

# "The Same Renew" : Finnegans Wake as a chamber of echoes

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“The Same Renew”:  
*Finnegans Wake* as a Chamber of Echoes

Fritz Senn

If Repetition simply means, as it will in the following remarks, saying (or writing) what has been said before, either within an immediate context or over an intertextual expanse of tradition, then Joyce, who does everything he does more radically than others and has an irritating flair for thrusting the obvious upon us, has to be represented in this framework. It is equally true that he never repeated himself (all his works are unique) and that he kept elaborating the same themes. The truism that there is nothing new under the sun is demonstrated in encyclopaedic variation. Fairly early the disheartening insight that also nothing new can be said may have dawned on the ambitious author: “*Nullum est iam dictam, quod non sit dictum prius,*” thus Terence in the Prologue to his *Eunuch*, more than two thousand years ago. Joyce’s Leopold Bloom unwittingly translates this into “Never know whose thoughts you’re chewing” (*Ulysses* 140<sup>1</sup>). We can’t help, Joyce seems to have realised at some pristine turning point, being repetitive; there is nothing to create but remakes, and one way out is to parade the artefacts *as* remakes. Perhaps nowhere more blatantly than in the 14th episode of *Ulysses*, where the prose reminds us in successive stages of literary craftsmanship of past ages. Whatever Joyce does in apparently rapid pioneering strides into novel territory (or “*ignotas . . . in*

<sup>1</sup> Parenthetical references follow the convention of Joyce publications: page numbers are to the Viking Critical Library, New York, of *Dubliners* (1971) and *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (1968) and *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler, London: Bodley Head, 1986. All editions of *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939) have practically the same pagination.

*artes*"<sup>2</sup>) he always carries along and freely displays the complete bag of timeworn narrative tricks.

The Joyce canon begins and ends with Repetition. The evidence is well-known, a few reminders are sufficient. Take the first and the last. The opening prose sentence, "There was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke" ("The Sisters"), unusual for its time, takes us into an unspecified sequence and prior occurrences known to the source but not the goal of the information. The last sentence in the published works is the unterminated end of *Finnegans Wake*:

A way a last a lone a loved a long the

and in itself a reiteration of lexical and phonetic patterning. Above all, at least in one dominant reading, since a definite article requires a noun, it provokes supplementation. The best candidate for the missing noun is the opening word, "riverrun," so that at least a link "along the river" is approximated and the book circles back on itself – which has become one of its most advertised features. There is validity in such joining, for *Finnegans Wake*, in so far as it "takes place," takes specific place along the river Liffey in Dublin. As it happens, that phrase, common enough, can be found at the very outset, the second stanza of the first poem in *Chamber Music*: "There's music along the river." Such a memory would signpost the *Wake's* musicality. The linking is initiated by grammar and perhaps by subterranean etymology: Joyce's fade-out sentence consists of six articles among eleven words; article is after all a joint or link, *articulus*, and it is active in just this function.

In other words, a typographical no-end (no full stop) links with a no-beginning (no capital letter). As though to reinforce the tendency here elaborated, the first word, "riverrun," happens to begin with a prefix *ri-*, which in Italian announces recurrence. There is no necessity to extract an Italian prefix from an English river, but the same short introductory

<sup>2</sup> "*Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes*," from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (VIII.188) is put in front of *A Portrait*. It pinpoints the moment when Daedalus the artificer, trapped on Crete, considers ways of escape: "and he dispersed his mind towards configurations or techniques (or of course arts in the narrow sense) not yet known." It is characteristic that Joyce refers far back to such a mythological moment which points into the future.

paragraph soon afterwards sports a first deviant element, “*commodius vicus of recirculation*,” in which a Latin word thinly disguises the name of the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico, whose view has commonly been simplified in the formula that History repeats itself.

*Finnegans Wake* is extreme, and Joyce an author in whom extremes meet. Paradoxically he never did the same thing twice: no reader would ever confuse a paragraph from *Dubliners* with one from *Finnegans Wake*, and most parts of *Ulysses* are highly idiosyncratic. But he can also be seen as an inspired recirculator of the same material in increasing sophistication. In this light, “along the river” occurs in both the first and the last prose work, they are “repeated” – yet the later reincarnation differentiates itself by such trivia as a tiny space between “a” and “long” or the separation of “river” from its component “run,” and by the cardinal spiralling from the blankness of an ending to the ongoing flux of the new start.

### Changing Shape and Hue

It is of course the retrospective Joyce that interests within a conference devoted to Repetition. Reading is very much a tracing backwards to precedents. Some precedents are flaunted in a title, like “Ulysses,” or foregrounded in a notable name, Dedalus. Others are less easy to discern.

One perennial theme in Joyce is the continuity of basic patterns that may be so common that we hardly perceive them any more. *Dubliners* focuses on repetitions that may be wholly unspectacular, like ordinary scenes picked at random. Life goes on the same, attempts to change it seem to fail, characters see themselves as imprisoned – one reason why such keywords as the ones injected into the first paragraph, *paralysis*, *simony* and *gnomon*, can be applied universally.

Recurrences also tend to lend structure to what otherwise might seem to be lack of coherence (there seemed something haphazard and sketchy about the stories). Repetitions are bracketing devices. Some themes pervade the collection, above all attempts to break out, usually unsuccessful, as in “An Encounter,” “Eveline,” “A Little Cloud” or “Counterparts,” the fate of citizens who live alone (“Eveline,” “Clay,” “A Painful Case”) or who are trapped into marriage (“The Boarding House,” “A Little Cloud,” “Counterparts”). Formally, the garner of stories set off

with a boy studying a “lighted square of window” thinking about a dying priest, and closes with a mature man looking out of a window, remembering a dead young admirer of his wife (“The Dead”). The window is lighted “faintly and evenly” and the boy repeats words “softly” to himself; the snow outside the window is “falling softly” and again “falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling” in the cadenced ending of the story.

The opening of “Two Gallants” thematises a dreary and yet gaily coloured sameness and recirculates a few key elements:

The grey warm evening of August had descended upon the city, and a mild warm air, a memory of summer, circulated in the streets. The streets, shuttered for the repose of Sunday, swarmed with a gaily coloured crowd. Like illumined pearls the lamps shone from the summits of their tall poles upon the living texture below, which, changing shape and hue unceasingly, sent up into the warm grey evening air an unchanging, unceasing murmur.

The vignette also circumscribes the works yet to come, characterised by an unchanging, unceasing murmur and yet changing shape and hue unceasingly. Joyce is forever circulating memories.

### *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man and Ulysses*

By its nature as a variant of the Bildungsroman genre, the *Portrait* presents a figure as it is growing up. Stephen Dedalus, very much a *figure* and thus something formed, not alone repeats himself in new roles or changing adaptations, but through a conspicuous name also calls up a mythological figure, Daedalus as known from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, an inventor, engineer, imitator, craftsman, who in turn created figures or fictions (a wooden cow, for instance). We watch Stephen engaged in mental fictions throughout. At the moment when he finds his strange name a portent he starts metamorphosing a girl wading in the water into a seabird according to Ovidian prototypes. One of his first activities, on the sports field of his school is, that he “kept on the fringe of his line . . . , feigning to run now and then” (*Portrait* 8; feigning derives, etymologically, from Latin *ingere*). Survival is in part a mastering of the appropriate feints<sup>3</sup>. *A Portrait*

<sup>3</sup> Stephen does a lot of feigning; later on he is feigning “still greater haste,” or

is thus the story of, literally, transfigurations. Stephen imagines how in that glorious "moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured" (65), where the term has religious and romantic overtones; not soon after, in quite a different atmosphere, a dreamlike woman has "her face transfigured by a lecherous cunning" (99). So in typical Joycean fashion the verb transfigure itself acts out the process it describes; and in fact the novel is characterised by its serial variation of motifs that are often verbal patterns, so that it is possible to extrapolate the whole artefact from its first sample, which is in itself an arrangement of repetitions. The most commonplace is a series of "*Tralala lala*," almost pure phonemic replication, with one "*Tralala tralaladdy*" thrown in for good measure (7).

"Once upon a time," it sets off, and already circles back on the keyword: "and a very good time it was," which already gives "time" a different meaning. The duplication that follows: ". . . there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road . . ." will be seen as a mnemonic help for the childish listener, but it also foreshadows the *Portrait's* characteristic device. Physical and mental development corresponds to lexical reprocessing of growing complexity. In biological analogy, everything is germinally present in the first cell that comes under inspection. Experience of today becomes a memory tomorrow and is revalued.

Constant rephrasing also serves to co-ordinate the seemingly chaotic nature of the novel, which seemed "too discursive, formless, unrestrained" to even sophisticated early but unprepared readers.

It is perhaps in Stephen's villanelle, the one fully presented specimen of his poetic efforts, that the device of iterative elaboration shows itself most clearly. The first stanza

*Are you not weary of ardent ways,  
Lure of the fallen seraphim?  
Tell no more of enchanted days. (Portrait 217)*

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"composure" or "patience" (*Portrait* 86, 96, 237). To feign is, of course, to imitate standard roles or poses and to repeat them in a social context. In *Ulysses* Stephen Dedalus is instantly called a "mummer" (5).

predetermines all the rhymes to follow. All further choices are narrowed down, they lead to “rays of rhyme: ways, days, blaze, praise, raise” (218), in the course of further creation “lays” and “gaze” will be added. A villanelle, with its interplay of freedom and determination, limitations and possibilities, is auto-repetitious. Stephen’s creation moreover recirculates motifs from the dream out of which it arises and, beyond that, from all of the preceding parts of the novel. It demonstrates what in *Ulysses* will be called a “retrospective arrangement” of known elements that are recirculated in a conventional choreography. The villanelle is thus a small scale model of the *Portrait* as structured recurrence. Formally and thematically the beginning sets up a genetic model and also, if we want, a variation of Stephen’s first poem, a mere composition of “pull out his eyes” and “Apologise,” which turns threats into a pleasing fiction.

The process is continued into the next work, *Ulysses*, where Stephen Dedalus undergoes many more transformations. Verbally, the *Portrait* is continued even into *Finnegans Wake*, where its opening formula “Once upon a time, and a very good time it was” is in turn taken up and varied:

There was once upon a wall and a hooghooog wall a was (69)

Eins within a space and wearywide space it wast (152)

O, fibbing once upon a spray what a queer and queasy spree it was (319)

Once upon a drunk and a fairly good drunk it was and the rest of your blatherumskite! (453)

Once upon the grass and a hopping high grass it was (516)

One’s apurr a puss a story about brid and breakfedes (597)

One’s upon a thyme and two’s behind their lettuce leap (20)<sup>4</sup>

The better known a phrase becomes, the more it fixes itself in memory, the more it lends itself to modification; “One’s apurr a puss” has strayed far from the original matrix and yet previous reinforcements have made it perceptible. Perhaps it is no accident that a hackneyed formula containing “time” can serve as a prime example. Time is, after all, almost wholly characterised, and measured, by repetition.

<sup>4</sup> All the way to fade-outs like “A time. And a find time” or “the ones upon a toppers” (356, 322).

The very title “Ulysses” suggests that one way to treat this novel (if it is one) is as a rehash of one of the oldest epics in contemporary staging: the shadow of the *Odyssey* is there for readers to compare, to use as a guideline, or to ignore, according to inclination. The book more and more regurgitates its own events, motifs, or memories, and there are passages, like

O sweetie all your little girlwhite up I saw dirt bracegirdle made me do love sticky we two naughty Grace darling she him half past the bed met him pike hoses frillies for Raoul de perfume your wife black hair heave under embon senorita young eyes Mulvey plump bubs me breadvan Winkle red slippers she rusty sleep wander years of dreams return tail end Agendath swoony lovey showed me her next year in drawers return next in her next her next. (*Ulysses* 312)

that would be practically incomprehensible to any novice reader opening the novel at this point. The paragraph is made up almost entirely of recalls. Reading here turns into a tracing back to previous incarnations. *Ulysses* appropriately was the first 20th century prose fiction that was processed into a concordance. Ironically, though the next work, contains many parts that appear in kind just like the one just quoted, without, however, any possibility of retrospective linking, it is even more dependent on repeated patterns.

### *Finnegans Wake*

*Finnegans Wake* is suffused by repetition in its primary sense of *repetere*, ‘attacking or seeking again, of a renewed effort’; in Latin it also denoted ‘returning or starting again’. Textual energies emphasise an *élan vital* as a constant striving again, and in part it is a going back to first beginnings, like Eve and Adam (in this order) or the first legendary invaders of Ireland. The book is chaotic but insistent in its effusive urge, it does not appear to give up ever.

One prime paradox about Joyce’s last and extreme work is that it consists entirely, almost, of either novelties or mistakes, deficiencies or over-achievements, non-sense or hyper-sense – and at the same time it seems indefatigably to reassert the platitude that there is nothing new to impart. It flouts all traditions by substantiating them with renewed



impetus. Its techniques are besides the norm, and so are its minute particles, as any spelling checker will hilariously bear out. Many words are neologism (or lexical misses), neither heard nor seen before: "Onheard of and umscene!" (17). These are communicative failures of expression or else semantic re-enactments. The irony is that the words that call up *unheard* and *unseen* have indeed (at least probably) not been heard or seen before, and yet we can only recognise them because they approximate those standard forms in our memory of the language. Spectral meanings are superimposed: seeing or not seeing has something to do with the surrounding scene. A first step in interpretation is to extract the old and familiar from its often cryptic guises and interferences. "unheard" and "unseen" (as well as perhaps "obscene") emerge by a precarious act of discovery or detection.

*Finnegans Wake*, though branching out into ever exotic territory, largely appeals to our memories of things known and – if we are lucky – calls them to mind. Such as the well-known words of Ecclesiastes that seem to underlie everything in "there is nihil nuder under the clothing moon" (493), except that the moon has been substituted for the sun. There is possibly a recall of Cleopatra ("There's nothing left remarkable/Beneath the visiting moon," *Caesar and Cleopatra*, IV,15,67-8), and a contrast between being nude and being clothed. Novelty may well consist in different vestments for old nudities. An old proverb is dressed up anew. Nothing new under the sun is put in an unprecedented form which contradicts its message. This happens all the time, and in particular to one of the key phrases, a commonplace formula of eternal repetition that is most clearly sounded as "Teems of times and happy returns. The seim anew" (215) and echoed in transmutations:

Themes have thimes and habit reburns. To flame in you. (614) – The same renew (226) – This aim to you! (510) – Time after time. She sehm asnuh (620) – And Sein annews (277) – moves in vicous cicles yet renews the same (134)

Such a series of varied repetitions (with many fainter echoes) again exemplifies the inherent truth and falsifies it by the constant innovation: the same is not the same, but the novelties are also never quite new.

As a matter of fact and reading experience then, *Finnegans Wake* is a recirculation of things known. We never quite grasp what exactly the main figure has done in that mysterious sin in the Park, but it calls up notorious

cases, original sin to begin with, furthermore all the misdeeds in the annals of crime or scandal. Nor do we identify who the main figure is, so that we need the acrostic HCE, or approximations thereof, to remind us of his shadowy and versatile presence. "Who the main figure *is*" turns out to be a wrong way of putting it, for there are no more figures or characters clearly outlined: they consist in variegated serial recalls.

On the whole the *Wake* generates few new and independent plots, though it does recirculate a few basic encounters or conversations or episodes. One of them is the reiterated incident of some Irish soldier Buckley shooting a Russian General, but we would have a hard time figuring it out if a basic story had not been passed on through the Scholia, Richard Ellmann's informative biography, which reports an anecdote that is attributed to Joyce's father. The incident, as it happens, is often alluded to and in one long chapter discussed at large, but somehow never really told. Readers, novices in particular, seem to be most comfortable with the retelling of fables, like the Mookse and the Gripes or the Ondt and the Gracehoper, because the Aesopian (and again LaFontainean) prototypes supply a convenient grid to hold on to.

One corollary is that the events or miniplots, because supposedly all common knowledge, need not be retold in detail, a few cues are enough to tip us off and invite us to supplement our own versions. Any suspicion of, say, "Eve" can suggest the Fall or Seduction, any mention of Waterloo, or even a phrase like "Up guards and at them" (accredited to the Duke of Wellington on the occasion) brings to mind a historical battle. *Finnegans Wake* is a dense accumulation of reminders, even if most of them elude us. Most such reminders or signposts are anchored in the western tradition, many in Ireland (St. Patrick, O'Connell, Parnell). The book resorts to referential mnemonic shorthand, as it did in the phrase quoted above: the archetypal character "moves in vicious circles yet renews the same," which has already been presented as a permutation of the theme "the same anew"; this amounts to a vicious circle (or cycle), but the defective spelling *vicious* calls up, once again, Giambattista Vico who claimed that history moves in repetitive patterns. Such familiarities can easily occlude further anomalies like the verb "renews" which seems to combine the expected "renews" (maybe "reviews"), and in which the root "mew" might suggest moulting, that is some bird's change of feathers: "mew" is a derivation of Latin *mutare*. The multiple hints, some overt, most of them less so and many no doubt spurious, can lead us far afield into ingenious ramifications.

*Finnegans Wake* is the repetitive literary artefact *par excellence*. In exaggeration one might claim that it is nothing but repetition. A permutation of the same sixty-odd letters, it says the same things over again and is thereby tautological, or rather, in its own confession, "Toughtough, tootological" (468), "which is tautautologically the same thing" (6). At times the tautology is a stutter or a convoluted effort at articulation: "As we there are where are we are we there from totmtittot to teetootomtotalitarian. Tea tea too oo" (260). Occasionally the text bursts into word chains: "through a windr of a wondr in a wildr is weltr as a wirbl of a warbl is a world" (597). Reciprocal echoes are frequent, especially in dialogues where the speakers are ever at cross purposes, as between the Mookse and the Gripes:

- Efter thousand yaws, O Gripes con my sheepskins, yow will be belined to the world, enscayed Mookse the pius.
- Ofter thousand yores, amsered Gripes the gregary, be the goat of MacHammud's, yours may be still, O Mookse, more botheared. (156)

In this echoing games "Efter" becomes "Ofter," "yaws" turns into "yores," so that the millennium is viewed in two different ways, once from the point of view of a pious Christian (or else a pope named Pius or Gregory), one from a Mohammedan one. The sheep are opposed to the goats, as on Doomsday, and the sense of seeing ("blind" and "line") is pitted against hearing: there are two ears in "botheared," but conversely also an Irish word "bothered" which means deaf. We may see the beard of a local Mohammed as a goatee or hear the phrase "blind to the world" as term for drunkenness. The point made is that, inevitably, we match the anomalous wording against our erratic thesaurus of erudition. The similarities seem to sharpen the eye and the ear for any aberration, and as always there are elements ("enscayed," "amsered") that seem to defy easy appropriation or that, in other words, are not (yet?) identifiable as repetitions.

The book is rescriptive, rewriting itself all the time. In its own words, "the world, mind, is, was and will be writing its own wrunes for ever" (19). One effect is that the more often a motif is reiterated, the more the wording may depart from the matrix. In fact deviations can only be from something already known and repeated. "Obesume Burgearse Benefice" (371) may have little or no resemblance to the motto of the city of Dublin, "*Oboedientia civium urbis felicitas*," but many other incarnations of it

the hearsomeness of the burger felicitates the whole of the polis (23), the obedience of the citizens elp the ealth of the ole (76), Thine obesity, O civilian, hits the felicitude of our orb! (140), To obedient of civicity in urbanious at felicity (277), durblinly obasiant to the felicias of the skivis (347), happy burgages abeyance would make homesweetstown hopeygoalucrey (358), Obeisance to their sitinins is the follicity of this Orp! (494), Obeyance from the townsmen spills felixity by the toun (540), And the ubideintia of the savium is our ervics fenicitas (610)

pave the way to make it a semantic possibility, and even a divergence like "the boxomness of the bedelias makes hobbyhodge happy in his hole" (265-6) is at some stage of recognition drawn into the circuit. Each single item in the dissonant versions can trigger a new explorative endeavour. In the items quoted above, "homesweetstown" links the City of Dublin with the song "Home Sweet Home," another recurrent motif, which readers of *Ulysses* may be tempted to link with the theme of Bloom's home and "Who is he when he's at home" and Home Rule, and so on backwards in the canon. Joyce's works provide an evocative regression, they are cultural ghost stories.

*Finnegans Wake* reprocesses itself in abundance and it also assimilates pre-existing texts, literary, historical, all the way to advertisements like "genghis is goon for you" (593). So it consists, by its own admission, of "borrowed brogues, . . . painful digests, once current puns, quashed quotatoes, messes of mottage . . . , stale shestnuts, . . . borrowed plumes," and is therefore the most extended piece of plagiarism, a "forged palimpsests" foisted upon us by the "pelagiariast pen" (182-3) or "plagiast dayman" (577). Of course, one implication is, all literature is of that kind, one continuous reverbalsation, a few changes rung here and there.

Joyce's extravagant work is still largely uncharted territory, and one of its characteristics is that scholarship about it is able to proceed without excessive curiosity about semantic minutiae. It is the *Wake's* glory that it defies understanding, which in turn may lead to a fashionable notion that no understanding (in the traditional sense) is even called for, that there is actually something philistine in the very attempt to make out pedestrian sense. Now for all practical purposes, understanding in *Finnegans Wake* is replaced by the discovery of repetition, or its creative invention. We may not know what something on the page is supposed to convey, but we

remember having come across some similar configuration before, and there is something comforting in the aha-effect. Such a mental triviality is enshrined in the etymology of *knowing*: “I have seen – and therefore I know” both in Greek (*oida*) and in German, where *wissen* is linked to the act of seeing (as in Latin *videre*). I understand something in the *Wake*, the self-deception goes, because I have seen it before. Though we still may not know what it is we have seen.

It is a common *Wake* experience that by way of recirculation a cryptic item gradually becomes vaguely familiar and is accompanied by a tingle of recognition. A prominent riddle, which occurs in triplicate early in the game, “why do I am alook alike a poss of porterpease?” (where “a poss” changes to “two poss” and then “three poss,” 21-2), has never been satisfactorily clarified, let alone solved, though attempts have not been lacking. When in the course of reading on we are exposed to some dozen verbal semblances of the pristine riddle – “Hwere can a ketch or hook alive a suit and sowterkins? / whye do we aime alike a pose of poeter peaced? / why do you lack a link of luck to poise a pont of perfect, pease?” (311, 372, 493) – they appear like old acquaintances and the atavistic pleasure of recollection may make us neglect further inquiry. So *déjà lu* substitutes for knowledge. Which is what in part accounts for the liturgical nature of *Finnegans Wake*, the reassurance of accustomed cadences. It is again the basically opaque texture of the book that makes us all the more dependent on repetitive grids or holds.

### Merge of Unnotions

The multi-repetitive nature of *Finnegans Wake* can be sketched in one short paragraph taken from the last pages of the book. Naturally, self-perpetuation tends to increase towards the end when there is more previous material to remould. (For convenience and reference the sentences are shown as separated and labelled units.)

- (1) Fennsense, finnsonse, aworn!
- (2) Tuck upp those wide shorts.
- (3) The pink of the busket for sheer give. Peeps.
- (4) Stand up to hard ware and step into style.
- (5) If you soil may, puett, guett me prives.
- (6) For newmanmaun set a marge to the merge of unnotions.

(7) Innition wons agame. (614)

Newcomers are likely to be puzzled, experienced readers would feel surrounded by semi-familiar shades. Since the given topic is repetition, a first glance should describe them. Some are internal. In (1) “finnsonse” echoes or varies “Fennsense,” the same thing with a difference. (4) has a parallel structure, in (5) the oddities of “puett” and “guett” are matched. (6) contains a slight variation in “newmanmaun” – as though “maun” might indeed be a new “man”; “marge” becomes “merge,” and “unnotions” is perpetuated in “Innition.” All repetition with minor changes, a typical feature of the whole book.

The seasoned and attentive reader addressed above would in all probability remember precedents for all items except (2), (3) and (4), Wakean stereotypes. Earlier occurrences like “Sonne feine, somme feehn avaunt!” (593) and “sinnfinners” (36) prepared the way for (1), if we are ready to accept spoonerisms; some might recall “*Sinn fein amhain!*” from *Ulysses* (251). “Tuck upp those wide shorts” (2) seems to derive from the music hall stage or a minstrel show, the Wake usually perpetrates it in the shape of “*Take off that white hat!*” (32), with reinforcements like “flick off that hvide aske, big head! / Take off thatch whitehat . . . Tick off that whilehot / Teak off that wise head!” (320, 322, 607) and others. But it also brings back quite another context, one of the washerwomen’s “Tuck up your sleeves” (196) in the Anna Livia Plurabelle episode.

Variations of the last three sentences have resounded before and may at least vaguely linger in our oblivious minds. “When you sell get my price! . . . gift you soil me peepat my prize . . . Ere you sail foreget my prize . . . If you pulls me over pay me, prhyse! . . . where you canceal me you mayst forced guage my bribes” (500, 327, 433, 375, 366). Sometimes the layers of concealment are more dense: “where you canceal me you mayst forced guage my bribes” (366), “sold for song, of which you have thought my praise too much my price”(571). All of this is to leave out of account the partial echoes and the fade-outs.<sup>5</sup> The earlier recalls also make it possible

<sup>5</sup> “Pride, O pride, thy prize!,” “Beat my Price Get my Prize,” “Fetch my price!” “what a sellpriceget,” “If I sell whose, dears? Was I sold here tears?” “To Be Soiled,” and many more.

to find a place for the single exclamation "Peep".

"For newmanmaun set a marge to the merge of unnotions" follows two fairly clear-cut prefigurations: "no mouth has the might to set a mearbound to the march of a landsmaul," "No mum has the rod to pud a stub to the lurch of amotion" (292, 365), and a number of minor ones. "Innition wons agame" echoes "a nation wants a gaze" (43), and an earlier avatar in *Ulysses* as a patriotic song (*A Nation Once Again*, 260).

These echoing phrases did not originate in the *Wake* itself, nor in *Ulysses*, they pre-existed, are quotations, in this case historical ones. Widening circles of stereotype oratory would take us to Irish nationalist slogans. "Sinn fein" or, more completely, the Irish "*Sinn fein, sinn fein avaunt*" ("Ourselves alone") was a political programme that surfaced in the 1890s and later became the name of a political movement. Once this background emerges, we may also enlist anglicised forms like "Ourselves, our soles alone," "Our svalves are svalves aroon!," "Our set, our set's allohn" (628, 311, 324). "If you sell me, get my prize" has been attributed to Charles Stewart Parnell as a cynical comment to his doubtfully loyal followers when his political standing was in jeopardy. So the phrase also signals Parnell, his rise and tribulations, his betrayal and his fall. Item (6), "For newmanmaun set a marge to the merge of unnotions" is an even more famous quote of Parnell; one version of it is inscribed on his monument in Dublin, that "no man has a right to fix the boundary of a nation." "Innition wons agame" is an easily noticed change on a famous song, "A Nation Once Again," it encapsulated the hope of Irish nationalists in the 19th century. The phrase "once again" of course in turn underlines continuity and, therefore, repetition.

So even a surface knowledge of historical clichés can provide something like an overall pattern of Irish slogans, 19th century history is reduced to a handful of fossilised sayings. Parnell, for one, has become a thesaurus of catch phrases, history a series of verbal repeats.

There are formal similarities as well: most sentences are grammatical (or else implied political) imperatives. "Tuck upp those wide shorts" and "Stand up to hard ware . . ." as different commands would fit into such categories. "The pink of the busket for sheer give" and "Stand up to hardware and step into style" have the air of being advertisement, incitements to commercial, not nationalist, action. Political and commercial advertisements moreover merge in the idea of getting one's price.

Tracing antecedents, within the book itself or within the various cultures in question, is part of the game of interpretation. This is where spotting a patriotic song comes dangerously near an illusion of having understood the significance of “Innition wons agame.” In an essential way, it evokes but also does *not* mean “A Nation Once Again,” but whatever is left over, perhaps the start of a process, *initiation*, and a game seems to be won by plucky enterprise. In some degree the repetitions are vehicles to accumulate further meaning, old bottles for new *ad hoc* vinegar, they can merge with other recalls. “Newmanmaun” would bring to mind cardinal Newman, the famous convert, writer of silver prose admired by Joyce and founder of the Irish catholic university. Less expansive, we may want to be satisfied with just “a new man,” but there are precedents, as for example in the story “Grace,” where some characters will “make a new man of” the victim of an accident, Bloom in *Ulysses* once was hailed “the new womanly man” (403) – and so on in a potentially endless cultural regress. It is no wonder that writers like Joyce were catalysts for such notions as intertextuality. *Finnegans Wake* seems to take it literally.

Within a seemingly random convergence of echoes, it is the unique elements, those for which no source has been traced, that stand out all the more. The *Wake* passage amalgamates the familiar with the eccentric, old stand-bys with *hapax legomena*: neither “guett” not “puett” have been encountered before. Obviously, “guett” turns the expected “get” into a French looking word (*guetter* would mean something like ‘ambush’), paired by “puett,” which backtranslates into “pet,” but all of this groping does not reveal the two terms’ intrinsic function. The uncharted transgressions remain an energising irritant. Until a valid gloss for the erratic blocks is forthcoming, the assonance, at any rate, is felt to have esthetical charm: there is some order at work even though out of our reach. “Understanding” would also involve repair work on the syntax, and the sexual, maybe mildly coprophiliac overtones would have to be spelt out. The opacities may be of quite another sort: neither the vocabulary nor the construction of “Stand up to hard ware and step into style” is particularly troublesome, but the significance has still eluded commentators. “The pink of the busket for sheer give,” though fairly simple in appearance, may still be the pick of the basket for obscurity.

Some meanings seem to be detached from the matrix that carries them along. Quite apart from nationalist vibrations, and not stopping at the legendary Finn, “Fennsense, finnsonse, aworn!” also reflects on the *Wake*



itself and the passage in question: there may be sense, possibly fine sense, around, but it has an air of being worn, and nonsense is hovering over it. Stereotypes become hackneyed. In fact the original form, "Sinn fein," has worn thin and needs to be reconstructed. Semantic attrition is balanced by pioneering new departures. And what better epiphany of the whole section and of the whole book than to say that it merges unnotions, and that there is no boundary, or margin, to the inquisitive process? Interpretative probes are set in march.

The aim of the above comments is not to enlarge on some convincing interpretation but to focus on the exuberance of multiple repetition. To recognise repeated items is an appropriate first step, and there is usually an initial reflex to link the text back to its own past. But this sort of inevitable retro-petition is only the reductive part of the game, in practice it tends to preclude further investigation.

The game is won, the text seems to imply, by "inition," which is, as demonstrated an echo of "unnotion," but also the initiation of something new. Maybe a new fire is being lit ("ignition"). Everything is also "A Nation Once Again," the reinstatement of a former political state (which never existed), an idealised past projected into a wishful future. But then a nation is also, originally, a birth, so the phrase includes a semantic rebirth along some genetical chain. "Initions wons agame" is self-descriptive: the same word ("a nation" or "unnotions") once again. Indeed the Joycean game is won, or at least played, by the intricate balance of innovation and the same old routine.

History, as philosopher Leopold Bloom reminds us when he tells the same historical story twice with minor deviations, "repeats itself with a difference" (*Ulysses* 535), and when history becomes text new differences begin to exfoliate. *Finnegans Wake* has entirely given up to distinguish between facts and rumour or gossip, myths, events. They all become recirculation of the same verbal tags which of course are never the same. Not even identical repetitions are identical, the mere fact of their being said a second time has changed them. It did not need *Finnegans Wake* to teach us that once again, but the book has found new modes of expression to drive it home. The same anew.

## Appendix

Translations, as transformed selections from the original intricate texture, are excellent control groups. The recreated versions mirror what the source text contains, and are revealing even more by what they have to bypass or suppress. The following samples are not offered for evaluation but to indicate subjective preferences at so many crossroads. They show where resonant matrixes were noticed, which side-tracks were open and, in particular, if those repetitive elements were emulated.

Philippe Lavergne<sup>6</sup> made little attempt to foreground Irish history or to reproduce the internal repetition and, since Irish historical echoes simply do not exist, not even dormant, in other cultures, specific resonances tend to disappear.

(1) Finn, beau Phénix, secoue-toi! (2) Retrousse tes larges manches. (3) La crème du panier sur simple don. Ouvre un Oeil. (4) Lève-toi et marche dans le péristyle. (5) Si tu dois te salir, alors trouve-moi un petit endroit. (6) Car le matin de Newman a tracé la marge au surgissement des immotions. (7) Mets le contact et remet ça. (Lavergne, 635)

The translation does not, at this point, deviate from lexical norms. Whereas Parnell or any patriotic noises have evaporated, Newman is clearly visible, and Phoenix, at best a marginal speculation in Joyce's phrasing, is moved into limelight as an apposition of Irish Finn. A recent German effort by Dieter Stündel takes Joycean types of liberties with language:

(1) Feinsinn, Finnsonn, alleun! (2) Leg ap diese weissen Shorts. (3) Der Piek des Kurbens für schieres Geben. Spinx. (4) Steht auf zur Eisenware und schreite im Stil. (5) Wenn du vierkaufen magst, Lippchen, dann nümm meinen Preichs. (6) Für NeumannMaunen setze eine Marge zum Einverleiben der Unnationten. (7) Ehrhüdzung gewinnt Daspiel. (Stündel 614<sup>7</sup>)

Readers will hardly be reminded of Irish hopes and aspirations, though the sentence “Wenn du vierkaufen . . .” is clearly based on the historical saying

<sup>6</sup> *Finnegans Wake*, présenté par Philippe Lavergne, Paris: Gallimard, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> *Finnegans Wehg: Kainnääh ÜbelsätzZung des Werkess fun Schämes Scheuss* von Dieter H. Stündel, Darmstadt: Jürgen Häusser Verlag, 1993.)

(while the French rendering opted for “soiling” and a certain place), but probably out of view of most German readers, who, on the other hand might well wonder about a shadowy Sphinx (3). Only (1) retains an internal echo, and in neither rendering does the substitute for “unnotions” phonetically lead to “Innitions,” and no subcurrency of “nation” remains perceptible.

Translations are supposed to be repetitions of the original with variations imposed by the *force majeure* of the target language. Such shifts are inevitable, and translations, never able to step into style, repeat their stories with preponderant differences. Another German rendering, in progress, tackles the paragraph:

(1) Fennsinn, finnsohns, nach vorn! (2) Zieh diese weissen Hosen hochh. (3) Der Harn im Korb für schiere Dehnbarkeit. Pieps. (4) Steif auf zu harter Ware und steig in Stil. (5) Falls ihr mich versauft, Worter, ordert meinen Steiss. (6) Denn neumanmaund setzt dem [Marsch] unner Notion eine Marke. (7) [Endlich] winner ein Inition.<sup>8</sup>

The historical reverberations are present, and at least potentially discernible, and repetitions are preserved as well in (1), (6) and (7). An assonance (“Worter, ordert”) provides some equivalent for *puett* and *guett* in (5), and a chain (“Steif . . . steig . . . Steiss”) extends the principle even beyond the original.

<sup>8</sup> The translation, by Ulrich Blumenbach and R. Markner from Berlin, exists in a typescript of 1992; the passage is reproduced by kind permission of the authors. Words in brackets are still on probation.