

Serenella Zanotti, *James Joyce, English Teacher. Archival Explorations into Language Teaching in Early Twentieth-Century Europe*, Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2020, 204 pp.

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What was it like to be an expatriate English language teacher in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century? What was it like when the teacher in question was none other than James Joyce himself? These are the questions Serenella Zanotti grapples with in her recent book, which is entirely devoted to offering a clearer picture of Joyce's activities as a language teacher and his approaches to teaching during the years he spent living in Trieste. A major household name in contemporary Joycean scholarship (Zanotti 1999, 2006, 2013, 2019; Wawrzycka – Zanotti 2018), Zanotti is well equipped to tackle several notorious myths associated with Joyce's teaching. As is well known, existing scholarship has routinely castigated Joyce for his poor teaching standards. He has been presented as unsystematic, "eclectic, if not eccentric" (Zanotti 2020: 170), especially when his highly idiosyncratic style of teaching was compared to that of his conscientious and responsible brother Stanislaus. The explanation oftentimes provided for this unfavourable characterisation has stressed Joyce's lack of motivation and real calling for the teaching career, constrained as he apparently was to become a language teacher in order to make ends meet.

Adopting a different approach to that of some recent research on the same topic (see, for example, Switaj 2016), Zanotti is able to argue for a reconsideration of such portrayals of Joyce the language teacher by painstakingly assembling documentary evidence from a wide range of little known or neglected archival sources. For example, she examines in great detail the contents of two precious manuscript notebooks belonging to Adriano Sturli and Paolo Cuzzi respectively, both of whom took private English language lessons with Joyce in Trieste. A comparative analysis of Sturli's and Cuzzi's notebooks revealed itself particularly fruitful, as the two pupils clearly had two different levels of proficiency, a fact that Joyce clearly took into account in the planning of his lessons. Zanotti shows how,

in the case of the beginner learner Sturli, Joyce adopted the familiar methodology of the Berlitz School, closely following the standard graded textbook used in Berlitz classes. Instead, with a more advanced pupil Cuzzi, the material used during lessons, as well as for homework assignments, was different and diversified at the same time. In fact, Zanotti identified another popular contemporary English-language textbook, Richard Kron's *The Little Londoner*, as the main source for the material of the notes in Cuzzi's notebook. This is highly significant as the textbook in question, with its focus on *realia*,¹ represents another methodological strand associated with the pan-European Reform approach. The Reform movement sought to revolutionise modern language teaching by prioritising the spoken language as well as the study of connected texts, eliminating translation and privileging an inductive teaching of grammar (Smith 2004: 43). By emphasising the importance of embedding Joyce's teaching activities in contemporary cultural context of modern language teaching, which witnessed a series of paradigmatic shifts at the turn of the twentieth century, Zanotti draws our attention to the different pedagogical influences Joyce was receptive to. The documented variety of textbooks used by Joyce, which included many other titles in addition to the Berlitz and Kron's textbooks, thus attests to "the variety of approaches to teaching foreign languages available at that time" (Zanotti 2020: 97), as well as being indicative of Joyce's familiarity with the up-to-date teaching methods and materials. Important developments in language teaching methodologies emphasising the primacy of speech, with conversation and oral work occupying a prominent place, were reflected in and became the cornerstone of Joyce's own approach to teaching English. As a language instructor then, Joyce was an innovator in his use of novel teaching methodologies, a fact that can only be grasped by locating his language teaching activities more fully in the cultural and social context of early twentieth-century foreign language teaching in Europe.

Seen in this light, as Zanotti argues, Joyce's apparently idiosyncratic methods are in fact grounded in contemporary ideas about language pedagogies. Moreover, she provides evidence of Joyce the teacher being much more systematic in his approach to teaching than has been previously assumed. The analysis of the two notebooks has shown, for example, that "Joyce relied on a textbook as the basis for instruction, gave assignments to improve the reading skills of his more advanced

¹ It needs to be clarified that *Realien* (or *realia*, as they came to be known in the English-speaking context) represent "the provision of information relating to the contemporary social life of the target culture, not, as is commonly assumed today, the illustrations or 'real objects' used to convey this information" (Smith 2004: 45).

pupils, and chose content best suited to the interests, capabilities and goals of his learners” (Zanotti 2020: 148). His choice of diversified teaching materials, which included, in addition to various textbooks, a range of authentic materials such as his own writing, poetry, as well as texts that had been translated into English from other languages, bears witness to his effort to boost his students’ vocabulary acquisition and reading skills.

Personally, I found most fascinating the part of the book detailing Zanotti’s research on the inventory Joyce’s Trieste library. Her meticulous examination of Joyce’s annotations and underlinings in fifty-two of the 564 volumes hosted at the Harry Ransom Center (University of Texas) offers insights on more specific aspects of Joyce’s teaching, such as, for example, his attention to the teaching of pronunciation. Among other archival textual sources discussed in the book we find bookshop bills containing information on language textbooks, typescript notes of Richard Ellmann’s interviews with Joyce’s former students, as well as information provided by Rosa Maria Bollettieri² who had been able to interview Paolo Cuzzi, the owner of one of the two notebooks analysed here. Zanotti also raises a number of valid methodological points concerning historical research into language teaching. She discusses, for example, the importance of oral history in the investigation of the past, at the same time calling for caution in interpreting pupils’ volatile recollections of language lessons with their former teachers.

A short complementary chapter is devoted to an analysis of Joyce’s notebook ‘Italiano’ which comprises autograph notes giving a fascinating account of Joyce’s methods in the role of language learner. By combining these different sources, Zanotti draws upon her reconstruction of James Joyce’s various language teaching and language learning activities to offer a convincing alternative depiction “of Joyce the teacher at work” (Zanotti 2020: 99). The book thus is invaluable not only because it succeeds in dispelling some of the negative myths surrounding Joyce’s teaching, but also on the account of an important contribution it makes to our understanding of practical aspects of English language teaching in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was, of course, impossible to cover all multiple aspects of Joyce’s teaching activities in one volume. For my part, I would have liked to learn more about the teaching undertaken in contexts other than private tutoring (for example, at the Scuola Superiore di Commercio Revoltella, which is discussed only very briefly in Zanotti’s book). Zanotti herself acknowl-

² The late Rosa Maria Bollettieri appears as the author of a short chapter which documents the history of the Cuzzi copybook, donated to Bollettieri by Paolo Cuzzi himself.

edges that much more further research is needed to even better assess Joyce's teaching on the basis of solid textual evidence properly contextualised within the larger framework of historical research into foreign language teaching. I sincerely hope there will be more studies of the same high standard shedding new light on this fascinating topic.

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