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**James Joyce's Poetics of Gramma(r)  
and Languages at the *Wake***

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**Editura Universității de Vest  
Timișoara, 2023**

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*Chapter 1*  
**JOYCE'S POETICS OF  
LANGUAGE(S) AND COMPOSITION<sup>1</sup>**

The languages at the *Wake* have come in for a good deal of attention, and should come in for more. Apart from pertinent word lists, what we need is some idea of why any given language is used in a given place.<sup>2</sup>

A great deal more work needs to be done [...] on the 'states' that the languages of foreign states evoke in the *Wake*.<sup>3</sup>

Joyce's attempts to harness the effects of language and, increasingly with time, languages, can be seen as the arch-feature of his writing which conditioned its technical evolutions and *revolutions*, also in the etymological sense since his innovations sometimes meant readopting once discarded compositional habits in a different guise. To give a hasty but convenient summary, the early selective epiphanic treatment of material and plot (*Dubliners* and the reworking of the verbose *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), still haunted by the joint classical principles of economy and intensity, slowly metamorphosed back, as *Ulysses* wrote more of itself, into the all-inclusive compositional technique that will characterize *Finnegans Wake*, in which accretions prompted by earlier lexical cues dilate a narrative sequence

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<sup>1</sup> Material from this chapter informed the 'Introduction: Language(s) with a Difference' to my edited collection *James Joyce and the Difference of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-27.

<sup>2</sup> Fritz Senn, 'Dutch Interpretation', *AWN* XI.3 (1974): 54.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark*, 461 n. 29. Made a decade after Senn's earlier plea, this remark coincidentally appeared in print when the present work began its long period of gestation and endless deferral.

to the extreme, thereby shaping dense thematic networks through narrative and linguistic recycling.

Another significant shift in Joycean textual production occurs roughly half-way through the development of *Ulysses*: Joyce's *Odyssey* turned from a sequel to *A Portrait* mixing stream of consciousness with third-person narration into an increasingly self-reflexive work in which the narrative technique ascribed to each chapter is foregrounded as subject through the linguistic, metadiscursive strategies of its oblique, parodic modes of telling. In *A Portrait*, the narrator's language, which gradually becomes more articulate and analytic in order to reflect the development of Stephen's intellect over some twenty years, still serves as a focal point giving the reader a retrospective side-glance into the hero's maturation at choice moments.<sup>4</sup> With *Ulysses*, conversely, Joyce felt the need to supplant the 'initial style',<sup>5</sup> with its relatively more conventional narrative agencies, by a polytropic style so as to render the circuitous wanderings of the protagonist away from home in a single day poised between myth and realism. This in turn caused the Irish writer to recast and amplify most of the earlier episodes towards the end of his own Ulyssean wandering through forms and styles (*Letters I* 172; 7 October 1921). Fiction writing gradually shifted to a more metafictional level, exploring new expressive forms for their own sake, and such elements as the mnemonic flashbacks of the interior monologue came to work as self-reflexive linguistic traces in the later foregrounded stylistic techniques, with their inbuilt vision of the book's encyclopaedic relation to human world and knowledge expressed in the dual orientation of language towards the narrative's fictional universe and towards itself as a parodic source of fiction within fiction. This evolution is inseparable from an increased dissolution or problematization of neat entities like character and voice, as well as the boundaries between them, and, consequently, from the emergence of more polyphonic voices, which in *Finnegans Wake* will combine with shifting enunciative poles and a pliable

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<sup>4</sup> See, for e.g., Anthony Burgess, *Joysprick: An Introduction to the Language of James Joyce* (London: André Deutsch, 1973), 65.

<sup>5</sup> *SL* 242: letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, dated 6 August 1919.

linguistic medium to create discursive effects ascribable to a 'side' or 'role' in a 'character complex'.<sup>6</sup>

As Derek Attridge has noted, *Finnegans Wake* holds at bay character identifications and relations while tantalizingly dramatizing patterns of recognizability;<sup>7</sup> its textual surface is ruffled by voices erring in a Bakhtinian 'polylogue' (*FW* 470.09) or 'drama parapolylogic' (*FW* 474.05). Likewise, expression of the Joycean emphasis on the foreignness of the English language will move from latent lexical defamiliarization in *Dubliners*, growing to an overt questioning of the familiar yet alienating tongue of tradition and subjection at the end of *A Portrait*, to a systematic attempt at 'depleting' styles, idioms and idiolects, which will culminate in the parody of linguistic vivisection and mimesis pitted against the foetus' growth in the 'Oxen of the Sun' chapter of *Ulysses*. Matching the Bloomian yearnings for Ithaca, the dialectic of such a composition, which integrates previous narrative and stylistic priorities at a deeper level, is best seen in the *Nostos* episodes, corresponding to the Telemachiad in narrative modes but filtered through de-characterized language and climaxing with the pure enunciation of Molly Bloom's infinitely revolving thoughts. When 'Penelope' fades out on Molly Bloom's last re-turning sleepy 'Yes', this panoramic one-day trip taken through discourses, idioms, techniques and styles<sup>8</sup> available in the history of English language and literature until the early 1920s, and already featuring a dozen foreign languages mainly used to enhance motifs or for characterization, will have paved the way for the linguistic night of the even more experimental

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<sup>6</sup> The work of reference for character identification is of course Adaline Glasheen's, *Third Census of Finnegans Wake: An Index of the Characters and Their Roles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). For a classical study of the relation between narrative and character in the text, see also Michael H Begnal and Grace Eckley, *Narrator and Character in Finnegans Wake*, foreword by Bernard Benstock (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> Derek Attridge, 'Joyce and the Ideology of Character', in *James Joyce: The Augmented Ninth. Proceedings of the Ninth International James Joyce Symposium, Frankfurt 1984*, ed. Bernard Benstock (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988): 152-7.

<sup>8</sup> In this respect, see Karen Lawrence's classic *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

and self-reflexive *Wake*.<sup>9</sup> In many ways a counterpart to the diurnal concerns of 16 June 1904 and a continuation of the end-of-*Ulysses* nocturnal mood, *Finnegans Wake* will extend the diachronic scope of 'Oxen' to a much broader range of the world's idioms with its linguistic resources and recourses.

If the growing tendency in *Ulysses* was to parody and perform operations on itself as the novel writes more of itself, or to satirize previous stylistic poses in some of its sections, the most encompassing gesture of this kind was to come with Joyce's ultimate creation. It was long assumed that, on the basis of the headings in the *Scribbledehobble* or VI.A notebook matching chapter divisions in Joyce's previous works, the *Wake*'s first design included a thorough parodic reworking of the major stylistic attitudes struck so far. However, later research challenged this canonical view of what Thomas Connolly's early transcription called the *Ur-Workbook* for *Finnegans Wake*<sup>10</sup> – an honour which, unless and

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<sup>9</sup> 'Je suis au bout de l'anglais' is Joyce's celebrated summary of his linguistic situation to August Suter when he started out on the Wakean journey, at the end of which, as he mock-heroically declared to Max Eastman, he would 'give them back their English language' (*JJ* 546).

<sup>10</sup> See *James Joyce's Scribbledehobble: The Ur-Workbook for Finnegans Wake*, ed. and intr. Thomas E. Connolly (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961). In his study of the mechanics of the *Wake*'s early stages, *The 'Wake' in Transit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), David Hayman saw the notes under *Ulysses* headings as remnants rather than projections (21). Danis Rose went further in his review essay on Hayman's book and, especially on the basis of unpublished Joyce letters of the period to Harriet Shaw Weaver, claimed that the VI.A notebook 'was compiled over a period of a few weeks in July, 1923, that is, after Joyce had drafted the first three sketches and while he was engaged in revising these and composing others.' (Danis Rose, 'The Beginning of all Thisorder of Work in Progress: *The "Wake" in Transit*, by David Hayman', *JJQ* 28.4 [1991]: 958) For Hayman's counter-arguments, see his 'Transiting the *Wake*: A Response to Danis Rose', *JJQ* 29.2 (1992): 411-19, and for a reconstitution of the post-*Ulysses* transitional period, see both Hayman, *The 'Wake' in Transit*, especially 8-16 (summary), and also Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon, 'A Nice Beginning: On the *Ulysses* / *Finnegans Wake* Interface', in *Finnegans Wake: Fifty Years*, ed. Geert Lernout (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 165-73. Note that to Rose's 'three sketches' above was added a fourth one, the 'Dympna' (cf. *U* 12:1710) sketch, following the accession of new manuscript material in

until missing intermediary documents surface, is now attributed to Notebook VI.B.10, begun in October 1922 – and the current critical consensus about VI.A, whose several handwritings range across the period 1923-1931, is rather as ‘a collection and rationalization of notes from other early notebooks’.<sup>11</sup> Be that as it may, this putative move did find its way into the final work, its most sustained expression being in *FW* I.7 where, under the new fictional guise of Shem the Penman, the titles of Joyce’s earlier fiction and the ‘inartistic portraits of himself’ in ‘monolook interyerear’ (*FW* 182.19-20; cf. also *FW* 119.32-33) come under the severe scrutiny of the inimical brother and alter ego Shaun the Post.

Throughout the painstaking composition of this ‘untitled mamafesta’ (*FW* 104.04) which remained known until publication on 4 May 1939 only as *Work in Progress*, Joyce kept filling some fifty notebooks of the VI.A kind with potential pre-draft material, an attitude to random notetaking he had kept developing more and more systematically from the days when, roughly with the ‘Cyclops’ episode, he had reverted to an aesthetics of expansion, but with a higher degree of metafictionality. With no first-step narrative guideline such as the *Odyssey* to follow, and consequently no definite idea of what structure and thematic principles should frame his new work, Joyce picked from these rough lexical jottings and embryonic story elements, often exploring anew old concerns from various narrative approaches,<sup>12</sup> and composed disconnected sketches, later to become the structural *nodes* scattered evenly throughout the book in order to ensure its cohesion.<sup>13</sup>

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March 2006; see Sam Slote, ‘Prolegomenon to the Development of Wakean Styles: New Acquisitions at the National Library of Ireland’, *JJQ* 42/43.1/4 (2004-2006): 26-7, and *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-chapter Genetic Guide*, ed. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 11, 41 n. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Sam Slote’s words from the introduction to *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> A good example is the rethinking of the Tristan and Isolde story from the VI.A notes under the headings ‘*Exiles (.I.)*’ and ‘*Exiles (.II.)*’ for an early sketch. See Hayman, *The ‘Wake’ in Transit*, 56-92; Rose’s subsequent developments in his review essay of Hayman’s book, 962-3; and, for a more recent genetic summary, *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake*, 7-8, 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> Hayman developed his useful concept of nodality first in ‘Nodality and the

Whereas the haphazard wanderings of Joyce's Odyssean heroes had made possible a fairly sequential mode of writing,<sup>14</sup> the architectural problems that necessarily arose from the elaboration of random episodes entailed a less linear approach to composition – the first two 'Books' (I and III) to have been drafted being the two opposite narrative currents – and may have played a part in suggesting a cyclical structure for the new work. Joyce expressed the divergence in compositional needs in a (now famous) letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver dated 9 October 1923 as follows:

The construction [of *Work in Progress*] is quite different from *Ulysses* where at least the ports of call were known beforehand. [...] I work as much as I can because these are not fragments but active elements and when they are more and a little older they will begin to fuse of themselves.<sup>15</sup>

It is with those data in hand, while bearing in mind the enduring continuity of some of Joyce's preoccupations and achievements throughout his oeuvre, especially those stylistic or narrative modes in *Ulysses* which Joyce recycled and travestied for *Finnegans Wake*, that one should reconstruct the slow emergence of a radically new linguistic 'project' at the end of the structuration period (1923-6), after the basic thematic strands which were to run through the *Wake* had been fashioned.

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Infra-Structure of *Finnegans Wake*', *JJQ* 16.1-2 (1978-9): 135-49 (revised as the second chapter of *The 'Wake' in Transit*, 36-55). See also Matthew J. C. Hodgart's often ignored seminal study 'The Earliest Sections of *Finnegans Wake*', *James Joyce Review* I (1957): 3-18.

<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that the earlier 1914 sketches, now lost, probably centred on the *Nostos*, especially 'Eumaeus', and 'Circe'; see A. Walton Litz, *The Art of James Joyce: Method and Design in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964 ed.), 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> *Letters I* 204. Joyce's remark, also to Harriet Shaw Weaver, after mentioning 'Cyclops' and 'Circe', that '[t]he elements needed will only fuse after a prolonged existence together' illustrates the gradual shift, half-way through *Ulysses*, towards the compositional modes that will characterize *Finnegans Wake* (*SL* 241; letter of 20 July 1919).

The main stages of this project are revealed more clearly if one pairs general draft development against the linguistic innovations in contemporaneous *Wake* research notebooks. The first of these early episodes to assume linguistic significance was the encounter between St Patrick and the druid, or 'pidgin fella balkelly' (now in Book IV), whose various revision stages will already bring out Berkeley's pidgin and St Patrick's Nippon English by the end of 1923.<sup>16</sup> While those inaugural sketches were being polished, Joyce's research notebooks began storing the earliest Wakean concretions and scraps of foreign idioms whose significance, despite their randomness at first, lies in the fact that early seminal notes on Babel were entered about the same time. Here is a representative sample:

VI.B.1 (February-April 1924)<sup>17</sup>

p. 102: 'Ty Gwyn / white House' (Welsh with English translation).

p. 115: 'deiectio a saxo Tarpeio / execratio' (Latin for 'thrown from the Tarpeian rock / execration').

VI.B.4; end 1923-beginning 1924<sup>18</sup> for the first pages containing Russian and Dano-Norwegian<sup>19</sup> elements but no use until after 1926, except for:

p. 5: 'bWhere ladies have<sup>b</sup> / bthey that a dog<sup>b</sup> / bmean sort herring?<sup>b</sup>' (the 'How are you today, sir?' motif in a funnily

<sup>16</sup> See SL 397-8: retrospective letter to Frank Budgen dated 20 August 1939.

<sup>17</sup> Narrowed down from post October 1923-autumn 1924 in *JJA* 29 according to the James Joyce Digital Archive (hereafter referred to as JJDA), whose more recent estimates, based on Danis Rose's revised chronology in *The Textual Diaries of James Joyce* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995), 20-37, I will often follow throughout. Compare with *The Finnegans Wake Notebooks at Buffalo. Notebook VI.B.1*, ed. Vincent Deane, Daniel Ferrer and Geert Lernout, intr. Geert Lernout (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> However, dated in its entirety between January and late April 1929 on JJDA.

<sup>19</sup> This blanket term has been used in the case of common forms. For a good recent presentation of the historico-linguistic context warranting the confusion of Danish and Norwegian in Joyce's days as well as an assessment of his competence, see Kristian Smidt, "I'm Not Half Norawain for Nothing": Joyce and Norway', *JJQ* 26.3 (1989): 333-50.

Anglicized Dano-Norwegian [draft usage in January 1924, now *FW* 186.32]).

VI.B.8 (May-November 1924)

p. 61; ‘└ Zug / ⊥ Schiff / ⇐ aero / ⊤ auto’ (a generic note associating rudimentary attempts at sigla with means of transport, half in German). The list was reworked on VI.B.8 145 as part of a larger list of sigla.

These first foreign elements tend to be submerged amid strongly English-based lexical constructions or prompted by the surrounding cultural context of the notetaking, as is the case with the earliest Breton samples in VI.B.14 23-7, 57, 61-2, composed between August 1924 and January 1925, or, later, with the Middle Egyptian found in VI.B.32 (ca. 1925-7) and VI.B.15 (mid-September to December 1926, or January 1927 according to JJDA) as part of Joyce’s first jottings on the *Book of the Dead*.<sup>20</sup> The first VI.B.4 pages are therefore all the more revealing since they show both the primary function of the linguistic research at that stage, i.e. the translation of the motifs or, more generally, recurrent key elements which will be crucial in the overall shaping of the work or the organization of narrative units (the Scandinavian fragment), and (possibly) the first list(s) of unrelated linguistic units, which were to mark the later compilation of foreign vocabulary (mixed Dano-Norwegian and Russian notetaking). In the following extract from a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver dated 27 January 1925, Joyce’s usual epistolary style of ‘precise indirections’ confirms, if somewhat jocularly, the slow advent on the nocturnal scene of a Babelian vein in the translation of such elements:

The words expressing nightmares are from Greek, German, Irish, Japanese, Italian (my niece’s childish pronunciation) and Assyrian (the

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<sup>20</sup> See Jacques Aubert, ‘Breton Proverbs in Notebook VI.B.14’, *AWN* XV.6 (1978): 86-9, and Danis Rose, *Chapters of Coming Forth by Day* (Colchester: A Wake Newsletter Press, 1978) respectively. Other crops of Breton words were provided by Rose in ‘Breton in  $\wedge$  a/b’, *AWN* XV.6 (1978): 90-2, and, more recently, by Ian MacArthur in ‘More Breton in *Finnegans Wake*’, *Genetic Joyce Studies* 20 (2020), at [https://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/articles/GJS20/GJS20\\_MacArthur](https://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/articles/GJS20/GJS20_MacArthur).

stargroup called 'the gruesome hound'). I speak the latter language very fluently and have several nice volumes of it in the kitchen printed on jampots. (SL 306)

Most scraps of foreign idioms woven into the drafts of that period come from languages of which Joyce had at least a smattering. The mention of Japanese and Assyrian marks a more radical break from the Indo-European family circle Joyce usually tapped, and what could have passed as a unique freak of composition will prove to have been a decisive step in the linguistic reorientation of the *Wake*, as a sample of entries found in contemporaneous notebooks will confirm:

VI.B.19 (September-December 1925)

p. 76: 'Egy darab 20 / fillerés abosada / utan a fogantyu / kehuzanda' (slightly garbled Hungarian for 'after feeding a 20-fillér coin you must pull the handle')

VI.B.12 (May-July or August 1926)

p. 14: various transliterated forms for 'I' in Japanese, uncrossed, as in Mme Raphaël's transcription (VI.C.6 4-5), but used in *FW* 486.26-27.

pp. 111-3: Japanese units in ideograms and transcribed, with some English translations; note especially the two Shintoic divinities *Amé no minaka nushi no mikoto* ('heaven's middle master', p. 112) and *Ama terasu*, whose meaning is broken down.

Soon after seminal notes on Babel, the (third-level) Esperanto addition, now in *FW* 565.25-28, is the first passage not in one of Joyce's more familiar languages to have been incorporated directly into the text.<sup>21</sup> It is the first sign testifying obliquely to the synthetic quality of Joyce's Babelian night tongue in progress, 'an artificial tongue with a natural curl' (*FW* 169.15-16; Shaun's mock-blazon of Shem opening *FW* I.7), which will have prolonged echoes in later note-taking on universal languages (see *infra*).<sup>22</sup> This qualitative leap of

<sup>21</sup> See *JJA* 60:4, 122: first draft of 'G' subsection of III.4, October-November 1925.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, Joyce's interest in 'Basic English', which was being elaborated during the

the Wakean idiom outside the Indo-European frame of reference is on a par with a quantitative leap, from the isolated portmanteau word to a more fully-fledged sentence built independently from motif translation or to the first linguistic indexes, when the structuring period draws to a close – once Joyce had devised a full flexible network of sigla as character universals or archetypes in order to channel disparate notebook material into coherent, unifying planes of meaning.

This first ‘linguistic offensive’ peaks in 1927-8 with the emergence of longer polyglottal lists in which the frequency of many-coloured deletions indicates several runs through the material, with increasing draft usage of foreign data in various sections of the work. The emergence of this truly Babelian writing as well as the incipient thematic organization of some clusters will be seen from a brief selection of Joyce’s linguistic preoccupations between 1926 and 1929 (with extent of draft usage), randomly culled from five of the eleven workbooks of the time:<sup>23</sup>

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*Wake’s* gestation by C. K. Ogden, for whom he recorded the final pages of ‘Anna Livia Plurabelle’ (FW pp. 213-16) which Ogden subsequently rendered into his minimalist idiom (see *transition* 21 [1932]: 259-62), is worth emphasizing since the 850-word construct – trimmed to ‘six hundred and six ragwords’ in *FW* 478.09? – stands at the opposite end on the spectrum of linguistic universality. See Susan Shaw Sailer, ‘Universalizing Languages: *Finnegans Wake* Meets Basic English’, *JJQ* 36 (1999): 853-68; Jesse Schotter, ‘Verbivocovisuals: James Joyce and the Problem of Babel’, *JJQ* 48.1 (2010): 89-109; and, for a wider literary context related to linguistic universalism, Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). The earliest account of the presence of (especially) Volapük and Esperanto in *Finnegans Wake* is Matthew J. C. Hodgart’s ‘Artificial Languages’, in *A Wake Digest*, ed. Clive Hart and Fritz Senn (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), 56-8, which also mentions Otto Jespersen’s *An International Language*, for which see n. 32 *infra*. I dealt with the paradoxical, ‘however basically English’ (*FW* 116.26) dimension of Wakeese in relation to the presence of international auxiliary languages (IALs) in Joyce’s text in an unpublished talk on ‘Joyce’s Artificial Tongues with a Natural Curl in *Finnegans Wake*’, given on a special ‘Joyce and Linguistics’ panel at the XVIII<sup>th</sup> International James Joyce Symposium on ‘Mediterranean Joyce’ (University of Trieste, June 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Notetaking in some of these languages, especially Russian, Dutch, Dano-Norwegian