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"The Rest is Silence.." Hamlet's Death, Wittgenstein and the Working of "Too-Muchness".
Toward a Revised Model of Text-Reading.

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Abstract

If Santner's reading of Schmitt's interpretation of Hamlet holds, then, using Brooks's theory of the plot, we may support an ontological model of texts, applicable to the Later Wittgenstein and which ostensibly places the *locus* of his perduring relevance outside of the author into the same "device of too-muchness" of Hamlet.

1. Introduction

In his work on the People's two Bodies, Eric Santner [1] points to Schmitt's interpretation of Hamlet [2] to develop, after Turk [3], the concept of *intrusion* (Einbruch) or "break-in". Such concept is introduced with reference to the irruption of history into the theatical space of the artwork in a special way, different from mere *allusion* or from explicit reference in the form of *mirroring*.

An intrusion demands serious consideration because it touches on what Schmitt refers to as an *Ernstfall*, a serious or critical situation demanding decisive action without, however, providing the coordinates for such action. Such would be the possibility to identify Hamlet with King James I. Since no *allusion* is done in the drama to the King, neither He becomes a matter of representation, this possible identification can only represents an *intrusion* into the play, that makes the true "dream work" of the aesthetic realm get mobilized.

Our work focuses on the fact that Schmitt – whatever one may think of his interpretation of Hamlet – in detecting the presence of James I as the central figure of the play, by way of symptomatic distortions in the drama, already emphasised by Eliot [4], points at the "end of the tragedy", which is repoduced in Appendix 1.

In this final Hamlet the hero gives his dying voice to Fortinbras as a transmission of royal legitimacy that really took place in 1603, when Elizabeth gave her dying voice to the election of James. So the most famous last words of world literature are:

"*tell him (Fortinbras) …which have solicited – the rest is silence*".

Our aim is then to highlight the complete structural equivalence between this outstandingly known piece of literature and the end of the *Tractatus*[5].

The structure of it is precisely the definition of the world as the totality of what it happens, with the famous conclusion that :

"*What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.*"

Horatio can tell Fortinbras just what it happened, and the rest is silence. All the folly of Hamlet, all that is passed in his mind, all the secrets of Ophelia's despised love, all the mysteries of the court, and the intricancies of Hamlet's mother involvement or not in his father's murder, all this is silence. Horatio, as we, cannot

speak about it and it must pass over in silence.

What is then the stance of Wittgenstein ? What is the stuff of the perduring myth of the Later Wittgenstein made of ? And may we really maintain and grasp the literal parallel of these two texts ending both with the word "silence" ?

And, finally, supposing that we can, what the meaning of this all could be ?

2. Related Works and Method

Our method is related as well to "close reading"[6] as to the way of interpreting texts derived from Peter Brooks [7]. In particular this method has received a new formulation and new applications in Agamben's "The end of the poem" [8].

According to Brooks it is the end of a work of art which reveals the meaning of it through an investigation of the narrative plotting which implies its end as necessary.

In both cases analyzed here we face a similar narrative structure of the plot:

[world of events : speakability] – [world beyond events : un-speakability]

This structure is deeper than expected, because it is at work also in Primo Levi's accounts of the Shoah [9]. His attept having been to conclude that in really serious cases (*Ernstfallen*) it is possible only to give voice to witnesses of events, but it results impossible to produce a discourse on those events, and our aim is to relate such structure to the close analysis of the ending of Hamlet and to the Later Wittgenstein.

Of course the literature pertaining to Hamlet is so huge that it cannot even be summarised in this note, but for a a direct reference to the Oxford Companion to Shakespeare[10] for any further reading.

The same can be said also for the literature related to the Later Wittgenstein, and for his two main theories of linguistic games and of language as a form of life, and their reception in comparison with the *Tractatus* [11]–[14].

Our attempt is then to give room to the same theories of Wittgenstein, especially the theory of linguistic life-forms, applying them to the *too-machness* [1] – that which can never be fully contained – the *excess* of the two texts in comparison.

I our view it is then possible to construct an *ontological* reading of texts where rhetorical figures are the connecting devices which link them together *via* the plotting structure underlying their composition.

3. Our Model

Our model, according to the method explained in the previous section, is based on a renewal of the classical "close reading" approach as a mean to investigate texts *without any external reference* to their context, or their standard classification into varying academic fields of enquiry, such as philosophy or fiction, psycho-analysis or sociology. From this standpoint our model, as we said, is similar to an extreme version of the model developed by the Yale New Critics[15], but it is completely disconnected from its untenable commitment toward the independence of aesthetics [16].

In our model, texts may be seen as a kind of life-forms, that live and merge and reproduce themselves thanks to human agents, but independently from any consideration of intentionality of their authors. As such it is a pure *ontological* reading of texts treating them as "living" objects, though their life is evidently not based on carbonium.

Then if our model holds it follows that we must assume that the parallel between the end of the Shakesperean tragedy and the end of the *Tractatus* are too close to go

undetected, and that this proximity deserves to be explained.

Perhaps this explanation may be constructed in a kind of *diasystem* of the cultural order. We could borrow this notion from comparative linguistics [17], [18], where it became outdated, but in some field still used[19], to denote a layer behind the different observed cultural variables, and that might account for their varied appearances.

In our model, anyhow, the explanation lies in the *locus* of an *imagery of the ineffable* which trascends time and geographical location and that can be captured only through a reconsideration of the romantic aesthetics of the sublime [20].

This aesthetic is precisely devoted toward the appreciation of that which always beyond words, beyond the human capacity of expression.

The importance of Hamlet for romanticism being well esteblished[21] what we need, and must search for, is a missing link between Wittgenstein and romanticism. But this link has been convincingly given by Eldgridge [22] . His study presents an account of Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations", interpreting the text as displaying the human need to pursue an ideal of expressive freedom within the limits set by culture. The author sees Wittgenstein as a romantic protagonist pondering on the nature of intentional consciousness, and ranging over ethics, aesthetics and philosophy of mind. Leading a human life becomes a creative act, of continuously seeking to overcome both complacency and scepticism.

4. Implementation

In this section, we propose to consider the tentative hypothesis that what is seductive in the Later Wittgenstein is his romanticism as reconstructed in the previous section. This tentative hypothesis being built upon the background waves of Hamlet's last words and Eldgrige's study on Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations".

The conclusion to be derived from this hypothesis is that the contemporary audience of Wittgenstein is patently still captured in the setting of a romantic aesthetics, and that this paradigm can be thought as a perduring element in Western culture, notwithstanding any rationalist effort to exorcise it [23]. In a way the "sublime dimension", or, as we prefer to call it, the "too-muchness device" operates as a *remainder*.

Our model of close reading expressed in the previous section can so be implemented to become a tentative study of this remainder within the framework of Western rationalism and its inner impossibility.

5. Evaluation and Results

What can a theory of Wittgenstein as a romantic protagonist offer us ?

As we said the matter is that of a return of a remainder that deprives a rational discourse about it of any legitimacy.

This rather radical conclusion can be tested in different domains.

5.1 The *ironic* nature of the text

In detail we can now see how much, and to what extent, the very text of the *Tractatus* seem designed to undermine its own premises [12], [24].

This is even blatantly asserted by the Author in proposition 6.54:

> "*My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless*"

This is of course a complete *irony* displayed by an author who at the end deprives his text of any validity, including its own conclusion. The *recursive* nature of

this irony can hardly being dismissed, since recursiveness was certainly a matter mastered by Wittgenstein.

What, then, does this ironic ending mean? The rest of the proposition is famously alluding to the "ladder"[14] : when one has used the senseless propositions of the book as steps, to climb up beyond them, he must – so to speak – throw away the ladder after he as climbed up it.

Here the language from ironic becomes openly metaphorical, which implies that the text can be appraised only *via* literary categories, undermining its own attempt to produce a *logical* order of the world of events.

Besides, the language of the ladder is also patently a language of *initiation*. He who must acend toward a higher degree must throw away the ladder which he climbed up it.

Once again, according to our model, we should not look for the intentionality of the author, but for the devices of the text itself *and* the effect on its audience as the *locus* in which its fascination is produced. But all this can't bring us but to the conclusion that what operates as the production of meaning in the Tractatus is the same device which, pointing to the ineffable, deprives itself of its legitimacy.

This conclusion has already been reached by other cited authors: our specificity is to highlight that this conlcusio is to be seen as the result of the working of the hidden remainder of the too-muchness device: an *objective refoulé* surfacing in Wittgenstein's text as its own semantic excess producing its fascination. In a sense, here, the meaning of the text is produced, ironically, by its deferment toward a dimension which by definition is beyond words.

The end of the *Tractatus*, just in its resemblance to Hamlet's death, would then become the *locus par excellence* of the emergence of inconclusiveness of all texts because of their necessarily excessive nature.

5.2 The romantic experience

At this point we could try to envisage further readings to rediscover and recentralize the problem of the aesthetic of the sublime within the framework of a wider concept of literature capable of including both the political and the philosophical domain, through the key concept of *intrusion* [3].

If we take the *Tractatus* seriously, the end of it can be seen as the emergence of an intrusion always there from the beginning and capable to surface only at the completion of the text. Its power as a remainder proved to be so great as to give birth to the configuration of a "Later Wittgenstein" as possibly distinct from a First Wittgenstein. But this way of referring to the author what can be a linguistic game of the texts is of course Un-Wittgensteinean.

On the other side in the final sentences of the *Tractatus* the author takes the lead himself:

> "*Meine Saetze…My propositions… He who understands me….*"

The impersonal composition of the preceeding propositions becomes a direct personal speech.

What kind of a fracture has occured between proposition 6.53 and proposition 6.54 ?

There is a different possibility to be considered. That he who speaks at the end is not the author but the *Tractatus*. This would be a final *allegory* in the form of a *prosopopeia* (or personification), which descends from the mode of irony and the use of the metaphor of initiation to higher degrees of knowledge.

But without plungung in this further hypothesis, that cannot be literarily excluded, the personal entrance of the author in his writing signals the *existential* dimension of the intrusion, from which we started in our introduction. Maybe here, to

paraphrase Eliot's judgement on Shakespeare [4], the author encountered something he could not shape, he could not master, leaving us not with a precise formulation but with vague, slightly frightening but seducing emotions.

From the standpoint of romantic sublime this vagueness is not to be condemned but to be appraised as the real existential embezzlement felt in the presence of the too-muchness.

This same impossibility to decide if it is the author or the text speaking at the end, is a validation of the sublime experience as unlocatable within or without the subject of its experience.

5.3 Denial and Anxiety

Our hypothesis on the structural similarity of the end of Hamlet and the *Tractatus* is reinforced, rather than challenged, by the notorious oddly negative judgement expressed by Wittgenstein on Shakespeare [25], and here reproduced in Appendix 2.

Though Schulte[26] has denied that Wittgenstein was referring to Shakespeare, but rather to himslef, the more widespread opinion remains that expressed by Steiner [27] that "a great logician and epistemologist can be a blind reader of literature" (p.126). But we do not need to recur to it if we adopt the model of the Anxiety of Influence elaborated by Bloom[28], and that we find consistent with our premises.

In this peculiar case Wittgenstein's judgement proves his interest into the Bard's works, as well as it discloses the possibility to be read as a typical expression of influence, which becomes denied at explicit level, as well as it *breaks in* into the text. The structural symilarity we have noticed would, then, represents a denial of the influence which confirms its persistence.

6. Conclusion

Our main conclusion is of a general rather than particular order, and it is that we may build a framework of understanding of Wittgenstein's perduring influence, based on the relevance of the same "device of too-muchness" of Hamlet.

We could label this operativeness as the logic of the ineffable, peculiarly assumed at an explicit level by romantic aesthetics, but still operating, though under the surface, even at the level of philosophical investigations.

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Appendixes

APPENDIX 1

Hamlet, act 5, Scene 2, 352-356

O, I die, Horatio.
The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England.
But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th' occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.

APPENDIX 2

People look at
[Shakespeare] in amazement
almost as a spectacle of
nature. They do not have
the feeling that this
brings them into contact
with a great human being.
Rather with a phenomenon.
It seems to me that
[Shakespeare's] plays are
like enormous sketches,
not paintings; they are
dashed off by one who
could, so to speak, permit
himself everything. And I
understand how one can
admire this & call it the
highest art, but I don't
like it.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*