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**JOYCE'S FICTION
AND
THE NEW RISE
OF
THE NOVEL**

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*edited by
Franca Ruggieri*

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BOOK REVIEWS

Muriel Drazien, *Lacan Lettore di Joyce*
(Roma: Portaparole – 2016, pp.141, €16.00)

One might reword the title of this book *Drazien reads Lacan*. Trained by Lacan in Paris, the author and psychoanalyst, Muriel Drazien has dedicated much of her life to transferring Lacan's approach to Italy – and in turn, training analysts in the way she was trained by him.

The book addresses several questions: How is it possible to 'transmit' psychoanalysis? What does it mean to become a psychoanalyst? What exactly is exchanged during analysis? Without having experience of such an exchange can one become a psychoanalyst? Through the very distinct practice of analysis we learn that we are not, as we might think, in control of what we say but rather that we are divided – since in speaking we are subject to language. Rather than hidden in a hypothetical depth, our unconscious has a language-like structure and resides within our words – a central concept taught by Lacan. It is up to us to grasp our divided subject from what is said unwittingly, in the interval between enunciation and what is enunciated, beyond all sense and signification, always tending towards other meanings and significations. That this is a limitless quest is illustrated by how academics continue their seemingly unending search for new meanings in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. From the very beginning Lacan warned against understanding too soon: against losing ourselves in the labyrinth of meaning, the broken record of signification, or in endless *metonymia*. How then does analysis function?

This is exactly what interested Lacan when he rediscovered Joyce – as is adeptly and wittily uncovered here in Drazien's book. Up until the very end of his seminars Lacan kept questioning the unconscious and the ways in which a subject of analysis invents a means to bind together the three dimensions of the analytic experience: the *Real*, the *Symbolic* and the *Imaginary*. The initials here are RSI, read in French as *heresy*, with Lacan equivocally toying with himself as a heretic, just as Joyce had done. As the years passed Lacan became increasingly intent on grasping

the equivocal within the work of analysis – starting from the simplest signifier, not purely for the pleasure of “en-joy-ance”, but in order to produce out of the void generated by the signifier effects within our subjective divide.

This makes psychoanalysis unique with respect to other practices that have become effective due to the power of suggestion afforded by language. It is no coincidence that Freud soon abandoned the technique of suggestion.

Once Lacan became interested in Joyce he made a point of showing how the signifier as it emerges from a letter, or from sound, results in emptying all sense. Observe how Lacan writes *symptom*: symptom with an *h* added to indicate clinical consequences. Furthermore, the game he plays with *sintho-madaquin*, alludes to one of Joyce’s favourite philosophers, St Thomas Aquinas – from whom he understood the *epifanal* phenomenon; the spiritual epiphany, sudden apparitions: for Joyce a revelation and confirmation of his literary vocation. How do these *epiphanies* relate to Joyce’s language? In Seminar XXIII Lacan comments:

Reading Joyce’s work, and even more so reading his commentators, we are astonished by the number of enigmas they contain. These commentators are people interested exclusively in resolving enigmas, in wondering why Joyce wrote something where he did ... exactly like in my stories of *osbjet*, *mensionge*, *dit-mension* and so on, but I have my reasons, I want to say something, yes, equivocal, while with Joyce one doesn’t understand it at all.

Several questions arose here for Lacan: Can the equivocal be grasped from Joyce’s writing? What function did writing fulfil for Joyce? What place did his art occupy within him? Lacan says that Joyce’s effort to eliminate all meaning, to disrupt and destroy the English language in his writing – in the attempt to found a new language – was in fact his *mission* to redeem his weak father as well as his nation, Ireland.

Doing without a father and then creating one’s own name surely has its implications. When a son accepts a weak father, *transmission* can confer a symbolic debt. This debt might be traced to the illustrative anecdote – presented here in Drazien’s book – in which Joyce’s father goes to

the bank to take out a new mortgage every time a new child of his is born. Here we have an inversion of transmission, with respect to a symbolic debt between father and son. How then is symbolic debt revealed by Joyce?

Does being an exile from his nation create a further exile, that from language – one being increasingly felt in Joyce’s work, one wrecking the English language? The exile so indispensable for Joyce – from *Ulysses* to the play *Exiles* – is that of the artist. Joyce’s demolition of language leads Lacan to declare that he is “unsubscribed to the unconscious”, thus accounting for the difficulty faced by readers trying to grasp something that is not correlated to meaning or the *imaginary*. What kind of relationship did Joyce have with language, or as Lacan puts it with *lélangues?* – either with his native language or others, particularly with his most cherished Italian?

It is hard to ignore that prior to the start of his seminar *Le Sinthome* Lacan had recently witnessed a psychiatric patient suffering from so called “forced words” – during the weekly “presentation of a patient” that took place in *Sainte-Anne* hospital in Paris under Dr. Marcel Czermak. That patient was convinced that everyone knew what he was thinking, down to his most intimate thoughts, and considered himself a telepathic emitter. Lacan noted that Joyce considered his own daughter Lucia telepathic – but as a receiver, rather than an emitter, of secrets: those of others she subsequently shared with him. Is Joyce defending Lucia when he attributes her with something like the extension of his own symptoms? What would such defence reveal about the role and function of Joyce, the father?

In this seminar Lacan asks, “[H]ow come not everyone is aware that the words on which we depend are in some way imposed? ... the real problem is rather how come a normal man doesn’t realize that words are parasites, plastered on, a kind of cancer that attacks the human being?” If it is possible to gather the wish to destroy the language from Joyce’s work, should we not then ask how many words were imposed upon him as artist?

A final question to lay before the reader concerns the symptomatic desire that Joyce had for Nora. What kind of relationship was there between Nora and Jim – as she called him? Lacan describes Nora as snugly

fitting Jim like a turned out glove, a perfect fit. How do we decipher such a strange relationship, and what was Nora's part in Joyce's *symptom* as a writer (with Lacan's additional *h* to differentiate this new concept from traditional symptoms)?

All the above questions are explored by Muriel Drazien in her book – which strives both to do justice to Lacan's thought, and to demonstrate its clinical importance.

Gabriela Alarcon

Enrico Frattaroli, *Envoy verso : in : attraverso : da : Giacomo Joyce. Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* n. 5-2015, suppl. 2, (Firenze: Firenze University Press – pp. 139)

Ever since its first publication in 1968, the text known as *Giacomo Joyce* has baffled critics no less than the huge novels universally considered as the most complex and cryptic works in the Joyce canon. As Paola Pugliatti reminds us in an illuminating essay, scholars have used many different labels in their attempts to pin down its manifold aspects: “prose sketches”, “visual poem”, “vignettes”, “collection of impressions and moods”, “love poem”, “sketchbook”, “interior dialogue”, “interior monologue”, “epiphanic narration.”¹ It is no surprise, therefore, that this multifaceted text has caught the attention of such a versatile artist as Enrico Frattaroli, independent author of theatrical, acoustic and audiovisual works, as well as the singular piece of criticism *Envoy verso : in : attraverso : da : Giacomo Joyce*.

Just as *Giacomo Joyce* is a work that crosses traditional generic boundaries, *Envoy*—as Donatella Pallotti remarks in the Postface—is at the same time an essay, an artist's memoir, the story of Frattaroli's different approaches to Joyce's text over many years and through different ar-

¹ P. Pugliatti, “Nookshotten: the Text Known as *Giacomo Joyce*”, in F. Ruggieri (ed.), *Classic Joyce: Papers from the XVI International James Joyce Symposium, Rome 14-20 June 1998*, Rome, Bulzoni, p. 293.