Plurality in *Finnegans Wake*

Joyce with Derrida and Lacan

Gabriel Renggli

PhD

University of York

English

September 2015

Abstract

The challenge of James Joyce's final work, *Finnegans Wake*, is an ethical one, and one whose implications extend far beyond the boundaries of that particular book. Joyce's dismantling of language is too often dismissed as either a meaningless experiment or else a superficial attribute, beneath which we can postulate a truer writing that is perfectly straightforward.

I argue that taking seriously the strangeness of *Finnegans Wake* leads to an interaction with alterity. Confronting us with a writing that we can only assimilate insofar as we do violence to its illegibility, Joyce drives a wedge between knowledge and mastery. Ultimately, the *Wake* requires us to develop modes of interpretation that acknowledge their own status as necessarily incomplete, and that resemble what post-structuralist ethics conceptualises as the questioning of the self in an encounter with the other.

This is an exemplification – not a negation – of the workings of knowledge production in virtually all linguistic codes. To examine the hermeneutic critique that Joyce effectively offers, I draw on Jacques Derrida's analyses of signification and of hospitality, as well as on Jacques Lacan's theorising of the subject's implication in a symbolic system whose descriptive powers are constitutively insufficient.

The chapters deal, in turn, with Joyce's depiction of the imaginary nature of essential meaning (chapter one), the impossibility of an author completely controlling the writing process or of a reader isolating the traces of what authorial control there is (chapter two), the splitting of the authorial gesture into a plurality of meanings, and Joyce's implementation of this plurality as a value in itself (chapter three), and the need, in any exploration of such plurality, for hospitality towards other positions (chapter four). I conclude that the language of *Finnegans Wake* represents Joyce's criticism of an ideal of univocal expression, putting to work the very mechanisms that render transparency impossible so as to achieve a poetics and an ethics of openness towards the undecidable.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

A shorter version of chapter three of this thesis, "Postlapsarian Language and Pentecostal Writing," was published as: Renggli, Gabriel. "Suspended Pluralities: Postlapsarian Language and Pentecostal Writing in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*." *Modernism/modernity* 21.4 (November 2014): 997-1015. Print.

Note on Cited Texts

The edition of *Finnegans Wake* used is that published by Oxford University Press in 2012, edited by Robbert-Jan Henkes, Erik Bindervoet, and Finn Fordham. Like the majority of editions of the *Wake*, it follows the practice of reproducing the first edition, including its pagination and lineation. References are given by page and line numbers. References to *Ulysses* are given by chapter and line numbers and are to Hans Walter Gabler's edition of the text. I use the MLA referencing system for any other works.

I cite texts by Jacques Derrida and by Jacques Lacan in English translation. At the time of this thesis's submission, no English translation has been published of Lacan's 23rd seminar, *Le Sinthome*. I therefore cite it in the French original and provide my own translations in footnotes. Since several different versions of Lacan's collection *Écrits* are available, I include in each reference the title of the cited paper.

Introduction

Theory and responsibility

This thesis argues that James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* develops an artistic vision and a philosophical position that have a great deal to say about the processes of writing and reading. To make this case is not simply to repeat the critical commonplace that the *Wake* is a handbook to its own interpretation. Rather, I will show that Joyce's final work engages in inquiries of a hermeneutic kind, asking of language a number of questions whose significance is in no way limited to Joyce's own writing.

In order to examine this claim, I will draw on the work of philosopher Jacques Derrida as well as on that of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In demonstrating how both Derrida's and Lacan's examinations of language can be brought to resonate with Joyce's position, I will therefore argue two additional points in support of my central one. I will suggest that, contrary to the customary reading that opposes Lacan and Derrida, their work is compatible: that on the subject of signification – an issue central to both authors – their analyses overlap to a considerable extent. Secondly, I will argue that a return to these two early exponents of theory (I use the term in an unspecific sense, for reasons I will presently discuss) is not an anachronistic strategy, but an approach well suited to throwing into relief Joyce's ideas about reading and writing – and their undiminished relevance today. Joyce is concerned with the fact that our languages are hardly perfect tools: that, time and again, we are confronted with gaps in our expressive capacities. This theme parallels a common concern of Derrida's and Lacan's, who both accentuate the extent to which language is shaped, even constituted, by its own limitations, and who investigate the far-reaching consequences of such a constitution.

Bringing this kind of theory to *Finnegans Wake* is not in itself a new procedure. Key texts relating Joyce to Derrida or to Lacan include Alan Roughley's *Reading Derrida Reading Joyce* (1999), Christine van Boheemen-Saaf's *Joyce,*

Derrida, Lacan, and the Trauma of History (1999), Luke Thurston's *James Joyce and the Problem of Psychoanalysis* (2004), Peter Mahon's *Imagining Joyce and Derrida* (2007), Sheldon Brivic's *Joyce Through Lacan and Žižek* (2008), as well as the 2013 essays collection *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, edited by Andrew Mitchell and Sam Slote. As I draw on some of these texts over the course of this thesis, it will become apparent that critical enterprises that trace theory's debts to Joyce, provide theoretical models for reading Joyce's work, or use Joyce's work to exemplify theoretical discussions of other subjects can all draw on significant affinities between theory and Joyce's writing, particularly *Finnegans Wake*. But it will also emerge that it is possible to go beyond what these studies already achieve, by shifting emphasis away from the *Wake* as an object-text on which or with which theories of interpretation can be seen to work, and towards a theoretically informed articulation of the considerable scope and the systematic nature of the *Wake*'s own hermeneutics.

In discussing the correspondences between Derrida's analysis of the signifier, Lacan's understanding of the symbolic, and Joyce's linguistic experimentation, I will insist on the implications that each of these explorations has for virtually any activity of reading or writing. In particular, I will emphasise the broadness of the *Wake*'s horizon, not only as far as content is concerned (as commentary on the *Wake* has long been over-enthusiastic in its insistence on the book's universal range) but particularly in relation to form, typically seen as the attribute regarding which *Finnegans Wake* more or less stands alone. I want to propose that the *Wake* is not only a text about which certain things can be known, but also a text that inflects what it means to know, and that it does so precisely by way of its own impenetrability. Joyce confronts us with radical cases of opacity, but like Lacan and Derrida, he maintains that the occurrence of such opacity is a constitutive feature of signifying systems in general. Thus, on the one hand, I hope to make a contribution to *Finnegans Wake* criticism, where certain aspects of the *Wake*'s questioning of language have gone insufficiently examined. On the other hand, these aspects will lead me to suggestions pertaining to a theoretical analysis of signification – as opposed to theoretical analysis of *Finnegans Wake* – since they show Joyce himself to be examining the problem of the inexpressible in general.

And I want to suggest that if the *Wake* poses the question of how we are to come to terms with what remains indecipherable and unassimilable in language, the key aspect of this question is its *ethical* demand.

In outlining my approach, the first issue I want to address in the following is therefore that of literary theory's relationship to ethics. In the next subsection, "Responding to the text," I will explain how this relation informs my usage of Derrida's work. Then, I will address Joyce's implementation of language's imperfection in "Joyce's ethics of form," where I also outline which parts of the *Wake* this thesis focuses on. In the final subsection, "Lacan and language's beleaguered subject," I outline how my reading of the *Wake*'s hermeneutics will also draw on Lacan's thought in order to address a dimension of psychological urgency. In the present subsection, I first of all want to ask in what ways it is possible for theory to be ethical, if ethical import requires a minimum of pragmatic applicability that sits uneasily with what is often seen as theory's speculative, unpractical nature.

The response I want to develop is that this view of literary theory is a misapprehension. Such an argument, of course, is far from new. For instance, 2014 saw the publication of the third, expanded edition of Simon Critchley's *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, which may indicate two things. First, that the question of how a theoretical endeavour such as deconstruction relates to ethics is still pertinent, enough so to merit a second reissuing of a book chiefly dedicated to the topic. And secondly, that this question is still being *debated*. Critchley's book was originally published in 1992 and was at the time one of the first texts to extensively engage with the theme (together with J. Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading*, to which I will return in this introduction). If critical debates had since either largely subsumed or largely displaced Critchley's ideas, then his argument that deconstruction revolves around the task of responsible reading would arguably no longer constitute a current intervention. The point, then, bears repeating – if only because doing so will situate my own approach within the on-going debate. In the following, I sketch an overview of theory that is preliminary to the presentation of my own interpretative project, but that may help to contextualise this presentation.

If some who have taken issue with theoretical interventions would emphasise theory's hermetic quality, we need to recall that the first thing argued by this allegedly hermetic critique of discourse is that there is no such thing as pure discourse. Any signifying gesture unfailingly positions us in a history of interpretative frameworks. Theory furthermore maintains that these frameworks are never simply given; they are the product of decisions and of conventions, of the whole complex machinery through which we acquire knowledge. Already Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, one of the seminal works in establishing what we now encounter under the name of theory, does not offer its critique of logocentrism in a philosophical vacuum, but painstakingly engages with a metaphysics of presence that reaches back to Plato. This is not to say that theory holds that nothing exists outside of discourse. It holds that there is an irreducible complexity to our conceptualising of, engaging with, and communicating about things. This complexity is what any metaphysics of presence dissimulates when it maintains that relating to the factuality of the world is or should be straightforward. From the beginning and from its beginnings, theory is thus ideally situated to serve in a rethinking of ethical discourse itself. For theory has the potential to intervene in our discourses in such a way as to achieve significant re-evaluations of our thinking, of our lives, and of the world around us. Most importantly, perhaps, theory enables us to better understand the very link between discourse and world, that is to say: the palpable impact on our experiences made by our ways of thinking about these experiences, of speaking about them, and of writing about them.

It is worth pointing out here that Derrida's "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (*Of Grammatology* 158) is at best rendered confusingly in the English translation: "*There is nothing outside of the text*" (158). Derrida is not proposing to idolise whatever text one happens to be reading, and to declare the rest of the world inexistent. He is arguing almost the exact opposite: a meaning that would be better expressed by saying "there is nothing that escapes being text." Any given text comes out of a historical, political, social, personal world that provides the context of its writing. What gets in the way of directly and without uncertainty accessing such a world is not that it does not exist, but precisely that the world

comes to us only in the form of readings filtered through discourse. Derrida emphasises that the world reveals itself, to an observer, not in any unchanging aspect but only ever as this observer can live it and conceptualise it in their here and now, on the basis of their perception and of their stored-up knowledge and experience up to that point. Therefore, not only is Derrida saying – and most emphatically so – that our writing and our reading are contextualised, that texts are never cut off from the world; there is in a crucial sense nothing but context, nothing but engaging with the world in what is always a particular time and space.

It is to this particularity that Derrida is referring when he says that as far as perception and sense-making are concerned, the condition of *being text* can be seen to include the world, leaving nothing outside of it ("*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*"). Of his example, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Derrida explains on the very next page that "in what one calls the real life of these existences 'of flesh and bone,' beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; […] the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace" (159) – that is, from the differential structure of signification, as I will elaborate in chapter one. This interaction between world and discourse means that "world" cannot simply be delineated as a solid basis of existence, but is formed, by multilateral activities, into a polyvalence of worlds, whereas "discourse" cannot be limited to a representation of these worlds, because it is itself a formative activity, impacting what it codifies (I will return to this thought when I argue that a formal attribute of a text can at the same time constitute an ethical attribute).

In the study of literature, theory should therefore not be taken to indicate an essentially counterproductive debt to abstract thinking – be it in the shape of a disavowed preference of philosophy over literature, or in the shape of a preference of inconsequential philosophical ideas over philosophy's applicable concepts. On the contrary, one of the things literary theory argues on the basis of the world-discourse interaction is that literature constitutes an *activity in the world*, not a secluded realm of its own. If the "theory" part of "literary theory" means anything at all, it means this: to formalise textual effects in order to make them more concrete and appreciable, and in order to thus address the

practicalities and urgencies we encounter through these effects. In what is no doubt already an overly schematic manner, one could therefore say that theory in literary criticism does not manifest itself as a method – a set of ready-made tools that can be applied to texts – but as a point of view regarding what is at stake in reading.

Even a list of only the most frequently found applications of theory in current literary criticism demonstrates that far from being abstract in any negative sense, theory is practical (and often manifestly political). Approaches that draw on theory include feminist criticism, postcolonial criticism, queer theory, Marxist criticism, disability studies, and ecocriticism, among others. If there is something all of these modes of reading have in common, it is that they use theoretical analysis in order to bring specific aspects of political and social life to bear on literature, and to bring literature to bear on them. In other words, literary theory frequently strives (though certainly not as the only form of criticism to do so) to bring criticism into dialogue with epistemes outside of literature. This is significant, since it constitutes an illuminating contrast to the idea that theory, fond of paradoxes, counterfactuals, and opaque jargon, is chiefly a solipsistic activity. However, it is also at this point that a by now well-worn discussion sets in: the debate on whether theory actually contributes to these fields, or whether its meditations are so self-contained, abstract, or plain *difficult*, as to render its endeavours into these topics ineffective.

Responses to this question have produced essays and entire volumes; I will give only one example that can do no more than indicate the direction in which I would argue (and I will briefly revisit the question in the conclusion). As recent debates on theory and textual difficulty have taken the writings of Judith Butler as one of their focal points (see for instance Martha Nussbaum's "The Professor of Parody" and the essay collection *Just Being Difficult?*, edited by Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb), I will share my own anecdote relating to her work. If this example takes me away from the modes of theoretical enquiry I employ in this study (as Butler is not among the theorists I chiefly draw on) as well as from my subject matter, I hope that it can nevertheless serve to underline how, in arguing that our

speaking about the world can significantly impact our experience of the world, I am not simply echoing an unexamined axiom.

On 15 November 2014, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Fribourg/Freiburg, Switzerland, conferred an honorary doctorate upon Butler. The decision was surrounded by some controversy. Opposition against honouring Butler originated largely with a number of Catholic organisations outside the university itself as well as with parts of the university's Faculty of Theology. Significantly, the arguments against the doctorate *honoris causa* were centred less on an evaluation of Butler's work in particular than on an assessment of the field within which that work was perceived to be situated: the field of gender studies. For instance, a member of the academic staff is cited by the Fribourg/Freiburg newspaper *La Liberté* as having stated that he "ne souscrit ni au 'gender' ni à la remise de ce doctorat" (qtd. in Zoellig), which I would translate as: "subscribes neither to 'gender [studies]' nor to the conferral of this doctorate."

I do not wish to suggest that the originator of this comment necessarily failed to grasp Butler's work; nor do I wish to find fault with the form of protest that was enacted on the evening of 14 November, in the context of Butler's plenary address (which I attended). Butler's subject was non-violent resistance, and the people who held a vigil outside the lecture theatre effectively implemented a version of this strategy in defence of their own views. What I want to argue is that there is a tension between these two reactions. The groups that regarded Butler's presence in Freiburg/Fribourg with scepticism, even as they dismissed her outlooks as unscientific and untenable, were also triggered into an emphatic resistance. There was thus a momentary surfacing of fault-lines, as two largely incompatible sets of arguments were mobilised in the name of one and the same cause. On the one hand, it was ventured that gender theory is "just a theory," and a rather preposterous one at that: one that defies common sense and biological fact and whose uselessness as a scientific approach is therefore self-explanatory (one does not subscribe to it, does not credit it as a serious discipline). On the other hand, it was given to understand that gender theory is something of a menace, opposing itself to a formative discourse – that of traditional gender roles and relations between genders – but offering arguments apparently

intriguing enough to nevertheless pose a threat to that discourse and (unless duly protested) potentially dislodge age-old value systems.

The cause that fused together these largely contradictory statements can in part be subsumed under the injunction that the *subversive* nature of theory should be met with some form of control, with reliable formulations of normativity and stability. In putting things this way, I am not suggesting that subversive approaches intrinsically occupy a moral high ground. I simply want to offer the image of the protesters standing outside that lecture hall – as well as the image of the people inside attending Butler's lecture in what I would call a charged atmosphere – as a counter-example to the view that theory's worrying of discursive standards is an altogether inconsequential activity, safely ignored by those whose allegiance is to the world as we actually experience it. And I want to suggest that the energies that theory can muster against such a classification consist largely in its subversive, transformative qualities. As one of the members of the awarding committee, François Gauthier, puts it in an article about the event: with Butler, "la pensée émane de la vie dont elle doit, par méthode, se distancier - mais seulement pour y retourner" (§ 5).[1]

This is not to say that theory can be equated with one monolithic instance of resistance – even though this is more or less what is implied by its name, particularly if it is spelled as "Theory." The diversity of critical approaches listed above goes to show that theoretical criticism reserves the right to ask a great number of different questions and to employ a heterogeneous and indeed constantly evolving set of methodologies. Martin McQuillan remarks on a similar issue when he writes that "'Theory' is a name that traps by an aberrant nomial [sic] effect the *transformative critique*" (xix, my emphasis) of which theory's work consists. Theory seeks to transform both its subject matter and itself, for any application of theory is in part an attempt at re-inventing the coordinates of a specific question: an attempt at not taking for granted – not accepting as self-evident or natural – epistemological frameworks that are anything but.

---

[1] "the thinking derives from life, from which it must distance itself through methodology – but only in order to return to it" (my translation)

It is important, then, not to be too quick to equate theory with one simple agenda or procedure. Theory "as such" does not exist, except as an umbrella term that can be handy as long as it remains flexible and as long as we remember that it covers over important debate internal to what the term purports to designate as one homogeneous field. In fact, the difficulties we encounter in describing theory can be seen as partaking in something like theory's essence – although "essence" is of course exactly the wrong word. Theory, one could say, is programmatically difficult to pin down, and it is partly for this reason that it is programmatically controversial. As Paul de Man writes: "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself this resistance" (19). Theory is the resistance to its own simplification, to its own solidification, to the belief that anything – including theory – can be understood once and for all, in an act of apprehension that escapes its own contexts and temporality. As we will see, a crucial part of the theoretical project is to demonstrate the dependence (however minimal) of any purportedly objective signification on specific frameworks pertaining to its interpretation. The task of defining theory, too, is therefore one that continually renews itself as contexts and applications change. A central concern of all theoretical inquiry, and one that will be important to my argument in this thesis, is therefore the need to reinvent your interpretative approach *in response* to each individual interpretive task (I will return to this notion in the following subsection).

Yet for all this, theory does not indefinitely defer, nor dissolve in equivocality, the need for explicit stances. There is no conflict between, on the one hand, commitment to a precisely defined position and, on the other hand, theory's questioning of seemingly self-evident truths, its usage of defamiliarising techniques, or its refusal to simulate stability in lieu of the complexity of the problems it addresses. In fact, the latter procedures can serve as means for attaining the goal of precision. When Derrida claims the global applicability of the values of democracy beyond any cultural differences (in "Autoimmunity") or when Butler urges the need to review the legal basis of indefinite detention (in *Precarious Life*), the fact that they base their arguments on theoretical considerations (the conditions of decision-making and the possibility of the future

in Derrida, the categories of sovereignty and governmentality in Butler) does not take away from the concreteness and seriousness of their demands; it lends its rigour to their formulation of these demands.

Nor do we have to turn to recent theoretical work (cultural studies, broadly speaking) to witness a deeply ingrained concern with social organisation, justice, and emancipation. To realise this, one merely has to do a roll call of early theorists: Louis Althusser begins a Marxist analysis of culture in the 1960s, Luce Irigaray publishes *Speculum of the Other Woman* in 1974, Michel Foucault publishes *Discipline and Punish* in 1975, and so on. Derrida, I would argue, is no exception from this list. The positing of a political turn in his work misrepresents the fact that his philosophy is politically pertinent from its early stages on, because in this early work, Derrida critiques dominant, phallogocentric modes of thought whose ideologically inflected nature is precisely one of his main themes. Nicholas Royle, in his book *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*, advocates that we need "to get beyond the notion that his writing or his thinking, his language, if you will, takes on an increasingly political character, starting perhaps with 'The Force of Law' in 1989 or *Spectres of Marx* in 1993. It's political all the way down the line" (106).

I have already pointed to the important role played by *Of Grammatology*. In *To Follow*, Peggy Kamuf recounts, with regard to this text, which examines forms of violence that interlink writing, heritage, and authority, how, on its original publication, it "gave us the means to re-establish links between current politics [student demonstrations against the Vietnam war] and the metaphysics of presence that he showed to have been long at work in the philosophical tradition" (43). Looking back, and drawing on the experience related by critics like Kamuf, we should not read works like *Specters of Marx* or "Force of Law" as deviations from, or corrections of, a deconstructive project originally undertaken in a more self-contained manner. Arguing that no hermeneutical activity and no linguistic practice is truly self-contained, Derrida's work in the 1960s and 70s already engages in the critical analysis of frameworks that merely pose as unpolitical and self-evident. And it counters this pose with a thinking of the situated-ness and particularity of frameworks – or as Derrida puts it in *Rogues*: "the thinking of différance [was] always a thinking *of* the political" (39).

Theory questions the grounds on which we construct certitude. It does not abandon the factuality of our inhabiting the world; it works on the question of how what is *presented* as factual is often the result of discursive strategies – an investigative attitude frequently misread by critiques that urge a return to the factual world as accessed through (what they call) objective or ideologically neutral modes of thought. Theory, moreover, is not a cynical, destructive, or nihilistic exercise. It opens up spaces and develops vocabularies for the articulation of new and alternative visions of inhabiting the world. In this view, the relation between theory and ethics is perhaps best summed up by Adam Newton's comment in *Narrative Ethics*. Newton writes that "ethics apparently imposes a responsibility to the world and the word, whereas deconstruction – especially the brand perfected by Paul de Man – seems to abjure such responsibility. But that easy opposition trivializes the tension in each term." (37). Newton suggests that what deconstruction does is in fact one version of the ethical task of stopping and asking questions before acting: a mode of inquiry that avoids pre-emptive certitude. "Ethical answerability here is not a flattened prescription for action; it is not a moral recipe book. Nor is deconstruction an indifference to answerability; it is at its best a scrupulous hesitation, an extreme care occasioned by the treachery of words and the danger of easy answers." (37). My thesis is concerned with such a mode of scrupulous hesitation.

Responding to the text

I provide this brief review of theory in general and of Derrida's contribution in particular in order to indicate two things. First, that theory is interested in questioning the normative and the seemingly self-evident because such questioning can reveal a number of productive fault-lines. Secondly, that in doing so, theory is not opposed to practicality. What I want to demonstrate now is that this includes the practice of engaging with texts: that in problematizing the lure of easy answers, theoretical reading by no means aims for the violent dissolution of the text.

One question that I touch on above but have not yet explicitly addressed is whether theoretical reading is still a form of literary criticism, or whether it uses the (quite literal) pretext of discussing literature in order to develop ideas that have little to do with the texts it pertains to study (although these ideas may be of importance to other fields, such as politics). Can a theoretical reading of a literary work constitute a response to this work, or is its claim to be interpreting literature disingenuous? The answer I would give is that, naturally, it depends on the manner in which theory is employed in an individual piece of criticism. As in any other mode of interpretation, there is a risk of bringing preconceptions to the table and of tweaking the data so as to match the model. But this is not theory's intrinsic fate. It certainly is not its aim.

Subjecting the apparently self-evident to careful examination is not synonymous with a claim for the boundless mutability of meaning. Rather, as Derek Attridge writes in *Reading and Responsibility*, with regard to deconstructive reading: "The spectre of deconstruction is present – or perhaps somewhere between present and absent – whenever a wariness is expressed about too-simple appeals to categories such as truth, meaning and, indeed, presence" (37). Such undue simplicity, I propose, includes not only incautious assertions of objectivity, but also unbridled invention. To altogether abandon the question of what is present in a text is yet another *unwary* conceptualisation of presence and meaning. Indeed, nothing could be further off track than the reprimand that Derrida's deconstructive project argues the irrelevance of authorial intention, and that literary theorists use this thought to make claims about texts that invert or ignore these texts' original meanings.

If, as we will see, Derrida's work on language insists on how the lack of univocality is what makes expression possible in the first place, and how the logic of marginalisation structures the very centres of communication, it is always because the aberration, the misadventure, the risk, the effect we would *like* to be a mere secondary addition, can never be clearly identified or neatly separated from what we would prefer to be the purity of a primal, original, and central meaning. Deconstruction, then, does not teach a toolkit for reading texts against the grain. It teaches that the grain behaves in a most curious manner – a manner

that effectively frustrates the search for any such simple direction as "with" or "against."

In Derrida's writings, this concern is at times obscured by a tendency to speak of possibilities when what is being analysed are irreducible risks. The possibility of misunderstanding a signifier, for instance, should not be (but often is) taken to indicate a choice, a decision to be made between the option of taking a speaker or writer at their word and the option of twisting their signifying gesture into creative new meanings. This type of reduction to once again clear-cut terms fails to take into account Derrida's critique of such concepts as centre, self-identity, or self-evidence. Based on his examinations of these notions, which I will outline in the following chapters, Derrida argues that an interpretative shift is *always* possible, that its possibility consists in its *imperceptibility*, that the possibility of its occurring or its having occurred can thus never be excluded, that although this risk can be handled with caution and insight, it can never be entirely evaded, and that, ultimately, we can never reach a point where we can assert with total accuracy that the meaning we have now identified is indeed the intended one.

In thus analysing the possibility of misunderstanding as the effective inescapability of uncertainty, Derrida does not attest the reader a choice or an interpretative free pass. On the contrary, he insists on the irreducible difficulty of reading as well as on the virtually unlimited need for rigour that this difficulty carries with it. For this difficulty means that an interpretation's apparent centrality can never completely assure us of the marginality of alternatives. Rather, the appearance of centrality is contingent on the conditions of its observation to an extent that we can and must problematize, but that is not *exhaustively* calculable. To respond to this dilemma by gesturing towards the supposedly fail-safe organisation of an interpretative procedure – the careful contextualisation that keeps in check all bias – is to remain blind to the fact that whereas uncertainty can be productively engaged with, there is a minimal degree of it that remains insurmountable and that troubles our insight, indefinitely and never in the mode of exhaustively defined alternatives.

In formalising these issues, deconstruction therefore raises the question of the reader's *responsibility*. As Derrida puts it in the "Afterword" to *Limited Inc*, the irreducibility of uncertainty

> calls for decision in the order of ethical-political responsibility. It is even its necessary condition. A decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes. (116)

Deconstruction in this sense is an examination of the conditions under which responsible reading is possible. As Geoffrey Harpham comments, Derrida is in fact "trying to determine the conditions under which a reading [becomes] truly responsible by identifying a phase of undecidability through which reading must pass, a phase in which conclusions that [have] been taken for granted become subject to disinterested questioning" (23). However, I disagree with Harpham in that I would maintain that this questioning is not (and cannot be) disinterested; it is more accurately described as being engaged in an interested reflection on interests.

The argument put forward by Derrida is that since no act of reading is programmable without remainder, *any* act of reading is the result of decisions and of ideological frameworks – including deconstructive readings, but also including any other interpretative procedure. By extension, the ethical dimension of reading consists in acknowledging the responsibility entailed by such decisions, and in formulating one's reading strategies in reaction to this responsibility. As Critchley writes in *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, "[t]he ethical moment that motivates deconstruction is this Yes-saying to the unnameable, a moment of unconditional affirmation that is addressed to an alterity that can neither be excluded from nor included within logocentric conceptuality" (41). On this basis, Critchley argues that an ethical approach is not an extrapolation that is derived from deconstruction like "a superstructure from an infrastructure" (2). Deconstruction's procedures are intrinsically ethical where they examine the irreducible alterity that makes assertions of certainty dangerous.

As I will argue in more detail in chapter two, there is, in reading, a complex interaction taking place between the reader and the other. The intervention that deconstruction makes in this interaction is not that of bestowing on the reader unlimited power over the other as author; on the contrary, deconstruction attempts to counteract the preconceptions through which a reader would reproduce only the discourses they already inhabit. The productive force of alterity that opposes itself to such immobility is what in *The Ethics of Reading*, Miller describes as "a necessary ethical moment in that act of reading as such, a moment neither cognitive, nor political, nor social, nor interpersonal, but properly and independently ethical" (1). This ethical moment is first of all a sense of being compelled. Miller describes it as an imperative that places certain constraints on the reader; it requires a reaction: not one in the (unethical) mode of total freedom, but one that "is a response to something, responsible to it, responsive to it, respectful of it" (4). The object of this responsibility is not a fixed attribute of the text; it is established as part of the relation between the text and the specific coordinates of a reading. Yet this does not mean that the constraints that make reading an ethical act are imposed on it in a prescriptive manner that would make of reading a means to an end. In order for reading to come into being as an ethical process, Miller specifies, "[t]he flow of power must not be all in one direction. There must be an influx of performative power from the linguistic transactions involved in the act of reading into the realms of knowledge, politics, and history" (5). Thus, reading emerges as an interaction with the text in which the reader acts upon the text in the attempt to do justice to it whilst also letting the text act upon herself or himself so as not to reduce it to a mere instrument.

It is important that Miller develops this account of ethical reading without taking recourse to a concept of unchanging meaning. The responsibility of the reader is, for Miller, inscribed in a process of interpretation that is never separable from "the real situation of a man or woman reading a book, teaching a class, writing a critical essay" (4). The act of reading he describes is therefore not an attempt at reducing interpretation to a unilateral transmission of information (an attempt that can only stop any interpretative effort in its tracks). Rather, reading "faces in two directions" (4); what is ethical about it is that it simultaneously

reflects on the text and on the task of interpretation. On the one hand, reading enters into a specific situation within which the text can become the object of a certain responsibility. On the other hand, reading draws on the text to, as it were, *interrupt* this situation, to question and potentially change the frameworks that define it, including what Miller calls the realms of knowledge, politics, and history. Yet Miller makes it clear that by ethics he means this productive transaction of influxes, *not* an attitude that this transaction may depend on or produce. "No doubt the political and the ethical are always intimately intertwined, but an ethical act that is fully determined by political considerations or responsibilities is no longer ethical" (4). Perhaps essentialising matters, I would suggest that the question of politics is chiefly concerned with our conduct as part of a socius, with the alliances we form with others, the narratives into which we integrate ourselves, and so on. The question of ethics – interactive but less concretely interpersonal – is how we respond to the other (for instance to her or his writing) through a readiness to *change ourselves* (though I agree with Miller that these two questions are not separable).

In reading, the ethical dimension that exists apart from the political one lies in our responsibility as readers towards the alterity of the text. In *The Singularity of Literature*, Attridge writes about the transformative quality of alterity: "If I succeed in responding adequately to the otherness and singularity of the other, it is the other *in its relating to me* – always in a specific time and place – to which I am responding, in creatively changing myself and perhaps a little of the world as well" (33). The otherness of a text can lead us to reflect on, and potentially re-invent, the very frameworks within which we read – and this is the only *adequate* response to a text insofar as it manifests itself as other than these frameworks. "There is thus an ethical dimension to any act of literary signification, and there is also a sense in which the formally innovative work, the one that most estranges itself from the reader, makes the most sharply challenging (which is not to say the most profound) ethical demand" (130-1). Literary capriciousness need not equal profundity, but there is a sense in which a formal challenge entails a heightened demand at the ethical level.

It is the question of this demand that my thesis investigates (and it should already be becoming clear that the demand made by a text as innovative as *Finnegans Wake* is likely to be a particularly challenging one). Having said this, I am aware that my own reader may find the first two chapters of this thesis largely technical, more concerned with formal aspects of the reading process than with questions of ethics. It is important, therefore, to keep in mind theory's rethinking of the reader's responsibility towards the text. Textual alterity, which I will discuss in chapters one and two, is an irreducible remainder that opposes itself to the neat unfolding of any exegetical programme. It requires not only the *application* of interpretative frameworks, but also their refashioning – which is also to say, a refashioning of world-discourse interaction. However, if part of what places us in a particular position in the world are the ways of speaking through which we articulate this position, then a change at the level of discourse is never innocent at the level of the self: it requires the sort of questioning of the self that we can call an ethical response.

This is why we can say that formal innovation entails an ethical challenge, and it is why questions of ethics need not constitute a break with formal inquiry, but may represent a continuation of such inquiry. The ethical implications I discuss in chapter three and four (that there is in the very form of the *Wake* a demand for tolerance with regard to alterity and diversity) are inextricably linked to Joyce's investigation of how alterity troubles the concepts of the self and of self-identity. Finally, all of this is why it comes as a considerable *advantage* of Derrida's philosophy (as opposed to other types of theory concerned with more applied varieties of ethics) that he locates a question of responsibility at the formal level of language. For this allows us to describe how certain formal attributes already entail certain ethical considerations, as is the case in Joyce.

Joyce's ethics of form

One of the early texts in which Derrida insists that the reader is inscribed in a complex interaction with the text – an interaction in which interpretation must be

neither totally active nor totally passive, but *responsible* – is "Plato's Pharmacy."
In the opening pages of this essay, Derrida states:

> [T]hat person would have understood nothing of the game who, at
> this [*du coup*], would feel himself authorized merely to add on; that
> is, to add any old thing. He would add nothing: the seam wouldn't
> hold. Reciprocally, he who through "methodological prudence,"
> "norms of objectivity," or "safe-guards of knowledge" would refrain
> from committing anything of himself, would not read at all. (64)

How, then, to read any text, let alone that famously illegible text, *Finnegans Wake*,
without either producing inexcusable additions or else total silence?

The first and most crucial response to this question is to note that the
question is here neither mine nor Derrida's – it is Joyce's. As Mitchel and Slote put
it in their introduction to *Derrida and Joyce*, "the Derrida/Joyce relationship"
concerns "a relentless pursuit for the limits of any and all such efforts at
totalization (appropriation, establishment, comprehension)" (2) – that is, Joyce's
writing is already partaking in this pursuit. Yet such a view is not merely a prejudice
of theory. The pursuit in question is rather what Fritz Senn describes as "a
recurrent, basic, Joycean motion" – namely, "an excessive bias, a tendency to
overdo, to break out of norms, to go beyond" (35). If in committing a reading and
committing myself to a reading I hope to avoid the danger of using a literary work
to merely exemplify certain theoretical considerations, it is because the starting
point of my reading of *Finnegans Wake* is an observation about the text itself:
namely, that *Finnegans Wake* is difficult to read.

In view of the sheer strangeness of the *Wake*, this may appear to be an
issue that hardly merits argument. Consider, for example, the following passage,
which is the second paragraph on the book's first page:

> Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passencore
> rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of
> Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had
> topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselse to
> Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all

the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuartpeatrick: not yet, though venissoon after, had a kidscad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all's fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface. (3.4-14)

There is simultaneously too much meaning here and not enough. The material we are confronted with in this and almost every other passage in the *Wake* violates any number of conventions through which languages become what they are. Here, I repeat one of the most obvious statements to be made about this work. As Seamus Deane writes, "[t]he first thing to say about *Finnegans Wake* is that it is, in an important sense, unreadable" (vii). Yet in adopting this description, I would already raise the question of how we are to understand Deane's cautious qualifier, "in an important sense."

As we will see, one crucial problem posed by *Finnegans Wake* is what we are to do with its unreadability as readers and as critics. Criticism may see it as its task to reduce difficulty: to elucidate the text and to present interpretations taken from the text but isolated and rendered more appreciable in their critical restatement. I find nothing inherently wrong with this approach, and partly follow it myself; the problem is that the *Wake* both invites and at the same time resists and problematizes these procedures. The difficulty of this text is in an important sense irreducible, for if we fashion the oddness of the *Wake* into a legible text, even if we do so with great rigour and only on the safest of grounds, we already pass over certain complications that, not least of all, put into question the very idea of legibility.

The nature of these complications is such that theory can be helpful in addressing them. My comments in the previous subsections are meant to indicate – and I will argue this in greater detail – why literary theory is an apt tool for describing some of the challenges we face in reading the *Wake*. But first and foremost, these complications are *Joyce's* own subject. To employ a simplifying but helpful division, we can say that Joyce's text not only draws on these

complications at the level of form, structure, materiality, and so on; it also returns to them, again and again, at the level of content. As we will see, textual difficulty is one of *Finnegans Wake*'s themes. Which is also to say that it is not possible to divide criticism of the *Wake* into one set of studies that look at what we can say about the text itself (at what goes into its making both in terms of content and of form) and a separate set of studies interested in what the text can help us realise about our own predicaments as readers. With the *Wake*, a thorough examination of the world within the book reveals that a central element of this world is precisely the question of the book within the world.

For these reasons, I subscribe to the position that Thurston outlines in *James Joyce and the Problem of Psychoanalysis* when he writes that we should reject any

> dichotomy between historical rigour and theoretical adventurousness, not only because such a dichotomy misrepresents the potential significance of still-current critical debates, but for a more direct reason: namely, that the principle [sic] site of our argument – the writings of James Joyce – entails in itself an urgent demand that we think through and beyond such a dualism, and escape from what Joyce sardonically portrays in *Ulysses* as a mythical choice between Scylla and Charybdis. (17)

Any attempt at strictly differentiating between discourse and world ignores their interaction; which is not to say that they are the same, but that it is impossible to access one without going through the other. This is especially true with regard to Joyce's texts. Joyce's hyper-awareness of the relation between what he writes about and the mode of its expression (the "scrupulous meanness" of *Dubliners*, the evolving languages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the way in which narrative impacts narration and narration impacts narrative in *Ulysses*) is a highly conscious implementation of the world-discourse interaction: an implementation that, as Thurston argues, undermines any strict separation of Joyce's subject matter from his discursive strategy. Consider, for instance, Karen Lawrence's reading of the multiple style of *Ulysses*, about which she writes: "We see the styles

as different but not definitive ways of filtering and ordering experience. This view of style obviates a 'spatial apprehension' of the book: one cannot see through the various styles to an ultimate Platonic pattern of meaning" (9).[2] Form is not a veil we can remove to gain a clearer picture. With Joyce, a formal gesture can disclose a philosophy, a political stance, an entire mode of subjectivity.

What I want to argue is that in *Finnegans Wake*, one of the positions expressed through form is a critique of the notion of *presence* in language. That is, I claim that the difficulty of the *Wake* is neither an instance of purely self-serving aestheticism nor a merely auxiliary instrument of expression. It is not, in short, a superficial attribute beneath which we can simply postulate a truer, perfectly straightforward writing. Drawing our attention towards that which escapes comprehension, Joyce can be seen to drive a wedge between understanding and mastery, between linguistic capacity and linguistic purity. The underlying assumption that would associate these terms is that a matter is properly understood only when it is assimilated, when it no longer raises any questions. Opposing this view, *Finnegans Wake* relies on an unassimilable alterity of writing in order to demonstrate the hermeneutical value of uncertainty: not in the mode of a lack of understanding, but in the mode of an appreciation of those remainders that no approach can fully integrate. In other words, the hermeneutics of the *Wake* is a hermeneutics of openness and of plurality.

It should be clear, then, why I begin this introduction with a look at some of theory's reflections on discourse. Joyce's programme in the *Wake*, as it appears through the lens of difficulty, is notably similar to the theoretical position. It works against the notion that the production of knowledge happens through replication in the mode of identity, and instead gives due consideration to the alterity that unsettles ideals of univocality and self-sameness. Therefore, I will not so much apply theory to the *Wake* as draw parallels between the two. It is worth pointing out, however, that this is not fundamentally different from any other deconstructive reading. Deconstruction is not a method, nor is it a phenomenon

---

[2] The example I cite from Lawrence is an early one, but questions of diegesis and representation are still very much part of the debate (see for instance the 2014 collection of essays *James Joyce: The Recirculation of Realism*, edited by Ruggieri and Terrinoni, in particular the article by Annalisa Federici).

that begins with Derrida's philosophy. Deconstructive fault-lines are at work in all writing, and deconstruction is therefore not a procedure that defines itself independently from the texts to which it is applied, but represents a rethinking of what we already encounter in texts. The quality that sets *Finnegans Wake* apart, then, is not that it can be read with a view to these fault-lines (any text can), but that it is itself actively working with them. Joyce is in the precise sense of the word *self*-deconstructive. This is how, throughout this thesis, I will discuss the *Wake* as both a work exemplary of other texts and a case of particular interest.

Here, however, we run up against a paradox of reading *Finnegans Wake*. We struggle in vain to make any kind of sense of the *Wake* without immediately undoing some of its far-reaching interrogation of sense-making itself. And the reception of *Finnegans Wake*, for all the ways in which it has singled out the book as the most illegible in recent memory, is also proof of the enormous assimilative powers of readers. Joyce may have spent an exorbitant amount of time and energy on, quite literally, tearing language to shreds; nonetheless, we as readers can still find ways to make sense of it. I will argue that this is in fact part of the point Joyce is making. Increasing his writing's difficulty, he confronts us with the strength of our desire for meaning, and indeed with language's powers of producing meaning under such extreme conditions. Yet there is also a risk here of responding to Joyce's difficulty as if he were not raising any questions about intelligibility, but communicating in a manner whose intelligibility is merely eccentric.

Interacting with *Finnegans Wake*, we are at all points tempted to return to the exegetical model of removing the veil of form so as to perceive meaning in its ipseity. This is not merely a manner of speaking: in *Wake* criticism, there is a long tradition of studies that attempt a return to intelligibility through isolating stable units of content. Yet I do not want to suggest that this tradition is simply a history of misreading. Given the illegibility of *Finnegans Wake*, there is a sense in which *any* reading of it is a misreading, seeing how it is a deviation from the actual text. This complicates the distinction between reading and misreading – without rendering this distinction any less significant or problematic. Conversely, the activity of making Joyce's text readable is in many ways an appropriate and necessary interpretative response, no more or less at fault than many others. My

reader will find that in the outline of the *Wake* I give below, as well as throughout this thesis, I employ generalising notions of plot, situation, and character that derive precisely from this type of critical work. What I am taking issue with, then, is the notion that such reduction to familiar categories can close the question of what *Finnegans Wake* is about. Which is again to say that I hold that the *Wake* does not deny meaning, but pluralises it.

Attempts at defusing the text's plurality date back to before its original publication. Already the 1929 essay collection *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* combines some pieces that prepare the reader for the novelty of Joyce's creation with other contributions that re-integrate the evolving book, serialised at the time as "Work in Progress," into familiar frameworks. Stuart Gilbert, in "Prolegomena to *Work in Progress*" insists on the work's readability along the lines of a thorough but ultimately straightforward exegesis. As Patrick McCarthy notes in "Postlegomena to Stuart Gilbert's Prolegomena," Gilbert appears determined in this essay to emphasise "the coherence of what others regarded as an incoherent work" (34) and "to counter the charge that Joyce was a proponent of the literary avant-garde" (36).

If Gilbert may thus have started the trend, it is Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson's 1944 *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* that canonised it. Towards the end of this study, Campbell and Robinson boldly assert that "[i]n every passage there is a key word which sounds the essential theme" (357) as well as that "*there are no nonsense syllables in Joyce!*" (358). They assure us that although Joyce's literary extravaganza may initially look daunting, and although it demands some truly strenuous effort, there is nothing in it that requires us to think outside of such habitual notions as central and peripheral meaning, or reading as explication. This has subsequently become the underlying assumption of many studies of the *Wake* that produce insight by doing away with obscurity. Critical projects undertaken in this vein include William York Tindall's *A Reader's Guide to Finnegans Wake*, Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon's *Understanding Finnegans Wake*, John Gordon's *Finnegans Wake: A Plot Summary*, and John Bishop's *Joyce's Book of the Dark*, all of which retrieve from the *Wake*'s weave of material something

like a stable narrative world – although, it should be noted, with results that differ between these four studies.

One significant departure from this style of reading is Margot Norris's 1974 *The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake*. In the book's final chapter, having analysed what she calls the "lack of certainty in every aspect of the work" (120), Norris concludes that "[t]he greatest critical mistake in approaching *Finnegans Wake* has been the assumption that we can be certain of who, where, and when everything is in the *Wake*, if only we do enough research" (120). The obscurity of the *Wake* is not a surface layer that can be penetrated so as to reach an underlying clarity; the text is obscure *through and through*. The need to which Norris thus gives voice to critically examine the very notion of certitude is also taken up in Colin MacCabe's 1978 *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*, which stipulates that "[t]he difficulty of reading Joyce is a difficulty in our notion of reading" and that Joyce "presents literary criticism with its own impossibility" (2). A similar attitude informs several contributions to the 1984 collection *Post-Structuralist Joyce*, edited by Attridge and Ferrer. In Stephen Heath's essay, "Ambiviolences: Notes for reading Joyce," the post-structuralist programme is stated in the following terms: "The text is never closed and the 'ideal reader' will be the one who accedes to the play of this incompletion, placed in 'a situation of writing', ready no longer to master the text but now to become its actor" (32).

The notion to be underlined here is that of refraining from attempts at mastering the text. The *Wake*'s obscurity requires that we develop critical responses that interact responsibly with the text – that become actors prompted by the text or acted upon by it – without subjecting the work to an exegetical mastery that forces Joyce's writing into the normative patterns it is in fact evading. Joyce's deliberate muddying of language demands that we come to terms with the productivity of his difficulty without taking recourse to the sort of certitude this difficulty works to undermine. It is thus necessary – and far from methodologically outdated – to continue work on *Finnegans Wake* in the mode developed by Norris, MacCabe, and others. Thus, in their introduction to the 2015 essay collection *Joyce's Allmaziful Plurabilities*, editors Kimberly J. Devlin and Christine Smedley suggest that what justifies grappling with Joyce's unreadable text to the extent to

which many readers and critics still do, more than seven decades after its original publication, is chiefly Joyce's undoing of monovalence: what they call his "semantic excesses – pluralities of possibilities, in terms of meanings – that veer off in multiple, nonexclusive directions" (2).

This line of inquiry is particularly relevant at the current moment, at which an important strand of *Finnegans Wake* criticism is again drawn towards an ideal of lucidity: namely, the lucidity promised by the consultation of the *Wake*'s avant-textes. As I will examine at the end of chapter three, the philological approach, although it holds readers accountable to a formidable standard of knowledge about the making of Joyce's text and, precisely by taking into account the range and variety of Joyce's sources, steers clear of the idea of a single, overarching narrative, also risks atomising the text into manageable units, emphasising Joyce's creative process to an extent that does away with much of what is remarkable – and disturbing – about that process's result.

To counteract the risk of neutralising, as it were, the obscurity of *Finnegans Wake*, it is necessary instead to give due consideration to the meaning that form carries, to the implications of Joyce's complexity in and of itself. John Lurz's article "Literal Darkness: *Finnegans Wake* and the Limits of Print" is one recent instance of a study that provides some reflections on this task. Lurz notes that in the *Wake*, writing markedly resists the role of docile carrier of meaning. Since the form Joyce gives his writing often serves to *interrupt* codes of intelligibility, the "exteriority" of his writing "is not merely a part of the process of signification but is, rather, something to notice in its own right" (680). Therefore, *Finnegans Wake* requires a reader "who is able to open his or her eyes to obscurity itself" (681), who is able to look *at* the page, not *through* the page. For instance, I would argue that attempts at looking through the above-cited "Sir Tristram" passage – by transforming it into something meaningful – inevitably do violence to the fact that many of this passage's units, as they appear on the page, do not partake in any existing modes of meaning production. However, I also maintain that looking at this passage can show it to be evoking, manipulating, and even newly creating such modes, thus nevertheless inviting us to read. What makes Joyce's experiment so

compelling is that his manipulations demand of us not that we surrender meaning, but that we transform the modes of its production.

I therefore only partially agree with Lurz's statement that "the printed letters and words in the *Wake* also function as a non-referential medium" (682), because I do not subscribe to the binary division this implies between lucid reference, on the one hand, and obscure materiality, on the other. Even where Joyce distorts the materiality of writing in order to disrupt procedures of reference, the very disruption is in itself productive of meaning. By contrast, Lurz's argument (though not his terminology) aligns itself with Allon White's proposition, in *The Uses of Obscurity*, that "it would be wrong to call 'Finnegans Wake' an obscure work" (20). In White's sense, obscurity continues the production of meaning, whereas *Finnegans Wake* lacks "the desire for denotation" (20). Contrary to this rather sweeping verdict, I will argue that a sophisticated manipulation of desire is in fact one of the key aspects of the *Wake*'s unreadability. I therefore hold that the *Wake* is a perfect example of White's notion that obscurity carries "distinct and distinctive kinds of meaning which are not secondary to an anterior obscured content. Obscurity signifies in the very act of obscuring" (18). Obscurity draws attention to itself, which is precisely what takes place in *Finnegans Wake*.

Lurz offers another formulation that more closely matches this position when he writes that the task of Joyce's reader is that "of accessing (without dispelling) hiddenness as such – of looking at the *Wake*'s dark print itself" (683). Where the *Wake* is materially unreadable, it does not hide neat and neatly retrievable units of meaning. Its obscurity, at these moments, is more fundamental, since any light to be shed would touch only on things other than what is actually on the page. To look at the darkness of the page is not therefore to search for hidden meaning; but neither is it to cease looking. Rather, it is to look at hiddenness without a hidden, to appreciate the meaningfulness of an obscurity that challenges meaning itself.

What could be the meaning of such a challenge? In "Values of Difficulty," Judith Butler suggests that to interrupt what she calls translatability – that is, the dynamics that transport information into familiar modes of understanding – is to

adopt a position that can be as productive as it is "isolating, estranging, difficult, and demanding" (203). The untranslatable or not fully translatable constitutes a painful breakdown of meaning, but it also contains "the possibility of meeting up with the limits of our own epistemological horizon, a limit that challenges what we know to be knowable" (206). It *challenges* this knowledge; it does not necessarily reconfirm it. Tracing the limits of our own understanding, as Joyce's language does, need not newly confine us within those limits. Instead, the process of running up against the limits may find that the delineations of what is knowable are not absolute: we can change them, we can change the nature of knowing. The untranslatable thus brings about disruptions that can potentially break the mould of translatability and tautology; it reveals opportunities for crossing the boundaries of repeating only what we already know we can repeat.

Yet, in engaging the limits of translatability, the aim cannot be to expand a realm of intelligibility that is itself perfectly homogenous. There is never simply one intelligibility that renders accessible all of the world or of the plurality of worlds; rather, there are what might be called *epistemes*, in Foucault's sense: configurations of intelligibility. Where language's capacity to make intelligible breaks down, we are not therefore confronted with an absolute limit to discourse, at least not in the sense of an absolute limit to world-discourse interaction. On the contrary, in indicating the limitedness, and thus partiality, of any discursive position (of any configuration of intelligibility), such a breakdown may point us in the direction of discourse's non-absolute nature – of its openness to change.

In this view, the richness and the ethical import of the meaning produced by Joyce's particularly recalcitrant untranslatability can be read along the lines of Sara Salih's argument in "Judith Butler and the ethics of 'difficulty'." About discourses that are not easily integrated into regimes of interpretative mastery (that are not easily translatable), Salih writes: "it is possible to read 'difficulty' as an important ethical component of the radical democratic project" (42). Difficulty is *democratic* not because it opens the floodgates of an undifferentiated relativism, but because difficulty of this kind opposes itself to what Salih terms "the anti-democratic uses of 'clarity'" (42) – that is, "the exclusionary schemes of intelligibility which currently pass for the ontological norm" (43).

The call for clarity all too often carries with it a prohibition against explorations and questions that are disconcerting because they break with existing modes of knowledge-production. Yet if, as theory argues, *all* modes of knowledge-production depend on discursive frameworks, such a prohibition can be seen to be exclusionary in a highly problematic manner. For it relies on an appearance of objectivity without examining the constructedness and mobility of this appearance. Difficulty, by contrast, actively underlines this constructedness and thus potentially confronts us with an alterity that can transform us by transforming the norms we live and think by. This is what Joyce is doing when he challenges the understanding of knowledge as mastery and opposes to it a thinking of knowledge as plurality. He is not employing illegibility in an aggressive dismantling of meaning; his undoing of language is itself meaningful. Which is not to say that the procedure in question is one of a wholesale rejection of existing practices. Attridge gives a helpful clarification of this when, in *The Work of Literature*, he writes: "*Alterity* [...] is not a matter of simply *opposing* accepted norms, since oppositions occurs within a shared horizon; rather, it's the introduction into the known of that which it excludes in constituting itself as the known" (219). If *Finnegans Wake* ventures into the space of an untranslatability that may disconcert us, it also succeeds in breaking open the evenness of discourse, allowing for the creation of new meaning and of new *types* of meaning.

Still, Joyce achieves these meanings in a manner whose destructive qualities we should not dissimulate, as such dissimulation would, once again, return us to a concept of productiveness as neatness and control. In *Finnegans Wake,* I will argue, the aim of achieving such control is displaced by an acknowledgment of alterity, of that which will not let itself be assimilated and which catalyses change precisely because it resists the categories we possess. Reading *Finnegans Wake* without disregarding its strangeness thus leads to the ethical problem of encountering the other – and I will discuss Derrida's analysis of hospitality in chapter four. At this point, we may also recall Philippe Sollers's passionate defence, at the 1975 International James Joyce Symposium in Paris, of the political dimension of the *Wake*'s language. Speaking of what he calls Joyce's "trans-nationalism," Sollers ventures that "[i]n what he writes, *nothing remains*

but differences, and so he calls into question all and every community (this is referred to as his 'unreadability')" (4). And, famously, Sollers adds: "*Finnegans Wake* is the most formidably anti-fascist book produced between the two wars" (4).

This is not to say that Joyce, writing in the 1920s and 30s, is giving his readers a recipe how to beat Nazism – a patently absurd idea for all sorts of reasons. What is at stake here is rather an anti-fascist stance whose outlines Patrick McGee denotes when he writes: "if there is anything that the patriarch, the imperialist, the capitalist and the fascist fear, it is the desire for desire, which has another name: hope" (177). As we will see in chapter one, the *Wake* stages the logic of desire in such a way as to undermine the notion that any particular readability could serve as the answer to desire. If such jouissance – desire in excess of desire – can be put to service by the structures McGee names (Slavoj Žižek demonstrates impressively how capitalism does this), it also opposes itself to the solidification of any given order. As Vincent Cheng argues in *Joyce, Race and Empire*, "[a]ll attempts to assert the Self by denying the Other are problematized as unstable in the multipleness of *Finnegans Wake*" (269). Which is to say that the *Wake* opposes itself to fascistoid thinking not by constructing a utopian, monolithic counter-narrative, but by destabilising *all* forms of monolithic readability.

That this destabilisation is to a considerable extent achieved through the *Wake*'s form is something also taken into account by Len Platt's *Joyce, Race and Finnegans Wake*. Writing about the *Wake*'s historical context with regard to racism, Platt argues that "the *Wake* is the racist's [...] worst nightmare at a number of different levels" (33), partly because it "is designed as a monstrous failure – a failure to concoct 'pure', original language, to find racial origins and to construct the dimensions of racial identity" (21). In Joyce's text, the one pure utopia and/or dystopia is displaced by the challenge of an impure but lively chaos – especially linguistic chaos. Again McGee: "This is why *Finnegans Wake* is one of the most ethical books ever written [...], it does not present us with a spectre coming from the future but with the grace that demands that we live in the present, that we never surrender our desire (not even to utopia)" (179). In view of such readings, I

would venture that as long as the comments by Sollers remain but an anecdote to be retold (whether dismissively or approvingly), we have not yet developed a sufficiently serious response to what he is describing as Joyce's challenge to meaning as legibility, to community as homogeneity.

This challenge is by no means marginal to Joyce's literary project. In *Ethical Joyce*, Marian Eide demonstrates the crucial role that alterity plays in Joyce's writing from *Dubliners* onwards, and argues that "[f]or Joyce, the first ethical consideration is the preservation of difference within a context of response or responsibility" (7). My reflections on the difficulty of the *Wake* proceed from a similar starting point, seeing how I am likewise interested in how Joyce represents strategies for encountering and preserving alterity. My approach differs from Eide's, however, in that Eide aims to relate the reader's experience to encounters within the text. Her method, she writes, is "to focus on specific textual moments throughout [Joyce's] works that present particular ethical dilemmas or opportunities" (3), brought about by how characters relate to each other. This strikes me as a pertinent approach, but I rely on a slightly different one. Analysing the encounter with the other, I emphasise less negotiations between characters than a more abstract alterity, found in the textual difficulties faced by both readers of *Finnegans Wake* and by readers within the *Wake*'s narratives (and where the reader is a character, my examination will shift the focus away from this fictional reader's response to the fictional writer, towards the fictional reader's response to the fictional written). In this way, I hope to do justice to *Wake* as a book that, as Eide puts it, "is not only descriptive but also performative in its effects" (1). *Performing* the ethical uses of plurality, the *Wake* not only conjures up encounters with various others, but explores a linguistic otherness that breaks with the very concepts of self-sameness, identity, and presence, to instead draw on a language of volatile and mutable plurality.

If this plurality and illegibility loom large in the *Wake*'s language, they are also the focus of many moments in the text at which acts of reading or writing take centre-stage. There, we find Joyce explicitly addressing the predicaments that engaging with the alterity of language entails for both readers and writers. Before I turn to these scenes, however, which will also be the subject of my readings in

the following chapters, I will give a brief summary of those elements (or rather versions) of the text's narrative that are important to my investigation. In this abstract, I will not problematize any scenes or any aspects of their telling, but aim to provide some minimal background for the argument I put forward. To give a sense of setting and of character relations, I will draw on essentialising strategies. Yet I understand my account here to be well short of completion: it does not cover the entire text and it is partial with regard to the sections covered.

Chapter I.1. of *Finnegans Wake* introduces us to the idea that this is in many ways a book about crises, downfalls, and resurrections. There are allusions to various historical and mythological constellations, particularly conflicts, that relate this abstract theme to a cyclical pattern of rise and fall, catastrophe and new beginning, repeating itself throughout human memory. The chapter also provides the first glimpse of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (HCE), a more individual embodiment of human fallibility – although the nuclear family that is the *Wake*'s nearest approximation to main characters (HCE, ALP, and their children Issy, Shem, and Shaun) also undermine notions of individuality by blending with any number of figures and archetypes. I.2 closes in on HCE and his history. We learn about a mysterious crime he may have committed and witness how this transgression becomes public knowledge. I.3 and I.4 are then largely concerned with HCE's trial, possibly including, in I.4, his execution and resurrection or else his being buried alive and escaping. Although he subsequently disappears, the trial continues, and the motif of an investigation is carried over into I.5, though not necessarily in the context of the trial narrative. I.5 features the close examination of the missing piece of evidence, a letter. It also introduces in more detail the figure of Anna Livia Plurabelle (ALP), who either wrote or dictated the letter and who at one point retrieved it after it was lost. I.6 stages a quiz that is also a parade of the book's main characters and motifs, following which I.7 gives us a slightly different background for the writing of ALP's letter. In the mode of derogatory comments made by Shaun (the Postman), we learn about the literary output of his twin brother Shem (the Penman) who, throughout the book, is hinted to have had a hand in the production of the document in question. This chapter also firmly establishes the rivalry between the two twins (already hinted at in some of the

histories of I.1). Finally, I.8 closes Book I by returning to ALP, this time in her manifestation as Dublin's river Liffey.

Book II gives us a sense of what could be called the family life of these characters. II.1 shows Issy at play with her friends and her brothers Shem and Shaun. At the end of the chapter, they are called home by their parents, and II.2 centres on the children doing their homework. II.3 tells us about the events taking place in the bar downstairs, where HCE the publican falls out with his customers over what appears to be yet another manifestation of his guilt. II.4 is a boat journey (reminiscent of Tristan and Isolde) that may or may not be a dream dreamt by HCE, who has downed all the alcohol left over by his guests and has collapsed drunkenly.

The first three chapters of Book III hinge on Shaun, the first and third chapter once more being organised as investigations. Shaun is questioned by four old men in III.1 and gives a sermon in III.2 to an audience that includes Issy. In III.3, he again becomes the subject of an interrogation by the four, this time while he is asleep or in a trance, a state in which he responds to the questions addressed to him by channelling the voices of other characters. One of the characters who is given the floor in this manner is HCE, who talks about his past as a builder of cities (including, possibly, Dublin). The enquiry, however, is once again interrupted when III.4 takes us back to the family home, with Shaun, Shem, and Issy now in bed in their more childlike roles.

The single chapter of Book IV, finally, is in many ways a mirroring of I.1. It conjures up more scenes from history, and ultimately matches up the many disgraces and falls that take place throughout the book with the possibility of a new beginning. This possibility is represented by ALP in her river form, flowing into Dublin Bay to merge with the sea and eventually return as a cloud of rain (one of Issy's manifestations), whilst also returning us to the beginning of the text by way of the loop that famously connects the book's last sentence to its first.

If the strangeness of Joyce's language and the protean mutability of his characters and narratives provide countless occasions to discuss problems of interpretation, I will focus in particular on chapters I.5, I.7, and III.3 – that is, on

the analysis of ALP's letter, on Shaun's comments about Shem's writing, and on Shaun's task of literally giving voice to the experience of other characters. I begin with ALP's letter, whose location and content mystify characters throughout the book, and my argument is that, as readers of the *Wake*, we share this predicament. Regarding the version of the letter that actually appears in I.5 (see 111.10-20), Tindall confidently asserts that here is "[t]he letter, before us at last" (102). By contrast, Bernard Benstock introduces an element of caution when he writes that "[i]t is difficult to resist the temptation to assume that the variation of the letter that appears here is *the* letter" (35). ALP's letter, it would appear, is not presented to us in a straightforward way; to treat its text as known is effectively a temptation. And even though Benstock seems willing to some extent to give in to this temptation, he also notes: "Although this can safely be said to be *the* letter chapter, the actual text of that letter within chapter five does not give us either the first or the most complete version available in the *Wake*" (34). Capable of being authentic without being complete, and *vice versa*, ALP's all-important letter comes before us decentred and pluralised, with aspects of its reliability scattered through several, competing versions. In chapter one, I will argue that this raises the question of the essence of a signifying gesture. And I will show how I.5 delineates its exegete-figure's futile attempt to bring ALP's letter into agreement with an ideal of essential meaning.

In chapter two, I focus on another interpretative process: Shaun's reading of Shem's writing in I.7. To quickly outline my own approach, I can again contrast it with Tindall's assessment of the scene (in this case one that has found more lasting resonance in subsequent criticism). Tindall suggests that Shaun's tell-tale rant against his brother is in part a parody of attacks by other writers on Joyce – what Tindall calls "Joyce's indirect and jocular defense" (137). As part of this reading, he makes the problematic suggestion that "[Joyce's] feeling counteracts Shaun's tone" (132). Rather than reading the episode as one in which Joyce actually defends his own opinion, Tindall thus assumes that at the centre of the chapter stands not linguistic production as Joyce views it, but precisely a detraction from these views, in the form of Shaun. As we will see, this idea has

gained some acceptance; I would venture, however, that this approach passes over fascinating opportunities offered by the text.

Shaun's response to his brother's writing incorporates both his understanding of that writing and his expression of that understanding: it is a production based on an interpretation of another production. We should take seriously Shaun's tone as part of the point that Joyce is making, since the vehemence with which Shaun puts forward his position can tell us a lot about what is at stake in reading and writing as Joyce understands it, especially in terms of affect. In particular, Shaun's aggressiveness (what I will analyse as his *anxiety*) resonates with *Finnegans Wake*'s insistence that language operates without taking recourse to stabilising concepts of centrality and essence. When we also take into consideration the multiple filtering of one voice through another (Joyce's through Shem's, Shem's through Shaun's, Shaun's through Joyce's), I.7 emerges as one of Joyce's most complex statements about what it means to read or write. At the end of chapter two, I also bring to bear on these considerations Shaun's role in III.3, which in its own way takes up the motif of one voice reproducing another.

Chapter three continues to examine plurality in absence of essence, mainly focusing on a short passage from I.1 about the loss of univocal clarity, but also relating this section to others that consider how the loss potentially opens up a space for a plurality of meaning. These include some of Joyce's implementations of the philosophy of Giambattista Vico and of the biblical tales of Babel and Pentecost. Finally, chapter four explores the Wake's staging of linguistic and cultural plurality by returning to III.3 and examining HCE's city-building as an example of the formation of public, discursive space. HCE's account of his city is frequently poised between creation and violence, an ambiguity that I relate to Derrida's understanding of hospitality, which similarly suspends the idea of co-habitation between the beneficial and the problematic. I conclude that, for *Finnegans Wake*, questioning the (linguistic) grounds on which we acquire knowledge also entails asking about our (ethical) response to the other.

The *Wake*'s insistence on the impossibility of separating creative gestures from destructive ones is a common denominator of many of the discussions I put forward in the following chapters. It is also where Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical

theory comes into play. The aspect of Lacan's teaching key to my argument is his thinking of the inseparability of the interpretative order from the distortive one. As we will see, this resonates with Joyce's depiction of how expressive power complicates, even divides, itself.

Lacan and language's beleaguered subject

It is no doubt one of those coincidences that we fetishize at our own peril that Derrida and Lacan met for the first time in Baltimore (see Derrida, "For the Love" 49-51), once the home of Edgar Allan Poe and the city where Poe died and is buried. It is intriguing nonetheless – after all, the most tangible point at which their work intersects is their debate about Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter." Lacan uses his "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" to preface *Écrits*. "Le facteur de la vérité," included in *The Post Card*, provides Derrida's extensive critique of this seminar. Both authors would at times return to the subject – for instance, Derrida in "For the Love of Lacan" and Lacan in "Lituraterre" – but the first two texts constitute the primary archive on what it means to read Lacan with Derrida or Derrida with Lacan.

I will not, however, spend too much time on the Poe debate in this thesis, although I will briefly touch on it in chapter one. For what I want to suggest is that in spite of this well-documented disagreement – examined in great detail in *The Purloined Poe*, edited by Muller and Richardson – Lacan's and Derrida's respective discussions of language are in fact compatible in important respects. In "For the Love of Lacan," Derrida points out that his own contribution is "unreadable for readers in a rush to decide between the 'pro and the con,' in short, for those minds who believed I was opposing Lacan or showing him to be wrong" (63). Derrida is making some restorative gestures in this lecture (which seems appropriate in a colloquium commemorating Lacan), but his statement is by no means reducible to retrospective teleology or apologetic adjustment. As I will show in the first chapter, Derrida's objections are from the start aimed at Lacan's manipulation of such expressions as the letter, the phallus, or castration. I would therefore argue that it is chiefly Lacan's *rhetoric* that is at stake in Derrida's criticism. If Derrida

states that Lacan's work makes "the most strenuous, and powerfully spectacular, use of […] the most deconstructible motifs of philosophy" (54), he maintains that, at the same time, this work is also "the closest" (55) to his own.

To second this judgement – which I would be inclined to do – would first of all require an in-depth analysis of Lacan's style. This I will not undertake here; suffice it to say that whereas Derrida's critique of Lacan does advance some pertinent points regarding the latter's unforthcoming idiom, it also construes a version of Lacan that, as I will argue in chapter one, runs counter to important aspects of Lacan's thinking. This is not to say that deconstruction inverts Lacan's meaning in order to disagree with him. Derrida does not sacrifice an apparent compatibility so as to emphasise hidden contradictions; on the contrary, Derrida's reading of Lacan is arguably not altogether deconstructive enough, odd as this admittedly may seem.

Derrida somewhat too readily adopts Lacan's at times problematic manner of presenting his thought, without investigating how this manner masks a more differentiated argument that can be shown to subvert or deconstruct many of the superficial problems. My proposition, then, is to read Lacan in a way that draws on this deeper level of differentiation. And in attempting a re-evaluation of this kind, it is important to keep in mind that the first to plot such a trajectory was, in a certain sense, Lacan himself. Michael Lewis gives an informative account of this in his study *Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing*. Detailing the important transition from Lacan's middle to his late period, Lewis shows that among the transformations Lacan's system undergoes, one of the most crucial concerns the relation between the symbolic and the real. I will therefore briefly consider these two terms before turning to the shift Lewis describes in Lacan's conceptualisation of them.

Lacan's symbolic encompasses the totality of interpretative codes, which is to say: all that serves intelligibility, including most of language – though not all of language, as we will presently see and as I will further examine in chapter one (and this difference between language and the symbolic is one of the things that make Lacan highly relevant to an examination of Joyce's unreadability). All modes of symbolic codification express what Lacan calls the real – the excessively

immediate, uninterpretable presence from which our experiences derive – by cutting it down into identifiable units. The real is therefore only accessed in the distorted forms that the symbolic imposes on it, which is tantamount to saying that the real itself cannot be accessed at all. Bruce Fink, in his introduction to Lacan's work, offers the following summary:

> The division of the real into separate zones, distinct features, and contrasting structures is a result of the symbolic order, which, in a manner of speaking, *cuts into* the smooth façade of the real, creating divisions, gaps, and distinguishable entities and laying the real to rest, that is, drawing or sucking it into the symbols used to describe it, and thereby annihilating it. (24)

This opens up the question – crucial both to Lacan's work and to my present investigation into *Finnegans Wake* – of the unintelligible. How are we to describe remainders of the real that cannot be annihilated? That is, how are we to represent to ourselves the points at which our capacity for representation breaks down, because we encounter something we cannot quite express?

With regard to these cases, Lewis argues that Lacan, in his middle period, posits "a clear border between the symbolic and the real" (165), a "suture" (165) that both separates the two categories and holds them in place relative to each other. Simultaneously separation and link, this suture is what "institutes a deconstructible relation between the real and the symbolic" (73), for it puts in place an overly autonomous symbolic that remains separated from, and effectively undisturbed by, the real that it describes. Lewis relates this excessive autonomy to the Lacanian category of the name of the father (see 58, 158-9), but I would propose that its most problematic manifestations are the Lacanian images of the phallus and of castration. Both the name of the father and the phallus evoke paternal authority as the source of the symbolic, but it is the phallus that extends the field of the paternal metaphor to include *breakdowns* of the symbolic order as well. The phallus represents the ideal signifier: a symbolic unit that would grant access to a mode of expression that knows no failure. The absence of this signifier (which is of course what we experience, constantly lacking the terms to

domesticate the real) becomes in turn represented as castration. Castration thus gives to the inexpressibility of the real a specific location on the (imaginary) body. As we will see, it is this specificity in the description of what is also said to remain inexpressible that Derrida attacks. As Lewis puts it, "through this fantastic image, the real presents itself to the signifier in a manageable form" (167), because the very failure to manage becomes itself manageable.

In his late period, however, Lacan classes the image of castration as precisely a fantastic one, as a fantasy or myth imposed after the fact, "always staged later" (167), as Lewis writes. That is, Lacan rejects the *intrinsic* privilege of castration/the phallus as the signifier of lack/what is lacking. Moreover, he more generally rejects the notion that the symbolic can in any way codify lack whilst remaining unaffected by it. The absolute suture between the symbolic and the real, Lewis argues, is replaced with a border that is "porous" (165). In the new formulation, the real is effectively said to act upon the symbolic; the symbolic order is now "itself full of holes. And it is in these holes that the real exists" (165).

In Lacan's late system, a possibility thus emerges of the real being experienced almost directly: namely, insofar as the real tears palpable gaps into the fabric of symbolic codification (whilst the symbolic still also cuts into the real). Yet this does not mean that the real becomes more identifiable. On the contrary, whereas middle Lacan reserves the right to name the real in a strangely descriptive manner, late Lacan states categorically: "The real can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalization" (*S XX* 93). The real is where meaning is not, though the real and the symbolic may invade each other in disconcerting ways, and the real *produce* meaning in the process. Lacan eventually terms this tangling of the symbolic and the real the *sinthome*. I will discuss this rewriting of the symptom, and its relation to Joyce, in the following chapter. For now, I want to note that this final formulation of the relation between the symbolic and the real is one of the key elements that render Lacan's and Derrida's thinking on language similar in decisive ways. Simply put, both authors see it as one of the fundamental characteristics of language that in our usage of it, we encounter difficulties we cannot overcome.

Yet I disagree with the conclusion reached by Lewis, who proposes that between Derrida and late Lacan, the latter undertakes an even more radical break with transcendental models of knowledge. In chapter two, I will show that contrary to what some Lacanian critiques of Derrida assume (my example is Žižek), deconstruction does in fact posses an equivalent to Lacan's *objet petit a*: the object that absolutely eludes symbolic codification and whose presence maims any knowledge-production. On the question of the compatibility of Derrida and Lacan, I thus side with van Boheemen-Saaf, who writes that "[i]f Lacan's 'real' is that 'which prevents one from saying the *whole* truth about it,' there is more truth in combining Derrida and Lacan than in privileging one perspective to the other" (28). And if an out-and-out conflation of Lacan's and Derrida's work would risk suppressing considerable differences, an integrative approach can draw on their correspondences whilst also allowing each theory to remain distinct, thus achieving a variety of perspectives to bring to Joyce's problematizing of alterity.

In particular, the inclusion of Lacan in my argument will allow me to emphasise the effects that unreadability has on a reader. Derrida ascribes great significance to aporias and to exegetical impasses, but he does not relate them to the reader as a psychological subject in as illuminating a manner as Lacan does. At the height of his structuralism, Lacan famously declares that "*the unconscious is structured like a language*" (*S XI* 20), indicating a legibility in which even the unconscious remains subject to symbolic codification: "the unconscious is structured as a function of the symbolic" (*S VII* 12). This pervasive legibility is what late Lacan radically undoes when he describes the subject as the knotting together of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real in such a way that the symbolic and the real effectively permeate each other (their border becoming porous). Unreadability can be interpreted as a manifestation of this porousness: it is an encounter with the real tearing into the symbolic, and describing it as such an encounter can help us gain some purchase on the deeply paradoxical problem of the limits of understanding.

The key aspect of Lacan's work for my interpretation of Joyce's unreadability is therefore the examination of the real in late Lacan. However, I will also draw on middle Lacan in instances where this can further my discussion of

issues raised by *Finnegans Wake*. As Lacan's revisions of his position are considerable, I will indicate these choices and, where necessary, provide late Lacanian re-readings of middle Lacanian material. I should furthermore add that in applying a psychoanalytical framework, I do not aim to describe what exactly, as readers of Joyce, we must be thinking or feeling at any given point. I will rather examine the ways in which Joyce's writing *confronts* us with intrusions of the real, and make propositions as to what is at stake in our reactions to those intrusions. My focus is thus on what could be called our own implication in the text.

Lacan provides a helpful exemplification of this effect in his discussion of Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, which, although the terminology is middle Lacan, can serve to introduce the function of the real that I will be discussing throughout. In the foreground of *The Ambassadors*, there can be seen an elongated blot that, looked at from the correct angle, reveals itself to be an anamorphic distortion of a skull. Lacan suggests that through the distortion's active manipulation of our act of looking, "we are literally called into the picture, *and represented here as caught*" (*S XI* 92, my emphasis). That is, we not only stare at the morbid blur; the circumstances of our staring – that we have to change our own position in order to do so – are already part of what the painting depicts. The skull thus functions as "the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* [(-ϕ)] of castration" (89, insertion in original), as a reminder of our limitations: not only mortality, but also the flawed nature of the symbolic order.

The symbolic order into which we are inscribed (the representation into which we are called) is already distorted. It is imperfect, and this imperfection means that it is never *fully* at our disposal for the codification of our experience – itself distorted, it distorts us, too. Or, as Lacan puts it: "the subject as such is uncertain because he is divided by the effects of language. Through the effects of speech, the subject always realizes himself more in the Other, but he is already pursuing there more than half of himself" (188). As we are called into the symbolic order, we pursue in it a wholeness and definiteness of meaning that it does not provide. And although this particular description is found in Seminar XI , it can be re-read for the later shift in Lacan's thinking towards the real's infiltration of the

symbolic, towards the impossibility of complete legibility, and towards a subjectivity that remains irreducibly opaque to itself.

All of this suggests that if Joyce challenges us to respond to alterity in language, this might not after all make his text categorically different from other systems of signification. The difference is one of intensity (rendering the *Wake* an example of self-deconstructive writing). Reading *Finnegans Wake* implicates us in a situation in which the limits of understanding are unusually palpable, yet this but radicalises the fact that *any* symbolic codification encounters cases of alterity it cannot assimilate. As we will see in the following chapter, the prominent place that Lacan's views on signification ascribe to opacity thus has its parallel in Joyce's own conceptualisation of reading as a search for closure that is inevitably frustrated. Moreover, if such Lacanian terms as the real or the *objet petit a* provide crucial articulations of these effects, I will argue that Derrida's philosophy is no less committed, though in a more abstract register, to examining unreadability as a component of the interpretative process.

Finally, a note on Joyce's presence in the work of Lacan and Derrida. If to bring Lacan's and Derrida's thinking to *Finnegans Wake* is not necessarily to *impose* this thinking on Joyce, van Boheemen-Saaf goes so far as to argue that "their abstract concepts have a concretely embodied textual precursor in Joyce's complex textuality. It was Joyce's text which made their ideas possible, so to speak, by providing textual-material collateral" (9). I would posit that this statement can do without the qualifying "so to speak," since Joyce's influence on these two theorists is something both of them address in their own work. As far as Lacan is concerned, I will discuss in the following chapter how Joyce's writing inspired him to make some highly significant changes to his system in the seminar *Le Sinthome*. However, I will not assess Joyce's impact on Lacan's theory in general, as this task has already been undertaken in a very thorough manner by Roberto Harari's *How James Joyce Made His Name* (a study in psychoanalysis, despite the title). Nor will I take into consideration the entirety of Lacan's interpretation of Joyce, which is discussed, for instance, in the chapter on Joyce in Jean-Michel Rabaté's *Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalysis and the Subject of Literature*.

In Derrida's case, the encounter with Joyce is less concentrated in one key moment, and Joyce's influence on Derrida is less readily delineable. On the one hand, there are references to Joyce in Derrida's writing that are developed to varying degrees. In several short pieces ("Two Words for Joyce," "Ulysses Gramophone," and "The Night Watch"), Derrida takes Joyce's work as his chief subject – yet it would be difficult to identify in these discussions any specific inspiration that Derrida derives from this work. The reliance of Derrida's thinking on Joyce is more palpable in remarks made in passing that are scattered throughout his oeuvre (surfacing as early as *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry"* and notably in *The Post Card* and "This Strange Institution Called Literature"), indicating Derrida's sustained interest in Joyce's writing. I will comment on *The Post Card* in chapter two and on "Two Words for Joyce" in chapter three, but my focus will not be on tracing Joyce's presence in Derrida – an enterprise that is carried out in some detail in Alan Roughley's *Reading Derrida Reading Joyce* as well as, more recently, in some of the contributions to *Derrida and Joyce*, edited by Mitchell and Slote.

On the other hand, there is an affinity with Joyce in Derrida's philosophical project that goes beyond these explicit comments – as Derrida himself remarks when, in "Two Words for Joyce," he insists that "every time I write, and even in academic things, Joyce's ghost is always coming on board" (27). In *Imagining Joyce and Derrida*, Mahon elaborates on the range of this affinity, and concludes that we need to consider "an expanded zone of Joycean-Derridean intertextuality" that extends beyond cases "where Derrida either explicitly writes on Joyce or mentions him by name" (353). An expanded intertextuality of this kind is also what I propose to work in, both with regard to Derrida and with regard to Lacan. However, I stress again that drawing on their projects' similarity to Joyce's does not only further our understanding of the *Wake* as an object of theory, or illuminate the work of these two theorists. Instead, reading Joyce, Lacan, and Derrida in conjunction can highlight the extent to which Joyce truly *anticipates* certain theoretical conceptualisations of difficulty, and delivers his own analysis of it. Although many theoretical studies of the *Wake* have been undertaken, this aspect of the text has

gone largely unexamined: that *Finnegans Wake* is not only caught up in, but actively reflects on, the paradoxes of signification.

1

ALP's Absent/Present Letter

Referentiality and reference

The imperfection of the symbolic – our searching in it for a wholeness it cannot provide – suggests that even where we refrain from totalising readings, a certain desire for essential (original, authoritative) meaning affects our interpretative efforts. The present chapter addresses the question of this desire by presenting theoretical explorations of it and relating these to the problem of reading ALP's letter. One of the focal points here is the importance attributed to the letter by many of the *Wake*'s narratives, which variously cast it as a missing piece of evidence, as an object of study, or more generally as the one truthful account of something as yet unknown: the promised answer that may resolve any number of uncertainties the book's characters are confronted with – particularly the mystery of HCE's crime. However, a larger part of the present chapter than of the following ones will be dedicated to establishing my reading of Derrida's and Lacan's respective work on the subject of signification.

An exemplary case of the letter's role are the trial scenes that take up most of I.3 and I.4. There, the presiding judges hope that the evidence of a written document might, quite literally, illuminate the case under investigation: "Will whatever will be written in lappish language […] bright upon us, nightle, and we plunging to our plight? Well, it might now, mircle, so it light" (66.18-23). Yet this remains a hypothesis, for the trial ends before any consultation of the letter can be undertaken. This elusiveness of the vital piece of information is a recurring motif in *Finnegans Wake*. In view of this theme, I will discuss the authority bestowed on the letter as intrinsically linked to its absence from these and other scenes. The palpable effect that the letter has on characters who do *not* posses it introduces a certain division between essence and desire. If ALP's letter is called

upon to do away with uncertainty – for instance in the case of the judges: "The letter! The litter! And the soother the bitther!" (93.24) – then the notions of interpretative authority and of desire in interpretation can be said to be co-dependent in such a way that desire is the desire for an authority that absents itself. Far from entering the process as an umbrella term for what gives stability to interpretation, authority should be understood as an inherently unnerving notion. Amongst other things, authority constitutes a challenge, directing itself at the reader of any text, that cannot be met, but that precisely because of this gives rise to a desire that drives the reading process.

The significance of desire also reveals itself in a striking manner with regard to what I will call Joyce's *non-words*. Under this heading, I propose to collect a particular type of what, in the introduction, I refer to as the *Wake*'s obscurity or untranslatability: namely, the coinages in *Finnegans Wake* that are not actual words, that are different from any word in any given language. The category is thus unavoidably provisional (a non-word may turn out to be an expression in a language not previously considered), as well as deliberately makeshift (given the prolific vagueness of its terms "word" and "language"). Yet for reasons I hope to make clear over the course of this thesis, I hold that the non-word is crucial to any examination of signification in the *Wake*, precisely because this category is broader than any defined by more specific characteristics, such as the pun or the portmanteau.

The sole defining feature of a non-word is the difference between Joyce's creation and any conventional form, which is also to say that the perhaps somewhat binary distinction between words and non-words that I will implement throughout leaves room for many different varieties and degrees of distortion, fusion, punning, multilingualism, non-sense, and other effects. In particular, I propose to include in the category of the non-word those expressions in *Finnegans Wake* that differ only slightly from a word in standard spelling (especially in English) and that taunt us with their apparent recognisability. By insisting on this point, I do not mean to problematize the notion of the standard form. What interests me here – what is most curious and most momentous about non-words

– is the readiness with which we disregard the differences that separate them from standard forms (whatever these be).

Consider, for instance, the first phrase of the section in the *Wake* that most extensively discusses ALP's letter, chapter I.5: "In the name of Annah the Allmaziful" (104.1). It is inevitable – and this, I propose, is Joyce's point – that we immediately perceive numerous possibilities of making this readable. In the non-word "Allmaziful," echoes can be found of "almighty" and "amazing," perhaps also of "maze," and of Latin "alma" as in "alma mater:" "nourishing mother." Further non-English transformations include German "Almosen:" "alms," "charity." Open Roland McHugh's *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* on page 104, and you find the Turkish word "mazi," translated as: "olden times," given as another suggestion. Further interpretations offer themselves when we consider the non-word in context. McHugh adds "Allah the Merciful" (104) as another reading – or rather, as another resource for the process of, in McHugh's apt phrase, "mentally superimposing" (xiii) glosses over Joyce's text. Yet all of these superimpositions are spawned by a string of letters that (to the best of my knowledge) forms no word at all, be it in Turkish, English, German, Arabic, or Latin. There is a gap between Joyce's text and the interpretations we derive from it. Since these interpretations require a material transformation of the text, they will not reveal themselves in what may appear to be a passive encounter with the text: they demand an active motion towards the other side of the gap. Desire is the name I will give to what motivates this motion. It therefore designates not a possible effect that accompanies some readings of Joyce's text, but a structural necessity without which no reading can be undertaken.

To begin my discussion of Joyce's strangely prolific non-words, it will prove helpful to – briefly – discuss another example from literature, one that will initially look out of place in a study of *Finnegans Wake*, but that aligns itself with certain qualities of the *Wake*'s non-words. The narrative in question is "Atrahasis," an Old Babylonian version, dating to about 1700 BC (see Dalley 3), of the flood narrative now primarily familiar to us from the Abrahamic tradition. My purpose in referring to this text, apart from thematic resonances that will become clear in chapter

three, is to start off my analysis with a gesture of defamiliarisation that will hopefully distance us from *Finnegans Wake* and from certain competences in handling it that may otherwise lead us to treat illegibility as a negligible phenomenon. In other words, I use an out-of-the-way example in order to suggest anew the shock of a moment in which language does not quite do what it is supposed to do.

"Atrahasis" stages the universal flood as part of an extended conflict between gods and men. Since humankind has become a source of nuisance to Ellil, one of the foremost within the divine hierarchy, he and a number of other gods decide to send natural catastrophes to diminish the number of people on earth (see 9, 18). The story is then told in repetitions of the same pattern: Ellil's anger, the sending of a divine punishment (disease, drought, famine, and finally the flood), and the survival of people who just manage to cling to their lives. In particular, the narrative describes the experience of the Noah-figure Atrahasis, who perseveres with the help of the renegade god Enki, creator and protector of mankind (see 15, 18-9, 34). Let us consider, then, the following phrase from Stephanie Dalley's translation of the myth – a sentence that, with slight variations, appears three times in the sections of the text that have been preserved: "They stayed alive by . . .   . . . life" (23); "People stayed alive by . . .   . . . life" (26); "The people stayed alive by . . .   . . . life" (27). The omission dots indicate that here, Dalley is (twice in each version) confronted with "an unknown word or phrase" (xiii). In other words, precisely that part of the text that would inform us about what the people in this narrative had to do in order to survive the natural catastrophes has been wiped away by the linguistic transformations of the past three and a half millennia.

The curious result is that the significance of the passage is simultaneously limited and enhanced. The expert informs us that translation has not been able to go its usual, or at least intended, course. We acknowledge that, until new evidence is found, we cannot know what is hiding behind these dots, or behind the untranslatable cuneiform words. Still, this lack of knowledge does not defy the reading process. The perfectly positioned opening in the sentence is intriguing; in

a way, it no longer narrates, but puts into practice, the disruptions that threaten cultural stability and individual life. The levelling forces of time make a double impact on this passage. The text describes how a civilisation narrowly escapes its destruction; in addition, the text itself has faced partial obliteration, although in a slower manner, through cultural transition. What gives the phrase its poignancy is that both in its content and in the materiality of its signifiers, it brings us face to face with a force that opposes itself to meaning, information, heritage, civilisation, survival. One possible name of this force is "death," understood to mean not only the narrow limits of biological beings but a universal finality: a gradual wearing-away of all structures into the featureless *white noise* of entropy. This process can be found within the narrative as the catastrophe the people try to avert; it also makes its presence felt in the erosion of the language that transports the text.

How, then, does this duplication shape our encounter with the narrative? I suggest that what should be a largely limiting aspect of the text ("here is a word we do not know, let us ignore it and replace it with a placeholder") turns out to be an enhancement of our reading experience. It is because we are no longer able to learn how the people in this myth achieved their survival that we may shudder at the thought of what they might have had to do (and how intriguing it is that enough of this civilisation has survived to reach us, and yet the very thing we can no longer ascertain is their story of how survival is achieved). No doubt, this eerie deletion is perfectly coincidental; nevertheless, the coincidence exemplifies *the productiveness of a disturbance*, something that will become important to my interpretation of the *Wake* – and my remarks here are also made with a view to *Finnegans Wake*'s non-words. What the gap illustrates is that a ruined section does not escape the reading process. It would be a very unusual reader indeed who would not register the erasure, or would not include its occurrence into her or his reading. In fact, a reading that remains oblivious to the deletion would be inaccurate, for what we do know is that "The people stayed alive by life," without any indication of the untranslated material, would be an incorrect rendition of the text.

This should not lead us to conclude that it is solely the signifier's position within a text that bestows on it the capacity to take on new meaning. The situation is more accurately described by saying that it is only some remainder of the function of a signifier that enables this mark to *interrupt* the text. If ". . . . . ." did not echo the original words' capacity to signify something that remains hidden as long as the words are not translated, then "The people stayed alive by life" would be a correct rendition of the phrase. The section that cannot be translated remains *significant*, in the sense that it points to a mystery beyond its own presence. What I want to suggest is that we should take this mystery seriously as an attribute of the signifier that has faded away. If a signifier can be defined as something that refers to something else, my proposition is that the capacity of referring, which I will call referentiality, can be distinguished from all specific constellations that give rise to a reference. Referentiality is not tied to a particular meaning; it consists in the signifier's *potential* to produce meaning.

In the case of the untranslatable cuneiform words, referentiality can be identified with two attributes. At the most basic level, referentiality is synonymous with the status of these words *as words*. Here, we have to distinguish between different functions served by the context of the words. If it is in part the surrounding text that enables us to infer that the untranslatable inscriptions are indeed signifiers, it is solely in this inference that their referentiality is contained. Referentiality is not connected to the fact that the context can also tell us something about the meaning of the untranslatable words. In the present case, we can assume that the missing words describe an activity, that it is an activity that explains how part of a population survives a crisis, and so on. But as the assessment by the translator – expressed in ". . .   . . ." – tells us, none of these conjectures are sufficiently precise to allow for the words to be read in such a manner as to produce a specific reference. Referentiality, then, should be thought as that aspect of a signifier that remains even as meaning disappears. In principle, we can imagine a situation that does not allow for any assumptions about content, but that leaves in place signification itself, in the sense of sign-ness. Referentiality is precisely this sign-ness. It does not require the availability of reference, only (the assumption of) its past or future possibility.

The second way referentiality manifests itself in the untranslatable passage is by lending its support to the mystery – the double appearance of death – that attaches itself to the phrase. Several objections can be made against this second notion. Not every reader will accept an interpretation that considers the deletion a repetition of the theme of death (as opposed to a meaningless instance of noise interrupting the transmission of the message). And even if we accept the reading in this particular case, in which interruption is in fact what is thematically at stake, not every text develops a discourse on the themes of finality and death that can so readily be related to such an occurrence. Finally, not every text has had as adventurous a history as the Old Babylonian epic of the flood, which means that unlike referentiality itself, which adheres to all signifiers, the type of absence we encounter here is not universal. It is important, then, to differentiate between the potential enhancement of our reading experience, on the one hand, and referentiality, on the other hand. Referentiality is not the meaning that offers itself in this particular case, it is what makes this meaning possible: it is the remainder that turns the absence of reference into a palpable effect that can itself be subjected to interpretation – as can the distortions through which Joyce creates non-words.

The production of meaning

What the example of the Old Babylonian myth illustrates is that a signifier can be linked to a potentiality that withstands the erosion of all actual reference and that, as long as sign-ness itself is not removed, provides new opportunities for meaning. Moreover, if I say that referentiality is a remainder of the function of a signifier, we can attest a similar quality to the *Wake*'s non-words, seeing how they likewise interrupt a text that is incompletely rendered without their inclusion. However, unlike eroded parts of a natural language, these remainders should not be taken to indicate the faded presence of particular words. Since reducing them to one or several words they resemble invariably ignores the material difference that separates them from all of these readings, they should be conceived of as ruins, as it were, not of signifiers, but of signification more abstractly speaking.

In the absence of any reference, the non-words posses referentiality in the form of a *potential* for meaning precisely insofar as we take them to be at all meaningful. But as with the flood myth, a reading of their illegibility can in part rely on an interpretative movement leading from the inaccessibility of meaning to a production of meaning from that inaccessibility. As we will see, one of the things at work in this movement is the relation between the openness of the signifier and the reader's desire for meaning. However, since the example of "Atrahasis" introduces too many exceptional features to illustrate the general importance of desire, I will now turn to theoretical considerations of the gap between referentiality and reference. Subsequently, I will show that, much like the untranslatable words of the flood myth, the non-words of the *Wake* render this gap palpable in a productive manner.

In "Signature Event Context," Derrida examines the signifier's openness as what he terms its *iterability*. He argues that in order for a signifier to be usable at all, it must be usable in contexts that are different every time the signifier is used. In this very possibility to reappear under different guises, to "break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable" (12), there is a drift away from the stable nature of the mark towards transformation and heterogeneity. In order for the signifier to function in contexts that can never be exhaustively anticipated, it cannot remain inert. There must be at work in it a "logic that ties repetition to alterity" (7), where alterity is not a force operating on the signifier from the outside, but a constitutive part of its legibility, and therefore of its identity. As every context draws on the signifier in a minimally different manner, the very notion of its being recognisable and repeatable as itself entails alterity; the otherness and unpredictability of each iteration constitutes a condition for language to function at all.

Iterability thus opens up the gap between referentiality and reference, between the signifier's abstract sign-ness – its functioning – and the variable meanings produced by its actual repetitions. In Joyce's non-words and in the example of the Old Babylonian myth, we encounter radicalisations of this gap that interrupt the transition from referentiality to reference. Yet these interruptions

are anything but exemptions from the logic of iterability. In the case of the cuneiform words, we are confronted with a repetition in which alterity has run its full course, producing not non-sign-ness but a situation exemplifying a risk that Derrida describes as a necessary attribute of all signifiers: "What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way?" (12). The untranslatable words convey precisely such a loss of origin. If we can be said to repeat or *iterate* them, it is because we take them to be indicators of a referentiality constituted by the past availability of references now palpably absent. In the *Wake*, by contrast, referentiality emerges as a promise of the future availability of reference. Insofar as we undertake to read these non-words at all (some critics declare *Finnegans Wake* illegible and leave it at that, but many readers will agree that this response falls short of the text's challenge), we inevitably interfere with them at a material level, effectively iterating them with an amplified alterity that exemplifies both the disruptiveness *and* the inevitability of the less visible alterity of regular iteration (again, we see here the two-fold nature of the *Wake* as a text both exceptional and exemplary).

These extreme cases of the gap between referentiality and reference can thus be seen to raise problems that also pertain to signifiers whose references may appear to be unproblematic. Derrida's analysis of iterability shows that even for these signifiers, a certain gap has to be negotiated. Here, we should first of all consider a passage from *Of Grammatology* in which Derrida discusses reference as well as the referent in the sense of an object outside the text. Derrida states that reading "cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent [...] or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language" (158). That is to say, to organise a reading with a view to a meaning *assumed* to be essential, but not tested within textuality, would be to introduce a conjecture that transgresses the boundaries of the text. If "our reading must be intrinsic and remain within the text" (159), it is precisely in order to avoid "*the tranquil assurance that leaps over the text toward its presumed content, in the direction of the pure signified*" (159).

The text's pure/presumed content stands in strict contrast to the content produced by a reading of the text. If this production of meaning is unpredictable, it is therefore clear that, in Derrida's view, this is not because meanings may be imposed in order for the text to serve a purpose external to it. On the contrary, it is the presumption of a pure signified outside textuality that risks imposition. The risk any actual reading takes is a different one: it must risk the production of meaning in an activation or iteration of the text that cannot but bring into play alterity. The production of meaning must be thought as inseparable from a certain kind of invention: invention not in the sense of addition to the signifier's own opening up of meaning, but in the sense of the alterity without which no iteration of the signifier takes place at all.

In *The Singularity of Literature*, Attridge gives a succinct formulation of what such a process might look like. The key to conceptualising a mode of reading that invents without transgressing the boundaries of the text, Attridge suggests, lies in the fact that "my response to a work is not to the work 'itself' but to the work as other in *the event of its coming into being in my reading*" (91). If the reading is to acknowledge the specificity of the text it investigates, then "[t]he uniqueness to which the response must do justice is not an unchanging essence […], but the inventive otherness of the work as it emerges through my creative act of comprehension" (91). Due to the nature of iteration, every time the text comes into being, it comes into being as a different version of itself. Yet, if this coming-into-being is to remain the coming-into-being *of the text* – if it is to be an *iteration* of the text – then it also remains indebted to the text.

The notion of this debt is an important one. It indicates that there must be something that guides a reading, that negotiates the gap between referentiality and reference. We can conceptualise the nature of this debt along the lines of what Derrida calls the *trace*. Up to this point, I have implicitly suggested that the signifier's origin can be thought of as an essence that exists even though interpretation falls short of accessing it. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that, instead, we should conceive of the signifier's origin as something that "was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the

origin of the origin" (61). The trace cannot refer to an origin or an entity that would stand outside a process of referencing to which it gives rise, for "[t]he field of the entity, before being determined as the field of presence, is structured according to the diverse possibilities – genetic and structural – of the trace" (47). The entity itself cannot be thought outside a differential framework that can identify it as the entity it is.

Before it is any specific reference, the trace is the operation of this differential framework, of "a structure of reference where difference appears *as such*" (46-7), which is to say, appears as the most fundamental difference: not the difference between one particular entity and another particular entity, but the difference between that which is itself and that which is different. Therefore, "[t]he trace must be thought before the entity" (47), before the possibility of anything that can be conceived of as identical to itself. As this play of identity and difference, "[t]*he (pure) trace is differance*" (62). It is both difference and deferral, both spacing and temporalisation, both inscription within a differential *system* and inscription within a *movement* through which this system remains open to change and obscures its own origin: "the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation" (47). Most of all, the trace is the impossibility of separating the spatial from the temporal (differance from differance), of accessing an entity as an unchanging presence. "The outside, 'spatial' and 'objective' exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear without the grammè, without differance as temporalization" (70-1).

The trace, then, establishes signification not by enabling the signifier's pointing to an already self-identical origin, but rather by establishing the very notion of self-identity: "*The trace is the differance* which opens appearance [*l'apparaître*] and signification" (65). Yet, crucially, the trace also produces specific signifiers from this play of signification, by appearing as a placeholder for something that has never existed: the individual signifier's absent origin. As Derrida puts it in *Writing and Difference*, the trace "replaces a presence which has never been present" (295). That is, the trace gives rise to a notion of identification,

signification, or substitution that *dissimulates* that there exists no predetermined presence that would be substituted as such – a notion, therefore, that dissimulates the fictional nature of the essence that the trace stands for (the trace occulting its own origin).

It is this double nature of the trace that enables us to cross from referentiality to reference without violating the structures of textuality, grammè, differance. What the trace ultimately suggests is the importance, to any iteration of a signifier, of an imaginary essence. The trace gives rise to the possibility of signification by allowing us to *project* that which no signification can either access or produce. It is easy to see (and I would only have needed to discuss iterability to argue this) that where the process of reading attempts to close the gap between referentiality and reference, it directs itself towards something that cannot be obtained because it does not exist: essential, unchanging meaning. Yet the conclusion towards which we are now led (and this was the point of also considering the trace) is that essential meaning does not in fact exist, but that even if we are aware of this, we nevertheless let ourselves be taken in by the ideal of essence, insofar as this ideal marks the very possibility of identification and differentiation. Essential meaning is projected by the possibility of meaning in general, which is why even readings that dispense with the simplistic idea of a single correct answer incorporate essential meaning as the ideality against which we implicitly measure interpretations (when we ask whether they are coherent, relevant, and so on). Far from representing an interpretative outcome that we imagine as being given somewhere, and that we may or may not aim to access, essence is thus, from the outset, part of the reading process. Not as a presence, but as *palpable absence* – what I will also call a presence-in-absence or an absence made present – towards which reading directs itself.

My proposition is to interpret the trace not only as referring to the past (the signifier's imaginary origin) but also as pointing to the future. Contained in the trace is the effort, both extended into the future and continually cut short, to unearth essence – an effort that does not dissolve into ineffectualness, but structures our readings by both driving them and denying them closure, rendering

them points on a trajectory towards a solution that is forever arriving, never to arrive. In proposing this reading, I am aware that Derrida's analysis of signification opposes itself to all notions of teleology, of a known future or predetermined outcome. What I wish to argue is that Derrida's deconstruction of essential meaning reintroduces essence precisely in the shape of an open-ended searching for an essence for which to remain imaginable is the minimal condition of signification in general. If this reading appears to do violence to Derrida's fundamental concern with overturning the idea of signification's (stable) centre, consider that in the form of an (unstable) mirage or phantom, this centre, far from being excluded from Derrida's account of the play of language, is on the contrary declared one of its un-deconstructible elements. Thus, *Writing and Difference* asks: "But is not the desire for a center, as a function of play itself, the indestructible itself? And in the repetition or return of play, how could the phantom of the center not call to us?" (297).

By recalling something that cannot be obtained, the trace introduces into signification certain effects of absence, even loss. Yet the trace also enables us to step over the gap separating referentiality from reference. It gives a trajectory to this step – but not a definitive outcome – by inscribing it into a specific network of differences that is also an imaginary course towards an essence. Insofar as reading structures itself in response to this essence, it thus lets itself be affected by an absence: by something that does not exist. It is here that desire enters the interpretative process. Analogous to the way in which desire can be conceptualised as desire for what is *not* given, interpretation can be understood as sustaining itself by projecting an element it will never encounter. The creative act of interpretation produces meaning not by providing it from a pre-existing plenitude, or by newly generating it in a process that could nonetheless be imagined as mechanical insofar as it would be entirely pre-programmed by the text, but by calling upon the reader to turn an absence (essential meaning) into a presence (actual meaning, reference, interpretation). The reader is implied in the reading process precisely because at a structural level, before any individual readers and their states of mind appear on the scene, meaning must be desired in order to be produced.

The missing missive

Returning now to *Finnegans Wake*, the heuristic gain of the above examination of desire in interpretation is that it enables us to better describe the function of ALP's letter. As I have indicated above and in the introduction, ALP's letter is often associated with the missing and vital bit of information that would resolve some conundrum within the *Wake*'s narrative. The mysterious document is hinted at, talked about, studied, and searched for throughout the *Wake* – but most of all, it is simply not there. To clarify what I mean by this, let me outline some passages that provide sustained considerations of the letter as opposed to mere mentions of it. The first of these is found in the already mentioned trial scenes of Book I, chapters three and four. There, the letter is discussed by the four judges as the lost piece of evidence that might clear up the case of HCE's misdemeanour and "bring the true truth to light" (96.27). Unsurprisingly, however, these scenes end without the letter ever having surfaced.

Next, the document appears in chapter I.5. The whole of this chapter is comprised of an analysis of the letter by "a grave Brofèsor" (124.9); yet in all of the roughly twenty-one pages this account takes up, little about the letter's actual contents transpires. Instead, the insistence on aspects such as the "many names" (104.5) that have been given to the document (see 104.4-107.7), its "outer husk" (109.8) or envelope (see 109.1-36), the circumstances of its discovery on a "fatal midden" (110.25), as well as the damage that such "residence in the heart of the orangeflavoured mudmound" (111.33-4) has done to it (see 110.22-114.29), must raise doubt as to whether the letter's contents are still legible, whether in fact there is any content at all, and whether the professor is even in possession of whatever it was the envelope contained. It is worth noting that Joyce originally drafted the version of the letter we now find in Book IV as a part of I.5, but eventually decided not to include it in that chapter (see Fuse 98-9). The deliberate nature of this omission further stresses the absence of the object the professor discusses.

The letter resurfaces in a similar capacity in book three, where it features in two scenes of the four old men interviewing Shaun. In chapter III.1, "Shaun in proper person" (405.9) is questioned by the four. Though they press him to "read the strangewrote anaglyptics of those shemletters" (419.19-20), Shaun evades the question by announcing that, instead of revealing anything about the letter's content, he will describe "what pronounced opinion I might possibly orally have about them bagses of trash" (420.2-3), after which he proceeds to comment on the letter's address (see 420.17-421.14) and its author, Shem (see 421.21-425.3). Similarly, when the "senators four" (474.21) question Shaun in his incarnation as "Yawn" (474.11) in chapter III.3, they return to the letter several times (see 478.1-2; 483.1-6; 489.33-4) without eliciting any clear answers.

It is true that the actual text of ALP's letter appears to feature in *Finnegans Wake* several times, for instance as the "Boston" Letter in I.5 (see 111.10-20), as ALP's "cushingloo" in I.8 (see 201.5-20), and, most prominently, as the "Reverend" letter in book four (see 615.12-619.19).[1] Initially, this would seem to contradict the argument I am making about the inaccessibility of the missive. However, these manifestations of the letter are not to be taken as reliable renderings, as I have already indicated in the discussion of Bernard Benstock's comments on the letter's plurality. In an article about the letter's different manifestations, McCarthy points out that "[n]o two version of the document are identical" ("Last Epistle" 725), and, on this basis, ventures that "no single account of the letter is more accurate than any other" (726). What I want to suggest is that this aspect of the letter's functioning in Joyce's text should alert us to the fact that in the *Wake*, the signifier's presence, far from constituting an antidote to the absence of essence, is what makes this absence painfully palpable.

In particular, McCarthy analyses the final and longest version of the letter, in Book IV, which could be argued to be the letter's most complete and most authoritative representation. He shows that this incarnation of the document not only differs from other versions presented in the *Wake* (say, in "the omission of the four X's that represent kisses" [727]), but that it actually constitutes a reaction

---

[1] For a list that includes minor manifestations of the letter, see Hart 232-3.

to them. The seemingly authentic version, he states, "appears to have been altered by commentary on it" (730). For instance, it echoes the wording of a purely descriptive passage, found in the professor's remarks about the letter in I.5, "About that original hen" (110.22), in the phrase: "About that coerogenal hun" (616.20). McCarthy concludes that ALP's letter, despite being seemingly included within the text we are reading, "is free – that is, irreducible to a consistent level of meaning, or even to a definitive text. In this, as in other respects, it is a model of the mysterious, compelling, kaleidoscopic work of which it is a microcosm" (732).

The idea of ALP's present yet inaccessible missive as a model, microcosm, or synecdoche for *Finnegans Wake* has proven a highly successful avenue of interpretation. Examples of it can be found in *Wake* criticism ranging from attempts to isolate stable meaning in the text (Tindall, with regard to the professor's comments in I.5, writes that here, "for several pages, the letter and the *Wake* are plainly one" [107]), to examinations of the *Wake*'s unstable multitude of meanings and styles (Slote, in his 2013 *Joyce's Nietzschean Ethics*, posits that "statements apropos this mysterious "Letter" have a self-conscious aspect and could be said to characterize the conundrums of the *Wake* itself" [128]). In view of the letter's conspicuous motions of absenting itself, it should be clear how this relation also ties in with the notion of desire in interpretation. To the approach that describes the letter as a *mise en abyme*, as a metonymy for *Finnegans Wake* itself, I propose to add a metaphorical dimension that relates ALP's missive to the signifier in general. The same holds true of the letter's mystery: the palpable yet unfailingly frustrated interest in the document demonstrated by both the *Wake*'s characters and its narrative. The impatient awaiting of this continually overdue and continually hoped for letter corresponds to nothing if not the desire in interpretation caused by the very thing that can never be present, essential meaning.

One critic who takes a similar view is Mikio Fuse. In the section on I.5 in *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake*, "The Letter and the Groaning," Fuse argues with regard to the role of the letter:

> While it is a synecdoche of the *Wake* in that it exemplifies the ineluctable betrayal of the Word by both readers and writers, the Letter is equally *any* document that was, is, and will be articulated in any language, inasmuch as any iteration inevitable falls short of the Word Itself. While "that ideal reader" can read the Word without stumbling over "paralyzed" language, we (the real) readers must sin when reading. This is typified in our readings of the *Wake* because to make *any* particular sense out of it we inevitably betray the Word-Letter by focusing on only one or at most some of the many available senses it opens up. (114)

In the terminology I introduce above, this is to say that the distorted language of *Finnegans Wake* bars us from making the transition from referentiality to reference intuitively and almost unnoticeably, as we often do. It thus confronts us more explicitly than most texts with the desire that is necessary for the process of interpretation. In the case of the *Wake*, this desire expresses itself in our insistence on "sinning," on continually subjecting to interpretation a text whose ambiguation is strictly speaking irreducible and whose non-words are strictly speaking illegible. I would therefore expand on the reading Fuse proposes here, by positing that the symbolic dimension of ALP's letter registers not only the inevitable failure of language, but also the desire that *teases* us with this failure, the writing's presence-in-absence that has us read the text against our better knowledge.

The general significance of this desire is in turn the aspect in which my own approach differs most significantly from Mahon's exploration of how Derrida's thinking can be brought to *Finnegans Wake*. Mahon's *Imagining Joyce and Derrida* highlights the role desire plays in Joyce's text; it does so, however, without going beyond an interpretation of ALP's letter as a synecdoche specifically for the elusiveness of the *Wake*. Mahon links the figures of Finnegan and HCE (see 20, 81) as well as the letter (see 84-5) to a "structural principle of ever-receding withdrawal and pursuit that shapes not only book I but also the paradigm for the pursuit of truth as presence across the entire text of the *Wake*" (21). In the case of the letter, this principle manifests itself in the fact that "[t]here is no pristine

Platonic *eidos* in the letter; there is only distortion" (85). This distortion gets underway a pursuit of "truth as presence" that can ultimately only demonstrate that no such presence exists.

Up to this point, I subscribe to Mahon's argument, however, he conceives of this desire-inducing distortion as of an attribute that is particular to the *Wake*. Mahon proposes that "the text of the *Wake* functions as a theatre of mimicry" (138), where the reader is invited to imitate exegetical procedures depicted in the text he or she is reading, and that "[i]n this theatre the object that the reader imitates withdraws" (138). But he does not explore the possibility of taking these dynamics of pursuit and withdrawal as a description of the process of reading in general. Instead, he singles out Joyce's text as sharing these mechanisms with only a select few, commenting, for instance, on "the situation of the reader-writer in Vico, Joyce, or Derrida" (179). Mahon thus performs a detailed but hermeneutically restrictive examination of how a number of Joyce's motifs can be read as a self-reflexive commentary that details the process of reading-writing *Finnegans Wake*. By contrast, my approach here will investigate the reading strategies that the *Wake* necessitates with a view to arguing that Joyce's self-deconstruction is revealing the implications these strategies have for other texts as well – that far from belonging to certain specific modes of philosophy, myth, or fiction, the act of reading-writing is one under which all reading can be included.

The connection between the *Wake*'s displacement of presence and more general problems of reading is particularly relevant with regard to Joyce's non-words, since the category of the non-word is closely connected to the manner in which I propose to read ALP's letter. If the letter promises an answer that the *Wake* continually withholds, a non-word presents us with the prospect of a legibility that is never given. And if the letter's failure to fulfil its promise is far from destroying interest in it, a non-word's illegibility, similarly, will not put an end to our attempts to decipher it all the same. What makes a non-word so interesting is that it keeps asserting its presence, inducing the enduring suspicion that a gesture of signification may be taking place. Yet it leaves us without the possibility of

entering in a process of interpretation that would allow us to neatly isolate this gesture. And in this, crucially, a non-word constitutes not an exemption from the regular relation between referentiality and reference, but this relation's exemplification and radicalisation.

This is not to say that *Finnegans Wake* is anything less than unreadable. Read the non-word I discuss at the beginning of this chapter, "Allmaziful," and you have not read Joyce's text; you have transformed the text to make it say something you can read. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the transformation of *Finnegans Wake* into a readable text has to be carried out before the book can be brought to bear on other, more conventional forms of writing. Rather, the transformations in which the *Wake* involves us shed light on the transition from referentiality to reference in general. As the tripartite structure I borrow from Fuse – Letter, *Wake*, word – also indicates, these transformations are relevant to how we wrest meaning from standard texts. I would thus expand on a suggestion Attridge makes in *Peculiar Language*, "that *Finnegans Wake* may be not an aberration of the literary but an unusually thoroughgoing *exemplification* of the literary" (232), by arguing that the *Wake* also presents us with a critique of language that is applicable beyond the realm of literary texts (and in making this claim, I reiterate *Peculiar Language*'s argument regarding the difficulty of distinguishing literary from non-literary language).

One of our tasks in studying the complexity of *Finnegans Wake*, then, is to acknowledge that its very unreadability exemplifies something about all reading. This is what I call Joyce's self-deconstruction: if a non-word raises in a very particular way the question of essential meaning (when transforming a non-word into a word, which word do we go for?), it reflects a conundrum that, due to iterability, all signifiers confront us with. The *Wake* draws our attention to the role of desire in signification; it reveals, as Norris puts it, "the desirous or libidinal aspect [...] of intellectual activity" ("Joyce's Heliotrope" 4), but it also drives home "the painful truth of desire, that it is constituted of a gap, a space, a lack, an absence, a distance at the heart of desire" (14). This lack, far from being abstract and merely inferred, is palpable in the very presence of words, in their stout

refusal to yield anything like essence. In radicalising this refusal, whilst also demonstrating our undiminished desire to overcome it, the non-words of *Finnegans Wake* exemplify the extent to which – in the words of another passage from I.5 – reading consists in "hoping against hope all the while that, by the light of philosophy, (and may she never folsage us!) things will begin to clear up a bit one way or another" (119.4-6).

The shape of lack

Joyce shares the image of a letter standing for the signifier with Derrida as well as with Lacan. In fact, both Derrida and Lacan relate the image of the letter/signifier to *Finnegans Wake*. Lacan alludes to *Finnegans Wake* in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'," where, in the French original, we read: "*A Letter, a litter*" ("Le séminaire" 25), misquoting the *Wake*'s: "The letter! The litter!" (93.24). Emphasising distortion (the crucial piece of evidence that looks like a valueless piece of scrap paper) this suggests that in Lacan's conceptualisation of the signifier as denying purity or essence, the *Wake* may already be kept in mind. It is certainly kept in mind in Derrida's discussion of letter-sending in *The Post Card*, which, as we will see in chapter two, makes explicit reference to Shaun the Postman. The letter/signifier, finally, is also the intersection of Lacan's and Derrida's work that spawned their debate about Poe's "The Purloined Letter." Nevertheless, I argue that their positions on this subject can be extensively and systematically aligned. Their exchange about Poe can in part be described as an instance of expression having gone awry – which in the context of the arguments I will now review would be a highly appropriate event to have taken place.

In *The Post Card*, Derrida investigates signification in the mode of postal delivery. He argues that "a letter can always – and therefore must – never arrive at its destination" (121). To salvage this formulation from the trap of a *non sequitur*, he specifies: "in order *to be able* not to arrive, it must bear within itself a force and a structure, a straying of the destination, such that, in any case, it *must* also not arrive" (123, translation modified). Or, as he has it in a different section of *The Post Card*: "a letter does *not always* arrive at its destination, and from the

moment that this possibility belongs to its structure one can say that it never truly arrives, that when it does arrive its capacity not to arrive torments it with an internal drifting" (489). With regard to the signifier, this is to say that there is always the *possibility* of its not arriving (not achieving the result intended by the sender), and due to this possibility, it can never *fully* arrive (in the sense of fully assuring sender and receiver that the risk has been evaded). The straying of the letter is Derrida's expression for what happens to a signifier between sender and receiver due to the logic of iterability.

Initially, there appears to be a diametric opposition between this line of thought and the sentence that concludes Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter:'" "a letter always arrives at its destination" (30). However, if the incompatibility of this statement with Derrida's understanding of meaning-sending seems blatant, we should ask how Lacan is using the image. The letter, for Lacan as for Derrida, symbolises the signifier. Yet we cannot take Lacan's use of "destination" to indicate what it would stand for in Derrida's usage: the successful transmission of meaning as intended by the sender. To interpret Lacan's "a letter always arrives at its destination" in this manner contradicts the text in which the phrase appears. I will now outline Lacan's argument in that text in its own (middle Lacanian) terms, leaving for the following subsections the task of a late Lacanian reading of the link between the signifier and ALP's letter.

In order to discuss Lacan's seminar, let me briefly outline the contents of Poe's short story. Its plot can be reduced to the following: in Paris, a Minister steals a compromising letter that enables him to blackmail the Queen. Though it can be inferred that he keeps the letter on his premises, the police, employed by the Queen in secret, in multiple searches proves unable to retrieve the document. Only Poe's detective Dupin succeeds in exposing the Minister's ruse: he has made no effort at all to conceal the letter, openly displaying it in a card rack where it escaped the attention of the police who were looking for a hidden object. Note that not unlike ALP's absent letter, which inspires several of the *Wake*'s investigations and interrogations, the Queen's letter propels the narrative forward by absenting itself but *making this absence present*. It is most productive of

hypotheses, schemes, and actions when it is inaccessible but, at the same time, this inaccessibility is felt by the story's characters. Lacan's reading of Poe's text uses this productiveness to cast the letter as the signifier in general and to illustrate the extent to which, as Lacan puts it, "the signifier's displacement determines subjects' acts" (21).

If Lacan speaks of the letter reaching its destination, we must therefore read this as a signifier *unfailingly producing its effect* on the writing/speaking subject. This effect is described in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" as being above all a manipulation of desire: "Such is the signifier's answer, beyond all significations: 'You believe you are taking action when I am the one making you stir at the bidding of the bonds with which I weave your desires'" (29). This effect is not based on an ideal of lucid communication, with letters always showing up where we intended them to be – a state that would leave us without any want or doubt. At this stage of his teaching, Lacan rather sees the symbolic order as a force of radical alterity, and therefore as a force that renders the subject enigmatic to herself or himself (a view that arguably only becomes more pronounced as Lacan's system develops to include intrusions into the symbolic of the real itself).

The "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" takes up this theme of distortion in signification when it states the formula that the unconscious is structured like a language as: "the unconscious is the fact that man is inhabited by the signifier" (25). In middle Lacan's terminology, this statement is virtually synonymous with one he makes earlier in the text, where he says that "*the unconscious is the Other's discourse*" (10). For as we have seen in the introduction, to middle Lacan, the symbolic is a structure that imposes itself on us without ever properly belonging to us or rendering us transparent to ourselves: rather it distorts us, like the distorted skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. The symbolic is effectively an alien structure; as Lacan puts it elsewhere in *Écrits*, the Other itself can be conceived of as "the locus of speech" ("Direction" 524), and speech, in turn, as the locus of the Other.

I therefore agree with Žižek's assessment that Derrida's critique "misreads the Lacanian thesis, reducing it to the traditional teleological circular movement,

i.e., to what is precisely called in question and subverted by Lacan" (*Enjoy* 11). Even in the middle phase of Lacan's teaching, his questioning of the traditional view already anticipates Derrida's analysis of language. If Derrida speaks of the letter's loss of destination, and Lacan of its trajectory, we can read this as a loss that constitutes a trajectory, insofar as the trajectory consists in nothing else than the *uncertainty* that the straying of the signifier causes. And although Lacan's elucidations on the discourse of the Other in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" makes use of the middle Lacanian theme of the subject's traumatic inscription in the symbolic, it can easily be re-read for the late position that sees the symbolic as saturated with fragments of the real. Throughout Lacan's various conceptualisations of it, the symbolic inevitably opens up the gaps it is called upon to close – as Thurston remarks, in the symbolic, there is "never enough meaning to cover the enigmatic space opened by the Other" (*James Joyce* 27).

Similarly, Rabaté, in an account of the Derrida/Lacan debate in his *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis*, writes: "The agency of the letter at work in Poe's tale is not limited to the ideality of a closed economy, as Derrida contended, but guarantees that the workings of language displaces identities thanks to the constant sliding away of the signifier" (140). I would suggest that we can add ALP's letter to the list of letters that exemplify this sliding. Like Derrida's straying message, ALP's ever-changing letter is caught in a mutability in which no essential meaning can manifest itself. And like the Queen's purloined letter, ALP's elusive, absent/present missive also indicates that lack is not an inert attribute. The letter's absence has a trajectory: it gives rise to a desire that is productive of meaning.

In reading this absence/presence, Lacan's approach, which conceives of the signifier's effect on its user as its defining characteristic, can thus serve as a helpful complement to what Derrida's analysis invites us to think as a desire that attaches itself to the trace. The notion of an effect resulting from an absence, however, also raises a question I have so far avoided in order to better prepare a synthesis of Derrida and Lacan. Before turning to late Lacan's thinking about the effects of absence made present, I need to address the role played in middle

Lacan's argument by *symbolic castration*. For although the term "castration" does not appear in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" Lacan makes it clear that the chief example of the transformative power signifiers have over subjects – the example of the Minister – is an instance of symbolic castration.

Here is how Lacan describes the scene that greets Dupin when he enters the Minister's room: "Between the jambs of the fireplace, there is the object already in reach of the hand the ravisher has but to extend" (26). In the original, this reads: "entre les jambages de la cheminée, voici l'objet à portée de la main que le ravisseur n'a plus qu'à tendre" ("Le séminaire" 36). By punning on the fireplace's posts ("jambages") as legs (French: "jambes"), between which the card rack containing the letter is spotted, Lacan likens to castration the appropriation of said letter by Dupin, an appropriation that turns the Minister from robber into robbed, including a number of castrating effects this entails. In tracing the trajectory of language, manifested by the letter's effects on those around it, Lacan's discussion thus insists that one key effect is the powerlessness – the castration – to which we are reduced as a result of not truly possessing the signifier. In Derrida's view, this approach evades the failure of language, since it offers the place of castration, the place from which the phallic master-signifier is missing, as the locus of this failure. In doing so, it imposes limits on the lack to be described, maintaining that although the full truth cannot be spoken, it can be *located* in an absence, and that in this sense it is identified as a knowable effect. As Derrida puts it in *The Post Card*: "that which is missing from its place has in castration a fixed, central place, freed from all substitution. Something is missing from its place, but the lack is never missing from it" (441).

The phallus is indeed Lacan's name for the hypothesised, impossible signifier that would render the Other transparent to us. In "The Signification of the Phallus," Lacan offers a number of observations from clinical practice on which his choice of this term is based. I will not discuss these reasons, however, because I hold that the most pertinent criticism to be made of Lacan's terminology is the one offered by Butler in *Bodies That Matter*: that precisely insofar as the phallus is said to *signify* (as opposed to coincide with or correspond to) power, essence,

authority, and so on, it must be open to "signifying in ways and in places that exceed its proper structural place within the Lacanian symbolic and contest the necessity of that place" (55). The gendered framework that prompts Lacan's nomenclature raises serious problems, and the manner in which Lacan passes over these problems deserves to be subjected to rigorous analysis, since the term cannot but risk re-asserting a phallocentrism it claims to be merely observing in a specific cultural setting. At the same time, the universal applicability of "phallus" means that it is possible, by Lacan's own admission, to completely dissociate the term from that original framework, and use it as the name of the missing signifier in virtually any constellation.

In the evaluation of the disconcerting mismatch between the term's derivation and its application, I cannot agree with Derrida's argument that the specificity of the image entails an undue specificity of the meaning. Derrida maintains that castration introduces two consequences into the thinking about language, to which he refers as logocentrism (logos as the carrier of essence) and phallocentrism (the phallus as a marker of the possession of essence, power, knowledge). In "This Strange Institution Called Literature," Derrida states that "although phallocentrism and logocentrism are indissociable, the stresses can lie more here or there according to the case;" yet, "in the last instance, a radical dissociation between the two motifs cannot be made in all rigor" (59-60).

My contention is that the synthesis, in Derrida's critique of Lacan, of these aspects into *phallogocentrism* underestimates the extent to which the phallus is meant to refer not to a presence but an absence. Gilbert Chaitin makes this point when he writes that in the Lacanian system, "the phallus is designed to guarantee a 'beyond' of representation – real presence – but that beyond is in fact an illusion, and the phallic function is nothing in itself" (111). The phallus is not a name that can master the real: it is *the name of the illusory signifier that could* (just as it is not the actual object of the Other's desire, but the hypothetical object construed as a stand-in for that desire's assumed focal point). I would thus compare the phallus to what Derrida, in the passage from *Writing and Difference* cited above, calls the "phantom of the centre" – an expression that gives us no reason to

believe that providing this name, "centre," interferes with the spectrality of what is being named.

It is true that in choosing the term "phallus," Lacan attempts to gather under a single name the experiences of lack with which we are confronted in the symbolic order. The form this attempt takes is that of phallocentrism. Yet the range of the term's application immediately undercuts this essentialism, and subjects it to an internal critique. In the end, the term can always be turned against itself and be made to function in ways more rich and varied than Lacan's position would at times allow for, while still drawing on the crucial insights that inform this position: insights that work to undermine logocentrism. I therefore suggest that the correlation between logocentrism and phallocentrism is, in this case, inverted: if anything, the straying of Lacan's term confirms both iterability and, ironically, castration in the sense of a lack of linguistic control. Butler, whose reading of Lacan I draw on here, cites Gallop's apt remark that the "inability to control the meaning of the word *phallus* is evidence of what Lacan calls symbolic castration" (126, qtd in Butler, *Bodies* 28).

Lacan, too, indicates the possibility of separating the highly specific, *imaginary* dimension of the phallus (where the phallus represents the loss experienced by the child in the oedipal triangle of the family, a problematic assertion for all kinds of reasons) from its more general *symbolic* dimension, constituted by the alterity of the symbolic – or, in late Lacan, by the scars left in the symbolic by the real. Some clarification on this point is provided by the recent publication (2004) and English translation (2014) of Lacan's tenth seminar, the seminar on anxiety. There, the object of anxiety, *objet petit a*, is defined in middle Lacanian terminology as "the remainder left over from the constitution of the subject in the locus of the Other" (284) – that is to say, from the subject's inscription in the symbolic. The phallus, instead of serving as the one signifier that covers the effects of this alienated constitution, is presented as only one manifestation of the *objet petit a* among others. Lacan states that "one of the possible forms in which lack appears is the $(-\varphi)$, the imaginary support of castration. But this is just one of the possible translations of the original

lack" (136). And he adds: "The term that Freud gives us as the final term, the castration complex in men and *Penisneid* in women, may be called into question. It is not necessary for this to be the final term" (136).

Then, in a transition from the structuralist emphasis on language dominant in middle Lacan to the topological thinking that informs late Lacan's work, Lacan argues the ultimate irrelevance of terminological choices. He offers the image of an insect crawling along a Möbius strip, trapped by the way the strip is bent back on itself so as to lack a border, a piece that would allow us to distinguish between one side and another. "Is the matter settled because we are describing this little missing piece, the *a* on this occasion, with this paradigmatic shape? Absolutely not, because the very fact that it is missing is what forms the reality of the world the insect is walking about in" (136). We may give a name to what is missing from our world, but this cannot make up for its topology, for the distortion itself and for the fact that we are caught in a world that is *defined* by this distortion and that cannot be returned to an ideal state through the mere act of describing the distortion.

Here, we encounter a fundamental difference in the epistemologies of Lacan and Derrida. For Derrida, the play of differences and identities constitutes simultaneously the possibility of language *and* the condition of experience. This does not mean that Derrida does not believe in a world outside language. As Geoffrey Bennington suggests, Derrida's position is rather one that complicates the clear-cut distinction between language and world. Bennington argues that "in the 'first' distinction between anything and anything, in the minimal referral (not yet a reference in the normal sense of the term) that the trace involves, the possibility of what we come to think of as language is already given." (94). Thus, the perceived world comes into being precisely insofar as differance already structures self-sameness and perception.

Lacan, by contrast, comes gradually to insist on the possibility of our being affected by a real beyond symbolisation – by something that is constitutively beyond perception, but that impacts our experience (sometimes massively, traumatically). Yet note that both of these systems conceive of the un-

representable as having a formative impact on representation. In Derrida, this effect is found in the movement of the trace that produces the signifier by displacing the absence of essence. In late Lacan, it manifests itself as the uninterpretable remainder of the real that distorts perception by tearing holes in the symbolic. Though coming from opposite directions, as it were, Lacan's and Derrida's respective systems can be seen to meet in this primacy of the inexpressible. If the trace means that essence is never present, but always indicated, the *objet petit a* means presence is always desired, but never given.

I expand on this because I want to argue that in *Finnegans Wake*, there is a similar twist at work whereby the limits of representation become something to be represented. The inherent imperfection of any language, of any system of signification, is given expression in the *Wake* in the form of ALP's letter, which we can understand as an instance of both of the above terms. ALP's letter stages the trace's dynamics of occulted origination: it draws attention to itself by withdrawing from our grasp. And ALP's letter figures as that positivation of lack that is termed *objet petit a*: part desire's absent object and part the very movement of absenting that causes desire and that *projects* an object of desire, in order to give desire a focal point.

Indeed, the letter can be seen to resemble *objet petit a* as the paradoxical *object-cause of desire*, about which Žižek writes that desire "produces its own object-cause" in such a manner that "the process of searching itself *produces* the object which *causes* it" ("Why Lacan" 39). The letter, too, is caught up in such a circular formative process. It is a stand-in for *Finnegans Wake* itself, into whose materials Joyce was more than happy to feed responses to his own work (including reactions to the serialisation of the *Wake* as "Work in Progress"), in one of the *Wake*'s many gestures that make meaning-production itself part of the book's content. The letter repeats this procedure on a smaller scale. In the interaction between I.5 and Book IV mentioned above, one manifestation of the document is impacted by the discussion of another manifestation. Thus, the letter is not only the subject of a search. It continues or mirrors certain elements of this search: a search that can therefore be seen to shape the very thing it is looking for. As Shari

Benstock writes, "desire" constitutes both "[t]he missing 'content' of the dreamletter" and "the urge to its own production (to dream, to write)" ("Letter" 169). What is at stake in ALP's letter is the productivity of that which eludes our grasp, a productivity that, in generating meaning, also reproduces in meaning the impact of a certain desire or absence, thus rendering absence present. Before discussing this aspect of ALP's letter, I will first turn to Lacan's examination of the productivity in question as what, in his late teaching, he terms the *sinthome*.

Affirming the unreadable

The problems posed by Joyce's text cannot be resolved through the simply act of gathering them under the heading of unreadability. Just as it will not do to ignore how Joyce destabilises meaning-production through the use of non-words, we cannot be content either to state that in *Finnegans Wake*, we encounter the altogether meaningless. Referentiality persists: the suspicion of meaning remains (if only in the form of the much cited argument that Joyce would hardly have invested the better part of sixteen years to play a joke on the literary world). In short, we have to read unreadability.

Unreadability plays a key role in late Lacan's teaching. The Lacan of the 1970s, and in particular of the 1975-6 seminar *Le sinthome* – Lacan's most sustained effort at coming to terms with Joyce's work – no longer upholds the structuralist view according to which subjectivity, including the unconscious, is reducible to language. Instead, as Thurston writes, "by the mid-1970s Lacan has come to conceive of the human subject as precisely a knot or chain in which real, symbolic and imaginary are linked together" (*James Joyce* 94). That is, Lacan still describes the subject in terms of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, but the centrality of these terms is now displaced by their combination into what Lacan calls the *Borromean knot*. The braiding of this knot is effectively a fourth order in itself. Again Thurston: "the writing of the knot cannot be situated in symbolic structure, psychological meaning or the mute insistence of the drive; in other words, the knot itself is irreducible to the registers it inscribes" (195).

In this irreducibility, we see the movement of late Lacan's thinking away from legibility, towards a topology arranged around the centre of a certain illegibility. The fourth order, that which knots together the other three, is precisely the sinthome. Thurston's article on the sinthome in Evans's *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* describes this term as a shift away "from conceiving of the symptom as a message which can be deciphered by reference to the unconscious 'structured like a language'," and towards thinking the symptom as "a signifying formulation beyond analysis, a kernel of enjoyment immune to the efficacy of the symbolic" (Evans 189). In this formulation, the gaps in the symbolic order that afflict subjectivity are found to be gaps in subjectivity itself. Instead of encountering the illegible elsewhere, in the alterity of a symbolic imposed on the subject, the subject itself is already punctuated by illegibility; yet these sinthome-atic gaps are also what holds together subjectivity's Borromean knot.

In developing this position, Lacan's views on psychoanalytical treatment necessarily break with the notion of rendering the subject transparent. Roberto Harari, in his book-length exegesis of *Le sinthome*, argues that the sinthome is "the incidence or effect of an irreducible 'psychotic' kernel in every individual" (145). Similarly, Rabaté comments that "the symptom seen as *sinthome* provides a fine cusp between psychosis and normality" (*Jacques Lacan* 180). Positing an irreducible and illegible (psychotic) kernel at the very heart of subjectivity, Lacan's thinking on the sinthome suggests that normality itself, taken to mean functional implication in the symbolic order, cannot be thought without the sinthome, but actually consists in the subject's formulation of a sinthome that successfully ties the knot of this implication. At this point, writes Rabaté, the goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is no longer to *undo* the symptom but "to reconnect the symptom with the symbolic order" (165). Although I will not take up the question of clinical application, it is interesting to note that in the first volume of *Against Understanding*, Bruce Fink argues that "[t]he primary goal of psychoanalysis with neurotics [as opposed to psychotics] is not understanding but change" (5). Fink goes on to suggest that where re-formulating the sinthome is within the subject's compass (i.e. where psychotic material is not the absolutely dominant force), therapy is still all too often preoccupied with interpreting the

subject when its aim should be to give the subject the opportunity to re-knot the orders of her or his experience.

What attracts Lacan to Joyce's writing is that, for Lacan, this writing constitutes an act of such re-knotting. In the introduction to *Re-inventing the Symptom*, Thurston writes that

> turning to those texts offered [Lacan] a way to show forth, not a confirmation of some preestablished doctrine or interpretative method, but an exemplary *resistance* to interpretation. And Lacan saw this resistance not as merely a baffling theoretical dead-end, but rather as a provocation to reconceive, to reinvent his psychoanalytic thinking. (xvi-xvii)

If Joyce's texts provide Lacan with an occasion to reinvent his psychoanalytic teaching, it is because Lacan reads these texts as part of the formation of Joyce's subjectivity. Therefore, the moments at which Joyce's writing interrupts codification, to let emerge something that eludes all semantic appropriation, are seen by Lacan as opportunities to engage such elements in the formation of subjectivity as remain unreadable.

It is in this sense that Sheldon Brivic can write, in *Joyce Through Lacan and Žižek*, that "Joyce should not be seen as, say, psychotic in the bizarre distortions of the *Wake*, but as someone working with the exploration of psychotic patterns for a liberating purpose" (13). The precise nature of this purpose would lead into biographical considerations that I will not retrace here – although it is important to note that if Lacan insists on the voluntary nature and the success of Joyce's procedures sufficiently to balance any simplistic suggestion of pathology, Rabaté argues that "[h]is caution was of little use, since Joyce would subsequently be used by Lacanian psychoanalysts as an important 'case'" (*Jacques Lacan* 179). Suffice it to say that, according to Lacan, at certain points in Joyce's artistic fashioning of his self, only a brazen interruption of legibility would do. Eventually, Joyce "n'ait pu trouver que cette solution, écrire *Finnegans Wake*" (*S XXIII* 125).[2]

---

[2] "has been able to find only this solution, to write *Finnegans Wake*" (my translation).

Yet *Finnegans Wake* is not at the centre of *Le sinthome*, which spends more time on discussions of Joyce's early texts. Thurston underlines Lacan's interest in what Joyce calls an *epiphany*: that early Joycean vignette that "cannot be translated into another meaningful proposition, but is wholly identical with its own contingent, accidental utterance" (Thurston, *James Joyce* 167). Insofar as an epiphany is thus "framed as a discrete literary 'thing'" (167), it is unreadable, it resists semantic transmission. At the same time, as a literary thing, it is also a presence; it constitutes an unreadability that asserts itself. Since the Lacanian examination casts this mode of assertion as a model for the operation of the unreadable in subjectivity, the uninterpretable aspect of the literary thing raises the question of the sinthome, the question of how an unreadability can "become the key to the topological coherence – that is, the singular identification – of a particular subject" (161-2).

The answer Thurston proposes is that "when Joyce countersigns the epiphany as an act of signification, he identifies with its anonymous semiotic gift by affirming it […] For Lacan, it is the subject's meaningless choice of writing that constitutes the *sinthome*" (166). What matters most is not the epiphany's meaning, but its being affirmed in its entirety, including its contingent and meaningless aspects, its transgression of symbolic codification – what Thurston also calls the epiphany as the revelation of "the void of creative jouissance-in-language" (197). This void is no longer part of the symbolic (or the imaginary), yet neither can it be identified as the real, since it constitutes a response to the real that implies an agency extending into meaning-production. To grasp this response, which weaves together the real and the symbolic in a seeming violation of their distinction, we should turn to Harari's analysis of *Le sinthome*.

Harari points out what appears to be an inconsistency in the argument of Lacan's seminar. In the first session, "Σ [the sinthome] is the product of a division at the heart of the Symbolic" (298). However, "by the tenth session, Σ is, clearly, equivalent to the Real" (299). Rather than finding fault with Lacan's system, or reconstituting consistency by deciding between these usages, we have to read this transformation as a rethinking of the border between the symbolic and the real.

The newly emerging formulation changes nothing about the fact that these two orders are irreconcilably different, but it urges us to consider that at the heart of the symbolic, there are found instances of the real. A signifier *contains* bits of the real; they are that in language that is more than language's making legible. If, in the Derridean trace-structure, the absolutely inaccessible can be seen to shape the production of meaning, I now propose to conceive of the sinthome along the lines of a similar logic. We cannot identify the fragments of the real that we encounter in a signifier (they would not be of the real if we could). Yet the signifier lends to their impact a certain particularity.

What the sinthome means, therefore, is that "there is a degree of freedom in the way that each speaker organizes the marks of the Other" (300), in the way he or she shapes the encounter with the alterity of the real that takes place in and through their manipulation of the symbolic. This entails a fundamental revision of the middle Lacanian doctrine of linguistically constituted subjectivity, seeing how "it marks a radical shift from the firmly held position about language holding us, rather than our holding language" (301). Whereas in a 1958 paper, Lacan can still say that we are "at the mercy of language" ("Direction" 525) and in a paper from 1960 maintain that "the subject constitutes himself on the basis of the message, such that he receives from the Other even the message he himself sends" ("Subversion" 683), in the very last session of *Le sinthome*, he states: "Par cet artifice d'écriture, se restitue, dirai-je, le nœud borroméen" (152) – the artifice of writing in question being Joyce's active implementation of the sinthome.[3]

Joyce's achievement, from his earliest texts onwards, in taking language beyond the realm of semantic transmitability suggests to Lacan a reconsideration of the *agency* at work in the symptom. Middle Lacan largely conceives of symptoms as necessary by-products of the symbolic order (you cannot inhabit the symbolic without also encountering its symptomatic gaps). This changes when Lacan describes the sinthome as the centrepiece of human subjectivity, as the element that knots together the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. From this

---

[3] "Through such an artifice of writing, I say, the Borromean knot reconstitutes itself" (my translation).

perspective, as far as the interaction between the symbolic and the real is concerned, the sinthome is neither legible, fully situated in the symbolic, nor meaningless, fully situated in the real. It is the subject's idiosyncratic articulation of a relation between these orders: an articulation that opens onto symbolic structures without being reducible to them.

Lacan thus moves away from his middle phase's confidence in the possibility of reading the unreadable towards a position that could be described as reading unreadability itself. In *Le sinthome*'s session of 16 March 1976, he says of the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake* that "ce qu'il avance, […] c'est le sinthome, et sinthome tel qu'il n'y ait rien à faire pour l'analyser" (125).[4] Yet in Lacan's address to the previous year's International James Joyce Symposium, he states: "Lisez des pages de *Finnegans Wake*, sans chercher à comprendre. Ça se lit" ("Joyce" 165).[5] *Finnegans Wake* "se lit:" it makes for good reading, it compels us to read – yet at the same time, nothing can be done to analyze it. In view of the qualification Lacan includes that we should read without trying to understand, I would argue that what we observe in the tension between these two statements is not a contradiction, nor a change of opinion. Rather, this tension reveals the use that Joyce makes of language's intrinsic fault-lines.

In the presentation to the 1975 symposium, Lacan goes on to state that Joyce is "le symptôme pur de ce qu'il en est du rapport au langage" (166).[6] What keeps us reading *Finnegans Wake* is not a readability, a possibility of appropriation through analysis, but Joyce's affirmation of what, with Thurston, I would term the creative void at the heart of language. Joyce finds in the absence of essence a certain presence of the real, a presence of that in language which is more than language's making readable, but which also imbues language with its creative excess, with its striving for meaning (referentiality) that is a power beyond all actual meaning (reference). The problem of *Finnegans Wake*'s unreadability is the

---

[4] "what he confronts us with […] is the sinthome, and a sinthome of such a kind that nothing can be done to analyse it" (my translation).

[5] "Read some pages of *Finnegans Wake*, without seeking to understand. That makes for [good] reading" (my translation).

[6] "the pure symptom of what our relation to language is" (my translation).

problem of this affirmation, which transgresses the limits of an interpretable symptom to become a sinthome.

The unreadability of *Finnegans Wake* affirms the presence in language of that which is outside meaning, of the real kernel that is also a symbolic and imaginary void. Yet, at the same time, it celebrates the possibility of responding to this kernel in a re-invention of the symbolic that will open up new possibilities of meaning even though this re-invention is itself incalculable: irreducible to symbolic codification. Thus, what Lacan's thinking on the sinthome suggests is that in turning unreadability into an opportunity for the production of meaning, *Finnegans Wake* is not operating outside the normal modes of meaning production. Much like Derrida, who sees the abyss of the trace as the fundamental reference point without which language could not function, Lacan holds the unreadable kernel of language to be the very source of language's productivity.

In this view, the *Wake* once again emerges as an *intensification* of signification, as a work operating at the outer limits of processes that invariably derive the presence of actual meaning from a presence/absence to which we can only respond in ways that are beyond calculation. Radicalizing this underlying logic of all meaning production, Joyce presents us with moments that truly encapsulate the breakdown of codification; yet he also demonstrates *the liminal possibility of inhabiting this breakdown*, of opening it up to the production of meaning. This, I propose, is why we insist on reading *Finnegans Wake*: the *Wake* is a text dedicated to nothing if not a demonstration of the desire and the productivity spawned by unreadability. If certain aspects of it remain radically unreadable, we can choose to be affected by this unreadability, to accept this sinthome as a symptom of the reading process, and of our participation in it. Moreover, if the demand the *Wake*'s unreadability makes on us is that we formulate a response to the making-present of absence, this demand is itself a subject of the *Wake*'s meta-textual reflections. As we will see, it is precisely this demand that is depicted in ALP's letter where it most resembles the *objet petit a*.

In *Joyce, Derrida, Lacan, and the Trauma of History*, van Boheemen-Saaf formulates a similar Lacanian reading, which in its terminological choices

furthermore sketches a possible passage from middle to late Lacan. Van Boheemen-Saaf suggests that from the point of view of their material textuality, "*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are best understood as attempts to encrypt 'castration,' or the ontological void, *into* textual structure" (98). The question, then, is what view van Boheemen-Saaf takes of this void, and my contention is that her argument comes down on the side of examining this void's encryption as a palpable, but crucially open-ended, effect on the reader. Regarding what she calls "the reader's implication" in Joyce's text, van Boheemen-Saaf writes: "We can no longer maintain our illusion of transcendent objectivity; we must either engage the crack in the looking-glass or repress and ignore it" (46). She goes on to argue that the former possibility, that of engaging and affirming the fracture in the symbolic, is what "is implicitly demanded by the anxiety of Joyce's tantalizing signifying texture" (68).

The distortions to which Joyce subjects his writing may well contain a dimension of illegibility, but this illegibility also tantalises us, teases us, and calls us into the text. At this point, the distortions really become *our* symptom. Or, as van Boheemen-Saaf puts it, "part of the meaning of Joyce may reside in his *Wirkung* on the reader" (18). This *effect* (German: "Wirkung") I would argue, is also an *affect*. Even as it has us partake in the sinthome-atic production of meaning, *Finnegans Wake* confronts us with language's central void, and with the anxiety that results from this confrontation – results from the making-present of the absence of essence. What I want to argue now is that this affective dimension is what we find expressed in ALP's letter when we read it for its resemblance to the *objet petit a* as the object of anxiety: that is, as the lack whose becoming presence we desperately try to hold at bay.

Revealing absence

A key moment in I.5 relates ALP's letter both to the classic phallocentric topos of truth as female and to the related topos of femininity as difference, absence, and lack. If I argue that phallocentrism can be separated from logocentrism in Lacan's terminology, we will see that, similarly, Joyce employs phallocentric images in such

a way that not only is his use of them not logocentric, he twists them into a critique of logocentrism.

The *Wake* casts ALP both as a patron-saint of the truth encapsulated in her "mamafesta" (104.4), the absent letter, and as a river-mother who personifies the generative principle and the flow of creativity. The book thus establishes a code in which femininity stands for enigma, otherness, and signification itself. It also links truth to nudity. At the beginning of the next chapter, I will discuss the geometry problem from II.2 that is one example of this link. Another instance of the connection between nudity and truth is found in the following description of ALP from I.8: "Anna was, Livia is, Plurabelle's to be" (215.24; echoed in 226.14-5). Here, Joyce may be seen to be alluding to Plutarch's account of the Isis-cult in Ancient Egypt, in which Plutarch states that the shrines of this religion carried reminders of the hidden nature of truth: "In Saïs the statue of Athena, whom they believe to be Isis, bore the inscription: '*I am all that has been, and is, and shall be*, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered'" (25, my emphasis).

The allusion situates ALP in a logic that equates truth with female nudity (the disrobing of the goddess). In this context, we may also note that in a list of titles for ALP's letter, ALP is referred to as "*a Woman of the World who only can Tell Naked Truths*" (107.3-4). However, the gesture of clothing nudity in a robe that hides truth from the impudent gaze of mortals introduces into the phallocentric logic a somewhat contradictory element: the failure to actually perceive truth. The same contradiction is at work in a crucial passage of I.5's discussion of ALP's letter. There, the professor states with regard to the letter's envelope:

> Admittedly it is an outer husk: [...] Yet to concentrate solely on the literal sense or even the psychological content of any document to the sore neglect of the enveloping facts themselves circumstantiating it is just as hurtful to sound sense [...] as were some fellow in the act of perhaps getting an intro [...] to a lady [...] straightaway to run off and vision her plump and plain in her natural altogether (109.8-20).

If ALP's letter can be interpreted as an image for the signifier, then the letter's envelope, which contains and helps transport the document, takes on the meaning of a signifier's material inscription. At first, this may imply a cautionary reminder to base reading on material evidence. Yet in spite of the professor's protestations, which may seem to initiate a movement away from the image of denuding, the link between feminine clothing and a message's material carrier can only confirm an underlying topos in which the letter's meaning (its "literal sense" or "psychological content") corresponds to female nudity.

The reading I propose of this passage is that the professor is speaking from a phallogocentric perspective (I will presently give my reasons for this assumption), but that his account is complicated by anti-logocentric elements through which it comes to destabilise itself. This is to say that even though, in order to create the symbol of ALP's letter, Joyce draws heavily on the phallogocentric image of femininity as the figure of transcendental truth, we can perceive deliberate fault-lines in the text where this image is subjected to scrutiny and, I would argue, its logocentric element rejected. One of these fault-lines is precisely the fact that the professor advocates a "decent" examination of the letter. Within the phallocentric logic of this passage, to introduce the indecency of nudity means to introduce the indecency of meaning itself.

In order to understand this change of register, we should take into consideration another Lacanian reading of ALP's letter, one carried out by Hanjo Berressem in "The Letter! The Litter! The Defilements of the Signifier in *Finnegans Wake*." Berressem also proposes that "Lacan's reading of Poe suggests that the letter in *Finnegans Wake* might be read as a similar 'allegory of the signifier'" (145). However, in order to produce this allegorical correlation, Berressem accentuates not the letter's absence (with the letter consequently exemplifying desire), but its ragged appearance (representing the imperfection of the symbolic order itself). According to Berressem's reading, the linguistic subject "becomes a victim to the inevitable distortions and anamorphoses of language, which the outer appearance of the letter symbolizes" (146). The many partial destructions and defilements that ALP's letter undergoes are made to stand for

the violence that language inevitably does to what it expresses. Thus, we return to the Lacanian conundrum of producing the symbolic at the cost of obliterating the real.

Commenting on the passage from the *Wake* I have just cited, Berressem writes: "The spirit cannot exist without and outside of the letter" (150), and yet, "[i]n describing its envelope Joyce stresses, within a complex modulation from questions of language (signifier/signified) to questions of sexuality (nudity/clothing), the impossibility of an ideal signified or meaning as well as naturality" (149). In other words: no spirit/thought without culture, but no culture without loss of spontaneity. In culture, the naked body cannot therefore truly function as the last vestige of purity, but takes on a significance that is *opposed* to naturality and purity. As Lacan has it: "Is nudity purely and simply a natural phenomenon? The whole of psychoanalytic thought is designed to prove it isn't" (*S VII* 227). It is this reversal that troubles the professor's alignment of nudity and meaning: just as clothes hide not nature (there is no need for clothing in nature) but the absence of nature, the presence of the letter hides the absence of ideal meaning – hides the fact that meaning is not "natural," but constructed.

I would give to this line of thought the additional twist of arguing that the absent ideality or spontaneity can *only* be thought as an absence: it cannot exist as a presence, at least not outside of mythologies that imagine some form of utopian culture without culture. In this view, the opposition between nature and culture that Berressem puts forward corresponds to the classic Judeo-Christian account that relates both clothing and imperfect language to original sin. If Adam and Eve's existence in Eden is associated both with nudity and with transparency in expression (I will discuss the ideal nature of Adamic language in chapter three), the postlapsarian condition is characterised by clothing and by a linguistic experience in which ideas are obstructed by the signifiers that try to express them. What is important, then, is that the wearing of clothes after the fall implies an understanding of nudity that cannot be thought at the same time as the absolutely spontaneous character of nudity before the fall, which is uncontaminated by shame.

In chapter three, we will see that Joyce indeed implements certain biblical texts, as well as the philosophy of Giambattista Vico, in a manner that inscribes *Finnegans Wake* in a tradition of connecting cultural advance to a decrease in spontaneity and purity – what Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, calls an "insistence upon nudity, fault, and default at the origin of human history" (44). In the perspective opened up by this insistence, we "have to think shame and technicity together" (5). Historical, postlapsarian, non-utopian culture, with its indecent knowledge and its imperfect technics of signification, taints both language and the body. It does not cover up a nudity/meaning that beneath the cover provided by clothing/signification continues to exist in its prelapsarian state. Rather, it *replaces* that which it hides: with nudity ashamed of itself and with meaning that shamefully fails to capture essence.

It is shame as an inevitable symptom of cultural imperfection that the professor is struggling with in chapter I.5, and struggling with from a phallogocentric perspective. The theme of shame puts considerable pressure on the alignment of meaning and nudity. Consider how, in middle Lacan, the absence of essence from the symbolic is doubled by the absence of the phallus from the (imaginary) body, male or female. This body's bareness – without ceasing to serve the phallocentrism that does its best to classify and control the absence in question – is therefore also feared/shamed to the extent to which the castrated body, locus of truth as an enigma (truth as absent but potentially accessible), threatens at all points to become a locus of enigma as failure (truth as absent because inexistent).

In the professor's concern for decency, phallogocentrism can be seen to undermine itself insofar as it makes appeals to an essence that it nevertheless carefully stipulates should not be approached too boldly – fearful that the ultimate point of reference should reveal itself to be not a presence at all but, on the contrary, a making-present of absence. Phallogocentrism thus follows the procedures of a fetishism that, equating truth and presence with the phallus, settles upon femininity as the image of mystery, only to immediately take this mystery as an indicator of a hidden presence, thus carrying out the curious

reversal that is fetishist disavowal. Disavowal, writes Evans, "is the failure to accept that lack causes desire, the belief that desire is caused by a presence" (44) – a presence inferred from an absence, as it were, and used to cover up that absence (the very opposite of absence made present). In *Spurs*, Derrida examines the same logic when he writes about the image of truth as female nudity veiled that "only through such a veil which thus falls over it could « truth » become truth, profound, indecent, desirable. But should that veil be suspended, or even fall a bit differently, there would no longer be any truth, only « truth » – written in quotation marks" (59).

Here, we should also note the correspondences between the professor's warnings and the chain of association that Derrida posits as a part of phallogocentric reasoning: "truth-unveiled-woman-castration-shame" (*Post Card* 416). The discord between the first term of this series, truth, and its last term, shame, is precisely what is produced by the self-contradictory aspect of phallogocentrism. Woman is revered as the symbol of essential meaning, yet the shame that results from the actual impossibility of obtaining an uncastrated or prelapsarian essence is likewise attributed to her (biblically, the fall that leads from Eden to postlapsarian history is primarily associated with Eve, not Adam). This shaming forms part of a stigmatisation of the feminine that traverses phallogocentrism for all its declared idealisation of femininity; it is part of an obsessive praising and scolding, unveiling and veiling. Such phallogocentric aggression is also found in other eruptions, in I.5, of violence and of dubious notions of control. What is arguably the same narrative voice (seeing how the entire chapter appears to be made up of the professor's account) also indulges in a fantasy of male domination, rendered as the question: "who thus at all this marvelling but will press on hotly to see the vaulting feminine libido of those interbranching ogham sex upandinsweeps sternly controlled and easily repersuaded by the uniform matteroffactness of a meandering male fist?" (123.7-10).

This is the violence and essentialism that I argue Joyce is dismantling when he counters phallogocentric procedures of sense-making with a language that

frustrates the search for matter-of-fact clarity and with a narrative that flaunts the letter's refusal to be sternly controlled. Seeing how the professor's response to this refusal equates meaning with nudity only to posit that meaning should not be directly looked at, the following reading is made possible: the professor's phallogocentric rhetoric engages in manipulations of materiality, reprimanding the neglect of the envelope, in order to cover up the unbearable elusiveness of essence. Like the wearing of "definite articles of evolutionary clothing" (109.23), the covering up of actual meaning, in all its imperfection, is "suggestive, too, of so very much more and capable of being stretched, filled out, if need or wish were" (109.26-8). It is suggestive of the fetishist idealisations of a phallogocentrism always impatient with actual meaning and with real-life nudity. And it is capable of stretching so as to accommodate the fiction of essence – an essence that is not in fact there. When the professor proceeds to ask who would doubt "that the feminine fiction, stranger than the facts, is there also at the same time, only a little to the rere?" (109.31-3), my suggestion is therefore that we should not take at face value the claim contained in this rhetorical question. In view of the above-cited eruption of misogynist violence, we should consider the possibility that the professor's exegesis is far from doing justice to its subject matter: that in asserting that essence is waiting just behind the veil, it runs counter to the significance of ALP's letter, trying to pin down something whose productivity lies in its absenting itself.

Indeed, Joyce's text signals the failure of the professor's strategy in two ways. First, for all the professor's cautioning, he is clearly drawn in by the lure of the letter. Throughout I.5, he veers from one aspect of the document to the next, in search of an insight that would finally be safe and sound. It is thus not certainty that ultimately proves productive of meaning, but precisely a desperate attempt to create stability where there is none (what in the next chapter I will examine as the anxiety of language). Secondly, in spite of considerable interpretative exertion, the professor's account of the letter's outward attributes does not succeed in providing clarity. As with the other elements examined in I.5, the consideration of the "enveloping facts" only serves to raise more questions. What is more, the materiality of Joyce's text undercuts the professor's discussion, demonstrating

how the very quality this figure urges us to focus on can further subvert his project of keeping the enigma of language at a safe distance. Consider the following passage, from the chapter's closing section, which describes the origin of several holes that perforate the letter: "they ad bîn "provoked" ay Λ fork, of a grave Brofèsor; àth é's Brèak — fast — table; ; acùtely profèššionally *piquéd*, to = introdùce a notion of time [ùpon à plane (?) sù' 'fàc'e'] by pùnct! ingh oles (sic) in iSpace?!" (124.8-12). Here, as with non-words in general, Joyce stages the instability of the signifier by insisting on the possibility of distorting it at the level of its material carrier: precisely the level that, in the professor's view, should protect us from any disturbance to sound sense. Where the self-identity of words should be most evident – in the factuality of their material inscription – both the surface of the letter and the typography of Joyce's text have been distorted by violent lashes of the fork/pen that give us only the enigmatic materiality of a ruined inscription, of non-words.

Even as we try to grasp it by means of only the most sound method, focusing on the undeniable facts of materiality, ALP's letter slips away. Its materiality itself is shaped in such a way as to suggest that what is hidden beneath it is not – and never has been – the pure essence of meaning. The letter thus potentially provokes our frustration; yet its elusiveness becomes important precisely at the point at which we give in to the desire to read nonetheless. Insofar as ALP's letter can be seen as standing for *Finnegans Wake* as well as for the signifier in general, both the letter's perforation described in this passage and the distorted inscription of the passage itself point towards the perilous nature of the act of reading, insisting on how this act fills in the gaps and holes that constantly threaten to derail it. As van Boheemen-Saaf puts it, *Finnegans Wake*

> "litters" the letter of representation, smearing the signifier with the darkness of non-meaning, non-differentiation and obscenity (an intention staged *in* the text as the pricking of holes in the letter, burying it in a dungheap, staining it with tea, etc.), as if to give a *location* and presence to the non-figurability of discursive trauma. But Joyce's text also *possesses* and *owns* this location. The text not

only attempts to stage the impasse from which it originates, it claims to inhabit its point of trauma; and it is marked by a jubilant self-consciousness. (158)

Barring us from travelling smoothly over silences and breakdowns of meaning – from intuitively proceeding from referentiality to reference without paying heed to that process's abysses of undecidability – Joyce's text undermines signification, yet preserves it, too, subjects it to scrutiny, and makes it into a temptation.

This simultaneity of effects is irreconcilable with the professor's project of covering up language's shameful impurity. The professor's pedantry and condescension, moreover, make him a likely candidate for an incarnation of Shaun, who arguably reprises this role when, in I.6, he lectures on "The Mookse and The Gripes" (152.15). There, a speaker designated as "Jones" (149.10), which in the pairing of the twins suggests John/Shaun (as opposed to James/Seamus/Shem), haughtily ventures that "my explanations here are probably above your understandings" (152.4-5). Upon delivering the tale of the Mookse and the Gripes, he then delights in the fact "that I am a mouth's more deserving case by genius" (159.26). In the next chapter, I will discuss the problems posed by Shaun's rhetoric, by his taste for superiority and control, and by his disdain for his brother Shem's less disciplined conduct. On the basis of these attributes, I propose to read Shaun as an expounder of phallogocentrism. If Shaun's/the professor's investigation in I.5 aligns him with the phallocentric view of femininity as truth, we will see that his discourse on Shem's writing shows a logocentric belief in the availability of essential meaning.

The challenge of *Finnegans Wake* is to a significant extent based on its rejection of the phallogocentric striving for decency and clarity. Whereas the Shaun-type professor would cover up the indecent way in which essence absents itself, the text in which the professor's discourse is presented openly draws attention to the sinthome-atic void at the heart of language. More radically than most other texts, the *Wake* challenges us to confront and affirm this absence: to keep in mind that actual meaning is not the given, self-evident alternative to what is not there. The latter line of thought would return meaning to the logic of

essential meaning, reappearing in the guise of pragmatism. Actual meaning, instead, is produced by the act of interpretation. And in the case of the *Wake*, actual meaning includes the impossible meaning of a signification that should not even be taking place: the signification of non-words.

This impossible and yet persistent signification urges us to accept actual meaning *as* non-essential. It urges us to do so even if this means tolerating considerable anxiety. And this demand, in turn, can be associated with Shem. Joyce opposes Shem's role as the *Wake*'s Penman to Shaun's fetishizing of clarity, visibility, and the materiality of the signifier's surface. In the following chapter, I will show that in his creative production, Shem readily embraces the very origins of anxiety. I will furthermore argue that in outlining Shem's precarious method, Joyce is in part commenting on his own writing, and on the attitude that *Finnegans Wake* adopts regarding the anxiety of language. In Shem the Penman and in the chapter known as "Shem the Penman," the *Wake* can be seen to give us the foremost exemplification of this attitude: to tolerate anxiety, indeed to *inhabit* it.

2

Shem, Shaun, and the Genealogy of Authority

Shaun: the anxiety of language

In the closing section of the previous chapter, I argue that *Finnegans Wake* identifies anxiety as a key factor in signification. The text combines meaning and shame in such a way as to suggest that reading is in part a constant struggle against an inevitable yet shameful failure. In the present chapter, I will widen the scope of my examination to include the position of the writer, represented in the *Wake* by Shaun's counterpart Shem. I will argue that Shem's presence in *Finnegans Wake* subverts what I identify as Shaun's phallogocentric perspective. This subversion, however, does not contrast Shaun's position with a "proper" agenda on the part of Shem – an endeavour that could only reduplicate logocentrism. Rather, Joyce allows anxiety to inform the role of both reader and writer, in a manner that undercuts their distinction.

In the first half of the present chapter, I examine section I.7. of *Finnegans Wake*, known as "Shem the Penman." I.7 is a curious and somewhat disturbing entry in the corpus of Joyce's writing about literary creation and, by extension, about his own task as an author. The entirety of "Shem the Penman," bar a dialogue at the end, comprises a marathon tirade in which a Shaun-type narrator vilifies Shem. There is a transgressive quality to the fierceness of the attack. Take the chapter's most infamous image, that of Shem making "synthetic ink and sensitive paper for his own end out of his wit's waste" (185.7-8) and writing "over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body" (185.35-6). Whether or not we take this to be a factual representation (whatever this may mean in the context of the *Wake*) of the Penman's creative process, the description opens up a space of scatological imagery that is troubling even by this

text's standards. Yet this passage is but the capstone of an assault suspiciously relentless and markedly repellent throughout.

It is this constitutive excess that I want to examine here. Shaun's attack is an exercise in wilful superfluity that, from the start, raises questions about its own purpose and validity. From the first paragraph on, the narrator admits to what may well be libel – he openly acknowledges that he is "[p]utting truth and untruth together" (169.8-9) – and flaunts a self-congratulatory elitism that does not recoil from sneering at Shem's diet, largely based on canned goods ("So low was he that he preferred Gibsen's teatime salmon tinned, as inexpensive as pleasing" [170.26-7]), or from poking fun at his status as a social pariah ("he had been toed out of all the schicker families" [181.3-4]). Derisive remarks about Shem's appearance, manners, and views are thrown in everywhere for good measure.

All of this must raise the question why Shaun's attack on Shem is given prominence in the text – that is to say, what this chapter conveys other than the twins' enmity, which is arguably presented in more intricate fashion in other parts of the book. To explore this aspect of Shaun's outburst, it will not suffice to gloss the various insults. A different approach is needed if we are to pay due attention to the chapter's inquiry into the position of the writer. More than anything else, this approach needs to take into consideration the distress that manifests itself in the conspicuous vehemence with which Shaun is making, or indeed not making, his point. For it is through his forcefulness that Shaun becomes himself drawn into a mode of expression that is governed by irrationality and chaos.

I will read Shaun's distress with a view to what I have introduced as the anxiety of language, though we will presently see that I am taking some liberty in the use of that term, "anxiety." In the previous chapter, I relate anxiety to the indecent, non-essential character of meaning. Here, I will expand on it as a sense of being stuck, a certain paralysis arising from the fact that there is no differentiated way of using language, no application of language that proceeds cautiously and reflects on its own effects, that would not, in this very gesture, introduce more obstacles between itself and the goal of precision. As I have already indicated, the defining contrast between Shem and Shaun that emerges

through the anxiety of language is not a conflict between such categories as Shem's madness or weakness and Shaun's rationality or severity. Instead, the chasm that divides them in this respect is Shem's acceptance and Shaun's denial of an affective dimension neither of them can evade.

Take the scene in chapter II.2 in which the brothers attempt to solve a geometry problem that forms part of their homework. If Joyce's punning on Shem's name throughout the *Wake* indicates that he can be identified with shame and non-essential meaning (sham), this section demonstrates Shem's own acceptance of that which he cannot understand and which therefore constitutes a shameful distortion of phallogocentric certainty. Here is the task the twins have to solve: "Problem ye ferst, construct ann aquilittoral dryankle Probe loom!" (286.19-20). The equilateral triangle being the *Wake*'s siglum for ALP, this geometrical construction is yet another case of the phallocentric logic that aligns ALP's nudity with truth. Shaun, who here appears as Kev, is unable to solve the problem: "Oikkont, ken you, ninny? asks Kev" (286.26-7). He subsequently appeals to Shem: "Oc, tell it to oui, do, Sem!" (286.30). In the process of explaining the solution to him (the diagram on page 293), Shem, appearing as Dolph, also draws ALP's genitalia, or illustrates how Shaun could get a look at ALP naked: "we carefully, if she pleats, lift by her seam […] the maidsapron of our A.L.P. […] And this is what you'll say. […] plain for you now, […] the no niggard spot of her safety vulve, first of all usquiluteral threeingles" (297.7-27). When Shem unveils ALP's nudity, what he reveals is the site of symbolic castration. It is a locus of Shaun's lack of knowledge (of anatomical knowledge / of the answer to the geometry problem), and thus a locus that even as it formalises and apparently controls Shaun's defeat also confirms this defeat.

As the upholder of the phallogocentric view, Shaun promptly reacts to this revelation with the appropriate Freudian anxiety, which he enacts in the form of aggressiveness against Shem. In a phrase that echoes Cain's murder of Abel in Genesis ("And Cain was very wroth" [Gen. 4.5]), we read: "And Kev was wreathed with his pother" (303.15). Shem, by contrast, does not appear the least bit agitated by ALP's otherness from himself and from Shaun. This does not change

the fact that the scene is conveyed from an exclusively male perspective that conceives of femininity as difference. But within this phallocentric framework, Shem's reaction does not follow the lines of logocentric reasoning. What is unveiled to the twins is – to them – otherness. Shem, however, shows no desire to veil or censure the presence of the unknown. Hence, in this instance, his untypical role (Shem being more often identified with the wrongdoing of Cain) as both Abel and the more able of the two brothers, the one who can solve the task at hand.

Shem's success with the geometry problem can be read as an example of his ability to endorse alterity, an ability that separates him from his brother's anxious need for knowledge and control. In I.7, this need reveals itself to be connected to language. That is, the accusations Shaun levels against his brother can tell us something about Shaun's own ideas regarding what language should do. If Shem's discourse does not meet Shaun's standards, then, from the content of Shaun's criticism, we can surmise that these standards revolve around decency, discipline, purity, and hard-edged clarity. By, contrast, Shem's output is disparaged as being intrusive ("unsolicited testimony" [173.30]), full of mistakes ("all the different foreign parts of speech he misused" [173.35-6]), unintelligible ("his usylessly unreadable Blue Book of Eccles" [179.26-7]), sloppy ("every splurge on the vellum he blundered" [179.30-1]), offensive ("nameless shamelessness" [182.14]), chaotic ("messes of mottage" [183.22-3]), or plain repellent ("obscene matter" [185.30]).

Throughout, this general lowness of discourse is linked to Shem's social and material situation – the position of the outsider who lives in a ruined house, eats poor food, works surrounded by litter, and writes on his own skin for lack of paper. Perhaps the most significant fusion of the motifs of littering and impure writing occurs when Shaun describes Shem's house, "known as the haunted inkbottle" (182.30-1). In Shem's workshop, "[t]he warped flooring of the lair and soundconducting walls thereof, to say nothing of the uprights and imposts, were persianly literatured" (183.8-10). The very surfaces of the house are littered with literature; they are written all over in an intricate manner reminiscent of a Persian

carpet. It is in the context of this description that we also encounter the chapter's central image, that of Shem's own body serving as "the only foolscap available" (185.35-6), on which he writes with ink made from his own excrement.

These descriptions suggest that, as far as Shaun is concerned, Shem's artistic production can be deemed categorically unsound. Not only does his writing take place in filth and chaos, Shem's habits also betray a disorder in the sense of a mania or "pseudostylic shamiana" (181.36-182.1). There is some psychological realism to this conflation of exteriority and interiority. In "An Obsession with Plenitude," Patrick Moran points out that "Shem's living area, which has become unlivable because of his failure to discard seemingly valueless objects, closely resembles the spaces created by compulsive hoarders" (285). That Shaun's narration aligns Shem's compulsive behaviour with the latter's writing therefore suggests a permeability at multiple levels: an interaction between Shem's mental space, his surroundings, and his literary output. With regard to Shaun's statement that Shem is "writing the mystery of himsel in furniture" (184.9-10), that Shem's surroundings are formed or altered by his writing of his self, Moran comments that, in turn, "Shem's selfhood is inscribed in or understood through the associative networks of the hoarded objects that surround him" (299). This reciprocity, the notion that Shem not only expresses himself through the creative process in which he engages, but is also defined by this process, is important to my discussion. I will argue that the writing Shem produces indeed *leaves its mark on him*, both physically and psychologically.

Yet if Shaun wishes to dismiss Shem's practice on the basis of its transgressive character, Shaun's discourse gets caught up in its own form of manic behaviour. There is an illogical and self-defeating side to his performance, which begins by stating in the very first paragraph that its target's "back life will not stand being written about in black and white" (169.7-8), and which then proceeds to engage with that life for what adds up to the better part of twenty pages. Shaun appears to repeatedly postpone the moment when his point will finally have been made. He propels himself forward with exclamations such as "Aint that swell, hey?" (171.29), "Be that as it may" (182.4), and "O, by the way, yes, another thing

occurs to me" (190.10). Although he arguably wishes to defend a discursive ideal based on clarity and control, his own outburst thus has him frantically pile up accusations in a manner that betrays nothing if not his own irrationality. The more this excessiveness fashions Shaun's condemnation of Shem for not being the polite, coherent, and comprehensible writer Shaun implicitly posits as the ideal manifestation of that role, the more it becomes apparent that Shaun's own narrative falls massively short of these attributes.

My contention is that this contradiction is not incidental, but should be read as crucial to Joyce's portrayal of what I refer to as the anxiety of language. Before continuing my reading of "Shem the Penman," I will therefore specify how I use this term. I should begin by clarifying that, in the way I employ it, "anxiety" is an expression borrowed from Lacan, but intended more to tap into Lacan's topology of intelligibility and distortion than to convey the actual extremes of phobia and other states of anxiety in the precise psychoanalytic sense (without abandoning, however, the thought that Lacan's approach can tell us a lot about why a confrontation with certain texts – including Joyce's and, at a different level, Shem's – appears to be quite an unnerving experience for some readers).

Anxiety indicates an impasse and an increase in intensity: an incessant and increasingly frantic circling around something the subject can neither grasp nor turn their back on, something they have as little power to resolve as to abandon. In some ways, this is how Freud already defines the term. In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, he revises his earlier analysis of anxiety as pent-up libido, suggesting instead that anxiety is an expectation of helplessness. What brings about the shift from realistic anxiety to neurotic anxiety (the latter being what psychoanalysis concerns itself with) is a "displacement of the anxiety-reaction from its origin in the situation of helplessness to an expectation of that situation" (167). That is, anxiety is less a confrontation with something that renders the subject helpless than it is an unspecified but intense *dread* of such a confrontation: neurotic anxiety, writes Freud "is anxiety about an unknown danger" (165). In other words, anxiety "has a quality of *indefiniteness and lack of object*" (165).

Lacan's account is a reworking of this theory that inverts its main point. Emphasising the failure to control the object through codification, as early as the second instalment of his seminar, Lacan links anxiety to "the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*" (164). Yet the non-object of anxiety, although it cannot be perceived as such, nonetheless makes its presence felt. This heralds a difference between Freud and Lacan that is more fully developed in Lacan's pivotal seminar on anxiety. Whereas Freud stipulates that fear has an object but anxiety does not, Lacan unequivocally asserts that "*anxiety is not without an object*" (*S X* 131). Anxiety, in Lacan, is the experience of the real's imperviousness not as an inertia, but as a force that makes itself present: that intrudes into our codification of objects and confronts us with "the function of lack" (131). Anxiety's non-object is an object: *objet petit a*.

The example Lacan uses to discuss the function of lack in this context (see 136) is the topology of the Möbius strip that I mention in chapter one. Crucially, the distortion that bends this strip into its paradoxical shape is not an effect brought about by the insufficiencies of the symbolic order. It is the other way around; the distortion is a real formation of the world constituted by the Möbius strip, and it is this formation that interferes with its inhabitants' capacity for symbolically codifying the surface along which they travel. Anxiety, then, is the result of our becoming *aware* of this interference: a sudden confrontation with the insufficiency of our means of codification. As Lacan puts it, the "sudden emergence of lack in a *positive* form is the source of anxiety" (61, my emphasis). In other words, anxiety is generated when the *objet petit a* actually asserts itself, when, as Evans writes, "something appears in the place of this object" (12), so that the *objet petit a* is no longer a placeholder but becomes a presence palpably interrupting symbolic codification.

There is a parallel between, on the one hand, the late Lacanian perspective on anxiety that is emerging in the topology of the tenth seminar and, on the other hand, Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, where a similar symbolic insufficiency constitutes a recurring motif from the first page on. Derrida speaks of "an anxiety

about language – which can only be an anxiety of language, within language itself" (3). He is not using the term in a systematic manner, and certainly not in the specific psychoanalytical sense that Lacan gives it. What I want to argue, however, is that it is hermeneutically productive – and far from doing violence to Derrida's project – to carry out a Lacanian reading of this motif of *Writing and Difference*. Such a reading takes its cue from the superficial similarity to demonstrate the congruence of the underlying arguments, showing that both Lacan and Derrida are concerned with the affective dimension of an interruption of codification that effectively asserts its own, disconcerting presence.

Derrida describes the straying of meaning as "the anxiety and the wandering of the language always richer than knowledge, the language always capable of the movement which takes it further than peaceful and sedentary certitude" (73). This movement beyond certitude should not be taken to indicate that language is without bounds. The statement needs to be read alongside the problem of the *desire for certitude*. As I demonstrate in chapter one, the logic of the trace makes signification possible by projecting essential meaning. Therefore, the complete erasure of essential meaning cannot constitute the content of any signifying gesture, but only the limit at which signification itself breaks down. Within language, the emergence of an ideal of essence is inevitable. What a Lacanian reading of this implication of Derrida's argument brings out is that, if essence itself is never present, the ideal of essence should itself be understood as a presence, but as a presence that can ultimately only function as the *making present of the absence* of essence.

What gives rise to what Derrida terms the anxiety of language is not language's free play, but the organisation of this play around a liminal notion of stability. This is why Derrida can speak of a "hesitation between writing as decentering and writing as an affirmation of play" (297). If there is a hesitation here, there must be a difference: decentring and play are not the same thing, for *the play of language is not without effects of centring*. There would be no anxiety of language if one could simply "affirm the nonreferral to the center" (297) – which is exactly what Derrida is so often taken to be saying. Nor would there be any

anxiety if there was a centre outside play, a centre that "closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible" (279). What causes anxiety is the necessity of negotiating some stability *within* play: "anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset" (279). This mode of being implicated is what Derrida calls the trace, and what is crucial here is that the trace does double duty as both the signifier's fictional origin and as the trace structure that actually produces the signifier. The trace thus obscures its own origin; yet the very process through which it does so – the temporalisation that is differance – strictly speaking already reveals the fictional nature of the projected origin, even as it situates signification within a certain obligation towards this origin.

In this, the trace resembles nothing so much as Lacan's *objet petit a*, of which Žižek writes that it "stands simultaneously for the imaginary fantasmatic lure/screen and for that which this lure is obfuscating, for the Void behind the lure" (*Parallax* 304). The trace is a *projection*, both in the sense of the image that is being projected and in the sense of the process of projecting that, when examined, reveals the image's fictionality and the void that the image is covering up. And we can now say that, as in Lacan, what Derrida calls the anxiety of language results from a transition from the projection's former aspect to the latter, from essence absenting itself to the making-present of this absence, from *objet petit a* as a placeholder to *objet petit a* as a presence, from the obfuscation of the void to a contemplation of the trace structure that *confronts* us with this void and tells us that essence does not exist.

In reading Derrida in this manner, my objective is not a merely perverse alignment of different methodologies. I hold that this approach deviates in a meaningful manner from a great number of interpretations that assume Derrida denies the possibility of essence in such a way that his position is untroubled by the very notion of essence, positing the signifier as simply overflowing with meaning. One interpretation that proceeds along these lines is put forward by Žižek, for instance in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, where he writes that the "fundamental gesture" of deconstruction is "to dissolve the substantial identity

into a network of non-substantial, differential relations", and that "the notion of symptom is the necessary counterpoint to it, the substance of enjoyment, the real kernel around which this signifying interplay is structured" (78). Here and elsewhere, Žižek takes Derrida's approach to be a sort of isotropic networking or free-floating relativism. This is certainly a view on Derrida's work shared by many, it is not, however, what is in fact entailed by Derrida's speaking of the play of language.

As Derrida conceptualises it, the play of language is organised around effects of centring, where the centre is that which is not given within language itself. Yet the fact that no actual centre can ever be located (that no essential meaning can be identified) does not undo this organisation. What it does is to indefinitely extend the play, and render it anxiety-inducing, precisely *because* it constitutes a search for a kernel. This dynamic can be approximated, ironically enough, through the description Žižek gives of Lacan's position in "Why Lacan Is Not a 'Post-Structuralist'." Namely, that the "movement of the signifier is not that of a closed circle, but an elliptical movement around a certain void. And the *objet petit a* as the 'originally lost object,' as the object which in a way coincides with its own loss, is precisely the *positivation of this void*." (36, my emphasis). The play or movement of language is infinite not because it is all-powerful, but on the contrary because it cannot produce its own end. Where the end should be, there is instead a confrontation with a void that continues to throw us back onto the trajectory of the trace structure: a trajectory both open-ended *and* tortured by an ideal of essence. Žižek is therefore wrong when he states that Derrida's views on signification pass over the difficulties that Lacan formalises in the *objet petit a*. These difficulties are captured in the trace, which is the trace of a centre: a fictional echo of essence that, because it is fictional, is poised right between obfuscating the absence of essence and making present this absence.

It is this presence-of-absence that makes Derrida as well as Lacan highly relevant to Joyce's manipulation of desire in *Finnegans Wake*. They provide us with ways of making sense of the tension between the continual frustration of our impossible desire for stable meaning and this desire's undiminished urgency by

allowing us to formalise this tension as an anxiety of language. Broadly corresponding to the double role of castration as the site of (absent) truth and the site of (present) failure, and to the double role of the trace as that which promises and that which abolishes essence, there is a double movement of anxiety that recoils from any instances of language's instability and yet is tempted to conduct an analysis of them – namely, as of incidental, surmountable shortcomings, as opposed to inherent, insurmountable ones. The disclosure, critique, and to some extent undoing of this anxious response is what both Lacan and Derrida undertake, although they do so according to two very different epistemologies (as we have seen in the previous chapter).

For late Lacan, the task consists in rendering palpable the intrusions of the real into the symbolic. For Derrida, it consists in doing justice to the trace. Yet even though the trace is the very process of codification and thus seems to correspond to the Lacanian symbolic order, Derrida's insistence that the trace relies on a spectral centre is a gesture of making present the impact of something that itself absolutely eludes codification. This is to say that even though the thinking of differance by definition cannot include the category of the real, it includes much of what Lacan analyses as the real's *effects* on language. If in Lacan, codification is interrupted by its own outside, in Derrida, codification contains its own outside. Which is precisely what is also at stake in Joyce's strategy of bringing us face to face with distortion itself, of having us *confront* the anxiety-inducing manner in which, as I argue in chapter one, essence indecently absents itself.

It should be clear that, in the use it makes of anxiety, my line of argument favours structural analogy over a literal application of psychoanalysis – after all, few readers respond to the distortions of Joyce's writing with the full force of a phobic reaction or with an actual nervous breakdown. Yet I propose that the analogy is sufficiently useful to legitimise such usage: it helps us understand that, if language can never access essential meaning, then neither can language go the other way and expel from itself the notion of essential meaning altogether. The fiction of essence asserts its presence, and what the *objet petit a* (and the trace)

can tell us is that such a fiction is precariously suspended between providing and absenting a point of reference for interpretation.

As I will argue in the following, this is as true of writing as of reading. Our search for ever more careful formulations and specific expressions, for instance, performs the potentially unending back-and-forth of an anxious deadlock that cannot escape the fact that the more we say, the more we open ourselves up to the possibility of being misunderstood. Nor can this effect be evaded by means of writing less or writing more boldly. Any simplification, where it reserves the right to retain some core meaning seemingly stripped of misleading complexity, already constitutes a return to the anxious striving for minimal precision. Yet this is not to say that our reading and writing are *exclusively* anxiety-inducing activities; that this is not the case is evident from our capacity to enjoy texts.

Lacan's and Derrida's – and as we will see, Joyce's – analyses of language find in it a certain *irreducible* element of anxiety that is important since it makes sense of language's refusal to be controlled. A certain unpredictability tends to wrench even highly inspired writing and highly devoted reading away from their intentions, subjecting them to development. That it is effectively in doing so that language's instability proves productive is not a contrast to its being anxiety-inducing. On the contrary, it is how I would apply to language Lacan's statement that "it may well be from anxiety that action borrows its certainty" *(S X* 77). In flights of creativity, in sudden leaps of exegetical insight, we do not so much conquer or neutralise language's unpredictability as tap into it. Again Lacan: "To act is to snatch from anxiety its certainty. To act is to bring about a transfer of anxiety" (77). As we have seen in the previous chapter, to partake in signification is to find yourself in the presence of something you cannot completely grasp, and then to act by nevertheless articulating a response to this presence.

It is such a presence and such a response that we see at work in the case of Shaun's attack on Shem. Shem's writing, to Shaun, is an unbearable distortion: it is the making-present of everything about language that Shaun's phallogocentric position holds in abjection. In other words, Shem's literary output serves for Shaun the function of something appearing in the place of *objet petit a*, as Evans puts it.

And by circling around this appearance with morbid fascination, Shaun's attack stages for us the logic of an anxiety that, in reacting to the stain or gash where the symbolic breaks down, proves unable to quite get past this blemish and can only respond to it in a manner that, in some way or other, re-inscribes the breakdown onto the very response.

In Shaun's case, the re-inscription takes on an extreme form; if Shaun demands control, clarity, precision, and so on, his own production may not only discredit what he puts forward, it can be read as demonstrating the *opposite* of his claims to be the case. This is to say that in "Shem the Penman," Shaun serves not only as the creative figure's counterpart; in generating a (spoken or written) discourse about Shem, Shaun himself takes on the role of an author. The precipitation to which he falls prey in this role contributes key insights to the chapter's investigation into the creative process. In particular, Shaun's ferociousness can be read as enacting the curious logic whereby the attempt to impose stability on language is the very thing that reproduces the anxiety of language.

In a different form, this logic may also contribute to our own reactions to "Shem the Penman." When we read the chapter as one prolonged instance of irony in which Joyce, although he speaks through Shaun, also speaks against him and thus remains at a distance from him, we effectively give in to the temptation to preserve an ideal of authority: in this case personified in the figure of Joyce who remains authoritative precisely by being dissociated from Shaun's flawed discourse. However, we can do so only at the cost of not taking said discourse seriously. This problem is tangible, for example, in interpretations that focus on identifying I.7's sources, since among these, hostile reactions to Joyce's work (which the initiated reader of Joyce can be expected to disagree with) figure large. With regard to Joyce's use of this material, there is a tradition of biographical contextualisation that takes its cue from Tindall's categorical declaration that "Shaun embodies all disapproval of Joyce" (132). The fascinating notion of Joyce speaking through Shaun and against Shaun is thus narrowed to an approach that

engages only the latter half of this dynamic and that radically separates Joyce from Shaun.

Let me give just two brief examples of this approach. In *Joyce's Web*, Norris puts forward an interpretation that is intriguing, and indeed strongly points in the direction of the kind of reading I want to attempt here, but that also encounters some of the limitations resulting from reading I.7 as ironical. Norris ventures that "[th]e writing of the chapter – in its abandonment of modernistic scrupulosity and clarity – becomes itself tenemental, full of junk, filth, brokenness, and squalor" (83). However, rather than examining the profusion of these elements in what is simultaneously Shaun's discourse and Joyce's, Norris reads them as undermining a position from which Joyce is *distancing* himself: "the relationship between modernism's obsession with *form* and modernist notions of class" (70). Even though she identifies the chapter's language as one of its salient features, and even though she posits that "'Shem the Penman' greatly exceeds any personal counterattack against Joyce's critics, or any purely local exercise of *ressentiment*" (93), the interpretative focus she adopts on Joyce's mocking of classist attitudes leads Norris to read the chapter as an attack whose scope, though not personal, is essentially defined by the attitudes to be mocked.

For a more recent example, consider Ingeborg Landuyt's "Cain-Ham-(Shem)-Esau-Jim the Penman," the section on I.7 in *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake*. Having commented on various parodies of his critics that Joyce incorporates into the text, Landuyt proposes:

> The result of Joyce's accumulations is a quite recognizable description and condemnation of his person and his methods as seen through the eyes of his critics that simultaneously should be read as his defense. (159)

I fully subscribe to the idea that "Shem the Penman" is a portrayal of Joyce, and that it constitutes a defence of his art as well as his refutation of his critics. I would go so far as to say that no reading could make much sense of Shaun's spouting rage without these assumptions. Yet the phrase "as seen through the eyes of his critics" puts a problematic spin on things. For it posits that in defending Joyce's

method, "Shem the Penman" portrays this method from what amounts to a second-hand and second-rate perspective. We are thus transported from an intriguing problem – that Joyce' own voice and the voice of Shaun appear to coexist in the same narration – to a position that is content to posit that Shaun's outburst has little to offer beyond historical trivia about Joyce and his detractors.

In thus dismissing Shaun's aggressiveness, we get ahead of ourselves and abandon, before having accounted for it, the complex mode of Joyce's defence: the intersection of multiple points of view through which "Shem the Penman" depicts the writer at work. We effectively keep Shaun's failure at a distance, and thus we reproduce his anxious mode of criticism which bars him (and us) from perceiving that Shem's (and Shaun's) writing may enact for us something about the *inevitability* of writing's failure. At the level of this enactment, Shaun's viciousness and eagerness are no longer opposed to Joyce's own position; they can be seen to put this position into practice.

Shem: the peril of writing

In order to argue that what is at stake in "Shem the Penman" is indeed Joyce's staging of the anxiety of language, I will now turn to what provokes Shaun's anger in the first place: Shem's writing. By its very nature, Shem's text appears to be a manifestation of complete introversion. It remains with him and around him, surrounding him as an inscription on the walls of his house, on his furniture, and on his own body. It forms what would appear to be the private archive of a private mania. And the fact that this literary output does not reach the public sphere – does not, in fact, reach a single reader except for Shem himself – must again raise the question of why Shem's writing should provoke as much of Shaun's venom as it does.

Shaun's account undergoes a tell-tale moment of self-contradiction when he accuses Shem of the intention to "study with stolen fruit how cutely to copy all their various styles of signature so as one day to utter an epical forged cheque on the public for his own private profit" (181.14-17). One page further on, Shaun adds

the question: "how very many piously forged palimpsests slipped in the first place by this morbid process from his pelagiarist pen?" (182.2-3). What is striking is that the mode of these two misdemeanours, forgery and plagiarism, is necessarily public. Neither plagiarism nor forgery are of any consequence unless the perpetrator convinces a sufficient number of people of his or her authority either to claim the rights to an object's production (plagiarism) or to assert its authenticity (forgery). On the one hand, we are thus given a depiction of Shem's manner of writing in which he remains within his own four walls to scribble over every available surface, including parts of his own body. On the other hand, we are presented with the image of him forging cheques and other documents in order to get them into circulation. And although these are not mutually exclusive activities, as descriptions of the sort of literary output Shem produces, they do appear to be conflicting.

The crucial move in aligning these two images is to relate them to Shaun's phallogocentric outlook. In both descriptions, Shem can be seen to violate the ideas of essentiality and authority that Shaun is propagating. Shaun's understanding of a writer's authority, to which he unfavourably compares his brother, seems to cast the artist as the sole origin of a work that at no point of the creative process is outside its maker's express command. When referred to such an understanding of the artist, the two accusations made against Shem, plagiarism/forgery and introspective obsession, cease to conflict and take on the form of complementary images for Shem's readiness to be transformed both by the discourses that surround him and by those he produces himself – which is to say: his readiness to surrender mastery over these discourses. As Attridge remarks in *Peculiar Language*, Shaun "mistrusts Shem's writing on the grounds of its dispersal of meaning through ruses and plagiarism" (214).

Shem's thefts, ruses, and borderline insanity amount to a reinvention of the position of the artist as a position not of sublime expression of selfhood, nor of an approximation of objective truth, but as a position of ongoing, productive, and dangerous negotiation. In defiance of logocentric notions of stability, Shem is not the origin of his own discourse. Yet if Shem's words are never truly his own, it

is not because he derives them from some store of already perfected expression either. He is the place of the formation of a discourse that is but a forgery: already borrowed, already inauthentic, and thus already stained with the paradoxes of re-appropriation and re-authentication that are the paradoxes of language. What Shem's out-of-control writing method exemplifies is that the act of writing brings forth what it sets down in a process of invention and negotiation that exceeds any settled knowledge because it inevitably has to confront the unavailability of essence and therefore language's division from stability. Compare, for instance, the passage that describes Shem using "his own individual person" (186.3) in order to describe life in general, forging his personal experience "into a dividual chaos" (186.4-5). In the movement that leads from the undividable self of the writer as subject or "individual" to the expression of his or her views, this expression becomes "dividual:" divisible, divided from itself. Being expressed, it enters iterability, it is divided from its ideal essence.

In this view, Shem's mode of production closely corresponds to another remark of Derrida's in *Writing and Difference*:

> To write is to know that what has not yet been produced within literality has no other dwelling place, does not await us as prescription in some *topos ouranios* or some divine understanding. Meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself (11).

In the process of writing, as in the process of reading, there is straying from purpose, a structurally necessary element of this process's inadequacy to itself. Meaning is not produced through evocation of some already given understanding, but through a confrontation with what in chapter one I describe as the real kernel of language's productivity. Shem's work can be seen to exemplify this confrontation: like the Derridean or Lacanian subject, Shem is not so much a wielder of language – a language expressing an already settled meaning – as he is wielded by it.

This destabilises not only his literary output, but also his own self. For discourse, as Thurston writes, belongs "to the Other: in other words, it is

drastically at odds with the ego's urge to achieve final semantic self-appropriation" (*James Joyce* 94). Indeed, Shem is deeply and dangerously involved in his literary production, to the extent of being himself transformed by it as out-of-control bits of language come to be inscribed on his own self. He writes and he is written upon, which is to say that his schizophrenic split between active and passive attitudes is also represented by the fact that his own body provides his paper *and* his ink. He is both the writer and the written, as his physical self extends into writing both in the sense of the inscription that applies ink and in the sense of the document that receives ink.

Insofar as Shem can be identified with Joyce, Shem's active/passive enmeshment in borrowed language corresponds in particular to Joyce's use of non-words, through which his own writing undergoes a demonstrative break with the notion of setting down undistorted meaning. In *Imagining Joyce and Derrida*, Mahon argues that the rampant borrowing that takes place in Joyce's networks of allusions "destroys the traditional oppositions of true/false, owned/stolen, and so on, and dislocates the eidetic model where a text's meaning would be guaranteed through an author's animating intention or will" (349). By writing in a manner that does not try to limit the straying of language, to evade it or find a reasonably secure spot within it, but that instead puts the straying to artistic use, Joyce undercuts notions of the author as an active figure: a figure of absolute control.

Finnegans Wake would thus appear to perform the only way out of the deadlock of anxiety; namely, to acknowledge the non-existence of essential meaning and to enter the Shem-type wager that writing can be at its most powerful and most productive where it most embraces risk and instability. Yet what is crucial is that not even this solution can evade the anxiety of language. It can merely decide to inhabit anxiety. I argue, above and in chapter one, that no negotiation, no analysis, no signifying gesture of any kind can get underway without entrusting itself to the imaginary ideal of essential meaning. Therefore, in order to produce any text at all, a Shem-type sacrifice of mastery *must* be breached by a Shaun-type desire for expression. Which is to say that in Shem's

mode of literary production, the anxiety displayed by Shaun must already be at work.

The binary opposition between Shem and Shaun is thus complicated by an element of correspondence and interdependence. Here, I take my impetus from Finn Fordham's *Lots of Fun at Finnegans* Wake, where Fordham suggests that "Joyce's characters can be seen to embody principles of the various processes of writing and rewriting" (217), and that

> Shaun's attack on Shem is partly Joyce's self-critique, objectifying the self that criticizes and reformulates his very writing, according to opposing principles. Artists are the first critics of their own work. Self-judgement which predicts criticism may be a painful part of the creative process. The opposition of Shem and Shaun is a means for producing the identity of opposites in the work, something produced by revision, and a correlative for auto-critique. (221)

However, I would emphasise that we cannot imagine this process of dialectical opposition as one freely at the writer's disposal. Auto-critique (what I describe as Shem taking on attributes of Shaun, being drawn into the task of communication), does not come into being solely on the basis of a sovereign decision to anticipate one's future critics. Nor does auto-critique end when all objections the critical self predicts have been taken into account by the creative self. For it is precisely in attempting to exhaust this kind of prediction that auto-critique indefinitely rekindles itself (in the terms introduced above: Shaun's anxious rage reproducing Shem's lack of control).

Auto-critique *necessarily* accompanies writing. It cannot end before writing ends. If writing cannot take place outside a framework that projects the ideal of absolute precision, and if absolute precision can never be achieved, then the respective positions of Shem (mutability, production) and Shaun (essentiality) must be thought as each being in part defined and brought into existence by the presence of the other, in a manner that renders impossible their complete separation or merging. Just as anxiety introduces itself, in the form of Shem-type mania, into Shaun-type evasions of language's paradoxes, so it insinuates itself

into Shem-type scepticism, in the form of a Shaun-type longing for clarity. The process of writing, although it is necessarily interrupted at some point by external means, cannot therefore be interrupted by that which would put an end to the need for revision: by finding an identity between Shem and Shaun that would lay to rest the productiveness of their difference. Short of this possibility, writing remains, as the *Wake* puts it: "That letter selfpenned to one's other, that neverperfect everplanned" (489.33-4) – an on-going work that continues to fall short of its perfect form, and that therefore continues to divide the one who produces it, pitching them against their other.

Correspondingly, the motif of the twins' inseparability balances that of their conflict throughout the *Wake*, though not in the mode of a neat fusion. Instead, they are continually mixed up or amalgamated in ways that preserve some contrast between them, for instance in the combination of a tree or "stem" (216.3; Shem) and a "stone" (216.4; Shaun) into Tristan: "a Treestone with one Ysold" (113.19). In "Shem the Penman," the dialogue at the end of the chapter hints in a different manner at the impossibility of thinking the twins in the singular. It introduces them as "JUSTIUS (to himother)" (187.24) and "MERCIUS (of hisself)" (193.31), creating a tension between a sense of speaking to the other and one of speaking to oneself (and also performing a substitution and distribution that splits the word "himself" in half). However, their blending is not a complete synthesis, as the pronouns' suspension between identity, exchangeability, and separation indicates. There remains, as we read directly below the introduction of Mercius, "a convulsionary sense of not having been or being all that I might have been or you meant to becoming" (193.35-6). As the writer is divided, he or she is also transformed by a restless striving to restore unity. Thus, regarding another reiteration of the biblical fratricide motif, "And each was wrought with his other" (252.14), Roy Benjamin points out that, "[b]y combining the murderous rage of Cain towards Abel (and Cain was wroth with his brother) with the synthesis of each with the other, Joyce suggest a never-ending oscillation between conflict and resolution" (218).

The true peril of Shem's position expresses itself in the fact that he cannot be imagined on his own, diametrically opposed to, or indeed absolutely identical with, his brother Shaun. He is caught in the Lacanian "paradoxical topology of self and other" (Thurston, *James Joyce* 119). The one always depends on the other, and this co-dependence also means that neither of the twins' identities is ever truly settled. I would argue that this is also how we should understand Derrida's proposition, regarding a footnote in "Plato's Pharmacy," that he can be taken to refer to his own essay when, in this footnote, he speaks of "the whole of that essay, as will quickly become apparent, being itself nothing but a reading of *Finnegans Wake*" (88 n.20).

In "Two Words For Joyce," the text in which Derrida makes this suggestion – the suggestion that "that essay" may be taken to mean "Plato's Pharmacy" itself – he also specifies, in a remark not always noted in discussions of this claim, that it is "between Shem and Shaun, between the penman and the postman," that *Finnegans Wake* stages "the whole scene of the *pharmakos*, the *pharmakon*" (28). Derrida is not speaking, then, of reading *Finnegans Wake* in any general sense; it is specifically to the twins' paradoxical interdependence that he relates the scene of the impossibility of deciding between opposites inhabiting the same gesture (as with the meanings of Greek "pharmakon"): that is, the impossibility of separating "the medicine from the poison, the good from the evil, the true from the false, the inside from the outside, the vital from the mortal, the first from the second, etc." ("Plato's Pharmacy" 169).

This is a relevant interpretation to bring to *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce's text insists that it is impossible to strictly separate Shem from Shaun. It moreover unambiguously identifies Shem and Shaun as penman and postman, making clear that what is at stake in this inseparability is indeed the relation between the writer and the reader. When we engage the numerous moments in the *Wake* at which the twins exchange places, come to overlap, or collapse into a split identity, we should not lose sight of the fact that they are assigned these roles: creator and carrier, writer and reader. These characterisations mean that the twins' perilous co-dependence, which is never quite a synthesis, is the *Wake*'s explicit

representation of a mutability and reciprocity of the activities of reading and writing.

Shem and Shaun: negotiations

The position of the writer as Joyce depicts it in Shem and Shaun is one that cannot keep the anxiety of language at a distance, nor respond to it as to something that assails language from the outside. This has crucial consequences for interpretative authority. If the task of the writer necessitates the writer's division from himself or herself, then the process of writing will always complicate the ideal of the author as masterfully orchestrating her or his work. To make one more reference to *Writing and Difference*: "The 'subject' of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. […] Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found" (226-7). Instead, writing is from the outset caught up in the struggle between "the author who reads" (227), who reads what she writes in an attempt to turn herself into her first reader and anticipate interpretation, and "the first reader who dictates" (227), this being, I would suggest, an anticipated reader, a construct inhabited by the author, yet possessing the power to dictate, to interfere with what should have been the straightforwardness of the writing process. In this interference, the ideal writer, solitary and sovereign, disappears from sight together with the ideal written. What we are left with is a process of pre-emptive negotiation that always remains dangerous, in the sense that this process will tend to wrench the writer from whatever they originally thought their purpose was (before they thought about it by actually writing about it). As soon as writing is begun, it turns from the setting down of a single subject's thoughts into a negotiation between several perspectives: a negotiation fraught with all the risks that iterability introduces into transitions between different positions. The writer is already a reader, and writing is thus a process that takes place in the absence of essence, insofar as the writer, in her or his role as reader, cannot fully comprehend what her or his writing means.

We need to ask what happens to our reading of any text – but particularly a text like *Finnegans Wake*, which makes many of these mechanisms into its own subject matter – if the position of the writer is already divided in such a way as to suggest that not even a text's author has complete mastery over its meaning. Here, we can turn to Derrida's examination of a related constellation of reversibility and dictation. In *The Post Card*, Derrida explores the positions of writer and reader through the image reproduced on the eponymous postcard, which shows a thirteenth-century illumination, by Matthew Paris, of Plato and Socrates. What interests Derrida about this depiction is that it presents the philosophers in what appears to be a reversal of their customary roles. In Paris's illustration, Socrates is portrayed as "the one who writes – seated, bent over, a scribe or docile copyist," and thus appearing as "Plato's secretary" (9). Plato, on the other hand, is shown standing behind Socrates, with his finger raised in a manner that makes him look "like he is indicating something, designating, showing the way or giving an order – or dictating, authoritarian, masterly, imperious" (10). Derrida suggests that this inversion, which threatens to undo chronology and hierarchy in one fell swoop, can be seen as a paradoxical illustration of the fact that we know Socrates's philosophy chiefly from the writings of Plato. For this means precisely that Plato is not the scribe, but the one who dictates. Plato "has made him [Socrates] write whatever he [Plato] wanted while pretending to receive it from him" (12, and see 146).

Plato can effectively be understood to *ventriloquize* his teacher. I take this term from Derrida's "Literature in Secret," where he comments on a section in Franz Kafka's *Letter to His Father* in which Kafka himself formulates his father's possible response. Derrida asks:

> What does this spectral father say to Franz Kafka, to his son who makes him speak like this, *as a ventriloquist*, at the end of his *Letter to His Father*, lending him his voice or allowing him to speak but at the same time dictating what he says, making him write a letter to his son in response to his own, as a sort of fiction within the fiction? (134, my emphasis)

The point here is not that the Socrates we know from Plato's writings may be a fiction. It is rather to investigate the attributes such a fiction would possess – attributes that are of interest because Plato's (imagined and perhaps imaginary) method is a model for any number of interactions with the past, including the acts of reading and of writing an interpretation. In creating his dialogues, Plato would appear to set down what he wants, and bestow authority on it by claiming to have received it from an authoritative source. Yet this manoeuvre changes nothing about the fact that the authority in question remains with Socrates.

If Plato's writing can partake in this authority, it is because, nominally, Plato receives the text from Socrates – a claim that destabilises identities on *both* sides. In this scenario, Plato's dialogues would give their author a certain freedom to re-invent Socrates, to efface him and take his place. Yet this freedom comes at the price of Plato being in turn effaced by his invention, of being supplanted by the fiction whose voice we hear in the dialogues. Plato, Derrida writes, "has succeeded, moreover, by inventing Socrates for his own glory, in permitting himself to be somewhat eclipsed by his character" (49). The inventor is eclipsed by her or his invention, her fiction, her character. For this character, once invented, makes demands that must be fulfilled if the creation is to have any credibility. Far from possessing unrestricted control over the ensuing dialogue, the ventriloquist has to *speak in character* if the act of ventriloquism is to make its proper impression.

I propose to relate this problem of finding an appropriate voice to the point about reading as an act of invention discussed in chapter one. Interpretation must not abandon the text, but due to iterability, it cannot hope to pronounce the text's essential meaning. The only option left, then, is to speak in character: to speak in a manner that aims to do justice to the text even as one is aware that what is said nevertheless originates with the interpretation. If the ventriloquism performed in interpretation is successful (which is ultimately decided by the interpretation's reader, but which also depends on the achievement of its writer), it results not in arbitrary dictation, but in a destabilisation of identities on both sides such that it will become genuinely difficult to locate where the voice in question is coming

from. It will become difficult even for the one producing the interpretation. For interpretation, like any creative process, can produce unexpected results and divide itself from what its originator intended it to be. In the attempt to remain in character, the writer of an interpretation will therefore scan her or his output from the reverse angle, as it were. This writer, too, is already *his or her first reader* – and subject to the effects of ventriloquism, hearing the voice of the interpreted author in what is in fact the writing of the interpreting author (and never the essence of the interpreted text), and hearing this voice in the very reading that would test the authenticity of what is being said. Authenticity is displaced by the interpretative activity that would access it and communicate it in a new form.

Like Joyce's Shem and Shaun, Derrida's Socrates and Plato exemplify that the roles of writer and reader cannot be neatly detached from one another. "S. is part of p. who is but a piece in S." (132). Each one a necessary element of the identity of the other, the figures in these pairs become impossible to separate, yet they are neither indistinguishable nor interchangeable. Least of all are they parts of the monotony of a synthesis. "They are each a part of the other but not of the whole" (132), interdependent in a manner that precludes wholeness and closure: "p + S does not make any whole" (132). They are also as impossible to put in any kind of order (chronological, hierarchical, etc.) as the two sides of a postcard: "What I prefer, about post cards, is that one does not know what is in front or what is in back, […] the Plato or the Socrates, recto or verso. Nor what is the most important, the picture or the text, […] reversibility unleashes itself, goes mad" (13). Each already contains the other, which means that we cannot simply reverse the conventional positions of reader and writer.

Reversibility is not activated once, or any precise number of times, either rotating the reader into the place previously occupied by the writer, and *vice versa*, or else returning everything to the original state. Instead, reversibility goes mad, afflicting the very roles of reader and writer as they are troubled by an abyssal interdependence. In an article on *Finnegans Wake* and *The Post Card*, Murray McArthur notes that "[t]hrough the reversal of positions, […] [t]he self-present voice of consciousness is revealed as another's voice, the voice of the

other" (230) – a voice that, in a Lacanian manner, already inhabits the self. In the iterability and the postality of language that, as will see, can also be called its spectrality, identity is already haunted by difference.

As it presents itself in the reversibility of Socrates and Plato, the problem of authoritative interpretation is thus transported away from the *accessing* of an authority already given somewhere (Socrates unilaterally dictating to Plato, having complete mastery over the situation, or Plato unilaterally dictating to Socrates, completely usurping the father-figure) towards a *negotiation* of authority (Plato dictating to Socrates, but already taking Socrates's voice into consideration and thus also taking dictation from Socrates in turn). This returns us to Shaun the reader with a new view on his plight as the one who would preserve purity and clarity, but cannot avoid being drawn into creative processes himself. The focus is shifting to an ever more initial moment in Shaun's relation to Shem. Before Shaun can formulate any reaction to his brother, already at the point at which he reads him, he partakes in the act of invention that is reading. He thus becomes an inventor, a creator, a ventriloquist, someone who hears his own speech and reads his own writing, in disbelief of its perverse mode of fidelity to the text, of its infidelity to his own maxim of *absolute* fidelity.

In *The Post Card*'s imagery of card and letter sending, the *Wake*'s figure of one who would deliver a message is already at stake – "*Jean le facteur* (Shaun, John *the postman*) was not very far off" (142), writes Derrida. Shaun's function, moreover, is already connected to the rethinking of the roles of writer and reader through Socrates and Plato. Derrida indicates this in the abbreviated expression: "Shem/Shaun, S/p" (142), which, although highly condensed, is in my opinion the decisive clue to *The Post Card*'s thinking about the *Wake*. Here, we can follow a suggestion by Andrew J. Mitchell, who in "Meaning Postponed: *The Post Card* and *Finnegans Wake*" uses Shaun's appearance in Derrida's text to problematize the postman's task of transporting messages. Mitchell links the role of Shaun the Post to that of quotation marks, understood as a packaging or safeguarding that would allow the meaning they enclose to be transported without being altered in the process. He writes:

> To bear a message and establish order: these are the roles of Shaun the Post, and he is those quotation marks. Their problem is his problem. Each attempts to contain postality and yet maintain separation, to envelope it and limit the extent of its effect. (149)

If "[t]hroughout the text and especially in book III, Shaun is a mediator" (149), serving, for instance, as the postman who carries ALP's letter (see 420.17-9), this position is thus ultimately an impossible one, for any attempt to bridge a distance brings into play iterability, and puts into question the idea of absolute fidelity, of noise-free transmission, of transporting meaning without affecting it. Mitchell argues that, to the extent to which Shaun can be identified with this impossible task, the message he carries "is a rift in his being that divides him from himself, and it distances him from himself by interrupting his identity with himself" (149).

Thus, in chapter III.1 of the *Wake*, Shaun complains about his task, saying: "I am now becoming about fed up be going circulating about" (410.7). The circulation of the letter appears to be connected to Shaun's identity – "to isolate i from my multiple Mes" (410.12) – and its overall impact is clearly a destabilising one: "since it came into my hands I am hopeless off course" (410.17-8). Yet, in the end, nothing would be delivered – and Shaun would not inhabit the role of a carrier of messages at all – if such a division did not successfully wrench him from his own message and his own project, a project that in the radical form he envisions for it could only mean immobility, inertia, the ceasing of transportation.

In Mitchell's reading, Shaun's inevitable failure interrupts not only postal delivery, and communication more generally speaking, but also self-identity and thus essence itself. My own interpretation aligns itself with this approach. Shaun's necessary conflation with Shem does more than afflict the means of communication by which one attempts to access essential meaning. The blurring of the distinction between the twins threatens the concept of authoritative meaning itself. It is worth noting, at this point, that ALP's letter, which as we have seen can be taken to symbolise essence and the ipseity of the signifier, is repeatedly described as having been *dictated* to Shem. For instance, we read of the "Letter, carried of Shaun, son of Hek, written of Shem, brother of Shaun,

uttered for Alp, mother of Shem, for Hek, father of Shaun" (420.17-9), as well as that "[t]he gist is the gist of Shaum but the hand is the hand of Sameas" (483.3-4).

The letter, then, is not the work of ALP alone. Its writing appears to have required Shem's/Seamus's assistance, with contributions to its gist from either Shaun or Shem – "Shaum" being another example of the difficulty of distinguishing between the two, seeing how one is nearly (but not quite) the same as ("Sameas") the other. In view of the above argument that the one who takes dictation is simultaneously the one who can dictate, this means that Shem's creative process, with all its flaws and dangers, potentially afflicts this symbol of essential meaning – not at the level of its being read, but at the more constitutive level of its writing. Another reference to such a complication is made in the discussion put forward in I.5, where the author of the letter is found to be "possibly ambidextrous" (107.10-1). The presence of two hands might indicate two writers or two sides of the same writer; either possibility entails a split that distances the letter from its pure self.

On the multiplicity of influences that divide and destroy this purity, Shari Benstock comments:

> The letter's content is not only influenced by the woman who dictates it, but by the son who pens it and the son who posts it; its message is full of gaps and uncertainties, at times is partially or wholly obliterated, is badly transcribed, is written in foreign languages, and is addressed to someone other than its recipient. The letter's route from writer to reader is circuitous, ambiguous uncharted ("Letter of the Law" 196).

Uncertainties flow into one another. Just as Shaun cannot be neatly distinguished from Shem, the question of a message's transportation is entangled with that of its doubtful nature and with the question of its creation. In the *Wake*, the problems of interpretation, of interpretative authority, and of writing are all bound up in such a way as to suggest that, like essence, authority is not something pre-existing that waits to be accessed, but is negotiated in an interaction between reader and writer.

To further examine this interaction, I will now turn to a scene that stages the link between Shaun's task as a messenger and the nature of symbolic authority. This is the scene found at the beginning of chapter III.3. It presents Shaun acting in the role of "a medium at a séance channelling the voice of HCE" (Mitchell 149) – that is, the voice of the father and, as we will see, of authority itself. The un-deadness of HCE is, of course, a central motif of *Finnegans Wake*. Already the book's title brings to mind Tim Finnegan's return from the dead as described in the "Finnegan's Wake" ballad. In the first chapter of Joyce's text, HCE turns into a version of Finnegan when he refuses repeated demands to stay dead. We read, for instance: "Now be aisy, good Mr Finnimore, sir. And take your laysure like a god on pension and don't be walking abroad" (24.16-7); "Drop in your tracks, babe! Be not unrested!" (26.16-7); and "Repose you now! Finn no more!" (28.33-4).

The rise of the repressed, of the lost or lacking and even of the dead is a theme present in the *Wake* from the outset (detectable also in the "wake (up)" of its title, read as a verb). It is important to note, however, that in the séance conducted by the four old men in III.3, HCE does not fully return. His presence is conjured up, but it remains phantasmatic, and like the "spectral father" of Kafka's letter, he is allowed to speak only by merging his voice with that of his son. It is worth pointing out, then, that one of the titles I.5 gives to ALP's letter, and thus to the *Wake* and to all signification, is: "Suppotes a Ventriliquorst Merries a Corpse" (105.20). In the next subsection, I will argue that giving a ventriloquized voice to that which is not a living presence is the basic condition not only of language, but also of manifestations of authority, and I will discuss paternal authority as a key example of such inauthentic authority.

The name of the father

The séance that is conducted throughout III.3 and that brings forth a number of different voices begins with Shaun being either asleep, unconscious, or in a trance: "Yawn in a semiswoon lay awailing" (474.11). While he is in this state, the "four claymen clomb together to hold their sworn starchamber quiry on him" (475.18-

9). The main thing to note about the ensuing exchange, the conversation with the first of many ghostly voices Shaun channels in this chapter, is that it features HCE as "this *Totem Fulcrum Est Ancestor*" (481.4-5). That is to say, HCE appears as the prehistoric father from Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. And whereas the presence of Freud's book in *Finnegans Wake* has been commented on, for instance by Brivic (see *Joyce Between* 207, and *Joyce Through* 165) and Rabaté (see "A Clown's Inquest" 98), emphasis is typically given to the motif of patricide, and not to another gruesome act featuring in Freud's narrative. Here is the passage from *Totem and Taboo*:

> One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeed in doing what would have been impossible for them individually. (Some cultural advance, perhaps, command over some new weapon, had given them a sense of superior strength). Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. (141-2)

As Thomas Jackson Rice points out in *Cannibal Joyce*, there are numerous references in *Finnegans Wake* to HCE being eaten that can be linked to "the Freudian patricidal paradigm" (24). A darkly humorous one occurs in chapter I.1, where it appears that the mourners at HCE's/ Tim Finnegan's/Humpty Dumpty's wake are served Humpty Dumpty (that is, eggs) for breakfast, sunny side up: "And even if Humpty shell fall frumpty times as awkward again in the beardsboosoloom of all our grand remonstrancers there'll be iggs for the brekkers come to mournhim, sunny side up with care" (12.12-5). The trial scene in I.3 similarly conflates HCE as foodstuff with HCE as man (French: "homme") in the remark that if "you wish to ave some homelette, [...] Your hegg he must break himself" (59.30-

2). And the question in I.6 that is looking for the answer "Finn MacCool!" (139.14) includes among the characteristics of this avatar of HCE his representing a whole set of meals: "is Breakfates, Lunger, Diener and Souper" (131.4). When the customers leave HCE's pub towards the end of II.3, they similarly tell him: "We could ate you, par Buccas, and imbabe through you" (378.2-3).

These references to cannibalism are significant because they transport Joyce's evocation of *Totem and Taboo* away from a straightforward motif of violence, towards Freud's more complex concern with the sons' assimilation of the father's power. Freud's narrative is designed to accommodate a highly ambiguous attitude towards the father on the part of the murdering horde. Freud writes: "After they had got rid of him, had satisfied their hatred and had put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him, the affection which had all this time been pushed under was bound to make itself felt" (143). If the killing itself results from hatred, its subsequent interpretation as an act that must never be repeated – a codification Freud holds to be a founding moment of culture itself (see 159) – is the result of a surfacing of more positive feelings. The retroactive judgment that declares the killing a crime and that bestows guilt on those who committed it is based on an impulse of wishing the deed undone: an impulse tied to a shift in the perception of the father.[1] As Freud has it: "their longing for him increased; and it became possible for an ideal to emerge which embodied the unlimited power of the primal father" (148). Freud ventures that it is for this reason that "[t]he dead father became stronger than the living one had been" (143).

If we now turn to HCE's summoning in III.3, we find hints at a similar appropriation of the father's strength: an appropriation that, even as it destroys the father, establishes his all-powerful phantom – and we will see in the next subsection that this bilateral movement is precisely what relates III.3's depiction of paternal authority to the authority of the writer as it emerges from the reversibility of ventriloquism. References to the killing can be found from the

---

[1] In "Before the Law," Derrida points out that as a myth of origin of moral law, Freud's account nonetheless cannot explain how the deed takes on the hue of a moral wrong, that is to say, how regret lends its authority to the law in the form of guilt and guiltiness, the very concepts whose formation Freud's narrative is supposed to describe, but that it effectively presupposes as a deeper meaning of the crime (see 198-9).

beginning of the scene onwards, for instance in the exclamation: "The cubs are after me, it zeebs, the whole totem pack" (480.30-1). It is with a view to this hostility, and to the history Freud imposes on it, that I would read the question: "His producers are they not his consumers?" (497.1-2). This is sometimes taken as a self-aware comment on Joyce's part about the co-operative relationship between him and his audience. Although I would not want to deny the pertinence of this reading (and note the intriguing phrase "The author, in fact, was mardred" [517.11] that follows later on in the same chapter), it also puts strain on the text by having it proceed from what is arguably the less obvious term (the producers: the readers as active participants) to the more intuitive, seemingly tautological term (the readers as consumers). As a question asked of *Totem and Taboo*, by contrast, it would run: "those who have created the idol or totem of the father, are they not those who *ate* the father in the first place?" This reading, in turn, gives a different inflection to a phrase that appears on the facing page: "you may identify yourself with the him in you" (496.25-6). If the "in" points to the psychological inside of internalisation and identification, it also points to the physical inside of imbibing.

Freud's hypotheses about an elevation through assimilation of the father should thus be kept in mind when we read the séance's discussion of HCE. For instance, HCE's development "from the human historic brute, Finnsen Faynean, occeanyclived, to this same vulganized hillsir from yours" (481.12-4) resonates with the transformation of Freud's father-figure. Finn's/HCE's trajectory from human bully to natural phenomenon (volcano, hill) or god (Vulcan) owes a debt to the idolisation and naturalisation that take place in *Totem and Taboo* and that cast the dead father in the role of a god, of a totem animal, and so on. A few lines further down, we encounter a statement that engages in a similar dialogue with Freud's text: "That is a tiptip tim oldy faher now the man I go in fear of, Tommy Terracotta, and he could be all your and my das" (481.31-3). Here, the figure who can appear in such sublime manifestations as a mountain, a god of fire, or King Midas ("my das"), the larger-than-life father one goes in fear of and who stands in a paternal function to everyone ("all your and my das"), is precisely the HCE who

is no longer there, who has perhaps been killed and consumed and who at any rate is speaking at this point only through the medium of his son Shaun.

We can relate this rendering of Freud's myth in Joyce to Lacan's interpretation of *Totem and Taboo*. Here, I will take recourse to middle Lacan; it is important to keep in mind, however, that the making-legible achieved by the name of the father is superseded by Lacan's later suspicion of legibility. As Thurston notes, "[i]t becomes clear in Lacan's very late work (by contrast with some of his better-known earlier declarations) that the Name of the Father is *not* the only way of organising or knotting together the psychical orders of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary" (*James Joyce* 161). If it is the sinthome, not the symbolic authority established by the name of the father, that is ultimately said to support this organisation, what I am interested in here is the somewhat different question of the *fictional nature* of authority. Lacan's reflections on this issue, I would argue, can be treated separately from authority's role in the knotting of subjectivity – and they strongly reverberate with certain points *Finnegans Wake* makes about paternity, authority, and fiction.

In *Écrits*, Lacan writes that Freud's investigation of paternal authority

> led him to tie the appearance of the signifier of the Father, as author of the Law, to death – indeed, to the killing of the Father – thus showing that, if this murder is the fertile moment of the debt by which the subject binds himself for life to the Law, the symbolic Father, insofar as he signifies this Law, is truly the dead Father. ("On a Question" 464)

The father elevated to the position of absolute authority is the father no longer present. Here, however, Lacan adds a twist: inverting the Freudian logic that proceeds from death to signification, Lacan ventures that in order for the absence of the father to allow for his return as the personification of the law, he need not actually be killed; it suffices that he be *named*. This, too, amounts to an absolute removal, since, as Lacan notes elsewhere in *Écrits*, "the being of language is the nonbeing of objects" ("Direction" 524).

"It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" ("Function and Field" 230). In a no doubt unduly literal, but nevertheless illustrative reading of Lacan, we could imagine the occurrence of one of the first words in human language as the naming of the father in a prehistoric group or horde. If one of the members of this group sees the father and makes a sound, the sound is not a name, but an undifferentiated call attracting everyone's attention to the same degree. It is a name only if another member, or the same member at another time, repeats the sound (repeats it in memory of one of them having seen the father and having made the sound) – or anticipates the possibility of repeating the sound in this function. What gives a name, then, is not the presence of the father but the possibility of a sound becoming a name by *recalling itself*, which is to say precisely by imagining not a presence (here and now is the father) but an absence (let me preserve the father in a name).

Here, I again trail the line of Lacan's overlap with Derrida, for whom, similarly, the proper name is by no means excluded from the dynamics of iterability and differance. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes that "the proper name was never possible except through its functioning within a classification and therefore within a system of differences" (109). A few pages further on, he glosses "the so-called proper name" as "the originary violence which has severed the proper from its property and its self-sameness" (112). It is on the basis of this violence, severance, and dispossession that Derrida, like Lacan, associates the name with death. If your proper name, because it is an iterable signifier, is never your *proper* name, then, as Derrida puts it in *The Post Card*, "[t]he name is made to do without the life of the bearer, and is therefore always somewhat the name of someone dead" (39).

Writing about Lacan, Rabaté argues along the same Lacanian/Derridean lines when he states that "the father is not, for all that, a presence embodying the legitimate succession. Language is a system of differences, a power of death and absence in which he too is caught up" ("A Clown's Inquest" 83). In Lacan's account, the *mortification* of the father, then, is not literal patricide; it consists in the

father's entering a symbolic order in which he will inevitably fall short of the ideal that can now be signified. Inherent to the name of the father is the notion that no-one quite succeeds in being its legitimate bearer. This ideality of the name is what makes Lacan's analysis of paternal authority interesting to a discussion of the *Wake*. Drawing on Lacan's name of the father, MacCabe points out that "the split between bearer and name is made absolute in *Finnegans Wake* as the father becomes the simple permutation of a set of letters" (142) – HCE.

This is not to say that Joyce anticipates Lacan's reading of *Totem and Taboo*. It is to argue that *Finnegans Wake* stages a general disparity between naming and identity, and that both this disparity and HCE's Freudian appearance in III.3 are among the aspects of the text that indicate that for Joyce, the status of paternal authority is far from unproblematic, insofar as the very presence of the father is in question in various ways. Evoked through linguistic patterns, symbolic functions, and various substitutable avatars, the *Wake*'s father-figure is less a fictional character than a manifestation of fictionality itself, of what it means to be structured by fictions: "entiringly as he continues highly-fictional" (261.17-8). More symbolic constellation than actual character and "more mob than man" (261.21-2), HCE is the abstract, over-individual concept of the father. Yet he also is each of the *Wake*'s individual father-figures who fall short of that concept – that is to say, he is each instance in which the fictionality of the correspondence between concept and individual reveals itself.

This last aspect can be read in correlation with the theme of HCE's guilt. Chapter I.2 first introduces us to the mysterious events in Phoenix Park or "the people's park" (33.27), different versions of which are found all through the *Wake*. The descriptions vary in the precise circumstances of the events, but one recurrent motif is the accusation, levelled against HCE, "of annoying Welsh fusiliers" (33.26-7) and/or "of having behaved with ongentilmensky immodus opposite a pair of dainty maidservants" (34.18-9) Since these are key motifs of *Finnegans Wake*, much could be said about the nature of HCE's deed, its repercussions throughout the text, and the conflicting information we are given about it. I will touch on the significance of HCE's culpability in chapter four; for the time being, I will simply

suggest that this narrative serves to undermine his symbolic role. Whether it constitutes an account of HCE's crime or represents the slanderous mode of his being made a scapegoat, in either case it shatters his identification with symbolic authority. This, too, aligns him in significant ways with the fictional nature of paternal authority as Freud and Lacan conceptualise it. In Joyce as well as in Freud and Lacan, we find that the father's presence, far from lending to authority the full weight of unquestionable immediacy, effectively interferes with the ideality in whose image the father would like to appear. Ideality is more closely allied with absence, with potentiality as opposed to actuality.

HCE exemplifies the problematic relation that a father-figure has to the paternal authority of which individuals are stand-ins, but never fully authentic bearers. We can read this as the *Wake*'s variation on a theme first sounded in *Ulysses*, namely as an extension of Stephen's remark in the "Scylla and Charybdis" chapter that "Paternity may be a legal fiction" (9.844). If, as Stephen suggests, "[f]atherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man" (9.837-8), then there is no intrinsic and necessary truth to the role of the father. As Maud Ellmann comments, "[i]t is only through the 'legal fiction' of the *name* that he can reclaim his dubious paternity" (92, my emphasis). HCE, announced by his name but not extant as a self-identical presence, can be read as just such a legal fiction. He is a name from which a certain symbolic role and authority are derived, but at the same time, he personifies the fact that such authority is always more than the individual bearer of the name authentically embodies. In the individual, we only ever meet an imperfect representative of the authority that ultimately resides in the name.

In the following, I will argue that this tension between authenticity and authority can be brought to bear on the role of the author as well. Here, I should immediately address a possible misunderstanding. If manifestations of authority can be found to be problematic, inauthentic, less than ideal, this should by no means lead us to believe that they have no significance. If the law resides in a name – if paternity may be a legal fiction, as Stephen phrases the same motif – then what is crucial is the tension between the expressions "legal" and "fiction"

(and the equivocating nature of that "may"). The fictional nature of paternal authority challenges us to consider the potentially *binding* nature of something that may be fictional/construed. Fictions, in this view, are not there for us to unmask them so as to penetrate to the level of truth. There is in a crucial sense nothing beneath the kind of fiction we are concerned with here, nothing supporting the authority of fiction and the fiction of authority but fiction itself. Do away with all that is constructed, and you do away with the symbolic order itself. Which is decidedly *not* to say, therefore, that fictions are unimportant: we would do well to keep in mind Freud's proposition that a construct can become much more powerful than a simple and self-sufficient presence could ever be.

Spectres of authority

In "Ulysses Gramophone," Derrida suggests a similar connection between paternal authority and authority in interpretation. He calls this the filiation mechanism of *Ulysses* (but the proposition is applicable to *Finnegans Wake* as well): "The filiation machine – legitimate or illegitimate – is functioning well, is ready for anything, to domesticate, to circumscribe or circumvent everything" (70). Domesticating anything and everything: this is *not* to argue the banal possibility of declaring legitimate even filiations/interpretations known to be anything but that. It is to maintain the more fundamental difficulty, also remarked upon in Stephen's radical scepticism, of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate filiation in the first place.

Derrida echoes something of this scepticism when, in "Plato's Pharmacy," he writes: "The father is always father to a speaking/living being. In other words, it is precisely *logos* that enables us to perceive and investigate something like paternity" (80). On this, Michael Naas comments, in *Derrida From Now On*: "it would be from the son, from *logos*, that the father would be able to be *called* a father, that the father would come to be identified *as* a father" (46), and that, consequently, "the son always risks replacing the father, usurping his sovereign position" (46). Crucially, the risk in question here results not only from the problems that plague attempts of *consulting* authority. Rather, the difficulty of

distinguishing between legitimacy and illegitimacy in interpretation reveals the problematic nature of interpretative authority itself. In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that such authority is fictional in much the same way as the forms of paternity we encounter in Joyce, Derrida, Freud, and Lacan, where the father "has never been the father except in the mythology of the son" (Lacan, *S VII* 177).

We may undertake the Shaun-type gesture of trying to preserve original meaning, of trying to consult the authoritative position. Yet in doing so, we find that a direct comparison to the authoritative position is impossible. There is no mode of pronouncing authority in a manner undistorted by iterability and ventriloquism. Whenever it is consulted, authority emerges as the result of a negotiation that already mixes and confuses positions. Still, even beneath this dynamic of displacement, there is a mechanism at work that divides the author herself or himself from interpretative authority in the sense of total mastery over what they produce. This is crucial, for if there exists no absolutely authoritative position for interpretation to displace, if writing itself is afflicted by iterability, uncertainty, and anxiety as much as reading is, then the inauthenticity introduced by interpretation is not sharply identifiable as such. If Shem and Shaun merge to the extent of becoming difficult to separate, then not only can a reader not access essential meaning, but neither can he or she *approximate* essential meaning by identifying authorial meaning and thus producing what amounts to a non-essential but indubitably legitimate filiation.

Authorial meaning is not present in a text as a solid stratum, concealed by effects of illegitimate meaning from which it can be told with any certainty. Rather, from the outset, an *excess* of effects is at work. If I have suggested that a writer cannot exhaustively anticipate what her or his writing means, it is precisely because language refuses to codify a single, authentic intention without, in the process, dividing it up, wrenching it from itself, and transforming it in multiple, uncountable, and unpredictable ways. As the anxiety-inducing process of writing oscillates between Shem-type and Shaun-type impulses, it creates possibilities of meaning in such a manner that the writer can only ever control a subset of them.

And even if we grant that, once this process is interrupted, the author can adopt the role of reader and have a personal understanding of the finished product (which might then be termed authorial meaning, although any formalisation or communication of this understanding would again be subject to the same mechanisms), what the lack of control during the process means is that in the resulting text, effects intended or noticed by the author are not – not necessarily – distinguishable from effects not intended or noticed. As there is by definition no control that would govern both types of effect, there can also be no guarantee that they will be fashioned in such a way as to be different from each other, distinguishable in a manner that could be picked up by a careful enough reader.

The reader cannot therefore unearth an unquestionably authentic meaning, however deeply hidden or subtly discriminated. Derrida elaborates on this in *Specters of Marx*, where he argues that what he calls an inheritance or legacy – that is, any interaction with the past, including reading – does not consist in an encounter with an exhaustively defined potential. In order to inherit, one must iterate, that is, "*one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it *in a contradictory fashion* [my emphasis] around a secret" (18). The argument Derrida is making here is that the possibility of inheritance, as an act of drawing on the past, lies precisely in iterability's difference from a natural and inevitable programme. That is to say, he is approaching the question from the perspective of the receiver of an inheritance. Yet I propose that Derrida's formulation is equally valid – and not fortuitously so – as a description of the only kind of inheritance that a producer can put forward. Before it becomes a question of accessing the past, iterability already creates contradictions within any gesture that forms or may form an inheritance. Therefore, the plurality of possibilities that a reader faces is constituted by an excess of elements. It is not a well-defined set of elements awaiting something like creative re-arrangement; its contradictory nature undoes the very concept of the identifiable and organised set. The task of the reader, then, cannot consist in the recognition of a pattern given in the text. The reader produces a pattern in an act of invention, as the very processes of identifying meanings, attributes, or commands in the text cut into its wholeness.

If the structure thus produced is not neatly divisible into elements that partake and elements that do not partake in the authority bestowed by an authorial blessing, this does not mean that the idea of authority is abandoned. What divides our readings from authority is the *uncertainty* of their relation to it, and this uncertainty cuts both ways. This is to say that the impossibility of identifying and accessing authorial meaning without a potentially perilous negotiation is neither the end of authority as such, nor of a reader's responsibility towards it. Rather, any such negotiation is caught up in a reversibility that perpetuates sovereignty in the very act of rewriting it. Like Derrida's Plato, who in inventing Socrates takes on a debt and responsibility towards the fictional father-figure, the reader who is at a constant risk of usurping the position to be consulted is also tied to this position as the one he or she has to iterate and to interact with.

It is with regard to this suspension of authority between guiding reading and arising from reading that *Specters of Marx* introduces spectrality. Derrida urges us to consider the necessity, "beyond the opposition between presence and non-presence, actuality and inactuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility" (13). That is, he encourages us to acknowledge effects of signification that are not calculable on the basis of the text alone, because they arise from the text *through our attempt to make sense of its constitutive excess*. To engage with the spectre of the author thus requires our ability to think outside the automatisms of a process of reading that might as well happen without any intervention on our part. Since it is an interaction, reading requires that we learn how to think the author as an interlocutor, "how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself" (221). The spectre of the author is not a solid presence. It is *a modulation of the voice*: an attempt at ventriloquism, at internalising the other and speaking from the elusive point that is the position of the other – an attempt whose success no formula or strategy can guarantee.

However, Derrida does not only speak of the possibility of the spectre, but also of the *spectre as possibility*, as the possibility of possibility *per se*. There is no

inheritance without iterability, and no iterability without the bilateral inhabiting of voices. If inheritance is to be possible at all, then we cannot avoid the risk intrinsic to conversing with spectres. Or, to put it differently, without spectres, we would never even begin to read. Try to declare a reading legitimate without engaging in any construction, and you will have to refrain from *all* iteration, thus confining yourself to silence. The spectre, therefore, embodies authority in the same paradoxical manner in which the trace preserves essential meaning. In "The Mother, of All the Phantasms…," Michael Naas states that, "while always legitimated by a performative context that precedes and exceeds it, the phantasm always attempts to elide or conceal these origins, to present itself as self-generated, as naturally and purely given" (167). Or, conversely, one can say that the trace already contains the logic of the spectre, as Bennington suggests when he writes: "In terms of [Derrida's] later work, we can say that the trace entails a general 'spectrality'" (93). What I call the absence of essential meaning amounts to the fact that the essence projected by the trace is not anything we encounter, but a suspicion, and that all attributes with which we fill in this structural void, in order to produce the concreteness of a reading, are already spectral, are negotiated within a systematic play of differences. Without spectrality, no concrete manifestation would be produced at all.

In view of these considerations, let us return to the example of the séance in III.3. The voice that Shaun and the four conjure up is precisely the spectral appearance of HCE, who moreover appears as a Freudian father-figure in this scene: as the idealised ancestor called upon to do away with present uncertainties. HCE speaks through Shaun, thus it is Shaun who can say: "I have something inside of me talking to myself" (522.26). He has assimilated or internalised the other and is now engaging in an exchange that is no longer limited to his own voice. Yet, crucially, the origin of the phrase "I swear my gots how that I'm not meself at all" (487.17-8) cannot be decided with equal certainty. It may be Shaun informing the four that he is speaking from the position of the other, that he is channelling the voice of HCE. However, it may also be the manifestation of HCE that is produced through this channelling, pronouncing a warning that the channelled voice is not in fact him, that it is not his true and authentic presence. It may, finally,

be both of these voices at the same time: HCE ventriloquized and ventriloquizing, HCE dictating and taking dictation. This would be the spectre in the Derridean sense.

A similar dialogue between identities is hinted at in the exchange: "- Are you in your fatherick, lonely one? // - The same. Three persons" (478.28-9). As soon as one voice is speaking from within another, the notions of identifying and counting the identities involved become uncertain. Sameness (that of the son or of the father) may turn out be the inhabiting of the position of another ("are you in"). Loneliness no longer excludes the multiplicity of several persons. On this passage, Brivic thus comments that "III.3 is a major demonstration that the discourse of the *Wake* speaks for multitudes" ("Daughter" 256), because "the typical phrase of the *Wake* has several meanings that speak for several voices" (257). I will argue in the following chapters that this dissemination into several layers of meaning is indeed a key effect of Joyce's affirmation of excess. Here, I want to emphasise that even Brivic's "multitudes" of meaning fall short of Joyce's plurivocality if they are understood as a plurality of distinct, separable voices. None of the layers of meaning achieved by Joyce's writing are delineated by the purity of a single voice – which is also to say that no central, authoritative, and uncontaminated meaning can be isolated (not without doing violence to Joyce's polyvocal writing).

The conclusion I propose regarding III.3's play with voices and perspectives is that it conveys something about the workings of the rest of *Finnegans Wake*: namely, that this text's multiplicity of voices is at all points the result of interactions that are and are not instances of displacement. The voice of HCE, along with many others, would not emerge in III.3 without Shaun's act of ventriloquism (no manifestation would be produced without spectrality). At the same time, this act also threatens to usurp HCE's voice. But in order for the ventriloquism to draw on the authority of the other – and this is how usurpation is achieved – there must be left in the ventriloquized voice a discernible remnant of the position of the other. Which means that there may just be enough of HCE's voice coming through for him to be able to say: this is not me. The position of this

voice, I propose, is analogous to that of textual authority. The voice that says "I am not myself, *I* am *not I*," and that precisely in saying this preserves the notion of the original "I," is also the voice of the text itself. It is the voice of any text, divided from its essence – and preserving the ideal of this essence – as it is being iterated. But in particular, it is the voice of this text, of *Finnegans Wake*, that directs this message at us with every non-word we read, with every instance of a non-word's *non-identity* with any of its readable forms.

If, in chapter one, I argue that non-words exemplify something about reading, I hope to have illustrated in this chapter that they also exemplify a characteristic of writing – its excessiveness – and the far-reaching consequences this excessiveness has for reading in turn. The usage of non-words means that the excess of possibilities that distorts writing is made palpable, as is the power of the ventriloquism that inhabits and activates this excess. And in the gesture of rendering all this explicit, authorial authority is preserved in the form of Joyce's decision to accept and indeed employ excess. Here, a crucial double bind emerges. The peculiar form in which *Finnegans Wake* is written catalyses excess. It thus transports us even further away from unilateral authorial mastery than regular texts are. Yet the decision to give *Finnegans Wake* this form is irrevocably Joyce's. An echo of this decision, a spectral remnant of Joyce's authority over his text, is therefore inscribed in an unusually broad variety of interpretations (though by no means any and all interpretations).

This is what Derrida insists on in his own interpretation of the *Wake*. In "Two Words for Joyce," he describes *Finnegans Wake* as a linguistic performance so intricate that "everything we could say after it looks in advance like a minute self-commentary with which this work accompanies itself" (27). Yet he contrasts this statement with the assertion that, in spite of what it may *look* like, "the new marks carry off, enlarge, and project elsewhere – one never knows where in advance – a program that appeared to constrain them, or at least watch over them" (27). Derrida is commenting on the necessity for a reading to be a response to the text, but he expresses this necessity in a defamiliarising mode in order to emphasise the *Wake*'s spectrality. Any reading – everything we could say – must

offer itself up to be re-appropriated by the authority of the text. A reading that is found to entirely evade the retrospectively identified possibility of its prediction is not a reading, but an invalid deviation from the text, unconnected to it by any identifiable correspondences.

If such a process of identification is different from an author's unilateral command, it is not because it has become the unilateral command of the reader, but rather because reading and command must reciprocally construe each other – and such construction may produce results not foreseen in advance. That is, textual authority is absolute precisely to the extent to which it is construed; it is a *legal fiction*. In "Ulysses Gramophone," Derrida translates this into the vocabulary of spectrality and (applying it to *Ulysses*, but the general thought again holds true of *Finnegans Wake* as well) states that Joyce's "omnipotence remains a phantasm" (69). What the filiation machine of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* achieves is a manipulation of the fiction of authority (subjective and objective genitive): Joyce is construed as the spectral presence of interpretative law, and this spectral presence authorises construction by inscribing itself into the very manipulations of the text that we as readers undertake.

The problem, then, is with the spectrality of writing. This does not indicate our sovereignty as readers. It means that we are held accountable for our constructions, and in the case of *Finnegans Wake*, our accountability is inscribed from the start in the materiality of its non-words. The *Wake* is a book full of spectres, and each spectre is simultaneously an invitation and a task; in this, the *Wake* is not fundamentally different from any other text, literary or not. What is remarkable is Joyce's insistence on making mechanisms such as anxiety, dictation, ventriloquism, and spectrality into his own subject matter. He creates scenes and images that reflect on them, and he fashions a Shem-type language that pushes the constitutive excess of writing towards its uttermost potential, confronting us with a text to which to apply Shaun-type notions of legitimate and illegitimate filiation is not possible. This, I would suggest, is one of the most important functions plurality serves in *Finnegans Wake*. By writing the way he does, and

writing *about* writing the way he does, Joyce lends his name and his authority to the very excess that does away with the purity of the single voice.

Precisely insofar as a reading of *Finnegans Wake* attempts to read the text for what it is – for what Joyce in fact wrote – interpretation faces the impossibility of reducing the *Wake*'s excess to stable configurations. Far from serving the purposes of interpretative freedom for the sake of itself, however, this multiplication of meanings forms part of a much more specific gesture or programme on Joyce's part. By introducing the paradoxes of spectrality at the level of its material signifiers, *Finnegans Wake* achieves an excess of expression that is simultaneously more volatile and *more powerful* than that of more conventional texts. The *Wake* thus problematizes the conventionally assumed opposition between, on the one hand, precision in language, and, on the other hand, the failure of language. In defiance of a monovalent ideal of purity, the *Wake* celebrates the richness and expressive power inherent in imperfection, in imprecision, indeed in so-called failure.

Regarding the séance in III.3, Anne Cavender highlights the self-defeating aspect of an exegesis that begins by denying one of its subject's primary features. Noting how Shaun, and the spectres that speak through him, generate a discourse that shuns concrete answers, Cavender points out that "the Four are so frustrated at their failure to come to grips with Shaun that their tempers begin to flare" (671). She links this aggressiveness/anxiety to a hermeneutical attitude that manifests itself both in the four's "desire for order and fixity" (665) and in the examination of ALP's letter in I.5, conducted along similarly restrictive lines. The four are thus an example of what I call a Shaun-type interpretative effort; yet like Shaun, who in this scene is once again wrenched away from this ideal, they are confronted with the fact that their search for an answer cannot accommodate the complexity of what they actually encounter. Thrown into relief by their failure is the fact that III.3 also presents us with another, arguably more successful figure for the reader. This, as Cavender demonstrates, is the donkey that draws the four's cart and that appears in the séance as another listener or interrogator, one who "exhibits genuine sympathy for Shaun" (678) and who, Cavender argues, derives from

Shaun's talk a hermeneutical pleasure that the four forgo in their effort to reduce Shaun to stability.

Joyce's positing of such an alternative is critical. In view of such moments in the text, whose comical elements in no way diminish their importance, we should take seriously Joyce's critique of the fetishization of clarity as well as his vision of different artistic and hermeneutical procedures. This vision does not aim to replace hermeneutical pleasure with anxiety; it accepts a certain simultaneity of the two. As we will see in the next two chapters, this simultaneity renders difficulty productive and productivity difficult. It is inevitable insofar as interpretation constitutively entails a confrontation with an order beyond interpretation; its presence in *Finnegans Wake* is therefore not remarkable in itself. What is significant is the *Wake*'s active embracing of this simultaneity. If, in reading *Finnegans Wake,* we are to take our cue from Joyce's depiction of the interpretative process in such scenes as the examination of ALP's letter, Shaun's vilification of Shem, or the four's questioning of Shaun, then we have to exercise caution in any appeal we make to the ideas problematized in these scenes: ideas such as purity, clarity, or presence.

The combination of these meta-textual depictions with the *Wake*'s invention of non-words calls on us to become aware of our own logocentric axioms – axioms on which we base our critical enterprises whenever we equate the critic's task with the production of a knowledge that can only be monovalent. By contrast, in order to do justice to the meta-textual agenda that Joyce pursues both in the content and in the form of the *Wake*, we have to acknowledge the text's excesses and its explicit break with monovalence. This is a double injunction, through which Joyce's ordering authority is both present and not present in our manipulations of his text. The next chapter will be concerned with examining how we can conceptualise the pluralities of meaning that arise from such a double imperative.

3

Postlapsarian Language and Pentecostal Writing

The linguistic fall

Finnegans Wake locates both reader and writer in the dynamics of the anxiety of language, and it exemplifies the possibility of inhabiting and of utilising (but never of evading) that anxiety. If interpretation must take into consideration the spectre of the author, and if Joyce's spectral presence is palpable in his decision to give *Finnegans Wake* its particular form, then textual authority resides with the plurality of interpretations more than with any individual reading. Every reading that makes legible a non-word also decides, in the necessary manipulation of the non-word's materiality, on the limits of its own reach, and thus on its partiality and its distance from the authorial non-text.

Yet the referentiality without reference that is also at work in these coinages continues to call us into the text and to tease us with the possibility of subjecting the text to a reading. In "Two Words for Joyce," Derrida's watchword for this dynamic is Joyce's "double commandment" (39) – the imperative through which *Finnegans Wake* demands of us that we read it, but also that we do so without falsifying it for the purpose of reading. It is the law by which the text tells its readers: "Change me – into yourself – and above all do not touch me, read and do not read, say and do not say otherwise what I have said" (34). Needless to say, such a demand cannot be met, particularly (though not exclusively) with regard to non-words. The result of such an impossible command is that interpretation is perpetuated: the double bind of a double commandment eliminates the possibility of the interpretative process producing the decisive answer and thus coming to a halt. Derrida describes his own experience in reading Joyce: "the endless diving in throws me back onto the bank, on the brink of another possible dip, *ad infinitum*" (26).

We should be careful here not to infer from the indefinite repeatability of the immersion something like a freedom to champion whatever interpretation takes our fancy. As I will argue in more detail towards the end of this chapter, the fact that the movement of reading cannot be stopped does not mean that it goes everywhere. What it does mean is that our readings, all of which are in violation of the double commandment, are positioned within the framework of a certain equivocality. Joyce's double bind puts competing interpretations on much more of an equal footing than would be possible with a standard text. In a manner so fundamental that we almost stop noticing it, our interpretations are *all* imperfect, insofar as they refer to words Joyce did not quite write. And the difficulty of measuring a reading's degree of imperfection, as it were, is precisely what opposes the exegetical impulse to distinguish between central and peripheral meaning. It opposes this impulse – it does not undo it.

This, again, is say that with the *Wake*, we are not in a situation where all interpretations are equally valid or equally invalid; we rather find ourselves in a context of heightened *difficulty*, where attempts at sorting out readings according to a hierarchy of their importance are troubled by the simultaneity of their importance. This is what inhabiting the anxiety of language means: to find in difficulty itself a precarious and unpredictable productivity. By contrast, once we conceive of Joyce's non-words as expressions that merely demand particular care in the identification of their meaning, we lose sight of the way in which non-words rethink the very connection between signification and meaning in the singular. We should not pass over this rethinking. Joyce's implementation of excess and anxiety is not a superficial effect, detachable from other things the *Wake* conveys. The plurality of meaning is linked to imperfect language itself: both to the *Wake*'s mode of expression and to the mythological motif – whose importance to the *Wake* I will now examine – of the loss of a once perfect language.

Derrida links the impossible imperative, the voice of the text that demands to be understood and demands that its complexity be left intact, to another voice: the voice of the God of the Old Testament. More specifically, the connection Derrida makes is to the decisive utterance in the divine idiom that God pronounces

to mankind at Babel, both as a declaration of war and as an "act of war which consisted in declaring" (33). This utterance is the ultimate disruption of speech through speech – and a template for Joyce's double commandment, insofar as both condemn their addressees to negotiate haplessly, within postlapsarian idioms, the effects of an order given in an ineffable language.

The traditional reading of the biblical narrative has it that the divine act at Babel, the destruction of the tower and the dispersion of language, reaffirms original sin by punishing a transgression that results from this sin. The language confusion chastises the Babylonians for their hubris in creating a cultural work to rival divine greatness, and it confirms mankind's fallen status by confining it to a corresponding linguistic condition. The events at Babel thus complete Adam and Eve's fall into the corruption of culture, so that we can conceive of the linguistic confusion as a *second fall* to complement the first and decisive fall. In particular, the linguistic fall destroys the language Adam creates when he gives a name to each animal (see Gen. 2.19-20), an event retold in the *Wake* as Adam putting "his own nickelname on every toad, duck and herring" (506.1-2). Since each name miraculously corresponds to the essence of the animal it refers to, the language invented in this process is ideal: it constitutes the original and immediate mode of expression to which, according to this narrative's tradition, we have been trying to return ever since it has been lost at Babel. We will see, however, that this account is complicated by an alternative also presented in the biblical report.

Occasionally, the *Wake*'s deliberate immersion in sheer linguistic performance, which is also an immersion in evocative condensation, is construed as Joyce's attempt to press language back to this Adamic idiom. This is arguably the position adopted by Deane in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Finnegans Wake*, in which he comments on the "directness of communication" (ix) displayed by the *Wake*'s language. The notion that Joyce's text is charged with inherent significance, rather than with connotations bestowed by convention, also informs approaches that conceive of the *Wake* as radically self-reliant – a view first expressed in Beckett's famous comment that "[Joyce's] writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*" (14). In an article that defends a reading of

Finnegans Wake as nonsense literature, Tim Conley suggests that to construe from Joyce's unreadable non-words a normalised, "semantically sensible middle text," a translation sandwiched between Joyce's writing and the reader's interpretation, might already be to betray "[t]he primary text and its central negation of meaning" (244). This negation, without mediation through semantic codes, draws attention to the signifiers themselves. Although with strikingly different results, both readings, Deane's and Conley's, thus construe the *Wake* as a book that rejects the conventions for creating meaning, to instead rely on its own system of signification or non-signification.

In view of the *Wake*'s materially idiosyncratic language, to search for the text's own particular logic is an approach I would by no means reject. Conley's line of argument is close to my own contention that in reading the *Wake*, it is crucial to insist on the difference between words and non-words. Yet I would only subscribe to a "negation of meaning" if it is understood as the negation of *one* meaning, not as an inhibition to interpret at all. Here, the ready availability of meaning remarked upon by Deane comes into play. Not in the guise of direct signification, in the sense of a self-sufficient, intuitively decipherable symbolism, but rather in the form of the irresistibly productive communication achieved by the double commandment. What I would criticise in these two approaches, then, is the notion that anything in the *Wake* happens plainly or effortlessly, be it effortless signification or the plain denial of signification. I would, on the contrary, maintain the importance to the *Wake* of the gap that opens between ideal, inexhaustible language and human, finite language – as well as of the irreducible anxiety that results from this gap. In view of its productive oscillation between Shem-type and Shaun-type impulses, we should consider the possibility that *Finnegans Wake* constitutes a form of writing to which the linguistic fall is not an impairment to be overcome, but one pole of a dialectic tension that, as a whole, enhances the text's possibilities.

In the following, I will show that Joyce's self-reflexive use of postlapsarian language indeed casts the linguistic fall in the role of an enabling event. It does this at two levels simultaneously. At the formal level, the *Wake* embraces linguistic

confusion as a catalyst for the creation of meaning. At the level of content, as we will see, it draws on the Judeo-Christian traditions of interpreting this linguistic confusion that Derrida also makes reference to. By relating the complexity of its form to these traditions, *Finnegans Wake* bestows a thematic significance on its very opacity. In turn, some of the myths revolving around transgression, downfall, and sacrifice that the *Wake* rehearses can be read as representations of literary production itself.

One possible starting point from which to explore the double nature of the linguistic fall – a decline into limitedness that is also an opening into richness – is a consideration of the fact that the biblical account relating this fall describes a repeated event, or rather a *split* event. In the biblical report, the second fall cannot be identified with one historical or mythical incident. The acquisition of fallen language occurs at two separate moments: with God's announcement at Babel, but also with the division of Noah's descendants into separate nations after the flood. This split should not be taken to mean that the two incidents complement each other. Each of the events can be read as a self-contained explanation of the linguistic fall, which therefore annuls the alternative explanation and is annulled by it. This mutual cancellation further complicates the second fall's equivocal status.

The construction of the tower at Babel is the event I have already identified as the point at which humanity, through its own hubris, causes the wrath of God and brings onto itself the loss of ideal language. It is the instant of God speaking:

> Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. (Gen. 11.6-7)[1]

The language that is lost through this divine punishment is explicitly identified as a tongue shared by all mankind: "And the whole earth was of one language, and

---

[1] All references to the Bible are to the *Authorized King James Version*.

of one speech" (Gen. 11.1). Moreover, although without explicit legitimation from the biblical text, this original and common language is usually taken to be the Adamic one, meaning that the dispersion at Babel is cast as the explanation for both the plurality of human languages as well as their inferiority in comparison to the ideal nomenclature invented in Eden. I will refer to the notion that mankind speaks Adam's language up until the fall of Babel, at which point that language is dissolved into a multitude of inferior idioms, as the *babelian hypothesis*.

This hypothesis conflicts with information given in the preceding chapter of the Bible. In Genesis 10, we read that the various lineages originating from Noah's sons, Japheth, Ham, and Shem (a trio the *Wake* frequently invokes), form different nations that are scattered over the earth to repopulate it after the flood. The variations of the formula repeated for each genealogical line are as follows: "every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations" (Gen. 10.5); "after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations" (Gen. 10.20); "after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations" (Gen. 10.31). The contradiction to the babelian narrative and its initial declaration that "the whole earth was of one language" is evident.

If at this stage of pre-babelian history, each racial or tribal group has already developed its own linguistic variety, by which its members can be identified "after their tongues," then linguistic unity has already been lost. Nor is there any reason to believe that the languages spoken by Noah's descendants are not roughly equal to each other (and to latter-day language) in their capacity of expression. There is no indication given in the biblical text that of the tribal idioms, one was a continuation of the pure language of Adam, to which the others would have been inferior. Of the numerous questions this raises, the one that particularly interests me here is formulated by Umberto Eco in *The Search for the Perfect Language*: "[Genesis 10] is a chink in the armour of the myth of Babel. If languages were differentiated not as a punishment but simply as a result of a natural process, why must the confusion of tongues constitute a curse at all?" (10).

Taken seriously, the account in Genesis 10, which I will call the *diluvian hypothesis*, has two major consequences for an inquiry into biblical myths of the

origins of language. First, it invites a description of our present, postlapsarian and multilingual, condition in terms that are not entirely pessimistic, and it does so not only at a historical or scientific level, but also at the level of mythological interpretation. After all, as Eco points out, the emergence of multilingualism appears to be a development that occurs quite unspectacularly among the descendants of Noah – a notion also encouraging us to emphasise the extent to which the flood constitutes a new beginning. Secondly, Genesis 10 invites us to revisit the story of Babel with a view to other aspects than the punitive dispersion of language. In fact, in the light of the several nations already founded by Noah's sons, it becomes possible to read Babel as the preservation of multiculturalism, rather than the thwarting of human civilisation.

I should point out, however, that the split between Genesis 10 and Genesis 11 – a split that intriguingly begs the question of the ultimate origin of postlapsarian language – is not necessarily the symptom of the ineffable nature of that origin. It is perfectly possible to imagine the biblical account without this ambivalence; in fact, the most common rendition of the linguistic fall, that which recalls only the babelian hypothesis, is of this type. What is more important is that beneath the split of the linguistic fall into two biblical histories, we find ambiguities at work that divide each of these histories into several competing meanings, all of which inform and contradict each other in intricate ways. The ambiguous nature of the biblical myths thus provides an interpretative framework that will prove helpful in unravelling Joyce's staging of ambiguity in postlapsarian language – not least because the *Wake*'s treatment of the linguistic fall borrows from, but also re-imagines in significant ways, these biblical narratives.

The flight of the scribe

In a densely packed passage in the first chapter of *Finnegans Wake*, we read the following with regard to varying explanations for postlapsarian language:

> Somewhere, parently, in the ginnandgo gap between antediluvious 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. (14.16-21)

Campbell and Robinson are probably the first critics to point out that "*Ginnunga-gap* ('Yawning Gap') is the name given in the Icelandic *Eddas* to the interval of timeless formlessness between world aeons" (p. 45 fn. 1). It is a gap interrupting history itself, and in the context of this passage, it also takes on the form of a breakdown of continuous tradition. Ignorance inserts itself, in the shape of a sudden, cataclysmic event, between ourselves and the memories whose passing down cultural continuity is meant to ensure. The precise nature of this interruption is unclear, since we are offered four competing explanations for it. Whatever has happened, the record is now lost: "the copyist must have fled with his scroll." This loss of recollection is moreover so comprehensive that not only the manner, but also the moment of the loss is nearly forgotten. We cannot date it more precisely than as having occurred "between antediluvious and annadominant," at any point in a stretch of time that reaches from before the flood right up to the birth of Christ. And the reference to the flood recalls another cultural loss: that of the Adamic language as portrayed in the diluvian hypothesis. For if we now turn to the different explanations offered for the copyist's flight, it becomes apparent that the linguistic fall is indeed at stake in this passage.

Let us consider the four alternative histories: the flood, the elk, the thunder, and the bird (I will presently explain what a bird has to do with the fourth history). I will gloss them out of sequence – bird, flood, elk, thunder – in order to develop a thematic interpretation that links the motif of disrupted tradition to the interference of an aggressor, a link most explicitly sounded in the last of the four histories. This version, which we therefore need to consider first, contains an allusion to "Biddy Doran" (112.27) or "Belinda of the Dorans" (111.5), the hen that in I.5 scratches up "on that fatal midden" (110.25) an object that "looked for all this zogzag world like a goodish-sized sheet of letterpaper" (111.8-9) – ALP's letter. This literary bird, associated with the recovery of the recorded past, is here

"banged pan" – presumably killed, fried in a pan, and eaten – by "the Dannamen," a coinage that incorporates a reference to Danish men, that is, to Viking invaders.

Read in this way, the account adds to the many parallels between ALP's letter and the *Book of Kells* (for instance, ALP's letter and the *Book of Kells* share the fate of being lost and subsequently found under a heap of earth). Joyce's chief source for constructing these parallels was Sir Edward Sullivan's introduction to his facsimile edition of the *Book of Kells*, a paradigm of scholarly analysis both painstakingly detailed and wildly speculative, to which chapter five of the *Wake* makes frequent, often parodic, reference.[2] The violence towards Belinda Doran, and the hurried escape that the scribe makes with his scroll, would then evoke the history of attacks on the abbey of Kells described in Sullivan's text. Sullivan lists the Danes as one of the nations that most frequently pillaged the abbey, and states that "[h]ow the Gospels of St Columba [i.e. the *Book of Kells*] survived this century of violence and spoliation it is impossible to say" (21).

In the version we are concerned with here, ALP's letter proves somewhat less fortunate than the illuminated manuscript on which it is modelled. For the mother-bird personifies both the unearthing of the past as well as the procreation of future generations to engage with that past: "she just feels she was kind of born to lay and love eggs (trust her to propagate the species [...])" (112.13-4). With her destroyed, the letter – the signifier itself – remains undiscovered and barren: it takes on the hue of the part of heritage lost in violent cultural transitions and intersections, a reading reinforced by other renderings of the passage. As "banged upon the bloody door," it makes use of Danish "døren:" "door" (McHugh 14), which contains another hint at the invaders' nationality and moreover links the intruders to the "cad with a pipe" (35.11), who late at night tries to gain entrance to HCE's house by breaking down the door (see 63.20-64.21). McHugh also identifies "Danny Mann" (14) as the character from Dion Boucicault's play *The Colleen Bawn*, in which Danny attempts to murder the title heroine Eily O'Connor: another example of violence against a female character. Similarly, the word

---

[2] For instance, the description I.5 gives of different punctuation marks found in ALP's letter's (see 121.12-3 and 123.33-124.5) echoes the similarly meticulous remarks Sullivan makes on punctuation in the *Book of Kells* (see 26 and 49-50).

"gallous" echoes the line from J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*: "there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed" (act 3, lines 572-3). This exclamation refers to Christy Mahon's attempt to kill his father – a variation of the Freudian patricide and thus an instance of violence, if you will, against heritage or the past. In addition, "gallous" also conjures up a rooster (Latin "gallus"), thus further gendering, and arguably sexualizing, the violence against Belinda the hen.

Yet all these relatively straightforward interpretations of "the Dannamen gallous banged pan the bliddy duran" are destabilised by the proximity of the phrase "the copyist must have fled with his scroll." If invasion, plundering, and murder are amongst the themes echoed in this history of Belinda the hen, then a scribe's flight could be taken to signify the opposite of what I have so far suggested its meaning to be: it would not indicate that the written record ends, but that it continues (with the scribe hastily abandoning the abbey under assault to save himself and his precious document). In the context of the linguistic fall, the very event that apparently represents a destruction may contain an element of creation. This motif is only hinted at in the sentence about the scribe – in the form of a possible preservation that may catalyse future development – but it is evoked more explicitly in two of the other three histories.

As it is imagined in the other versions, the catastrophic event that interrupts history and jeopardizes the remembrance of the past may indeed take on an ambiguous shape combining destruction with suggestions of a new beginning. The first explanation offered for the copyist's flight ventures that what causes it is the rising of a "billy flood." In this version of events, it would be God who sends a global, punitive disruption, a "biblical flood" (which also seems to be irreverently identified here as a "silly flood," the divine equivalent perhaps of someone losing their temper). This proposition repeats the diluvian motif already sounded in "antediluvious," it links the disappearance of the copyist's scroll to the violent new beginning of the flood, which reduces antediluvian culture to a nearly clean slate. Yet we should ask what precisely happens to the copyist and his scroll once the "billy flood" rises. This question, though it cannot be answered from a

narrative point of view, is by no means irrelevant or fanciful. After all, the tale of Noah is that of an infinitesimal but all-decisive *departure* from the destruction of all else: the preservation of that which allows a new start.

Joyce refers to this story, and to its relevance to linguistic matters, in book IV, the part of the *Wake* most concerned with questions of disappearance and return. There, at the moment of dawn, a personified bringer of light addresses "the cowld owld sowls that are in the domnatory of Defmut after the night of the carrying of the word of Nuahs" (593.20-22). These are cold old souls, but they are also animals – cows, owls, pigs – that when listed like this evoke the catalogue of animals assembled on Noah's ("Nuahs") ark. As the night is ending, these animals and/or people find themselves in a "domnatory." This evokes "damnation" and the "dominion" of the damned, it thus introduces the theme of after-life. The same theme is sounded by the combination of the passage's particular wording with its references to the Ancient Egyptian deities "Tefnut" and "Nu" (McHugh 593): elements that, between them, suggest the presence of the *Book of the Dead*, a strand of Egyptian mythology to which the *Wake* frequently alludes. Then again, "domnatory" could also contain a reference to a dormitory, a reassuringly ordinary place in which to find oneself at dawn. The dormitory in question is the "domnatory of Defmut," which might indicate the absence not only of spoken language ("deaf-mute") but of all articulate expression and of understanding in general – keeping in mind the dialogue between Joyce's Neanderthals Jute and Mutt in I.1 (see 16.10-18.16) as well as Giambattista Vico's mute prehistoric giants, of which more presently.

If these readings emphasise death (the afterlife) and silence (the mute giants), the night that has passed is, crucially, "the night of the *carrying* of the word," indicating the *persistence* of a logos – word, language, knowledge, spirit, etc. Moreover, "Nuahs" is "Shaun" backwards (McHugh 593), thus evoking the character who, as Shaun the Postman, is literally a carrier of words. In view of the presence of Noah's ark, the night in question could then be interpreted as the metaphorical darkness of the flood; it is the darkness of a catastrophe that extinguishes nearly all of life (plunging it into damnation), but through which one

decisive word is nevertheless *carried*: the essential formulation of life as it is preserved aboard the ark, and from which a new (Irish "nua") civilisation emerges. As with the flight of the scribe, there is a *split narrative* to be found here, a twofold movement that indicates both ending and continuation. We should therefore consider the possibility that the "billy flood," too, is charged with ambiguity as to whether it is destructive or creative, whether it refutes or confirms the capacity of the word to transcend the most violent disruptions.

Let us furthermore bear in mind that in book IV, where this description of Noah's carrying of the word is found, ALP figures not only as the river Liffey, but is also identified with the biblical flood. At the beginning of her monologue, we read: "Folty and folty all the nights have falled on to long my hair" (619.20-1), a statement partially echoed three pages further on in the phrase: "Afartodays, afeartonights" (622.15). Both passages recall the apocalyptic rainfall reported in the Bible: "And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights" (Gen. 7.12). This is significant, since it complicates the symbolism of ALP's river-form in this section of the *Wake*. Book IV's description of the river Liffey joining her "cold mad feary father" (628.2), the sea, is arguably a representation of death and of the fading away of one generation as life makes its cyclical return in the next: in ALP's daughter Issy who is ready to rise from the sea in the form of a cloud (see 627.3-13), subsequently to return, as rain, to the earth and to the cycle of life.

In this image, ALP is, on the one hand, the personification of life-force and of procreation (as we have seen with regard to Belinda the hen). When she says "I feel I could near to faint away" (626.1), "I'm getting mixed" (626.36), or "I am passing out" (627.34), her experience symbolises the fading of cultural continuance itself. Yet, on the other hand, ALP's association with the biblical flood adds another level of meaning as it identifies her with the cataclysm that accompanies each turn of history's wheel. This merging of opposite meanings, I suggest, insists on the violence that constitutes an inherent part of each new beginning. ALP's role is split in a manner that reproduces the split of the flood myth itself, in which both divine wrath and divine mercy can be seen to manifest themselves. In view of the *Wake*'s famous cyclical structure, which ends and

begins with the river, ALP is herself an end that contains a beginning and a beginning that contains an end.[3] The *Wake*'s motif of cyclical recurrence is linked to the split between ending and beginning, between renewal and violence. And via the biblical flood, this split echoes in the simple phrase: "The billy flood rose."

To the growing list of potential sources of violence – which so far includes humans and gods – the next alternative history adds another entry when it gives the reason for the scribe's disappearance as: "an elk charged him." I admit that if there are any relevant mythological implications to this particular version, they escape me. Although deer feature in Christian, Greek, and Norse mythology, there seems to be precious little mention made of elk. (For considerations of space and coherence, I will not here discuss the question of how much freedom the *Wake* might grant us to travel along the metonymical lines provided by taxonomic relationships). Perhaps, then, this is a Darwinian variant on the broader theme of attack and destruction, included in order to remind us that violence is present among non-human animals as well.

That these various forms of violence – cultural, natural, and divine – are all linked to the problem of language is made evident by the third history listed in the passage, the one centring on the theme of thunder: "the sultrup worldwright from the excelsissimost empyrean (bolt, in sum) earthspake." Contained in this explanation is a reference to yet another theory on the origins of language: one put forward by eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico in his *New Science*. Though Vico's theories are something of a commonplace of *Wake* criticism, it is necessary here to revisit his views on language in light of split narratives. This will initially lead the discussion away from the passage on the scribe and the "ginnandgo gap;" I will return to it, however, for a number of closing remarks.

According to Vico, the first utterance of spoken words is attributable to a manifestation of religious awe that our prehistoric ancestors felt towards the

---

[3] In an unpublished conference paper, John Bishop moreover points out that ALP's monologue combines references to the development of a foetus with references to old age and failing health ("Joyce's Last Word;" referred to in Slote 152).

phenomenon of thunderstorms. Vico argues that "[w]hen people are ignorant of the natural causes that produce things, and cannot even explain them in terms of similar things, they attribute their own nature to them" (§180). Observing thunder and lightning, early humans, whom Vico pictures as brutish giants, therefore instinctively anthropomorphised the phenomena. They concluded that an immensely powerful being, a god, "was trying to speak to them through the whistling of his bolts and the crashing of his thunder" (§377). Whether it was because they tried to answer the god who was thus earth-speaking from the empyrean heavens through his bolts, or whether they wanted to contain the terrifying phenomenon by taking possession of it through replicating it, "articulate language began to take shape in onomatopoeia" (§447). That is, speech began at the precise moment at which the giants attempted to imitate the sound that had frightened them. In so doing, they invented the first word of human language: the name of the thunder-god, "initially called *Ious* after the sound of crashing thunder", "*Zeus* after the whistling sound of lightning", or "*Ur*, after the sound of burning fire" (§447).

Finnegans Wake makes frequent reference to Vico's theory of onomatopoeia, most significantly perhaps where it comments on "[t]he hundredlettered name again, last word of perfect language" (424.23-4). The name or word of one hundred letters (or one hundred and one letters in the case of the word that immediately precedes the phrase I cite here) is a thunder-word: a distinctive feature that occurs ten times in the *Wake* and that, in its prolonged rumbling, onomatopoeically represents the sound of thunder – a rendering not unlike the awestruck stuttering of Vico's giants. The notion that thunder is the "last" instance of "perfect language," moreover, highlights a critical difference between Vico's theory and the two biblical hypotheses.

To Vico, articulate language does not begin with Adam adequately naming each animal and thus demonstrating his perception of the true nature of each being. It begins with the giants inadequately imitating thunder – inadequately because thunder is a sound that the human vocal tract is unable to reproduce – a phenomenon of whose natural cause they remain ignorant. "Perfect language"

ends with the meteorological event; once the thunder-god has spoken his awe-inspiring name, what follows is a history of misunderstanding and feeble mimicry. Contrasting his account with the biblical one, we therefore find that Vico argues that mankind has at no point *lost* a perfect idiom but has always used language of an inferior nature, all the way back to those hardly articulate shouts and grunts sprung from the first giants' state of near bestial unreason.

It is possible to still read this as an updated version of the biblical narrative, as a translation of the biblical portrayal of mankind's humiliation into the terms of an aspiring natural science. For whether fallen language originates from the imperfect imitation of thunder or from God's thundering announcement at Babel, the linguistic fall would appear to be associated with complete and irreversible failure. In either narrative, our expressive capacity is measured against a sublime ideal that, in its unrivalled power, demonstrates nothing if not the feebleness of our own language. Joyce's implementation of Vico, however, is arguably somewhat more subversive than this manner of aligning Vico with traditional readings of the Bible. In the phrase cited above, Joyce does not cast "perfect language" as an object of admiration or yearning, but associates it with an agent constituting a perceived threat to humanity: thunder. The aspect of Vico's thought that is brought out in this application is not so much the idea that speech begins imperfectly, but the decisive reason for its beginning at all: a perception of danger. In Vico's opinion, the giants' hardly articulate first expressions were motivated by *fear*.

Vico's theory is thus an instance of yet another split narrative, yet another account in which destructive and creative forces can be found subsumed in one and the same influence. The thunderclap that initiates Viconian history is first of all a catastrophic limitation of the giants' freedom. As it causes them to stutter in helpless imitation, it also sends them to live in caves, henceforth afraid of the sky that has manifested itself as the native sphere of the frightful divine being. As Vico puts it: "Now, with his lightning bolts, which were the source of the greater auspices, Jupiter had laid low the giants, driving them underground to live in mountain caves" (§ 491). However, there is also an enabling element to the

thunder-god's mythical rage: "By laying them low, he brought them good fortune: for they became the lords of the ground in which they dwelt hidden, and so emerged as the lords of the first commonwealths" (§ 491). Mary Reynolds comments that "Vico's psychology finds men escaping the bestial primitive state only when the superstitious fear of thunder drives them into caves. Seeking shelter, they begin to form families; thus, the first step is taken toward the City, toward civilized human life" (118-9). It is in response to a perceived threat that the giants first discover the concepts of home and community. Thus, in a manner not unlike the subject's entry into the Lacanian symbolic order, the shattering of the giants' narcissistic self-image becomes part of the process that allows them to overcome their ignorant state. Yet the cultural achievement exemplified in Vico's first cities remains a profoundly ambiguous one. The organisation of the proto-households, as Vico imagines them, is violent and cruel enough (see §510), and in chapter four, I will discuss how Joyce's dramatization of the Viconian cities of refuge underlines the problem of a critical mass where progress deteriorates into chaos and accelerated change collapses into violence.

Of the four alternative histories, it is therefore in this one that we find the most perfect coincidence of constructive and destructive forces. In Vico's account, it is not the fall from Edenic perfection that contains the seed of present-day existence; his view is thus opposed to the Christian interpretation of history as decline. Yet the description he gives of our forebears also opposes itself to approaches that posit human rationality as the attribute that fertilises prehistory's otherwise clean slate. As Bishop observes, Vico's philosophy also "completely breaks with such forms of Enlightenment belief as Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism, both of which regarded 'Reason' as an eternal manifestation of laws of nature" ("Vico's" 183). In Vico, civilised life (though, again, civilisation is not always so civilised) results from the human ability to use palpably *imperfect* means of cognition and communication in order to develop forms of social organisation that aspire to improve on an originally brutal situation, but that are not – given said imperfection – necessarily guaranteed any success.

History, in this view, proceeds through what are essentially limitations imposed on an otherwise bestial state. Bishop furthermore argues that it is this aspect of Vico's thinking that can explain for us Joyce's somewhat peculiar proposition "that Freud had been anticipated by Vico" (Richard Ellmann 340). Bishop's suggestion is that the Viconian "crash of thunderbolts […] operates like the thunder of the patriarchal 'NO!' in Freud's accounts" (192-3), providing the template for the internalisation of law that becomes the basis of self-imposed limitations. I would add that the Freudian narrative of prehistoric patricide, like Vico's theorising of the thunder-god, relies on a dialectic of crisis and response in order to explain the origins of culture (in Freud's case: the killing of the father and the perturbations caused by it). Thus, I would read as one of the *Wake*'s reformulations of Vico's theory the phrase: "Now their laws assist them and ease their fall!" (579.26). It is only after their fall from self-absorbed supremacy that the giants develop the formalisations that underpin culture. Vico insists that a fall, precisely because it creates a need to be eased, is also the starting point without which there would be no human response at all, no struggle, and therefore no foundation for civilization or language as we know it.

Re-reading Babel

This reading of Vico allows us to return to Derrida's "Two Words for Joyce" with an adjusted focus. At the beginning of this chapter, I began to cite Derrida's definition of God's declaration of war at Babel as an "act of war which consisted in declaring" (33). We should now consider Derrida's description of that declaration as a statement in which all that needs to be declared is God's own, ineffable, name: "the vocable of his choice, the name of confusion" (33). For Derrida, the act of declaring war, the divine name, and the process of confusion are all one. The three aspects come together in the two words Derrida extracts from Joyce's text, "he war," which can be found in the following passage in the *Wake*: "And shall not Babel be with Lebab? And he war" (258.11-2). As "he wars," these words report an act or a declaration of war: "he wages war, he declares war, he makes war" (22), as Derrida puts it. As "he was" (German: "war"), they are the

name of God, the name of him who says of himself: "I am he who is, who am, I am that I am" (22-3). But as "he war," they are the symbol and the symptom of the dispersion of language – a multilingual pun (summoning, at least, English and German), suspended between meanings that can never be reproduced in their full range and their full ambiguity by any expression employing only one language.

In some respects, Derrida's description of God's declaration of war thus parallels Vico's description of Jupiter, who in his thunder speaks his own name and who through this announcement condemns humankind to linguistic inferiority. If we apply the Viconian insight that this ruinous event can be the starting point for a beneficial development, it quickly becomes apparent that Derrida's text goes even further in overturning traditional evaluations. Derrida suggests that God's "act of war is not necessarily anything other than an election, an act of love" (33). For when God declared war, "he declared war in tongues [*langues*] and on language and by language, *which gave languages*" (23, my emphasis). This motif of giving through waging war is repeated towards the end of the lecture, where Derrida proposes that God, by speaking his name at Babel, puts in place both the law and the "gift of languages" (39). To Derrida, the babelian act of war gives something in the same gesture in which it takes something away.

It is worth pointing out again that Joyce's own rethinking of linguistic confusion takes place in an explicit dialogue with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Tower of Babel and the babelian confusion of tongues are recurrent motifs in the *Wake*: "overgrown babeling" (6.31), "babbelers with their thangas" (15.12), "babel allower" (64.10), "turrace of Babbel" (199.31), "towerable" (224.12), "barrabelowther" (266.10), "babble towers" (354.27), "Tower of Balbus" (467.16), "tour of bibel" (523.32), and "tonguer of baubble" (536.8) are all instances in the text that remind us that the chaos of Joyce's writing happens in close thematic proximity to the biblical narrative – a narrative that arguably informs much of the language confusion of the *Wake* and much of its manipulation of the motifs of hubris, crime, and falling. Derrida is thus elaborating a biblical connection that Joyce himself foregrounds as an important aspect of the *Wake*'s staging of postlapsarian languages. Yet the notion of *giving languages* that Derrida insists on

is not necessarily confined to Babel as it appears in *Finnegans Wake*, though it certainly reflects on this appearance, too.

In "Des tours de Babel," an essay on translation the first part of which is in many ways a companion-piece to "Two Words for Joyce," Derrida comments that "the text of Genesis links without mediation, immediately, as if it were all a matter of the same design, raising a tower, constructing a city, making a name for oneself in a universal tongue that would also be an idiom, and gathering a filiation" (195). These, then, are the things that God's intervention is going to disperse, and he will disperse them all in one and the same gesture. Further down, we read:

> Can we not, then, speak of God's jealousy? Out of resentment against that unique name and lip [idiom] of men, he imposes his name, his name of father; and with this violent imposition, he initiates the *deconstruction* of the tower, as of the universal language; he scatters the genealogical filiation. (195-6, my emphasis)

The traditional answer to the question Derrida poses is yes. The Babylonians' vision of "a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" (Gen. 11.4) represents an act of hubris that God cannot tolerate. But the actual words that the Bible reports are more ambivalent: "they have all one language; and this they begin to do: *and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do*" (Gen. 11.6, my emphasis). The Babylonians' universal language is a source, or at least a symbol, of their growing power. It is part of an empire and of a lineage that is ambitious about perpetuating itself. Perhaps, we may even say that the universal Babylonian idiom is part of an aggressive political agenda: of a project as intolerable to the rest of humankind as it is to God. With this in mind, it becomes possible to interpret the story of Babel in the way Derrida reads it in "Des tours de Babel:" as an act of deconstruction that "ruptures the rational transparency but also interrupts the colonial violence or the linguistic imperialism" (199) of the Babylonian project – all in one and the same gesture. In this sense, there would be as much preservation and new beginning to the babelian confusion as there is devastation and punishment.

This reading, it should be added, makes historical sense, as can be seen from a comparison of Derrida's proposition to the original context of the biblical narrative. One account of this context is given in Nicholas Ostler's 2005 *Empires of the Word*, which provides an expansive overview of ancient and modern examples of world languages. Regarding the myth of Babel, Ostler comments that as a cautionary tale about the dangers of linguistic confusion, "it is bizarrely ill placed as a fable of Babylon, which was notable throughout its history for the leading role of a single language. For almost two thousand years this language was Akkadian" (59). He adds that "Akkadian was pre-eminently a language of power and influence" (60), and elsewhere, he elaborates that from about 2000 BC to about 500 BC, the entire region of Mesopotamia was "periodically unified under Akkadian-speaking dynasties ruling from Babylon in the south or Assyria in the north" (40).

Ending in approximately 500 BC, the supremacy of Akkadian extends up to or indeed beyond the setting down of the biblical Babel narrative. This section of the Pentateuch derives from a source known in compositional studies as the Yahwist, or "J" (see Baden 68-9). J is typically dated to about 900 BC – well prior to the demise of Akkadian in the empire of Babylon – with some critics arguing for other dates as late as about 600 BC (see Campbell and O'Brien 5-6). One of the most prominent defenders of a late dating, John Van Seters, actually proposes that J wrote "within a particular sociohistorical environment – that of the Judean exiles in Babylon" (287). That is, Van Seters holds that J lived as a deportee in the so-called Babylonian exile (which came to an end with Babylon's defeat at the hands of the Persians in the mid-sixth century BC). Based on this hypothesis, Van Seters reads the story of Babel as "a deliberate effort to lampoon this massive royal construction and all that it stood for" (32-3).

Ostler, despite his reference to the biblical tradition, does not propose an altered reading of Babel based on the facts he presents. But he repeatedly discusses the phenomenon of the Akkadian language's regional dominance with a view to political and military power. Together with what we know of the Pentateuch's composition, this suggests a historically founded connection

between, on the one hand, the privileged position of a single language as a correlative of jingoistic politics, and, on the other hand, the time and place from which the portrayal of Babylon emerges as we now encounter it in the Pentateuch. For the author or authors of the narrative found in Genesis 11, the link between linguistic diversity and political liberty may have been very real.

In theology, Interpretations that conceive of the Babylonian empire as a menacing force whose destruction is a welcome event go back to antique sources (though removed from the original setting down of the biblical text by more than half a millennium). One of the earliest exponents of this approach is the first-century historian Flavius Josephus. In his magnum opus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus identifies Nimrod as the Babylonian king who ordered the construction of the tower (a non-biblical identification), and writes that Nimrod "little by little transformed the state of affairs into a tyranny, holding that the only way to detach men from the fear of God was by making them continuously dependent upon his own power" (55). As we have seen, current scholarship similarly finds that an emphasis on the liberation from Babylonian oppression is historically realistic; contemporary research thus underpins the traditional view. However, to suggest that the positive inflection of the events at Babel, far from residing in the dire necessity of the imposed punishment, can be located in a divine act that is not a punishment at all, constitutes an incomparably more recent line of argument. The first efforts from within theological studies to revisit the narrative in this manner are about contemporary to Derrida's tentative attempt in the same direction. The interpretation flies in the face of the established (but not, I would venture, intrinsic) significance of God's action, for the revisionist approach sees liberation in the very *multiplicity* of languages – what Derrida's text refers to as the deconstruction of the limitations of a monolingual culture.

One theological account that relies on this political reading of Babel is an essay by Latin American theologian José Míguez-Bonino published in 1999. There, Míguez-Bonino argues that Babel's linguistic uniformity may be aligned with the symptoms of totalitarian co-optation, and that the Babylonians' power is that of a hegemony threatening not so much divine supremacy as individual human

freedom and cultural diversity. The purpose of the myth of Babel, writes Míguez-Bonino,

> is *not* primarily the explanation of the origin of diverse languages, *but* the condemnation and defeat of the imperial arrogance and universal domination represented by the symbol of Babylon. God's action, then, is twofold: the thwarting of the project of the false unity of domination *and* the liberation of the nations that possess their own places, languages, and families. (15)

It is the second of these two aspects – the setting free of individual characteristics – that constitutes a significant reinterpretation of God's destruction of the tower. If the dispersion of language is read as an act of decentralisation and democratisation, then this means that the act of war opens up a field of cultural undertakings that not only deviate from the centralised, overpowering, and megalomaniac project of the single language and the single tower, but that actually *profit* from entrusting themselves to that project's opposite: a state of chaos.

I go into some detail about all this because I want to suggest that the *Wake* draws on the myth of Babel in precisely this revisionist sense (if not necessarily on the basis of the historical perspective sketched above). This reading of Joyce in turn falls in place with what Derrida calls Joyce's double commandment. Regarding attempts at linguistic unification, "Two Words for Joyce" conjures up a scenario in which translators attempt to capture the meanings contained in the multilingual pun "he war:" an enterprise Derrida declares to be futile. "Their very success cannot but take the form of a failure. Even if, in an improbable hypothesis, they had translated everything, they would by that very fact fail to translate the multiplicity of languages" (34). This scenario demonstrates the ethical and political use that Joyce's method makes of plurality, of the babelian confusion. The translators' project, aiming to confine every aspect of "he war" in one translated or standardized expression, is in certain ways akin to the scheme of the single tower at Babel that would unify all ambition and all work into one structure. But Joyce's "he war" escapes translation of this kind. By creating a scope of meaning

that exceeds any single expression in any single language, it indefinitely suspends the moment at which its essence would be pinned down, and thus it enables the process of elucidation to go on indefinitely, defying the project of comprehending the non-word in a single, towering, transcendental interpretation.

Pentecostal plurality

It should have transpired that, in examining the points of intersection between *Finnegans Wake* and these biblical myths about language, my intention is not to privilege any traditional theological frameworks. Rather, the revisionist take on the Babel narrative provides us with an important way of linking linguistic chaos to certain political and ethical considerations. I moreover hold that this applicability of a re-interpretation of Babel to Joyce's ethics of form is not simply fortuitous. By including Vico's philosophy and the book of Genesis among his sources, Joyce positions *Finnegans Wake* within the traditional Judeo-Christian discourse on the flawed nature of language. What is crucial about his use of this tradition is that his response to it consists in an amplification, not an evasion, of postlapsarian un-decidability. I therefore argue that the revisionist reading of Babel is relevant to the *Wake*. Babel symbolises the loss of a perfect clarity, of a pure meaning that would reach its addressee immediately and not see itself challenged by rivalling interpretations. But read in the manner I outline above, God's act of war also makes possible a diversity of meaning that could not be achieved within an ideal idiom. The biblical narrative thus serves to question the very ideal of univocality, in a manner that aligns itself both with Joyce's use of ambiguity and with his implementation of the theme of fallen-ness.

The myths that the *Wake* either invokes or newly creates on the subject of the linguistic fall (the flight of the scribe, Noah's ark, Vico's thunder, the Tower of Babel) are all depicted in Joyce's text as suspended between creative and destructive gestures. My suggestion is that we can therefore read these motifs as miniatures of the *Wake*. On the one hand, the split narratives of these myths parallel the way Joyce's non-words remain suspended in a state of plurality and cannot be integrated into a unified interpretation like the one envisioned by

Derrida's hypothetical translators. On the other hand, these myths inscribe the *Wake* into a certain counter-tradition of interpreting the linguistic fall and postlapsarian ambiguity: a counter-tradition that conceives of them as of something other than a failure of language. In other words, a revisionist reading of the linguistic fall offers itself as a description of the way Joyce makes the *excess* of language, the irreducible plurality I analyse in chapter two, a part of his artistic agenda.

There is another biblical narrative we should consider here, since it can in fact be read as already forming part of the counter-tradition of re-reading Babel. It constitutes a possible (New Testament) response to the (Old Testament) challenge posed by Babel, and it aligns itself with the idea that the destruction of a domineering centre can liberate a vibrant multitude of peripheral endeavours. This is the narrative of Pentecost: the moment at which the Holy Spirit descends and miraculously enables speakers of different languages to talk to each other. The biblical account describes this moment in a rhapsodic enumeration of nationalities that bears quoting at length:

> Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (Acts 2.6-11)

I cite the passage in its entirety because its juxtaposition of ethnicities and nationalities creates an impression that a summary would, by definition, ruin: the catalogue exemplifies that Pentecost is a moment of plurality, not unity. The people in this narrative are from different cultures and they speak any number of

languages; what changes during the described event is their ability to understand one another. The Pentecostal miracle thus answers the babelian dispersion not in the mode of a re-convergence into a single position, but in that of a dialogue between numerous positions.

Whereas we may or may not read Babel itself as a positive event (and the norm, until recently, has been not to), the counterpart represented by Pentecost unquestionably takes place within the post-babelian diversity of languages and just as unquestionably turns this very diversity into a source of delight. People with wildly different backgrounds can suddenly understand one another, can communicate with each other, peacefully and in a fruitful manner. Pentecost thus affirms the babelian diversification rather than to undo it. In particular, there is no miraculous Pentecostal language temporarily granted to all interlocutors in this scene. The text states that "they all heard them speak *in their own language*" – in Greek: "ὅτι ἤκουον εἷς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν" (Acts 2.6 in Aland et al.), with "ἰδίᾳ" meaning "own" (as in "idiolect"). The experience of the event thus *varies* from speaker to speaker, and the overall effect is a bustling disarray confusing enough to be mistaken by some witnesses for drunkenness (see Acts 2.13).

On the basis of these considerations, I disagree with the description of Pentecost that Laurent Milesi offers in "L'idiome babélien de *Finnegans Wake*," where he writes that "le miracle de la Pentecôte, le don divin des langues venant racheter la confusion babélienne, permet de restaurer l'unité linguistique" (178).[4] A few pages further on, Milesi adds that in the Pentecostal event, "[l]'universalité et l'intelligibilité sont restaurées localement" (186).[5] Milesi is not arguing for the presence of a universal idiom at the Pentecostal event – in fact, the terms "unité" and "universalité" can be understood to indicate the sort of joyful capacity for exchange I also have in mind. Nevertheless, I hold that this way of phrasing matters – particularly the double emphasis on restoration – over-emphasises a contrast between the *destruction* of the tower and the creation of Pentecostal

---

[4] "The miracle of Pentecost, the divine gift of languages that undo the babelien confusion, allows the restoration of linguistic unity." (my translation)
[5] "Universality and intelligibility are locally restored." (my translation)

unity, and under-emphasises a more crucial contrast between the totalitarian project of *building* the tower and the liberating momentum of Pentecost.

In the Pentecostal gathering of voices, the passage that is initiated by the erasure of the tower and that leads from orderly univocity to illimitable diversity is not reversed: it reaches its zenith (albeit temporarily). I propose to conceive of the ensuing interaction along the lines described by theologian Letty M. Russell, who writes: "This is a different kind of world than the one envisioned by the builders at Babel. Here the unity comes, not through building a tower of domination or uniformity, but through communication" (463-4). The miracle of Pentecost gives the ability to communicate; what it does not do is to remove the element of chaos inherent to postlapsarian speech. On the contrary, what Pentecost adds to the babelian confusion is an unreserved *toleration* of plurality and of chaos. This aligns itself with Joyce's chosen mode of expression in *Finnegans Wake*. If Milesi, based on his definition of Pentecost as a restorative gesture that redeems confusion, argues that "L'avènement de la Pentecôte est sans cesse déjoué et la réconciliation n'apparaît pas derrière la fusion formelle des langues dans le moule de l'idiome wakien" (178),[6] I would suggest, by contrast, that the language of the *Wake* is already Pentecostal – precisely because of this indefinite suspension through which the text boldly affirms chaos, plurality, the other, the unknown, uncertainty, and so on.

However, if we are to translate "Pentecost" from the name of a specific mythological event into a theoretical term describing a certain way of writing, a number of qualifications are needed. First of all, although the *Wake* is a multilingual text, I am not referring to that multilingualism *per se* when I discuss it as Pentecostal writing. The remarkable feature of the Pentecostal event is that in bringing together heterogeneous and possibly contradictory outlooks, cultures, and languages, it generates a productive (though not entirely harmonious) discourse. Where we would expect to find a disintegration into the flat meaninglessness of white noise – the usual result of a merging of too much

---

[6] "The arrival of Pentecost is continually suspended and the reconciliation cannot manifest itself behind the formal fusion of languages in the cast of the Wakean idiom." (my translation)

information – we instead find an abundance of meaning. It is this abundance on the brink of total confusion, an abundance we also find in the *Wake*, that I propose to label "Pentecostal." And although the *Wake*'s multilingualism certainly contributes to its production of this effect, a text does not have to be multilingual to partake in Pentecostal heterogeneity. Nor is the Pentecostal chaos of the *Wake* in every case the result of Joyce's use of non-words, although non-words are certainly this text's most notable and most far-reaching enactment of Pentecostal plurality.

For similar reasons, Pentecostal writing is not related to the project of artificial languages such as Esperanto. These constructed languages aim to meet the challenge of linguistic diversity by means of unification. Where they synthesize existing languages, it is to make themselves available to an international community of speakers by providing one system easily accessible to all. The Pentecostal event, by contrast, maintains the differences between those present at it even as it allows them to communicate with each other. Similarly, Pentecostal writing, as we encounter it in the *Wake*, intertwines various layers of signification, but it does so in a manner that invites juxtaposition and re-separation rather than fusion. The difference between this way of writing and the goal of most artificial languages is pointed out by Norris, who remarks that

> [u]nlike artificial or "auxiliary" languages whose purpose is to overcome the Babelian diversity of national languages, Joyce's "mutthering pot" (20.7) in the *Wake* appears to be a dump or rubbish heap like ALP's scavenger sack, in which the fragments merely mix and mingle to be distributed anew. (*Decentered Universe* 129)

The essence of Pentecostal writing as I would describe it hinges on this capacity "to be distributed anew." The various meanings that coexist in the *Wake*'s Pentecostal utterances, although they interact productively, cannot be subsumed under a single heading, and they defy complete synthesis – which is precisely how this mode of expression avoids collapsing into the single, overwhelming note of white noise.

And another clarification is required. In proposing to dub the language of *Finnegans Wake* Pentecostal, I am not suggesting that one should read Joyce's text for a particular exegesis of that biblical story (even less for any affinity with Pentecostal forms of Evangelicalism). My application of this theological framework to the *Wake* is rather intended to demonstrate that we should not hastily term Joyce's text an example of *babelian* confusion without problematizing what is meant by this shorthand – Babel – that perhaps presents itself somewhat too readily when we try to describe what *Finnegans Wake* does with the plurality of languages. For to contrast Babel with Pentecost in the classical manner – as fall and redemption, as punishment and resolution – cannot do justice to how much the *Wake* is in fact *enjoying the fall*.

Finnegans Wake fully enjoys both the theme of the fall – and the possibility of its positive inflection, as in Joyce's use of Vico – and the linguistic fall itself, the linguistic condition that may be subsumed under this name. Thus, in *Joyce Effects*, Attridge comments: "*Finnegans Wake* retells the myth, a number of times, from a different perspective: neither lamenting language's fall nor trying to secure its recovery, it finds its pleasures in the knowledge that language, by its very nature, is unstable and ambiguous" (161). With the *Wake*, rather than holding on to a traditional understanding of Babel that can only over-emphasise the myth's negative connotations, we should think Babel *in* Pentecost and Pentecost *in* Babel. In multiplicity, chaos is implied. In turn, a certain chance is part of the fall, as we will also see at the end of the next chapter, where I discuss *Felix Culpa*, the fortunate fall, of which the linguistic fall at Babel can be regarded as one version. We encounter a re-imagination of Babel whenever, in reading the *Wake*, we are caught up between the creative and the destructive aspects of the text's double commandment.

This is not to say that the story of Pentecost is entirely absent from the *Wake*. The description of HCE's escape in I.4 makes reference to "pentecostal jest" (99.21). That it does so shortly after HCE's resurrection in the same chapter (see 83.4-6) may allude to Pentecost's following Easter in the liturgical year, particularly since this link is referred to, in the quiz of I.6, when HCE appears as

"Mr Easterling of pentecostitis" (130.8-9). I.6 also merges Pentecost with a museum in "pintacostecas" (152.27-8). Then, the term appears again in the séance in III.3, in the phrase "Paas and Pingster's pudding" (550.12-3), "Pfingsten" being German for "Pentecost." Finally, Book IV refers to the story's motif of drunkenness in "losing her pentacosts after drinking their pledges" (624.34-5). As is readily apparent from this list, my terminological choice is not a response to Joyce's implementation of Pentecost itself. It rather reflects my proposition to draw on instruments from theology that go beyond the (standard version of the) Babel story, as a way of responding to how Joyce re-imagines the multilingualism and the plurivocality on which that story centres. In short, if we examine Joyce's use of the Babel narrative as one of his strategies in problematizing language itself, its complexity and imperfection, then the revisionist style of his implementation of the myth requires, on our part, a more sophisticated theological toolkit than has so far largely been applied to his text.

To clarify this, let us return to the flight of the scribe, and consider again the four alternative histories presented in that section. Their listing, we can now say, constitutes an instance of Pentecostal plurality. The gesture of offering disparate accounts without giving any indication that one of them is authoritative replaces hegemonic singularity with a multiplicity of interpretations, none of which can be singled out as the central one, and whose very simultaneity takes on an importance of its own. No reading, however astute, can do away with the fact that this passage offers several answers simultaneously, and that these answers, which should exist in a state of mutual exclusion, speak to each other. Another Pentecostal moment, then, can be found in the phrase "the copyist must have fled with his scroll." I have already agued that this flight may be taken to signify either the loss of information or its rescue, and that this allows us to read the sentence as reporting both an end and a beginning.

We can now add that this split between destruction and creation is a Pentecostal one – in fact, this particular ambiguity between preservation and collapse is present in all cases of Pentecostal plurality. The Pentecostal overload of meaning already contains the breakdown of meaning, and this flaw of

Pentecostal writing in turn contains its productivity. But as with the list of alternative explanations, our interpretation must not stop here, with a neat separation of the elements whose simultaneity we establish. If we take "the copyist must have fled with his scroll" to mean that the passing on of information has been interrupted, that we have no access to the knowledge recorded in the missing document, then what we nevertheless *have* knowledge of is this lack itself, which we immediately begin to interpret. In other words, there is something like an oscillation here that touches on both versions of the split narrative. Something has been lost, but it is a *partial loss*, for although we cannot say what has been lost or how (or even when), we know about the loss itself, and thus loss and preservation come together in one and the same event.

What, then, of my claim that Pentecostal language defies synthesis? Is not the notion of such a partial loss a quintessential synthesis of the flight of the scribe? My answer would be that although the idea of a partial loss combines some of the text's connotations, it is far from exhausting the text. The split that disrupts the narrative of the scribe does not disappear once this synthesis, the story of a partial loss, is found. On the contrary, the split remains present in that story as *the very result brought about by the partial loss*. A partial loss or a noticeable lack – which amounts to the same – is what makes a split narrative possible. In order for such a narrative to exist at all, some remainder must persist and be noticed, some interest must be aroused in order to get underway a series of alternative hypotheses regarding that remainder, however distorted by lack it might be. Yet if we could remember, communicate, or otherwise summon into presence the precise details of that lack, it would cease to be lack, and with it would cease to exist any space for multiple interpretations. Here, destruction and creation of meaning are truly interdependent.

It is in this view that the flight of the scribe can be read as a passage *mise en abyme*. The text here addresses the conditions of its own existence as a split narrative, by reflecting on how loss or distortion of information leads to a state of uncertainty. It also addresses the conditions of the existence of non-words, which are possible only if the record has been disrupted – but not completely, not

beyond a point at which the knowledge *that* something is absent still comes to us and entices us to interpret this lack itself. A Joycean non-word is not a word, but it is close enough to being one to have us look for words it resembles. Like the copyist's flight, each of the *Wake*'s non-words is thus split into several meanings that cannot be gathered under the heading of one translation or one interpretation, and which nevertheless all communicate with each other as we indefinitely oscillate between them.

The fundamental problem with a Pentecostal plurality, therefore, is that it is not a totality, set, or pattern that controls or summarises its components. It does not branch out from the semantic centre of an equivocality. We can clarify this by considering some examples. Is "he war" an expression in German or in English? Does "Nuahs" mean Noah, Shaun, or new? What exactly does "Allmaziful" mean (and how many languages does it mean it in)? Or, to give an example not based on a non-word, what kind of fusion or confusion is taking place between Shem and Shaun? A co-operation? A conflict? A supernatural merging of their existences? A split identity? Or simply a difficulty, in particular instances, of distinguishing between them? And how, stranger still, are we to unite Issy the girl and Issy the cloud? My point is that we can no more integrate these instances of plurality into the hierarchy of an "either/or" than we can subject them to a neat synthesis. What we are left with, then, is the "and" of an open-ended list without centre or margins. Yet the excess of this list is not necessarily a question of quantity or magnitude. It is not the meaningless chaos of all-inclusiveness but a more intriguing state – an intensification of the excess of writing – in which chaos stems from the fact that what *is* included does not naturally divide itself into discrete units, that this division has to be undertaken in an identification that already changes the material it distributes.

To appreciate the role Pentecostal diversity plays in the *Wake* is therefore not to abandon all caution and to indiscriminately accept any interpretation we care to invent. On the contrary, the appreciation of Pentecostal plurality prompts us to question *how* we construct meaning, and to rigorously examine the simplifications we make when we translate non-words into words. We can always

construe inapplicable readings of a non-word. However, a serious consideration of the material manipulation that any reading of a non-word requires must lead us to acknowledge that it is difficult to decide what readings *are* in fact applicable, and that it is altogether impossible to once and for all synthesise or hierarchically arrange these readings: to bring the act of translation to a halt and produce a stable conclusion. It is precisely by having us grapple self-consciously with our anxious search for common denominators or stabilising centres that Joyce makes us comprehend the extent of his text's resistance to systematisation, the extent of its refutation of purity and univocality as the proper realm of artistic production, and its defiant reliance on postlapsarian fallibility instead.

The split meanings of non-words are possible only in a state in which something is missing, in which we encounter, and indeed acknowledge, a palpable lack or an absence made present. What is missing is the copyist's scroll, his document, perhaps we could even say, his letter – ALP's letter, in fact. There is more at stake in this identification than a superficial resemblance of the images in question. The scroll that is missing and the letter that is absenting itself are two representations of one and the same thing: they both symbolise that which would once and for all remove uncertainty and give us a conclusion. It is the loss of this possibility that destabilises language by introducing into it the problems of equivocality, plurality, and suspension. And this loss afflicts all forms of linguistic capability. Pentecostal writing, for instance the writing of the *Wake*, is therefore not fundamentally different from other language use; it is the exemplification and radicalisation of what could be called the fallen state of *all* language. What is particular about Joyce's procedure is that, in the *Wake*, the postlapsarian split between producing meaning and subverting meaning is not buried, hidden, or suppressed. It is made explicit in a text that challenges us to engage in a plurality of meaning even if, in order to do so, we have to acknowledge that this plurality results from the anxiety-inducing loss of the letter/scroll.

This is to say that the creation of a Pentecostal plurality of meaning is not a problem that can be reduced to the structure of the text itself. It is also a task imposed on the reader. The counter-intuitive nature of this task – to accept Joyce's

head-on implementation of the loss of essence, his making-present of its absence – can hardly be overstated. In our critical endeavours to make sense of *Finnegans Wake*, we more or less by definition tend to treat the difficulty of this text as if it were an underlying but (after a period of initiation) unobtrusive principle. That is, we run the risk of nominally acknowledging the difficulty only to subsequently exclude it from our readings, which it could only serve to destabilise. Yet whether we acknowledge it or not, this difficulty introduces a certain built-in shortcoming (to which the interpretation I develop here, too, falls prey whenever it settles on a specific meaning) into our anxious movement towards minimal stability, towards that which need no longer be questioned. A non-word destabilises the interpretations it provokes. It subjects each of our readings to the double commandment: "create, and destroy what you created," bestowing on it the status of provisional hypothesis, making it one in a potential series, thus putting into question its conclusiveness.

Pentecostal writing does not introduce this instability into our readings simply for the sake of flaunting technical brilliance. As I hope to have shown, such writing embraces instability so as to offer an alternative programme to those forms of writing that strive to approximate the ideal linguistic state by controlling, as far as possible, each expression's scope of meaning. Such modes of writing subject themselves to a limitation structurally akin to that of the monolingual project of Babel: namely, to achieve univocity at the cost of *rigidity*. To this vision, Pentecostal writing opposes an agenda that finds in ambiguity itself – in the very flaw that separates us from the ideal state – a force that creates new opportunities for expression. *Finnegans Wake* not only subscribes to such an agenda, but details it: by describing the excess of writing that I discuss in chapter two, and by inflecting some of the old and new myths forming part of its source material so as to emphasise the uses of splits and imperfections. If we want to take seriously this poetic agenda, we must remain careful not to cast Joyce's non-words as obstacles to a clarity that well-informed criticism would be tasked to bring about.

If we posit that the partial and provisional nature of our readings can be overcome through sufficiently accurate interpretation, if, in other words, we aim

to identify one translation (or indeed a given number of translations) of a Joycean non-word as the one whose overriding likelihood can hold at bay all alternatives, and if we venture that in the process of translating the non-word in question into a limited number of standard words, we overlook no relevant possibility and exclude only such readings as are demonstrably invalid, then the very first step of our exegetical procedure is to undo Joyce's decision to use a non-word rather than a word. Thus, we return the outrageous otherness of his text to the very rigidity from which Joyce has risked to sever his writing.

The emphasis that my interpretation places on this severance, however, must raise the question whether the account of Pentecostal plurality I give here may not be a misapprehension that perceives unfathomable conundrums where there are in fact barely disguised standard words. After all, many of Joyce's non-words are the result of slight alterations of expressions (in English as well as in other languages) that seem all too recognisable under the veneer of their unfamiliar inscription. To address this problem – a crucial one for the approach I am outlining here – I will devote the final subsection of this chapter to discussing an article by Geert Lernout, "The *Finnegans Wake* Notebooks and Radical Philology." Lernout's approach goes further than most interpretations of the *Wake* in making a case for identifying what exactly Joyce wrote. It does so on the basis of the following proposition: "Take away intention and context, and the only thing left to say about a text is that it can mean anything at all" (47) – which is of course tantamount to saying that it means nothing whatsoever.

I partly agree with this claim. For reasons outlined in the previous chapter, I think it impossible to univocally identify an author's intentions; they cannot serve as an unmovable basis of interpretation. But I do believe that they should form part of what is at stake in interpretation. The notion of a creative and at least partly intentional process that gives a text its shape – a structure that, although constitutively excessive, is also distinctive as well as unique, along the lines of what Attridge terms *singularity* (though this should not be taken to stand in opposition to what I call plurality) – such a notion does not, I hold, return us to the intentional fallacy. On the contrary, as I have also indicated in chapter two, the process of

interpretation as such can be conceptualised as an interaction with the author's spectral presence as it comes into being through interpretative query. It is only through a response to the singularity of Joyce's writing that we are able to read this writing's pluralities without producing meaningless isotropy. Crucially, however, the nature of any inheritance is necessarily bilateral. The notion of listening to Joyce's own voice is thus complicated by the ventriloquism that lends the text the only vitality it can posses: a spectral vitality. To deny the risk that accompanies spectrality does not mean a return to the safe ground of Joyce's text. I would argue that such a denial denies the text itself, by denying the extraordinary risks that Joyce's non-language requires us to take.

If, in examining this requirement as an authorial gesture, the following subsection discusses Lernout's article at some length, it is for two reasons. First, many critical approaches, although they stop short of what Lernout's title calls the radical nature of his methodology, nonetheless implicitly or explicitly agree with a goal that is central to Lernout's procedure: to oppose one meaning to another, to dismiss some meanings by finding others sound (and thus to stabilise meaning and bring the interpretative process to a halt). In a certain sense, of course, this is nothing if not a direly needed procedure to bring to *Finnegans Wake*. I have argued that the instability Joyce imposes on his text is effectively an unbearable one, that it is a source of anxiety, and that the *Wake* actively relies on our desire for meaning.

Yet the double bind that we cannot escape with the *Wake* is that in responding to this desire, our constructions of meaning also pass over certain aspects of Joyce's intention. The following discussion will help to clarify why an appeal to the legitimate nature of one particular reading is not, by itself, a sound basis on which to infer the irrelevance of other readings. My second reason for examining Lernout's text is that he posits a distinction between private readings and objective readings in such a way that examining this distinction will prove helpful in detailing my own approach. The interdependence of the private and the public (though not in their juridico-economic opposition) is crucial to my own investigation of intentionality in Joyce's text, both here and in chapter four.

Intentional complexity

To approximate the singular creative event of Joyce's writing, Lernout proposes the consultation of the notebooks in which Joyce jotted down preparatory materials for his composition. Drawing on these notebooks serves as a kind of homing beacon, keeping our readings from losing sight of the scope and the focal points of Joyce's creative labour. "It is only when we refer to the notebooks and the drafts that we can decide with some degree of probability which parts of the world went into the book and which parts probably did not" (45). This referencing takes the form of identifying the standard expressions underlying Joyce's non-words, as well as, where possible, tracing these source-words "to the text from which they were taken by Joyce" (37). It is an identification that, when undertaken with the care and rigour that Lernout stipulates, promises to reveal in some detail "the chaos of ideas out of which *Finnegans Wake* developed" (34). By contrast, immediately before the first sentence I cite here, we read that "[i]f we decide to ignore the notebooks – and maybe we have every right to do so – we can only continue to read as much of our world into the *Wake*: each reader will then inevitably create his or her own private *Wake*" (45). The *private text*, in the function in which it appears here, is something like the text filtered through our own individual chaos of ideas. Insofar as it can be understood as Lernout's term for the isotropy of an interpretation that can go absolutely anywhere, it is a term that requires careful analysis.

First of all, if an isotropic reading is private, then what are we to make of the claim that a reading in good faith, a radically philological reading, is to be based on Joyce's notes? It would be too simple here to maintain that Joyce's notebooks constitute private records. In fact, Lernout rejects this approach quite clearly; he writes: "I do not believe that the notebooks are private documents in more than the most pedestrian of meanings" (46). This could be demonstrated in various ways – for instance, we have evidence that Joyce took some care to preserve the notebooks. They are not, however, part of the book published as *Finnegans Wake*. One could immediately object that such a publication would have been as

impractical as unnecessary, and the point is certainly not sufficient to discredit the notebooks' status as partaking in criticism's public enterprise as well as in Joyce's authority. But it does raise the question of whether the public realm can be treated as a homogeneous space, or whether it is traversed by certain fault-lines – and if so, what the relations are in which the various manifestations of the public stand to each other.

The relation of avant-texte to text is of course a problem that is everything but unknown to genetic approaches. In addressing it, however, Lernout opts for a solution that raises further questions. He takes on board an axiom he adopts from Danis Rose, who, in the introduction to *James Joyce's The Index Manuscript*, states that "*Finnegans Wake* is an ordered aggregate of elements each of which can be identified with a unit entered in one of the notebooks" (xiii, qtd. in Lernout 30). That is, Lernout follows Rose in resolving the relation between the two public archives – *Finnegans Wake* and the notebooks – by concluding that this relation can under certain circumstances be treated as a mode of identity: namely, as a translation. Rose continues: "The translation of each unit from notebook to draft was intermediated by referring that unit to one of a small number of contextual invariants" (xiv, qtd. in Lernout 30).

If such an identity between text and source material can indeed be assumed, then it is curious that Lernout still concedes that we may have "every right" to ignore the notebooks. Here is the explanation that directly follows the passages I have already cited from this section of Lernout's text:

> The difference between the two approaches is one that is familiar from recent practice in the performance of classical music. Either we attempt to play the Brandenburg Concertos or the Goldberg Variations or the Ninth Symphony in the way Bach or Beethoven would have wanted them performed, or we play them our own way. The two approaches are irreconcilable because we have set ourselves different tasks. (45-6)

In one case, the task consists in the public reconstruction of the author's intention, in the other case, it is to explore the mobility and variety of private

readings. This strikes me as a problematic distinction for two reasons. First, it is not obvious why reading with our own concerns in mind – playing our own way – should necessarily be opposed to what Joyce would have wanted. Observant interpretations may inherit from Joyce's thought so as to think about our own contexts in his spirit. And where the concerns of the reader can indeed be seen to displace the concerns and the context of the writer, it is by no means certain that this invariably leads to private interpretation in the sense of what, in another article, Lernout terms "textual solipsism" ("James Joyce" 96) – that is, to a reading primarily interested in its own hermeneutical or aesthetic powers. Readings that bring their own contemporary issues and theoretical models to bear on Joyce may do so in order to explore social, political, and ethical questions. Where this is the case, reading our own way, even along the lines of idiosyncratic or anachronistic procedures, constitutes an interpretative enterprise that is anything but confined to a solipsistic or private realm (one could argue, though I will not do so here, that it is more public than readings concerned solely with what one person – Joyce – wrote).

Secondly, and more importantly to my present argument, the division cannot do justice to the intrinsic complexity of the public sphere that encompasses both the notebook entries and the published form of the *Wake*. An appeal to what Joyce would have wanted does not, in the complexity of this sphere, unambiguously delineate a reading, for this complexity points us in the direction of an authorial intention that is itself varied and potentially mobile. Let me illustrate this understanding of intentionality by giving another example from the field of music. In a documentary by British filmmaker Peter Greenaway, the composer John Cage tells an anecdote that involves authorial intention. Cage, too, is talking about the relation between the performance of a piece of music and the intention of the artist who wrote the piece (in particular, Cage uses the story to illustrate his own sceptical attitude with regard to any recording of music, a practice that gives the impression of a musical activity where, according to Cage, none is taking place). To make his point, Cage narrates a personal experience:

> I was present at a concert, conducted by Stravinsky, of one of his own works, and I was sitting behind a ten year old child and his father, and after the performance was finished, the child turned to his father and said: "That isn't the way it goes!" (Greenaway 41.30 – 41.50)

For Cage, the anecdote demonstrates the danger of conceiving of one – recorded – version of a musical piece as of its essence, as how "it goes." There is no indication given in the interview what version the child in the story is comparing the performance to. If we follow Cage's assumption that it is a record, there are two principal cases we can imagine. Either the boy is familiar with a record conducted by someone else. Or, more intriguingly, he knows another version interpreted by Stravinsky himself. What the latter possibility illustrates is that an artist's, for instance Stravinsky's, interpretation, re-interpretation, or reprisal of their own work may always challenge our assumptions about how they themselves would have wanted this work to be played or understood – even if these assumptions are based on the most authoritative of interpretations, including previous interpretations by the artist himself or herself. This is to say that in our attempts to conceptualise intention, we must keep in mind that Stravinsky or Joyce or any other artist may at any point have changed their mind or – more problematically still – may have had in mind more than one thing at the same time.

This potential plurality of authorial versions complicates the notion of performing a work as intended, in a scientific mode not afflicted by the complexities of private fickleness. For the complexity in question may be that of the artist: an artist employing a notation or a language capable of transporting the plurality of her or his intentions. Language's capacity for plurality, in turn, destabilises the clear-cut distinction between the public mode and the concept Lernout uses to describe unscientific reading: private language. Citing Derrida, Lernout proposes a connection between what he calls "a private form of writing" (46) and what Derrida, in "Signature Event Context," says about the

> possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which

constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication; in writing, which is to say in the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its "original" desire-to-say-what-one-means [*vouloir-dire*] and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context. (12, qtd. in Lernout 46).

With regard to this possibility of citational graft, Lernout states that "[a] radical philology simply does not see its relevance. I don't think there is such a thing as a private language in this fundamental sense" (46-7). Here, Lernout's usage of "private" can be seen to stretch the term to the point of encompassing its opposite. For the grafting that "Signature Event Context" is concerned with is not a total uncertainty, deriving from something like unrestrained interpretative power and allowing for the construction of private/irrelevant meaning. Derrida is arguing almost the exact opposite: that a subtle but irreducible uncertainly results from any reader's all too *limited* powers vis-à-vis the task of public/relevant interpretation.

The limitation in question is iterability, without which no legibility can come about. The citational graft, then, refers to the *inaccessibility* of essence, not to a belated change interfering with an essence that is otherwise secure, which appears to be Lernout's reading. As Derrida puts it in the passage Lernout cites, citational graft "belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written," and it defines this structure "before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication," since it represents the mark's very functioning as a mark. The possibility of a signifier's being iterable, and legible in its iteration, is the same as the possibility of its being cut off from one context and appearing in another: "in *writing, which is to say* in the possibility of its functioning being cut off". If this is still a somewhat awkward formulation, we read, a few lines further down in Derrida's text: "This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring" (12).

Derrida is not presenting an alternative to, or giving a recommendation against, contextualisation. He is arguing that even the best contextualisation we can carry out still depends on decisions made by the reader in ways that cannot be exhaustively controlled. If citational graft is a possibility, it is so in the sense of an underlying condition such that we can never be quite sure to what extent grafting has taken place and what direction it may have taken us in. It is not possible (for a reader) to identify a *vouloir-dire* as it would have existed "originally," outside any context. Nor is it possible (for a writer) to saturate a context with a signifying gesture's wanting-to-say in such a manner as to ward off the fact that the gesture's legibility will consist in its appearance in other contexts whose relation to the original one is imperfectly knowable.

When Lernout goes on to suggest that "[a] radical philology limits the inquiry to the original desire-to-say of any form of writing *and* to its participation in a saturable and constraining context" (47), he therefore adopts the position of a metaphysics of presence to which intention appears as monovalent, inert, and accessible (as public knowledge) but which leaves unexamined the private co-ordinates of this very appearance (and I will presently discuss the particular perspective that radical philology brings to bear on Joyce's text). The uncertainty that Lernout attempts to banish by subsuming it under the category of the private thus returns to haunt public discourse; it forms the condition of any gesture of making public through language. If the citational graft, and the possibility of misreading that comes with it, are to be regarded as instances of private language, then private language is at work within public language, indeed private language is what makes public language possible and what is thus *at the core* of public language – a point I will expand on in the next chapter.

To be clear, the blurring of this distinction does not mean that intentionality is disregarded. To acknowledge that we lack a language that would be perfectly public does not result in an outlook to which signification has no meaning apart from whatever a reader wants it to mean. This brings me back to the point that Pentecostal plurality resides not only in the number of possible interpretations, but also in the difficulty of deciding between them: that is, on the

difficulty of measuring and comparing the imperfection of individual interpretations. Before I continue this discussion, however, let me briefly address the problem of *infinite* interpretability. Lernout's use of the expression "freedom of intentionality" (36) in his critique of the deconstructive approach leaves open whether the freedom he has in mind is an infinite one, yet to comment on the point in general should help to clarify my own position.

The claim that interpretation goes on indefinitely and produces what is at least potentially an infinite number of different readings is not the same as saying that a signifying gesture can be made to mean absolutely *anything*. In inferring the latter from the former, the mistake that is committed is to conflate infinity with universality. This distinction, however, is fundamental: an infinite series does not include everything. The series of even numbers, for instance, is infinite; yet it does not include the number one. There is in fact an infinite series of numbers located outside of it: the series of odd numbers. But not even this infinity of numbers not included demonstrates that the series of even numbers is anything else than infinite. Analogously, it is possible to invent an altogether absurd reading of a text. Yet even if we were to list an infinite number of unacceptable interpretations, this would not suffice to prove that the number of acceptable interpretations must be finite. The assertion that interpretation must be limited, in the sense that there must be cases located outside the acceptable range of reading, is no way opposed to the assertion that interpretation is potentially infinite, for an infinity does *not* cover a universal ground, and indefinite interpretation is therefore not opposed to an exploration of intentionality.

Having said this, let me turn to the more specific critique Lernout offers of interpretations based on what he terms freedom of intentionality. He ventures that "[t]he results of such interpretations are more or less interesting", but he immediately adds that "[f]indings that derive from a radical philological approach belong to a different category: they are true in a different sense for the simple reason that *they can be proven wrong*" (48). Therefore, they form part of "a type of research that is *falsifiable* and therefore scientific in Karl Popper's sense of the word" (48). The problem with this argument is that the findings the philological

approach produces are falsifiable in this precise manner only in tests that refer them to the notebooks, not to *Finnegans Wake*. Where this approach offers to resolve the conundrum of a Joycean non-word – that is, where the notebooks can provide a standard word as the source on which the non-word can be shown to be based – the notebook entry is by the same token *different* from the expression found in the *Wake*. As soon as we bring a source-word to the *Wake*, the possibility of falsifying it is complicated by the same problems of material manipulation I have been discussing throughout.

If a private reading is one applying a strategy that does not arise immediately with the text itself, then we have to ask how a philological strategy of reverse engineering that forgoes portions of Joyce's text in favour of a different source is anything else than a private reading. The proposed answer would presumably be that although this strategy (as indeed absolutely any strategy of reading) brings something of its own to the text to be read, it nevertheless draws directly on Joyce's authority, included in the interpretative process in the form of his notebooks. Yet, in thus reconsidering matters, it is already becoming apparent how, in relation to *Finnegans Wake*, the authorial authority contained in the notebooks can only ever be a partial authority, because the notebooks are only part of the public archive and convey only part of the authorial intention. This is what I try to indicate in the above example about Stravinsky conducting his own work. In such cases of witnessing what amounts to one authorial version, we do not automatically have empirical grounds on which to assert that the artist also intends *only* this one thing with this particular creative gesture (in fact, we will see that authorial intention itself can be said to contain private elements: not in the sense of elements irrelevant to interpretation, but in the sense of elements that remain unknowable).

This is first of all to say that it is always possible that Joyce draws on a notebook entry in order to achieve a meaning different from the entry's original connotations. One process through which Joyce's use can transport a word away from its original meaning is described by Dirk Van Hulle, who writes: "Since each B-notebook is based on several source texts, it constitutes a creative environment

in which a note from a newspaper can end up next to a note from, say, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, without any distinction. This obliteration of the original context creates opportunities for new associations" (89). Wim Van Mierlo similarly comments on "the multiplicity of origins in the genetic dossier which interact and interfere with each other" ("Indexing" 180), and he adds that "Joyce's creative dynamic does not lie in the sources or conceptual notes only, but in the interface between source and notebook, and notebook and text" (181-2). It is therefore conceivable that the meaning Joyce is primarily interested in is different from that of a source-word's original context. Yet this is a possibility about which we are unlikely to possess any certain knowledge. More important, therefore, than this *absence* of proof is that the partiality of a source-word's authority has its *presence* in the material difference between a non-word and its source-word or source-words.

More often than not, no argument can be made that would actually exclude a source-word as a possible translation or normalisation of a non-word. All this proves, however, is that identifiable source-words, and the thematic and contextual fields that come with them, are likely to be present in the Pentecostal plurality of meanings spawned by a non-word. There is no reason to assume that source-words can control this plurality or arrange it around a core meaning, that they can hold divergent translations at bay or tell us what the primary, actual, or true meaning of the non-word is. For source-words can no more exhaust a non-word than any other translation can: what gets in the way of this exhaustion is the constitutive difference between a non-word and any and all of its source-words. This difference, although it is not, as identifiable source-words are, separately recorded, is just as material. It consists in the empirically verifiable changes that source-words undergo: the distortion produced by Joyce's addition and/or deletion of letters. The absence of this distortion from the source-words cannot assure us of its secondary nature. On the contrary, this absence means that Joyce has *introduced* the distortion at some point. Consequently, it is part of the authorial intention that goes into the formation of the text and of the linguistic material to which criticism is required to respond.

What I would criticise in the approach Lernout proposes is the implication that the authenticity of a source-word can outweigh the authenticity of a distortion. A translation based on a source-word is precisely not "true in a different sense" from any other translation: as a normalising translation of the illegible non-word, it is as imperfect as any other. I would agree that the interpretation provided by a source-word is *different* in the sense that the likelihood of its relevance is singularly hard to deny (likely though imperfect: this is Joyce's double commandment at work). A source-word, once it has been found, will hardly be placed, at any subsequent stage, outside the plurality of meanings of the non-word in question, which is to say that in most cases, other interpretations will co-exist with it (though they need not refer to it). Yet to call this "*true* in a different sense" is to identify *how readily* we can affirm its significance within the authorial design with the *extent* of this significance.

It is this identification – more deserving of analysis than Lernout's rhetoric lets on – that contains a sliding towards an altogether different claim: that in comparison to the likely relevance of a source-word, any other interpretation can be inferred to be less relevant, less authoritative, less scientific, and should therefore be rejected or metaphorically put in brackets. In making the transition to this latter claim, what is passed over is that the source-words themselves are already put in brackets by Joyce's distortion of them. At this point, Lernout's drawing of a dividing line between what is certain and what is uncertain about Joyce's text ends up including on the side of alleged certainty precisely such meanings as Joyce goes to unprecedented lengths to destabilise. If a different translation violates the authorial intention contained in the source-words, the source-words violate the authorial intention contained in the distortion.

In arguing against the absolute authority of source-words, I am therefore not querying the relevance of authorial intention. Nor am I returning to the whole-sale rejection of avant-textes that Van Mierlo comments on when he notes "how sticky the debate can get as critics question the relevance of evidence not provided by the text itself" ("Reading" 53). I am on the contrary arguing that Joyce's creative process, as it emerges from the public archive (published text, available

manuscripts and notes), reveals a complexity in his intention that is given short shrift by its reduction to monovalent elements. In its very attempt to secure the essential and authentic parts of Joyce's creation, such a reduction introduces hierarchies that run counter to Joyce's pervasive programme of generating hermeneutic impasses and indeed of demonstrating the *value* of such impasses.

Here, the theoretical approach I am following finds itself in agreement with Van Mierlo's argument that "[t]he works and the manuscripts" are not placed in opposition, but on a continuum on which they "share a state of incompletion with each other, revealing that there is no well-wrought urn but only a coming-into-being of the text through an intricate process of trials, errors, hesitations, reconsiderations, coincidences and so on" (56). Van Mierlo advances this as a critique of the poststructuralist position, whose emphasis on the medium itself, he argues, conceptualises the text as a self-contained entity. Yet there is nothing in his description that contrasts with either the Derridean or the Lacanian approach, both of which posit the writer as precisely the fragmented, divided subject of a writing process over which she or he does not have unchanging mastery (as we have seen in chapter two). Joyce's creative gesture paradoxically affirms and implements this fragmentation, and what I hold to be crucial is that neither theoretical nor genetic procedures can return his text to stability and well-wrought wholeness. "Each step along the discontinuous path of composition involves a new intentional moment" (56), and we cannot subsume these moments to an overarching pattern without bypassing the unpredictable, discontinuous nature of the process itself.

This is also to say, I would suggest, that we cannot assert any hierarchical relationship between the intentional moment represented by a source-word and the intentional moment represented by the compositional step of introducing a distortion – not without making assumptions about Joyce's own thought-processes that are as far-reaching as they are unfounded in empirical evidence. Or, as Van Mierlo has it: "What is falsifiable seems limited to a few applications: the dating of notebooks, identification of sources, location of notebook units in the drafts of 'Work in Progress'. Beyond that every part of the game involves

interpretation" ("Indexing" 176). In nevertheless asserting that the source-word is the only answer not based on conjecture, radical philology reveals itself to be – again, like all interpretation – an example of what I call ventriloquism. It speaks in Joyce's voice, modulating its pronouncements through references to the avant-textes of *Finnegans Wake*, in order to claim to be listening to this voice, the voice of authority itself, even though what is being said is pervasively structured by a set of priorities originating with the purported listeners.

The conclusion I now propose is that in a non-word, authorial intention itself is uncertain and potentially split, and that it is precisely with reference to this uncertainty that all interpretations of the *Wake* are, at a fundamental level, imperfect. If we cannot subject what I call the Pentecostal plurality of Joyce's writing to a final either/or, if *we cannot exclude an interpretation solely on the basis of having shown another interpretation to be convincing*, it is because no interpretative strategy can simultaneously do justice to all authorial manipulations operative in this text. There is no reading of *Finnegans Wake* without a minimum of conjecture – and in this, Joyce's text is an exemplification and indeed an examination of virtually any act of reading. Its non-words drive home this point, as every decision we make in order to negotiate their plurality of meaning imposes certain limitations on this plurality and thus violates their double commandment to be read and read in full. Reading the *Wake* is thus a task that cannot be free from the anxiety of language. If it may appear that a competent reading strategy is one that at least temporarily banishes anxiety, such an assumption is part of the tradition of reading and writing that Joyce is breaking with.

In *Finnegans Wake*, the forces of risk-taking, distortion, imperfection, inadequacy, frustration, and anxiety do not stand at the beginning of the processes of writing the book or of reading it – as obstacles to be eventually overcome by a strategy careful and/or creative enough. They compete with exhilaration, richness, diversity, pleasure, and benefit at every step of the creative process and of the reading experience. What this means is that Joyce challenges us not only to adjust our exegetical methodologies but also, as we will see in the next chapter, to find new perspectives on what the *goals* of our exegesis are: on

what we expect to happen to *us* (as opposed to the text) when we read the *Wake*. Effectively, the *Wake* has the potential to transform any exegetical discourse we construct around it into a meta-discourse – a discourse about the *formation of discourse*, about the frameworks within which we move and think, and therefore also, as I will now show, a discourse about certain problems of ethics.

4

Productive Chaos: the Text, the City, and the Fall

Building chaos

If a reading of the *Wake* continues to suggest other interpretations after the identification of source-words has been put forward as one possible exegetical path, it is not necessarily because this reading values interpretative freedom over responsibility towards Joyce's text. A reading may also proceed in this way on the basis of asking what the authorial intention is behind the distortions that undo the source-words' standard form and give us the non-text we encounter in the *Wake*. I have argued that in order to address the question of this intention (or, if you prefer, of this textual structure), it is necessary to relate the form of Joyce's writing to the various motifs through which *Finnegans Wake* illustrates the flawed state of language – as well as the powerful uses to which language can nevertheless be put. The key to these self-aware uses of flawed language is linguistic invention. If the previous chapter's discussion of post-babelian multilingualism and plurivocality relates such invention to the multiplicity of meanings, the present chapter will shift the focus still further towards an ethics of interpretation by examining linguistic invention as oriented towards the *unknown*. I will base this examination on yet another of the *Wake*'s meta-textual images: the building of a city.

In the "Haveth Childers Everywhere" section (532.6-554.9), which forms the ending of III.3 and thus of the séance already touched upon in chapter two, HCE describes himself as a builder of cities, or of one city, that he has constructed in honour of his wife ALP. In *Reflections on James Joyce*, Stuart Gilbert gives an intriguing anecdotal account of the method Joyce employed in writing this passage. Here is how Gilbert renders the scene of Joyce's literary workshop:

Five volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on his sofa. He has made a list of 30 towns, New York, Vienna, Budapest, and Mrs. [Helen] Fleischman has read out the articles on some of these. I "finish" Vienna and read Christiana and Bucharest. Whenever I come to a name (of a street, suburb, park, etc.) I pause. Joyce thinks. If he can Anglicise the word, i.e. make a pun on it, Mrs. F. records the name or its deformation in the notebook. (20-1, insertion in original)

Gilbert disapproves of this method, which to him appears random and mechanical. It does not create what he calls "appropriate" (21) puns – that is, puns that play on a meaning forming the bottom layer of the text. Instead, Joyce's procedure generates chance effects: deviations that, in all probability, have nothing to do with what Joyce, according to Gilbert, is actually writing.

The assumption that underlies Gilbert's account, and whose violation scandalises him, is that there should be a fundamental level of the text whose meaning is straightforward and governs all distortions the text can subsequently undergo. As Rabaté points out in "The Fourfold Root of Yawn's Unreason," "Gilbert's position corresponds to that of the reductive reader who imagines that a first-draft version of *Finnegans Wake* would be written in 'normal' English and would provide a 'basic text'" (395), with puns and neologisms forming a secondary layer. This is a version of what Rabaté identifies as "the genetic fallacy" (399), which he describes as the belief that "[w]hen, as in this case, we have retrieved almost all the sources from which the text is constructed, […] the meaning of the text is finally provided" (399).

With regard to "Haveth Childers Everywhere," Rabaté makes a case against this idea, suggesting that, in contrast to what Gilbert appears to suspect, Joyce's method of composition is indeed sound: that the layers of revision Joyce executes introduce ambiguities and overtones that serve important functions in the text. Rabaté posits that Joyce "was interested in adding overlays of meaning applied to the text in an almost mechanistic manner. And yet it is in this very method that he gained access to a different and original generation of meaning" (398). As Joyce

adds more and more allusions to HCE's recitation of the monuments he has constructed in praise of ALP, the "sheer excess of references" (401) begins to change the account into what Rabaté proposes to read as HCE's "vainglorious praise of his prowess" (401). At the same time, the increase of the passage's "endless piling up of textual debris" (404) comes to evoke more and more strongly the chaos and filth of big cities. Rabaté argues that through these parallel processes, HCE's city-building becomes charged with increasingly complex and contradictory meanings: "the Dublin that originally embodied the love and eternal desire linking HCE and ALP then generates a more fragmented 'drama parapolylogic' (FW 474.05) that stresses contradiction" (404).

In this view, to which I subscribe, Joyce's mechanical multiplication of references to cities becomes part of his larger strategy of implementing excess as a formative element of his writing. In this process, the individual allusions Joyce makes – which, if Gilbert's account is to be believed, are disconcertingly random – are subordinated not to a straightforward narrative but to a theme: here, the theme of excess itself, both as meta-textual comment and as various forms of excess in relation to city space. If it is by no means certain that the primary purpose of Joyce's non-words is to conjure up the words from which he forms these coinages, as well as these words' original contexts, the approach to Joyce's writing that I instead propose is centred on this notion of a thematic field.

We can compare "Haveth Childers Everywhere" to another of the *Wake*'s thematic clusters: the accumulation of river-names in chapter I.8. With regard to this amassing of references, Max Eastman reports Joyce telling him "that he liked to think how some far day, way off in Thibet or Somaliland, some lad or lass in reading that little book would be pleased to come upon the name of his or her own home river" (100). This might seem an innocent enough remark (and Eastman treats it as such). Yet we might ask ourselves what precisely makes possible the scenario Joyce imagines. Joyce having included the names of sufficiently many rivers in Tibet and Somaliland in his text is not the only explanation for the scene of the reader who recognises her or his home river. An alternative one is put forward by Attridge, who in *Joyce Effects* recounts the following experience:

> Rereading the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" chapter recently I came upon the phrase "bakereen's dusind" (*FW* 212.20) and there before me was the name of the South African river near whose banks I grew up (the Umsindusi, or in its familiar abbreviated form, the Dusi), and, like the small boy Joyce imagined in just such a situation, I felt a momentary pleasure in this unlooked-for bond between the work and me – a pleasure in no way diminished by my awareness that, if asked whether I was responding to an intended allusion or to a coincidence thrown up by the chapter's dense web of names, I would probably have to answer, like Bloom in his response to Stephen's story set in the Queen's Hotel, "coincidence." (121)

The question that is opened up by such an occurrence, of which there are many in any sustained reading of the *Wake*, revolves around the fact that Joyce's "dense web of names" contains its own form of intentionality. In the anecdote told by Eastman, Joyce takes pleasure in the knowledge that coincidental recognitions will happen; he anticipates them and arguably relies on them. Attridge argues that "if Joyce intentionally builds a machine of such complexity that unforeseen connections are bound to arise when it comes into contact with a reader possessing equally complex systems of memory and information, we cannot call them 'unintentional' in any straightforward sense of the word" (121).

The distinction is thus troubled further between public interpretations based on the author's intentions and private interpretations based on the intentions of the reader. In the case of "Haveth Childers Everywhere," to return to this example, it is always possible that we find in this passage the names of cities, districts, villages, and sites that we fail to trace to Joyce's sources, but that, through their participation in the thematic field, refer us to Joyce's singular structuring of the text, to what *he* has *us* associate. What is furthermore crucial is that a thematic field does not necessarily have to be identifiable via extra-textual evidence, in the way that the themes of city-building and of rivers are on the basis of the information given by Gilbert and Eastman, respectively. Chapters, passages, and smaller units such as paragraphs and sentences can create internal

correspondences that make possible the emergence of a local theme. And these structures can overlap and contradict each other, creating the suspended decisions characteristic of Pentecostal plurality. Still, plurality is not synonymous with isotropy. Rather, as Attridge writes in a different section of *Joyce Effects*, "we can still conduct meaningful and valuable discussions about rival frameworks – not in order to settle, once and for all, upon the right one, but to ascertain which are useful in which particular ways" (151). This holds true even of the infinitely extended and extendable plurality as which I propose to read *Finnegans Wake*. Infinity is not universality; the notion of an infinite number of possible readings is in no way opposed to the specificity of each reading or to the principle of limiting interpretation to such readings as meaningfully relate to the text's structures.

The problem is with the identification of these structures: with the measuring of intention in what we could call controlled distortions with uncertain outcomes. And contrary to what my focus on the non-*word* may imply, we cannot approach this uncertainty in a piecemeal manner. In *Peculiar Language*, Attridge writes that for each of Joyce's coinages, "the context *itself* is made up of puns and portmanteaux" (202). As this reciprocal destabilisation branches out, "a 'contextual circle' is created whereby plurality of meaning in one item increases the available meanings of other items, which in turn increase the possibilities of meaning in the original item" (202). With the notion of such circles, we have arrived at a level of complexity that can no longer be accounted for in terms of atomistic meaning, but that requires us to take into consideration the synergies generated by Joyce's distortions.

For one thing, our awareness that his is a text suffused with non-words means that "as we read the *Wake* we test for their possible associations not only the obvious portmanteaux but every apparently normal word as well" (205). The presence of material distortions gives rise to a notion of what we might term a zero degree of distortion, that is to say, of an interference with the wholeness of a word that remains invisible but that splits the apparently normal expression. Yet for all this proliferation of meaning, Attridge points out: "It is important to note, however, that the network of signification remains *systematic*" (202). If thematic

fields can be created through context, and if context in the *Wake* is variable, what is undone by this mobility is meaning in the singular, not the task of referring meaning to the singularity of Joyce's writing.

Within such contextual volatility, even the deletion or addition of a single letter in a non-word can entail the appearance of one or several new translations that need not be a solitary aberration but may prove to reverberate with the context provided by translations of other non-words. If this mechanism does not obstruct the possibility of assessing the relevance of each step along the way, what it does do is to multiply any such assessment's reference points. Our interpretations can only be measured against the mobile and above all *heterogeneous* contexts of the *Wake*. Slote gives a helpful account of this effect. He states that "the complexity of the *Wake* is primarily syntactic rather than semantic in that glossing, or unpacking, the portmanteaux is only of small (but not insignificant) help" (*Joyce's* 131). Syntactic complexity, which may or may not include convoluted grammar, suggests that Wakean ambiguity destabilises more than the univocality of individual expressions. It extends to the relations these expressions establish among each other, in such a way that interpretation is not limited to exploring the variable connotations of a single expression in an invariable context. Instead, reading becomes what Slote terms "linguistically parallactic: multiple perspectives are allowed, which complement and subvert each other" (131).

Complementation and subversion are here no longer understood as variations on a single meaning. Given that Joyce's non-words often fuse together expressions whose phonetic or orthographic similarity is coincidental rather than etymological, the layered perspectives suggested by a non-word need not be semantically compatible. Accordingly, phrases and passages that draw on non-words can generate multiple senses that do not necessarily stand in any relation to each other, they can be "sometimes harmonious, sometimes discordant, often both" (131). Most importantly, the various interpretations are not sufficiently *comparable* to permit their hierarchical arrangement. The patterns remain suspended in Pentecostal simultaneity: potentially informing one another, but not

allowing conclusive deductions about each other's validity, precisely because there are too many potential verdicts coinciding. Or, as Slote puts it elsewhere: "Joyce is developing a writing strategy in which nothing could be correct since any and every element is short-circuited by another" ("Imperfect" 148).

It is this simultaneity of meanings – a more peculiar and more challenging effect of Joyce's linguistic inventiveness than the mere *number* of possible interpretations – that is undone by any interpretative strategy that grounds hermeneutical rigour in an assumption of monovalence. Consider the following description given by Roughley of an effect resembling closely what I term Pentecostal plurality:

> Take any of his multiple puns. Dismantle them and identify the forms from which Joyce took the fragments he fuses together. Identify the allusions to the proper names that Joyce has ruined. Do we then have Joyce's meaning, or is it possible that our operations upon Joyce's writing might have unravelled the fabric that Joyce painstakingly wove together? […] Is it not possible that we might be closing up Joyce's "between", the gap between the either and the or, that Joyce opens for us? ("Untitled" 260-1)

Returning to the city-references: to imagine that these are put into the text solely to recall their original contexts (and the event of their own citing) would be to lose sight of the fact that Joyce is, after all, using them to write a work of his own. This work's strategies include its usage of a space in between the either and the or – the space of linguistic parallax, of Pentecostal suspension. This is to say that Pentecostal plurality is concerned with the emergence of un-decidability within certain limits, within a "between" that indicates the enfolding boundaries of Joyce's writing. The tension between, on the one hand, the necessity of these boundaries and, on the other hand, the play of parallax effects that produce meaning within them is thus a case of certain *liminality* with regard to range. Pentecostal writing increases the text's productiveness by enabling it to embrace and implement the excess of possibilities that feed into it; yet the text's range, in

order to realise itself at all, also has to remain shy of an entirely boundless reach, which would collapse signification into a state of white noise.

It is with regard to this process – signification on the very boundary of its own collapse – that is possible to read the city-building passage as one of *Finnegans Wake*'s instances of meta-textuality. City-building, as Joyce presents it, constitutes an activity that is split between productive and destructive elements. At the very beginning of "Haveth Childers Everywhere," we read: "Eternest cittas, heil!" (532.6). The evocation of the eternal city, Rome, is thus immediately followed by the Nazi salute, suggesting that in his entirety, HCE, who here appears as E.c.h., encompasses both the splendour of the great cities and what Joyce identifies as their fascistoid elements. HCE's rhapsody of cultural achievements, which ranges from the seven wonders of the ancient world (see 553.9-11) to the modern wonder of electricity (see 549.14-6), is thus from the start complicated by a sense that "the 'eternal city' can embody all cities only if it carries its onus of guilt, betrayal, and totalitarianism" (Rabaté, *James Joyce* 179). This is echoed in HCE's declaration: "Seven ills so barely as centripunts havd I habt" (541.1), transforming into "ills" the seven hills on which Rome is famously built.

This emphasis on the hubris and brutality of great cities may also be what is at stake in the instances in which the city-building passage mentions Babel: first, when HCE speaks about a "Babbyl Malket" (532.25), and again when he tells of someone "confused by his tonguer of baubble" (536.8). Yet this second manifestation already transports us away from the overbearing tower of Babel, seeing how it also evokes the confusion of tongues that reduces mighty Babylon to the dimensions of a mere bauble. The power-hungry aspect of these cities, then, is far from self-sustaining or self-stabilising; quite the contrary. We may also note here that in *Ulysses*, Babylon features as one in a series of examples that go through Bloom's mind when he thinks about the finitude that catches up with architectural constructions as well as with their inhabitants: "Cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away, too: other coming on, passing on. [...] Piled up in cities, worn away age after age. Pyramids in sand. Built on bread and onions. Slaves Chinese wall. Babylon. Big stones left" (8.484-490). It is significant that this

interior monologue occurs in "Lestrygonians," the chapter concerned with eating and (via the Homeric parallel) cannibalism, for this suggests entire populations and indeed entire cities devouring each other; one edifice built on the ruins of the last. In fact, as Rabaté notes, in HCE's account of his city-building, "cities tend to be coupled, thus New York goes with Kyoto (*FW*, 534.2), Budapest with Belfast, Cork with Calcutta (541.16), Bucharest with Berlin (540.21), London with Buenos Aires (540.34-35), etc." (*James Joyce* 192), creating such omnivore hybrids as "Corkcuttas" (541.17).

City-building sooner or later undoes the project of Babel with its single and inert centre, and feeds into plurality and change, into structures that are shared, modified, connected, divided, and put to new purposes, that influence each other and edge each other on – if always on the brink of collapse. In short, it feeds into what can ideally become a Pentecostal process. City-building can take the form of the "first commonwealths" of Vico's giants, or of the different nations of Noah's descendants. It can create the great cities of ancient and modern times, with all their dirt, violence, and poverty, but also their cultural momentum and diversity. In achieving these ambiguous results, the construction of cities will potentially take the momentum of cultural ambition to the point of nearly self-destructive excess. Thus, the city HCE builds sports numerous negative aspects, including prostitution ("daughters-in-trade being lightly clad" [532.25-6]), ill health ("tuberclerosies" [541.36]), overpopulation ("fair home overcrowded" [543.22]; "shares same closet with fourteen similar cottages and an illfamed lodginghouse" [545.2-3]), waste ("house lost in dirt and blocked with refuse" [543.32-3]), and poverty leading to the deterioration of the city space itself ("copious holes emitting mice" [545.8]).

Some of these are issues that arise from the sheer complexity of a city, from the adding on of new materials and technologies, from the subdivision of its spaces to accommodate more people, from the palimpsest-like overwriting of its uses. This is indeed a different world from that of the single tower: it is a world richer and more varied, but also prone to generating its own kind of violence against the individuals caught up in its mechanisms. We can thus read the kind of

cultural achievement presented in HCE's account – chaotic, bursting at the seams, and always on the brink of turning into its own opposite – as one of the *Wake*'s many self-reflexive comments on its language, sufficiently cluttered with meaning as to continually risk breaking down into meaninglessness. This meta-textual imagery is similar to what we have already encountered in the chaos of Shem's house as described in I.7. If Shem's situation stresses the mutability of the self, I now propose to draw a connection between, on the one hand, the spaces of HCE's city, so dangerously and yet productively open to a plurality of lives and meanings, and on the other hand, a more general problem of encountering the other: a theme that Derrida conceptualises under the name of *hospitality*.

The space of the other

That which gives hospitality, that which allows someone to offer hospitality to someone else, may at first appear to be the space of a certain *privacy*. I am hospitable by welcoming the other within the space that is mine: the space that I, by right, inhabit. Yet, as Derrida points out, welcoming and indeed inhabiting already imply an irreducible publicness: "There is no house or interior without a door or windows. The monad of home has to be hospitable in order to be *ipse*, itself at home, habitable at-home in the relation of the self to itself" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 61). Once hospitality becomes sufficiently continual, sufficiently busy, sufficiently hospitable, it reveals the frailty of the boundaries that we draw to divide up space (something like this is sounded in the city-building passage when it speaks of a "staircase continually lit up with guests" [543.31-2]). In this view, there is no fundamental difference between the hospitality offered within an apparently private space – the hospitality of an individual – and the hospitality offered within a public space: say, the hospitality of an entire city. Either constellation consists in opening up towards an outside whose public nature, whose possibilities of communication, exchange, economy, infrastructure, law, and so on, already structure the inside of the seemingly self-contained subdivision.

Privacy, in its most radical form, is on the contrary found in the secret, in the unknown, in the stranger who is *granted* hospitality. It is here that hospitality's

significance with regard to texts signals itself. A text, too, is not cut off in any definitive sense from the economies and interactions that surround its writing and its reading. Yet at the imaginary centre of these interactions, there remains a secret into which none of them can tap. It remains secret not because it is hidden away more cunningly than other meanings. A secret is not part of a text, which is why a text cannot be made to divulge it; it is the purely conjectural essence around which a text is necessarily presumed to be structured. Miller states: "The reader cannot go behind [the literary text], or beneath it, or before and after it. Literature keeps its secret, but on the surface" (*Topographies* 310).

The literary secret, in this sense, is that about which we have only insufficient information from the text, that about which the text has nothing left to reveal. In *The Work of Literature*, Attridge similarly writes: "A work of art states what it states, presents what it presents, no more, no less; and it refuses to say anything further; no matter how hard we press it" (256). There is, for each case, no text but the text itself, or no archive but the archive – to which I would add that the economy of essence is such that a text or archive can *never* say enough: it always ends before its essence is articulated. Add more information, and the boundaries shift, essence withdrawing once more. It is this withdrawal that renders interpretation open-ended, as a text or archive always engenders hermeneutical conundrums that it refuses to resolve. The secret is the question raised but never answered: "with no other basis than the abyss of the call or address" (Derrida, "Literature in Secret" 157). Thus, for all to see, there is in any text a dimension of that which no reading can appropriate.

This "for all to see" must recall the purloined letter from Poe's story as well as middle Lacan's reading of it. There, the letter is retrieved; yet what we have to keep in mind is that the destination this letter invariably reaches, according to middle Lacan, is that of creating anxiety in any receiver – anxiety resulting from the fact that the signifier both is and is not where it is ("it will be *and* will not be where it is" ["Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" 17]). If it is possible to overlook an openly displayed letter, it is because successful hiding engages in the manipulation of symbolic frameworks: in the foiling of expectations, reverse

psychology, and so on. As Lacan puts it: "what is hidden is never but what is *not in its place*" (17) – and a letter/signifier is never fully in its place. If you can miss it, it is because no manipulation of the symbolic can assure you that the signifier has been restored to its original place; if you can misread it, it is because you can only ever read it, its origin remaining an imaginary centre. For Lacan, when the letter is eventually found in Poe's story, it is by the same token robbed of parts of its significance: "What now remains of the signifier when, having already been relieved of its message for the Queen, its text is invalidated as soon as it leaves the Minister's hands?" (28). The answer Lacan gives is: a manipulation of desire. What is retrieved and presumably delivered to the original recipient is, in Lacan's reading, not the signifier's essence, but that remainder of referentiality that resists identification and that consists solely in the anxiety caused by a secret – what late Lacan reformulates as the impact of the real on the symbolic frameworks it permeates and distorts.

Rather than contrasting the sphere of public communication with a private sphere understood as the personal idiosyncrasies of reading, we can thus conceive of the private as the dimension of the secret, of the real, of that which *withdraws* from any reading and leaves any reading in anguish. This dimension of the secret is what we encounter in amplified form in Joyce's non-words, whose distortions exemplify that at the heart of intention itself, there is an illegibility: that a manipulation of measurable extent may raise questions whose answers escape us. What I want to propose, in the following, is that even though we cannot appropriate the secret, cannot resolve it, cannot do anything to *read* it, our readings should nevertheless remain open to it, in defiance of the twin strategies of exclusion and normalisation. This is to say that our readings should remain hospitable. Hospitality, as Derrida thinks it in the mode of unconditional hospitality, is hospitality to the utterly unknown, to that or she or he who carries or constitutes a secret. Derrida makes this point with regard to the stranger whose name, whose origin or genealogy (family) one does not know:

> absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give
> not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the

social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 25)

Unconditional hospitality is hospitality to the secret and thus to that which does not give any hospitality in return, that which undoes the very law of hospitality. Derrida continues: "The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights" (25). Hospitality breaks with hospitality not only because in respecting the inviolability of the secret it refrains from the welcoming gesture that is asking the other's name; in extending itself to the unconditional, hospitality also suspends the very law of hospitality, which in all its conditional forms would always be a law of reciprocity. Naas gives a helpful pointer when, in *Derrida From Now On*, he describes hospitality as "a welcoming of an other whose identity and character are thus not assured, an other, therefore, who may in fact pose a threat to us, who may cause us to question our right to what we call 'our home,' or who may in fact try to evict us from that home and from everything we consider 'our own'" (22). The project of constructing hospitable spaces is potentially a dangerous one, though this danger should not be read as an invitation to phobic connotations, but rather in the sense of a challenge to our complacency and preconceptions – causing us to ask questions about *ourselves*, as Naas puts it – that is productive of new meanings precisely if and when we refrain from reducing them to meanings already known, and instead allow them to contain aspects we cannot master.

This notion of alterity as something both productive and potentially threatening returns us to HCE's city as a productive chaos, in which we may also discern echoes of Vico's first commonwealths. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Vico's philosophy conceives of the origins of political community as a process that makes a virtue from necessity. The groups of giants that organise themselves, first into family structures and then into larger social units, are driven together by catastrophic interruptions of their pre-social lives. The resulting

communities are reactions to an outside threat. Vico writes that "refuges were the origin of cities, whose invariable property is to protect their residents from violence" (§561). And he continues: "such refuges were the world's first hospices, and the first people received there were the first guests or strangers, *hospites* in Latin, of the early cities" (§561). On the one hand, the link that Vico here establishes between threat, refuge, and the *hospites* that receive refuge resonates with Derrida's discussion of the terms "*hostis*," "host," "hospitality," but also "hostility" (see Derrida and Dufourmantelle 45). On the other hand, Vico's elucidations are arguably what "Haveth Childers Everywhere" alludes to when it makes reference to "my stavekirks wove so norcely of peeled wands and attachatouchy floodmud, now all loosebrick and stonefest, freely masoned arked for covennanters and *shinners' rifuge*" (552.2-5, my emphasis).

Some of these elements are also singled out by Rabaté in *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (which moreover contains a different version of Rabaté's essay on III.3 that I cite above, "The Fourfold Root of Yawn's Unreason"). In his book, Rabaté cites discussions of the split etymology of "hospitality" by both Derrida (see 160) and Vico (see 175), and he notes the applicability of hospitality to *Finnegans Wake*: "we should not forget that Earwicker is variously described as a publican or an innkeeper" (175). In bringing hospitality to bear on III.3, however, Rabaté somewhat diminishes its ambivalence. He initially draws a connection between the "dangerous hospitality" of HCE's city and Joyce's "linguistic mechanism" (179). Subsequently, however, he recasts hospitality as a "utopia of linguistic welcome to all" (184). Arguing that Joyce is manipulating his material quite freely and unsystematically, Rabaté concludes that in III.3, Joyce "proves the unique 'hospitality' of English when he makes it 'accept' the most foreign signifiers" (193), rather than having it appropriate these signifiers in what might be called an imperialist manner. My contention is that the full extent of III.3's interweaving of alterity and instability is better brought out by Rabaté's remark in "The Fourfold Root of Yawn's Unreason" that "the performative gesture of the text becomes one with its meaning" (404) – there, however, this theme is developed without reference to hospitality. In the following, my aim is to further examine the

connection between the *Wake*'s reflections on its own volatile productivity and Derrida's analysis of one's harbouring of the other.

What groups Derrida, Vico, and Joyce together is the theme of finding one's bearings in a situation in which interference with self-presence cannot be avoided. Derrida's position, in particular, is not as idealistic as the term "unconditional hospitality" might at first suggest. Nor is Joyce's evocation of Vico simply progressivist. There is a development to be found in the sentence from III.3 cited above, a cultural history in miniature, leading from the catastrophe of the flood ("floodmud" and "arked") to the building of certain structures that can serve as a refuge for sinners (after the fall, humankind in general). The passage establishes yet another connection between biblical notions of the fall and the thought of social organisation as a remedy. I will return to this connection later on in this chapter; for now, I want to remain with the sense of the *precariousness* of postlapsarian existence: a city that is a refuge from sin and from outside threats and that is nonetheless only half "stonefest" (as solid as stone; from German "fest"), being at the same time "loosebrick." HCE's city, like the text in which it appears, takes on the hue of a dangerous plurality, where unstable and productive aspects co-exist.

In view of this theme of the precarious progress achieved by the social, we should also keep in mind that the entire city-building scene takes place within the séance at which Shaun is channelling HCE (perhaps prompting one of the interrogators to ask, four pages into "Haveth Childers Everywhere:" "Have you headnoise now?" [535.23]). The remarks on space and its sharing that we find here are thus spoken by a voice that already endures speaking from the place of the other, from the most secret of spaces – that of the other's voice – or, inversely, they are spoken by a voice that endures offering, within itself, hospitality to the voice of an other. I argue that in this interweaving of motifs of meeting, interacting, co-inhabiting, and so forth, there is contained a call for a hermeneutical procedure that tasks itself with accepting the presence of the other without already looking for ways of turning it into the self (though, of course, no interaction can unconditionally fulfil this demand).

Here, we can first of all turn to Derrida's "Rams,"[1] where he writes about this acceptance as not a merely passive procedure of postponing decision, but, as it were, an active un-deciding:

> Indecision keeps attention forever in suspense, breathless, that is to say, keeps it alive, alert, vigilant, ready to embark on a wholly other path, to open itself up to whatever may come, listening faithfully, giving ear, to that other speech. Such indecision hangs upon the breath of the other speech and of the speech of the other – right where this speech might still seem unintelligible, inaudible, and untranslatable. (146)

The productiveness of an encounter arises from a certain suspension that keeps diversity and alterity alive, not from hurried unification. It is in this sense that we can conceive of the *unreadably other* as not an obstacle but as "the occasion to countersign the future as much as the past: the unreadable is no longer opposed to the readable" (148). In the possibility of reading and inheriting, the unreadable – the uncontrollable, unknown, or *secret* – is not a snag that interrupts inheritance; it is what makes inheritance inexhaustible, since not exhaustively programmable. It is what opens up inheritance towards the future and towards "the chances of infinite, unfinished readings" (148). In fact, that which is not already absolutely readable constitutes the very possibility of an inheritance that, as we have seen in chapter two, always consists in the affirmation not of a solid presence but of a spectral one, of the *spectre as possibility*: it consists, in other words, in the interpretation of an excess of patterns organised "in a contradictory fashion around a secret" (*Specters* 18).

Addressing what may nonetheless appear as the necessity to be able to *access* an inheritance, Derrida continues, in *Specters of Marx*: "If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the

---

[1] Derrida puns on the double meaning of this title: "a ram (*Widder*) will soon bound into the poem: sacrificial animal, battering ram, the bellicose ram [*bélier*] whose rush breaks down the doors or breaks through the high walls of fortified castles (*Mauerbrecher*)" (153). The link to Joyce's section about city-building is fortuitous, but my discussion of cities, spatial demarcations, their transgression, and the ensuing encounter with the other follows Derrida's usage of these terms.

same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it" (18). As the very possibility of iterating the past and thus carrying it into the future – "the only chance of an affirmed or rather reaffirmed future" (45) – inheritance is never closed to interpretation; but even as it calls for interpretation, it also defies it. Anything else than this double bind would return us to the absence of iteration and thus to the absence of anything that could be called *event*: "the event that cannot be awaited *as such*" (82), as predictable, as recognisable. What the event – the possibility of the future – requires from us is precisely "a hospitality without reserve" (82).

In *Aporias*, Derrida says of "the *arrivant* that makes the event arrive" (33) that we should think it as a guest, as "he or she who comes, coming to be where s/he was not expected, where one was awaiting him or her […] without knowing what or whom to expect, what or whom I am waiting for – and such is hospitality itself, hospitality towards the event" (33). In this view, hospitality ties together the encounter with the other, the emergence of the possibility of the future, and an irreducible unpredictability – and therefore a risk. As Derrida puts it as early as *Of Grammatology*: "The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger" (5). Or, again in *Aporias*: the other "surprises the host – who is not yet a host or an inviting power – enough to call into question, to the point of annihilating or rendering indeterminate, all the distinctive signs of a prior identity" (34).

We must therefore conceive of hospitality towards that which remains unreadable as a *split* strategy that is productive and destabilising in one and the same gesture, in a simultaneity that cannot be broken up. The unreadable never unfolds its innovative potential without threatening our very identity. In *The Singularity of Literature*, Attridge writes of the alterity of the unreadable that "when I encounter alterity, I encounter not the other as such (how could I?) but the remolding of the self that brings the other into being as, necessarily, no longer entirely other" (24). As the unreadability of a text's secret is, by definition, inaccessible to our readings, we cannot assimilate unreadability *itself*; yet a reading can respond to the presence and to the particular circumstances of an unreadability by allowing these circumstances to transform the self that does the

interpreting – in such a manner that part of the text's otherness ceases to be other and comes within the compass of the resulting self. Or, as we read in *The Work of Literature*: "In order to acknowledge the other, I have to find a means to destabilize or deconstruct the set of norms and habits that give me the world – my idioculture, in short – in such a way that the force of that which they exclude is felt" (71).

Altering the self, destabilising the world – there is a sense here of something unnerving: a sense that alterity makes of us demands that are very serious indeed. In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida makes it clear that when he speaks of the danger inherent in such processes, he is not offering a rhetorical or abstract gesture. He insists that hospitality itself risks undoing the law of hospitality – along with an entire world of ethics – when he draws attention to the biblical narrative of Lot and his family, to "the moment when Lot seems to put the laws of hospitality above all" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 151). The moment in question is the horrifying scene in Genesis 19 in which Lot seeks to protect the guests to whom he has offered his hospitality (two angels disguised as men) against the citizens of Sodom by telling the latter: "Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof" (Gen. 19.8). The aftermath of this offer is that the angels defeat the citizens and enable Lot's family to escape into exile. There, it is Lot's daughters who think of yet another desperate measure: "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father" (Gen. 19.32).

In *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism*, Rabaté points to this narrative's affinity with certain motifs in *Finnegans Wake* (see 163-4). In particular, both sexual violence and incest potentially figure in the *Wake* in the form of HCE's crime, which can be interpreted as a sexual assault on his daughter Issy (see Shari Benstock, "Nightletters" 224-5, and Eide 134-137). I emphasise this connection because Derrida's invocation of Genesis 19 lends itself to what I consider to be two serious misinterpretations. On the one hand, one could take Derrida to be

retracting here a notion of hospitality whose catastrophic self-destruction in the face of actual threats the biblical reference demonstrates. I will presently argue that this is not Derrida's point. On the other hand, it could be suggested that Derrida is in fact urging us to *accept* the unspeakable violence committed by Lot as a necessary cost of the ideal of hospitality. Transposed onto my discussion of *Finnegans Wake* and its implementation of the postlapsarian condition, the implication of such a reading would be that HCE's abusing Issy is part of a fall into greater cultural complexity. If it is necessary to address this reading here, it is because a consideration of the connection that *Finnegans Wake* establishes between postlapsarian existence and *responsibility* demonstrates that such an interpretation is to be categorically rejected.

After his discussion of the biblical scene, Derrida asks: "Are we the heirs to this tradition of hospitality? Up to what point?" (155). I read these questions (which appear on the final page of the text) as a rejection on Derrida's part of any notion, in the context of hospitality, of violence as an acceptable means to an end. Instead, Derrida appears to be suggesting that we can never exclude violence as simply *extrinsic* to the problem of hospitality. If the encounter with the other entails a transformation of the self, then we cannot reassure ourselves that this transformation will automatically be for the better. However, Derrida is not arguing either that hospitality puts us at risk by making us the passive recipients of a transformative event that is already pre-programmed and awaiting us (the most shocking brutality in Genesis 19 does not come from an outside, but originates with Lot). What the encounter with the other sets in motion is a re-configuration or re-invention of the *public realm*: of our laws, our ethics, our interactions. And it is precisely because, depending on *our* choices, this re-invention can take us in any direction whatsoever – violent or humane, ethical or horrifying – that it inscribes us into responsibility.

I would argue that this reading of Derridean hospitality, for all the emphasis I place on responsibility, is ultimately a version of the approach pioneered by Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism*. There, Hägglund shows that Derrida's analysis of the encounter with the other does not provide any ethical

prescription. The problem of hospitality "does not refer to an ethical obligation to be open to the other, since it is not a matter of choice. The exposure to the coming of the other – which is inseparable from the coming of time – precedes every decision and exceeds all mastery" (126). Interacting with alterity, in this view, is not so much a marker of goodness as it is an irreducible fact. If Derrida's discussion of hospitality does not provide an ethical programme in the sense of specific prescriptions of how one should act, however, what it does provide is a formulation of an ethical *problem* – the problem, in fact, of ethics itself. And I would argue that, in countering such misreadings of Derrida as construe hospitality as an ideal to be aspired to, Hägglund is somewhat too quick to dispense with this formulation. He so forcefully opposes positions that derive straightforward ethical recommendations from Derrida's work as to risk, if not denying, then largely passing over certain implications of hospitality that are highly ambiguous (rather than simply positive) but that constitute what Derrida, in a phrase cited by Hägglund, calls "[t]he nonethical opening of ethics" (*Of Grammatology* 140, qtd in Hägglund 75).

If hospitality, in all its complexity, is at the basis of *any* interaction, then it is arguably "precisely the operation of the logic identified by Hägglund that makes ethics possible" (Attridge, *Work of Literature* 303). As the structure underlying all interaction, hospitality cannot be co-extensive with ethical behaviour; yet neither is it opposed to it. Hospitality is what makes ethical interaction possible – along with any other form of interaction. In this opening-up, there is already contained a certain demand to *affirm* this opening-up, in the sense of acknowledging, and responding to, openness itself. Hägglund takes this into consideration when he writes that there is something in hospitality defying anticipation, that

> the law of unconditional hospitality does not provide a rule or a norm for how one should act in relation to the other, but requires one to make precarious decisions from time to time. The only unconditional law of hospitality is that one will have been forced to deal with unforeseeable events. (105)

What is at stake in the precariousness of these decisions – decisions that no preliminary reflection or convention can quite resolve for us – is responsibility. This is further elucidated when we read, one page further down, that "to deny this inevitable risk, to deny the essential corruptibility of responsibility or to project its consummation in an ideal future, is to deny the condition that makes responsibility possible in the first place" (106). Hospitality towards the unpredictable is not ethical, it opens up the *possibility* of the ethical. Yet in drawing this preliminary conclusion, we must keep in mind that the possibility in question here is not one in the sense of an option that can be denied. The risk is inevitable; hospitality is not a matter of choice. In fact, we are placed in a position of responsibility no matter what we do.

A denial of this position cannot therefore create a safe space outside responsibility: what it effectively denies is an understanding of the only available space's intrinsic precariousness. Relying on a stability that is not actually given, it fails to address the demands placed on us by our inevitable inscription in responsibility. In this view, what Derrida calls hospitality arguably takes on the additional meaning of an affirmation of this inscription. It is an affirmation not in the sense of an acceptance that embraces any event that may take place, but rather in the sense of a contemplation of responsibility's underlying structure, a willingness to engage the precariousness of the ethical, and an attempt to do justice to the demands placed on us by the coming of the other – including the potential threat of the other.

Derrida's thinking on hospitality is thus neither an encouragement to engage in utopian reveries, nor a fatalistic or nihilistic judgement that declares violence something to be accepted. What Derridean hospitality ultimately demands is action, including political action. Again Hägglund: "Far from absolving us from politics, it is the undecidable coming of time that makes politics necessary in the first place, since it precipitates the negotiation of unpredictable events" (171). The key term here is "negotiation" – this is politics not as exhaustive anticipation, but as an ongoing process. For what Derrida shows is that even though we cannot but offer hospitality, we are responsible for *how* we do this.

Hence, as Attridge writes, "the never-ending interaction and negotiation between the unconditional and the conditional" (*Work of Literature* 302), as each individual case tries to respond to a demand that is infinite.

There is arguably less at stake in the act of reading a literary text, yet I would suggest that some problems in interpretation are structurally equivalent to those outlined in this discussion of affirming responsibility. A text's secret – that private and illegible centre that makes an absolute demand on our hospitality – does not enter a public discourse that is essentially inert (that can deny the unpredictability of the other). Nor is interpretation so mobile as to be essentially private, removed from any common ground and thus from responsibility. Rather, the privacy of any individual interpretation that is actually an interpretation, in the sense of an iteration, is informed by the trace structure that relates the production of meaning to a play of differences that is at least partly public. At the same time, the necessity, in each iteration, to newly construct the trace from this play entails that interpretation is invariably impacted by decisions beyond public calculability.

In this view, the productivity of the private in the sense of the unreadable or the secret is that, in responding to it, we re-invent the coordinates of public discourse. Yet this is not to argue some sublime capacity for transformation. It is instead to recall that the public realm is in a sense nothing but the sum of the ways in which we inherit, interpret, interact – and in which we are *responsible* for these inheritances, interpretations, and interactions, insofar as they are neither simply objective nor simply subjective. Unreadability, the secret, the private: these are all facets (to which we can add the untranslatability discussed in the introduction and the referentiality without reference discussed in chapter one) of the dynamic whereby a text induces us to search for essential meaning whilst foreclosing the possibility of any end to that search. The responsibility entailed by unreadability, as it emerges from a consideration of the hospitality that unreadability demands, is a responsibility for a public realm that, in this search, we are called upon to help create and from which we effectively cannot absent ourselves.

In placing emphasis on this public space, my approach differs from Attridge's argument that what the reader is responsible for is chiefly "the work

itself" (*Work of Literature* 121) – the work as it comes into being in a reading that through its own creativity "does justice to the inventiveness of the author" (191). If such a reading is understood to always refashion the reader as well – refashion what Attridge terms the reader's idioculture, precisely her or his mode of participation in the public realm – it is this element whose transformation I would highlight: the realm of discourse, the framework that relates reader, work, and author to each other. With regard to public space as something that has to be *built*, I take my impetus from an essay by Miller in which he imagines the relation to the other as a relation "maintained at one and the same time to all the others" ("Absolute Mourning" 20): a relation that therefore partakes in a process of veritable "world-building" (21).

In "Hostipitality," Derrida insists that responding to an individual alterity (in our case: a particular text) cannot be thought separately from the building of societies and worlds as a response to alterity more abstractly speaking: "the third [*le tiers*], who is the birth of justice and finally of the state, already announces himself in the duel of the face-to-face" (364). Inversely, we may attempt to leave everything the same, to leave everything unchanged, to create a public space unaffected by any private or secret; yet this gives us not a different kind of iteration or a safer way of doing justice to a text, but no reading at all. As we cannot separate one iteration from another – *pharmakon* from *pharmakon* – the only possible iteration is an absolute danger. It is therefore in transforming ourselves and transforming the space of our discourse that we both aim to respond to a text *and* risk doing violence to the other, including the otherness of a text. As Derrida puts it: "As soon as there is substitution, and as soon as there is a third [*un troisième*], I am called by justice, by responsibility, but I also betray justice and responsibility" (388).

In other words, as soon as there is differance, the systematic play of difference and identity that enables us to conceptualise alterity and the necessity of responding to it, there is also a system of signification that enables us to reduce alterity to sameness. This simultaneity is such that response and reduction are never neatly distinguishable. And even though we can imagine a prelapsarian state

of perfect lucidity that would allow us to distinguish between these two procedures, in actual reading, there is no sacrifice or trade-off of this prelapsarian state involved, since we can only think this state as a state before iterability and differance and therefore, from within any epistemological perspective we can actually inhabit, as no state at all. (That events already play out in a state of imperfection and, for this very reason, in a state of ethical accountability is also how, in the following, I will approach the violence *Finnegans Wake* confronts us with). The decision we are left with is how we want to inhabit the responsibility resulting from that risk.

Lacan's creation myth

Our response to unreadability entails a discourse-formation that can also be understood as a process of world-building. What is at stake in this response is therefore the world-discourse interaction, and I now propose to expand on this interaction by returning to Lacan's analysis of it as symbolic codification. In chapters one and two, we have seen that, from a Lacanian perspective, Joyce's writing disturbs our discursive habits by making present certain distortions on whose absenting and covering-up symbolic codification is typically based. Joyce's undoing of legibility may thus strike us as something that does not form part of our world as it ordinarily decodes itself, presenting itself instead as what Thurston calls "something outside the discursive bounds and bonds of social reality" (*James Joyce* 96), something that is outside this reality because it "refuses to be subject to the constraints that constitute that reality" (96).

Yet our reaction to the presence of these distortions is not (usually) a descent into a psychotic unravelling of meaning. Rather, the nature of the symbolic is such that we strive to interpret even transgressions of it: to reconstitute it in new forms where it has been transgressed (the only instances in which this fails are traumatic ones). Thus, "an act of this kind is always a masked act, its transgressive edge blunted by an implication in social discourse; its exposure of jouissance is limited to an anamorphic instant, a momentary glimpse of the forbidden Thing" (196-7). Responding to the Joycean distortion, we are

compelled to move from the literary thing to the re-constitution of discourse: we re-invent the symbolic, and we do so indefinitely and in ever-changing forms, since we can never quite catch up with or truly repeat Joyce's "unspeakably innovative" (210) gesture. However, if this failure to catch up with unreadability "dooms literary criticism to an eternal recurrence of misreading and misappropriation" (80), I would argue that this is first of all a productive mechanism – though along the lines of an anxiety-inducing productivity. Secondly, our own inventiveness need not break with the responsibility inherent in interpretation. Where our construction of readings leads us to *reflect* on how these readings inevitably constitute misreadings and misappropriations, the result may on the contrary be a heightened awareness of the role that (short of the possibility of iteration without iteration) active interpretation plays in discourse-formation: in the production of the symbolic realm.

The importance of this activity aligns itself with Lacan's thinking about the sinthome. We have seen in chapter one that the sinthome effectively turns the symptom from an effect into a cause: into the idiosyncratic braiding of the three orders into a subject's singular topology. Yet, crucially, the fundamental illegibility of this idiosyncrasy does not transport us outside symbolic accountability, to a realm where (symbolically, psychologically, ethically) anything goes. Re-knotted and reshaped, the symbolic returns us to discursive bonds and to accountability precisely because it can be seen to depend on our decisions, rather than simply being imposed on us. As Thurston writes, in late Lacan, "[w]hat ties the knot of human subjectivity is therefore not some universal patriarchal law of signification, but an *act*" (196). Even as our social existence takes place in the symbolic order and therefore in this order's constitutive deficiency, we still have some freedom in deciding how to live in that deficiency. Therefore, even though the deficiency itself is not the result of any choice of ours, our mode of living in it is our responsibility.

This is first of all structurally similar to Derrida's notion of a self that renews itself by re-inventing the public realm it inhabits. In fact, the sinthome's function resembles that of hospitality insofar as both raise the problem of welcoming that

which is illegible (the Other, the real, the private) within that which is legible (the self, the symbolic, the public). Secondly, the ethical implications of Lacan's discussion are also reminiscent of certain theological debates on fallibility and responsibility. This link to theology is not lost on Lacan, nor that the sinthome itself, by way of a Joycean pun, can be taken to suggest the biblical fall. Early on in *Le sinthome*, Lacan states: "C'est la faute, le *sin*, dont c'est l'avantage de mon *sinthome* de commencer par là" (13).[2] The sinthome, the psychological manifestation of the state of not being whole, not being perfect, already carries within it an echo of the fall from grace (and perhaps Lacan is implicitly keeping in mind here the etymological root of "symptom" – "falling together").

Since the fall is also one of the elements that tie together imperfection and responsibility in *Finnegans Wake* (as we will see in the next subsection), it is worth examining in some detail this brief aside in Lacan's text. Speaking of Eden and of original sin, Lacan, too, refers these issues back to Joyce, via the palindrome "Madam, I'm Adam" – "le *joke* qu'en fait Joyce justement" (13)[3] – with the added twist that in Lacan, Adam is himself said to be a madam. This identification conjures up a problematically gendered figure of symbolic castration; yet if castrated Adam is the one who invents language (by naming the animals, a scene for which Lacan has only belittling words), Lacan suggests that it is Eve – whom he dubs l'Èvie – who first puts language to actual use: "la première personne qui s'en sert, c'est elle, pour parler au serpent" (13).[4] In using language to communicate with the snake, "l'Èvie fait du serpent [...] faille, ou mieux phallus" (13).[5] She makes a phallus of the snake, makes transgression itself into a phallic moment – a moment that partakes in formative authority but that, through the illusory character of the phallus, also constitutes a failure or flaw ("faille").

Lacan thus invokes Eden and original sin, the invention of language, the failure brought about by symbolic castration, and the possibility of nevertheless

---

[2] "It is the fault, the *sin*, with which to begin is the advantage of my *sinthome*" (my translation).

[3] "the *joke* made, precisely, by Joyce" (my translation).

[4] "The first person who makes use of it is her, in order to speak to the snake" (my translation).

[5] "Eve makes of the snake [...] flaw or, better still, phallus" (my translation).

drawing on language to bring about a certain effect – and he associates all this with Joycean wordplay. On this cluster of elements, Harari comments that "[t]hrough Joyce, Lacan marks a certain inflection in the story of the Bible: the point that highlights how a site of castration or lack is linked to a certain knowledge" (28-9). After all, the sin to which the snake tempts Eve consists in eating from the tree of knowledge: falling from grace is intertwined with hermeneutical gain. Flawed or not, the moment of speaking to the snake proves highly productive: Lacan goes so far as to say that "[l]a Création dite divine se redouble donc de la parlote du *parlêtre*" (13)[6] – the *parlêtre* indicating a speaking being, a symbolically constituted subject. I follow Harari in reading this as maintaining a distinction between a "'so-called divine' creation" (346) and the "symbolic nomination" (346) that is the human variety of creation. What I want to suggest is that in Lacan's account, this human creation should be taken as truly *duplicating* the divine one.

Original sin, which Lacan imagines as the implementation of the symbolic order – the speaking being's putting speech to use – creates its own world: the world as we encounter it through the symbolic order. What is important to highlight is that, in Lacanian terms, this really is an altogether different world. Insofar as the symbolic contains fragments of the real, reveals the real as fragmented, or, more precisely, *fragments* the real, the symbolic is never in the presence of a divine and whole real, of a perfect world that it would merely fail to represent. As soon as the symbolic order is so much as possible, its possibility changes the real. The fall, in this view, is not to be thought as a delayed exclusion from a divine world, but as the fact that, for beings inhabiting the symbolic order, the world cannot in the first place exist in that state of perfection – and further parallels to the Derridean idea of world-building should be becoming clear. Accordingly, the insight to be gained in the fall, in the eating from the fruit that opens Adam and Eve's eyes to their own predicament (in the Bible: to their own nudity), is precisely the revelation of this fact. As Žižek puts it in *The Parallax View*, the "'Fall' is the first step toward liberation – it represents the moment of

---

[6] "What we call divine creation is thus duplicated by the prattling of the *parlêtre*" (my translation).

knowledge, of cognizance of one's situation" (96). In a reading of the fall as fortunate (more about which presently), "[t]he loss is thus not recuperated but fully asserted as liberating, as a positive opening" (127). And again, in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*: "We rise again from the Fall not by undoing its effects, but in recognizing the longed-for liberation in the Fall itself" (86) – namely, the liberation (but also the responsibility) that comes with our recognition of the opening that our situation inevitably already provides.

Thinking back to my first chapter's argument about nudity and clothing in relation to the fall, we could say that whereas nudity is the real, the symbolic is the dressing-up that covers the real. Yet just as postlapsarian nudity is no longer spontaneous but is, as it were, *tainted* by the idea of clothing, and thus displaces the ideal state rather than returning to it, so the postlapsarian real only makes itself known to us through a sense of fragmentation that displaces whatever access to the real may be possessed by beings existing outside the symbolic. As I have also indicated in chapter one, the sinthome should not be taken then as a synthesis of the symbolic and the real. What the sinthome indicates, for Lacan, is that we have to make up for the fragmentation of the real – and constitute us as subjects living within the real – through our cunning use of the symbolic. Rewriting the symptom as the sinthome, he emphasises, always within the horizon of incessant demands addressed at us by the three orders, that there is a degree to which the response to these demands depends on the self.

Such dependence, however, does not indicate mastery. Our braiding of the three orders that give us our world – our world-building – amounts not (automatically) to solipsism, but to the sinthome as encompassing both the idiosyncrasy of the process *and* the fact that this idiosyncrasy constitutes a problem for us, insofar as we would like to experience the real, if not in the psychotic encounter with its rawness, then nonetheless without the fallibilities that are introduced by its being filtered through the other two orders. Like Derrida, Lacan can thus be seen to insist on a certain difficulty in the manipulation of the symbolic or public, as the problem once again manifests itself as a degree of freedom that is substantial enough to place on us certain responsibilities or

demands, yet limited enough to make meeting those demands a considerable challenge.

Here, *Le sinthome* can also be seen to take up some of Lacan's earlier reflections on the subject of responsibility. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, he states: "Moral experience as such […] puts man in a certain relation to his own action" (3). And he continues: "moral experience is not limited to that acceptance of necessity, […] to that slow recognition of the function […] of superego" (7). Instead, Lacan relates moral experience to the Freudian dictum "*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*" (7), which he glosses in the following way: "That 'I' which is supposed to come to be where 'it' was […] asks itself what it wants. It is not only questioned, but as it progresses in its experience, it asks itself that question and asks it precisely in the place where strange, paradoxical, and cruel commands are suggested to it by its morbid experience" (7). In sum, even as experience bombards us with all kinds of demands (often enough impossible ones), Lacan associates the sifting and interpreting of this experience with an *active* self – whose activity he describes in his late teaching as the braiding of the three orders.

The reference to Joyce in *Le sinthome*'s discussion of creation and original sin is offhanded enough, and not directed at an examination specifically of *Finnegans Wake*. Yet I hold that by conceptualising a connection between, on the one hand, the problem of the real, and on the other hand, the subject's capacity for articulating their own attitude, Lacan delineates a position that is indeed relevant to the linguistic distortions of the *Wake*, and that the *Wake* itself can be seen to be taking up in some of its implementations of biblical themes. Lacan's teaching on the sinthome thinks fallen-ness (the fundamental divide that prohibits any neat synthesis between the symbolic and the real) as something to which we can respond in a variety of manners – just as Derridean hospitality opens up any number of possible reactions – thus placing us in a position of responsibility. I will now consider the interlinking, in *Finnegans Wake*, of responsibility, illegibility, and the fall, and I will do so by means of another theological motif that Joyce alludes to: the notion of the fortunate fall.

New beginnings

The traditional idea of the fortunate fall goes back to St. Augustine and interprets original sin as the *Felix Culpa* (Latin: "happy fault" or "happy fall") on the basis that a postlapsarian world occasions greater proofs of divine mercy than would be possible if humankind had not fallen. It should be becoming clear that the inflection given to the term by the various contexts of *Finnegans Wake* is a slightly different one. Two of Joyce's sources, Vico and Freud, converge on the view that the state of innocence is not to be considered as standing at the beginning of human history, but is essentially excluded from this history, given that humanity only truly begins with the horde's patricide (as discussed in chapter two) or with the giants' flight from the thunder god (as discussed in chapter three).

Vico's secular history, in particular, insists that at no point has a perfect language or an ideal social organisation actually existed and subsequently been lost. Bishop comments that, in Viconian history, "man creates over generations his own human nature – and exactly as he also creates human nations" ("Vico's" 189), that is to say: not from the blueprint provided by an inherent or divinely bestowed reason, but through a process of world-building. This process operates in a manner that is decidedly less than perfect. According to Vico, as Bishop puts it, "history is made by men descended from animals, and not always well" (183). In other words, world-building makes do with means – in particular: with languages – that are anything but the ideal ones we are capable of attributing to superhuman beings such as the god of thunder. We can see, then, how this reading of Vico aligns itself with the Derridean and Lacanian approaches outlined above, which similarly argue that certain intrinsic conditions of human perception and interaction – differance in Derrida, the symbolic in Lacan – already locate us in a state of fallibility and responsibility.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that a similar attitude towards the fall also informs the *Wake*. In this sense, I agree with James Atherton's somewhat sweeping statement that, in the *Wake*, "creation is the original sin" (32). Joyce's text is steeped in notions of guilt and fallen-ness that are balanced by motifs of new beginnings but remain practically unmitigated by any

classical notion of salvation. In all of these various perspectives, which posit an already imperfect world, the fortunate fall can be defined as an active affirmation of this imperfection: one that aims to inhabit the world in the complexity in which we find it and that therefore strives towards a better understanding of what this complexity entails – even at the cost of uncovering its more anxiety-inducing aspects. In short, falling is a hermeneutical procedure.

Such a procedure, I propose, is what is at stake in the mechanism of the *Wake*'s non-words, which confront us with the imperfections underlying all language use: imperfections made present by the *Wake*'s own fall into linguistic complexity. Compare what Attridge writes about the fall in *Finnegans Wake* being

> necessarily fortunate, not, as the Christian tradition would have it, because it brings forth otherwise unattested Divine mercy, but because by its own daring it makes manifest the prohibition it transgresses against, and in doing so exposes the hidden power structure – whether we call it the force of God or the force of Nature – within which humanity is obliged to operate. (*Joyce Effects* 157)

What aligns this strategy of exposure with the fortunate fall in the sense I am concerned with here is that Joyce depicts the *outside* of this power structure – the superhuman or pre-human realm of social and linguistic perfection – as radically absent from the *Wake*'s own mythos.

Take, for instance, the sentence "Now their laws assist them and ease their fall!" (579.26), already briefly mentioned in chapter three. I have suggested to read this as positing fallen-ness as a starting point, and procedures of world-building as a response to that start. This dynamic is linked to Vico not only by the logic of historical progress discussed in the previous chapter, but also by the term "laws." As Klaus Reichert points out, Vico's giants, in responding to the rumbling of thunder, learn "something like self-restraint which in its turn leads to some form of natural law which Vico claims to be already present in the name of Jupiter (*Jovis – Jous – ius*)" (51). This etymology of "ius" derives the term from the name of a law-giving figure who embodies the conditions of the law's invention. In this

explanation, the figure of Jupiter serves not merely as a convenient fiction, but as a necessary fiction covering over an absence.

In a logic that closely parallels the paternal metaphor in Lacan, as well as the *Wake*'s depiction of HCE as an empty name, authority itself is fictional, is authoritative to the extent to which it is constructed. Vico's Jupiter can serve as the origin of the law, and thus of the law's name, only as the figure whom the giants *hypothesise* upon hearing thunder. Without being invested with this absent ideality, the noise in question would not become what the *Wake* calls the "last word of perfect language" (424.23-4), it would remain a natural phenomenon incapable of giving rise to anything like legal structures. Crucially, then, what precedes these structures is not a perfect language or any other ideal state; ideality as a concept emerges simultaneously with the giants' fall into culture, whereas what precedes the fall is, as Reichert puts it, that "human beings in the first phase are still in a status [sic] of animal-like savageness" (49).

I would argue that the view on history the *Wake* develops in such moments is similar to Derrida's and Lacan's propositions that human activity exclusively takes place in a state that various mythological accounts describe as fallen-ness. And like Derrida and Lacan, Joyce tasks world-building with acknowledging, and thinking through, this fallen-ness. That the purpose of world-building (for instance, of the creation of laws) cannot be to *undo* fallen-ness seems part of what is at stake in the statement: "Ut vivat volumen sic pereat pouradosus!" (610.16). McHugh translates this as: "that the book may live let paradise be lost" (610). As "that the book may exist, let the fall from grace happen," this risks returning us to the brutal calculation of a sacrifice, along the lines of: that we may have knowledge or freedom, let Eden be lost, let us give up on perfection. But from a perspective of already inhabiting a postlapsarian world, it is possible to read the phrase in a slightly but crucially different way: namely, as an affirmation. Let the fall from grace *have happened*; and let us boldly accept and indeed affirm that it has happened: let, consequently, the paradise of an absolute and stable interpretation of the book absent itself from our endeavours, so that (at least) the book may be the more alive, and we alert to this liveliness. In other words, one way of actively

affirming the fall and acknowledging the complexity it entails – a particularly far-reaching way – is to work towards a state of Pentecostal plurality.

My decision to opt for this reading of the sentence takes its cue from the fact that, for all its repetition of the motif of falling, the *Wake* does not present us with any one scene that corresponds to the moment of Eve and Adam's original transgression, dividing the *Wake* into a part set before and a part set after the fall. This suggests that the entirety of the *Wake* takes place in a postlapsarian world, within the horizon of a certain belatedness. The origin of this state of affairs, moreover, remains itself outside this horizon. In creating its narrative world, one of the opening gambits of *Finnegans Wake* is not to answer in a univocal way the question: "What then agentlike brought about that tragoady thundersday this municipal sin business?" (5.13-4). Instead, we are told: "There extand by now one thousand and one stories, all told, of the same" (5.28-9). Although its manifestations are versions "of the same," the very frequency with which the fall is evoked, its vertiginous repetition and division, transport the text away from the all-decisive move from a prelapsarian to a postlapsarian condition, emphasising instead a problem of fallibility more generally speaking.

Thus, in the city-building passage, HCE/Shaun tells his four interrogators: "I gave you of the tree" (535.32). Together with his reference to an "Adder" (535.31), this suggests the snake, the tree of knowledge, and original sin as we find them depicted in the biblical account. Original sin, however, is not presented as the starting point of HCE's chronicle, nor is it given a significant status within the activity of city-building. The cited phrases form part of a plea HCE addresses to the four several pages into his monologue, whereas, at the beginning of "Haveth Childers Everywhere," we find descriptions of cultural activity already steeped in postlapsarian conflict. In the third and fourth lines of the passage's first paragraph, McHugh annotates "Shitric Shilkanbeard" (532.8) as "Sitric Silkenbeard" (532), leader of the Danes at the battle of Clontarf, and "MacAuscullpth the Thord" (532.9) as "Ausculph Mac Torcall" (532), the Irish king under whose rule Dublin came under English control. Based on these historical

allusions, Rabaté proposes that "the foundation of Dublin sends us back to Genesis, less to Adam than to Cain, killer, sinner, and builder" (*James Joyce* 179).

HCE's account unfolds from inside a history in which the state of Eden has long been replaced with a belligerence reminiscent of the first fratricide. That this has been the context of HCE's activity for quite some time is furthermore indicated when he tells us, of the kind of city he builds, "that from the farthest of the farther of their fathers to their children's children's children they do inhabit it" (545.16-8). HCE may build an imperfect city and thus, by affirming the fall into imperfection, create an opening in which – ideally – a Pentecostal plurality can come about, but he does so in a world in which builders are already sinners. Which is to say that no amount of affirmation can do away with the potential for failure and conflict that is the very definition of the postlapsarian condition.

This insistence on fallibility is also indicated in Joyce's frequent allusions to the expression "Felix Culpa" itself. The motif returns throughout the text: "O foenix culprit" (23.16), "Phillyps Captain" (67.22), "*O'Phelim's Cutprice*" (72.4), "*Ophelia's Culpreints*" (105.18), "O'Faynix Coalprince" (139.35), "O happy fault" (202.34), "O felicitous culpability" (263.29), "finixed coulpure" (311.26), "Colporal Phailinx" (346.36), "fellows culpows" (363.20), "Fu Li's gulpa" (426.17), "O foolish cuppled" (433.30), "Felix Culapert" (536.8-9), "*O ferax cupla*" (606.23), "O, felicious coolpose" (618.1). Amongst other things, the fortunate fall as it appears in these phrases can be related to HCE's crime in its manifestation as the deed in the park ("If you want to be felixed come and be parked" [454.34]). And I would suggest that a possible hint as to the nature of this connection is found in the version: "foenix culprit." Over the course of I.3 and I.4, HCE, who may or may not be innocent in this version of the plot (in I.3, we read: "the unfacts, did we possess them, are too imprecisely few to warrant our certitude" [57.16-7]) is tried for misconduct towards two girls and three soldiers. It appears that at one point in the proceedings, HCE is killed or buried alive and subsequently comes back to life: "There was a minute silence before memory's fire's rekindling and then. Heart alive!" (83.4-5). This makes him, the suspected culprit in the case, an avatar of the phoenix, the mythological bird that dies and is resurrected from its ashes.

What is presented in this image is therefore HCE's ability to "rise afterfall" (78.7); yet we can already see how this pattern of fall and redemption is different from the traditional understanding of Felix Culpa. Whereas the fortunate fall conventionally refers to mercy afforded by a divine judge, in HCE's case, it relates to the possibility of his being saved from the verdict of other people. One shape this process may take is that of HCE's being rehabilitated in the eyes of others, and it is this goal that ALP, in some of her manifestations, can be seen working towards. Her letter is being appealed to throughout the trial scenes and throughout the entire book in connection with attempts to reveal the events in the park. In this view, it is significant that in the version of this letter found in Book IV, she writes: "When he woke up in a sweat besidus it was to pardon him" (615.22-3). Part of the letter's message, then, seems to be ALP's attempt to exonerate HCE. This would be a fall and rise very different from the conventional notion of Felix Culpa. It consists not in divine forgiveness, but in the possibility of being forgiven by others, potentially by one's "fellows culpows," that is, fellow culprits: others who are as caught up in fallibility as oneself, and whose forgiveness operates from *within* that postlapsarian condition. What is more, just as we never learn whether HCE is guilty or not, so we never get to know whether he and ALP succeed in clearing his name. His rise is not a decision already made, a mercy already granted, but, at most, the continuation of getting another chance – about whose outcome *Finnegans Wake* remains silent.

Other narrative choices reinforce the sense that in the *Wake*, the state of fallen-ness is never truly lifted or transcended. Notwithstanding the various resurrections that the text rehearses, what the *Wake* does *not* stage is a second coming, nor an equivalent event from outside Christian myth – a moment of judgement and redemption that once and for all puts an end to worldly existence. Instead, the *Wake* ends in as postlapsarian a mode as it begins, with one cycle ending and another beginning. Its closed textual loop – "A way a lone a last a loved a long the [...] riverrun, past Eve and Adam's" (628.15-3.1) – sends us not to a realm beyond the text but back to the start, drawing us into the world of the text once more. The process continues, with no end in sight – infinitely, not universally: that is, without approaching a state of wholeness or completion.

In spite of the violence that potentially forms part of this process (as we have seen, for instance, in chapter three's discussion of ALP as a personification of the flood), *Finnegans Wake* thus encourages us not to fight with the fix of a transcendental signifier the necessarily continual nature of reading. As has often been pointed out, the time-structure of the *Wake* is therefore not an eschatological one, but one that is similar to the cyclical time of Vico's philosophy. However, what the *Wake* does not reproduce are certain static elements of Vico's view on history.

In an article on Vico and *Finnegans Wake*, Timothy Murphy notes that "Vico's model is an interpretive schema that establishes the meaning of the third and present age, the age of men, in the play of signifiers of the past ages" (717-8). Unlike this system, which sees the meaning of present events as fully determined by their correspondence to events in the past, the *Wake* remains suspended between repetition and renewal. On the statement that HCE "moves in vicous cicles yet remews the same" (134.16-7), Murphy thus comments: "The cycle is vicious, statically repetitive along the lines of Vico's model, but the contrapuntal 'yet' undercuts this and insists on the oxymoron of renewal of the same" (722). In fact, the wording here contains one of many iterations of a recurrent motif, yet Murphy points out that "the 'original' English phrase, 'the same anew,' appears nowhere in the *Wake*, so Vico's signifying repetition cannot work as such. There is no origin to the motif" (724), and the phrase goes through variations every time it appears.

In *James Joyce and Victims*, Sean P. Murphy points out a similar logic inherent in Joyce's adaptation of the three ages of Vico's history into the four parts or books of *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce makes Vico's *Ricorso*, the loop that closes the cycle of history by returning it from the third age to the first, "an age in and of itself rather than, as Vico would have it, a period of retrial (recourse, appeal) or transition between historical ages" (138). If the very process of returning is itself something new, this complicates nothing if not our desire "to symbolize or colonize origins" (136). And in the absence of any stable point of origin, the grand narratives of history "give way in the *Wake* to more provisional, local, and open

narratives of rupture" (140), narratives within which our relating to our circumstances largely originates with ourselves and within which we therefore "bear responsibility for our constructions and our mythic origins" (140-1).

The sense that we ourselves are responsible for our origins is something that should be thought in connection with Joyce's querying of an original expression that would have the capacity to control its repetitions. ALP's letter, for instance, conveys the distortion that interferes with repetition, as the document appears in different manifestations that compete for the status of authenticity. Shem, in his turn, is about as far from being an unmoved mover as it is possible for a writer to be; he is not the source of a work originating solely with him, nor of a writing that repeats source material without in the process becoming divided from itself and engendering uncontrollable excess. And Shaun, who does aspire to this kind of pure repetition, fails as he, too, is brought off course by his message's citational drift.

I have furthermore argued that these and other depictions in the *Wake* of the interpretative process itself are in dialogue with the *Wake*'s non-words. Both in these scenes and in Joyce's non-language, there is no Archimedean point outside of mobility and negotiation. The repetition of signifiers – that is, discourse – is revealed to already constitute discourse *formation*. And the results that such formation produces are far from stable; they are more like the cultural achievements of HCE's city through which Joyce depicts our very means of creation as volatile. If we follow the *Wake*'s lead in affirming this volatility, we may render it fortunate in the sense introduced above: by acknowledging complexity and thus finding complexity itself productive, giving it a Pentecostal inflection. Precisely because essence is absent, repetition means change: means the mobility and the liveliness of world-building procedures.

In these procedures, distinctions cannot be upheld that would reliably separate innovation from repetition, activity from passivity, the totally private and self-sufficient act of writing from the totally public and transparent act of reading, the Shem-type function – creation – from the Shaun-type function: transportation. Yet if we thus cannot affirm essence, neither can we affirm the non-referral to

essence. Which means that Joyce's undermining of these distinctions is nothing else than an exemplification of iterability's double bind. The same possibility of signification on which any textual singularity relies for its being made present is necessarily also the possibility of a replacement that betrays singularity. In this manner, we are inscribed into responsibility, and we can now say that the key to doing justice to this responsibility is to acknowledge the openness of the process, to acknowledge our inhabiting and co-shaping a space of plurality in which encountering other articulations of this plurality is not the exception but the norm.

As in Derrida's and Lacan's respective arguments, once prelapsarian self-presence and self-sufficiency are out of the picture, alterity emerges as that which defines the self but also questions the self, as that which constantly entices the self to grow but is also met by the self in a highly confrontational manner. In short, the existence of the other opens up the possibility of a plurivocality that gives meaning, yet it also introduces the possibility of doing violence to the other. In this view, (the possibility of) HCE's crime or crimes, the brother battles between Shem and Shaun, and other instances of violence are not, I would propose, presented in *Finnegans Wake* as aspects of something like cynical pragmatism, paralysing nihilism, or despairing irony. Rather they are markers of a danger – the danger of doing violence to the other – whose being a common theme in human history in no way diminishes its seriousness. To return to the point made about HCE's city, the *Wake* insists that any form of creation is taking place in very close proximity to catastrophe. Brimming with contradictions, the space of HCE's city can be read according to a logic I have been approaching throughout this chapter and that I will return to in the conclusion: a logic in which justice remains what it is only through a responsive and responsible openness that cannot function unless it is also open to (whilst guarding against, but unable to foreclose) the risk of an injustice.

No less than Lacan or Derrida, Joyce can thus be seen insisting that in a postlapsarian world in which creative means are imperfect, we are responsible to the other for our constructions of meaning – responsible to the other both in the sense of the text and of other readers who share with us the space created by our

interpretation of the text. Here, we come full circle to affirmation of alterity discussed at the beginning of this thesis, and we can now say that what is being affirmed is the plurality of possible interpretative constructions. When I write in chapter one that the non-language of *Finnegans Wake* is in part about the liminal possibility of inhabiting the imperfection of language, this is therefore to say that it is about the possibility of inhabiting the question of how to encounter the other – and that one answer to this question is: by continually inventing the required discursive spaces.

In *Ethical Joyce*, Eide suggests: "Readers are asked to suspend decision, to entertain ambivalence, to place ourselves in a position between two options; that 'place between' options is the ethical space of interpretation and, as Joyce suggests in these elliptical moments, the ethical space of subjectivity itself." (33). Subjectivity – understood as the creation of new, idiosyncratic options in response to the presence of a secret – is not locked into a private space that remains irrelevant to the world. It shifts interpretation away from the reassuring stability of what may appear to be the public, scientific, or objective mode; yet it does not transport interpretation towards an ethics-free isotropy or relativism, but rather towards a heightened, a more precarious, but also a more encompassing responsibility: the responsibility of co-shaping discourse.

Depicting processes of interpretation as lacking a definitive origin and end-point, and confronting us with the radical openness of its non-words, the *Wake* urges us to think a text's secret as the element to which interpretation must strive to do justice – both in relating to the text and in relating to other interpretations. To acknowledge a text's secret is to acknowledge the text's singularity, and therefore the necessity to adapt interpretative strategies to the elusive essence that is the only thing that can orient them. At the same time, it is to acknowledge that this essence remains absolutely unassimilable, that the text withdraws from our grasp, and that this withdrawal gives rise to the productivity of an interpretative process that cannot stop. And at the same time still, it is to acknowledge that through this withdrawal, the text *keeps* its secret, and that in the productivity spawned by it, any interpretative effort we may undertake will

consequently be only one among many, gathered around the same secret. *Hospitality towards the secret is hospitality towards other readings of it*. It is in the resulting horizontal plane of simultaneity (the city) that the *Wake* achieves the kind of impact and resonance the vertical plane of uniformity (the tower) cannot produce. Thus, *Finnegans Wake*'s reflections on language itself, whether they take the shape of meta-textuality at the level of content or the shape of self-reflexive elements at the level of form, are powerfully ethical: they speak the value, and the challenge, of alterity and plurality.

Conclusion

I hope to have indicated, over the course of this thesis, some of the ways in which the difficulty of *Finnegans Wake* is a significant element of this work in its own right. It is not merely to accommodate his readers' penchant for free association, or his own ambition to dazzle for dazzling's sake, that Joyce confronts us with "variously inflected, differently pronounced, otherwise spelled, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns" (118.26-8). Nor should we treat the *Wake* as a case in which the complexity of the subject matter is such that it requires difficult treatment, putting certain unfortunate but necessary obstacles in the path of elucidation. Such an explanation would posit that difficulty's strains and delays are superficial: orchestrated by an underlying principle that may eventually reveal itself. The difficulty we encounter in Joyce's last work, I propose, is of a different kind. It is itself the underlying principle. It resists identification, resists appropriation, resists anticipation, and therefore can always transform our reading experience in unforeseen ways.

I have moreover argued that difficulty is a mode of alterity: that it is precisely through its resistance to reading that the *Wake* represents certain aspects of the alterity at work in all signification. The complexities of Joyce's language and non-language, as well as his meta-textual reflections, explore how we can neither identify a signifier's unchanging essence (this is the argument of chapter one), nor limit its scope by isolating authorial intention (chapter two), how, consequently, interpretations are irreducibly plural, such that the possibility of one interpretation does not indicate the impossibility of others (chapter three), and how also, ultimately, acceptance of this plurality is acceptance of the partial and imperfect nature of each individual reading (chapter four).

In putting things this way, I have undoubtedly carried out what could be called a theoretical reading of Joyce. At the same time, I have tried to show that Joyce already anticipates the theoretical position. Thus, when Derrida writes, in "Two Words for Joyce," that, with Joyce, "one remains on the edge of

reading" (26), he is clearly applying the type of imagery that is dear to post-structuralism: on-going processes, the elusiveness of the centre. Yet I hold that this kind of application has a sound basis: first of all, as a description, however idiosyncratically inflected, of mechanisms that are effectively ineluctable in any signifying process, as I have argued throughout. Secondly, and more importantly, as a repetition of certain gestures already found in Joyce's text. Now, it is important to note that there exists a tension between these gestures and the argument I make for the unreadability of *Finnegans Wake*. Insofar as Joyce's text remains opaque, the self-reflective narratives I cite can only ever partly support any interpretation, including the meta-textual interpretation put forward in this thesis. The exegetical decision to be made here is a fundamental one. If we take Joyce's distortions to be *denying* meaning, then his writing should perhaps not be interpreted at all – not beyond an interpretation of the effects of unreadability itself. My wager, however, is that one of these effects is Joyce's manipulation of desire: a manipulation that transports his text away from anything like a pure or straightforward denial of meaning, because it reveals unreadability to be at the heart of readability.

Unreadability, through its very referral to a question of reading, appears not as the absence of referentiality but as a referentiality without reference (one would not think to speak of unreadability where referentiality is not at stake). Unreadability is thus the driving force behind language's excessive productivity. It functions as what Derrida calls the aporia that makes inheritance possible, as the real that in late Lacan's thinking about the sinthome not only forms the realm outside symbolic and imaginary sense-making – delineating a silence beyond the speakable and the productive – but also constitutes a potentially transformative force operative *within* the symbolic: the absolutely illegible stain that in its very transgression of meaning opens onto a re-invention of meaning.

I purposely conflate here Derrida's analysis of a necessary effect with Lacan's analysis of a violent one, because I hold that such a conflation is one of the points Joyce is making. The non-language of *Finnegans Wake* multiplies meaning even as it demonstrates that meaning is inevitably the product of a process that does violence to the text: this is what Derrida calls Joyce's double commandment.

I would therefor argue that an interpretation exploring the modes of meaning-production opened up by this commandment may take forms more complex than that of an intrinsically contradictory application of frameworks of interpretability to Joyce's absolute obscurity. If the *Wake* denies any simplistic notions of legitimate interpretation, it equally undoes the argument that a reading of its non-words is absolutely illegitimate. And one of the things that the *Wake* allows such a reading to articulate – always in a voice no longer totally intrinsic or totally extrinsic to the text – are reflections on just this conflation of voices: on the uncertainty that adheres to interpretation and to the construction of evidence, on the lack of anything like absolute mastery over the creative process, on the tantalising and anxiety-inducing nature of the signifier, and on the richness of meaning brought about by negotiations that forgo teleology.

Joyce can thus be seen as not only a favourite case study but as himself an exponent of that strange entity, literary theory. In making this proposition, I am aware that I advance what may appear to be yet another self-contradiction. Simply put, how can I hold up Joyce's writing as an example of openness, plurality, and decentralisation if, at the same time, I claim him for a school of thought that is notoriously inaccessible? I have outlined my views on theory in the introduction; in light of this more specific question, however, it will prove helpful to briefly review the role played by difficulty. Difficulty, not in the sense of a bad presentation obscuring an underlying simplicity, but in the sense of a productive alterity, is the chief reason for the oddities that make theory, precisely, difficult to access. When, in the Introduction, I define theory by gesturing towards the impossibility of doing so, I repeat one of the central strands of theory's self-understanding. In *Topographies*, Miller writes that "it may be the essence of literary theory to resist definition" (318), and he continues by proposing that "[t]o translate theory is to traduce it, to betray it" (319). As with the non-words of the *Wake*, emphasis cannot be on one particular formulation, on one particular translation or interpretation. The coordinates of each reading inscribe on it a partiality that makes it one in a series of different possibilities. With regard to Derrida, for instance, Nicholas Royle suggests that "reading Derrida means

meddling *with* Derrida [...]. His texts call to be read differently, anew, every time: they affirm the open-endedness of the *or again*" (47).

Consider my own use of Derrida's and Lacan's respective work in a synthetic approach that neither of them can be said to have anticipated, let alone prepared. What I want to suggest is that theory's reasons for re-reading itself in this manner are similar to the reasons that Joyce gives us for re-reading *Finnegans Wake*. Or, to put it more summarily still, *Finnegans Wake* and literary theory are difficult for similar reasons. Each finds that knowledge and its production are not coextensive with stability, and each introduces irreducible complexities in order to make the point that there are elements – crucial ones – in any system of knowledge that escape assimilation. That this is where theory, or indeed *Finnegans Wake*, shows its unwillingness to adopt a consistent positon, however, is not a convincing argument. It is, in fact, yet another impatient bout for clarity that, in championing monovalence, unduly conflates infinite plurality with universality. The double standard it moreover implements quickly becomes apparent when we ask ourselves whether there is in fact *any* intellectual discipline of which we would say that it is serious and productive, and that it produces sound results, if and only if all of its branches and contributors are in total agreement with each other.

If such a notion is opposed to most concepts of serious debate, theory's difficulty, through which it remains open to on-going interpretation, can in turn be shown to produce results of a serious nature. As Robin Valenza and John Bender note, in positing an opposition between difficulty and the relevance of the work being done, "[t]he operative belief [...] is that common speech embodies common sense and that anything worth saying can and should be said in broadly accessible terms" (36). This is not a belief theory shares, given its analysis of how accessibility is generated through a dissimulation of the constitutive complexity of linguistic codes – that is to say, through a metaphysics of presence that gives the name of common sense to what can only ever be partial outlooks. A critique of theory that passes over this analysis by reasserting the primacy of accessibility therefore masks "deeper structural divergences that such thinking refuses to acknowledge" (34). In such a constellation, it is not, as is often asserted, difficulty

that constitutes a refusal to make a relevant contribution. Where difficulty is used to transform a debate's operational framework, it is rather the out-and-out rejection of this transformation that risks denying productivity, flexibility, and relevance in the name of an unquestioned, inert stability.

The observation that, when theory is returned to the logocentric procedures with which it explicitly breaks, much of what theory does in excess of logocentrism, or in opposition to it, takes on the appearance of inconsistency, obscurity, and purely rhetorical effects – such an observation does not, in fact, tell us much that was not already given in the movement of that break. On its own terms, by contrast, theory delineates its hermeneutic upshots quite clearly. Theory's first result, the one all subsequent results are in some form of dialogue with, is the finding that there is no intrinsic stability to any signifying gesture and that logocentrism can uphold the clarity and stability to which it lays claim only at the cost of violent processes of normalisation and exclusion.

The structural divergences that are masked by a rejection of difficulty thus hinge, to a significant extent, on the question of whether or not we find that, in representing to ourselves certain parts of the world (for instance, certain works of literature) our hermeneutical enterprises are lent sufficient depth and scope by such methodologies as achieve transparency within the existing discursive frameworks. If so, then a break with these methodologies will resemble nothing if not a break with the world, or at least with productive ways of communicating about the world. If not, however, then it becomes apparent that such a break attempts to articulate the possibility of the world itself undergoing change in ways not anticipated by the current frameworks – but *articulation* is precisely the problem under such conditions.

It could be argued that the price paid for a deviation from existing structures of expression is too high: that a writer or speaker who challenges the need for intelligibility within the existing frameworks fails, by the same token, to communicate whatever vision of alternative frameworks they may have. There is certainly a question here of a balance to be struck; yet this line of thought also risks foreclosing interaction with certain frameworks not on the basis of their own merit (or lack thereof) but on the basis of an axiomatic preservation of stability.

The argument reveals, therefore, the extent to which "the order of intelligibility depends in its turn on the established order which it serves to interpret. This readability will then be as little neutral as it is nonviolent" (Derrida, "Force of Law" 270). In order to counteract this violence, a discourse has to remain open to reviewing the repercussions of its own axioms – its own stability. For instance, in the case of the *Wake*, stability violently reasserts itself whenever we operate on the implicit or explicit assumption that reading one of the most difficult works of literature in existence should not, in the long run, cause us any anxiety or uncertainty. Reviewing this assumption means confronting the fact that we cannot read *Finnegans Wake* at all unless we destabilise the frameworks within which we read – even if doing so should mean putting into question some of the foundations of our hermeneutics. The point is precisely to refrain from casting such questioning as inherently negative.

To give another example: in a democratically organised society, in which public debate contributes to the negotiation of social structure, contributions that confront us with alterity should not be understood as automatically positioning themselves *outside* the process of negotiation or its juridico-political formalisation (alterity aspiring to override debate). The demand that alterity often makes of us, in such a constellation, is that we respond to it without confining our response to the acknowledgement of a position we refuse to interact with. But neither can interaction consist in a gesture of control that undoes alterity, codifying a position until it appears as the object of pre-existing modes of knowledge, no longer as a challenge to these modes and to their claim to unlimited applicability.

Avoiding both of these forms of appropriation depends on our ability to conceptualise discourse itself, the very process of knowledge-production, as mobile. In the case of political structure, such an ability is what Derrida describes as the democracy-to-come, which – in spite of what the term may suggest – is a configuration of the here and now. As David Wood notes, "Derrida is arguing, not for some utopian future, but for a certain anticipation of openness to the other, of justice, an imminent possibility" (52). The implementation of otherness is not an ideal whose achievement in the future is to be worked towards, but an activity in the present: an activity of working out what kind of future we want to achieve.

Therefore, to make possible the political and social sphere in the here and now as, precisely, a social, intersubjective, interactive one, there has to be, at the very heart of the public, an element that escapes the public, a possibility of change not yet symbolised or knowable: a secret.

The meta-textuality of *Finnegans Wake* can be read as being concerned with this dimension of the secret. Joyce's text questions any division between the public and the private as a division between the self-evident and the irrelevant. By staging for us the precariousness of public space – both of shared physical space (seen in HCE's city) and of participation in the symbolic order (seen in the non-words, in ALP's letter, in Shem's writing, in Shaun's ventriloquism) – the *Wake* subverts the notion that what is communal or shared is, by virtue of these qualities, morally good or objectively correct. The public space of the *Wake* is precisely not partaking in anything like eternal or indeed local truth, but is self-consciously flawed, split, postlapsarian.

This must raise the question how this kind of public space can give rise to any values. Would not the very mutability of meanings place us in a sphere where my proposition that there are ethical implications to Joyce's procedure is void? The response I would give is yet another iteration of the above point that the questioning of stability breaks not with the world and the necessity of inhabiting it, but rather with the notion that certain representations of the world are neutral. We have seen, for instance, how Joyce's depiction of HCE as a pure name or legal fiction undermines both the idea that legality/public acknowledgement is an indicator of factuality *and* the idea that fictions can be cast aside. We must recognise the significance of fictions whilst seeing them for what they are – in short: recognise the instability *and* the importance of our own constructions. This corresponds to what Lacan aphoristically expresses in the title of his unpublished twenty-first seminar: *Les non dupes errent* (punning on "les noms du père" – the names of the father). Those who are not fooled are mistaken; refusing to take fictions seriously (to be fooled by them), they miss the seriousness that lies, not in some underlying truth, but rather in the necessity of fictions themselves.

The importance of constructions that Joyce's text exemplifies extends to the discursive practices that textual interpretation is concerned with. Texts

transport information whose visibility and relevance depend on paradigms of observation, without the information therefore being divorced from the singular and contextualised process of a text's original formation. Clarity, in this view, does not only open up interpretation by making it transparent, but also closes it down by reducing the scope of its results, and pre-emptively so. As in the above example of democratic debate, the link between convention and validity that is thus problematized is one that often serves to underpin the value of interaction and of compromise. Yet even in stressing the need for debate, the merging of convention with objectivity already tends towards a solidification that also *opposes* itself to debate. Difficulty, in turn, may be used as a means of continuing the debate by challenging solidification.

The illegibility of *Finnegans Wake* interrupts our interpretative activity, interfering with it from what seems to be a realm outside this activity's appropriate means and procedures. But it is precisely by doing so that difficulty reminds us that relevance can never be guaranteed by these procedures, but is ultimately bestowed by our using them to *newly inscribe us into the world*. Therefore, difficulty, in the sense we are concerned with here, does not obscure what is actually the case; it challenges us to think what is the case with new rigour and vitality. The fundamental mobility and instability of the interpretative process gives rise to a responsibility that *reinforces* the ties between discourse and world. We could say that difficulty is annoying, but that it is annoying in much the same way the sound of a street festival outside your window is annoying when you are trying to concentrate on your work.

Let us, in fact, get distracted for a moment, and consider that as I write this, there are children outside my window, yelling and playing a game of football. Hearing the noise, I do not get up but concentrate on the voices, attempting to be hospitable to a sound that enters my room unbidden, before I can do anything to respond to it, and that distracts me from my work. The children shout, sometimes in triumph, sometimes in anger. Occasionally, one breaks into song. It occurs to me that they are playing a game: that is, they are applying rules, they are teaching themselves – and each other – the application of rules. They probably even invent the rules at times. In more than the athletic sense, this is training, and if I describe

it here, it is because I believe that their game, informal as it may be, and my writing, confined as it may be to a fairly narrow section of cultural space, both partake in the same activity: world-building, the building of public space itself.

I hope that this example can go some way towards showing that, in writing about world-building, I do not have in mind some activity of Promethean dimensions. The point is rather that the world as we experience and inhabit it is not an inert container for our lives to take place in, but in a crucial sense consists in these lives, down to their smallest events. This line of thought can furthermore be brought into dialogue with the moment in *Ulysses* when Stephen, perhaps exasperated with Mr Deasy's declaration that "[a]ll human history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God" (2.380-1), opposes to this vision the sheer actuality of "[a] shout in the street" (2.386). In this scene, too – which my real-life event might be accused of plagiarising – the noise in question is that of children playing a game: "Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee!" (2.384).

These shouts stand in contrast to a stance that Stephen attributes to the same children only moments earlier. Sitting in his classroom, shortly before their game of hockey begins, they produce the sort of remarks that he internally classifies as "[a] dull ease of the mind" (2.15). In a reading of the passage in which this phrase occurs, Eide proposes that Stephen is trying to counteract this dullness by means of a teaching method that stimulates rather than punishes what unorthodoxy it can find in his pupils' ideas: "thus cultivating creative thought processes and promoting […] curiosity", whilst destabilising "a codified distinction between fact and error" (65). I would subscribe to this reading, and I moreover hold that the shout in the street, which Stephen posits as an alternative model to an ultimate code, can be seen in much the same light. It interferes with codification itself, thus aligning itself with difficulty as I describe it here, forming an interruption that reminds us of complexity and of the hermeneutical value of liveliness: the value of the unexpected or the unexpectedly meaningful.

The shout in the street – insofar as it can be seen to embrace a life heartily unconcerned with Mr Deasy's one great goal – opposes itself not only to solidified codification's dull ease, but also to its hasty pragmatism: what Attridge calls the effort of "the too full, excessively goal-oriented consciousness" (*Singularity of*

Literature 123). Difficulty strives to replace this ease and this pragmatism with a slowness that is deliberately uneasy. In *Stupidity*, Avital Ronell ventures that there are types of intelligence that lay claim to great efficiency through sheer velocity and agility – that is to say, ultimately, through ease – but whose operations are "smooth and unproblematic in terms of the results they yield" (300). Her conclusion is that "[i]t could be that fast is slow, where mind hasn't stopped or been stopped, made to give pause over some imponderable or stumped by an effect of paradox" (300). I take Ronell to be postulating here an alternative understanding of efficiency in knowledge production: an efficiency not tied to quantities of speed, volume, or density, but to a quantity of interaction. This efficiency is opposed to the goal-oriented mind-set that wants its knowledge in neat units and therefore equates uncertainty with ignorance. It is an efficiency for which a solution should not distract from the complexity of a problem and for which the result of a successful internalisation of this complexity is a certain remainder of uncertainty or doubt.

This, I argue, is precisely the attitude towards knowledge-production expressed in *Finnegans Wake*. The *Wake* resists the solidification, the commodification, the streamlining of knowledge. As Beckett suggests in his essay on "Work in Progress: "The danger is in the neatness of identifications" (3). And in the way that *Finnegans Wake* makes palpable this danger with respect to its own meaning, it can be seen to also comment on the practice of literary criticism in general. It demonstrates that we need a hermeneutics not only of the legibility of texts, but also of their illegibility: of their difficulty. The aim of such a hermeneutics must be, on the one hand, to avoid merely acknowledging difficulty without reading it, and on the other hand, to avoid reading it by making it legible. Instead, it must examine the very terms of a text's illegibility.

By confronting us with how much of our own desire, our own voice, and our own constructive activity goes into reading, *Finnegans Wake* provides us with crucial aspects of such a hermeneutics of difficulty. Exploring how difficulty impacts processes of discourse formation that are also processes of world-building, Joyce's text shows that a hermeneutics of difficulty is also an *ethics* of difficulty, whose primary imperative is that we preserve the openness of discourse

by accepting the partiality of our responses. This is not necessarily bad news for interpretation. The more a text escapes appropriation, the more it will interrupt any towering solidification and instead locate a debate on a horizontal plane where it can generate meaning by growing into multiple habitats, separate or interlocking but always without an absolute centre, and by executing such shifts as escape any teleological zeroing in. One key rationale of the *Wake*'s unreadability, then, is to enact all this at the level that has the single greatest impact on its readers: the level of reading itself. If meaning is not legibility, then community is not homogeneity, and negotiation is not stability or accessibility. This means that the building of a future is difficult. Exemplifying this difficulty, *Finnegans Wake*, often decried as a formalist extravaganza or a bad literary joke, is a text in which we are confronted with unreadability only to find that, through this confrontation, we have the capacity to read again, anew, differently.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(List of Works Cited)

Aland, Barbara, Kurt Aland and Eberhard Nestle, eds. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28., revised edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009. Print.

Atherton, James S. *The Books at the Wake: A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009. Print.

Attridge, Derek. *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

---. *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

---. *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction's Traces*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. Print.

---. *The Singularity of Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

---. *The Work of Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Print.

Attridge, Derek, and Daniel Ferrer, eds. *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. Print.

Baden, Joel S. *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. Print.

Beckett, Samuel. "Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce." *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. New York: New Directions, 1972. 1-22. Print.

Beckett, Samuel, et al. *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. New York: New Directions, 1972. Print.

Benjamin, Roy. "Room in the Kirkeyaard: *Either/Or* and the Heinousness of Choice in *Finnegans Wake*." *Joyce Studies Annual* (2014): 215-235. Print.

Bennington, Geoffrey. *Not Half No End: Militantly Melancholic Essays in Memory of Jacques Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. Print.

Benstock, Bernard. "Concerning Lost Historeve: Book I, chapter v." *A Conceptual Guide to Finnegans Wake*. Eds. Michael H. Begnal and Fritz Senn. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974. 33-55. Print.

Benstock, Shari. "The Letter of the Law: *La Carte Postale* in *Finnegans Wake*." *Philological Quarterly* 63.2 (Spring 1984): 163-185. Print

---. "Nightletters: Woman's Writing in the *Wake*." *Critical Essays on James Joyce*. Ed. Bernard Benstock. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985. 221-233. Print.

Berressem, Hanjo. "The Letter! The Litter! The Defilements of the Signifier in *Finnegans Wake*." *Finnegans Wake: Fifty Years: European Joyce Studies 2*. Ed. Geert Lernout. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990. 139-164. Print.

The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha. Ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Bishop, John. *Joyce's Book of the Dark: Finnegans Wake*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press. 1986. Print.

---. "Joyce's Last Word: Thoughts on the Last Paragraph of *Finnegans Wake*." Paper presented at the James Joyce Research Colloquium, University College Dublin, 18 April 2009. Unpublished.

---. "Vico's 'Night of Darkness': *The New Science* and *Finnegans Wake*." *James Joyce: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Mary T. Reynolds. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1993. 180-195. Print.

Boucicault, Dion. "The Colleen Bawn." *Nineteenth Century Plays*. Ed. George Rowell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972. 175-231. Print.

Brivic, Sheldon. "The Daughter in the Father: The Revolutionary Aspect of III.3." *Joyce's Allmaziful Plurabilities: Polyvocal Explorations of Finnegans Wake*.

Eds. Kimberly J. Devlin and Christine Smedley. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015. 255-271. Print.

---. *Joyce Between Freud and Jung*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1980. Print.

---. [Shelly]. *Joyce Through Lacan and Žižek: Explorations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.

---. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

---. "Values of Difficulty." *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*. Ed. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. 199-215. Print.

Campbell, Antony F., and Mark A. O'Brien. *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. Print.

Campbell, Joseph, and Henry Morton Robinson. *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake: Unlocking James Joyce's Masterwork*. Ed. Edmund L. Epstein. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2005. Print.

Cavender, Anne L. "The Ass and the Four: Oppositional Figures for the Reader in *Finnegans Wake*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 41.4 (Summer 2004): 665-687. Print.

Chaitin, Gilbert D. *Rhetoric and Culture in Lacan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.

Cheng, Vincent J. *Joyce, Race, and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.

Conley, Tim. "'Oh Me None Onsens!': *Finnegans Wake* and the Negation of Meaning." *James Joyce Quarterly* 39.2 (Winter 2002): 233-249. Print.

Crispi, Luca, and Sam Slote, eds. *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. Print.

Critchley, Simon. *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas. Third Edition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. Print.

Culler, Jonathan, and Kevin Lamb, ed. *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Print.

Dalley, Stephanie, ed. "Atrahasis." *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others.* Revised Edition. Trans. Stephanie Dalley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. 1-38. Print.

De Man, Paul. *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Print.

Deane, Seamus. Introduction. *Finnegans Wake*. By James Joyce. London: Penguin Books, 2000. vii-l. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. "Afterword: Toward An Ethic of Discussion." Trans. Samuel Weber. *Limited Inc*. Ed. Gerald Graff. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988. 111-154. Print.

---. *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. Trans. David Wills. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. Print.

---. *Aporias*. Trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1993. Print.

---. "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides." Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Giovanna Borradori. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 85-136. Print.

---. "Before the Law." Trans. Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston. *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992. 181-220. Print.

---. "Des tours de Babel." Trans. Joseph F. Graham. *Psyche: Inventions of the Other. Volume I*. Eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007. 191-225. Print.

---. *Edmund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction*. Trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. Print.

---. "For the Love of Lacan." *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. 39-69. Print.

---. "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'." Trans. Mary Quaintance. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge, 2002. 228-298. Print.

---. "Hostipitality." Trans. Gil Anidjar. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge, 2002. 356-420. Print.

---. "Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation." *The Gift of Death & Literature in Secret*. Trans. David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 117-158. Print.

---. "The Night Watch (over 'the book of himself')." Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. 87-108. Print.

---. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Print.

---. "Plato's Pharmacy." *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. 61-171. Print.

---. *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. Print.

---. "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem." Trans. Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski. *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Eds. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005. 135-163. Print.

---. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005. Print.

---. "Signature Event Context." Trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. *Limited Inc*. Ed. Gerald Graff. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988. 1-23. Print.

---. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

---. *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. Trans. Barbara Harlow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. Print.

---. "This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida." Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992. 33-75. Print.

---. "Two Words for Joyce." Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. 22-40. Print.

---. "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce." Trans. François Raffoul. *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. 41-86. Print.

---. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. Print.

Derrida, Jacques, and Anne Dufourmantelle. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000. Print.

Devlin, Kimberly J., and Christine Smedley. "Introduction: The Prodigal Text." *Joyce's Allmaziful Plurabilities: Polyvocal Explorations of Finnegans Wake*. Eds. Kimberly J. Devlin and Christine Smedley. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015. 1-13. Print.

Devlin, Kimberly J., and Christine Smedley, eds. *Joyce's Allmaziful Plurabilities: Polyvocal Explorations of Finnegans Wake*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015. Print.

Eastman, Max. *The Literary Mind: Its Place in an Age of Science*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931. Print.

Eco, Umberto. *The Search for the Perfect Language*. Transl. James Fentress. London: Fontana Press, 1995. Print.

Eide, Marian. *Ethical Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.

Ellmann, Maud. "The Ghosts of *Ulysses*." *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Casebook*. Ed. Derek Attridge. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 83-102. Print.

Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce.* New and Revised Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. Print.

Evans, Dylan*. An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Fink, Bruce. *Against Understanding, Volume 1: Commentary and Critique in a Lacanian Key*. New York: Routledge, 2014. Print.

---. *Against Understanding, Volume 2: Cases and Commentary in a Lacanian Key*. New York: Routledge, 2014. Print.

---. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. Print.

Fordham, Finn. *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake: Unravelling Universals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1995. Print.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII (1913-1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*. Ed. James Strachey. Trans. James Strachey, Anna Freud, et. al. London: Vintage, 2001. Print.

---. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XX (1925-1926): An Autobiographical Study, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, Lay Analysis and Other Works*. Ed. James Strachey. Trans. James Strachey, Anna Freud, et. al. London: Vintage, 2001. Print.

Fuse, Mikio. "The Letter and the Groaning: Chapter I.5." *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*. Eds. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. 98-123. Print.

Gallop, Jane. *Thinking Through the Body*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Print.

Gauthier, François. "Trouble dans le Genre et Grandeur d'une Philosophe: À propos de Judith Butler." *Revue du MAUSS permanente* 26 August 2015. Web. 22 September 2015. <http://www.journaldumauss.net/?Trouble-dans-le-Genre-et-Grandeur>

Gilbert, Stuart. "Prolegomena to *Work in Progress*." *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. New York: New Directions, 1972. 47-75. Print.

---. *Reflections on James Joyce: Stuart Gilbert's Paris Journal*. Eds. Thomas F. Staley and Randolph Lewis. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. Print.

Gordon, John. *Finnegans Wake: A Plot Summary*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986. Print.

Greenaway, Peter. "John Cage." *Four American Composers*. Berlin: Absolut Medien, 2006. DVD.

Harari, Roberto. *How James Joyce Made His Name: A Reading of the Final Lacan*. Trans. Luke Thurston. New York: Other Press, 2002. Print.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. Print.

Hart, Clive. *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1962. Print.

Heath, Stephen. "Ambiviolences: Notes for reading Joyce." *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*. Eds. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 31-68. Print.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985. Print.

Josephus. *Vol. IV: Jewish Antiquities, Books I-IV.* Loeb Classical Library edition. Trans. H. St. J. Thackeray. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957. Print.

Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. Ed. Margot Norris. New York: W. W. Norton, 2010. Print.

---. *Finnegans Wake*. Eds. Robbert-Jan Henkes, Erik Bindervoet, and Finn Fordham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.

---. *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man*. Ed. John Paul Riquelme. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006. Print.

---. *Ulysses*. Eds. Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe, and Claus Melchior. London: The Bodley Head, 1986. Print.

Kamuf, Peggy. *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. Print.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power." *Écrits.* The First Complete Edition in English. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. 489-542. Print.

---. "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." *Écrits*. The First Complete Edition in English. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. 197-268. Print.

---. "Joyce le Symptôme." *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005. 161-169. Print.

---. "Lituraterre."*Autres écrits*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001. 11-20. Print.

---. "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis." *Écrits.* The First Complete Edition in English. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. 445-488. Print.

---. *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005. Print.

---. "Le séminaire sur 'La Lettre volée'." *Écrits I: Texte Intégral*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999. 11-61. Print.

---. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Sylvana Tomaselli. New York: W.W. Norton, 1991. Print.

---. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Dennis Porter. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. Print.

---. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety.* Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. A. R. Price. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014. Print.

---. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton, 1981. Print.

---. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: [Encore.] On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. Print.

---. "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'." *Écrits.* The First Complete Edition in English. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. 6-48. Print.

---. "The Signification of the Phallus." *Écrits.* The First Complete Edition in English. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. 575-584. Print.

---. "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious." *Écrits.* The First Complete Edition in English. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006. 671-702. Print.

Landuyt, Ingeborg. "Cain-Ham-(Shem)-Esau-Jim the Penman: Chapter I.7." *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*. Eds. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. 142-162. Print.

Lawrence, Karen. *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1981. Print.

Lernout, Geert. "The Finnegans Wake Notebooks and Radical Philology." *Probes: Genetic Studies in Joyce: European Joyce Studies 5*. Ed. David Hayman and Sam Slote. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995. 19-48. Print.

---. "James Joyce and Critical Theory." *Comparative Critical Studies* 1.1-2 (2004): 85-96. Print.

Lewis, Michael. *Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008. Print.

Lurz, John. "Literal Darkness: *Finnegans Wake* and the Limits of Print." *James Joyce Quarterly* 50.3 (Spring 2013): 675-691. Print.

MacCabe, Colin. *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978. Print.

Mahon, Peter. *Imagining Joyce and Derrida: Between Finnegans Wake and Glas*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007. Print.

McArthur, Murray. "The Example of Joyce: Derrida Reading Joyce." *James Joyce Quarterly*, 32.2 (Winter 1995): 227-241. Print.

McCarthy, Patrick A. "The Last Epistle of *Finnegans Wake*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 27.4 (Summer 1990): 725-733. Print.

---. "Postlegomena to Stuart Gilbert's Prolegomena." *Joyce's Disciples Disciplined: A Re-Exagmination of the 'Exagmination' of 'Work in Progress'*. Ed. Tim Conley. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2010. 33-41. Print.

McGee, Patrick. "Errors and expectations: the ethics of desire in *Finnegans Wake*." *James Joyce and the Difference of Language*. Ed. Laurent Milesi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 161-179. Print.

McHugh, Roland. *Annotations to Finnegans Wake.* Third Edition. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006. Print.

McQuillan, Martin. Series Editor's Preface. *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida*. By Peggy Kamuf. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. xix-xx. Print.

Míguez-Bonino, José. "Genesis 11:1-9: A Latin American Perspective." *Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible*. Eds. John R. Levison and Priscilla Pope-Levison. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999. 13-16. Print.

Milesi, Laurent. "L'idiome babélien de *Finnegans Wake*: recherches thématiques dans une perspective génétique." *Genèse de Babel: Joyce et la Création*. Ed. Claude Jacquet. Paris: Editions de CNRS, 1985. 155-215. Print.

Miller, J. Hillis. "Absolute Mourning: It Is Jacques You Mourn For." *Re-reading Derrida: Perspectives on Mourning and Its Hospitalities*. Eds. Tony Thwaites and Judith Seaboyer. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013. 9-21. Print.

---. *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987. Print.

---. *Topographies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995. Print.

Mitchell, Andrew J. "Meaning Postponed: *The Post Card* and *Finnegans Wake*." *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. 145-162. Print.

Mitchell, Andrew J., and Sam Slote. "Derrida and Joyce: On Totality and Equivocation." *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. 1-16. Print.

Mitchell, Andrew J., and Sam Slote, eds. *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. Print.

Moran, Patrick W. "An Obsession with Plenitude: The Aesthetics of Hoarding in *Finnegans Wake*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 46.2 (Winter 2009): 285-304. Print.

Muller, John P., and William J. Richardson, eds. *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Print.

Murphy, Sean P. *James Joyce and Victims: Reading the Logic of Exclusion*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003. Print.

Murphy, Timothy S. "The Eternal Return of 'The seim anew': Joyce's Vico and Deleuze's Nietzsche." *James Joyce Quarterly* 35.4/36.1 (Summer/Fall 1998): 715-734. Print.

Naas, Michael. *Derrida From Now On*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. Print.

---. "The Mother, of All the Phantasms…" *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Andrew Mitchell and Sam Slote. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013. 163-181. Print.

Newton, Adam Zachary. *Narrative Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.

Norris, Margot. *The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake: A Structuralist Analysis*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. Print.

---. "Joyce's Heliotrope." *Copying With Joyce: Essay from the Copenhagen Symposium*. Eds. Morris Beja and Shari Benstock. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989. 3-24. Print.

---. *Joyce's Web: The Social Unraveling of Modernism*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992. Print.

Nussbaum, Martha. "The Professor of Parody: The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler." *New Republic* 220.8 (22 February 1999): 37-45. Print.

Ostler, Nicholas. *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006. Print.

Platt, Len. *Joyce, Race and Finnegans Wake*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

Plutarch. *Moralia, Vol. V: Isis and Osiris. The E at Delphi. The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse. The Obsolescence of Oracles*. Loeb Classical Library edition. Trans. Frank Cole Babbitt. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969. Print.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Purloined Letter." *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading*. Eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. 6-27. Print.

Rabaté, Jean-Michel. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print.

---. "A Clown's Inquest into Paternity: Fathers, Dead or Alive, in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*." *The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text*. Ed. Robert Con Davis. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981. 73-114. Print.

---. "The Fourfold Root of Yawn's Unreason: Chapter III.3." *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*. Eds. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007. 384-409. Print.

---. *Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalysis and the Subject of Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001. Print.

---. *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

Reichert, Klaus. "Vico's Method and its Relation to Joyce's." *Finnegans Wake: Fifty Years: European Joyce Studies 2*. Ed. Geert Lernout. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990. 47-60. Print.

Reynolds, Mary T. "The City in Vico, Dante, and Joyce." *Vico and Joyce*. Ed. Donald Phillip Verene. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987. 110-122. Print.

Rice, Thomas Jackson. *Cannibal Joyce*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008. Print.

Ronell, Avital. *Stupidity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Print.

Rose, Danis. *James Joyce's The Index Manuscript: Finnegans Wake Holograph Workbook VI.B.46*. Colchester: A Wake Newslitter Press, 1978. Print.

Rose, Danis, and John O'Hanlon. *Understanding Finnegans Wake: A Guide to the Narrative of James Joyce's Masterpiece*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1982. Print.

Roughley, Alan. *Reading Derrida Reading Joyce*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999. Print.

---. "Untitled." *The Languages Of Joyce: Selected Papers from the 11th International James Joyce Symposium, Venice, 12-18 June 1988*. Eds. Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli, Carla Marengo Vaglio and Christine van Boheemen. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992. 257-264. Print.

Royle, Nicholas. *In Memory of Jacques Derrida*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. Print.

Ruggieri, Franca, and Enrico Terrinoni, eds. *James Joyce: The Recirculation of Realism (Joyce Studies in Italy)*. Rome: Edizioni Q, 2014. Print.

Russell, Letty M. "Encountering the 'Other' in a World of Difference and Danger." *The Harvard Theological Review* 99.4 (October 2006): 457-468. Print.

Salih, Sara. "Judith Butler and the ethics of 'difficulty'." *Critical Quarterly* 45.3 (October 2003): 42-51. Print.

Senn, Fritz. "Joycean Provections." *Inductive Scrutinies: Focus on Joyce*. Ed. Christine O'Neill. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. 35-58. Print.

Slote, Sam. "An Imperfect *Wake*." *Errears and Erroriboose: Joyce and Error: European Joyce Studies 20*. Ed. Matthew Creasy. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011. 135-149. Print.

---. *Joyce's Nietzschean Ethics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.

Sollers, Philippe. "Joyce and Co." Trans. Stephen Heath. *Tel Quel* 64 (Winter 1975): 3-13. Print.

Sullivan, Sir Edward. *The Book of Kells: With 24 Colour Reproductions from the Original Pages*. London: The Studio Publications, 1955. Print.

Synge, J.M. *The Playboy of the Western World and Other Plays*. Ed. Ann Saddlemyer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Thurston, Luke. "Introduction: Lacan's *pas-à-lire*." *Re-inventing the Symptom: Essays on the Final Lacan*. Ed. Luke Thurston. New York: Other Press, 2002. xiii-xx. Print.

---. *James Joyce and the Problem of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.

Tindall, William York. *A Reader's Guide to Finnegans Wake*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1969. Print.

Valenza, Robin, and John Bender. "Hume's Learned and Conversable Worlds." *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena*. Ed. Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. 29-42. Print.

Van Boheemen-Saaf, Christine. *Joyce, Derrida, Lacan, and the Trauma of History: Reading, Narrative, and Postcolonialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Print.

Van Hulle, Dirk. *Manuscript Genetics: Joyce's Know-How, Beckett's Nohow*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008. Print.

Van Mierlo, Wim. "Indexing the Buffalo Notebooks: Genetic Criticism and the Construction of Evidence." *Writing Its Own Wrunes For Ever: Essais de Génétique Joycienne / Essays in Joycean Genetic*. Eds. Daniel Ferrer and Claude Jacquet. Tusson: Éditions du lérot, 1998. 169-190. Print.

---. "Reading Joyce In and Out of the Archive." *Joyce Studies Annual* (2002): 32-63. Print.

Van Seters, John. *The Yahwist: A Historian of Israelite Origins*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013. Print.

Vico, Giambattista. *New Science: Principles of the New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations.* Third Edition. Trans. David Marsh. London: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.

White, Allon. *The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. Print.

Wood, David. *Time After Time*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Enjoy your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

---. *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009. Print.

---. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003. Print.

---. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 2008. Print.

---. "Why Lacan Is Not a 'Post-Structuralist'." *Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 1.2 (Fall 1987): 31-39. Print.

Zoellig, Marc-Roland. "Des catholiques s'opposent à la remise d'un doctorat honoris causa." *La Liberté* [Fribourg/Freiburg] 11 November 2014. Web. 22 September 2015. <http://www.laliberte.ch/news/regions/canton/des-catholiques-s-opposent-a-la-remise-d-un-doctorat-honoris-causa-262988#.VHI1EcnsvhQ>