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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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Enrico Terrinoni

James Joyce, *Pomi un penny l'uno / Poesie una pena l'una*

(edited by Francesca Romana Paci)

(Torino: Nuova Trauben - 2016, pp. 66, €12.00)

James Clarence Mangan, *Il mio cuore è un monaco*

(edited by Francesca Romana Paci)

(Torino: Trauben - 2014, pp. 230, €20.00)

Notoriously, Joyce's poetic works have not attracted the same critical attention as his more experimental prose. And yet, when he had to give advice to his Czech translators on how to translate *Work in Progress*, after telling them that theirs was an impossible task, he added: "[i]t is possible to make it into poetry – poeticize it with the greatest poetic freedom that you can give it. *Work in Progress* is not written in English or French or Czech or Irish. Anna Livia does not speak any of these languages, she speaks the speech of a river... I do not want to be translated, I have to remain as I am, only explained in your language. I am giving you every possible freedom in the transformation of words."<sup>1</sup>

The term poetry is for Joyce to be taken literally in its original Greek sense of “making, shaping”, not *ex nihilo* but starting from an inspiring principle. And it can be argued that his works all belong to *genus* poetry, insofar as they are indeed “poetic creations”. Hence, the importance of his poetry should never be underestimated, just like the comicality of *Exiles*, a text often taken to be a diluted boring version of Ibsen, but which at a second look contains, starting from the male characters' names (Dick and Hand: what's in a name?) many interesting comic allusions which touch on one of his favorite themes: sexuality.

Joyce's first published work is a collection of poems which combines the ethereal and the romantic with the obscurely scatological, starting with its title (what's in a title?). But *Chamber Music* is also, or rather mainly, an allusion to music, and it was Ellmann before many others who suggested that the main obsession of Joyce's writings was the aspiration

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the literary quarterly *Granta*. The English translation of this interview is available at <https://granta.com/the-game-of-evenings/>

one, he did create music: in *Ulysses* and in the *Wake*, and also in his poetry. His musical ear was probably an ideal counterpart to his eyesight problems, and he even famously admitted that after writing a certain episode of *Ulysses*, he was not able to listen to music anymore. A lover of Elizabethan songs as well as of opera and operetta, music accompanied him throughout his life, and it can be said to be the very essence of his poetical works.

A new Italian version of *Pomes Penyeach* translated and edited by Francesca Romana Paci seems to stem from this very awareness. The thirteen poems—published in Paris in 1927 while most of Joyce's time was in fact devoted to the composition of *Work in Progress*—were significantly put to music by a number of composers. In Italy they have been presented in many different translations, among which one can list those of Camerino, Rossi, Sanesi and more recently Natali. This new edition avails itself to an incredibly rich apparatus of annotations, which explain the poems one by one and at the same time shed light on the translation process and on the choices made by the translator.

The afterword is just as crucial, and it is here that the choice of the title is accounted for. It is a new title indeed, and a dual one. The second part reveals the very interpretive principle adopted by the translator, that is, the desire to stress and highlight the anguish, the pain which the editor and translator links to the vicissitudes of Lucia—who even worked on producing elaborate illuminations inspired by her father's work. In late years Joyce increasingly devoted more and more of his own time and money to Lucia and her problems, and this also notoriously caused further frictions in the precarious balance of the household. But the poems included in the short collection also speak of other pains and sorrows, namely those connected to Joyce and Nora's own past, especially *She Weeps Over Rahoon*, without which much of the arcane sense of the final short story of *Dubliners* would be perhaps lost on us.

With her new translation, Paci shows an awareness of such existential echoes as well as a sensitivity to the musical ones, with Bellini and Verdi at the forefront; but her translative style is also much informed by another type of awareness, that of Symons's aestheticism and Pound's imagism, as the Italian versions manage to combine philological accuracy with a desire to reproduce the interplay of their own poetics, and indeed of their influence, in Joyce's ineffable compositions.

Another major poetic influence on Joyce was that of James Clarence Mangan. Italian readers are aware of his role thanks to the various editions of Joyce's critical writings which place Mangan at the very centre of Joyce's early poetic impulses. And yet, now that a good selection of his most well-known poems (again translated by Paci) is available, it is easier to appraise the *fil rouge* which links the two Irish authors.

In the text of an Italian lecture he was supposed to give in Trieste in 1907, Joyce makes use of an anecdote by Irish revolutionary John Mitchel according to whom, in the beautiful library of Trinity College, Mangan appeared as a "thin little man with the waxen countenance and the pale hair, who was sitting on the top of a ladder with his legs crossed, deciphering a huge, dusty volume in the dim light" (OCPW: 127). There he "passed his days in study and became a competent linguist. He knew well the Italian, Spanish, French and German languages and literatures, as well as those of England and Ireland, and it appears that he had some knowledge of oriental languages, probably some Sanskrit and Arabic. From time to time he emerged from that studious quiet to contribute some poems to the revolutionary newspaper" (ibid.). Joyce's account of the life and writings of this pre-Victorian Irish poet has at times the romanticizing touch of an exile speaking of his beloved abandoned country, and it is indeed of some notice that his way of presenting Mangan might have in turn influenced subsequent critical approaches to him and his works in the light of a somewhat heroic shadow.

Mangan's works appeared in a myriad of different publications, and even the tracing of them would prove complex without critical editions to collect and connect them. Mangan's poetical output is, to be sure, as elusive as his own life, and a number of questions about him remain unanswered, though not unexplored. How could he know so many languages without having traveled the world, and more importantly, having almost always lived in poverty? He was of course a regular in the magnificent library of Trinity College, but did he have books in his personal library? These are some of the questions the vast critical apparatus of the Italian edition of Mangan's poetry tries to give an answer to in order to build a reliable artistic and existential portrait of the great artist.

The book includes about fifty poems, and each of them is densely annotated in the appendix. The aim, however, is not just to shed light on Mangan, but also to reconstruct the cultural, historical, political and lin-



guistic context he inhabited. In the first half of the nineteenth century Ireland was a hybrid laboratory in which colonial policies were tested. The final years of Mangan's life are those of the Great Famine, an event which literally put an end to an age-old culture in which the Gaelic matrix was, if not always prominent, at least quite well represented. English policies of linguistic and cultural assimilation would utterly change the face of Ireland and the inner soul of her population, without quenching, however, their thirst for emancipation and difference.

Mangan lived through the age of O'Connell's monster-meetings for Catholic emancipation, and saw around him, and interpreted foreseeing in them, to some extent, all the seeds of the future revolts. And yet he was mainly a literary person, feverishly working on his own writings and scattering them all in a mosaic of publications which faithfully seems to mirror his fragmented self. No wonder that such a myriad-minded man appealed to the young James Joyce.

The Italian edition edited by Paci also explores his activity as a translator, and the very role that translation plays in his own works. The portrait we get is no longer that of a subversive republican, or of just an ill and feeble collaborator to many obscure journals. This book has the merit of returning to us a poet whose imagination might be said to have the Blakean touch: a prophet almost, and a man obsessed with the performative as well as the creative value of the instability of the language. This very quality of Mangan's writing is well grasped in the Italian translations of his poems, aware as they are of the influence of Coleridge and Blake, but also of the use that later poets would make of his own aesthetic and visionary intuitions. The lyrical plurilingual magic of Mangan's poetry reverberates in the Italian translation and helps to create fruitful connections with Joyce's own poetic mission, always progressive in its inspiration, and never reducible to past formulae.

The poetic in Joyce is reflected, and perhaps foreseen, in the poetry of Mangan in the deep awareness that any use of the language is, at its core, also a form of translation, for translation is, as Umberto Eco argued long ago, always "a species of the *genus* interpretation".

*Enrico Terrinoni*