

## Reviews Ltd.

LERNOUT, GEERT. *Help My Unbelief: James Joyce and Religion*. London: Continuum, 2010. 239 pp. £19.99. ISBN 978-1-4411-9474-9.

In his book *Help my Unbelief: James Joyce and Religion*, Geert Lernout attempts to cross the border between literary criticism and theology and to find out why James Joyce was in turn considered a Catholic, an anti-Catholic writer, or more recently a liberal practitioner of Catholicism.

The title of Lernout's book originates from Mark 9:24, "I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief. That is, help me to believe or help me to unbelieve?", a quotation which haunts Stephen in *Ulysses* (9:1078-9). What does the Joycean scholar claim to believe in? He would not confess that, or he would rather define his beliefs through a sort of Shakespearean recipe reminding us of "Sonnet 116", by weaving together a series of unbeliefs and by arguing that Joyce's unbelief is critical for the fuller understanding of his work.

The book starts from Stephen's admitting that he does not believe too much in the theory on Shakespeare he expounds at great length; Lernout himself asserts his unbelief in Joyce's capacity of crossing the border to heresy. If Stephen makes fun "of religious belief in general" (2), we need to take Lernout seriously, another unbeliever, in his own words, when he sets the premise from which his book starts: that "James Joyce was an unbeliever from the start of his life as a writer, that he never returned to the faith of his fathers" (2), which is, as Lernout assures us, the only way in which Joyce's work can be read properly.

Lernout's book was written with the uncertainty of a post 9/11 moment, after the organization of a Joyce conference in 2002, when the Belgian critic was amazed by the number of papers on Joyce and theology that were received by the organizers.

From showing Nora's inability to allow a Catholic priest to perform a religious service for her deceased husband with the words "I couldn't do that to him" (Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 742), Lernout discusses Michael Paul Gallagher's attempt to place Joyce's unbelief not in relation to God, but in relation to the Catholic church, in a descending attitude from alienation to anger and finally to apathy. In trying to assess Joyce's unbelief/ disbelief/misbelief, Lernout resorts to Gottfried's definition of Joyce's special heretic nature that respected its own philosophy and coherence: "[T]o be a misbeliever rather than a believer or an unbeliever was, for Joyce, to be always mindful of orthodoxy while attempting to break its hold of unitary meaning, its narrow sense, and to open up personal possibilities that led to artistic ones of rebellious challenge and freedom" (Gottfried quoted by Lernout, 26). Lernout does not believe in myths but in facts; therefore he considers that Joyce's repeated use of the King James Bible would not "necessarily indicate any stance towards catholic or protestant interpretations or religion in general" (26) and that Joyce's love for Cardinal Newman's prose did not mean that the Irish writer accepted the religious doctrine.

The critic rejects both Mary Colum's suggestion that Joyce's mind was "Catholic in structure" and Thomas MacGreevy's insistence that Joyce's work was deeply rooted in

Catholicism. Colum's claim regarding Joyce's esteem of the church is well and truly taken to pieces by Lernout who goes back to the importance of the catechism in *Ulysses* or the medieval scholasticism used with secular aesthetic purposes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The Belgian critic believes that Joyce's relation to religion must be studied not only in relation to Irish Catholicism, but in relation to the four countries in which Joyce lived and worked, in which the role of the church was always different.

"The Holy Roman Apostolic Church" looks at the way "catholic historiography was carefully controlled by the hierarchy and greatly restricted in what it was allowed to say about the history of the church" (29). "Heresy, Schisma and Dissent" starts from Francis Bacon's "All that impugn a received religion or superstition are by adverse part branded with the name of the atheists" and tries to identify the main features of Joyce's freethought, anti-clericalism and freedom of expression, which are explored in more minute details in the following chapters dealing each with different chunks of Joyce's work, from "the sectarian reality of Ireland's capital city" in *Dubliners* (206), to the "central stage" of Catholicism as "the most important alternative to art" (206) in *A Portrait*, to the reading of *Ulysses* as the "writer's apostasy from the Church of Rome" and to Joyce's final gesture in *Finnegans Wake* of placing the theme of religion in the marginal.

If Lernout distances himself from the critics who transformed Joyce into a good Catholic, he does not give too much credit either to the ones who recklessly call Joyce "a triple atheist" (Suarès) or who place Joyce's "huge and monstrous" *Ulysses* within the works of the apocalypse and suggest that 'Circe' should be read as "a negative Catholicism that only knows the Inferno" (Curtius quoted by Lernout, 210).

This insightful and highly provocative study is of interest to all readers of Joyce and to anyone interested in the relationship between religion and literature. Lernout believes that even if "religion is a central presence" in most of Joyce's books, this is not a reason to "make his work religious" (211), as with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, Joyce "knowingly and willingly marked his distance from the church" and "he died as an apostate" (217). Joyce's consistent refusal to join the Irish academy founded by Yeats and Beckett and to accept the new catholic Ireland are sufficient reasons for Lernout not to commit the sin of considering Joyce an Irish catholic writer (207). The Belgian critic's last word (and only belief) is therefore not to commit the "great injustice" or "the mortal sin to drag" Joyce back in Catholicism (217).

Lernout's book proves to be an excellent guide to scholars looking for explanations of several religious allusions in Joyce which were either ignored or insufficiently explored by criticism.

(Arleen IONESCU, UPG Ploiești)

MANOLESCU, NICOLAE. *Povești pentru oameni mari*. București: Mașina de scris. 2011. 333 pp. ISBN 978-973-8491-36-6.

There is no Romanian philologist who has not read at least one study written by literary critic Nicolae Manolescu, who has published over forty books, among which the acclaimed *A Critical History of Romanian Literature* and the history of Romanian novels entitled *Arca lui Noe* [Noah's Ark]. Recently, *Mașina de scris* has published a new (this time literary) 'gem' of Manolescu in the form of what the author chose to entitle *Povești pentru oameni mari* [Tales for Grown-Ups]. The literary critic has therefore decided to overstep the limits of criticism and to write his 'tales', which are actually fictional experiments. Some of these had already been published in 1971 in the volume *Teme* [Themes], but others are new texts in which one may notice certain literary influences. Most of these short-stories bear the 'shadows' of great names in literature. Echoes of Mircea Eliade's fantastic prose may be 'heard' both in the characters' portrayal and in the ending fragments of the texts. Here is, for example, the final sentence of the short-story *Pianul* (The Piano): "The truck finally budged, rattling from the joints the huge instrument, making it sound so delicate, impudent, shy even; it went across town, right down the main street, leaving behind in turn both the centre and the cemetery street and faded away, piano and all, into the unknown of the new world<sup>1</sup>" (22). Some of the characters' confessions remind the reader of the unique style of the Romanian writer Mateiu Caragiale<sup>2</sup>, of the manner in which Sir Rache<sup>3</sup> tells his mysterious stories.

Manolescu's prose is written on the boundary between criticism and literature; he writes his fiction rationally, from within criticism, being aware, for instance, how to balance different narrative structures that he had theorized in so many studies. G. Călinescu<sup>4</sup> once said that a good critic should fail in writing literature. Manolescu becomes a prose writer, yet he continuously makes use of his experience as a critic: his pages are filled with references to literary icons such as Milan Kundera (*L'Insoutenable légèreté de l'être*), Tolstoi (*The Kreutzer Sonata*) or to analytical psychologist Jung (*Essai d'exploration de l'inconscient*). Needless to say that these are only pretexts for the author to embark on comparative studies or literary criticism.

The first part of the volume addresses this kind of double bind from a range of different perspectives: from criticism to literature and from literature back to criticism.

Yet the second part of the volume amazes the reader with autobiographical fragments placed immediately after the fictional ones. The technique is not new – Radu Petrescu used it in his works and he was the first one in Romanian literature who practically destroyed the limit between fiction and biography. *Povești pentru oameni mari* uses the same technique and enriches it. On the one hand it is fascinating to see the way the author combined fiction and fragments from his diary in the same volume and,

<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Romanian writer associated with Symbolism, the Decadent movement of the *fin de siècle*, and early modernism.

<sup>3</sup> The protagonist of *Sub pecetea tainei* [Under the Seal of Mystery].

<sup>4</sup> The most famous inter-war Romanian critic, whose book of criticism, entitled *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (1941) [The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present] is probably the most comprehensive critical study written in Romania.

on the other hand the way the diary is written is intriguing, as we cannot ignore the fact that this is not a common man's diary, but the one a literary critic wrote who cannot help mixing the events in his life with reflections upon classics of Romanian and world literature.

One question the reader legitimately can ask is: "Where does (auto)biography end and where does criticism begin?" We are provided with one possible answer by Manolescu himself, who claims that "a diary has as much value as the person who writes it (has)" (254). The Romanian critic chose to confess, and he has lots of precursors who did it before: from Saint Augustine to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and to Jacques Derrida's *Circumfession*. As Derrida used to confess about the disease of his mother, Manolescu interweaves events such as his father's death with reflections upon literature. A diary entry from 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1986 mentions the tragic event of his father's illness: "Father operated on by Professor S. last night. Waiting at the hospital this morning. If the liver is in incipient cirrhosis, that is the key to survival. I'm rereading Coşbuc for an article".

The volume ends with a collection of nine fragments of memoirs bearing the suggestive title of *Viaţă şi cărţi* [Life and Books]. These are recollections of the author's childhood and youth with a strong emphasis on the importance books played in his life. They were all written in 2010 and 2011 and they make up what I would call "A Portrait of the Critic as a Young Man". In this Dedalean position, Manolescu finds it easy to cross the limit from criticism to literature, even if some critics may say that Manolescu failed as a writer and that he will never be able to write *A Portrait of the Artist* at any age. Perhaps this is why the critic's testimonies are addressed to 'grown-ups'. I hope other 'grown-up' readers will follow my steps and read Manolescu's tales.

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\*\*\*, *Proceedings of 3rd International Conference Institutional Strategic Quality Management in Higher Education, ISQM 2011*, The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Bucharest, Braşov: Editura Universităţii Transilvania din Braşov, 2011, 440 pages, ISBN 978-973-598-913-2

In 2011, Romania embarked on an extremely ambitious programme to restructure higher education in order to make it internationally more visible; its new evaluation criteria were elaborated in collaboration with several academics from Europe, including the United Kingdom, and have now become our national equivalent to the British REF. It is more than obvious that higher education is at present at the crossroads: while some consider the university is a business and students are customers, others have huge misgivings about this commodification of higher education (see for instance Thomas Docherty's *For the University: Democracy and the Future of the Institution*, 2011).

Under the aegis of The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), the 3rd International Conference Institutional Strategic Quality Management in Higher Education (ISQM 2011) took place in Sibiu in July 2011. Conference topics covered a wide range of areas, identifying and addressing issues of paramount importance to higher education under the Bologna Reform: the impact of international cooperation in quality assurance, international assessment in institutions, new environments and challenges, good practices in quality management, new policies and practices in higher education, transnational education of the quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of the study program, learning outcomes.

The volume contains 51 papers, which present case studies of the latest developments in higher education, best practices and experiences from different European academic systems, making a meaningful contribution to reforming the academia. The ideas conveyed in these pages have comprehensive meanings, being of paramount interest to all higher education institutions and study programs. Among the most innovative and creative contributions, mention should be made of "Quality Life Cycle of the Study Programme and Methodology for Evaluation" (Rudite Cevere, Sandra Sproge), "Particularities of a Strategy for Training the Intercultural Competence" (Mircea Cosma, Paul Tudorache), "Higher Education Assessment in the Era of the Digital Natives" (Viorel Guliciuc, Roxana-Ema Dreve, Valeria-Alina Miron, Emilia Guliciuc), "European Studies between the Dynamic Development and the New Challenges" (Ioan Horga), "Criteria and Procedures for Obtaining the Euro-Inf Quality Label" (Roland Ibbett, Frauke Muth), "European Guidemarks in Quality Assurance of the Higher Education" (Adrian Marinescu, Meda Udroui), "Considerations on the Romanian University Education in the 21st Century — between Challenges and Opportunities" (Gabriela Mihăilă-Lică, Wiegand Helmut Fleischer), "Is the Policy of Merging in Higher Education One Dimension of Quality Assurance?" (Luminiţa Moraru), "An Exception to the RULE "Increasing Competition Improves Quality" – The Higher Education System in Romania in the Last Decade" (Tudor Pitulac, Adriana Bondor), "Beyond the Open Method of Coordination: the Contribution of Higher Education to the Europe 2020 Strategy" (Andra Maria Popa), "Institutionalization of Strategic Responsiveness in Higher Education" (Luminiţa-Gabriela Popescu), "New Perspectives and Challenges of

the Academic Life in Romania within the Context of the Globalization of the European Higher Education” (Mihai Valentin Vladimirescu).

The papers look at the European university in its most troubling current position, in search of what the Bologna Process designed by the phrase ‘quality reform’, a reform that involves not only university vision and its philosophy, but also its form and purpose. New possible approaches and paradigms in the context of the reform of higher education are presented in order to give possible solutions to limiting disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, to crossing the border from quantitative to qualitative data (extremely practical is the evaluation model that Isabel Huet, José Rafael, Nilza Costa, Cláudia Figueiredo, José Oliveira had managed to put forward at the University of Aveiro, in Portugal). Another topic of interest is the new concept of massification, with the mention that massification and quality in education and research should not exclude each other. The elite university in the massified education, from the Knowledge Society and globalization era, is the required formula in 21st century education (see Iosif Urs, Sorin Ivan).

The volume is substantial and its solutions numerous and different, yet the main question to be asked is to what extent several national proposals can be applied at an international level. Authors try to suggest only an external reform of education (that concerns the framework, structures and infrastructure), but also an internal one (at managerial, educational, scientific levels, with a special focus on the need of a change in mentalities). The quality reform, with everything it implies (quality assurance, the development of a quality culture), is a difficult, highly complex process, which operates on all institutional and human levels of higher education. Yet, in spite of its shortcomings, the volume remains an academic challenge – within the *Academis Project* – for higher education institutions, for ministries, agencies and reform leaders, for universities and their managers, for academic staff, and ultimately for students.

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