

Zeno's Unstable Legacy: Case-Writing and the Logic of Transference in Giuseppe Berto and Goliarda Sapienza

In this article I will explore some examples of the complex narrative influence of Italo Svevo's fictionalized account of a course of psychoanalytical treatment in *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923) on Giuseppe Berto's *Il male oscuro* (1964) and Goliarda Sapienza's *Il filo di mezzogiorno* (1969). Specifically, my interest is in exploring how in these three cases, patient and analyst (author and author, and then also author and reader) are bound up in a kinetic process of transference and counter-transference, and work together within such a process to construct a form of 'curative' narrative, rather than a cure *per se*. In regard to the two later texts, I would also like to discuss what happens when, as with *La coscienza di Zeno*, the model for such 'curative' narratives re-enacts defence mechanisms which render it unstable in its insincerity.

Svevo was himself, of course, famously ambivalent towards psychoanalysis as therapy, making light of both his familiarity with Freud's scientific practice and texts as well as the profundity of influence they may have had on his own work.¹ But he was also very aware of great literary potential of psychoanalysis ('Ma quale scrittore potrebbe rinunciare di pensare almeno la psicanalisi?' 2004b, 897), as well as – conversely – of the danger he perceived it might pose to the artist's creativity. 'Come cura a me non importava. Io ero sano o almeno amavo tanto la mia malattia (se c'è) da preservarmela con intero lo spirito di autodifesa.' (2004b, 897) This self-defensive attitude was compounded by the wounded reaction he had to the rejection of his work by analysts such as Edoardo Weiss ('In allora mi dolse [...] Ora non mi duole più' 2004b, 895), leading to a revealing hostility towards Freud's writings, which: 'fu interpretata da un Freudiano cui mi confidai come un colpo di denti dato all'animale primitivo che c'è anche in me per proteggere la propria malattia.' (2004b, 897-98)

This defensive ambivalence, is, of course, also repeated and re-enacted within *La coscienza di Zeno*. Zeno not only dismisses the efficacy of psychoanalysis (terming it a 'sciocca illusione, un trucco buono per commovere qualche vecchia donna isterica,' 2004a, 1049) and the theories of his own analyst – who diagnoses him with an Oedipal complex – but also any claims that it is psychoanalysis that has 'cured' him ('Fu il mio commercio che mi guarì e voglio che il dottor S. lo sappia.' 2004a, 1082). So in order to maintain his beloved 'illness', Zeno must set about curing himself of the cure already carried out ('sono intento a guarire della cura', 2004a, 1064) and the setting for that recovery is to be located precisely in the narrative we have in front of us. 'Ma ora mi trovo squilibrato e malato più che mai e, scrivendo, credo che mi netterò più facilmente del male che la cura m'ha fatto.' (2004a, 1048). For just as Svevo's own resistance to analysis and to a deeper form of self-knowledge was intimately tied up with the fear that the discovery of the self implicated within a so-called 'cure' would lead to a lack of artistic inspiration and a subsequent inability to write, so Zeno's account of such an analysis within *La*

¹ 'Io con la psicanalisi non c'entro e ve ne darò la prova.' Here Svevo refers to the fact that *Senilità* was published in 1898 when Freud 'non esisteva o in quanto esisteva si chiamava Charcot', and goes on to admit to only 'due o tre idee' in *La coscienza di Zeno* being taken from Freud (Svevo 2004b, 894).

coscienza di Zeno constitutes, in Lavagetto's words, a 'grande difesa preliminare' and the manuscript itself is specifically constructed around a 'cristallizzazione delle resistenze' (2004, lxxviii).

Indeed, *La coscienza di Zeno* is the perfect embodiment of a typical patient narrative described as consisting of 'gaps, memory lapses, inexplicable contradictions and screen memories concealing repressed memories' (Brooks 1994, 47). But it is fundamental to remember that it retains such characteristics precisely because it is the tale of an aborted analysis and an unresolved negative transference, as we can see in Zeno's disdainful description of dottor S.: 'come potevo sopportare la compagnia di quell'uomo ridicolo, con quel suo occhio che vuole essere scrutatore e quella sua presunzione che gli permette di aggruppare tutti i fenomeni di questo mondo intorno alla sua grande, nuova teoria?' (Svevo 2004a, 1049). The gaps and inconsistencies in the narrative, which ought to have been interpreted and resolved through the intervention of the analyst through the dialectic process of transference, have not – as they should have – been recomposed, re-ordered, and given significance, *except by the person who is writing them*. Thus Zeno is free to create and interpret images of his own past, to truncate at will, repeating, correcting and crystallizing his life into written form, and taking on the analyst's task – defined as 'supplementing', 'combining' and even 'constructing' memory traces in order to produce a credible story.² Hence, the formation of a *coherent* (if not accurate) narrative substitutes the achievement of a 'cure', and Zeno's narrative itself is revealed to be inscrutable and even insincere in its lonely subjectivity, much in the mode of the opacity of the final 'forma di nebulosa' (Svevo 2004a, 1085).

Since the premature and antagonistic termination of Zeno's analysis thus leads to a certain narrative *instability*, what kinds of repetitions, substitutions and constructions will be (re-)enacted in texts which seem to take *La coscienza di Zeno* as a literary model? To borrow Arthur W. Frank's words: 'Narrative is always one way to *finish* a suffering that remains an unfinished project' (2002: 166, my emphasis). And it seems to me that based on the logic of transference and counter-transference, both *Il male oscuro* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* are also attempts to suture up the gaps in personal narratives in order to construct coherent (not *true*) meaning, and to write illness in order to evade a real cure.

Freud judges transference to be not only fundamental to the analytical process (stating that if there is no inclination to transference, there is no possibility of influencing the patient by psychological means), but also to be a universal phenomenon of the human mind, dominating the whole of each person's relations to his human environment (Freud 1925, 42). Within the analysis, the affective bond of transference initially replaces the patient's desire to be cured, but when it has become so intense that it falls into either passion or hostility, it becomes the principle tool of resistance. It is then that the transference becomes *performative*. 'In (transference) the patient produces before us with plastic clarity an important part of his life-story, of which he would otherwise have probably given us only an insufficient account. He acts it before us, as it were, instead of reporting it to us.' (Freud 1940, 175) The patient himself is induced to perform active psychical work, convinced by the analyst that he is 're-experiencing

² 'Quite often we do not succeed in bringing the patient to recollect what has been repressed. Instead of that, if the analysis is carried out correctly, we produce in him an assured conviction of the truth of the construction which achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory.' (Freud 1937, 265)

emotional relations which had their origin in his earliest object-attachments during the repressed past of childhood. In this way the transference is changed from the strongest weapon of the resistance into the best instrument of the analytic treatment.’ (Freud 1925, 43)

However, it is in the later *Constructions in Analysis* that the significance of transference for narrative formation becomes even more evident. For Freud states that the transference creates an intermediate region (*Zwischenreich*) of invention between illness and real life and it is within this transference space between analysand and analyst that the patient’s life-story is re-formed in symbolic or textual form, *through signs*; characterized by substitution and shaped through interpretation:

In other words, the transference is the realm of the “as-if”, one in which the history of the past, its dramatis personae and emotional conflicts, becomes invested in a special kind of present, one that favors representation and symbolic replay of the past, and that should lend itself to its eventual revision through the listener’s “interventions”. (Brooks 1994, 53)

Thus, in terms of transference, the dimension of dialogue is of utmost importance because the dialogic figure is necessary for the subject to be able to form new constructions and supplements, through the interpretation of the other, ultimately enabling her to re-create a new personal history.

Unlike Svevo, both Berto and Sapienza are recording genuine accounts of analysis undertaken in response to real psychological disorders. Indeed, suffering from increasingly severe neurotic anxiety through the 1950s, and finding himself unable to complete further novels (as Piancastelli says, ‘tanto da non riuscire più a capire se non scriveva perché era ammalato o se si era ammalato perché non scriveva’ 1972, 66), Berto made recourse to psychoanalysis in 1959, remaining in treatment for two years. He chose psychoanalysis for two, revealing, reasons: because of his ‘speranze di benefici intellettuali’ and his ‘segreto bisogno di sostituire in qualche modo il padre morto’ (Berto 1998, 6). Indeed, this second desire saw him develop such a strong affective attachment to his analyst (whom he stated he loved ‘incondizionatamente,’ Berto 1998, 9) that he was almost unable, or at least unwilling, to end the cure and face life without him. ‘Ma Berto è stato capace di liberarsi della tortuosità di questa situazione riprendendo la penna in mano,’ (Pullini 1991, 27-28) and on the suggestion of his analyst wrote the first draft of *Il male oscuro* in just two months after the termination of his treatment, publishing it after quite extensive revisions in 1964. In the appendix to the novel he writes:

In quest’anno 1964 compio cinquant’anni. Ho un sacco di fobie: non viaggio in treno né in aereo né in nave, non salgo oltre il quarto piano delle case, non mi chiudo nelle sale da concerto, non vado ai funerali, non m’intaso con la macchina nelle strade del centro, non mangio frutta né verdura, non saluto le persone antipatiche: potrei continuare per un pezzo. Sono quindi ancora malato e credo che non guarirò mai. Però sono guarito per quel tanto che volevo disperatamente guarire, ossia non ho più paura di scrivere. (Berto 1998, 419-20)

Sapienza suffered from debilitating depression, and after a failed suicide attempt was admitted to a Roman clinic where she was subjected to an intensive treatment of electric shocks (which Providenti terms with sinister foresight, a ‘terapia di annientamento’ 2010, 151), that lead her to a near-total temporary amnesia. She was discharged from the clinic by a young therapist, Ignazio Majore, who undertook to rebuild her memory through a course of psychoanalysis, which lasted from 1962-65. The treatment was definitively interrupted in dramatic fashion when, following an intense case of transference which saw Sapienza fall passionately in love with Majore, the analyst permanently gave up his clinical position and broke off relations with all his patients still in cure. ‘In futuro,’ says Providenti, ‘trovando la cosa divertente, Goliarda avrebbe raccontato alle amiche di aver fatto impazzire il suo psicoanalista.’ (2010, 156) Yet her last and most serious suicide attempt was following her analyst’s abandonment, and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* ends with the following admonition:

Ogni individuo ha il suo segreto... non violate questo segreto, non lo sezionate, non lo catalogate per vostra tranquillità, per paura di percepire il profumo del vostro segreto sconosciuto e insondabile a voi stessi [...] È per questo che ho scritto, per chiedere a voi a ridarmi questo diritto [al mio segreto]. (Sapienza 2003, 185)

So – similarly to Zeno – despite a lack of ‘cure’ in both cases, each author attempts to recover and reconstruct the past through the production of narrative, constructing a plot that gives order and sense to an untidy case history. This appears to be an example of what John S. Rickard terms a ‘willingness to settle for a coherent narrative, an incomplete, but not false, image of the universe’ in a dynamic where:

[P]lot and truth have become part of the transference – the negotiation of meaning between the analysand and the analyst, between the text and the reader, between one character and another – [is] an attempt to *construct* a pragmatic, rather than empirical truth. (Rickard 1998, 7)

Thus we can borrow Schuyler W. Henderson’s term ‘resistant texts’ to define both *Il male oscuro* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno* – since both appear to be narratives in which ‘denial and defense mechanisms enact phenotypes of fractured selves and engage in distorting reality to protect themselves from disturbing knowledge of own illness’ (2008, 261). Let us now examine some specific examples of such mechanisms and strategies which not only display these effects of an unresolved *psychoanalytic* transference in both cases, but also – in their similarity to parallel Svevian tropes, point to a *literary* transference whose model is precisely the narrative instability of *La coscienza di Zeno*.

Zeno’s narrative is an exemplary example of an account which, similarly to Freud’s theories in ‘Constructions in Analysis’ (1937), relies on force of conviction, rather than autobiographical truth, for its power and validity. Indeed, the protagonist’s confession that his ‘memories’ are actually inventions (‘[a] forza di desiderio, io proiettai le immagini, che non c’erano che nel mio cervello, nello spazio in cui guardavo,’ (Svevo 2004a, 1051) and his justification of them as ‘creazione’, not ‘menzogna’ reminds us of Freud’s insistence on active creation and construction (‘reconstructing in such a way that the *re-* quietly drops out’, Brooks 1998, 59) as a

wholly justifiable and integral aspect of the transference method. This process in which reconstruction moves from the passive to the active can even clearly be seen in Svevo's own introjection of Zeno's memories into his own past:

Camminavo come lui, come lui fumavo, e cacciavo nel mio passato tutte le sue avventure che possono somigliare alle mie solo perché *la rievocazione di una propria avventura è una ricostruzione che facilmente diventa una costruzione nuova del tutto quando si riesce a porla in un'atmosfera nuova.* (Svevo 1965, 144, my emphasis)

Indeed, the only confirmation that the constructions of the analyst have been correct lies in its ability to create further patterns, and 'in the *production of more story*,' (Brooks 1998, 57) something which again is evident in the continual rewriting of Zeno's autobiography in the so-called 'continuazioni' to *La coscienza*, where Svevo celebrates the process of rewriting in which 'la propria vita risulterà più chiara o più oscura ma si ripeterà, si correggerà, si cristallizzerà.' (2004a, 1116) And life again imitates art in Svevo's rewriting of his own autobiographical writings, as the first publisher of the *Profilo autobiografico*, Giuseppe Morreale explains. Svevo had given the task of writing the piece to Giulio Cesari, who completed and passed it back for Svevo to type up. 'Ma accintosi alla ricopiatura, e come procedeva nell'opera, tanto mutò, coverse, rettificò, aggiunse, da trasformare le note del Cesari in un'opera nuova, originale, bellissima: l'autobiografia di Italo Svevo.'³ The various autobiographical writings of Ettore Schmitz-Italo Svevo-Zeno Cosini thus become examples of Freud's revised editions, reprints and facsimiles, reconstructions that are the product of a dynamic and continual process of self-creation. 'The transference actualizes the past in symbolic forms so that it can be repeated, replayed, worked through to another outcome, in a changed personal history.' (Freeman 2002, 10)

Berto's transformation of *Il male oscuro* from autobiographical patient narrative to a literary account through the process of extensive pre-publication revisions mentioned above has similar ramifications. As Michael Gazzaniga says about the brain's repeated tendency to distort and embellish recollections of the past: '[t]he story remembered on one day becomes part of the memory for the next time it is told. Soon begins a rich narrative about past events. The narrative most likely becomes less accurate and much more elaborate in its detail.' (1998, 148) Berto himself admitted that not all of what is written in the manuscript is even true, as he saw construction become a 'radical' activity. 'È chiaro che vi sono parti vere e parti inventate (ma fino a che punto?) e neppure Berto è in grado di stabilire i limiti. "Non saprei dirlo con precisione," disse a Giulio Nascimbeni, "Ho confuso un po' tutto. Quasi non ricordo le parti che ho inventato."⁴

Indeed, this reworking had effects on both the style and the content of the novel. Stylistically, it seemed to privilege narrative clarity over Berto's professed adherence to a free association style, mimicking the discourse of analytic sessions. Indeed, the language, form and structure of *Il male oscuro* is not as spontaneous as it may first appear. True, the punctuation is all but completely lacking in the text ('[v]ia

³ Cit. Bertoni, C. 2004, 1451. Similarly, *Soggiorno londinese* has been described as an 'ambiguo gioco di reticenze, ripensamenti, smentite, ironie e ritrosie, compiacimenti e timidezze, pudori autentici e artefatti narcisismi.' Bertoni F. 2004, 1683.

⁴ Piancastelli 1972, 66. On the process of narrative selection, E. E. Sampson has said: 'That selection is never an entirely personal, private act that is mine alone. I make my selections with you, my addressee, in mind, and once I have made my selection, I am then swept up into a story that is never entirely mine.' Cit. Patterson 2002, 5.

le virgole!’ as C.E. Gadda puts it in the preface to the text, Berto 1998, vi), but in the revisionary process it has become syntactically and rhythmically clear to read. Interestingly, in an interview with Claudio Toscani, Berto himself spoke of this textual clarity as: ‘*forse anche il mio modo di resistere all’analisi*’.⁵ And similarly, in terms of content, Berto also seems to have enacted some form of self-censorship: ‘Poi, si capisce, lavorai a lungo sulla prima stesura, mettendo un po’ d’ordine in quelle associazioni che m’erano venute fuori magari *troppo libere*’ (Cit. Piancastelli 1972, 9, my emphasis). Which begs the question: too free in what sense – not literary enough? Or too close to a truth uncomfortable to bear and impossible to write? Because the issue here, as also with Zeno (and Sapienza, as we will go on to see), is that the author takes on both roles, of patient *and* analyst (‘sono insieme il paziente che dipana il suo (relativamente) libero filo e l’analista che cerca di comporlo in un ordinata interpretazione’ cit. Piancastelli 1972, 82), and in avoiding the external dialogic kinesis necessary for a successful transference working-through, constructs an opaque text which in a dialectic of diffidence and resistance repeats, rather than resolving, the existing neurosis.

Another defensive strategy that is reminiscent of Zeno in *Il male oscuro* is that of irony. Brian Moloney has identified three types of irony within *La coscienza* (the irony of events mysteriously turning out for the best, Zeno’s self-deprecating irony which absolves him from blame, and the irony of his own self-betrayal, 1972, 311-12), all of which work to preserve ‘deniability’ and maintain a character of ambiguity and doubleness in the narrative (Cf. Stringfellow 1994, 9-14). But irony also makes telling a difficult account easier by the very nature of its mechanism, which enables the person narrating ‘to readily evade the difficulties of direct expression,’ (Freud 1905, 174) rejecting the claims of reality, and reacting to protect and console the ego. Because in using irony, Berto is not giving us the simple account of a course of psychoanalytic therapy. He is also producing a self-reflexive parody of that same experience, something which surely must be seen as the product of a certain resistance, much as it was in *La coscienza di Zeno*. He mocks his own indecision about whether or not to take off his shoes as he lies on the couch (‘il primo dilemma della cura’, Berto 1998, 287), his analyst’s southern accent,⁶ and even describes the ‘verve’ he feels he must employ when talking of his neurosis with him: ‘gli raccontai della morte di mio padre e della grande carognata che avevo fatto nel lasciarlo solo al momento del trapasso e naturalmente anche questo cercavo di raccontarglielo per quanto possibile con un certo brio’ (Berto 1998, 285). In this way, Berto seeks to hide his own fear by making light both of his own neurosis and of the method he has chosen to cure it precisely through the mechanism of irony, whose ‘fending off of the possibility of suffering places it among the great series of methods which the human mind has constructed in order to evade the compulsion to suffer’ (Freud 1927, 163). Because, as Freud states: ‘humour is not resigned, it is *rebellious*. (1927, 163)

But the process of ironic expression is (ironically) one which reveals the depth of Berto’s neurosis in relation to his father, and goes as far as reproducing it. As Freud explains, the humorist who employs irony to ward off suffering has assimilated the parental agency of the father by displacing the psychical accent from the ego to the superego – ‘treating himself like a child and at the same time playing the part of a

⁵ Cit. Piancastelli 1972, 81, my emphasis. Within the narrative, Berto also refers to his ‘abituale preoccupazione di dare un ordine rigoroso ai pensieri,’ (1998, 8) even in analytic sessions themselves.

⁶ ‘[...] e inoltre questo qui solo per dirmi si accomodi tira fuori un bell’accento meridionale Dio santo sta’ a vedere che costui è terrone e io non sono preparato a un terrone’, Berto 1998, 280.

superior adult towards that child' (Freud 1927, 164). Indeed, such episodes of ironic introjection abound in the text:

[M]a perché non mi liberano da questi dolori padre mio perché non allontanano da me questo calice, dico padre che sei nei cieli e non tu che stai nella tua cassa di noce che m'è costato invano un occhio della testa, vedi quanto sei entrato in me padre terreno se penso ai quattrini anche nei limiti estremi dell'agonia. (Berto 1998, 121)

And within them, ironic humour seems to constitute, in Monterosso's words, a '*meccanismo di difesa* che ha contribuito a salvare Berto da una definitiva catastrofe' (1977, 65).

In the case of *Il filo di mezzogiorno*, we can identify another typical Svevian defence mechanism in the suggestion that since the account is not given in dialect, it cannot be either complete or sincere. As Zeno exclaims:

Una confessione in iscritto è sempre menzogna. Con ogni nostra parola toscana noi mentiamo! Se egli sapesse come raccontiamo con predilezione tutte le cose per le quali abbiamo pronta la frase e come evitiamo quelle che ci obbligherebbero di ricorrere al vocabolario! È proprio così che scegliamo dalla nostra vita gli episodi da notarsi. Si capisce che la nostra vita avrebbe tutt'altro aspetto se fosse detta nel nostro dialetto. (Svevo 2004a, 1050)

Similarly, despite both patient and analyst being Sicilian, analytic sessions in *Il filo di mezzogiorno* are rigorously carried out in Italian, something which at times seems to affect Sapienza's potential for self-expression, a difficulty she re-enacts by placing her fingers into the analyst's mouth, leading him to protest "Così mi sembra di balbettare".⁷ Indeed, the description of their first meeting becomes fused in her mind with the linguistic confusion of her entrance exam to the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Rome, and aware and ashamed of a Sicilian accent that she has to suppress in order to gain entry, she becomes unable to speak: 'Aspettavo una risposta, ma non potevo ringraziare. La "e" di *sono contenta* è aperta o chiusa? Potrei dire che sono emozionata, ma le "o" di *sono emozionata* erano chiuse o aperte? Non devo aprire bocca.' (Sapienza 2003, 23) The whole of this chapter, dedicated to the painful and humiliating memories of trying to lose her Sicilian accent, seem to be a paradigm of the difficulty of self-expression in Italian during her analysis in its constant shifts between past and present ('Non dovevo parlare [...] Non devo parlare,' Sapienza 2003, 23). This linguistic tension of not carrying out the analysis in their 'mother' tongue is repeatedly referenced throughout the text, leading to the inference that

⁷ Sapienza 2003, 66. It is evidently problematic to term Sicilian as Sapienza's 'mother tongue', as her mother, Maria Giudice, was actually from the heart of Lombardy, but Sicilian was undoubtedly the language of her childhood. Greenson has written on how breastfeeding has a 'decisive influence' on the child's relationship to the mother tongue (1950, 42), and interestingly, Sapienza describes in detail how as an infant she was fed Swiss formula milk, not even by her mother, but by her older half-brother (2003, 67), which emotionally may posit Sicilian closer to a perceived 'mother' tongue position. It is precisely the act of placing her fingers into the analyst's mouth which alerts him to her artificial feeding as an infant, and exposes her ambiguous and often conflictual, competitive relationship with her mother.

Sapienza's expression remains 'macchinale' (2003: 23), perfectly pronounced in its resistance.

For Daniel Gunn has written on the avoidance of the mother tongue as a *strategy* which must be enacted since that language 'represents the site of maximum desire, and therefore maximum danger and suffering' (1988, 99). By expressing herself in Italian, therefore, Sapienza takes advantage of the opportunity to build up a new defensive system against her past infantile life and the trauma of unresolved conflicts. As Ralph Greenson puts it: '[a] new language offers an opportunity for the establishment of a new self-portrait.'⁸

And such resistances are also enacted in the resolution of each narrative, where an ambiguous, ambivalent attitude towards both analysis and its potential to cure is embodied in respective retreat of the authors from reality into the safe haven of the 'curative' text. Sapienza substitutes the missing analyst, who had functioned as a 'schemo bianco' (Sapienza 2003, 86) on which to project memories and emotions, with the *text* itself, locus not only of past faces, but of present illness: 'Ma ti dico: se siamo morbosi, malati, pazzi, a noi va bene così. Lasciateci la nostra pazzia e la nostra memoria: lasciateci la nostra memoria e i nostri morti. I morti e i pazzi sono la nostra protezione.' (Sapienza 2003, 60) But the lack of analyst also signifies a protection (and retention) of the neurosis and the silent reader cannot fulfill the necessary dialogic function after the analyst's exit from the text, leading to a narrative which concludes with an appellation to the audience characterized by its own fragmentation.

E così per avere il coraggio di aprire quella cassapanca piena di cadaveri e di vivi a pezzi mi rivolsi a voi e... Cari lettori, non è per importunarvi... scrissi a voi ancora assenti ma presenti [...] dovevo ritrovare mio padre, mia madre, Nunzio, Nica, i miei fratelli, le mie sorelle, dovevo ritrovarli e ricostruirli in una vita loro così che nessuno avrebbe più potuto... (Sapienza 2003, 176)

Hence, following the conclusion of the analysis and in the closure of the text, Sapienza's neurosis is left exposed and uncured, leaving her painfully vulnerable: she describes her body as being 'senza pelle' (Sapienza 2003, 178), and 'coi nervi e le vene scoperte' (Sapienza 2003, 179). She ends the novel prefiguring her own death in an exhortation to the reader to guard her psychical secrets which betrays the total breakdown of her faith in the so-called 'talking cure': 'non lo dite forte *la parola tradisce*' (Sapienza 2003, 186).

And after a final crisis, Berto's final trauma of the discovery of his wife's infidelity, coupled with his fear that psychoanalysis is ultimately nothing more than 'una montagna di balle' (Berto 1998, 406) leads him to retreat to the extreme rurality of the Calabrian coast (but only because he is still too 'ill' to cross the straits of Messina and go to Sicily, a land strongly associated with his father), where he lives a hermetic life, and enacts the substitution of the beloved analyst in a full identification – spiritual and physical – with his father, the root of his neurosis. 'se avrò voglia di aprire la busta con le fotografie del padre morto vedrò a quale buon punto sia giunta la rassomiglianza fisica, mentre la rassomiglianza spirituale o identificazione è

⁸ Greenson 1950, 38. Similarly, Sapienza's initial mistrust of the analyst's motivations for trying to persuade her to speak ('Eh! Lo credo bene che gli piace quando parlo! Devo diffidare. Chissà cosa pretende che io spifferi. Ma se sto zitta, si insospettisce: l'unica cosa è parlare di cose frivole.' Sapienza 2003, 32) leads her to employ her training as an actress in order to hide her true self: 'A furia di imparare a pappagallo tutti quei discorsi, anche se non sei molto intelligente o spiritosa, *qualche briciola degli altri ti resta sulla lingua, e la puoi far passare per tua.*' *Ibid.*, 32, my emphasis.

pressoché compiuta io credo' (Berto 1998, 410) But he is not even able to look at the photographs of his dead father, which he burns together with his unfinished manuscript as he definitively turns his back on reality and the possibility of cure. As Piancastelli asks:

Dov'è la guarigione del personaggio – fino all'ultimo gli campeggia dentro la figura del padre, e rinuncia al mondo in una fuga dalla realtà. In altri termini, psicanaliticamente Berto avrebbe operato uno "spostamento" di nevrosi ma non una guarigione. (1972, 74)

In other words, Berto dissolves his present self into his neurosis in order to reconstruct it in the text: 'ora io non ho paese ne luogo al mondo ho solo questa terra dei racconti e della mia memoria' (Berto 1998, 407). But as we have seen, the line between reconstruction and construction is consistently blurred, and as Berto himself stated in a discussion of his narrative work: '[c]i sono infatti, nella vita di un uomo e di una società, dei periodi [...] in cui il soggetto rivendica a sé il diritto di interpretare e quasi perfino a creare il reale.' (Berto 1965, 81) Because although neither *Il male oscuro* nor *Il filo di mezzogiorno* tell the story of a successful cure, in both cases we can posit that creation of narrative, 'the linking of events in an uninterrupted causal series, provides a narrative *that is itself curative*' (Brooks 1998, 49).

For indeed, in both cases it is precisely the lack of 'cure', through the non-resolution of transference in the analytic process, that has necessitated the production of such curative narratives. As Brooks explains, transference itself is an allegory of metaphor,⁹ representing a substitution, and eliciting participation. Both the later novels discussed in this article lack a true dialogic figure until they reach the reader, so on a textual level merely reproduce the initial *performative* stage of transference, which finds only partial resolution (not cure) through the production of curative narratives. Curative because as Frank states: 'narrative is a privileged means of regaining a sense that one's own life – however threatening and threatened – can still have a point. Lives are retold and refashioned in narrative, and illness made part of the *point* of one's life.' (2002, 168) Thus, to borrow Freeman's phrase: 'the poet is engaged in a process in which meaning is at once found *and* made– or, to be more explicit still, in which *meaning is found through being made*' (2002, 24). In both *Il male oscuro* and *Il filo di mezzogiorno*, taking their lead from *La coscienza di Zeno*, the connections and coherence that we find result from active authorial work, constituting the construction of a 'storyworld' (Frank 2002, 95), which reproduces the transference in a dynamic substitution for an actual cure.

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⁹ 'Freud repeatedly describes the transference as a realm of the "as-if", as an "artificial illness" and as a "new edition or reprint" of an old text.' *Ibid.*, p. 42.

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