

6. Repetition

Let everyone form his own judgement with respect to what is said here about repetition; let him also form his own judgement about my saying it here and in this manner, since I, following Hamann's example, mit mancherlei Zungen mich ausdrücke und die Sprache der Sophisten, der Wortspiele, der Creter und Araber, Weiszen und Mohren und Creolen rede, Kritik, Mythologie, *rebus* und Grundsätze durch einander schwatze, und bald καὶ αὐθόπου bald κατ' ἐξοχήν argumentire.¹

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then...I contradict myself.²

It is a paradox of a circular form that destruction is also creation and creation is a return to past forms. Newness is dependent on oldness which is dependent on newness. This is how *Finnegans Wake* repeats. Each incident or phrase is a version of an earlier incident or phrase; each difference is also a similarity. "There extend by now one thousand and one stories, all told, of the same" (5.28-29), claims an early whisper about Earwicker, alluding not only to internal repetitions in *Finnegans Wake* but also acknowledging its debt to a specific earlier work; all stories, *Finnegans Wake* suggests, are the same story, but the story occurs with a thousand and one variations. *Finnegans Wake* will therefore be hundreds of different versions of one, universal story and will draw upon earlier tellings. But as an exaggerated example of the creative possibilities of language *Finnegans Wake* has the virtue of displaying both the formality and the informality of language. As a purely linguistic world it demonstrates the

¹ "...express myself in various tongues and speak the language of sophists, of puns, of Cretans and Arabians, of whites and Moors and Creoles, and babble a confusion of criticism, mythology, *rebus* and axioms, and argue now in a human way and now in an extraordinary way."

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling / Repetition: Kierkegaard's Writings, VI*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 149.

² Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* (London: Penguin, 1976) 85.

ceaseless originality of language, the inevitable basis of meaning in repetition, and the meaninglessness of repetition for its own sake. *Finnegans Wake* is both formally limited and limitless. Rather than proving the case for a universal, systematic understanding, it presents a strong case for the irrationality of the rational, all-encompassing view of human history, mythology and art.

Repetitions in *Finnegans Wake* are of several kinds. There are the scraps of songs, legends, nursery rhymes, games, clichés and phrases from diverse sources. Words from different languages are repeated and doubled with other languages. As a hostile and exasperated Shaun observes of his brother's writing, "Every dimmed letter in it is a copy...[it is] The last word in stolentelling" (424.32-35). These cultural repetitions are woven into almost every line of the book as part of the process of doubling by which the book's distinct language is created and it is this doubling that creates the ambivalence between new and old, creation and destruction, that is characteristic of *Finnegans Wake*'s language. It is also as a result of this doubling that the implication arises that *Finnegans Wake* is a universal history. Northrop Frye sees the form of *Finnegans Wake* as "one traditionally associated with scriptures and sacred books" in that it "treats life in terms of the fall and awakening of the human soul and the creation and apocalypse of nature", and groups it with works such as the Bible, the Egyptian Book of the Dead and the Icelandic Prose Edda.³ Individual incidents are given archetypal significance by being linked to other, similar incidents. Stories and historical events from a range of cultures and eras recur to give a sense of order to an otherwise chaotic linguistic and narrative jumble. In this way *Finnegans Wake* explicitly reaches beyond a single culture or tradition and attempts to include them as a part of its whole, and implicitly places itself above limited, specific perspectives. Most importantly for this theme of universality, as we have seen, *Finnegans Wake* suggests (though mockingly) it is a religious text that incorporates all of creation as seen from a divine perspective.

³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (London: Penguin, 1990) 314.

Many of the repetitions in *Finnegans Wake* take the form of linguistic motifs or catchphrases. There are internal motifs scattered through *Finnegans Wake* that appear frequently and more or less obviously, many of which are listed by Clive Hart.⁴ The Prankquean's question "why do I am alook alike a poss of porterpease?" (21.18-19), for example, is repeated three times (with variations) in the short narrative of the Prankquean (21.5-23.15), and appears numerous times throughout the book in various manifestations; different each time but recognisable as a version of the riddle from chapter one. Each recurrence links a later, specific incident to the earlier riddle, patterns the text, and thus allows a path to be created for significance within the book's structure. Though the question echoes two common phrases—"As like as two peas" and "A pint of porter, please"—like many of the motifs in *Finnegans Wake* it is a question that has no obvious, single meaning and seemingly no sensible answer.⁵

There are also numerous repetitions from the works of other famous and not-so-famous writers, Shakespeare being a prominent example:

For a burning would is come to dance inane. Glamours hath
moidered's lieb and herefore Coldours must leap no more. Lack
breath must leap no more. (250.16-18)⁶

Typically for an appropriation of another writer's work that makes an appearance as a part of *Finnegans Wake*'s text, the quotations from *Macbeth* are altered and layered with added meaning. In this case lines are taken from different parts of *Macbeth* and are re-written and disordered. A passage expressing Macbeth's gnawing guilt and sense of horror at his murderous actions, along with a line prophesying the time of his downfall,

⁴ Clive Hart, *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber, 1962).

⁵ Margot Norris has noted that every chapter of *Finnegans Wake* is based upon a question or mystery. Despite the claims to universality, *Finnegans Wake* actually refers constantly to an absence of knowledge or understanding—thus it is, in her word, "decentered". Total knowledge, though a comfortable theoretical presence, is a practical impossibility. Norris, *Decentered*.

⁶ *Macbeth* V.5.51-2: "till Burnam Wood / Do come to Dunsinane". *Macbeth* II.2.54-5: "Glamis hath murther'd Sleepe, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more: Macbeth shall sleep no more". Burning world (doomsday). Archaic: *glamour*: witchery. *Moider*: confuse, bewilder. German: *hierfür*: for this. German: *lieb*: dear. (*Annotations*.) Burning (hot) / cold.

are broadened in their implications and transformed to invoke a vision of universal doom in the apocalypse.⁷

The writers themselves, along with a large supporting cast of notables, are also subject to the text's powers of distortion. Shakespeare is insultingly referred to as "Cheekspeer" (257.20) and "Shakehisbeard" (177.32), and more respectfully "Great Shapersphere" (295.4); "scoot, duckings and thuggery" (177.35)—Scott, Dickens and Thackeray—make an appearance, as do Byron, Tennyson, Wellington, Napoleon (sitting on his "big wide horse" (10.21)), Sterne and Swift (often mentioned together, perhaps because both their names are adjectives) and innumerable others, both real and fictional. Most occur more than once, and all have their names, works and deeds manipulated, recreated and misrepresented.⁸

There are also frequent and often disrespectful echoes from Joyce's earlier works, some of which, such as the opening line of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (which is itself a repetition of a generic fairy story beginning), are themselves transformed into ironic, self-depreciating *Wokean* motifs:

once upon a wall and a hooghoo wall a was...(69.7);

Eins within a space and a wearywide space it wast...(152.18);

once there was a lealand in the luffing ore it was...(311.5);

Once upon a drunk and a fairly good drunk it was and the rest of
your blatherumskite! (453.20-21).⁹

As the comic variations displayed in these examples suggest, each repetition is not straightforward but is a distorted reference that creates new meaningful combinations while it evokes the preceding form. The allusions both pattern the text internally as motifs and refer to external sources as cultural and historical markers; Joyce is simultaneously creating and plundering his

⁷ For a full length study of Shakespeare in *Finnegans Wake* see: Vincent John Cheng, *Shakespeare and Joyce: A Study of Finnegans Wake* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984).

⁸ For an extensive if not comprehensive study and index of the characters, real and imagined, who populate *Finnegans Wake* see, of course, the wonderful, the indispensable Adeline Glasheen.

⁹ Dutch: *hoog*: high. Valhalla. German: *eins*: once. Charles Godfrey Leland discovered the Shelta language. Charles Leland: poem about Flying Dutchman. Lee and Luff sides of a ship. Archaic: *leal*: loyal. Ofling. Norwegian: *øre*: ear. German: *Ohr*: ear. Anglo-Irish: *blatherumskite*: blather, yarns. (*Annotations*.)

Other incidences of repetition are more resistant to interpretation, but still reinforce the implications of self-referentiality and universality that accompany the *Wake's* process of doubling. *Finnegans Wake* is "Echoland" where we must proceed with "Caution" (13.5) since even seemingly incidental, marginal utterances can become repeated, transformed and meaningful fragments. Even phrases and words not obviously loaded with significance are echoed, sometimes with hundreds of pages separating the connection. One of the many charges made by the witness against the defendant in "The Trial of Festy King" is that Festy tried to "sack sock, stab and slaughter" (87.16) two old kings. Later, during "The Four Watches of Shaun", in a section brimming with allusions to warfare, someone shouts out "Slog, slagt and slaugther!" (500.17). This repetition, over four hundred pages later, is significant in the sense that, even though the connection is remote, it still seems to allude specifically to an earlier confrontation. Meaning has been stretched across much difficult terrain, but the echo is unmistakably there and is therefore potentially meaningful. Both instances occur in Shaun-ish contexts, suggesting the tendency toward violence that lurks immediately below the surface of his character. The repetition is unconscious, or rather it is consciously mimicking the operations of the unconscious, but it becomes a meaningful instance with ~~implications~~ ^{implications} beyond a specific context because it is repeated.

Meaning in language and culture is based on repetition in this sense. Repetition brings recognition, significance and the appearance of order. But repetition in itself is not meaning, only a precondition for meaning. In *Finnegans Wake* everything carries hints and echoes of everything else, everything is both significant and insignificant. This allows it to be endlessly explicable since the most obscure, marginal fragment can be explained in terms of a previous idea. There are not simply repetitions of important words and events, but trivial events and obscure utterances too. Each is as important as every other and each repetition exists both as meaningful and meaningless patterning that transforms each element into an unconsciously (and consciously) ritualised moment, significant not because it *must* be considered significant but simply because it *can* be considered significant. The internal motifs, particularly those that

are questions, can, like much of *Finnegans Wake*, serve as a source of confusion as well as a form of internal patterning or a meaningful instance, but as repetitions they are referential and finally self-referential and therefore imply coherence.¹⁰

Finnegans Wake does not see any possibility of liberation from the endless play of contradictions that characterise the text, but it attempts to cohere the contradictions into a unified and structured whole with incoherence as one of its governing principles. It is both form and formlessness, anarchy and order. Joyce's text works towards making conflicting, irreconcilable ideas into a single, comprehensive view of humanity by including repeated contradictory elements. This is evident in its creation and use of archetypes, since an archetype is a representation of a supposedly universal form displayed within a specific form. Specific conflicts are thus represented as typical of past and future conflicts, and the individual moment, despite its uniqueness, is burdened with the weight of history and mythology. It remains linked conceptually to the creations of the past, a parody (as well as a monument) of human knowledge and achievement.

The repetition that *Finnegans Wake* attempts is thus a reductive form of repetition that implies its own universal applicability. Each incident, and by extension every possible action, is part of a broader pattern of recurrence through which everything can be explained. The fact that repetition occurs is sufficient to grant significance, and it is this patterning that is the basis of the archetypal significance that is developed in the book. In an essay on "The Archetypes of Literature", Northrop Frye argues:

The pull of ritual is toward pure narrative, which, if there could be such a thing, would be automatic and unconscious repetition. We should notice too the regular tendency of ritual to become encyclopedic. All the important recurrences in nature, the day, the phases of the moon, the seasons and solstices of the year, the crises of existence from birth to death, get rituals attached to them, and most of the higher religions are equipped with a definitive total body of rituals suggestive, if we may put it so, of

¹⁰ See chapter two: Everyone's a Critic.

the entire range of potentially significant actions of human life.¹¹

Events, though meaningless in themselves, are made meaningful based on the fact that they recur, and this recurrence leads to the suggestion of ritualisation. In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce has attempted the opposite, or rather arrives at the same conclusion from the opposite direction. *Finnegans Wake* takes narrative toward encyclopedic, unconscious repetition and thus takes narrative towards the universal, divine implications of religious texts and rituals. Repetition itself is ritualised. Shem and Shaun act out their roles as opposites eternally, slipping on every separate occasion into a well-defined groove; falls and resurrections repeatedly punctuate the narrative, each referring to the others. "Pure" encyclopedic narrative, towards which *Finnegans Wake* strives—paradoxically, since it is a conscious attempt to associate unconsciously—does not signify anything but itself and its own repetition. Beyond the obvious natural recurrences referred to by Frye, *Finnegans Wake* attempts to ritualise its characters' interactions through similarly repeated cycles of fragmented and compounded narrative. In a typically self-reflexive move, in *Finnegans Wake* repetition does not necessarily point to significance; repetition is a part of its theme of eternal recurrence and is thus of significance in itself. Meaning is repetition and repetition is meaning. Repetition is important because it is upon coincidences and repetitions that the burden of meaning falls. Conflict recurs, meaninglessly, except for the fact that it recurs without reason. Repetition occurs for the sake of repetition. This is its only meaning.

But another paradox emerges (one that has already been mentioned): this quasi-religious universality, this all-encompassing repetition and order, undermines itself. In *Finnegans Wake* no forms of authority—religious, social or political—are given any basis to justify their claims to power, but are presented as part of an eternal and absurd squabbling that has characterised history. The divine, metaphysical perspective that is implied by the text's repetitions depends entirely upon the

¹¹ Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963) 15.

materiality of the text, a materiality that undermines transcendental, universal implications. The battles of history are Shem and Shaun's battles which, as we have seen, are never resolved. The nightmare of history becomes literally a nightmare as the battles and arguments are both robbed of their importance and magnified in their gravity by becoming the expression of the internal conflict of a single man. It is a dream which is not a dream; a history which is not a history.

"History", says Stephen Dedalus, "is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake",¹² but in *Finnegans Wake* the characters of Shem and Shaun have no such luck. The twins are satirised as individual characters, but they are also a satirical portrait of the system they represent. They are simultaneously the system's victims and its justification. They are presented for much of the book in an infantile state, with "the cradle rocking equally to one and oppositely from the other on its law of capture and recapture" (81.36-82.2). Joyce is laughing at the intransigence that has characterised human history and the formality of the dialectical historical system that defines the twins as they define it. The system's endless self-reflection is also self-satirising. The dialectic, as it appears in *Finnegans Wake* is a pseudo-dialectic, a non-progressive conflict that leads to no conclusions. Instead of the opposites that are represented in the twins being reconciled, the contradictions and paradoxes that pattern the text lead to a state of eternal fluctuation between two flawed possibilities that ultimately can lead only to a futile oscillation between points that are endlessly diverging, uniting and diverging again. Reconciliation in *Finnegans Wake* is always a fleeting, unsustainable moment that is inevitably disrupted by conflict, and the concept of progress is banished entirely. History is thus satirised as an endless round of repeated mistakes. The acceptance of all possible positions—the "universal" rhetorical strategy adopted by *Finnegans Wake*—is also to take no position. The combination of a fictional, self-referential and all-inclusive universe swallowing all possible opinions and values and playing them against each other, and the absence of any dominant position articulated by the text leaves the book as signification stripped of significance.

¹² Joyce, *Ulysses* 28.

Finnegans Wake finally articulates nothing more than its own process of articulation.

The undermining or destruction of an established order s, in *Finnegans Wake*, an ongoing process that is inevitably combined with the establishment of a new order. In *Finnegans Wake* rebellion is a means by which nothing actually changes. For if any contradictory view is to succeed in avoiding the pitfalls of the preceding power structure, instead of ultimately replicating that structure, it must account for the previous structure and thus render it redundant along with the arguments that sustained it. This is not what occurs in *Finnegans Wake*; the arguments and structures are repeated. The idea that the existing order will be overthrown by another order—that is really still the same order—is already anticipated by the system. Everything “moves in vicious circles yet renews the same” (134.16-17); we experience “The seim anew” (215.23) or “The same renew” (226.14).

The roles of Shem and Shaun as rivals to their father demonstrate this point. As rebellious youths they forge an identity that seeks its definition by separating itself from parental authority and acting in opposition to that authority. In other words they seek to be subject to their own authority. But their desire for difference is a desire for separateness, not for unlikeness. They wish to be different but remain the same. Their rebellion indicates a desire to seize power, but not necessarily the desire to alter the nature of that power. Kimberly Devlin touches on this idea while discussing the motif of smoking in Joyce’s work:

The son’s rebellion through smoking also contains a definite element of imitation, as he challenges parental authority by indulging in a habit that is stereotypically “adult”. So smoking in both *A Portrait* and the *Wake* operates on a second level: it represents the son’s attempt not only to defy the father, but also, in a sense, to become him by copying his behaviour.¹³

Childish repetition of adult behaviour is a frequent occurrence in *Finnegans Wake*. Glugg—the devilish Shem in “The Mime of Mick, Nick and the Naggies”—acts out Tim Finnegans’ drunken death and resurrection:

¹³ Kimberly Devlin, “Self and Other in *Finnegans Wake*: A Framework for Analysing Versions of Shem and Shaun”, *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol.21, No.1 (1983) 47.

For poor Glugger was dazed and late in his crave, ay he, laid in his grave.

But low, boys low, he rises, shrivering, with his spittyful eyes and his whoozebecome voice (240.3-6).¹⁴

The answer to the question “who has he become?” (“whooze-become”) is answered by his actions: he is imitating his father collapsing, dazed with drunkenness, and then rising, weak, hungover and miserable; and by extension he is also imitating other famous deaths that were followed by resurrections. The parental action is being mimicked and ritualised in both the game and the folk song “What Shall We Do With the Drunken Sailor?”, which is echoed in the lines.

Similarly, the relationship between the adults and the voice of divine authority in the first era of Vico’s history (*i.e.* cringing fear) is repeated in the children’s relationship to their parents, in particular their father. The relationship that exists between God and humanity is mimicked when the children’s games are brought to a close as “Housefather calls enthrateningly” in imitation of the voice of a wrathful God “With lightening bug aflash from afinger” (246.6-9). The relationship between teacher and student is another repetition of this hierarchy, and earlier in the book an angry teacher’s voice sends a playground full of children running for cover with a few stern words, “a whole school for scamper” (80.34).¹⁵ The children, acting out the fears of their parents in comic miniature, both reinforce and satirise the power structure.

A similar point can be made about the manner in which Shem and Shaun are constructed in their roles not simply as opposites but as types—a process that occurs with every character in *Finnegans Wake*. The conflicting pair are both a satirical portrayal of a dialectical structure of history that mocks the idea of progression, and at the same time a reinforcement of that duality. One of the functions of the twins is simply to demonstrate that it is possible to fit the universe into this structure and see it as a whole in these terms, however ambivalent the text may be about the

¹⁴ Children’s game: ‘Old Roger is dead and is laid in his grave’. Anglo-Irish: *glugger*: a foolish boaster. Song: What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?: ‘Low, boys, and up she rises’. Pitiful. Woebegone. Booze. (*Annotations.*)

¹⁵ Sheridan: *School for Scandal*. (*Annotations.*)

structure. The order itself cannot be, and is not, explained; it exists for no good reason, or, at least, none that is known. When confronted with a universal system, the act of questioning leads to an infinite regression, an endless chain of Whys?, that can only be stopped by admitting and embracing the ignorance that is implied by the specific:

The untireties of livesliving being the one substance of a streamsbecoming. Totalled in toldteld and teldtold in tittletell tattle. Why? Because, graced be Gad and all giddy gadgets, in whose words were the beginnings, there are two signs to turn to, the yest and the ist, the wright side and the wronged side, feeling aslip and wauking up, so an, so farth. Why? On the sourdsite we have...and on the sponthesite it is...Why? One's...but others is...Why? Every talk has his stay...Why? It is a sot of a swigswag, systomy dystomy, which everabody you ever anywhere at all doze. Why? Such me. (597.7-22)¹⁶

The ~~entirety~~ ^{entirety} of lived lives revolves around a duality of being; but repeated questioning of the duality that governs *Finnegans Wake* exposes the fact that the system is not explicable, it simply is. System is destiny, a trap. The duality of Shem and Shaun places the universe of *Finnegans Wake* into the framework of an order, but at the same time it laughs at the order it uses. The satire emerges at least in part from the ease and the arbitrariness of the imposition. The duality of the system is ultimately unjustifiable, but the system leads to complacency: it has its own life; it consumes and patterns thought of its own accord through the eternal recurrence of its own self-defined forms—that is, through the imposition of a meaningless meaning.

“The Trial of Festy King” (85.20-93.21), although it initially appears to be about Earwicker’s crime, eventually reveals yet another version of the recurring conflict between Shem and Shaun, and typically the ideas that emerge reflect the paradoxical nature of their relationship and an ambivalence towards the order they represent. It is also an example of different forms of

¹⁶ Entireties. Tale told. Grace of God. John 1:1: ‘In the beginning was the Word’. Sides (turn over in bed). West / east. Yesterday (past) / German: *ist*: present. Falling asleep and waking up, so on, so forth. South. French: *sourd*: deaf. Other side. Italian: *sponda*: riverbank. Phrase: every dog has his day. Systole. Diastole. Does. Search me. (*Annotations*.) Substance. Trance. System. Destiny. Knows.

repetition as they are used in *Finnegans Wake*. The plot of this short scene is simple. Festy King (Shem)¹⁷ is put on trial for a series of bizarre but vague offences, somehow linked with the equally vague incident in Phoenix Park, under the mistaken assumption that it is Earwicker (the patriarch; the king) who is in the dock. Evidence against Festy King is given by a witness—a disguised version of Shaun—who makes several confident accusations against Festy, but this evidence is also unclear, thanks again to the permutations of the *Wake*'s language, and becomes even more doubtful when the witness is subjected to cross-examination. Responding to the witness, Festy King, now referred to as Pegger Festy in reference to his ~~drunkenness~~ ^{drunkenness}, gives a slurring, partly reverent, partly abusive speech in his defence which culminates in the entire courtroom erupting in laughter. Twenty-eight schoolgirls (one remains behind), recognising the witness as Shaun, surround him to flatter him mockingly and dispense sexual favours. As Shaun is thus distracted and the judges are unable to make a decision, Pegger Festy escapes judgement; but at the last minute he reveals his true identity as Shem as he lets rip an enormous fart in response to a polite enquiry from a security guard. The schoolgirls immediately recognise Shem by his distinct and embarrassing emission and shout abuse at him as he retreats.

While this narrative is relatively short and uncomplicated, there are, in the course of the narrative, extreme complications in the text's linguistic twists. The scene is a repetition in several senses: it recalls an earlier enquiry into Earwicker's behaviour (57-60) and is full of echoes of other phrases and incidents in *Finnegans Wake*. It becomes apparent, too, that the ideas being expressed are paradoxical. Although the identities of the two chief protagonists are initially unclear, they do finally turn out to be stable and identifiable as the twins, but their relationship, the

¹⁷ Campbell and Robinson assign Shem the role of the witness and claim that Shaun is Festy King. Bernard Benstock repeats the mistake, as does Michael H. Begnal who claims that Shaun is "Peggy Festy" [*sic*]. This reading is partly an attempt to prove the reverse: that Shem is Festy and Shaun is the witness. Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944) 87. Bernard Benstock, "The Quiddity of Shem and the Whatness of Shaun", *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol.1, No.1 (Fall 1963) 26. Begnal, *Dreamscheme* 27.

implications of the duality they represent, and the means of expression remain as complicated as ever.

Before the incident has even begun to be narrated we are told that in the course of the trial no progress will be made toward the solving of the unknown crime, one of the mysteries around which everything in *Finnegans Wake* revolves:

little headway, if any, was made in solving the wasnotto be crime
conundrum when a child of Maam, Festy King...was subsequently
haled up at the Old Bailey. (85.21-28)¹⁸

The identity of Festy King is, at this stage, a mystery, although there are already clues present in the allusion to the “child of Maam”. In 1882, the year of Joyce’s birth, a man named John Joyce—the same name as Joyce’s father—and his family were murdered. One of the men tried for the crime was also named Joyce. Of the three who were executed for the murders one, Myles Joyce, was innocent of the crime. Myles Joyce was a native Gaelic speaker who was unable to speak a word of English; his trial was, however, conducted entirely in English. During his testimony he was unable to make himself understood, let alone present his version of events, as his translator reduced his long, detailed explanations to monosyllables. He was found guilty anyway and sentenced to death.¹⁹

This tale of an Irishman unjustly victimised by British tyranny, when coupled with so many coincidental, if superficial, links to Joyce’s own life, is perfect fodder for Joyce’s doubling technique in *Finnegans Wake*. Not only does the historical crime consist of the murder of a namesake of the patriarch of Joyce’s family, thus linking the incident to the Oedipal theme of rivalry between father and sons that recurs in *Finnegans Wake*, but Shem, as Joyce’s alter ego, fits easily (with tongue firmly in cheek) into the role of hapless, persecuted innocent represented by Myles Joyce.

¹⁸ Conundrum. Maamtrasna: scene of murders in 1882 for which Myles Joyce was executed after unsound trial. Festus King: shop in Clifden Co. Galway. (*Annotations*.)

¹⁹ A more detailed retelling of this incident and an argument supporting the suggestion that Joyce included it in *Finnegans Wake* can be found in: James Fairhall, *James Joyce and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 57-59, 217-220. According to Fairhall, who points out that Joyce makes several historical errors in the retelling of the story, for Joyce the incident demonstrated the “political importance of language”.

The trial of Myles Joyce also embraces a broader political, anti-nationalism theme as Shem, the pacifist and anarchist, though perhaps not quite as innocent as Myles, is persecuted (for his language) by the legal machinery of the justice system, set into motion by the accusations of his patriotic arch-enemy Shaun. Typically, however, in *Finnegans Wake*, unlike the unfortunate Myles, the child of Maam escapes and the conflict remains unresolved.

The trial, it is suggested, is something of a farce from the beginning since the imputations themselves, as framed by the court, are as convoluted as they are dubious. Festy King is charged with

an incompatibly framed indictment of both counts (from each equinoxious points of view, the one fellow's fetch being the other fellow's person) this is to see, flying cushats out of his overalls and making fesses immodst his forces on the field. (85.27-31)²⁰

The charges are confused, if not actually contradictory, and also seemingly trivial. Festy King is variously accused of having ringdoves fly out of his pants, stealing coal, indecent exposure, public defecation, and pulling immodest faces, all while he was amongst his forces, ^{whom he} ~~was~~, as king, ~~he~~ was presumably supposed to be leading. While the "incompatibly framed" charges themselves make little sense as a collection of crimes, they do serve another function: they provide more hints to the identity of Festy. The king has attempted to avoid his responsibilities as a leader by acting the fool in front of his subjects. The inability to act decisively and acting irreverently towards authority are qualities that are attributed to Shem in his portrait. The fact that defecation is also one of his crimes suggests again that Festy could be Shem.

More evidence appears. It is then charged that Festy disguised himself by smearing various forms of filth across his face, an act again reminiscent of the description to come in I.7, also suggesting that he is Shem:

²⁰ Incompetently. Fetch: apparition; double of a person. Fish. Phrase: One man's meat is another man's poison. French: *poisson*: fish. Cushats: ringdoves. Slang: to fly pigeons: steal coal. French: *fesses*: buttocks. Faces amongst. Fesse, field: heraldic terms. (*Annotations*.) Equinox. Equally noxious. Obnoxious. Feces. Immodest / amongst.

[he] rubbed some pixes of any luvial peatsmoor o'er his face...as
the best means of disguising himself. (86.9-11)²¹

There is a hint here that language is a part of the disguise, implied by the references to Anna Livia—the river of the text—and the peatmound that has distorted the letter in I.5. This also points to the possibility that Festy, despite his apparent role as a king and therefore patriarchal figure (implying he is Earwicker and his many archetypal identities), is actually Earwicker's son Shem in disguise.

The digression that comments on the accusations is curious. The interruption seems to be saying that the charges were drawn up by two people, and that the incompatible perspectives from which the charges were formulated—their “equally noxious” or “equally obnoxious” points of view—are contradictory but nevertheless somehow the same. The reference to an “equinox” also suggests a sense of balance between the brothers' opposed perspectives. It is the rewriting of the cliché “one man's fish is another man's poison” that contains this paradox. Three of the possible interpretations of the phrase as it appears could be:

- 1 — One fellow's double (fetch) is the other fellow's person;
- 2 — One fellow's fish is the other fellow's poison;
- 3 — One fellow's fish is the other fellow's *poisson*.

Considered one at a time, these three interpretations all seem to be commenting on the relationship between those “equals of opposites” Shem and Shaun:

- 1 — Shem and Shaun are each other's double and therefore their existence is split. They serve a dual purpose: Shem is as much Shaun's double as he is his own person. They mirror each other; each exists as the other's reflection. They are separate but identical.
- 2 — This interpretation is the cliché. The two are opposed. Their tastes are completely different.
- 3 — A tautology. One man's fish is another man's fish. But not exactly: there is a difference between French and English. The two languages have different expressions for the same thing. Although they are the same, and are attempting to express the

²¹ Pieces. Latin: *pix*: tar. ALP. Smear. (*Annotations.*)

same thing, they are kept apart by language. Differing forms and uses of language are the basis of their incomprehension.

Interpretation at this stage is complicated, however, by the still uncertain identity of the accused. The charges are framed from “equinoxious points of view”, suggesting that the opposed twin sons have brought their poisonous hatred to court with charges against their father, but Festy King’s identity is unclear at this point due to his strange appearance. Later it becomes apparent that they have the wrong man: it is not Earwicker in the dock but one of the many versions of Shem, Jim the Penman, the master forger, in disguise. But while there are more interpretations that could be added to this brief summary, it is these three conflicting interpretations that contain the basic paradox of their relationship: they are eternally opposed, but fundamentally the same.

When the witness appears to give evidence against the accused he is, like Festy King, disguised. His testimony is delivered from “under his morse mustaccents (gobless!)” (87.2-3).²² The disguise in this case extends not only to a physical disguise—a large false walrus moustache that covers his mouth: *mustacci* is Italian for moustache—but also to his voice which has affected a Norse accent. Like Festy King, and as hinted earlier, the witness uses language as a form of concealment, a trick to hide his identity. Language, typically for *Finnegans Wake*, is the vehicle for communication—and the basis for the formality of the trial itself—as well as being a source of confusion, and it is conceived of as a material reality. His false accent and his disguise are united by the puns.

This concealment by language means the allusions pointing to the identities of the two chief protagonists as Shem and Shaun, though frequent, are only clear in hindsight. Festy King is a “Karikature” whose clothes are covered with “stains, rents and patches” (83.33-34), a description that, combined with the filth he uses to disguise himself, anticipates the description of Shem in his hopelessly littered and stained Inkbottle House (I.7). There are more obvious hints that the witness is Shaun. He has a “Coverdisk” whose colours are “rice and peacegreen” (86.35), anticipating the

²² Norse. Morse: walrus. Italian: *mustacci*: moustache. (*Annotations*.) God bless. Slang: gob: mouth.

embroidery on the front of Shaun's clothes in "peas, rice, and yeggy-yolk" (404.29) that we see as he rolls into view at the beginning of Part III. Before the witness speaks he is "cautioned against yawning" (86.36): another clue since Shaun yawns before speaking for the first time in III.1, and is transformed into Yawn in III.3. Finally, we are informed that the witness is "an eye, ear, nose and throat witness" (86.32-33). Oliver St John Gogarty, whom Joyce considered a rival, was an ear, eye, nose and throat specialist, and as he was a rival to Joyce the allusion to Dr. Gogarty reinforces the idea that the witness is Shem's and Joyce's rival, Shaun.²³

Despite being disguised with a walrus moustache that covers his mouth, Shaun's character manifests itself immediately. He begins by stating "that he slept with a bonafides and that he would be there to remember the filth of November" (87.3-4),²⁴ a remark that combines a boast about his sexual prowess with a resounding contempt for traitors, whom he regards as "filth". This sets the tone for his testimony. It is all delivered with Shaun the Boast's characteristic blend of arrogance and subservience to authority.

The certainty of the witness about what he actually saw is quickly brought into question by cross-examination, although he sticks to his story. His answers are meant to incriminate Earwicker, but become blurred with his grievances against Shem. The witness's responses make it clear that he thinks he is identifying H. C. Earwicker:

And with tumblerous legs, redipnominated Helmingham
 Erchenwyne Rutter Egbert Crumwall Odin Maximus Esme Saxon
 Esa Vercingetorix Ethelwulf Rupprecht Ydwalla Bentley Osmund
 Dysart Yggdrasselmann? Holy Saint Eiffel, the very phoenix!
 (88.20-24)²⁵

²³ According to Ellmann, Joyce was "thoroughly committed . . . to keeping on bad terms with [Gogarty]" and though Joyce was physically a pacifist he "waged literature like a battle". Thus is poor Gogarty still unforgiven and still being cast as an enemy, even in Joyce's final work. Ellmann, *James Joyce* 207.

See also Chapter Three in this work on Shem the Penman.

²⁴ Irish pubs were once open on Sundays only to bona-fide travellers. Slang: *bona*: girl. 'Please to remember The 5th of November Gunpowder, treason and plot' (Guy Fawkes Day chant). (*Annotations*.)

²⁵ Redenominated. Acrostic: HERE COMES EVERYBODY. Egbert: King of W. Saxons. Vercingetorix: Gallic chieftan, revolted against Caesar. Ethelwulf: King of W. Saxons. Burke's *Peerage* lists "Lyulph Ydwallo Odin Nestor Egbert

This name, acrostic for Earwicker's nickname "Here Comes Everybody", consists of the names of various kings as well as several allusions to Humpty Dumpty (tumble, egg, wall) and suggests that Shaun has no idea that it is Shem who is in the dock. The charges, however, though they are aimed at unseating the father-king Earwicker, contain some of the attacks on Shem.

Shaun's testimony fails to convince the judges who remain "perplexedly uncondemnatory" (90.35) at the prospect of convicting the king. Festy, now referred to as Pegger Festy, then makes his reply. During the witness' speech, a change has taken place: the disguise is slipping and the King has lost his nobility. "Pegger" is a slang term for a heavy drinker, and Pegger is suitably pissed. His response to the evidence of the witness is a page—long, rambling, drunken, abusive monologue that is understandably incoherent. Although the content of his outburst is narrated in the third person, the language of the description of Pegger's speech adopts his mannerisms.²⁶ The speech is a precursor to the description of Shem as a drunkard in the chapter devoted to his portrait (I.7) where, similarly, the language adopts the characteristics of drunken speech after Shem has drunk "mmmmuch too mmmmany gourds" (171.19) of his favourite intoxicant. The page—long ramble ends with Pegger Festy attempting to "make the sign of the Roman Godhelix faix" (91.35-6), but tripping himself up by starting to talk reverently in Castilian. This culmination of his drunken bumbling causes the entire courtroom to explode with laughter, including the reluctant testifier (Shaun).

"The hilariohoot of Pegger's Windup" (92.6), juxtaposed with the seriousness of Shaun's responses are an indication of their two characters, we are told. "Pegger's Windup" (P.W.) is the inverse of the po-faced delivery of the "Wet Pinter" (W.P.). They are

Lyonel Toedmag Hugh Erchenwyne Saxon Esa Cromwell Orma Nevill Dysart Plantagenet *Bentley*", b.1876, under "Tollemache-Tollemache". Yggdrasil: the World-Tree in Norse myth. Holly and Ivy. (*Annotations.*)

²⁶ It is this feature of Joyce's writing that Hugh Kenner called "The Uncle Charles Principle", after the character in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*, and Bernard and Shari Benstock expanded upon in the humbly named "Benstock Principle".

Hugh Kenner, *Joyce's Voices* (London: Faber, 1978).

Bernard Benstock, ed., *The Seventh of Joyce* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

completely opposed, despite their common origins and occasional alliances:

equals of opposites, evolved by a onesame power of nature or of spirit, *iste*, as the sole condition and means of its himundher manifestation, and polarised for reunion by the symphysis of their antipathies. Distinctly different were their duadestinies (92.8-11)²⁷

The sentiment is typically contradictory. They are the same, but different. They are polarised but will reunite. They will remain distinctly different. They are irreconcilable but inevitably bound together.

Early in his testimony the witness quotes Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade": "though theirs not to reason why" (87.10). Pegger Festy, like Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, prefers Byron, as to begin his defence he speaks "in a loudburst of poesy, through his Brythronic interpreter" (91.3-4). These allusions reinforce the identities of the witness and the defendant as Shaun and Shem respectively. As we have seen, the two Lord poets are frequently each associated with one of the twins: the wayward Byron with Shem; the respectable Tennyson with Shaun. Both Shem and Shaun, however, are let down by their chosen heroes. Shaun, despite his reverence for the official proceedings of the trial and solemn testimony—complete with its authoritative allusion to a Great Work of English Literature—is forced to watch helplessly as order collapses into irreverent chaos and no decision is reached. Shem's escape is due to good fortune and a general sense of confusion rather than his defiant, heroic eloquence. Shem's impulsive, poetic outburst in homage to Byron's unfettered spirit also contains a more sinister reference. Shem's Byronic poetry reaches the court through an interpreter, a timely reminder of the fate of the unfortunate Myles Joyce whose inability to exert any control over his fate is the exact opposite of Byron's anarchic defiance. As Myles Joyce discovered, a great deal

²⁷ Coleridge: *The Friend*: 'Every power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite as the sole means and condition of its manifestation, and all opposition is a tendency to reunion. This is the universal law of polarity or essential dualism, first promulgated . . . by Giordano Bruno'. German: *einsam*: single. Latin: *iste*: that of yours. German: *hin und her*: hither and thither. Greek: *symplysis*: growing together. Synthesis / antithesis. Greek: *duas*: two. (*Annotations*.)

can be lost in translation, and the consequences can be horrific. The twins are thus, once more, portrayed as being in some sense deluded. They are not the men they think they are. The paradox around which the trial circulates is the same as the paradox that governs Shem and Shaun's relationship: the two are utterly irreconcilable, not only because they are ~~different~~^{different}, but also because they are the same. Their points of view are "equinoxious", equally noxious; they are "both as like as a duel of lentils" (89.4). They are dual and they duel, constantly.

As "The Trial of Festy King" progresses two opposed patterns emerge. There is firstly an increasing sense of confusion about the charges themselves. The accusations, which were comical and obscure to begin with, remain obscured and despite the efforts of the court become more doubtful and difficult to prove as the trial proceeds. This is, of course, the exact opposite of the usual process of revelation and progression towards truth that a trial is meant to embody. The clash between accuser and accused is meant to progress toward resolution, but does not. The increasing confusion is reflected in the increasing disorder of the courtroom. As the judges dither while the schoolgirls and Pegger Festy fail to observe the rules of the court, the authority of the court breaks down. In contrast, as this process of obscuring is taking place, there is a simultaneous movement towards revelation, although it is not the revelation sought by the court. The process of revelation shifts to focus on the identities of the two chief participants in the trial. The trial, instead of solving the crime and passing just sentence, progresses towards the unmasking of Shaun the Post and Shem the Penman as the principal players, and it is their respective unmaskings that are the climax of the scene. It is, in fact, this very unmasking that finally exposes the trial as a sham, since the court does not even have the correct man in the dock. The man they thought was Earwicker is actually Shem, and instead of being an impartial forum for the discovering of truth and the dispensation of justice, it turns out that the court has simply been another stage for a performance of the twins' personal grievances. Instead of resolution the scene ends in division. The crime itself (whatever it may be) is forgotten in these acts of unmasking that usurp the crime's central role in the trial to become the ultimate significance of the narrative.

Joyce here manipulates the dramatic conventions of disguise and unmasking. The trial, as a result, is stripped of its authority, not simply by Shem's drunken disrespect, but by being reduced to mere theatre. While a trial, like all good rituals, maintains much of its sense of authority from its theatrical and symbolic power, in the case of "The Trial of Festy King" the trial's supposed practical functions—the impartial examination of evidence leading to the eventual revelation of truth and the dispensation of justice—fail completely. The court becomes merely another stage upon which the twins act out their ongoing feud. The event becomes an airing of personal grievances and an acting out of the opposed natures of Shem and Shaun that is significant only to the extent that it is entertaining. The trial is exposed as a ritual devoid of meaning because the assumptions that govern the ritual have been made redundant and the formality reduced to farce.

So *Finnegans Wake* gives us repetition, but simultaneously undermines the importance of repetition. It does so without the insistence upon a strict distinction between form and content,²⁸ and without the insistence—or even the suggestion—of a single meaning. Instead there ~~is~~^{is} a plethora of meanings, often contradictory, and there is a plethora of repetition. There is repetition—which allows for meaning but is not meaning itself—and, as a result, it is an ideological act, that is in the Napoleonic sense of biased, to interpret *Finnegans Wake*. The difficulty in regarding form and content separately (does "the sudden spluttered petulance of some capItallised mIddle" (120.4-5) say what it is or is it what it says?) means there can be no uncontested significance in *Finnegans Wake*. Every element demands not just interpretation but constant re-interpretation. Each element is recontextualised by its repetition. Recurrence is the only significance, and this is no significance at all.

As long as language remains a thing, a material reality as *Finnegans Wake* presents itself, without becoming referential, it is non-ideological. Once it is taken to refer to something outside language then we are in the domain of ideology. The establishment and insistence upon a logical relationship between an object and a

²⁸ As pointed out by Beckett in "Dante...Bruno. Vico..Joyce". Beckett 14. See also chapter one: Joyce's Literary Fascism.

sign that refers to that object is ideological: it is in the abstract realms of the idea. The insistence that markings on a page, a particular sound combination, or the tweaking of a cerebral nerve-ending bear some kind of relationship to another physical reality is—to use a tautological phrase—an ideological idea: i. is a transcendental mode of thought. Language is thus free from ideology until the instant it is used. Language is a material reality, free from metaphysics as long as it does not mean anything, that is, as long as it is not language.

This paradox is the basis of another difference and similarity between the brothers. Shaun tries to make language signify and contain; for Shem language simply is. As usual, both are ignorant of the partial truth possessed by the other brother. By ignoring the fact that language is a reality in itself, capable of indeterminacy and contradiction and not the direct, precise expression of his will, Shaun is constantly undermining his own proclamations and making himself look foolish. Shem, by deliberately avoiding determinacy in favour of the materiality of his production, becomes subject to the dogmatism of others, since he is powerless to articulate his own defence. In his chapter he is forced to agree instantly with every word said in his presence for fear of disagreement, verbal or physical, and in a later chapter he is even humiliatingly assaulted by a gang of letters from a mathematics problem of his own production.

Finnegans Wake as a material object is not ideological until, as has been attempted in parts of this thesis, one actually starts to read the thing and treat it as language. The act of reading the chapter on Shem the Penman and interpreting that mute physical reality into a meaningful, speaking reality is based on ideological assumptions. But *Finnegans Wake* does not deny the possibility of an ideological use being forced upon it, but rather it exists precisely for ideological use. It is a playground for meaning, debate and disagreement. The Mookse and the Gripes, or in political terms perhaps “Marx and their Groups” (365.20) are constantly at odds in an environment where “Friends! First if yu don’t mind. Name yur historical grouns” (477.35).²⁹ *Finnegans Wake* does not distance itself from ideology but actively calls for ideology as a

²⁹ Matthew is speaking. Ulster pronunciation of ‘you’. (*Annotations*.)

necessary starting point but, significantly, via its emphasis on its materialism, it stresses that the ideas being used to access the work are ideological in the narrow, biased sense of the word and are never the only ideas applicable.³⁰ Where a Marxist materialism argues that the internal contradictions of a society will finally resolve into a Communist utopia (and thus Marxist materialism turns out to be metaphysical after all), the materialism of the language in *Finnegans Wake* suggests the internal contradictions of language and of history will not and cannot be resolved, and revels in its materialism and incompleteness. *Finnegans Wake* contains ideas that can be understood as conventional satire: the King is put on trial; the Pope is mocked; Shaun appears as a travesty of Christ; the children mimic their parents' follies. These incidents, however, cannot be understood ~~simply~~ as satire without reservation because of the book's emphasis on the materiality of language, even though the targets and messages of the satirical incidents are relatively unambiguous. The satirical concern is typically fragmentary and secondary to the broader concerns raised by the language itself.

Joyce mythologises all of the action, language and characters in *Finnegans Wake*; all the trivial, petty squabbles of the twins, all of the inadequacies of a Dublin Innkeeper into "the murk of the mythelated" (266.9). The ordinary substance of everyday existence is transformed into something of profound significance; things of profound significance are trivialised. Why he does this is the wrong question; the important thing is simply that he does. It is not the myths themselves that are important—and if *Finnegans Wake* demonstrates anything it is that one myth is as good as another—but the act of mythologising itself, the process of establishing meaning and order. This is seen as being necessary and of extreme importance as well as the height of improbability and ridiculousness.

The universalism of *Finnegans Wake* is thus of an unusual kind. While Joyce has adopted an inclusive technique, the loose, relational language of the book does not suggest a definitive level of meaning to which the other levels are subject. As Beckett

³⁰ See chapter five: Shem, Shaun and Non-ideological Ideology.

pointed out “poetry is essentially the antithesis of metaphysics”,³¹ and so is *Finnegans Wake*. The order is not fixed but is revolving, disproving itself as a responsible, meaningful idea.

A recent book by Harry Burrell, however, argues that *Finnegans Wake* does have a single, stable base for its entire content in the form of the book of Genesis. Genesis was used by Joyce to create the book’s deep structure and therefore everything in *Finnegans Wake* is related back to this single source. Joyce, he argues,

goes far beyond just incorporating the Bible along with all other literature. He actually rewrites it, creating a new text and a new theology. Furthermore the third chapter of Genesis, reinterpreted and repeated hundreds of times, is the narrative base of *Finnegans Wake*. All of the events are simply reenactments of the Fall story.³²

The problem with this theory is the same problem that is encountered with any theory of the ultimate significance of *Finnegans Wake*: the book itself will contradict the theory and disclaim any responsibility. There are always exceptions. There is no particular reason for Genesis to be *the* level of meaning, even if Genesis is informing every line. While it is undoubtedly true that references and ideas from Genesis are a prominent source for the *Wake*, so too are hundreds of other sources. The Earwicker family could be regarded as the principal meaningful level; they are, after all, unlike most other members of the *Wake*’s cast, a product of Joyce’s creativity rather than figures lifted from established sources. Similarly, the ballad of “Tim Finnegan’s Wake” could just as easily be read as the original source (it is alluded to in the title), with all references to the Biblical fall being read as embellishments to the folk song. The point, however, is not that Finnegan’s fall is a version of the fall of Adam and Eve, or that Adam and Eve are a version of Finnegan, but that they are versions of each other. The levels are not hierarchical but are constantly interacting and reinforcing each other.

The problem again returns to a question of language. There is no evidence to suggest one reference is structural while another is

³¹ Beckett et al. 10.

³² Harry Burrell, *Narrative Design in Finnegans Wake: The Wake Lock Picked* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996) 7.

simply embellishment. The relentless ambiguity of the *Wake*'s language ~~causes~~ causes the ideas it expresses to become paradoxical and unstable. Joycean repetition takes the form of a doubling ("either/or" becoming "and", for example: see chapter one) which does not simply consolidate meaning but also confuses meaning so that truths are, in *Finnegans Wake*, conditional and subject to contradictory ideas. Thus Burrell, though he is attempting to establish a definitive platform for reading *Finnegans Wake*, is forced to contradict himself. He argues that "the *Wake* has a straightforward message that is developed from beginning to end", but states on the same page "No one will argue that *Finnegans Wake* is not ambiguous". *Our Exagmination* is rejected as a misleading "publicity effort" that "unfortunately critics there and now have fallen for", but it is cited on the next page as an authoritative source for the idea that Joyce used Vico (not Genesis) for the book's narrative pattern. "Multiple personality" is called "the most unifying literary device that Joyce uses".³³ This last claim is paradoxical but does not acknowledge a further contradiction. Even though Joyce conglomerates multiple personalities around single figures (Shem and Shaun, for example, although Burrell prefers to reduce the *Wake*'s cast to God, Adam, Eve and the Snake), the ambivalence of the text means that these multiplying personalities also have the opposite effect: every one of these figures is distinctly disunified even if they can also be conveniently regarded as whole characters.

The universal ambiguity that is generated by repetition in *Finnegans Wake* is therefore the quality that both allows and disallows such searches for the originary structure of the book. Distinctions can be—and have been—made, but they are matters of convenience. They render meaningful something that is otherwise meaninglessly repeated and merged. This applies equally to the ideas used in this thesis as defining, structural ideas: circularity, duality, the "characters" of Shem and Shaun, and so on. The complexity and contradictory nature of the text means that there are always exceptions, always elements awaiting consideration and explanation. There will always be work in progress.

³³ Burrell 5, 9, 10, 12.

The reader is faced with an excess of order and an excess of chaos. The desire for and the impossibility of a complete understanding are both understood and mocked. Teasing, self-referential clues litter the book, both explaining and not explaining, encouraging and discouraging:

sentenced to be nuzzled over a full trillion times for ever and a night...by that ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia (120.12-14);

So This Is Dyoublong? (13.4);

As we there are where are we are we there...And howelse do we hook our hike to find that pint of porter place? (260.1-5);

Tis jest jibberweek's joke (565.14);

Can you rede...its world? (18.18-19);

Are we speachin d`anglas landage or are you spraykin sea Djoytsch? (485.12-13).³⁴

This is the basis of Frye's theory that the reader is given creative power in *Finnegans Wake*,³⁵ a theory that anticipates the post-structuralist conception of "the text as a methodological field" where "the text is experienced only in an activity of production".³⁶ The text does not have an essential meaning. It is

³⁴ Huysmans: *A Rebours* 265: 'Le roman...deviendrait une communion entre un écrivain magique et un idéal lecteur': The novel should be a communion between a magic writer and an ideal reader. M. J. MacManus: *So This Is Dublin* (1927) derides Joyce. Howth. Prankquean's riddle (21.18). (Children return to father's pub—to Dublin—after II.1.) Lewis Carroll: *Jabberwocky*. German: *Rede*: speech. French: *d'anglais*: English. Land / sea. German: *sprechen Sie Deutsch?*: do you speak German? Joyce. (Annotations.) Do you belong?

³⁵ "If I have read the last chapter of *Finnegans Wake* correctly, what happens there is that the dreamer, after spending the night in communion with a vast body of metaphorical identifications, wakens and goes about his business forgetting his dream, like Nebuchadnezzar, failing to use, or even realise he can use, the 'keys to dreamland'. What he fails to do is therefore left for the reader to do, the 'ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia', as Joyce calls him, in other words the critic."

Frye, *Anatomy* 354.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977) 157.

In the essay "The Death of the Author" Barthes argues that "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" and that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" [my emphasis]. This has, perhaps, added pathos (and relevance) in *Finnegans Wake* where "The author, in fact, was mardred" (517.11).

Barthes 146, 148.

the reader who must create a path, make connections and produce meaning; the reader can dabble in the shallow end or sink into the inky depths. The novel never ends because every order—that is also to say every meaning—that is extracted from the book is a re-order of the chaotic but potentially infinitely orderly universe of *Finnegans Wake*. As a mythologised text *Finnegans Wake* does not signify but repeats and awaits the extraction of significance, significance which will inevitably be the site of ideological dispute. Thus the only mistake that can be made in interpreting *Finnegans Wake* is to insist that one level of significance is the key to its understanding, all the others being simply decoration.

For all their similarities and differences the twins are, in their relation to the slippery, uncertain world of the text, not treated as equals in this one important respect. Shem always has the advantage of acceptance of his linguistic environment, in the absence of control. While Shaun, as a man of action, struggles to say what he means, Shem is passive and accepts that ultimately he will never have total control over language. Shem recognises and lives amongst the material reality of language. For Shem language is not only a vehicle for expression (although it is this too) but is a tangible part of existence. Shaun, on the other hand is constantly attempting the impossible: he tries to turn language into his unquestioning servant. He wants to control meaning. He tries to master his speech and harness it to say exactly what he means to say. Shaun, therefore, is constantly frustrated by his inadvertent slips as he attempts garrulously to assert his opinion in an environment that will not allow him to do so. He dismisses his brother's writing for its unconventionality as a "pinch of scribble" (419.32) since he is temperamentally opposed to the uncertainty it happily promotes.

Again there is a parallel with the options faced by a *Wake* reader. While *Finnegans Wake* offers endless opportunities for significance, any attempt at mastery will break down. The result is always either ~~sublimity~~^{futility}—as in "The Mookse and the Gripses"—or farce—as in "The Trial of Festy King". The advice offered is to accept this incompleteness, abandon the desire for wholeness, the desire for a totalising system, and accept the immediacy of understanding as a process. Meaning in *Finnegans Wake* is always to be understood as a process: an ongoing action dependent on

It is apparent in *Finnegans Wake* that there is a less than reverential tone adopted to any and all such universalisation. The writing functions as a comic version of the universal, a parody that adopts all the features of a universal system but laughs them into absurdity. Thus conservative interpretations of the work are not wrong when they stress the coherence of the work since it is through this coherence that the work apes its satirical target. A certain amount of coherence is supposed to—and does—emerge from a reading of *Finnegans Wake*. But the textual complexity not only parodies the pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo that generally accompanies any grand theory (see, in particular, the pompous rumblings of Shaun as Professor Jones whose proof is actually nothing more than an exercise in obfuscation), but also, through the repetitions that run through the text, from the most blatant motifs to the faintest echos, points out that the inevitable fate of all universal and therefore closed systems is unconscious, meaningless repetition. Meaning becomes simply “tootological” (468.8)—too, too logical and tautological—and the unfortunate ascriber to a system of universalisation is left to ponder the “maymeaming of maimoomeining” (267.3)³⁹: a circular, repetitive meaninglessness as meaning. The universal appears universal not because it actually is universal, but because it has the ability to refer constantly to itself:

It will remember itself from every sides, with all gestures, in
each our word. (614.20-21)

It makes sense only to the extent that the reader is sent in a circle, leaving the reader “paralogically periparolysed” (612.19), logically paralysed in the midst of its labyrinth. Thus, as the book is “just, it is just about to, it is just about to rolywholyover” (597.3) to restart its story of “the hundering, blundering dunderfunder of plundersundered manhood” (596.2-3), there is the revelation that nothing has changed:

Yet is no body present here which was not there before. Only is
order othered. Nought is nulled. *Fuitfiat!* (613.13-14)⁴⁰

³⁹ C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards: *The Meaning of Meaning*. German: *Meinung*: opinion. German: *Minne*: love. Irish: *meann*, *minne*: stuttering. (*Annotations.*)

⁴⁰ Latin: *fuit fiat*: as it was, let it be. (*Annotations.*)

History—perhaps lamentably retold by “herodities”—will “incessantly be coming back” (614.2)⁴¹ and there will be, thanks to the bickering twins, “No peace at all” (620.17).

The world, mind, is, was and will be writing its own runes for ever, man, on all matters that fall under the ban of our infrarational senses (19.35-20.1)⁴²:

writing rules and righting wrongs are, in *Finnegans Wake* also creating ruins, because of a less than rational but all ~~encompassing~~ ^{encompassing} “world-mind”.

Once you are dealing with the universal, with Everything, meaning becomes redundant, it loses all sense of relation. It ^{is} with a sense of relativity, an interaction with other ideas—contexts, differences, similarities—that meaning takes place. If one conceives of a Whole which is Holy (and in the case of *Finnegans Wake* also holey) then what you have is something that is by definition beyond comprehension, but also, by its nature of including Everything, intellectually paralysing. It is only by returning to the microcosm that meaning can be re-established. Thus the “Whole” can only be conceived of superficially, without attention to detail, for when dealing with detail, even if in the service of a universal scheme, you have inevitably lost touch with the universal.

It is by pointing out this superficiality and emptiness that *Finnegans Wake* satirises the universal. The universal ideas used to explain *Finnegans Wake* fail to engage with the specific contradictions of the text. We are not meant to believe in Vico’s theory of history or have faith in *Finnegans Wake*’s all-inclusive powers, but rather we are meant to read it and explore its possibilities. It is only in the specific engagement with the details of sections of the text that it can become a meaningful work lose its superficiality and begin to express ideas: funny, satirical, contradictory, and without resolution. Thus, as Eco suggests, we must “disambiguate various levels of sense”, and, as Frye suggests, become the creators of a meaningful text by tackling it directly and specifically.

⁴¹ Heredities. Herodotus: Greek historian. Incessantly. (*Annotations.*) Incessant lament.

⁴² World-mind. Righting. Wrongs. Rules. Archaic: ban: curse. (*Annotations.*) Runes / ruins. Infra- (prefix): below.

Finnegans Wake encourages the assumption that its parts are related to a whole, but the patience it advises is not of the “all will become clear” variety. Things have not cleared up and will not clear up. The universal system goes backwards and forwards and round in circles; it is only by dealing with the detail (and the detail is extensive enough) that it is possible to discuss ideas. A universal system is also a meaningless system. *Finnegans Wake*’s non-ideological qualities are similarly redundant. It is non-ideological in the superficial, impractical, all-inclusive sense, but it is ideological in the important sense that it contains and is the site for the conflict of ideas. It is ideological in the sense that it is practical. The broad, non-ideological element to the work is a contributing factor to its “white elephant” status. The other factor—its intimidating wealth of detail and association—is the means by which it can become ideological again, and thus meaningful. It becomes ideological by what is brought to it.

This, then, is what emerges from an examination of the twin’s interaction. Their universal status as the representatives of fallen, divided mankind is a joke at their expense, a joke they can never appreciate. Joyce created a work whose utility is its uselessness, whose motion is stasis. Ultimately *Finnegans Wake* demonstrates nothing. It proves no point; it is a monument to perversity and it is precisely for this reason that it is not one of the white elephants of literature. It is repetition that continues to be creative, and “Although I have read the book again and again, each word remains new to me”.⁴³

And to Shaun the Post I give that for which he longs but *Finnegans Wake* denies: the last word:

Fik yew! I’m through. Won. Toe. Adry. You watch my smoke.
(469.27-28)

⁴³ Kierkegaard 205.

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