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THE JOYS OF EXILE**

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IN THE *WAKE* OF TRAUMA: EXPLORING EXILIC  
IDENTITY THROUGH JAMES JOYCE'S USE  
OF NARRATIVE FETISHISM

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According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is a 'wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind', arising from an unknowable absence as the distressing event is experienced too 'soon' and too 'unexpectedly' to be known (Caruth 1996: 3, 4). As a result, a trauma victim experiences a metaphorical splitting of the self, leading to a fractured identity as they become both 'self' and 'Other'. To repair this psychological wound, an individual will often turn to narrative fetishism as a means of expunging the trauma, in the belief that by writing oneself anew a coherent identity can be reforged. In a study on the relationship between trauma and identity, Lynn Worsham articulates the role of narrative fetishism, noting how it 'substitutes for the painful work of mourning the *pleasure* of narrative', simulating a 'condition of wholeness' through 'its power to compose – and, indeed, impose – a sense of order, sequence, causality, coherence, and completion' (Worsham 2006: 178). Put simply, narrative enables trauma victims to dictate a sense of mastery over the event, giving order to the fractured self through story-telling and language. This process allows the victim to organise and manage the trauma, diminishing the difficult memories through the verbal or written act of narrative.

In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's use of narrative fetishism is highly complex and adaptable, operating microcosmically and macrocosmically as it is used in the context of individual trauma and collective history. As described by Roy Ellen, one way to interpret the notion of 'fetishism' is the 'appearance of value' that conceals the true nature of a commodity or event (Ellen, 1988: 216). Attempting to mask a fractured identity, the purpose of narrative fetishism can thus be seen to echo our use of historical grand narratives. Both employ storytelling as a means of achieving a sense of coherency and wholeness, concealing the fractured nature of identity through a false image of unity. For this reason, when I discuss Joyce's use of narrative fetishism I will do so in the context of trauma and in the context of history.

When examining *Finnegans Wake* alongside Caruth's trauma theory, a narrative of exile emerges as HCE is 'self-exiled in upon his ego' following an ambiguous rumour (*FW* 184.6-7). To comprehend this self-expulsion we must revise our understanding of the term 'exile', as HCE's banishment is unusual, unlike that of a typical expulsion as it diverges from its traditional definition.<sup>1</sup> This disparity hinges on the word 'ego', as, for HCE, this displacement is psychological rather than physical: it manifests itself internally, leading to a splitting of the self that echoes the experience of trauma victims. What emerges is a separation between the self and Other, as we are faced with waking Finnegan and his dreaming, exiled counterpart, HCE.<sup>2</sup> Cast out of a solid identity and unable to ground himself in one place, this interpretation follows the bid to repair HCE's fractured self, as narrative fetishism is used in an attempt to regain coherency. However, as Joyce demonstrates, this desire for wholeness is doomed to fail as narrative is a

<sup>1</sup> The traditional definition that I am referring to here is one which describes exile as a physical process of casting someone out of one's nation following political dispute.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst I am alert to the interpretations that lie beyond my reading of the narrative, for the purpose of this paper, I intend to examine HCE's exile on the assumption that the *Wake* is either a representation of a dream or a reconstruction of the night, a theory which enables the reader to reduce the multiplicity of text to a single plot line. It is also important to note that when I discuss the character of HCE, I am referring to him as a polysemic being, representing both an individual and a collective society.

problematic and flawed means of achieving wholeness. Beneath the superficial appearance of healing lies the fragility and uncertainty of history, demonstrated by the *Wake*'s fragmented and polysemic structure as it undermines any attempts of singularity and coherency.

Although the texture of the *Wake* provides countless routes for psychological and historical exploration, for the purpose of this paper I will be focusing on two large, yet interwoven, lines of enquiry. The first will analyse HCE's exilic identity in relation to gossip and rumour, determining how the dreamer's ambiguous persona is formed and distorted through the words of others. This will then be reexamined in the context of history, articulating how HCE's polysemic and unstable persona functions as a microcosm for the fragmented state of contemporary identity. The second line of enquiry will then examine this binary between history and identity in relation to narrative fetishism. Here I will demonstrate how Giambattista Vico's *New Science* is used in an attempt to stabilise and order this trauma, centering on T. S. Eliot's statement that myth is 'simply a way of controlling, of ordering, and of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (Eliot 1975: 177). Together, this bipartite exploration weaves a narrative of cyclical exile, showing how HCE's trauma appears to be superficially healed and left stagnant through Joyce's use of narrative fetishism.

Given the complexity of the *Wake*, it will first be useful to loosely outline HCE's exilic identity. His psychological exile can be observed on the first page of the novel, where he begins the narrative as Finnegan, a 'once wallstrait oldparr' who suffers a mysterious 'great fall' (*FW* 3.17-18). This descent is both literal and figurative, as he lays knocked 'out in the park' and 'laid to rust upon the green', whilst simultaneously suffering a fall from grace (*FW* 3.22-23). Unclear as to whether his fall is the result of a drunken stupor, spontaneous slumber, or a heinous park crime, Finnegan's reputation and social identity are left to rumour and community gossip as his status becomes a product of slander. Reflecting this destabilisation of identity is Joyce's use of name, where the move from conscious 'Finnegan' to sleeping 'HCE' embodies the new fluidity of the dreamer's exilic self. Taking the form of a polysemic



acronym, HCE undergoes over two-hundred transformations throughout the course of the text: he embodies place, society and object, representing a collective society in the form of 'Here Comes Everybody', whilst forming a Dublin landscape under the guise of 'Howth Castle and Environs' (*FW* 32.18-19, 3.03). Functioning under an image of multiple, mutating selves, HCE no longer holds a singular, stable identity, reflecting a condition of exile as he is unable to ground himself in one place.

In addition to echoing the dreamer's ambiguous identity, Joyce's use of 'Here Comes Everybody' implies that HCE's persona is both micro and macro as he represents both a singular individual and a collective society. This introduces the idea that the *Wake* embodies a shared identity crisis, extending the exile beyond the individual and towards a global sense of trauma. John Bishop reinforces this assertion, noting how HCE is a somebody who the night has 'rendered indistinct', and that 'in his identity-void drift through sleep, [HCE] becomes indirectly represented in the images of so many other people [...] that his mind eventually becomes a space made possible and cohabited by a world of people (Bishop 1986: 133, 212). Operating under multiple personas – 'some vote him Vike, some mote him Mike, some dub him Llyn and Phin while others hail him Lug Bug Dan Lop, Lex, Lax, Gunne or Guinn' – the abundance of names, characters and forms that HCE takes on throughout the course of the text magnifies the tale of exile, producing a commentary on modern civilisation as the dreamer takes on a shared, global, identity (*FW* 44.10-12).

To heighten this sense of fragmentation the reader only hears snippets of HCE's crime, blurring the distinction between truth and reality as the offence can only be translated through the words of others. This is best exemplified in Book One, Chapter Eight, as two washerwomen stand over Dublin's river Liffey, literally and figuratively airing HCE's dirty laundry. The women discuss the incident, mulling over, 'whatever it was they threed to make out he thried to two in the Fiendish park', before declaring that 'he's an awful old reppe. Look at the shirt of him! Look at the dirt of it! (*FW* 196.10-11). Blending two domains of discourse, the women debate HCE's muddled character through an

image of laundry, exemplifying the disfiguring nature of gossip as the slurs misshape the tale with each sentence. This visual deterioration takes place as the line 'he's an awful old reppe' is later recycled as, 'O, the rouhty old rappe!' (*FW* 196.11, 196.24). The simultaneous repetition and distortion of the line can be interpreted in multiple ways; firstly, the sentence is a direct reference to rivers, as the words 'rappe' and 'rouhty' – two slurs which allude to HCE's rowdy and promiscuous persona – are also the names of Russian and Irish rivers. Forming the shape of a human mouth, the capitalised 'O' can be interpreted as the mouth of a river, the point at which a river flows into the sea. This establishes a parallel between the flow of water and the nature of gossip, as HCE's tale is passed from one mouth to another, distorted with each murmur. Furthermore, when considered in relation to Ireland, the word 'rappe' alludes to the word 'rapparee', an Irish term used during the 17th century which refers to a bandit or outlaw. A link is thus created between geography, crime and status as the image of the river highlights HCE's social position as an exile, deeming him to be an outsider as the women destabilise his identity through rumour.

Functioning as microcosm for a larger social structure, HCE's tale questions the role and production of history, demonstrated as a connection emerges between rumour and reality. The slander which misshapes and splinters the dreamer's persona takes on a life of its own, highlighting the unreliable and subjective nature of historicism as the tale of 'Here Comes Everybody' is shaped through perception and gossip. Following a similar pattern of repetition and distortion to the one seen in the conversation between the washerwomen, the retellings maintain a basic plot which is slightly distorted with each whisper, as HCE, 'the father of fornicationists', is dubbed to have been 'Minxing marrage and making loof' in the park, or 'joulting by Wellinton's monument' (*FW* 4.12, 196.24, 47.07). These fractional changes demonstrate the gradual shaping and misshaping of history, articulating history's unstable nature as it bases itself on hearsay, rather than 'fact'. Observing this relationship between history and gossip, Janine Utell asserts that,

HCE is created through the linguistic performance of the community [...] through speech, letters, and ballads, the story is repeated, re-written, and passed around. The story of HCE must pass through the mouths of the people like linen through the hands of the washer-women. In the public eye, in the public mouth, gossip becomes history, community is created and sustained, and memory is given life (Utell 2004: p. 689).

Utell's articulation of the connection between the community's 'linguistic performance' and history is interesting; blending multiple modes of discourse, these letters, ballads and speeches collectively build a tale of trauma, reflecting the slippery nature of contemporary identity as multiple, divergent narratives are at play. Through the repetition of rumour and gossip, HCE's tale becomes a form of history as it gains momentum, illustrating how slander can easily be mistaken as truth.

This binary between truth and reality is outlined in the previous chapter when Shem, the presumed son of HCE, is deemed an 'outlex between the lines' (*FW* 168.3). Questioning the validity of news, Joyce writes that,

every honest to goodness man in the land of the space of today knows that his back life will not stand being written about in black and white. Putting truth and untruth together a shot may be made at what this hybrid actually was like to look at (*FW* 169.6-10).

By referring to Shem, the passage simultaneously outlines HCE's own unstable position by alluding to his 'back life' or origins. In the context of truth, the passage elucidates the scandal that surrounds the family, holding connotations of a newspaper as it refers to being written about in 'black and white'. Examining these two images of outlaw together – the first appearing in relation to the newspaper and the second emerging from the community gossip – a narrative of historical uncertainty develops, reflecting HCE's unstable identity as the reader is left to put 'truth and untruth together'. To shed clarity on HCE's tale, one must consider all the fragments, retellings and selections, balancing the

accounts in a futile attempt to reach a conclusion about HCE's waking persona.

The *Wake*'s interrogation of history resonates with R. G. Collingwood's argument that history is a concept with 'no fixed points' (Collingwood 1993: 243). Asserting that, 'in history, no achievement is final', Collingwood notes how 'every new generation must rewrite history in his own way [...] the historian is part of the process he is studying' (Collingwood 1993: 248). By refuting the possibility of finality, Collingwood suggests that history, much like HCE's tale, is part of an ongoing process, shaped and rewritten as it is passed through the community. Everyone has their own perception of history and this perception becomes part of the grand narrative it analyses. When examining this alongside the *Wake*, this notion of 'rewriting' history articulates the relationship between HCE's tale and the reader. Functioning as a type of historian, the reader must put truth and untruth together to uncover the identity of the allusive HCE. Each reading is a retelling and a rewriting of this history, leading to new versions of the truth as HCE is continually regenerated by those around him.

Alongside this micro juxtaposition between truth and reality is the macrocosm which is history itself, reinforcing individual destabilisation through a collective and enlarged view of the past. Throughout the text Joyce demonstrates history's subjective and incoherent nature, subverting historicism's singularity and coherency by multiplying its form. This is apparent in the first chapter of the text, where Joyce writes in the style of Irish annals, using the dates 566 A.D. and 1132 A.D. Beginning with 1132 A.D., Joyce records how 'Men like to ants or emmets wonder upon a root hwhide Whalfisk which lay in a runnel', which, when translated on a basic level, can be read as 'men alike to ants wonder upon a wide whale fish' (*FW* 13.33-34). Individually, the annal follows historical tradition, describing a series of events in a linear, chronological order. However, Joyce distorts tradition through the addition of another chronicle of the same date, describing how two sons 'at an hour were born until a goodman, and his hag' (*FW* 14.11). Although at a first glance these annals appear to have little significance, when reexamined they can be seen to exemplify the unstable and

unreliable nature of history. This stems from the relationship between the two dates, as they move from the later date, 1132 A.D., to the earlier, 566 A.D. Offering an additional commentary on the role of history, the non-sequential progression between the two dates disrupts the traditional narration of a historical event, which takes place in a chronological sequence. This, alongside the narration of two simultaneous histories, destabilises the appearance of ‘wholeness’ which an account of the past seeks to achieve, exemplifying how just as HCE’s persona is fragmented by the gossip and interpretation of others, history too is subject to multiple accounts and tales.

Furthering this, Joyce emphasises history’s singularity as he continues to question its continuity, stating that,

          somewhere, parently, in the ginnandgo gap between antediluvius and annadominant the copyist must have fled with his scroll. The billy flood rose or an elk charged him or the sultrup worldwright from the excelsissimost empyrean (bolt, in sum) earthspake or the Dannamen gallous banged pan the bliddy duran. A scribicide then and there is led off (*FW* 14.16-21).

In Norse mythology, the ‘ginnaandgo gap’ (ginnungagap) is the primordial void noted in the *Gylfaginning*, an Eddiac text which records Norse cosmology. During the writing of the *Gylfaginning* the copyist went missing, highlighted in the *Wake* as he ‘fled with his scroll’. This leaves the historical text with an abyss, a missing ‘gap between antediluvius and annadominant’, which results in a loss of comprehension as the events cannot be known. By following the duplicate annals with an image of chasms and fragmentations, Joyce destabilises history, replacing objective certainty with subjective speculation. This provides numerous possibilities for interpretation, and history thus becomes a game of choice as we decide whether the ‘billy flood rose’ or an ‘elk charged him’. As a result, the attempt to establish a complete grand narrative is stunted, and the primordial void of Norse mythology functions as a metaphor for the fractured nature of history.

Considering this parallel between HCE and history, we can observe how Joyce's destabilisation of narrative leaves the dreamer in a position of psychological exile, unable to retain a stable persona as the tale is only presented in fragments. To eclipse this uncertain state of exile, Joyce appears to employ narrative fetishism as a means of writing oneself, or humanity, anew. This is where, unable to trace HCE's own origins due to his polysemic state, Vico's grand narrative of cyclical history is used to regain a sense of wholeness. The reason for doing so resides in history's ability to help us comprehend our identities, a notion elucidated by Peter Brooks in *Reading for the Plot*, where he declares that, 'we know what we are because we can say where we are, and we know this because we can say where we came from' (Brooks 2002: 275). If we cannot trace our origins or say 'where we came from', our identities become uncertain, leaving us unable to fully assimilate ourselves in reality as we cannot know 'where we are', let alone who we are. When an individual is unable to trace his own beginnings, Brooks asserts that one can attempt to 'make raids on a putative master plot in order to remedy the insufficiencies of his own unsatisfactory plot'. He does so, in the hope that this 'providential plot' will 'subsume his experience to that of mankind, to show the individual as a significant repetition of a story already endowed with meaning' (Brooks 2002: 280).

Brooks' elucidation of the relationship between history and identity recalls T. S. Eliot's statement that myth is 'a way of controlling, of ordering, and of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (Eliot 1975: 177). Reexamining this in the context of the *Wake*, we can argue how by 'making raids' on a 'putative master plot', Joyce can be seen to employ Giambattista Vico's philosophy of cyclical history as an insufficient substitute for the fractured state of identity, forming an example of narrative fetishism as it simulates a 'condition of wholeness'.

To briefly outline Vico's theory and how this operates in the *Wake*, it is useful to examine the novel's structure. The *Wake*'s circular framework echoes Vico's major text, the *New Science*, a philosophy which argues that civilisation progresses and develops in cycles, each of which are split into three distinct ages: the divine, the heroic and the

human, followed by a ricorso where the cycle is renewed. This results in the *Wake*'s four-part structure, where the novel begins following an age of renewal, highlighted in a return to divinity following the process of a 'commodus vicus of recirculation' (Vico's cyclical history) (*FW* 3.2). Here we are met with the first of ten thunderclaps, each serving as a biblical reminder of the dreamer's primitive form. From the first thunder, Finnegan suffers 'the great fall' where he takes the form of an 'overgrown babeling', 'laid to rust' in a long lost bed, experiencing his first polysemic transition into HCE, before becoming 'Haroun Childeric Eggberth' (*FW* 3.18, 6.31, 3.24, 6.26, 4.32). The thunder marks the beginning of the dreamer's social evolution, where in Vico's philosophy the undeveloped minds of early humans were triggered by fear, causing them to instinctively run into a cave for shelter. From this point, the connection between history and reason forms a domino effect, where from thunder came religion, from religion society and the beginnings of primitive family life. Society then extends outwards towards and beyond feudalism, democracy, anarchy, monarchy and finally towards a tendency to destruction, where the cycle is renewed.

HCE's tale of trauma becomes a repetition of Vico's theory, as Joyce alludes to the philosopher throughout the text, deeming him to be 'the producer (Mr. John Baptist Vickar)', casting an image of Vico as divinity, the maker of all things, a reincarnation of God (*FW* 255.27). The title of 'producer' – connoting a theatre or film producer – suggests that Vico is the driving force behind HCE's narrative, moving the dreamer towards renewal as he is assimilated with the story of another. To comprehend Vico's divine influence on the dreamer, we can return to HCE's early mutation into 'Haroun Childeric Eggberth', where towards the end of the text, Joyce takes the 'egg' from 'Eggberth' and recycles it with the phrase: 'eggburst, eggblend, egg burial and hatch-as-hatch can' (*FW* 614.32-22). Put simply, the sentence summarises HCE's journey through the Vichian ages, directly referencing Vico's three principles of history as the word 'burst' suggests thunder (or birth) and therefore the beginnings of religion, whilst 'blend' and 'burial' signify marriage and death. The connection between Vico's cyclical history and HCE's dream is cemented in the repetition of 'egg', which

connotes rebirth, fertility and the cycle of life. This implies that HCE's journey towards psychological repair will rely on Vico's historical cycles, as he must progress forwards through a 'wholemole millwheeling vicocirometer', in order to reach the 'wholeness' of the waking day (*FW* 489.35, 614.27).

By composing HCE's tale of exile alongside a grand narrative of evolution, Joyce structures the trauma with a familiar tale of man. Vico's narrative is all-encompassing, a story which assimilates the experience of everyman into a singular, coherent form, enabling Joyce to momentarily surpass the fragmentation of history as Vico's tale appears to 'simulate a condition of wholeness'. However – and here is where the problem lies – despite its apparent healing, this act of narrative fetishism merely 'substitutes for the painful work of mourning the *pleasure* of narrative', simulating coherence and structure whilst the trauma still lies beneath. As a result, the *Wake* produces an image of false progression, seen as HCE moves towards coherency at the end of the tale as he is 'changing sonhusband', before the tale forms as continuous loop as the first lines of the text complete the last (*FW* 627.01). Rather than coming to an end, HCE's trauma is simply renewed as he is carried by means of a 'commodius vicus of recirculation' back to the 'river past Eve and Adam's' of the first page of the novel, preventing a return to wholeness as the 'humpty hill head' and simply finds himself 'knocked out in the park' once more, caught in a permanent state of exile (*FW* 627.1, 628.15-16, 3.1). This dialectic between trauma and narrative reveals the false sense of unity that myth, or history, enables society to achieve. In the *Wake* there are thus two narratives in operation, one of fragmentation and one of unity, as Vico's grand narrative struggles to mask the inherent trauma of contemporary history.

In conclusion, HCE's tale of trauma is complex and enigmatic, representing a state of psychological exile as he remains caught between multiple identities yet is unable to assimilate himself in any. Functioning as both a microcosm for history and a representation of the individual, HCE symbolises a global trauma, articulating the crisis of contemporary history by demonstrating its unreliable and fragmented nature. To overcome this crisis, Vico's cyclical history provides an



opportunity for narrative fetishism, serving as a coherent framework on which the fractured self can be structured. Vico's philosophy represents both an attempt to repair this state of trauma and the impossibility of doing so. On the one hand, the narrative provides HCE and modern history with a structure, a means of filling the chasms in his tale with a story already rife with meaning, but on the other, this act of narrative fetishism simply 'simulates' wholeness, rather than healing the trauma itself. This is because narrative is a flawed means of achieving coherency, doomed to failure due to its subjective and reductive nature. As a result, HCE is caught in a permanent state of exile, unable to heal the fissure in his 'brainskin' as he states 'I'm not myself at all' (*FW* 563.13, 626.18).

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