

Much of the success of the book resides less in system and science and more in the learning of the man, in his ability to evoke the range and texture of western culture and literature, and in the ease with which he is able to go from Goethe to Homer, Faulkner, and Dante. Even today the book reads like an adventure. There are no topic paragraphs or plans, which are then followed to their deadly and predictable ends, no chronological charts systematically traversed. One is never quite sure as one goes from paragraph to paragraph where the mind will leap and what it will light on. Western literature from the Greeks to the Russians is one garden and roots of the flowers are intertwined. Steiner was practicing in criticism then what Joseph Frank later called "spatial form in literature." Western literature was a simultaneous whole for Steiner, and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy engaged in a living dialogue with Homer, Sophocles, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Dante. One realizes how much the criticism of today or since then has become a criticism of stricture and constriction, most of all of theoretical weight, and how foreign it is to personal belief and passion. If this is a work of old criticism, then old criticism never changes in its quickness, love, intelligence, and sensitivity.

For Steiner, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy demand more than knowledge; they ask for belief and passion. And he gives both easily, and most of all he gives admiration, if not awe. In a not uncharacteristic hyperbolic vein, he speaks of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (as well as the literature of the nineteenth century in Russia) as one of the three greatest leaps of Western imagination, along with the Sophoclean and Elizabethan ages. If this is an exaggeration—and one's first impulse is to say it is—who would one put in the presence of the Greeks and the Elizabethans?

Marguerite Duras

THE WAR, translated from the French by Barbara Bray

Pantheon Press, 1986.

Reviewed by Germaine Brée

The title in French of Duras's book is *La douleur*. Wisely, Barbara Bray opted for *The War*. "La douleur" is the title of the first and most powerful of the six pieces in the book. Although in some measure all speak indirectly of the pain of war, only "La douleur" immerses its readers in the stark suffering of body and mind that the word communicates.

"The War," for Duras's generation, can only be World War II. In these pages it refers more specifically to the twilight zone between the allied landing in Normandy and the convoys of returning prisoners and deportees, Jews, and political prisoners—among these, Duras's husband Robert L. "La douleur" is the hour by hour account of the anguish of waiting in uncertainty, without news, as the unimaginable horror of the concentration camps is written large in the skeletal bodies of the returning victims. These pages, Duras tells us, were written in a quasi-hypnotic state and forgotten, to be discovered (rather too patly) in time for publication at the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of Paris: pages of a diary most certainly revised, a perfectly controlled transcription of intolerable anguish and uncontrollable emotions: hope, despair, images of Robert L's lonely agony flow through the text as if unmediated by language. After his return, these pages are followed by an obsessive, clinical documentary as Duras notes his physical plight and his slow return to life. Duras has given us one of the most unforgettable descriptions of the effects of the concentration camps' dehumanizing bestiality, a description stark in its restraint.

Three of the five following episodes describe incidents in Duras's life as a member of the Paris based Resistance network headed by one "François Montard," actually François Mitterrand, at present President of France. These, which antedate "la douleur," seem to be fragments of a journal. In March 1986, a new weekly in Paris—*L'Autre Journal*—ran a series of three conversations between President Mitterrand and Marguerite Duras, the first of which corroborates Duras's account of the events she was involved in. It fills in details and furnishes the broader frame that gives these apparently unconnected memories their coherence and significance as fragments of a broader historical moment, as details lived in an absolute present by the individual action. We are given dramatic glimpses of the amorphous confusion and ambiguous atmosphere of cafés, restaurants, and streets in Paris where Nazi informants,

Resistance agents, and Gestapo personnel, whose roles are changing as the German defeat becomes tangible, hunter and hunted, face the moment of truth. Duras does not moralize, nor deal in stereotypes, hence the disturbing impact of these episodes.

Particularly disturbing is the episode in which a young woman, Therese—Duras's pseudonym—orders and oversees a brutal operation: physical violence wreaked on a wretched "informer" who must be made to speak. Less brutal but just as ambivalent are the accounts of Duras's dealings with a Gestapo agent and a young militant for whose execution she is in part responsible, while yet emotionally torn by the discrepancy between the individual human beings and the rigor of a fate for which they are no match.

The last two texts are "invented"—evocations of wraithlike figures, haunting her imagination and memory. The more familiar to Duras's reader is that of the little Jewish girl "Aurelia" of Paris emerging from a kind of penumbra that has inexplicably for her closed in upon her life, waiting for an eventual release, as she "reads" the progress of the war in the sounds of invisible squadrons of planes flying overhead, purveyors of massive destruction and frail hopes. These are less immediately compelling texts than "La douleur," but they too open up perspectives into the unbearable traumas suffered by individuals, for which, the reader feels, there can be only sorrow and no vindication, no accountability in terms of hero and villain, victory and defeat, right and wrong. "Sacred texts," Duras called them, that confront starkly the "ferocity" of life when the ordered surface of so-called "normal life" is torn asunder.

One is grateful to Barbara Bray for her faithful and sensitive translations that, like the texts themselves, successfully steer a difficult course between what could be overly dramatic self-serving renderings, and flat realism. These are not merely documentary texts; they belong to a literary world, unmistakably the world of Marguerite Duras.

Thomas Jackson Rice
JAMES JOYCE: LIFE, WORK, AND CRITICISM
Fredericton, N. B.: York Press, 1985. Pp. 46. \$6.95
Reviewed by James L. McDonald

This study is not intended for the scholar's library, already well-stocked with detailed treatments of Joyce, his development, his achievement, his relation to other writers, and his influence. Rather, it is directed to the reader who requires a general introduction. Thomas Jackson Rice provides a brief biography, a chronological list of Joyce's writings, compact analyses of the major works, and an annotated bibliography.

The biographical sketch emphasizes Joyce's early life, suggesting that his intellectual development was virtually complete before he left Ireland: Rice maintains, for example, that "1898 . . . his conversion to the religion of art was fait accompli" (p. 7), surely an oversimplification. The difficulties Joyce encountered with publishers, censors, and the public are minimized, and there is no mention of Ezra Pound or Harriet Shaw Weaver—there is only scant indication that Joyce's experience on the continent informed the increasing maturity, richness, and complexity of his vision. In a brief account, of course, this peril goes with the territory.

In interpreting the works, Rice discerns a continuity and consistency in Joyce's artistic vision. He pinpoints two dominant assumptions: ". . . that man is paradoxically both isolated from and integrally related to his community, and that man either confirms his alienation by egoism or escapes from it through communication" (p. 32). The major theme of *Dubliners* "is that man's condition of moral paralysis, sense of unfulfillment . . . and materialist preoccupations . . . are self-created, the predictable consequences of his egoistic withdrawal into himself in reaction to an oppressive and cruel environment" (p. 19). The same theme is central to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "Stephen's flight will be impossible, uncompleted, or idolatrous . . . because he is immobilized by his egoism . . . He cannot escape if he does not know himself fully, in terms of his full community" (p. 21). *Exiles* (which Rice argues is "a