational processes of psyche that the rational mind is able to falsify. As a result, although in psychoanalysis the telling of the dream holds, likewise the dream itself, a crucial relevance in hermeneutic terms, this mechanism cannot be applied to Zeno's reports of oneiric activity, which, for dreams of the first category, is totally fictional.

Dreams of the second group, allegedly dreamt by the protagonist, are, though, a different matter. The series of the three dreams that Zeno recounts in detail – the dream of the dying father; Zeno's eating Carla's neck; the so-called 'Basedow dream' – cannot be considered purely invented sub-plots. Scholarship has in fact analysed these dreams extensively, treating them as the privileged route to understand Zeno's unconscious and his neurosis. They have been read, in sum, as a fundamental channel to bring to light concealed meanings in *La coscienza*.<sup>17</sup>

Although affirming that these dreams should also be read as inventions of the character I would push the interpretation too further, a thorough analysis of this sequence of 'real dreams' reveals that reading them as the expression of Zeno's alleged unconscious is highly problematic. The most attentive reader should in fact not miss a series of clues that Svevo disseminates in Zeno's account of the oneiric episodes in question. If read together, they signal, I argue, that the relationship between these dreams and the character's unconscious – as well as the existence of a supposed 'hidden content' – should be suspiciously regarded.

A year before the publication of the novel, Svevo had started translating Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* from German into Italian. We have therefore to assume that, both before and during the elaboration of

the novel, Svevo has developed an in-depth knowledge of this work and that, when claiming Freud was a source of inspiration<sup>18</sup> for *La coscienza*, his studies on dreams were in particular an essential point of reference. It is therefore surprising that the three ‘real’ dreams are almost completely impermeable to Freud’s most spectacular finding concerning dreams. The techniques of distortion and concealment that, for Freud, characterizes the oneiric activity, seem in fact not to affect Zeno’s dreams. As a result, in *La coscienza* dreams do not distort manifest content – dominating the unconscious but unacceptable by the conscious mind – transforming them into latent, unrecognizable, content. The way the protagonist tells his oneiric memories does not differ in any relevant manner to the narrative mode he adopts for any other event he accounts for, nor the mechanism of distortions that, for Freud, take place in dreams perturb the narrative.<sup>19</sup>

One could certainly object, with Almansi, that this lack of ‘dream-work’ is obvious since there is no such thing as a ‘pacifica omologia tra il sogno sognato e il sogno raccontato’ [straightforward homology between the dream that is dreamt and the dream that is told]:

Tutti i sogni sognati sono veri e tutti i sogni raccontati sono falsi. Non esiste il sogno: esiste una traduzione verbale nel linguaggio della veglia di quella esperienza multisensoriale simulata [...] detta sogno, che è avvenuta nel mondo del sonno. [...] Il sogno è irrecuperabile perché si estende nei parametri dell’esistenza onirica che ci sono familiari solo quando sogniamo, ma che non possiamo conoscere da svegli.<sup>20</sup>

[All dreamt dreams are true and all told dreams are false. Dreams do not exist: there exists a verbal translation, in the diurnal language, of that multi-sensorial, virtual experience [...] that we call ‘dream’, and which took place in the domain of sleep. [...] Dreams are irrecoverable because they span within the parameters of oneiric existence that are familiar to us only when we sleep, without being able to know them while awoken]

Yet, *La coscienza* exhibits no attempt to reproduce an ‘oneiric style’ nor a dream-like language, not even in the form the alterations of logic can take after the retrospective process of sensemaking carried out by the dreamer. Despite, in fact, the elaboration of dreams always entails a degree of rationalization and a coherent organization, Svevo seems to completely suppress the hallucinatory dimension and the state of cognitive deficiency that accompany the recollection of a dream and the attempt to recount it. In Zeno’s dreams, characters are all recognizable, spaces are faithful to reality, prohibited desires are barely disguised. Moreover, there is no sign of the impressions of displacement, disorientation, and uncertainty to which the dreamer is exposed when translating the oneiric experience into language.

The dream of the dying father is ‘vivissimo’ [most vivid] and it only implies a temporary – and lucid – time slip. This resembles a conscious recollection of memories and has little to do with the ephemeral apparition of oneiric images in which temporality is disjointed. The alteration of actual reality the dream brings along seems to function more as a flashback than as an oneiric phenomenon:

mi riportò con un salto enorme, attraverso il tempo, a quei giorni. Mi rivedevo col dottore nella stessa stanza ove avevamo discusso di mignatte e camicie di forza, in quella stanza che ora ha tutt’altro aspetto perché è la stanza da letto mia e di mia moglie

(65)

[brought me back to those days with a tremendous jump. I saw myself back again, with the doctor, in the same room where we had been discussing of leeches and straitjackets, that room that now looks completely different because it’s my and my wife’s bedroom]

Similarly, the dream in which Zeno eats Carla’s neck is defined by the dreamer ‘bizzarro’ [odd] in its content but, in no way, the logic congruence of the episode is loose or confused, and not even inconsistent. On the contrary, Zeno describes a surreal scene with a remarkable realism and precision, without reproducing an atmosphere of oneiric absurdity, although the dream is centred around an episode of antropophagy: ‘Era però un collo fatto in modo che le ferite ch’io le infliggevo con rabbiosa voluttà non sanguinavano, e il collo sembrava perciò sempre coperto dalla sua bianca pelle e inalterato nella sua forma lievemente arcuata’ (235) [it was, nonetheless, a neck made so that the wounds I inflicted on her with furious voluptuousness did not bleed, and the neck, therefore, always looked covered by its white skin and unaltered in its slightly arched shape].

This mixture of realism and exactness is also evident in the dream of Basedow, where spaces are the faithful transposition of domestic, well-known, places. These are immediately recognizable even in those cases in which their location does not correspond to reality. Although rearranged, spaces are by any mean metamorphosed into an uncanny dimension by the dream-work. Quite to the contrary, they maintain a geographical exactness and recognizability:

Ecco il sogno: eravamo in tre: Augusta, Ada, ed io che ci eravamo affacciati ad una finestra e precisamente alla più piccola che ci fosse stata nelle nostre tre abitazioni, cioè la mia, quella di mia suocera, e quella di Ada. Eravamo cioè alla finestra della cucina della casa di mia suocera che veramente si apre sopra un piccolo cortile mentre nel sogno dava proprio sul Corso.

(392)

[Here's the dream: we were three, Augusta, Ada, and I, and leaned out of a window, to be precise the smallest one we had in our three houses – mine, my mother-in-law's, and Ada's. So we were at the kitchen's window in my mother-in-law's house that actually looks on a small courtyard, whereas in the dream it directly looked on the main street]

In terms of content, the mechanism of wish fulfilment is patent in Zeno's dreams and always clear to the dreamer himself. The two dreams in which the wife Augusta is involved express the protagonist's will to find a compromise between his sexual drives, directed towards Carla and Ada, and the love for her. At the same time, the coexistence of the two women in the dream represents Zeno's attempt to clear his conscience, making Augusta the witness of his forbidden desire and silent accomplice of his betrayals. The dream of the dying father holds a similar function. It also fulfils Zeno's desire to have made any possible effort to cure the father, alleviating his feeling of guilt for aggressing the doctor because of that last, desperate, attempt to slow down the disease:

Poteva esserci un'azione più malvagia di quella di richiamare in sé un ammalato, senz'averne la minima speranza di salvarlo e solo per esporlo alla disperazione, o al rischio di dover sopportare — con quell'affanno! — la camicia di forza? Con tutta violenza, ma sempre accompagnando le mie parole di quel pianto che domandava indulgenza, dichiarai che mi pareva una crudeltà inaudita di non lasciar morire in pace chi era definitivamente condannato.

(61)

[Could there be more wicked an action than having a sick one to regain consciousness, without having the least hope of saving him, only to expose him to despair or to the risk of bearing (and, the more, with that trouble!) the straitjacket? Most vehemently, although always coupling my word with those tears that begged for pardon, I declared that I thought it cruel not to let die in peace someone who was absolutely condemned to death]

This mechanism is overt in the account of the dream, in which Zeno himself stresses the inversion of roles with the doctor, clearly aimed to free him from 'un vero delitto, che mi pesava orrendamente' (64) [a true crime, excessively bearing over me]:

Io insegnavo al dottore il modo di curare e guarire mio padre, mentre lui (non vecchio e cadente com'è ora, ma vigoroso e nervoso com'era allora) con ira, gli occhiali in mano e gli occhi disorientati, urlava che non valeva la pena di fare tante cose. Diceva proprio così: 'Le

mignatte lo richiamerebbero alla vita e al dolore e non bisogna applicarglielo!'. Io invece battevo il pugno su un libro di medicina ed urlavo: 'Le mignatte! Voglio le mignatte! Ed anche la camicia di forza!' (65)

[I taught the doctor how to heal my father, while he (who, not old and doddering as he was, and still vigorous and nervous as he used to be then), in anger, with his glasses in his hand and with confused eyes, cried that it was useless to take so many troubles. He actually said so: 'Leeches would bring him back to life and pain, so we must not put them on him!' And I, hitting a medicine book with my fist, I cried: 'Leeches! I want leeches! And the straitjacket too!']

Significantly, even when Zeno's oneiric imagination alters events, this falsification takes place – as Albertocchi observes – 'con una perfetta simmetria [...] con la precisione di un fenomeno scientifico' [in perfect symmetry [...] with the rigour of a scientific phenomenon],<sup>21</sup> rather than reproducing dream's typical 'anarchia analogica dei significati' [analogical anarchy of meaning].<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, Svevo subverts the Freudian mechanism of dreams, making clearly emerge 'what is clearly the essence of the dream thoughts' that, for the founder father of psychoanalysis, 'need not be represented in the dreams at all'.<sup>23</sup>

Oneiric sequences that help Zeno compromise with his guilt also hold a crucial function within the fictional universe of the novel. The absence of a definite difference – in stylistic, rhetorical, and logical terms – between the narrative of oneiric and non-oneiric episodes make the dividing line between what has been dreamt by Zeno and what has actually taken place in his reality blur. As such, despite the surreal aspects these dreams display, their presence in the text is, ultimately, an instrument in Zeno's hand, which serves a well-defined objective. That is to say, representing a character who is able to construct, piece by piece, an image of himself as the inept neurotic with whom, though, the reader should sympathize and whom, in the end, should forgive. Dreams are, in sum, cleverly crafted by the narrator to mitigate his guilt and diminish his sins in the eyes of his audience, becoming the essential means in the conscious process of *innocentizzazione* Zeno carries out along the novel. In the dream of the dying father, Zeno absolves his conscience by montage and – hybridizing the dimension of memory with that of dreams – 'convin[ce]' [persuades] both himself and the readers that 'quello schiaffo che mi era stato inflitto da lui moribondo, non era stato da lui voluto. [...] eravamo ormai perfettamente d'accordo, io divenuto il più debole, e lui il più forte' (73) [the slap inflicted on me by the moribund one, had not been inflicted willingly. [...] we perfectly agreed now, I had become the weaker, and he the stronger]. Similarly, the dream in which Zeno eats Carla's neck is used by Zeno to emphasize, by contrast, his diurnal 'migliori propositi'

[better resolutions] towards Augusta: ‘La parola nella notte è come un raggio di luce. Illumina di un tratto di realtà in confronto al quale sbiadiscono le costruzioni della fantasia. Perché avevo tanto da temere della povera Carla di cui non ero l’amante?’ (237–238) [speech is like a ray of light. It illuminates a trait of reality against which all constructs of fancy do fade. Why should I worry so much about poor Carla, of whose I was not the lover?].

Also this oneiric episode – Zeno himself suggests – must be therefore pigeonholed as one of those ‘maniere’ [ways] through which he manages to ‘attenuare il futuro rimorso’ (221) [mitigate the future remorse] and, with it, mitigate his reader’s judgement. This dream provides the crucial interpretative key to read the story of ‘La moglie e l’amante’ [The wife and the lover], inserting it within a framework of inevitability and *excusatio*. In what follows, Zeno stresses in fact that even the firmest will is doomed to fail if not supported by passionate love. Preventing any negative judgement through a contrite reflection upon his fault (‘ora so di aver tradito con quelle parole tutt’e due le donne e tutto l’amore, il mio e il loro’ 248 [I know, now, of having betrayed with those words both women and all the love, mine and theirs]), Zeno asks Carla – and implicitly the reader – to understand and justify his immoral behaviour:

Carla mi vedeva in una luce falsa! Carla poteva disprezzarmi vedendomi tanto desideroso dei suoi baci quando amavo Augusta! [...] [L]e raccontai per filo e per segno la storia del mio matrimonio, come mi fossi innamorato della sorella maggiore di Augusta che non aveva voluto saperne di me perché innamorata di un altro, come poi avessi tentato di sposare un’altra delle sue sorelle che pure mi respinse e come infine mi adattassi di sposare lei.

(247–248)

[Carla saw me in a false light! Carla could despise me in seeing me so yearning for her kisses, while I loved Augusta! [...] I told her the story of my marriage in detail, how I fell in love with Augusta’s older sister, who refused me because she loved someone else, and how I later tried to marry another of her sisters, who also refused me, and how I finally adjusted myself to marrying her]

The dream through which Zeno confesses to Augusta his attraction towards Ada holds a comparable function within the plot: the husband can feel his consciousness is unburdened, since ‘nella mezza coscienza io [ho] seguito ciecamente l’antico desiderio di confessare i miei trascorsi [...] Quando si viene colti nel sogno, è difficile di difendersi’ (394) [in half consciousness, I blindly followed the old desire of confessing my past [...]. When one is got there in a dream, it is difficult to defend one’s self]. Interestingly, though, this semi-conscious outburst – seemingly due

to the intromission of the unconscious – is contradicted a few lines later, when Zeno claims that his confession did not coincide with an irrational need to free himself from the guilt. Quite the opposite, it is the character himself to acknowledge, the admission has been guided by the rational certainty that

per tali gelosie di Augusta, io non avevo nulla da perdere perché essa amava tanto Ada che da quel lato la sua gelosia non gettava alcun'ombra e, in quanto a me, essa mi trattava con un riguardo anche più affettuoso e m'era anche più grata di ogni mia più lieve manifestazione di affetto.

(394–395)

[because of this jealousy of Augusta, I had nothing to lose, for she loved Ada so much that, as far as that aspect was concerned, her jealousy did not cast any shadow, and, as far as I was, she treated me with even greater attention and was even more grateful for every least manifestation of affection on my part].

In this occasion too, both the oneiric episode itself and the way Zeno retrospectively accounts for it seem to ultimately respond to the constraints of consciousness, with the narrator in total control of his defences and, even, of what his dreams can, or cannot, reveal.

It is worth to also note that, in reassuring his wife about the content of the dream, Zeno lays stress on the presence of Basedow, claiming that – he is sure – the core of the oneiric episode he has just recounted is this figure, rather than Ada as Augusta fears.<sup>24</sup> This claim follows Zeno's statement, occurred just a few pages before, of the crucial influence Basedow had on the protagonist's cultural *Bildung*:

Grande, importante malattia quella di Basedow! Per me fu importantissimo di averla conosciuta. La studiai in varie monografie e credetti di scoprire appena allora il segreto essenziale del nostro organismo. [...] di Basedow vissi sol io! Mi parve ch'egli avesse portate alla luce le radici della vita la quale è fatta così: tutti gli organismi si distribuiscono su una linea, ad un capo della quale sta la malattia di Basedow che implica il generosissimo, folle consumo della forza vitale ad un ritmo precipitoso, il battito di un cuore sfrenato, e all'altro stanno gli organismi immiseriti per avarizia organica, destinati a perire di una malattia che sembrerebbe di esaurimento ed è invece di poltronaggine. Il giusto medio fra le due malattie si trova al centro e viene designato impropriamente come la salute che non è che una sosta. E fra il centro ed un'estremità — quella di Basedow — stanno tutti coloro ch'exasperano e consumano la vita in grandi desiderii, ambizioni, godimenti e anche lavoro, dall'altra quelli che non

gettano sul piatto della vita che delle briciole e risparmiano preparando quegli abietti longevi che appaiono quale un peso per la società. Pare che questo peso sia anch'esso necessario. La società procede perché i Basedowiani la sospingono, e non precipita perché gli altri la trattengono.

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[What a great, important disease, that of Basedow! Knowing it was most important to me. I studied several monographs about it, and I thought of having just discovered the basic secret of our organism. [...] But only I lived on Basedow! It seemed to me that he had unveiled the roots of life, which is made as follows: all organisms are on a line, on the one end of which there stands Basedow's disease – implying the most generous and fool waste of vital energy at a most hasty rhythm and the uncontrolled beating of the heart – and on the other those organisms that organic meanness has impoverished, and are condemned to die of a disease that looks like exhaustion and is actually laziness. The happy medium between the two diseases is in the middle, and is improperly called health, but is actually but a stop. Between the middle and one of the extremities – Basedow's one – are all those who exacerbate and spend their lives in big desires, ambitions, joys, and also work, and on the other all those who throw nothing but crumbs on life's plate and who save, preparing those long-lived abjections that society sees as burdens. It seems that such burden is also necessary. Society proceeds because Basedowians push it, and does not collapse because the others hold it]

Such a fervent 'profession of faith' in Basedow is, I believe, not irrelevant to understand the significance the dream holds within *La coscienza*. Zeno's interpretation of this oneiric episode as a dream about Basedow cannot be uniquely considered as a – quite pathetic, indeed – attempt to tranquillize Ada who, he was well aware, in the end was not really jealous of the sister. What if, instead, the emphasis on Basedow has to do with the dream itself and the hermeneutic process it carries along? What if, in other words, Zeno's emphasis on the German doctor as the focus of his dream is directed to the consignee of his diary, Doctor S.? Whereas Zeno's interpretation of this oneiric episode remains largely obscure if read exclusively in the light of his relationship with Augusta, interpreting it within the framework of the oblique polemics against psychoanalysis Svevo – and Zeno – are carrying on through irony gives this episode a further significance.

The importance Basedow holds for the narrator is due, Zeno affirms, to the essential discovery about 'le radici della vita' [the roots of life] he did after reflecting upon the disease named after the German doctor. That is to say, a worldview based on a purely organicist explanation

of existence, to the extent that human desires depend uniquely on the body's (mal)functioning. Clearly, a challenge to the Freudian view of existence. Basedow's theory can be seen in this context as the antithesis of a psychoanalytic – or more broadly psychologist – understanding of human beings. As a result, affirming that the centre of the dream is Basedow means affirming a purely biological understanding of desires and a corporeal interpretation of symptoms. Within a text whose implied reader is – we do not have to forget – the hated psychoanalyst, Basedow ironically plays therefore the role of the *untore* [plague-spreader]:

Con uno sforzo ci sporgemmo anche noi e scorgemmo una grande folla che s'avanzava minacciosa urlando. 'Ma dov'è Basedow?' domandai ancora una volta. Poi lo vidi. Era lui che s'avanzava inseguito da quella folla: un vecchio pezzente coperto di un grande mantello stracciato, ma di broccato rigido, la grande testa coperta di una chioma bianca disordinata, svolazzante all'aria, gli occhi sporgenti dall'orbita che guardavano ansiosi con uno sguardo ch'io avevo notato in bestie inseguite, di paura e di minaccia. E la folla urlava: 'Ammazzate l'untore!'

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[We also leaned with an effort and saw a great crowd that came forth with threatening roars. 'But where's Basedow?', I asked again. And then I saw him. It was him, the one who came forth, chased by the crowd: an old tramp covered by a large, ragged mantle, still made of stiff brocade, the big head covered by messy white hair that floated in the air, the eyes protruding out of their orbits and looked with the anguishing gaze I had noticed in chased animals, a gaze of fear and of menace. And the crowd roared: 'Kill the plague-spreader!']

Dealing with a book that is on – and above all against – psychoanalysis, it does not seem to push the interpretation too further claiming that Svevo seems here to play with the Freudian metaphor of the plague,<sup>25</sup> inverting its meaning. In a society where psychoanalysis was becoming more and more in fashion, it is the return to an organicist understanding of human being and a medical approach to disease to be prosecuted as a dangerous, old-fashioned, idea. On the one hand, thus, the centrality of Basedow in the dream is certainly due to Ada's change of status – traumatic for Zeno – from a condition of health to one of disease. On the other hand, making the physician the protagonist of this oneiric episode can be read as one of Zeno's many attacks against a psychosomatic, rather than physical, understanding of malady. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact Basedow disease is central in Ferenczi's analysis with Freud. The founder father of psychoanalysis was inclined to explain his patient's symptoms as the signs of his hypochondria, whereas Ferenczi

rather believed to be actually affected by the morbus. The auto-diagnosis ended up to be true and the Hungarian analyst had to be treated in a sanatorium.<sup>26</sup> Although we cannot assume that Svevo could know these circumstances, the hypothesis that ‘Freud’s mistake’, which occurred just a few years before *La coscienza* was published (1916–1917), was known in psychoanalytic circles those days is not improbable. Still more probable, if this is the case, is that Svevo might have used the reference to Basedow disease as a polemical cutting remark. An allusion, for sure, in disguise, but certainly very clear to the ‘insiders’.

At this stage, it becomes evident that the lucidity that guides Zeno not only in the construction of the storytelling as a whole but also in the strategic montage of these oneiric accounts make him a narcissistic manipulator rather than a neurotic hypochondriac at the mercy of a suffering psyche. Dreams confirm in fact the firm control Zeno’s ‘I’ hold over the process of storytelling. Rather than embodying the ‘royal road’ to the protagonist’s unconscious, these oneiric memories should be therefore interpreted as one of the many strategies Zeno employs to deceive and satirize the analyst’s profession.

As Genco observes, ‘Zeno rovescia i freudiani sintomi dell’inconscio in manifestazioni di una consapevole visione del mondo’ [Zeno inverts Freud’s symptoms of the unconscious in manifestations of a conscious vision of the world], and dreams fully confirm this tendency.<sup>27</sup> Zeno’s dreams cannot in fact be assimilated to those ‘literary dreams [that] mimic real life dreams, which means that they incorporate the process of the dream work as Freud had defined it’.<sup>28</sup> Quite to the contrary, the narrator’s non-invented dreams are part of the book’s fictional universe, which is – as Briosi has acutely observed – ‘l’esatto contrario di un mondo onirico: in esso tutto ha, di volta in volta, un significato chiaro – fin troppo chiaro; tutto si svolge secondo una “logica” fin troppo “prevedibile”’ [the exact contrary of an oneiric world: everything in it has, each time, a clear, too clear a sense: everything runs with too far ‘predictable’ a ‘logic’]. The sense this cluster of dreams expresses is, in sum, ‘del tutto cosciente’ [overall conscious], likewise the overall ‘senso che *La coscienza di Zeno* trasmette’ [sense conveyed by *La coscienza di Zeno*].<sup>29</sup>

The objection that such a rational control over the material offered to the analyst may conceal Zeno’s resistances against therapy and that, as such, should be object of analytical investigation itself is for sure legit. However, the text itself does not provide any specific clue that suggests the presence of an ‘unconscious layer’ to be searched behind Zeno’s cleverly orchestrated narrative, as the presentation of dream-like material confirms. As such, reading the character’s conscious discourse as a mode of repression means, I argue, to assume Zeno’s pages should be interpreted through psychoanalytic lenses – an approach that can certainly reveal further meanings in such a dense text but that, at the same time, falls outside my methodology and the scope of this analysis.

In no way mimicking the unconscious logic nor expressing the symptoms of a split subject, dreams in *La coscienza* do not imply a higher degree of readers' cooperation since – we have seen – the meaning the oneiric episodes hold is not disguised, nor the sequences in question present the features of an open text.<sup>30</sup> Also in this respect, these narrative segments contradict the peculiar characteristic of those literary dreams that, instead, attempt to reproduce the unconscious work: their being a 'luogo privilegiato del dialogo autore-lettore, momento in cui più incalzante si fa la richiesta di cooperazione al lettore perché la narrazione possa procedere' [privileged site for dialogue between author and reader, a moment when the request to the reader for cooperation is the more urgent in order for narration to proceed].<sup>31</sup> Quite the opposite, if a form of reader cooperation is activated by these dreams, it is not directed towards the deciphering of underlying meanings but, rather, to detecting the clues of an intertextual dialogue each of the non-invented dream establishes with both literary and non-literary sources.

### *La coscienza's Intertextual Unconscious*

Freud's theory of dreams as expression of wish fulfilment is elaborated through the self-analysis of one of his dreams, the so-called dream of Irma's injection. In this dream, Freud is attending a reception where he meets Irma, a patient he was worried about. Treated with no success, Freud feared she could suffer from an organic disease he had overlooked. In the oneiric encounter, Irma is – as she was in reality – still unwell and is therefore examined by Freud and some colleagues. After the visit, the doctors confirm Irma's problems with her throat are attributable to an infection. In particular, in the dream, the disease is due to an injection administered to the patient using a dirty syringe. Similarities between this episode and Zeno's dream of the father are significant. First, the wish the dream fulfils is associated with the sense of guilt, a burden oppressing the dreamer's conscience. This guilt concerns in both the cases a lack in the duty of care the dreamers are responsible for. Second, the dreams revolve around an organic disease that has been, in good faith, neglected, leading the patient's condition to worsen. Third, for both Freud and Zeno, the mechanism defusing the sense of guilt consists in an inversion of roles. Through this strategy, the dreamer's negligence is attributed to a third, external figure, whereas the dreamer exhibits instead the firm will to medically approach the matter. As a result, Zeno's dream follows closely Irma's episode in terms of both content and architecture. Freud's dream acts as the implicit reference that shapes the plot of Svevo's oneiric narrative about his father's death.

This oblique intertextual game is not limited to this dream. Also, the other two 'real' dreams, seem, in fact, to re-elaborate and disguise

suggestions from the past literary tradition rather than repressed material emerging from the character's unconscious.

Zeno's dream about Carla conceals a dense intertextual subtext that testifies a Dantean influence. The protagonist's affair with Carla is triggered by the gift of a book – defined by Zeno 'il nostro Galeotto' (230) [our Go-Between] – he uses as an excuse to return to the woman's house. From this moment onwards, the account of his relationship with Carla is dominated by the tension between sin and salvation. The narrator describes in fact his attempts to fight against the temptation of betrayal as a 'resistenza alla tentazione' (223) [resistance against temptation] and a 'lotta col peccato' (221) [fight against sin]. Interestingly, it is the only occurrence in which the word *peccato* holds the meaning of 'sin', otherwise absent in the book in its entirety. As a result, in the chapter 'La moglie e l'amante', the term *salute*, a ubiquitous presence along *La coscienza* as a whole, suddenly loses its psychosomatic meaning to acquire a moral – almost religious – significance. Within this theological narrative framework, several other expressions evoke a Dantean imaginary which includes, among the most significant: the gradual journey to the object of love, which cannot be approached directly, but step by step only ('io arrivai a Carla non con uno slancio, ma solo a tappe' 221 [I did not come to Carla in a rush, but by steps]); the obsession with the object of love that, as a 'potenza' (228) [power], dominates the narrator's soul; the *topos* of the lover whose senses fail as soon as the beloved woman gets closer ('L'emozione mi oscurò la vista e ritengo sia stata provocata non tanto dal dolce contatto di quella mano, ma da quella familiarità' 226 [emotion blinded my sight, and I believe it was not much caused by the sweet touch of that hand, but by that familiarity]); the stress on Carla's hesitancy, further emphasized by her frequent blushing ('Carla stessa, quando mi riconobbe, arrossì e accennò a fuggire vergognandosi' 226 [also Carla, when she recognized me, blushed and made as if to run away in shame]; 'La faccia di Carla era veramente bella così arrossata' 227 [Carla's face, so blushed, was very beautiful]).

The account of Zeno's dream representing himself eating Carla's neck is therefore inserted within a framework which is markedly connotated in a Dantean sense. In the light of the ubiquitous references to Dante the episode exhibits, the anthropophagy of the object of love in Zeno's oneiric vision can be interpreted, I believe, as one of those 'Dantean remakes' Svevo encapsulates into the novel. The 'episodio sveviano del tavolino' [Svevo's episode of the table], Palmieri argues, 'è costruito sulla falsariga parodistica e deformata del celebre incontro di Dante con lo spirito del suo antenato Cacciaguida' [is constructed through the parodical distortion of the model of Dante's encounter with the spirit of his ancestor Cacciaguida].<sup>32</sup> Likewise, Zeno's dream might conceal a distortion of the dream of the eaten heart in the *Vita Nova*. The ironic subversion Svevo puts in place in the scene of the seance can also be found here,

where all the symbolic meanings of the original are overturned and, to a certain extent, ridiculed. The *topos* of anthropophagy and, in particular, the image of the eaten heart, recurrent in medieval literature, is contaminated with a vampirical imaginary, which Italian readers have just become familiar with.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, references to Dante's *Vita Nova* relate to the feminine figure with whom Zeno establishes a sexual and extramarital relationship, which in no way can be assimilated to courtly love. Also the detail of Carla's hairstyle – braids – seems to be reiterated in the text to emphasize the parodical element: rather than Beatrice, the lover's hairs recalls the woman whose 'belle trecce' [beautiful hair] Dante would like to play with in his *rime petrose*. The oneiric episode as a whole, and not uniquely the reference to the book *galeotto* as Palmieri states, holds therefore, I argue, 'una funzione veramente parodistica, tendendo ad accomunare l'amore sublime [...] con quello nevrotico e bovaristico di Zeno' [a truly parodic function, aiming to combining sublime love [...] with Zeno's neurotic, Bovary-like one].<sup>34</sup>

The dream of Ada and Augusta as well draws fully from the literary tradition. As anticipated, this oneiric episode has been extensively discussed by scholarship which, considering it the most obscure among Zeno's dreams, has variously attempted to interpret its hidden meaning. However, with the exception of Palmieri's comment to *La coscienza*, these readings have mostly overlooked the overt Manzonian subtext this dream exhibits. This is immediately evident in the use of two explicit signposts: the terms *folla* and *untore*. As Palmieri observes, the more direct reference is the only dream Manzoni inserts in *The Betrothed*<sup>35</sup>: Don Rodrigo's nightmare, an oneiric imagination about plague, crowd, and contagion. Svevo's description of Basedow<sup>36</sup> recalls closely Manzoni's 'vecchio più che ottuagenario' [old man, eighty or more years old], beat up by people who identify him as the 'untore':

dopo aver pregato alquanto inginocchiato, volle mettersi a sedere; e prima, con la cappa, spolverò la panca. – Quel vecchio unge le panche! – gridarono a una voce alcune donne che vider l'atto. La gente che si trovava in chiesa (in chiesa!), fu addosso al vecchio; lo prendon per i capelli, bianchi com'erano.

[after having prayed for a while on his knees, he wished to sit: before that, with his cloak, he dusted the bench. – That old man greases the benches!, cried all together a few women who saw that gesture. The people gathered in the church (in the church!) assaulted the old man: the took him by his hair, so white]<sup>37</sup>

*La coscienza di Zeno* – Palmieri explains – relies on two libraries:

quella dell'autore reale, purtroppo andata distrutta, che è il magazzino delle fonti della *Coscienza*, e quella di Zeno che è presente

nel testo e che alimenta la sua ipertrofica cultura da autodidatta. I libri contenuti in quest'ultima biblioteca sono tutti, direttamente o indirettamente, ricavabili da un'attenta lettura dell' autobiografia'; è infatti lo stesso Zeno a rivelarci i suoi autori. In altri casi, invece, i volumi si possono dedurre indirettamente come fonti di un sapere che il testo manifesta. Appare evidente che tutti i libri di Zeno coincidono con quelli letti, posseduti, o anche solo conosciuti dal suo creatore; al contrario, non tutti i libri di Svevo appartengono alla biblioteca del personaggio.<sup>38</sup>

[That of the author, unfortunately destroyed, where the sources of the *Coscienza* are stored, and that of Zeno that is present within the text and which feeds his overdeveloped knowledge as a self-taught person. The books that are present in the latter library can all be directly or indirectly known from the 'autobiography': Zeno himself actually reveals his authors. In other cases, instead, books can be indirectly deduced as the sources of a knowledge that is manifest in the text. It seems evident that all Zeno's books coincide with those read, possessed, or merely known by his creator: on the contrary, not all Svevo's books belong to his character's library]

Whereas Freud, Manzoni, and Dante certainly belong to Svevo's library, their influence on Zeno's writing is – with the exception of the father founder of psychoanalysis – unascertainable. Although, in fact, the influence of these authors surface in the narrative, it is difficult to understand whether, in Svevo's intention, the assimilation of these materials should be attributed to Zeno, as internal narrator, or instead to the empirical author. What is however clear is that the texture of *La coscienza*'s dreams reveal to the most attentive – I should say 'model' – reader their own character of artificiality. It seems in fact that Zeno's dreams dip into the repertoire of past literary tradition and take the shape of the privileged site in which intertextual references, rather than unconscious material, are transformed and distorted. In other words, in *La coscienza* dreams are a space of negotiation with the cultural heritage Svevo confronts and assimilates, rather than a tool through which the author mimics the character's unconscious. Also in dreams, in sum, 'è altrettanto evidente che non è la semiologia dell'inconscio che gli interessa quanto la costruzione di un'invenzione letteraria' [it is equally manifest how he is not much interested in the semiology of the unconscious, but rather in literary invention]<sup>39</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Virus of the Unconscious**

In the second chapter of his 'Portuguese adventure', *Requiem* (1991), Antonio Tabucchi describes the encounter of the protagonist with one of the many surreal characters inhabiting the novel's fictional universe,

*Lo zoppo della lotteria* [The lame of the lottery]. Shortly after the two men meet, they engage in a conversation on a book of French philosophy about the notion of 'soul'. Asked whether he believes in the soul, the protagonist instinctually gives an affirmative answer that, though, he immediately amends. Rather than in the old-fashioned notion of soul, he believes in the 'Unconscious', which has triggered his oneiric and hallucinatory journey. At this point, the *zoppo* is surprised and responds to the foreigner with an objection:

Alto là, disse lo Zoppo della Lotteria, l'Inconscio, cosa vuol dire con questo?, l'Inconscio è roba della borghesia viennese d'inizio secolo, qui siamo in Portogallo ed il signore è italiano, noi siamo roba del Sud, la civiltà greco-romana, non abbiamo niente a che fare con la Mitteleuropa, scusi sa, noi abbiamo l'anima.<sup>40</sup>

[Stop, said the Lame of the Lottery, the Unconscious, what does it mean?, the Unconscious is for the Vienna middle class of the beginning of the century, here we are in Portugal and the gentleman there is Italian, we are Southern, the Greco-Roman civilization, we have nothing to do with Central Europe, pardon me, we do have a soul]

The protagonist shares his new friend's perplexity and concern. However, he seems at the same time resigned to accept the inevitability of getting hold of an unconscious sphere. Through quite an explicit reference to the metaphor of the plague, he claims that 'l'Inconscio uno se lo prende, è come una malattia, mi sono preso il virus dell'Inconscio, càpita' [the Unconscious, one gets it, like a disease, I got the Unconscious virus, that's life].<sup>41</sup>

The two protagonists of *Requiem* are right in this respect. Since psychoanalysis made its appearance in Italy, the Freudian discipline had been perceived as an exotic matter, a bourgeois cure for introverted Northern European souls. Not by chance, the principal channel through which psychoanalysis could first 'seep into' the terrain of Italian culture was the Triestine Italo Svevo, a figure that paradigmatically embodies the difficult compromise between Italy and foreign influences perturbing the country's Mediterranean soul. Or, in other word, the hybridization between the neurotic *mitteleuropa* and the Italian national character.<sup>42</sup> The social and fictional construction of 'Italianness', as David notes, is in fact grounded on a number of stereotypes – '[l']estrovensione' [extroversion], 'il carattere teatrale dell'italiano' [Italians' theatrical attitude], 'il rifiuto della pazzia' [the refusal of folly], 'il mito della sana latinità' [the myth of healthy Latinity]<sup>43</sup> – that overly clash with an 'analytical attitude'.

As a result, I argue, *La coscienza* can be read as the very first symptom of the rooted resistance Italian culture would exhibit against the most uncanny discoveries of psychoanalysis: the 'virus' of the unconscious.

As Antonello observes, ‘*La Coscienza* intende essere, fra le molte altre cose, una sorta di confutazione romanzesca del freudianesimo’ [*La coscienza* aims to be, among many other things, a sort of confutation of Freudianism by the means of a novel],<sup>44</sup> an intention in itself symptomatic of the controversial reception of the Freudian discipline in the context of national culture. As soon as psychoanalysis made its appearance in the country, *La coscienza* challenged it by the mean of parody, inaugurating a long-lasting tradition of, more or less explicit, ‘pagine e pagine di mani avanti’ [pages and pages of excusations]<sup>45</sup>: ironic and polemical portrayals of the analytical treatment and ideological stances against the discipline. However, *La coscienza* does not exclusively embody one of the earliest signs of a generic aversion Italy showed towards psychoanalysis but also of the specific attitude national culture exhibited towards the very notion of unconscious. To put it in Sergio Benvenuto’s terms, Italian culture has suspiciously regarded the descent into the irrational recesses of psyche, perceived as an ‘exquisitely “gothic” activity, fit to introverted and twisted Anglo-Germanic and Frankish souls, which contrasts sharply with the Renaissance brightness and sunny Mediterranean extroversion of Italian culture’.<sup>46</sup> Through *La coscienza*, thus, Svevo not only turns psyche into a literary object but also *italianizza* it. In other words, he transforms the ‘inward twist’ of the Freudian discipline into a well-orchestrated manipulation of the dimension of consciousness: a tension between truth and deceit, rather than a struggle between reason and the irrational. By so doing, Svevo’s novel inaugurates a specific ‘Italian way’ to the unconscious, marking the resistance that would characterize the country’s attitude towards the radical attack psychoanalysis moved to a consciously led model of subjectivity. Decades of ideological struggle against the relapse into the abyss of psyche will have to pass before the sunny and Mediterranean Italian soul will catch the morbid virus coming from the Northern, decadent, Europe.<sup>47</sup> Within an ideal archaeology of the unconscious, *La coscienza* epitomizes therefore the earliest manifestation of an explicit, post-Freudian, reflection on the notion of the unconscious in Italy. At the same time, it marks the point of departure of its long-lasting, problematic, reception in the country. The unconscious as the missing protagonist of *La coscienza* reflects, and even foresees, a broader lack – and an engrained resistance – in the context of national culture.

## Notes

- 1 Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno* (Bologna-Rocca San Casciano: Licinio Cappelli Editore, 1923). All translations throughout, of both primary and secondary sources, are mine.
- 2 Scholarship has extensively analysed the role of psychoanalysis in the novel. See, among the others, Brian Moloney, ‘Psychoanalysis and Irony in *La coscienza di Zeno*’, *The Modern Language Review*, 67, 2 (April 1972),

- pp. 309–318; Eduardo Saccone, *Commento a Zeno. Saggio sul testo di Svevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1973); Mario Lavagetto, *L'impiegato Schmitz e altri saggi su Svevo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975).
- 3 Sandro Briosi, 'Il sogno raccontato da Zeno', in *Allegoria*, 14 (1993), p. 140; Giuseppe Genco, *Italo Svevo. Tra psicanalisi e letteratura* (Naples: Alfredo Guida Editore, 1998), p. 167.
  - 4 Genco, p. 167.
  - 5 Valentino Baldi, 'Zeno dopo Freud', *Studi Novecenteschi*, 39, 84 (July–December 2012), 345–370 (p. 350).
  - 6 I refer here to the interference of the unconscious in the subject's expression, rather than its influence on the subject's everyday life, since *La coscienza di Zeno* is a written report of the character's past and any of the events narrated is mediated by the filter of writing.
  - 7 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Past Things* (Vol. 2) (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), p. 331.
  - 8 Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno* (Milan: Giuseppe Morreale Editore, 1930), p. 5. All the further references from *La coscienza* will be given in the body of text.
  - 9 Italo Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno* (London: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1930).
  - 10 'What is the difference between consciousness and conscience? The first, we say, is a matter of perception or awareness. In philosophy, for example, I am a subject of consciousness before an object of knowledge. The second is a matter of moral authority, the degree to which I am constrained or governed by a voice which speaks to me of what I should or should not do. In Freudian language (as opposed to Kantian language), the first would correspond to the scheme conscious, pre-conscious, unconscious, the second to the scheme id, ego, and superego, where conscience would translate superego', Sandor Goodhart, *Möbian Nights: Reading Literature and Darkness* (New York: Bloomsbury Academics, 2017), p. 112.
  - 11 On *La coscienza's* title see also Philip Nicholas Furbank, *Italo Svevo: The Man and the Writer* (London: Sacker & Warburg, 1966).
  - 12 Giuliana Minghelli, 'In the Shadow of the Mammoth: Narratives of Symbiosis in *La coscienza di Zeno*', *MLN*, 1, 109 (January 1994), 49–72, 49.
  - 13 Pierpaolo Antonello, 'Rivalità, risentimento, apocalisse: Svevo e i suoi doppi', in *Identità e desiderio: la teoria mimetica e la letteratura italiana*, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Franco Giuseppe Fornari (Massa: Transeuropa, 2009), pp. 143–163 (pp. 144–145, 151).
  - 14 This is Carlo Fonda's hypothesis: 'Zeno rievoca la sua vita passata in uno stato di dormiveglia o di transe [...] quindi, in questo senso, la sua rievocazione è falsa'. *Svevo e Freud. Proposta di interpretazione della Coscienza di Zeno* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1978), p. 8.
  - 15 Giovanni Albertocchi, 'I sogni di Zeno', *Quaderns d'Italià*, 13 (2008), pp. 71–80, 72. Italics mine.
  - 16 Albertocchi, p. 72.
  - 17 See the aforementioned contributions by Albertocchi, Baldi, Saccone, and Lavagetto (1975).
  - 18 See Italo Svevo, 'Soggiorno londinese', in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. by Mario Pazzaglia, 4 vols (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1992), IV (1992), pp. 250–251.
  - 19 I am referring here to the processes through which the dream thoughts are transformed into the manifest dream content: the work of condensation, displacement, overdetermination, and the mechanism of figurability. See Sigmund Freud, 'The Dream-work', in *The Standard Edition*, vol. IV, pp. 277–338.
  - 20 Guido Almansi, 'Introduzione' to Roger Callois, *L'incertezza dei sogni* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1989), pp. 12–13.

- 21 Albertocchi, p. 75. In this context, the term symmetry is not employed with the sense Ignacio Matte Blanco attributes to it.
- 22 Mario Lavagetto, *Freud, la letteratura e altro* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), p. 135.
- 23 Freud, 'The Dream-work', p. 305.
- 24 'Non Ada era importante per me, ma Basedow, e le raccontai dei miei studi e anche delle applicazioni che avevo fatte' (394) [It was not Ada who was important for me but Basedow, and I told her of my studies and also of the experiments I had made].
- 25 Freud reportedly told Jung, sailing towards America, 'We are bringing them the plague and they do not even know it'.
- 26 See *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi: Vol. 2, 1914–1919*, ed. by Ernst Falzeder and Eva Brabant, with the collaboration of Patrizia Giampieri-Deutsch (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 27 Genco, p. 164.
- 28 Tom Conner, 'Introduction', *Dreams in French Literature*, ed. by Tom Conner, pp. 9–23 (p. 23).
- 29 Sandro Briosi, 'Il sogno raccontato da Svevo', in *Italo Svevo. Il sogno e la vita vera*, ed. by Mario Sechi (Rome: Donzelli, 2009), pp. 217–222 (p. 221).
- 30 See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- 31 *Sogni di carta. Dieci studi sul sogno raccontato in letteratura*, ed. by Anita Piemonti and Marina Polacco (Turin: Le Monnier Università, 2001), p. 12.
- 32 Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno*, ed. by Giovanni Palmieri (Florence: Giunti, 1994), p. 118. I will henceforth refer to this critical edition as 'Palmieri'.
- 33 The first edition of *Dracula* in Italy had been published one year before *La coscienza di Zeno*, in 1922: Brahm (sic.) Stoker, *Dracula. L'uomo della notte* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1922).
- 34 Palmieri, p. 182.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 305.
- 36 See above, p. 247.
- 37 Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (Milan: Tipografia Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1840), p. 606.
- 38 Palmieri, p. XIX.
- 39 Genco, p. 165.
- 40 Antonio Tabucchi, *Requiem. Un'allucinazione* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1992), p. 18.
- 41 Tabucchi, p. 18.
- 42 For a discussion of the notion of *carattere nazionale*, see Silvana Patriarca's *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 43 Michel David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1972), pp. 14–15.
- 44 Antonello, p. 151.
- 45 See the exchange of letters between Cesare Pavese and Ernesto De Martino, *La collana viola. Lettere, 1945–1950*, ed. by Pietro Angelini (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).
- 46 Sergio Benvenuto, 'Italy and Psychoanalysis', *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, 5 (Spring–Fall 1997) available at <http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number5/benvenuto.htm> [accessed October 2017] (para. 1 of 8).
- 47 The controversial reception of psychoanalysis in Italy is discussed in Michel David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*.