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JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

22

JOYSPACE
JAMES JOYCE AND SPACE

Edited by
Roberto Baronti Marchiò

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published³, showing its structure, focussing on its humorous aspects, on its use of language and its style, introducing its characters and main themes, and describing the settings⁴. There is a smooth passage from preliminary advice to the information the reader needs in order to commence Joyce's *maledettissimo romanizzazione* without getting lost and frustrated. At the end of the introduction, McCourt also indicates which English editions and Italian translations of *Ulysses* are available, and recommends some.

A useful and enjoyable guide for beginner readers, McCourt's book also provides a series of bibliographical references from which he quotes when necessary. These can prove useful for Italian readers who would like to continue with further study and preliminary research. McCourt quotes from letters and memoirs, from both Italian (Melchiori, Ruggieri, Eco, Amalfitano, Vaglio, Terrinoni) and international critics (Ellmann, Budgen, Kiberd). As befits such a book, he does not follow the pedantic academic habit of overquoting from secondary sources: his references are concise and to the point.

This publication fills a definite gap in existing Italian academic literature on the topic, being aimed particularly at students and the ordinary reader. It is a comprehensive guide for beginners and will also prove an extremely useful practical tool for teachers, who might want to add this title to their courses not only to introduce *Ulysses* to their students, but also to provide them with continual support that they can rely on before and while reading the text.

Fabio Luppi

Brian Moloney, *Friends in Exile: Italo Svevo & James Joyce*
(Leicester: Troubador – 2018, pp. 256, £ 13.95)

Brian Moloney, Emeritus Professor of Italian at the University of Hull and expert on Svevo's work, analyzes in his book, *Friends in Exile*, the friendship between Italo Svevo (alias Ettore Schmitz) and James Joyce. Indeed, as is underlined in the introduction, it is "the first book in English to look at the full impact of the friendship that sprang up between these

³ Academics will realize that McCourt is implicitly referencing genetic criticism here.

⁴ Again, without going into a detailed discussion, McCourt alludes to postcolonial theories.

two major writers and the effects on both of that friendship” (XI). Most of the essays by other scholars on the relationship between Svevo and Joyce have in fact only emphasized general points of contact between the works of the two authors and have mostly tried to reconstruct their biographical intertwinings and make anecdotal references. This kind of recognition is certainly interesting when it tries to (re)discover a relationship long understated and underestimated (for example, even by Stanislaus himself)¹, but it is less so when it produces accounts that are not accurate in the choice and treatment of sources, such as the recent work by Stanley Price, *James Joyce and Italo Svevo: The Story of a Friendship*².

Starting with Giacomo Debenedetti’s chapter, “Svevo e Joyce”, in his book *Il Romanzo del Novecento* (1971), only a few essays have focused on a more in-depth comparative analysis of the works of the two writers and their possible reciprocal influence³. With the publication of Moloney’s work, however, a very significant contribution to understanding this relationship has been made. His book, divided into 15 chapters, reworks, in an organic though not always linear structure, already published materials, now revised and updated, together with new unpublished reflections.

¹ Stanislaus Joyce, “The Meeting of Svevo and Joyce” [1965], in *Joyce nel giardino di Svevo/Joyce in Svevo’s Garden*, a cura di R. Crivelli, Trieste: MGS Press, 1995, p. 88.

² Stanley Price, *James Joyce and Italo Svevo: The Story of a Friendship*, Bantay: Somerville Press, 2016.

³ See Giacomo Debenedetti, “Svevo e Joyce”, in Idem, *Il Romanzo del Novecento*, Milano: Garzanti, 1971, 558- 594; Micheal Hollington, “Svevo, Joyce and Modernist Time”, in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* [1976], ed. M. Bradbury and J. McFarlane, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, 430-442; Carla Apollonio, “Annotazioni sul rapporto tra Svevo e Joyce sullo sfondo della componente europea”, in *Otto/Novecento*, a. II, 6, novembre-dicembre, 1978, 67-84; Brian Moloney, “Svevo e Joyce: affinità elettive”, in *Il romanzo di Pirandello e Svevo*, a cura di E. Lauretta, Firenze: Vallecchi, 1984, 91-106; Giancarlo Mazzacurati, “Introduzione”, in Italo Svevo, *Scritti su Joyce*, a cura di G. Mazzacurati, Parma: Pratiche, 1986, 5-29; Neil Davison, “Joyce’s Homosocial Reckoning: Italo Svevo, Aesthetics and ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man’”, in *Modern Language Studies*, 24.3, Summer 1994, 69-92; Brian Moloney, “Il signor Schmitz e il professor Zois”, in Idem, *Italo Svevo narratore. Lezioni triestine*, Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 1998, 115-156 and the recent Salvatore Pappalardo, *Modernism in Trieste: The Habsburg Mediterranean and the Literary Invention of Europe, 1870-1945*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

His knowledge of Italian allows Moloney to draw on a wide variety of sources to reconstruct in a detailed and evocative way the cultural, social, and intellectual environment of Trieste at the turn of the century, which was shared by Joyce and Svevo. For the non-Italian reader, the addition of *La villa dei usei*⁴, a collection of memoirs by Alma Oberti di Valnera, Svevo's niece, written down by the writer Licia Liotta, is of particular interest. This book, which is not easy to find and is currently not translated into other language, offers vivid insight into the Veneziani clan (Svevo had married Livia Veneziani and worked at her family's firm, which produced anti-fouling compounds for ships' hulls). Using Alma Oberti di Valnera's memoirs, Moloney outlines a social context that in Trieste was often quite unpleasant. Given the different social class of the two writers, a certain distance and formality was insisted upon by the Veneziani. For example, when Joyce was in Trieste, all the intelligentsia of Trieste took part in the Sunday receptions at Villa Veneziani. But since Joyce was "a domestic employee of the family" (43), he was not invited. And Svevo's wife — snobbish Livia — who was probably never fully aware of the importance of the relationship between her husband and Joyce, pretended not to see Nora when she passed her in the street.

Nonetheless, a "mutual recognition" (18) developed between the two writers who had voluntarily chosen exile — Joyce to keep "his creative energies intact as he allowed himself to see his native land only from a distance"⁵, and Svevo as "a means of protecting his creativity from the essentially money-driven bourgeois world in which he lived" (XX). And this "mutual recognition led to the growth of a literary friendship" (39), which Moloney reconstructs by investigating its less obvious aspects.

During the English lessons that Joyce gave to Svevo, the two writers discussed, very simply, everything. They exchanged pertinent information and opinions, and they encouraged, supported, and helped each other in general. And Joyce appreciated Svevo's first two novels, *Una vita* (1892) e *Senilità* (1898), which, however, had been received with general indifference at the time they were published, giving his friend new confidence and motivation to write. Svevo, in turn, successfully urged

⁴ Licia Liotta, *La villa dei usei: dai ricordi di Alma Oberti di Valnera*, Palermo: Edizioni Novecento, 1994.

⁵ John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom*, Dublin: The Lilliput Press, p. 190.

Joyce to resume the interrupted draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and supported him in his worst moments during the troubled search for a publisher for *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*. Later, when Svevo's third novel, *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923), seemed to be yet another fiasco, not only did Joyce praise it, but he also actively strove to bring it to the attention of those Parisian critics whose opinions carried weight. Thanks to Joyce, Svevo finally enjoyed the literary success he always wanted — even if only from abroad. It was, as Svevo himself defined it, “the miracle of Lazarus” (my transl.)⁶. In 1927, to at least partially repay his debt to his friend, Svevo held a conference on Joyce, in Milan, for “Il Convegno”.

Joyce shaped Leopold Bloom by drawing inspiration from various real people, including Svevo himself. Moloney outlines the elements that Bloom and Svevo share and he makes clear that “the fact that they share this particular combination of characteristics [...] suggests that Svevo was a particularly significant source for Bloom”. Indeed, Moloney adds that “this hypothesis is greatly strengthened if one goes on to compare the relationship between Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus with that between Svevo and Joyce” (112). Equally meaningful and important for Joyce was the information that Svevo shared with him on everything related to the Jewish world and culture. The Irish writer in fact reworked and reused it in *Ulysses*, in particular in the creation of Bloom and in the *Cyclops* episode, on which Moloney lingers. With regard to this, Trieste gains particular relevance “for it was in Trieste that Joyce first began seriously to listen and to learn from Jewish voices, one of which is that of Svevo” (73). And according to Moloney, Joyce paid homage to Trieste and Svevo in *Giacomo Joyce* by adding the umbrella motif also present in *Senilità*: “in so far as [*Giacomo Joyce*] uses a lexical cluster that derives from *Senilità* and employs irony at the expense of its hapless protagonist, it also pays tribute to Svevo” (74).

Among the topics Joyce and Svevo discussed was Freudian psychoanalysis and the Italian writer Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was very popular at the time. Joyce was a great admirer of D'Annunzio. According

⁶ In the original, “il miracolo di Lazzaro”, in Italo Svevo, “Prefazione alla seconda edizione di *Senilità*”, in *Romanzi e «Continuazioni»*, edizione critica con apparato genetico e commento di Nunzia Palmieri e Fabio Vittorini, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2004, p. 399.

to Moloney, it was precisely thanks to the conversations with Svevo and perhaps the reading of *Una vita* that Joyce, in *A Portrait*, became “more capable of bringing his own irony to bear on Stephen’s, and his own, youthful D’annunzian posturings” (85-86). Indeed, as Moloney explains, “Svevo’s masterly irony helped Joyce to progress in irony from the first to the final version of his novel. By the time we come to *Ulysses*, Stephen has become capable of exercising a cutting irony towards himself: ‘Toothless Kinch, the superman’ ”(87).

If on the one hand Svevo helped Joyce to change his perspective, on the other hand, it is very likely that *Dubliners* had an impact on *Novelle muranesi* and on *Novella del buon vecchio e della bella fanciulla* that Svevo wrote shortly after reading his friend’s collection of short stories. In fact, Moloney outlines a series of parallels between these texts, regarding the social criticism they share, how they shape their characters, some of the topics they cover, and some narrative techniques they use (in particular the notion of epiphany). Moreover, *Ulysses* could have inspired *Corto viaggio sentimentale* in “a subtle series of intertextual references and allusions” (149).

In the broader perspective of European modernism, Moloney argues that Joyce and Svevo share a series of characteristics: “their debt to their predecessors, especially Flaubert; writing about their own lives; writing about their native cities; creating literate characters; [and] portraying artists, aspirant or failed” (204). However, as Moloney points out, “the principal differences between them seem to lie firstly in the very different kinds or qualities of their imaginations, and secondly in their strikingly different linguistic abilities and the confidence with which they used their respective languages” (216).

Moloney’s *Friends in Exile* closes with a chapter on Joyce’s homage to Livia in *Finnegans Wake*, where she lends her hair to Anna Livia Plurabelle to symbolize the River Liffey. While Svevo is delighted, and his wife flattered, Livia is yet “disgusted to hear that two washerwomen were scrubbing dirty linen in its waters” (*JJ*, p. 5). Joyce then wrote to Svevo that he “took from her only her hair, and that only on loan” (*LJJ III*, p. 133). However, as stressed by Moloney, “Joyce may have been displaying a little malice as far as the washerwomen are concerned, as he would not have forgotten that Nora used to do some of Livia’s washing and ironing” (225). Moloney adds that Joyce took care to also insert in the text the

famous antifouling compound of the Veneziani company, and what we read is that Anna Livia “greased the groove of her keel, [...], with antifouling butterscath and turfentide and serpenthyme” (*FW* 206). After Svevo’s death, Joyce refused for various reasons to write the preface to the English translation of the *La coscienza di Zeno*, as Livia would have liked (Stanislaus would write it), but Joyce continued to stay in touch and on good terms with her. This also emerges from the collection of memories that Livia would publish in 1950, followed by another fuller, annotated edition in 1958⁷. Here not only does she idealize Svevo himself, but also the relationship between him (and the Veneziani family), and Joyce and the Joyces.

Friends in Exile, at present, is the most valuable contribution to the understanding of how Svevo and Joyce interacted and influenced each other. Moloney’s book successfully combines biographical and historical reconstruction with critical interpretation and comparative analysis of the two authors’ texts. With sharp critical insight, he interrogates texts, testimonies, studies by the authors themselves, and works that Joyce and Svevo read and discussed together. Taking nothing for granted, Moloney indeed traces connections and allusions, detects thematic and stylistic analogies, and builds convincing hypotheses and interesting suggestions for future research.

Marco Camerani

⁷ Livia Veneziani Svevo, *Memoir of Italo Svevo*, translated by Isabel Quigly, London: Libris, 1989 [Livia Veneziani Svevo, *Vita di mio marito* (stesura di Lina Galli), nuova edizione a cura di Anita Pittoni, Trieste: Edizioni dello Zibaldone, 1958].