

**SHEM, SHAUN AND THE DUALISM OF
JAMES JOYCE'S *FINNEGANS WAKE***

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



James Ley

A Note on the Text

All citations from *Finnegans Wake* are referenced in the text in the following, usual manner: (page number.line number).

Chapters are referred to in the following manner: section in Roman numerals, chapter in Arabic numerals, e.g. pages 3-29 are I.1.

When quoting from *Finnegans Wake*, in an effort to acknowledge the variety of the meanings it contains, references from Roland McHugh's *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* have been footnoted. These allusions are attributed to McHugh by the abbreviation: (*Annotations.*). The page and line numbers in the *Annotations* correspond to the page numbers in *Finnegans Wake*.

Where there are additional meanings that need to be acknowledged, they are listed after McHugh's in the same footnote.

All other references are footnoted according to the guidelines in:

Achtert, Walter S., and Joseph Gibardi. *The MLA Style Manual*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1985.

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Preface: A Disclaimer

There is very little that can be said about *Finnegans Wake* that is unambiguously and unqualifiedly true. For almost every seemingly reasonable, uncontroversial proclamation about the nature of the text or its contents, demonstrable though it may be, there is a contrary statement that can be made that is equally reasonable and demonstrable. To suggest the book is a meticulously planned and carefully executed work of art is fair enough, and is supported both by what is known of Joyce's technique in writing the book and by the numerous intricate connections that have emerged from readings of the work. To suggest that *Finnegans Wake* is a monstrous, bewildering, chaotic slab of nonsense that gives itself over to meaningless chance and incoherence also seems like a fair call. It is written in a language that accepts this contradiction; a language that is at once obscure and revelatory.

It is this contradiction and the endless paradoxes and puzzles which flow from it that are the focus of this thesis. It is ambivalence that not only informs the text of *Finnegans Wake* but constitutes its relevance as a work of literature. The contradictions that are the subject of this work, and that at the same time have infected its coherence, are precisely the point of what Ezra Pound called "circumambient peripherization".¹ It is through this ongoing process, though it superficially argues for *Finnegans Wake* as the expression of a universal theory of humanity and history, that the text actually becomes a consistent refutation of any universal, impartial system of thought via the specific complexities and contradictions of its language. Language,

¹ Ezra Pound, "Letter to James Joyce", 15 November 1926, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol.III, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber, 1966) 145.

Finnegans Wake implies, cannot be the vehicle for the expression of a universal theory because it is itself a material reality, caught in the moment of the specific. Language is an event. It is constantly making gestures toward universality. But it is also something that is experienced and grows to take account of each new occurrence. Language is itself a thing, capable of change and capable of defying restrictions. However much it strives to encompass everything, to become universal, its work is never complete.