

BRIEF MENTIONS

ROY K. GOTTFRIED

The Art of Joyce's Syntax in Ulysses
Athens: The University of Georgia
Press, 1980. Pp. 191.

Dr. Gottfried, assistant professor of English at Vanderbilt University, has written an honest and valuable, but wayward study of Joyce's style.

Maintaining that "for Joyce, style was a matter of proper words in improper places" (p. 10), Gottfried argues that syntax is the key to that style, and that "there is something unique, fundamental, and pervasive about" it (p. 6)—linguistic dislocation, "syntactic displacement" (p. 3). Joyce's method involves the disruption and inversion of conventional word order, disjunction of words and phrases, concentration on modifiers sometimes at the expense of noun subjects, alterations in the references of modifiers, transformations of word forms (i.e., verbs followed by their participals). These devices challenge grammatical expectations, yet function within them—hence the "characteristics of the Joycean sentence: a freedom within bounds, an extension of certain expected patterns of syntax to the limit of their rules, but not beyond. . . . a two-sided effect . . . which explodes language into new forms while still relying on the normal, expected order to render the new creation sensible" (pp. 9-10).

This is a bold thesis. To assert that there is a style and a syntax in *Ulysses* is virtually to challenge Joyce himself. His "chaffering all-including most farraginous chronicle" (*Ulysses*, p. 423) was written, he told Harriet Shaw Weaver, "from eighteen different points of view and in as many styles, all apparently unknown or undiscovered by my fellow tradesmen" (24 June 1921); now this may be a characteristic Joycean exaggeration, but it does not miss the mark by much. Hence to persuade the reader that a "common denominator" (p. 3) exists in the points of view and the styles is no mean task. In the first three chapters Gottfried takes major steps toward accomplishing it: his generalizations are clear and precise and are supported by careful explications of the text. This is, therefore, an important book.

The problem is that Gottfried does not sufficiently demonstrate and document the "Joycean sentence" as basic to the multiple styles of *Ulysses*. "Syntactic displacement" is, after all, a relatively elementary method for conveying the texture of prespeech in the interior monologue; to convince us that its function is more "fundamental, and pervasive," the thesis should be presented more systematically, in greater detail, with more extensive citations and explications. A greater weight of evidence needs to be assembled and presented.

This Gottfried does not do. Instead, in Chapters Four and Five, he succumbs to dissertationism: the demonstration of awareness of theories and problems only tangential to the subject but insisted upon by one's readers (the study began, he confesses, as a "recalcitrant dissertation"). In this case, the author grapples with Whorf, Wittgenstein, the nature and limits of language, space and time, nominalism and universalism—weighty matters, no doubt, but not immediately germane to the argument. The generalizations become solemn, tedious, murky: ". . . the entelechic sentences . . . break away from the restrictions of spatial and physical pattern and enter the realm of progression, of motion throughout time. As against the rigidly ordered dimension of space, the sentences suggest the longer and more fluid dimension of process in time" (p. 92). Or they are imprecise, muddled: "There are, of course, few occurrences where language tries directly to obliterate those patterns which give it meaning, or where it tries to use them as little as possible" (p. 131—surely it is the writer, not language, who "tries"). Or they begin to defy common sense: Gottfried insists that Bloom's monologue as he falls asleep at the end of Sirens (*Ulysses*, p. 382) is clear because "the associations are made by the words themselves, paradigmatically freed from the order that syntax seeks to impose" (p. 130)—in fact, the words themselves can mean anything or nothing unless the reader remembers the larger syntax, Bloom's day, or has at hand Gifford and Siedman, or Thornton, or Hanley.

The conclusion further disappoints. From the beginning, Gottfried has claimed that Joyce's form is "expressive" of content

and authorial judgment: "Carefully crafted in original patterns, language [as Joyce uses it] enacts a meaning and presents what it means in a visual form. With the rules and order of syntax used and misused as its structure, language is an expressive as well as appropriate form" (p. 23). In the final chapter, he insists that "The vision and the form of Joyce's art are one: his artistic choices suggest moral ones [earlier, p. 31, Gottfried insists that they also suggest a political stance], and his moral perspective . . . informs his aesthetic view" (p. 169). This important point, however, is argued in the context of a defense of Joyce against D. H. Lawrence and F. R. Leavis, and these dunderheaded objections are not worthy of Gottfried's intelligence and discrimination. If Gottfried is right, and I believe he is, then the "moral perspective" which "informs" Joyce's aesthetic ought to be demonstrable and explicable in terms of the plot and themes of *Ulysses*, and thus the serious objections to Joyce raised by, among others, Wayne C. Booth, could be answered with conviction and authority. To say that I eagerly await what Gottfried has to say to such as Professor Booth is to underscore my admiration for this study, despite the reservations expressed.

James L. McDonald

DABNEY STUART

Nabokov: The Dimensions of Parody
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State
University Press, 1978. Pp. 191.

Vladimir Nabokov engages the reader in a game in which the rules he has created are so compelling that, when the reader comes to write his or her own responses to the work, the player wants to continue in the spirit of the game. As Joyce observed, an original artist creates his own readers. Dabney Stuart, in his *Nabokov: The Dimensions of Parody*, proves himself a fitting opponent because he understands Nabokov's moral concerns, that the game incorporates ideas about perception and value. Play is delightful in itself and a rehearsal as well.

Stuart takes on some Nabokov works which are less frequently addressed: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Laughter in the Dark*, *Despair*, *Pnin*, and *Speak Memory*. By using the conventions of genre—the novel as film, as biography, as play, as quest, as joke, as game—Stuart comes to recognize Nabokov's epistemological concerns: ". . . what is parodied turns out to be not so much a literary form used by other writers as more basic assumptions about perception and its relationship to so-called factual reality, that term which Nabokov has frequently said should be surrounded by quotation marks" (p. 133).

To what ends does Nabokov parody our expectations of what is "out there" in the novel and the world? I think Stuart is primarily concerned with diagramming process by means of description, close reading, analysis of detail, rather than attacking this question, but it is clear that he respects more than Nabokov's skill, that he admires his seriousness. Parody is a distancing device. When a political writer such as Brecht deploys it, the reasoning is obvious: he wants his audience not purged, but resolved to action. Nabokov's use of a tactic of disruption may be, despite different goals, more similar than he would have admitted. He seeks through his fiction to thwart received opinion and assert the liberty of individual expression.

Stuart's book stays, unlike the speculation above, within the confines of Nabokov's field, sensibly and sensitively. Speaking of his chapter on *Pnin* in the Preface, he writes: "I intend in the rest of that chapter to mimic more than comment, and certain devices (the address to the reader, and its counterpoint, for example) in the final chapter [on *Speak Memory*] signal a conscious veering toward parody itself, seen as subject matter earlier, but used, or almost used, as a mode of composition in the end. My aim, inadequately adumbrated here, is to have the book assumed by its subject, and the reader, a companion in these divagations, returned there, too." This homage to the Master, in which criticism emulates the strategies of the work under review, is advantageous to the reader in putting him or her on more familiar terms with the novels than their slippery, erudite author would sometimes allow—unless, of course, "Dabney Stuart" is an anagram I haven't succeeded in decoding.

June Perry Levine