

Becoming a person beyond the embodied narrative.

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Abstract. This paper looks at some of how people can be constitutive parts of a literary narrative. Based on the reading of the novel *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* by the Italian Luigi Pirandello, seeks to demonstrate here how the main character of the novel, Vitangelo Moscarda, emulates characteristics of a person when constituting a narrative of himself. For this, we read some passages of the narrative in first-person and associate them with the notion of "embodied narrative", while we perceive the conflict that Moscarda represents by constituting himself as a character who acquires a consciousness derived from the comprehension of the limits of the body's understanding. Moscarda believed he knew how his body was seen by the people around him, but a comment from his wife about his nose followed by recognition in the mirror of his own "deformed" image make him forced to leave behind the image he had of himself and build a new one, now with the help of a narrative of himself. We conclude our analysis by observing that the first-person narrative of Vitangelo Moscarda follows as a passage from the incomprehension of the body to the possession of a new body, which is equivalent to the possession of a new self and the process of becoming a person.

Keywords. Embodied narrative, Luigi Pirandello, Literary person, Self, Literary theory.

1. Introduction

A quick analysis of several textbooks on the study of literature and narrative exposes, in a very straightforward way, that one should not confuse the human person and the literary character ([1], [2], [3], [4]). I understand the reasons that lead to such a statement, especially the elements related to the fact that we are able to understand more deeply a literary character than a person since the character is coherently constructed, while the person does not have the constitutive obligation to be coherent. Even so, I believe that this point of view can be relativized, especially when taking the book *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (*One, No one and One Hundred Thousand*), 1926, by Luigi Pirandello [5] [6].

In a naïve way, we could ask ourselves: what do the novels talk about if not about people? Our answer would necessarily be that it is people who produce and consume novels, who internalize and "live" the stories, and who give meaning to the texts. Because they presuppose the human activities of textual creation and comprehension and cannot, therefore, exist without people, novels are privileged forms of transforming actions into discourses and discourses into actions. However, this theme is quite controversial and deserves a little deeper analysis.

To this end, in this article, I will analyse how Vitangelo Moscarda, the main character in Luigi Pirandello's novel, acquires a certain "consciousness of self" and how this consciousness relates to what Passos [7] calls the "robust inner life", which is a "prerogative of subjects we can call persons", even if these subjects are fictional.

I aim to conclude that Moscarda is a character constructed to present himself as a being who writes about the *past*, makes considerations about what he has *lived* and *felt*, and immobilizes himself in a narrative form. Moscarda is a literary character who translates the characteristics of people and fixes himself as a character, who assumes characteristics of a person and, by assuming them, uses his memories to build an image of himself that is fixed in the time and space of a narrative.

2. Methodology

2.1 The nose

In this paper, the point of view assumed starts from an analytical and methodological perspective based on: (a) the theory of the novel, and (b) the social and psychological theories of discourse and literary analysis. There is a reason for this "mixture" because my object is the person, not the person seen by

idealists or the person seen by biologists, but the person who can be read within the confines of a literary text.

In this sense, I believe that Michel Zérafra [8] is right when he states that there is a narrative structure that manifests itself linguistically in the monologues, especially in the interior monologues, which goes through the "search for a meaning and a form of the person in a world where the individual only finds signs and aspects: where he only sees contingency and organised disorder". Therefore, I see in the narrative that Vitangelo Moscarda develops within *Uno, nessuno e centomila* a textual form that presents the literary character Vitangelo Moscarda who when writing about himself does not constitute himself as a character, but *as if he were a person*.

Obviously, Vitangelo Moscarda is a fictional being, a character from a novel elaborated and published by the human being Luigi Pirandello. However, within the confines of the narrative, Vitangelo Moscarda acts not as if he were a fictional being, but by *remembering* what he has lived before and transforming these memories into an organised fiction. In this way, there is both an equality of identity and a dissociation between the self of the narrator Vitangelo Moscarda, already conscious and organiser of a coherent discourse of the *lived*, and the self of the character Vitangelo Moscarda, who does not *yet* know that he will organise what in a narrative form. The opening lines of the novel set the stage for the entire novel:

"What are you doing?" my wife asked me, as she saw me lingering, contrary to my wont, in front of the mirror.
"Nothing," I told her. "I am just having a look here, in my nose, in this nostril. It hurts me a little, when I take hold of it."
My wife smiled.
"I thought," she said, "that you were looking to see which side it hangs down the lower."
I whirled like a dog whose tail has been stepped on:
"Which side hangs down the lower? My nose? Mine?"
"Why, yes, dear," and my wife was serene, "take a good look; the right side is a little lower than the other." [6]

In this case, the "dissolution of the social forms" that Vitangelo Moscarda's character is victim only reaches the readers when the narrator Vitangelo Moscarda understands the procedures of this "dissolution" in himself, after having lived it, and, in this way, recovers "a consciousness of himself that is also a consciousness of us" [8].

2.2 Embodied narrative

The choice to study the idea of *the person* in Luigi Pirandello's work is not random, but a possibility opened by the reading of the Pirandellian narrative

itself. Several texts could have been brought up in our analysis, but we believe that the narrative form of *One, none and a hundred thousand* reveals the possibility of deepening our theoretical problem while allowing us to make references to other texts by Pirandello. This is because we take Catherine O'Rawe's ideas as a starting point. For her

The novel's structure certainly mirrors that of the discourse of its protagonist Moscarda [...]. Moscarda aims to 'destroy' himself as narrator, as author, and as literary character. As a narrator, he exposes the unreliability of his own narrative processes, and the novel dramatizes, through its narrative techniques, the arduous production of literary meaning. [9]

Catherine O'Rawe is concerned to discuss what she calls "self-plagiarism", i.e., the way Pirandello constantly took up and reused the same passages and the same ideas in various texts throughout his career. Hence his unease with the question of authorship. Hence also her need to think with Edward Said about the interpenetration of the concepts of "authorship" and "originality", since, for her

These twin concepts are crucial to my reading of *Uno, nessuno e centomila*: Moscarda the founder of his text, of himself (within a text founded by Pirandello) at the end renounces his right to own possessions [...], and also his right to authorship and to the status of character. [9]

Now, if Vitangelo Moscarda renounces his right to possessions, his right to authorship, and his status of character, it remains to be asked what he accepts. O'Rawe's answer comes in terms of "metaphors" and "epiphanies" [9]. We venture another answer here. The renunciation of possessions, authorship, and character status in *One, none and a hundred thousand* is a consequence of Moscarda's renunciation of the name: "For a name is no more than that, an epitaph. Something befitting the dead. One who has reached a conclusion. I am alive, and I reach no conclusion. Life knows no conclusion. Nor does it know anything of names." [6].

His choice for life is then the consequence of his renunciations. But not the life of an individual, whose identity is enclosed in his name, not the life of any *I* or any self, whose conception is given by the connection between the conscious and unconscious components, but the life of a person who, not being *the* being, "is the movement from being to being" [10] and, for this very reason, the life of a subject, through which the being of the person is concretized.

In the next section, I will then deal with the person who escapes from the narrative lines and seek to analyse it in its sliding specificity.

3. A mirror person

3.1 Bodily experiences

Take the following excerpt:

I opened my eyes. What did I see?
Nothing. I saw *me*. There I was, whipped,
burdened with my own thoughts, with a very
disgusted countenance. A fierce anger assailed
me, and I was tempted to spit in my own face. I
held myself in. [...].
The change of expression in my image was
instantaneous, by reason of the spontaneity of
my wrath; and this change was followed, with
equal suddenness, by a bewildered apathy; as a
result of all of which, I succeeded in beholding,
there before me in the mirror, my body detached
from my imperious soul.
Ah, at last! There it is!
Who was I?
I was nothing. No one. A poor, mortified body,
waiting for someone to take it. [6]

The body is unrepeatable because from instant to instant it is formed with a unique character always impossible to be immobilized in the instant, likewise the image and the reflection. But this impossibility does not prevent the self from being tempted to seek fixity. The self when speaking of itself immobilizes itself in discourse, when speaking of the body, fixes it in an intelligible language, when speaking of the image and the reflection proceeds in the same way as before, always fictionalizing the characteristics of the being, always forgetting that the characteristics are not of the being, but are *in* it.

It is crucial to realise that "fiction" is not a hoax, or falsehood, but rather a considerable part of the notion of the subject with body and language since language allows the self to refer to the body indirectly, as well as to refer to the very language that constitutes it and of which it is constituted. Thus, the self makes use of language to understand that it has a body that exists and that it is, therefore, an embodied consciousness. To relate to oneself, in this case, is to make a fiction of oneself, i.e., is to construct an "embodied narrative", to use the expression of the psychologist Richard Menary [11].

In the same way, as it is linguistically indirect, metaphorical, how the subject takes possession of the world, i.e., through the attribution of meanings to the data of reality, meanings as variable as the number of people in the world, and as restricted as the human imagination, ideology and power allow, so it is in the direct clash between bodies that we perceive ourselves as subjects and are able to attribute meanings to our "being in the world" or, in other words, to fictionalize.

What we call fictionalization is, in fact, a way of constituting the self through narrative, not just any narrative, but an "embodied narrative". See that our analysis of Moscarda as being like a person is only possible since he decides to develop a narrative of himself.

In "Embodied narratives" Menary discusses the way that the self has of constructs itself through

narratives. For Menary [11], we cannot think that the self is constituted by "abstract narrative[s] account[s]", since "the self is constituted both by an embodied consciousness whose experiences are available for narration and by the narratives themselves, which may play a variety of roles in the agent's psychological life". Taking this to be true, whether in the episode of the "nose", with Dida, in the episode of the "tail on the back of the head", with the stranger, or in the episode we are analysing, of Moscarda with himself in the mirror, what we see/read is Moscarda's narration of the recognition of his own body. Just like the constitution of Menary's "psychological self", Moscarda is also not an abstract being, whose formatting is only fictionalization, but, rather, a self, a subject whose consciousness is embodied, incarnate, since the analysis of himself derives from corporeal factors (the crooked nose, the eyebrow in ^^, the badly stuck ears, etc.), at the same time as he is a self, a subject who becomes aware of it and decides to narrate and narrate himself.

It is possible to wonder how this description of the formation of self not through abstract narration, but through embodied consciousness and narrative itself, connects to the conception of *person* that we seek in Moscarda. To this questioning, we will have to observe that Menary's analysis is about narratives that constitute subjects/persons, but that does not take them as abstractions and idealizations, but as materialized and embodied consciousnesses and as the fruit of narratives. That is, the self is not a narrative that is constituted abstractly.

If we take up Althusser's [12] point of view and his idea interpellation like a process in which we encounter our culture's values and internalize them, we will recall that the philosopher claimed that the subject could not be the cause of itself, since it was always already the subject of conditions prior to itself. Also, Mounier [10] will think about the double constitution of the person, since the person is "that in every human being cannot be treated as an object", but also the movement from "being to being".

In the same vein, for Menary [11], "Minimally, to be a self, a person, is to be a subject of bodily experiences". It is in this way that Moscarda constructs her narrative of self, collecting her bodily experiences and ordering them for the readers in narrative form. This is also how we have access to the narrative image of self that Moscarda makes. And that is also how we behave like people:

Before we construct a narrative self image we talk to ourselves and others (Nelson, 2003). We talk to others about our experiences, we have conversations about them, and then when we interiorize this dialogue we learn how to talk to ourselves. Eventually we may talk to ourselves and others in the form of a story and some of these stories may constitute our self image. But the narrator comes into being through conversational and discursive practices. One way in which this intersubjective structuring of the self can be ontogenetically understood is

through the interiorization of exterior linguistic communication. On this model, children learn to communicate in dialogue with others first and then only secondly to interiorize this dialogue. The egocentric speech of children has a dialogical flavour, children are talking to themselves. This then becomes inner speech. [...] [11].

Menary here is discussing the forms of the constitution of the self, or person, or subject. Not the fictional role subject, like the literary character, but the human person. However, to do so, he dwells on the narrative form we give to our self. Menary does not believe that this narrative image we build to be our self is something abstractly given, so he believes that alongside our subject formation given through the narratives there is what he calls "embodied consciousness". For him, it is from the body as a relational element with the world that the person starts to constitute himself in fact as a person.

In effect, following these ideas, I believe it is possible to organise a relational model that accounts for a good part of the formatting we use in our training as people. Such as:

(a) our body exists *in* the world and exists *for* the world,

(b) this existence is ensured by the interpellation of the other that gives us the status of existing being,

(c) the interpellation of the other is done through "conversational and discursive practices", from this comes our moral sense of belonging to a certain culture,

(d) we also act as interpellators of the other and, in this sense, try to some extent to delimit the space in which each of us can act within society,

(e) after internalizing the exchange of positions of interpellation, we understand that we can be the *other of ourselves* and we become capable of reflecting with ourselves about who we are,

(f) at this point we become *able* and, perhaps, *willing* to construct for ourselves a "narrative image", i.e., a version of us that we put into our narratives about ourselves, a narrative that is not abstract, but derived both from a body that relates to other bodies and from a consciousness that embodies this body and not another body,

(g) therefore, the story we tell about ourselves and that constitutes us as subjects is, first, a story about our bodies *within* social spaces and a story about the image we have been able to preserve, modify and/or multiply in the narratives we hear about ourselves,

(h) this is also why the narratives we tell about ourselves when they are embodied narratives, help us build self-awareness of who we are and thus create our narrative image, our self.

A little attention is needed here. According to the

passage we read, the character Vitangelo Moscarda is in front of the mirror and there, at that moment, he opens his eyes and sees "nothing": "I opened my eyes. What did I see? Nothing: I saw *me*". It is not as if Vitangelo is blind and is unable to see anything. On the contrary, his visual faculties are working, but what he sees is nothingness and nothingness equals him. Let us go a little further. If this *nothing is equal himself*, what happened was that Vitangelo, when opening his eyes in front of the mirror, saw exactly what he had always seen, the same image, the same reflection. Hence his frustration before what he saw, that is, before the same himself *as always*.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider now the fact that what we are reading is what the narrator Vitangelo Moscarda tells us. Having already had and *lived* through the experiences that led him to the beggars' asylum, the narrator Vitangelo Moscarda can state that having seen himself in the mirror was like having seen nothingness. If it were not for the temporal distance between the moment of action and the moment of narration, we might well hear the Vitangelo Moscarda character saying: "I opened my eyes. What did I see? Nothing *much*. I saw *me*". And this "much" would mean that the process of consciousness that the narrator Moscarda *now* demonstrates had not even been initiated by the character Moscarda *at the moment* he saw himself in front of the mirror.

It is the examination of consciousness, rather than the mere acting, that distinguishes the character Vitangelo from the narrator Vitangelo, just as one distinguishes the person from the person.

I bring the words of Michel Z eraffa to help me finish this analysis, because, for him, in a first moment "the specific and irreplaceable role of literature is to make the reader aware of the artificiality of language, to make him precisely perceive reality as such" [8] and, in a second moment, "no technique, no form is purely operative; the means of expression used by the novelist, signify, embody, represent, are his thought" [8]. As literature that embodies reality, this leads us to affirm that what Luigi Pirandello constructed with his novel was a Vitangelo Moscarda who behaves like a person by fleeing from an obligatorily fixed form in order, paradoxically, to establish himself as a character.

I could provisionally conclude then that if the person is the possibility, the character is what each of us in our daily lives deals with; if the person is something "open", the character is "closed"; if the person is the movement from being to being, the character is the construction made with the details that are gathered from people; if the character is derived from the person, the person is the character itself.

3.2 Becoming a person

I leave a model that should help to understand how the person inserted in the novel is not like the character in the novel:

(a) the character embodies himself through his story, while the person enters culture through myth, that is, through the metaphors [13] that organise our culture and our social relations. Vitangelo Moscarda narrator is a being of culture, responsible for a narrative discourse that maintains a pact of interpretability with the reader while the character Vitangelo Moscarda has his reality in complete dependence on the narrated story.

(b) the character is an individual organised concerning other individuals created by a subject to compose a social framework. The person does not enter society as an individual, but always as a subject [12]. The narrator Vitangelo Moscarda, understood as if he were a person, analyses, contemplates, researches, and interprets his own consciousness and desires in a continuous stream that only ends when the narrator fixes his memory of the past, and himself, as another of himself and becomes a factual element of a certain literary frame, i.e., a character.

(c) Being a cultural self, the person operates with polysemic symbols and images. The character, in turn, is a paper being that only exists in the signs that confirm it. In the case of *One, none and a hundred thousand*, when Vitangelo Moscarda, the narrator, draws from memory what he has lived and makes of himself a double that can be understood as a triple, he tries to translate what he has felt into expressive images. Double by the fact that the narrator puts before himself the images of the past and revives them, transforming them into a narrative. Triple, because the fixed image of himself that contains the narrative is linked to the moment of narration, in which the narrator cannot see himself living and cannot see himself remembering, even so, he lives and remembers, and these two "selves", the *narrated character* and the *person who narrates*, unite in the future opened by the story that will reach the readers through the book.

(d) While the character is entangled in a narrative time, fragmented, because it exists only while narrative, and current because it lives in the moment of narration, the person has duration, a duration that subverts the very notion of time, because it updates the past by the memory, making it present, and anticipates the future by the projection of possible relations. The character Moscarda, from then on, is constituted as a fragment of memory that escapes from the narrator Moscarda's totality and begins to narrate himself and be narrated inside the structure of the novel organised by him.

(e) The "decomposition of the character" [8] is the way found by writers to recompose the person. In Pirandello's book, from the apparent non-sense of the actions of the character Vitangelo Moscarda is that one can recompose the sense of the person. Thus, in the same way, that the narrator Vitangelo Moscarda can recompose himself in the most integral way possible, the readers also could organise their individualities in the face of the state of the character Vitangelo Moscarda. This human possibility of

constituting oneself is in the expectation horizon of the novel.

(f) Finally, the narrator Moscarda, like a person, interprets what he has lived, contemplates his own history, reveals his desires, recognizes his duration, his past, and his memory, and recomposes for himself literary images, recognizing his limits and the limits of his past self - the character Moscarda - and at the end of the narrative understands that there is something beyond him - both in the present and in the past - that does not directly relate to him, but exists whether he conceives it or not ("I quickly turn my eyes in order not to see again anything coming to an apparitional halt and dying." [6],

After understanding himself as at least two in himself, the narrator again separates himself from the things of the world, struggling not to "kill" them with his fixating but superficial gaze. This is because if things are not only the appearance we see of them, neither is the human being. Thus, to have "fixed" or "killed" the past by transforming it into a narrative is the way that the narrator Vitangelo Moscarda found to escape the very fixed form of the character and transform himself, at least in discourse, into a person, incomplete as any person.

4. Conclusion

In summary, we could say that the thesis that Vitangelo Moscarda behaves like a person within this narrative derives from the fact that, firstly, Vitangelo Moscarda lived the encounter with his wife and the encounter with a different version of what he considered to be "himself" and this made him put his own identity in perspective.

Secondly, we well know that "we cannot see each other while we are living" and that we "only" live, without realizing it. In the same way, we understand that it is proper for a person to look back at moments lived and to attribute both value and meaning to these moments, exactly as Moscarda behaves when he leaves the condition of a subject that lives to the condition of a subject who analyses the moments lived, removes them from memory and "eternalizes" them in a form, in this case, the narrative form.

Thirdly, even though he wants to destroy himself as author, narrator, and character, and even though he abandons the "name" that differentiates him from others, Moscarda writes a narrative of himself, which not only places him in the position of a character in a story - his own - but also place him in the position of a person who endures in time and who, for that very reason, leaves existential marks on himself and others.

Certainly, it is as if Vitangelo undertakes a whole narrative to answer a question: *who are you?* It is important to note that it is not a question of answering the question "*Who is there?*", which presupposes that the questioner does not see the

other [14], but of answering the question "*Who are you?*", because Moscarda, recovering the memories of himself, sees himself as a person, a person whose narrative is eternalized in his own body, someone to whom the pronoun "you" can be addressed.

Thus, even when he abandons "everything" to just exist, his narrative proves that when thinking about himself there is a residue of humanity that locates him as someone: someone whose nose is crooked and that, because of this defect in his own body, he discovered himself as someone who did not tell his own story. In possession of the knowledge of the body that embodied his own story, Moscarda could act as a person would act and chose to give himself a narrative body, a complete figure in the form of a story. Only a person can take himself as an object of thought while existing within his own ambiguities.

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