Laden with the Loot of Learning: The *Wake* and Learned Wit

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The tradition of learned wit, a phrase, if not a concept, introduced by D.W. Jefferson in an essay of 1951 on *Tristram Shandy*, is a long one. Jefferson sees it as a feature of the eighteenth century, enjoying the reaction against the tradition of philosophical logic, aimed at reconciling Aristotelian logic with Catholic doctrine, known as scholasticism, and practised by what were called 'schoolmen', of whom the chief was Thomas Aquinas. The ridiculing of the pedantry of the scholastics is given justification and impetus by Protestantism, in which scholasticism stands for the obscurantist corruption of Rome.

But learned wit is a feature of ancient comedy, in particular in Aristophanes's *Clouds*, in which poking fun at philosophy takes on a mock-philosophical coloration. Early Christianity has a very strong strain in it of suspicion of philosophy. Augustine's early work *Contra academicos* is written as a critique of the scepticism of Greek philosophers and a rescue of certainty through Christian faith. And, in a writer such as Rabelais, himself a scholar and Catholic priest, carnival fun-for-all at the obscurities and excesses of scholasticism is deployed by a man deeply inward with its modes of thought. Rabelais was familiar with his contemporary Erasmus, whose *Praise of Folly* was a runaway success across Europe. Thomas Urquhart's astonishing translation in 1693 made Rabelais's blend of erudition and grotesque corporeality familiar during the following century, during which it was drawn on among others by Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

So the satirical assault on learning is laden with its loot, a phrase that occurs in the course of a query articulated with relation to the cryptic, corrupted, much-manhandled mamafesta that is excavated in chapter 1.5 of the *Wake*:

Say, baroun lousadoor, who in hallhagal wrote the durn thing anyhow? Erect, beseated, mountback, against a partywall, below freezigrade, by the use of quill or style, with turbid or pellucid mind, accompanied or the reverse by mastication, interrupted by visit of seer to scribe or of scribe to site, atwixt two showers or atosst of a trike, rained upon or

blown around, by a rightdown regular racer from the soil or by a too pained whittlewit laden with the loot of learning? (Joyce 1971, 107-8)

Whittlewit is not recorded in the OED, but the link with *whittle*, a knife, and the verb to whittle, meaning to cut away in thin slices, might evoke a hairsplitting, logic-chopping, nail-paring kind of procedure. Whittle is also recorded in Yorkshire dialect to mean to fuss, fret or fidget (Wright 1961, 6.479). The word *loot* was itself carried off from Hindi *lut* in the mid-nineteenth century, in reference to just the kind of looting that went on in India and other colonies. Whittlewit might imply a witless kind of wit, in recalling the *wittall*, a contemptuous term for a cuckold who knows of his cuckolding, but whose meaning, as the one who knows all, inverted to mean an idiot, nincompoop, or witling, by the late sixteenth century. Though the whittlewit, two-pained as two-paned like the bespectacled Joyce, is laden with learning, it may whisper of Pope's dangerous 'little learning'. And the loot of learning may imply either the looting, in the sense of the ransacking of learning, rather than its honest acquisition, or may even, at a stretch, suggest that all learning is to be regarded in the light of this kind of pillage. I do not know if Joyce came across Samuel Beckett's little poem 'Gnome', published in the *Dublin Review* in 1934, and described by his editors as a 'pithy farewell to academe and intellectualism generally' (Beckett 2012, 349):

> Spend the years of learning squandering
> Courage for the years of wandering
> Through a world politely turning
> From the loutishness of learning. (Beckett 2012, 55)

'Loot of learning' seems already to have been there in Joyce's first draft of 1.5, which might imply that Beckett was allowing it a discreet reecho in his 'loutishness'.

The feature of scholasticism which was singled out most regularly and energetically is the madness of its rationalism, passing through, and going well beyond rationality. In G.K. Chesterton's remark, 'The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason' (Chesterton 1908, 32).

Scholasticism is so named because its particular forms were involved in schools and education. In the twelfth century these schools began to coagulate into what we now call universities. Joyce's reading in Aquinas is evidence of his close familiarity with the leading Scholastic philosopher, while Frank Budgen reports that Joyce retorted to a criticism of the triviality of his puns, 'Yes, some of the means I use are

trivial – and some are quadrivial' (Givens 1963, 24). The Nightlesson boasts 'We've had our day at triv and quad and writ our bit as intermidgets. Art, literature, politics, economy, chemistry, humanity, &c.' (Joyce 1971, 306). 'Trivial' had acquired its meaning of commonplace, paltry, slight, of little weight by the early seventeenth century, as a result of the fact that it named the beginner or entry level of studies in the medieval university, dealing with the three roads, internal to thought, of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric, before the student progressed to knowledge of the external world in the four roads of the Quadrivium, in Geometry, Arithmetic, Music and Astronomy.

The word trivial belongs to the comic underhistory of learning, along with the word dunce, a corruption of Duns Scotus. In 1577 Richard Stanyhurst, in his *Treatise contayning a Playne and Perfect Description of Irelande*, included in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, wrote of the name Duns, 'which terme is so triuiall and common in all schooles, that who so surpasseth others either in cauilling sophistry, or subtill philosophy, is forthwith nicknamed a Duns' (Holinshed 1577, 1.f.2). Joyce effects a similar collusion of wit with dimwit in the taunt late in chapter 1.8 'Latin me that, my trinity scholard' (Joyce 1971, 215), in which 'scholar' is dumbfounded by 'dullard'.

omnitudes in a knutshedell

Recent arduous events in and around Cambridge should have reminded us if we needed it that, if the governing affect of knowledge is pride, in all of its raging thymotic intensity, then the furtive, lurking, inner lining of learning is disgrace. This pairing is to the fore in the Freudian doctrine of 'omnipotence (*Allmächtigkeit*) of thoughts', the two-sided belief in the power of thought which Freud named by appropriation of a phrase used by one of his own patients. The omnipotence of thoughts is two-sided. It represents the rapture of the thought of the power that thought can exercise. But it also, as in the specific case of the Ratman, embodies the reflexive sorcerer's-apprentice power of thoughts over us. Freud saw epistemophilia as essentially a displacement of sexuality, but it is possible to invert this, to see sexuality itself as driven and riven by the lust to know. Certainly, in *Finnegans Wake*, sin is sexual, but it is also epistemopathic, for the knowledge of sin is the sin of knowledge.

The university is at once a domestication and amplification of the imperious arrogance of thought. Anybody and everybody who has the capacity for thought about the powers and limits of thought is able to

think themselves, like Hamlet, a 'king of infinite space'. This arrogance has no negative, for every effort to limit or chasten the possibilities of thought is an addition to its imperium, every boundary is a new horizon, every abrogation is a new arrogance, indeed a supererogation. To be arrogant is to arrogate, Latin *ad* + *rogare*, meaning to lay claim to, or claim as a right. Thought claims the right, cannot but claim it, to think of anything, at any time. The grandiose absurdity of this claim, paired always with the coeval and inexpiable fact of the university's necessary subservience to the pettiness of politics is the essential condition of Pascal's thinking reed. Thought is a two-way telescope, for its grandiose appetites are always liable to be translated, or, to use the time preferred in the Wake, transluded (Joyce 1971, 419), into the ludicrous littleness of Rochester's reasoning engine, 'huddled in dirt'.

The Wake abounds not only in the language games of knowledge, but also in evocations of the disgrace of imposture, as in the famous postcard of the Marquis of Queensberry, who alleged in the fateful postcard handed to Oscar Wilde in the Albemarle Club that he was a 'posing Somdomite', but claimed in the subsequent trial that he had written 'posing as a Somdomite' (Ellmann 1996, 8):

One cannot even begin to post figure out a statuesquo ante as to how slow in reality the excommunicated Drumcondriac, nate Hamis, really was. Who can say how many pseudostylic shamiana, how few or how many of the most venerated public impostures, how very many piously forged palimpsests slipped in the first place by this morbid process from his pelagiarist pen? (Joyce 1971, 182-3)

I am well-placed at this time of my semiprofessional life to appreciate the comic inversion of academic eminence into the battered kettle of the emeritus. Joyce had his share of academic humiliations. The other side of Joyce's trickster career as serial cadger and moonlight flitter is the fact, like many another artist attempting to ply his unsustainable trade in the era of the market, of his efforts to support himself through teaching. Ellmann recounts that in 1911 Joyce conceived the idea of teaching in an Italian school, for which he would be required to travel to Padua to take accrediting examinations, which included two essays to be written in Italian, one on Dickens, the other, with characteristic Italian humility, on 'The Universal Literary Influence of the Renaissance'. We even have Joyce's scores in the examination (Ellmann 1982, 321). Even after the publication of *Finnegans Wake*, two years before his death, the idea of academic employment still seemed feasible. Ellmann records, on the strength of an interview with Beckett, that he 'found out there was a

position open as a lecturer in Italian at the University of Capetown. Joyce thought it over for a few days, then, having heard thunderstorms were frequent there, gave it up' (Ellmann 1982, 722)

Many things are too large and palpably nearer your pecker to constitute an object of scrutiny in the visual field. One such widescreen object is the fact that whatever we mean by modernism must be, was always implicitly, or was always going to be, university writing, writing for the university and, in the end, the university itself in the act of writing. Joyce is one of the few writers to have understood the academic condition and destiny of his work. Ellman records that Joyce was wary of letting the French translator of the 'Penelope' episode in on everything he meant in the episode because 'If I gave it all up immediately, I'd lose my immortality. I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that is the only way of ensuring one's immortality' (quoted Ellmann 1982, 521).

Philip Toynbee, writing in 1947, judged that '*Finnegans Wake* would have to be a university school on its own if it were to be digested in a three-year course' (Givens 1963, 244). Vivian Mercier writes of the 'cult' of Joyce in the two Dublin universities: 'Joyce is the quintessence of University College; his intellectual virtues and vices are both the products of Jesuit training; the pedantry is Jesuit, and so is the continual seeking after first principles.' (Givens 1963, 296). Elzabeth Switaj has published a book length study devoted to Joyce's work, both outside his writing, and within it, as a teacher. She sees the Nightlesson chapter as 'pedagogy that takes Joyce's own antiauthoritarian approach to teaching to its furthest possible expression. Wakese, with its refusal of standardization, cannot be taught in an authoritarian way because no one can be an absolute expert on it' (Switaj 2016, 115). Joyce certainly celebrated the insurance offered for *Ulysses* by being on a university syllabus, writing in 1931 to Harriet Shaw Weaver that

> Soupault … told me yesterday that the government would have no chance of winning a suit against Ulysses. He said it is on the extension lecture program for many universities and actually prescribed for the M.A. degree for next year in the New York University So let them take off the ban and I suppose England will follow suit as usual a few years. later. And Ireland 1000 years hence. (Joyce 1966, 3.232-3)

Joyce even went to the trouble to try to steal a march on the afterlife of critical explication in advance of the *Wake*'s publication, with the volume of critical essays he seems to have commissioned and even, as

we nowadays say in our weaselly way, 'curated', *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. Victor Llona, one of the contributors to the volume, observed the preposterous previousness of this process:

To me, one of the most striking and illuminating thing[s] in connection with Work in Progress is that it has managed to reverse the consecrated order of things. We commentators simply could not be kept in leash – we had to have our say in a volume which will grace the stalls in advance of the text under consideration. (Beckett et. al. 1961, 102)

The title of this critical preview was then itself taken up and made subject to internal transformation within the book that was its object, like Alice's flamingo-croquet mallet curling round to look her in the eye. It morphed into 'Your exagmination round his factification for incamination of a warping process' (Joyce 1971, 496-7) and 'ratiocination by syncopation in the elucidation of complications' (Joyce 1971, 109), and 'an anondation of mirification and the lutification of our paludination' (Joyce 1971, 372. There may be other rescramblings that my echometer has not yet picked up.

If one asks of the *Wake*, what is its principal rhetorical mode, or the principal language game it seems to be playing, then a more than plausible answer would be arguing, in the sense of rational deliberation, or, perhaps, following William Empson, argufying, going through the motions of something that sounds like argument. The mode of the Wake is not narrative but disputation, a word which might be etymologically glossed as thinking about, or thinking all over the place. This was the mode in which rational discourse was conducted in the institutions called universities from the 12th century to the end of the eighteenth, and this current occasion is of course a distant and more-or-less respectful memorial of it. If the consistent note of *Finnegans Wake* is gossip, it is gossip with a disputatious inflection. Its Rabelaisian expatiations are reminiscent of the words overheard by somebody crossing an Oxford quadrangle and passing two dons in conversation, one of them saying 'And, ninthly'. (Here might be the point to point out that the presence of the academic is indicated more than anything else by verbal copiousness, as will be apparent from the length of the quotations required to bear witness to it.)

The Wake features a number of extended passages of mock-academic or mock-philosophic disquisition. They include the children's Nightlesson, and the answer the question no 11 in chapter 1.6, which incorporates the fable of the Mookse and the Gripes (Joyce 1971, 149-68), attributed to a

character whom William York Tindall persists in calling 'Professor Jones', 'that man who lectures on and off throughout the night' (Tindall 1969, 75). But there are minor, local upsurges and outbreaks of what Beckett once called 'doctoracy' throughout the text.

This mode of academic 'explosition' (Joyce 1971 419), is most to the fore in the chapter that mimics the textual analysis of texts or documents that come to resemble the Wake itself, as most particularly in the Mamafesta every-which-way anatomised in chapter 1.5. David Hayman cannot forbear observing that 'A glance at any of the early draft versions (especially those dating from 1923-1925) should convince us that Joyce was speaking of his own manuscripts and his own method of revision when he wrote for Chapter I, v, the following description of ALP's "Letter" ' (Hayman 1963, 14):

> These ruled barriers along which the traced words, run, march, halt, walk, stumble at doubtful points, stumble up again in comparative safety seem to have been drawn first of all with lampblack and blackthorn. Such crossing is antechristian of course, but the use of the homeborn shillelagh as an aid to calligraphy shows a distinct advance from savagery to barbarism. (Joyce 1971, 114)

latin me that

The language of scholarship for centuries across Europe, was Latin. The Wake seems to treat Latin as a short-cut into academic or technical registers. At times, the text appears to have swallowed a dictionary, producing a telltale stammering stream of technical terms:

Signifying, if tungs may tolkan, that, primeval conditions having gradually receded but nevertheless the emplacement of solid and fluid having to a great extent persisted through intermittences of sullemn fulminance, sollemn nuptialism, sallemn sepulture and providential divining, making possible and ever; inevitable, after his a time has a tense haves and havenots hesitency, at the place and period under consideration a socially organic entity of a millenary military maritory monetary morphological circumformation in a more- or less settled state of equonomic ecolube equalobe equilab equilibbrium. (Joyce 1971, 599)

Even where the Wake is not borrowing the accents or idioms of scholarly disquisition, it is able to drop into the kind of Latinate technicality which the burgeoning technosciences of the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries made increasingly familiar, its linguistic gewgaws suggesting a world of proliferating gadgets and devices:

Our wholemole millwheeling vicociclometer, a tetradomational gazebocroticon (the "Mamma Lujah" known to every schoolboy scandaller, be he Matty, Marky, Lukey or John-a-Donk), autokinatonetically preprovided with a clappercoupling smeltingworks exprogressive process, (for the farmer, his son and their homely codes, known as eggburst, eggblend, eggburial and hatch-as-hatch can) receives through a portal vein the dialytically separated elements of precedent decomposition for the verypetpurpose of subsequent recombination so that the heroticisms, catastrophes and eccentricities transmitted by the ancient legacy of the past; type by tope, letter from litter, word at ward, with sendence of sundance, since the days of Plooney and Columcellas when Giacinta, Pervenche and Margaret swayed over the all-too-ghoulish and illyrical and innumantic in our mutter nation, all, anastomosically assimilated and preteridentified paraidiotically (Joyce 1971, 614-15)

Joyce also parodies the prim practice in medical works and other texts of dropping delicately into Latin for the purposes of what 1.5 calls 'unfilthing' obscene material. This possibility is alluded to in the letter of protest by one G.V.L. Slingsby appended to *Our Exagmination* : 'Is Mr Joyce's hog Latin making obscenity safe for literature?' (Beckett et. al. 1982, 191). Surprisingly, Joyce's Latin tends not to be subject to much in the way of distortion:

> *Primum opifex, altus prosator, ad terram viviparam et cunctipotentem sine ullo pudore nec venia, suscepto pluviali atque discinctis perizomatis, natibus nudis uti nati fuissent, sese adpropinquans, flens et gemens, in manum suam evacuavit* (highly prosy, crap in his hand, sorry!), *postea, animale nigro exoneratus, classicum pulsans, stercus proprium, quod appellavit deiectiones suas, in vas olim honorabile tristitiae posuit, eodem sub invocatione fratrorum geminorum Medardi et Godardi laete ac melliflue minxit, psalmum qui incipit: Lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis: magna voce cantitans* (did a piss, says he was dejected, asks to be exonerated), *demum ex stercore turpi cum divi Orionis iucunditate mixto, cocto, frigorique exposito, encaustum sibi fecit indelibile* (faked O'Ryan's, the indelible ink). (Joyce 1971, 185)
>
> *First, the craftsman, a lofty prose-writer, without any shame or pardon, approached the earth, viviparous and omnipotent,*

> *wearing a raincoat and with his loincloth unbuttoned, his buttocks bare as when he was born, weeping and groaning, and emptied himself into his own hand* (highly prosaic, crap in his hand, sorry!), *afterwards, having emptied himself of the black animal, striking a classic pose, he placed his own excrement, which he called his dejections, into a once honourable vessel of sorrow, and upon it, under the invocation of the twin brothers Medard and Godard, he joyfully and sweetly urinated, the psalm which begins: My tongue a scribe's pen, writing swiftly: singing in a loud voice* (did a piss, says he was dejected, asks to be exonerated), *at last, from the foul dung mixed with the delight of the divine Orion, cooked and exposed to the cold, he made himself an indelible encaustic* (faked O'Ryan's, the indelible ink). (DeepL automatic translation)

The work of commentary offers to purify or stabilise the text it explicates, as it were restoring it to itself, but commentary may also be seen as a kind of appropriation though pollution, in which the commentary makes the text its own by mingling its own substance with it. The loot in 'loot of learning' is also the *lutum*, mud, which inhabits pollution and ablution, and which comes to the fore in another mangled version of the 'exagmination' title: 'For an anondation of mirification and the lutification of our paludination' (Joyce 1971, 372) the *palus* hidden in paludination being a marsh. That loot is also pollution is underwritten by the Freudian association of faeces and filthy lucre. The act of writing is never far from the excremental in the Wake, just as analysts are inevitably also 'analists' (Joyce 1971, 95), 'as he shall produce nichthemerically from his unheavenly body a no uncertain quantity of obscene matter not protected by copriright in the United Stars of Ourania' (Joyce 1971, 95).

the hoax that joke bilked

Finnegans Wake was regularly accused of being a momentous hoax, to which the routine answer, framed as a counter-question, is, why would anyone devote seventeen years of their life to a hoax of this kind, a hoax, what is more which seems to have no particular purpose other than to trick members of the reading public into taking the hoax seriously?

I once regretted in a little book the fact that, in contrast to *Ulysses*, which nobody else could have written, pretty much any photoist worth his chemicots ought to be able to work up a plausible bit of Wakese after an

hour or so of coaching. In contrast to *Ulysses*, the governing rule of which seems to be that every part of it calls for and spontaneously precipitates a style of its own, *Finnegans Wake* is fundamentally, and for all its fabled polymorphousness, *all the same*. A large part of the work of explication consists of making out organising differences in the puling sample jungle of woods in order to establish factitious provinces and pathways that would facilitate the naming of parts. The truth is, however, that this is not hard to write. What is hard, and hard to account for, is to carry on doing this self-evidently facile thing for so long, seemingly against the odds. There are many jokes in *Finnegans Wake* and to read it for the purposes of anything but the jokes, so often appertaining to the jakes, though many pretend to, seems like a pathological undertaking, though flushing out that kind of pathology is a large part of the joke.

One of the commonest any-port-in-a-storm routines in reading Finnegans Wake is to keep your ears peeled for anything that seems like you might be catching the book out in a bit of auto-exegesis. The book seems to be full of philological exercises – 'philological' being in the process made to seem like a mad word made up by the *Wake* to evoke its own procedures – exercises of editing, compilation, sieving, disputation and commentary.

Take a sentence evoking the process like this:

> Since a precess, the mucksing and mending, the orduring and symposying, the chewning and discourding, was indefinitely a longdrawnin hole-in-won, untelling innuminous refusions.

Where does this sentence occur? Not, alas, anywhere in the *Wake*. It is in fact, my retread of part of the following passage, from the beginning of David Hayman's precious *First Draft Version of Finnegans Wake*, which is therefore made to seem like a first draft of many of the parodies of textual scholarship that burst into bloom throughout the Wake. Here are his blameless sentences:

> For seventeen years, Joyce, having at his disposal all the means of knowing and all the means of expressing, labored to resolve the "proteaform" mass of modern learning into a "faustian fustian" of words. *Such a process, the mixing and blending, the ordering and composing, the choosing and discarding, was necessarily a lengthy one entailing numberless revisions* which bear "hermetic" testimony to the nature of the creative act while recording the mind in a state of flux. It is self-evident therefore

> that the manuscripts for *Finnegans Wake* are of immense importance to the scholar. (Hayman 1963, 3)

It is hard to forbear making out what the *Wake* might make of a passage such as this:

> For seventeen years, Joyce, having at his disposal all the means of knowing and all the means of expressing, labored to resolve the "proteaform" mass of modern learning into a "faustian fustian" of words. *Since a precess, the mucksing and mending, the orduring and symposying, the chewning and discourding, was indefinitely a longdrawnin hole-in-won, untelling innuminous refusions*, which bear "hermetic" testimony to the nature of the creative act while recording the mind in a state of flux. It is self-evident therefore that the manuscripts for *Finnegans Wake* are of immense importance to the scholar. (Hayman 1963, 3)

My effort is not the best it could be, but I wager that few of you would have been able, if presented with it and deprived of electronic means of verification, definitively to finger it as obviously inauthentic since, frankly, and since we are among friends, a great deal of the Wake is far from the best it could be and even more laboured than this.

It both is and is not quite a huge work of let-it-be-so fantasy to see Joyce's work on *Finnegans Wake* as a prodigious work of transfiguring the history of learning, having, as David Hayman improbably but routinely alleges, 'at his disposal all the means of knowing and all the means of expressing'. There has always been much talk of Joyce's 'erudition', a work which literally means devulgarisation, or making less rude. There was indeed a great deal of looting of dictionaries and encylopaedias required for the writing of *Finnegans Wake*, but in a parody of scholarly process so sustained as no longer quite to resemble parody. Much has been written about the avant-garde circles in which Joyce participated, but it is not observed often enough for my taste that these circles functioned as a kind of seminary or invisible college, recalling the peripatetic life of the Royal Society in the seventeenth century, or the informal quasi-academic groupings that grew up around psychoanalysis in the twentieth century.

There is a sizeable tradition that runs together the work of learning with the magical thinking of childhood – think of the words spelling, and glamour. One of the well-known routines of *Finnegans Wake*, a book that is, like Homer's Ulysses, polytropos, full, in the musichall sense, of

turns, is the insinuation of childish jingles and nursery-rhymes into seemingly grownup sensemaking:

> — So this was the dope that woolied the cad that kinked the ruck that noised the rape that tried the sap that hugged the mort?
>
> — That legged in the hoax that joke bilked. (Joyce 1971, 511)

I would have laid good money that, amid all the deliberated garbling of the Wake, Joyce would have put the word 'garble' to greater use than he does. In fact, it appears only once: 'to garble a garthen of Odin' (Joyce 1971, 69). I quote the following from a recent work:

> Though the etymology of that latter word [garbage] is uncertain, a link with "garble" has been suggested – a word that that undergoes an alternation between clarity and confusion, which is intriguingly similar to that undergone by "verbiage." "To garble" entering English via Italian and French from Arabic *girbāl* (a sieve), originally meant to filter or remove impurities like dust and soil from spices or dyestuffs. From being employed metaphorically in this sense to refer to the ill-advised improvement of classical texts by overfinical editors, "garbling" acquired the inverted sense of muddling or mangling the meaning of some original. (Connor 2026, 162-3)

The hoax that joke bilked of 'the book of Doublends Jined' is, or is in effect, a kind of doublebind. Given the seventeen years toil, or, in the light of Nora Barnacle's witness that she knew that writing was going well when she heard Joyce laughing, seventeen years of sick notes, you would have to be joking to maintain at this time of day the calumny that the Wake is just an elaborate legpull, intended to make its readers look silly by tricking them into taking it seriously. There comes a point at which the labour of elaboration must flip across into the work we cannot but call hard. The *Wake* would at least be a proof of Freud's observation that people will do more work to avoid the work they have to do than would be involved in actually doing it.

Of course the joke is not exactly on us, for we, the regal we of the itself fictitious realm known as the academy, and the more pragmatic congregation of any two or three that are gathered in the *Wake*'s name, must always be permitted, yet also commissioned to be in on the joke of which we are inveigled into being the butt. We are the *Wake*'s understudies: we are the means of putting the Wake to work on ourselves, as the continually more and less intermisunderstanding minds of its anticollaborators. The various pedants, pedagogues,

expounders, lecturers, commentators, and scholiasts whose voices pipe up throughout the Wake, sieving and garbling, are our viceversical surrogates, pantomiming the work we sign up to do on it, in Beckett's 'Acacacacademy of Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy' (Beckett 1986, 41).

The effect is sometimes to compromise and contaminate (perhaps this contamination-by-examination is in part what 'incamination' might mean) in advance the sober commentaries of editorial come-latelys, in what Derrida has described as the condition having to be 'in memory' of *Finnegans Wake* in its

> encyclopedic, Ulyssean and more than Ulyssean totality. And then it is, simultaneously, much bigger than even this odyssey, it comprehends it, and this prevents it, dragging it outside itself in an entirely singular adventure, from closing in on itself and on this event. The future is reserved in it. The 'situation' of *Finnegans Wake* is also, because of this, our own situation with respect to this immense text. In this war of languages, everything we can say after it looks in advance like a minute self-commentary with which this work accompanies itself. It is already comprehended by it. And yet the new marks carry off, enlarge and project elsewhere – one never knows where in advance – a programme which appeared to constrain them. This is our only chance, minuscule and completely open. (Derrida 1984, 149)

And of course this process too is 'prevented' in the seventeenth century sense of anticipated through mock-thematisation in the *Wake*: 'If there is a future in every past that is present *Quis est qui non novit quinnigan* and *Qui quae quot at Quinnigan's Quake!* Stump! His producers are they not his consumers? Your exagmination round his factification for incamination of a warping process. Declaim!' (Joyce 1971, 496-7)

opened university

Finnegans Wake is an anomaly in this respect, that it cannot be read other than academically. The Wake is the ultimate textbook, the most essentially set text of any text, in which the whole set-up is academic, and so a book that brings about and is unreadable outside a collision and coalescence of literature and learning. But it is also the prediction of a general condition of a literature that, defined in Roland Barthes's terms as 'what gets taught', is entirely inundated in annotating, the loot of learning.

The alignment of thought and world is the defining action of the University and the University in action. The University is the enworlding of thought, the putting of thought in the world, and the instantiation of a world of thought. But because thought is supplementary to world, it is also its own unworlding. This absurdity did not have to wait for the coming into being in the world of the institutions we call universities, for the University is already there wherever the absurdity of thought, the exorbitant excessiveness of thought to itself, is enacted.

So, though it is conventional to construe the Wake as a kind of *ne plus ultra*, I would prefer to see it as part of a long tradition of learning turning upon itself, doubling the world politely turning from it. From the beginning of self-conscious knowledge, that is to say, knowing that claims, or strives, to know the nature of its own knowing, knowledge has been unable to avoid falling out with itself. Knowledge can only achieve completeness if it leaves room for doubt as to that very possibility. Hence the fact that scepticism is coeval with systematic knowledge, philosophy with sophistry, knowing with the performance of knowing. Hence too, the fact that the learned satire of learning is not an occasional eruption in the history of learning but a constant accompaniment to it. Psychoanalysis is only one of these fellow-travellers, providing a systematic understanding that the knowing human subject can never fully and finally coincide with the entity Lacan named the subject-supposed-to-know. The traditions of learned wit, running, if not quite continuously, then irrepressibly from Aristophanes, through Lucian, Erasmus, Rabelais, Burton, Molière, Swift, Sterne, Pope, Carroll, Kafka, Borges, O'Brien, Beckett, Wittgenstein, Peake, Theroux, Wallace, Pratchett and others aft and fore, negotiate the renewed predicament of the human relation to its own mooted, bruited sapience. The phantasmal dramaturgy of epistemopathic identifications and connivances with knowledge can never put paid to the nagging suspicion that it will have been a university of the absurd.

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