

The last selection in the present volume is from the "Dream Talks" of Nahman of Bratslav, a Hasidic rabbi who lived a mere two hundred years ago. Rabbi Nahman is "a spinner of fantastic yarns." He combines "folk motifs, biblical images, and kabbalistic symbols to create works of a startling mythic profundity" (333). The "dreams" are marked by an uncanny sense of a treacherous, slippery reality, foreshadowing Kafka's anguished world of abandonment and crushing guilt. The paralyzing impotence vis-à-vis a mocking malignity, which informs those dreams, strikes a responsive chord in our modern consciousness.

The excellent introduction by David Stern and the evocative afterward by Mark Jay Mirsky open a window onto a world hardly known to the outsider and help clear up some long-entrenched misconceptions. The rabbinical world emerges from the conventional, dry-as-dust image, and turns into a flesh-and-blood civilization, fired by an inner world of turbulent passions, humor, doubt, and creative imagination.

Fritz Senn and Christine Van Boheemen, eds.  
*JOYCE, MODERNITY, AND ITS MEDIATION.*  
Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1989. Pp. 228  
Reviewed by Michael Patrick Gillespie

*Joyce, Modernity, and Its Mediation*, the first volume of a new series being brought out by Rodopi entitled *European Joyce Studies*, evokes at least two distinct responses. One of course wishes to assess the efforts of the work's contributors, both in terms of the insights of specific essays and with regard to the volume's overall success at addressing its announced topic. At the same time the commitment to an ongoing publication devoted to presenting essays on Joyce leads one to consider a range of interesting ontological issues.

Christine van Boheemen, the series associate editor, leaves the broader questions to which I allude to the individual reader. Her introduction to volume one focuses exclusively on its announced topic—a study of how Joyce's canon situates the sensibilities of contemporary readers within the flux between the modern and the postmodern. One certainly understands her decision, for this perceived oscillation of Joyce's canon between artistic periods has generated a wide range of criticism demanding a concerted response. With this doubtless in mind, van Boheemen offers a fluent blend of the conventional and the imaginative that proves a refreshing alternative to the more predictable readings that leave one both confused and restive. Van Boheemen reminds us of the need to review Joyce's traditional position as a figure that mediates the confrontation of modernism by postmodernism, but she also promises a broad exploration of the implications of that conjunction through critics who eschew conventional readings.

One inevitably finds some disappointing work in a volume of this size, but across a range of topics and methodologies van Boheemen and Fritz Senn, general editor of the series, have selected an enviable number of first-rate essays. Although many Joyceans, for example, have demonstrated affinities for poststructuralist theoretical views, few have presented the complexities of postmodern critical theory with the grace, wit, and insight by which Geert Lernout enables those out of sympathy with his epistemological views to benefit from his insights. Likewise, Jeri Johnson offers a highly complex reading of Joyce that presents a sophisticated corrective to the more reductive feminist readings of *Ulysses*. From more conventional epistemological perspectives, well-known Joyce scholars like Fritz Senn and Mary Power recapitulate proven methods and still adduce useful insights.

As noted above, van Boheemen's introduction does not attempt to delineate a long-term perspective informing the development of this project, and one certainly understands her possible reluctance to circumscribe future efforts through a prescriptive constitution of the series. Nonetheless, the appearance of *European Joyce Studies* will, in a profession devoted to teleology, evoke a range of opinions as to its nature. In the remainder of this review I would like to anticipate some and to offer my own sense of its purpose.

The list of scholarly journals already specifically concerned with examinations of the works of James Joyce—*James Joyce Quarterly*; *Joyce Studies*; *James Joyce Broadsheet*; *A Finnegans Wake Circular*; and *James Joyce Literary Supplement*—naturally raises questions of the general need for such an additional commitment to Joyce scholarship, and of its particular success in meeting that need. Presented at the beginning of this review and the scores of other publications devoted to Irish studies, contemporary literature, and/or critical theory prompts the obvious question: why produce another? The title itself—*European Joyce Studies*—provokes several interesting questions but no clear sense of how one might answer them. Since this volume's contributors come from a range of locations across the Continent, England, and the United States, geography does not seem to be the factor in determining inclusion. Since a variety of methodologies inform various interpretations, one cannot assume that the work exists to forward a specifically European (whatever that might mean) approach to epistemology. The number of established critical figures who have essays in this volume precludes any thought that it would serve as an outlet for essays unpublishable anywhere else. Even the ostensive purpose of highlighting essays first presented in October of 1987 at the University of Leiden's conference on Joyce and Mediatization falls short as a justification, for essays not presented at that conference or not related to that topic appear throughout the volume.

The remaining conclusion strikes me as the most logical: so much work must still be done on Joyce and so many talented critics wish to fill this need that demand simply requires another journal to meet these needs. Certainly ample evidence exists to support such an argument, but, while one might wish that van Boheemen had adduced some of this information rather than leave it to readers to intuit the purpose and the need for this series, such a gesture

would have inevitably been taken by some as self-aggrandizement and might have impeded rather than accelerated the maturation of the series. In the end perhaps the wisest course is to let *European Joyce Studies* stand on its own merits. It demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses common to any new publishing project, but Senn and van Boheemen have shown the discerning ability to offer a variety of responses to Joyce's work that many readers, new to Joyce, will find insightful. They have also demonstrated the capacity to attract more sophisticated work from a range of scholars, both well known and relatively unknown. As volumes continue to appear, the focus of the series will doubtless sharpen and the consistency of its offerings will improve, and it will continue to make useful interpretive contributions to examinations of Joyce's canon.

Jerry A. Varsava

*CONTINGENT MEANINGS: POSTMODERN FICTION, MIMESIS,  
AND THE READER*

Tallahassee: The Florida State University Press, 1990. Pp. 233

Lance Olsen

*CIRCUS OF THE MIND IN MOTION: POSTMODERNISM  
AND THE COMIC VISION*

Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990. Pp. 171

Reviewed by Ben Stoltzfus

Jean-François Lyotard speaks of postmodernism as a state of mind rather than a historical period and, insofar as self-conscious, reflexive art has not been limited to any one historical period, there is an element of truth in such a view. Because writers from earlier centuries such as Rabelais, Cervantes, Diderot, Sterne, and others have foregrounded language and the creative process (an enterprise that postmodernism has taken on with a vengeance), it is tempting, as Lyotard does, to think of metafiction—the process of exploring the theory of fiction through the practice of writing it—as a generalized endeavor spanning the centuries.

However, as the term so strongly implies, postmodernism is a sequel to modernism, and modernism, although not all agree on what it is or when it began, does cover a historical period of approximately 100 years, let us say, roughly speaking, from 1850 to 1950. In the twentieth century there is bound to be a good deal of overlapping between modernism and postmodernism whenever, for example, we try to situate the works of James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Raymond Roussel, André Gide, or Vladimir Nabokov. Certain aspects of their fiction are recuperable because they are mimetic whereas others are not and, in this connection, the "state of mind" approach makes sense. Nonetheless, because postmodernism has become a catchall term for so many disparate aspects of the twentieth century, from architecture to the zone, it seems to me