

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

21

**LANGUAGE
AND LANGUAGES
IN JOYCE'S FICTION**

Edited by
Serenella Zanotti

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CONTENTS

1. LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGES IN JOYCE'S FICTION

Serenella Zanotti <i>Language and Languages in Joyce's Fiction: An Introduction</i>	9
Fritz Senn, Jolanta Wawrzycka, Enrico Terrinoni, Erika Mihálycsa <i>Joycean Translatitudes</i>	21
Richard Brown <i>The "Whereabouts" of the Intertextual-genetical in Joyce and Sterne</i>	51
Ilaria Natali <i>Defining His Poetics: Joyce's Early Notes on the Divine Comedy</i>	65
Laura Pelaschiar <i>Joyce's "Pinocchioism": The Language of Lies in Joyce's Art</i>	81
Arianna Autieri <i>Translating Joyce's Musical Language: "The Dead"</i>	95
Niall Ó Cuileagáin <i>"Is he as innocent as his speech?": Rural Hiberno-English in Stephen Hero and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	113
Alberto Tondello <i>Material Language and Situated Cognition in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	127
Chiara Sciarrino <i>Corpus Stylistics and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: (De-)constructing the Spirit of the Soul</i>	143

Ira Torresi	
<i>A Tale of Two Homers (and One James): Ulyssean Loops from Literature to Popular Culture, and Back</i>	159
Ennio Ravasio	
<i>“Why Minor Sad?”: Musical Theory in Ulysses</i>	173
Fedya Daas	
<i>“Masked licence”: Parody, Heroism and the Yeatsian Theory of the Mask</i>	187
Andrea Binelli	
<i>Circulating Like a Ballad in The Dark. Joyce, The Wake and the Anarchist Translation</i>	203
Alan Shockley	
<i>“[S]oandso Many Counterpoint Words”: The Contrapuntal Music of “Night Lessons”</i>	223
Annalisa Federici	
<i>“Dear Henry” / “Dear Jim” / “My Dearest Nora”: Fictional and Private Language in Joyce</i>	233
2. BOOK REVIEWS edited by Fabio Luppi	
<i>Richard Barlow, The Celtic Unconscious. Joyce and Scottish Culture</i> (Fabio Luppi)	251
<i>Andrea Pagani, Il cammino di Bloom. Sentieri simbolici nella Dublino di Joyce</i> (Fabio Luppi)	255
<i>Genevieve Sartor (ed.), James Joyce and Genetic Criticism: Genesis Fields (European Joyce Studies 28)</i> (Emanuela Zirzotti)	257
CONTRIBUTORS	261

2.

BOOK REVIEWS

Genevieve Sartor (ed.), *James Joyce and Genetic Criticism: Genesis Fields* (European Joyce Studies 28)
(Leiden/Boston, Brill Rodopi —2018, pp. 143, € 59)

A collection of nine essays, *James Joyce and Genetic Criticism: Genesis Fields* offers an interesting insight into Joyce's writing practice from different perspectives, relying on detailed analysis of poignant passages from the author's bulk of manuscript material and covering almost all of his production. While reiterating how Joyce's work keeps eluding "conclusive understanding" (p. 1) despite scholarly efforts in finding one's feet in the intricacies of Joyce's interventions on pre-published materials, the essays here collected demonstrate what genetic criticism can do not only in shedding light on the author's *method* (thus clarifying the intertextual, intratextual, and paratextual connections that result from the interpolation of exogenetic and endogenetic material), but also in opening up new, ever-evolving interpretive possibilities on his *meaning*. It would be impossible to examine in detail such a dense collection; what follows then offers a quick – and, perhaps, insufficient – overview of some of the main features of each essay.

Exploring Joyce's complex method of composition also entails taking into account his role as editor and proof-reader of his own texts and to what extent the presence of errors and misprints in the published texts mirrors the author's determination to increase his works' obscurity. These issues are at the core of the first set of essays, which form the most engaging part of the collection and one that adds significantly both to our knowledge of the Joycean *corpus* and to our appreciation of the merits (and the limitations) of the genetic approach. Hence, Tim Conley highlights how, to Joyce, revision was always a form of "rewriting", not a "departure from natural writing" (p. 13) but part of it, thus prompting a re-assessment of accepted definitions of "writing" and "revision" which further complicates interpretation of both the final text and the author's intentions ('Revision Revisited'). Joyce's revising practice shows that he was often keen on incorporating and maintaining transcription errors of typists and typesetters in his texts. As Robbert-Jan Henkes demonstrates analysing the one instance of adaptation in *Finnegans Wake* II.2, a genetic critical approach might prove invaluable when it comes to differentiate

between misprints to be corrected and typos that Joyce silently accepted and intentionally incorporated in his text: in this sense, genetic criticism helps “catch glimpses of Joyce’s intentions and ultimately get a better grasp of the intentions of his work” (p. 26) (‘The at Wickerworks and the Case for Mute Authorisation’). Joyce’s “Work in Progress” and its editorial process form the focus of Dirk Van Hulle’s essay, which explores the genesis of the phrase “genetic field” in *Finnegans Wake* I.5 through an interesting “reversal of roles” – that is, using the edition as a tool for manuscript research thus giving shape to the *avant-texte* through an interpretive act –, and proposes a strategy for “modelling” a digital archive of *Finnegans Wake*’s various (and varied) sources (‘Editing the *Wake*’s Genesis: Digital Genetic Criticism’). The investigation of Joyce’s editorial work is completed by Sam Slote’s contribution approaching authorial-editorial interventions in *Ulysses*, a “palimpsest” itself (p. 61) whose pre-, intra-, and post-publication evolution parallels the evolution of the author’s own ideas about his work as well as his own compositional unevenness (p. 68). Slote restates the challenges of managing “errors” in *Ulysses*: the “asymmetrical” structure of Joyce’s revising method calls on a re-evaluation of concepts of revision and editing (‘Correcting Joyce: Trial and Error in the Composition of *Ulysses*’).

“Finding textual connection in order to create meaning” may be considered the tenet of the following essays, in which genetic critical approach merges with comparative analysis in triggering new interpretations, thus building up our experience of the Joycean text as both readers and critics. Analysing the late genetic development of *Finnegans Wake* II.2 and IV, Genevieve Sartor suggests that Joyce’s daughter Lucia variously acted as a link between the two chapters and a relevant compositional feature in his last book (‘What Genetics Can Do: Linking II.2 and IV of *Finnegans Wake*’). Adopting a similar comparative approach, Shinjini Chattopadhyay delves into a specific textual correspondence between *Giacomo Joyce* and the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ chapter in *Ulysses* attempting at establishing whether the former could act as an *avant-texte* or an *inter-text* to the latter; Chattopadhyay then proposes the definition of “anterior intratext” (a phrase in which attributes of both *avant-texte* and intertext merge) to qualify the unique position that *Giacomo Joyce* retains in the genetic dossier of *Ulysses* (‘Giacomonic Oxen: *avant-texte* or Intertext?’).

Finally, Luca Crispi examines in detail how Joyce constantly added to and altered the ‘Penelope’ chapter in *Ulysses* through a cross-referential analysis of the drafts and the NLI notebooks (acquired in 2002) with newly-found manuscript and epitextual material to demonstrate how Joyce conceived and implemented the chapter’s most recognizable features relatively late in the genesis of *Ulysses* (p. 96), thus significantly prompting readers to re-shape commonly accepted views of these features as intrinsic to the chapter (‘The Genesis of “Penelope” in Manuscript’).

The analysis of the larger issues raised by genetic critical appreciation of Joyce’s *corpus* finds its perfect completion with last two essays of the collection: Sangam MacDuff tackles Joyce’s manuscript copy of the “Apocalypse of Saint John” – which shows how the act of “copying” implied, to Joyce, making intentional changes to the lettered text in a parallel attempt at interpreting and exploring textual meaning and style – and considers the author’s use of the Revelation in his subsequent production, thus opening up to new research possibilities (‘Joyce’s Revelation: “The Apocalypse of Saint John” at Cornell’). Finally, Fritz Senn’s contribution closes the collection full circle, standing as “a tribute” to early genetic scholars (p. 127) and using extant genetic research to explore the impact of late revisions in intensifying some of the “eccentricities” of the ‘Ithaca’ chapter of *Ulysses* (‘Opsigenetic Touches in *Ulysses*: Ithacan Correlatives’).

As the essays collected in *James Joyce and Genetic Criticism: Genesic Field* demonstrate, despite the limitations and difficulties of manuscript and intratextual research, genetic criticism stands as a valuable contribution to our understanding of the evolution of our author’s compositional method, thus adding significantly to textual research and paving the way to new interpretive possibilities. This testifies to the liveliness of the critical debate around Joyce’s practice: much has been said on Joyce’s *corpus*, but much more still remains to be said.

Emanuela Zirzotti