

Diana A. Ben-Merre and Maureen Murphy, eds.
JAMES JOYCE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES
New York: Greenwood, 1989. Pp. xii + 188
Reviewed by Michael Groden

James Joyce and His Contemporaries contains eighteen essays based on papers delivered at an October 1982 Joyce centenary conference held at Hofstra University. Divided into five sections—Joyce's Canon: Style and Structure; The Rhetoric of Joyce's World; Joyce's Connections to the Writers of His Time; Joyce and Modern Irish Writers; and Joyce's Centenarian Contemporaries—the essays deal with an impressively broad range of Irish topics. These subjects include Joyce's major prose works ("The Dead," *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*); his use of popular literature; links between the priesthood, sex, and economics in the *Wake*; Joyce's friends Hanna and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington and reform movements; connections between Joyce and Wilde, Shaw, and O'Casey; such modern Irish writers as Flann O'Brien, Austin Clarke, Thomas Kinsella, and Seamus Heaney; and various writers and public figures of Joyce's age, including Pádraic O Conaire, Seamus O'Kelly, James Stephens, and Eamon de Valera.

This wide range of topics, potentially a strength for a collection like this one, unfortunately weakens the book. The essays are all quite short—most of them are under ten pages long, even with endnotes—and ideas tend not to get developed very fully. Several of the essays read like preliminary versions of ideas that could be (and in many cases went on to be) developed more completely. In fact, between the conference in 1982 and the publication of this collection in 1989, several of the stronger essays (including those by Robert F. Garratt, Michael Kenneally, R.B. Kershner, Jr., Cheryl Herr, and Bonnie Kime Scott) did appear in more fully developed versions in individual books, and in revised form Suzette Henke's essay is part of her book that appeared at about the same time as this volume, so these earlier versions were rendered superfluous before they were published. In addition, the *James Joyce Quarterly* published two of the essays in 1984.

At the same time, the brevity of the essays means that premises under which the writers are working often go unquestioned, and this causes some essays to be grounded on positions that should be at least mildly questioned or justified. These positions span the entire critical and theoretical range: for example, one essay takes for granted that an "organic justification" for *Ulysses* can be found and that the book has both a "profound unity" and a "key," whereas the essay immediately following this one posits without question, "If the world is a Derridean text." Had the editors selected fewer papers from the conference for publication and then allowed the authors more space to develop and argue their positions, they not only would have eliminated some of the weaker essays from the book, but also might have strengthened the essays that remained by encouraging the writers to at least examine the validity of

their assumptions before basing arguments or analyses on them and to flesh out their arguments.

Apart from its contents, the book's visual format offers an unusually unpleasant reading experience. Except for the title and copyright pages at the front and information about the editors and contributors at the back, the text is set in a proportionally spaced Courier font that is photographically reduced in order to jam fifty-eight lines of type on a page. This cramped appearance is unpleasant enough, but the use of underlines rather than italics for book titles and handwritten accents for Irish names only make matters worse. It is unfortunate that the publishers chose such primitive typesetting methods; as it is, this reader had to turn to the copyright or contributors' data, set in Times Roman with italics, simply for a momentary respite for the eyes.

Unfortunately, in both its content and its visual format, *James Joyce and His Contemporaries* is a disappointment.

Horacio Vazquez Rial

TRISTE'S HISTORY

Translated from the Spanish by Jo Labanyi

Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991. Pp. 216. \$18.95

Reviewed by Robert DiAntonio

Triste's History is a powerful novel, one that graphically documents the political and social failings of the Argentine state over the past forty years. Argentina, with its highly literate populous, its fertile pampa, and its vast mineral and oil deposits, has experienced great difficulty creating stable democratic governments. While the chronicling of the brutality and repression of a series of ultraconservative regimes forms the underpinnings of this brilliant novel, Horacio Vazquez Rial manages to transcend the "mangled corpse syndrome," attaining an aesthetic distance that makes comprehensible the draconian politics of one of the world's most fascinating countries.

During the now infamous "dirty war of the *proceso*" (1976-1982), the military, with strong civilian and religious backing, "disposed" of and "reeducated" thousands of enemies of the state in a manner that recalls, and was said to be linked to, the Third Reich.

Vazquez Rial does not focus on the victims of this systematized terror, but rather on two members of the infamous death squads. He recounts the story of Chaves, a disillusioned priest, and Triste, a lonely child from the southern slums. In writing of these two hired killers, Rial's poetic prose often conveys touching insights: "Cristobal Artola, known from birth as "Triste" (the Sad One), an epithet much like those charitably applied to minor monarchs to exonerate their incompetence or feebleness, in this case too a cover for an inadmissibly worse predicament: for Triste was never really sad: it was more a matter of