Introduction

Writers Writing

> The past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only.
>
> "A Portrait of the Artist" (1904)

In 1973, Emile de Antonio directed a film called *Painters Painting,* a fascinating documentary about the New York postwar art scene. The meaning of this title can be interpreted in two different (but not exclusive) ways. The painting of artists such as Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Helen Frankenthaler and some of the painters of the next generation is clearly oriented toward the medium itself. It is a painting for the real connoisseurs—for those who care for painting for its own sake, for other painters, for people who are interested in the painterly medium and the problems it raises—more than for the general public, which tends to forget the medium and look for the subject matter. These artists could be called painters' painters, like Uccello, Chardin, or Velázquez before them. In the same way, Joyce is an author for those who are interested in the craft of writing: he is the supreme craftsman, with a concern for his medium (the narrative medium and, ultimately, language itself) that matches, at least, the passion for canvases and pigments that characterized American Abstract Expressionists. In the same way as their paintings are described as "painterly," Joyce's works can be called "writerly" in every sense of the word.

The primary meaning of the film's title, however, is probably a different one: *Painters Painting* shows painters *in the act of painting.* It is particularly

interesting, in the case of those artists who have been called "action painters," to see not only the result of the action, the trace of the painting gesture on the canvas, but also the gesture itself, the painter in action. Emile de Antonio's documentary quotes from Hans Namuth's photographs and film of Jackson Pollock dancing over his picture, dripping paint, flinging colors across the surface of a huge canvas on the ground. Now, the text of *Finnegans Wake* can readily be compared to the surface of a Pollock picture: the multiple layers, the intricacy of the intertwining strands of material, the all-over feeling, a sense that every known principle of composition is superseded by an overwhelming proliferation of local accidents at the heart of the medium. *Finnegans Wake* might be considered a kind of "action writing": the surface of the text bears the visible trace of the energies that went into its composition. Some of Joyce's manuscripts actually look somewhat like Pollock's canvases—but the superficial resemblance is misleading. The manuscripts of *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* are not the result of an exuberant extemporization but suggest, on the contrary, a meticulous and protracted process of revision. It is manifest that the kinship between the finished works can hardly be the result of a similarity in the working process of the two artists.

We may feel that it is unfortunate that we do not have something comparable to the film recording Pollock in action: a documentary picturing Joyce in the act of writing. But perhaps we do have such a thing. The manuscripts (and a huge corpus of them has been preserved) could be the best possible record of Joyce's writerly performance, the best film that we have, if only we knew how to develop this film and how to interpret it. And this is precisely what genetic criticism proposes to do. It is a discipline that studies the traces left by the labor of writing—in notebooks, drafts, typescripts, proofs, correspondences, early printed versions, and all the available documents—in order to recover the process of *invention.*[1]

"Joyce" does not exist

For a discipline focused on invention, Joyce is an irresistible subject.[2] In the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses,* John Eglinton affirms, "When all is said Dumas *fils* (or is it Dumas *père?*) is right. After God Shakespeare has created most." When all is said, we might come to the conclusion that Joyce, who claimed that he had no imagination, has invented more than anyone,

and more radically, in terms of style, narrative technique and language (and that, in so doing, he has profoundly renewed our conception of our self as a multifaceted construction immersed in a flow of equivocal discourses).

After his statement about Shakespeare and God, Alexandre Dumas (the father!) goes on to say:

> It is *men* who invent, not one man alone. Each arrives in turn and in his own time, takes possession of the things that were known to his fathers, puts them to work in new combinations, and then dies, after having added something to the sum of human knowledge, which he bequeaths to his children. As to complete creation of something, I do not believe it possible. God himself, when he created man, could not or dared not invent him: he made him in his own image.[3]

For Dumas, then, individual invention is impossible, even for the Creator: invention is a purely accretive and collaborative process. One would perhaps expect genetic criticism, as a potential abettor in the kind of literary hero worship that surrounds Joyce (and other "major" writers), to strongly disagree with this opinion, which seems to run counter to what we have just said about the power of invention manifested by Joyce's work. Far from it—and not only because Joyce is not the mythical "solitary genius"[4] that we may suppose him to be (many collaborators were enlisted in the creation of the works that bear his name), but also, more fundamentally, because genetic criticism believes, and verifies in the manuscripts, that "Joyce" does not exist.

In the strong words of Paul Valéry, "The literary work is a lie," insofar as it pretends to be the production of a unified author. It is "the result of a collaboration of very different states, of unexpected incidents; a kind of combination of points of view originally independent from one another."[5] The figure of the author is thus a retrospective construction, deceptively based on the final resulting work. Most of the time, when we refer to "Joyce," we are not referring to the human being who created the works signed by this name but to a figure created *by* the works or, rather, inferentially derived from them.

It should be obvious to everyone that the Joyce who wrote *Stephen Hero* is not the same as the author of *Finnegans Wake*. Most people would also be ready to admit that the Joyce who began writing *Ulysses* in Trieste in 1914 is not the same as the Joyce who finished it in Paris in 1922, after a world war and several fundamental changes of project for the book, or that the Joyce who was

taking notes at random for a hypothetical book in the autumn of 1922, or the Joyce who was writing a series of naïve vignettes in 1923, are not the same as the one who managed to integrate these elements into a book as complex as *Finnegans Wake* and to bring it to an end in 1939. In "Circe," Joyce stages the proverbial "Philip drunk" and "Philip sober" as two different characters. We do not know if Joyce sober ever corrected what he had written drunk, or vice versa, but genetic criticism believes (or rather observes) that the writer who starts a draft page is not quite the same as the one who completes it and even that the writer who strikes out a word currente calamo is not the same as the writer who inscribed the word a few seconds before: if the word that has just been selected is erased, it is because the writer's perspective has somewhat changed in the short interval. In the words of Bloom: "Or was that I? Or am I now I?" (*U* 8.608). What appeared to be, at least provisionally, the best choice no longer seems to be so once the word has been entered. The context has changed, ever so slightly, and the *evaluation* (of the appropriateness of the word) is modified. The genetic approach performs a kind of deconstruction[6] of the authorial figure that we hypostatize from the books published under a writer's name. Whereas the basic aim of traditional textual criticism is to establish texts, so as to publish "corrected" or "definitive" editions that comply with the author's intention, genetic criticism tends on the contrary to destabilize simultaneously the notions of text and of authorial intention by insisting on their mobility.

This is not to say that the genetic approach disregards the writer's identity. Writing involves a sequence of macro- and micro-decisions, and these decisions are not taken haphazardly. They certainly show a continuity of purpose, especially in the case of a writer as stubborn as Joyce (Eliot called him a fanatic).[7] Writers are (generally) not schizophrenic; their personality is relatively stable. They have been conditioned by their physiology, their background and their training so that they carry with them from their youth a number of habits, emotions and memories that leave a recognizable mark on all their productions (the habitus of Aquinas or Bourdieu). When studying their manuscripts, one can remark a number of typical procedures that remain stable during their whole lives. But if the original background, the innate faculties and the initial training play a decisive part in the writer's orientation, the background for each decision taken in the course of writing is a different one, and the training of a writer is a process that never stops.[8] Even if Joyce could have remained locked up in an ivory tower, immune from

historical evolution, social and political upheavals, sentimental crises, viruses and health accidents, not to mention changes in the literary field around him, he would have been affected by the events occurring on the surface of his own manuscript pages. Even when it is not disrupted by the interference of external events of all kinds, the continuity of intent is constantly disrupted, because the implementation of each decision opens unforeseen possibilities and precludes others: it modifies the context in which the next decision has to be taken. Pierre Mac Orlan used to say that there are more adventures on a chessboard than on all the seas of the world. Some of Joyce's manuscripts are more eventful than many historical battlefields.[9]

"New" manuscripts

In 1919, after reading just a few pages of "Telemachus" in the *Little Review,* Virginia Woolf made this note: "Possibly one might write about the effect of reading something new, its queerness."[10] It is difficult for us to realize how strange, how queer, how shocking the first episodes of *Ulysses* were for the reader in 1919. It is difficult for scholars of modernist literature, who have read them so often and who have benefitted from so many works of exegesis, but it is difficult even for the first-time readers of today. It is hard for us to believe that, when he first received "Proteus," Ezra Pound (Ezra Pound!) should have found it "mostly incomprehensible."[11] Joyce's innovations (at least those displayed in the early part of *Ulysses*) have percolated through our culture, and even undergraduates are permeated by them. There is no longer the same sense of shock: to a large degree, the "queerness" has worn out or at least become attenuated. We might transpose what Pierre Bourdieu says about the perpetrator of another symbolic revolution, Manet:

> a symbolic revolution overturns cognitive, and sometimes social, structures, which become invisible the more they become generally recognized, widely known and incorporated by all the perceiving subjects in a social universe. Our own categories of perception and judgment—those we ordinarily use to understand the representations of the world and the world itself—were created by this successful symbolic revolution. The representation of the world created by this revolution is therefore self-evident—indeed, it is so self-evident that the scandal provoked by Manet's works itself is surprising if not scandalous.[12]

On the other hand, the more familiar we are with Joyce's text, the more we are liable to be shocked by a different kind of novelty, when we discover the work we know so well in a "new" form. The feeling of being confronted with different versions of the text that we are so familiar with and that suddenly appears unfamiliar can be truly *unheimlich.*

The more familiar we are with a literary text, the stranger it is to discover it in a different form in its other versions in the genetic archive, but the more we have acquainted ourselves with the archive, the more we have studied the manuscripts of an author, the more we are going to be surprised, thrilled, shocked, when we encounter unexpected manuscripts. It is one of the joys—and one of the dangers—of the geneticist's trade: as opposed to critics who work with a finite text, the genetic critic has to live with the fact that no archive is definitely circumscribed. We live in the hope that new material will be discovered but also under the constant threat that this new material will destroy the hypotheses that we have made on the basis of the existing materials.

The discovery can be quite small: just one word that we could not decipher becomes readable because someone has made a suggestion and suddenly it becomes clear to everyone. Or an accepted reading is contradicted by the discovery of a source or a previous draft. We all know that a single word, or even a punctuation mark, can make a significant difference. On the other hand, we are sometimes confronted with a massive transformation of the archival situation. In the case of Raymond Roussel, there were practically no extant manuscripts, and critics had to rely entirely on Roussel's own statements in his famous *Comment j'ai* écrit *certains de mes livres;* no real genetic study of his work was possible until 1989, when a trunk was discovered containing the almost complete drafts of his work. A whole new world opened up, fifty-five years after the author's death.[13] The case of Joyce is different. For many years, Joyce scholars had been blessed (or cursed) with a huge, accessible archive.[14] Most of it was reproduced in the two volumes of color facsimiles of the Rosenbach *Ulysses* manuscript[15] and the sixty-three volumes of the Garland edition of the *James Joyce Archive:* (eleven volumes for the early works, sixteen volumes for *Ulysses,* thirty-six volumes for *Finnegans Wake,* including the sixteen volumes representing the fourteen thousand pages of the Buffalo notebooks).[16] Nobody expected that anything substantial could still be discovered: a few letters and a few sheets of proofs might resurface from time to time, but not much more. The situation changed, however, with the new

millennium when the "John Quinn draft" of "Circe" came out of hiding. Joyce had claimed that he had written eight versions of the episode, but we had only one draft (Buffalo V.B.19). In a letter accompanying the fair copy that he had sold to John Quinn, Joyce mentions that he is "throwing in" a rough draft. But it was only seventy-nine years later that Quinn's heirs decided to offer it for sale at auction.[17] The sale of the Quinn manuscript for a very substantial sum was the tremor that triggered a series of earthquakes. In the next few years, the landscape of Joyce studies was distinctly modified by the arrival of successive waves of new autographs: both manuscripts that were known to have existed, even if they were lost (e.g., missing parts of extant drafts), and manuscripts that were a complete surprise. First an unknown very early draft for the "Eumaeus" episode of *Ulysses* came on the market in 2001. Then a considerable number of fascinating manuscripts (notebooks, drafts for *Ulysses,* typescripts for *Finnegans Wake*) were discovered in the papers of the family of Joyce's private secretary, Paul Léon. And finally (?) the National Library of Ireland acquired half a dozen large sheets of papers that changed our idea of the transition period between *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake.*

It is easy to imagine the excitement of Joyce scholars—their wild surmise when these new planets swam into their ken—and also the traumatic effect caused by each of these revelations. We are far from having absorbed the shock. We will see, in the following chapters, how this massive new evidence forced us to reconsider some of our conclusions, but I would like to go further and suggest that every working manuscript, because it represents a field of virtual realities preceding the closure of the final text, has the same potential for subverting our understanding of the work as a "new" manuscript. The purpose of genetic criticism is to study manuscripts from this perspective: we have said that it is concerned with invention (or innovation), but invention is only a transition between phases of repetition, and it is possible to apprehend it only when it is stabilized through repetition, so that we have to make a deliberate effort to reanimate and reenergize it. In this respect, the unexpected emergence of new manuscripts is a useful reminder of this disruptive potential.

Homo geneticus

As Jon Elster has remarked, "One of the most persisting cleavages in the social sciences is the opposition between two lines of thought conveniently as-

sociated with Adam Smith and Emile Durkheim, between *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus.*"[18] *Homo sociologicus* is "pushed" from behind by the quasi-inertial forces of social norms, while *homo economicus* is "pulled" by the prospect of future rewards, guided by instrumental rationality. Now, if there is such a thing as a *homo geneticus,* she or he is submitted to both these forces, pushed by preexisting determinations (unconscious drives, sociological dispositions, configuration of the professional field) and pulled by the perspective of the projected goal, a certain equilibrium of the different aesthetic choices. But the characteristic of *homo geneticus* is that she or he is moved by a nonlinear motion, which we could define as the dynamics of invention. *Homo geneticus* must constantly, and dialectically, adjust the goal, the means toward this goal, and the values according to which the result will be appreciated, in relation to varying external circumstances, but also in relation to the internal logic and the incidents and accidents occurring in the process of accomplishing the goal. So that apart from the two impulses, upstream and downstream, pushing and pulling, he or she is moved by a third category of impulses, issuing from within the creative process. It is this third category, this internal dynamics, that we can consider as specifically genetic.

To reveal these forces at work, I will start from an unusual set of documents: a batch of corrected proofs for *Ulysses* that arrived too late to be used by the printers. We will evaluate the consequences of this accident and see how Joyce used the unimplemented corrections at a later stage of the composition and how the postponement and the transposition (the deferral and the displacement) transformed the corrections and their environment.

In the second chapter, I will examine separately the effects of the superimposition of intentions in a single place, on the one hand, and the interference of contemporary acts of writing, on the other, and we will see how both phenomena contributed decisively to the shaping of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. We will see that the accident of the stray proofs is only a special instance of the part played by chance in the genetic process and that the overdetermination of elements that is so much in evidence in Joyce's work is paradoxical from a genetic point of view. It necessarily relies on the connective propensity of textual matter, which is the best ally of writers in general and particularly of someone like Joyce, who knew how to take advantage of it and how to change the contingent into the necessary.

In the next chapter, we will look at some aspects of the transition between *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* and see how the passage from one to the other was made possible by a process of decontextualization and recontextualization related to the procedures described in the first chapter. This will give us some insight into the genesis of chapter 4 of Book II of *Finnegans Wake*.

The fourth chapter deals with the spatial dimension of Joyce's writing. It shows how the layout of the manuscripts reflects the genetic process and also how it influences it.

The fifth chapter analyses two pages of a draft of "Sirens" and recapitulates what we know of the early development of this episode, highlighting what seem to be turning points in the development of the book.

The sixth and seventh chapters study Joyce's mysterious notebooks and his note-taking process. They consider the evolution of his intertextual relationship in the course of his career.

Finally, I will try to show how the genetic approach can move beyond the single-author perspective: we will look at Virginia Woolf's notes on the first episodes of *Ulysses* and see how they reveal a conversation between several voices, personal and institutional (Joyce and Woolf are obviously involved, but also May Sinclair, Dorothy Richardson, the *Little Review,* the *Times Literary Supplement* and many others). In comparison with Woolf's relatively transparent mode of taking notes and discussing her ideas, the singularity of Joyce's procedures and the difficulty of interpreting them stand out.

This book does not intend to serve as a manual of Joyce genetics: it would require a much larger volume simply to present the extent and diversity of the Joyce archive and to map the whole range of problems raised by Joyce's writing practices. Its aim rather is to make the readers of Joyce aware of the relevance of the domain that genetic criticism calls the *avant-texte,* give them an idea of the wealth of material that they can find there, and suggest ways of interpreting the complex mechanisms that rule this material.[19] Its main ambition, however, is to persuade readers of Joyce that they should consult the manuscripts for themselves, in the original when it is accessible, in the facsimile editions, or in the wonderful digital reproductions that are now available online for part of the corpus. Becoming personally acquainted with this fascinating universe should prove a transformative experience: it is likely to change their relation to Joyce and perhaps more generally to literature.

The book could also be used as a kind of introduction to genetic criticism, its purpose and its methods. Because of the nature of Joyce's writing, the creative impulse is more in evidence in his manuscripts than in practically any other writer's archive. The traces left by the writing process are extraordinarily numerous and diverse, but the problems raised by the interpretation of such traces also appear more distinctly.