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JOYSPACE
JAMES JOYCE AND SPACE

Edited by
Roberto Baronti Marchiò

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CONTENTS

1. JOYSPACE JAMES JOYCE AND SPACE

Roberto Baronti Marchiò

Joyce Pays, Joycepace (Or Joyce and Space): an Introduction 9

Irakli Tskhvediani

'Nausicaa': Fragmented Narrative, Montage and Spatial Form 17

Zoe Miller

*Holes, Piers and Canyons: Absence as Emancipatory Space
in Ulysses* 33

Sonja Đurić

*An Ivory Tower within an Ivory Tower – Invented Space
in James Joyce's Ulysses* 45

Mina M. Đurić

*The Poetics of the Novel on Urban Heterotopia: Joyce's Dublin,
Pekić's Belgrade, Pamuk's Istanbul* 59

Ioana Zirra

*The Vehicle of the Broken Space Hierophany in 'Ithaca'
and the Significance of Joyce's Final Analytic* 77

Carla Vaglio Marengo

*Mapping the Unknown, Charting the Immarginable, Fathoming
the Void: Space, Exploration and Cartography in Finnegans Wake* 85

Annalisa Federici

Ulysses and the Textual Space of Little Magazine Serialisation 111

Duncan Foster <i>The Maritime Spatial Language of James Joyce</i>	131
Laura Diamanti <i>James Joyce's text: the subject's displacement and the spatial dimension</i>	141
2. JOYCEAN GLEANINGS	
Jonathan McCreedy <i>Joyceradamus: Foretelling the Age of Trump in Finnegans Wake</i>	161
Chiara Valcelli <i>Joyce's Infernal Dublin in Childhood and Maturity</i>	179
3. BOOK REVIEWS edited by Fabio Luppi	
Ronan Crowley and Dirk Van Hulle (eds.), <i>New Quotatoes: Joycean Exogenesis in the Digital Age</i> , Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016 (Andrea Binelli)	195
Manana Gelashvili, <i>James Joyce and the World. Proceeding of the International Conference, September 26-27</i> , Tbilisi, Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation, 2020 (Fabio Luppi)	199
Nilotpal Roy, <i>Pastiche of Angst: The Polythetic Analects of a Schizophrenic</i> , Kolkata: Joyce and Company Publishing Society, 2016 (Annalisa Federici)	202
John McCourt, <i>Ulisse di James Joyce. Guida alla lettura</i> , Roma, Carocci, 2021 (Fabio Luppi)	205
Brian Moloney, <i>Friends in Exile: Italo Svevo & James Joyce</i> , Leicester: Troubador, 2018 (Marco Camerani)	208
CONTRIBUTORS	215

a publication that bears witness to the commitment of Georgian scholars to Joyce Studies.

Fabio Luppi

Nilotpal Roy, *Pastiche of Angst: The Polyolithic Analects of a Schizophrenic*
(Kolkata: Joyce and Company Publishing Society, 2016 – pp. 288, ₹1000)

Joyce and Company is a new and promising publishing house from Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Debuting in the centenary year of the first appearance of Joyce's *Portrait*, their first book, Nilotpal Roy's *Pastiche of Angst: The Polyolithic Analects of a Schizophrenic*, was published in 2016. The novel draws from the author's eclectic interests in Indian scripture and mythology, Sanskrit and Bengali folk literature, Greek and Roman mythology, modernist and postmodernist experimental literature and criticism, avant-garde drama and film, European philosophy, and psychoanalytic literary criticism. As the dust jacket immediately reveals, in its unconventional use of typography and self-conscious rethinking of genre, *Pastiche of Angst* reflects both the avant-garde aspirations of its publishers and the incommensurate ambition of its author who, after compiling a long list of famous people he declares he *is not*, or prodigious things he says he *has never done*, flamboyantly affirms that "in lieu of idolizing and identifying himself with Spiderman or Batman or He-man or Superman, he chooses to be a 'Penman'". The Joycean echoes of this epithet sound even more provocative when juxtaposed with the author's pronouncement that "in fact, Nilotpal never wants to be [...] the second Joyce or the second Borges" and, more generally, with the self-contradictory and self-betraying elements of the text. However, Roy explicitly mentions Joyce (together with Borges, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, Burroughs, Eliot, Beckett and many others) among the authors who influenced the writing of his debut novel, which narcissistically propounds ideas such as "Nilotpalisation/Nilotpalising, Nilotpalesque Genre, Nilotpalesque Aporia", alongside "Third Degree Literature" (reminding of Genette's *littérature au second degré*) and "Death of Book" (evoking Barthes's *The Death of the Author*). Moreover, among the literary genres

the book purports to conflate into the unique “Nilotpalesque Genre”, the dust jacket lists the “experimental novel, experimental short story, experimental poetry, experimental drama, analytical critique, literary treatise”.

Roy’s modernist and postmodernist bold aspirations are undoubtedly evident in the absence of a traditional plot, the psychological penetration of the character, the labyrinthine style, the presence of more or less overt allusions and intertextual references, as well as the use of daring typographical experiments, collage and montage. *Pastiche of Angst* tells of the absurd and fairy-tale like events occurring inside the mind of the protagonist – who is named after the author despite the fact that they are two separate individual identities – in Kolkata on 28 April 2004, when he gets estranged from his fiancée. Nilotpal, who thinks of committing suicide as a way of beginning a new life at the very opening sentence, bespeaks the anxieties of a hypersensitive human being lost in a world of convention and routine, and becomes the inevitable expression of the helpless plight of the postmodern man. The book opens abruptly with ominous news, without providing any sentimental preparation for the audience. Questions are paradoxically counterbalanced by counter-questions which ceaselessly go on haunting the reader throughout the entire novel. The answers are repeatedly hinted at several times here and there in the text, but never presented, which immediately draws attention to the conception of the book as the labyrinth of Dedalus, or the labyrinth of the absurdity of life in which the character gets lost. In this respect, Nilotpal is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Kafka’s Gregor, Sartre’s Roquentin, Beckett’s Malone and, last but not least, Joyce’s Leopold Bloom. By penetrating his protagonist’s mind and establishing a philosophy of relative truth, Roy satirises the attitude of the postmodern man.

The philosophical intertext of this richly allusive, allegorical and symbolical novel, drawing on the theories of Kierkegaard, Hegel, Hobbes, Camus and Nietzsche among others, is also evident in the subtitle *The Polyolithic Analects of a Schizophrenic*, which makes use of the Lacanian notion of psychosis as being on the other side of language, and schizophrenia as a kind of language disorder. If schizophrenia or psychosis has an abortive impact upon language, it is also bound to have a similar effect on storytelling, while the materiality of the signifier makes narrative

both indecipherably chaotic and self-reflexive, very much like the metafictional style of postmodernist fiction. The “schizophrenization” of narrative in *Pastiche of Angst* works both on the level of avant-garde experimentation and on the clinical-pathological level, in the sense that the novel presents to its readers the train of thought occurring in the mind of the protagonist when he contemplates suicide and continues until the end. The book is a story told in an “inside-out” way from the point of view of a schizophrenic, thus creating a suspended interstice between the inside and the outside. Therefore, the storytelling techniques are variously affected and impeded by the schizophrenic’s aporias in memory and logical sequencing. Owing to this suicidal contemplation, the protagonist’s narrative acquires a self-conscious character, while the play of memory repeatedly takes him back and forth in time and space. Moreover, in moments of extreme multipolarity, Nilotpal psychologically transforms into several other characters, and the story ceaselessly shifts from one intertextual existence to another. This determines a continuous construction and deconstruction of motifs in his memory, with images coming and going with a randomness of their own. Numerous metaphors are unpredictably created out of the aporetic consciousness of the schizophrenic, while memory motifs oscillate between surface and depth.

Not only the psychological penetration, the theme of memory and the practice of intertextual allusion, but also the fact that the book is dedicated to a date (28 April 2004, the day of the separation for Nilotpal the protagonist from his fiancée Manjari) may be seen as Joycean echoes in the novel. If it is true that many authors have tried to follow in Joyce’s footsteps since the publication of *Ulysses*, Roy is undoubtedly one of the most zealous: *Pastiche of Angst* clearly resonates with many subversive aspects of Joyce’s *oeuvre*, ideals and writing practice, first and foremost his habit of meticulously preconceiving his work, or misleading critics and readers alike. In the wake of Joyce, Roy has even drawn an explanatory sketch for his book – which he calls, with Joycean as well as Lawrentian allusions, “Omphaloskepsis” or “The Centripetally Centrifugal Gyre of *Pastiche of Angst*” – exactly as Joyce made schemas for *Ulysses*. Roy’s schema illustrates how the novel consists of a “Pre Phase” (preface) and eleven “Phases” (chapters), each made up of “Stairs” (paragraphs) in varying numbers. The main character is most of the times “Nilotpal the

protagonist as himself”, who may metamorphose into “Nilotpal the protagonist as Nilotpal the author”, or a vast array of literary and historical characters, the most resonating transformations definitely being those into “Nilotpal the protagonist as Leopold Bloom”, “Nilotpal the protagonist as Shem the Penman”, “Nilotpal the protagonist as Ulysses”, “Nilotpal the protagonist as James Joyce and Manjari as Nora Barnacle”, “Nilotpal the protagonist as Leopold Bloom and Manjari as Gerty MacDowell” and “Nilotpal the protagonist as Leopold Bloom as Dante and Manjari as Molly Bloom as Beatrice”. The narrator, “Nilotpal the author as himself”, may also impersonate, to name but a few, Moses, Dante, William Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, George Orwell, Herman Hesse, Eugene Jolas and Richard Ellmann. When the narrator is “Nilotpal the author as James Joyce”, it is interesting to remark that the schema lists, as context for the narrative, “*Ulysses*”, “*Exiles*” and “*Finnegans Wake*”.

Regardless of its merits, *Pastiche of Angst* undoubtedly attempts to reproduce the most challenging aspects of Joyce’s *oeuvre*, and it will also represent a challenge for the Quinns, Linatis, Larbauds, Gilberts or Ellmanns of the twenty-first century who will venture to decipher it.

Annalisa Federici

John McCourt, *Ulisse di James Joyce. Guida alla lettura*
(Roma, Carocci – 2021, pp.198, Euro 19)

Many commentaries and reading guides to *Ulysses* are available nowadays, from Stuart Gilbert’s classic *James Joyce’s Ulysses. A Study*, written under Joyce’s supervision and published in 1930, to more recent ones such as Terence Killeen’s *Ulysses Unbound: A Reader’s Companion to James Joyce’s Ulysses* (The Florida James Joyce Series, 2017) and Harry Blamires’s *A Guide Through Ulysses* (New Bloomsday Book, 1996)—a page-by-page, line-by-line running commentary on the plot. There is also Bernard McKenna’s *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Reference Guide* and Sean Sheehan’s *Joyce’s Ulysses: A Reader’s Guide* (Bloomsbury, 2009), which also includes a chapter-by-chapter examination of the plot and stylistic