

REVIEWS

FRIENDS IN EXILE: ITALO SVEVO & JAMES JOYCE, by Brian Moloney. Leicester, England: Troubadour Publishers, 2018. xx + 256 pp. £13.95.

Friends in Exile is the first serious book dealing with the relationship between James Joyce and Italo Svevo. It follows Stanley Price's thin *James Joyce and Italo Svevo: The Story of a Friendship*, which appeared in 2016 to understandably mixed reviews given its second-hand feel and Price's non-engagement with the bulk of critical material on the subject in Italian.¹ *Friends in Exile* is an altogether more scholarly work and yet has garnered little critical attention thus far. This is a great pity, because few, if any, scholars are better equipped to jointly tackle Joyce and Svevo than Brian Moloney, Emeritus Professor of Italian at the University of Hull. He has spent a lifetime working on Svevo and played a key role in shaping contemporary Svevo studies and giving him his rightful place within the modernist canon. Unlike Price, he reads Svevo and his critics in the original Italian, which should be a prerequisite for anyone taking on the Italian Swabian.

His handling in this book of the sometimes tense but always fecund relationship between the two writers is detailed, nuanced, insightful, and, at times, intimate. Even if a social gulf separated them—and meant that Joyce (not to mention Nora) was never invited to the Sunday afternoon musical gatherings at Villa Veneziani—at the core of their connection lay something more important than mere social pleasantries, that is, a “mutual recognition” that “led to the growth of a literary friendship” (39). Joyce, Moloney claims, “would have seen in Svevo a novelist who was consistent in his choice of themes, but also an artist who did not repeat himself” (37): in other words, a writer after his own heart.

Although occasionally a little meandering and repetitive (the book gathers essays written over several decades that have been stitched, for the most part felicitously, together), the story unfolds winningly and gently with a carefully constructed Triestine context emerging vividly. Passing mentions of the greater Joyce family are often spot on, as when, for example, he quotes Joyce's niece as saying that Nora “a Trieste visse appartata” (lived a secluded life in Trieste) (43). The author makes ample use of memoirs not readily accessible (especially to the English reader), but is wise in treating such sources with caution. *Friends in Exile* will be of great interest to readers of Joyce and Svevo alike and would have brought renewed attention to Joyce's Triestine sojourn this year—2020—when the International James Joyce symposium was scheduled to return, for the third time, to the

city; sadly, because of the pandemic, it has been postponed until 2021.

Moloney points out that Joyce's encounter with Svevo was key to his remaining in Trieste for both personal and literary reasons (and are the two areas ever really separate in Joyce?). He rightly asserts that Svevo was a key model, or perhaps *the* key model, for Leopold Bloom and the source of so much of the Jewish background in *Ulysses*. As Moloney writes, "Svevo had thought long and hard about his Jewishness and its meaning: he supplied Joyce with ideas and information about Jews and Jewishness" (xiii). If Svevo was both a source and a support for Joyce, it was not (unusually for Joyce) all one-way traffic; in fact, it was quite the opposite. Svevo had published *Una vita* in 1892 and *Senilità* in 1898 to general disinterest both in Trieste and beyond, and he was, in 1902, so disappointed that he resolved to give up publishing any more of his writings.² Five years later, when Joyce read these two novels, he immediately saw their value, hailing *Senilità* as an unjustly unrecognized masterpiece. Moloney speculates that "Joyce very probably read *Una vita* as Svevo's 'chapter of the moral history' of Trieste" (35), which may be true. Even if it is not, there is little doubt that Joyce was so impressed by his friend's writing that he singlehandedly restored Svevo's confidence and spurred him to begin composition again. Joyce failed, however, to convince Triestine literary contemporaries, such as Nicolò Vidacovich, the president of city's prestigious literary and philosophical society, La Società di Minerva, of Svevo's true worth. Vidacovich (who translated J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* with Joyce) considered Svevo's Italian a clumsy translation of the Triestine dialect and tended to favor writers like Gabriele D'Annunzio whom Joyce admired as a young man but by 1907 considered "a charlatan."³ In Irredentist Trieste, the cultural establishment, led by Vidacovich, thought that Svevo, whatever his literary worth, was never quite Italian enough.

Svevo later made a public statement of his gratitude to Joyce in the "Prefazione" to the second edition in 1927 writing "[t]his second edition of *Senilità* was made possible by a generous word from James Joyce, who was able to repeat for me, as he had done a short time earlier for an elderly French writer (Édoardo Dujardin) the miracle of Lazarus."⁴ It should be said that Svevo regularly intervened to keep Joyce on the writing straight—and-narrow during the years of despair before World War I when he struggled valiantly, but vainly, to find publishers for *Dubliners* or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. No one, apart from Stanislaus Joyce, played a bigger role in keeping Joyce afloat in those difficult years. It is small wonder then that, when Svevo published *La coscienza di Zeno: Roman* in 1923, it was Joyce, now at the center of the literary world in Paris—who, having told him that "it is by far your best book" (62)—made the vital first moves to ensure that it became an international success long before it was properly

appreciated in Italy.⁵

Moloney skillfully describes Svevo's reception in Italy and points out that his works were virtually ignored in the anti-Semitic country because he was Jewish. This neglect worsened with the rise of Fascism. Svevo's reputation only began to be recognized in the 1950s and 1960s, when Italy belatedly discovered modernism, and even then leading critics, such as Bruno Maier, continued to discount Svevo's Jewishness. Moloney points to a similar underplaying of Jewishness in Joyce's writings, quoting Marilyn Reizbaum who was told by Richard Ellmann that "there is not much in it."⁶ Moloney shows that there was a lot in it and that much of it derived directly from the treatment of Svevo. He describes the regular meetings of Joyce and Svevo—at times even every day in the Caffè Tergesteo—in the immediate aftermath of World War I "in the shadow of San Giusto" (53) and speculates that they must have discussed Freudian psychoanalysis (a subject Joyce also examined with Ottocaro Weiss). At the same time, he quotes Svevo's niece Alma Oberti di Valnera, who recalled how "Joyce astonished Svevo by saying that people who had the need [of psychoanalysis] would stick to confession" (55). When Svevo was away, Joyce complained to Frank Budgen that there was "[n]ot a soul to talk to about Bloom."⁷

Joyce readers will benefit from knowing more about Svevo and through him more about the city of Trieste that was Joyce's second home for a decade. The Adriatic city haunts the Dublin of *Ulysses* and undoubtedly (if indirectly) fed into Joyce's ideas about religion, politics, language, and nationalism as expressed in that novel. In this regard, Moloney's correction of Vicki Mahaffey's assertion that the Triestine setting of the vital transitional text, *Giacomo Joyce*, "is merely 'ostensible,' in that the action takes place 'primarily in the world of Joyce's imagination'" is important (73).⁸ He reinstates the importance of the Triestine setting, calling it "crucial, for it was in Trieste that Joyce first began seriously to listen and to learn from Jewish voices, one of which is that of Svevo" (??). He also offers a novel take on *Giacomo Joyce* itself, seeing it as "primarily 'about' Joyce" (??), but also, because it recognizes the influences of Trieste's Jews on the author, a tribute to the city. Finally, "[i]n so far as it uses a lexical cluster that derives from *Senilità* and employs irony at the expense of ?? is hapless, it also pays tribute to Svevo" (73, 74).

Moloney's book offers a rich and generous cornucopia of fifteen chapters or essays teasing out various aspects of the Joyce-Svevo relationship in the contexts of Trieste, of Italian writing, and of the reception of modernism in Italy and beyond. It establishes coherent lexical connections between their writings, explores their distinct use of the epiphany, and carefully examines their written and spoken appraisals of each other's works. The final piece looks entertainingly

at how Joyce used elements of Svevo's wife, Livia—mostly her hair—for the creation of Anna Livia Plurabelle. Svevo greatly appreciated this gesture (even if his wife was said to be “disgusted”—225) and, to express his gratitude, presented Joyce with Umberto Veruda's portrait of Livia painted in 1902.⁹ Joyce was also, Moloney notes, careful “to insert into *Finnegans Wake* references to the celebrated Veneziani antifouling compound on which the family fortune was based” (228). Thus, Anna Livia is seen greasing “the groove of her keel” with “anti-fouling butterscath” (an anti-fouling compound) “and turfentide” (turpentine).¹⁰ This was quite the riposte to the snobbish woman who had cut Nora on the street and never fully understood the complexity or importance of her husband's relationship with Joyce (and, in fact, later penned a sanitized version of it).¹¹

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NOTES

¹ Stanley Price, *James Joyce and Italo Svevo: The Story of a Friendship* (Bantry, Ireland: Somerville Press, 2016).

² Italo Svevo, *Una vita* (Trieste: E. Vram, 1893), and *Senilità* (Trieste: E. Vram, 1898).

³ J. M. Synge, “*Riders to the Sea*”/“*La Cavalcata al Mare*,” ed. Dario Calimani, trans. Joyce and Nicolò Vidacovich (Teviso: Compiano Editore, 2012). Joyce's comment about Gabriele D'Annunzio is found in Stanislaus Joyce's unpublished “Triestine Book of Days,” which is held at the McFarlin Library Special Collections, University of Tulsa.

⁴ Svevo, *Senilità: Romanzo* (Milan: Giuseppe Morreale, 1927). The original passage reads: “Questa seconda edizione di *Senilità* fu resa possibile da una parola generosa di James Joyce, che per me, come poco prima per un vecchio scrittore francese (Edoardo Dujardin) seppe rinnovare il miracolo di Lazzaro.” (p. 49). **A late page number for a Preface??**

⁵ Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno: Roman* (Bologna: L. Cappelli, 1923).

⁶ Marilyn Reizbaum, *James Joyce's Judaic Other* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), p. 1.

⁷ Joyce, *Letters of James Joyce, Volume I*, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 134.

⁸ Joyce, *Giacomo Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), and see Vicki Mahaffey, ??

⁹ The portrait is now housed in the Joyce collection at the University at Buffalo.

¹⁰ Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 206.32, 33-34, 34,

¹¹ Livia Veneziani Svevo, *Memoir of Italo Svevo* (London: Libris, 1989).