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Susana Pajares Tosca
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# Michael Joyce: Twilight, a Symphony (Review)

By Susana Pajares Tosca

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The story begins with a chapter called "Our story so far" that explains the basic argument, giving the reader the contextual basis to understand the multiple fragments from the start. There are two stories, distant in time and space but related because they both have lakes as scenes and characters in common. In the first story, Hugh Colin hides with his son (his mother has the custody) in a holiday place where he meets a couple of Polish political refugees. In the second one, later in time, Hugh and the Polish woman, Magda, are looking for Doctor Twilight, one of the few doctors who practise euthanasia, because she has an incurable illness.

Upon this basic structure, Joyce builds an impressive scaffolding made up of voices, memories and thoughts that tells us about the eternal human themes, death and the search for the self.
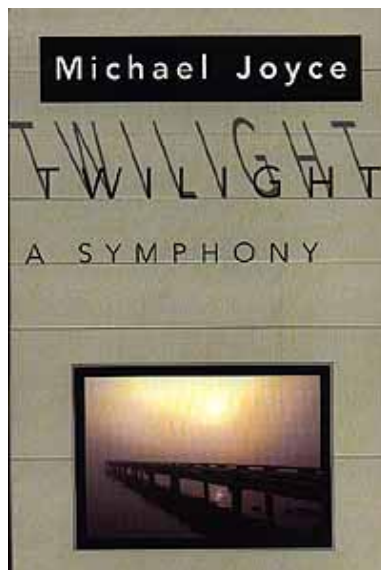
> "My search is for what authentically can be said about a life, how people talk about what is in their hearts and whether it is possible to do so all outside the ironical. All this is meant to be in the most authentic voice I can here summon, knowing -aside from the theoretical questions- that my own authenticity is always in question even for me. Aware always also that as soon as you have read this I begin to disappear or, like Mallarmé´s swan, freeze into the form of my own inaction."

The language is splendid, or we should say "languages", because it is a constant variation of integrated styles: lyrical, lively dialogue, journalistic language, philosophic language… Joyce uses even the language of literary criticism, quoting enemies of hypertext or making Eco and Goodard act as characters in a theoretical discussion. Other narrative techniques are: direct and indirect quote, words in at least seven languages other than English, the repetition of sentences or texts that reappear included within different texts and even doubly joycean word games like "the Old man and the see".

In fact, Joyce pays here homage to his illustrious predecessor not only by playing little style games, but so explicitly as this:

> there´s only been one book ever written and it was a Greek who wrote it though some say he was Armenian, Asia Minor, Greek-Jew or Jew-Greek or something- and then an Irishman rewrote it and everybody else kept trying.

This work reveals Joyce as a master of the hypertextual environment from where he´s taken the last advances to tell his tale. Twilight, a symphony is compositionally a step forward compared to afternoon, a story.

The first innovation is that two screens open at the same time: text screen and map screen. The map places the space we´re reading, allowing the reader to navigate everywhere, from one hierarchy to the next, conscious of every fragment´s belonging to a coherent structure where relationships are made explicit. There is an specific tool to move within maps other than clicking on them: a four-headed arrow. The upper arrow takes us to the superior space to that we´re reading, the lower arrow to a space within the space we´re reading, the left-hand arrow to the space we´ve read before, and the right-hand arrow to the next space.

Other known tools are the possibility of saving our reading and the "dialog box" that comes out pressing the information button and which contains a list of the links leading to and from the current space and a history of the reading in "recently visited spaces". However we can´t write our own notes or use bookmarks to mark pages.

Twilight, a symphony includes more than text. There are pictures, photos, a video of a short film, music and other sounds including human voices. These components are not only decorative but have their own semantic purpose and serve as links to different parts of the story. The photos show smaller photos and meaningfull

objects as very deep personal memories. The short film could be described as impressionist because of its shifting light and colours and the rock music that we can hear. Music is very important in this work as we can already tell by the title. We not only hear fragments and read about composers and musicians (Glenn Gould, Bach, Chopin, etc.), but the reading´s ups and downs suggest the movements of a symphony.

This multiplicity is specially adequate to Michael Joyce´s ideas about the meaning in motion and the impossibility to end stories, everything is relevant in Twilight, a symphony. He quotes Harold Pinter´s words making them his:

> Meaning begins in the words, in the action, continues in your head and ends nowhere. There is no end to meaning. Meaning which is resolved, parcelled, labelled and ready for export is dead, impertinent, and meaningless.

Michael Joyce´s work is not only attractive for its mastery of the technical hypertext environment, Twilight, a symphony is a beautiful work of art that deserves to be read for its own sake. Maybe the best compliment to be paid to this work is that, although we´ve used a few lines to talk about technical matters above, the reader uses the hypertext tools unconsciously, getting absolutely involved in the meaning of the story, which is the most valuable thing in Twilight, a symphony. The hypertext is not the enemy or the competitor of the printed page, but a logical follower, another way of telling stories:

> There is only one story of time and space and it is constantly retold: someone far away tries to come home.