Paola Pugliatti

1882 – 1941: The lives of James Joyce[1]

... what draws biographers to write in the first place, and us to read? The wish to catch sight of the genius – not Mr. Gillespie or Mr. Waller, but Dizzy and Fats. James Hillman

Biography remains essentially a form of higher fiction. Peter Costello

As for biographers, let them worry ... I am already looking forward to seeing them go astray. Sigmund Freud

Never mind my soul. Just be sure you have my tie right. James Joyce

1. Between logic, epistemology and narratology

It was in the 1970s that the debate surrounding the logical-semantic status of fictional discourse began to develop. The first and most important contribution to that debate was an article by John Searle, in which the American linguist argued that true assertions made in serious discourse and fictive assertions made in fictional discourse are similar to the extent that both can be considered instances of the speech act of assertion-making (Searle, 1975). The logical difference distinguishing historical writings from fictional writings according to this thesis lies in the illocutionary intention of the sender. The only dissimilarity between senders making true assertions in historical texts (journalism, biography, autobiography, etc) and senders making fictive assertions in fictional texts is that the latter pretend to be making assertions, though not with the intention to deceive. The two situations also differ from a pragmatic point of view since while in fictional discourse all rules of sincerity are suspended, in historical discourse these latter cannot be waived. Thus the pragmatic status of fiction guarantees the (external) sender a certain immunity which is excluded from the pragmatic status of true discourse.[2]

It was during that same period that what are now considered classic works of historiography began examining the narrative and discursive strategies of the historical text in their consideration of what it means to ‘make history’ (Veyne, 1971; Elton, 1970; White, 1973). These studies privileged an epistemological approach but also began to reflect on the narratological characteristics of historical texts, underlining the extent to which their narrative and rhetorical organisation is similar to that of fictional texts. However, these writings ignored the contemporary debate regarding the logical status of fictional discourse, and thus missed the opportunity to connect two areas of investigation. Narratology also ignored the problem, at least up until the publication in 1991 of Genette’s Fiction and diction which contains a chapter entitled “Fictional narrative, Factual narrative”.

Following in the footsteps of Searle, Genette takes up the discussion regarding the problem of the narratological (and logical) status of true discourse on the basis of the categories developed in his “Discours du récit” (in Genette, 1972), concluding that order, duration and frequency are similar in both types of discourse, whilst differences can be detected in the areas of mode and voice. Mode, according to Genette (1993: 65), differs because it is only in narrative fiction that we get direct access to the subjectivity of another person insofar as it is only possible to guess at, with any degree of certainty, that which is invented. Similarly, Genette affirms that the voice of a historical text coincides with the voice of the actual author and, in giving Searle’s thesis a narratological slant, he arrives at the same pragmatic conclusion: the factual account implies that the authors of that discourse align themselves with what is recounted, and assume that what they recount is truthful (Genette, 1993: 70).[3] In other words, Genette allows that historical discourse is to some extent free to adopt certain narrative strategies of fictional discourse; however, on the one hand he excludes that it can adopt the strategy of introspection and therefore the modality of omniscience, while on the other he stresses its absolute commitment to truth.[4]

The Searle-Genette dialogue confirms the widely held belief that whilst the status of fictional accounts are thought to be ambiguous, true accounts are thought to be unproblematic. Indeed, Genette’s conclusion, like Searle’s before him, reduces the problem of the logical-semantic status of true discourse to the principle of referentiality: the truth value of historical discourse, in other words, would gain implicit confirmation from the existence in the ‘real’ world of the named beings and the recounted events.

Whilst we might accept that this conclusion accounts for many of the problems pertaining to the highly varied genre of what we perceive as history, it does not present a satisfactory model for assessing the nature of biography, that essentially hybrid form which continually transcends the boundaries of pure history to enter the domain of fiction. Genette’s claim regarding the category of mode, i.e. that true accounts exclude the possibility of direct access to the subjectivity of others is in fact problematic.[5] Indeed, one of the most obvious similarities linking biography to the novel is precisely its tendency to organise itself about the category of character, something which often provokes retrospective voyeurism or, as Nabokov has said, tends to characterise the biographer as a ‘psycho-plagiarist’ (in Edel, 1984: 21).

2. The commitment to scholarship

Nevertheless, true accounts can certainly be distinguished from fictional accounts if we consider one rather important point – a point common to both the biographical account and the historical account. Historical discourse is characterised by a particular method which functions pragmatically as a truth-giving manoeuvre. The historian and the biographer must not only ‘tell the truth’, that is, they must make assertions about things which have or have had a referent in the ‘real world’ – they must also demonstrate that what they are claiming is true. According to Le Goff, this demonstration is achieved through a set of gestures that constitute the ‘historical method’, which the French historian calls ‘the commitment to scholarship’. Le Goff’s thesis is that
James Joyce, by the American writer Herbert Gorman, was commissioned by Joyce himself and first appeared in 1939, the same year in which *Finnegans Wake* was published. Several paratextual details act as authenticating devices for this particular biography. In the *Acknowledgements* section found at the end of the volume we read that Joyce himself is thanked by the author: “To James Joyce himself I am indebted for his patience in answering questions, his calm unconcern for my deductions and assumptions and his permission to print unpublished or rare writings by him” (Gorman, 1939: 348). The biography ends with two italicised sentences and a date: “It is impossible to write ‘finish’ to the biography of a living man. Therefore, this book is interrupted here. November 15, 1939” ([ibid.]: 347). In January 1941, Gorman’s biography was being prepared for a reprint in England. On 13th January, Joyce died in Zürich. The sentences regarding the incomplete nature of Gorman’s biography were preserved though two additions were made: a subtitle stating that Gorman’s work was “A Definitive Biography” and a publisher’s note that reads: “James Joyce died in Zürich on Jan. 13th 1941. This biography, which was approved by Joyce, was written in 1939. This note has been added at the last moment, after the printing was almost completed. January 1941” (Gorman, 1941: unnumbered page). Evidently, these two additions serve as authenticating devices. They explicitly declare that the text in question can no longer be completed as such, but that we can consider this text, interrupted at a certain point, as being *definitive* because it was approved by Joyce. Its truth value should therefore be beyond question. But as we shall soon see, this is far from the case.

It is a well-known fact that Gorman worked in close contact with Joyce and was able to speak and correspond with him. This might lead one to believe that Gorman is the most ‘objective’ of Joyce’s biographers. Yet Joyce himself imposed cuts, made additions and suggested interpretations which appear to contradict details that later would be considered ‘facts’. (For instance, he insisted that Gorman refer to Nora as his ‘wife’ and gave his biographer a highly idealised description of his father).[8] Joyce’s control of the text extended even into the editing phase when, adamant that no detail should escape his attention, he insisted on correcting the proofs to the first edition. Moreover, Gorman’s text is littered with what in his *Acknowledgements* he refers to as ‘deductions’ and ‘assumptions’, and there is an abundance of uncertainty expressions referring to situations in which Joyce’s testimony would have expelled all doubt. For example, Gorman refers to the marriage of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane Murray as “a marriage that resulted in sixteen or seventeen children” (Gorman, 1941: 11); even more surprisingly, he leaves a question mark over a detail which, had he actually asked Joyce, would have resolved a pressing problem facing scholars of the *avant-texte* of *Ulysses*, that is, how Joyce actually assembled the myriad notes which were then dispersed throughout the text. Gorman’s tactic here is to distance himself from his object of study and to invent a fictional temporal distance which acted as justification for his being unable to resolve the question: “How he ever assembled these multitudinous notes was a puzzle, for his complicated and apparently haphazard method of cross-indexing seemed impossible for a writer with such bad eyesight” ([ibid.]: 236).

Expressions which serve to construct a fictional distance between the biographer and his object of study also abound. Alluding to certain of Joyce’s early poetic experiments, Gorman states that the copy books in which the poems were written "seem to have been lost in the years that followed” ([ibid.]: 68). Also, the verb ‘to speculate’ is frequently used in reference to episodes which could easily have been verified: “it is interesting now to speculate as to the reasons why he was particularly drawn to Ben Jonson” ([ibid.]: 94). We also find many instances of conjectures being forwarded or expressions denoting uncertainty being used which are typical of the narrative mode of eyewitness accounts in fictional texts when the narrator seeks to understand the inner feelings of a particular character:

How much Joyce knew or cared about it all is a mystery.

…as the train chugged out of the station, Joyce must have sighed a little.
...he must have realised how apparently hopeless was his continual struggle against the Philistines.

...what must his emotions have been at this liberation?

On these occasions, Gorman seems to recognise the need to move beyond the quasi-eyewitness account, sensing that in establishing a greater distance from his object he will be better able to understand him.[9] Yet on other occasions, Gorman’s assertions regarding Joyce’s inner feelings are presented according to the mode of the omniscient narrator. Gorman describes the eleven year-old Joyce as “a rather grave observant boy...whose mind... was adjusting itself with avidity towards the necessary goal of comprehension” (ibid.: 40-41). Further on, the adolescent Joyce is described as being caught up in the conflict between his physical desires and the Jesuit teaching he was then being exposed to:

Pubescence played a great part in the mental struggles of this period. With the awakening of the body the entire aspect of living changed and the youth found himself in the midst of a dreadful struggle of reorientation in a life where all the values had suddenly shifted. The warnings of preceptors took on a deeper significance while body and mind engaged in an unsuspected warfare (ibid.: 47).

Furthermore, commenting on Joyce’s one-year stay in Rome, Gorman himself concludes that “the sensation that he was stifling in a vacuum obsessed him” (ibid.: 187). Whilst certain affirmations are attributed to witness accounts, the witness is rarely identified. Again, in these cases Gorman seems to take a certain distance, giving the reader the impression that he is referring to non-verifiable facts. The expressions introducing such assertions are of the following type: “There exist brief flashes of Joyce, pictures from the memories of those who knew him at that time, during that period” (ibid.: 63); “One flash of him exists...” (ibid.: 113); “those who remembered him” (ibid.: 48); “he was to be seen often...” (ibid.: 237); “Friends of this period affirm that...” (ibid.: 280); “…one of them has a memory of Joyce...” (ibid.: 280-81). In such cases, the absence of an identifiable source weakens the assertion – indeed it reinforces the conjectural character which in other places is explicitly stated.

Yet the most interesting of Gorman’s manoeuvres and that which gives his book a novelistic feel is the concluding section of his biography, Ellmann thanks the fifty or so people he personally interviewed or (ever the biographical entrepreneur) asked other people to interview on his behalf. Thus he succeeded in putting together an impressive number of what he calls ‘facts’ and

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The evening gathering, together with Gorman’s book itself, closes on a highly false note:

It is after midnight when the moment for parting (delayed as long as possible) comes. Joyce stands by his door bidding good night to his guests, and as they depart down the stairs and into the night they glance back and see standing above them the tall lean figure of a great gentleman and a great writer (ibid.: 347).

4. 1959: Ellmann’s great biography and the commitment to scholarship

Ellmann decided to re-write Joyce’s biography when Yeats’ wife showed him an unpublished manuscript in which Yeats described his first encounter with Joyce (Ellmann, [1959] 1982: ix).[10] The initial idea was thus the fruit of an interview and the existence of a document, or at least what Ellmann considered to be a document. It was certainly a written source, and a highly fascinating source at that, presenting as it did the opportunity to re-write Joyce according to the testimonies of other great writers who had met him. And yet, this written source which actually triggered Ellmann’s research was no more reliable as a source than much of the eyewitness-based material that Gorman used for his text. Indeed, one of the problems with Ellmann’s biography is precisely this point – that he tried to pass off the ‘weak representation’ of testimony as scholarship. Moreover, the ‘myth’ of Joyce had already begun to take shape and it was therefore highly probable that any testimony gleaned from his contemporaries would in fact confirm this myth.

Ellmann’s testimonial material is certainly impressive. During two successive visits to Europe (in 1953 and 1954), he succeeded in collecting a formidable number of interviews, contacting perhaps all those who had known Joyce and who were still alive, including Joyce’s brother, Stanislaus, his sisters, Nora’s relatives, as well as artists, writers, critics and intellectuals who had seen Joyce at work or who had helped him out in one way or another. Ellmann also interviewed those friends in Trieste, Zurich and Paris who had kept Joyce company well into the night in bars and cafés – like Frank Budgen, who was witness to the tormented writing of Ulysses (Budgen, [1934] 1960). Svevo and Dujardin were already dead, but Ellmann interviewed their wives who very willingly offered their own forms of second-hand evidence but who were probably more preoccupied with the literary destinies of their own husbands than with that of the eccentric Dubliner. Ellmann was also able to make use of the corpus of letters written to and by Joyce, which a few years later he would edit for publication.[11] He obtained from Stanislaus the manuscript of My Brother’s Keeper, which was Stanislaus’ unfinished biography of his brother – or rather the autobiography of one living in his brother’s shadow – which Ellmann published after Stanny’s death in 1958.[12] Stanislaus also gave Ellmann the unpublished manuscript of Giacomo Joyce which Ellmann duly published in 1968. In the second and third editions of his biography, Ellmann thanks the fifty or so people he personally interviewed or (ever the biographical entrepreneur) asked other people to interview on his behalf. Thus he succeeded in putting together an impressive number of what he calls ‘facts’ and
relays these to the reader with the rhetorical and grammatical mode of utter certainty, which contrasts sharply with the uncertainty and hesitancy of Gorman’s style.

Yet Ellmann falls into other traps, the most risky of which is his tendency to seek to read biographical facts into Joyce’s fiction. This is a natural temptation for any reader, especially when faced with texts like *A portrait*, the *Telemachia* and *Giacomo Joyce*. Ellmann however makes a banal narratological error, which is to identify the narrative voice of Joyce’s fiction with Joyce himself. This problem comes to a head with his treatment of *Giacomo Joyce*, one of Joyce’s most enigmatic texts and that which attracts much voyeuristic deducing, as would-be biographers seek to identify the woman from Trieste with whom the fictional narrator falls in love (*Ellmann, 1982: 344–45*). Ellmann also tends to depict as true those events which are only verisimilar – an example of this is his way of painstakingly transcribing in dialogue form the reminiscences of the people he interviewed.[13] But what is most surprising is that this biography fails to keep its own promise. That well-known opening sentence (“We are still learning to be James Joyce’s contemporaries”) is followed by an ambitious declaration of intent:

This book enters Joyce’s life to reflect his complex, incessant joining of event and composition. The life of an artist, but particularly of Joyce, differs from the lives of other persons, in that its events are becoming artistic sources even as they command his present attention (*Ellmann, 1982: 3*).

And yet it is precisely in its attempt to unite the life with the works and, more ambitiously still, the life with the poetics, that Ellmann’s biography of Joyce seems to fail. Faced with the enormity of his research material, Ellmann often abandons himself to anecdotal detail and reads Joyce’s works as if they were a form of testimony to reality – or worse, he uses Joyce’s fiction to explain certain events that took place beyond the page, a technique he shares with his predecessor Gorman.

Gorman wrote to his American publisher: “I will never again write another biography of a living man. It is too difficult and thankless a task” (*Ellmann, 1982: 706*). Ellmann was not conditioned by Joyce’s input, nor did he have to deal with the opacity created by Joyce’s actual physical presence. He was in the perfect position therefore to write the object, a condition subtly delineated by Michel de Certeau in his *L’écriture de l’histoire* (1975) in which the author describes history as a gesture which excludes the physicality of the Other and which thus achieves understanding through imposed distance. Ellmann goes in the opposite direction, searching for the physical bodily presence of the Other. Rather than set his object at a distance (which Gorman had at least tried to do), he tends to bring him close, breathing ‘new life’ into him, as it were. And, unlike Gorman, Ellmann actually presents himself as a witness, one of the last-remaining witnesses to have met people who at some point or another come into contact with the ‘truth’ of Joyce’s life, or should we say lives, given that each of these people did in some way create their own version of that life.[14] What Ellmann seems not to see is that his work is less a gathering of facts regarding the life of James Joyce, and more a series of autobiographical fragments belonging to the lives of other people who happened to meet Joyce. Thus he probably did not appreciate one of the most interesting implications of his biography, which is to say that, far from being a truthful account of a single life, it underlines the impossibility of presenting a definitive account of that life. Paradoxically, as would soon become clear, this inability to present a definitive account was also destined to characterise the text of *Ulysses*.

5. Towards the study of context

Ellmann’s work attracted much criticism, and yet for many years it seemed unlikely that anyone else would be able to improve on his biography. Subsequent to publication, Ellmann published occasional corrections or brief explanations in specialist journals which nevertheless were still gleaned from witness-based evidence. In 1982, he published a second edition of his biography, which was deemed necessary because fresh material had come to light which “deal(t) with most aspects of Joyce’s life: his writings and his attitude towards them, his experience of love and desire, his domestic travails, his political views” (*Ellmann, 1982: xii*). After the publication of the 1982 edition, it seemed that Ellmann’s method would be unmatchable: Ellmann had managed to exploit the information provided by all existing testimony accounts and was thus considered to be the biographer who, more than any other, had succeeded in grasping the ‘facts’. He had also become a sort of executor of all important documents (*Stanislaus* book, the letters, *Giacomo Joyce*)[15] which he assembled for publication in carefully edited volumes. Given this situation, it was some time before the new generation of scholars sought to examine the lives of James Joyce from an alternative methodological angle.

Peter Costello’s book, published in 1992, was the first of this new generation of studies. Presented as a sort of complementary research to Ellmann’s, the book focuses specifically on Joyce’s Irish background. Costello boasts an in-depth knowledge of the city of Dublin and its culture, history and political climate which, he says, allows him to contextualise Joyce’s actions, writings and opinions within the environment in which the writer was born and in which he spent the first part of his life. Despite this commitment to description, however, Costello’s book falls short of presenting a real methodological innovation. Like Ellmann before him, Costello abandons himself to the search for figures which he claimed Joyce lifted from real life and inserted into his works – he expends much energy identifying those characters he claims are inspired by Joyce’s mother’s family (Costello, 1992: 23–53), and his suggestion that Leopold Bloom was not in fact based on a Jewish Dubliner but on a Belfast Presbyterian is presented as the find of the century.[16]

Costello’s attention is drawn in the main to Joyce’s Dublin years. He presents only a superficial analysis of Joyce’s Triestine years, concluding the book at the moment when Joyce leaves the city. What is innovative about this book however is the fact that it turns its attention away from the centre in order to concentrate on the margins, with the result that Costello emphasises the family stories as well as the political and religious climate, the social relations and cultural atmosphere which characterised late 19th and early 20th century Dublin. What we find therefore is what I believe to be a very significant revisiting of *Le Goff’s* commitment to scholarship: Costello attributes great importance to the notion of context and directs his research towards archival documentation as opposed to witness-based evidence (which anyway would no longer be available). And this approach effectively clears the way for the writing of the last biography I intend to analyse.
The most recent (to date) of Joyce biographies, *James Joyce: The Bloom Years* by John McCourt, was published in 2000. The author, a Dubliner living in Trieste, states in his premise to the Italian translation of his work that what he sought to do with his biography was to question a statement attributed to Stanislaus in which he claims that Trieste gave his brother nothing (Crise, 1967: 20, 22, cited in McCourt, 2004: 3). McCourt is far more convincing than Costello in his overturning of Gorman's and Ellmann's method. Rather than draw the biographical details from Joyce's works, he seeks to identify the influences driving Joyce's literary production by focusing on the specific contexts in which Joyce found himself. An example of this is McCourt's analysis of the Mittel-European character of early 20th century Trieste. Suggesting that it must have appeared decidedly oriental to an inhabitant of a "Hibernian metropolis", McCourt draws a portrait of Joyce's Tarry-Easty (the eastern land of *Finnegans Wake*) by evoking the city's Jewish and Mediterranean elements, its mixture of styles, the traffic passing through its port and its extravagant fashions:

Trieste exuded an Eastern atmosphere which was sometimes authentically faithful to the diverse origins of its mixed population and at other times as false and stereotyped as that to be found in any other major European city. Thus a colourful variety of sellers of spices, fruits, carpets and other goods from the countries of the East, many of whom were clad in native dress, such as a Turkish Jew called "Michelin de la Forchette" (Little Michael of the Forks), a seller of trinkets, could exist side by side with fashionable young ladies who happily paraded about in the trendy *jupe-culotte*, or Oriental-style trousers, which had been created in 1911 by a Parisian tailor, Paul Poiret, to widespread indignation and criticism in other European cities (McCourt, 2000: 43).

This of course brings to mind a passage from the fourth episode of *Ulysses*:


McCourt suggests that Joyce's interest in Judaism was raised by 'Tarry-Easty', but the city was also a linguistic cross-roads whose *lingua franca* was the local dialect, though this was flanked by a myriad other Italian, Turkish, Maltese, Hungarian, Slovenian, Czech and Greek dialects. He also points out the fact that Trieste's satirical weekly, *La Coda de Diavolo*, "liked to use a variety of languages impishly mixed together in a playful linguistic pot-poumi" (McCourt, 2000: 51), which of course brings to mind *Finnegans Wake*. He tells us that the paper "published articles and letters written in Italianized Slav and Triestinized German and in 'friulana infrancesata' (frenchified Friulian)" and claims that "(i)n this way, the language of *Finnegans Wake* is like an exaggerated, exploded version of Triestino" (McCourt, 2000: 52-53).

McCourt also reflects on the possibility that Trieste stimulated Joyce's interest in socialism. He may have come into contact with socialist ideas at the Berlitz school and at the cafés he frequented, and events such as the lectures given by Labriola and Guglielmo Ferrero, the strikes, and the presentation in May 1905 of Gorky's *L'Albergo dei Poveri* (where, according to newspaper accounts, the participants passionately demanded the writer's freedom) may have exposed him to socialist ideas, ideas which are present in several of the letters he sent to his brother in 1907. McCourt also makes the interesting observation that whilst Joyce attacked Irish nationalism as a form of grim provincialism, he became involved for a time in Trieste's nationalist irredentist movement.

As Rosa Maria Bosinelli has rightly observed, McCourt makes constant use of the modal *may*, a modal which favours suggestion over assertion and undermines any attempt to claim absolute truth. It is also true that, as Bosinelli notes, McCourt's Joyce is "more often than not, just one of the many characters that populate the city" (Bolletti, Bosinelli, 2001: 1).

What therefore becomes evident from this analysis is that these recent biographical experiments are characterised by a rather postmodern outlook. Fragmentation, intertextuality and the juxtaposition of different types of 'texts', the rejection of a purely subject-focused perspective and the explicit awareness that all biographical experiments are provisional and biased in nature, meaning that it is impossible to give a definitive reading to any life – all these elements point to the fact that what we have before us with these more recent biographies is a kind of poetics that tends to blur boundaries and deconstruct dogma. However, the knowledge that all histories are relative is accompanied in these texts by a great sense of nostalgia for History and for the commitment to scholarship that the concept implies.

6. The Daimon and the case of Joyce's necktie

Commenting on Michael Holroyd's reference to the enemies of biography, who believe that if we are to preserve the works, we must avoid the biographies, James Hillman speaks of the archetypical conflict between work and life and states that "it is the genius who is the antibiographical factor, the genius who may be offended by life on earth, even though all its efforts seem expended down to touch earth and expanded out to reach widely into the world" (Hillman, [1976] 1977: 187) "The genius", Hillman proceeds, "is the enemy of rational accounts that ipso facto explain it anyway." Biographers, therefore, "are ghost writers, even ghost busters, trying to seize the invisible ghosts in the visibilities of a life" (ibid.: 187-188).[17]

We know that Joyce favoured a novelistic biography, and forced his first biographer to alter some of the events of his life, to obscure others and deform others still, and that he showed approval for the instances of pure fiction through which Gorman sought to transcribe his genius. This approach is in line with what Hillman says are the necessary falsifications – the omissions and pseudo-memories – which characterise the genres of autobiography and biography and which serve to capture the *daimon* rather than smother it with rational narration.

But that said, Joyce was also known to favour what might at first glance appear to be the opposite approach. Basing his findings on five different sources, Ellmann recounts how in May 1924 Joyce reluctantly posed for a young painter from Dublin
who had insisted on painting his portrait. Joyce told the painter that he objected to having his image reproduced, but in the end agreed to the project because, as he says in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, when he asked the painter if he wanted to paint him or his name, the painter gave him the correct answer (“He said he wished to paint me” [Gilbert (ed.), 1957: 214-215]). Ellmann recounts how, during one of the sittings, the painter began to expound on “the importance to an artist of capturing his subject’s soul”. Joyce replied: “Never mind my soul. Just be sure you have my tie right” (Ellmann, 1982: 566). This simple anecdote may have been deformed by Joyce’s friends who were ever-preoccupied with recounting – or inventing – Joyce’s dazzling one-liners by which they tried to capture his soul’s code. But in a sense the episode is indeed ‘true’ because it does capture a fragment of that code, revealing as it does an awareness on Joyce’s part of the inherent *aporia* underpinning any attempt to reproduce, together with the facts, the *daimon*. Or again, what this episode might be said to reveal is Joyce’s fear that the portrait may have actually captured his soul, laying bare once and for all the ‘figure in the carpet’. Indeed, the falsifications endorsed by Joyce and his refusal to expose his soul are not in fact contradictory at all. By way of a conclusion, let us turn to Hillman once more:

The disguises and boastings are not mere cover-ups, daydreams, and grandiose fantasies. They are fears of loss, fears of colonization, fears of slavery to a normalizing system that, by capturing my image in biography, might take over and walk away with my soul (Hillman, [1976] 1977: 189).

**References**


[1] An Italian version of this article (“1882-1941: le vite di James Joyce”) was read at a conference of the Associazione Sigismondo Malatesta on biography and is forthcoming in C. De Carolis, ed., *La biografia*, Roma, Bulzoni. Translation has been provided by Jennifer Varemy.

[2] Searle adds that what makes it possible for the sender to pretend in fictional discourse is the suspension of the rules correlating words to the world, a suspension which allows “the speaker to use words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by these meanings” (1975: 156).

[3] Genette rather hurriedly distinguishes between cases where A = N and cases where A ≠ N. In the first category he inserts historical texts, autobiography and biography. I would contend that the utterance situation that he outlines is somewhat problematic. As I have argued elsewhere, in a work of fiction the author assigns a ‘mask’ within the text itself the job of making assertions and references. While authors know that the speech acts they attribute to narrators are not true (that is, that they have no true reference to the world), narrators, as regards the possible world of the story, beyond which they have no existence, are simply telling the sheer truth and making fully verifiable references to that world (unless of course they explicitly state that they are ‘lying’, which in any case is a ‘lie’ regarding the possible fictional universe they inhabit). Furthermore, from a narratological point of view, we can assume that the doubling of the sender also takes place with the recounting of true accounts. It is, if anything, from the referential world of the author, and therefore from a pragmatic point of view, that the narratological point of view, we can assume that the doubling of the sender also takes place with the recounting of true accounts. It is, if anything, from the referential world of the author, and therefore from a pragmatic point of view, that the responsibilities of these senders cannot, in the case of true narratives, be severed. (Pugliatti, 1994). Of course, authors of a true text can allow their senders to say things which have insufficient proof, or which obfuscate the sense or temporal logic of the discourse, or which organise the recounting of events in such a way as to create a biased account, or indeed which are untrue; they nevertheless know that such manoeuvres have a pragmatic effect beyond the pages of the text; they of course cannot use as justification before a court of law or before their critics the narratological principle which severs Flaubert’s responsibility from that of Emma Bovary or Tolstoy’s responsibility from that of Anna Karenina.

[4] I don’t believe that these notions have been taken up, and the fields of inquiry which seemed interested in these ideas – logical semantics, epistemological historiography, narratology – have turned their backs once more on this highly interesting topic. Genettean narratology has now been largely discredited and therefore the ideas which were begging explanation several decades ago have been dropped in favour of a quasi-philosophical approach which questions categories and proposes a highly self-referential outlook.

[5] Genette points out that in the absence of justification, it is fair for the reader to ask “what do you know about it?” (Genette, 1993: 65).

[6] A fictional narrator can also collect witness accounts and present documentary evidence. The point is that he can, but unlike the historian, does not necessarily have to.

[7] Jeanne Clegg discusses the theme of eyewitnessing in Defoe’s work in connection with the changing way in which evidence was treated in English law courts during the eighteenth century. She reveals that during this time eyewitness accounts began to be seen as increasingly unreliable and thus factual evidence was introduced (Clegg, 1998). The expressions weak representation and strong representation are taken from A. Welsh, 1992. See also Clegg, 2004.

[8] Richard Ellmann, Joyce’s second biographer, was able to consult Gorman’s papers, which now form part of the Croessmann Collection of the Southern Illinois University.

[9] It is sometimes possible to read Joyce’s intervention between the lines, though Joyce is never referred to on these occasions as the source of information.

[10] Ellmann (1962: ix) says he started working systematically on the biography only in 1952 (*ibidem*), and finished it in 1959. It seems strange that he should not point out that it took him the same length of time to write Joyce’s biography as it took Joyce to write *Ulysses*.

[11] A part of Joyce’s letters was edited by Stuart Gilbert (*Letters of James Joyce*, Faber and Faber, London 1957). In that same year, Ellmann edited a volume of *Selected Letters* (*The Viking Press, New York 1957*) and several years later he edited a further collection which was brought together in two volumes (*Letters of James Joyce*, Faber and Faber, London 1966). It appears that to date, over a thousand of Joyce’s letters remain as yet unpublished.


[13] See for example on pp. 382-83 the joking dialogues reported by Joyce’s former pupils in Trieste as well as an interview with Livia Svevo. John McCourt, the last in the line of Joyce’s biographers to date, lists the various critical reactions (from 1959 onwards) from eminent Joycean scholars such as Hugh Kenner and William Empson to Ellmann’s biography (McCourt, 2000).
On several occasions the critic is faced with two or more differing versions of the same event. E.g., regarding Joyce’s meeting with Proust at the house of the English novelist Sydney Schiff, Ellmann lists six differing versions: the first, indirect version, was reported by William Carlos Williams and can be found in the writer’s autobiography; the second appears in an autobiographical piece written by Margaret Anderson; the third is found in a letter that Mrs Schiff showed to Ellmann; the three remaining versions were given by Joyce himself – to Arthur Power, Jacques Marcanton and Frank Budgen (Ellmann, 1982: 508-09). The myth surrounding both writers clearly exerted a strong influence in shaping the reports of the encounter and in this case Ellmann rightly reports all the different versions.

The copybook containing the manuscript of Giacomo Joyce, published by Ellmann in 1968 (cit.), disappeared and for a long time it was thought that Ellmann himself was secretly holding on to it.

It is interesting to note that Costello’s epigraph, a passage from Benjamin, seems to act as a sort of challenge to Ellmann: “The superficial inducement, the exotic, the picturesque has an effect only on the foreigner. To portray a city, a native must have other, deeper motives – motives of one who travels into the past instead of into the distance. A native’s book about his city will always be related to memoirs: the writer has not spent his childhood there in vain.”