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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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In the last section of *Envoy*, “Sliding – space – ages – foliage of stars”, Frattaroli further illustrates the manifold domains and media through which the influence of *Giacomo Joyce* has made itself felt on his own imagination and career as an artist: plastic installations with audio-live interventions, such as *Mandala bianco: scrittura come perturbazione del vuoto* (2001), or his “crumpled books”, conceived as transformations of readable books into material objects which can only be observed. All of these “products” derive from his personal conception of Joyce’s text as a force field, in which the blank spaces represent the void, and writing a perturbation of it.

Envoy, therefore, retraces and tells the story of its author’s fascination for *Giacomo Joyce*, and at the same time self-reflexively comments on such a personal and intellectual growth. The basic idea, again, is that of the infinite reverberations of an elusive literary work on the heterogeneous production of an eclectic artist. All of this enormously enriches our experience, as both readers and spectators, of the process at the core of artistic creation (whether literary, plastic, or audio-visual): the transformation, *by a commodius vicus of recirculation*, of something into something new.

Annalisa Federici

James Joyce, *Best-Loved Joyce* (edited by Jamie O’Connell).
(Dublin: The O’Brien Press – 2017, pp. 128, €12.99)
Anthony J. Jordan, *James Joyce Unplugged*.
(Dublin: Westport Books – 2017, pp. 204, \$9.76 kindle)

In the congestion—predicted by Joyce himself—of Joycean criticism, there are publications that are meant to make the difference and add interesting insights to the ongoing debate, while others are less ambitious, in a way, but still make Joyce’s work more accessible to new readers. Two recently published books belong to the list of such less ambitious contributions: *Best-Loved Joyce*, edited by Jamie O’Connell and *James Joyce Unplugged* by Anthony J. Jordan.

Bob Joyce—the writer’s grand-nephew—acknowledges the difficulty of approaching Joyce’s writing in his short prefatory note to *Best-Loved Joyce*, and explains that O’Connell’s selection of quotations from the major works must be viewed as a presentation of “the writer at his most accessible” (8). Bob Joyce defines this book as an inspiration or a motivation for new readers who will find the writer “unexpectedly” charming and fascinating. It is clear that the selection is meant as an introduction to Joyce’s writing and an attempt to encourage an instinctive and non-academic approach to the writer’s works. *Best-Loved Joyce* groups together short passages from Joyce’s masterpieces in nine sections labelled according theme: ‘Truth’, ‘Love and Romance’, ‘Family and Domestic Life’, ‘Art, Literature and Music’, ‘Living’, ‘Desire and Sex’, ‘Religion and Sin’, ‘History, Politics and Ireland’, ‘Morality and Time’. All sections are introduced by an illustration by Emma Byrne, who describes her work as an attempt to match the texts with “sketchy and almost ‘dirty’” images of places in Dublin—a combination defined as “landscape typographic painting” (127). The word that best describes O’Connell’s intention is ‘accessibility’. This collection of excerpts, in fact, proves that Joyce can be entertainingly read by a wide audience and that a purely emotional, non-specialist approach to the Irish writer is possible.

O’Connell’s project shares the same concerns expressed by “Joycean democrats” such as Declan Kiberd, who remarks that “a book [*Ulysses*] which set out to celebrate the common man and woman endured the sad fate of never being read by many of them”. Kiberd poses a crucial question: “Why has it [*Ulysses*] been called unreadable by the ordinary people for which it was intended?”¹ Much more recently, Margot Norris reminds us that Joyce is now popular not only among academics but also among ordinary readers—suffice to mention the many *Ulysses* reading groups that have sprung in different countries in the last few decades.² In

¹ Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: the Art of Everyday Living*, London: Faber & Faber, 2009, p. 7 and p. 30.

² Margot Norris, *The Value of James Joyce*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. The first chapter of this book is significantly titled: “Introduction: democratic and cosmopolitan Joyce.”

Italy, following in Kiberd's footsteps, Enrico Terrinoni produced a brilliant new "democratic" translation of Joyce's *romanzaccione*,³ an attempt at renegotiating the idea of a novel too often considered as the privileged reserve of a snobbish and intellectual elite. Terrinoni argues that this might have been an involuntary—or sometimes a deliberate—consequence of critics and academics who have rendered the book—that certainly requires attention and commitment—more difficult than it is. Once more, O'Connell's position seems to be less ambitious and more popular. While Kiberd, Norris and Terrinoni's work, built as they are upon solid scholarly foundations, intend to "democratize" Joyce's novel, O'Connell aims to produce "the writer at his most accessible".

Anthony Jordan's *James Joyce Unplugged* is a basic biography. While providing a short account of Joyce's life, the book aims to highlight two aspects that are closely interrelated. The first is Joyce's relationship with Arthur Griffith, founder of Sinn Féin, for whose newspaper—the *United Irishman*—Joyce contributed a number of articles; moreover, during his lifelong exile, Joyce constantly read Griffith's *Sinn Féin*, using it as a main source of information on Irish affairs. True, a different composition of anecdotes changes our understanding of the material we have and may suggest a different perspective; yet putting together anecdotes from the epistolary relationship between Joyce and Griffith—and taking account of their encounters—does not add excessively to what is already known. Furthermore, Jordan had already investigated this relationship in his biography of Arthur Griffith, titled *Arthur Griffith with James Joyce & WB Yeats – Liberating Ireland*. In both biographical works the author claims that while Griffith tried to liberate Ireland politically and economically, the two artists—namely Yeats and Joyce—tried to liberate Ireland spiritually and artistically.

With his biography, Jordan advocates a second, more contentious issue relating to the previous one: to present Joyce's political position as that of a staunch republican. However, critics have discussed Joyce's supposed nationalism and/or his internationalism since Joyce's first and glorious biographies, among which, Herbert Gorman's and Richard Ellmann's. A short revealing passage from Gorman's *James Joyce: a De-*

³ James Joyce, *Ulisse*, Roma: Newton Compton 2012.

definitive Biography, mentions both Griffith's movement and Joyce's declaration that he was a nationalist—a declaration that is not particularly straightforward as it contains a crucial distinction:

Here was Joyce prophesying either that the infant movement of Arthur Griffith would conquer or British imperialism would devour the country. And here it may be pointed out that Joyce, if anything, was *an Irish Nationalist at heart*, especially if a lifelong and so far successful battle against English ideas merits that title. 'if the Irish programme did not insist on the Irish language,' he declared to his brother, 'I suppose I could call myself a nationalist.' [...] He was as precise and consistent as ever in intimating that he could not offer even lip service to any shift in Irish culture that would cut that country off from the great stream of European civilization.⁴

Rebutting a review of Joyce's biography—written by Peter Costello⁵—Jordan blames those "Joyceans [who] are so enamoured with 'reading' and interpreting Joyce's fiction that they have lost sight of much of the reality of his life."⁶ Perhaps Jordan's reply is a little off the mark here, as he might have alluded to the fact that—and explained why—of the various post-Ellmann Joyce biographers, the vast majority are independent scholars or full-time writers/journalists, and not academics.⁷ In the end, rather than an attempt to put forth innovative readings, this is a short, readable, non-academic and easily accessible biography. The very structure of the book—divided into sixteen chapters, some of which are subdivided into sections useful for pinpointing interesting issues that merit particular attention—is the tell-tale sign of the primary function of such a text: helping the common reader to approach Joyce's life. After all, to be

⁴ Herbert Gorman, *James Joyce: a Definitive Biography*, John Lane, 1941, p.60. Italics mine.

⁵ In *The Irish Catholic*, 15th June 2017.

⁶ In *The Irish Catholic*: <http://www.irishcatholic.ie/article/james-joyce-and-irish-nationalism>

⁷ Cf. John McCourt, *Questioni Biografiche. Le Tante Vite di Yeats e Joyce*. Roma, Bulzoni, 2009.

original after the many biographies written in these decades is no easy task,⁸ and originality is not necessarily the main aim of all publications in this area. *James Joyce Unplugged* can thus be taken as an entertaining, well-written educational book.

Both *Best-Loved Joyce* and *James Joyce Unplugged* witness a constant modern concern to “democratize” Joyce, to the point of popularizing the Irish writer. Both books evidently address a general, non-specialist reader; while *Best-Loved Joyce* is intended as an emotional encouragement for would-be readers, *James Joyce Unplugged* can be seen as an accessible, entertaining, introductory biography. They are the products of the vast growing ‘Joyce Industry’ and are essential samplers for potential amateurs who have been reluctant to approach a complex author. So far...

Fabio Luppi

⁸ Cf. John McCourt, *Questioni Biografiche. Le Tante Vite di Yeats e Joyce* (cit.). McCourt also refers to a possible source of unpublished material—the James Joyce Estate—and to the subsequent dangers of being sued for the unauthorized use of unpublished and even published material, for defamation, invasion of privacy, transcription of conversations, and breach of contract. Investigating such material can be problematic.