

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

13

**WHY READ JOYCE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY?**

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CONTENTS

Enrico Terrinoni <i>Preface. Why read Joyce at all?</i>	p.	13
Spurgeon Thompson <i>Returning to political interpretation: a communist Finnegans Wake</i>	»	17
Claire Culleton <i>Strick's Ulysses and war: why we read Joyce in the 21st Century</i>	»	37
Paul Fagan <i>"a mixer and wordpainter": Finnegans Wake in the age of remix culture</i>	»	49
Jonathan McCreedy <i>The Death of a Joyce Scholar and The Further Adventures of James Joyce: the crossroads of two reading publics</i>	»	69
Erika Mihálycsa <i>Horsey women and arse-temises: wake-ing Ulysses in translation</i>	»	79
Benjamin Boysen <i>Joyce's "politicoecomedie": on James Joyce's humorous deconstruction of ideology in Finnegans Wake</i>	»	93
Ilaria Natali <i>Joyce's "corpo straniero": the European dimension of Irishness in four border crossings</i>	»	105

Maria Vaccarella <i>A medical humanistic exploration of James Joyce</i> »	121
Emanuela Zirzotti <i>Have you ever “seen” Joyce? The role of the Internet in the popularization of the man and his work</i>	» 131
Patricia Pericic <i>The limits to literature in Ulysses in the 21st Century</i> »	145
Ivu I-chu Chang <i>Ulysses backed against the sea: Taiwan’s alternative modernity in Wang Wen-hsing’s Backed Against the Sea</i> »	155
Thierry Robin <i>Joyce’s “ghosts”..., Flann O’Brien, Samuel Beckett and John Banville</i> »	169
Maria Grazia Tonetto <i>The body of finitude</i>	» 185
Federico Sabatini <i>Contemporary Joyce: Joycean themes and stylistic techniques in William Trevor’s writings</i>	» 193
Andrea Binelli <i>Joyce and what is to become of English</i> »	209

RETURNING TO POLITICAL INTERPRETATION:
A COMMUNIST *FINNEGANS WAKE*¹

I'd like to recall an age when we knew less about *Finnegans Wake*. If possible, I'd like to recover that sense of estrangement paired with interpretive freedom we had about the text before the arrival of genetic criticism in full force in the last 15 years, before we all knew and used the annotated Buffalo Notebooks, before we knew what Sam Slote and Luca Crispi have titled their book, that is, *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake* (2007), indeed before we had access to the advanced critical apparatus Finn Fordham has made available to us in his *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake* (2007) and his excellent new Oxford World Classics edition of the novel (2012) alongside the revised standard, McHugh's *Annotations* (2006). I want to turn the clock back, in short, to a time when we didn't know what we were doing. I believe our methods of approaching *Finnegans Wake* have fallen into somewhat inhibiting, rigid patterns and need to be shaken up or revised. And the attempts we've made in the past have something to teach us about where to go next.

I. Why we need new ways to interpret *Finnegans Wake*

Just before the ascendancy of genetic criticism, a wave of interpretations—especially raw or *strong political interpretations*—suddenly invested the act of reading *Finnegans Wake* with an urgency it hadn't had before; I'm recalling the rise of controversial works like Colin MacCabe's *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1978) (which he later, himself, calls "Leninist")

¹ This article is based on a plenary delivered for the James Joyce Graduate Conference IV: 'Why Read Joyce in the 21st Century?' University of Rome Tré, Rome, Italy, 2 February 2011. I would like to thank the organizers of the conference, Enrico Terrinoni, Franca Ruggieri, and John McCourt for making the occasion of its presentation possible.

and then Manganiello's magisterial *Joyce's Politics* (1980) and Seamus Deane's *Celtic Revivals* (1987) (as well as his 1992 introduction to the UK Penguin edition). Then came the early nineties-critics like James Fairhall, Vincent Cheng, and Emer Nolan who all tried their hand at political interpretations of *Finnegans Wake*. Back in 1995 we knew so little; the first of the published Buffalo Notebooks, for example, were six years away. And while all the notes were there—for decades—to be edited, commented on, sorted and annotated, most of us had no real idea how *Finnegans Wake* came into existence by that point. Only a handful of scholars understood the compositional history of the text. Without the notebooks, without an authoritative history of the composition of the book, without the web-based version or FWEET to aid us, without a revised *Annotations*, so many of us were just reading in the dark. I remember, in fact, two decades ago, as an undergraduate in a Joyce honors seminar in which we had to read all four of Joyce's big books, our professor had decided that the best way to deal with *Finnegans Wake* was to simply cover a book per week reading out loud passages we found interesting, and just letting the associations flow; while I look back to that kind of communal, out-loud reading of the book as being unique in all my experience, I also remember being completely lost—and remaining so, for a good month. Reading *Finnegans Wake* in the dark like this, though, was hardly a new condition, and it has long been the way the book was encountered.

So, to try and defamiliarize the text (or to recover a sense of innocence about approaching it) I will turn the clock back even further, to the months of its publication. Its earliest major reviewers give us a good sense of what it was like to encounter *Finnegans Wake* in all its radical strangeness. The question asked by the 2011 Fourth James Joyce Graduate Student Conference in Rome was, "Why Read Joyce in the 21st Century?" And many of the earliest reviewers of *Work in Progress* and *Finnegans Wake* were posing the more fundamental question of "why read Joyce—in any century?" Like the hostile critics of fascist Italy (and post-fascist Italy) that Umberto Eco so carefully documented in "Joyce's Misfortunes in Italy," very few early reviewers had anything good to say about the book (2008). Take the reviewer of the *Atlantic Monthly* in June of 1939 who suggested it was probably better to take the five-dollar bill it costs to buy the book and burn it to light a cigarette, which would be far more satisfying anyway. "Translated," he says, "into native Tasmanian, this book should have a well deserved sale" (Fagnoli 2003, 353). (The last known speaker of any of the Tasmanian languages died in 1905.) Or the *Irish Times*, which, poetically suggests that, "after *Ulysses* he had no more

to say, in *Finnegans Wake* he went on saying it” and May 1939’s *Times Literary Supplement* which heartily recommends it for “a splendid audience of one,” that is, for James Joyce himself to read (*Ibid.*, 354). Looking at early responses to Joyce, John Nash, in a 2008 article, has gone so far as to say that Joyce’s “reception, then, also consists in his not being read (a fact of which he was well aware)” (2008, 109). In these negations, then, I will argue, are important triggers or start-points to interpretation. When we are in the dark, the direction we reach out our hands or what actions we take first tell us much.

Even though it is embarrassing and a little amusing for us, today, to watch early readers grope and try to interpret or even to reply to what they saw in *Finnegans Wake* when it was first published, their value lies in their radical innocence. Imagine being a book reviewer at the *New York Herald Tribune* in early 1939, handed a copy of *Finnegans Wake*, and told to write about it for the next printing of the paper. No critical equipment to guide you, no “keys” to unlock its mysteries, no idea what this book is except that it took 16 years to write (as the blurb on the back informs you), you are truly lost. Here’s what a diligent *New York Herald Tribune* reviewer came up with. First of all, according to his reading, the book’s hero is a Norwegian living in Dublin, who has been a postman, brewery worker, and a shop assistant at various points in his life. His name is mysteriously HCE and he is “carrying on a flirtation with a girl named Anna Livia”. According to the reviewer, Alfred Kazin, there are 17 or 18 languages present in the book, and it is, he concludes, “the sleep, in truth, not of one man, but of a drowsing humanity” putting his finger on a debate John Bishop would make widely influential. He also concludes, “As one tortures one’s way through *Finnegans Wake*, an impression grows that Joyce has lost his hold on human life” (Fargnoli 2003, 352). Harsh words, but nowhere near as harsh as Sean O’Faolain’s judgment in a letter to *Criterion*, reiterating that *Finnegans Wake* “comes from nowhere, goes nowhere, is not part of life at all” (*Ibid.*, 353) not to mention that it’s “morally deficient”. “628 pages of pedantic nonsense,” a “ghastly stodge,” concludes the *Atlantic Monthly*, which is certain that readers someplace will be found, if not in Tasmania, somewhere, for this kind of writing (a particular brand of reader, that is). “Readers [who] are not interested in what the author’s words mean to him, but in what they mean to them” (*Ibid.*, 353). There is something in each one of these dismissals that should catch our attention. What are they each reaching for?

Of course the most intriguing dismissal was to come from Rebecca West, who, when meeting the text of *Work in Progress* in January of 1930,

would make the following argument against reading Joyce. The one who would read *Finnegans Wake* is a “dithering spendthrift of time”. She argues:

[If...] Mr. James Joyce is to take ten, or twenty, or thirty years packing allusions into portmanteau words; and if his readers are to take twelve ... or twenty five, or forty years unpacking these allusions out of portmanteau words, it is impossible to avoid the suspicion that troops have been marched up a hill and then down again. A work of art planned in a medium and then executed in a second medium, which cannot be comprehended by any audience unless they can transport it by mental effort back into the first medium, is a crazy conception, and even Mr. Joyce’s most devoted followers do regard it as essential that they should unmake his words into constituents of which he made them, and should acquaint themselves with his subject matter as it appeared to him before he clothed it in these words (*Ibid.*, 327).

According to her reasoning here, Joyce should just tell them what he was thinking about, proffer to his followers his subject matter plainly, and talk to them directly about the things he’s alluding to. To a rightly humorless Rebecca West, with urgent socialist and feminist projects absorbing her time constantly, writing at the very onset of the Great Depression, this was a relevant issue indeed. Who would waste their time breaking down into elements something that had already existed in those elements before? What’s the point of that? “A cipher [always] takes longer for a stranger to read,” she says, “than for its inventor to write” (*Ibid.*, 327). West’s argument against reading Joyce, then, hinges on a particular mode of interpretation that she assumes the book calls for: the “unpacking” type of interpretation, a hermeneutics of rational explanation set ticking like a machine, systematically disassembling *Finnegans Wake* so we can see how it works, and read what it alludes to. To West, it’s just common sense that this is what portmanteau words and extensive allusion calls for. As a cipher, naturally it requires time-consuming decoding. The other early reviewers bring other assumptions to the table: 1) they seek characters and narrative, as Kazin does, 2) they seek morality and purpose like O’Faolain, and, 3) they imagine readers’ responses, speculating about the book’s reception and worth—like *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Irish Times*, etc., and they all wonder about the author’s intentions. Assumptions about interpretation have evolved considerably since 1939. Or at least they ought to have; the assumptions, however, resting at the base of the field of Joyce Studies have shifted little. While growing quantitatively at an exponential rate (Joyce Studies is second only to

Shakespeare studies in terms of the volume of literary criticism produced), its guiding assumptions remain close to what these early reviewers—each coming to the book blind—articulate.

For example, Derek Attridge, notes, just four years ago, that “we have only just begun the task of understanding *Finnegans Wake*” (2008, xx). And then he says he was surprised by the absence of any extended discussion of the book among papers gathered together in the proceedings of a graduate student conference:

Is this a sign that, although the *Wake* is no longer the awkward and, for many critics, unapproachable oddity in the canon that it was when I was a graduate student, it remains a hard nut to crack...? (*Ibid.*, xviii)

Attridge and West seem to agree here: crack the nut, break it down into its elements. Seek to “understand” the book this way. Find out how it functions by reducing it to its constituent parts, the way a mechanic takes apart an automobile or a chef names the ingredients in a soup by taste alone.

Or we could pose the task Eco posed in 1962 when he wrote, “Having determined what Joyce wished to do, we must now ask why he proposed this task” (1989). Not the question of how, not what, but *why*, Eco seeks an answer to. But broader-minded than Rebecca West, Eco imagined,

An infinity of allusions, contained in a word or resulting from the coupling of two words, escape the reader. Many of the allusions, in fact, escape the author himself, who has prepared a machinery of suggestion which, like any complex machine, is capable of operating beyond the original intentions of its builder (1989, 67).

A Cusanian vision of a “polydimensional reality,” Eco calls it almost 50 years ago, a “grandiose epistemological metaphor” (*Ibid.*, 74) or a “universe of relativity” (*Ibid.*, 76) requiring his famous ideal reader. He concludes that “the main lesson that we can draw from the Joycean experience is a lesson in poetics” (*Ibid.*, 85) indeed a lesson in the “internal coherence” of artistic expression.²

² Almost 50 years ago, Eco asserts, “*Finnegans Wake* is the first and the most notable literary example of this tendency of contemporary art. To say that such universes of artistic discourse need not be immediately translatable into concrete ‘utilization’. [...] This discourse

Finnegans Wake has always exceeded attempts to understand it reductively, though, regardless of our repeated attempts. In one of the best books written on Joyce in the last decade, *Joyces Mistakes: Problems of Intention, Irony, and Interpretation* (2003), Tim Conley notes that,

The challenge Joyce's last book poses to criticism's tendency towards allegory [...] has not been directly accepted [...] The unchecked urge to simplify, to reduce what may be more than metaphor to something less than metonymy is ridiculed by Joyce's language's own self-awareness... (2003, 18).

The language itself seems to ridicule reduction, unhinge allegorical interpretations, and leave "understanding" of the kind Attridge recommends impossible. Calling attention to the extreme difficulty posed to any set of assumptions about interpretation a reader brings to the book, Conley reminds us of Fritz Senn's cautioning, "Its compressed, fractured language can be seen [...] as an attempt to rectify the errors of assertive simplification at once" (*Ibid.*, 20). Conley reminds us that Terry Eagleton, long ago, called *Finnegans Wake* a "trial by fire for any hermeneutic theory one cares to advance" (*Ibid.*, 19). A trial by fire, I should add, that nobody passes. Think of Alfred Kazin sitting in his Brooklyn study, faced with this incredibly strange text, having to make some sense of it for his *Tribune* readers—charged with assessing its literary and artistic value and probably calling upon the expertise of his friend Hanna Arendt as he tried. He decodes what he reads as a Norwegian "carrying on a flirtation" with a girl named Anna Livia in Dublin inside the dream of a drowsing humanity. A long history of such valiant interpretive failures, surely, is part of what makes Seamus Deane *begin* his "Introduction" to the book (almost 20 years ago) with the sentence, "The first thing to say about *Finnegans Wake* is that it is, in an important sense, unreadable" (*FW* 1992, vii). Its first interpreters's first readings attest to that, partly because they failed to examine their assumptions.

In 1997, Thomas Jackson Rice noted the fact that, "those who have been boring into [the] mountain of *Finnegans Wake* from the top down, analyzing its grand themes and meaning, have yet to meet those who have tunneled into the novel from the bottom up" (Conley 2003, 113). This characterization still holds, a decade and a half later. Further, geneticists

no longer makes statements about the world; rather, it becomes a mirror-like representation of the world" (*Ibid.*, 86).

perceive that the field of Joyce Studies has become swamped with reductive postcolonial and Irish-related approaches to Joyce; and postcolonial critics think geneticists have swamped the field with author-worshipping intention-seeking forays into minutiae. This is only a broad-strokes version of a divide within the field that I think, however, also divides us interpretively.³ That is, one side seeks history, the other seeks the author; one side seeks the social determinants of textual productions, and the other seeks the individual “in charge” of what happens in the text dropping hints here and there. The greatest achievement for a geneticist is the discovery of a new source for *Finnegans Wake* (and there are dozens out there waiting to be found)—or better still a new draft of the book; the greatest achievement for the postcolonial critic is a new reading based on Irish historical-archival materials—or better still newly uncovered materials. Whether those tunneling from the top or from the bottom will meet, however, is a matter of interpretive priorities not time, as well as the models of interpretation being deployed. As John McCourt has recently demonstrated in *Joyce in Context* (2009) there are roughly 30 different contexts in which critics have researched Joyce’s work (there are many more, obviously, but his collection illustrates a kind of core set). In most, the intersection of Joyce’s works with particular claims or thematic concerns (say, gender, psychoanalysis, or medicine) allows scholars to chart new readings. Almost all of them share the same model of interpretation: show where particular themes appear in Joyce’s texts, and claim for Joyce the position of advocate for, mirror of, or elucidator of the issues stemming from them. That procedure is so often followed it has become a kind of static interpretive ritual.

Genetic criticism does not share this model, and has no such rituals. Even a cursory look at the 2010 *Genetic Joyce Studies* volume renders up articles like Robbert-Jan Henkes remarkable situating of Joyce in the summer of 1924 in a library in France, “Reading in the Rain” as his title indicates, taking notes. Henkes asks:

³ An attempt to suture this division in the field has been made by the James Joyce UCD James Joyce Research Centre and the National Library of Ireland, which has published, under the editorship of Anne Fogarty and Luca Crispi *The Dublin James Joyce Journal* since 2008 printing strictly geneticist articles alongside strictly historicist. The journal serves as an example of the best the field can become.

What is M. Joyce reading with nothing better to do? M. Joyce is reading about Brittany, its customs and traditions. He is skimming through articles and books of the great folklorist Paul Sébillot. And through the textual Hubble telescope of time, we slowly get to know what exactly he has lain his lone and tired and sick eyes upon (2010, 1).

Then he gives us exact copies of what Joyce read and noted. This is far more like biography than literary criticism. In fact, genetic criticism is a kind of literary micro-biography. It's a scientific biography of reading and drafting practices, particularly in the case of *Finnegans Wake*—and hence Finn Fordham's urgent, and justified, recent call for a new biography of Joyce, given what we've been learning in the last 15 years alone about his reading. Far from faulting genetic criticism, however, for its "hypnotic fascination with the isolated author" as Jerome McCann has called it in another context, geneticists and postcolonial/historicist critics can and often do meet on the ground of new interpretive strategies (1991, 20). Not only do I find the *Finnegans Wake* Notebooks research, for example, as essential to the field of literary studies in general, but foundational to any new interpretive strategies we in postcolonial studies may deploy. It is not only possible but necessary to consider both authorial intention and social determinants of textual production, preferably simultaneously. The so-called divide between them is false, and the patterning of analyses along one or the other interpretive trajectories weakens both.

Mark Wollaeger, in a sophisticated 2008 critique of postcolonial readings of Joyce, entitled "Joyce and Postcolonial Theory: Analytic and Tropical Modes," argues:

Theory will always be crucial to opening up new ways to make literature matter to our own moment, but the routinized redeployment of theory untempered by new archives, new forms of contextualization, and a keen sense of rhetorical complexity—a kind of tone-deaf textual processing—tend to give theory a bad name by blunting its vision and wadding its ears (2008, 186).

The routinized redeployment of thinkers from Said, to Bhabha, to Spivak in postcolonial theory, surely, has had a deadening effect on the political purchase of the field as a whole. Wollaeger has, in fact, declared dead the metaphors driving the "first and second waves" of postcolonial approaches to Joyce. In order, then, for postcolonial and Marxist approaches to Joyce to avoid the "beating a dead metaphor" trap Wollaeger has warned us away

from, interpretive strategies that incorporate the priorities of genetic criticism need to be deployed. Responding to Wollaeger's charge directly, then, I offer a handful of pointed micro-readings of moments in *Finnegans Wake* that allow experimental interpretive models to be deployed. And I conclude with a call to widen our understanding of what constitutes the text of *Finnegans Wake* to include the Notebooks themselves and the materials alluded to as part and parcel of the Joycean text we set our interpretation to work upon.

II. Marxist anticolonial micro-readings

Since Ellmann, it has been commonplace to reduce Joyce's relation to Marxism to a note he wrote for Herbert Gorman's biography, in which he listed the books he was reading at the turn of the twentieth century. Joyce writes, about himself: "He never read anything by Karl Marx except the first sentence of *Das Kapital* and he found it so absurd that he immediately returned the book to the lender" (Ellmann 1982, 142). Just who that lender may have been remains open to speculation—possibly Francis Sheehy-Skeffington. It was definitely not, however, James Connolly, who never met James Joyce and further, didn't own a copy of *Capital, Volume 1* nor had he read even its first sentence until a friend bought it for him abroad and mailed it to Dublin in February of 1903. Connolly had, by that time, been the leader of the Irish socialist movement for a full seven years and would go on to become Ireland's most important Marxist. And he had never read *Capital*. Joyce and Connolly, it seems, had at least one thing in common.

If Connolly vanishes into the presence of a significant absence in Joyce's earlier fiction—he never appears in *Ulysses*—to figure the invisible elephant in the room, i.e., the inordinate attention paid to "the question of wages" in "A Painful Case," and into "the style and political manner" of "Ivy Day," as Anne Fogarty has it, he reappears late in a Benjaminian flash, and with force, in Joyce's last work, in *Finnegans Wake* 2.2. (Gibson 2006, 104-118). Connolly appears in the notoriously difficult night lesson section in a relatively clear historical ensemble of three key Irish leaders, as part of a history lesson for the children. The passage reads:

This is brave Danny weeping his spache for the popers. This is cool Connolly wiping his hearth with brave Danny. And this, regard! how Chawleses

Skewered parparaparnelligoes between brave Danny boy and the Connolly. Upanishadem! (*FW* 303, 8-13).

This parade of national figures at first appears to be an interpretation of events, squaring off Daniel O’Connell’s mass parliamentary movement for repeal and reform against the revolutionary socialist politics of Connolly. Then Parnell weaves between them, negotiating, as he did, between the mass movement and the parliamentary imperative. But how exactly did “cool Connolly” wipe his hearth with Daniel O’Connell? In what sense can this be an interpretation of events unfolding? It isn’t.

It is, on the contrary, a meta-historiographical commentary. It is a comment specifically on the writing of Irish history, and how histories compete with one another. I’ll explain by taking the sentence, “This is cool Connolly wiping his hearth with brave Danny,” and broadly historicizing it. In his 1910 text *Labour in Irish History*, James Connolly shatters conventional glorifications of O’Connell in a brilliant sustained critique he entitles “A Chapter of Horrors: Daniel O’Connell and the Working Class.” He mops the floor with O’Connell—or wipes his hearth.

In his article, “Connolly, the Archive, and Method,” in *Interventions* 10.1, Gregory Dobbins explains Connolly’s methodology, “Rather than reiterate positions regarding Irish history in the wake of colonization according to conventional values of the archive, Connolly’s method centers upon recovering evidence misinterpreted according to those values or offering positions far from them” (2008, 64). Aside from the chapter-long critique of O’Connell, one excellent example of this is his treatment of “The Liberator” himself in what appears to be an aside to a longer discussion of Robert Emmet. Connolly notes that O’Connell was among the militia in Dublin whose job it was to search out rebels during the Emmet rebellion, and how he pointed out a rebel house and conducted a raid for arms. Then he inserts the following:

The present writer has seen in Derrynane, O’Connell’s ancestral home in County Kerry, a brass-mounted blunderbuss, which we were assured by a member of the family was procured at a house in James’s Street, Dublin, by O’Connell from the owner, a follower of Emmet, a remark that [...] gave rise to a conjecture that possibly the blunderbuss in question owed its presence in Derrynane to that memorable raid (1987, 91).

The blunderbuss is still there, and I personally have seen it and been told by the tour guide that it was presented to O'Connell by Robert Emmet as a gift—as the house's OPW guide-book also claims it was, similarly, “a blunderbuss belonging to Robert Emmett which was presented to O'Connell after Emmett's execution.” Connolly's “conjecture” here about a blunderbuss mounted on a mantelpiece over a “hearth” in Derrynane is a devastating indictment drawing upon unconventional, oral, informal sources. It is behind this historiography lesson in *Finnegans Wake*, as a story like this would not have escaped Joyce's attention in the pages of *Labour in Irish History*, a book Joyce's friend Francis Sheehy-Skeffington advocated on behalf of and worked hard to see into print. Placing Connolly's account of national hero O'Connell conducting an arms raid against rebels next to the line “This is cool Connolly wiping his hearth with brave Danny” allows us to re-read it as a mediated negotiation of Connolly's method of subaltern historiography.

In this first micro-reading of three lines of *Finnegans Wake*, my aim is to take our idea of contextualization and to expand it. Not, to the point of Patrick McGee's work on Joyce and Marx, which, though suggestive, in places amounts to simple speculation about whether Joyce had read Marx. McGee “assumes” that “Joyce would have read *The Communist Manifesto*” (2001, 220). Far from speculation and guess-work, my interpretive method here is to open out the text to the possibility of the history and cultural production happening around it, while simultaneously reading it as historiography itself. Not as a book simply residing in or saturated by history, but as a book both in and about history's production, then, is how I'm reading *Finnegans Wake*. My next reading, of a single phrase from the “Shem the Penman” section, models another interpretive procedure.

In *Finnegans Wake* 1.7 we observe what happens when its author's concern about the civil war in Ireland, well documented by Nicholas Allen in his recent *Modernism, Ireland, and Civil War* (2009) in a chapter he entitles, “Irregular Joyce,” links up with Joyce's own, *lexical* guerilla war (2009, 20-41). One of the ways that *Finnegans Wake* operates “against English,” in Seamus Deane's words, is to counter the lateral movement across grammar with a forward or inner movement into words themselves—as Eco has demonstrated. The portmanteau word, for example, jams grammar, and signifies by associating, and then the free play of associations lingers like dust after

dynamite as one tries to return to a lateral movement across meaning. I want to lift one phrase up out of the dust of the Shem the Penman section and move “forward” through its associations, just to demonstrate the kind of jamming or derailing Joyce enacts against English. The phrase is: “Move up. Mumpty! Mike room for Rumppty!” Try to follow the associations, if you can. At about the same time he was writing a well known letter to his beloved Aunt Josephine during the civil war, Joyce took a note in his first *Finnegans Wake* notebook from an English newspaper. The newspaper article he read, entitled, “Iron Rule in Ireland,” in the *Illustrated Sunday Herald* runs as follows:

“Mulcahy has now placed himself definitely on the danger line, and nothing is more significant of this than the doggerel: Move up Mick / Make room for Dick. Translated into plain English this means: We have killed Michael Collins, we are after you now, General Richard Mulcahy” (Joyce, 2001, VI.B.10: 64).

One can of course imagine Joyce’s reaction to words like, “translated into plain English,” “doggerel,” “the danger line,” and the title of the article, all of which signify the writer’s pro-British bias, particularly since it was anonymously written by somebody using the byline, “Dubliner.” Joyce jotted down the words “Move up Mick, Make room for Dick,” and then inserted them into a draft of the novel in about November or December of 1923 as, “Move up, Dumpty. Make room for Humpty!” He next changed it by severely nuancing a couple of key words; he placed a full-stop/period after the “up” deliberately recalling the “U.P. up.” insult of *Ulysess*, which adds a sectarian resonance recently explored by Luke Gibbons (2009, 18-19). He changed Dumpty to Mumpty, inserting, therefore, a word signaling the oral or mouth; then changed Humpty to Rumppty, triggering the association with “rump” (from mouth to rump).

But this was not doggerel; it was a piece of Dublin graffiti, a potent form of unofficial writing, chalked up by the dissident IRA or its socialist supporters to signal the derivativeness of the state from the colonial state that preceded it. And it was likely the work of members of Cumman na mBan, the women’s revolutionary organization supporting the dissident IRA; Mick and Dick are like Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum to the sophisticated writers of the graffiti, showing a high level of consciousness regarding the key issue at stake in postcolonial succession, that is, whether, as a liberated people, a nation chooses to derive its state forms from its oppres-

sors, or to invent new ones. So many postcolonial civil wars were fought on precisely this issue, which often also took the extremely bitter and personal form of debating about whether one is part of the comprador class, a lackey or sell-out, or one takes inventing a nation anew seriously. Joyce clearly liked the graffiti, enhancing its message, and pushing on its initial play on words (Mick and Dick) like a graffiti artist himself, tagging over tags. His first nuance is to use the British, Mother Goose nursery rhyme, Humpty Dumpty, to signal the precariousness of the new state, as if it were teetering on a wall. His second nuance is to reverse the order of the names: making Dumpty first, and Humpty second, implying the interchangeability of leaders when an oppressive state form is retained, and the lack of difference between new postcolonial state leaders and the British who preceded them. And then, to nuance it even further, and more ingeniously, he suggests that the mouth should make room for the ass, that one orifice be replaced by another, more insulting one, in a remarkable addition to or elaboration upon a highly charged original text (the graffiti). Joyce derails English grammar by inserting a piece of revolutionary graffiti marking derivativeness and the key issue of postcolonial succession; instead of moving forward across the line, one must move into the range of associations Joyce layered into this short civil war phrase and his changes to it. This is a double dose, in other words, of his being highly conscious of the civil war when writing this novel, as Allen indicates, and detonating associational depth charges under the lexicon of the English language.

Luke Gibbons makes the point that with Joyce the context isn't simply "background" but it is what makes Joyce's texts intelligible and possible, and that's what I want to insist on here. Rather than providing useful footnotes to this moment when James Connolly ghosts into Joyce's text, or offering historicization for historicization's sake (to "brush in a little local colour"), I read these two moments in the text as significant *interruptions*—the way that the earlier sentence speaks out from some of the densest pages of *Finnegans Wake* in crystal clear grammar—"This is cool Connolly wiping his hearth with Brave Danny"—without so much as a single shift, letter change, or rearrangement. They signal a negotiation of the politics of anticolonial socialism in Ireland with its analysis of state derivativeness and its highly innovative—bordering on Gramscian—historiographic methodologies.

My final set-piece interpretive maneuver in this article is very different from the two I demonstrate above. In the first, I modeled a broadening of what we conventionally understand as historical contextualization by letting

the text instruct us on historiographic practice; in the second, I modeled a reading down a chain of associations to recover a radical political content, possible only with the help of geneticist research into the compositional history of *Finnegans Wake*. Indeed, in the editing, re-drafting, and re-writing of words/lexemes lay most of the politics—not in the “finished” text itself (whatever that may be). I conclude with a final set-piece reading of communism and allegory in *Finnegans Wake*.

Allegory has been given a bad name, most famously in Derek Attridge’s “Against Allegory”. But in 1986, in perhaps the most important Marxist foray into postcolonial theory (if not the most controversial), Fredric Jameson argued that in Third World fiction “the story of the ‘the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society’” (1986, 67). Emer Nolan, one of the founding voices of postcolonial readings of Joyce, and whose “Poor Little Brittle Magic Nation: *Finnegans Wake* as a Post-colonial Novel” in *James Joyce and Nationalism* (1995) is the first reading consciously to set the novel in dialogue with postcolonial theory, claims *Finnegans Wake* for the Third World as an allegorical text. In my final reading, I want to recover the power of allegory (which both Luke Gibbons and myself have researched in Irish cultural production)⁴ partly because allegory has always been the hermeneutic outcast, the picked-on awkward little brother of big literary critical terms like representation or narrative; Benedetto Croce once called allegory “monstrous,” for example (Owens 1984, 215). But the anticolonial Irish left have long had their uses for it, as the allegorical play “Under Which Flag?” staged by James Connolly a week before the Easter Rising in 1916 clearly shows (Thompson 2008).

Nolan argues that *Finnegans Wake* is legible as a Jamesonian national allegory, particularly when “familial” matters are mapped onto national historical issues. “[...] when these familial adventures are matched up with their Irish historical counterparts, we can see that the arrival of HCE in Dublin (the ‘originary’ moment of colonization) the parricidal ambitions of his sons (anti-imperialist war) and the fraternal antagonism or succession disputes (post-colonial power-struggles) are not at all clearly dissociable” (Nolan 1995, 146). From the perspective of Irish history, it becomes hard not to see two brothers fighting over power (especially *these* two brothers—

⁴ See: Luke Gibbons. 1996. *Transformations in Irish Culture*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP. 1-10, as well as Spurgeon Thompson 2008. 9-11.

Shem and Shaun) as anything but the Irish Civil War expressed in terms of “private individual destinies.”

But of course Joyce’s text itself has something to teach us about politics and *allegoresis* (reading for allegory). In 1.5, the nightletter section, in which various “interpretations” of the Boston letter are put forward, we have, first of all the appearance of what looks like an innocent letter, “from Boston (Mass.) of the last and the first to Dear whom it proceeded to mention Maggy well & allathome’s health well only the hate turned the mild on the van Houtens and the general’s elections with a lovely face of some born gentleman with a beautiful present of wedding cakes for dear thankyou Christy and with grand funferall of poor Father Michael don’t forget...” (FW 111.8-14). This “letter” is, pages later, interpreted as allegory by an insistent voice of authority, presenting us with, in McHugh’s words, “a parody of [the] ‘Aesopian language’ of early Bolshevism” (2006, 116). The interpretation reads as:

for we also know, what we have perused from the pages of *I Was A Gemral*, that Showting up of Bulsklivism by ‘Schottenboum,’ that Father Michael about this red time of the white terror equals the old regime and Margaret is the social revolution while cakes mean the party funds and dear thank you signifies national gratitude (FW 116.5-10).

Finn Fordham has read this as “an allegorical reading of the letter as encoding a ‘social revolution,’ expanding the trivial contents of the letter into something substantial and historically significant” (2010, 140). Rather than being a parody of Bolshevik allegorical writing as McHugh sees it, it is, on the contrary, a parody of the anti-communist trying to decode communist code. Whether it is read this way or not, however, it raises the question of how we interpret *Finnegans Wake* politically, since the “letter” in this section of the book so often is referring to the book itself. It is this exact passage, in fact, that, in one of the first detailed interpretations of the book ever published, Communist critic Margaret Schlauch, in her pioneering 1939 article, “The Language of James Joyce,” in *Science and Society: A Marxian Quarterly*, would single out as Joyce instructing his readers how to view allegory. Schlauch hints at the affinity between *Finnegans Wake* and communist allegorical code when she says, “An obscured language with doubled meanings is nothing new, continues Joyce; it has been used by plotting revolutionaries” and then she quotes the passage above (Schlauch 1939, 494).

Lenin called it, in *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1918) “that accursed Aesopian language” that he was obliged to use. According to the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, it was “the technique worked out in the Russian press... [in] the early 20th century—that is, a system of “deceptive means,” or of encoding (and decoding) freely conceived ideas—as a reaction against the ban that forbade mention of certain ideas, subjects, events, and persons” (Grigor’ev 1975, 456). It is a system, also, that Antonio Gramsci would come to know and use, throughout his *Prison Notebooks*. It is also a system of communication that struck fear into the hearts of many a reactionary, anti-communist, as expressed in, for example, the American McCarthy Era’s near-paranoid *The Techniques of Communism* (1954) by Lois Francis Budenz: “without a mastery of this communist phraseology, it is most difficult to analyze communist actions in the nation or community” (1954, 41). Discussing Aesopian language, Budenz notes that both Lenin and Stalin recommended it; and he quotes a Russian criticism of Italian communists from 1934 that claims “they have not mastered the secret of using that language of Aesop, that, without diminishing its revolutionary class contact, may stir, and capture the imagination of the workers” (*Ibid.*, 44). Allegory was something everyone on the left should be able to use well.

I read the passage above both, with Schlauch, as a signal to the allegorical character of *Finnegans Wake* itself and, with Fordham, as a mockery of anti-communists struggling to read a text written in a code they don’t understand, and to which means they forced a text through their original censorship; when Fordham sees Wyndham Lewis’s persona shadowing in behind the mocked, authoritative narrator, I concur; and further I see in Joyce’s 1937 inserted references to G.B. Shaw, a reference to that other Shaw Joyce knew well, Harriet *Shaw* Weaver, who that year joined the Communist Party of Great Britain as “Comrade Josephine” as her biographers have uncovered, and whom Joyce mocked for it (Lidderdale 1970, 370-373).

Speaking in code is one thing; reading code is another. The most recent full-length study of allegory has observed that *allegoresis* actually came first, prompting Medieval authors and artists to write or paint in allegory (Tambling 2010, 166). As Jeremy Tambling has put it, “Allegorical interpretation, while perhaps revealing a truth that allegory seems to seek, can never reach it; it can only generate further allegorical writing” (*Ibid.*, 167). While, as Tim Conley notes—as I quoted above—the tendency to reduce or simplify seems to come with allegory-seeking, I would argue that, and

perhaps especially with political allegory—reduction or simplification is not predominantly a feature of its manifestations. In fact, allegorical interpretation is a mode of reading politically that, as it does for Emer Nolan and a number of others, allows critics of the left both to multiply and energize approaches to Joyce, as well as to shore up a kind of interpretive solidarity, to be partisan in a way that does not reduce the complexity or sheer variety of the texts that comprise *Finnegans Wake* but rather generates that kind of radical innocence, and interpretive freedom we felt before the ascendancy of genetic criticism. In conclusion, I'll gesture toward a way of deploying allegorical interpretation that exemplifies this, that is, reading the *Finnegans Wake* Notebooks as composing part of the text itself.

We are accustomed to reading Benjamin's notes in fragments; we read Gramsci's notebooks in fragments; and postcolonial theory as a discipline has been enormously enriched by the process. I believe a comparable manner of reading to that which we deploy with Gramsci and Benjamin can be deployed with the Buffalo Notebooks, so much of which is never incorporated into the "finished work." Seamus Deane has recently described it as follows: "[T]he text of *Finnegans Wake* was, in one sense of the word, composed of those notebook materials and yet, in another sense of the word, created out of them. This is a fascinating example of composing and composition, of one becoming the other and yet both remaining distinct" (Deane 2010). It is therefore not enough to simply track Joyce's reading practices and leave it at that, as, for example, Robbert-Jan Henkes does in his article on notebook B.14. We should, rather, read Joyce's reading practices—now that we can in fact read "over his shoulder" in such enormous detail—and read them allegorically. To begin, take the enormous number of notes he jotted down in 1923-1924 from Irish newspapers, mainly about court cases and murder trials, jotting down witness testimony; how, as allegorical readers do we understand an Irish writer in the wake of a bitter, personal Irish Civil War that caused the deaths of thousands, jotting down countless notes from Irish court cases; as merely a search for quaint "Irish turns of phrase" to add "local colour" to *Finnegans Wake*? There is a politics to Joyce's reading practices that has yet to be read out loud. Reading Joyce's notebooks as valuable documents in themselves, as *composing* the text, as *texts-of-the-text*, or *back-texts* fully absorbed into a "final" text (as labour is absorbed into the value of a commodity), and deploying allegorical interpretation as a strategy to generate vital new interpretive methods, I think, is one of the next steps we need to make in the field.

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