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**Joyce Studies in Italy** is a peer-reviewed journal aimed at collecting materials that throw light on Joyce’s work and world. It is open to essays from scholars both from Italy and abroad, and its broad intertextual approach is intended to develop a greater understanding of James Joyce, the man and the artist. The project was initiated in the early 1980s by a research team at the University of Rome, ‘La Sapienza’ led by Giorgio Melchiori. It subsequently passed to the Università Roma Tre. Originally no house style was imposed regarding the individual essays in the collection, but in recent issues a standardized style sheet has been adopted which can be found at the end of each volume.

Under the patronage of honorary members Umberto Eco and Giorgio Melchiori, the James Joyce Italian Foundation was founded in 2006 (<http://host.uniroma3.it/Associazioni/jjif>). The work of the Foundation, and the issues of the Piccola Biblioteca Joyciana series, are intended to promote and further the work undertaken by “Joyce Studies in Italy” (website: <http://joycestudiesinitaly.netsons.org/index.php/>).

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

20

**JAMES JOYCE**  
**THE JOYS OF EXILE**

*Edited by*  
*Franca Ruggieri*

**ea**  
ANICIA

*Volume pubblicato con il contributo  
di The James Joyce Italian Foundation*

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Patrick O’Neill, *Trilingual Joyce. The Anna Livia Variations*.  
(Toronto: University of Toronto Press – 2018, pp. 226, €34.58)

Many have argued that *Finnegans Wake* is untranslatable. Yet, is it really possible to debate what might be uncontroversially translatable, and why, and how, if there are books that can be translated only partially, and if the act of translating literary texts is always an arbitrary act? True, *Finnegans Wake* is not even written in English: Wakeese is Wakeese, and undoubtedly this is something different. Furthermore, *Finnegans Wake* is the Book quoted in manuals of translation theory as an exemplum of untranslatability. However, objections to the question of translatability and to the opportunity of translation are often just an excuse for hostile and envious criticism, possibly alluding to – or concealing – a certain contempt for what is mistakenly considered a controversial or commercial operation.

Thank God Joyce gave us an example and translated the eighth chapter of his untranslatable book: indeed, Anna Livia Plurabelle (ALP) was rendered into both French and Italian with the help of friends and fellow writers. It is also true that to convince his Italian friend, Nino Frank, to translate this excerpt, he stated that “we must do the job now before it is too late; for the moment there is at least one person, myself, who can understand what I am writing [...]” (29).<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding the latter objection – the author necessarily would one day be out of reach for reasons of force majeure – this operation, authorized and performed by the author himself, means that the text is – as are all texts – translatable.

Patrick O’Neill’s *Trilingual Joyce. The Anna Livia Variations* is the first comparative investigation of these three ALP translations: the French, the Italian and the Basic – Basic English being “a radically simplified subset of standard English with a vocabulary limited to 850 words, including only eighteen permissible verbs” (26). The book is made up of ten chapters, each containing sub-chapters titled according to the excerpt under consideration and each examined minutely; in most cases the author focuses on

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from Frank, Nino. (1979). “The Shadow That Had Lost Its Man”. In Willard Potts (ed.). *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*. Seattle, University of Washington Press, p. 96; Ellmann, Richard. (1982). *James Joyce*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 700.



short sentences, and only occasionally on longer parts made up of different lines. Each chapter invariably ends with a sub-chapter called “Comments and Contexts”. That is to say that after the inevitable linguistic, structural, and semantic close reading – a critical tour de force (nothing new under the sun, when we face *Finnegans Wake*), O’Neill comments on more general aspects, on the issues raised, on coincidences, on the possible renderings of cultural references that might create problems in a different language, and even on the emendations Settanni, Beckett and others proposed. However, these sections too are rigorously text-based.

Describing the book as a close reading of a text and of its authorial translations does not give credit to the work done or to the in-depth analyses of the passages reported; were it not for its Introduction and Conclusion, *Trilingual Joyce* could be seen as a series of meticulous footnotes to the primary texts. Yet, these footnotes occupy pages and pages of comments on short passages and their variations, and even on single or half lines. The result is that the whole book is, of course, an operation that is pedantic (not to be interpreted in a negative or derogatory way), and yet not organic either. As O’Neill states in the conclusion of the study, “to keep the project within reasonable limits” (182) he had to make a choice and take into consideration no more than half of ALP. No worries here: Joycean scholars are used to such minutiae, endorsed by Joyce himself when he stated that critics would spend decades over the allusions and references hidden in and scattered throughout his texts. Thus, O’Neill spends six pages even on ‘easy’ passages such as the first “O / tell me about / Anna Livia! I want to hear all about Anna Livia”. Here his argumentation over the choice not to translate literally ‘hear about’, changing it to ‘want to know’, is not particularly convincing given that the verb ‘to hear’ in both French and Italian would probably sound more marked than the rendering of ‘want to know.’ If this might make us doubt the author’s imperfect grasp of French and Italian, then we would be mistaken. Shortly after, O’Neill comments on one of Settanni’s emendations to the text, “tutto sapere vo” instead of “tutto vo’ sapere”, suggesting the most common word order in colloquial Italian. Here, and in many other instances, the author perfectly distinguishes nuances that would otherwise be difficult to detect.

However, this precision might also be attributed to an extensive reading of secondary sources. Indeed, *Trilingual Joyce* is also very well

documented. O'Neill makes ample use of previous studies that necessarily include several Italian and French publications. Among the Italians are some of the former trustees and honorary members of the James Joyce Italian Foundation, whose names it is a pleasure to recall here: Umberto Eco, Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli, Jacqueline Risset and Luigi Schenoni. These names, together with those of many other critics, are mentioned and quoted in the introduction, where O'Neill retraces the events that led to the 'final' translations of ALP – published when Joyce was still alive –, the publication history of these translations and, obliquely, the relative critical debate.

The introduction of the book is also divided into five short chapters, each dealing with a different translation (English, French, Italian, Basic) and with a conclusion entitled "Text and Macrotext", where, once and for all, it is made clear that as "there are no nonsense syllables in Joyce", and that as "Joyce's unit of attention had narrowed down to the single letter" (39)<sup>11</sup> this book, in dealing with translation, will proceed with a meticulous analysis of a book that, evidently, "remains a work perennially in progress" (200).

*Fabio Luppi*

Giuliana Bendelli, *Leggere l'Ulisse di Joyce* (With essays by G. Giorello and E. Terrinoni. Pref. by M. Bacigalupo).  
(Milano: Vita e Pensiero 2017 – pp. 240, €16.00)

A random look at posts on several Facebook "reading groups" provides an interesting overview of the role that *Ulysses* and its author still have in

<sup>11</sup> These two sentences from the text are quotations from Joseph Campbell & Henry Morton Robinson respectively (1961. *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, New York: Viking Press) and from Hugh Kenner (1992. "Shem the Textman," in Maria Rosa Bollettieri Bosinelli, Carla Marengo Vaglio, and Christine Van Boheemen (eds.). *The Languages of Joyce: Selected Papers from the 11th International James Joyce Symposium, Venice, 12-18 June 1988*. Philadelphia and Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 145-54).