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City University of New York PH.D. 1983

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ITALO SVEVO AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL

by

LILIA GHELLI-SUBRIZI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Abstract

ITALO SVEVO AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL

by

Lilia Ghelli-Subrizi

Advisor: Professor Allen A. McCormick

The study of the mind, which up to the nineteenth century had been the privilege of the philosopher then became a common subject of study for the educated reader, thanks to the illuminating contributions of the psychologists. The birth of psychology as a science and its application to the novel probably date to the lectures in psychology given at Harvard by William James and at the Sorbonne by Henri Bergson. In Italy, at the turn of the century, the new concept of the anti-hero as a protagonist of the novel is presented by Italo Svevo, a writer who, because of his innovation, moved among the hostility of critics used to romantic heroes delineated in polished style. They accused him of fragmentation of language, of a lack of action, and of a gray atmosphere, not realizing that in Svevo's time even the visual arts witnessed a new awareness of the human spirit. The isolation and sense of anguish of man is rendered through a new fragmented style capable of communicating a feeling of displacement. The sketched figures of the paintings communicate anxiety and

sadness never before so poignantly displayed. The artist seems to be turning towards himself, inviting others to acknowledge the complexity of the self. Svevo's characters are very often a replica of himself or acquire different characteristics mirroring the many facets of his own.

Following Schopenhauer's belief in the will as a negative force, Svevo presents protagonists taken by the force of their excessive cerebral activity; they display very little action in the external world. Using the technique of the inner monologue, the narrator shares his immediate psychological flashes with the reader, as if a camera were placed in the character's mind. Generally, Italo Svevo explored the relationship between the self and society in which the individual becomes estranged. Since then, such a dichotomy was to characterize the best of the artistic output of Italian letters.

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INTRODUCTION

SVEVO AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL

This dissertation will study Italo Svevo, the once unappreciated turn-of-the-century writer from Trieste, author of three novels and several sketches. Svevo provides a good starting point for examining the development of a new kind of narration, broadly defined as the psychological or "stream of consciousness" novel. In the latter, a new technique is used that starts from the soul or "transcendental ego," to quote William James,[1] and explores the interior point of view, the reasoning mind of the character presented, thereby illuminating his surrounding world, guiding the reader's attention from the external to the internal reality of the individual.

Svevo belongs to a class of writers who want the reader to be aware of the continuous flow of images--comprising dreams, memory, and present perceptions--that weave an intricate life of conscious and unconscious feelings in the human mind. To be aware of this ebb and flow is extremely important for a proper understanding of the relation of the individual to the outer world. Any attempt to explain "why" and "how" the individual reacts

in a certain way to his exterior reality must take this process into account.

An examination of Svevo's life will show some of the reasons the author could not but choose the portrayal of the anti-hero who is ill at ease in an alienating society, where real communication (implying understanding of personal needs and aspirations) is, for all intents and purposes, an unattainable end for a sensitive person.

In his fiction, Svevo demonstrated his particular predilection for the tormented man and his thought process, which can be understood as a projection of Svevo's own notion of reality into his writing. It follows then that, as Svevo himself stated, his very first book, Una vita, is mostly autobiographical. The main characters in Svevo's fiction share pessimism as a common trait, and undoubtedly this is a reflection both of the author's life and the influence of certain philosophers and writers on him.

Una vita is the story of a simple and humble everyday life as it was lived by the obscure character himself. It describes an impossible dream of achieving success and surpassing rivals. This desire to become a winner is shared by Svevo himself during that period. Yet at the same time it shows the character's indifference to success.

Trieste is the silent, ever-present witness, following the mood of the character, constantly in the back-

ground like the Paris of Zola. Trieste was dear to Svevo, as Dublin was to James Joyce and Cambray to Proust. But both Dublin and Trieste have a brooding atmosphere which renders the characters gloomy and incapable or reacting to their ambience, for to do so would provide the germ of "salvation." Svevo makes one feel from the very beginning that such a reaction is impossible, and indeed all his stories are permeated by the very stillness and paralyzing contempt that the character holds for "winners." Through Svevo we visualize successful men as ridiculous puppets whom nobody wishes to emulate. Their positive attributes have but a superficial value; the real judgement of the author goes beyond their little stage performance and points to details that give us a sense of the fatuity and "nonentity" of their real human value. In a sense, the reader, while sharing the feelings of the main character and seeing through Svevo's eyes, is aware from the very beginning of the senselessness of any social achievement.

There is perhaps another reason why Svevo embraces the new type of novel, in which action has little or no part, and things that happen seem only to be accidents in the story, stones and branches in the stream of consciousness.

Svevo's closest link with the psychological novel is his considerable use of introspection by means of the interior monologue. Caught in the stream of various, often parallel, reflections, his characters lose their

already tenuous grasp of reality. In his very first story, "L'assassino di Via Belpoggio," written in 1890, the reader is plunged directly into the most intimate flow of thoughts of the central character. These thoughts are often presented without any logical sequence or direct link to the outside world. The character is hopelessly in conflict with a destiny he is unable to control, just as was Svevo himself in his private life.

The theory of the interior monologue as Joyce employed it in his fiction--subsequently explained by Dujardin in his series of lectures[2]--appears to have come to Svevo's attention too late for him to have made conscious use of it in his work. Svevo's first novel, Una vita, was written in 1892, but he may very well have picked up the technique from other sources, making use of it because it best expressed his feeling about the contrast between reality and dreams, reality and the difficulty of adjustment. In dealing with his last novel, La coscienza di Zeno, we will examine the personal literary relationship between Svevo and Joyce. At the time he came into contact with Joyce, Svevo had already written and published Una vita and Senilita'. It is the opinion of Stanislaus Joyce that Svevo received from Joyce encouragement as an artist and the necessary stimulus to write. He writes,

> Svevo seemed to have come to regard his two early novels as juvenile errors. In my brother instead, the fighting instinct is strong, and perhaps more than his sincere admiration for

> Svevo's work, the example of my brother's overwhelming confidence in himself was useful to Svevo.[3]

Svevo never had much confidence in himself or in his talent as a writer. We will explore how much biographical projection there is in his protagonist's frustration, and see how much the psychological stress of Svevo, the artist (forced first to work in a bank and then to follow a business career in the dye-factory of his wife Livia Veneziani) really transferred itself into the inner monologue novel. Svevo said he poured himself into the written page in order to understand himself. From his statement and from his correspondence we gather that the difficulty of attending to the necessity of everyday life was to be contrasted with his "flights" of imagination.

In Trieste he seemed to be isolated from European culture and, in spite of the fact that many studies have been dedicated to Svevo since the year of his discovery in 1925, a serious exploration of the motives that have determined his kind of writing has not been made.

This study will attempt to discover if his confessional way of writing is the direct consequence of the disintegration of values that seems to have been influencing the literary representation of life at the turn of the century. Especially in the politically torn and "irredentist" Trieste such a disintegration could have brought about an internalization of the focus of both the writer and the reader as a form of escapism. Svevo particularly

needed to escape his restricted life as well as the incomprehension of his fellow men, who did not appreciate his awkward way of writing, so far removed from the polished style then in fashion and also from political involvement. He found such escape when Joyce, through his French literary connections, succeeded in having Svevo publicized and appreciated. From that point on, we shall see how Svevo, encouraged at last by his success, wrote more and more with an increasingly assured form, thereby achieving a maturity of style and themes which had previously not come to the fore.

The first chapter will study Svevo's literary output in light of his life, from the first difficult years to his final success. The second chapter will deal with the development of the confessional novel into the so-called "psychological novel," bearing in mind that Svevo himself started writing in an effort to unburden himself, but ended up exploring in depth the subtle moods of his subconscious.

His initial interest in examining his inner being soon evolved into a wider sphere of interest as he developed and honed a particular technique which rendered vivid psychological insights. Although we know little about Svevo's reading preferences and cannot therefore readily discern which authors he was the most influenced by, we can assume that his contact with Trieste's sophis-

ticated circles did contribute to the maturing of his thought processes.

If it is true that the isolation of Trieste encouraged echoes from neighboring European literatures, then Svevo might owe his technique of describing the world from within the character to French and German schools (i.e., Flaubert and his circle in France, and the post-romantic movement in Germany) which held that the writer should withdraw from the novel in order to create the illusion, for the reader, of being in direct contact with the internal life and inner flow of thoughts of the character from which the action springs.

As far as Svevo is concerned, we may speculate that the choice of the form of narrative is the direct influence of the spirit of Zurich and, as for many writers of the time, may have "a lot to do with the business of being psychoanalyzed," as Kumar puts it.[4] Kumar also suggests that the technique of the inner monologue may be a direct influence of other artistic techniques, such as the one used by the post-impressionistic movement,[5] because the European development of the genre at the time included visual as well as literary art. Svevo's later productions show a link to the theories of both Freud and Bergson and with the stream of consciousness concept then popular in the thought of William James. Such concepts have ancient roots in man's early thoughts, as testified by the writings of Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle. As for the

application of the "interior monologue" technique begun in France by Dujardin, it seems likely that Svevo came to know of it through his friend and teacher James Joyce, with whom he long exchanged many literary points of view.

The third chapter attempts to ascertain why Svevo found recognition difficult in his homeland. It tries to show how the Italian literary mainstream in Svevo's time was multi-faceted. Though the main interest was to convey an idea through the use of conventional writing style, and an effort was made to popularize the Fascist concept of a "superman" a particular sensitivity was nonetheless gaining ground within the mainstream and preparing the soil for the germination of the Svevian evolution, and the acceptance of the anti-heroic, antisocial, and pessimistic character.

In line with the then popular theories of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, man should have begun to be accepted for himself, with all his faults, weaknesses, and sense of estrangement. The time had not yet come for the acceptance of the anti-hero, a man without exceptional qualities who had always been there in the underground, but who was for literature a newly conceived man who would finally express his own insecurity. This character found a voice capable of representing him in Italy, through Svevo, an artist with an emotional capacity sharp enough to acknowledge and accept shortcomings and a writer with the courage to go against the national mainstream.

Footnotes

[1]William James, The Principle of Psychology, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1918) [first published by Henry Holt and Co. in 1890], vol. I, passim.

[2]In 1930, after the acknowledgement of Dujardin's discovery of a new kind of narrative by James Joyce, Dujardin gave a series of conferences explaining the origin of the "monologue interieur." He spoke in Marburg, Berlin, and Leipzig. See Frida S. Weissman, Du Monologue Interieur a la sous-conversation, (Paris: Editions A.-G. Nizet, 1978), p. 99.

[3]Stanislaus Joyce, intr. to La coscienza di Zeno, (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1969), p. iv.

[4]Shiv K. Kumar, Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel, (New York: University Press, 1963), p. 2.

[5]Ibid., p. 4.

CHAPTER I

THE WORK OF SVEVO IN LIGHT OF HIS LIFE

The personal anguish which typifies the writing of Italo Svevo is a reflection of the traumas he endured throughout his life. In fact, a scrutiny of his work will show in many instances the close relationship between the author and the characters he created. For his characterizations he drew from family, friends and acquaintances, and his motivation, too, emerged from his own personal frustration.

We have four main sources from which to draw material and evidence for such a conclusion: the diary of Svevo's brother which records the story of the writer's childhood and adolescent years, the volume of Svevo's correspondence, the collection of letters written to his fiancée, and the story of his life as interpreted by his wife Livia after his death.[1]

Most significant are, of course, his own works, which inform and shape his narrative adventure. They represent the only outlet of a man who has been called a "castrated poet," a man continuously forced by an ironic destiny and a

set of constricting petty personalities to reshape and reset the limit of his genius.

As often happens, all the various documents which would have revealed his personal dilemma have been carefully concealed by the author, his relatives and friends, and finally by timorous critics,[2] for it is unbecoming in any age to speak without due deference about close relatives or public figures during their lifetime, or during the lifetime of their offspring. As we shall see during this study, Svevo himself and those who later wrote about his life, avoided exposing the main reason for Svevo's frustrations, which stemmed from financial problems encountered from his immediate family, and later from that of his wife. Both families expected his financial contribution and looked with contempt at the literary career to which he aspired, inasmuch as it was a threat to their financial security. Consequently, they denied him both monetary and moral support. When Svevo became famous, attempts were made to eliminate all traces of his family's lack of understanding and appreciation. However, if one reads carefully through their correspondence, one inevitably can reconstruct the negative environment which Svevo had to overcome.

Ettore Schmitz (who called himself Italo Svevo for reasons to be explored later in this study) was one of eight surviving children of Francesco Schmitz, an active businessman of Hungarian extraction whose father became an

Austrian subject and had settled in Trieste, where he married an Italian woman.

Francesco Schmitz had known a very poor and unhappy childhood. He never forgot his humble origin and the hardships of his childhood, nor did he ever allow his family to forget them. We have an example of his harshness documented in the diary of Elio Schmitz. Svevo's brother reports that the decision to allow him to study medicine was purposely postponed by his father to March 20 (1880), a date that reminded Francesco Schmitz of his own unpleasant early life. At thirteen, he had been practically thrown out of his own house because his parents felt they could no longer afford to take care of him. He found himself on the street with a few belongings and he had at once to learn to bargain for his meals.

It is understandable that such an experience must have left an indelible mark on Svevo's father but we cannot condone him for constantly bringing it up to his children and in a way making them experience the same bitterness he felt. After all, he later amassed a small fortune for his family, and that must have given him some satisfaction. Why did he want his children to go through the painful experiences that he remembered even when it was no longer necessary to bring them up? On March 16th of that year, four days before the alleged prophetic date, Francesco Schmitz decided against Elio's request for a medical education and placed his unwilling 17 year-old son as an appren-

tice in a grocery store.[3] Obviously, he was very effective in subconsciously reproducing for his son a frustrating situation similar to his own.

Svevo's father would deserve a chapter of own. Reading between the lines of the carefully edited correspondence of Elio and Ettore, we find evidence of a disturbed personality which alternated in spurts of affection and punishment for all the members of the household.

After all, Francesco Schmitz believed only in commerce, the sole activity that provided comfort for his family. As soon as his children were old enough, he found for them business-oriented schools where they could learn German. He chose a secluded boarding school at Segnitz, on the Bavarian border, and he was pleased to learn that it was a highly disciplined one. For him, education meant the mastering of at least four languages, essential in running a business in the flourishing multilingual port of Trieste. His purpose in sending his three sons to school was twofold: it gave them the necessary preparation for business and at the same time lessened the number of children left at home in the care of his wife. Earlier, he had even attempted to enroll his older sons in the Austrian military service.

Finally, his three sons--Adolfo, fifteen, Ettore, thirteen, and Elio, ten--were taken away and sent to Segnitz. They missed the warmth of their loving mother. Elio, the youngest and weakest of the three, suffered bit-

terly: in his diary, he recalls the sharp pain of this separation. He was unable to survive without his mother's tenderness. Ettore also seemed to suffer from the callous atmosphere of the boarding school. The three Italian boys plunged into a new language and found it difficult getting used to German ways. From Elio's diary we know that Adolfo was able to make the adjustment while Ettore, the introvert, turned to literature as an escape. It was during this unhappy time that he started writing.[4]

He began a comedy in "versi martelliani," L'Ariosto governatore, which is noteworthy because it demonstrates not only the young boy's interest in Italian literature and his ability to imagine a literary figure come to life in the format of a play, but also his intellectual precocity. These "versi martelliani" are lines of verse in French hendecasyllables; there is no way of knowing which of the many poets that he read he wanted to emulate in his choice of form. Except for its theme this play is not especially remarkable. It was a juvenile attempt at a historically accurate portrayal of Ariosto and followed a literary fashion of the time by which a famous writer would be described in the midst of his creative activity.[5]

We know that Ettore's teachers discouraged him from continuing this project, especially when he asked for their technical help, which they were probably unable to provide. At this point they merely advised Ettore to abandon poetry and write prose. Strangely enough, at this early age

Ettore was mainly concerned with the theme of old age. He also touched upon the theme of disillusion, in portraying Ariosto as a writer who saw writing as the only worthwhile activity in life. Certainly, for a boy of thirteen it was an unusual subject.

The teaching at the Segnitz school was not very challenging. Mostly geared to preparing the students for a business career, it provided at best a superficial view of German literary culture. But Ettore absorbed what he could and soon fell in love with the poetry of Goethe and Schiller. He used to say to Elio that Schiller was the greatest genius in the universe, and the two German writers, as Elio reports, "were the ones he held in the greatest esteem while he was in boarding school" (furono i suoi piu' grandi al tempo che fu in collegio).[6] We shall see later how this early enthusiasm for Schiller may have influenced Svevo's writing. For the time being one may merely observe that the seeds of human philosophical and poetic thought, even when casually sown, may be fast to take root in a fertile soil.

As soon as he could communicate with his fellow students in German, Ettore Schmitz formed a little circle of young enthusiasts who dreamed of attaining literary recognition someday. Ettore wanted to write, but his literary flights, carefully documented by Elio, were short-lived in spite of the encouragement by his brother and young friends. Many of his early efforts ended in the fire. He

was insecure during those early days, undecided and afraid of failure, and "inactive in appearance, because his greatest vitality was to be found in his mind" (apatico in apparenza, giacche' la sua maggior vita la trova nella sua mente).[7]

In short, Svevo embodied the inept character which would one day be skillfully portrayed by him. Lack of confidence and inability to act, which were to characterize his main fictional protagonists, were also characteristic of Svevo.

His younger brother Elio was very perceptive about these deficiencies, but he also believed in Ettore's ability and encouraged him to continue to write. In fact, Elio was to become his brother's first biographer, and he duly kept records of his brother's achievements. But it was a hard task to sustain, as Ettore vacillated between peaks of enthusiasm and active writing and long periods of destructive criticism. He always started new projects which he would abandon, unable to complete them. Elio comments: "He dreams about comedies and dramatic or romantic works, yet never gets them down on paper" (Vive sognando commedie e lavori ora drammatici, ora romantici, che sulla carta non vengono mai a compimento).[8]

Fortunately, the fragment of L'Ariosto governatore was preserved. Written when Svevo was nineteen, it was only the first of his many attempts in this genre. Svevo showed since this early period a strong love for the theatre; he

seemed to be particularly unfit for comedy, yet he returned to it several times. This literary genre requires a naturalistic tendency towards action, which was contrary to Svevo's nature. Even syntactically, Svevo had difficulty in using direct dialogue, which is so essential to the stage. Even in his later work one will notice the difficulty he experienced in making his characters communicate. (Thus, examining Senilita', the critic Giacomo Devoto noticed: "the spoken word, which direct speech, by definition, imposes, is absent" (il tono parlato, che il discorso diretto per definizione impone, rimane assente).[9]

In his first clumsy attempt, Svevo relied on his ability to study and report dialogue within the self. Some have detected an almost "bookish dependence on Leopardi."[10] While there are obvious similarities between the two in both themes and tone, it is startling to notice in the immature novelist the presence of a pessimistic and polemic personality which foreshadows his ultimate philosophical attitude.

One sees this, for example, in the expressions Svevo puts in the mouth (or should one say the mind) of Ariosto, who remarks: "Cold is the glory, cold is the life, and cold is the heart" (fredda la gloria, fredda la vita e freddo il cor) and sees life as "poetic illusion; if the young poet had it, the old poet puts it in the grave" (poetica illusione, se il poeta l'avea, il vecchio nella tomba la

pone).[11] One can detect here in embryo the theme of *Senilita'*.

As the critic R. Rimini pointed out, Svevo, from the earliest time, succeeded in dramatizing "individual psychological conflicts" (singoli conflitti psicologici), making them "theatrical" (teatrali).[12] We also detect the subjective feeling of inadequacy of a poetic soul forever incapable of coping with everyday reality, yet continually confronted with the everyday practicality of it.

As a child, Svevo was already experiencing the frustrations of a poet forced to confront the practical demands of daily existence. His brother Elio soon proved to be less fit than he to endure the rigid discipline of the boarding school. He was already in fragile health and soon had to leave Segnitz to go home. He had been living in the shadow of his talented brother Ettore and was going to miss his role. Ettore had given Elio the label of "the good one"; consequently, Elio felt that it was his task to help and encourage Ettore, an insecure young writer. Elio took his role seriously and became exasperated and frustrated when Ettore was not able to finish anything. In the meantime, several unfortunate incidents were occurring in the Schmitz household that would make it impossible for Ettore to pursue his literary dream.

As a result of some mistakes and misfortunes (Francesco Schmitz had bought a glass factory which resulted in economic disaster), Svevo's family suffered a sudden finan-

cial crisis that made it impossible to maintain the economic level they had known. The father had been up to that moment a prominent businessman of some reputation. His large family (he had sixteen children, of which only eight reached adulthood) was known in the bourgeois circle of Trieste. He guided his family like a general, with severity (as recalled by Svevo's wife Livia Veneziani). Such attitude created a gloomy atmosphere, lightened somewhat by his wife Allegra. The family had strong ties, each member developing his own particular talent; the three girls and Elio were given to music, Adolfo embraced politics, passionately taking sides with the Irredentisti of Trieste, the movement that wanted the city free from foreign domination. Only Ottavio liked commerce and would follow willingly the activity the father had chosen for all his sons.[13]

The sudden turn of misfortune destroyed Francesco Schmitz. Instead of facing the new situation with vigor, he let himself go and started drinking heavily. In addition, he was soon to face the death of his son Elio, following a long illness.

After the bankruptcy, Svevo's father, who had always been very authoritative, became even more difficult and caused his family much pain and anger. The family had made strenuous efforts to leave intact the façade of a harmonious relationship among its members, as well as the continued appearance of a comfortable financial situation.

The constant nagging complaints of the father made it very difficult for Ettore to devote himself to literature, a dream for which he had nothing to show at the moment. While living at the Segnitz boarding school, he had already considered abandoning business studies altogether in order to plunge into literature, but he knew that his father had destined him for a business career like all his brothers. (Livia Veneziani Svevo reports, "Literature was far removed from the thinking of the elder Schmitz" (la letteratura era una cosa lontanissima dalla mentalita' del vecchio Schmitz.)[14]

The situation at home was such that Svevo could not even contemplate undertaking literary studies. From Segnitz he had to go back to Trieste to the Commercial Institute "Revoltella" and from there seek a job, for serious problems were already facing the numerous family members. Besides the sudden turn in the economic situation and the sad worsening of his father's behavior, he was soon to face an added disturbance: the long illness of his brother Elio which brought to a close a precious but colorless life. Svevo was thereby deprived of the only support of his literary endeavor.

Ettore had more than enough reason to justify the steady growth of a pessimism which would turn inward and encourage solitude and introspection. His delicate and timid nature was crushed by the harsh practical demands of a period in his life which he felt incapable of control-

ling. Svevo had dreamed of going to Florence in order to perfect his language, but he realized that studying away from home was out of the question. Indulging in the literature he loved was also unthinkable. In 1880 he was employed by the bank Union of Vienna, where he was to remain 18 years. Suddenly, he found that all his time and energy were devoted to an absurd clerical position in which he could find no meaning.

He felt that it was his destiny to become one of the cogs in the bureaucratic wheel. The only distractions allowed him were evenings at the theatre, a proper bourgeois entertainment; while the many hours Svevo spent reading at night were considered by his father a useless waste of time.

When he became a clerk at the Triestine branch of the bank Union, and while starting on other short-lived projects, he began to write for the local Irredentist newspaper, l'Indipendente. The first article he produced for that magazine was quite accidental. He wrote some comments on "The Merchant of Venice," which he had seen at the local theatre. On coming home, he had felt the urge to write something about Shylock, defending the human position of Shakespeare's alleged villain. The magazine liked the original piece and accepted it, to the obvious delight of the writer.

The collaboration between the Indipendente and Svevo was to last ten years and included articles and reviews of

Italian and French books. Svevo became a member of the literary community of Trieste. However, his main activity would be his work at the bank. He was even expected to be thankful to his father for having found him, through his many good friends of better days, a position as a correspondent at the bank Union, which was reluctant to accept the inexperienced son of Francesco Schmitz. His knowledge of German was about the only positive point Svevo could offer to get the position.

The result of this first experience was an autobiography, carefully documented in his first book Una vita (1892). At first glance, the book is no more than a detailed report of the daily life of a little "peon" (Travet), and it was criticized for dwelling too much on minutiae. The readers felt uncomfortable when confronted by this wearisome character, living in a grey office, always ready to tell how he was caught in an exasperating game of petty jealousies, office gossip and other trivialities.

The protagonist is a timid, unambitious (in the social sense) carbon copy of the author himself. Svevo wrote of his inability to cope with the outside world. He had a propensity towards observing other people's role-playing and finding them quite absurd; he became judgmental. He observed his fellow men with diffident curiosity and with the detachment needed to describe them well. In the novel the various actions and reactions of his colleagues are studied as if by a spectator watching a stage performance.

Observing in detail the characters' behavior, one comes to the same conclusion as Svevo and sees the absurdity of their preoccupation with success and other "bourgeois" values.

Perhaps Ettore Schmitz, suddenly placed in a bank (an ambiance which he would never have chosen nor dreamed of before), found there the fertile soil in which to nourish his curiosity. Bewildered by the unbelievable characters an unpredictable fate had placed before him, he resorted to putting his observations in writing. His position forced him to portray himself in his book in the difficult role of a strange character perpetually vacillating between the desire to remain proudly a spectator (we shall see how many factors contributed to this role), and the wish to plunge himself into role-playing in order to be recognized as capable and practical. Then there was the difficulty of having to create the role of an anti-hero that previously no one had represented, and that the writer found difficult to initiate.

Una vita was probably written as a result of the interplay of these contrasting feelings. The author simply portrayed his double, duplicated his own ambience, made his character repeat and experience his thoughts, so as to gain some perspective which would enable him to look at himself from a distance and understand his reactions. The book appeared in 1892 and was published in Trieste by the publisher Vram. Vram had refused the title Un inetto (an inept),

which described the contents so well, and wanted it changed to something else. He did not understand this new type of narrative which illustrated the role of the anti-hero. He thought the title would never meet public approval.[15] When Svevo proposed the title Una vita, people claimed it was an exact translation of Maupassant's Une vie. Svevo could only protest that he had never read the French author. Besides, the two books had only the title in common. Svevo was portraying a completely new character; in fact, his effort constituted the first attempt in Italian literature to present an inept character, the kind who "failed to assimilate"[16] into society.

The autobiographical elements are apparent from the very beginning of the novel: in fact, the first page starts with a letter by Alfonso Nitti, the protagonist, to his distant and sick mother (Svevo's mother was ailing and would die on October 4, 1895). The book itself had the death of the mother as a central, determining episode.

The dominant themes were the thoughts of an "absurd man" who finds a way out of what he considered an absurd life in his own suicide, conceived as a device to attain the "destruction of an organism which did not know peace" (distruzione di un organismo che non conosceva la pace) and therefore would "continue to drag him into the fight because it was meant for that" (continuato a trascinarlo nella lotta perche' era fatto per quello scopo).[17] This particular pessimism probably had its roots in Svevo him-

self, but also shows with its "scepticisme desenchanté "[18] adherence to the theory of Schopenhauer, whom Svevo held in great esteem and admired for many years as the author he liked best. Whatever the source, the novel documents the development of a mind exasperated by the absurdity of reality. The interior monologue makes continuous reference to opposite personalities which the protagonist perceives as operating on an efficient though superficial level; they were in turn described as his colleagues at the bank, the bank president and, finally, Macario, a socially successful man. They all appear as active individuals whom he credits with the balance necessary for success. He could not duplicate their behavior but nevertheless perceived it as necessary in order to thrive in society.

Any choice, even not to make a choice, was abhorrent to Alfonso's nature. Like Svevo himself, he appears to be trying to prove his capability as a writer, thereby escaping the active demands of life. At the same time, Svevo was, as seen through his contribution to the newspaper Indipendente, aiming for acceptance by the intelligentsia of Triestan society and hoping that the success of his first book would guarantee a place among them. The book, however, did not meet with success. It had been published at the author's expense, and only a few friends acknowledged the intrinsic value of this first novel. In spite of many shortcomings, Svevo felt that what he had written was definitely a good and sincere story that reached beyond the

typical book of the times. (His second book was to have a better structure and show mastery of the novelist's craft.)

The author would soon display a firmer grasp of what was going to be the new genre of the psychological novel, utilizing the technique of the inner monologue. The first 1000 copies of Una vita sold poorly. It was the book that "Elio had so much hoped to see."[19] Svevo sent a copy to each of his friends, as well as to literary critics. The scant result was that Svevo, in spite of his meager success was, from this moment on, regarded as a dilettante with some possibilities who "enjoyed a certain reputation as a literary critic within his small city circle" (godette di una certa rinomanza di critico letterario nel piccolo ambiente cittadino).[20]

Una vita was mentioned twice in the local papers with no comments. The Corriere della Sera of Milan published a slightly warmer appreciation with words that betrayed a certain condescension. They said that the book did not seem to have been written "by just anyone" (dal primo venuto). The authoritative critic Domenico Oliva "indicated that the center of the narration was psychological stress, but he also noticed a certain overstressing of analysis and some limitation in the creativity and technique" (indicava il centro piu' genuino della narrazione nell'assillo psicologico, ma rilevava certi inutili appesantimenti dell'analisi e alcuni limiti d'invenzione e di tecnica).[21] The local papers did not even attempt to formulate a real

criticism. Could it be that the intellectual circles of the time were so absorbed by the patriotic movement of the "irredentismo" that they could not pause to evaluate some thing as trivial as a novel? Surely, an art "without politics, without the national struggle" (un'arte senza politica . . . senza lotta nazionale)[22] did not have any meaning for them.

Professor Ferdinando Pasini of Trieste was one of the few who acknowledged Svevo as a writer. He published an article deploring the silence that had surrounded Italo Svevo's novel. He paraphrased for us the comments which circulated at the first publication of Una vita: "to come and tell of such stories while the fire is raging, and we can only think of one thing, to put out the fire" (venirci a fare di tali racconti . . . mentre infuria un incendio e non c'e' tempo da [sic] pensare che ad un unica cosa--spegnere il fuoco). The irredentists of Trieste were absorbed with the problem of determining the political settlement within the city (torn between the old Austrian regime and that of the new order of Italy). In the Annali della universita' degli studi di Trieste it is clearly stated that among the irredentists art for art's sake was scarcely cultivated.[23] The irredentists were more interested in fostering their political ideology than in an appraisal of literary works.

> What the city did admire were those Triestine writers who adhered to the cult of the city by following the popular literary currents of Italy

> and who thereby once again proved that Trieste was just as Italian as any other city on the mainland. If you were a poet you wanted to write like Carducci or Pascoli, if a novelist like Manzoni or d'Annunzio.[24]

In the hopes of receiving a professional critique and an official approval of some sort for his work, Svevo sent a copy of the book to Paul Heyse, a German man of letters known for being a severe censor of French contemporary literature, and an "italophile." Heyse took a great deal of time to read the book and respond to Svevo. When he finally did answer Svevo, he reproached him for having chosen as his subject a person of such an "insignificant and obscure trait as a bank employee," and for having described in such pedantic minutiae a "grey life in a grey ambiance."[25] He found a few words of admiration for the many sincere pages of acute introspection, "said he was sorry that the author had attempted what he called 'esercizio scientifico alla Zola,' [scientific exercise in the style of Zola] advised him to try and 'refine his own style' (raffinare il propio stile), acquiring more control on the narrative." Above all, he advised Svevo to choose "a happier and more important subject." (un tema piu' felice e piu' importante.)[26]

Heyse probably did not realize how much he might have hurt Svevo, who himself had served as the model for his fictional character. However, destiny spared Svevo some pain because, ironically, the letter Heyse wrote reached him when he had already completed his second book, Senilita' (1898), and thus did not severely affect Svevo's abili-

ty to continue his writing. Probably Heyse would have been pleased to see that in his second novel Svevo had elevated the protagonist to a higher rank. It was evident that as Svevo's station in life progressed, so did his characterizations and literary style. As a literary work its narrative was now more refined than its predecessor.

His methodical account of visits to the library described in the autobiographical Una vita does not provide us with much information on his reading. We do know, however, that in spite of his having been exposed almost exclusively to German literature in boarding school, Svevo turned his attention to Italian and French literature. His concern for his language problem motivated him to read the great Italian writers of the past as compensation for his lack of formal education in Italian letters. As recounted in Una Vita, Svevo was discovering within himself a somewhat didactic bent that found expression in an episode transcribed in his second book. The first chapter of Senilita' was in fact written for the edification of Giuseppina Vergal, a proletarian woman whom Ettore Schmitz had met and who was to become a circus dancer.[27] At the time (this infatuation dates to 1890), Svevo is reported to have entertained the friends of his literary circle in Trieste with complaints about "an absurd, sentimental tie to a creature of little value" (un assurdo legame a una 'creatura' di poco valore).[28]

"Creatura," is a poetic term in the description and is in sharp contrast with the expression "di poco valore." The former suggests a justified warm attraction; the latter her moral inadequacy and lack of education. Possibly, the writer started his second book in an effort to understand his passion for a woman beneath his moral and intellectual level. He wanted to explore the intricacies of a feeling he could neither justify nor control. The result of this effort would lead to Senilita', a highly autobiographical work which would again develop the themes reflected in the author's own life: the inadequacy of the object of his love, the fatality of uncontrolled passion and, above all, self-analysis and introspection.

The character of Emilio Brentani, the protagonist in Senilita', is more developed than Alfonso Nitti of Una vita, although the two personalities are really one and the same. In turn, they reflect the growth and development of Svevo himself. He is again "an employee of little importance in an insurance company" (un impiegatuccio di poca importanza presso una societa' di assicurazioni)[29] but this time he has literary aspirations and has succeeded in being considered a "respectable writer" (rispettabilita' letteraria), a number "within the small artistic scale of the city" (nel piccolo bilancio artistico della citta').[30]

We can see that this development follows the new position of the writer himself, who had now attained some

fame with Una vita, and again the autobiographical note has some of that truth and some of that wish. Of course, one could not yet speak of a serious literary reputation for Svevo because he had been ignored by all but a small group of close friends in his hometown.

Emilio falls in love with a "girl of little morality" (ragazza dai facili costumi), and, to justify this passion to himself, conceives the project of educating her. Although he realizes the closeness he feels for her, he does not understand the entangled web of feelings and desires he experiences in her presence. He is unable to explain or to acknowledge his own craving for love. Emilio Brentani's attempt to educate Angelina serves as his justification for seeking her presence, and as Svevo's rationale for writing a passionate story.

Incidentally, one is tempted to consider the influence of Ariosto on Svevo's novels in several ways. Even the name Angelina, chosen to embody an ever-fleeting object of desire in both authors, seems to suggest that Svevo retains in his memory much of Ariosto's literary creation and that in a certain way he wanted to emulate him. However, Ariosto's Angelica is saved by her love for Medoro, while Svevo's Angiolina is lost forever to any possible romantic rehabilitation except in the mind of the lover himself. "The woman that he loved, Ange, was his invention. He had created her from an effort of his will.

She had not collaborated in this creation and she wouldn't even allow him to proceed with it so she resisted it. In the light of the day the dream disappeared" (la donna ch'egli amava, Ange, era sua invenzione, se l'era creata lui con uno sforzo voluto; essa non aveva collaborato a questa creazione, non l'aveva neppure lasciato fare perche' aveva resistito. Alla luce del giorno il sogno scompariva).[31]

Since the writer gives several hints of Angelina's shrewdness throughout the story, it is clear that Emilio has a realistic picture of her character and profession. Here Svevo strikes another autobiographical note: his love for teaching and his predilection for analysis. In his "lettere per una fidanzata," the diary Svevo wrote for Livia Veneziani during their engagement, we find the same predilection for education and the same reluctance to deal with a one-to-one relationship on an emotional level. Svevo's naiveté and innocence as exemplified in his letters to his fiancée are embodied in the description of the innocent love he wants to portray within the protagonist.

In Senilita', Emilio Brentani is really the one who needs a practical education in the facts of life (the name itself may suggest Rousseau's Emile, who is naturally good and unspoiled until society spoils him). The greedy and careless interest of society is well represented by Angiolina, a prostitute who belongs to the proletarian stratum of society. She knows her body is her main asset, an is

willing to exploit it in order to survive. Angelina represents not only a true survivor of the working class, but also the victim of the oppressive forces of society. Emilio is not ready to acknowledge his understanding of this ambiguous situation, nor is he ready to take advantage of it with a light heart.

Another character in Senilita' is the painter Balli, a friend of Emilio who should at this point help him unveil his blindness to the ruthless nature of Angiolina, the healthy and uncomplicated "proletarian" (popolana). This Don Juan type prides himself, in contrast with Emilio, on having full control over his adventures. Balli sincerely means to help Emilio, and he finds his task made lighter and even pleasant by the lofty social status he feels he holds over Emilio. To save him, Balli tries to present a clear perspective of who Angiolina really is, but to no avail, for Emilio does not want to see the truth.

The character of Balli was in reality the painter Veruda, a fashionable Triestine portrait artist. He was very young and vivacious, and became a close friend of Svevo. Like the fictional Balli, he led a bohemian life. In addition to being talented, he was extremely sensitive, a quality he concealed under a superficial gaiety. In his Diary, Svevo himself identifies Veruda with the painter Balli and then, fearing that he wronged him in his portrait, he asserted that he "had learned from the painter

the great art of living life instead of succumbing to the despair of life" (ebbe dal pittore il grande dono di apprendere l'arte di vivere della vita, invece che morirne).[32]

Here we have two clear examples, or actually two parallels drawn from real life; one is Svevo's anonymous lover portrayed in Angiolina and the other, Balli, who appears in Svevo's fiction as the artist friend Veruda. In the second novel, Senilita', Emilio lives the same monotonous life that Alfonso Nitti leads in Una vita, made grayer by the coexistence with a "small, pale, younger sister, a few years his junior, but older in character and maybe in destiny" (sorella piccola e pallida di qualche anno piu' giovane di lui ma piu' vecchia per carattere e forse per destino).[33] Emilio's sister has never known love, and has lived vicariously through the passions that Emilio experienced. Though Emilio is trapped between his uneventful office routine and the dreary existence of a small apartment, his unhappy sister waits for Emilio's recounting of the day. She has no life of her own, and he feels responsible for her unhappiness. Until Angiolina enters his life he has nothing interesting to tell his sister except his frustration; now he has his romance to relate.

His blindness towards Angiolina's amorality has something to do both with the idealized love figure he needs for himself and the embellishment his love story requires.

Here is the adolescent-like trepidation of an immature man who takes all the unconscious precaution to preserve a former idealization of love.

Amalia, (the name is the feminine counterpart of Emilio) after having experienced through her brother how love may change one's life, starts seeking a love story for herself. Her dream becomes a conviction transferred to the only person she could invest it in, the painter Balli, the only man besides her brother, whom she really knows. At this point in the story, it appears that Emilio and Amalia, these two "old people" (vecchi) as Svevo calls them, are both heading for certain disillusionment; the sister will end up an alcoholic faced with the inconsistency of her illusion, while Emilio will be confronted with the reality of Angiolina's eloping with another suitor.

Emilio invests the earthy and practical Angiolina with a sort of "angelization" that could not be sustained. In effect, a thin, golden veneer peels off from this ever-changing, unpredictable woman. It is a reality that he cannot face. He does not want to admit that his passion for Angiolina is only a sexual drive and that the natural force she represents is stronger than the thin bond of brotherly affection which keeps him bound in a common unhappy destiny to his colorless sister. Angiolina's call will take Emilio away from the bedside of his dying sister. Baffled by such a passion and hurt because of his

inability to resist it, Emilio will find himself alone with his family memories and self-created idyllic love story. With a confusion typical of old people (we shall return later to the topic of old age, a favorite of Svevo), Emilio, now alone, in his mind will fuse the characters of his sister and his lover.

The title, Senilita', intends to symbolize the perennial state of senility that man experiences when he contemplates his own helplessness. The book, published at Svevo's expense, was written in two years. In the meantime, Svevo had married Livia Veneziani, a second cousin, the daughter of "dear" Uncle Giuseppe on Ettore's mother's side, whom Elio mentions in his diary.[34] Livia had been educated in France and had been asked to give French lessons to Sarah, the niece of Ettore Schmitz, who was living in the Schmitz household.

The two cousins were tied by a friendship which turned into love. Svevo wrote her many letters, which were gathered in the volume, Diario per la fidanzata (1896). He was at the time a compulsive smoker, and Livia promised him a kiss if he would not smoke for three months. He pretended he had kept the promise and received his reward. His comment on this episode, as in many passages of his diary, is of an astonishing tenderness, but it also shows ingenuity and sentimentalism which would be more appropriate in a much younger man.

Livia's side of the family was much more prosperous.

Ettore Schmitz was to be forever embarrassed by the desire to conquer the girl he loved and by his fear of appearing to be a calculating fortune hunter. He was allegedly thirteen years older than Livia, and that gave him a perennial inferiority complex, or at least he often pretended to have one. The family, especially Livia's mother, was not in favor of the match for several reasons, but Livia was determined to marry Ettore. Olga Veneziani, Livia's mother, was the backbone of the family business (which manufactured underwater varnishes) and was the real head of the household. Livia resembled her mother in some ways. She was, in fact, the opposite of Ettore, much less a dreamer and an intellectual than he was. She viewed life with a matter-of-factness unknown to his complex makeup, neatly avoiding its many disillusions. She intended to provide Ettore with what she believed he needed most--a reassuring practicality. Amused by Ettore's gift for dreaming, she treated him like a talented child but always considered that talent not as a precious gift to encourage but as an amusing and somewhat interesting originality to be fostered and mostly controlled at the same time.

Later, when Ettore Schmitz entered the family business (he was allowed to do so only after five years), Livia's family became a trap for him. Like an obedient boy he had to prove his willingness to earn money at the expense of his talent. Livia assumed the role of a

mother-figure for him. In spite of her youth she guided him firmly, sometimes pretending to take half-seriously his timid objection.

One physical feature of Livia appears in the works of both Svevo and his future friend James Joyce. It is her thick flock of golden hair: Svevo represents it as belonging to Angiolina in Senilita'; James Joyce sees it as the image of a flowing river and consequently names a stream in his Finnegan's Wake after Livia.

Livia was both loved and despised by Svevo. She certainly held him with physical attraction and we witness in his letters many fits of jealousy. However, we also find in his letters and diary expressions which testify to his scorn for her pettiness and narrow-mindedness. Her expediency and practicality were sometimes beneficial for the dreamer Svevo, who would be helped both by the success and failure of Livia's endeavors to monitor his life: her success would put order in his life; her failure to organize his life would confirm his independence and spiritual autonomy.

Svevo's feelings toward Livia were probably always ambivalent. From the pages of Diario per la fidanzata up to the letters written after his marriage, we detect a childish need for approval, and, at the same time, a particular pleasure in tormenting Livia. Throughout Svevo's correspondence with her there is an distinct effort to rationalize the impatience that he felt. One can gain

a better picture of her through their correspondence rather than relying on her honey-dipped reports on the life and feelings of her husband.

In spite of the many differences in attitude towards life, the couple got along well enough, but certainly they were the products of two different sensibilities. She was tidy, unintellectual, and cared much about appearances. Younger and richer, she probably felt a certain superiority, which disturbed a writer notorious in such matters as losing his umbrella and hat. She reports such episodes with an attitude of protective indulgence, but certainly the fact that they constituted a topic of conversation in the Veneziani family must have caused Svevo much embarrassment; so also his violin playing (which he portrayed in Senilita'), and his addiction to cigarette smoking. All were regarded by the Veneziani family, and even by the young spouse, as foolish self-indulgence.

It was after marrying Livia that Svevo wrote Senilita'. The title has been aptly translated As a Man Grows Older, for throughout the book there is a pervading sense of premature old age. It was strange that this young wife was unable to bring a sparkle of youth into his life.

Svevo worked at the bank Union of Vienna for four years in order to pay for Livia's little extravagances. He also gave regular lessons in French and German correspondence at the Istituto Revoltella and contributed reviews and articles to Il Piccolo. After five years, the

Veneziani family finally decided to take him into the family firm. He felt obliged to repay them with the utmost dedication. And in fact he stopped writing for the next twenty-five years.

Luckily, a particular incident revived his dedication to writing. For his many trips abroad to care for the family business, Svevo needed English, and, together with his wife, he took classes from James Joyce, who had just been dismissed as a teacher from the Berlitz School of Trieste. Joyce became a regular visitor to the Schmitzes at their Villa Veneziani, a mansion that Livia's family had built close to their factory. At first, he was an English teacher. Livia, who probably had started to study the new language in order to encourage Svevo, stopped taking lessons after a while. Joyce had just come back from Rome where he had been living for a time. He did not care for the "eternal city." He called it "a great cemetery." In fact, he said it inspired him to write "The Dead," one of the short stories in his Dubliners.

He soon became a close friend of the Schmitzes. Upon reading them his short story, Joyce received great applause from the couple. Hearing that his teacher was a fine writer encouraged Svevo to show him the two novel he had published many years before. Joyce must have reluctantly agreed to take them home, but returned with great enthusiasm and congratulated his pupil. He declared that Svevo was an "unrecognized artist" (uno scrittore ignora-

to).[35] Joyce began to publicize his conviction within his literary circle, but few of his contemporaries paid him any heed. Joyce himself had not yet achieved recognition. To his acquaintances he was only a professor of language, and Svevo only a small businessman with some literary ambition. But Joyce knew Svevo's potential, and his praise encouraged him tremendously. Svevo began writing again, despite the lack of attention to his work.

The main character of the new novel, La Coscienza di Zeno (1923), evolved into a more socially conscious individual: Zeno Cosini. The setting is still Trieste. The boss of whom the character speaks resembles the author's father at the time of his success as well as the old father-in-law who had started and developed the firm in which Svevo was now working. Augusta, the protagonist's wife, has many of the characteristics of Livia. Finally, Svevo portrayed his addiction to smoking (present in the pages of his diary to Livia). That addiction was now described in full detail. In real life Svevo ignored his smoking habit, a vice which in fiction drove his protagonist to the psychoanalyst, who advised him to keep a diary. This would clarify for the patient the source of his compulsive disease. Zeno thus becomes the record of Svevo himself.[36]

The author pours his soul into his diary, revealing his nature. Guido, the ever-present antagonist, is another Balli type, only more mature, the opposite of Zeno

Cosini, opposing him even in name. The name reminds us of Zeno of Ephesus, the ancient philosopher who lived in 500 B.C.); his family name Cosini (little thing) is a startling opposite to Guido, a name phonetically very close to "guida": a guide, a leader.[37]

Just as Svevo has developed the passion for playing the violin, so his character Guido will be an accomplished violinist: thus Svevo continues his vicarious interest in success, undermined by self-destructive tendencies. Guido assumes the quality that the author himself wishes. He plays Bach "precisely" (sapientemente).[38] He is of course successful among his friends, a group in which the protagonist is unable to establish himself.

Death, which has been present throughout Svevo's youth, appears again in this book in a powerful episode: the death of the protagonist's father. There is a continuous parallel between Svevo's life and his fiction. It appears obvious that Svevo is again recalling scenes from his own experience or from those recounted by his friends. At the time he wrote this novel Svevo had lost Veruda, his best friend from old times. The strong and fortunate painter had died while tormented by his mother's malediction: in her deathbed delirium she had reproached him for not giving her a glass of water, which her doctor had prohibited. The novel does not tell of a malediction, but of the anger of a dying father who attempts unsuccessfully to slap his son. The episode is described in very realis-

tic detail with great pity both for the father in his overwhelming sense of helplessness and the sad impotence of the son, who does not have the time to express both his innocence and his love. The father's episode also recalls a similar one in Una vita in which the protagonist's dying mother[39] asks that the window be opened, but could not have her way because of the cold. In Zeno, the father too makes the same request, but to no avail. Svevo seems to recall death "in the anguish of his emotivity" (nei suoi soprassalti angosciosi).[40]

Guido, another example of Svevo's alter ego, is an artist like the lost Veruda. He gives the appearance of self-sufficiency but reveals himself to be supersensitive and in need of other people's understanding. Svevo seems here more prone to forgive the superficiality of this character's behavior; probably in an attempt to render homage to Veruda he indulges the childish Guido. Guido always attempts suicide, treating life capriciously, as would a spoiled child. Toying with his life once too often, as if it were something of slight value, he miscalculates so that his staged suicide tragically becomes a real one.

The worldly Guido has stolen and married the woman whom Zeno Cosini loved, but Zeno is avenged by learning that he has been the real love of the widow. She has some of the characteristics of Svevo's wife, Livia, and some of the virtues he wished she possessed. Finally Zeno has a

love affair with a singer, Carla, in which can be detected some flavor of a love affair that the writer has experienced. Carla, though she appears to manipulate everybody, is a born loser, a well-matched companion to Zeno Cosini.

By the time he came to present Zeno Cosini, Svevo acquired the ability to create an objective characterization through the device of a fictionalized double. He succeeded in projecting those elements of irony and self-mockery that added more facets to his protagonists and were typical of his own idiosyncratic behavior.

The author examines the central character from so many points of view and places him in so many different ambiances that we know him inside out. At the same time he achieves a healthy perspective so that he can manipulate his thoughts and actions with complete detachment. One can say that Svevo has by now acquired a perspective on his fiction equal to the one he has on life.

The analytical approach of the novel, the obvious use of Freudian psychoanalysis, was well received by French critics and found many enthusiasts among the disciples of Freud. In Italy, however, Svevo would pass almost unnoticed. Borlenghi reports, "He found an absolute lack of appreciation for his work except in Trieste" (meno che a Trieste trovo' una incomprensione assoluta).[41]

In despair at the lack of support by his fellow countrymen, Svevo decided to send his book to Joyce, who was then living in Paris and had meanwhile become an

acclaimed author. One wonders why Svevo did not approach his "friend and teacher" for reassurance before attempting the publication of the book. After all, an examination of the many letters exchanged on the subject of writing between the two[42] indicates that Svevo could have asked Joyce to return the favor of reviewing his new work. For the Irish writer had been constantly sending Svevo samples of his writings. As far back as 1909, Joyce had solicited Svevo's opinion about A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man then still in manuscript.

In a letter dated November 21, 1925, Joyce, who finally received a copy of Zeno, writes almost casually to Svevo: "I have spoken with the director of the Navire d'argent who assured my that a section of your book will be published in the January or February issue with an introduction by Crémieux" (ho parlato con la Direttrice del Navire d'argent la quale mi assicuro' che un brano del suo libro sara' pubblicato nel numero di Gennaio o Febbraio presentato da Crémieux).[43]

In fact, Joyce read Svevo's writing and finding the work interesting, had some passages translated into French and given to some literary friends. They proved very successful. Perhaps the translation, which smoothed out the inadequacy of Svevo's language, did the trick and pointed out his innate talent. Benjamin Crémieux acclaimed Svevo as the "first analytical novelist that modern Italy has produced and one might say the only one" (primo

romanziere d'analisi che abbia prodotto l'Italia contemporanea, e si puo' dire il solo.) In his book on Italian literature, written in French, Crémieux defined Svevo as the author of "some unique works in the Italian literary production of the last years" (des oeuvres uniques dans la production littéraire italienne des dernières années).[44] Critics even found in his writings similarities to the writing of Proust, who had died in 1922.

It was certainly a great consolation for Svevo, who up to that point had been a very isolated man. He had been hoping for the day when he would find appreciation. At the age of 63 that day finally came. On January 30, 1924, the writer Valerie Larbaud proposed publishing some extracts from the novel La coscienza di Zeno in Commerce, a literary review of which Joyce was co-editor. The next two years saw many literary critics talking about the Triestine writer, pointing to him as an unknown genius. The Italians were upset and wanted to show how they appreciated Svevo too. For instance, Eugenio Montale had dedicated to the writer a tribute "Omaggio a Italo Svevo" (in L'Esame, 1925) one year before the French officially claimed to have discovered him. The Italian critics, however, insisted that in Trieste Svevo had not really been completely unnoticed. The critics Benco and d'Orazio had found Svevo interesting. Professor Pasini had praised his book in a newspaper published in Trento.

At this point Svevo himself came to the rescue of the

Italians and said he had received from Pasini "as much admiration as the novel would find after its success" (tanta ammirazione come il romanzo non ne trovo' che dopo il successo).[45] These are words that Svevo used to thank Pasini and the few Italian critics in general, but Svevo also said that his lack of success had been so painful that even his health was affected. In Livia's book we read "Ettore became depressed; even his health was affected by his countrymen's rejection of his work and his heart troubles intensified" (Ettore risenti' persino nella salute dell' insuccesso italiano. Si fece malinconico e i disturbi di cuore s'intensificarono).[46]

From these contrasting points the "polemica Svevo"--the literary debate over Svevo--began. The literary "caso" of Svevo was studied with passion. The Italians were so resentful that they harshly criticized the French intelligentsia who seemed prone to discover genius in other countries. A violent debate followed which focused more attention on Svevo. This debate has been the object of other studies, and it is worthwhile to consider the following point. Livia Veneziani Svevo in Memorie di mio marito, declares that if Italo had received, in due time, the praise due to his works, he would have produced much more. She is not the only one to have made such an observation. Many other commentators have concluded that the lack of success which followed Svevo for so many years surely impeded the production of some works of art, but

this is pure, and perhaps even idle, speculation.

Actually his lack of success was more severe because of his unrealistic expectation regarding the acceptance of his works, and his life's hopes in general. Throughout the available documents one can follow his enthusiasm for the literary creations that he dreamed of. The book Una vita gives us autobiographical details of the glorious dream of the little bank employee, the no-man that Svevo ironically described this way:

> alone in his room . . . he was dreaming of one day becoming a divine author who had gathered in himself all those positive attributes and been immune to all faults . . . in his writing he found all that courage which was lacking in his life. . . . he wanted to work, and work well; success would follow.
>
> (solo nella sua stanza sognava di divenire il divino autore che avrebbe riunito in se' tutti quei pregi essendo immune da quei difetti . . . nello scrivere trovava tutto quel coraggio che gli mancava nella vita . . . Voleva lavorare e lavorare bene, il successo non sarebbe mancato.)[47]

Svevo knew his limits and took pleasure in documenting the lack of a self-discipline that would have allowed him a continuous literary production:

> He worked well but he worked little. He drifted too often with thoughts about his complete work even when in actuality the phrases that he had completed for it could be counted only on one hand.
>
> (Lavorava bene ma lavorava poco. Ricorreva troppo di spesso col pensiero all'opera completa quando le frasi che ne aveva fatte si potevano contare sulle dita.)[48]

Since the writing of Una vita Svevo had complained of his difficulty in expressing himself in Italian. Describing the activity of the protagonist in his first book he says:

> He was writing, but little; the style was not yet well developed, the inappropriate words were saying, more or less, what he wanted to express, but he could never keep them on target and they never satisfied him.
>
> (Scriveva, ma poco; il suo stile, poco solido ancora, la parola impropria che diceva di piu' o di meno e che non colpiva mai il centro, non lo soddisfaceva.)[49]

After the publication of his last novel, Svevo wrote a letter to Valerio Jahier telling him how he suffered the constant reproach from critics regarding his scant knowledge of Italian.[50] It is apparent that this difficulty followed Svevo throughout his work. It is apparent to today's reader. One must conclude that Svevo's contemporaries were quite correct in noticing the inaccuracy of his language.

As testimony we have the reproaches that Svevo speaks of, as well as a copy of Senilita' found in the library of Professor Pasini's widow. Such a copy has been marked in the margins by Professor Pasini who appeared to have noticed the mistakes and put them into proper Italian. Pasini had commented on the language and style of Svevo. He appreciated his powerful writing, despite his incorrect grammar. He says that "if Svevo, in spite of his barbaric

and incorrect language, has succeeded in composing such a work, then perhaps we can do away with the vocabulary and the grammar."[51] But Pasini tempered his enthusiasm immediately, stating that among the Italians, the cult of formal quality "has always been very much appreciated."[52]

Could this be the reason why success was so long in coming? It took quite some time for the critics to overlook Svevo's writing deficiencies and see the value of his content. In spite of the fact that Svevo dreamed like Manzoni of cleansing his language in Florence's river Arno, he never really tried to review and correct his stories. Svevo was sorry he did not succeed in doing anything to improve his form. This was due in large part to his inherent resistance to "classic" literary structure combined with his unwillingness to change. He was sorry but he took no action to correct the flaws in his life either. He could only be the author of a series of detailed diaries about his life and his isolation. He succeeded in being an isolated person even in crowded and politically active Trieste. He could not actively bring himself to develop an interest in what happened around him.

During the war years he was very happy to be away from the world because he found that he could use the peace that solitude afforded him (although a silent one, and full of terror for those who where crushed by the avalanche of the First World War). He was not indifferent

to the sorrow of humanity, but seemed to be an introvert capable only of living for his interior life. Because of his intense introversion he barely met the expectations of his family and society. He actually lived on the fringe of society. From his "Autobiographical Profile," written by a friend, and revised by the author, we have his own description of those war years:

> The factory was closed by order of the authorities and it was in those terrible years, terrible for everyone, that Svevo, since the beginning of 1917, enjoyed great tranquility.
>
> (La fabbrica fu chiusa d'ordine dell'autorita' e in quegli anni terribili per tutti, lo Svevo, specialmente dal principio del 1917, godette di una grande tranquillita').[53]

Svevo then focused his attention on himself and his psyche, something he would do for the rest of his life.

The tale "Una burla riuscita" (A Successful Joke) reveals his distrust of success so much so that he gives the protagonist in two different publications the pen name of Samigli which he had been using during his work as a collaborator on the newspaper l'Indipendente.

Samigli is a writer who does not succeed in publishing and is finally the victim of a very cruel joke. A phone agent leads him to believe that a publisher wants to buy the rights to his book. He is a foreign publisher, and we witness the author's enthusiasm at the idea of his success coming unexpectedly from abroad. This is exactly the situation that Svevo experienced. The recognition

from France must have seemed like a joke to him. This work shows Svevo's ability to use irony in tragicomedy.[54] It is another example of the typical parallel between the life and the imagination of the author.

Svevo the author and Svevo the character are often fused because the author is studying himself through the protagonist. Confronting himself with the shrewd society that surrounds him, he tells us throughout his moving pages of the anguish of ineptitude. What would have happened to Svevo had he been granted success as a writer earlier in his career? If he had not been forced to fight the indifference of the literary field that opposed him, he could have remained forever inept. The perennial situation of continuous inadequacy forced him to study carefully from different points of view the peculiarities of his own personality.

In Saggi e pagine sparse (Essays and Loose Pages) we find summarized in a few lines all the vicissitudes of Svevo. He tells us that "the lack of success of Senilita" (published at 37) made him decide to abandon literature forever. As an afterthought he adds: "He got married, had a daughter, and it was time to become serious." (Si era sposato aveva una figlia e doveva diventare serio.)[55] At the bank he had been able to think and write. Placed in a business situation where he had responsibility, he did not find freedom of expression because he did not have time for it. "As a cure" he dedicated a few hours daily to the

study of the violin, feeling that something in him "was asking for an artistic outlet of expression." He says: ". . . as you can see the cure did not succeed. . . . And I sometimes ask myself why, at 63, I should find myself back running after a publisher." (come si vede la cura non riuscì . . . e io mi chiedo a volte perche', a 63 anni, mi devo ritrovare a correr dietro a un editore.)[56] The cure did not succeed because it was not a cure. Crushed by the new duties to the Veneziani family, Svevo felt he should not indulge in writing. For this reason Svevo appears to have had nothing else to say for several years. Moreover, his character has been studied down to the minutest detail, and perhaps there was nothing else to say or nothing that he could safely say about himself.

He went on taking notes randomly until he discovered the work of Freud. Here he found another perspective from which to study and present himself. At that point, and encouraged by Joyce, he came out with Zeno, a book in which the subject of psychoanalysis is not treated with technical ability, but a subject to which he makes repeated reference. He gives us the same character as seen from another perspective, as if it were under a Freudian lens.

From the pages of Vita di mio marito Livia gives us news about "those years of the apparent abandonment of literary life that Svevo endured." (quegli anni di apparente abbandono della letteratura che Svevo dovette sop-

portare.) He had enlarged his readings and translated Freud's "The Dream."[57] He had also traveled a lot and acquired new experiences. It is difficult, then, to make a value judgement about the inactivity of those twenty or twenty-five years that fall between the second and third books of Svevo. It may be more appropriate to describe them as useful years of research and maturation in the technique of introspection, which would bear its fruit in the last novel.

The only thing we must lament is Svevo's sudden death, which came when he was on the threshold of success. He was working on the unfinished chapter of Il vecchione (The Old, Old Man), a new novel which would have been the continuation of Zeno. It was to be a new literary experiment, having as the same subject himself. Il vecchione might have given us the precious testimony of an old Zeno speaking in the first person about his present life. We have but a few fragments of it. Or did Svevo mean it to be an extension of the short story "La novella del buon vecchio e della bella fanciulla" (The Good Old Man and the Beautiful Girl)? Already in this long "short story" all the themes of Svevo appeared pervaded by a more extensive comprehension of the human paradox. With this the writer probably intended to conclude the cycle of Svevian short story telling. He even used the appearance of Angiolina in the guise of a common girl, who had little moral conscience but was endowed with a very serene amorality and

was not lacking a certain appealing freshness. Il buon vecchio wants to be the young girl's mentor. Again, the most memorable feature of the tale is the inner dialogue of the characters.

Could Svevo have further explored the story of Il vecchione? Many critics felt that Svevo had terminated his cycle and that the literary world might as well "say goodbye to Svevo"[58] after the publication of his short story "Il buon vecchio." But we notice that in the first part of his last work there are passages which remind us of the best of Svevo and at times surpass his previous achievements. The whole story develops with a particular rhythm and a sustained lyricism. We find in this last unfinished work many passages which reveal to us the importance the written page always had for Svevo.

The old man has to fight a reality whose logic has strange rules; these rules elude the old man and the writer. They both feel reassured when they are able to capture the swift and elusive perception of reality on paper. The "very old" man says:

> but here, in my little room, I can be safe and I can gather myself on these pages to look at and analyse the present in its incomparable light and to reach, at the same time, that part of the past which has not yet vanished.
>
> (ma io nella mia stanzetta posso subito essere in salvo e raccogliermi su queste carte per guardare e analizzare il presente nella sua luce incomparibile e raggiungere anche quella parte del passato che ancora non svani'.)[59]

Writing has become an integral part of his life, an extension of it.

> I do not feel old but I have the feeling of being rusty. I have to think and write in order to feel alive, because the life that I lead (among the virtues that I possess and the virtues that are attributed to me) forces on me so many loves and duties, which tie me, paralyze me, deprive me of all liberty . . . and I want to shake myself, I want to wake up.
>
> (Io non mi sento vecchio ma ho il sentimento di essere arrugginito. Devo pensare e scrivere per sentirmi vivo perche' la vita che faccio fra tanta virtu' che ho e che mi viene attribuita e tanti affetti e doveri che mi legano e paralizzano, mi priva di ogni liberta' . . . e voglio scuotermi, destarmi.)[60]

Thus writing has a vital force of its own which transforms the light of reality like a prism. He reiterates:

> For this same reason, the description of life--a great part of it--the one about which everybody knows and nobody talks, is eliminated. Written life becomes so much more intense than life itself.
>
> (Gia' per questa ragione la descrizione della vita, una grande parte della quale, quella di cui tutti sanno e non parlano, e' eliminata, si fa tanto piu' intensa della vita stessa.)[61]

Perhaps Svevo wrote all that he did for the same reason that "Il vecchione" has. He regarded himself as a devotee of self-introspection. He knew that when he would feel it necessary, he would continue to write in order to clarify to himself, and to us, the mysterious sub-conscious drives associated with the experience of mankind,

that only a writer can rediscover or recreate:

> In fact, for this reason the description of life idealized itself and I set about to face a task a second time, trembling as if I were approaching something sacred.
>
> (Gia' per questa ragione la descrizione della vita si idealizza ed io m'accingo ad affrontare tale compito una seconda volta, tremando come se accostassi una cosa sacra.)[62]

Footnotes

[1] Lettere a Italo Svevo: Diario di Elio Schmitz, ed. Bruno Maier (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1973). Epistolario, from Opera Omnia, ed. Bruno Maier (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1966). Italo Svevo, Diario per la fidanzata, ed. Bruno Maier (Trieste: Edizioni dello Zibaldone, 1963). Livia Veneziani Svevo, Vita di mio marito (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1976).

[2] Only recently Enrico Ghidetti in his work Italo Svevo, la coscienza di un borghese triestino (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1980), has had the courage to write a biography of Svevo demystifying the established persona of the Triestine author.

[3] Lettere a Italo Svevo, pp. 232, 237.

[4] Ibid., p. 244.

[5] Ruggero Rimini, La morte nel salotto (Firenze: Nuove Edizioni Enrico Valecchi, 1974), p. xiv.

[6] Lettere a Italo Svevo, p. 246.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 254. See also Livia Veneziani Svevo, Vita di mio marito, p. 25.

[9] Giacomo Devoto, in La critica e Svevo, ed. Sandro Briosi (Bologna: Universale Cappelli, 1975), p. 143.

[10] R. Barilli, "La Linea Svevo-Pirandello" in Civilta' letteraria del Novecento (Milano: Mursia, 1972), p. 23.

[11] Lettere a Italo Svevo, p. 223.

[12] Rimini, p. 16.

[13] Livia Veneziani Svevo, p. 15.

[14] Ibid. p. 17.

[15] Giuseppe Antonio Camerino, Italo Svevo e la crisi della mitteleuropa (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1974), pp. 15-17.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Italo Svevo, Una vita (1892; rpt. Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1938), p. 354.

[18] Mario Fusco, Italo Svevo, conscience et réalite' (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 458.

[19] Livia Veneziani Svevo, p. 28.

[20] Italo Svevo, "Profilo Autobiografico," in his Racconti, saggi, pagine sparse, ed. Bruno Maier (Milano: Dall'Oglio Editore, 1968), p. 80.

[21] Silvano del Missier, Italo Svevo (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1980), p. 160.

[22] Marco Forti, Svevo romanziere (Milano: All 'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1966), passim.

[23] Ferdinando Pasini, Italo Svevo in Annali della regia universita' degli studi economici e commerciali di Trieste, I, Fasc. 1 (1929), 168.

[24] Charles C. Russell, Italo Svevo, The Writer from Trieste (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1978), p. 42.

[25] Pasini, passim. See also in Svevo's Una vita how the verdict of his protagonist's literary effort is condemned by his alleged pseudo-critic Annetta who comments about his book: "But it is grey, very grey. Who could read with pleasure these strings of thoughts which go on without interruption and without ornament?" (E' pero grigio, molto grigio. Chi vuole che legga volentieri queste filze di pensieri senza interruzione e senza ornamento?), p. 130.

[26] Livia Veneziani Svevo (quoting Heyse's letter to Svevo), pp. 29-30.

[27] P.N. Furbank, Italo Svevo, The Man and the Writer (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966), p. 37.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Italo Svevo, Senilita', Collana Universale Moderna-I Corvi (1898; rpt. Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1938), p. 10.

[30] Ibid. Cf. also Italo Svevo who writes to Montale in 1927: "In my youth, in Trieste, they thought of me as some kind of literary critic." (Nella mia giovinezza, a Trieste, mi consideravano qualche cosa come un critico) Epistolario, p. 833.

[31] Svevo, Senilita', p. 48.

[32] Svevo,"Profilo Autobiografico," p. 801.

[33] Svevo, Senilita', p. 9.

[34] Lettere a Italo Svevo, p. 213.

[35] Giacinto Spagnoletti (quoting R. Ellman, who reports the words of Joyce), La coscienza di Zeno di Italo Svevo (Milano: Rizzoli, 1977), p. 45. See also Livia Veneziani Svevo, p. 45.

[36] John Freccero "Verismo to Experimentalism," in The Modern Italian Novel from Manzoni to Svevo, ed. Sergio Pacifici (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 35-60.

[37] Much could be said about Svevo's play with names in his fiction. Joyce, who was certainly an expert in onomastics, was amused by Svevo's choices. See the letter to Svevo that he wrote upon receiving a copy of Zeno where he assured Svevo that his Dott. Coprosich would certainly be appreciated by the readers. Joyce wittily noticed the component "copro" from the Greek "Kopros" (excrement): Italo Svevo, Carteggio, ed. Bruno Maier (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1965), p. 31.

[38] Italo Svevo, La coscienza di Zeno, 15th ed. (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1969), p. 152.

[39] Svevo, Una vita, p. 243.

[40] Elio Gianola, Un Killer Dolcissimo, Indagine Psicanalitica sull 'Opera di Italo Svevo (Genova: Il Melangolo Universita', 1979), p. 253.

[41] Svevo, "Profilo Autobiografico," as quoted in Aldo Borlenghi, Tradizione e novita' nelle esperienze narrative di Svevo e Pirandello (Milano: La Goliardica, 1966), p. 101.

[42] Svevo, Carteggio, passim.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Benjamin Crémieux, Panorama de la littérature Italienne, 8th ed. (Paris: Kra, 1928), p. 115.

[45] Svevo, Racconti, saggi, pagine sparse, p. 809.

[46] Livia Veneziani Svevo, p. 100.

[47] Svevo, Una vita, pp. 44-45.

[48] Ibid., p. 84.

[49] Ibid, p. 63.

[50] Italo Svevo - Carteggio, ed. Bruno Maier (Milano: Dell'Oglio, 1965), p. 248. See also Chapter III, pp. 12-13.

[51] Pasini, p. 174.

[52] Ibid. Pasini stated "But it would be silly and insolent of me. It would be, above all, unfair, because, with us, the cult of formal, aesthetic qualities was always very much valued." (Ma sarebbe, soprattutto, un'ingiustizia poiche', da noi, il culto delle qualita' formali . . . fu sempre apprezzatissimo): p. 174.

[53] Svevo, "Profilo Autobiografico", p. 808.

[54] Forti, p. 110.

[55] Svevo states, in his "Profilo Autobiografico": "A few years before publishing Senilita' Italo Svevo had got married and had a daughter . . . . To write more was difficult . . . . As a result he had to renounce to it. The silence which had followed his work was too eloquent. The serious demands of life were upon him. It was a very firm decision." (Pochi anni prima di pubblicare Senilita' Italo Svevo s'era sposato e aveva avuto una figlia . . . . Scrivere dell'altro era difficile . . . . Derivava la necessita' della rinunzia. Il silenzio che aveva accolto l'opera sua era troppo eloquente. La serieta' della vita incombeva su di lui. Fu un proposito ferreo): p. 805.

[56] Giacinto Spagnoletti, Svevo (Milano: Edizione Accademia, 1972), p. 169. See Svevo's "Profilo Autobiografico", p. 809, where we read: "He was 62 and he was finding out that, if literature could be considered always harmful, at that age it was even dangerous." (Aveva 62 anni e scopriva che se la letteratura era nociva sempre, a quell'eta era addirittura pericolosa.)

[57] Livia Veneziani Svevo, p. 95.

[58] Forti, p. 71.

[59] Italo Svevo, Il buon vecchio e la bella fanciulla (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1975), p. 190.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid. Notice here that Svevo seems to hint at the impossibility of telling the truth about his own frustrations which could not possibly find a voice in his writing, for the middle class ambience in which he lived would not admit of that.

[62] Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE TRANSITION FROM THE CONFESSIONAL TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FORM OF EUROPEAN NARRATIVE

In order to understand Svevo one must see how much an innovator he was in the Italian psychological novel. In a very real sense he was one of the earliest to apply to the confessional novel the particular technical device of the interior monologue; the use of this device may be said to change the "confessional" novel into the "psychological novel," a phenomenon that occurred at the turn of the century.

The psychological novel thus is a development of another kind of narrative, the so-called "confessional novel." The genre goes back to St. Augustine and runs through a course which had such focal points, in Italy and France, as the writings of Petrarch and Montaigne. Its slow but continuous development through the centuries has seen its present manifestation in the psychological narrative or "stream of consciousness novel," as William James called it.

St. Augustine (4th century) was the first who undertook to write a book which unveiled his soul as well as the conflicts his spirit experienced in attempting to attune the inner self to the requirements of reality. Biograph-

ical writings have of course existed since ancient times, notably Plutarch's Lives, which goes back three centuries before St. Augustine. Plutarch's work was an attempt to render in detail the lives of the men who shaped history, while adding psychological interpretation to their characters, even granting the immense difference between biography and autobiography. Plutarch was criticized by his contemporaries for using subjective philosophical assertions about those figures, which proves that, up to his time, a writer was supposed to report facts without personal speculation and therefore without psychological insight.[1]

Plutarch's work was different from that of St. Augustine in that the former tried to "discover moral qualities" in great persons, whereas the latter was given, in the Confessions, to passionate rendering of his own inner thoughts. He was a precursor of existentialism because he had, as a final aim, the attainment of a personal understanding which would lead him to possess the truth that would lead him to God: in other words, he tried to solve the problem of his own existence with Christian metaphysics and meditation.

A transitional figure, the 14th century poet Petrarch, alternates between a desire for fame and admiration of worldly achievement, and the awareness of the inherent vanity of such an achievement. These contrasting reflections have been the source of the "many pessimistic medita-

tions that the author put in the mouth of so many of his characters," establishing a deep rapport between psychological insights and art.[2]

Petrarch applies human psychology in the description of the lives of De viris illustribus, where he gives a personal interpretation of the historical facts he has decided to bring to life. The meditation on the vanity of power and the application of psychological insight becomes deeper when he bares his innermost self in the pages of the Secretum, which takes the form of a sincere and passionate confession.

The book, a dialogue in Latin between Petrarch and St. Augustine, was meant to be a direct testimony of a spiritual crisis. The prose is lucid and fluent with many literary references which were to show his classic background and ascetic tendency. What is even more striking is not the learned Latinist per se, but the continuous attention he pays to the movements of his consciousness; this is not without a certain understanding of the author's lack of will or "accidia," the constitutional uncertainty of a restless and tormented soul, a disease he claims to be unable to rid himself of. This comes very close to Svevo's "malattia."

Instead of a flow of contrasting thoughts, the two parts of Petrarch's personality involve a conversation between St. Augustine and himself. In this dialogue, St. Augustine reproaches the poet for his ambition and the

vanity of his cultural achievements. Although, following the De vera religione of St. Augustine, Petrarch asks for God's help, he makes the reader understand that in spite of his prayer the a desire to find peace will never be fulfilled. Perennially torn as he is between desire for peace and craving for worldly acknowledgment, Petrarch offers a devastating vision of the vanity of all things.

Petrarch thought he was making a confession for the sake of his soul's salvation. He did not realize that the subject of his real interest was the movement of his inner thought. He believed he was showing his concern over contrasting wishes only for the sake of religious morality; therefore he thought that he needed to associate himself with a great name and chose St. Augustine as a mentor and censor.

We need to get to the 16th century to find, in France, Montaigne, a great writer who consciously explored, in his words, "l'étrangeté de l'être, sa fluidité, ses contradictions. . . ." In Van Tieghem's words, "Ce qui intéresse avant tout Montaigne, c'est cette pierre vive qui est l'homme."[3]

In the 16th century (and for many centuries to come) it was believed that one should not describe himself unless he had established some worldly fame, for only a superior being would be worthy of a description. In the words of Montaigne himself:

> On me dira que ce dessein de se servir de soi pour sujet à écrire serait excusable a des hommes rares et fameux qui, par leur réputation, auraient donné quelque désir de leur connaissance.[4]

Nevertheless, Montaigne believed that reputation itself is not necessarily justification for becoming a model or a subject for study. He believed that the writer's description of his own personality, allegedly for others to consider, attains the more important result of giving the author a better knowledge of himself. "Me peignant pour autrui, je me suis peint en moi de couleurs plus nettes que n'étaient les miennes premières."[5]

He realized that it had been the normal trend of literature, up to his time, for the author to look outward and be able to describe what he saw. He found instead that the effort of looking inside himself and describing what he saw was more worthwhile and rewarding. "Chacun regarde devant soi: moi, je regarde dedans moi. Je n'ai affaire qu'a' moi, je me considère sans cesse, je me contrôle, je me goûte."[6]

Astonishingly for his time, Montaigne considered the anti-hero valid as a subject. Thinking of himself as a humble person, he described, not the philosophical, but the human side of man in himself. He was great enough not to care whether or not he would thus diminish his own image:

> Les autres ont pris coeur de parler d'eux pour y avoir trouvé le sujet digne et riche: moi, au rebours, pour l'avoir trouvé si sterile et si maigre qu'il n'y peut échoir soupçon d'ostentation.[7]

These were not empty words. Montaigne lived according to the dictates of his beliefs, and in fact he was more inclined to study in private than to prove his worth in public. Reading his biography, one finds that in 1570, at 37, he officially let go and sold the important office of Mayor and Counselor of Bordeaux and retired to his castle to study himself. Montaigne, though withdrawing from public office, continued to play his original role, but we have his essays as witness of his effort of self-knowledge.

Montaigne, among the French authors of the Renaissance, thus demonstrates that even in the 16th century a famous author and statesman restated the "nosce te ipsum," emphasizing the ancient interests of exploring and knowing the self, as a first act of applied philosophy which would make the truth of man come to the surface. Montaigne was certainly a courageous pioneer to speak openly about inner experiences. Philippe Van Tieghem so describes him:

> Or il se trouve qu'en cherchant en lui son originalité Montaigne a trouvé non seulement un individu, mais l'homme. La justesse de son coup d'oeil, décelant derrière l'apparence la realité psychologique, lui a permis de dessiner, sans le vouloir peut-être, une image de l'homme vrai. . . . comme aucun texte littéraire n'en offrait encore. . . . Cette psychologie est la base d'une morale. Morale type de l'humaniste nourri de l'expérience des Anciens.[8]

Modern man's efforts to explain the suffering of his incomprehensible existence, however, became more difficult to deal with at the turn of the century, when the myth of

religion no longer provided consolation.[9] Therefore, the results of these efforts would ultimately be "confusion and anguish," which has been acknowledged by great philosophers. Nietzche, in his The Birth of Tragedy, a work which anticipates Freudian concepts of psychoanalysis, states: "Man today, stripped of myth, stands famished among all his pasts."[10]

Man tries to cope with his disillusion by a continuous process of self-examination which leads to the literary creation of the anti-hero, a character torn between social and private imperatives.

In fact, in both the confessions of St. Augustine, a blend of mystical and personal search for the truth within the self, and the more clearly defined heroes of Flaubert, Turgeniev, Dostoevsky, Svevo and Kafka, there are elements of detailed introspection, concerning the relationship between the self and society, from which the individual becomes estranged. The effort to clarify such an estrangement requires a commitment of truthfulness to the self. This can be considered a natural continuation of the quest for the "truth" which leads to God. St. Augustine, with his ascetic soul, was after all searching for his place in God's design of the universe. Man continued to search for another truth in order to have a greater understanding of himself. Even left without a God, man was able to sustain his acceptance only through his belief in his worldly and intellectual power. That power served to answer his ques-

tion and, for some time, to complete the puzzle of life. It was when man, through his self-examination, acknowledged his own inadequacy that the pieces of the whole puzzle started falling apart. That situation "was bound to give a turn to the traditional narrative."[11] In Europe, politics worsened the situation. At the turn of the century, fragmentation occurred in every field: it involved literature, politics, and painting. In European literature in the early 20th century a kind of aesthetic "stasis" occurred, a precursor of materialistic and spiritual famine brought about by two catastrophic world wars. Literary theory was quick to reflect the situation.

In an article by Davis H. Miles about Lukacs contribution to the theory of the novel, we found some interesting insight on the German post-Nietzschean attitude towards the kind of genre that Svevo was advocating with his works. We think we can throw further light on the difficulty of acceptance of the new genre, if we examine the theories on the novel debated by some of the German idealistic aestheticians among whom Lukacs moved. Lukacs agreed with Hegel that the novel was then a "bourgeois . . . or middle class epic . . . with upper-class heroes . . . a chronicle of a world in which the gods are dead."[12] The modern hero--he states--are lonely with their own romantic dreams; those populating the Homeric world, instead, had gods planning their life for them; therefore, they enjoyed a common semi-paradise in a society "integrated and

bounded." In contrast, the modern hero lives in a milieu which is "unbounded and infinitely problematic."[13] This situation creates for each individual the "burden of conscience itself" with the result of endless warring, the necessity of decision-making and self-understanding. Ultimately, one may experience a sense of alienation capable of provoking intense suffering.

Critics like Lukacs (imbued with the German idealist admiration for the ancient Greek world, promoted by Winckelmann) yearned for a return to the "meaningful" ancient times, while the younger ones like Adorno (who was, with Marcuse and Fromm, a member of the prestigious Frankfurt School of Social Research, all part of the German idealistic tradition) stated that the "meaningful times" for whose return some yearned "possessed as much alienation as the bourgeois age." In contrast to Lukacs assertion, Adorno maintained that only through "lost conditions does the past sometimes become glamorous," and therefore he urged writers to accept and recognize their "own age of individual disintegration." He stated that one could even make it a point to "establish a literary cult of it."[14] Adorno did not know whether his commentary would spark acceptance; in fact only much later, the critics of the psychological novel would accept it. Adorno also tried to reassure the literary intelligensia of the time that documenting (with the novel) an age of alienation would not increase the alienation in itself. However, current crit-

ics denied the validity of a "cult of disintegration," and some of them gave "disintegration" such a negative connotation that they thought they could attach to it the responsibility of the "downfall" of western civilization. They even tried to ascertain when the so-called "downfall" of the "inwardness" occurred in the literary production of the world. Obviously they attached a negative implication to the psychological approach to literature inasmuch as by it the heroes, instead of being guided by Olympic gods, are "possessed by the demons of the modern psyche."[15] For Adorno, the presentation of the disintegration of values started with Flaubert, who introduced the disillusioned hero of his time. Auerbach instead dated it to Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, which clearly shows signs of "fragmentation of exterior action, and a hopeless dissolving of reality into multivalent reflections and consciousness."[16] Here Adorno seems to blame man's journey into his interior, probably because, politically, he saw in the upcoming "fragmentation of reality" a threat to the cohesion of society and found it "much to be lamented." Adorno's contradiction between his emphasis on the spiritual and the political is obvious, but in trying to understand and solve such difficult paradox any literary man would be bound to fall into contradiction. Intellectuals were, after all, both challenged and frightened by the new reality with which they had come to terms, and no one wanted to be the spokesman of a complex rising individu-

ality still so difficult to define. At best, in the face of the new idealization and depreciation of the path towards inwardness, one could try to voice one's increasing sensation of displacement.

Man became more aware of his own vulnerability. The social structure was not secure enough to sustain the weight of his individuality and he had trouble building a better one.

At the turn of the century it is amazing to notice the outspread fragmentation of thought and signs. The immediate result was a pluralism of individual voices in literature and a diversification in the visual arts which a parallel with a deplorable pluralism in political groups where cohesion might have helped to ensure a smoother political growth.

Crispi, the Italian conservative premier, had complained in 1883 that:

> Since 1878, in Italy, one could not find political parties, but political men. Those men, either autonomous or gathered in groups, did not always know how to get together or agree on an ideal. Each group, instead of representing an order of ideas, was representing an association of individuals. These individuals would fatally, in different cases, change opinion. . . . The candidates did not succeed in putting together any definite program; individuals, not associations, brought to the voters a parliament's confusion. Not having principles to sustain, but men to defend, the result was the rise of personal coalition.
>
> (Sin dal 1878, in Italia, non vi furono partiti politici, ma uomini politici. Codesti uomini, rimasti autonomi, o riuniti in gruppi, non sempre

> seppero allearsi o concordarsi. Ogni gruppo, anziche' comprendere un ordine di idee, comprendeva un'associazione di individui, i quali fatalmente, secondo i casi, mutavano di opinione. . . . I candidati non seppero raccogliersi con programmi definitivi; individui, non associazioni, portarono nell'elettorato la confusione parlamentare. Non avendo principi da sostenere, ma uomini da difendere, ne vennero le coalizioni personali)[17]

Individualism was emerging all over; the visual arts reflected the new trend. Clearly the psychological novel has much to do with post-impressionistic painting. The similarity starts with the same fragmentation, dispersion and sense of anguish that we find in literature.

Describing painting throughout Europe, in the period between 1886 and 1888, the Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren is reported to have exclaimed: "there is no longer any single school."[18] In fact "the impressionist group had disbanded in 1886 and the new painters had nothing of the homogeneity of the previous ones; the artists followed very personal paths which called for a stress of individuality."[19]

In the fall of 1892, the same year of Svevo's Una vita, there was a scandal in the art world which was reported by the Mercure de France; it was the exhibition of a young Norwegian "impressionist" painter Edvard Munch[20] whose "paintings so exasperated the public" that they had to be removed after a few days.[21] Gauguin, the leading painter of the day, was in Haiti then and little affected by what happened in France or anywhere. The critics used many different names in their effort to describe the new group of painters. In 1892 the Parisian critic Albert Au-

riel wrote a long article on "Les symbolistes" which commented on works by painters such as Redon, Bonnard, Gauguin, and Veuillard.[22] Auriel defined the new art as: "a translation into a special and natural language of an intellectual idea." The Scandinavian artist was said to have "reverted to the human condition and drawn from it the substance of his inward-oriented art."[23]

While the literary intelligentsia in Europe was making a real effort to accept a pessimistic, personal, interiorized and consequently slow-motion novel, the artistic counterpart of the visual art, i.e., painting, was passing through the same experience. The artist, who had been up to then looking for a dialogue with the public, turned to himself as a more immediate participant and reached sympathetically towards a tormented nature, while voicing his loneliness. This is particularly well expressed in Munch's painting The Scream (1893) (Munch's production extends to the end of the century). This haunting picture, a modern emblem of anguish, depicts the ghostly representation of a man's inner suffering. His hands cover his ears to protect him from what Munch describes as "a scream from nature,"[24] while the man himself lets out a silent scream. The man's face is, in shape and color, no more than another curve of the sky, the land and the lake, and his dress is but an extension of the road and the fence he walks along. The two indifferent figures in the background walk past him and are obviously unaware of his presence and pain; their heads

are only another line in the horizon, and in their isolated aloofness they escape being enveloped within the stormy setting.

It is interesting to note how the twisted figure stands alone: the other two straight figures are completely oblivious to their fellow man and his personal anguish.

Such a picture exemplifies the conflicts of human emotion as can be conveyed by the detailed description of Svevo. In the conclusion of Una vita, Alfonso, in his desperation, feels far removed and separate from his fellow men, with whom he tried to walk for a while. They seem to have found the strength which permits them to go on in their path, resisting each other and nature's raw forces. But he is looking for inner peace, and his precarious balance (so well illustrated by Munch) cannot withstand the drain of energy that nature requires from mankind. The demand is too strong and violates his frail being. He feels like a sick man taken in a storm he is unable to oppose; rather, as in Munch's figure, he feels twisted by it. Svevo's protagonist decides to get out of that fight for survival for which he feels unfit. We can compare Munch's figure with Svevo's view of his protagonist (Fig. 1):

> He had to fight . . . in an unequal confrontation in which his adversary had the upper hand. . . . What could he hope for? He had only one way to escape a battle in which he could only have a miserable and ridiculous role: suicide.
>
> (Doveva battersi . . . in una lotta impari nella quale il suo avversario aveva tutti i vantaggi

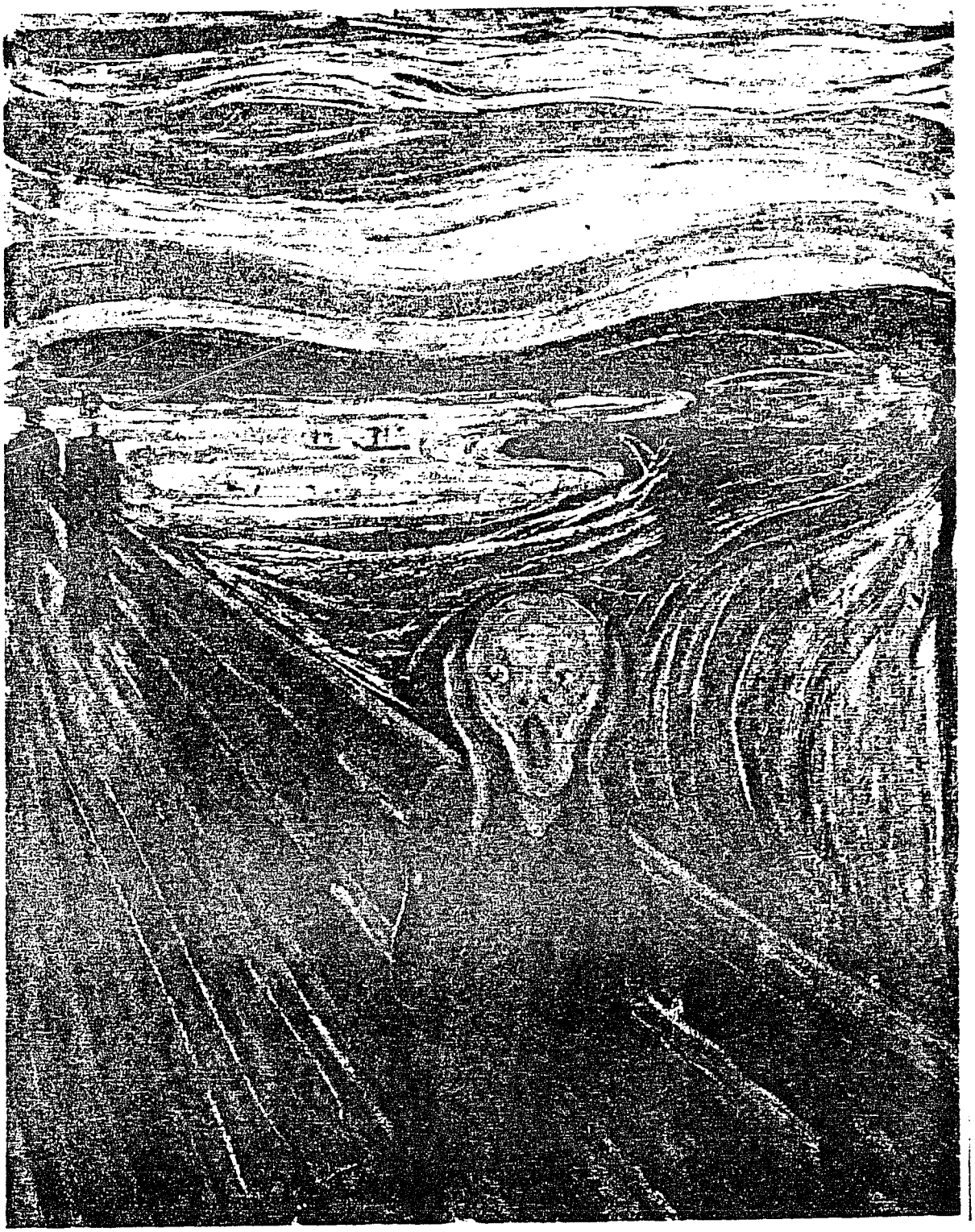

Fig. 1. **The Scream**

. . . Che cosa poteva sperare? Gli rimaneva soltanto una via per sfuggire a quella lotta in cui avrebbe fatto una parte miserabile e ridicola: il suicidio.)[25]

The human figures in Edvard Munch's paintings portray the artist's anguish and isolation characteristic of the psychological novel. The themes, too, revolve around frustration, lack of communication, death, and disease--the very themes of Svevo's novels. Feelings are conveyed through a modern symbolism, and one can see that the meaning is motivated by private impulses which resist a "too easy translation into biographical or into universally symbolic terms."[26]

In 1889 Munch declared: "No more interiors should be painted, no people reading and women knitting: they should be living people who breathe, suffer and love."[27] He was thus expressing some antinaturalistic themes: instead of caring about details of everyday life, he wanted to express human emotions. His artistic imagery evoked the frailty and physical vulnerability of human bodies, "with fear and terror embodied in the psychology of their figure."[28]

Munch's painting met with the same reception as Svevo's work, the two rejections only differing in form. Svevo's two novels passed unnoticed, with some disparaging criticism such as the one by the publisher and the one by Heyse. The show that Monet organized for Munch had to close in a few days. Only his friends understood the sincerity of his expressions. Munch and Svevo both seem to share a common destiny and mode of expression, so much so that in many instances one could be the illustrator of the other.

One can interpret Munch's depiction of the lonely man in Melancholy (Fig. 2) (painted between 1891 and 1892) as an illustration of a character in Svevo's Una vita, written the same year. Munch's Melancholy has been described as an "articulation of his distinctive character"[29] because he was fascinated by the nature of loneliness to the point of obsession, so much so that he created five painted versions and two woodcuts of this theme, which testifies to the obsessive nature of his motifs (Fig. 3). Svevo also always returned to the same compelling themes of desperation, death, disease, and inadequacy.

In the best known oil canvas of Melancholy (which is now in the Main Gallery in Oslo, Norway) we see the figure of a pensive man whose dream is represented by the white-clothed female figure on the pier. She is with another

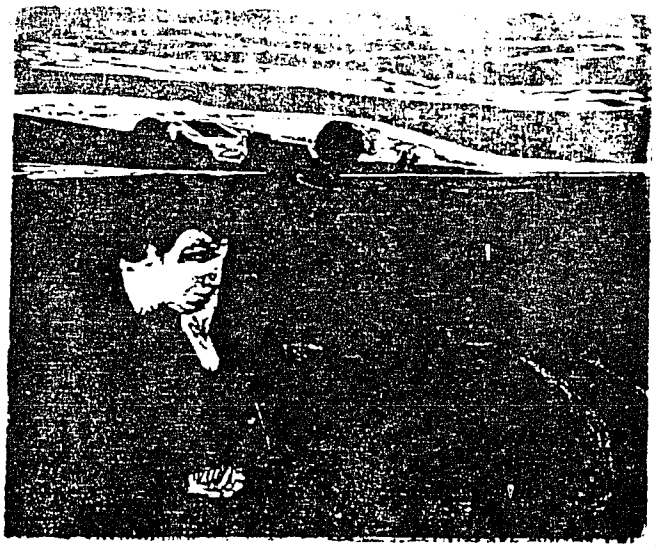

Fig. 2. **Melancholy**

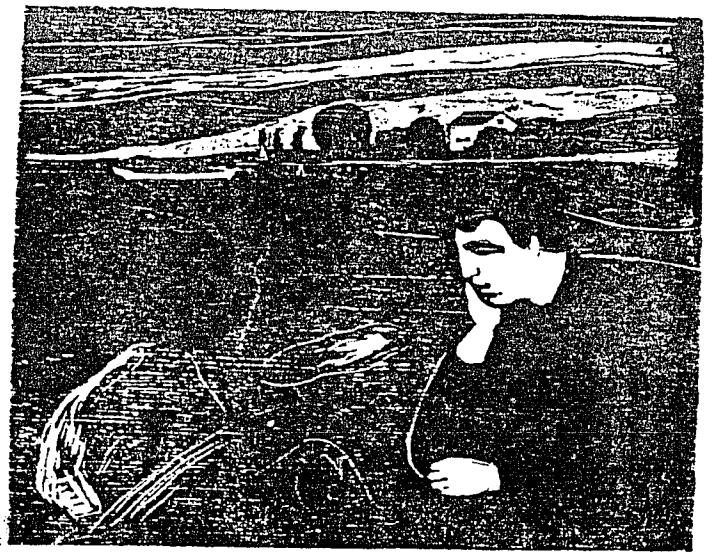

Fig. 3. **Melancholy**

man, however, and the expression of the central figure in the foreground (who has his back turned to the distant group), as well as the large stones and the stretch of shore separating the figures would suggest that his dream is unobtainable. This painting was also called Jealousy. It has been observed that the picture exemplifies the "intense feeling and . . . lyrical colour harmony that is rightly considered as one of Munch's greatest achievements."[30]

While the ability to reproduce intense feelings has always been regarded as one of Svevo's particular fortes, one can notice that over the years he also developed a lyrical way of describing landscapes, which probably had much to do with his friendship with the painter Veruda. In looking at Munch's Melancholy (Fig. 4), one cannot help but be reminded of Svevo's description of Trieste. Even Munch's beach, with its northern light, is reminiscent of many of Svevo's descriptions of his city. Trieste is ever present in all the author's novels but it begins to acquire a poetic atmosphere of its own in the novel Senilita'. Let's observe next Munch's painting together with this description:

> The air was tepid, but covered by a thick white mist forming a cap of the same color, the sky looked wintry and St. Andrea, with all those trees with their long naked branches not yet pruned, and the ground made white by the diffused white light, looked like a snowy landscape. A painter, who could not render the mildness of the

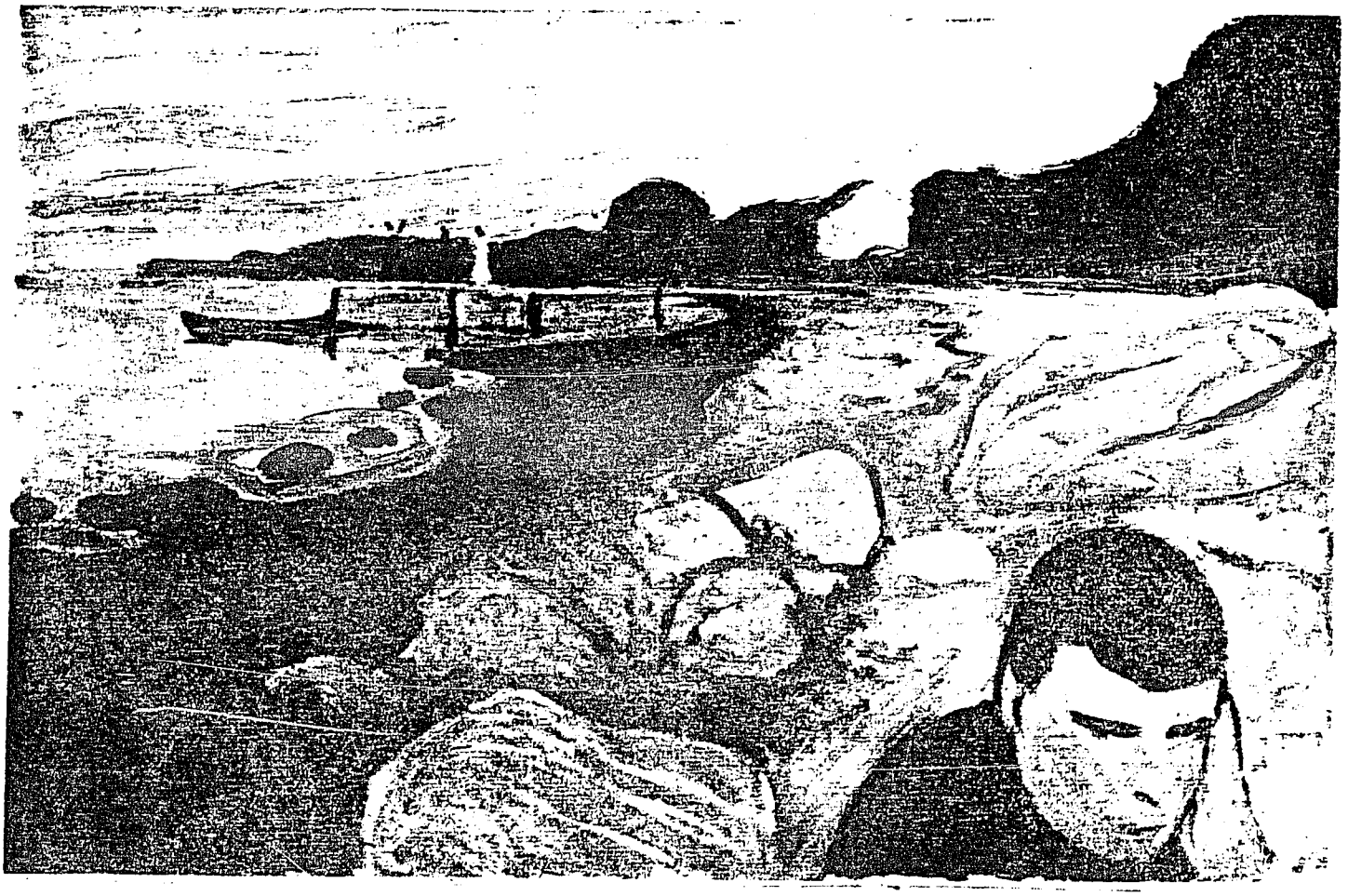

Fig. 4. Melancholy

> air, would have to create that erroneous illusion of snow.
>
> (L'aria era tepida ma, coperto di una fitta bianca nebbia, tutta una cappa dello stesso colore, il cielo era veramente invernale e Sant'Andrea con quegli alberi dai lunghi rami nudi, secchi, non ancora tagliati, e il suolo bianco per la luce impedita e diffusa, sembrava un paesaggio di neve. Riproducendolo e non potendo dare la mitezza dell'aria, un pittore avrebbe stampata quell'erronea illusione.)[31]

As far as the theme of jealousy is concerned, one could take Munch's Melancholy to illustrate Alfonso's (in

Una vita) ambivalent feelings of love for Annette, whom he has always felt far away and interested in someone else, and for whom he held mixed emotional spurts of desire and scorn. Munch's figure seems to express similar contrasting mental emotions.

The anonymity of the solitary pedestrian in Evening on Karl Johan Street (Fig. 5) by Munch (also painted in 1892), would bring to mind Svevo's main protagonists in both Una vita and Senilita', the writer depicts the same alienation

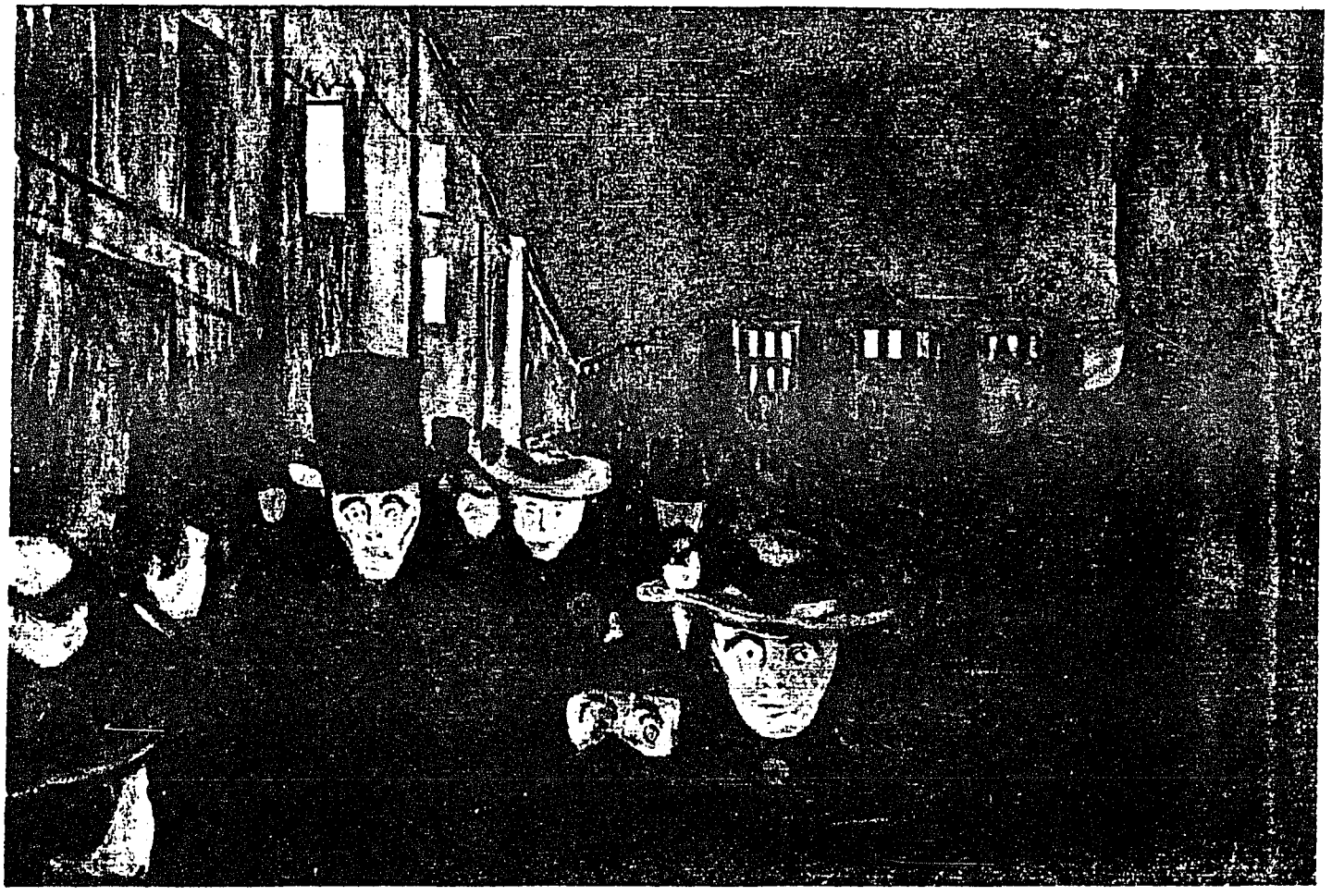

Fig. 5. **Evening on Karl Johan Street**

from the bourgeoisie which has been depicted by Munch. Svevo described them as an absurd crowd parading in their petit bourgeois attire.

At the beginning of Una vita, we find one of the first descriptions of the protagonist's awareness of his colleagues' foolishness. They are concerned only with their attire and fail to see that they are part of a ghostly procession of which he is only too aware. He exclaims: "They are all dandies who spend most of their days at the mirror. Foolish people!" (Sono tutti zerbinotti che passano la meta' della giornata allo specchio. Gente sciocca!)[32]

The Voice (Fig. 6), painted in 1893, has been described as a

> "puberty motif, and this interpretation is supported by Munch's own literary notes. . . . The suggestive erotic mood in the picture is created by the interplay between the vertical pine trunks, which repeat the form of the woman, and the shaft of moonlight. As a sign of awakening eroticism, the shaft of moonlight is placed as a phallic symbol on the fjord."[33]

The very title of this painting suggests a girl who is eagerly listening for the call of love. The figure of a woman

> "with her hands behind her back, was a formula used by Munch to represent . . . a woman who is offering herself and holding back at the same time."[34]

Fig 6. **The Voice**

Again, the motif of this painted version was repeated by Munch in a woodcut and an etching.

Munch's figure in The Voice seems to be listening to the enchanting voice of love. Svevo's Amalia, the gray sister of Emilio, is under the same enchantment:

> Never had Amalia been the object of so much attention. She was listening to the intimate revelations the sculptor was sharing with her and was telling herself that she was not wrong: they were uttered for the very purpose of winning her affection and in fact she already felt completely his. In the mind of the gray girl there were no thoughts of the future. She was enjoying only the present, the very hour in which she felt wanted and important.
>
> (Mai Amalia era stata l'oggetto di tante attenzioni. Ella stava ad ascoltare le confidenze che le faceva lo scultore, e non s'ingannava: le erano fatte proprio per conquistarla ed ella infatti si sentiva tutta sua. Per la mente della grigia fanciulla non passarono speranze per l'avvenire. Era propio del presente che ella gioiva, di quell'ora in cui ella si sentiva desiderata, importante.)[35]

Munch painted Madonna (Fig. 7) between 1894-1895. The painting had also been named, by Munch himself, Loving Woman. It has been said that "some emphasize the purely orgiastic element in the motif; others, especially Munch

Fig. 7. **Madonna**

himself, emphasize the aspect of death." Here are the words with which Munch accompanied the Madonna in his private album.

> The pause when the entire world halted in its orbit. Your face embodies all the world's beauty. Your lips, crimson red like the coming fruit, glide apart as in pain. The smile of a corpse. Now life and death join hands. The chain is joined that ties the thousands of past generations to the thousands of generations to come.[36]

Svevo's novel, Senilita', begun in 1892, was to be published at a later date in serial form, in l'Indipendente.[37] In the novel, Amalia is dying for love of Balli, and is seen by Balli, on her deathbed, as transfigured into a real beauty by her own passion and intensive feelings for him.

> Amalia was ashen; her face had the color of the pillow on which it was resting. Balli looked at her with obvious admiration. The yellow light of the candle was reflected brightly on Amalia's moist face so that she looked all aglow; the shimmering and suffering nude was screaming; it seemed only a shallow representation of a violent scream of pain. The small child-like face, on which a firm determination had imprinted its stamp, was imperiously threatening. It was as quick as lightning; she fell back at once, as if quieted down by words she could not understand."
>
> (Amalia era livida; la sua faccia aveva il colore del guanciale su cui si proiettava. Il Balli la guardo' con evidente ammirazione. La luce gialla della candela si rifletteva luminosissima sulla faccia umida d'Amalia, tanto che pareva luminosita' sua; il nudo cosi' brillante e sofferente gridava. Pareva la manifestazione plastica di un grido sofferente di dolore. La faccina, su cui per un istante s'era stampata una risoluzione

> ferma, minacciava imperiosamente. Fu un lampo: ella ricadde subito, quietata da parole che non comprese.)[38]

Like Munch, Svevo sometimes sees woman as a symbol of both love and death. Here is the painter Balli experiencing such a revelation:

> Balli said: "She looked like a good sweet Fury. I never saw anything like that.". . . Amalia was dying while endowed with the most noble kind of love Balli could offer.
>
> (Il Balli disse: "Pareva una buona dolce furia. Non ho mai visto qualche cosa di simile.". . . Amalia moriva amata dell'amore piu' nobile che il Balli potesse offrire.)[39]

Svevo's obsession with disease is well-documented by his often-repeated episodes of dealing with death (the protagonist and his mother in the first novel, the death of the sister in Senilita', the death of the father in La coscienza di Zeno. The theme of disease is always present in the description of depressive states and sometimes treated in detail. Love is often associated with disease and even death, as if the emotion of love had to have some sort of tragic connotation. Amalia's finding love when she dies reminds us of Munch's Maiden and death, and Svevo's mourning chambers are often described with a detailed sense of isolation. As in Munch's paintings (Fig. 8), Svevo's characters are described as enduring the loss of the loved one in complete isolation.

Woman is sometimes perceived by both artists as a kind of vampire under whose spell man must succomb. In one

instance, Svevo actually describes her as such: "That little trace of woman still remaining in her was that of a virago. She had sparse hair so artfully arranged as to seem abundant." (Quel poco che alla sua fisionomia rimaneva di donna era di virago. Aveva i capelli radi e disposti con arte per farli sembrare piu' numerosi.)[40] Like Munch, Svevo often described women as cold, calculating, and fiendish seductresses capable of reducing man's strength to ashes.

The portrayal of death and disease, in the quoted episodes and paintings, allows us to consider yet another parallel which closely ties the two artists. Both death and disease were themes fashionable during the period of romanticism, but for Munch and Svevo, they became recurrent to the point of obsession.

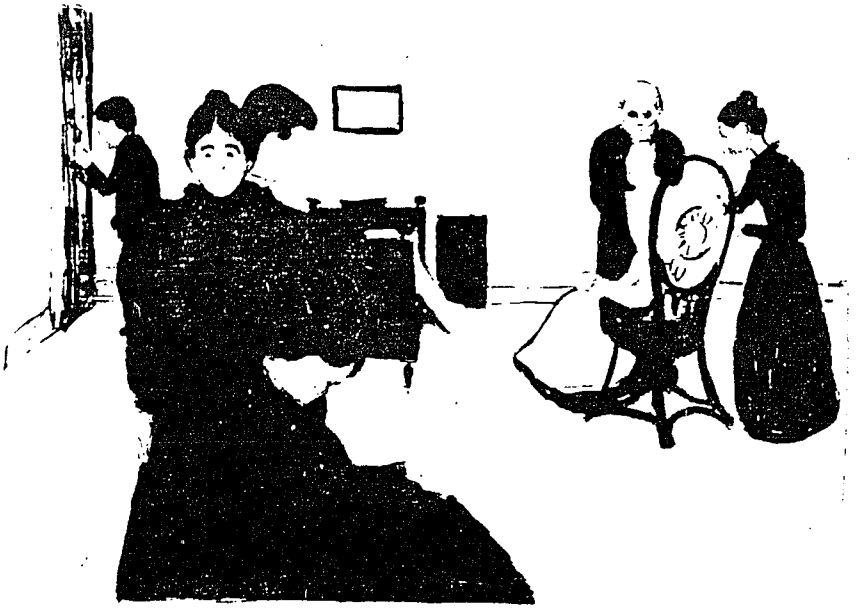

Fig. 8. **The Death Chamber**

Fig.9. Ashes

Munch painted several versions of the sick child, and Svevo spoke of disease in his correspondence, autobiography, novels and short stories. In a sense the disease was a way of being different from other human beings and it was believed that a person not possessing his full health would be more capable of profound sensitivity resulting in an increased capacity for artistic expression. Thomas Mann expressed this view in The Magic Mountain and Svevo's beloved philosopher Schopenhauer depicted disease as one of the artist's prerogatives, and sometimes even a prerequisite.[41] Svevo's artists often use ill health as a tool to gain sympathy, understanding and even appreciation by their fellow man. They indulge in the representation of their

frailty: "He spoke with self-pity of his sickness, which he could ill define." (Parlo' commosso di una sua malattia che non sapeva definire.) And again, "He had a gentle nature which needed caressing." (Egli aveva una natura mansueta che abbisognava di carezze.)[42]

In life, both Svevo and Munch knew very early the meaning of disease and death. They also knew the consequence of a sick mind, which could render harsh an otherwise loving person. We have a particular case in point in the respective fathers of the two artists. Munch's father was at times very tender to his motherless children, and very generous to people in need (in his medical practice he was known for treating his impoverished patients without recompense).[43] He was by nature very authoritative and secluded. He could not tolerate his children's restlessness and became violently abusive towards them, punishing them with extreme harshness. Munch was undoubtedly affected by the unstable environment the father created in his family, and this must have been aggravated by a hereditary predisposition to mental instability. Two of Munch's sisters became insane, and many people are of the opinion that he too suffered the same fate.

Although Svevo was not mentally unstable, we know that he suffered from continuous depression which he tried to combat by immersing himself in his writing. Svevo's family history has similarities to Munch's. Svevo's father was also responsible in providing for his children. He was

generous towards members of both his and his wife's family by helping them through difficulties. However, he too was emotionally abusive and established a gloomy and repressive atmosphere. Both artists had a mother figure (Munch his joyous aunt Karen, and Svevo his cheerful mother, appropriately named Allegra) who were able to counteract the sombre atmosphere of their respective households.

As for death, both Svevo and Munch in their youth lost people very dear to them; Munch lost his older sister, Sophie, and Svevo his brother Elio. They both lost dear friends. Such tragic losses and negative experiences during their formative years were undoubtedly contributing factors in the development of their brooding personalities which expressed themselves so well in their ability to create and represent an atmosphere of impending doom.

Both artists came from the same intellectual milieu. Svevo in Trieste was in touch with French and German culture, and Munch, in old Christiana (and in his subsequent stays in Paris and Berlin), was affiliated with a bohemian group of which he was part but from which he also diverged. In a sense, both Christiana and Trieste were, in their isolation from the intellectual mainstream, towns lacking a local tradition and therefore readily welcomed the most diversified intellectual influences. The work of Darwin, known in both towns, paved the way for Munch's and Svevo's agnosticism. Svevo read all the work of Zola, in French, and certainly knew Nietzsche's theories. Finally, Ibsen,

with his theatre, contributed to his critical approach to society (his novels testify to his attempt to write a social treatise). In Christiana, Munch was familiar with the work of both Ibsen and Steinberg; he even designed costumes for Ibsen's "The Ghosts." In addition, he came under the influence of Hans Jaeger, a writer of whom Munch painted a portrait. He was a leader who prepared a new generation of rebels to freedom of thought:

> They were anti-bourgeois, affected by Marx's early romantic-revolutionary writings including the Communist Manifesto of 1848 and the first volume of Das Kapital, published in 1867 . . . They hated the suffocating narrowness of the middle classes . . . their materialism in resolving everything into terms of debit and credit, their craving for security, their dogmatism and intolerance.[44]

They were also interested in scientific research and Munch's fascination with pathological states is a proof of the scientific bent of his group. (While in Berlin, the painters he lived among studied neurology with a view to understanding the causes and results of psychological stress and its physiological impact.) Munch painted many poignant thematic versions of The sick girl and a very personal Melancholy (1889-1890). This particular Melancholy has the same title as the one of the disheartened man on the shore, but it now depicts his sister sitting on a chair. In this picture, Munch goes beyond the portrayal of a solitary, distressed human being. He now tries to get the viewer to see through the disturbed mental state of his

sister Laura; therefore, "he does not resort to the standard Romantic physiognomic typology to evoke melancholia. Rather, ambiguities of space and color act as visual equivalents of Laura's morbid mental condition."[45] He even portrayed her derangement using a technique of missing shadows (the girl has no shadow), irrational perspectives, and finally by symbolically projecting the brain sections, shadowed by sclerosis, on the disorientingly inclined tablecloth. This testifies to Munch's acquaintance with the studies of Jean Martin Charcot (Lectures on the Diseases of the Nervous System, 1881)[46] which might very well constitute another common ground of interest between Munch and Svevo.

It has been observed that Munch displays a "symbolist concern with the materialization of invisible impulses and with psychological, not representational portraiture."[47] This brings to mind many of Svevo's episodes wherein he gives us the possibility of experiencing (as happens to us when looking at a Munch painting) the disorienting effects of misplacements of space and mood which resemble a nightmarish derangement. The reader is made to feel and experience states of mind which fall just short of an abnormal mental condition. This method of forcing people to get in touch with something they did not even want to acknowledge was probably one of the main reasons why both Svevo and Munch did not find approval among their contemporaries.

Mankind did not want to read a description or see a

portrayal of its own unconscious sense of inadequacy, nor did it want to reflect on what made it feel uncomfortable about admitting it.

But literature and the visual arts were using a different voice and technique. At this time, as is generally known, there was in painters and in writers a shifting of attention from static appearance towards the everchanging flow of reality. Emotionally, the paintings give the observer the impression of contemplating a movement more than a static state. I have the impression that what happens now is the contrary of what Zeno of Ephesus wished to demonstrate: he wanted to direct the attention toward the many static moments which made up the movement as appearance; now artists wanted to divert attention to the opposite: one must see that the static point is a portion of the whole movement itself, so one has to consider that the single static component is a part of the real motion which the artist wants to suggest to you. So, for example, an emotion in screaming like the one that Edvard Munch paints is visually static but provokes a feeling of continuity of fear and distress whose duration is subject to the individual experience.

Such different states of which the description gives only one part suggest the complexity of the others. The novelist does not "conceive character as a state, but as a process of ceaseless becoming in a medium which may be termed Bergson's Durée réelle."[48] The exterior lack of

action (socially speaking) of the character is thus counterbalanced by the many changes and movements taking place in his mind; the fragmentation of expression, after all, seems to point to the multiplicity of an everchanging and perpetual displacement that the mind is performing under the stimulus of objects, persons, situations.

A writer like Svevo was after all conscious that his anti-hero, judged inept because of his inability to achieve social status, was in a way a hero of a different kind, an intellectual continuously judging the ineptitude of others and deeply reflecting on the absurdity of their apparent coherent behavior.

Alfonso, Emilio, and Zeno all follow Schopenhauer's belief in the will as a negative force, a primeval cause of our suffering. Svevo, ironically and partly applying Schopenhauer's concept of fiction, often managed to have his hero realize that in the end he has chosen the best path towards what can be considered not happiness but the less painful solution in spite of his constant reluctance to choose.

Alfonso of Una vita, who forsakes the worthless Annetta, commits suicide rather than compromise his values, in an exaggerated gesture of defiance towards a bourgeois value system in which he absolutely does not believe. Thus he succeeds in becoming a true romantic hero.

Emilio in Senilita' loses Angiolina, another mismatched little opportunist who would assuredly have made

him unhappy in the long run. Zeno in La coscienza di Zeno ends up content at having married by mistake the homely but good and healthy Augusta, and avoiding by pure chance the sick Ada. He also outlives Guido, his successful rival.

Such characters have an advantage over those who represent success. They possess a rich inner life which, though causing them much frustration, leaves them as well as the writer and reader with an unmistakable belief in their spiritual superiority. Besides, Svevo's central characters are apt to avoid pitfalls because they are not in the habit of formulating personal expectations, while their counterparts, i.e. the successful ones, easily fall into deception because they set for themselves higher goals.

The study of the mind, which up to the 19th century had been the privilege of the philosopher, becomes a common subject of study for the educated reader, thanks to the illuminating contribution of the psychologists. The birth of psychology as a science and its application to the novel probably date to the lectures in psychology given at Harvard by William James. A parallel interest can be noticed in the lectures given at the Sorbonne by Henry Bergson.[49]

Bertrand Russell says that both James and Bergson "emphasize action,"[50] probably referring to the concrete active experience of the mind at work, and the continuous passing of the same from the perception of the present into

recollection of the past and projection into the future; such incessant flow of thoughts is certainly "very active," actually it is a swift continuous movement and, in certain writers like Svevo it is represented in sharp contrast to the apparent inactivity of the character. The protagonists of Svevo's novels are taken by the force of their over-excessive cerebral activity; their own involvement in thinking hinders their interest in the exterior world, and in their outer appearance they display very little action. The energy spent by the brain in secreting the continuous flow of thoughts (it being made of phosphorus or other chemicals)[51] can also detract from the energy necessary to focus the attention towards external interactions. In effect, attention "implies withdrawal from something in order to deal effectively with others."[52]

Svevo's seemingly inactive characters are blocked by their "pensées de derrière la tête"[53] which use so much of their energy and attention as to deprive them of normal intellectual ability and leave them with a vague feeling of sickness. Alfonso Nitti of Una vita is described this way: "with the pen on his paper and his thoughts elsewhere, he was imagining that an abundant matter was moving in his body through some vessels which were incapable either to resist or regulate." (con la penna sulle carte e il pensiero altrove, s'immaginava che nel suo corpo si movesse una materia abbondante attraverso a vasi molli incapaci di resistere o di regolare.)[54]

He finds himself incapable of concentrating on his work, which brings him to the point of nausea:

> Towards the evening his hand, the only part of his body which was really tired, stopped writing; his attention, lacking stimulation, was distracted so that sometimes he was forced to throw his pen down and leave his work, for he was nauseated, as if he had eaten too much of the same food."
>
> (Verso sera la mano, l'unica parte del suo corpo veramente stanca si fermava, l'attenzione non stimolata si distraeva e qualche volta doveva gettare la penna e lasciare il lavoro, per una nausea da persona che ha preso troppo di un solo cibo.)[55]

The continuation of external action becomes unbearable and meaningless to Svevo. This is apparent also in the setting of his novels. He is more prone to stress the repetitiousness of the same action or state of mind. Here we have another striking similarity between Munch's intense but not fully-drawn faces and Svevo's vaguely defined features of a character. Both artists seem to be working towards a character in formation. In Munch there are some dramatis personae which reappear in interchangeable forms. In Svevo's psychological sketches the personae are drifting from one mood to another. The paintings of the Norwegian painter describe the same state of anxiety, melancholy and jealousy. These feelings are portrayed as if performing an organic physical change. The actions of loving and dying are shown in the exterior aspect of his figures, as if the painter were involved with the "primary concern of optical reality"[56] and its effect on a given character. Both the

painter and our writer are artists who belong to a group which wants to bring others to an awareness of the continuous flow of images--comprised of dreams, memory, and present perception--that weaves an intricate life of conscious and unconscious feelings in the human mind. To be aware of this ebb and flow is extremely important for a proper understanding of the relation to the outer world. Any attempt to explain "why" and "how" an individual reacts in a certain way to the exterior reality with which he has to cope must take this process into account.

Twentieth-century fiction became aware of this. In fact it is characterized by an inward-turning form of narration by those many novelists who make words evoke images, sensations, and mental impressions. This technique grew out of new discoveries in the fields of psychology and philosophy. It requires a great ability to render abstract ideas in a fictional context.

William James explored in detail the interrelationship between matter and mind. He defined a person's state of mind as "conciousness," and labeled as "stream of consciousness[57] the steady flow of thought, including perception, emotion, memory and will--all the mental phenomena that take place continuously in the mind of the individual.

It is interesting to note that the expression <u>stream of consciousness</u> paraphrases the "river-statement" in Heraclitus' pantha rhei[58] and draws an analogy to the concept of the continuity of each thought process. In order to

evaluate in its true light the contribution of this ancient philosopher to modern psychological findings one may study his "Cosmic Fragments" in the context of his time by examining the interesting collection and commentary of G. S. Kirk.[59] One of these clearly states: "All things are in flux."

Heraclitus saw as invariable the succession between two extremes which was chiefly significant of their essential unity. "In the case of youth and old age, for example, the one extreme is not suddenly replaced by the other . . . [so he] concentrates on the termini of the young-old continuum . . . ignoring the process between them."[60]

Svevo comes very close to this concept when he entitles his second novel Senilita'. Although the hero in the novel is young, he feels himself to be so old that the two extremes, his physical being and the mental image he has of himself, complement each other and the two opposites become one and the same. His feeling--and therefore becoming old--does not change his essential personality. This implies a concept of time from which many modern writers would extract so many observations.

In exploring the mind's continuous movements, William James has used the "river-analogy" of Heraclitus as a metaphor for consciousness:

> Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up or in bits. Such words as "chain" or

> "train" do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A "river" or a "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it thereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.[61]

The stream of subjective life thus becomes the subject matter of the new novel which will focus on the individualized perception of the reality of the character. Such perception of reality constitutes the sensations which are, according to William James, "results of discriminative attention."[62] To record such fleeting perceptions requires a particular kind of "organization, discipline [and] restraint."[63] Organization insures that the main points do not get lost; discipline that the editing will let in all the important shades of the sensations; and lastly restraint insures that, in recording the flow of thought of a passing moment, the writer might not be carried away and, by reflecting on it, expand the thought into another field. This last point is in some danger of occurring in the dynamic of the creative process.

The psychological form of narrative is a good illustration of the statement of Albert Guerard:

> Art, like life, exists in time; no masterpiece, even the statuette that can be embraced at a single glance, is purely instantaneous; our enjoyment deepens with further scrutiny; it is conditioned by the memory of other objects in nature or art which the one under contemplation evokes in us. A poem is not a haphazard jumble of unrelated cries; like a piece of music, it is a sequence."[64]

A piece of music, to be transferred from the artist to the listener, must be written down; the recording of it becomes a necessity in itself. In Svevo's opinion writing is a necessity not only because it allows the reader to participate in the writer's sensation, but also because it rescues the personal experience of the writer from the ravages of time itself; like seeds or roots, in time ideas may mature. In his words ideas:

> . . . come and go away apparently very far if you do not put them on paper. Transposed on paper they escape evolution and crystallize [then] they fertilize like that organic matter which decomposes to reconstitute itself when its season comes.
>
> (. . . vengono e vanno via apparentemente molto lontano se non si fissano sulla carta. Fissate sulla carta sono tolte all'evoluzione e si cristallizzano . . . [poi] fertilizzano come quella materia organica che si decompone per meglio ricostituirsi quando viene la sua stagione.)[65]

This natural "fertilization" is a symbiosis of the earth and the root, for the growing plant requires the interpenetration of the two. Much the same thing can be said of the artistic output.

With reference to this, Beverly Jean Gibbs has gone so far as stating that "there are times when this fusion of the author and the object of his attention has caused the object to be dominated completely by the personality of the author" for instance "Miro' has so completely projected himself into the object that the latter has ceased to exist individually and has taken on attributes of his own person-

ality, a phenomenon known as empathy."[66] In Svevo the empathy between the author and the object of his writing is so complete, Svevo and his protagonist so closely connected, that the artistic production and the author are one and the same, his protagonist a replica of himself. In this perfect symbiosis lies the greatness of Svevo. If, as Ruskin stated, Art is greatest when it conveys the mind of the author as a spectator, then certainly Svevo belongs in the category of great artists because of his sincerity. Svevo proceeded to dissecting scientifically his own impressions and feelings, examining his own flow of thoughts. This procedure, however, which might sound naturalistic, went far beyond the naturalistic approach of reproducing the truth and minimizing the imagination. Sometimes Svevo lets the imagination mingle with the individualized reality he represents, but some other times he lets it transcend reality itself, thus giving us a glimpse of his personal truth.

Of course, as Monroe Beardsley states, "truth has never taken kindly to monopolization. It is for each philosopher to work in the row he can cultivate most effectively."[67] If the times were not ripe in Italy to appreciate and accept Svevo's truth, one field his contemporary might at least have credited him is the effort to persist in the study and representation of the self.

Svevo's closest link to the psychological novel is in fact his considerable use of introspection by means of the

interior monologue. Caught in the stream of various, often contradictory reflections, his characters lose their already tenuous grasp on reality. Starting with Svevo's very first story, L'assassinio di Via Belpoggio, written in 1890, the reader is plunged directly into the most intimate flow of thoughts of the central character. It must be said that Svevo often directed his attention to unconscious as well as conscious mental processes at the very beginning of his writing career; this is apparent in his first short article on The Merchant of Venice and very obvious in "L'assassinio di Via Belpoggio." This latter, while resembling Edgar Allen Poe's The Tell Tale Heart and Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment in plot, seems to show some knowledge of the studies which preceded Freud's theories, such as those by Janet and Breuer, whose influence Freud himself acknowledged, and was widely recognized.

When Svevo started writing, Freud's main work had not yet been published, but before Freud's publications there was previous research on psychoanalysis available to the interested public. Zeno is in some of its aspects the obvious result of Svevo's readings of Freud: such characters as the therapist and the patient (and the doctor's request to have the patient write down his own life) are clear indications of Svevo's familiarity with the Viennese doctor. That he used the relationship of psychiatrist-patient as the very framework of the book, also tells us that Svevo (who denied even having read Freud during the

writing of his previous work) was, when he wrote La coscienza di Zeno, no longer interested in denying the strong influence that Freud had upon him.

It must be said that for several years the early Freud was not appreciated or even understood, but after a while his innovations in psychology had become so renowned that the discipline was finally recognized as a science. Both psychology as a theoretical science and the practical psychological analysis of the self in the novel had encountered obstacles.

The previous century had left a legacy which gave authority to anything connected with science, but psychology was not recognized as a science. That made Freud wonder. In his Autobiographical Study, he asks himself why man "who had accepted the Darwinian theory of evolution" (which provided pieces of evidence as partial proof of a scientific discovery was not yet defined) would not accept the same fragmentation in the field of psychoanalysis. He concludes that this was probably due to the way people regard psychoanalysis, not as a science, that is, but as a product of the speculative imagination.[68]

Freud himself published his first work on the "Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena" in the autumn of 1885, immediately after he had finished his medical training in Paris under Charcot. In 1886, when Svevo was working as a clerk in the Triestine branch of the bank Union of Vienna, Freud was settling in Vienna as a specialist in

nervous diseases, and reported on his work before the Society of Medicine of Vienna, the "Gesellschaft der Aerzte." In his first appearance before the commission he met with an hostile reception, but the illustrated case of classical hysteria was applauded. There is no doubt that Svevo had access to Viennese newpapers and other reports. Therefore he must have known this first work of Freud.

Svevo was already making his way into a small group of intellectuals among which any scientific happening made news. Besides, how many men of science and letters before Freud had scientifically explored the inner soul with the depth and subtlety of a Freud? Freud says that the first intuition in the field that constituted the kernel of his research came from the literary world, and the poet's mind probably found in the new science some confirmation of the truth which his intuition could not express in scientific terms. Freud's first published paper "Studien uber Hysterie" laid stress upon "the significance of the life of the emotions" and upon the importance of distinguishing between mental acts which are unconscious and those which are conscious."[69] At a later time (exactly 1918), Svevo was to translate Freud's work on dreams with his nephew Aurelio Finzi, a doctor. Though enthusiastic about the findings of psychoanalysis, Svevo did not believe in it as a possible cure for nervous unbalance, also a friend of his--who went to Vienna to cure his abulic temperment--came back convinced that he could not change his nature.[70]

Another relative of Svevo was treated by Freud himself for several years and the dismissed as "incurable." In spite of these negative outlooks on the results of psychoanalysis, Svevo liked it for its insight into the human psyche.

The novelist was well aware of the mental struggle as we see in his fictional figures who are torn between the mental acts which rise from their unconscious, and those acts which immediate reality seems to require from them. He consequently made great use of the literary device we have come to know as the "inner monologue." Svevo tried to see--during the writing of his entire work and even during his first experiments as a short story teller--how he could put a continuous flow of thoughts down on paper, not for the sake of publication alone but to gain a perspective on his inner monologue that would allow him later better to understand his problems.

One of the main characteristics of the psychological novel is in fact the frequent use of the interior monologue, that is to say, the rendering of the continuous stream of thought which the main character is presumably carrying on silently and to himself, without any particular audience in mind. The language, so close to the original thought process,[71] is such that many consider it almost a pre-speech level of consciousness. Did Svevo realize how much of that technique he was using in his novels?

The classic example of the interior monologue (externalized only for the sake of our receiving it as readers)

is the one that appeared in the last chapter of James Joyce's Ulysses, in which Molly Bloom expresses aloud a stream of emotional recollection. This struck the world of letters as a true literary novelty. Joyce was acclaimed as the initiator of this form of narration. When congratulated for having discovered such an unusual device, Joyce gave credit for such an invention to the French novelist Edouard Dujardin.[72]

Dujardin had been a follower of the symbolist poets and had written an almost unnoticed novel thirty-five years before, in 1887. The short novel Les Lauriers sont coupés was written with the naturalist's attention to details and in a rather poetic style, but it was startling for another feature: the whole story was told from the inner eye of the protagonist, and everything was reported from the character's point of view, as if a camera were placed in his mind. The story itself is not of great consequence: its main and longest stretch of action is a stroll through Paris on a spring evening by a sensitive young man whose romantic mood is very well-adapted to fill the enchanted atmosphere of the city. The protagonist observes, feels, recalls, measures his hopes and his foreseeable disillusionment for the love of Lea, the girl he is going to meet. After a short preparation (a kind of prelude) in his dressing room, he goes to the appointment, shortly meets the girl, does not stay for the night as he hoped, savors the frustration and illusion of his love, and

finally goes back to his apartment. Throughout the action, the writer depicts the protagonist's daydreaming. In spite of his involvement, he has his romantic infatuation, a poetic eye for reality, which constitutes a background for his thoughts.

When the book appeared it received praise from sensitive readers among whom were Mallarme' and Huysman,[73] who found in the short study a kind of novelty, but they were not able to see that a new technique was being used. It was Joyce who saw it at once; he found the book by chance at a bookstand in a Paris train station in 1901 or 1903,[74] read it and was startled to see that the story, which carried no relevant exterior action, was told as if directly from the consciousness of the young protagonist, David Prince, and followed nonchalantly but effectively the movement of his inner thoughts. Joyce would apply the technique to his fiction in the years to come, and only when the literary world hailed the new discovery did he point out Dujardin's forgotten book.

Eduard Dujardin, because of the sudden publicity resulting from Joyce's revival of his novel, looked back at this intuitive choice of narration and attempted a technical definition of the inner monologue. In 1924, exactly thirty-seven years after its first publication, he re-edited the novel and attempted to give a detailed account of the sources which he thought prompted his unconscious innovative way of presenting a short story. He gave a

series of lectures on the subject, which then formed the backbone of his study of the inner monologue; this appeared in 1931 in Paris, published by Albert Messein. It was not until 1977 that a new integral edition was published in French.[75] Dujardin's title was translated into English as "We'll go to the woods no more." The expression is only likely to be understood by someone closely familiar with French culture. There is a popular song in French which goes: "Les Lauriers sont coupées, nous n'irons plus aux bois." The first expression was used by Dujardin, the translator used the second one, and came out with "We'll go to the woods no more," a title probably chosen because it conveys the idea of the flow of time and the precious uniqueness of the moment of youth. Dujardin's hero, strolling through an enchanted fin-de-siècle Paris, is accorded a unique chance of living a fleeting precious moment which is a blend of his youth, his passion, his hopes and even his disillusions.

Dujardin was an active young man and quite well-known in the Paris élite, even if his name remained confined to the margins of literature. In 1885, he founded la "Revue Wagnerienne" and in 1886, when Svevo was about to publish his first short story, he became the director of a La Revue Independante,[76] where he published texts by Mallarme' (who was, together with Wagner, the genius he admired most), prose pieces by Huysman, Zola and Barres, the Irish writer George Moore and others, besides poems by Verlaine,

Laforgue and Verhaeren, lithographs by Redon and sketches by many other painters who would meet with the approval of the public only a generation later.

Well-known in the Paris of his time, Dujardin was capable of a personal understanding and appreciation of the best geniuses of his time who were then at the stage in which they could only leave the audience "perplexed" at their innovations. He was one of the first who used vers libre and used it in a dramatic trilogy. To his "La Legende d'Antonia," Mallarme' devoted one of his divagations and attracted the attention of the readers to Dujardin's skillful use of words. "L'attraction majeur," he said, "est l'emploi extraordinaire de la parole."[77] He also remarked that, in Dujardin, there was an instinctive excellence he could not better describe. In Paris, Dujardin was popular but nobody saw him as an important literary figure. Mallarme', his master and friend, dedicated a descriptive poem to him and wrote Dujardin a letter in appreciation of his works. Toulouse-Lautrec painted him in one of his "affiches," and all his friends went to applaud his plays.

Like Svevo, Dujardin was always interested in writing for the theatre and kept going back to it. He believed that in the theatre there was a better possibility of letting the deep voice of the unconscious speak. Artists, through the actors, had a better chance "de laisser parler les voix profondes qu'ils entendent dans leur coeur."[78]

In spite of some critics' efforts to show some positive features in Svevo's theatrical works, the writer's style remained primarily apt for narrative; even Ruggero Rimini, his most faithful advocate, had to conclude that his writing was badly adapted to the dynamism of the stage. There, the long reflections of the protagonists stifle the dramatic qualities that the author wants to convey.

Svevo used the theatre, as Rimini states, "to focalize on a series of topics which were of concern to him: money, social relationship, adultery, the woman position." (mettendo a fuoco una serie di argomenti che gli stavano a cuore: il denaro, il rapporto societario, l'adulterio, la posizione della donna)[79]; besides, "in line with some European experiences he chose a type of theatre which . . . could represent a world always suspended between comic and tragic, resolving in bitter comedy its own problems." (parallelmente ad alcune importanti esperienze europee, Svevo ha scelto un tipo di teatro che . . . rappresentasse un mondo sempre sospeso fra comico e tragico e che risolvesse in amara commedia i propri problemi.)[80] Unfortunately Svevo's ambitious plan often resulted in "bringing the theatrical dialogue to the level of a cold debate." (portare il dialogo teatrale a livello di un freddo dibattito.)[81] Svevo's narrative approaches very often "slow the tension of the already modest vicissitude, impeding the life of the characters and the concentration of the spectators on their problems." (rallenta la tensione della gia'

modesta vicenda, impedisce la vita dei personaggi e la concentrazione dello spettatore sui loro problemi.)

Svevo's theatrical production remains a witness to the love-hate relationship that Svevo entertained to that Triestine bourgeois ambience that he tried to portray on stage.

In the first short story that Svevo published, L'assassinio di Via Belpoggio, the profound inner voices were dramatic. In fact Svevo describes a murderer whose inner monologue opens his story with the reflection, "Was it so easy to kill them?" (Dunque uccidere era cosa tanto facile?)[82] and ends up with the main character's confession, uttered as if to himself in a low voice: "It's me, I murdered Antonio." (Sono io, l'assassinio di Antonio.)[83] The protagonist, through his recollection, fear and uttered half-confession to his fellow-man, is presented while experiencing his trauma. Through his inner reflections he keeps repeating to himself that he must calm his emotions, but he cannot help seeing again in a sort of stupor how he killed his friend as if in a fit of forceful decision. He acts without premeditation and almost in a trance in order to take a bundle of money he is not even sure he wanted to have. He runs through the streets of Trieste, pauses, looks around, first plans and immediately gives up running away. Whenever he speaks it is as if he is taken by surprise, and his answers are almost an echo of his fear, a voiced inner thought. His occasional search for an alibi

never materializes. The only thing he can do is give voice to his deep reflections which can make him so much an object of suspicion as to put him in the hands of the police, who were not suspicious of him at all. It is interesting that Svevo has chosen, as a first experiment, to describe the twisted mind of an hysteric.

Both Dujardin's young aristocrat who is immersed in his infatuation and the murderer of Via Belpoggio are victims of a certain paralyzing force that inhibits their ability to react to their situations. Certainly, their minds passed without interruption from the perception of the present into recollection of the past and faint projection into the future, but they take no course of action to solve their problems.

Very likely Dujardin's Parisian lover, Svevo's murderer, and Svevo's other anti-heroes are hindered by what Montaigne called the "Pensées de derrière la tête." They are barely capable of exterior action, whereas their incessant flow of thought is certainly very active. Actually, its swift continual movement is represented in sharp contrast to the external inactivity of the character.

In his definition of the inner monologue, Dujardin sees some precursors of it and quotes Browning and Dostoevsky as examples. He distinguishes between the dramatic and the psychological monologue.[84] The dramatic monologue applies a careful editing to highlight the action, whereas the psychological is more faithful to the continuous flow

of the inner experience. The distinction deals with the editing choice of the writer. Browning chose the dramatic effect in Porphyria's Lover and Svevo did the same with L'assassinio di Via Belpoggio.

The psychological monologue in Dujardin's opinion and in its application does "pick up all flow, including the irrationalities";[85] this would account for the resulting fragmentation of expression typical of the inner monologue.

Historically, the specific inspiration for Dujardin's book was the Symbolist movement as well as Wagner's music, which accounts for its leitmotif. The Symbolist movement had advocated "a turning inward, a desertion of the outside world for the inside."[86]

Dujardin's and Svevo's anti-heroes started a new trend in the literary European esthetic which has been expressed also by the visual arts. Artists, that is, writers, painters, and sculptors have since then been expressing feelings which before might have alienated them from the reader and the viewer. They have been searching not for a relationship with the public, but for expression of themselves for its own sake It is the "nosce te ipsum" of the ancients which has comes back, in the eternal cycle of nature and mankind.

Footnotes

[1] Plutarch, Lives, trans. John and William Langhorne, introd. Eduard Lindeman (New York: New American Library, 1950), p. 8. Petrarch, Montaigne, and Svevo share a similar attitude of helplessness regarding the lack of willpower. In his 'Secretum', Petrarch reports that St. Augustine, who represents Petrarch's own conscience, reproaches him for "his lack of a firm and vigorous determination, the lack of or the corruption of the will" (la mancanza in lui di un proposito fermo e vigoroso, l'assenza, ovvero la corruzione della volonta'.) Natalino Sapegno, Letteratura italiana: Il trecento [Milan: Garzanti, 1965], p. 226.) In his De remediis, Petrarch notes: "And if I should desire virtue and I cannot achieve it? Many believe that they wish something but do not want it, or they do not want it and yet wish it--thus does everyone deceive himself."

Montaigne, as a serene observer of human frailty, says: "Nous flottons entre divers avis; nous ne voulons rien librement, rien absolument, rien constamment." (Essais [Paris: Nouveaux Classiques Larousse, 1965], II, 10.) Svevo summarizes the bewilderment of Petrarch, the objectivity of Montaigne, and his own frustration, calling his awkward way of dealing with reality a "sickness" (malattia).

[2] "Petrarca," Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana, 1974 ed.

[3] Michel de Montaigne, Essais (Paris: Nouveaux Classiques Larousse, 1965), I, 16.

[4] Ibid., II, 75.

[5] Ibid., II, 78.

[6] Ibid., II, 74.

[7] Ibid., II, 77.

[8] Philippe Van Tieghem, Histoire de la litterature francaise (Paris: Fayard, 1949), p. 98.

[9] For an interesting article on this subject, see David H. Miles, "Portrait of the Marxist as a Young Hegelian: Lukacs' Theory of the Novel," PMLA 94 (1979), pp. 22-35.

[10] Friedrich Nietzche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 137.

[11] Miles, pp. 22-25, et passim. Subsequent references to the philosophers associated with the German idealistic tradition are from the Miles' article.

[12] Ibid., p.23.

[13] Ibidem

[14] Ibidem

[15] Ibid., p. 24.

[16] Ibidem

[17] Denis Mack Smith, Storia d'Italia dal 1861 al 1958, trans. Alberto Aquarone (Bari: Laterza, 1962), p. 214.

[18] John Rewald, Post-Impressionism from Van Gogh to Gauguin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962), p. 7.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 517

[22] Ibid.

[23] Thomas M. Messer, Impressionism (New York: New York Public Library, 1960), p. 759

[24] J. P. Hodin, Edvard Munch, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 68.

[25] Italo Svevo, Una vita (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1938), p. 353.

[26] John Elderfield, The Masterworks of Munch, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), p. 7.

[27] John Rewald, Post-Impressionism, p. 9.

[28] Ibid., p. 32.

[29] The Masterworks of Munch, p. 21.

[30] J. P. Hodin, Edvard Munch, p. 47.

[31] Italo Svevo, Senilita', (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1971), p. 75.

[32] Italo Svevo, Una vita, p. 6.

[33] The Masterworks of Munch, p. 26.

[34] Ibid., p. 26.

[35] Italo Svevo, Senilita', p. 77.

[36] The Masterworks of Munch, p. 40.

[37] Livia Veneziani Svevo, Vita di mio marito, (Milano: Dall'Oglio, editore, 1976), p. 45.

[38] Italo Svevo, Senilita', p. 236.

[39] Ibid., p. 236.

[40] Italo Svevo, Una vita, p. 186.

[41] We read in Schopenhauer: "a dull mind is, as a rule, associated with dull sensibilities, nerves which no stimulus can affect, a temperament, in short, which does not feel pain or anxiety very much, however great or terrible it may be. Now, intellectual dullness is at the bottom of that vacuity of soul which is stamped on so many faces, a state of mind which betrays itself by constant and lively attention to all the trivial circumstances in the external world . . . but, on the other hand, this high degree of intelligence is rooted in a high degree of susceptibility, greater strength of will, greater passionateness; and from the union of these qualities comes an increased capacity for emotion, an enhanced sensibility to all mental and even bodily pain, greater impatience of obstacles, greater resentment of interruption--all of which tendencies are augmented by the power of the whole range of thought, including what is disagreeable." Arthur Schopenhauer: Essays, trans. by T. Bailey Saunders (New York: Willey, 1920) pp. 22-23.

[42] Italo Svevo, Una vita, p. 157, and Senilita', p. 119.

[43] J. P. Hodin, Edvard Munch, p. 11.

[44] Ibid., p. 33.

[45] Kirk Varnedoe, Northern Light (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1982), p. 196.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Shiv K. Kumar, Bergson and the Stream of Conciousness Novel, (New York: University Press, 1963), p. 1.

[49] Ibid., p. 11. (The lectures given by Bergson at the Sorbonne, were attended by Marcel Proust, who was a younger relative of Bergson by marriage.)

[50] Bertrand Russell, Wisdom of the West, (London: Rathbone Books Limited, 1959), p. 292.

[51] William James, The Principles of Psychology, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1918), I, pp. 101-102.

[52] Ibid., p. 104.

[53] (William James uses this term to describe the physical activity of the brain and the interaction of the subconcious.)

[54] Italo Svevo, Una vita, p. 62.

[55] Ibid., p. 61.

[56] Thomas M. Messer, Impressionism, p. 14.

[57] William James, The Principles of Psychology, I, p. 239.

[58] It is difficult to date exactly Heraclitus' lifetime: a scholar states that he was in his prime (meaning about forty) during the 69th Olympic Games, i.e., about 504-500 B.C. See Heraclitus, The Cosmic Fragments, ed. G. S. Kirk, (Cambridge: University Press, 1954), passim.

[59] Ibid., passim.

[60] Ibid., p. 366.

[61] William James, The Principles of Psychology, I, p. 239.

[62] Ibidem.

[63] Albert L. Guirard, Art for Art's Sake, (New York: Shocken Books, 1936), p. 296.

[64] Ibid., p. 295.

[65] Italo Svevo, Opera Omnia, Racconti, Saggi, Pagine Sparse, (Milano: Dall'Oglio Editore), vol. III, p. 835.

[66] Beverly Jean Gibbs, "Impressionism as a Literary Movement," Modern Language Journal, 136 (1952), p. 182.

[67] Monroe C. Beardsley, Aesthetics, (Birmingham, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1975), p. 388.

[68] Sigmund Freud, An Autobiographical Study, trans. James Strachey, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), pp. 95 and 111.

[69] Ibid., pp. 38-39, where Freud himself states that the essential material for his study Studien Uber Hysterie, was the product of Breuer's mind, even if the theory was partly his own.

[70] Livia Veneziani Svevo, Vita di mio marito, p. 95.

[71] Carmen Licari, (Introduction to Edouard Dujardin's Les Lauriers sont coupés) quotes Valery Larbaud who in 1924, noticed that "the expression of the most intimate thoughts are the most spontaneous. There are those who seem to form themselves underneath the conscience, and which again seem to come before organized speech." (l'expression des pensées les plus intimes sont les plus spontanées, celles qui puiissent se former a l'insu de la conscience et qui semblent antérieures au discours organisé." [emphasis mine]

[72] Ibid., p. 208.

[73] Ibid., pp. 198-199.

[74] Ibid., p. 201.

[75] Ibid., p. 10.

[76] Ibid., p. 11. Mallarmé wrote to Dujardin (1888) "Je reconnais que vous avez fixé la règle. . . pour exprimer, sans mesapplications des moyens sublimes, le quotidien si précieux à saisir."

[77] Ibid., p. 12.

[78] Ibid., pp. 198 and 213.

[79] Rimini, Ruggero, La Morte nel Salotto (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1974), p. 92.

[80] Ibid., p. 41.

[81] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[82] Italo Svevo, L'assassinio di Via Bellapoggio in Racconti-Saggi-Pagine Sparse, (Milano: Dall'Oglio, editore, 1968), III, p. 220.

[83] Ibid., p. 240.

[84] Edouard Dujardin, We'll go the the Woods no More, (printed for New Directions, by the University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1938), introduction by James Laughlin, IV, pp. 155-156. Trans. Stuart Gilbert.

[85] Ibid., p. 156.

[86] Ibid., p. 157.

CHAPTER III

SVEVO AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL IN ITALY

In May 1929, the literary review Solaria published the "Omaggio" that several literary figures were paying to Italo Svevo. This was a few months after the Triestine writer died in the car accident at Motta di Livenza (in September 1928). Svevo, who was starting to savor the just recognition that France and Italy were finally awarding him, would probably have noted with much interest Piero Gadda's appreciation of his novel:[1]

> The novel Senilita' will remain one of my most singular experiences as a reader. The often torpid and heavy tone, that dense lucidity of analysis, those poor and feverish situations, all that was very far from my habitual predilections. I was then, and still am, with all the reserves that a reading of Svevo has matured in my spirit, a lover of the expression which soberly unwinds itself with a limpid cadence, a lover of formal accuracy, of the enamelled Flaubertian stylistic finish. Svevo was dense, thick, apparently disorderly, sometimes raw and imprecise; in spite of that, his writings were working on me with irresistable persuasion, and very few books have had this power.
>
> (Aver aperto Senilita' rimarra' una delle mie piu' singolari esperienze di lettore. Il tono sovente torbido e greve, quella densa lucidita' di analisi, quelle situazioni meschine e febbrili, tutto era assai lontano dalle mie abituali predilezioni. Ero allora, e sono tuttora, con le riserve che la lettura di Svevo ha maturato nel mio spirito, un innamorato della frase che

> sobriamente si snoda con limpida cadenza, dell' accuratezza formale, dello smalto stilistico flaubertiano. Svevo era denso, folto, apparentemente disordinato, talora approssimativo e grezzo: tuttavia mi prendeva gradualmente con una irresistibile persuasione, come pochissimi libri hanno saputo fare.)[2] [emphasis mine]

We quote these lines because they summarize clearly the bewilderment that the linguistic peculiarities of Svevo provoked (and even now provoke) in many readers and critics. Despite their reservation about his style, the critics noted the fascination that the psychological novel, a genre not yet canonized in Italy, began to exert among certain early readers of Svevo. Readers like Gadda could not well describe their kinship to the new genre, but felt they had to acknowledge its "irresistibile persuasione."

Svevo, because of his regional dialect and his Austrian education, ended up without a definite mother tongue and in consequence had difficulty writing authentic Italian prose. Yet in a sense, the very inadequacy of his Italian helped him to render the complexity of his own thoughts, which he transferred on to his characters. Because Svevo had no fluency in Italian, he was unable to use the social and linguistic code that the sophisticated speaker and writer often employs to mask his feelings. Like a child, whose very lack of language skills forces him to express his emotions in a more primitive way, Svevo could not use language as a screen to hide his raw emotion. Lacking the normal complex syntax for self-expression, he was forced to have recourse to the undercurrent of thought, to what has

been called "the pre-speech level of language."[3] At that level, speech does not necessarily follow syntactical rules because its urgency does not have the time to assemble, choose, or complete a sentence.

This concern with the use of raw, unrefined language to define emotional life was expressed by many writers and thinkers of the period. Giovanni Papini, the critic of La Voce, for example, described the literary language of the late 19th century Italy as "castrated and purged" (linguaggio castrato e purgato) and called for a return to a simpler and more vigorous literary style.[4] James Joyce's early experimentation with what came to be known as the "stream of consciousness" dates from this period. As we have seen, the American psychologist William James, a contemporary of Svevo, dealt with the topic in his well-known discussion of the "stream of thoughts" in The Principles of Psychology (1890).[5]

A paradox of Svevo's artistic life is that, despite his life-long effort to "correct" his Italian, his great achievement as a writer resulted from his unrefined language skills used in the service of his instinctive and extraordinary understanding of the human mind. Svevo's linguistic difficulties and psychological achievement would seem to illustrate that the effort to communicate with a grammatically correct sentence automatically distorts, for the sake of clarification, the original train of thought. A naturally disordered train of thought has its own inner

sincerity and strength. This idea, that grammatical and polished rhetoric is somehow less sincere than simple and "naïve" speech, has a long tradition. It was, for example, expressed by Montaigne:

> Le parler que j'aime, c'est un parler simple et naïf, tel sur le papier qu'a la bouche; un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serre' . . . non tant délicat et peigné comme véhément et brusque: "Haecdemum sapier dictio, quae feriet" plutôt difficile qu'énnuyeux, éloigné d'affectation et d'artifice, déréglé, décousu et hardi.[6] [emphasis mine]

This is contrary to Croce's admiration of the "pulchritudo adhaerens" which presupposes, when the intention is to write a formally organized expression, that expression should be perfect. Quoting Kant, he says:

> There are . . . two different kinds of beauty: free beauty or "pulchritudo vaga", and one which simply adheres "pulchritudo adhaerens"; the former has no preconceived notion of what the object must be; the latter, on the other hand, does have a preconceived notion and implies the perfection of the object which originated it (Vi sono . . . due differenti specie di bellezza: la bellezza libera 'pulchritudo vaga' e quella semplicemente aderente 'pulchritudo adhaerens'; la prima che non presuppone alcun concetto di quel che l'oggetto dev'essere, la seconda che presuppone un concetto e la perfezione dell'oggetto secondo questo.)[7]

Croce would have called the conceptual achievement of Svevo's writing "pulchritudo vaga," but it is due to Svevo's vagueness that the effects of his prose is such that the reader experiences the momentary illusion of witnessing the characters' thought processes which later materialize

in their feelings and expectations. The representation of such a stage succeeds in mirroring the vicissitudes of the characters' souls.

Two examples from the first pages of Svevo's first book, Una vita, make this point. In the first instance, Alfonso, the main character of the novel, is walking along a corridor of the bank where he works. Svevo describes the oppressive ambience of the bank from Alfonso's viewpoint.

> Alfonso walked forward yawning. A short, narrow, and dark corridor connected the room with the main hall along the sides of which several offices opened, all lit; the doors were all alike with black frames and steamed panes. Those of the rooms of Mr. Maller and Mr. Cellani, the bank's attorney, bore the name in black on golden plaques. In its even light, the walls painted an imitation marble, the door panes lit more strongly, and thus without half-shadows, the deserted hall seemed like one of those pictures made as exercises in perspective, complicated but only of light and lines
>
> (Alfonso s'incammino' sbadigliando. Un piccolo corridoio angusto e oscuro univa la stanza al corridoio principale ai cui lati c'erano gli uffici, tutti ancora illuminati, dalle porte uguali, con le cornici nere e le lastre appannate. Quelle delle stanze del Signor Maller e del Signor Cellani, il procuratore, portavano i nomi in nero sopra una piastra dorata. Nella sua luce uguale, le pareti pitturate a imitazione di marmo, le lastre delle porte illuminate piu' fortemente, cosi' senza penombre, il corridoio deserto sembrava uno di quei quadri fatti a studio di prospettiva, complicati, ma solo di luce e di linee.)[8]

The simile, in the last sentence, where the hall is described as like a study in perspective, gives a clue to Svevo's approach in the passage: he communicates Alfonso's

view of the scene in quick brush strokes, without colors, that are as fragmentary and incomplete as his language. The passage has none of the polished style that one would expect in a passage from d'Annunzio. Instead, its fragmentary, unpolished, occasionally unidiomatic language better renders Alfonso's feeling of detachment than a more polished description would.

One notes in the passage that the sentences are often incomplete, that verbs are missing, or that phrases seem strung together. (A better stylist, for example, would have changed the last phrase, "a studio di prospettiva, complicati, ma solo di luce e di linee" into a complete sentence.) Yet the very fragmented and imperfect language prevents the reader from establishing an aesthetic--or metaphoric--distance from the subject. Because the language is imperfect, we cannot admire it as an artistic object, cannot savor the pleasure of reading it. Instead, the reader remains with Alfonso, contemplating the depressing and oppressive corridor. The imperfect and unpolished language itself renders the unpleasant and shabby corridor.

Shortly thereafter, Alfonso encounters Starringer, another bank employee. Starringer, enraged because he has been asked to stay late in order to complete some unfinished work:

> . . . said that he understood that his bad luck was the fault of the employees in charge of correspondence. In his time, he shouted, when he was an employee (he often kind of referred to that period) one would work without pause during

> the day, but at night one would go home at the established time. That day he had seen Miceni chattering in the corridor, Ballina working at a lock. Why did they waste their time in such a way? His face red, with the veins in his forehead bulging, he was advancing toward Alfonso.
>
> (Disse ch'egli comprendeva essere colpa degli impiegati alla corrispondenza, che gli toccava quel terno; a suo tempo, gridava, quando lui era impiegato [alludeva a quell'epoca di spesso], si lavorava di un lavoro battuto durante la giornata, ma alla sera si andava a casa alle ore volute. Quel giorno aveva veduto chiacchierare Miceni sul corridoio, lavorare intorno ad una serratura Ballina. Perche' perdevano in tal modo il loro tempo? Rosso in volto, ingrossate le vene della fronte, s'era avanzato verso Alfonso.)[9]

It is noteworthy that Svevo chooses to report Starringer's speech in indirect discourse, instead of quoting it directly. The choice of indirect over direct discourse reminds us that Una vita is narrated from the limited viewpoint of Alfonso. In this passage, we do not even read Starringer's own words, but experience them in terms of how they affect Alfonso and how he remembers them. Indirect discourse thus allows the novelist greater control in focusing on the story from the perspective of his main character. This passage resembles the one previously quoted in its chopped style, and its occasionally flawed Italian is even more at fault. A grammarian would correct Svevo's description of times; while di is not used with "spesso," we notice that "la sera" is preferable to "alla sera," and "alle ore previste" or "alle ore stabilite" should substitute for "alle ore volute." (These might be examples of interference from the other languages which

Svevo knew or perhaps from his Triestine dialect.) At other points, however, Svevo's very stylistic errors seem better able to express his points than "correct" Italian would. Starringer, the frustrated employee, is annoyed because he cannot return home when he wants to and probably in his rage lets the dialect interfere with the proper use of expressions. Besides, he was enraged because he could not impose his will, so "alle ore volute" is quite a likely slip of the tongue. A more correct Italian would be something like "a ore decenti"; but Svevo's odd expression about the "willed hours" better expresses Starringer's powerless frustration.

At another point we read that Starringer saw "chiacchierare Miceni sul corridoio" and that he saw "lavorare Ballina." As the expression continues, correct Italian would require the use of the imperfect or the progressive forms of the verb instead of the infinitives (Svevo seems incapable of employing these difficult tenses). Yet Svevo's use of the simpler infinitive seems a more expressive rendering of the action described, because it draws out Miceni's chattering and Ballina's working much more than the "better" form of the verb would. The unidiomatic "sul corridoio" (literally, up in the corridor) is in this case a happy fault. Correct style would have required Miceni to be in (nel) the corridor, but Svevo's "sul corridoio" adds a surrealistic note to the description: the

foolish and aloof Miceni floats at mid-point somewhere up in that corridor made of light and lines!

Anyone suggesting that mistakes in grammar and flaws in style can be considered improvements must, of course, be careful not to overstate the case. One does not want to maintain that all of Svevo's errors are signs of genius. But one can argue that Svevo's imperfect mastery of Italian grammar and rhetoric forced him to confront his characters more directly. Furthermore one can make the point that certain mistakes in grammar and style make the psychology of Svevo's prose more forceful.

Were the difficulties that Svevo encountered in being accepted to be attributed more to the apparent "disordered" prose to which Gadda alludes, or rather to the unavoidably "dense" and "thick" language of the inner soul? Certainly, "the reflections of the inner soul could not be translated through using the conventional expressive instruments" (gli strumenti espressivi convenzionali infatti sono inadeguati a captare i reconditi fondali intrapsichici), argues the Italian critic Ferruccio Monterosso,[10] because the conventional instruments which constitute smooth prose are inadequate in rendering the "hidden depth of the unconscious" (reconditi fondali intrapsichici.)[11]

The fragmentation of expression, so central to the psychological novel, constitutes the core of Svevo's prose. The language of the inner soul "contains all the intricacies of memories, transitory states, buried and surfacing

feelings and splitting selves."[12] Therefore, such a language could not allow any formal accuracy capable of "unwinding with limpid cadence," as Gadda would have it, because, as William James put it, "when we deal with consciousness, absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism is the law."[13]

But Italians have always liked a formal polished prose style, and the stylistic tradition at the turn of the century was predominantly "influenced by Carducci, Pascoli and d'Annunzio,"[14] the three great classical stylists. However formal accuracy, a legacy of the past, was not the only tendency in Svevo's time. In fact there was, at the turn of the century, a plurality of literary trends which made even more difficult the acceptance of a definitive change in the literary form such as the one advocated by Svevo.

There were several factors which prevented the rise and acceptance of the psychological novel, as was described in Chapter 2;[15] Italians would not part with their conservative linguistic tradition. However Svevo inherited not only the difficulties, but some unforeseeable benefits of the complex state of Italian letters as well. The hostility of the very social and literary milieu in which he found himself would prove, in the long run, to be beneficial to him.

The difficulties were various: The existential anxiety about the survival of the ego (as discussed in Chap-

ter 2)[16] existed side by side with the contradictory Fascist quest for a superman. In addition, the isolation of Trieste[17] from the Italian literary mainstream provided Svevo with a unique situation "at the center of a paralyzing and wary world" which would only later make him a "favorite subject of Marxist, Freudian and Existentialist critics."[18] During his lifetime he had to struggle between a sad awareness of the literary and political disenchantment and a firm belief in the alluring and pervasive Austrio-Hungarian myth which promised that the old European culture would survive and sustain the political unrest. "The myth of Austria-Hungary: . . . Outside the family and the patriarchal society there is only anarchy, the domination and the oppression of the individual" (il mito dell'Austria-Ungheria: . . . Fuori della famiglia e della Societa' patriarcali c'e' l'anarchia, la sopraffazione, il soffocamento dell'individuo.)[19]

Svevo also had to cope with the bourgeoisie, threatened by social turmoil, who had no interest in fostering the uplifting of consciousness in any field.

It is obvious that the seeds of the psychological novel were present, even if in nuce, in the literature which emerged from the literary reviews of the time,[20] and one could argue that the situation was probably the same in the rest of Europe. In terms of the literary form, the aesthetic quality in Italy was regarded as the most essential aspect of a work. According to Croce, an image which

is not expressed perfectly, that is, not conveyed completely, combining the beauty of form and the depth of intuition, does not constitute art. He reiterated the need for perfection in the rendering of expressed intuition. He believed that "a thought must be rendered in words," just as "musical fantasy" is rendered "in sound" in the most complete way; in short, all representation "must arrive at a maturity of expression."[21]

As to Svevo's rendering of the psychological novel, Crocean philosophy would probably have regarded it as unacceptable in the literary world because it does not represent clear and polished images of thought and action. Generally, within the psychological novel the intent is not to decorate a concept with suitable words, but rather to reach for a deeper, more subtle image of it; such an image need not necessarily be colored and clear but rather apt to solicit a challenging interpretation from the reader.

The psychological novel does not attempt to express things in beautiful form or to create perfect pictures. In Svevo, in fact, the psychological novel attempts a search for the truth in the inner self. This is apparent, for example, in Alfonso's realization in Una vita, that he has merely wasted his life to conquer Annetta, and not to marry her. It is evident in Emilio's understanding in Senilita', that his desire to "angelicate" the sluttish Angiolina is foolish and hopeless. It is also to be seen in Zeno's understanding in La coscienza di Zeno, that the Augusta

whom he has reluctantly married is a better wife than the woman he has lost. Thus, all of Svevo's fictional heros are overwhelmed by an unhappiness, but are compelled to realize that it is their own creation.

Because of his confused linguistic background and his inability to express himself in poetic prose, Svevo successfully depicted subtle psychological states. The instances are so many that it would be impossible to recall them all. Svevo's entire work is permeated with psychological insights. Representing this point are a few instances from the book Senilita'.

Emilio's self-mockery in his relationship to Angiolina shows that he is aware of his determination not to let her invade his private life:

> "We shall be very wise," he pleaded. To ease his unstable conscience he would have been capable of any sacrifice.
>
> ('Saremo pero' molto prudenti' - prego lui. Per tranquillare [sic] la sua coscienza inquieta, egli sarebbe stato capace di qualsiasi sacrificio.)[22]

In Emilio's effort to secure Balli's sympathy Svevo comes forth with another revealing insight:

> "I am very unhappy," he declared, pleased to have the opportunity of increasing the sympathy he had already perceived in the words of Balli.
>
> ('Sono molto disgraziato' - dichiaro' compiacendosi per [sic] aumentare la compassione che aveva gia' percepita nelle parole del Balli.)[23]

Again, when confronted by his subconscious motivation:

> Emilio was taken by a deep malaise. Balli had just explained to him the inner motives of his bad behavior. He protested vehemently.
>
> (Emilio fu colto da un profondo malessere. Il Balli gli aveva spiegati gl'intimi moventi della mala azione. Protesto' energicamente.)[24]

Through his own personal intuition he not only conveyed thoughts that lie in the subconscious, but depicted their difficult path to the surface of consciousness, enabling the reader to understand his characters' conception of life, even if such expressions were not expressed in the polished Crocean form. Crocean aesthetic philosophy, acclaimed by some, was in any case probably out of touch with the rather restless feelings of these indefinable years, as European literary production of the same period proves. Proust, Joyce and Brecht earned as much acclaim in Italy as Fogazzaro and Pirandello. They all presented an interiorized world of inner conflicts in which the tormented souls of the people could recognize their own frustration. Following the critic Cattaneo, literature of "fantasy and memory, divagation and dreams" where the subject matter prevailed over the style, the technical sophistication of language seemed to be losing its importance.[25] One could even have made a point of foretelling the success of Svevo if it were not that, on the other hand, "the fascination for the precious bombast of d'Annunzio was seducing part of

the nation into an absurd fondness for the attitudes of the superman."[26]

The Fascists were on the same side: they encouraged the love and imitation of the classical world, revived the Roman myth of a strong, healthy and powerful hero, with a consequent distrust and rejection of what was regarded as abnormal weakness; consequently Fascist spokesmen such as Marinetti's Futurists and d'Annunzio avoided whatever individual shortcomings a psychological insight might reveal. They were voicing the law of the strong also because their moral principles were totally at the service of the regime. D'Annunzio, and by extension the whole Fascist school, differed from Svevo in terms of their moral and intellectual views. D'Annunzio was after all "a decadent and so unable to establish, or unconcerned with establishing, an intellectual or ethical perspective with the degree of intellectual clarity which characterizes Svevo's moral and psychological insight."[27] For different reasons, however, both Svevo and d'Annunzio are clear in their rejection of "conventional morality." D'Annunzio rejects it by presenting a superior hero who, because of his own detachment from the crowd, feels above any moral or social code; he has a sort of amorality to which he clings in the name of his absolute genius, which must surmount all obstacles.[28] Svevo's characters, instead, denounce the commonplace morality of the little people as unacceptable in the name of an ethical code or artistic sensibility which places the

artist in a vulnerable spot; therefore, he displays a childlike sensibility which requires being cuddled and preserved at all cost. Some descriptions of Svevo's hero constitute a perfect opposite to the self-sufficient artist of a d'Annunzio. Svevo's protagonist is, from the very first book, a passive subject susceptible to being humiliated by anybody. The autobiographical Una vita reports:

> The blind acceptance of Sanneo's orders, the daily reproaches that he was forced to bear, humiliated him. His studies were a reaction to this humiliation. While imagining his as yet unwritten book, he dreamed megalomaniac dreams . . . finding himself at one extreme, he dreamed of being at the other.
>
> (Le cieche ubbidienze a Sanneo, le sgridate che giornalmente gli toccava sopportare, lo avvilivano; lo studio era una reazione a quell'avvilimento. Dinanzi a un libro pensato faceva sogni da megalomane. . . . Si trovava a un estremo, si sognava nell'altro.)[29]

Where did Svevo's dreams take him? Perhaps to the secure path of a d'Annunzian ideal. In Una vita, Svevo's spokesman Alfonso happens to report one of his dreams which seems to reflect his admiration for some of the quality of the d'Annunzian type:

> His dreams were centered upon himself, as his own master, rich and happy. He had certain ambitions of which he was fully aware only when he was daydreaming. It didn't suffice to make of himself a person supremely intelligent and rich. . . . He had all but forgotten his father and took advantage of it to procure for himself the blue blood which his dreams required. With that blood in his veins and with those riches he would bump into Maller, Sanneo, Cellani: of course, their roles were completely reversed. He was no longer shy, they were! But he treated them kindly,

> indeed graciously, not as they had been treating him.
>
> (Centro dei suoi sogni era lui stesso, padrone di se', ricco, felice. Aveva delle ambizioni di cui consapevole a pieno non era che quando sognava. Non gli bastava far di se' una persona sovranamente intelligente e ricca. . . . Il padre aveva quasi del tutto dimenticato e ne approfittava per procurarsi per mezzo suo il sangue turchino di cui il suo sogno abbisognava. Con questo sangue nelle vene e con quelle ricchezze si imbatteva in Maller, in Sanneo, in Cellani; naturalmente le parti del tutto invertite. Non era piu' lui il timido, erano costoro! Ma egli li trattava con dolcezza, davvero nobilmente, non come essi trattavano lui.)[30]

It is curious to note that Svevo never consciously refers to d'Annunzio either in his novel or in his letters. It would have been impossible not to be aware of such a prominent figure. One wonders whether, while consciously resisting d'Annunzio, Svevo admired some quality of his worldly and literary success.

D'Annunzio had succeeded in charming everybody. He was a popular hero, with his flamboyant displays of riches, his mastery of the language and stylistic excellence; a reader today might find his personality overpowering and his egotistic manners and arrogant literary style disturbing, as Svevo's silence apparently indicates, but he has to recognize d'Annunzio's extraordinary poetic lyricism and his "joi de vivre," that primordial health with which Svevo, perhaps out of envy, endows so many of his minor characters. One is reminded, for example, of the thoroughly self-assured Miceni in Una vita, the womanizing artist, Alfonso Balli, in Senilita', and the socially accomplished

Guido in La coscienza di Zeno.

In spite of the fact that Croce, perhaps for his excesses defined d'Annunzio as a neurotic, Italy, in his period, was "totally d'Annunzian; it loved the fireworks of beautiful images, the sculptured beauty of form, the harmonious sonority of beautiful words" (tutta d'Annunziana, amava i fuochi d'artificio delle belle immagini, la sculto-rea bellezza della forma, la sonorita' armoniosa delle belle parole).[31] D'Annunzio, two years Svevo's junior, had published Il Piacere in 1889 and, by the time Svevo started writing, he was already an established hero. Svevo seemed to be insensitive to such a clamor, and among his Italian contemporaries he has words of admiration only for Giovanni Verga, even if Verga's naturalistic world of peasants and agricultural life was far from his own. Verga had published about a decade before d'Annunzio and Svevo always felt much more kinship with him. He must have reflected upon d'Annunzio; however, we find no comment about the soldier-writer and poet who was sweeping the country with the novelty of his genius.

In spite of the apparent incompatibility Svevo and d'Annunzio have something in common: they shared the same feeling of superiority of the intellectual, even if they acted it out in different ways: D'Annunzio in an overtly and direct statement of such a superiority; Svevo in a subtle way and through indirect suggestions.

Franco Petroni, during the Convegno dedicated to Italo Svevo which took place in Florence in 1979, demonstrated that the protagonist's attitude in Svevo's Una vita hints at the alleged superiority by which the intellectual judges the other characters. In the rapport between Emilio and Angiolina, for instance, a "master-servant relationship"[32] is established by Emilio at their very first meeting. This will be concretely established in a predetermined and purposeful lack of communication between the two. The attitude of Emilio towards Angiolina is similar to the one that d'Annunzio had towards his greyhounds. Emilio rejoices in Angiolina's beauty but would never dream of considering her his equal or anyone whom he would seriously associate with. At best he wants to educate her but not for the purpose of having her at his side. The distance established between the two is never allowed to diminish, and it is treated by the author as an undeniable law of nature. One wonders if Emilio ever wanted his relationship to get anywhere; actually, one wonders if Svevo's underdog and d'Annunzio's superman could ever love anybody. Perhaps Svevo himself was aware of this and one can only guess how much self-mockery he used in sketching his self-portrait. Certainly Svevo's hero, with his megalomaniac dreams of superiority, is the provincial caricature of the superman. Notice in Senilita' one of Emilio's reflections:

> What was honesty after all in this world? Only self-interest. . . . Saying those words, he felt he was the immoral superior man who sees and

> wants things as they are. He thought of himself as a powerful thinking machine that had conquered its inertia. A thrill of pride swelled his chest.
>
> (Cosa era l'onesta' a questo mondo? L'interesse! Dicendo queste parole egli si senti' l'uomo immorale superiore che vede e vuole le cose come sono. La potente macchina da pensiero ch'egli si riteneva era uscita dalla sua inerzia. Un'onda d'orgoglio gli gonfio' il petto.)[33]

Svevo treats his inflated sense of superiority with a trenchant irony by contrasting the pseudo-intellectual character's outburst of pride with the most revealing insights into his inadequacy. His intellect is unable to deal with any practical demands of life. In Una vita we read:

> Alfonso thought of himself as witty and in fact he displayed a lot of wit in soliliquies. He never had had the opportunity to display it to people whom he esteemed worth the trouble.
>
> (Alfonso credeva di avere dello spirito e ne aveva di fatto nei soliloqui. Non gli era mai stato concesso di farne con persone ch'egli stimasse ne valessero la fatica.)[34]

We are told her is unconsciously deeply aware of its shortcomings: "It was not good will but capacity he was lacking, it was an organic defect" (Non era la buona volonta' che gli mancasse, era la capacita', il suo era un difetto organico).[35] In spite of that, Svevo never forgets the superiority of his character's mind. In this too he is not far from the fostered national love for self-esteem which of course was bound to provoke both approval and resentment in his country. Indeed Italy was faced with the

confrontation of the contrasting attitude of the Futurists' boldness, which provoked both admiration and irritation; while people did not want to indulge in depression, the too-self-assured hero was puzzling, to say the least.

The Futurists defended themselves by calling all those who did not belong to their group "passatisti" (that is, men of the past). Actually they despised long-standing tradition in any field, but in fact perpetuated the Roman concept of strength and youthful exuberance: futurism, while condemning rhetorical constrictions, praised stylistic excellence.[36] Thus they share with Croce an appreciation of superiority in literary style. But their bold attitude was not an indication of Italy's sense of security. The leaders of the country understood that; in fact, it is reported that Italian politicians had tried to raise in the conscience of Italians an aggressive nationalism with imperialistic designs as a natural consequence of the unity of the country attained in 1861. Their efforts met with much difficulty, for the Italian intelligentsia felt the turmoil and unsteadiness of the time; after the trauma of the First World War it was difficult to obey the request of a government which called for the production of a "harmless literature, one which should lack violent emotional force" (letteratura innocua, nel senso che priva di forza commotiva e impressiva). It is always difficult to establish the positive and negative elements in literature; the inevitable result would be to encourage a literature which

"hinders a priori a vast and profound part of reality." Svevo, together with other writers such as Vittorini and Gadda would refuse to have his novels intimidated into "exorcizing reality . . . wiping out both subconscious and death, fear and childhood, madness and the inner 'monster'" (esorcizzare il reale . . . cancellare l'inconscio e la morte, il timore e l'infanzia, la follia e i 'mostri' interiori).[37] Instead we find him seeking "to carry on a critical discourse that is somewhat free from the abstract formulas of a theory of value" (di svolgere un discorso critico alquanto libero dalle forme astratte di una teoria di valori).[38]

In politics, the values which the government tried to impose were also questionable; Depretis and later Crispi tried to revive a national pride recalling the old Roman grandeur, reminding Italians about the "triplice alleanza" (signed in 1882) which aligned Italy with great powers such as Austria and Germany. Finally, rhetorical speeches and other writings of the time declared that the future belonged to the powerful ones; "the weak not only could be crushed, but should be, because the future belongs to the strong" (I deboli non solo potevano ma dovevano essere schiacciati dato che il futuro apparteneva ai forti).[39] Such a categorical statement seems to be addressing a faltering strength in the citizenry. The new Italian intellectuals felt the uneasiness of such an imposed self-assurance. The critic Cattaneo believed that in the early

years of the twentieth century a vague uneasiness seems to take hold of the young intellectuals. Looking back at the cause of this restlessness, this uneasiness reveals itself as a premonition of the approaching war which was not yet in sight. It was difficult to determine the cause of the intellectual and social unrest.[40]

Though many critics were studying the phenomenon of intellectual turmoil, none of them succeeded in detecting a uniform literary trend among the writers. Even the young intellectuals who wrote in La Voce, the most unorthodox among the literary reviews, failed to represent an organic culture. They voiced many different, often disparaging and even contradictory experiences so that they probably deserved to be called the "enfants terribles" of literature.

Was it really "the very fragile state of peace"[41] that produced such great varieties of attitudes? Certainly, an underground resistance was trying to emerge. With the advent of Fascism some Italian intellectuals refused to take a stand; some started a retreat from life into the ivory tower, an attitude which would result in the phenomenon of the Hermetic poetry of 1930.

Many voices of dissent were raised in the pages of Strapaese,[42] a literary review which managed to be slightly polemic with the Fascist regime and struggled to last almost as long as Fascism (1924-1943). Publishing some appeasing rhetorical sentences which appealed to the regime's moral code, the voice of Ardengo Soffici would

dare to say in 1930 that "a mediocre artist, die-hard patriot, could through his activities, prove harmful to the nation to which he belongs" (un artista mediocre, sfegatato patriota, con la sua attivita' puo' nuocere al nome della nazione a cui appartiene).[43] Many writers and critics were openly opposed to Fascism. Contini, for instance, was among the rebellious intellectuals who refused to be an instrument of Fascist propaganda. He was one of those who later joined the allegedly apolitical review Solaria, founded in 1926. In that Review he advocated the newly emerging novel, while letting Ungaretti, Montale and Quasimodo present and defend the new poetry.

Literary people joined together to form new literary clusters, but Triestine Svevo was remote from them. The literary critic of Solaria, de Benedetti, who had been part of another group, succeeded in re-forming an association of people who shared the same political and aesthetic principles. Many other reviews of the time were founded by this same restricted group. When Solaria ceased publication, another Florentine magazine, Letteratura, took its place. Letteratura claimed to deal strictly with literature and, though it was later to publish the works of Montale and Ungaretti, whose poetry was politically neutral, was also the magazine who continued presenting Vittorini's controversial novel Conversazione in Sicilia which had begun publication in Solaria and heavily contributed to the magazine's being reprimanded by the authorities. The

novel's publication was completed by Letteratura which changed the original title into "Nome e Lacrime" in order to disguise it from the Fascist censors.[44] The writer's philosophy and attitude did not comply with the male supremacy and strength advocated by the Fascists, for he stated the "impossibility of being a hero, the impossibility for everyone of redeeming oneself separately, to justifying oneself even if only in part, on one's own strength." (L'impossibilita' dell'eroe, l'impossibilita' di ognuno di riscattarsi separatamente, di giustificarsi, anche soltanto in parte, per forza propria.)[45] One cannot avoid being reminded of Svevo's attitude, nor can one avoid thinking that Svevo, had he had the chance to face the forces which opposed all over Italy the rise and striving of a new underground awareness of man's limitation and sense of dismay, would probably have felt more ill at ease than he was in his secluded but after all more open and more European Trieste.

In the "peninsula" as the Triestine called the rest of Italy, the fight to free literature from the yoke of politics went on and each one chose his own personal path. Certainly in the debates appearing in the literary reviews with both political and apolitical implications, the generation representing the intelligentsia writing before the First World War was as heterogeneous as it could possibly be but, interestingly enough, one can notice among poets and writers of northern Italy "a tendency to confess them-

selves, to be listened to,"[46] especially in isolated Trieste. The tendency was to find a voice in Slataper, who described the special bliss that can be found in solitude in the pages of his book Il mio Carso.

As Cattaneo said, tendencies toward solitude had found common ground in other collaborators of La Voce, in spite of the fact that the artistic principles of the review were against such outbursts of personal feelings. One wonders how sincere Slataper was when he pretended to find it necessary to excuse himself for voicing his feelings and his desire for escape. Probably he thought it barbaric if compared to the stylistic "raffinatezza" of his Florentine friends. He was probably referring to the prose of Prezzolini and the early writing of Papini, and possibly hinting at the lack of sincerity in their impeccable form.

Refinement, and not only in the literary sense, served both the political scene and the bourgeois need for security, while it worked against the possible interest of the psychological narrative. Papini shared with Prezzolini and de Robertis the editorship of Solaria. The magazine, because it was suspected of extreme attitudes, caused an atmosphere of uneasiness in the established bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie, described by Svevo as a rising middle and upper class of businessmen (presently referred to as "upwardly mobile"), was already frightened by the new social masses. Since the first of May 1880, the proletariat had been getting more and more organized and would eventu-

ally disturb the life and consciousness of the dormant nation. The businessmen's absorption in material matters forced them to put aside all other problems or existence, and their concern for social respectability and entertainment left them little time for thought of social reform. They had preconceived notions of culture which was acquired for the sole purpose of making a grand public impression. Speaking of Macario in Una vita, Svevo says of him (obviously introducing a live character of his own time):

> He would put on garments which were not his own and would live in them as if they were truly his and as if he would never have to remove them. That was easy for him because his culture was superficial but broad enough so that he could take from it the means to create a type of person with culture and originality. But his culture was not deep enough to allow for personal convictions.
>
> (Si metteva in dati panni non suoi e ci viveva come se fossero stati suoi e non avesse avuto da smetterli mai piu'. Cio' gli era facile in grazia alla sua cultura superficiale abbastanza estesa per ricavarne i mezzi e creare un tipo da persona colta e stramba, non abbastanza profonda per dargli una ferma convinzione sua.)[47]

Svevo on several occasions shows his protagonist hopelessly engaged in a project of social improvement,[48] and out of his own frustration he develops a portrait of a defeated workaholic, a man trying to avoid thinking in order to avoid facing the absurdity of his own existence, which could not be relieved even by intelligent entertainment. Throughout the development of Svevo's characters, we never find any of them engaged in serious mastery of any art, or

in pursuing any great scientific or literary achievement, in seeking the good of society, or engaged in the study of social behavior in any part of the world to attain a better society. Though such things are always hinted at, they are never undertaken as a subject of weighty consideration, as if they were impossible or useless attainments. In a section of his notes, probably written with the intention of further developing them into a story, we read:

> I met a great businessman. His entire life was dedicated to business, so much so that the man lived for nothing else except to constantly think of new ways of accumulating money.
>
> (Conobbi un grande uomo d'affari. Tutta la sua vita e' stata dedicata agli affari, tanto che l'uomo in lui non trovo' altra espressione di vitalita' che nell'immaginare continuamente nuovi mezzi per accumulare denari.)[49]

Such businessmen, in Svevo's opinion, use incessant activity to avoid coming to terms with the dormant obsession usually associated with the fear of death. His businessman is reported to have told Svevo, "I have always thought of death and I believe that all my activity is the result of my effort to avoid that painful thought" (Io ho sempre pensato alla morte e credo che tutta la mia attivita' sia risultata dal mio sforzo di sfuggire a quel pensiero doloroso).[50] We have already seen how this obsession with death was so pervasive as to have become the subject matter central to the new psychological approach to the various arts. Expressionist painters and psychological writers were no longer expected to "paint country scenes or

reproduce colorless dialogue, but to render a very particular exterior and interior world of an extremely individual sort, as was previously unheard of" (dipingere paesaggi di maniera e riprodurre dialoghi scoloriti, ma rendere un mondo esteriore e interiore molto particolare, molto individuale, come prima non usava).[51]

Conventional visual art, or at least that which preceded expressionism, is represented in Senilita' by the painter Balli, who is more a ladies' man than a real artist and is consequently seeking success in personal gratification:

> Success had not smiled upon him either. Some critics, rejecting his sketches, had praised parts of them. But he had never been beaten down by failure; he was content with the approval of a few individual artists . . . the love of women was more than a means of satisfying his vanity. Such love was his idea of success or so it seemed to him.
>
> (Il successo non era arriso neppure a lui. Qualche giuria, respingendo i suoi bozzetti, ne aveva lodata questa o quella parte.... egli pero' non aveva mai sentito l'abbattimento dell'insuccesso. S'accontentava del consenso di qualche singolo artista... L'amore delle donne era per lui qualcosa di piu' di una soddisfazione di vanita'... era il successo quello o gli somigliava molto.)[52]

Music is pursued by two characters in Svevo's first novel, the protagonist himself and Macario, who definitely excels in ease of performance as he does in all other social activities. But there again none of them is a real musician, nor does the reader ever detect in their love for

music the character's reflections on the real value of music as an elevation of the human spirit or as one of man's marvelous contributions to his cultural achievement. All the characters' observations on the performing arts seem to add up to two main considerations: art as an escape from the dryness of life and from the lack of consideration of fellow-men, and art as a self-assertive means of imposing the pseudo-artist's presence on society, so that it could be accepted and make the artist's life a little more bearable.

With regard to a project of social reform, there is an interesting short story of Svevo's, called "La tribu'." In this fictional tale, a nomad tribe puts roots in a paradisical land only to discover that the higher form of civilization which the new settlement gives to them carries with it new problems of land and wealth division. They need laws and wisely send the youngest and brightest of them to study other people's civilizations. When he comes back with the economic principles he has learned, he finds the tribe's previous honest sharing changed, with some having much and others suffering poverty in an agricultural structure where the strongest had won and subdued the weak.[53]

In this state of things, the new economic specialist can only see the beginning of a natural human fight for survival. Such fighting can increase in ferocity till one gets to the organized differentiation of the wealthy and the poor. The affluent can afford the leisure of indulging

in poetry and philosophy and whatever else is deemed healthy for man. The poor, at best, can afford only to be organized in unhealthy places (that is, places unhealthy for their inner development), without the benefit of culture.

> The current misfortune of your poor people, forced to cultivate your lands, is happiness and wealth compared to the fate of their offspring. And only then will the tribe reach the level of modern times.
>
> (La sventura attuale dei vostri poveri, obbligati a coltivare le vostre terre, e' felicita' e ricchezza in confronto alla sorte dei loro discendenti. E soltanto allora la tribu' sara' giunta all'altezza dei tempi.)[54]

Eventually, the emissary founds the first factory in order to speed the civilization of the tribe to his own advantage, applying what European civilization had been teaching him. As a result, he is expelled from his tribe. In Svevo's story, the implication is distrust of civilization. He demonstrates a profound skepticism about the good will of even the most intelligent to change the natural laws of aggression.

Svevo seems not to have had much hope for humanity in any field, for his men are never great in soul or intellect, and when they have potentiality they try their best to turn it to the worst use. Probably this is why he never succeeded in completing the study of social reform that he undertook so often, first personally with the education of Giuseppina Vergal, and then in fiction (which served him as

a continuous pondering on the subject, experimenting with his imagination) with the education of Angiolina of Senilita'.

Of course, the subject of Svevo's study is the anti-hero, but it seems to me quite odd that his very sensitive and intellectual lens never focuses upon a heroic subject. He could after all have depicted (and I dare say it would have been quite interesting) the human frailty and anti-heroic side of such a subject. It seems as if Svevo chanced to live in a very exclusive world where eminent personalities have no place or are, if met (because surely Svevo must have met them or read about them), immediately dismissed as if they could have no place in his imaginative world and as if man's praiseworthy achievements were impossible or useless. I do not want to sound like the first detractors of Svevo, who reproached him for the anti-heroic personalities of his characters, but it seems to me that there is a persistent determination to exclude any worthy man from the domain of his observation and description.

It is again interesting to note that in his first attempt as a writer, when he started "L'Ariosto governatore," Svevo, who was then about seventeen, had taken as a subject Ludovico Ariosto, an illustrious poet, and imagined him while pondering on the passage of time and lamenting that life is but an illusion. Ariosto had brought about the Renaissance in Ferrara. Of course this choice is partly due to Svevo's youth and to what would become his

chronic uncertainty. A case could be made for the exceptionally heroic subject he had chosen. Svevo dealt with this unusual subject by presenting the great poet's reflections in a psychologically submerged undertone, but he must have felt that it would have been too difficult for him to pursue the subject further. In fact, Svevo seemed not to be able to write about people with whom as a man he could not perfectly identify himself. The young writer must have felt an intuitive kinship with Ariosto. They both liked to emphasize "the realistic descriptive elements" (gli elementi realistico-descrittivi) together with "intimate bourgeois ones" (quelli intimistico-borghesi); both are "psychologically characterizing" (psicologicamente caratterizzanti), a quality which "remained present even in the elements of the most refined contemplative intensity" (permangono anche nei componimenti di piu' ricercata intensita' contemplativa.)[55]

Not only the subject matter, but the modes of description are often strikingly similar in both Svevo and Ariosto. They both gravitate toward life's misfortunes. Observe Ariosto in one of his minor works:

> Other rains under shelter, other storms
> of sighs and tears I expect
> which might be more steady and harmful than this
>
> (Altre pioggie al coperto, altre tempeste
> di sospiri e di lacrime mi aspetto
> che mi sien piu' continue e piu' moleste)
>
> . . .

listlessly will the rest of my life
melt away with pressing sorrows
always beaten by heavy penitence

(Languido il resto della vita mia
si struggera' di stimolosi affanni,
percosso ognor da penitenza ria)

and months, hours and days will feel like years
and time will become so slow that it will seem
as if time might have clipped my wings.

(E' mesi, l'ore e i giorni a parer anni
cominceranno, e diverra' si tardo
che parra' il tempo, aver tarpato i vanni.)[56]

The stylistic excellence and the archaic words are incomparably Ariosto's; the sentiments and ideas, however, are quite close to those often expressed by Svevo. The reflective mood and the discursive colloquial form of reflection is the one which Svevo always advocated and practiced. Both in Ariosto and Svevo the characters are in constant search for happiness, and they differ only in the way they seek it. In Ariosto, the search is pursued by a sort of continuous motion, which provokes a series of actions prompting the characters to swift motions and moving them from one adventure to another in order to fulfill their desires. In Svevo, the characters are also in search of happiness, but they pursue it in a negative way. They continuously reproach themselves for their incapacity to attain it and make every effort not ever to come close to it. Instead, what appears similar in the two writers is the attitude toward fulfillment. Ariosto brings his characters to the point of fulfillment and then becomes disin-

terested in them. For example, he follows Angelica in all her search for happiness. But, when she attains the love of Medoro, "he denies her any further place in his poetic fiction."[57] Ariosto seems to imply that for his characters, happiness, when obtained, results in an inner state of inertia. He is inclined to describe only protagonists who are struggling against their fate or their surroundings. Once they achieve a semblance of happiness, he loses all interest and disregards them.[58]

For Svevo the solution to the problem is obvious; he simply does not let his characters tread on such dangerous ground as happiness, so that their twisted paths continue to have a meaning.

With such a determination it is understandable how Svevo would so persistently cling to his alleged "malattia" which is both the disease of living plus the disease of the will, the lack of control not only on the events but on ones's own idiosyncracies. (He reminds one of Alexander Pope's expression: "this long disease, my life," and of Eugenio Montale's poem: "il male di vivere".) When Svevo met with Freudian theories, he probably did not distrust so much the healing power of the surfacing unconscious, but rather feared the positive result of the treatment. He was convinced that once one is helped to recognize his own disease, he might stop (or start) struggling against it. Svevo believed that when the disease is identified and labeled, the struggle ceases; in the same way when happi-

ness is attained, it loses its appeal. Svevo, who "had used psychoanalysis only as an instrument for scanning the interior world, did not trust its healing power and above all he did not believe, due to his own alleged superior wisdom, in the necessity of recovery" (Si era servito della psicoanalisi unicamente come strumento di scandaglio del mondo interiore, non aveva fiducia nel suo metodo di cura e soprattutto non credeva per una sorta di superiore saggezza alla necessita' della guarigione).[59]

It has been observed that Svevo, who had decided to have (for affinity and for personal choice) as a spiritual guide the philosopher of his generation, Schopenhauer, created characters which were more "Schopenhauerian than Svevo himself." This might be evident from the "tone of shipwreck and loss of all the work of his youth."[60] This observation is particularly interesting because it was made by Silvio Benco, who knew Svevo's activity as an Irredentist patriot (they belonged to the same political party in Trieste). Benco seems to indicate that Svevo was not, in this respect, as withdrawn as his characters. He rather believed that Svevo indulged in a "pessimistic concentration"[61] in his work; perhaps he did so because it appeared more consistent with the psychological kind of narrative that he wanted to create.

Svevo reveals a lot of humor in portraying the defensive mechanism utilized by his antisocial, anti-heroic and pessimistic characters; they seem to demonstrate Svevo's

strong belief that his defective characters have the right to remain imperfect, thus defending themselves against the danger of disillusionment.

This passivity of Svevo's characters also became a very convenient tool for Svevo's love of analysis, thereby affording him an outlet for an analytical process to apply to a suitable subject which is in reality himself. Speaking of Emilio Brentani's character in the book Senilita', Mario Fusco remarks that Svevo's hero is "dépossedé de toute capacité d'action personnelle," thus providing Svevo with "un sujet d'analyse entièrement passif."[62] This remark makes us think that a writer might unconsciously choose to create a persona with whom to perform the kind of study he is more interested in. Perhaps for this purpose Svevo created what Fusco called some "personnages romantiques dans une perspective nouvelle, celle de la maladie."[63] These characters recounted personal inadequacies which were not socially acceptable to the readers of the time. Svevo's characters were afflicted by a disease that was deeply imbedded in Svevo himself, so that he had to explore it.

Perhaps if the ambience in which Svevo moved had been more understanding of his nature, he would have felt less compulsion to put himself on paper and study his own idiosyncracies. He probably endeavored to keep his characters passive as long as he needed to cure or perserve his "malattia," a subject he approached with an existentialist

vision of life. After all, he could compare it with the many other diseases or difficulties he discovered in the social strata that moved around him, namely the bourgeoisie. He could not have opposed it romantically because he realized that the myth of the past could not merge with the society of his time; so he endowed his antihero with a diseased feeling, which is a combination of a sense of inferiority and one of intellectual and moral superiority; his loser, after all, does not want to win, and when he does win he is content in showing that he is (because he won) superior, to the point of not using his victory to his advantage.

For Senilita', it is again Fusco who notices that, after the conquering of Annetta, Nitti is contented to feel that he has "ainsi repris l'initiative" and it is enough for him to be able to show that "c'était lui le plus fort." The critic notices "l'amère volonté de laisser devant lui des barrières infranchissables,"[64] and sees that, as a result, the character of Nitti displays a great ability to turn even a winning situation to an apparent disadvantage.

I think that the main advantage Svevo wants to ensure for his characters is the determination (after proving to themselves and the others that they are in fact morally correct) to preserve their disease, and for this purpose he uses an introspective technique with a tinge of self-punishment.

We can also consider both Svevo and his protagonist an adolescents who want to make sure to preserve the status quo; after all the Italian writer and poet Cesare Pavese described the romantics as "eternal adolescents" in his diary Il mestiere di vivere,[65] and we are reminded of Gustave Flaubert's statement "Je suis un vieux romantique."

Surely the protagonist of Una vita, Alfonso Nitti, protects himself from becoming part of adult sane humanity. His opposite Francesca, a proletarian product, has a much clearer "picture of the aim she is pursuing," perhaps because she has "less ingenuity" than Nitti and is "less an idealist."[66] Francesca, who represents the practical common sense which is the result of the normal healthy side of humanity, so little understands the complexity of Alfonso that she tries to save him from what she considers a lack of judgment of the situation; she only thinks that he did not fully understand the love game in which he was involved so that she reminds him that it is necessary, in life, to arrive as soon as possible at the wanted result and concentrate all one's physical and mental energy toward the attainment of what she believes everybody has, that is, a practical dream.

While Alfonso was afraid that Francesca "could understand that he did not dedicate to the matter the interest he should have,"[67] he felt at the same time annoyed "because nothing is more irritating than not to be understood

at once when one is pretending." Francesca pleads for attention:

> I do not know how to gain your confidence in such short time, but I know I need it. You are about to make a mistake, AND I WANT TO STOP YOU. Then listen to me, follow my advice, do not leave . . .
>
> (Io non so come conquistarmi in si' breve tempo la sua fiducia, ma ne ho bisogno. Ella sta per commettere una sciocchezza, ED IO VOGLIO IMPEDIRGLIELO. Dunque mi ascolti, segua il mio consiglio, non parta. . .)[68]

In danger of being rescued, Alfonso becomes irritable:

> He was speaking as if he wanted to cut short the subject. He did not have good reasons, not he; he had decided already and did not care to find out what would result from it . . .
>
> (Parlava col tono di chi vuole tagliar corto. Non portava argomenti lui; aveva deciso cosi' e non si curava di sapere ove sarebbe giunto . . .)[69]

The rescuer is puzzled; Alfonso's stupidity risks upsetting even her own plans:

> She looked at him in amazement, not certain to have understood correctly. Then she spoke again and for the first time Alfonso heard that little voice altered; it was still a weak voice but was so broken, and in such a high pitch that it had lost all its sweetness.
>
> (Ella lo guardo' stupefatta, non certa ancora di aver udito per bene. Poi parlo' di nuovo e per la prima volta Alfonso udi' quella vocina alterarsi; rimaneva sempre esile ma era rotta dall'affanno e, gridata, aveva perduto ogni dolcezza.)[70]

But he knows best. He certainly understands the intelligent and scheming design which would bring him too close to the conquest of Annetta and on the winner's side and carefully avoids the indicated path. Before changing his unfortunate persona which would make of him one of the masses, he stages a suicide, thus avoiding the very possibility of a personal rehabilitation.

It is like that in all Svevo's short stories and novels. From Svevo's first short story to his last incomplete novel we notice the author's obstinacy in condemning the protagonist to his doom. In "L'Assassinio di Via Belpoggio" the man has in his pocket the ticket which could take him far from the scene of the murder; the train is almost there; it is exactly at that point that the unconscious mechanism is triggered and the assassin chooses to go back and very deliberately plans to be taken and made to confess by the police.

All that is considered happiness is somehow hindered: Svevo's women are always inaccessible or made inaccessible by imposing upon their true nature a superstructure which has to fall apart at one time or another. Svevo builds it by faking a romantic love where there is only sex appeal, as in the case of Angiolina of Senilita' or by substituting a predetermined impossibility even when he is clearly shown how he can win in love as in the case of Annetta of Una vita.

Certainly Svevo's characters carefully avoid success in any field; they defend their precious disease of the will, probably remembering Schopenhauer's admonition against the danger of the volition's alluring call. A disease, after all, is a comfortable Linus's blanket in which to wrap oneself; besides, as long as you hold to it people will go on considering you a child. But probably this is not the purpose of Svevo, who wants only to avoid reality. He wants to go on considering himself an adolescent, probably seeing in it the charm of the innocent adolescence of humanity which means in turn unspoiled perfection, implying remoteness from any social struggle. Speaking of Alfonso, Gennaro Savarese says:

> Alfonso understood precisely that his error had been to behave like a fighter, while he was born to be a contemplative.
>
> (Alfonso comprese appunto che il suo errore era stato quello di comportarsi come un lottatore, egli che era nato invece contemplatore.)[71]

There is, then, Alfonso's effort to defend his own identity, in which his final aim is to go on contemplating, while it is the final aim of the fighter to achieve victory.

As far as Svevo's determination to draw from his life's experience is concerned, one may make reference to the interesting study of John Freccero titled "Zeno's last cigarette," which examines in detail Zeno's (and therefore Svevo's) effort to find a cause for one of his diseases,

chain-smoking. Such a disease resulted in the creation of what Freccero calls a "lie literature,"[72] and quotes Zeno to explain such a process:

> pursuing these memory-pictures, I at last really overtook them. I know now that I invented them. But invention is a creative act, not merely a lie. . . . I thought my dream-pictures really were an actual reproduction of the past. . . . I remembered them as one remembers an event one has been told by somebody who was not present at it.[73]

In Zeno's words, one can detect the reflections and voice of Svevo himself who was trying to achieve self-knowledge through the creative process. At this point Svevo, already at his third novel, saw clearly the fusion which was taking place between himself and his main character. We agree with Freccero that:

> In a sense, a novelist is at once a creature and a creator for the story he tells is necessarily his own invention, yet it must be drawn from his own experience. He must be within it, in order for it to be "alive," yet in another sense he must be outside of it in order to understand.[74]

Freccero goes on to explain that the transcendent foreknowledge which takes in past and future gives Svevo's characters a "rationale and an inner consistency" which is exactly what Svevo was looking for. Svevo also tries to understand that deviation of the will which is so often presented in the form of a compulsion for smoking which appears from the very Diario per la fidanzata, and ends up

unfortunately with the last cigarette that Svevo asked for in his last day of life and which was ironically refused him.

If we study the influence that Schopenhauer had on Svevo and the consequent attention Svevo gave the phenomenon of will-failure throughout his life as a novelist, we may refer to the "Profilo Autobiografico" where Svevo states that the very pen-name he gave himself, Italo Svevo, is in homage to the German philosopher. Indeed, Schopenhauer, who died in 1860, one year before the birth of Svevo, was to become the philosopher of the next generation. As far as suicide is concerned, Schopenhauer was against it in spite of his description of life as something to get over with, for in life pain is the positive force and happiness the negative one; in fact, he regarded suicide, among other things, as an experiment that man could attempt in order to elicit an answer from nature about the meaning of man's existence, an "insight into the nature of things"; if considered for this purpose, the experiment itself is, in his words, "clumsy: for it involves the destruction of the very consciousness which puts the question and awaits the answer."[75] If a man destroys himself, he will obviously never get the answer, nor will he be able to process it.

Svevo is reported to have said that he wrote Una vita based completely on Schopenhauer's theory. The conclusion of the novel, the suicide of the protagonist, is for him

equivalent to the "conclusion of a syllogism." It is unclear what Svevo meant by such a statement. Suicide does not seems a logical conclusion for a life deprived of action, because the final determination would require too much strength and accomplishment, unless suicide is meant as an ultimate proof of strength. Svevo probably went beyond dramatizing Schopenhauer's belief in the negative forces of the will, and was interpreting the philosopher's conviction that man is totally victimized by the determining power of nature which makes him active only to serve in a design of reproduction, and/or (as Darwin would have it) for the purpose of connecting the links in the chain of evolution.

Whatever theories he was considering, Svevo wanted to show the total disbelief of his protagonist in any real meaning of life, thus becoming a kind of modern Hamlet. We can compare Svevo's questioning character to the Shakespearean hero. Both "having looked deeply into the true nature of things . . . have <u>understood</u> and are now loath to act. They realize that no action of theirs can work any change in the eternal condition of things and they regard the imputation as ludicrous or debasing that they should set right the time when it is out of joint."[76]

Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's views of human nature resemble Svevo's attitude towards man's indifference towards life. Svevo himself suffered from a pessimistic vision of existence which did not allow him to enjoy any-

thing without considering the transience and futility of it all. This disposition can be dated to his first compositions, as we have observed, and can be traced even in the letters of Livia during Svevo's idyllic courtship. In an undertone, Svevo seems to be uttering a very devastating truth for a man of thirty-five; he writes to Livia:

> Even when I am enjoying life near you, something in my soul remains detached and warns me: Beware! Everything is not what it appears to you and everything is a comedy, because the curtain will fall.
>
> (Anche quando godo la vita a te d'accanto, mi resta nell'anima qualcosa che non gode con me e che m'avverte: bada, non e' tutto come a te sembra e tutto resta come commedia perche' calera' il sipario.)[77]

We think we can conclude with Natale Tedesco that Svevo's pessimism "is not a proof of a tragic feeling but of a mental attitude of indifference."[78] Maybe such an attitude was a result of Svevo's natural disposition as a youth, but as he progressed in his life he might have seen annihilation more and more as a sole solution to life's absurdity. In writing Una vita, Svevo progressed from a sense of dismay at the thought of the inevitability of death to a forceful end of the whole comedy. In Una vita such an end is portrayed as the suicide of an individual, but in La coscienza di Zeno the concept is extended to the complete destruction of the earth itself. We read:

> Maybe it will be through a terrible catastrophe produced by some explosives that we will be restored to health. When the poison gases are

> not sufficient, some ordinary man, in the secret of a room on this earth will invent an incredible explosive, in comparison to which the existing explosives will resemble harmless toys [he seems to have foreseen Oppenheimer!]. And some other ordinary man [Teller?] but somewhat more sick than the other, will steal such an explosive and climb to the center of the earth to place it where it might have the greatest effect. There will be an enormous explosion which no one will hear and the earth, reduced to the form of a nebula, will wander in the heavens lacking both parasites and diseases.
>
> (Forse traverso una catastrofe inaudita prodotta dagli ordigni ritorneremo alla salute. Quando i gas velenosi no basteranno piu', un uomo fatto come tutti gli altri, nel segreto di una stanza di questo mondo, inventera' un esplosivo incomparabile, in confronto al quale gli esplosivi attuali esistenti saranno considerati quali innocui giocattoli. Ed un altro uomo fatto anche lui come tutti gli altri, ma degli altri un po' piu' ammalato, rubera' tale esplosivo e si arrampichera' al centro della terra per porlo nel punto ove il suo effetto potra' essere il massimo. Ci sara' un'esplosione enorme che nessuno udra' e la terra ritornata alla forma di nebulosa errera' nei cieli priva di parassiti e di malattie.)[79]

La coscienza di Zeno has even been adapted for the theatre in Italy. As such, it was performed at the Metastasio Theatre in Prato (Florence) in 1978. On such an occasion, Tullio Kezich, a Triestine critic, has commented upon the "appalling vision of a world threatened by a destruction which we would nowadays call atomic and Svevo could not obviously define as such but could, in a ghastly intuition, sense" (Sbalorditiva visione di un mondo minacciato dalla distruzione che noi chiameremo atomica, che Svevo non poteva definire ma solo, in modo agghiacciante, intuire).[80]

Where does it spring from, this negative atomic vision of the universe? Certainly, first of all, from Svevo's life. He lived first in his house with a neurotic father, then was moved to the rigid atmosphere of a boarding school, then forced, in his teens, to take responsibility for his own life and work for a living; finally, he fell in love with a cousin whose family shunned his pretension to literature and humiliated him. He was all along imbued with the catastrophic reflection of Schopenhauer, which certainly did not prepare him for a serene acceptance of life and must have made Svevo realize that the unhappiness of life can put one on the edge of despair. It was also true that Svevo had a melancholy disposition which was fed by his readings; that is why we can see that "the protagonists of so many of his pages belong to the Hamlet type . . . to the category of the superfluous man." We must notice in Svevo the same structure as a typical novel of Turgeniev, with a problematic hero around which society moves. The reading of the Russian author stirred "some reflections on the elaboration of the story of the 'inept' by Svevo." Now we know that among the novelists he loved, Svevo mentions Turgeniev and Jean Paul Richter, two different writers who worked on an unresolved dialectic between a hostile reality and an unattainable "utopia."[81]

Each spoke of solitude as the only means of attaining knowledge of the self. Schopenhauer advocated seclusion and admonishes that men of great intellect "live in the

world without really belonging to it . . . for the mission of these great minds is to guide mankind over the sea of error and to a haven of truth."[82]

Certainly in much of Svevo's fiction and reflection we find a craving for solitude and a deep aversion for the demands of the bourgeois group which definitely bored him. Schopenhauer's enemies of a happy life were pain and boredom.[83] Svevo seems to suffer more from boredom. Therefore, he found refuge only in his inner life, in the effort to understand himself. He preferred to re-create fragments of life in his fiction rather than living the everyday realities, always harping on his alleged "disease." As Lukacs observed, "Schopenhauer too had a romantic taste for the disease" (gusto romantico per la malattia) and thus encouraged "the tendency of the little German bourgeois to set himself aside from society and to develop an attitude of disdain for the common person."[84]

These feelings of superiority are often evident in Svevo's characters since the writer never loses an opportunity to illustrate the intellectual and moral superiority of his heroes. Alfonso, Emilio and Zeno are always the only ones truly capable of deep reflection, sensibility, intellectual authority, and even moral judgment over all those who gravitate around them. Svevo's hero is the only one who possesses and cultivates any genuine love for culture. He belongs to the middle class, which allows him to have, and boast about having, enough education. He is

not concerned with the pursuit of wealth for that would distract him from concentrating on his other fine qualities. They all love to read and retreat into the study of literature. This is certainly true of Svevo himself: his brother Elio tells us that when Svevo was in boarding school and later at home, he had the habit of spending his nights devouring books. He was severely punished and reprimanded by his father and teacher for this. His avid reading must have been a way to escape the realities of life which always oppressed him. The fact that he constantly changed names proves that he was uneasy even about his own self-identity. His family gave him the name of Aron Schmitz but then called him Ettore. Later on, he took the pen name of Samigli, which he later changed to Italo Svevo. He must have felt uncomfortable at home because of the severity of his father, but this is never clearly mentioned in his Diary. We guess the various difficulties of his life by examining the personal letters written to friends and relatives. His religion was never mentioned either by him or by members of his family. He lived a life of concealment whose suffering was voiced by his characters. He never directly comments on his deeper personal problems, but lets his characters voice them for him in such a way that it is quite easy to decipher whom he is speaking about.

The central obsession of his life, so intertwined with his fiction, is always the examination of "self" and the

relationship to the others. In the process of applying criticism to literature, he also shows the same attitudes. It has been noticed that in one of the articles that Svevo wrote in the newspaper "L'Indipendente'" (which appeared in 1884 when Svevo was a very young man), while commenting on Turgeniev's The White Handed Man (where an intellectual tries to join and to help a group of workers and is killed by them), Svevo noted that the "tragic part of the story was not the death of the white-handed man, but the fact that he sacrificed himself for men who did not know how to appreciate him." (il fatto piu' commovente non e' la morte dell'uomo dalle mani bianche ma bensi' il suo sacrificio per uomini che non lo sanno apprezzare.)[85]

While his comment is quite to the point, it nevertheless also becomes apparent that Svevo was very sensitive to the intellectual "self-praise deriving from the fact that he felt 'different' from common mortals" (autocompiacimento per il fatto di essere 'altro dai comuni mortali). Besides one notices that Svevo's intellectual (as the writer himself remarks) always has the grudge of "being aware of working for them, without being understood" (la consapevolezza di lavorare per loro, pur non essendone capito),[86] and of course appreciated.

We have an example of that in the relationship of Alfonso in the Lanucci family and in the one of Emilio towards Angiolina, Zeno in respect to Carla, the old man and the beautiful girl, etc. It seems to me, though, that

Svevo is conscious of this game and ready to criticize himself; he certainly likes to study himself through his characters and characterization but he has acquired, at least in the last part of his life, enough distance from his idiosyncracies that he can now observe them with humor and condescension. He can also exert a certain benevolent and honest consideration for their limitations. In Zeno, the father says something to his son which is a reflection of Svevo's attitude as a writer:

> I feel that my experience and my knowledge of life are great. One does not live in vain so many years. I know many things but unfortunately I cannot teach them to you as I would like. Oh! how much I would like that! I see inside things, what is right and true and what is not.
>
> (Io sento come la mia esperienza e la scienza mia della vita sono grandi. Non si vivono inutilmente tanti anni. Io so molte cose e purtroppo non so insegnartele tutte come vorrei. Oh! quanto lo vorrei! Vedo dentro nelle cose, e anche vedo quello che e' giusto e vero e anche quello che non lo e'.)[87]

In the same page we find a confession of the serene impotence a man might have in trying to relate powerful insights:

> Today while I write, as I have now got close to my father's age, I know for sure that a man can have the feeling of possessing a very high intelligence that might not give any sign of itself except its own strong feeling of being.
>
> (Oggi che scrivo, dopo di aver avvicinata l'eta' raggiunta da mio padre, so con certezza che un uomo puo' avere il sentimento di una propria altissima intelligenza che non dia altro segno di se' fuori di quel suo forte sentimento.)[88]

This is the son of the man who spoke before, and it is of course the confession of Svevo. After being so terribly self-involved, one could not be more humble than that in the literary world.

Footnotes

[1] Nine years later, Piero Gadda would embrace a form of psychoanalytical approach in La cognizione del dolore (1938).

[2] Solaria, May 1929, p. 42. (It must be noted that Gadda's appreciation seems very close to the later criticism by Ettore Bonora who associates Svevo's fascination with his particular sensitivity to the subtle movements of the soul. See Il Novecento, Vol. IV of Antologia della critica letteraria. (Torino: G. B. Petrini, 1970), pp. 239-245.

[3] Shiv K. Kumar, Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 3.

[4] Giovanni Papini, La voce, 1909, Vol. I, 34, p. 137, quoted in Alberto Abruzzese, Svevo, Slataper e Michelstaedter lo stile e il viaggio (Venezia: Marsilio, 1979), p. 57.

[5] William James, The Principles of Psychology (1890; rpt. New York: Dover, 1950), Vol. I, pp. 224-290.

[6] Michel de Montaigne, Essais (Paris: Nouveaux Classiques Larousse, 1965), Vol. I, p. 80.

[7] Benedetto Croce, Ultimi saggi; saggi filosofici, VII (Bari: Laterza, 1963), p. 210.

[8] Italo Svevo, Una vita (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1938), p. 10.

[9] Ibid., p. 11.

[10] Ferruccio Monterosso, "Italo Svevo e la proliferazione psicanalitica nella letteratura novecentesca," Otto-Novecento, 2, No. 6 (1978), p. 16.

[11] Ibid., p. 21.

[12] William James describes the many different classes of our conscious states; "Now we are seeing . . . reasoning . . . willing . . . recollecting, expecting . . . loving . . . hating . . . our mind alternately engaged [in a] succession of different feelings [or] sequence of differents." I, p. 230.

[13] Ibid., I, p. 226.

[14] Alberto Abruzzese, Svevo, Slataper e Michelstaedter: lo stile e il viaggio, p. 15.

[15] Ibid., pp. 7-9

[16] See Chapter II, pp. 8-10.

[17] Charles C. Russel describes Trieste as: ". . . the little Austro-Italian city on the Adriatic shore, a city which was a worldwide crossroads for commerce but a dead-end street for literature; a colorful and exciting mixture of various tongues and nationalitis in which money represented a kind of 'lingua franca' and business acumen was the common passport and in which the real foreigners were its poets, its painters and its writers; a city in the midst of a political storm and literary doldrums." Italo Svevo, The Writer from Trieste (Ravenna: Longo, 1978), p. 16.

[18] Naomi Lebowitz, Italo Svevo (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1979), p. 2.

[19] Giuseppe Antonio Camerino, Italo Svevo e la crisi della mitteleuropa (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1974), p. 20.

[20] The literary reviews of the time, all clustered in Florence, mainly La Voce, La Ronda, Solaria and Letteratura, represented the mirror of the main literary trends of young Italy. For the Triestine writers like Svevo, Slataper, Michelstaedter and Stuparich, they also represented excellence in language and style. It is no wonder that such writers wanted to be connected with the Italian literary reviews, even if they questioned the validity of their rigid code. To be published in them meant for the isolated writer of Trieste to be able to voice officially the personal reform they were concerned with. To be connected with them meant also to become part of the Italian mother mainland they felt cut off from. We know that Svevo never succeeded in going to Florence, nor did he at first attempt to send his works there, but his fellow countrymen Stuparich, Slataper and Michelstaedter did. La Voce published Slataper's Il mio Carso in 1912 and his first book Un uomo finito before that. It also published his essay on Ibsen, works which treasured and made use of the reading experience in Nietzsche, Bergson and Lukacs. We also find Stuparich in Florence in 1913 with the publi-cation of Il Discorso al Popolo. Stuparich was so elated about the active ambience that he encouraged Slataper to go to Florence. In spite of their conservative attitudes, the literary reviews were guided by men able to appreciate good authentic works of literature and would sustain even writers very different from the ones who currently wrote in their group. Even La Ronda, which had started with a classical reforms program, but had among its editors people coming from La Voce, published many autobiographical pieces often given to per-

sonal meditation. Solaria did challenge the establishment publishing "a puntate" Vittorini's Il garofano rosso in which workers seek an alternative to the misery of man and the injustice of his human society.

We find in all these works, besides a political revolt, a Svevian necessity of expressing oneself and one's sense of solitude.

(See A. Abruzzese, Svevo, Slataper and Michelstaedter, pp. 50-151.)

(See also Dizionario Critico UTET, vol. III), pp. 405-406 [Slataper], pp. 635-642 [Vittorini].)

[21] Benedetto Croce, Brevario di estetica (Bari: Laterza, 1966), p. 43 [translation mine.]

[22] Italo Svevo, Senilita', p. 44.

[23] Ibid., p. 126.

[24] Ibid., p. 127.

[25] Giulio Cattaneo, Esperienze intellettuali del primo Novecento (Milano: Mondadori, 1968), p. 56.

[26] Brian Moloney, Italo Svevo and the European Novel, (Hull, England: University of Hull, 1977), p. 10.

[27] Moloney notices that "D'Annunzio ostensibly presents his characters as examples of corruption, and therefore to be condemned, while at the same time regarding this corruption as the prerogative of a social, intellectual and artistic elite which he, a social as well as an intellectual snob, admires and envies." Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 12.

[29] Italo Svevo, Una vita, p. 62.

[30] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[31] Elio Gianola, Un killer dolcissimo: Indagine psicanalitica sull'opera di Italo Svevo (Genova: Il Melangolo Universita', 1979), p. 21.

[32] Franco Petroni, Italo Svevo oggi, ed. Mario Marchi (Firenze: Nuove Edizioni Enrico Vallecchi, 1979), pp. 207-208.

[33] Italo Svevo, Senilita', p. 25.

[34] Italo Svevo, Una vita, p. 24.

[35] Ibid., p. 61.

[36] They claimed that " . . . literary researches [should be] . . . not spasmodic [or] refined." Instead, they praised the" . . . exuberant Tuscan simplicity. (. . . ricerche . . . non spasmodiche, nevrasteniche, raffinate . . . semplicita' toscana ed esuberante.") Primo Conti, Imbottigliature (Florence: l'Italia Futurista, 1917), p. 12.

[37] Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, La cultura e la poesia italiana del dopoguerra, Universale Cappelli, No. 112 (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli, 1968), p. 15.

[38] Ibid., p. 64.

[39] Denis Mack Smith, Storia d'Italia, dal 1861 al 1958 (Bari: Laterza, 1962), p. 229.

[40] Giulio Cattaneo, Esperienze intellettuali del primo Novecento, pp. 226-227.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Strapaese (1924-1943) was a review which advocated a national literature against Il Novecento, a review with a European orientation. Among the founders of Strapaese were the painter Rosai and the writers Ardengo Soffici and Giovanni Papini. They originally supported the Fascist regime, but soon engaged in polemics with it because they found its attitudes bourgeois and began to doubt that it would keep its promises. See Luciano Troisio, "Strapaese," Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana, 1974 ed.

[43] Il caso Svevo, ed. Giuseppe Petronio (Palermo: Palumbo, 1976), p. 29. Soffici was trying to use some rhetoric which could appease the moral code of the Fascist regime.

[44] Edoardo Sanguineti, Introd. Conversazioni in Sicilia, by Elio Vittorini (Torino: Einaudi, 1970) pp. XVI-XVII.

[45] Ibid., XIV.

[46] Benjamin Crémieux, Histoire de la littérature italienne contemporaine (Paris: Kra, 1928), p. 23. Crémieux adds that the most typical representative of a psychological trend among the Italians are Fogazzaro and "son annex triestine. Slataper, Michelstaedter, Italo Svevo, Umberto Saba. Chez les Triestins, l'inquiétude se change en tourment patriotique et métaphysique, et se complique pour certains d'hyperexcitabilité sémite ou d'instabilité slave." See also Ibid., pp. 310-311.

[47] Italo Svevo, Una vita, p. 89.

[48] Italo Svevo, Senilita', p. 53: "In the past he had cherished some socialist ideas without, of course, ever moving a finger in order to realize them." ("In passato egli aveva vagheggiato delle idee socialiste, naturalmente senza mai muover dito per attuarle.")

[49] Italo Svevo, Opera omnia (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1968), Vol. III, p. 856.

[50] Ibid.

[51] E. Ghidetti, ed., Racconti, by L. Capuana (Roma: 1974), Vol. III, pp. 320-321, as quoted in Moloney, p. 6.

[52] Italo Svevo, Senilita', p. 17.

[53] Note that the development of the story is reminiscent of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest.

[54] Italo Svevo, Opera omnia, Vol. III, p. 529.

[55] Nino Borsellino, Ariosto (Bari: Laterza, 1973), p. 25.

[56] Ibid., see also Opere minori, ed. by C. Segre (Milano-Napoli, 1964), pp. 175-177.

[57] Ibid., p. 105.

[58] Ibid., passim.

[59] Giulio Cattaneo, Esperienze intellettuali del primo novecento. p. 11.

[60] Silvio Benco, Introd., La coscienza di Zeno, by Italo Svevo (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1969), p. 12. Benco states that Svevo " . . . belonged to the irredentist group of disorder which followed the death of Oberdan. We read in the newspaper of the time his name among . . . the patriots." ("Apparteneva alla gioventu' irredentista ed ebbe parte in tutte le manifestazioni del periodo agitato che segui' il sacrificio d'Oberdan. Leggiamo nei giornali del tempo il suo nome tra quelli . . . dei patrioti.") Ibid., p. 11.

[61] Ibid., p. 12.

[62] Mario Fusco, Italo Svevo, conscience et realité (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 250.

[63] Ibid., p. 295. Svevo's characters, all of whom suffer some sort of mental or physical ailment, find their embodiment in Zeno. See Fusco, p. 295: "Or Zeno s'est en

effet presenté comme un malade dès le début du texte, et cette notion de la maladie, qui justifie le sujet même du roman, est une donnée nouvelle, qui le différencie des autres protagonistes sveviens." On the physical effect of the alleged disease, see Ibid., p. 303.

[64] Ibid., pp. 166-167.

[65] Cesare Pavese, Il mestiere di vivere, as quoted in Fusco, p. 449.

[66] Italo Svevo, Una vita, pp. 210-212.

[67] Ibid., p. 211.

[68] Ibid., p. 212.

[69] Ibid., p. 213.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Gennao Savarese, Scoperta di Schopenhauer e crisi del naturalismo nel primo Svevo (Firenze: Sansoni, 1971), p. 418.

[72] John Freccero, "Svevo's Last Cigarette" in Sergio Pacifici, From Verismo to Esperimentalismo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 35.

[73] Ibid., p. 37.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Arthur Scopenhauer, Essays, trans. T. Bailey Saunders (New York: Willey, 1920), See On Suicide, p. 31.

[76] Friedrich Nietzsche, Birth of a Tragedy (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 51.

[77] Italo Svevo, Diario per la fidanzata, Opera Omnia, Vol. III (Milano: Dall'Oglio, 1968), p.

[78] Natale Tedesco, La coscienza letteraria del Novecento (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1981), p. 131.

[79] Italo Svevo, La coscienza di Zeno, p. 500.

[80] Tullio Kezich, "Felice ritorno," (Firenze: La Nazione, Dec. 15, 1978), p. 17.

[81] Enrico Ghidetti, Italo Svevo (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1980), p. 54.

[82] Arthur Schopenhauer, Essays, p. 36.

[83] Ibid., p. 23.

[84] Ibid., p. 80.

[85] Renato Barilli, La linea Svevo-Pirandello (Milano: Mursia, 1972), p. 25. See also Italo Svevo, Opera omnia, Vol. III, p. 574.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Italo Svevo, La coscienza di Zeno, pp. 60-61.

[88] Ibid., p. 63.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation we have tried to ascertain whether Svevo's breakthrough in the new genre of the psychological novel is primarily a personal achievement and/or a natural outgrowth of the turn-of-the-century's literary evolution. We did that through the analysis of Svevo's various works and the examination of his life, social surroundings and the prevailing aesthetic of his time.

Our aim, as explored in the first chapter, has been to find out to what extent his personal life affected his artistic output. By examining his correspondence and the autobiographical material left to us we came to a clearer picture of the motives which prompted him to express himself through his writings. These motives were, to an unusual degree, primarily self-understanding and assimilation into a hostile environment. His markedly negative view of humanity, also stemming from the philosophical influences of the time, prompted his effort to understand others and find his place in an alienating world.

Both his correspondence and fiction show his effort to adjust to the demand of his ever-present family and social responsibilities while still giving in to his creative drive. He had a compelling need to dissect the thought

processes of the human mind in order to understand both himself and others and consequently adapt to the requirements of reality. We noticed a continuous wavering in his attitude between the irritation provoked by the idiosyncracies of his fellowmen and his need to conform to and be accepted by the social milieu of which he was a part. Svevo tried to keep hidden the defects of the characters who populated his private life but a close examination of his fiction reveals, applied in turn to the various characters, the many facets of the people around him and fit perfectly into the biographical elements that the correspondence presented.

In the second chapter, while studying the rise of the psychological novel, we found that Svevo and his narrative came to maturation at the point when the ancient philosophical moralizing and the mystical search for perfection was substituted by man's more practical need to understand the natural motives which spring from each individual's personality and allow him to cope with the tangible realities of his world.

The fragmentation experienced and expressed in all fields of art comes to a resolution with the evolution of psychological findings as seen through Svevo's intuition and its application in his fiction. In examining expressionism we found parallels between Svevo's literary description and post-expressionist paintings. Thus, Svevo's

work well represents the cultural and emotional evolution of the times.

In spite of his far from admirable syntactical language (a consequence of his native Triestine dialect), and a limited capacity to express himself in proper Italian, Svevo demonstrated a natural ability to reveal in depth many elements of the human psyche; sometimes his literary inadequacy worked to his advantage. He used a fragmentary language, which seemed not yet edited by a conscious process, to suggest subconscious awareness of his characters.

Rendered through a very personal application of the inner monologue Svevo applied to his novels a concept of time which had come to a psychological application with the writings of James and Bergson.

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