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JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

22

**JOYCE'S OTHERS / THE  
OTHERS AND JOYCE**

Edited by  
Fabio Luppi

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ANICIA

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

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Direttore responsabile: Franca Ruggieri

Registrazione Num.R.G, 1885/2016, Tribunale Ordinario di Cassino

**ISSN 2281 – 373X**

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<http://www.edizionianicia.it/store/>

[info@edizionianicia.it](mailto:info@edizionianicia.it)

Single copy price: €18.00

Subscription rates (one issue annually):

Personal: €18.00

Institutional: €30.00

The journal will be published on the following website:

**<https://thejamesjoyceitalianfoundation.wordpress.com/>**

Purchases can be made by directly contacting the publisher and then completing a bank transfer covering the price of the book and postage costs (this is €5.00 within Italy, but varies according to the country of destination).

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1.

JOYCE'S OTHERS / THE OTHERS AND  
JOYCE

Serenella Zanotti *with* Rosa Maria Bollettieri, *James Joyce, English Teacher. Archival Explorations into Language Teaching in Early Twentieth-Century Europe.*

(Roma: Bulzoni – 2020, pp. 204, € 14,50)

James Joyce's teaching methods and his figure as a teacher of English have been discussed over the years in different contributions, some of which centred on the specific issue — Elisabeth Switaj's<sup>1</sup>, Hugh Kenner's<sup>2</sup>, and Roy Gottfried's<sup>3</sup> to name few of them — while others tackling Joyce's role as a teacher seen as an important part of Joyce's Triestine years — as John McCourt's and Renzo Crivelli's books.<sup>4</sup>

Serenella Zanotti's new book, *James Joyce, English Teacher. Archival Explorations into Language Teaching in Early Twentieth-Century Europe*, is not a mere repetition of known data. The author draws a portrayal of Joyce as a teacher collating information deriving from previous biographies / studies, but also, and more significantly, problematizes some of the stereotypes usually and mistakenly associated to the depiction of Joyce's figure as a teacher as it emerges from different sources. Therefore, Zanotti acknowledges the merits of Richard Ellmann, whose authoritative account “paved the way to seeing Joyce's experience as an English teacher in the light of Giacomo Joyce” (39) but also warns against possible misleading descriptions implicit in different authoritative biographers' / commentators' / former pupils' reports (among which Ellmann's himself and Stanislaus Joyce's). The author devotes the first part of her book to the description and problematization of what she defines as “the creation of a myth” (Joyce as a teacher) investigating upon

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<sup>1</sup> Switaj, Elisabeth. 2016. *James Joyce's Teaching Life and Methods. Language and Pedagogy in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses, and Finegans Wake*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

<sup>2</sup> Kenner, Hugh. 1976. “Approaches to the Artist as a Young Language Teacher”. In Henry Regnery (ed.). *Viva Vivas! Essays in Honour of Eliseo Vivas*, 331-353. Indianapolis: Liberty Press.

<sup>3</sup> Gottfried, Roy. 1978/1979. “Berlitz School Joyce”. In *James Joyce Quarterly*, 16 (fall / winter): 223-237.

<sup>4</sup> Crivelli, Renzo. 1996. *James Joyce: Itinerari Triestini / Triestine Itineraries*. Trieste: MGS Press. McCourt, John. 2000. *The Years of Bloom. James Joyce in Trieste 1904-1920*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press.



the portrayal of the novelist as an unconventional and unsystematic teacher.

The second chapter of Zanotti's research provides an overview of "the language teaching methods in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century" with specific attention to the reform method and direct method as opposed to the traditional and obsolete grammar and translation methods (51-64). This excursus is functional to the close analysis of Joyce's teaching methods that follows in the chapter titled "Joyce's Teaching Methods" (65-99), a thorough investigation upon how much Joyce relied on the approach used at the Berlitz School. Zanotti lists and scrupulously describes different important features of Joyce's teaching methodology that derive from the Berlitz School: an (almost) exclusive use of English, the occasional use of dictations, an unusual absence of the traditional teaching of grammar followed by translation. However, "Joyce did not confine himself to teaching the Berlitz textbooks" (84). Reporting on the accounts of Joyce's pupils, Zanotti explains that for his lessons, Joyce used different texts from his library. He also made use of his own writings — even those that had not been published yet. Pupils also recollected how sometimes lessons ended up with Joyce sitting at the piano and singing. This unconventional style is eventually compared to Stanislaus's, who was much more a traditional professor.

After a close examination of Joyce's teaching methods derived from the analysis of the many biographies and of direct accounts of Joyce's former pupils, the second part of the book — probably the most interesting — deals with Joyce's teaching strategies as they emerge from the examination of unpublished materials connected with his teaching. All information gathered in the first part of Zanotti's study find its confirmation in the examination of two first-hand documents: the Sturli notebook and the Cuzzi notebook. These are two notebooks written by Joyce's pupils — namely the distinguished Triestine surgeon Adriano Sturli (1873-1964) who took private lessons in Trieste in 1913 and the eminent Triestine Lawyer, Paolo Cuzzi who had studied with Joyce for two years between 1911 and 1913. While commentators had had the opportunity to examine the Sturli notebook, the Cuzzi notebook is here taken into account for the first time. In 1964 Rosa Maria Bollettieri had the opportunity to conduct interviews with some of the Triestine pupils of the

writer: one of them was Paolo Cuzzi who generously donated her his English notebook. The fifth chapter of Zanotti's book is a brief and interesting preliminary overview of the characteristics of this manuscript as presented by Rosa Maria Bollettieri herself.

In the following chapters through an analysis of the occurrences of specific words in the two notebooks, Zanotti meticulously trace back the evidence of possible analogies with extracts from books available in Joyce's library and that were consequently and supposedly used as tools for teaching. She also makes good use of the notes and markings that can be ascribed to teaching activities, thus confirming the depiction of Joyce's methods as presented in the first part of the book. Furthermore, in a short coda, while identifying one main source for Joyce's lessons (*Il Piccolo Italiano*, a book by Oskar Hecker, lector of Italian at the university of Berlin around the turn of the century) Zanotti adds that Joyce certainly used different books for his classes: significantly many of them have not been identified yet: "there is much more yet to be discovered" (182).

Zanotti is extremely clear in her conclusions where she concisely summarizes the main aims of her study: this book is meant not only to dispel the negative myths surrounding Joyce's teaching style providing a context of the teaching methods used at the time; it also shows how the author of *Ulysses* was not unsystematic — as different critics / biographers suggested — but followed precise patterns inspired by the Berlitz School and by different materials the novelist found appropriate for his students.

The purpose of this book does not reside only in shedding new light on the figure of Joyce as an English teacher. *James Joyce, English Teacher. Archival Explorations into Language Teaching in Early Twentieth-Century Europe* can also be seen under a different perspective: it demonstrates how a close analysis of original materials — such as notebooks used for language acquisition — can be functional to understand how the practice of teaching languages has evolved over the years.

Fabio Luppi