“Aeolus” without Wind
Introduction

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This sheaf of short essays is an echo—a silent echo—of an event that took place in the Physics Theatre of Newman House, Dublin, on Wednesday, 17 June 1992, and which was itself an echo—audible as well as visible—of an event that took place ten years and a day earlier in the basement of the same building. On that earlier occasion, eight young(ish) scholars, four from France and four from Britain, read papers on the subject “Sirens without Music” as part of the Eighth International James Joyce Symposium, thus responding to a series of events that did not take place in a nearby hotel exactly seventy-eight years before that.¹

What the eight of us had in common was an admiration for Joyce’s writing and an interest in the French developments in philosophy and literary theory that had come to be called—in Anglophone countries—poststructuralism. But our intention was far from programmatic: this was not to be an exposition of a body of “theory” and a demonstration of its “relevance” to Joyce (a genre of critical discourse that has become lamentably common in Joyce studies and elsewhere), but an engagement with a single chapter of Ulysses from our own perspectives, enriched as they had been by our reading of this new work. Literature, for us, was not the merely passive object of theorizing, but a discourse pre-empting and exceeding all theories. The panel title was a signal that we would start with no preconceptions about the interpretation of Ulysses of the kind installed by Stuart Gilbert’s pioneering and “authorized” work, which in 1982 was still dominant in Joyce studies. And the (few) notes in the published papers evince no desire to insist on allegiances with fashionable “theorists”: the references are to Ivan Fonagy, Roy K. Gottfried, Richard Ellmann, Freud, Plutarch, Blanchot, Gilbert, and Kafka.

Nevertheless, the panel seems in retrospect to offer itself as a benchmark: a solid wedge of “French theory” that by the time of the next International...
James Joyce Symposium, held two years later in Frankfurt, had apparently become the dominant approach to Joyce's work. More recently, we have heard calls for (and exemplifications of) other kinds of reading that were either overwhelmed by the wave of poststructuralism or that have been made possible by poststructuralism's advances. The essays that follow are the result of an invitation to mark the distance traveled by Joyce studies in the ten years between the two Dublin conferences by once more reading closely a chapter of Ulysses. What has the wind of theory wrought? What is there besides wind in the theoretical weather of the past decade? How does the Joycean text continue to challenge and subvert attempts to enclose it in the bag of theory?

The contributors to the panel included members of the original "Sirens" panel (Daniel Ferrer, Maud Ellmann, and myself as chair) and newcomers—such as Jennifer Levine, who might well have been included in the earlier panel had we looked across the Atlantic for readers of Joyce in tune with French developments, and Pascal Bataillard, who belongs to a new generation of Joyce critics for whom the 1982 Symposium is a matter of written history. (Bataillard's paper is not included in the selection that follows.) Maud Ellmann was obliged to fax her paper to Dublin, owing to examining duties at Cambridge; this had a certain appropriateness both to the substance of her paper and to the events of the chapter in question, in which the achievement of the great Gallaher that is celebrated is precisely the international transmission of graphic material by digital means. Robert Young, who was also unable to attend the Symposium owing to examining duties (in his case at Oxford), supplied the panel's title.

NOTES

1. The participants in the 1982 panel were Michael Beausang, Maud Ellmann, Derek Attridge, Robert Young, Colin MacCabe, Jean-Michel Rabaté, André Topia, and Daniel Ferrer. Six of the papers read were published in the conference volume (Beja, et al., 57–92).

2. See Benstock. It must be said that the conference program itself was less markedly influenced by "theory" than the volume of proceedings; though this is in itself of some historical and sociological significance.

WORKS CITED
