

“MANGID. KCIRTAP.”:

The Printed Word in “Aeolus”

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Novels are *printed*. They use a series of typographical conventions so effortlessly comprehended that we tend to read right past them, enjoying the considerable pleasures of immersing ourselves in the realism typography can bring. Reed Clements explores how in the “Aeolus” episode of *Ulysses* Joyce breaks that effortless pleasure, bringing new pleasures into the reading experience, pleasures both odd and significant. As Clements argues, the episode highlights the difference “between language and . . . lived experience,” and it gets its central effects from a series of typographical/linguistic interruptions which are central to exploring how, in fiction, “language itself must be represented.” Realism, for novelists, had rarely been unproblematic, but in “Aeolus” Joyce explores a whole new way of understanding what those problems might be, and how those problems might be a source of vertiginous pleasure.

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U*lysses* begins to question language and narrative convention from its first word, but it is in the “Aeolus” episode that this aspect of the novel begins to dominate. Several elements of the episode are thus far unprecedented: the abundance of wordplay, the

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encyclopedic demonstration of virtually every rhetorical figure in existence, and the inclusion of bizarre headline-like phrases in between sections of regular prose. Though all of these elements contribute to Joyce's linguistic and narrative games, a few small passages in particular draw attention to the printed nature of the novel. In this paper, I will explore the implications of these passages as examples of the linguistic questions raised in the novel, and show that, in making explicit the printed nature of his work, Joyce exposes several kinds of interpretative artifices at play in printed language.

In "Aeolus," as Karen Lawrence explains, "the book begins to advertise its own artifice, and in doing so it calls attention to the processes of reading and writing" (391). When Joyce begins to intersperse strange headlines throughout the text, the illusion of a single, coherent narrative is shaken: the reader "must pretend that stitching together the micro-narrative [i.e., the regular prose between the headlines] is the same as reading an uninterrupted version of the story" (390). In this way, Joyce draws attention to the effort that the reader must expend in order to interpret the work, to build a meaningful and coherent story from the printed material. Moreover, because Joyce builds into the episode an encyclopedic demonstration of

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rhetorical tropes, sentences often seem to interrupt the flow of the narrative for the sole purpose of playing linguistic games. Lawrence observes an example of such games in the following chiasmic passage:

Grossbooted draymen rolled barrels dullthudding out of Prince’s stores and bumped them up on the brewery float. On the brewery float bumped dullthudding barrels rolled by grossbooted draymen out of Prince’s stores. (Joyce 108)

The second sentence in this passage adds no meaning to the narrative; rather, it shifts the reader’s attention “from the meaning of [the] sentence to its shape on the page” (Lawrence 394). The variability of this shape, Lawrence argues, highlights the difference between language and the lived experience that it is supposed to represent: while language may be rearranged and played with, reality may not be so flexible. By calling the reader’s attention to the fact that language does not have a one-to-one correspondence with the reality it supposedly communicates, Joyce divorces words from their meanings and transforms them into tools of playful expression.

This playfulness is present as Joyce draws attention to the printed nature of his work in a number of different ways, which Lawrence does not discuss. The first example occurs in a headline that reads “HOUSE OF KEY(E)S”

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(Joyce 112), which is a pun on the name “House of Keyes” and the picture of keys that adorns it in an advertisement. Because the name “Keyes” is spelled differently than the word “keys,” the pun is communicated in the printed form above, using brackets to denote the variant letter. Here, the spoken word is mutated in order to be properly represented in print, calling the reader’s attention to the dissonance between the printed nature of the book and the spoken word that it attempts to represent.

The second example occurs in Bloom’s thoughts as he recalls a spelling bee conundrum:

It is amusing to view the unpar one ar alleled
embarra two ars is it? double ess ment of a
harassed pedlar while gauging au the symmetry of a
peeled pear under a cemetery wall. Silly, isn't it?
Cemetery put in of course on account of the
symmetry. (Joyce 112-13)

This passage is remarkable in a number of ways. First of all, it represents Bloom’s thought process as he attempts to spell words as he thinks them. To show this process to the reader, Joyce breaks up the hard-to-spell words and inserts phonetic representations addressing how many of certain letters to include in them. These interruptions not only jar the reader, who must piece together the broken up words, but also call attention to the printed nature of the text by

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representing an internal monologue dealing with the spoken word in printed form. Finally, Joyce returns the reader’s attention to phonetic interpretation by punning on the words “symmetry” and “cemetery.” The pun is obvious when the words are spoken, but more difficult to notice when those same words are presented in print, due to their dissimilar spellings.

The final and most radical instance of the text drawing attention to its printed nature also occurs in an internal monologue. Bloom observes “a typesetter neatly distributing type,” a task that requires reading backwards (Joyce 114). Bloom then thinks to himself, “mangiD. kcirtaP.” (114). This phrase is extraordinary because it could only be represented in print. The purpose of the periods after the initial letters of the reversed words is unclear, but this puzzle only further reminds readers that they are reading a printed work.

There are three significant points about these deliberately “printed” moments that I wish to highlight. The first is simply that “Aeolus,” being set in a newspaper office, is the perfect episode in which to raise questions about the printed nature of *Ulysses* itself. The second is that, if the processes of reading and writing are being discussed, then print is necessarily at the core of the

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discussion. Even before language can be called into question, language itself must be represented, and the medium of that representation is print. Regarding the example of chiasmus discussed above, Lawrence observes that the sentences are alienated from their meanings by the playful rearrangement of their component words: the configuration of the words themselves displaces any represented meaning as the principal significance of that passage. The mirrored presentation of “mangiD. kcirtaP.” serves to alienate its own meaning in an even more radical way. Thus, it is not merely that the writer’s meaning must step through the interpretative middleman of language to reach the reader’s mind, but that language itself must step through its own interpretative middleman, print.

Joyce’s use of headlines and rhetorical devices, combined with those moments in which the novel gestures explicitly toward its own printed nature, serves to demonstrate the limitations of the conventional novel – the separation that must exist between a printed work and reality. *Ulysses* is itself a printed novel, and, until “Aeolus,” it presents a thorough and coherent depiction of a realistic world; “Aeolus” reveals the impossibility of the task the novel has seemed to set itself. The exposure of its own artifice is a reversal of the aesthetic theory presented in

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Joyce's earlier novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which Stephen declares, “The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (233). The artist of *Ulysses*, on the other hand, visibly intervenes in “Aeolus,” exposing the necessary artificiality of all printed material and foreshadowing the total war with convention that will characterize the later episodes.

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Works Cited

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