

Abstract

The Ending and the Ambiguity as the Literary Strategy in Italo Svevo's novel

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The aim of this thesis is to study the ambiguity in Italo Svevo's text, which is often referred to as a characteristic effect produced mainly by the protagonist's personality in the narration. The ambiguity is the consequence of the text's unclear intention: it is arisen on one hand from the ambivalence and the duplicity of the protagonist's humour and irony, on the other with the intervention of the narrator, who, with it is critical and ironical view, gives the text still more duplicative effect. These multiple effects result in a high expansion of the possibilities of interpretation of the text. At the same time, the narrator asks the readers to be actively involved in the process of text interpretation, thus betraying the narration's reliability.

As a tendency in the study of Svevo's ambiguity, scholars often limited their analysis to the communicative aspect in the interpretation between the author and the readers, or the discussion on the ambivalency and the irony in the text, confronted mostly with the triestine author's masterpiece, *The Confessions of Zeno/Zeno's Conscience* (1923). The analysis could be limited only to this work, for the most famous among Svevo's texts have in common autobiographical facts in the settings of protagonists and scenes, and this very one masterpiece it is believed to show its features in the most concentrated and perfected way. As the narrator is the main character and the focus is mainly internal, the narration appears chiefly inner monological, a dominant to the text.

But, taking in consideration only the original aspects of Svevo's narrative technique – the ironical protagonists and the unreliable narrator - it would deprive the other options of analysis which contribute to form the ambiguity, and would suggest that the ambiguity is caused only by such particular aspects. Indeed, the ambiguity of intention is caused, with a collaboration of the narrator, by the duplicity of meanings created by the ironical character in his relations with other characters, and it is a part of the whole ambiguity which the text produces, because in other part of the text it can be found in different forms. For this reason, it would be necessary to pay attention to some other characteristics of Svevo's text, to be able to rethink this process of creation of ambiguity, which will provide a complementary fact to the analysis. This study will therefore focus on the endings of the works, assuming that toward the conclusion of the story it is

possible to trace a visually vanishing image, which would contribute to increase the ambiguity between the protagonist and the narrator. This study looks into the relation between the ending and the ambiguity produced as what has been called the text's unclear intention.

The vanishing image is created often by characters' fading away: it is accompanied with the image of moving away or someone's death followed by a fumelike or foggy description which covers the visibility. In order to analyze the relation between the ambiguity and the ending, this study observes how the option of ending creates the vanishing image by its characters and going-away image. At the same time it takes a look into the author's way of thinking to see the connection among them. The subjects of this study are principally three works: *A Life* (1892), *As a Man Grows Older* (1898) and *Confessions of Zeno/Zeno's Conscience* (1923). Moreover we can include two stories in which this fading-away images appears in a peculiar way: *A Perfect Hoax* (1926) and *Short Sentimental Journey* (1928).

The study starts with the analysis of the relations between characters, considering the relations by four characters as Svevo's quartette. The analysis is based on the Girard's triangular desire, where the quartette eliminates one person to realize its triangle to put the character in a direct relation to his desire. That eliminating system in the relation with other characters is seen inside the protagonist as the inner activity to achieve his desire, which appears as "sincerity" in the text. The sincerity as a concept is constructed by a duplicity of self: the personal self and the social self. When these two selves matches, the protagonist's sincerity appears in the text. The moment of sincerity in the narration corresponds thus to the state of the protagonist, a state which is faithful to self desire. The other characters of the quartette are described distant from the protagonist and some are destined to fade away in the story, because they are the subject of hero's desire. By fading away they preserve the desire. The vanishing image is created by the setting of the quartette with its eliminating system to describe the way the protagonist can maintain his desire.

As reading forward to the ending, the narrator makes the reader follow the protagonist who leads the problems of subjectivity that contains the duplicity of self. This duplicity is also sensed as a border inside the protagonist, in the sense that he has two kind of selves. Reading the vanishing image in the context of Trieste, the city which is also the background of the story and of the author, the tendency to sense distance is perceived as a double sense of belonging, one to the present location Trieste and another to the place of origin. The city itself has ethnic and cultural diversity. Every ethnic group belongs to the present city and to the original place from which the group was immigrated in the past. Simultaneously, in the same ethnic group there is a mental division that comes from the fact that they cannot sense in the same way their original place, a place which is different from the place they are living in now. Thus in the city there is the duplicated double sense of belonging, centrifugal and centripetal. A subject

in the present place always results in being in a continuous process of self defining. To define self, the inner border of duplicity, is what the narrator wants the readers to be aware of.

For this reason, the narrator uses the technique of "unreliably unreliable narratore" to make the reader conscious of the present, the only time that human being can have, by involving the readers in the motion of playing duplicities, with its unreliable narration which make them sceptical and critical to the text. By lasting critical attitude toward the text, with the unreliable, irresponsible, temporary, incomplete and unclear narration, Svevo makes the reader conscious of the present. That is his literal strategy of the ambiguity to put the readers in active participation to the hermeneutical process.