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CONTENTS

Sylvain Belluc <i>Science, Etymology and Poetry in the “Proteus” episode of “Ulysses”</i> p.	9
Andrea Ciribuco <i>“I’ve got the Stephen Dedalus Blues”: Joycean allusions, quotes and characters in Don DeLillo’s “Americana”</i>	» 25
Ann Fallon <i>Stephen’s Ovidian Echoes in “Ulysses”</i>	» 39
Chih-hsien Hsieh <i>Hark the Written Words – The Gramophone Motif in “Proteus”</i>	» 51
Alison Lacivita <i>Ecocriticism and “Finnegans Wake”</i>	» 63
Yi-peng Lai <i>“Bloom of Flowerville”: An Agri-national Consumer</i>	» 71
Fabio Luppi <i>Women and Race in the Last Two Chapters of “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”</i>	» 83
John McCourt <i>After Ellmann: the current state of Joyce biography</i>	» 97
Jonathan McCreedy <i>An Argument for Characterology in the “Wake’s Old I.2”: HCE’s ‘Centrality’ and the “Everyman” Archetype.</i>	» 111

Niko Pomakis	
<i>Lean Unlovely English Turned Backward: Reading</i>	
<i>“Scylla & Charybdis” Hermetically</i>	p. 123
Franca Ruggieri	
<i>James Joyce: Tradition, and Individual Talent</i>	» 137
Elizabeth Switaj	
<i>Joyce, Berlitz, and the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language.....</i>	» 151
William Viney	
<i>Reading Flotsam and Jetsam: The Significance of Waste in ‘Proteus’</i>	» 165

AFTER ELLMANN:
THE CURRENT STATE OF JOYCE BIOGRAPHY

Given the busy and multidirectional nature of Joyce studies, it is ironic that Joyce, who placed his 'multiple mes' (FW 410.12) at the centre of so much of what he wrote, is today still read within the frame of just one major biographical portrait, Richard Ellmann's elegant and vast *James Joyce*, which appeared in 1959 and was partially revised in 1982. Today we still rely almost exclusively on Ellmann's biography, conveniently ignoring the extent to which it belongs to another time and is oblivious not only to a vast quantity of new information about Joyce's writings and the nature of their composition but also to the critical and theoretical earthquakes which have shaken so many of the foundations upon which it rests. Since Ellmann wrote his 'definitive' biography, the very idea of a unified biography and of the unity of the subject has been placed in question. We have grown increasingly aware of how each critical work is a response to a very particular historical and ideological situation and both a response to and a reflection of its own times. As a result it is now evident that Ellmann's *Joyce*, justly hailed as a milestone of twentieth century biography, is not, however, the last word, nor is it neutral or objective, any more than the works that preceded it and followed it are but is a subjective and hybrid mixture of fact and conjecture, of documented record and authorial observation. Ellmann wrote in the belief that to admit holes, to not paint over cracks, to break, as it were, the illusion of a seamless whole was to play a risky game, to expose not so much the subject of the biography as the biographer himself. In his view, biography works best by furnishing the illusion of total knowledge, definitive interpretation. The biographer will be criticised for not knowing, for betraying the readers' implicit belief even if admitting to not knowing would sometimes be the more honest course. All of which may have been fine at the time but what is less acceptable is that we continue to rely on Ellmann's fifty-year-old book today (this, despite the recent publication of

Gordon Bowker's 600-page *James Joyce A Biography*, which is readable but falls a long way short of what is needed and is strewn with factual errors).¹

Joyce is one of the few canonical authors not to have been reborn in biography since '68 and it is timely to ask why Joyce biography has largely failed to challenge Ellmann. At the outset, it should be said that Ellmann worked hard to keep the field empty of competitors, guarding his territory from possible intruders. As he told his editors at Oxford University Press: 'Even a bad book by someone else would take the cream off [mine].'² But over fifty years have passed so he can certainly not be blamed for the absence of challengers in the meantime. Most biographies written after Ellmann either restated or only very partially adapted his reading of the writer and his life. I have in mind, by way of example, Bruce Bradley's valuable account of Joyce's Jesuit education, *James Joyce's Schooldays*³ (which carried the *imprimatur* of an Ellmann preface). Several illustrated biographies have left a useful heritage of sharp text and important contextual photography, notably Chester Anderson's *James Joyce and His World* and David Pierce's *James Joyce's Ireland*,⁴ which reads Joyce's life and works in terms of their Irish and European contexts. My own short illustrated biography, *James Joyce A Passionate Exile* seeks to understand Joyce in terms of his European exile. Various partial biographies, limited to a circumscribed period in the writer's life, such as Peter Costello's *James Joyce: The Years of Growth*,⁵ or my own *The Years of Bloom Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920* have offered alternative readings to Ellmann's.⁶ In addition to these works, a number of full but short, openly derivative versions of the life have been published. The best of this latter genre is Morris Beja's *James Joyce A Literary Life*, a portrait which vividly explores the importance of Joyce's life for his writing. Beja acknowledges that his book 'owes many debts to Ellmann's work' while also pointing to how it 'attempts to reflect what has been learned – and thought – about

¹ Gordon Bowker, *James Joyce A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2011).

² Richard Ellmann to Oxford University Press, 13 July 1953. REC Series I, Box 179. I am grateful to Amanda Sigler for bringing this comment to my attention.

³ Bruce Bradley S.J., *James Joyce's Schooldays* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1981).

⁴ David Pierce, *James Joyce's Ireland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵ Peter Costello, *The Years of Growth 1882-1915* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1992).

⁶ John McCourt, *The Years of Bloom Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000). For biographical treatments of the Trieste years, see also Peter Hartshorn, *James Joyce and Trieste* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1997); Renzo S. Crivelli, *James Joyce, Triestine Itineraries* (Trieste: MGS Press, 1997).

James Joyce, his family, his writings and his world in the generation or more since Ellmann's biography first appeared.⁷ Other short biographies are part of what William St Clair has described as 'a kind of restless biographical consumerism, a constant repackaging of the same materials in ways which give an appearance of novelty'.⁸ They include Ian Pindar's dull and unoriginal *James Joyce*⁹ and Edna O'Brien's quirky, gushing volume which gives Stan Gébler Davies's *James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist* a good run for its money as the most unreliable mainstream version of the life.¹⁰ O'Brien's agenda had more to do with her own literary legacy – her conscious self-casting as the female counterpart to Joyce – than it had in any real interest in the writer's life as anything other than literary predecessor, exemplar and presumed counterpart. Most recently, Andrew Gibson joined the fray with his *James Joyce*, a short volume written to the post-colonial agenda that has reclaimed Joyce for Ireland.

Other re-writers of Joycean biography have shown little interest in such a political placing of their subject, and have preferred to come at Joyce sideways, choosing to write about a member of his immediate family and about Joyce only through refraction. Proceeding genealogically, John Wyse Jackson and Peter Costello lead off with *John Stanislaus Joyce. The Voluminous Life and Genius of James Joyce's Father* which provides a copiously detailed account of the Joyce ancestry. In *Nora: The Real Life of Molly Bloom*, Brenda Maddox brings Nora out of relative obscurity and argues convincingly for her importance at Joyce's side and as a source for his writing, particularly for the character of Molly Bloom. Carol Schloss brings the cycle to a close with her sometimes obsessive biography of Lucia Joyce¹¹, a work that rescues Lucia from oblivion, and, in the process, deposes Nora as Joyce's chief muse. In doing so, it overplays its hand with exaggerated claims about Lucia's importance to Joyce's creative process and vindictively harsh judgements on most members of the Joyce family and circle. While celebrating Lucia it also does down Joyce.

⁷ Morris Beja, *James Joyce A literary Life* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), p. xi.

⁸ William St Clair, 'The Biographer as Archaeologist', in Peter France and William St Clair, eds., *Mapping Lives The Uses of Biography*, p.224.

⁹ Ian Pindar, *James Joyce* (London: Haus: 2004).

¹⁰ Stan Gébler Davies, *James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975).

¹¹ Carol Schloss, *Lucia Joyce To Dance in the Wake* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

The works of both Maddox and Schloss are, in a sense, throwbacks to what Geoffrey Wall calls the 'feminist humanism of the class of '68' which he says was 'inescapably biographical and predominantly populist. The primary task for that generation was to fill in the gaps, to uncover significant lives that had long lain hidden from view, to chronicle recurrent psychological experiences that had always been silenced, or ignored. This meant biographical research, but it also involved gradually rewriting the very protocols of the biographical enterprise.'¹² Both Maddox and Schloss attempt to do posthumous justice to the two of the most significant female figures in Joyce's life and have, in turn, cast new, important and not always positive light on Joyce himself. Indeed it could well be argued that, much though they claim the contrary, Joyce is their principal interest: without his presence their biographies would simply not exist. For this reason, Suman Gupta asserts, with some justification but rather harshly, that Maddox's *Nora* is, in fact, a biography of Joyce: 'The unfortunate thing is that she does not know this because she calls her book *Nora: the Real Life of Molly Bloom*. It is true that she does once in a while struggle against Nora Barnacle's "otherness." But she ultimately throws up her hands in despair, confirms Nora's position as the 'other,' and ends up writing yet another biography of James Joyce.'¹³ The same can be said of the Schloss book. Although our views of Lucia may have been changed by the time we reach the end of her biography, it is, inevitably, our altered vision of Joyce that matters more.

Missing from this series of book-length family portraits is Stanislaus, a vital presence in Joyce's formative years whose own later versions of events are crying out to be analysed.¹⁴ He held a key role as mediator between Joyce and his critics but at times felt that he had something of an exclusive hold on Joyce and his reception. As he told Herb Cahoon, 'You must remember that I was my brother's first disciple.'¹⁵ Stanislaus saved an extraordinary mass of letters and materials and hoped to write his own version of his brother's creative life. As he stated it: 'My aim in writing is to present my brother's character and outlook as I knew and understood them in about

¹² Quoted in Geoffrey Wall 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4 2000, p.294.

¹³ Suman Gupta, 'On Literary Biography and Biografiends', *New Literary History*, Vol.24, No.3, Textual Interrelations (Summer, 1993), p.693.

¹⁴ John McCourt, 'James and Stanislaus Joyce: Eternal Counterparts' in *Joyce in Svevo's Garden*, ed. R. Crivelli and J. McCourt (Trieste: MGS Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Letter of 6 March 1950 to Herb Cahoon. A copy of the letter is kept in the REC, Box 6.

thirty years of life together.¹⁶ Unfortunately he died in 1955 having written just the Dublin chapters of what became *My Brother's Keeper* and so an invaluable witness to post-Dublin Joyce was lost.

Stanislaus's project would have been marred by his abiding desire to protect and defend his brother (this despite his own feeling of having been abandoned, betrayed even by him); by his placing of his own reactions to and hostility towards people known to both of them in place of Joyce's own; by his total lack of sympathy for Joyce's later writings and later lifestyle. Despite these provisos, it should be stated clearly that what we do possess of his commentaries on his brother remains valuable and that Stanislaus has often been the subject of rather unjust criticism. His *Dublin Diaries* (even though they are doctored in his own favor) provide an insightful sense of life in the Joyce family in Dublin while *My Brother's Keeper* remains a valuable document even if it too is somewhat sanitized. Of even more value is the unpublished *Triestine Book of Days*, which covers two years (1907-1909), and provides an extraordinarily vivid account of the difficulties of life in Trieste, recreating the social and cultural backgrounds of a lively city whose impact on Joyce has, up to very recently, been seriously undervalued.¹⁷

If certain of Stanislaus' assertions in his published works are partial with the truth, there is nothing to stop subsequent critics and biographers from correcting them but Stanislaus should not be seen as the root of all the limitations of Joyce biography. If anyone, from the very outset, was trying to carve a very particular and selective version of Joyce it was Joyce himself and Stanislaus simply took up that mission following his brother's death. One of the most repeated criticisms of Ellmann's Joyce biography is that it is tinged with "Stannic acid"¹⁸, that it depends too much on Joyce's brother's vision of things and allows Stanislaus's point of view to function as a sort of filter. Certainly Stanislaus's collection formed one the important bases for Ellmann's Joyce and contributed significantly to its depth and its success. Without the unlimited and exclusive access that Ellmann had to Stanislaus'

¹⁶ Quoted from a letter from Stanislaus to Ellworth Mason reported by Mason to Ellmann in a letter dated 11 December 1958 and kept in the REC, Box 156.

¹⁷ For a more ample discussion of Stanislaus Joyce see Laura Pelaschiar's "Of brother, diaries, and umbrellas: News from Stanislaus Joyce." *Joyce Studies in Italy*, 5 ed. Franca Ruggieri (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1998), pp.213-224, and her "News from Trieste: Stanislaus Joyce's *Book of Days*", *James Joyce Quarterly*, (Special Issue Fall 1999), ed. Corinna Del Greco Lobner, University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, pp.61-72.

¹⁸ Bernard McGinley, *Joyce's Lives. Uses and Abuses of the Biografiend* (London: University of North London Press, 1996), p.20.

papers his book would have been a much thinner and more unreliable affair but Stanislaus cannot be held responsible for the shortcomings of Ellmann's work, nor inculpated for being a "ghostly" and "distorting" presence in the first half of it.¹⁹ In short, his influence on Ellmann has been overestimated. From the outset Ellmann was overly cautious about asking Stanislaus questions and worried that his chief source 'would resent my milking him too much'.²⁰ In addition he often dismissed what now read like sound, unbiased versions of events as recounted to him by Stanislaus, preferring instead to rely on Joyce's livelier fictional renderings. Later he felt that he had missed his chance with Joyce's brother, that he had failed to ask him the pertinent questions when he had the chance. As Ellmann himself wrote: 'We talked, and I was trying to be very delicate about asking questions, till finally he said to me "don't you have anything else to ask me?" At that point I asked as much as I could, but always felt afterwards that I had really muffed a great opportunity. I regret to say that the following year he died.'²¹

In the second part of this paper, I'd like to look at the factors that have deterred academic critics from the field of Joyce biography. Of the various post-Ellmann Joyce biographers, it seems no accident that the vast majority are independent scholars or full-time writers/journalists. This seems to suggest an academic shying away from biography's vital challenge of reconciling what Woolf calls the 'granite-like solidity' of facts with the 'rainbow-like intangibility' of personality²². Coupled with biography's uncertain place within literary criticism, the would-be biographer must assume a heavy responsibility in terms of the moral accountability inherent in the narration of lives. Empathy, sometimes bordering on what, in psychoanalytical terms, is referred to as a process of transference, plays a key role in biographical thinking and the recent work on Nora, Lucia, and even the essays on Stanislaus, has shown that most critics find it far easier to identify and empathise with secondary figures than they do with Joyce himself. The result of this may be that justice is done to these characters around Joyce at Joyce's own expense. One thinks for example of Brenda Maddox accusing Joyce of 'malignant self-absorption – it ruined Nora's life', of her celebration of Nora's

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.21.

²⁰ Letter of 30 August 1953 from Richard Ellmann to Oxford University Press. REC, Series I, Box 179.

²¹ Richard Ellmann, 'Reminiscences of the Biographer'.

²² Virginia Woolf, 'The New Biography' in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew MacNeillie (London: 1986), vol. iv, p. 473.

cheerfulness and simple wisdom, her self-sacrifice for Joyce. In this instance, empathy overwhelms the necessity for equidistance and justice. That Joyce was self-absorbed is evident but was it really 'malignant'? Furthermore, what exactly did Nora sacrifice when choosing to be with Joyce? Did any better life ever conceivably await her in Ireland? But Maddox's antipathy for Joyce is, by now, one shared by many of the most admiring readers of his works: the reality for many is that although their delight in Joyce's writings is almost boundless, they also find themselves somewhat less than enamoured with the man.

This question is further complicated by the fact large chunks of the life have already been creatively re-written, many times over, and with studied inaccuracy, by Joyce himself, in his fiction and in his letters. Just how to deal with Joyce's (semi-) autobiographical fiction when writing his biography is a tricky question. Much though one can strive to limit the impact of the fiction, there is an inevitable merging of, for example, Joyce and Stephen, Nora and Molly, Stanislaus and Shaun. One also has to fight the retrospective shape Joyce managed to impose on his life, and in particular on Gorman's authorised version. Today it is still no easy task for a writer to resist Joyce's impositions or today to write against much of the material to be found in a Gorman or an Ellmann. Joyce's life, Ellmann believed, was driven by a single, cohesive imaginative vision and when the material thrown up by chronological investigation failed to provide the necessary links in the Joycean creative chronology, Ellmann borrowed them from elsewhere, from earlier events in Joyce's life or fiction and knitted the whole into a marvelously solid whole. Of course, as Regard has written, 'biographical writing cannot escape the necessity of 'fictionalising' the author's life, since it has to disengage the self from an abundance of *a priori* disconnectedness.'²³

The problem, when reading a biographer as polished as Ellmann, is the sheer brilliance of his narrative achievement, the verisimilitude of what he writes, the manner in which he transmits information as though it were truth, as though he were the only voice capable of transmitting Joyce as he really was into one comprehensible and acceptable whole. But the problem is not really Ellmann at all. He simply did his biographer's task in a manner exemplary for its time, the problem is the lasting aura of dependability, almost sacralty, that has been heaped upon his text and the subsequent failure to create a viable alternative reading that would adequately challenge the shape it gives to

²³ Frederic Regard, 'The Ethics of Biographical Reading: A Pragmatic Approach', p. 402.

Joyce's life. The fact, however, that Ellmann edited the letters, is unfortunate because even if one chooses not to use his biography, one has little choice but to use his editions of the letters which have aged less well than his biography. With each passing year, their incompleteness becomes more apparent as does the sometimes less than perfect nature of some of the transcriptions.

Following the publication of Ellmann's revised biography, Arnold Goldman was critical of its 'positivist biographical presentation of unitary being'²⁴, which, he claimed, was as problematic as the New Critical automatic assumption of a work's organic unity. He further criticised the novelistic illusion of wholeness that Ellmann casts on the life and on the work. In Goldman's words, Ellmann sees 'a single Joyce, not versions of Joyce filtered to him through text and letter, diary and memoir, interview and conversation'.²⁵ Scholars are now in broad agreement that there were many Joyces, that the *aesthetic* credo that he espoused in the early works is of only limited use in understanding how he wrote and how we might read the later works. Joyce's texts are increasingly seen as not being the result of one unitary intention but rather the result of a changing circumstances that caused them to be written and rewritten, sometimes countless times over, by an artist whose aesthetics and ideas and assumptions were in radical flux.

Today we are still waiting for a biography that conveys an adequate sense of such aesthetic shifting – a shifting whose complexity and continuity has become far more apparent given the findings of genetic criticism. Joyce biography today has not taken adequate account of his wide and eclectic reading or of the many-levelled process of his multiple revisions and elaborate stylisation. Instead biography remains within the Ellmann frame which sees Joyce driven by a single imaginative vision, one that allowed his biographer feel justified in cutting and pasting to suit his narrative measure, believing that all the material from the life and the works was part of the same cloth and therefore interchangeable. There is also some truth in Katherine Frank's claim that much of the success of Ellmann's biography derives from its highly authoritative 'voice'²⁶. The Ellmann voice is hugely persuasive especially in construing a sense of its own objectivity: 'One cannot help feeling that Ellmann's objectivity is as much an attitude as, say,

²⁴ Arnold Goldman, 'Review of Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce*'. *James Joyce Broadsheet*, 10, February 1983, p.1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ K. Frank, 'Writing Lives: Theory and Practice in Literary Biography,' *Genre* 13, Winter 1980, p.502.

Gorman's eulogistic approach. One cannot say 'Ellmann has been *objective*' as if objectivity were an absolute prerequisite of Ellmann's writing. 'Ellmann has been objective' is more likely the case – that is, Ellmann has made objectivity his personal trademark. There is something personal about his objectivity: it is a style, a certain mode of presentation that makes *him* appear so.²⁷ Indeed the controlled authority of Ellmann's narrative voice allowed his cut-and-paste method to appear seamless and caused many to overlook his biography's factual shortcomings, its drawing on the fiction as though it were a reliable factual source when of course it is anything but. Ellsworth Mason faulted Ellmann for confusing 'the plausible with the actual', and, with only moderate overstatement, was correct in his prediction that his friend's mistakes would be 'the last to depart this earth'²⁸. Denis Donoghue and Hugh Kenner were among those who accused Ellmann of attributing little 'imagination' to his subject, for tracing the complex materials of the fiction almost inevitably back to the life. They also criticised him of doing the exact opposite, of borrowing, to quote Kenner, 'freely from the fictions when details are needed, secure in his confidence that if they got into Joyce's fictions they were originally facts'²⁹. In private correspondence, Ellsworth Mason had already frowned on this habit and wrote to Ellmann: 'If I intuit rightly, and if you are weaving both the works and the non-works into a single, supposedly factual, fabric, it is a serious flaw in the work.'³⁰ In other words, Ellmann was knitting, like Shem in *Finnegans Wake*, 'truth and untruth together' (*FW* 169. 8-9), and creating an almost mythical version of the life. Ellmann himself was deeply aware of the tools of narrative artistry he employed in creating shape and pattern and alluded to his method, writing: 'perhaps I could do a biography simply using this material weaving it together into some sort of pattern'. Pattern became more important than absolute factual accuracy and was in a sense dictated by Ellmann's sense of his own sure knowledge of his subject.

Ellmann sought to provide a narrational drive where sometimes the life was lacking one (or when his knowledge of the events of the life was lacking). He sometimes misplaced events to make them fit better and had

²⁷ Suman Gupta, 'On Literary Biography and Biografiends' in *New Literary History*, "Textual Interrelations", 24, 3, 1993, p.692.

²⁸ Letter of 26 October 1954 from Ellsworth Mason to Richard Ellmann. REC.

²⁹ Hugh Kenner, 'The Impertinence of being Definitive'. *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 December 1982, p.1383.

³⁰ Letter of 9 November 1958 from Ellsworth Mason to Richard Ellmann. REC.

a habit of tying up loose ends, providing a overarching sense of causality and completeness. As he himself wrote: 'The unknown need not be the unknowable. To paraphrase Freud, where obscurity was, hypothesis shall be. In this sense, paucity of information may even be an advantage, as freeing the mind for conjecture.'³¹ If this is the *credo* that he applied to the construction of his biography, it should lead us to re-evaluate the entire work as the creation of a God-like biographer who feels free to play fast and loose with the facts, to paper over the gaps of knowledge and to give conjecture free reign. This method, used with restraint and sensitivity by Ellmann sometimes served him well but it also set a perilous precedent for successors who sometimes felt licensed to proceed in like manner. Bowker is but the latest example to fall into this trap, conflating the life with the literary works and showing little or no understanding of the differences between Joyce's characters and their conjectural models. Joyce himself is constantly identified, unproblematically with Stephen Dedalus, when he (Joyce) is described, for example, as 'the self-proclaimed forger of the conscience of his race'. Other biographers make use of the subjunctive mood to push their conjectural hypotheses. Pushed too far, the use of the conditional can become an irritation as it does in Schloss's *Lucia Joyce*, where, what we might call the 'conjecture principle', is allowed freer reign and the narrative is interrupted by unsubstantiated claims that begin with phrases such as 'We can imagine', 'We can speculate'. Following a description of the 'footnote' to Issy's letter in *Finnegans Wake*, Schloss writes: 'Written in 1934 with drafts (nine and ten) that were revised up until 1937, these words sound remarkably like a conversation we can imagine Joyce having with Lucia in 1935'³². When a biographer resorts to what she merely believes happened she is entering the dangerous subjective realm of fancy. In Schloss's case this is a pity because she does throw new light on the Joyce family and is motivated by a noble desire to rescue Lucia from oblivion. Her aim is to do Lucia posthumous justice and her narrative is driven by a fierce empathy. But serious biography also has to come to terms with the issue of accountability to all of its subjects and Schloss falls down on this count in her almost caricatured depictions of Nora and Giorgio, evil mother and brother, and, to some extent of Joyce himself. The question of accuracy and doing justice is a huge issue in biography, and one that is not easily solved, even

³¹ Richard Ellmann, 'Freud and Literary Biography,' in *a long the riverrun, Selected Essays* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1988). p.261.

³² Carol Schloss, *Lucia Joyce: To Dance in the Wake*, p.433.

in individual cases. Worthen's suggestion to affix the words – 'Some or all of this may be wrong' – to literary biographies as a kind of Government Health warning is hardly a workable solution.³³

Another crucial restraining factor in Joyce biography is the fear of legal difficulties. Potential biography writers are all too fully aware of the dangers of being sued for the unauthorized use of unpublished and even published material, for defamation, invasion of privacy, transcription of conversations, and breach of contract. No one wants to see ten years of research blocked by problems with a literary estate or to be severely compromised by being compelled to make cuts and leave out valuable new material, yet, with few exceptions, scholars and biographers find themselves having to invent ways to get around these problems. The Joyce Estate's policy has been highly effective in this regard, succeeding in scaring off potential biographers and publishers but in doing so, it has conversely done Joyce himself an enormous and lasting disservice by leaving his readers with an outdated and incomplete vision of his life and of the lives of those closest to him. Biographers have tried to deal with this problem in different ways. Some have simply ignored it, hoping to push fair use to the limits and have gotten away largely unscathed by avoiding controversial areas of investigation. Others came had to come to accommodations with the Estate (Maddox, for example, agreed to cut her closing chapter about Lucia Joyce). But even that did not satisfy the estate as Stephen Joyce's response to a later request from Carol Schloss shows: 'Our experience with Brenda Maddox has taught us not to work with anybody doing a book about, or on, any member of the immediate Joyce family. We have learned our lesson well!'³⁴ Maddox's unpublished chapter, which lies in Texas, takes its place among a mass of biographical material (more than 1500 unpublished Joyce letters) that the would-be biographer can read and study, can perhaps paraphrase or frame within 'I like to imagine' constructions, but ultimately cannot quote.

Given this state of affairs who could blame Joyce critics for avoiding Joyce's life sure in the knowledge that his works will continue to be read, regardless of the version of the life we possess. These critics may take comfort from Flaubert's words: 'I think that a writer should leave no trace of

³³ John Worthen, 'The Necessary Ignorance of a Biographer', in John Batchelor, ed., *The Art of Literary Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.242.

³⁴ Quoted in Max, D.T., 'The Injustice Collector', *The New Yorker*, 19 June 2006, http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060619fa_fact

himself except for his works. His life really does not matter'.³⁵ But to come to this conclusion is mistaken. The life does matter. What is needed is a carefully constructed version of the material events of Joyce's life, set against the many contexts in which he lived. A new biography must get its facts right, update and straighten out what we already know, incorporate much specialised research as part of the historiographical thrust of biography itself which demands rewritings and revisions every couple of generations. Such a project should not be about scoring points against Ellmann. Nor is it to reduce biography to the status of mere chronology or to argue in favour of the so-called 'documentary life'. Whoever eventually takes on the task of writing a Joyce biography on the scale of Foster's *Yeats*, will have a significant amount of new, and largely untapped resources to draw on, including the Paul Léon collection at the National Library of Ireland and the Jahnke bequest at the Zurich James Joyce Foundation which includes lots of material about, among other things, Joyce and Lucia. Other material lies latent in publishers' archives.

What will emerge is a less unitary vision of Joyce, one that is less heroic, less coherent. Joyce will, to some extent, be taken down from his plinth. Making him more human, sensitively taking on board his failings, his contradictions will not devalue him but may help make him less intimidating. Ideally, as has happened for other writers of Joyce's stature, several versions of Joyce should emerge in the future, each of which attempts to transmit its version of what Virginia Woolf called 'those truths which transmit personality'. The idea that someone can write a 'definitive' version is inappropriate in today's critical context. But it is to be hoped that new biographies will appear and will strive to blend a passion for documentary accuracy with a capacity for reasoned and plausible interpretation (and not conjecture).

³⁵ Quoted in Geoffrey Wall, 'Introduction', *The Cambridge Quarterly* Vol. 29, No. 4, 2000, p.294.

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