

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

feeling nothing, of relating to nothing around him whether great or small, an indifference to all things human and divine that suggested causes more tragic, a being locked up inside himself" (14).

Triste travels north with his mother to attend the carnivalesque funeral of Evita Peron, an event that brought thousands of Argentina's disenfranchised citizens to the capital. "At 20 hours and 25 minutes, Eva Peron, the spiritual leader of the nation became immortal" (21). Her charismatic spirit, as well as the machinations of the whole Peronist movement, pervade the novel. Rial emphasizes the role that the marginal classes played in the country's power struggles, struggles that were to create human rights abuses of epic proportions.

Triste was raised amidst this fanatical Peronist mysticism, which pervaded and still pervades the country's "villas miserias," or shantytowns. After his mother's death, Triste becomes involved in plots and counterplots, assassinations, kidnappings, and the ritualized torture that characterized the era. The priest and the young man from the slums are urged on to purify the country with catch phrases like "enemies of the people," "communist rabble," and the simple racial epitaph, "Jews." They receive their orders, commit their crimes, and become more and more enmeshed in the repression that seems to sustain each subsequent government.

Power is never in the hands of people like Triste and Chaves, but flows from unseen leaders ensconced in suburban mansions and elegant military garrisons: "He heard his St. Augustine say, 'we're going to carry out a pogrom': he stared at him blankly: he'd never heard the word before, and his drinking companions took it upon themselves to instruct him that it meant an attack on a Jew: 'any Jew?' 'well . . . strictly speaking, yes, but in the case of this attack we've selected a very special one'" (69).

The author attempts to understand the mind-set of the death squad members as the sinuous politics of contemporary Argentina lead Triste to become a victim of the very system he so dispassionately sustained: "It was true he had not been a good man: he had stolen, he had killed, he had committed almost every crime in the book, had violated all God's commandments: but he also knew himself to be the victim of other men whose crimes were worse, much worse than his, men whose crimes were more sophisticated, who were breaking new ground, scaling new heights in the conquest of hitherto undreamt-of-crimes." (205)

The author affirms that "Triste is not just a character who lives in Buenos Aires: he is by and large an image of his city which cannot be understood without reference to those who live on its fringes." Buenos Aires, with its cafes and tango bars, is a vivid presence in the novel. The book is a modern Latin-American masterpiece that transcends traditional political writing.

*Triste's History* evolves as an act of national catharsis. It is a far cry from the magical fantasies of a García Márquez or the slickly packaged novels of

Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, and Isabel Allende. It is a raw and passionate affirmation of Latin-American writing at its best.

Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Edward W. Said  
*NATIONALISM, COLONIALISM, AND LITERATURE*  
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. Pp.103 \$12.95  
Reviewed by Axel Knoenagel

Over the past years, the canon of texts discussed in English Departments and the paradigms for this discussion have undergone considerable change. Contemporary literary discourse is opening to texts from Australia, India, the Caribbean, Africa, and other English-speaking areas under the heading "New Literatures in English," thus no longer automatically referring back to colonial power structures. In fact, the term postcolonial is central to the debate now. The literature of Ireland has been one of the losers in this development. Irish literature has been appropriated by the British literary discourse for so long that the colonial and postcolonial nature of the Irish-British political and cultural relationships tends to be overlooked.

*Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* attempts to fill this gap. The book contains three essays first published as separate pamphlets by the Field Day Company in (London) Derry, Northern Ireland, an enterprise founded on the conviction that "we need a new discourse for a new relationship between our idea of the human subject and our idea of human communities" (3). As Seamus Deane explains in the introduction, the concept of the Field Day pamphlets is "to analyze the various rhetorics of coercion and liberation that are so evident in modern Irish literature (particularly in Yeats and Joyce), in modern Irish political and legal discourse and practice, as well as in the systems of interpretation that have mediated these" (14).

In the book's first essay, Terry Eagleton examines the nature of nationalism, an unfortunate but seemingly inevitable stage every decolonizing nation experiences. Central to Eagleton's argument is his claim that the paradigms of British academic discourse cannot be applied to Irish culture because "the liberal humanist notion of Culture was constituted, among other things, to marginalize such peoples as the Irish" (33). Consequently, in clear difference to the rest of (colonizing) Europe, "the aesthetic as a totalization of particular and universal is in general absent in Ireland" (34). Eagleton presents the novels of James Joyce as the Irish answer to this situation, particularly *Ulysses* which "celebrates and undermines the Irish national formation at a stroke, deploying the full battery of cosmopolitan modernist techniques to recreate it while suggesting with its every breath just how easily it could have done the same for Bradford or the Bronx" (36). The ironic position of Joyce's writing, simultaneously affirming and undermining Irish nationalism and