

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

13

**WHY READ JOYCE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY?**

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JOYCE'S "CORPO STRANIERO":
THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF IRISHNESS
IN FOUR BORDER CROSSINGS

Mr. Daedalus was himself a renegade
from the Nationalist ranks: he professed
cosmopolitanism. But a man that was of all
countries was of no country—you must
first have a nation before you have art.
(*SH* 103)

Joycean scholarship is often associated with a sort of “anxiety of belatedness” which, reinterpreting Brooker’s metaphor, might be compared to that of latecomer “guests wondering whether there’s anything left to drink” (2002, 203). Such anxiety seems unwarranted: the vitality of this field of study has never abated and is in fact constantly providing new insights and analytical tools.

Two aspects, in particular, have contributed towards the impetus for research. In the first place, a bulk of new documentation by and about Joyce has appeared over the last decade, both confirming and upsetting previous assumptions; this is the case of the 2002 National Library of Ireland acquisitions and the 2006 Hans Jahnke bequest to the James Joyce Foundation. In the second place, several aspects of Joyce’s figure and works are still object of heated debate, with significant theoretical impact.

Most notably, a favoured academic topic has recently undergone major revisions. The beginning of the twenty first century might be considered a sort of gulf in the critical discourse regarding Joyce’s relationship with Ireland. In the mid-1990s, Hofheinz and Williams noted the spread of a non-Irish and a-political idea of Joyce, emphasizing how the writer was often read as a cosmopolitan author who had merely left Ireland behind him. Significant work in a postcolonial perspective flourished with, among oth-

ers, Joseph Valente, Vincent Cheng and Christine van Boheemen. But it was probably in 2006, with Andrew Gibson's *James Joyce* that a new, more radical tendency emerged: the "materialist turn" challenged the cosmopolitan figure of Joyce by means of a "nationalization" of the author, as also discussed in John McCourt's *Questioni Biografiche* (2009). Recently, Gibson provided further explanations of his theoretical stance:

Historical materialism also presumes that the more we know about the historical relations between the British and the Irish in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the more our grasp of Joyce substantially improves and deepens (2010, 181).

Despite its unquestionable value, a critical "immersion in Ireland" can also present some risks: in extreme cases, an emphatically Irish perspective on Joyce can result in taking the writer out of his actual cultural context, offering a limited angle of the reality he experienced. Joyce's Irish-centred logic is traversed by the multiple influences of its European frame, as part of the same, broad picture; in this sense, his crossing of boundaries is not only a basic trait of his life and works, but also, as I will argue, the essence of his cultural repertoire and of his own Irishness.

In line with the latest scholarly work on cosmopolitanism,¹ I propose to emphasize how Joycean studies are part of Irish studies especially because of the European dimension they embrace. With this objective in mind, I will analyze transnational intersections and encounters in a rather unexplored area of Joyce's corpus, the Hans Jahnke collection at the Zurich James Joyce Foundation; the focus will be especially on the 60 documents which testify to the private correspondence between James Joyce and his son, Giorgio.² These letters, postcards and notes shed new light on four different boundary

¹ For the question of cosmopolitanism, see for example Binnie *et al.*, 2006; the idea of transnationalism is treated in Ben-Rafael and Sternberg, 2009. My use of the terms 'cosmopolitanism' and 'transnationalism' here conform to the definitions proposed by Alan Latham (2006, 94-5) and Portes *et al.* (2009, 568-9) respectively.

² My heartfelt thanks go to the director of the Zurich James Joyce Foundation, Prof. Fritz Senn, who offered me full access to the Jahnke collection. A description of the Hans Jahnke documentation is available in Frehner and Zeller, 2006. The Zurich material is still under copyright and quotations from the manuscripts and typescripts are accordingly limited in this essay. All references to James Joyce's letters to Giorgio Joyce are in parentheses after the quotation, in a day/month/year format. My translations from Joyce's Italian are provided in the footnotes or after the text.

crossings involving linguistic, thematic and textual aspects of the manuscripts and they are worthy of detailed analysis.

I. Italian/English: A linguistic encounter

The first border to be crossed in the Jahnke material is a linguistic one, concerning the English and Italian languages. To be more specific, it occasionally regards dialects, which yield a more composite and complex picture. As is well known, Joyce communicated in Italian with his children, even after leaving Trieste; according to Francini Bruni, he “used to say that the language for family affection could only be Italian” (qtd in Potts 1979, 45). Consequently, the 60 documents which compose the correspondence between James and Giorgio Joyce are mostly in this language, except for a few cases, when father and son are not the only recipients.

It seems unnecessary to dwell upon the subject of Joyce’s Italian, since the most groundbreaking views on the subject have appeared in well-known essays by Melchiori (1979 and 1995), Bosinelli (1998), Ruggieri (1992), Vaglio (1994), Lobner (1983) and Zanotti (2004); what I wish to comment on are some specific aspects of the Jahnke papers. The new documentation offers a wider perspective on Joyce’s communication modalities with his family than ever before, as well as additional information about Joyce’s private use of Italian. We are now allowed a more nuanced and informed view on particular linguistic choices, a view which both confirms and broadens previous assumptions.

One of the most relevant features of the Jahnke letters is that they especially reflect Joyce’s split identity as an expatriate. For instance, Joyce’s condition of “migrant” or “exile” is unconsciously expressed in a *lapsus*, or revealing mistake, which is also quoted in the title of this essay: in a letter dated 30 August 1932 he complains that a “foreign body” entered his eye, defining it in Italian a “corpo straniero” (“foreigner’s body”), instead of “corpo estraneo” (“foreign body”).

Indeed, the linguistic encounters between English and Italian, in all their variants, appear dialogic, to the point that the two languages often intermingle. In particular, some letters addressed to both Giorgio and his wife Helen Fleischman are written partly in English and partly in Italian, with the two languages alternating within sentences:

Mi rallegro della [sic] buone notizie datemi di Stefanuccio and also of the other members of the colony.³ (19/07/1932)

Language switch within sentences is a rather new phenomenon: available published letters addressed to Giorgio and Helen are usually in English, with possible salutations or postscripts in Italian. A practical explanation of the bilingual writing in the Jahnke material could be that the Italian sections were especially meant for Giorgio, since Helen could not understand them; but this does not exhaust what is involved in such a complex use of code-switching.

The most striking aspect of the bilingual letters is that personal remarks, opinions or emotions are usually expressed in Italian:

I am waiting [sic] a reply from Collinson about the glaucoma complication, cosa che mi sorprende molto perché non me ne sono mai accorto.⁴ (19/07/1932)

Italian is also the language of playful comment or verbal provocation:

[Brauchbar] wrote [Lucia] a long letter of encouragement but [...] quello che fece era un'asineria [...].⁵ (19/07/1932)

It cannot be excluded that an emotional linguistic bond underlies the choice of the language of expression. Whereas the second language is generally believed to allow the subject more distance from the topics under discussion (see Pavlenko 2007, 131), in Joyce's case the situation is apparently reversed. As already noted by Melchiori (1979), Bosinelli (1998) and Milesi (2003), Italian represented a "lingua franca" for Joyce and was both "the family lexicon" and the "language of politics, of *Irish* politics" (Melchiori 1995, 22). Evidence in the Zurich documentation both confirms and broadens this idea, highlighting a bilingual affective response where Italian

³ "I am glad to hear the good news about Stephen and also of the other members of the colony."

⁴ "I am waiting [sic] a reply from Collinson about the glaucoma complication, a thing which surprises me very much, since I had never realized it before." Given the syntactic construction of the sentence, the first verb might be assumed to be 'I am awaiting,' but the manuscript does not seem to present this reading.

⁵ "[Brauchbar] wrote [Lucia] a long letter of encouragement but [...] what he did was foolish."

is not only connected to “family affection,” but also to emotional expressivity in general.

In the Jahnke material as a whole, the use of Italian is characterised by the combination of different registers and a large use of colloquialisms and idioms, such as “ne ho le tasche piene” (“I am fed up with it,” 19/07/1932) and “sangue da una rapa non si cava” (“one cannot get blood out of a stone,” 23/04/1935). Set phrases are also occasionally transformed or distorted, thus extending their meaning and expanding the language’s horizons.

Indeed, we are well accustomed to both Joyce’s switching registers of language and transformations of words and set phrases from his novels. What emerges from the letters is that he adopted these procedures in a continuative way throughout different functions of writing (public and private texts) and in different languages (English and Italian), thus substantiating Melchiori’s remarks:

The whole of Joyce’s work is a constant infringement of conventional linguistic structures in order to accommodate not only the creativity of the writer who translates the common idioms, the language of the tribe, into an individual style belonging to him alone, but also to involve the creativity of each individual reader who is invited to translate what he is offered into his own private language (1995, 20).

II. A migrant’s-eye view of “Ireland/ Europe/ The World/ The Universe”

Transnational encounters in the Jahnke collection do not only concern Italy and its language, but also many other European countries. From 1930 to 1940, approximately when the Jahnke letters were written, Joyce travelled to various cities, touring France, England, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Denmark. In his letters to Giorgio, Joyce talks about his experiences around Europe, offering an overall rich and cosmopolitan picture.

What appears as the common thread in the numerous perspectives on different countries is Joyce’s ironic attitude. His irreverent remarks usually concern those aspects that are considered typical of a certain cultural model, such as beliefs and behavioural distinctions. Conventional national imagery is then de-contextualized and turned to a new purpose, or transformed into something incongruous with the original discourse.

In particular, Joyce often re-employs the most formulaic and grotesque clichés about European national characters. For instance, Joyce thus answers Giorgio's claim that he has no pleasant memory of the years he spent in Europe:

Però se davo una mano di pittura alla Francia e se arriccio i baffi degli italiani e se chiudevo le bocche dei tedeschi e se davo una doccia rinfrescante agli inglesi e se solleticavo gli svizzeri sotto le ascelle e se spidocchiavo i russi? Eh? Il quadro forse sarebbe meno orribile.⁶ (21/05/1935)

Joyce humorously dismisses Giorgio's unpleasant comments on Europe through inter-discursive irony, thus parodying stereotypes. As Fritz Senn notes, parody is "an inverse form of homage" (2007, 80) and in the Jahnke letters no European population is spared Joyce's particular homage. In 1936, a trip to Denmark was the source of inspiration for a sort of fairy tale which Joyce wrote in English for his nephew, Stephen:

I cannot send you a Copenhagen cat because there are no cats in Copenhagen. There are lots and lots of fish and bicycles but there are no cats. Also there are no policemen. All the Danish policemen pass the day at home in bed. They smoke big Danish cigars and drink buttermilk all day long. (05/09/1936)

The whole text revisits several clichés about Denmark and its population, including the fact that Danish police were seemingly well-known for undergoing little or no supervision. At the same time, though, this fairy tale is meant to fascinate the child and let his imagination approach different realities, or picture other, foreign dimensions.

Manipulating stereotypes was more important to Joyce than eschewing them: thus, he paid great attention to commonplaces and grotesque reductions about national characters or images, which he playfully captured in his correspondence. He confronted any monolithic conception of otherness on its own terms, in a procedure that is similar to what Paola Pugliatti and Donatella Pallotti define the "unmasking of naturalized discursive practices" in the "Wandering Rocks" episode of *Ulysses* (2004, 152).

⁶ "If I had given France a coat of paint, and curled Italian moustaches, and closed German mouths and given the English a refreshing shower and tickled the Swiss under their arms and deloused the Russians? Maybe the picture would be less horrible."

While putting clichés under a magnifying glass, Joyce emphasized their deforming aspect and therefore their improbability; in this sense, stereotypes become platforms from which intercultural prejudice is disarmed. Exaggeration and obvious irony are all ways to reject conventions and make cultural boundaries more traversable. Yet, Joyce's irony is often ironic in its turn. As in Wayne Booth's idea of "unstable" irony (1975, 62), Joyce's humour encompasses multiple dualities, so that there is no certainty that he always means the opposite of what he's writing. In other words, his irony is pervasive but not uniform, as it opens up the possibilities of manifold meanings.

For instance, in a 1938 letter Joyce playfully lists all the people who would be amazed at hearing Giorgio's beautiful singing; his last entry is "i bravi britannici ingoiatori di patate" ("the good British potato-swallowers," 06/01/1938). Joyce uses a stereotype, a perceived dietary habit typically ascribed to the Irish by the English, and applies it to the British people in general. It's the term "britannici" that attracts our attention, because Joyce was very careful in the choice of terms, especially regarding geopolitical matters: in this respect, for example, it has already been noted that in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen locates Ireland in Europe, omitting the United Kingdom (*P*, 12). As far as the above example is concerned, it cannot be excluded that the word "britannici" might be the real source of scorn; at any rate, it demonstrates Joyce's continuative attention to the knots of political tension.

While parodying national stereotypes and received discourse, Joyce also establishes a distance from the objects of his humour; he often speaks as an observer who is foreign to any national context. The Jahnke letters show well Joyce's heterogeneous and ambiguous sense of national belonging, which pivots between different incorporations. His departures are never complete, especially from Ireland: detachment is something that always continues to happen. The new research challenge opened by the Zurich material, thus, is to try and understand the simultaneity of connections and variations in Joyce's cosmopolitan and multilayered reality.

III. Territorial and Mental Otherness: Lucia Joyce

The Janke letters also allude to a third kind of border crossing, which concerns the symbolic spaces of the mind. Lucia Joyce and her psychologi-

cal issues are the main topic of many letters addressed to Giorgio: Joyce often describes Lucia's conditions, gives details about her medical reports and provides his opinion on her treatment.

In some of these letters, Joyce seems to perceive Lucia as a stranger, or rather, as a foreigner; her mental distance from him is worded in terms of physical remoteness. Geography is the metaphor Joyce commonly uses to describe Lucia's divide from him and from the social context at large: she inhabits a faraway foreign country which is hard to reach. For instance, in 1935, while Giorgio was in New York, Joyce suggested that Lucia was located even further away from himself and his son, writing: "Vi è molta acqua adesso tra te e me E ci sono due piccoli mari fra noi e Lucia." ("There's a lot of water now between you and me And there are two small seas between us and Lucia," 23/04/1935).

Joyce's "geographical" metaphors essentially rely on archetypal representations of identity parameters. "Being elsewhere" is a common image adopted in defining mental disorder, but it is interesting to see how this image modulates in a migrant writer's perspective. As might be expected, Joyce seems to perceive a connection between his condition of exile and his daughter's inability to integrate in any social system. Lucia does not live according to conventional order; she is described as escaping all constrictions and transcending all boundaries. This is a sort of freedom Joyce seems to sympathize with:

Le sue stramberie possono fare sognare [sic] gli isolani fra i quali per il momento ella ha scelto di vivere. [...] A loro ed a se stessa può sembrare una stupidina. A me no però.⁷ (21/05/1935)

In this passage, Joyce is referring to Lucia's stay in Ireland. Her reasons for being a stranger there go beyond the questions of homeland and national identity, but Joyce often seems to relate these two aspects. He is also very concerned about other people's views of Lucia; because of her exclusion from any system, she could be thought capable of disrupting order and provoking conflict. In a letter to Giorgio, Joyce indignantly ridicules this idea:

⁷ "Her eccentricities can provoke the sneer of those islanders among whom she has chosen to live for the moment. [...] She might seem a little silly to them and to herself. But not to me."

[...] noto che mi scrivi che tutto è tranquillo in Irlanda malgrado la presenza di Lucia. Che cosa è il senso di ciò? Perché la presenza di Lucia dovrebbe provocare una ribellione od una guerra civile.⁸ (23/05/1935)

Ridicule is conveyed through hyperbolic imagery which widens the family context to that of the whole country. At the same time, Joyce is still relying on traditional *topoi*: political rebellion was historically interpreted as an attack on rationality. The political metaphor replaces the most common geographical ones in alluding to Lucia's mental condition. Incidentally, politics and geography are strictly interrelated in the idea of boundary.

The issue of Lucia's rightful place, both symbolic and physical, was a major preoccupation for Joyce, who constantly tried to "put up a home for her."⁹ As can be seen in the history of psychiatry, the apparent increased freedom of the unconventional subject results in experiences of confinement and solitude. Joyce seemed well aware of every aspect of Lucia's personal exile, and most letters testify to his attempts at building a bridge between his daughter and himself, or the world.

IV. The Jahnke material as a place of textual encounter

A common *leitmotiv* of the Zurich letters is music and opera. While encouraging Giorgio to pursue his singing career, Joyce often mentions operatic works and, at times, playfully quotes from their texts. For instance, when defining a common acquaintance "quel moscardino di viscontino" ("that dandy viscount," 31/07/1937), Joyce is referring Puccini's *La Bohème* (Act III, Scene 1). Even the jocoserious complaint "Ma che pena, che tormento, che stento mi sento!" ("What a pain, what an agony, what a misery I feel!" 02/02/1938) might be inspired, among other texts, by Rossini's *Ermine* (Act I, Scene 1).

⁸ "I notice that you write that everything is calm in Ireland, despite Lucia's presence. What does that mean? Why should Lucia's presence provoke a rebellion or a civil war."

⁹ The quotation is taken from the manuscripts of Joyce's letters at the British Library (Weaver Collection), ADD 57351-064, dated 20/04/1932. Further references to this collection will be indicated by the abbreviation BL followed by the catalogue number of the letter and its date. I wish to thank Prof. William Brockman for the useful information and bibliographic references he provided me regarding the Weaver Collection.

Apart from opera, the most relevant source of quotations in the Jahnke letters is Joyce's own work. In particular, he often includes pieces from *Finnegans Wake*:

Mi cito per finire: "And all the Dunder de Dunnes in Markland's Vineland beyond Brendan's herring pool wears number nine in Yangtsee's hats."¹⁰ (14/05/1935)

Given the highly polysemic nature of the Wakean text, the meaning of most of its passages in the letters is often far from being obvious. Still, Joyce seemed to assume that Giorgio was both familiar with the text and able to catch the sense or implication of its quotations; this certainly reveals a new aspect of the father-son relationship, a sort of literary complicity which could be of biographical interest.

In some letters, Joyce similarly relies on his son's knowledge of *Ulysses*, although the allusions to this novel are definitely less demanding. *Ulysses* is never extensively or directly quoted, but Joyce evokes its text on at least two occasions: when discussing the risk of losing one eye, he compares himself to the Cyclops (30/08/1932), while, in a humorous account of the weather conditions in Paris, he mentions the saints Gervasius, Servasius and Bonifacius (21/05/1935), who also appear in one of the interpolations of the XII episode of the novel (*U* 441,10-11).

The self-quotes in the letters can be connected to a common tendency of Joyce's literary writing processes, which I have elsewhere defined "multiple re-employment" (2008, 150). This tendency consists of constant returns on the "already written," and is based on a concept of text as a dynamic entity that can be re-enacted in the course of time and re-adapted according to different contexts. Citations of and allusions to *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* in the letters have, of course, a different function than the "re-employments" in the literary writing process. Yet, even in the letters, when Joyce recalls ideas, emotions and impressions in connection with fresh experiences, he significantly turns to *textual* memory: in other words, he combines personal recollection with what Hughes defines "the memory of words" (1987, 86).

¹⁰ "To finish I quote myself: [...]." The *Finnegans Wake* text reads: "And all the Dunders de Dunnes in Markland's Vineland beyond Brendan's herring pool takes number nine in yangsee's hats" (*FW* 213.34-36)

On the whole, the Jahnke material widely testifies to the use of inter- and intra-textuality in Joyce's writings. Of course, these phenomena also concern the fictional texts contained in the collection, where Joyce's works encounter other works or intersect among themselves. Exemplary in this regard is a typescript that displays the title "Chamber Music" but contains two poems that were published in the collection *Pomes Penyeach*: "Alone" and "Bahnhofstrasse." The origin of this hybridization is not clear; in a purely hypothetical way, it could be connected to the fact that, according to the documents in the Weaver Collection, in 1932 *Pomes Penyeach* was being set to music by Mrs. Piccoli, after her husband, Prof. Piccoli from Cambridge, had translated the whole collection (BL 57351-065, 20/04/1932).

In the intertextual encounter, translation plays a central role. Poetry seems again the preferred space of intersection, since the Jahnke material includes several verse translations. A significant example is the poem "Sulla spiaggia a Fontana", an Italian version of the 1914 poem "On the Beach at Fontana", which was also published in *Pomes Penyeach*. Even in this case, we have no certainties about the origins of the text, which might be Joyce's self-translation (see Natali 2011). What seems certain is that translations, or self-translations, testify that Joyce's intertextuality moves through what Minier defined "interlingual networks" (2005, 81), revealing the "foreign" at different levels.

It is not surprising that the Jahnke material shows how Joyce's texts dialogue with each other and with works by different authors: these phenomena characterize the entire Joycean corpus and have been largely discussed. Rather than providing unexpected vistas, the Jahnke documentation seems to embrace most Joycean features like a sort of microcosm, while highlighting their multicultural context.

New materials certainly add to our knowledge about Joyce, but the main question is not how revolutionary this new knowledge is, but rather how it affects the way we think about Joyce and how it can interact with or encourage new perspectives of investigation and new approaches. In this case, the Zurich letters highlight how Joyce's transnationality is fundamental to both his private and public expression, as it underlies various forms of intertextuality and interdiscursiveness at different levels.

Joyce clearly cultivated a multiple vision of the border, which he seemed to conceive as a "process" incorporating several realities. Because of its dynamism, Joyce's constant transnational dialogue also acquires a new relevance

in recent scholarly discourse, according to which cosmopolitanism does not arise from a refusal of a specific cultural identity: it develops from an idea of culture and nation as moveable entities which can re-articulate and extend across the globe, while maintaining a connection with an “original position” (See Pearson, 2010; Archibugi, 2003; Cheah, 1998).

Indeed, from his standpoint of a national and cultural “in-between”, Joyce seemed to perceive borders as places of alternative significations, where no perspective acquired predominant value. In other words, Joyce’s cosmopolitanism and transnationalism open new possibilities without establishing “alternatives” to Irish culture. His writings show no signs of replacement of a mainstream discourse with another; rather, they question the concept of mainstream discourse *per se* and demystify it through sarcasm and parody. Language, a salient element in this procedure, also escapes any “official” frame with its varying and often distorting shapes.

With these remarks I do not mean to suggest that an Irish-historical perspective on Joyce would be limiting or unproductive; its fruitfulness depends on the meaning we ascribe to signifiers such as “nation” and “culture” in their constantly varying contexts. Indeed, Joyce’s writings can prove precious in order to explore the European frame of Irish studies: as shown in previous discussion, they help us identify the possible areas of engagement which bring different cultures together and they question any notion of boundary, reminding us that nowadays, in an age of changing demographics, we should come to think of new spaces which include the emigrant and immigrant peoples of various countries.

Additionally, Joyce’s transnational issues are connected to the cultural identity concerns and the challenging of boundaries which characterize contemporary Irish literature, in a continuity that is worth stressing. Multicultural issues and threshold crossings are now central to Irish studies, as seen in recent work on contemporary literature: Amanda Tucker emphasized the conception of Ireland as a multicultural society in McCann’s novels (2010), Asier Altuna-García de Salazar dealt with the “new Irish” in a study on Marsha Mehran (2010), Emilie Pine analyzed the patterns of emigration and return in the plays of Bolger, Devlin, Murphy and Hughes (2008), while the first issue of the new journal *Studi Irlandesi - A Journal of Irish Studies* is devoted to “Italy-Ireland Cultural Inter-relations” and includes Gioia Gamerra’s noteworthy investigation of threshold images and intertextuality in McGuckian (2011).

The question of un-reconciled homeland conflating with the world at large represents a constant tension which snakes its way through Irish litera-

ture, a common thread which connects Joyce to the present. “[T]he impetus to flee the land and to flee culture as such,” as well as “the ‘Irish’ search for a different hearing, for a new epistemology, a new mode of representing or mapping the world and thus a new mode of inhabiting it” (Docherty 1996, 222) are commonly considered the main concerns of Irish postmodern literature; this discussion has tried to show how the roots of such concerns can also be traced back to the foundations of Joyce’s poetics.

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