

---

# Out-of-Time Experiences in Four Iconic Twentieth Century European Modernist Novels Including *Zeno's Conscience*: A Psychosynthetic Analysis

Zsuzsanna Tóth-Izsó

Doctoral School of Literary Studies, University Eötvös Loránd of Budapest, Hungary

Email: [convegno.assagioli.2020@gmail.com](mailto:convegno.assagioli.2020@gmail.com)

Received: 07/08/2023

Accepted: 29/10/2023

Published: 01/11/2023

Volume: 4 Issue: 6

How to cite this paper: Tóth-Izsó, Z. (2023). Out-of-Time Experiences in Four Iconic Twentieth Century European Modernist Novels Including *Zeno's Conscience*: A Psychosynthetic Analysis. *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*, 4(6), 37-44

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46809/jcsll.v4i6.239>

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



## Abstract

On the centenary of the release of Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience* in 1923, it is opportune to explore the renowned psychoanalytical novel from a fresh perspective—one that not only refrains from contradicting the traditional interpretation but also enhances and complements it. The psychosynthetic approach that I intend to employ in analyzing the transpersonal experiences depicted in "Zeno's Conscience" will demonstrate its efficacy as a valuable tool for attaining a more profound comprehension of the protagonist's—potentially reflecting Svevo's—complex personality. As Assagioli, the founder of psychosynthesis, articulates, it delves into the concept of multiple minds. In this first article of the two, transpersonal experiences of Zeno are identified, followed by describing similar experiences in three iconic 20th-century European modernist novels, *Ulysses*, *Time Regained* and *The Man Without Qualities*, by using appropriate quotes. The common main feature of these four novels is the steadily flowing time, the natural medium of the "horizontal" processes of personal psychosynthesis (Chronos). My focus here is, however, on the detectable – although rather sporadic – "vertical" episodes of transpersonal psychosynthesis, which are, in a sense, "out of time" (Kairos). Moreover, Zeno's transpersonal experiences are compared with that of the characters' of the selected three iconic modernist novels.

**Keywords:** Zeno's Conscience, Ulysses, Time Regained, The Man Without Qualities, Flow, Transpersonal Experiences, Kairos, Psychosynthetic Literary Criticism

---

## 1. Introduction

This paper is the first of two related articles that compare the transpersonal experiences narrated in *Zeno's Conscience* with those described in three selected iconic 20th-century European modernist novels. In the second related paper – titled *Spiritual rebirth in three 19th-century European classics compared to transpersonal experiences in Zeno's Conscience* –, the transpersonal experiences occurring in *Zeno's Conscience* are compared with transpersonal experiences of clear religious character identified in three selected 19th-century European classical novels.

In 2023 the centenary of the publication of Italo Svevo's famous "psychoanalytical" novel, *Zeno's Conscience*, is celebrated throughout Italy, and not only there. Svevo, born in Trieste as Aron Hector Schmitz was an industrialist with great inner literary inspiration. Polite literature was like a secret second life for him. After his first two books were completely ignored by critics (*Una vita* and *Senilità*), he stopped writing for the public for a while. According to Marasco,

Svevo, therefore, declares that having resigned himself to such «a unanimous judgment (there is no more perfect unanimity than that of silence) [...] The years of silence and painful solitude are those in which Ettore Schmitz gave up his alter ego, he is first of all a paint industrialist, an 'accidental writer' only in the clippings of time, in the rare moments in which he withdraws from practical life to give in to the 'forbidden vice', to secret writing which will later prove to be an indispensable literary apprenticeship. [...] I am witnessing the very end of my aesthetic dreams and when I think about it I find it very bad. Maybe as I reach old age I will have the time to regret it, feeling that I had offended my intimate nature by failing a task to which for 38 years I believed I was born. (2022, pp. 52-54)

I will use psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1959, 1966, 1974, 1983, 1988, 2012) in these two articles as a critical tool to interpret the chosen transpersonal experiences. Apart from these authentic psychological works on psychosynthesis by Assagioli, about psychosynthesis as applied to literary criticism I have already published two papers in English (Tóth-Izsó, 2021, 2022a) and a book in Hungarian (Tóth-Izsó, 2022b).

This paper only offers a concise overview of the fundamental concepts of psychosynthesis, outlined as follows. The human psyche is delineated as comprising two distinct entities: The Transpersonal Self, interchangeably identified as the Higher Self or simply Self, which functions as an enduring and elevated unifying focal point for internal development. Conversely, the "I" (or personal self, ego, or self) operates as the epicenter of consciousness, enveloped by three segments of the personal unconscious—specifically, the lower, middle, and higher unconscious, with the latter denoted as the superconscious. The notion of "personal psychosynthesis" (along the horizontal dimension) encompasses the advancement and harmonization of all human functions and potentialities, denoted as subpersonalities, converging around the self. Moreover, rectifying the fundamental polarity between the human personality centralized around the self and the Transpersonal Self assumes paramount importance in attaining a heightened unity. This procedural facet is denominated transpersonal psychosynthesis and manifests along the vertical dimension. The driving force behind transpersonal psychosynthesis is the Transpersonal Will, articulated by Assagioli (1974, p. 112) as follows: "Just as there is a personal will—the one we have been considering up to now—so there is a Transpersonal Will, which is an expression of the Transpersonal Self and operates from the superconscious levels of the psyche. It is its action, which is felt by the personal self, or I, as a pull or call."

For this same centenary, I published (Tóth-Izsó, 2023) a more detailed paper on *Zeno's conscience* in Italian focusing mainly on the unification of his subpersonalities (on Zeno's psychosynthesis in the horizontal dimension) and only partly on the transpersonal aspect of the vertical dimension. In this study, I underlined that the title "*Zeno's Conscience*" is exceptionally accurate: the actual subject of the events described in the novel is not Zeno himself as a whole personality, but Zeno's conscience, more precisely, his field of consciousness. In contrast, this article aims to identify episodes of Zeno's process of transpersonal psychosynthesis. Furthermore, in this article, I will also briefly analyse from this aspect other characters from three selected famous modernist European novels and the results will be compared.

First, I will analyse *Zeno's Conscience* from the psychosynthetic view of vertical development instead of the psychoanalytical genre in which this novel was written and interpreted by many. Later I will compare the findings of this analysis with the results of similar psychosynthetic studies of three selected iconic 20th-century contemporary European novels, namely Joyce's *Ulysses*, Proust's *In Search of Lost Time (Time Regained)*, and Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. The reason why these very pieces were selected, is that the majority of literary authorities consider that *Zeno's Conscience* ranks with these great modernist novels. Given the massive volume of these novels and the narrow limits of this article, the psychosynthetic analyses were simplified and limited very much only to a few selected parts in which elementary events of transpersonal psychosynthesis, the so-called transpersonal experiences (also called peak experiences, oceanic feelings or mystical participation/experiences) could be identified. William James (2002) gave the following four more specific marks of the concept of mystical participation (experience/state):

- (1) Ineffability: it defies expression, no adequate report of its content can be given in words.
- (2) Noetic quality: it relates to such activities of the mind as illuminations, and revelations, full of significance and importance.
- (3) Transiency: it usually cannot be sustained for long, about an hour seems to be the strict limit beyond which it fades away.
- (4) Passivity: it is characterized by the feeling of the experiencer as if his/her own will were in abeyance.

Since these terms largely overlap, for my present purposes these are taken as synonyms in this article. Important to emphasise that these experiences are not necessarily religious.

Shapiro (1994) claims that transpersonal psychology, as a science, represents an important vehicle for understanding mystical experiences, restoring legitimacy to the quest for a greater meaning to life. He cites Greely and McReady (1979), who found that – based on a random sample of 1,500 Americans – 40% of the population reported at least one mystical experience. Two more recent surveys – Greely (1988) and Pew survey (2009) – indicated that even higher percentages (about 50%) of Americans have had mystical, including religious experiences.

## 2. Transpersonal Experiences in *Zeno's Conscience*

Although the novel is mostly about how Zeno's conscience interacts with the contents of his lower and middle unconscious – actually about his personal psychosynthesis – and for the first reading, we can hardly find anything else in it, a more careful examination, somewhat surprisingly, can reveal sure signs of longing for the transpersonal. Right at the very

beginning of the Preamble, a vision occurs. The following quotations in this section are from Svevo (2003, p. 24.), and the page numbers also relate to this edition: "I can see, or glimpse, some odd images that surely have nothing to do with my past: a puffing locomotive dragging countless coaches up a steep grade."

This scene later returns:

I discover that the image that obsessed me at my first attempt to see into my past, that locomotive dragging a series of cars up a slope, had come to me initially on that sofa, as I listened to my father's breathing. That is how locomotives sound, as they pull enormous loads: they emit regular puffs that then accelerate, ending in a menacing pause as the listener fears he will see the engine and train go hurtling downhill. Seriously! My first effort to remember had carried me back to that night, to the most important hours of my life (p. 55).

This vision can easily be, and was many times, interpreted in the style of classical psychoanalysis: the locomotive struggling up the steep grade and lugging heavy loads represents Zeno carrying heavy psychic burdens. In addition, the burdensome puffing of the locomotive directly resembles the laboured breathing of Zeno's dying father. From a psychosynthetic perspective, however, it can be considered a lengthy and demanding journey upwards from the conscious self towards the Transpersonal Self. Assagioli (1976, 1983) called this phenomenon "psychological mountain climbing". Zeno was unconsciously longing for the switch from horizontal to vertical direction in his life, even if it seemed too hard to accomplish. Zeno labelled the related experiences "the most important hours of my life". While thinking about his wife's seemingly superficial religiousness, Zeno concludes that "whereas I, had I been religious, would have guaranteed my eternal bliss by spending the whole day in church" (p. 139). He goes even further: "Finally, and I don't know why, I devoted myself to the study of religion. I seemed to be resuming the studies I had already begun at the death of my father" (p. 148). Although cautious, Zeno started getting acquainted with religion, a possible way upward. He also sporadically found non-religious ways to lift his field of consciousness to his higher unconscious. However, the Transpersonal Self, as the highest unifying centre, still needs to be put in actual perspective:

To collect my thoughts more readily, I spent the afternoon of my second solitary day on the shores of the Isonzo. Nothing is more conducive to meditation than watching the flow of water. You stand motionless, and the running water supplies the distraction needed, because it is never identical to itself, in its color and its pattern, not even for a moment. [...] Mine was genuine meditation, one of those rare instants that our miserly life bestows of true, great objectivity when you finally stop believing and feeling yourself a victim (p. 334-335).

Later on, Zeno found out that – despite his symptoms and pains – he is mentally healthy since he is well balanced and integrated, so he needs no psychoanalysis:

I am cured! Not only do I not want to undergo psychoanalysis, but also I don't need it! [...] I am healthy, absolutely. For a long time I knew that my health could reside only in my own conviction, and it was foolish nonsense, worthy of a hypnagogue dreamer, to try to reach it through treatment rather than persuasion. I suffer some pains, true, but they lack significance in the midst of my great health. [...] Sorrow and love—life, in other words—cannot be considered a sickness because they hurt. I admit that before I could be convinced of my health, my destiny had to change and warm my organism with struggle and above all with victory. It was business that healed me and I want Dr. S. to know it. (p. 346)

I would rewrite it with real clarity, for how could I understand my life before knowing this last period of it? Perhaps I lived all those years only to prepare myself for this! (p. 347).

Zeno, better to say Zeno's conscience, finally found his business as an authentic external unifying centre, an intermediary between him and the Transpersonal Self. Although still an indirect, provisional, valid link, this centre functions as an energising channel to and from the Transpersonal Self, thus realising a partial psychosynthesis.

Lombard (2013) wrote, "For individuals such as ourselves, the stages of self-realisation are a context in which we can understand the meaning of our suffering, take responsibility for redeeming it, and, ultimately, achieve our highest human potential". I guess that Zeno's psychoanalyst, Dr. S., was wrong: Zeno had not been escaping from something, but of the contrary: he had been approaching for something. This "something", in a psychosynthetic term, is the Self. In other words: Zeno sometimes, although uncertainly, heard the weak voice of the call from the Transpersonal Will. Thus, in my opinion, in this case, the psychosynthetic answer seems to be better than the psychoanalytic. Therefore, *Zeno's Conscience* is not only a psychoanalytical but also or more a psychosynthetic novel, which does not exclude the first but completes it.

### 3. Transpersonal Experiences in Ulysses, Time Regained and The Man without Qualities

In this section, three selected representative pieces of modernist fiction are studied from the view of transpersonal experiences in the frame of psychosynthesis. These are rather close to *Zeno's conscience* in genre, topic and time. Therefore, similar results are expected to that of *Zeno's conscience*.

The steadily flowing time, the natural medium of the "horizontal" processes of personal psychosynthesis (Chronos), has an essential role in all these four novels. Our focus here is, however, on the detectable – although rather sporadic – "vertical" episodes of transpersonal psychosynthesis, which are, in a sense, "out of time" (Kairos).

### 3. 1. *Ulysses*

I start with *Ulysses* since its author, James Joyce, was a close friend of Svevo. Furthermore, as Staley (1963) puts it, Svevo helped shape the main character in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom. It means there might be something – although very little and indirect – familiar in the two novels.

Modernist innovations included the stream-of-consciousness novel, and *Ulysses* is an excellent prototype of that. An essential tenet of psychosynthesis is that the ever-changing contents of the field of consciousness are the stream of consciousness itself. Another principle is that the Transpersonal Self is above and unaffected by this mind stream. However, the question arises: whose stream of consciousness are we talking about in the case of *Ulysses*? The answer is: the Narrator's! Namely, it is an original feature in this novel that the Narrator of the story has direct access to the most intimate thoughts and feelings of the three main characters, Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus. This condition provides a unique possibility for a psychosynthetic analysis since the Narrator can be considered the field of consciousness. At the same time, the three main characters are subpersonalities within the same psyche, very probably of the author himself. Occasionally, other characters behave also as other subpersonalities. I used the Joyce (2022) edition.

Bloom is an efficient person, a philistine, and an advertising canvasser. Conversely, he is mature and pragmatic, refuses to think about spiritual topics, and is generally passive and accepting. We may feel that Bloom is the alter ego of the older Joyce, who is said to be the "poet of every day". Molly is the wife of Bloom, a thoroughly real person. She is also a symbolic figure, an embodiment of archetypal womanhood. I could not find any significant trace of transpersonal experiences concerning these two "feet-on-the-ground" characters. Dedalus is a gifted poet whose artistic talent is still unrealised. Therefore, he is depressive, aloof, somewhat dramatic, disappointed and moody. Dedalus appeared earlier as the main character of Joyce's semiautobiographical tale, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Thus Dedalus is the alter ego of the young Joyce. Concerning Dedalus, although sparsely and blurrily, it was already possible to identify some signs of wish and tendency for ascending towards the Transpersonal Self. Already his name "Dedalus" symbolically suggests his desire to fly above the everyday constraints of life, religion, nationality, politics, etc. Being a rooted atheist, his desire is non-religious but artistic and aesthetic. He sees himself as a kind of poet-Icarus, who flew too high unprepared, and finally clip-winged pitched into the sea. It was impossible to find several concrete quotations – or at least one single sentence – in the text that would clearly and directly illustrate this wish to ascend. However, it became my conviction that this quasi-delocalised aspect is present throughout the novel. In a fallible way, Dedalus is courageously pursuing the goal of breaking free from all the obstacles inhibiting his spiritual growth as an artist. In Greek mythology, Daedalus was the father of Icarus, who both were imprisoned in a tower overlooking the sea, from where they escaped using wings that Daedalus constructed. Daedalus warned Icarus of complacency and hubris, saying not to fly too close to the sun, but Icarus ignored it, causing the beeswax in his wings to melt. He finally fell from the sky, plunged into the sea, and drowned. Ironically, Dedalus, who suffered from hydrophobia in *Ulysses*, finally pitched into water.

### 3. 2. *Time Regained*

*Time Regained* is the seventh and final volume of Proust's monumental novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. The main character is the writer himself, an artist, who, throughout six and a half volumes, is searching for the lost time for his richly lived life episodes that are continuously fading away into the past. The seven volumes represent a slowly flowing, enormous and elegant epic about the family and social life of the French upper class, with the writer included in it. The writer obsessively tries to capture all his important memories; for him to live is to remember. But, unfortunately, by the beginning of *Time Regained*, the writer becomes seriously ill, disappointed and uncertain even about his literary gifts. At about the half of *Time Regained*, the writer, in a very hopeless mood, leaves for an afternoon party at the Princesse de Guermantes. Then, quite unexpectedly, the writer had three exceptionally unusual experiences in a line within a period as short as about half an hour. The following quotations are from Proust (1931), and the page numbers also relate to this edition.

First experience:

Walking towards the palace of the Princesse de Guermantes, he suddenly had to step aside from an approaching carriage, and realized that his feet got on unevenly placed paving stones. Since this same sensation was a part of a very pleasant old memory – he had once felt the same when stepped on two uneven waist slabs in Venice in the Baptistery of St. Mark – this triggered the full recall of the whole happy scene from the depth of the past:

I had not noticed an approaching carriage; at the call of the link-man I had barely time to draw quickly to one side, and in stepping backwards I stumbled against some unevenly placed paving stones behind which there was a coach-house. As I recovered myself, one of my feet stepped on a flagstone lower than the one next it. In that instant all my discouragement disappeared and I was possessed by the same felicity which at different moments of my life had given me the view of trees which seemed familiar to me during the drive round Balbec, the view of the belfries of Martinville, the savour of the madeleine dipped in my tea and so many other sensations. (p. 100)

He, wasn't aware himself why, got into an ecstatic timeless state and asked himself: "But how was it that these visions of Combray and of Venice at one and at another moment had caused me a joyous certainty sufficient without other proofs to make death indifferent to me?" (p. 100). This state is clearly an artistic transpersonal experience. Since it is beyond any personal experience, his individual death seems to him indifferent any more.

Second experience:

Several moments later, already at the party, quite unexpectedly again, he had a second similar experience:

At that very instant a second premonition occurred to reinforce the one which the uneven paving-stones had given me and to exhort me to persevere in my task. The servant in his ineffectual efforts not to make a noise had knocked a spoon against a plate. The same sort of felicity which the uneven paving-stones had given me invaded my being; this time my sensation was quite different, being that of great heat accompanied by the smell of smoke tempered by the fresh air of a surrounding forest and I realised that what appeared so pleasant was the identical group of trees I had found so tiresome to observe and describe when I was uncorking a bottle of beer in the railway carriage and, in a sort of bewilderment, I believed for the moment, until I had collected myself, so similar was the sound of the spoon against the plate to that of the hammer of a railway employee who was doing something to the wheel of the carriage. (p.100-101)

This time a sound sensation caused an artistically perfect harmonious scene to emerge from the timelessness in full details, resulting again in unlimited happiness feeling.

Third experience:

At the party a servant offered him a napkin, with which he automatically wiped his mouth. The touch of this napkin resonated with a similar feeling long-long ago, recalling again a once lived esthetically perfect feeling of peace, joy, and happiness:

A servant, a long time in the service of the Prince de Guermantes, recognised me and, to save me going to the buffet, brought me some cakes and a glass of orangeade into the library. I wiped my mouth with the napkin he had given me and immediately, like the personage in the Thousand and One Nights who unknowingly accomplished the rite which caused the appearance before him of a docile genius, invisible to others, ready to transport him far away, a new azure vision passed before my eyes; but this time it was pure and saline and swelled into shapes like bluish udders. The impression was so strong that the moment I was living seemed to be one with the past and (more bewildered still than I was on the day when I wondered whether I was going to be welcomed by the Princesse de Guermantes or whether everything was going to melt away. (p.101)

The recalled scene was so lively, that:

I believed that the servant had just opened the window upon the shore and that everything invited me to go downstairs and walk along the sea-wall at high tide; the napkin upon which I was wiping my mouth had exactly the same kind of starchiness as that with which I had attempted with so much difficulty to dry myself before the window the first day of my arrival at Balbec and within the folds of which, now, in that library of the Guermantes mansion, a green-blue ocean spread its plumage like the tail of a peacock. (p. 101)

Superficially, these three experiences might seem like simple memory associations. However, considering the enormous accompanied psychic energy that changed the writer's life at one blow, we must understand that these were extremely forceful – non-religious, artistic – transpersonal peak experiences. The transpersonal feature strongly appears in the joyous feeling of the writer, that his personal life and death suddenly became indifferent to him (see the last sentence of the quotation above concerning the First experience). The writer's experiences are in harmony with the general description of the psychological symptoms of such transpersonal experiences published by Assagioli in his article Psychological Mountain-Climbing: (Assagioli, 1983).

In conclusion, we can state that the writer had been searching for the lost time all his life, throughout six and a half volumes, and finally, quite unexpectedly, found it within several Chronos minutes in the state of Kairos.

### 3. 3. *The Man Without Qualities*

Robert Musil was an Austrian novel writer – originally an engineer, mathematician and philosopher – who was deeply interested in mystical experiences. Musil's own controversial notion of the mystical state is the "*other condition*" (*der anderer Zustand*) which refers to a specific relation between the inner and the outer world, between the mind and the physical universe. As Di Bona & Ercolino (2019) put it, the "*other condition*" (or "*other state*") "is a presence of a kind of mutual interaction between brain, body and the outer world". It means that there is no real boundary between the mind and the world as if the mind extended into the world and the world constituted the mind. The "*other condition*" can also be taken as a deification of the self as of the world. I am convinced that the "*other condition*", which also has a similarity with Jung's concept of "*unus mundus*", is an elementary step along the process of transpersonal psychosynthesis. There is strong autobiographical data that the main characters' ideas and attitudes are largely those of Musil. We could even say in psychosynthetic terms that the protagonist, a 32-year-old man Ulrich, "the man without qualities", represents Musil's dominant subpersonality (interestingly enough originally Ulrich also was engineer, mathematician and philosopher as Musil himself), while the other characters refer to other subdominant subpersonalities. Ulrich's indifference to life, his passivity and his dependence on the outer world have shaped his character into "a man without qualities".

In the following three characters' several selected transpersonal experiences are presented, starting with those of Ulrich, the protagonist. Some of the two central female characters' – Clarisse's and Agathe's – such experiences are also shown.

Clarisse is the wife of Ulrich's friend, who failed to reconcile the realities of her own life with her exaggerated ambitions. Although she had remarkable spiritual capacities, due to her hysterical character, oversized ambitions and fighting against her demons, she gradually lost her sanity. This sad case is an illustration of the danger of losing control during transpersonal experiences. Assagioli draws attention to the huge difference between the cases of ordinary patients whose psychological symptoms have generally a regressive character:

These patients have not been able to accomplish some of the necessary inner and outer adjustments that constitute the normal development of the personality. [...] The difficulties produced by the stress and strife in the various

stages towards Self-realization have, on the contrary, a specifically progressive character. They are clues to the stirring of superconscious potentialities, to the strong "call from above", to the pull of the Self, and are specifically determined by the ensuing maladjustment and conflicts with the "middle" and "lower" aspects of the personality. . . . [..] It is obvious that psychotherapeutic treatment appropriate to the two diverse kinds of patients must correspondingly be altogether different. The therapeutic problem concerning the former group is that of helping the patient to reach the normal state of the average man or woman [..] the contrasting, partly undeveloped, uncoordinated conscious and unconscious trends and functions have to be harmonized and integrated into a personal psychosynthesis. The specific therapeutic task for the latter group, instead, is that of arriving at a harmonious adjustment using the proper assimilation of the inflowing superconscious energies and of their integration with the pre-existing aspects of the personality; that is, of accomplishing not only a personal but also a spiritual psychosynthesis. (Assagioli, 1965, pp. 54-55)

It is clear enough that Clarisse's case belongs to the second case and as such she was probably absolutely mistreated in the mental hospital.

Agathe is Ulrich's forgotten sister, who showed up again when they met after their father's death. They got immediately romantically attracted to each other, and experienced a mystically incestuous excitement. They considered each other as soulmates ("Siamese twins").

Ulrich's first experience of the other condition:

Ulrich, still as a young cavalry lieutenant, fell in love with his major's wife. When they both realized the hopelessness of their affair and that it has to be finished, Ulrich wanted to get away as quickly and as far as possible from the place of this love. He travelled blindly at random, until arrived at an island, where he walked in nature all day long in a strange timeless mental state. He climbed up on a hillock or lay down on the island's rim in the company of sea, rock, and sky. What then happened to him is the following:

He had penetrated the heart of the world; from it to his far-off love was no farther than the nearest tree. In-feeling linked living beings without space, as in a dream two beings can pass through each other without mingling, and alter all their relations. Other than this, however, his state of mind had nothing in common with dreaming. It was clear and brimful of clear thoughts; however, nothing in him was moved by cause, purpose, or physical desire, but everything went rippling out in circle after ever-renewed circle, as when an infinite jet falls on a basin's surface (Musil, 2017, pp. 103-104).

Driven by the spiritual energy of eros, Ulrich's field of consciousness ascended a lot along the vertical dimension towards the Transpersonal Self and obviously reached the "*other condition*".

Ulrich's second experience:

Once Ulrich contemplated on the moral and the immoral, the truth and the falsehood, the objectivity and the subjectivity, the total and the partial, the rational and the irrational. Suddenly he had a feeling as follows:

What he felt at this moment was not a commandment; it was a region he had entered. Here, he realized, everything was already decided and soothed the mind like mother's milk. But what gave him this insight was no longer thinking, nor was it feeling in the usual incoherent way: it was a "total insight" and yet again only a message carried to him from far away by the wind, and it seemed to him neither true nor false, neither rational nor irrational; it seized him like a faint, blissful hyperbole dropped into his heart (pp. 203).

His deep contemplation unexpectedly resulted in a kind of "total insight", transcending the binary opposites. Clarisse's experience (practicing her mysterious powers):

Clarisse often had strange, unusual experiences:

At such times she is so beside herself that she can't tell where she is, except that she is definitely not absent; on the contrary, she could be said to be more inwardly present than ever, inside some deep inner space somehow contained inside the space her body occupies in the world, something indefinable in ordinary words—but then, why struggle for words where words don't apply; she will soon be back with the others again in any case, with only a little tickle left in her head, like after a nosebleed. Clarisse realizes that these phases she sometimes goes through are dangerous. Evidently, she is being tested and prepared for something special. She tends to think of several things at a time anyway, like a fan opening and shutting, with one fold partly beside, partly underneath the other, and when this gets too confusing it is only natural to wish one could just pull out altogether, with one jerk; lots of people feel like that; they just don't make it, that's all (p. 346).

Clarisse talks to Ulrich about her unusual experiences:

There are days when I can slip out of myself. Then it's like finding yourself—how shall I put it?—right in the center of things as if peeled out of a shell, and the things have had their dirty rind peeled off too. Or else one feels connected by the air with everything there is, like a Siamese twin. It's an incredible, marvellous feeling; everything turns into music and color and rhythm, and I'm no longer the citizen Clarisse, as I was baptized, but perhaps a shining splinter pressing into some immense unfathomable happiness. But you know all about that. That's what you meant when you said that there's something impossible about reality and that one's experiences should not be turned inward, as something personal and real, but must be turned outward, like a song or a painting, and so on and so forth (pp. 500-501).

Ulrich talks to Agathe about his unusual experiences:

I would say [...] that it's like looking out over a wide shimmering sheet of water—so bright it seems like darkness to the eye, and on the far bank things don't seem to be standing on solid ground but float in the air with a delicately exaggerated distinctness that's almost painful and hallucinatory. The impression one gets is as much of intensification as of loss. One feels linked with everything but can't get close to anything. You stand here, and the world stands there, overly subjective and overly objective, but both almost painfully clear and what separates and unites these normally fused elements is a blazing darkness, an overflowing and extinction, a swinging in and out. You swim like a fish in water or a bird in air, but there's no riverbank and no branch, only this floating! (p. 562).

Schärer (1990) gave a psychoanalytic interpretation of the life of Ulrich: he took Ulrich as neurotic, who by being attracted to and seeking after the "other condition" (mystic experience), actually was escaping from the frustrating reality. I disagree with Schärer (1990) and agree with Stummer (1995), who claimed that Ulrich was not escaping from something, but he was even striving to approach something higher, which we may call the Self. Thus the psychosynthetic interpretation frame seems to be better than the psychoanalytic. Ulrich's case is a much softer and less dangerous case than the above-cited case of Clarisse.

At this point, some similarities have to be mentioned between Ulrich and Zeno in Zeno's Conscience. Both men lived in the high society of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and both can be considered "without qualities" since both of them were rather passive and neutral to live, and their behaviours were almost exclusively dependent on their outer world. Both of them were taken neurotics and were subjects of psychoanalysis: Zeno was formally analysed within the plot of the novel by Dr. S., while Ulrich was analysed without the plot by the critic Schärer, who in this respect played the same role that Dr. S. played in the Zeno's Conscience. Both men heard the – still weak – call of the Transpersonal Will and tried to approach it.

#### 4. Conclusion

The novel *Zeno's Conscience*, in its overwhelming volume, deals with the interactions between Zeno's conscience and the contents of his lower and middle unconscious, in fact, with his personal psychosynthesis. Only after a thorough investigation was it possible to find certain signs of the touch of the Transpersonal Will.

Comparing the results of the short psychosynthetic analysis of *Zeno's Conscience* with the results of similar analyses of the three selected modernist European novels revealed important similarities. The characters in all these four novels had experienced relatively few obscure peak experiences and – except to some extent Zeno himself – these were not religious by nature. In some of Zeno's peak experiences a slight religious charge was present. Other than religious traditions and related sciences, it is literature that gets closest to the description of transpersonal experiences. Psychology is just an indirect method and not a direct source. Countless literary pieces sang about human feelings and psychological sensations experienced while "transcending" themselves. These pieces of art need to be considered by literary criticism as they represent a subjective, but very important and almost unavoidable human experience.

#### References

- Assagioli, R. (1959). *Dynamic psychology and psychosynthesis*. New York: Psychosynthesis Research Foundation.
- Assagioli, R. (1966). *Jung and psychosynthesis (Lecture 1-3)*. Manuscripts. Conserved in the Archive of the Institute of Psychosynthesis, Florence, Italy. Available: <http://synthesiscenter.org/articles/0119.pdf>
- Assagioli, R. (1974). *The act of will*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books.
- Assagioli, R. (1983). *Transpersonal Inspiration and Psychological Mountain-Climbing*. Pasadena, Calif.: Psychosynthesis Training Center (8 vol., p. 21); Available in English "Psychological Mountain-Climbing": <http://synthesiscenter.org/articles/0136.pdf> (Assagioli, R. (1976), Part Two, Psychosynthesis Research Foundation (reprint) Issue no. 36) and in Italian: Assagioli, R. (1988). *Alpinismo psicologico*. In Assagioli, R. (1988). *Lo sviluppo transpersonale*. pp. 28-35. Rome, Italy: Astrolabio.
- Assagioli, R. (2012). *Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings*. United Kingdom: The Synthesis Center Press.
- Dattilo, G. Y. (2021). *Psicodinamica della creazione artistica tra sublimazione e intuizione*, In M. Puca and Zs. Tóth-Izsó (Eds.), *Atti del Convegno Assagioli 2021 – Psicointesi e Letteratura* (pp. 146-149). Mozzate: Edizioni Istituto di Psicointesi.
- Di Bona, E. & Ercolino, S. (2019). *Musil in a loop: the other condition and the extended mind*. *Philosophy and Literature* 59(70): 49-59. <https://doi.org/10.4000/estetica.5067>
- Greely, A., & McCready, W. (1979). *Are we a nation of mystics?* In D. Goleman & R. J. Davidson (Eds.), *Consciousness: Brain, states of awareness, and mysticism* (pp. 178-183). New York: Harper & Row.
- Greely, A. (1988). *Mysticism goes mainstream*. In E. Bragdon, *A sourcebook for helping people in spiritual emergency* pp. 228-236. Los Altos, CA: Lightning Up Press.
- Grill, G. (2009). *The "Other" Musil: Robert Musil and Mysticism*, in *A Companion to the Works of Robert Musil*. Payne, P., Bartram, G., Tihanov, T. (Eds). Rochester, NY: Camden House, pp. 333-54.
- James, W. (2002). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Centenary Edition. *A Study of Human Nature*. Routledge e-book based on the 1902 edition. p. 295.
- Joyce, J. (2022). *Ulysses*. Planet PDF. eBook.
- Lombard, C. A. (2013). *In Search of Meaning*. *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*, 2(4): 23-28.

- Marasco, C. (2022). L'uomo d'affari e il letterato. L'immagine della fabbrica nelle novelle e nelle lettere di Italo Svevo, In Cavalli, S., Savio, D., Van den Bergh, C. (Eds.). (2021). *Fabrica in fabula: industria e editoria culturale nel Novecento* pp. 51-61. Florence: Franco Cesati Editore (Civiltà Italiana, Terza Serie 49).
- Musil, R. (2017). *The Man Without Qualities*. Wilkins, S. (Trans.), Electronic edition published by Picador Picador Classic, an imprint of Pan Macmillan.
- Pew survey (2009). <https://religiousnaturalism.org/frequency-of-spiritualreligious-experiences/>
- Proust, M. (1931). *In search of Lost Time 7 (Time Regained)*. Stephen Hudson (trans.). Feedbooks.
- Shapiro, S. I. (1994). Religion, spirituality, and transpersonal psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 13(1), 33–41.
- Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies/vol13/iss1/6>
- Schärer, H.R. (1990). *Narzissmus und Utopismus. Eine literaturpsychologische Untersuchung zu Robert Musils Roman "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften"*. München : Wilhelm Fink, ISBN: 3770526287
- Staley, T. F. (1963). James Joyce and Italo Svevo. *Italica*, 40(4), 334–338. <https://doi.org/10.2307/476822>.
- Stummer, A. (1995). *Pszichikai vagy/és egzisztenciális*. (In Hungarian). *Thalassa*, 6(1–2): 83–93.
- Svevo, I. (2003). *Zeno's Conscience. A novel*. Weaver, W. (trans. 2001). New York: Vintage Books of Random House Inc.
- Tóth-Izsó, Z. (2021). Proposing a psychosynthesis-based literary criticism methodology. *Academia Letters*. Article 2692, 2021 (08). <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL2692>
- Tóth-Izsó, Z. (2022a). Fundamentals of a Psychosynthetic Literary Analysis Approach and Applying it to an Italian Poem Giovanni Papini: *C'è un canto dentro di me*. *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*, 3(5), 17-28.
- Tóth-Izsó, Z. (2022b). *Egy lehetséges pszichoszintézis alapú irodalomlemezési módszertan alapjai* (in English: Fundamentals of a possible psychosynthesis-based literary criticism methodology). L'Harmattan, Budapest.
- Tóth-Izsó, Z. (2023). Breve analisi psicosintetica de *La coscienza di Zeno*, *Ermeneutica Letteraria-Rivista Internazionale*, XIX:77-87. <http://digital.casalini.it/10.19272/202308001009>