

between narcissistic self-confidence and monastic humility. The religious view of the

tion conveying accidental perplexity and torment that Paris produces for him culmi-

novel of 1930 and the radically abstracted and idealized two volumes of *New Poems* (1934)

and to her he was even able to persuade her to send back some of her letters unopened.

Is it my German grandfather's legacy, that I do not seem more of a Latin? Yet I always cherished and even studied my language. But in my early youth I was thrown around several countries, and – my longings notwithstanding – Florence I only saw in my fifties, and Rome in my sixties . . . Thus for me the Italian idiom was stuck to what still floats in my isolated head. My fellow Triestini carry their dialect along with themselves, but that is an Italian dialect, and they are not as contaminated as I am. When I was a young man my literary friends called me the Barbarian. Hence my pseudonym, Italo Svevo.

The elderly Zeno Cosini, narrator of *La coscienza di Zeno*, apologizes to the reader of his memoir in much the same way, but this quotation is from a letter which Zeno's creator, Ettore Schmitz, sent to Attilio Frescura, the writer and journalist. Schmitz's publisher, Licio Cappelli, had asked Frescura to read and then to edit "Svevo's" manuscript. Frescura was impressed by its "irony, paradoxes, freshness of images" (his italics), but found the language hopelessly strange. After attempting a first revision he wrote to the author: "like a stubborn German, the grandfather still inhabits the grandson's pages".

Svevo gratefully accepted Frescura's advice, it seems, but just how thorough that revision was is a matter of debate, as the original manuscript of the novel has vanished. Frescura's remarks quoted above came after he had worked on the first eighty pages of *Zeno*. As he went on, however, he seems to have found it less in need of corrections, or, indeed, to have been seduced by its style. The

final product is much closer to Svevo's other writings than to the faultless Tuscan to which the writer paid lip service but which he never attempted to emulate. Uncouth as Svevo's phraseology appeared to the early critics of his novels – the critical failure of the first two discouraged him from attempting a third for a quarter of a century – it has greater appeal to our more catholic tastes. Svevo had more luck abroad, as is well known. His friend James Joyce recommended him to *italianisant* Parisian intellectuals such as Benjamin Crémieux and Valéry Larbaud, the first of whom promoted and followed the work of Paul-Henri Michel, Svevo's first French translator, with great solicitude. A German translation was just as timely, and Beatrice Stasi's introduction to her edition of the novel quotes an important letter from Piero Rismondo, who acknowledges the necessity to create "il tedesco di Svevo" ("there is Goethe's German, there is Gottfried Keller's German, &c. That means that every writer must create a new language of his own, a lan-

guage which only exists in his own work". Unlike the French and the German, no English version really attempted to achieve an equivalent of Svevo's prose until, recently (2001), William Weaver's for Everyman.

Svevo died suddenly in 1928, shortly after receiving Rismondo's letter quoted above, and he did not see the complete German edition of *Zeno* nor was he able to supervise the first Italian reprint of the novel, which came out in 1930. This was undertaken by a new publisher, Giuseppe Morreale, who simply reproduced Cappelli's first edition of 1923. Subsequent publishers like Dall'Oglio (1938) did the same, although silently correcting many misprints and, increasingly, what seemed inaccuracies Svevo himself would have emended. The impetus for a critical edition sprang from the necessity to distinguish between the printer's errors and the writer's characteristic "oddities", which publishers likewise felt tempted to rectify. This is tricky ground, and Beatrice Stasi argues that some apparent contradictions in the text may be intentional as due to Zeno's mendacity – the man does not trust the psychoanalyst at whose bidding he is writing his recollections, and so enjoys lying to him. Thus no fewer than five different critical editions of *La coscienza di Zeno* followed Bruno Maier's seminal one of 1985. Stasi's is the sixth, and it is part of a planned national edition of Svevo's work in nine volumes. It offers readings as close to

Careful spelling

MASOLINO D'AMICO

Italo Svevo

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Edited by Beatrice Stasi

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Svevo's presumed intentions as we are ever likely to get. Misprints are corrected, but after balancing each one of them against Svevo's practice elsewhere, and only if the case is pronounced unobjectionable. Svevo's peculiar spelling of certain words (for instance, the plural of words ending in -ia: "grunzie" instead of "grunzie") is often retained after checking it against what was considered acceptable in Svevo's times, and indeed appeared in Policarpo Petrocchi's Italian dictionary of 1887-91, which Svevo knew and quoted admiringly. Interpretations of controversial passages are backed, in a few cases, by decisions taken by either the French or the German translator, who submitted questions to the author – to which they received answers.

But it is reassuring news that the text in this handsome volume is close to the familiar one. Restored paintings often reveal new and unsuspected beauties, but also tend to upset their staunchest admirers. There is no such danger in this case: Svevo's voice is still there, as genial and as sarcastic as ever.

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