

Suheil Badi Bushrui and Bernard Benstock, eds.

*JAMES JOYCE: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE*

New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1982. Pp. xiii + 301. \$26.50.

Reviewed by: Michael Groden

James Joyce's centenary year, 1982, inspired countless conferences, festivals, and publications, including several essay collections celebrating various aspects of his achievement. The organizers of a conference in Beirut, and the editors of a volume of essays based partly on that conference, have emphasized his international audience and reputation. The sixteen essays and four poems presented by Suheil Badi Bushrui of Lebanon and Bernard Benstock of the United States in *James Joyce: An International Perspective* demonstrate the international nature of Joyce's art in several direct and indirect ways, including comparisons with European authors, assessments of his presence in non-English-speaking countries, and the different nationalities of the contributors themselves. The essays, like those in most collections, vary widely in quality, and there is an inconsistency between the apparent goals of the editors for the volume as a whole (a biographical introduction and chronology of Joyce's life suggest a guidebook for the general reader) and the specialized nature of many of the essays, but the book succeeds in presenting discussions of Joyce that move beyond the familiar American and English viewpoints into a true "international perspective," or, more accurately, international perspectives.

Each of the book's four sections features its own variation on the international theme. First are studies of the individual works, one each devoted to *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Exiles*, *Finnegans Wake*, and the poetry, and two to *Ulysses*. The critics themselves form an international group; three come from the United States, two from Ireland, and one from England, while the seventh is an Irishman living and teaching in the United States. This section is the most wide-ranging part of the book, and here the split between generalist and specialist levels of discussion is felt most acutely. The essays divide into three main groups. Articles for the general reader include Dominic Daniel's elementary account of *Exiles'* moral themes; Terence Brown's useful discussion of the public buildings, houses, rooms, and other aspects of Dublin's "physical milieu" (p. 11) in *Dubliners*; and Francis Warner's study of Joyce's poetry. Bernard Benstock's argument regarding misreadings and accurate readings of *Ulysses* and Vivian Mercier's essay on the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses* in terms both of an analogy between Joyce and Shakespeare and of the form of a Platonic dialogue situate themselves within the mainstream of specialized Joyce studies. Finally, Charles Rossman's structuralist/reader-response discussion of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and John Paul Riquelme's poststructuralist analysis of *Finnegans Wake* assume familiarity not only with Joyce criticism, but also with recent developments (primarily European, thus another "international perspective") in literary theory. Rossman, in "The Reader's Role in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," works with Wolfgang Iser's theory of textual gaps filled in by the reader, but his emphasis on the reader's use of contexts to fill in the gaps leads him to the argument that "Iser's metaphor of a gap or aesthetic blank less aptly accounts for the reader's participation...than does the idea of a frame. The reader accumulates evolving contextual elements and brings them to bear, positions them like a frame around a painted scene, to reveal and apprehend the scene's purposive form" (p. 31). In "Twists of the Teller's Tale: *Finnegans Wake*," Riquelme concentrates on the letter ALP writes and offers first a Möbius strip and then a strip cut in half (the cut produces two twists) as visual analogies to both the letter and the *Wake* itself. Citing Clive Hart's suggestion that the letter stands for the whole book, Riquelme discusses the production of the letter within the text and the production of the book itself, including many technical terms that Joyce built into the text. Riquelme's essay, the most provocative in the volume, forms part of his recently published book, *Teller and Tale in Joyce's Fiction: A Study of Narration*.

The second section consists of essays by David Norris, Augustine Martin, and Declan Kiberd, all Irish natives and residents. Norris emphasizes Joyce's use of the reality of Ireland as he experienced it, Martin Joyce's Irish Catholic background, and Kiberd Joyce's political reactions and responses. In terms of the international perspective, the main interest in the three valuable essays lies in each author's use of his own Irish background as an entrance into Joyce's world. The third section contains solid historical-comparative studies by Phillip Herring (an American) on Joyce and Rimbaud, and Ann Saddlemeyer (a Canadian) on "Joyce and the Irish Dramatic Movement."

The last section offers three surveys of Joyce's importance, as revealed through his influence on native writers, translations of his works, and criticism and scholarship, in non-English-speaking countries. Paul van Caspel writes about the Netherlands, Paul F. Botheroyd and Sylvia Botheroyd about Germany and Switzerland, and Suheil Badi Bushrui about the Arab world (including a checklist in both English and Arabic of translations of Joyce's works into Arabic, original Arabic studies of Joyce, and translations of American and European criticism of Joyce and modern literature). Finally, Thomas F. Staley's "Following Ariadne's String: Tracing Joyce Scholarship into the Eighties" discusses studies that appeared between 1974 and mid-1981; the essay continues Staley's earlier survey that was published in *Anglo-Irish Literature: A Review of Research* in 1976. Staley provides invaluable capsule summaries of the criticism and scholarship that was published in the mid- and late 1970s, and he discusses the studies in terms of such general directions and trends as textual studies, "the broadening of the critical outlook and theoretical approach in Joyce studies" (p. 250), and the continued strong presence of traditional scholarly and critical approaches. There are perhaps too many brief, unsupported assessments of studies as "sound," "thorough," or "rigorous," and given Staley's tendency to find something positive to say about almost every item, his one unqualified rejection of a recent book seems almost irrational in its extreme negativity. But anyone facing the bewildering array of studies that appeared between 1974 and 1980 (especially now that the 1982 wave has arrived) will appreciate Staley's efforts in sorting out and describing this criticism.

*James Joyce: An International Perspective* also contains a biographical introduction (attributed to both editors but reading much like Bushrui's essay in the volume) and a chronology of Joyce's life compiled by Bushrui. Prefatory materials include a two-page foreword by Richard Ellmann; a tribute to Sir Desmond Cochrane, Honorary Consul General of the Republic of Ireland in Lebanon, who died in 1979 and in whose honor the essays are published; and a facsimile reproduction of a brief, moving message from Samuel Beckett, dated 29 September 1980: "I welcome this occasion to bow once again, before I go, deep down, before his heroic work, heroic being."

Max Frisch  
*BLAUBART*

Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982. Pp. 172  
Reviewed by David Myers

Both Frisch and Dürrenmatt, the terrible Swiss twins of moralistic postwar drama, have shown themselves fascinated over the last forty years with the tragicomic analysis of evaded ethical responsibility. The guilt of their protagonists has commonly had allegorical overtones for the whole of Western civilization. These male protagonists are violently expelled from the ostensible harmony of their cowardly lives. They are forced into tragic introspection that reveals they are *en mauvais foi* with themselves. Their lives culminate in the moving confession of guilt and failure. This is so with Dürrenmatt's Ill in *Der Besuch der alten Dame* and with Trapp in *Die Panne*, just as it is with Frisch's teacher in *Andorra*. Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* is a farcical but still allegorical variation on this theme.

Frisch's latest novel *Blaubart* reads like an absurd inversion of these plays in a minor domestic key. The main character Felix Schaad does not achieve tragic stature through his obsession with a guilt that he has largely invented. He simply renders himself neurotically ineffectual, paranoid, and suicidal. The fact is that he is no more guilty of the ultimate sin of lovelessness than his seven egoistic wives.

In the original seventeenth-century legend, Bluebeard is a comic hyperbole of bloodthirstiness and perverted lust. Frisch parodistically inverts this legend, mocking its psychological superficiality. This is the same technique that he used in his play *Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie*. At the end of his tragic farce, condemned to obscure monogamy in a monastery, Don Juan says: "Im Ernst, mein Unwille gegen die Schöpfung, die uns gespalten hat in Mann and Weib, ist lebhafter als je. ... Welche Ungeheuerlichkeit, dass der Mensch nicht das