

Richard Brown

JAMES JOYCE AND HIS SEXUALITY

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Pp. 216

Reviewed by Mary Beth Pringle

Richard Brown's *James Joyce and His Sexuality* builds from the following straw dog: "The stress on the more eccentric parts of Joyce's personality and attitudes, the hurried accumulation of detailed explicatory glosses and the attention to Joyce's developments in literary form that have characterized the criticism, have reinforced the impression that Joyce was a recluse from contemporary historical and intellectual pressures [even those that concern human sexuality]" (3). This observation may surprise critics who assume that, in his writings, Joyce both reflected and contributed importantly to the intellectual streams of his time. It will also puzzle those who often teach the modern period by measuring it against Joyce's canon. Such straining as Professor Brown's to justify his own work is unnecessary because he has much of importance to say about sexuality in Joyce's work and about the intersection between that sexuality, modernity, and contemporary critical theory.

James Joyce and His Sexuality deals with Joyce's attitudes toward love and marriage, the modern science of sexuality, women, and what Brown calls "sexual reality." In "Love and Marriage," Brown shows that Joyce's attitudes toward marriage, free love, and adultery were more closely in relation to the 'progressive' theories of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers than is normally supposed" (35). He also shows that fiction such as Joyce's that criticized traditional marriage and explored adultery "are felt to contain the furthest reaching explorations into their age" (17). When Joyce in his later works became increasingly indirect in style and treatment of sexuality, his critiques of traditional sexual views were intensified as he "ridicule[d] and disrupt[ed] the forms of order that his youthful mind had rejected" (49). Finally, according to Brown, Joyce shows by means of Leopold and Molly Bloom's relationship not just the inadequacy of marriage but also the necessary separateness of each of us from all others, inherent in the human condition.

Chapter 2 deals with Joyce's treatment of masturbation, the effects of birth control on sexuality, and Joyce's depiction of sexual perversity. According to Brown, the "new emphasis on questions of sexuality, as opposed to questions of marital legitimacy, as well as a new understanding of what sexuality might be . . . characterize . . . the modern scene" (50). Brown links Joyce's interest in sexual perversity to his "linguistic and personal relationships associated with the breakdown of bourgeois society" (78).

In chapter 3, Brown deals with feminist issues, arguing that Joyce is more of a feminist than he is credited with being. Further, in terms of feminist issues, Joyce's "fiction suggests a continuity of feeling with some of the strongest traditions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought" (89). Joyce's feminism, however, is not polemical. Instead, according to Brown, Joyce complains "against the social institutions governing the lives of women" (94). Joyce's modernity is reflected in his assumption of sexual differences in his fiction, or sexual dimorphism, as Brown calls it. Nevertheless, Joyce is able to transcend these assumptions by envisioning an androgynous ideal and by creating women, in many cases, as dominant characters. When Joyce creates female characters who are dominant and greedy, he is dealing with "the intrusion of mercantilism into the sexual life" (117).

Brown's fourth chapter, "Sexual Reality", shows Joyce recognizing the sexual heart of "persons, phenomena, and institutions" (127) and of literature throughout time. Here Brown argues that Joyce uses sexuality to "advance on reality" (145) at the same time that he uses experimental forms. Using sexuality, Joyce "aspires toward timelessness, but hopes to gain momentum from changes in popular taste that are closely tied to social and economic circumstances" (145). This dynamic sense of his art, Brown writes, Joyce "developed from . . . his relationship with the institutions of literary censorship" (145). Finally, Brown

argues that Joyce recognized a connection between literary and sexual pleasures. Joyce's play with language and that language's central sexual theme is proof of the fact.

There is much rich reading to be had in Brown's book, but the act of reading *James Joyce and His Sexuality* could have been made far more pleasurable. At one point, Brown translates an abstruse passage from the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*. Joyce had written: "Both indurated by early domestic training and an inherited tenacity of heterodox resistance professed their disbelief in many orthodox religious, national, social, and ethical doctrines. Both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism" (quoted in Brown 16). Brown translates: "They disbelieve in religion but believe in sex" (16). Brown's occasionally painful prose--seventy-eight word sentences that make up single paragraphs--would have benefited from similar editing.

Esther Fuchs

ISRAELI MYTHOGYNIES: WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY HEBREW FICTION

Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. Pp. 147

Reviewed by Miriam Roshwald

Esther Fuchs looks at contemporary Israeli literature from a feminist critic's vantage point. Her approach is determined by some basic premises of the feminist theory. The sine qua non of feminist philosophy is that woman, in our male dominated, or androcentric world, is by definition the Other. As the victimized object of "one of the most oppressive ideologies of all time-- patriarchy" (12), she is represented by the male writer as an inferior in every respect--mentally, emotionally, and morally. Armed with these unassailable axioms, Ms. Fuchs turns her objective critic's eye to the Hebrew letters. Focusing mainly on two of Israel's most prominent contemporary writers, A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz, she comes up with conclusions which hover between the peevish and the absurd.

Both authors under discussion are deeply preoccupied with Israel's impasse with her Arab neighbors and with the corrosive effect this bloody impasse has wreaked on the national as well as individual soul. Both authors probe mercilessly into the rot, cant, self-delusion, and despair which inimical reality, together with human corruptibility, have wrought in the collective and individual psyche. Compromise of once hallowed Zionist and socialist ideals, defection from the pioneering commitment to a simple life and closeness to land, the onset of urbanization with all its attendant ills of materialism, are exposed and caricatured in every one of these writers' works. The phantom haunting modern man everywhere--alienation--is only compounded in this embattled society by the memory of the Holocaust, endemic sense of insecurity, and dissatisfaction with itself. The disturbing literature which tries to translate the nagging sense of malaise reads often more like an allegorical parable than a mimetic representation of reality. The ugly self-image which emerges--of both the male and female protagonist--reflects a bitter sense of guilt and failure. The heroes, or rather antiheroes, who fill the pages of contemporary Israeli fiction are marked by a stigma of spiritual impotence, profound disorientation, fragmented sense of identity, and self-destructive, semi-conscious hostility. Esther Fuchs, an intelligent and capable critic, knows all that, but she chooses to isolate one component and to make it the exclusive criterion by which to pass judgment on this fiction, namely, the woman.

As Ms. Fuchs would have it, the male Israeli writer is a foresworn enemy of the woman. A.B. Yehoshua, who often employs surrealist techniques in which his heroes act in a compulsive, automaton-like twilight of semi-consciousness, is accused by Ms. Fuchs of denying his female figures the gift of rational thinking, a sense of public and family responsibility, and of depicting them as "seductive objects of desire" who "drain the male subject of energy and gradually lure him to self-destruction" (38-39). Later, as an after-