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Coping With Joyce: Essays From the Copenhagen Symposium. Morris Beja and Shari Benstock (Editors). Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989, 280 pages, $30.00.

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Coping With Joyce: Essays From the Copenhagen Symposium may or may not help its readers to cope effectively with James Joyce, but its eighteen essays certainly provide an insight into myriad coping means, techniques, and strategies that Joycean critics employ. Beja and Benstock's excellent Introduction—as helpful and insightful as all but the very best essays in this book—examines the most common critical approaches to Joyce and the attendant problems: from the veneration of Joyce, through the exploitation of Joyce, to the intent to "master" Joyce. The Introduction also points out "a discernible change in Joyce studies," the increasing focus on *Finnegans Wake*, partially because of "new theoretical approaches," and partly because critics have realized that the *Wake* can serve to illuminate Joyce's other works. No doubt this has also come about because the decades-long communal effort to make *Ulysses* accessible has succeeded to the point of diminishing returns: critical quibbles over *Ulysses* are increasingly minor. As the introduction says of Joyce, "he shows himself as a pedagogue of self-instruction providing the means by which his readers teach themselves how to read the texts." His readers now seem ready to teach themselves to read *Finnegans Wake*.

Joyce does not always provide the means; rather, like most great writers, he is vastly accommodating. Thus very often whatever is in critical, intellectual, or social vogue provides the means for this self instruction. Morgaret Norris, in the collection's first essay (one of five "Major Addresses" from the symposium), "Joyce's Heliotrope," states her intention to subject *Finnegans Wake* to "feminization" by "suggesting the flower as an alternative to the architectural and geometrical metaphors that have historically dominated our thinking about its structure." She does so quite cleverly, and it is probably helpful to consider the *Wake*'s structure as "floral: petals enfolding other petals—invaginated (Derrida)—to use the botanical term that preserves the female resonance, the erotic allusion." Norris's essay is serious but playful, and it provides numerous useful insights—especially by applying the "organic and floral structure of psychic life" to Joyce's characters and to Joyce himself. Consider her declaration that the threat to Stephen's sight in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* may result from "infantile scopophilia," and that this unfolds to become on other levels (the aesthetic, for example)

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not only Stephen's transgression as a young man, but Shem's and, ultimately, Joyce's. That this makes sense is perhaps less an indication of psychic truth than it is of Joyce's consistently masterful characterization: critics do not hesitate to apply elaborate psychoanalysis to his fictional characters (and why not? Freud's best subjects were mythological) and to extend this analysis to their creator, as well.

Yet reading Joyce teaches many lessons, one of the most valuable that altered perspective alters meaning. And when the vogue of Derrida passes, perhaps readers of Norris's essay may be inclined to laugh at critical "invagination." How future feminists may view her aside that this term somehow preserves an "erotic allusion" is highly debatable. Could a male critic suggest such a thing with impunity? Probably not. The fact, however, that a female critic can comfortably explore Joyce's "female imagination" in a manner that is at once fairly convincing and enlightening says a great deal about the adaptability of the greatest literature.

It is useful to note, for example, how a particular critical approach alters perspective, as the critic sees everything in the context of his or her single perspective and, at times accidently, expands the text. Austin Briggs, in " 'Circe' and Cinema," for example, explores "Circe" in light of Joyce's well-documented interest in cinema. The perspective is inarguably enlightening; certainly "Circe" is a cinematic episode. But when Bloom imagines watching through the keyhole as Blazes Boylan cuckolds him, does his "Show! Hide! Show!" "give the flicker effect, incidentally"? Did Joyce have any intention of doing so, or is this simply a product of the critic's monocular approach? Again, Joyce's inclusive genius makes it difficult to reject, with any degree of confidence, what may at first glance appear to be mere biases, distortions, or creations of the critic.

"Images of the Lacanian Gaze in *Ulysses*" by Shelden Brivic appears to be such a distortion. How useful is it to apply Lacan's "theory of the split between the eye and the gaze" (especially with Brivic's acknowledgement that "gaze" is merely an approximation of "le regard") to Bloom's and Stephen's preoccupation with their own perceptions in *Ulysses*? The answer probably depends almost entirely upon one's attitude toward Lacan. This is often the case with Joyce criticism: one's own perspective determines the effectiveness of "coping" aids (consider how Stuart Gilbert's book infused early Joyce criticism with Eastern philosophy, for example). Lacan does provide Brivic with a nice counterpoint to Norris/Derrida's invagination: "For Lacan, the point that is the object of desire always stands for an absent phallus. . . . The power of the Other to create one's being . . . is represented by the phallus, an organ which is invisible in its fully realized state, or as Joyce describes it, put 'out of sight.' " Once again, the perceptive reader is not quite certain if he is meant to laugh appreciatively, to nod solemn approval, or to do both. Perhaps using *Ulysses* and the *Wake* for mutual illumination is, indeed, a breakthrough in Joycean criticism: a critical Lacanian gaze, or a meeting of Derrida's invagination and Lacan's phallic "power of the Other."

Ellen Carol Jones, in "Letter Selfpenned to One's Other" also uses Lacan and Derrida to "cope," and observes that Joyce "reinscript[ed] . . . the sexual body into the language of literature." Jones discusses phallogocentrism as a limiting force in criticism, and at times her essay borders upon using Joyce as a podium for philosophical proselytizing, rather than as an aid for coping with, or appreciating, Joyce. This, of course, is a common recurrence in Joycean criticism: Joyce is a vehicle for demonstrating the efficacy of Freud, Jung, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, de Man, Barthes, the Catholic faith, apostasy, Irish blood, an international mind set, and on and on. It should come as no surprise that most of the essays in this collection refer to Derrida, and a few rely upon him. One might venture the opinion that philosophy is catching up with Joyce; the time is right for deconstruction to be applied to his work.

Jones quite seriously expands upon a phrase from *Finnegans Wake*, "his penisolate war," declaring that Joyce wages his "war in words . . . with his pen and his slate—and his penis." Reading her solemn explication, anyone unfamiliar with *Finnegans Wake* would be hard pressed to discover evidence that it is a funny book and might conclude that Joyce's layering of puns was always with an eye to philosophical import. Thus we are back to Joyce's own words and to the matter of perspective. What are we to make of Joyce's observation that the Catholic Church was founded on a pun? Clearly, the Catholic Church assumed that Peter was the rock, even if Christ were using Peter as an exemplar of faith. Joyce was justifying his use of a literary vehicle held in low esteem, to be sure, but he has certainly proved his point: elaborate, serious systems can be founded on a pun.

The best Joyce critics never lose sight of the relationship between the solemn and the serious. Certainly literature can replace religion as a belief system (this is a theme that runs throughout Joyce, a characteristic not only of the individual, but of the times), and Faulkner was doubtless correct when he suggested that the readers of his day had to approach Joyce "as the illiterate Baptist preacher approaches the Old Testament, with faith." Yet, the solemn approach to Joyce's work as sacred text leads to elaborate explications and declarations that are reminiscent of Sir Thomas Browne's interpretation of the text of the world from a Christian perspective: clearly, for example, a tortoise shell was created to remind us of Christ's wounds on the cross. Too much Joyce criticism flounders in that nebulous area composed of the Creator's discovered intentions and the worshipper's enlightened perspective.

Coping With Joyce does contain some excellent essays which not only show the critic in the act of coping with Joyce but which can also help most readers of Joyce to cope. The last essay of the book, Derek Attridge's "The Wake's Confounded Language," for example, discusses the *Wake*—and by extension Joyce's cannon—in light of the Babel myth. As Attridge observes, "The literary text, far from being the most aberrant instance of language, is the instance that reveals its nature most clearly, as an endlessly retranslatable complex of signifiers, existing as a set of public, and political, institutions, themselves caught in a process of constant transformation." The power and the weakness of language is suggested by the Babel myth; communication is strength, but language is inherently "unstable and ambiguous."

Fritz Senn's "Joyce the Verb" explores the elusive nature of language, as well, and his essay is another of the collection's highlights. Senn shows that Joyce, paralleling his creation Leopold Bloom, consciously chose the middle way: between verb and noun, in this case. Senn admits to saying nothing new, but what he says is persuasive, perspicacious, well-written, and redirects the attention from the critical fringes to coping with the work: adapting to the Joycean tendency to combine the "either/or" into the "both/and." Joyce has Stephen Dedalus, early in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, contemplate this aspect of language: "belt" can be both noun and verb, its referents can vary from a clothing accessory to an action. How, then, can a developing young poet hope to control language?

Ultimately, meaning depends upon both text and reader, upon the receptivity of the reader, the reader's background knowledge, even, on occasion, upon the reader's mood. As Senn notes, "Joyce exploits the confusion in naming." This observation adds a whimsical emphasis to an East Cork saying offered in Colbert Kearney's "The Joycead": "*never trust a Joyce, a Rice, or a Quirke.*" Kearney's history of the Joyces provides some new insights into Joyce's character and family, insights that alter one's perspective of the work, and as the Cork saying shows, reaffirms the suspicion that most readers of Joyce develop: absolutely nothing is irrelevant, superfluous, or unrelated to the works of James Joyce.

Of course, it might be beneficial to recall the words that Joyce puts in the mouth of his character Haines when Stephen Dedalus's ingenious Shapespearean criticism is mentioned: "I'm sorry, Shakespeare is the happy huntingground of all minds that have lost their balance." It is germane to observe, by way of summary, that Joyce makes the connection between himself and Shakespeare quite clear in *Ulysses*. Joyceans will find happy and unhappy hunting in abundance in *Coping with Joyce*; their judgments of the stability and equilibrium of the assorted minds involved will doubtless vary widely.