In Dante's Wake.
The Dantean Poetics of Finnegans Wake

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Lucia Boldrini
Department of Italian, Department of English
University of Leicester

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Lucia Boldrini

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Abstract

The thesis investigates how the theories of linguistic and literary composition of Dante's treatises and the poetics of ineffability of the Divine Comedy may be seen to provide the basis for (one of) the poetics of Joyce's Finnegans Wake. The polysemny of Joyce's last novel relies on Dante's literary-exegetical model of the four levels of meaning at the same time as it challenges it so as to show both its inadequacy for the modern literary work and, conversely, how its failings can be turned to the writer's advantage in the production of an original text.

The multilingual idiom of the Wake draws from, at the same time as it reshapes, Dante's conception of the history of language and his theory of an illustrious poetic language, and the thesis shows how Joyce exploits these two aspects, turning them into a narrative framework for several episodes of the Wake and thematising their features in order to explore the function of character-roles in connection with the processes of artistic creation.

Finally, Joyce's reliance on a pliable language for his evocation of the unfathomable dimension of the "nocturnal world" and of the unconscious is shown to be comparable to the poetics of ineffability that informs Dante's "vision" in the Divine Comedy. In this context, the thesis looks at such issues as silence, vowels / vocalisation, and the use of geometry to express the ineffable and / or the unspeakable.

Joyce's use of Dante's works thus involves a constant reflection on the processes of writing and of literary composition as well as on the relationship between a modern writer and his sources, and the intertextual practice of the Wake is shown to be part of the "poetics in progress" that Joyce has been elaborating from his earliest to his last publication.
Dante's programmatic wish at the end of the Vita Nuova is no doubt also every critic's secret desire. How frustrating, then, when a polite "Oh. Interesting", and, after a moment's hesitation, "There is already a book on that, isn't there?", often followed my proud announcement of my topic. My thanks, therefore, go to all those who won't repeat the same words when they see this thesis, but first of all to all those who did not say them when I started it, while I wrote it, and when I finished it: Klaus Reichert, whose seminar on Finnegans Wake at the University of Pisa in 1988-89 provided the spark; Paola Pugliatti and especially Elsa Linguanti for her encouragement and affection; Valeria Raglianti Biagioni, who pushed me, and Dirk Vanderbeke, who listened when I had nothing yet to say; then Jane Everson, who listened even when I had too much to say, and patiently waited for me to get back on the straight way - and for some years, simply waited; Kelvin Everest first, then Martin Stannard, who also had to wait; Fritz Senn, for his unfailing support; Carmen Concilio, who read some of it, and took me out for walks when she got bored; many people who it would be too long to list, and the long list which is at the end of this thesis under the rubric "bibliography" (to whom perhaps at times I should extend my apologies); and of course Laurent Milesi, who has made all the difference, and to whom this thesis is dedicated.
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Abbreviations

Note: This list includes only the titles (and, in some cases, the edition) of texts for which I have used abbreviations. Full bibliographical details can be found in the bibliography. The translations of Dante's works I relied on are the ones here indicated; at times they have been silently amended.

   (Translation by Philip Wicksteed, 1903.)


   (Transl. by A. G. Ferrers Howell, 1890.)

Exag. : Samuel Beckett et al., Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress.

FW : James Joyce, Finnegans Wake.

Inf, Purg, Par : Dante, Inferno, Paragtorio, Paradiso. Società Dantesca Italiana, La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi.
   (Transl. by Charles S. Singleton.)


Letters II, III : Letters of James Joyce, ed. by Richard Ellmann, voll. II and III.


SL : Selected Letters of James Joyce, ed. by Richard Ellmann.

U : James Joyce, Ulysses, ed. by Jeri Johnson. Oxford U P.

VN : Dante, Vita Nuova, ed. by Edoardo Sanguineti. Garzanti.
   (Trans. by Thomas Okey and Philip Wicksteed, 1906.)
Introduction

In the Wake of the Divine Comic

L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse;
[...]
Volart' poi che drizzaste il collo
per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale
vivevi qui ma non sei veni satollo,
meter potete ben per l'alto sale
vostro naviglio, servendo mio solo
dinanzi a l'acqua che ritorna eguale.³
(Pur II, 7; 10-15)

Skim over Through Hell with the Paper (mostly boys) by the divine comic Denti Alligator
(FW 440.05-06)

In canto XXV of the Inferno, abandoning his (often only nominal) deference towards the auctoritates of the literary past and the mask of the unworthy follower ("io non Enea, io non Paolo sono,"² Inf II, 32), Dante tells of the complex and terrible metamorphoses to which the thieves are subjected, and underscores his poetic invention by bidding Lucan and Ovid be silent, because the changes they described in their works could not stand comparison with what Dante is now witnessing - or, as we are to understand, with his own superior inventiveness:

Taccia Lucano omal li dov'è tocca
del misero Sabello e di Nasidio,
e attenda a udir quel ch'or si scocca.
Taccia di Cadmo e d'Aretusa Ovidio,
che se quello in serpente e quella in fonte

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¹ "The water which I take was never coursed before [...] You few who lifted up your necks to the bread of angels which men here live on but are never sated of, commit your vessel to the deep salt, following my wake before the water that turns smooth again."
² "I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul".
Dante's boastful self-appraisal achieves a double result: the poet acknowledges two of his main sources of inspiration, and, at the same time, he marks his departure from the pagan models he is imitating. The principal issue is thus one of originality, understood both as temporal anteriority and as novel treatment of one's poetic material, and of competition with one's sources and models in order to surpass them; what is really at stake, then, is the assertion of one's own rights to authorship, the victorious reversal of Harold Bloom's notion of anxiety-laden influence into an appropriation and metamorphosis of the earlier poet, guided by an awareness of one's superiority. But those who live by literature die by literature, and Dante's success in his competition with his predecessors has transformed him into a model to be appropriated and transformed to new ends by his successors.

Joyce's relationship with Dante is to an extent comparable to the one thus sketched by Dante: by inscribing Dante's literary theories and techniques into his text, appropriating (thieving) and transforming (metamorphosing) them for his own purposes, Joyce can be said to be implicitly proclaiming his own "Taccia Dante...". Through this silent silencing, however, Joyce also allows Dante's voice to resound through his work, acknowledging his source and giving a clue to one of the many (and always insufficient) poetic, structural and exegetical models for the *Wake*.

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3 "Let Lucan now be silent, where he tells of the wretched Sabellus and of Nasidius, and let him wait to hear what now comes forth. Of Cadmus and Arethusa let Ovid be silent, for if he, poetizing, converts the one into a serpent and the other into a fountain, I envy him not".
Joyce started reading Dante early, when he was at school, and his interest in the Italian poet never lapsed. Of course, he was not alone in this fascination for Dante: while, apart from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries had shown scant interest in his works, pre-Romantic medievalism, Blake's illustrations of the *Commedia*, and the German thinkers' writings on Dante (which Coleridge absorbed and introduced into Britain) are just three instances of the Florentine's increasing prominence in the landscape of past literary masters from the late eighteenth century onwards. Coleridge, Hunt, Shelley, Byron, all read Dante, wrote on him, and borrowed from his works. Whereas the Romantics' picture of the medieval poet was of a proud, solitary and cheerless figure and their concern was mainly with the dark but lively *Inferno*, later in the nineteenth century Rossetti and the pre-Raphaelites promoted an image of Dante and of his work as both highly sensual and spiritual, focusing on the poet's love and on the figure of Beatrice, and often privileging the *Vita Nuova*, which had generally been neglected until then. In our century, Dante became a main source of inspiration for the modernists, to the extent that it has been claimed that "Dante has dominated the imagination of [Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Beckett, Stevens, Auden] as has no other writer," while another critic, Reed Dassenbrock, has argued that "[o]ne of the ways we could describe an aspiration of virtually all the major modernist writers in English is that they were all trying to write the *Commedia* of the twentieth century. [...] [T]here is a sense in which Yeats,

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4 See Ellmann, *Joyce and Dante: The Shaping Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1981). Cf. also *Stephen Hero*, probably written as early as 1903 (cf. *SH*, Introduction by Theodore Spencer, p. 11), where Stephen thinks of Dante as "the first poet of the Europeans" (*SH* 42), discusses Dante with the President of the school's Debating Society (*SH* 85) and later chooses Italian at University, "[...] from a desire to read Dante seriously" (*SH* 152), and even plans to structure his poetic writings on the *Vita Nuova* ("The *Vita Nuova* of Dante suggested to him that he should make his scattered love-verses into a perfect wreath", *SH* 156).


Wyndham Lewis, Beckett, and Eliot, in addition to Pound and Joyce, were simply imitating the Italian, Dante Alighieri.\(^8\)

So, why was Dante so central to the modernist project of "making it new" (to use Pound's slogan), and why was he so relevant, in particular, to Joyce's radically new narrative technique in *Finnegans Wake*? With Dante, the Italian language achieved a semantic and lexical flexibility and range that were unthinkable before. Bare mathematical statistics show the scope of Dante's linguistic innovation. Bruno Migliorini points out that the Italian vocabulary increased from 4,000-5,000 words at the turn of the first millennium to 10,000-15,000 around 1300;\(^9\) this expansion in the three centuries preceding Dante's *Commedia* was mainly due to the increasingly widespread use of abstract terms and to a general refinement of the language. Compared with this "common language", the extension of Dante's lexicon is stunning: nearly 28,000 words, a figure that becomes even more striking if we consider the lexical range of contemporary Florentine poets: Dante's friend Guido Cavalcanti, for instance, used just over 800 words in his poetry. It is not surprising then that Dante should have earned the reputation of "father" of the Italian language,\(^10\) or that he should be the author to which modernists turned in their project of renewing literary language.

As we shall see in chapter 4, Dante's impressive expansion of the vernacular was not due to some kind of "baroque" exhibitionism, but it was in fact both justified and necessary on account of his programme, famously stated at the end of the *Vita*

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\(^10\) A claim which Joyce characteristically acknowledged while simultaneously pointing both to the 'distortion' inherent in Dante's technique and in his own treatment of language, and, implicitly, to the "metamorphosis" and "distortion" to which his "model" will also be subjected: "May Father Dante forgive me," [Joyce] said, "but I took [his] technique of deformation as my point of departure in trying to achieve a harmony that vanquishes our intelligence as music does". See chapter 2, p. 110 infra for context and bibliographical reference.
Nuova (his autobiographical *Künstlerroman*, to use a modern term), to go beyond the immediate perceptual reality in order to express the *novum*, the divine, the ineffable. Joyce's trajectory too may be said to be informed by a poetics of the *novum*: it appeared at least as early as his own autobiographical *Künstlerroman*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, cut short like the *Vita Nuova* exactly when Stephen announces his intention to forge the "uncreated conscience of [his] race" (*P 253*), and remained central in the *Wake*’s (in)ability to tell in "nat language" (*FW 83.12*) - through techniques that can be profitably aligned with the (im)possibility of representing the ineffable in the *Paradiso* (see chapter 4) - the "something itself" ("DBVJ" 14) that is its subject.

Nino Frank claimed that Joyce's interest in Dante declined and finally ceased as he wrote *Finnegans Wake*, but I would argue on the contrary that Joyce's understanding of the way he could rely on and exploit Dante's works culminated with the *Wake*. By this I am certainly not trying to suggest that Joyce's use of Dante in his earlier works was "immature" or that his "understanding" of the medieval poet was limited. It has been pointed out that "The Sisters", the first story of *Dubliners*

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11 "Appresso questo sonetto appare a me una mirabile visione, no la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei. [...] Sì che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita durì per alcuni anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fui detto d'alcuna" ("After this sonnet there appeared to me a wondrous vision, wherein I beheld things that made me determine to speak no more of this blessed one until such time as I could treat of her more worthily. [...] So that if it be the pleasure of him, by whom all things live, that my life persist for some few years, I hope to write of her what had never been written of any woman", *VW* XLI [XLIII]).

12 "Joyce questioned me about Dante's *Paradise* and Vico's *Principles* [...]. But it was not to inform himself that Joyce asked me about these authors; he knew a great deal more than I and was simply yielding to the need to talk of subjects dear to his heart. Later Dante's importance was to recede, and only Vico's philosophy, with its 'turn' and 'return,' would remain part of the inspiration of *Finnegans Wake*". Nino Frank, "The Shadow That Had Lost His Man" (1967), in Willard Potts (ed.), *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans* (Dublin: Wolfhound, 1979), 74-103: 80.
(1914), opens with a reference to the portal of Hell in the *Inferno*, and I have shown elsewhere that, from the start, the Dantean subtext enables Joyce to confront the aesthetic and ethical implications of his literary practice through a use of textual references that is already much more problematic than simple parody, the borrowing of a structure, or a humble following in literary footsteps, and that this confrontation already implies - as will be the case with *Finnegans Wake* - a reflection on the nature of the relationship between the modern author and his precursors.

Mary Reynolds has demonstrated how subtly Joyce wove references to Dante into all his books, both in order to shape and give depth to themes as different as love, father-figures, rebirth, etc. Yet Reynolds's thematic approach finds more suitable ground in Joyce's work up to *Ulysses*, whereas *Finnegans Wake* is discussed in general, though perceptive, terms. As I have said, I believe that it is precisely in the *Wake* that Joyce's use of Dante becomes most pervasive and far-reaching. In the work of the Italian, Joyce could find an unprecedented and unequalled complex semiotic, structural and linguistic programme, and if plurality and polysemy are two of the main structural and thematic aspects of the *Wake*, then Dante is the obvious antecedent to look at, not only in order to go back to his works but also to parody them, "thieve" from them, "metamorphose", surpass and "silence" them.

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15 "The Artist Paring His Quotations: Aesthetic and Ethical Implications of the Dantean Intertext in *Dubliners*," forthcoming in a volume of essays on Joyce's *Dubliners* edited by Harold Mosher and Rosa Maria Bosinelli, U of Kentucky P.
Polysemy and (linguistic) plurality will accordingly be the focus of the first three chapters of this thesis. Dante was the first to design and apply to his own poetry a fully-fledged model of literary interpretation, which he based on the exegetical theory of the four meanings of Scriptural writing. Admittedly, the system did not work too well; as I shall argue in chapter one, its application and parody in *Finnegans Wake* also exposes its contradictions and ultimate failure. This is not to say, of course, that Joyce was exploiting a failed model in a facile show-off of literary superiority; on the contrary, the adoption of the model also involves a reflection on the nature of signification and on the deviations and distortions that the writer must face in order to achieve polysemy. If for Harold Bloom the only way forward for the later poet is to misread the precursor, and thus to be condemned to suffer from the anxiety of the latent "guilty" knowledge of this misreading, Joyce's fully conscious recycling of Dante (as well as of any other writer) shows, rather, how it is in fact the precursor that allows the later poet to distort his works in an operation that should therefore be described not as "misreading" but as an exposition of any model's limitations. (This also involves an awareness of one's own unstable position, as the silencing of the earlier writer always entails the possibility of being "silenced" in turn in the future: Dante's "Let Ovid be silent..." is counterbalanced in the following *cantica* by Oderisi da Gubbio's warning about the futility of taking pride in one's own artistic supremacy: another will always come who will overturn, displace and replace the present prevailing model\(^{17}\) - a movement that any reader of Joyce will also recognise as typical.

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17 "Credette Cimabue ne la pittura / tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido, / si che la fama di colui è scura. / Così ha tolto l'uno a l'altro Guido / la gloria de la lingua; e forse è nato / chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà dal nido" ("Cimabue thought to hold the field in painting, and now Giotto has the cry, so that the other's fame is dim; so has the one Guido taken from the other the glory of our tongue - and he perchance is born that shall chase the other from the nest", *Purg* XI, 94-99). Interestingly, the last lines ("he perchance is born...") have been interpreted as referring to Dante himself, whose name has displaced Guido's but this may also entail that Dante is guilty of the sin of pride at the same time as he describes how it is punished and expiated. Although this can be explained by saying that, in this context, Dante may be showing that he is conscious of his own supremacy now, but also of his
of the pattern of supersession at work in literary as well as family genealogies in *Finnegans Wake*.)

The same process of "thieving" and "metamorphosing" applies to the issue of linguistic plurality: Dante's account of the Babel episode in the *De vulgari eloquentia* (see chapter 2) and then, in the second part of the treatise, his re-building of a composite language (chapter 3), may have suggested to Joyce possible ways of exploiting the theme of Babel and provided a structural model of linguistic construction, but they also offered a system to be parodied and distorted into a principle for organising the plot (e.g. in the pattern that relates linguistic, alcoholic and excremental distillation - see chapter 3) and for composing the *Wake's* protean and highly unusual "characters" (e.g. HCE as a language that rises and declines, itself to be declined and articulated in various forms). Joyce's treatment of Dante's linguistic history also allows the reader to look back at Dante as a Nimrod figure proudly attempting to reverse history by achieving what had been denied to his precursor.

Perhaps I should specify at this point that although this thesis is intended primarily as a reading of Joyce rather than of Dante, the obscure words of *Finnegans Wake* may also throw light on unforeseen aspects and implications of Dante's works. On a first reading of the treatises, for instance, it is difficult to be aware of the extent to which Dante's project of linguistic redemption in the *De vulgari eloquentia* brings him perilously close to the sin of pride which he endeavours to redress, but if one goes back to the treatise and reads it in conjunction with the *Wake's* fusion of different roles (HCE and Shem, the language and the tower, the hunter and the hunted, linguistic synthesis or distillation and technique of characterisation), one arrives at an almost perverse image of a Dante who is both saviour and sinner, builder of the Tower and
redeemer of Babel. The impasse of Dante's theory of polysemy is generally read as a
defect which contributed to the abandonment of the theory, and contradictions are
pointed out between the *Convivio*’s view of the superiority of Latin on the one hand
and the *De vulgari eloquentia*’s defence of the vernacular on the other. However, if
one re-reads the *Convivio* and the *Epistle to Can Grande* through the prism of Joyce’s
last text, one realises that Dante’s contradictions and paradoxes are in fact productive,
that they prove to be instrumental to Dante's project instead of limiting its validity, and
that only when a later writer takes them up and pursues their implications can the
reader perceive what new paths Dante’s “limits” had opened for his successors. And it
is to Joyce’s credit that he did not try to speak in the “true dantescan voice”18 and
steered clear of the broad avenue of “easy” imitability that, according to Eliot’s
questionable views, Dante’s universal language allowed,19 but looked instead for the
untrodden paths, taking up the challenge of the “deep salt” and of the waters that have
never been “coursed” before, or of the “wake” that has “turn[ed] smooth again” (*Par
II*, 7, 13-15; cf. the first epigraph to this introduction). By following this “uncoursed
wake”, Joyce may in fact have been the best imitator of Dante among the modernists,
as Dasenbrock has written20 and as Jacqueline Risset has also observed in her fine
commentary on Joyce’s Italian translation of the ALP chapter.21 It may be useful at
this point to sketch the main differences between the relationship that Joyce on the one
hand, and Pound and Eliot on the other, established with Dante.

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18 See below.
19 “Dante can do less harm to anyone trying to learn to write verse, than can Shakespeare. Most
English poets are inimitable in a way in which Dante was not. [...] The language of each great
English poet is his own language; the language of Dante is the perfection of a common language.”
21 “One can also say that Joyce (and the Italian translation of Anna Livia has the merit of
revealing it fully) is the sole disciple of Dante, in the sense that he is the only one who takes up (the
relationship between word and language) directly, at the level of the scriptural activity. Ultimately, the
deepest aim of the very enterprise of translating - this is what the analysis brings to light - was to
repeat, in the Italian language, Dante’s experience. - Even if, in a certain sense, one can say that Joyce
repeats Dante’s experience in reverse. That is, where Dante makes, invents a national language, Joyce
unmakes all languages”. Jacqueline Risset, “Joyce traduce Joyce”, in Franca Ruggieri (ed.), *Joyce:
Despite Pound's claim that the poet must consciously imitate in order to be independent from his models and sources of inspiration, the reverence with which Dante is always treated by both Pound and Eliot - the latter being the poet on whom the former bestowed the title of "true dantescan voice" (my emphasis) - may suggest that a real independence was never really achieved, and that Dante always remained the standard of excellence to which the modern poet could only try to aspire. The notion that imitation is only a stage in the poet's development and in his search for the "lost" roots of our decaying modern culture is somewhat belied by both Eliot's and Pound's adoption of Dante to confirm, support or justify their ideologies, and by their all-too-faithful linear rewriting of the Hell-Purgatory-Paradise sequence (cf. the *Cantos*, to a large extent structured on the *Commedia*, as the project of a "restorative" epic of the crumbling modern world which would thus be cured of its ills by the messianic poet; and Eliot's sequence from the "Inferno" of "The Waste Land" - or, earlier, "Gerontion" - to the unified final vision of "Little Gidding" in *The Four Quartets*, where "the tongues of fire are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one")

Joyce's use of Dante (and of any other source) is never informed by the deference shown by his two contemporaries. Although critics have claimed that the structure of the short story "Grace" is indebted to that of the three *cantiche* of the *Divine Comedy*, even here the model is ironised, and its inadequacy as a linear plot

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22 "No one wants the native American poet to be *au courant* with the literary affairs of Paris and London in order that he may make imitations of Paris and London models, but precisely in order that he shall not waste his lifetime making unconscious, or semi-conscious, imitations of French and English models thirty or forty or an hundred years old. [...] The first step of a renaissance, or awakening, is the importation of models for painting, sculpture or writing", Ezra Pound, "The Renaissance", in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), 214-26: 214.


of "salvation" is exposed more fully. Joyce's eclecticism, and the relevance that Vico's cyclical pattern acquired in his last novel, enabled him both to forgo the teleology of the *Inferno*-to-*Paradiso* pattern (or, for that matter, the view of contemporary culture as being in a process of ineluctable decline) and to play off any model against any other, so as to show that if they can all be equally valid, they are also equally "debunkable". If Dante was a source for Joyce, he was, as I have suggested above, one which encouraged plurality, and this would already be enough to offset the priority of any single model - including Dante himself of course - and undermine its univocal use. It is this radically eclectic and "playful" relationship to "parent" texts that best distinguishes Joyce's literary practice from that of his fellow-modernists. After all, the quotation from *Finnegans Wake* I have chosen for my second epigraph ("Skim over Through Hell with the Papes (mostly boys) by the divine comic Denti Alligator", *FW* 440.05-06) shows what kind of operation Joyce performs on Dante: the reference is to *Inferno* XIX, where a pope, soon to be followed by others, is thrust head down into a hole in the ground with his feet sticking out, and if we apply this back to the *Wake*, Joyce may be said to be turning Dante and his works upside down in a comic and irreverent parody; and yet Dante is still the "divine" poet who produced an imperishable and "divine" "comedy".

Joyce's use of earlier writers also affects the theoretical frame within which the critic must work. The reader cannot be bound by any single model of literary interrelationship, whether one wants to call it imitation (as the conscious practice of literary borrowing and transformation, in the sense described by Pound - which is not dissimilar from the Renaissance concept and practice - and adopted by Dasenbrock;\(^\text{27}\)), influence (as in Harold's Bloom's theory, to cite the best known but also the most controversial), or intertextuality (as in the original theoretical programme, outlined in particular by Kristeva and Barthes, of a textual relationship which reverses or rejects

the traditional critical model of literary-historical filiation). It is Joyce's practice in the first place that invalidates any such neat categories, and while all these theories will offer insights into the *Wake’s* relationship with Dante or any other writer, none will suffice on its own.

Dasenbrock has convincingly defended the case for the use of the term imitation, and to some extent I share his claim that literature is made by conscious agents whose imitations are deliberate and intentional acts. To be more precise, I agree with the assumption that the writer makes conscious choices; but I cannot share Dasenbrock's hostility towards the concept and what he calls "the language of intertextuality", which in his case goes as far as banning the words "intertextuality" and even "text" from his book. Indeed, *Finnegans Wake* probably best demonstrates Barthes's claim that the text is a tissue of quotations whose nature therefore is to be always already an intertext, and that it is an autonomous entity cut loose from the intentionality of its author, programmed in such a way as to generate unpredicted meanings and textual connections that the reader has every right to discover or to establish in his/her own "writing" of the text (to take up Barthes's distinction between the "readerly" and the "writerly" text, which arose in conjunction with the emergence of the concept of intertextuality). I have already pointed out above that reading Dante's works through the *Wake* enables us to discover in them aspects that a non-intertextual, traditional source study would not reveal, and it is especially in the fourth chapter, where I

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28 "My premise is that literature is made up of works, not texts, created by individual authors working at specific (if not always specifiable) moments in history, and it is too easy to lose sight of this situated aspect of literature when we rely on the concepts of textuality and intertextuality. [...] To speak of one writer imitating the works of another is automatically to assume a world of agents conscious of and deliberating on their actions; to imitate is an intentional act just as to write is an intentional act", Dasenbrock, *Imitating the Italians*, 11-12.


discuss Dante's and Joyce's attempts to deal with the problem of the ineffable and of the unspeakable, of what cannot but also ought not to be said, that I shall try to "write" the *Wake* and the *Paradiso* at the same time as I read them, so that the critical discourse becomes an intertextual parcours that weaves them together in a "single" text spanning several centuries and in which chronology is ultimately irrelevant.

But the theory of intertextuality banishes the link of textual filiation from its vocabulary, whereas in reading Joyce's works one cannot but notice the omnipresence of the father / son theme, which operates also at the level of the literary interrelationship ("May father Dante forgive me..."), and would therefore seem to require the critic to rely on Bloom's oedipal framing of the theory of influence. However, Bloom's oedipal conflict never appears to be resolved victoriously for any successor, whereas in *Finnegans Wake* the son always displaces the father - even if it is only in order to be displaced again in turn.\(^{32}\) Thus the burden of the oedipal link - "anxiety" - seems to fall always on the father / precursor rather than on the son / successor, while the process of appropriation and distortion (thieving and metamorphosis to return to the context of *Inferno XXV*) proves to be always an intentional and fully conscious one.

Bloom's model of literary influence cannot work for Joyce on at least another account. As Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein have pointed out, "Bloom's theory is absolutely non-referential. He repeatedly asserts his interest in the poet qua poet, which he takes to mean that the overt subject matter of poems is irrelevant. [...] The events to which a poem refers, whether personal, historical, mythic, or divine, are merely the backdrop against which the central drama of poetic influence is acted

\(^{32}\) I shall discuss this aspect especially in chapter 3, in connection with the father / son battle of Sebastopol - a battle which also affects and informs the treatment of the earlier text and which therefore seems once again - even in the choice of the setting, the battle - to evoke Bloom's framing of the theory.
out. Joyce's imitation / displacement of the Italian precursor is played out and fought on the battleground of specific literary structures, themes, stylistic and linguistic choices, and is therefore always referential and rooted in the nature of the subject-matter. It is first of all the form and content of Dante's texts, and not his towering figure, that Joyce draws from in order to elaborate his own linguistic poetics in *Finnegans Wake*.

This leads me to two related points: first, Joyce's use of earlier texts always entails a reflection on the process of writing and text-formation as well as on his own relationship with his sources (the reasons for and the implications of a certain choice, the positioning of himself and of his texts within a specific literary tradition and within literary history); in other words, it is part of the elaboration of a poetics "in progress". Secondly, my subtitle, "The Dantean poetics of *Finnegans Wake*", should not suggest that the *Wake* was written according to a notion of poetics arrived at, practised or theorised by Dante and which Joyce adhered to, but that there is a poetics of *Finnegans Wake* (a conception of the relationship between language and literature, and between theme, structure and style, as well as of the scope of the literary work, and of how a text signifies) which is comparable to the poetics of Dante's works (also constantly "in progress") and which I believe Joyce recognised and actively exploited by reading and "raiding" Dante, writing Dante, filling in the gaps left by his texts. Yet this is only one possible path, one of the many poetics of *Finnegans Wake*. (It can also be pointed out that the *Wake's* plurality of inspirations / raidings are another

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34 *Finnegans Wake's* words best express this practice of reading / writing / raiding: "The prouts who will invent a writing there ultimately is the poeta, still more learned, who discovered the raiding there originally", *FW* 483.31-32. On reading as "raiding" cf. also Stephen Heath, "Ambiviolences: Notes for reading Joyce", in Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (eds.), *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1984), 31-68: esp. 41-45.
reason why Bloom's theory ultimately fails: no son will suffer from any oedipal anxiety when he has too many fathers.)

This eclectic conception of literary relations also enables the critic to avoid the trap Beckett warned his readers of in his 1929 essay "Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce": the danger of the "neatness of identifications", of trying to "stuff" the work of one into the "pigeonhole" of the other ("DBVJ" 3-4), or into rigid categories devised by the critic him/herself. Although Beckett was the first to deal at some length with Joyce's use of Dante in his jocoserious and often outrageous essay, the importance of "Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce" lies not so much in its chronological priority or in its content but in its technique: as in the case of the typically modernist unreliable narrators, Beckett's unreliable critic may not tell the truth, but can still tell us a lot on Joyce's unreliable imitations. Reading Beckett on Work in Progress is probably the best introduction to reading Finnegans Wake, and that is why I have chosen to enter the forest of Joyce's relationship(s) with Dante by the crooked path of Beckett's essay.
Prelude

"Bethicket me"
Or, How to Find the Straight Way in the Wood
of Samuel Beckett's Obliquity of
Exagmination

"You is feeling like you was lost in the bush, boy? You says:
It is a puling sample jungle of woods. You most shouns out:
Bethicket me for a stump of a beech if I have the poultiest notions
what the fairest he all means" (FW 112.03-6)

Samuel Beckett's "Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce", the first of the twelve essays collected under the curious title Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, is the earliest critical attempt to deal with the importance of Dante's works for Joyce's Finnegans Wake. The essays, published ten years before the book they introduced or "examinied", will have to be taken with a good degree of scepticism: for one thing, the author of what was then known as Work in Progress was still able to modify parts of the text and to parody his own "twelve apostles" (JJ 613), for instance by transposing the title of the collection into his novel ("Your exagmination round his factification forincamination of a warping process", FW 497.02-03) and by referring to them in a patronising and tongue-in-cheek tone ("With however what sublation of compensation in the radification of interpretation by the byeboys?", FW 369.06-7). More importantly, as the function of the Exagmination was to advertise Joyce's "unreadable" new novel, the tone of the essays is seldom balanced or objective, and the essays must celebrate (some of) the main innovative features of Work in
Progress, make its readers curious, enthusiastic, irritated, even angry - anything but indifferent.\textsuperscript{1} The overall message is that, even if Work in Progress is no ordinary book, it is a readable, highly original and amusing one, and the point repeated throughout the collection is that the obstacles that stand between readers and their comprehension of the work are not in the book itself but in their mental attitude. Given the premises of this militant campaign, the essays will have to operate, and therefore be read, according to particular strategies; they contain most of the information about their topic but the presentation is often indirect, inexplicitly suggested, sometimes deliberately misleading so that the reader can get its full impact only after careful deciphering of the "explanatory" essay as well as of Work in Progress. We shall see that Beckett's piece is an outstanding example of this technique.

Joyce himself orchestrated the production of the Exagmination. He asked the twelve critics to collaborate, suggested subjects for their essays, perhaps also recommended some of the arguments they should use and the features of Work in Progress to which he wanted to draw the readers' attention ("I did stand behind those twelve Marshals more or less directing them what lines of research to follow", SL 345).\textsuperscript{2} Some of the strategies used by Beckett may indeed be seen as typically Joycean: the attribution of an allusion to a "wrong" text or writer while the "right" source is mentioned a few lines away in a different context;\textsuperscript{3} deliberate mistakes and misinterpretations, hints dropped but never clarified. The problem is encapsulated by Suzette Henke at the beginning of her review of the Exagmination:

\textsuperscript{1} Cf. also Massimo Verdicchio, "Exagmination Round the Fictification of Vico and Joyce", JJQ 26, 4 (1989): 531-539: 531.
\textsuperscript{2} Cf. also SL 339 - 342.
\textsuperscript{3} For an example of this technique in Finnegans Wake cf. James Atherton's comments on Joyce's use of Dantean allusions in the "Nightlesson", quoted in chapter 4 infra, p. 174.
How does one conceal and reveal at the same time, leaving clues to "authorial intention" but obscuring the origins of a commentary that never allows itself directly to comment on the text or its origins?^4

"The twelve unwary disciples", Henke writes, "were marshaled by an author who, like Christ and Averroës, spoke in riddles and parables while destabilizing traditional cognitive formulas". But Henke makes the "disciples" more naive or ingenuous than they probably were: "[l]ittle did those first brave exagminers suspect that they were analyzing incaminated chapters". Beckett, for one, certainly knew the rules of the game he was playing at with (for) the "master", and put them into practice as well: the tone of "Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce" - scornful, ironic, tongue-in-cheek throughout - speaks for itself. From the opening sentence of the essay we realise that Beckett too is playing games with his readers:

The danger is in the neatness of identifications. The conception of Philosophy and Philology as a pair of nigger minstrels out of the Teatro del Piccoli is soothing, like the contemplation of a carefully folded ham-sandwich.6

Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? Literary criticism is not book-keeping.

The danger to be avoided by any reader approaching the Exagmination is to expect to find in "Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce" neat identifications of what in Joyce's work derived from each of the three Italian authors. As with Work in Progress, the reader must be able to pick up the hints and clues hidden beneath the


^5 Henke, "Exagmination...", 61.

^6 Beckett's nearly nonsensical irony, however, is not wholly out of place, as Verdicchio points out: "Dante's Convivio, which Beckett quotes later, is the obvious antecedent. The humor of the phrase betrays an ironic stance, for Beckett really wants to stress the dangers inherent in a carefully folded analogy" (Verdicchio, "Exagmination...", 531).
surface of Beckett's text. "Beckett" - Henke points out - "had inherited a good groatsworth of his master's cunning, along with generous portions of exile and literary silence". In the following pages I shall then examine some of Beckett's silences and cunning techniques on the subject of Joyce and Dante.

A good part of the essay is devoted to Vico, whereas Bruno gets a lesser share of the critical argument which, moreover, always remains quite general whenever the heretic philosopher is concerned; Beckett only mentions the coincidence of opposites (originally in fact not a Brunonian concept), after stating that "at this point Vico applies Bruno - though he takes very good care not to say so" ("DBVJ" 5-6) - an assertion which is, at the very least, debatable. Equally debatable statements are made with regard to Dante. According to Linda Ben-Zvi, Beckett had been familiar with Dante's works since his youth, whereas he was less acquainted with Bruno and Vico at the time of writing the essay. If questionable interpretations regarding the two Neapolitan philosophers might therefore be attributed to hasty reading or misinformation, "mistakes" about Dante must be due either to a frankly wrong reading of the medieval poet or to deliberate cover-ups (as in detective fiction) meant to disseminate through the text oblique clues that only the cunning reader will be able to pick up.

One would normally expect a title to be chosen to reflect and sum up what the essayist deals with in his text, but Beckett introduces the section on Dante with a dismissive "[to justify our title" ("DBVJ" 17), as if he had to deal with Dante because the title (perhaps imposed by the "master") requires it. Despite this apparently casual, almost apologetic remark, the section on Dante covers about a quarter of the text, which after all is exactly its due in an essay dealing with four authors. Beckett mentions most of Dante's works: the Divine Comedy, the two

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7 Henke, "Exagmining...", 66.
8 Linda Ben-Zvi, Samuel Beckett, quoted in Henke, "Exagmining...", 63.
theoretical treatises De vulgari eloquentia and Convivio, from which he also cites the titles of two canzoni; and the De monarchia, briefly referred to as the book that enraged the Church and was burnt in public as heretical. Thus most of Dante's work is shown to be relevant to Joyce's, more than satisfactorily "justifying" the title, in fact suggesting that Dante's entire production, and not just some basic concepts as in the case of Vico and Bruno, needs to be taken into account.

Beckett starts his discussion of Dante and Joyce from the two writers' attitudes toward the "worn out and threadbare" conventions of the literary language of their times and their rejection of any "approximation to a universal language" (Latin and English, in medieval and in modern times respectively) ("DBVJ" 17-18).

In particular, Beckett exalts the linguistic anti-municipalism of the De vulgari eloquentia, and props up this point by choosing two ad hoc excerpts from Dante's treatise:

[Dante] attacks the world's Portadownians: 'Nam quicumque tam obscenae rationis est, ut locum suae nationis delitiosissim [sic] credat esse sub sole, huic etiam pro cunctis propriam vulgare licetur, idest maternam locutionem. Nos autem, cut mundus est patria...

etc.' When he comes to examine the dialects he finds Tuscan: 'turpissimum fere omnes Tusci in suo turpiloquio obtusi...... non restat in dubio quin alius sit vulgare quod quiserimus quam quod attingit populus Tuscanorum.'

"DBVJ" 18

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9 William Carlos Williams's essay in the collection ("A Point for American Criticism", Exag 173-185) is an attack on Rebecca West's condemnation of Joyce and a defence of Joyce's literary quest to "save the world" from "the static, worn out language" of literature (Exag 183). The emphasis on the theme of the renewal of literary language and the wording - nearly identical to Beckett's - may indicate the presence of Joyce's mastermind even behind the details of the essayists' arguments. That Joyce casts himself, or is cast by his "apostles", in the role of "saviour of the language" recalls one of the functions that Dante implicitly attributes to himself in the De vulgari eloquentia, where the post-Babelian, decayed contemporary language is "saved" by the poet's elaboration of a vulgare illustre ("illustrious vernacular"). This theme will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3; but see also the overtones of spiritual innovation of the Convivio (cf. footnote 19 infra).

10 The first of Beckett's two quotations from the De vulgari eloquentia is the one that in the original introduces Dante's tirade on exile (Dve I.vi.3). Beckett's quotation may be an indirect way to draw attention to the fact that Joyce too was an expatriate (as was Beckett) and that this similar biographical condition may bear some weight on their literary relationship.
Beckett then "concludes" that Dante formulated the theory of a "synthetic language" refined and purified from any vulgar element as if it was a consequence of his "complete freedom from civic intolerance" ("DBVJ" 18):

His conclusion is that the corruption common to all the dialects makes it impossible to select one rather than another as an adequate literary form, and that he who would write in the vulgar must assemble the purest elements from each dialect and construct a synthetic language that would at least possess more than a circumscribed local interest: which is precisely what he did. ("DBVJ" 18)

That the *De vulgari eloquentia* postulated the need for an artificial, "synthetic" language - a refined and immutable version of the common vernacular - was the predominant interpretation at the time of Beckett's essay, although many critics have questioned it since;\(^\text{11}\) the statement that follows - that Dante used his "synthetic" language in the *Divine Comedy* and that "[h]e did not write in Florentine any more than in Neapolitan" ("DBVJ" 18) - is rather more difficult to accept without qualifications. It is true that in the *De vulgari eloquentia* Dante elaborates the theory of a supra-municipal, illustrious vernacular, but he *did* write the *Divine Comedy* in an illustrious form of Florentine: he coined new words, used archaic expressions, Italianised Latin, French, or Provençal, but the skeleton of the poem was and remained Florentine; and if Beckett was not aware of this, Joyce, with his very good knowledge of Italian and Italian dialects, of Florentine and of Dante,\(^\text{12}\) certainly would have been. Why, then, this notion of a *Commedia* written in Florentine no more than in Neapolitan? And why Neapolitan in particular? Interestingly, the notion of Neapolitan in the *Commedia* has been repeated by Joycean scholars whereas, as far as I am aware, it is not to be found in the writings

\(^{11}\) Cf. Illeana Pagani, *La teoria linguistica di Dante* (Naples: Liguori, 1982). However, as I shall point out below, Vico had already criticised this view.

of Dante critics; Beckett would have been pleased to know that he is probably responsible for the groundless myth of a semi-Neapolitan Divine Comedy. In fact, it is likely that Neapolitan is mentioned in his essay because of Bruno and Vico, in order to create a further link between the three authors; and this may simply be another of Beckett's indirect remarks that the reader is invited to unmask: Beckett's next obliquity is about Dante's Latin readership (needless to say, and unlike what Beckett writes, the language commonly spoken in Italy in Dante's time was no longer Latin), and he reports the anecdote that Dante had actually begun the Commedia in Latin, but that he had then changed his mind and substituted the "barbarous directness" of the vernacular "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" for the "suave elegance of: 'Ultima regna canam, fluido contermina mundo'" ("DBVJ" 19). The anecdote of a Commedia originally in Latin originates in Giovanni Boccaccio's Vita di Dante,13 but Beckett does not reveal his source; instead, he fuses it - again without acknowledgement - with Vico's interpretation of Dante as the poet of barbarity and directness. Vico writes that the Divine Comedy must be read "as a history of the period of barbarism in Italy, as a source of the fairest Tuscan speech, and as an example of sublime poetry".14 Beckett lifts the "barbarity" from Vico, but ignores altogether the philosopher's emphasis on Dante's Tuscan idiom in order to highlight (whether deviously or wrongly) the Commedia's alleged medley of dialects. In fact, Vico explicitly denies this reading of the poem: he defines the notion that "Dante gathered together the speech of all the various Italian dialects" as "false", and expresses his scepticism that Dante may have learned in his lifetime "the vulgar speech of so many communities" and that he

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may have got from them "the abundance of forms he needed and employed to express his thought in the Comedy". Even disregarding Vico's caveat, we know that Dante did not put the theory of the "synthetic language" of the De vulgari eloquentia into practice when it came to writing the "sacratum poem" ("sacred poem", Par XXIII, 62); Beckett is thus forced to make the "barbarism" of the vernacular poem (a barbarism which, for Vico, is also linked to Dante's achievement as the poet of the sublime) rest on the improbable "directness" of a patchwork of vulgares as opposed to the stiffness of a polished but "worn out and threadbare" Latin.

Although Beckett withholds the information that Boccaccio is the source of the anecdote of the Latin Commedia, he mentions the Italian writer at the end of the same paragraph in a bizarre sentence apparently disjointed from the rest and meant to confirm that the the "barbarous directness" of the Commedia had a similar effect on Dante's Latin audience as Joyce's "barbarous" writing now has on English ears: "Boccaccio did not jeer at the 'piedi sozzi' of the peacock that Signora Alighieri dreamed about" ("DBVJ" 19). Hasn't Beckett just defined Dante's language as an idiom assembled from "the purest elements from each dialect", that "could have been spoken by an ideal Italian" ("DBVJ" 18), just as the language of Work in Progress could reasonably be spoken by an "international phenomenon" ("DBVJ" 19)? But the first example that he can provide of this purity of idiom is the none too illusrious "piedi sozzi" ("dirty feet"), which surely places greater emphasis on the "vulgar" and "barbarous" side of the language than on its "purest elements".

Beckett's parallel between Dante's synthetic vernacular and the language of Joyce's Work in Progress does not hold: the language of the Wake would have puzzled any

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15 Vico, "Discovery of the True Dante", 11. However, some years earlier, in the letter to Gherardo degli Angioli, Vico had been much more ambiguous: "[o]n account of such poverty of speech, Dante, in order to unfold his Comedy, had to assemble a language from those of all the people of Italy, in the same way that Homer had compiled his, using all those of Greece", quoted in Caesar (ed.), Dante: The Critical Heritage, 351-52.
contemporary "international phenomenon" much more than Dante's *Divine Comedy*, whose (Florentine) idiom would have been comprehensible to most despite its inventiveness. One of the keys to this odd mixture of Boccaccio and Vico, of sublimity and "dirty feet", is in fact suggested by Beckett himself: in the *Vita di Dante* Boccaccio reports a dream that Dante's mother ("Signora Alighieri") allegedly had when she was pregnant: among other oneiric-allegorical elements, Dante is cast as a peacock, a symbol for poetry whose feet, Boccaccio points out, are notoriously dirty. It is quite telling that Beckett should obliquely refer to a text whose meaning he obscures in order to prove the need to interpret and unravel the hidden meanings of a dream about beauty and vulgarity and thus underscore their relevance for interpreting the "dream itself" of *Work in Progress*.

Beckett's next step is to quote from the *Convivio* a fitting definition of the "monodialectical arcadians" who cannot understand Joyce's new novel, and an excerpt praising the formal innovation of the Italian vernacular which will also celebrate the innovative style of *Work in Progress*. The *Convivio* is mentioned,

16 "Signora Alighieri" dreamed that she was giving birth to a son under a laurel tree; the child, feeding only on the berries that were falling from the tree and drinking from the clear waters of a nearby stream, soon became a shepherd and tried to climb the tree to take some of its branches; but he fell down, and when he got up he had become a peacock. She marvelled so, that she woke up; and a short time later, she gave birth to a son, who she and her husband decided to call Dante (*Vita di Dante*, 52-53). Boccaccio says that the peacock has four features in common with the poet and the *Commedia*; first, it has angelic feathers, and has one hundred eyes therein; second, it has dirty feet and walks quietly; third, it has a horrible voice; and fourth, its flesh is scented and incorruptible. These characteristics also belong to the *Commedia*: its moral and theological meaning is incorruptible, its feathers are like those of the angels because of the beauty of the historical meaning of the pilgrimage, and its great variety is like the hundred eyes of the peacock; its feet are dirty because feet are what the rest of the body rests on, and the *Commedia* rests on the vulgar tongue and walks quietly because of the humbleness of its style; finally, its voice has a horrible sound because of Dante's harshness against the sins of men (*Vita di Dante*, 53-57).

17 "Joyce's] writing is not about something; it is that something itself" ("DBVJ" 14).

18 "Questi sono da chiamare pecore e non uomini; che se una pecora si gittasse da una ripa di mille passi, tutte l'altre le andrebbero dietro: e se una pecora per alcuna cagione al passare d'un' strada saltasse, tutte le altre saltano, eziandio nulla veggendo da saltare. E io ne vidi già molte in un pozzo saltare, per una che dentro vi saltò [sic], forse credendo di saltare un muro" ("DBVJ" 19, cf. Conv I.xi, 10-11).

19 "Questo (formal innovation) sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, il quale sorgerà ora [sic] l'usato tramonterà e darà luce a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscurità per lo usato sole che a loro non luce" ("DBVJ" 19; cf. Conv I.xiii, 12).
that is, not for its polysemic and stratified conception of textual meaning\(^\text{20}\) which, as I shall argue in chapter 1, is taken up and exploited (indeed, exploded) in the *Wake*, but in order to continue the offensive against the unsympathetic readership, thus showing (perhaps "mongering"?) a further analogy between the two writers which has the effect of casting the medieval poet into the role of a *figura* for the modern writer.\(^\text{21}\)

After this attack, Beckett goes back to the *De vulgari eloquentia* to point out a "curious mistake" ("DBVJ" 20) made by Dante when he writes that the Bible is wrong in saying that Eve was the first speaker because the first to use the God-given language must have been Adam. The entire passage about Dante's wrong reading of the Bible is in brackets, and it is only very loosely connected with the rest of Beckett's argument. I shall come back in the second chapter to the questions raised by Dante's inversion and Beckett's comments, but it is already possible to suggest what one of the motives behind Beckett's *curious* argument might be: as Dante finds a precedent for his linguistic invention in the Bible and criticises it by (partly) inverting it, Joyce similarly finds one of his major antecedents in Dante's history of the creation and decay of language which he exploits and often subverts. After this bracketed digression, Beckett goes back to his major theme, the generally hostile reception of *Work in Progress*. The relationship between the passage in brackets and its context is not immediately evident, and, to paraphrase Stephen

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\(^\text{20}\) Although there is no mention of Dante's method of interpretation, two of the *canzoni* that the *Convivio* explains through the four levels of meaning are cited in the essay ("Donne ch'avevo intelletto d'amore" and "Voi che, [sic] intendendo, il terzo ciel novete", "DBVJ" 14) in order to provide examples for the word "intendere" which, according to Beckett, best renders the "general esthetic vigilance without which we cannot hope to snare the sense which is for ever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself" ("DBVJ" 14). The most satisfactory English word for this "esthetic vigilance" is according to Beckett "apprehend", in the sense used by Stephen when he explains to Lynch in *A Portrait* his Aquinian theory of art and beauty. Cf. chapter 3 infra for a discussion of the first attribute of the Italian vernacular in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, "illustre", which may have been inspired by Aquinas's definition of beauty.

\(^\text{21}\) In the medieval doctrine of interpretation of Biblical and Classical texts alike, an event or character could be explained as a foreshadowing, or a *figura*, of the coming in the Christian age of another event or character which would "fulfil" the meaning of the earlier one. Cf. Erich Auerbach, "Figura", *Studi su Dante* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963), 176-226; and chapter 1 infra.
Dedalus, the reader has to look "within or behind or beyond or above" the lines of Beckett's "handiwork" in order to find an "invisible" allusion which has been "refined [nearly] out of existence" (P 215) and thus unveil its relevance to the relationship between Dante and Joyce.

Beckett recalls how Dante's work was regarded as blasphemous for its attack on the papacy and the clergy; was burnt as heretical (the De monarchia), and continued to be criticised for years, even centuries, for its "mighty vindication of the 'vulgar'" ("DBVJ" 20). Then, with another very loosely connected digression, Beckett points out that "a[nother point of comparison is the preoccupation with the significance of numbers" ("DBVJ" 21), and goes on to explain the importance of number three in Dante and number four in Joyce. Interestingly, Joyce allegedly used almost the same words in a conversation with Adolf Hoffmeister, and this provides yet another clue that Beckett's argument may be a repetition of Joyce's suggestions or favourite points made in conversations with his friends - or that the osmosis is not only between the "master" and the "disciples" but also among acquaintances and / or "disciples" who copied each other's words and produced a wealth of spurious Joycean anecdotes.

22 Hoffmeister reports Joyce's following remarks: "Number is an enigma that God deciphers. Along with Beckett, a small, red-haired Irishman and my great friend, I have discovered the importance of numbers in life and history. Dante was obsessed by the number three. He divided his poem into three parts, each with thirty-three cantos, written in terza rima. And why always the arrangement of four - four legs of a table, four legs of a horse, four seasons of the year, four provinces of Ireland? Why are there twelve tables of the law, twelve apostles, twelve months, and twelve Napoleon's marshals? Why was the Armistice of the Great War trumpeted forth on the eleventh minute of the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month? Number as a measure of time is uncertain. The significance of the same numbers varies, depending on where it occurs and what it refers to" ("Portrait of Joyce", in Potts (ed.), Portraits of the Artist in Exile, 127-136:129-30). Beckett's words are: "Dante never ceased to be obsessed by this number [3]. Thus the Poem is divided into three Cantiche, each composes of 33 Canti, and written in terza rima. Why, Mr Joyce seems to say, should there be four legs to a table, and four to a horse, and four seasons and four Gospels and four Provinces in Ireland? Why twelve Tables of the Law, and twelve apostles and twelve months and twelve Napoleonic marshals and twelve men in Florence called Ottolenghi? Why should the Armistice be celebrated at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month? He cannot tell you because he is not God Almighty [...]" ("DBVJ" 21).

Very similar words about numbers four and twelve are used also by Padraic Colum in Our Friend James Joyce (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 124.
The essay is finally wrapped up by a "last word about the Purgatories" ("DBVJ" 21) and about the differences and analogies between the function and structure of Dante's Purgatory and the "purgatorial" quality of *Work in Progress*. In his last page Beckett asks a puzzling question to which he gives an equally puzzling answer: "And the partially purgatorial agent? The partially purged" ("DBVJ" 22). At one level, the suggestion is that *Work in Progress* stages a world of transience in which nothing and nobody ever reaches a condition of stability, whether of eternal bliss or eternal penance (like the souls in Dante's Paradise and Hell, for instance) or of coming to the final destination (like the "letter" in the *Wake*). Translating the *Divine Comedy* into terms that evoke Bruno's philosophy more than Dante's poetics, Beckett writes: "Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. Paradise is the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory is a flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements" ("DBVJ" 22). But the "purgatorial aspect of the work" is explained by Beckett in Vichian terms too: "[t]here is an endless verbal germination, maturation, putrefaction, the cyclic dynamism of the intermediate" ("DBVJ" 16).23 Everything, that is, keeps turning and returning, each time in different guises, and the condition of language as well as the content of the book is most similar to that of the souls subjected to the penance of Purgatory, where suffering and joy coexist in the penance of the present and the vision of the future ("absolute progression and a guaranteed consummation", "DBVJ" 22) - a future which is however ever-deferred, never achieved (forever only "partially" realised.

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23 Thomas McGreevy states that "[t]he purgatorial element of *Work in Progress* is most obvious, of course, in the purgatorial, transitional language in which it is written. This language is adequate to the theme. Purgatory is not fixed and static like the four last things, death, judgement, heaven and hell. [...] In *Work in Progress* the characters speak a language made up of scraps of half the languages known to mankind. Passing through a state of flux or transition they catch at every verbal, every syllabic, association". But McGreevy also adds: "[t]hen there is a politically purgatorial side to the work dominated by the figure, intermediate from every point of view, of the Anglo-Irishman, Earwigger, Perse O'Reilley. And there is, perhaps, the personal purgatory of the author" ("The Catholic Element in *Work in Progress*, *Exag* 117-127: 124).
as Beckett's "endless" betrays), condemning to eternity the process of mutation itself (a Brunonian notion). But in the Purgatory evoked by Beckett the penance is in the endless waiting, in looking back to the past and ahead to an unknown future (or vice versa, in a further Brunonian overtone: "movement is non-directional - or multi-directional, and a step forward is, by definition, a step back", "DBVJ" 22).

This theme will engender Vladimir, Estragon and the ever-postponed coming of Godot in Beckett's own work; in the 1929 essay on Joyce, it leads Beckett to transfigure Dante in terms of Bruno and Vico and eventually to refine him out of existence and beyond recognition. According to this Wakean "purgatory" (but is it Joyce's or Beckett's?),

Vice and Virtue [Dante] - which you may take to mean any two pair of large contrary human factors [Bruno] - must in turn be purged down to spirits of rebelliousness. Then the dominant crust of the Vicious or Virtuous sets, resistance is provided, the explosion duly takes place [Vico's thunder] and the machine proceeds [Vico's cyclical history]. And no more than this; neither prize nor penalty [certainly not Dante's Purgatory]; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail [perhaps Work in Progress, but no longer Vico].

("DBVJ" 22; my interpolations)

"Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce" can certainly throw light on the relationship between Joyce and Dante, and especially on the way in which Joyce draws material from Dante and transforms it - but only if Beckett's method of twisting his references is heeded even more than what he says: one must beware of Beckett's (and / or Joyce's) obscuring techniques and try to detect and decipher the clues left in the text. One must also beware of what Beckett does not say - for instance, that Vico knew Dante and wrote about him. What Beckett says is that "Vico applies Bruno - though he takes very good care not to say so" ("DBVJ" 5-6). What the reader must infer is that Beckett applies Joyce - though he takes very good care not to say so.
The danger is in the neatness of identifications. No danger in Beckett's essay of such neatness. Nor is there danger, whether in "Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce" or in Work in Progress, of a "distortion in one of two directions" to satisfy the abhorred "analogymongers": to "wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole" or, alternatively, to "modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole" ("DBVJ" 3-4); as we shall see in the following chapters, the danger of distortions is welcomed, rather than rejected, by James Joyce as it is by Samuel Beckett, and necks are wrung in more than one or two directions, so as to preempt any chance of filling any pigeon-hole. In fact, in Dante's, Bruno's and Vico's poetical or philosophical conceptions on the one hand and Joyce's invention on the other, which would be the system to be stuffed into what plastic pigeon-hole? Does analogymongering take the form of tailoring Joyce's work to fit the more manageable pigeon-hole of the systems of its three Italian models, or is it, on the contrary, the attempt to fit the models of the past into the much more complex system of the modern master? Perhaps both alternatives are true, or perhaps neither of them is: analogymongering would be book-keeping, and literary criticism, Beckett warns us, is neither the one nor the other. What then about literary practice? The answer, as Beckett has obliquely taught us, also involves performing operations on the plasticine of Dante's theories and poetics ("thieving" and "metamorphosing"), and wringing their necks. But the chief neck-wringer was Joyce himself - the "dreamskhwindel" who "necklassoe[d]" (FW 426.27) his inspiring / antagonistic models, and I hope that the analogies traced in the pages that follow will not be mere book-keeping but an illumination of some aspects of the "attractive parallel between Dante and Mr. Joyce in the question of language" ("DBVJ" 18).
Chapter 1

Working in Layers

"spell me how every word will be bound over
to carry three score and ten toptypical readings"
(FW 20.14-15)

"(if you can spot fifty I spy four more)"
(FW 10.31)

Dante's poetic work, from the *Vita Nuova* to the *Divine Comedy*, is informed by some recurrent concerns that also provide the conceptual foundations for the *Convivio* and the *De vulgari eloquentia*, the two treatises begun in the early fourteenth century but left unfinished, sacrificed as it were to the more urgent need to compose the *Commedia*. These concerns are the relationship between everyday and literary language, between literature and the real - whether spiritual or material; the issue of the semantic capabilities (or limits) of language as a means of representation and communication of the multiplicity of reality; and the exploration of the medium of poetry for producing meanings which everyday language cannot convey. At the centre of this life-long reflection stands the nature and status of the vernacular, the language commonly spoken at Dante's time and which everybody could understand but which had never been used before in "high" literature or for theoretical inquiry, and which was therefore still in its youth, waiting to be fashioned as a mature idiom. For Dante, the elevation of the Italian vernacular to the status of a noble and flexible language was the task of the poet; the *Convivio*, written in Italian between 1304 and 1307, can be regarded as one of the steps taken in the fulfilment of this programme. Aware of the "revolutionary" implications of
writing a doctrinal work in vernacular at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Dante devoted the greater part of the first book of the treatise to a personal and philosophical justification of his linguistic choice and to the praise of the Italian vernacular language, and his object takes on clear tones of linguistic / spiritual salvation: "Questo sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonterà, e darà lume a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscurità per lo usato sole che a loro non luce" (Conv Lxiii.12). As I have pointed out in the "Prelude", this is the passage that Samuel Beckett selects to describe the language of Work in Progress and its remedial scope for the contemporary "worn out and threadbare" literary language. In the following pages I shall discuss what other features of the Convivio, beside this telling but general analogy (but Beckett would probably prefer us to use "point of comparison", "DBVJ" 21, or "attractive parallel", 18), can offer the critic one of the surely infinite possible threads through the labyrinth of the Wake. To this end, it will be useful to start from a preliminary discussion of the most important element of Dante's treatise for this study: the hermeneutic theory of the four levels of meaning.

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Dante wrote only four of the fifteen books that he had originally planned for the Convivio. The first is an introduction to the whole treatise, and it explains the purpose of the work and Dante's reasons for preferring the vernacular tongue over Latin; each of books II, III and IV begins with a canzone which is then illustrated according to the interpretative method expounded at length in book II. The Convivio is thus both a commentary on poetry and a commentary on the

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1 "This shall be the new light, the new sun, which shall rise when the wonted sun shall set, and shall give light to them who are in darkness and in shadow as to the wonted sun, which shines not for them."
commentary, and Dante's originality in the treatise is perhaps shown at its best in this meta-critical scope. The poems, he declares, are "polysemos", and they must therefore be illustrated through four senses: literal, allegorical, moral and analogical. The subdivision of a text into levels of meaning was an established tradition in the Middle Ages, but the distinction into the four senses listed and analysed by Dante had until then been applied only to Biblical texts.

Dante wrote the Convivio at the height of a long and rich exegetic tradition. A. J. Minnis has shown that although it had developed independently, in the Middle Ages literary theory was subordinated to Scriptural exegesis and had received great incentive from the study of the Bible. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, classical authors, including the pagan ones, were invested with the status of auctoritates from both the literary and the moral points of view, and their works were believed to hold important teachings which detailed analysis would reveal and make explicit. The distance between Scriptural and secular texts was thus progressively reduced, although pagan writers were still naturally seen as inferior to the Christian ones in the hierarchy of the auctoritates, and secular writers as inferior to the prophets of the Bible, whose word must ultimately be attributed to God's inspiration.

It is at this moment, when the gap between the literary and the religious text is reducing, that Dante writes the Convivio. The treatise is thus part of a more general and open debate, but Dante's originality lies in that for the first time a secular writer dared to transfer the method and terminology of Biblical exegesis to poetry - his own love poetry (and love poetry was generally considered as a "low" literary genre) - in a move that goes beyond the merely terminological or even

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2 "Theologians regularly drew on the resources of secular literary theory, refining and modifying it in accordance with their special needs. When it proved inadequate, they went beyond it, thereby bringing out the uniqueness of Scripture. Consequently, the study of the Bible occasioned much of the most sophisticated literary theory of the later Middle Ages". A. J. Minnis, The Medieval Theory of Authorship (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988), 36.
methodological borrowing and ultimately implies the elevation of the poems to the same level as Holy Writ:

Dico che, si come nel primo capitolo è narrato, questa esposizione conviene essere letterale e allegorica. E a ciò dure a intendere, si vuol sapere che le scritture si possono intendere e deonsi esporne massimamente per quattro sensi. L’uno si chiama letterale, e questo è quello che non si stende più oltre che la lettera de le parole fittizie, si come sono le favole de li poeti. L’altro si chiama allegorico, e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto l’unto di queste favole, ed è una veritade ascossa sotto bella menzogna: si come quando dice Ovidio che Orfeo facea con la cetera mansuete le fiere, e li arbori e le pietre a sè muovere; che vuol dire che lo savio uomo con lo strumento de la sua voce faria mansuete e umiliare li crudeli cuori, e faria muovere a la sua volontade coloro che non hanno vita di scienza e d’arte; e coloro che non hanno vita ragionevole alcuna sono quasi come pietre. [...]

Veramente li teologi questo senso prendono altrimenti che li poeti; ma però che mia intenzione è qui lo modo de li poeti seguitare, prendo lo senso allegorico secondo che per li poeti è usato.

Lo terzo senso si chiama morale, e questo è quello che li lettori deono intentamente andare appostando per le scritture, ad utilitade di loro e di loro disceuti: si come appostare si può ne lo Evangelio, quando Cristo salio lo monte per transfiguraisi, che de li dodici Apostoli menò seco li tre; in che moralmente si può intendere che a le secretissime cose noi dovenmo avere poca compagnia.

Lo quarto senso si chiama anagogico, cioè sovrasenso; e questo è quando spiritualmente si spone una scrittura, la quale ancora sia vera eziandio nel senso letterale, per le cose significate signifca de le superue cose de l’ettemal gloria, si come vedere si può in quello canto del Profeta che dice che, ne l’uscita del popolo d’Israel d’Egitto, Giudea è fatta santa e libera. Chè avvegna essere vero secondo la lettera sia manifesto, non meno è vero quello che spiritualmente s’intende, cioè che ne l’uscita de l’anima dal peccato, essa sia fatta santa e libera in sua potestate.3

(Conv. Il.i.2-8).

3 "I say that, as was told in the first chapter, this exposition must be both literal and allegorical; and that this may be understood it should be known that writings may be taken and should be expounded chiefly in four senses. The first is called the literal, and it is the one that extends no further than the letter as it stands; the second is called the allegorical, and is the one that hides itself under the mantle of these tales, and is a truth hidden under beauteous fiction. As when Ovid says that Orpheus with his lyre made wild beasts tame and made trees and rocks approach him; which would say that the wise man with the instrument of his voice makest cruel hearts tender and humble; and moveth to his will such as have not the life of science and of art; for they that have not the rational life are as good as stones. [...] It is true that the theologians take this sense otherwise than the poets do, but since it is my purpose here to follow the method of the poets I shall take the allegorical sense after the use of the poets."
Prudently, Dante does not go as far as explicitly equating his poems with the Biblical text, and draws a significant distinction between theologians and poets by emphasising that the literal sense is true only for the former, whereas for the latter it is a "beauteous fiction", a charming lie or mask which envelopes the truth of the allegorical meaning. Dante declares that his intention is to follow the "modo de li poeti", and therefore he does not claim truth for the letter of his poems - indeed, he cannot do so, because the treatise is meant to provide an apology for himself and for his behaviour after the death of Beatrice, when he had written poems for another "Donna Gentile" ("Gentle Woman"). Dante wants to prove that this "other woman" (perhaps the same one that appears under the name of "Donna Pietosa" in the *Vita Nuova*) is an allegory of Philosophy. To be a lover of Philosophy, and not of another real woman, would acquit Dante of unfaithfulness to the memory of Beatrice, and even enhance his worthiness insofar as Philosophy is the "daughter of God" (*Conv. II.xii.9; II.xv.12*). Thus, also on account of this self-defence, Dante needs to argue that the literal level of the poems must be understood as only a fiction - certainly beautiful, but strictly a fiction written in the "manner of the poets".

The distinction between poets and theologians was not new: the interpretation of poetry according to a twofold standard of letter and allegory was common
among medieval grammarians and rhetoricians, while the fourfold interpretation was reserved only for the Holy Scripture. As Charles Singleton has put it, the basic difference between the two methods is that "poets create, and theologians only interpret", or that the poet's words work according to a principle which can be encapsulated as "this for that", while God's principle is "this and that". The poet's word has only two layers, the truth which has to be conveyed and the fiction in which the truth is dressed, whereas the theologian's mode is not one of construction but only of interpretation, because the author of the Holy Scripture is God, who inspires the scribes with prophetic truth. In God's Writ both the letter and the other senses are true, because He is the only one who can signify through both words and things and is the author of two "books": the Bible, written in words, and the world, "written" in things. St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, stated that God is the unique auctor of things and can use them to signify, whereas men can be auctores of words only, and have to use them to convey meanings.

Dante's assertion that he wants to follow the "modo de li poeti" would thus seem to disclaim any attempt to identify his poems with scriptural writing; indeed he mentions the distinction between poet and theologian only when he writes about allegory and points out that, while the literal level is either true or untrue, the allegorical is always true. But he does not mention the opposition again when he writes about the other two levels of poetic interpretation, the moral and the anagogical, which traditionally belonged only to Biblical exegesis and for which therefore Dante cannot find examples in the fictional "manner of the poets". Juxtaposing the two methods without any further distinction thus gives rise to several problems, and the issue in Convivio remains rather confusing. To sum up,

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4 The fourfold method ultimately derived from John Cassian (c. 360-345) and it was summarised in a well-known thirteenth century distich which ran, "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia" (Minnis, Medieval Theory, 34).
6 Minnis, Medieval Theory, 73.
what Dante explicitly says is that he wants to follow the manner of the poets, but he
does not actually deny the possibility of a fourfold interpretation of poetry.
However, when he has to provide an example for each level, he is able to offer
poetic ones (from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*) only for the first two, whereas for the
moral and the anagogical senses he can only find examples in the Scriptures. Later
on in the treatise, Dante repeats that the exegesis of the *canzoni* is carried out
through the literal and allegorical meanings, while the moral and the anagogical
have only incidental interest; but, also in this case, he does not rule out the
possibility that they may also be resorted to:

> Io adunque, per queste ragioni, tuttavia sopra ciascuna canzone ragionerò prima la letterale
> sentenza, e appresso di quella ragionerò la sua allegoria, cioè la nascosta veritate; e talvolta
de li altri sensi toccherò incidentemente, come a luogo e a tempo si converrà.7

(Conv II.i.15)

As many of Dante’s critics have pointed out,8 Dante is missing (or even
intentionally disregarding in a strategic move that can enable him to reduce an
otherwise unbridgeable gap, as Mazzeo has suggested?) the fundamental difference
between the "modo de li poeti" and that of the "teologi", and this is what gives rise
to the confusion and the wavering between the two. Whatever (wilful?)
misunderstanding there may be (in fact, thanks to the ambiguity thus created),
Dante reduces the distance between "poeti" and "teologi" and succeeds in
introducing the four exegetical levels of holy texts into literary criticism. If Dante
was aware of the problems left open by the *Convivio* - and this, it has been

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7 “Therefore, for these reasons, I shall always first discourse concerning each ode as to the
literal sense of the same; and after that I shall discourse of its allegory, that is its hidden truth; and
from time to time I shall touch upon the other senses incidentally as shall suit place and time.”
8 Cf. e.g. J. A. Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell U
P, 1958), in particular the second chapter, "Dante’s Conception of Poetic Expression", 25-49; A.
D’Andrea, “L’allegoria dei poeti”. Nota a Convivio II.1” in M. Picone (ed.), *Dante e le forme
dell’allegoria* (Ravenna: Longo, 1987), 71-78; and C. Singleton, “Dante’s Allegory”.
9 *Structure and Thought*, 33-34.
suggested, may be one of the reasons why he abandoned the composition of the treatise - the *Epistle to Can Grande della Scala* may be seen as an attempt to solve some of those contradictions, and some preliminary remarks upon this text may also be due before it is discussed in detail in relation to the *Wake*.

The *Epistle* dedicates the third *cantica* of the *Commedia* to Can Grande della Scala, Dante’s patron at Verona. Written in Latin, it gives indications as to how the poem should be read and interprets the "prologue" of the *Paradiso* on the basis of the four levels of meaning:

Ad evidentiam itaque dicendorum, sciendum est quod istius operis non est simplex sensus, immo dicit potest polysenon, hoc est plurum sensum; nam primus sensus est quia habetur per literam, alias est quia habetur per significata per literam. Et primus dicitur literalis, secundus vero allegoricas, sive mysticas. Qui modus tractandii, ut meliori pateat, potest considerari in his versibus: 'In exitu Israel de Aegypto, dominus Iacob de populo barbaro, facta est Iudaeae sanctificatio eius, Israel potestas eius'. Nam si ad literam solam inspiciamus, significatur nobis exitus filiorum Israel de Aegypto, tempore Moysis; si ad allegoriam, significatur exitus filiorum nostri redemptio facta per Christum; si ad moralem sensum, significatur exitus animae de luctu et miseria peccati ad statum gratiae; si ad anagogicum, significatur exitus animae sanctae ad huius corruptionis servitute ad aeternae gloriae libertatem. Et quamvis isti sensus mystici variis appellentur nominibus, generaliter omnes dicit possunt allegorici, quum sint a literali sive historiali diversi. Nam allegoria

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10 The authorship of the *Epistle* has long been a matter for debate, and the attribution is still by no means certain. The parties for and against count many illustrious scholars among their number, and there is no need to take sides here: what matters is that the theory of the fourfold meaning, first proposed in Dante’s *Convivio*, was later applied to the *Commedia* in a letter of dedication of the *Paradiso* to Dante’s patron Can Grande. The *epistle* was accepted as authoritative on the subject (although not necessarily as Dante’s own) by Dante’s early commentators, including Guido da Pisa, Dante’s son Pierio, Iacopo della Lana, and Giovanni Boccaccio. The first recorded attribution of the *Epistle* to Dante was made by Filippo Villani at the end of the fourteenth century (cf. Luis Jenaro-MacLennan, *The Trecento Commentaries on the Divina Commedia and the Epistle to Can Grande*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1974). Joyce’s critics, contemporaries and friends have generally assumed the *Epistle* to be Dante’s (cf. e.g. Louis Gillet, *Claybook for James Joyce*. London and New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1958). For simplicity’s sake, I shall generally treat the *Epistle* as Dante’s and refer to the doubtful attribution only when relevant.
dicitur ab alleon gracee, quod in latinum dicitur alienum, sive diversum.\(^{11}\)

(Epistle to Can Grande, §7)

In the *Epistle*, Dante glibly "resolves" the contradictions deriving from the *Convivio*’s juxtaposition of the two "modi" by doing away with the distinction itself, and thus making the duality between the truth and the fiction of the literal level disappear. Now allegory is not only restricted to words (in verbis) but is also in facto, and the letter truthfully describes facts which signify both itself ("literam") and other meanings ("significata per literam"). The twofold method of the poet and the fourfold method of the theologian are thus now integrated, and the distinction is made in two stages: the primary opposition is between the "litera" and the "significata per literam" (allegory in the broader sense of meaning "other"); but the allegory can also be further divided into three layers: allegory proper, tropology or moral sense and anagogy or spiritual sense. Thus, the four levels of meaning are preserved, and their application to poetry can be rescued and reassessed.\(^{12}\) Still the

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\(^{11}\) "For the elucidation, therefore, of what we have to say, it must be understood that the meaning of this work is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as ‘polysemous’, that is, having several meanings; for the first meaning is that which is conveyed by the letter, and the next is that which is conveyed by what the letter signifies: the former of which is called literal, while the latter is called allegorical, or mystical. And for the better illustration of this method of exposition we may apply it to the following verses: ‘When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.’ For if we consider the letter alone, the thing signified to us is the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses; if the allegory, our redemption through Christ is signified; if the moral sense, the conversion of the soul from the sorrow and misery of sin to a state of grace is signified; if the anagogical, the passing of the sanctified soul from the bondage of the corruption of this world to the liberty of everlasting glory is signified. And although these mystical meanings are called by various names, they may one and all in a general sense be termed allegorical, inasmuch as they are different (diversi) from the literal or historical; for the word ‘allegory’ is so called from the Greek alleon, which in Latin is alienum (strange) or diversum (different)."

Dante also used the psalm "In exitu" in *Purgatorio* II, 46-48, where it is chanted by the souls arriving on the shore of the mountain of the Purgatory. The psalm is sung "secreto" and in the "modus peregrino" by Stephen and Bloom in the "lithaca" chapter of *Ulysses* (U 651). Joyce’s use of Dante’s references to the psalm is discussed by Reynolds *Joyce and Dante* (121-123), and by T. C. Theoharis in the third chapter of his *Joyce’s Ulysses: An Anatomy of the Soul* (Chapel Hill and London: U of North Carolina P, 1988), 88-141.

\(^{12}\) One of the ways in which the truthfulness of the literal level is made possible is through the adoption of the figural relationship. According to this manner of interpretation, characters and events contained in the Old Testament, in classical authors, in pre-Christian history or in myth are seen as prefigurations of characters and events which represent their fulfilment in the New
poet refrains from explicitly presenting his work as part of Scriptural writing: he does say that his conceptual inspiration comes from God (Dante calls himself a "scribe" of God-inspired words in Par X, 27, and the Commedia is called "poema sacro", "sacred poem" in Paradiso XXV, 1); but he is a poet, and as such he takes upon himself the full responsibility, and therefore also the full merit, of what he has written and how he has written it ("Agens igitur totius et partis est ille qui dicitus est, et totaliter esse videtur").

Whereas a fourfold mechanism of interpretation of the poem's meaning is still deemed necessary, the twofold distinction between the manner of the poets and of the theologians no longer applies to the allegory but shifts, more coherently perhaps, to the formal aspect of writing, the "forma sive modus tractandi" (Epistle to Can Grande, §9, my emphasis), described in the Epistle (as it was in the Convivio, although less clearly expressed) as "poeticus, fictivus" (§9). The "way of dealing with the subject-matter" contains forms typical of philosophical discussions ("diffinitivus, divisivus, probativus, improbativus") as well as the forms of sacred and secular literary discourse ("poeticus, fictivus, descriptivus, digressivus, transumptivus" and the "exemplorum positivus", which, like the modus parabolicum, is especially found in the Scripture). In this, Dante seems to have moved nearer to St. Thomas's discussion of figurative language and of poetic techniques, which the Aquinate justified by accepting that metaphorical and

Testament and Christian history. The figural pattern confirms the literal truth of both foreshadowing and fulfilment while preserving their spiritual meaning, as it is that kind of relationship whereby God signifies in facto what he wishes to make known; it is, in other words, what Dante calls in Convivio the "allegory of the theologians". Cf. Peter Armour, "The Theme of Exodus in the First Two Cantos of the Purgatorio," in D. Nolan (ed.), Dante Soundings: Eight Literary and Historical Essays (Dublin: Irish UP, 1981), 59-99; Erich Auerbach, "Figura", John Hollander, "Dante Theologus-Poeta", in Studies in Dante (Ravenna: Longo: s.d.), 39-89.

13 "The author, then, of the whole and of the part is the person mentioned above, who is seen to be such throughout." By contrast, the human auctores of the Bible were not held responsible for what they had said, insofar as they were chosen as "voices" for the Holy Spirit, to which they only played the role of scribes. The exegetes could thus justify why the prophets could also be sinners: they sinned as men, but spoke prophetically when inspired by God.
symbolical meanings, parables, similes and all figures of speech could be used by
the poet in the construction of the literal meaning without impairing its value or
truth:

Although spiritual things are set forth under the figures of corporeal things, yet those
things which are intended by sensible figures to concern spiritual things do not pertain to
the mystical sense, but to the literal; because the literal sense is that which is first intended
by the words, either speaking properly or figuratively.\(^{14}\)

Taken to its logical consequences, if the letter consists in what the author intends to
convey, the letter could turn out to be, in fact, the allegory, i.e. the truth that the
author wants to communicate.\(^{15}\) But for Dante (or the hypothetical forger of the
Epistle) the contradiction is brushed aside: if the distinction between the poet and
the theologian is that poets construct and theologians interpret, now that the
opposition has been relocated in the manner of dealing with the subject-matter the
implication need not be that the poet's word must be false, but only that the poet
does not create the historical facts he writes about; these are instead integrated in a
complex poetical structure which shows that they convey "other" meanings too,
according to the same mechanism of signification characteristic of the Scripture.
So, it does not really matter whether the Commedia tells of an actual vision or
whether the journey is a poetic framework for the expression of truths: the Epistle
makes it clear that the letter of the poem is also true, and not a "beauteous fiction",
whether one understands this to be a real vision in which the journey into the world
beyond would have happened as a real elevatio ad coelum,\(^ {16}\) or whether one reads
it with such scholars as Joseph Mazzeo, who writes that the Commedia "is on the

\(^{14}\) Expositio in librum B. Ioh, cap. i, lect. 2; quoted in Minnis, Medieval Theory, 74.
\(^{15}\) Jean Pépin, Dante et la tradition de l'allegorie (Montreal: Institut d'Etudes Medievales;
\(^{16}\) As Giorgio Padoan interprets it, explaining that the Commedia has all the characteristics of
the mystic vision. Cf. "La mirabile visione" di Dante e epistola a Can Grande", in Il pio Enea,
one hand fiction because the journey never happened; it is on the other hand truth because the elements of the poem, cosmological, ethical, and personal are true.\textsuperscript{17}

Dante's repeated assertions in the \textit{Commedia} of his inability to remember what he has experienced and to convey it through the imperfect means of language\textsuperscript{18} also contribute to prop up the (fiction of the) "truthfulness" of the vision. If the "letter" of the poem were only a beautiful fiction, Dante's difficulty in reproducing the vision would in fact have to be read as his artistic inability to compose an adequate fiction; but if the literal level is also taken to be true, then the insufficiency of the poet and of the language become a further proof of the exceptionality of the other-worldly experience.

\textbf{The terminology of the Middle Ages}

One of the received notions of Joycean criticism is that Dante's theory of the four levels of meaning is important for all of Joyce's works, and especially for \textit{Finnegans Wake}, the "polysemos" (\textit{Epistle to Can Grande}, § 7) text par excellence. Everything in the book, from its complex structure down to the single word, must be interpreted on several levels of meaning, and the \textit{Wake} encourages its readers: "spell me how every word will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypical readings" (FW 20.14-15). Therefore, one may suppose that Joyce would include in \textit{Finnegans Wake} references to the author who - the first to do so in European vernacular literature - vindicated a polysemic status for literature, and, in particular, that he would include references to the works in which the method had been elaborated. Even if the \textit{Wake}'s allusion to any author or text are generally

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Structure and Thought in the Paradiso}, 34. See also Charles Singleton's well-known and successful encapsulation that "the fiction of the \textit{Divine Comedy} is that it is not fiction"). "The Irreducible Dove", \textit{Comparative Literature} IX (1957): 129-135: 129.

\textsuperscript{18} I shall discuss this aspect in chapter 4.
parodic, this inclusion would imply that the theory of layered interpretation should also be taken to be applicable in some form to the Wake itself: the problem then would be to discover in what (comic and subversive) form. Richard Ellmann writes that when Joyce was planning the novel, he

set out upon this radical technique, of making many of the words in his book multilingual puns, with his usual conviction. He called it 'working in layers.' After all, he said to Frank Budgen, 'The Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church was built upon a pun. It ought to be good enough for me.' To the objection of triviality, he replied, 'Yes. Some of the means I use are trivial - and some are quadrivial.'

Joyce may have been jocularly suggesting through the pun that he was going one step beyond triviality into the more advanced use of the *quadrivium*, but he was perhaps also pointing to his use of "quadrivial", or four-fold, patterns: the Vichian cycle of the three ages transformed by the *ricorso* into a four-part model of historical development, the four attributes of the Italian vernacular, or the four levels of meaning. All these patterns may then be alluded to in such words as "quadriliteral" (*FW* 477.19) and "quadrifoil" (124.21, primarily suggesting a four-leafed shamrock) together with all the four-part structures that interact in a web of intricate cross-references.

The relevance of the four levels of meaning for the interpretation of Joyce's works, *Finnegans Wake* in particular, was pointed out very early by his readers and critics. As I indicated in the Prelude, Samuel Beckett does not explicitly refer to the theory of polysemy in "Dante. . . Bruno. Vico. . Joyce" (1929), but he quotes excerpts from the *Convivio* and places them side by side with the following passages from *Work in Progress* in which Joyce may allude, as I shall suggest later, to Dante's text:

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19 See chapter 3.
20 This reference is suggested by Reynolds in *Joyce and Dante*, 323.
"Yet to concentrate solely on the literal sense or even the psychological content of any
document to the sore neglect of the enveloping facts themselves circumstantiating it is just
as harmful; etc."

("DBVI" 13)

"Who in his hearts doubts whether the facts of feminine clothing are there all the time
or that the feminine fiction, stranger than the facts, is there also at the same time, only a
little to the rear? Or that one may be separated from the other? Or that both may be
contemplated simultaneously? Or that each may be taken up in turn and considered apart
from the other?"

("DBVI" 13-14)

The fact that Beckett draws together the Convivio and these excerpts from
Work in Progress suggest the existence of a close link between the works of the
medieval poet and those of the modern writer, although Beckett, in a typically
oblique (and Joycean) manner, does not explicitly connect them. Despite the many
radical revisions that Work in Progress had undergone by the time it was
published, the passages quoted by Beckett in 1929 and composed by Joyce in
192421 were hardly touched up at all: this may suggest that Joyce's idea of how to
employ Dante's texts, and in particular the theory of the stratified polysemy of the
literary work, was devised at an early stage in the composition of Finnegans Wake
and did not greatly change afterwards.

One of the first critics to acknowledge explicitly Joyce's debt to Dante was
Louis Gillet in the article "James Joyce and His New Novel", originally published
in 1931, eight years before the publication of Finnegans Wake:

The text has to be read like Dante's, according to several superimposed meanings. There is
a literal meaning, an allegorical meaning, and perhaps several others - almost as many as
the skins of an onion. As in writing of music, each sentence should be given on several
parallel lines.22

22 Gillet, Clayhook for James Joyce, 58.
But it was Harry Levin who, in 1941, for the first time tried to distribute the "meanings" of the *Wake* according to Dante’s fourfold pattern when he pointed out, in his now classic *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*, that the four levels of meaning may be seen as a "useful" tool to tackle the *Wake*:

We have so little critical equipment for divining a complex piece of symbolism that we may be excused for borrowing the terminology of the Middle Ages. That 'divine comic,' Dante Alighieri, explained to Can Grande della Scala that his own work could be interpreted at four different levels, and it may throw some light on *Finnegans Wake* to consider Joyce's "monomyth" in those terms. Anagogically, it envisages nothing less than the development of civilization, according to Vico's conceptions. Allegorically, it celebrates the topography and the atmosphere of the city of Dublin and its environs. Literally, it records the misadventures - or rather the nightmares - of H.C. Earwicker, as he and his wife and three children lie in their beds above his pub, and broken slumber reiterates the events of the day before. Morally, it fuses all these symbols into a central theme, which is incidentally Milton’s - the problem of evil, of original sin.\(^{23}\)

After Levin, it has become usual for other critics to recognise a fourfold pattern in Joyce's works, and not only the *Wake*.\(^{24}\) In fact, Levin did not need to apologise for borrowing a "terminology of the Middle Ages": this is not a case of simple borrowing of a useful tool on the part of the befuddled reader, and the


\(^{24}\) For instance, Magalaner and Kain underline in their *James Joyce: The Man, The Work, The Reputation* (Oxford, Plantin, 1956-1990) the importance Dante’s four levels of meaning in *Ulysses* and find it particularly relevant to the "Scylla and Charybdis" chapter (169-170), and Robert Boyle has found a quadripartite structure in the short story "Grace", which he interprets as modelled on Dante's fourfold pattern (cf. "Swiftian Allegory and Dantean Parody in Joyce's 'Grace'"). Dante's theory has now long been accepted in Joycean criticism and references to it appear in many commentaries of Joyce's works; cf, for example the chapter on "Joyce and Dante" in T. C. Theoharis’s *Joyce's Ulysses*. Klaus Reichert is, as far as I am aware, the only one who has found a direct allusion in the *Wake* to the list of the levels of meaning, and in the paper "The Theory of the Fourfold Meaning in Joyce" read at the 10th James Joyce International Symposium, Copenhagen, June 1986, he suggested that in the sentence ‘scrutiny fowback into the fargoneahead to feel out what age in years tropical, ecclesiastic, civil or sidereal’ (FW 426.23-24) "tropical" refers to the tropological, or moral, sense; "ecclesiastic" to the allegorical, also called "mystic" by Dante in the *Convivio*; "civil" is the literal sense, in which we see the "public" life of HCE and his family; and finally, "sidereal," with its reference to the stars above, alludes to the anagogical "sovrasense". I am grateful to Prof. Reichert for pointing out to me this possible reference.
method, I would argue, is consciously used by Joyce, who weaves into the *Wake* several allusions both to the *Convivio* and to the *Epistle*; the reader, then, is justified in using it - indeed, s/he is expected to refer to it to gain a better understanding of how Joyce's book functions with regard to the distribution / creation of meaning, but also, and perhaps above all, with regard to Joyce's treatment of literary sources.

I would then like to reconsider this literary / interpretative relationship, using Harry Levin's reading as my starting point but also going back to Dante's texts in order to see whether the theory of polysemy can indeed be taken as a straightforward, uncontroversial tool, applicable to another text without any further specifications; the theory will then be tested again on the *Wake* in order to find out how far it can be followed as a hermeneutic model. Thus, the attempt to answer the first, basic question - is Dante's theory of the four levels of meaning helpful for reading *Finnegans Wake*? - will inevitably raise other questions: is it just a reading strategy, in Levin's words a piece of external "critical equipment", that the critic applies to Joyce's book in order to find his way around an otherwise nearly illegible text (thereby showing the need for the reader to make use of the earlier text in order to understand the later one, rather than studying what operations the later text has performed on the earlier one), or is it, on the contrary, an instrument whose interpretative function is already *inscribed in*, rather than having to be *applied to*, the *Wake* and whose traces in the text can therefore be confirmed by internal evidence? And, should this second hypothesis be proved tenable, how is the theory integrated into the *Wake*’s self-referential interpretative system? What kind of (hermeneutic) relationship is established between the medieval exegetical model and the modern literary polysemic work?
The epiepistle and the enveloping facts

If the premises of Levin's interpretation are revised, the meanings that he attributes to each level will also have to be reconsidered. Levin's starting point is that the literal level consists in the characters dreaming, or having nightmares, while sleeping in their beds, and in their re-living the day's events. This is only partially correct: as Beckett's notorious slogan goes, "[Joyce's] writing is not about something; it is that something itself" ("DBVJ" 14): Joyce, then, did not write a book about a dream (that is, about a character dreaming something): he wanted to write the dream in "night language", to plunge the reader directly into the dreamer's mind at work, regardless of the identity of the dreamer. If the literal level of Dante's Divine Comedy is the "status animarum post mortem" (Epistle to Can Grande, §8), that of Finnegans Wake is the "status animarum", as it were, per somnium - i.e., already inside the dream, in the sleeper's mind, or the "semiary of Somnionia" (FW 594.08) where the sleeping lie dead to the world. Interpreting the literal level as the fact that the characters are dreaming or having nightmares while sleeping in their beds (in other words, as the context of the dream instead of the dream itself) would mean shifting from the picture to the frame, but the literal meaning can only be the immediate surface of the dream, told in the peculiar "Wakean" language that creates a multiplicity of "other" meanings. Moreover, Levin's interpretation is based on the assumption that it is HCE who is having the dream represented in the Wake, whereas the identity of the dreamer is by no means certain: is it a "modern" man dreaming that he is Finn MacCool, and many more, or

25 In a letter to J. S. Atherton of 30th August 1954, Harriet Shaw Weaver wrote: "My view is that Mr. Joyce did not intend the book to be looked upon as the dream of any one character, but that he regarded the dream form with its shifting and changes and chances as a convenient device, allowing the freest scope to introduce any material he wished - and suited to a night-piece". James S. Atherton, The Books at the Wake (Mamaroneck, N.Y.: Appel, 1974), 17.
is it Finn lying under the city of Dublin and dreaming that he is a modern man? Or is it none of these?

Let us suggest, as a first tentative and very naive interpretation, that the literal meaning of the *Wake* as a whole is the dreamt story of H.C. Earwicker, publican, and his family: his wife Anna Livia Plurabelle, their twin sons Shem and Shaun, and their daughter Issy. HCE's "misdemeanour" in Phoenix Park, his encounter with the cad, the rumours about him, the row in the pub, the children's games and homework, the parents' love-making in the bedroom, and so on, to include all the episodes that happen to the "charictures in the drame" (*FW* 302.32), should be regarded as the story narrated in the book, the literal or "historical" sense.26

If the literal level of Levin's interpretation is thus rephrased, the description of the other senses must also be revised. Levin's interpretation of the allegorical level as the topography of the city may be generally correct but probably too reductive: while the topographical elements may be seen, at one level, as the allegorical ("other") meaning of HCE and his family, they also constitute, at another level, the physical context for HCE's story, and they must therefore be seen as elements of the literal level "hiding" or "containing" other allegorical meanings. Our starting working hypothesis may then be that the events presented at the literal level can be read allegorically as the vicissitudes of Everyman and of all mankind through history. The male character-role HCE is present every time his initials appear in the text; consequently, all the characters he stands for are evoked...

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26 What I have just proposed, in fact, is very much like a boiled down version of the plot summary first divulged by Campbell and Robinson in their classic *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber, 1947), and not everyone would nowadays agree this is the best account. For an assessment of the *Wake* 's plot line and a reconsideration of the function of narration and "narrativity" in Joyce's novel see Derek Attridge, "Countlessness of Livestories: Narrativity in *Finnegans Wake*", in Morris Beja and David Norris (eds.), *Joyce in the Hibernian Metropolis: Essays* (Columbus: Ohio U P, 1996), 290-296. As will become clear in the rest of the discussion, Attridge's central point - that *Finnegans Wake* foregrounds "narrativity" over actual narratives, "metaphoricity" over metaphors, etc. - can be applied also to the treatment of polysemy, whose importance as a principle and a system far outweighs the actual meanings that can be identified in the text.
every time his presence is manifest. He is thus Here Comes Everybody (FW 32.18-19); Haveth Childers Everywhere (FW 535.34-35), i.e. the father of mankind, be he Adam or God (or, indeed, both); but he is also "Heinz cans everywhere" (FW 581.05), the by-product of capitalism; his initials, which appear also in the order "hec", may stand for "hic est corpus meum", the words pronounced by Christ at the Last Supper and by the priest at the Eucharist in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice - and therefore he is also Christ himself; and so on, to embody practically all characters in history, legend, literature - literally "every man".

This is one of the ways in which a polysemy that literally rests on the "letter" can function in Finnegans Wake: the "character"'s presence is marked by the appearance of his or her initials, but the initials may stand for anything else beginning with the same letters. Thus, an identification of all things, no matter how heterogeneous, is grounded in the sharing of the same initials - the sharing, that is, of an apparently outward, superficial and literal feature. This is the case of course also for all the other character-roles: the wife ALP, the twins Shem and Shaun who embody all opposites, and the daughter Issy, Isolde or Iseult, whose personality splits in her mirror image, or divides into seven parts when she forms, with the other girls, the colours of the rainbow, or in $28 + 1$ in association with her school friends the "Maggies", when they form the leap year month of twenty-nine days.

As Harry Levin rightly points out, the story of the family is also "the topography and the atmosphere of the city of Dublin and its environs": HCE is "Howth Castle and Environs" (FW 3.03; Howth Head is the promontory on Dublin Bay, to the north of the city); ALP is the river Liffey, whose springs are in the Wicklow mountains and which flows through the city of Dublin before reaching the Bay; Issy is the riverside village of Chapelizod, or the "Chapel of Iseult", the legendary Irish princess of the Tristan story. Shem and Shaun, finally,
are the two banks of the river. Other more detailed identifications follow from the
first: HCE, for instance, is also the giant Finn MacCool of Irish tradition, lying
dormant ("the brontoichthyan form outlined aslumbered", 7.20) under the territory
of the city27 with the Head of Howth as his head (or "The cranic head on him",
7.29), the two hillocks in Phoenix Park as his feet28 and, in Joyce's typically
irreverent humour, the obelisk of Wellington's Memorial, also in Phoenix Park, as
his penis ("And the Willingdone git the band up", 9.09). As the left and right banks
of the river, the brothers Shem and Shaun also identify with the people that live on
them; in the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" chapter (FW I.8), for instance, they are the
two washerwomen washing the dirty linen of HCE's family in the river and
chatting from the opposite banks until nightfall, when they are transformed into a
tree and a stone.

This reading already starts posing some problems. First of all, if the letters
HCE and ALP signal the presence of - i.e. stand for - the archetypal man and
woman, it would seem that the letters are, appropriately, the literal level, while each
embodiment of the "characters" should already be displaced to the allegorical one.
On the other hand, chapter I.8 ostensibly tells of the washerwomen on the Liffey,
their gossiping and metamorphosis; how can one say, then, that this is an
allegorical reading and not the literal surface of the text? We seem to be getting
entangled in a double reversal where the literal becomes allegory and the allegory
becomes literal. We must then reconsider what I earlier provisionally identified as
the literal level, the story of HCE and his family. This story is not linear; it does not
have any apparent coherent development. It is made up of many different plots,
sketches, scenes of dialogue, confrontations of characters, short interludes. Only

27 Cf. e.g. "From Shopalist to Daillywick or from ashtun to baronoth or from Buythebanks
to Roundthehead or from the foot of the bill to irglait's eye he calmly extensolies" (FW 6.34-
35).
28 Cf. e.g. "[...] his tumptytoes; and their upturnpikespointandplace is at the knock out in
the park" (FW 3.22); "His clay feet, swarded in verdigrass, stick up stark where he last fellonem,
by the mund of the magazine wall" (7.31-32).
after several readings does this multilingual ("polygluttural", 117.13), polymorphic surface ("The proteiform graph itself is a polyhedron of scripture", 107.08) reveal some form of coherence, which the reader is able to identify thanks to the return of character roles and, especially, the return of types of relationship between them (antagonism and conflict between male roles, desire of male characters towards the female ones, the temptation and titillation of young female figures or protectiveness of the older ones towards the male figures). The different "stories" thus appear to be in fact different versions of the same basic ones, with similar underlying significance. They are one by one - or, more often, many of them simultaneously - brought to the surface and cast into a role that we could perhaps call the "literal meaning", but they are then plunged back again into the volcanic magma of the text, to surface again, at other moments and usually in particles, through linguistic hints, suggestions, overtones, letters. The "literal level" is therefore extremely complex, made up, in turn, of several levels which cross and interfere with one another, not exactly like the orderly layers of the "skins of an onion" of Gillet's definition, but rather like several threads of different lengths and thickness woven together to form a multicoloured and irregular fabric. Let us consider the fundamental and ever-recurring motif of the "fall" in the Wake - perhaps a banal example in itself, but one which, by its very obviousness, will serve our purposes better than more complex examples, where the problems encountered may be due to the difficulty of the passage rather than be inherent in the method of analysis under observation.

The primary association of "fall" is to Adam and Eve's original sin, which is, in a way, the fall par excellence: it is the first in the chronological and causal order of sins and the "efficient cause" of the whole of human history after that original lapse. While this anteriority gives it a primary place in the Wake, there are many other instances of "fall" in the book. Tim Finnegan's fall from the ladder in the
comic ballad "Finnegan's Wake" can also claim a sort of paradigmatic priority in the book, since it is the one which is alluded to in the title; the same can be said of HCE’s "sin" of sexual exposure in Phoenix Park, since it is the one that sets the plot in motion. In fact, all instances are linked to one another, fused together, so as to make each recall all the others whenever they appear; the apparent pre-eminence of one or another instance of the "fall" over the rest (as is true of all other recurrent elements and motifs) depends each time on which one is selected in the text as the carrier of the "main" narrative structure of the particular episode - which one, that is, appears as the immediate literal sense while the others are more or less explicitly alluded to and made present in the text through a figurative use of language. HCE’s sin in the park repeats Adam and Eve's sin in Eden and it is related also to Tim Finnegan's fall, since "HCE" and "Tim Finnegan" are different names which denote different aspects of the same character-role. As the reader tries to unravel "main narratives" and "subsidiary plots", "characters" and their roles, s/he inevitably has to find shelter in the use of inverted commas: nothing is free from doubt, and even when one level of the polymorphic meaning of a word or concept may be expected to carry the main narrative and emerge over other aspects, fragments of these diverse layers (i.e. sub-layers of the literal level of meaning, as in the Thomist interpretation) keep coming up to the surface at the same time, obscuring the main thread. The motif of the "fall" occurs for the first time on the first page of *Finnegans Wake*:

29 I am not taking issue here with what some critics would argue: that in fact in *Finnegans Wake* there is no "main" narrative, or meaning, insofar as it is a non-hierarchical text in which nothing can be said to be more true or more important than anything else. While I agree in principle that different interpretations can be held as equally valid (as I shall myself argue when dealing with the moral level of meaning), I also want to point out the rather obvious fact that distinctions and divisions must be made within the text - indeed, that they are indeed inherent to the text. This means both that there exist, in the text itself, principles (formal, structural, conceptual, linguistic, etc.) by which the subject-matter is ordered and organized and which make it possible for a plurality of meanings to be conveyed; and that, in following these principles, the critic finds an order in the text - an order that, ultimately, arranges the text according to the hierarchy implied in the hermeneutical model assumed.
The fall (bababalgharaghtakamminronkoonibroronntonomronnuthunntrovarrhononnawnakawooohoobooodenenturbation!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all Christian minstrelsy. The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan, erse solid man, that the humptyhillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes. (FW 3.15-21)

The fall is accompanied by the onomatopoeic effect of thunder in the first hundred-letter word of the Wake, which is also a multilingual synonymic - and to some extent apparently tautological - emphasis of the concept. The episode is "retaled [...] down through all christian minstrelsy" (3.17-18), which leads the reader to assume that the text may refer to the original sin, the very important "Fall" which is so fundamental to Christian religion as to be told again and again ("retaled" = "retold") and reinvented ("re-taled") both orally as in the minstrel tradition, and in writing in Christian literature (Adam and Eve's names, in inverted order, have already been mentioned on the first line of the Wake). However, the spiritual meaning takes on economic overtones with the echo of the dramatic fall of the Wall Street stock-exchange in 1929 ("a once wallstrait oldparr", 3.17) which had such dire consequences for world economy and for many people. There is also the evocation of a "great" (and literal) fall of(f) a (straight) wall, which may perhaps suggest a literal crashing down of the wall of the tower of Babel, struck by God's thunderous wrath as it was being built, since the beginning of the hundred-letter-word contains a "stuttering" reference to Babel ("bababal"), confirmed by an enactment of the confusion in the use of many different languages to express the idea of thunder. But, at the literal level, "the great fall of the offwall" must also include Humpty Dumpty (and therefore a reference to Lewis Carroll), who did actually fall off a wall ("humptyhillhead [...] tumptytumtoes", emphases added), and maybe also of the people that were building the tower of Babel, whose "fall", in the sense of sin, is turned into a literal fall from the walls they were building.
And, to complicate matters, one learns that these events also entailed the "pftjschute of Finnegan", rendered through another word uniting onomatopoeia to semantics ("pftjsch..." + French chute, "fall") and in which we can hear the sibilant swish of Finnegan coming flying down. All the layers here isolated (religion: Adam and Eve; socio-economy: Wall Street; nursery rhyme: Humpty Dumpty; Bible: the tower of Babel; folklore: Tim Finnegan) among the many others that could be listed, are woven together and share a portion of the surface of the text, or "literal level". One cannot help noticing that in the literalisation of the Babelian fall-as-sin into a fall from the wall, the text - rather: the diligent explicator - may already be voiding the possibility of metaphorical or figurative language, disallowing the depth that Aquinas attributes to the "literal level", dangerously flattening it, as it were, into an imageless, ultimately unimaginative, language. Fortunately, despite the anxiety of polysemie interpretation, the final effect is that of an addition of images: the sin + the literal falling off (and all the others), which could be summed up in Singleton's catchphrase for the "mode of the theologians": "this and that".

However, we are now faced with a further problem: how do we distinguish a figurative use of language at the literal level from an allegorical (= "other") level of meaning? The linguistic indices that actually appear on the narrative surface make it difficult to separate what is intrinsically implied (allegorical meaning) from what is on the contrary a figurative use of language and could therefore be ascribed, as in the Thomistic interpretation, to the "letter" of the text. Given the enormous number of legendary, historical, mythological, anecdotal, Biblical and literary references, if one considers that allusions of this kind are to be taken as a figurative use of language and therefore as pertaining to the literal level, it would seem that nothing is left for the allegorical level, unless the allegory is understood as an abstraction, a pattern of "common denominators" (with regard to sequences of events, "characters" and their relationships) that underlie the basic structure of all episodes
in the *Wake* and can therefore be defined as the universal characteristics of mankind and the historical development of civilisation - which is, incidentally, what Levin ascribes to the anagogical level.

These matters are indeed hard to disentangle, just as it is hard to disentangle and keep separate all the threads of allusions which can be found in *Finnegans Wake*. The logical conclusion would be that while the assumption of the theory of the fourfold meaning could be a useful tool, but one which is external to the *Wake*, any rigorous distinction between the actual meanings is virtually impossible and any attempt at a strict application of the model is bound to be unsuccessful, being even more confusing than the text which it proposes to explain. One would indeed end up where Levin had started, accepting the theory of the fourfold meaning as an interpretative grid to map on to the *Wake* but not as a structure which the *Wake* appropriates and incorporates as part of its semiotic system (to a large extent in a parodic, subversive manner), as on the contrary I would like to argue. If my assumption is right and the *Wake* does offer some keys to its riddles, the solution must then be sought in *Finnegans Wake* itself, in particular in its allusions to the theory as Dante expressed it in the *Convivio* and the *Epistle to Can Grande della Scala* and in the way these references are treated and transformed. We shall see that Joyce himself confuses the terms of Dante's formulation of the theory, subverting his source-model and therefore showing it to be inadequate if it is applied too rigidly to the *Wake*. This does not mean, however, that the model should be discarded: it is in fact only by understanding exactly where it fails and how it is transformed that the reader can discover something about the intertextual relationship that the *Wake* establishes with the sources from which it borrows and the transformation which it works upon them. Most of the *Wake's* references to the theory of the fourfold meaning can be found in chapter 1.5, entirely devoted to the discussion and interpretation of the "Letter", or Anna Livia's "untitled mahafesta"
FW 104.04); in this episode both the *Convivio* and the *Epistle to Can Grande* are drawn upon and fused together.

The "letter" is one of the ever-returning motifs in *Finnegans Wake*; different version are given in various parts of the text, and ultimately it identifies with the *Wake* itself, this obscure and circular book of the night ("Leave the letter that never begins to go find the latter that ever comes to end, written in smoke and blurred by mist and signed of solitude, sealed at night", *FW* 337.11-14). The longest and most complete occurrence appears in book IV (615.12-619.19); it starts with "Dear" and ends with a "P.S." (619.17-19) that clearly define its spatial limits and its nature as epistle. The word "Reverend" at its beginning (615.12) associates the letter with the whole of the *Wake*, whose first word, "riverrun" (3.01) is similarly pronounced in Anglo-Irish. Most of the main themes and motifs of *Finnegans Wake* appear in this last version. It is signed "Alma Luvia Pollabella" (619.16), which suggests that Anna Livia is its author, although in other parts of the book the writer seems to be Shem the Penman, the artist-type in the *Wake*; but Shem could also be the "scribe" who writes down what his mother dictates and addresses to HCE: "Letter, carried of Shaun, son of Hek, written of Shem, brother of Shaun, uttered for Alp, mother of Shem, for Hek, father of Shaun. Initialled" (*FW* 420.17-19). Shem was indeed "formelly confounded with amother" (125.11-12), as the reader is told at the end of the "mamafesta" chapter, but the entire family has clearly had a part in writing / scribing / delivering the letter:

But resuming inquiries. Will it ever be next morning the postal unionist's [...] strange fate [...] to hand in a huge chain envelope, written in seven divers stages of ink, from

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30 Chapter 1.5 and this longer version of the letter were planned and composed at the same time, but the letter was later relocated towards the end of the book, so as to make the "actual" text of the missive the object of an ever-deferred quest. For an account of the genetic interlinked development of 1.5 and the letter in Book IV and their seminal importance in the conceptualisation of the structure of the book and the theme of the quest in *Finnegans Wake*, cf. Laurent Milesi, "Metaphors of the Quest in *Finnegans Wake*", in Geert Lemout (ed.), *Finnegans Wake: Fifty Years. European Joyce Studies 2* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), 79-107: esp. 89-101.
blanchessance to lavandaiette, every pothook and pancrook bespaking the wisherwife, superscribed and subpencilled by yours A Laughable Party, with afterwite, S.A.G., to Hyde and Cheek, Edenberry, Dubbloum, WC? Will whatever will be written in lappish language with inbursts of Maggyer always seem semposed, black looking white and white guarding black, in that siamixed twoatalk used twist stern swift and jolly roger? (FW 66.10-21)

HCE appears consistently as the letter itself ("huge chain envelope") and its addressee ("to Hyde and Cheek, Edenberry") throughout the Wake, while Shaun the Post(man), predictably, is the deliverer; but the entire Earwicker family, except perhaps the father himself, participate in the writing; "blanchessance" suggests Issy (as Iseult of the White Hands" in the Tristan myth), while "lavandaiette" seems to indicate ALP, in whose waters the washerwomen wash the family's dirty linen (one of the functions of the letter is to excuse HCE's sin and clear his reputation); the details of the text, "bespaking the wisherwife", would confirm it. In fact, this may also point to the washerwomen - that is, Shem and Shaun - as the writers; the letter clearly resounds with ALP's tones ("written in lappish language"), but Issy may "burst" in a few words ("with inbursts of Maggyer", perhaps through Shem and Shaun if "semposed" combines Shem and Post), together with the twins ("black looking white and white guarding black, in that siamixed twoatalk"). The letter was lost, and later found again under a heap of dung by a hen, Belinda or Biddy Doran ("when [...] Biddy Doran looked at literature", 112.26-7); it was saved by Shem, stolen by Shaun and passed on by him as his own discovery.  

An exegesis of the letter is offered in chapter I.5. It is here that the "mamafesta", a text that has been known under many names (cf. the three-page-long list of titles, FW 104.05-107.07) and in many different forms ("The

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31 At the end of I.5, it is Shem who is qualified as a stealer of notes ("that odious and still today insufficiently malenominated notesnatcher [...] Shem the Penman", 125.21-22), but this sounds like the voice of Shaun denigrating his antagonist twin-brother. Earlier in the chapter it is in fact suggested that it was "keepy little Kevin" (Shaun) who obtained for himself a reputation of "future saintry" by outwitting his brother and taking from him ("euchring") what Shem - "another helly innocent" - had found (110.31-36).
proteiform graph itself is a polyhedron of scripture", 32 107.08) is examined. The reader is informed about the "enveloping facts circumstantiating it" (109.14), that is, presumably, the circumstances of writing and of discovery. A reiterative analysis of the letter is carried out in different critical styles (textual, Marxist, psychoanalytic, etc.); then it is identified with the "Tunc" page of the Book of Kells, through a parody of the style and language of its most famous interpreter, Sir Edward Sullivan. Like the letter, the Book of Kells had been buried for years by the monks at Kells to protect it from the Danish invaders, until it was rediscovered and dug out of its "mound". Joyce considered the weirdness of its fine illuminations, the intricacies and suggestiveness of its design, a powerful analogy for the peculiar style and language that he created for *Finnegans Wake* and for the essential quality that he tried to achieve in all his works. Since he was particularly fond of its illuminated "letters", 33 it would not be by chance that it is especially in the chapter where the Letter or "mamafesta" is analysed that the Book of Kells and its beautiful "Tunc" page become a major sub-text. Perhaps it even more significant that not so much the Book but Sullivan's interpretation becomes the basis for the parodie analysis of the "Letter": in this chapter, as in the *Convivio*, the text becomes secondary, almost accessory, to interpretation. There are hints even that the "Tunc" page of the Book of Kells may have been inspired by *Finnegans Wake*: "the cruciform postscript from which the three basia or shorter and smaller oscula have been overcarefully scraped away, plainly inspiring the tenebrous Tunc page of the Book of Kells" (FW 122.20-23). The logical inversion of precedence - the ancient book deriving from the one which is being written and

32 Cf. also "holypolygon" (FW 339.35) in the Butt and Taff episode of *FW* II.3, which associates HCE with a (holy) geometric polygonal figure. I shall deal with the implications of the Wake's use of geometrical figures in chapter 4.

33 Joyce told Arthur Powell that the Book of Kells is "the most purely Irish thing we have, and some of the big initial letters which swing right across a page have the essential quality of a chapter of *Ulysses*. Indeed, you can compare much of my work to the intricate illuminations. I would like it to be possible to pick up any page of my book and know at once what book it is" (JJ 545).
which claims an archetypal primacy over the whole of literature - is also reflected in
the transformation of the illuminated page of the manuscript into a "tenebrous" one,
in the obscure revisionism that allows reality to signify only through its
reinterpretations in the language of the night, or "nat language" (*FW* 83.12; night
language, not language); but it also recalls the paradoxical circularity of the
modernist topos of the book announcing its own writing (*Ulysses* by Stephen, *À la
Recherche* by Marcel - the *Divine Comedy*, if I am allowed an inversion that places
Dante among the Modernists, by the pilgrim Dante).

"But to return." (*FW* 295.15). I have already used "letter" in at least three
meanings (and so has the *Wake*): as alphabetical units, letters can be combined
together in infinite ways to produce different meanings, or which can acquire
symbolic meanings of their own (e.g., alpha and omega as symbols of absolute
beginning and end), or signal the presence of "characters", reminding us perhaps
of the cabbala's detection of God through the appearance of the letters of His name.
As epistle, the letter enables messages to be transmitted, whether in daily life or in
the literary transmission of texts and documents - maybe by having to dig them out
of the midden heap of the past. A letter of course may also accompany a present,
dedicate a book. As "literal meaning", the letter implies a stratified conception of
writing, exactly the message that Dante was transmitting through his *Epistle*, the
letter that accompanied the *Paradiso* and dedicated it to Can Grande della Scala
(who may be overheard in the *Wake's* "Scaliger", 491.28, together with the
fifteenth-century Italian scholar by that name and the ladder-carrier [Latin *scaliger*]
Tim Finnegan). Dante's *Epistle* also contained instruction as to how the poem must
be read at its several levels, qualifying in a way as a manifesto of poetics: notations
of literary criticism and poetic intent that the *Wake's* "mamafesta", even if more
obscurely, also offers.
The first scholarly step for any researcher must be to establish the origins of the text; thus, after the statement of the polymorphic nature of the letter, a quest for its "true" author begins: "who in hallhagel wrote\textsuperscript{34} the durn thing anyhow?" (107.36-108.01) is the question to be asked, and the researcher must equip him/herself with patience: "Now, patience, and remember patience is the great thing, and above all things else we must avoid anything like being or becoming out of patience" (108.08-10). After all, the Dantean scholars who have embarked on the same quest - who the hell wrote the damned \textit{Epistle} anyway? - have had to be patient for over six centuries, and still do not know the answer. Philologists know that they must turn to the text, but as soon as we go back to the letter, the search for clues as to the authorship turns in frustration into a search for another, and brighter, interpreter who can help find out what it is all about:\textsuperscript{35}

Then as to this radiooscillating epiepistle to which [...] we must ceaselessly return, whereabouts exactly [...] is that bright soundsuch to slip us the dinkum oil?\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{(FW 108.24-8)}

Unfortunately, the quest leads the researcher nowhere, if ten pages later "we must vaunt no idle dubiosity as to its genuine authorship and holusbolus authoritativeness" (\textit{FW} 118.03-04). All we know is that "somebody [...] wrote it, wrote it all, wrote it all down, and there you are, full stop" (118.12-14).

In fact, by turning to the text, not only have we missed its author, but we may have already lost sight of the text itself: depending on the interpretation we give to the prefix "epi-", the "epiepistle" may be a meta-commentary upon the...
epistle (a letter about or around the letter; perhaps a Dantean, or maybe apocryphal, *Epistle* about the epistle; and the *Epistle*, as we know, is already a commentary upon a text, an epi-text as it were, brightly trying "to slip us the dinkum oil"); or it may be the outer (additional?) layer over the epistle - is it a "sovrasenso" (literally "over-sense", *Conv* II.i.6)? or is it perhaps the envelope? It may be, because attention is now devoted to the envelope: "Has any fellow [...] ever looked sufficiently longly at a quite everydaylooking stamped addressed envelope?" (109.01-09). We are told that "admittedly it is an outer husk" (109.08), but that it is just as important as its content ("its face [...] is its fortune," 109.08-09). Yet,

to concentrate solely on the literal sense or even on the psychological content of any document to the sore neglect of the enveloping facts themselves circumstaniating it is just as hurtful to sound sense (and let it be added to the truest taste) [...]  

(FW 109.12-16)

The text goes on to develop a strong concern with appearance, face, clothing and what is underneath the surface; the final version of the second passage that Beckett had already quoted from *Work in Progress* is:

*Who* in their heart doubts either that the facts of feminine clothiering are there all the time or that the feminine fiction, stranger than the facts, is there also at the same time, only a little to the rere? Or that one may be separated from the other? Or that each may be taken up and considered in turn apart from the other?  

(FW 109.30-36)

In the *Convivio*, after the illustration of the four senses, Dante had gone on to say:

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37 The repetition of the first syllables of course betrays the presence of HCE, who has a "doubling stutter" (FW 197.05). "[R]adiooscillating" points to the nature of the letter as polymorphous text oscillating between different forms and different possible interpretations, in this case also oscillating between the written form inherent in the letter and the oral or "audiphonic" aspect of a text relying on "sound sense" (109.15) as much as on its visual aspect.
E in dimostrar questo, sempre lo litterale dee andare innanzi, si come quello ne la cui sentenza li altri sono inchiusi, e senza lo quale sarebbe impossibile ed irrazionale intendere a li altri, e massimamente a lo allegorico.38

(Conv II.i.8)

The literal meaning "always come[s] first" and encloses the others, so that they follow in the interpretation: "is there also at the same time, only a little to the rare" (FW 109.32-33). Of course, one should not concentrate only on the literal sense, neglecting the "enveloping facts": the circumstances of writing and of the transmission of the text, or the envelope into which the letter is sealed. However, if we keep Dante's words in mind, the "enveloping facts" should be the letter itself: "lo litterale [...] ne la cui sentenza li altri sono inchiusi" ("the literal [...] in whose meaning the others are enclosed", Conv II.i.8).

The confusion is based on the ambiguity of "letter", whether it is interpreted as "epistle" or as "literal sense". The second passage too (FW 109.30-36) intentionally confuses Dante’s terms. If the letter is the sense which enfolds the other three, one could say that it "clothes" them. Now, allegory, as "alien" or "different" meaning, may be qualified as "stranger" ("stranger than the facts", where the facts would have to be the literal or historical sense; cf. also Dante’s apostrophe to the reader in Inferno IX, 62-3, which invites him to look at the "dottrina che s’asconde / sotto ’l velame de li versi strani" ["the doctrine that is hidden under the veil of the strange verses"]). What in Finnegans Wake is "stranger", however, is the "fiction", which in the words of the Convivio is in fact again the literal sense, the "beauteous fiction" that veils allegory. This "fiction" is "only a little to the rare", this time like the allegorical meaning in Dante: "sempre lo litterale dee andare innanzi" ("the literal sense should always come first").

38 “And in thus expounding, the literal sense should always come first as the one in the meaning whereof the others are included [lit.: enclosed] and without which it were impossible and irrational to attend to the others, and especially to the allegorical."
By deliberately blurring the issue and by drawing attention to the envelope as well as to the letter proper, Joyce is moreover pointing out that layers of meaning do not stop at the literal sense but, on the contrary, go on proliferating in all directions. The emphasis on the envelope makes the point that the form is just as important as its content - form and content are in fact one and the same thing. Similarly, the letter could not be delivered and reach its target (the addressee and the goal of communication) without the envelope. In other words, the envelope also bears a message, the "instructions for use" directed to the postman and to the receiver, specifying where and to whom the letter should go and where it comes from. In a way, Dante's letter to Can Grande, with its directions and "instructions for use", is to the text of the *Paradiso* what the envelope is to the letter.

In the passage from *FW* 109.30-36 quoted above, both the "clothiering" and the "fiction" are feminine. In a book where all identities are elusive, feminine ones seem to be even more immaterial. Issy, who is often associated with her mirror image, certainly has a misleading side to her personality. In this context of letter and added meanings, outer and hidden senses, one may also be reminded of the passage of the *Convivio* where Dante states that the true value of a poem lies in its content and not in its form, often charming but misleading, and compares it with a woman whose beauty can be judged only when all exterior ornaments are laid aside:

Si come non si può bene manifestare la bellezza d'una donna, quando li adornamenti di l'azzimare e de le vestimenta la fauno più ammirare che essa medesima. Onde chi vuole ben giudicare d'una donna, guardi quella quando solo sua naturale bellezza si sta con lei, da tutto accidentale adorno discompagnata[^39]  

[^39]: "No more than the beauty of a woman can be made manifest when the adornment of decking and of garments brings her more admiration than she brings herself. Wherefore let him who would rightly judge of a woman look on her when only her natural beauty accompanies her, severed from all incidental adornment."
In the Convivio, where Dante still professes to be following the "manner of the poets" for whom the letter is a charming lie and only the hidden allegorical meaning is true, form and content are separate. Joyce, for whom form and content coincide because they are one and the same thing, may be bringing into the Wake an allusion to the text of Dante's Convivio by associating "letter" and "other" meanings with appearance and reality and the theme of clothes and feminine ornaments, "fictional" insofar as they may be misleading; but in the same way as he intentionally blurs the distinction between Dante's two main levels, the opposition between external appearance and hidden truth is also confused and Dante's terms are subverted.

"To concentrate solely on the literal sense" is "hurtful to sound sense" (FW 109.12-15); "sound sense" surely means "rightful judgement", but the Wake goes on to say, "and let it be added to the truest taste" (109.15-16), which on the one hand points to aesthetic taste, but on the other also makes the reader reinterpret "sense" as "sensorial perception" rather than "understanding", and "sound" as "hearing". It is another ironic touch which draws attention to the importance of the sound in Finnegans Wake. Sound, or the external form, may be no more than "incidental adornments" for the Convivio, but it is an essential part of the sense (meaning) of the Wake, where the phonological level produces its own significance, alone or by comparison and contrast with the printed form of words. The content, or "hidden truth" of the Convivio, is ironically transformed in the Wake into the sense of taste - a sense which is of course pertinent to an essay whose title means exactly "banquet" as well as to the Wake, whose title song celebrates in true Irish style the wake or banquet for Tim Finnegan's death and resurrection.

As I pointed out earlier, Aquinas held that the figurative use of language must not be interpreted as the allegorical meaning of a text, but that it is part of the literal
level and that the literal sense is what the author wants to say (intentio auctoris); now, if the intention of the author is to communicate the significance which is hidden, the hidden sense must be considered as the true literal sense. Taking this one step further, we would have to say that the true literal sense turns out to be the allegorical one, because it represents the true intention of the author. If we look at it in a Walcean perspective, we see that during a dream the intentio of the unconscious is to release meanings once they have been censored and processed by the dream work, liberating them and letting them come to the surface through linguistic indices which can still be obscure but possess some qualities that can enable the analyst - or the literary critic, or the exegete, as the case may be - to discover the truth (a truth, perhaps) beneath them, the "true intention" of the author / mind. Whether it is by a conscious contamination of Dante with St Thomas or not, it looks as though Joyce, starting from Dante, goes beyond him, to fall back again on Aquinas, the mentor of Stephen Dedalus's youthful aesthetic elaborations.40

Tropologies

Since Joyce's treatment of Dante's exposition of the function of letter and allegory is subverted throughout, it remains to be seen what happens to the other two levels that are contained in the sense "other", the moral and the anagogical levels, and it may now be predicted that they will also be transformed in / by the Wake. Let us first of all look at the moral sense. Harry Levin reads it as the fusion of all the symbols of the other levels into the central theme of evil and original sin.

It seems to me that Levin is here proceeding by successive stages of abstraction, in
that he is drawing a central theme from what is already an abstraction - the
"common denominator" which underlies all basic plot patterns and recurrent
relationships between the character-roles. In the mythology of the *Wake*, evil and
original sin are part of the historical development of mankind, of the nature of man
(Everyman), and of the pattern of life, death and rebirth which Joyce fuses so well
with the Vichian cycle. They would seem to belong, therefore, to the allegorical
rather than to the moral level. Moreover, interpreting the moral sense (defined by
Dante as the teaching that can be drawn from the literary work) in Levin's terms
poses another problem insofar as it presupposes a didactic conception of literature
which is difficult to attribute to James Joyce⁴¹ - if anything, the study of the letter's
sloping handwriting shows "a sure sign of imperfectible moral blindness"
(*FW* 122.36), reiterated several times by allusions to the characters' moral
turpitude (e.g. *FW* 522.14 and 523.28) or moral absence, for instance when a
personage named "Slippery Sam" is described as "physically present
howsomedever morally absent" (341.35-342.01 - there is also another character
names "Sordid Sam", and later we are warned that "[t]here are sordidly tales within
tales", 522.05). Is this the same "skeezy Sammy" of the "Dave the Dancekerl"
episode (in *FW* III.2) - or perhaps his opposite half (cf. "skeezy" as "schizo-") -
that is being corrupted by scruples, that is threatened with burning at the stake,

⁴¹ Already in *Stephen Hero* and in *Portrait*, as well as in Joyce's early reviews and articles,
there emerges an a-moral (which of course does not mean unethical) conception of the artist,
proceeding especially from *fin de siècle* aestheticism - especially D'Annunzio - and from
Nietzsche's philosophy; another contribution to this view of the artist, proceeding this time
mainly from Flaubert, is the concept of the impersonality of the work of art and its artistic
independence from the author's ideas and ethical beliefs; I shall take up Stephen's aesthetic theories
in chapter 4. On the influence of aestheticism, Wagner and Nietzsche on Joyce, cf. Klaus Reichert,
"The European Background to Joyce's writing", in Attridge (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to
Brother's Keeper* (London: Faber, 1958); I relate Joyce's early modulations of the theory of
impersonality to his intertextual use of the *Divine Comedy* in "The Artist Paring his Quotations:
Aesthetic and Ethical Implications of the Dantean Intertext in Dubliners".
who is (religiously) full of poetic tropes but is invited to act literally and not metaphorically?

I can feel you being corrupted. Recoil. I can see you sprouting scruples. Get back. And as he's boiling with water I'll light your pyre. Turn about, sleazy Sammy, out of metaphor, till we feel are you still tropeful of popetry (FW 466.07-11)

One may be even led to wonder whether this slippery, schizoid Shem-character (Shem is described as a "mental and moral defective" [177.16] by the Shaun-oriented narrator of the "Shem the Penman" chapter [FW I.7]) has anything to do with Sam Beckett, one of the early interpreters of Work in Progress, the one responsible for the first association of Joyce's banquet with Dante's Convivio and its exposition of polysemic poetics, and the one who has been associated with the character who - like Dante in the darkest hour of his morally reprehensible life - finds himself "lost in the bush" ("You is feeling like you was lost in the bush, boy? You says: It is a puling simple jungle of woods. You most shouts out: Bheeticket me for a stump of a beech if I have the pultriest notions what the farest he all means", FW 112.03-6; I shall come back to this passage in the next chapter).

The quest for the "moral" meaning of the story, inevitably accompanied by its denial, crops up here and there ("What Morals, if any, can be drawn from Diarmuid and Grania?", 306.27-842), but it is the nature of the polysemy of the Wake that makes it impossible to distinguish an explicit moral sense: for the moral to be found, there needs to be a univocal truth behind the text, and whereas this may true of Dante's works, it is certainly not of Finnegans Wake; if in the Wake everything can evoke by implication a potentially infinite number of other meanings, always by definition more than one can see or expect ("(if you can spot fifty I spy four more)", FW 10.31), there can be no single moral to be inferred.

42 Cf. also the drawing of the "moral" of the story at 434.18 and 550.03.
and therefore no teaching as to what is right or wrong, or as to how to behave righteously. Nevertheless, it is exactly from this lack of clear direction that readers can draw a conclusion about the Wake: an indication, that is, as to how to behave with regard to the text itself; or, in other words, instruction about how they are to perform their role of readers.43

The "meandertale" (FW 18.22) of the Wake forces its readers to an equally meandering manner of reading; it is necessary to go back and forth in the text to establish the relevant connections; one must read the lines and between the lines to unveil the mystery hidden in the "sibylline" (31.36) or, in Dante's words, "sotto il velame de li versi strani" (Inf IX, 63); divide and recompose words, go beneath their difficult surface, find the connections between words, themes, portions of text, extricate meanings, construct coherent readings, confront them, draw conclusions, however provisional these may have to be; and, finally, give up the possibility of reaching a single final and comprehensive interpretation of a text which "is, was and will be writing its own wrunes forever" (19.35-36 - a text, that is, which "tropes"44 its own meanings and therefore does not just stand for an "other" level of signification); and perhaps interpret this relativity, this inability to give any single or univocal answer to the many questions raised, as the "moral" message inscribed in the text. But this is by no means a nihilistic or sceptical message: the answers are not denied, they are given in great quantities; all the keys are hidden in the text; "The keys to. Given!" (FW 628.15) is the last hint that Anna Livia gives us on the last page of the book, in her final monologue, before flowing into the sea. We are given all the clues: the artist, like Dante in Purg XXIX, 97-

43 Several essays have been written about the mechanics of reading of the Wake and the new conventions it generates, thus forcing the reader to accept them and face the book in this new way. Cf. in particular Jacques Aubert, "riverrun", in Ferrer and Attridge (eds.), Post-Structuralist Joyce, 69-77; Roland McHugh, The Finnegans Wake Experience (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981); and Pieter Belcker's "Reading Finnegans Wake", in William McCormack and Alistair Stead (eds.), James Joyce and Modern Literature (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 185-201.

44 Vulgar Latin tropare, "to invent, find" in the sense of compose poetry, analogous to the Classical Latin invenio, also found in such forms as trouvère, trobar, troubadour.
99,49 has no time to explain in detail the meanings of his poetry; he indicates the sources, has already given (or merely suggested) to us a method of interpretation and shown how it can(not) be applied; now it is up to us to find our own way in the text, bearing in mind that what we find is just one possible interpretation and that other readers will find different ones, equally valid.

The "moral teaching" of the Wake - the way the reader is expected to behave towards the text - is therefore closely connected with the "reading instructions" therein inscribed, the ever-present self-referentiality of the text, and also, of course, the nature of the "letter" as "epi-epistle". Once again, and unlike what Dante says, once applied to the Wake the levels of meaning turn out to be impossible to distinguish, collapsing into one or fragmenting into too many, thus collapsing and fragmenting the theory they are drawn from. The original sense is turned around, turned about, "troped" as it were (from the Greek tropos, "turn"). After all, this is just another literalisation of the moral sense, also called "tropological", and it is related to the self-referentiality that the works of both writers share. Dante constantly critically re-examines his earlier works in a new light, and scatters through his texts more or less explicit instructions as to how the text must be understood, read, completed. We know about the Convivio and the Epistle; the Vita Nuova is made up of both poetry and prose, part of the prose being an explanation of the poems, and the poems being a transposition in the poetic medium of events or feelings narrated in the prose. The De vulgari eloquentia, beside being a theoretical treatise on language, is a rhetoric, or poetria, of the canzone and an ordering of Dante's ideas on that poetic form, with many examples drawn from his own production. The Divine Comedy is full of indications to the

49 "A descriver or forme piu non spargo / rime, lettor; ch'altra spesa mi stringe, / tanto ch'a questa non posso esser largo; ma leggi Ezchiel" ("To describe their forms, reader, I do not lay out more rhymes, for other spending constrains me so that I cannot be lavish in this; but read Ezchiel").
reader about how the poem should be read; many of its metaphors turn around the image of the student and the teacher: Virgil and Brunetto Latini, for instance, are or have been Dante's "maestri"; the reader sitting at his desk is the poet's disciple, Dante throughout his journey "notes" what he has learned.

Mary Reynolds suggests that, in the case of Ulysses,

Joyce actually invited a Dantean reading - fourfold or even more - by the schema (his word) that he constructed and gave to a few friends: Stuart Gilbert, Sylvia Beach, Carlo Linati. The Schema was Joyce's equivalent of Dante's Letter to Can Grande, a document in which Joyce indicated the complicated patterning of his work, specified some but not all of its connections and extensions, and invited multiple interpretations of the characters and incidents in the book. Joyce's construction of such a schema is evidence of a formal principle which attaches his work to Dante's.⁴⁶

The same can be said for the numerous letters that Joyce sent to Harriet Weaver and other friends listing words and explaining, or just making suggestions about, difficult points in Work in Progress (Letters I, 246; I, 295). A similar concern drove him to have his "twelve apostles" write the essays of the Exagmination about his work in order to encourage, to use Dante's metaphors, the "common herd" that do not "sit at the table where the bread of angels is consumed" (Conv Li) to read Joyce's puzzling work.

Finnegans Wake too, of course, is a highly self-referential text that constantly refers to and redefines its own nature: it is the "nightynovel" (FW 54.21), made up of "once current puns, quashed quotatoes, messes of mottage" (183.22-23), or the "Blue Book of Eccles, édition de tenèbres" (179.27), the new night edition of Joyce's earlier epic of the inhabitants of 7 Eccles Street, Ulysses, originally published with a blue cover. It is the "book of Doublends Jined" (20.15-16), the book of Dublin's Giants and also "of the two ends joined", with a clear allusion to

⁴⁶ Reynolds, Joyce and Dante, 65.
its circular structure which joins the last sentence to the first. This cyclic or tropic pattern is in fact already implicit in the first word of the title, "Finnegans", which has been interpreted also as "fin-negans", i.e., the book that denies the end by continuing its "last" sentence into its "beginning".

Implicit in this structure is the need to read the text several times, with broader and deeper insight at each new start. Such a method is inherent in the stratified structure of the text, which requires that the reader go through it at least once for each meaning that s/he can discern, and build coherent readings that can then be compared and drawn together. Dante also emphasised the need for a repeated confrontation with the polysemic text. After the illustration of the literal sense of the canzone "Voi che 'ntendendo" in the second book of the Convivio, he goes on to explain the allegorical meaning and introduces the passage from the former to the latter sense with the following words:

Poi che la littérale sentenza è sufficientemente dimostrata, è da procedere a la esposizione allegorica e vera. E però, principiando ancora da capo [...].

(Corr II.xii.1)

The interpretation of each level of meaning requires a new reading of the entire text from a different perspective. As a matter of fact, the Wake too suggests that the new reading (the new beginning which must follow the last sentence in the book) has to be carried out from a different point of view: the end of Finnegans Wake, on page 628, is "spoken" by Anna Livia, while the beginning, on page 3, is "spoken" by a different narratorial voice - not clearly identified but stylistically

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47 See Letters, 123. Another aspect of the self-referentiality are the marginal notes of FW II.2, where the text is printed like medieval manuscripts with glosses on three sides: the twins' on the right and left margins, and Issy's at the bottom of the page.

48 Cf. Fritz Senn's brilliant "The Challenge: 'ignotas animum'", in Senn, Joyce's Dislocutions: Essays on Reading as Translation, ed. by John Paul Riqelme (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), 73-84, which shows how this method of cyclic reading is in fact required by Joyce's works from at least the epigraph of A Portrait. Cf. also, in the same collection, "Book of Many Turns" (121-137), on Ulysses as a "polytropic" book.

49 "Now that the literal meaning has been adequately explained, we are to proceed to the allegorical and true exposition. And therefore, beginning again from the beginning [...]."
more matter-of-fact and emotionally less involving than Anna Livia's at the end of her monologue and her death-like flow into the sea.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Finnegans Wake} is then a "tropos-logos," a turning (and returning) discourse in which the image of the circle and of cyclic patterns (Vichian, Dantean or otherwise) play a powerful role. As any part of text, word or part of word in the \textit{Wake} may be made to signify different meanings through rhetorical artifice, it may also be said to be a "tropos-logos" based on the "logic of the trope" (the trope is defined in classical rhetoric as the "swerve of the semantic direction of a word that shifts from its original content to a new one"\textsuperscript{51}). This shift from an original content to a new one may be taken as symbolic also of the literary interrelationship - it is in fact very similar to the description that Harold Bloom gives of his first principle of poetic influence, the \textit{Clinamen} (originally Lucretius's word for the swerve of the atom in the universe).\textsuperscript{52} But Bloom's theory implies a wish on the part of the later poet to "correct" the precursor,\textsuperscript{53} whereas the relationship between Joyce and Dante - Joyce and any other writer, indeed any two great writers - is more one of exploiting the earlier one in order to create a new, original and (in the specific case of \textit{Finnegans Wake}) accretional work; of distortion, of conscious thieving and metamorphosing, as I have described it in the introduction; of eating as it were at the \textit{Convivio} ("banquet") of the earlier text (but not necessarily of feeding off the earlier text: eating at somebody's table is not always parasitism), and of turning about and upside down its contents in order to expose its untenability for the interpretation of the modern work. Not an anxiety-laden text but a "morally"

\textsuperscript{50} If not emotionally, "we" readers are grammatically included in the narration at the beginning of \textit{Finnegans Wake} ("brings us back," \textit{FW} 3.01). Just before flowing into the sea, moreover, Anna Livia shifts from the "I" to the "we" when the end and the new beginning are announced: "End here. Us then. Finn, again!" (628.13-14).

\textsuperscript{51} Heinrich Lausberg, \textit{Elementi di retorica} (Bologna: Mulino, 1969), 102; cf. also the discussion of the "cardinal" language of the \textit{De vulgari eloquentia} in chapter 3 infra.

\textsuperscript{52} Harold Bloom, \textit{The Anxiety of Influence}, 14.

\textsuperscript{53} Bloom, \textit{The Anxiety of Influence}, 14.
("tropologically") a-moral one which, like Stephen in "Scylla and Charybdis", refuses to pay its debts at the same moments as it acknowledges them.54

Baser meanings

The anagogical meaning remains finally to be considered. Harry Levin interprets it as the "development of civilization, according to Vico's conceptions" (134). Vico's cyclical view of history, although structurally the main one, is not in fact the only theory that contributes to the complex view of the evolution of human civilisation in *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce includes at least two other important theories, those of Giordano Bruno and Edgar Quinet, Vico's French translator; these allow us to place the development of society and man into the larger perspective of a cosmic theory of the universe and the transformation of all things (Bruno) and to relate its incessant flux to the existence of constant natural forces that are ultimately more powerful and more resistant than human structures (Quinet).55 The interconnection of these theories underlies the whole book as well as each of the single episodes that replay variations of the recurrent themes, and, insofar as it concerns the (hi)story of (Every)man, it should perhaps be ascribed to the allegorical level rather than to the anagogical, or spiritual, sense.

Dante defines the anagogy as the spiritual "sovrasenso", when the literal sense in the Scriptures is interpreted as signifying "le superne cose de l'eternal

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54 I shall come back to the (not) paying of debts and the tropology of the literary work in chapter 4; cf. esp. pages 196-198 and passim.
55 Bruno's unity of all things in the one is present throughout the *Wake* in the infinite number of coincidence of opposites, and specifically informs the relationship between the antagonist brothers Shem and Shaun; Quinet's theory is alluded to several times in the book (starting perhaps from the flow of the first word, "riverrun"), but the most complete version of its key-sentence is in the "Lesson" chapter (281.04-13), a sentence parodied at regular intervals from this correct central version (the first and last chapters, and the chapter immediately before and immediately after the "Night Lesson" reproduce it with several "Wakeese" distortions).
gloria" ("the supernal things of the eternal glory", Conv II.i.6). The concept of sovrasenso confers a transcendental meaning to this fourth level. In Finnegans Wake, however, divinities (and religion in general) are immanent in history, they are in fact (wo)man her/himself, fragile, mortal, sinful and guilty. The anagogical sense coincides thus with the everyday spiritual aspects of human existence rather than, as in Dante, the spiritual dimension of Christian religion. It is spiritual, as opposed to material, in that it refers to extra-rational events, to the unconscious, to memory, to feelings and impulses: all facets of a whole of which religions are also a part, but just one among many others, and one which exists not on an independent, higher (or "outer") level of reality but as an interior, psychological human need and as a cultural fact. In this sense, the whole of Finnegans Wake is "anagogical" insofar as it is a dream-like (i.e. a non-bodily, therefore "spiritual") construction deriving its subject-matter from actual (literal, historical) things, which must however be interpreted in order that this "historical" level may be reconstructed. Once again, the Wake completely inverts the meaning of Dante's theory of interpretation: for the medieval writer the letter "dee andare innanzi" (Conv II.i.8; "should always come first") and includes "superior" things; in Finnegans Wake the "spiritual" sense appears together with the literal sense and contains it in itself at the same time as it is contained in it. The "sovrasenso" is not something which is superimposed and points above to a higher morality or spirituality; on the contrary, it emerges from the depths of consciousness, as in the lapsus linguae or in dream, and it can pave the way to base, obscene readings that no one with any sense of decency would even dare to hint at: "[a] baser meaning has been read into these characters the literal sense of which decency can safely scarcely hint" (FW 53.15-16).

The "sordid[...] tales within tales" of Finnegans Wake (522.05) thus constitute yet again a subversion of Dante's ideas as well as a literalisation of them.
Dante explains the theory of the four levels of meaning in the *Convivio* in order to confer higher nobility and worthiness on the vulgar - i.e., vernacular - tongue, making it capable of treating subjects until then excluded from its range. Dante's defence of the *vulgare* is now taken literally and vulgar (in the current sense of "low") meanings and expressions are introduced into the idiom of the *Wale* and justified through various references to the Father of the Italian language. Thanks to this distortion of Dante's polysemic method, Joyce vulgarises language and literature and makes his new-founded language a medium capable of treating practically any and every subject at once, both high and low, thus incidentally and ungratefully showing that Dante's method does not quite work.

"This", "that" and the "other"

There is at least an analogy between Dante and Joyce's use of polysemy that ought be pointed out. For both writers the polysemic method becomes one of construction as well as one of interpretation. The allegory (in its comprehensive meaning of sense "other") can be synthesised in the formula "this and that", and no longer "this for that", as was the case with the allegory of the poets in the *Convivio*. However, the analogy ends here, and the nature of the polysemy of Dante's and Joyce's works is different. For Dante the various levels of meaning are built upon one another, each can be singled out and distinguished from the others, and they all work together towards the evocation of a single truth; for him the various layers of meaning cannot contrast with one another and point to different explanations, as that would require two or more different truths, which is finally inconceivable for the orthodox Christian medieval mind. In Joyce's text, on the contrary, several meanings are compounded together, intersect one another, are rarely univocal, more often point towards different directions thus allowing for
opposite interpretations that exist simultaneously and are never exclusive of one another.

Joseph Mazzeo makes an interesting point about Dante's definition of allegory in the *Epistle*, where it can also be taken as a general term subsuming the three senses allegorical proper, moral and anagogical:

One of Dante's intentions, in discussing allegory, is not so much to advance a theory of explication as to describe a theory of the selection and ordering of significant experience. It is thus that the meaningful intellectual and personal experience of a lifetime is compressed into the "time" of one week.56

Dante's theory of the four levels of meaning is a means of selection and ordering of experience: not so in Joyce, where it is, rather, a means of inclusion of all experience. Whereas in Dante the *alleon* is conveyed (hidden) by the letter, in *Finnegans Wake* it is simultaneously present together with the letter, and, as we have seen, it may be the letter itself which is in fact hidden. The reference to what is "other", moreover, is not only an allusion: it is perhaps better described as a *figura*, or even a relationship of identity. Humpty Dumpty's fall from the wall *is*, and does not just stand for, Adam and Eve's fall into mortal sin, and HCE's fall *is* the figural fulfilment of the original fault of our protoparents; HCE's arrival into Dublin Bay *is* the arrival of all invaders that have conquered the island at different times of history, and so on for every event, "character" or detail of the book.

As the *alienum* is everything that is "other" from what is printed on the page, and the printed word has both a literal and an allegorical meaning, taking this to extreme consequences, the words of the book mean both what is there and what is not - that is to say, potentially everything; one of Joyce's favourite and best-known word-plays is the pun on word / world: the word on the page is a microcosm

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56 Mazzeo, *Structure and Thought*, 34.
containing in itself the entire macrocosm. The road from Dante's selective polysemy to the Wake's all-inclusiveness passes through Giordano Bruno's theory of the coincidence of the opposites in the one and his conception of the infinity of the universe and its simultaneous presence in all things. But it also goes through the adoption and adapting (in fact, as can be expected, distorting) in the Wake of the theories of the "vulgar" language of the De vulgari eloquentia, and in the next two chapters I shall explore what aspects of Dante's theory of the evolution of language and what characteristics of the noble vulgare are appropriated by the Wake, how they help in making the idiom of Finnegans Wake an all-inclusive medium and how they contribute to the shaping of its thematic structure and of its radical narrative technique.
Chapter 2

The Confusioning of Human Races

"confusionary overinsured overlapsing"
(FW 335.06)

"In alldconfusalem"
(FW 355.11)

If the Convivio sets forth a defence of the vernacular language "in practice" by employing it in ways which had not yet been attempted before and by applying the exegetical theory of the four levels of meaning to vernacular poetry, the De vulgari eloquentia, written in Latin during the first years of Dante's exile, develops a related aspect of Dante's life-long speculation about language by providing a historical and philosophical justification of the existence of many different languages and dialects (Dve Book I, chapters i-viii), by searching for and attempting to define a "noble vernacular" that can rise above the multifarious variety of the post-Babelian idioms (I.ix-xix), and, finally, in the second book, through the elaboration of a formal vernacular poetics (II.i-xiv). Book II, however, was left unfinished in the middle of a sentence, and the rest of the treatise never written. That is why the first book, the only complete history of language and quest for a "perfect idiom" ever written until then, has always received greater critical attention;¹ I shall concentrate on this part too, because it is the one which offers the greatest "circumstantial similarity" ('DBVJ', 17) with Joyce's Finnegans Wake.

After a brief outline of the contents of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, I shall look in this chapter at how Joyce uses Dante's history of the creation of language and of Babelic confusion; then, in chapter 3, I shall turn to how *Finnegans Wake* exploits Dante's conception of the "redemptive" illustrious vernacular.

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The subject of Dante's inquiry and its originality are stated from the outset:

"Cum neminem ante nos de vulgaris eloquentie doctrina quicquam inveniam us tractasse"\(^2\) (*Dve* I.i.1), and the vernacular under investigation is thus defined:

\[*vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt ab assistentibus, cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus, quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus.*\(^3\)\] (\*Dve* I.i.2)

This "natural" idiom learned from birth is then distinguished from Latin ("gramatica"), a language that Dante considers to be "artificial" and therefore less noble than the vernacular (*Dve* I.i.4). Dante traces the history of the vernacular back to its origins - indeed, to the origins of language itself: language was given to man at creation, and God endowed man alone with its faculty because neither angels (pure intellects who communicate directly through God) nor animals (who lack rationality) need it (I.ii).

The next questions are, who the first speaker was (Adam), and what he said; according to Dante, the first word uttered by the first man must have been God's name, "El" (I.iv). After Babel, Adam's sacred language remained only with the

\(^2\) "Since we do not find that any one before us has treated of the science of the Vulgar Tongue".

\(^3\) "We call the Vulgar Tongue that to which children are accustomed by those who are about them when they first begin to distinguish sounds; or, to put it more shortly, we say that the Vulgar Tongue is that which we acquire without any rule, by imitating our nurses".
sons of Heber, who had not taken part in the construction of the tower, so that Jesus Christ, born among the Jews, descendants of Heber, would speak not in the language of confusion but in the language of grace.4

Dante then gives a vivid account of the building of the tower of Babel and its outcome (Dve I.vii; I shall look at it in more detail later). After Babel the people scattered and languages began to decay and change. The people who came to Europe brought with them a threefold idiom ("ydioma tripharium", Dve I.viii.2) and settled, some in the south of Europe, others in the north, and a third body, now called Greek, partly in Europe and partly in Asia. The idiom spoken in the South of Europe split into three further languages: the language of "si" ("yes" in Italian), the language of "oc" (in Provençal) and the language of "oil" (in French).

Why do languages continue to diversify? According to Dante's interpretation, God's punishment of the sin of Babel made men forget the original sacred language, so that new idioms had to be invented; but since man is a "most unstable and changeable animal" (Dve I.ix.6), these newly invented languages must also be unstable and changeable. To make up for the impossibility of communicating across time and space, men later also devised an artificial, conventional and unchanging language called "grammar", or Latin (I.ix.11).

The rest of the enquiry concerns the language of "si", the best because, in Dante's reversal of chronological and genetic precedence, it was the one on which the artificial "grammar" was founded. There are fourteen main dialects in Italy but, Dante explains, sub-differences amount to over a thousand (Dve I.x): is there one among them that can be called the Italian language? A quest now begins, and Dante

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4 This means that the original language was Hebrew: "Fuit ergo hebraicum ydioma illud quod primi loquentis labia fabricarunt" ("Therefore Hebrew was the language which the lips of the first speaker formed", Dve I.vi.7). As we shall see later, Dante adopts a different point of view in Par XXVI. On Hebrew in Finnegans Wake cf. Klaus Reichert, "It's as semper as ooxhousehumper'. The Structure of Hebrew and the Language of Finnegans Wake", in Rosa Maria Bosinelli and Paola Pagliatti (eds.), Myriadminded Man: Jottings on Joyce (Bologna: CLUEB, 1986), 235-250.
uses different metaphors: it is first a "hunt" in the "wood" of the dialects, then a "sifting" of them. The main Italian dialects are examined methodically one by one, offering many examples and demonstrating Dante's ability to perceive different inflections. However, all the dialects are found to be inadequate and rejected, including Florentine (I.xi), and at the end of this first phase of the quest the metaphor of the hunt is taken up again to compare this sought-for Italian language to a "beautiful panther" (Dve I.xvi) that leaves its scent everywhere but cannot be seen anywhere; in the same way, the Italian language cannot be found anywhere but all dialects carry some scent of it. If this noble idiom cannot be found empirically, then its nature must be inferred rationally and it is defined as follows:

Itaque adepti quod querebamus, dicimus illustre, cardinali, curiale vulgare in Latino, quod omnis loci civitatis est et nullius esse videtur, et quo municipalia vulgaria omnia Latinorum mensurantur et ponderantur et comparantur.® (Dve I.xvi.6)

The meaning of each of these attributes of the Italian vernacular will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Now we need to turn back to the moment when disaster struck - but was it really disaster?

Retempters

Dante's account of the building of the tower of Babel and of its consequences is especially interesting for a reading of Finnegans Wake, a text in which the issue of Babelic confusion and linguistic difference acquires a central narrative and thematic position. While the Wake generally refers directly to the Biblical narrative of the episode (or indeed to no text in particular: the shared oral

5 "Having, then, found what we were looking for, we declare that the Illustrious, Cardinal, Courtly, and Curial Vulgar Tongue in Italy is that which belongs to all the towns in Italy, but does not appear to belong to any one of them; and is that by which all the local dialects of the Italians are measured, weighed and compared."
tradition is usually enough), at times it also seems to filter references to the episode through Dante's version.

The story of Babel is "retaled" (FW 3.17) in the De vulgari eloquentia with great originality, and Dante adds many lively details to the Biblical version. This is how the episode is introduced:

O semper nostra natura prona peccatis, o ab initio et nunquam desinens nequitatrix! Num fuerat satis ad tui correpctioenm, quod per primam prevaricationem emaminata, delitiarum exultabas a patria? Num satis, quod per universalis familie tue luxuriem et trucitatem, unica reservata domo, quicquid tui iuris erat cataclismo perierat, et que commiseras tu, animalia elique terreae iam luarent? Quippe satis exilerat. Sed sicut proverbialiter dicit solet, 'Non ante tertium equitabis', miseris miserum venire maluisti a equum. Ecce, lector, quod vel oblitus homo vel vilipendens disciplinas priores et avertens oculos a vibicibus quae remanserant, tertio insurrexit ad verbena, per superbum stultitia presumendo.®

(Dve I.vi.2-3)

Dante's passionate apostrophe to man's sinful nature closely relates the episode of Babel to the two main former sins: the original fall of Adam and Eve and the wickedness of the entire race punished by the flood and the consequent death of all living beings with the exception of one single household ("unica reservata domo"). The construction of the tower of Babel was therefore the third great sin of mankind, and, for the third time, mankind was punished as a whole. The symbolic value of number three is well known: it is the number of completion or fulfilment, a magical number and the number of the Trinity, and numeric symbolism in all of

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® "O thou, our human nature, ever prone to sin! O thou, full of iniquity from the first, and ever afterwards without cessation! Did it suffice for thy correction that through thy first transgression thou wast removed and banished from thy delightful native land? Did it suffice that through the universal lust and cruelty of thy family, one house alone excepted, whatever was subject to thee perished in the flood, and that the animals of earth and air were punished for the evil deeds which thou hast committed? Certainly this should have been enough; but, as men are wont to say in proverbs, 'Thou shalt not ride on horseback before the third time,' thou, wretched one, didst choose rather to come to a wretched steed. See, reader, how man, either forgetting or despising his former discipline, and turning aside his eyes from the marks of the stripes which remained, for the third time provoked the lash by his stupid and presumptuous pride!"
Dante's works is very important. Human perfection is in fact more often associated with number four, and three is reserved for the spiritual or the divine; but in the passage quoted, Dante sarcastically insists upon the "spiritual" significance and perfection of human number three and illustrates the recurrence of sin through a popular proverb: at last, after two attempts, men succeeded in "riding the wretched horse", achieving the ultimate iniquity which won them the harshest punishment, the loss of the sacred tongue of Adam. Thus Babel gets the aura of the worst sin, as it were the "most perfect" in its wickedness.

In the previous chapters, Dante had explained that language is the faculty that distinguishes men from both animals and angels; it was created in Eden together with Adam's soul, in an indissoluble link: "certam formam locutionis a Deo cum anima prima concreatum faisso" (I.vi.4). What Adam was granted, then, was more than just the faculty of speech: "Dico autem 'formam' et quantum ad rerum vocabula et quantum ad vocabulorum constructionem et quantum ad constructionis prolacionem" (De vulgari eloquentia I.vi.4). Critics disagree about the right interpretation of Dante's words: is it a complete language or, as Umberto Eco interprets it, a set of principles for a universal grammar, something more than a faculty but less than a natural language? Because it was God-given, this "forma locutionis" was perfect

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7 As pointed out in the Prelude, Samuel Beckett does not fail to draw the readers' attention to the importance of numbers (especially three and four) in Dante and Joyce ("DBVJ" 21). For a detailed discussion of the use of numbers in Dante, cf. Guglielmo Gomi, Lettera nome numero: L'ordine delle cose in Dante (Bologna: Mulino, 1990).

8 In a note to his 1890 translation of the De vulgari eloquentia, A. G. Ferrers Howell writes that the treatise is rather obscure at this point, because whereas Dante's words imply that punishments climaxed with the loss of the sacred language, this was in fact a less severe penalty than either the expulsion from Eden or the destruction of nearly all living beings in the Flood (Ferrers Howell, 94-95). In fact, from the perspective both of a history of language such as the De vulgari eloquentia and of a "fabbro del parlare materno" ("craftsman of the mother tongue", Purg XXVI, 117) such as Dante, the loss of the original tongue is probably the most severe punishment of all, especially if one considers that Dante is drawing a parallel between the original sin and Babel and that, as I will argue in the rest of this chapter, he is implicitly presenting himself as a "redeemer" of the fallen language.

9 "A certain form of speech was created by God, together with the first soul."

10 "And I say, 'a form,' both in respect of the names of things and of the grammatical construction of these names, and of the utterance of this grammatical construction."

and could not change unless by divine intervention, as indeed happened at Babel.\textsuperscript{12} In the \textit{Divine Comedy}, however, Dante put forward a different view regarding two issues: whether man is granted a complete language or the faculty of speech, and whether the language spoken by Adam was the same that men spoke until Babel. In \textit{Purgatorio} XXV Dante learns from Statius that each soul is endowed with the faculty of speech (not a formed language) at the moment of its creation. In his explanation about the generation of man, Statius first tells of the progression of the foetus from the vegetative and sensitive phase, and then comes to the development of rationality:

\begin{center}
\begin{minipage}{0.8\textwidth}
\begin{flushright}
Ma come d'animal divega fante, \\
non vedi tu ancor\textsuperscript{13}
\end{flushright}
\end{minipage}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{(Purg XXV, 61-2)}
\end{center}

Charles Singleton translates this as “from animal to human being”, and indeed Dante had explained in the \textit{De vulgari eloquentia} that what distinguishes men from animals is rationality, and that men, unlike animals (who do not speak), need a rational and sensitive means of communication (\textit{Dve} I.iii.1). But the word that Dante now uses to define the "human being" is "fante", from the Latin \textit{fari} ("I speak"): rationality and faculty of speech are thus closely related. Only at this point does God infuse the living breath into the foetus, so that it may become a single, unified soul ("fassi un’alma sola", \textit{Purg} XXV, 74), uniting its three faculties. One of the implications that can be drawn from this bond of reason, language and soul is that the loss of the integrity of the soul (with the original sin) must have inevitably entailed the loss of the integrity of language - which brings us to the second point of Dante’s revision of his theory of language in the \textit{Divine Comedy}.

\textsuperscript{12} “Hac forma locutionis locutus est Adam; hac forma locutionis locuti sunt omnes posteri eius usque ad edificationem turris Babel, que turris confusionis interpretatur.” ("In this form of speech Adam spoke, and in this form also his descendants spoke until the building of the tower of Babel, which is by interpretation the tower of confusion", \textit{Dve} I.vi.5).

\textsuperscript{13} “But how from animal it becomes a human being you do not see yet”.
In canto XXVI of the *Paradiso*, Adam replies to Dante's questions about the original language and explains:

La lingua ch'io parlai fu tutta spenta
innanzi che a l'ovra inconsummabile
fosse la gente di Nembròt attenta*4

(Par XXVI, 124-6).

Whereas in the *De vulgari eloquentia* Babel engenders both linguistic mutability (corruption of the original) and linguistic plurality (multiplication of tongues), in the *Commedia* it marks the beginning only of plurality, and the introduction of changeability and decay is, perhaps more coherently, already attributed to the first fall also as far as the language is concerned (significantly, in the *Divine Comedy* it is Adam's task to explain both the original sin and the loss of the original language); what still remains is the very close connection between soul and language. In the *De vulgari eloquentia* the parallel between first and third sins is also emphasised by the fact that whereas we can say that the Flood punished a generalised evil rather than a particular sin, in the cases of both the Fall and Babel men's fault was a very specific praesumptio, the desire to reach a divine condition and be as great as, if not greater than, God.

The question of the original language and its relationship with the Fall and with Babelic confusion play an important role also in the thematic and linguistic texture of *Finnegans Wake*, in which the first three sins are foregrounded from the first three paragraphs: the first hundred-letter word, in a context where various "falls" are recalled, starts with a "stuttering" evocation of Babel ("bababal...", *FW* 3.15), also a polyglot onomatopoetic (as well as semantic) rendering of the thunder

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*4 "The tongue which I spoke was all extinct before the people of Nimrod attempted their unconsummable work".
symbolising the voice of God which can be read either as a Vichian announcement of the end of one age and the coming of the next, or, Biblically, as God's wrath for the sins of men (or, on a more "realistic" level, one could suppose that the thunder may announce heavy rains and thus hint at the Flood which, in the previous paragraph is evoked but has "not yet" happened: "pas encore [French "not yet"] [...] not yet [...] not yet [...] Rot [also "not"] a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface", *FW* 3.04-13).

The original sin is hinted at from the very first words of the *Wake* through the names of the sinners: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's" (*FW* 3.01); the direct reference is to the Franciscan church known as "Adam and Eve", on the right bank of the river Liffey, but what is particularly interesting, especially after Beckett's comments on Dante's "curious mistake", is the inversion of the names, "Eve and Adam's". We may recall that the "mistake" imputed to Dante is the notion expressed in the *De vulgari eloquentia* that the Bible records that the first speaker was Eve, whereas, Dante emphasises, we must rationally infer that it can only have been a man, therefore Adam. Of course, Beckett points out, nowhere does the Bible say that Eve was the first to speak:

(Dante makes a curious mistake speaking of the origin of language, when he rejects the authority of Genesis that Eve was the first to speak, when she addressed the Serpent. His incredulity is amusing: 'inconvenienter putatur tam egregium humani generis actum, vel prius quam a viro, foemina profuisse.' But before Eve was born, 'the animals were given names by Adam, the man who 'first said goo to a goose'. Moreover it is explicitly stated that the choice of names was left entirely to Adam, so that there is not the slightest Biblical authority for the conception of language as a direct gift of God, any more than there is any intellectual authority for conceiving that we are indebted for the 'Concert' to the individual who used to buy paint for Giorgione). (*DBVJ*20)
This bracketed passage, following a mocking reference to readers unable to understand the *Wake* and the nature of its language, is apparently disjointed from its context, but the connection rests in the parallel that Beckett has been drawing between Dante's and Joyce's innovative languages and their quest for the antecedents of such innovation: Dante finds them in the Bible (in the story of Adam which, in his "curious mistake", he criticises and inverts), Joyce (among other sources) in Dante and Dante's "curious" reading of the Bible, which he turns over through the vulgarisation, in a literal way, of Dante's noble vernacular. There may be another reason for Beckett's quotation of these words from the *De vulgari eloquentia*: the woman's speaking is described in the treatise as "foemina profuisset", and the evocation of the "flowing forth" (*pro + fluere*) of a woman's speech may reflect back onto the curious inversions, textual recirculations and flowing parallels of the *Wake* and recall the flux of Anna Livia's language, especially in her final flowing monologue which "recirculates" to the "riverrun" of the first line through a shift from the female voice of the last pages to the apparently male one of the beginning, although this "male" voice may still retain something of Anna Livia's vocal presence (and of Dante's opposite male-oriented "mistake"?) in the anteposition of Eve's name to Adam's.¹⁵

Adam and Eve's fault was declared a "felix culpa" by St. Augustine, insofar as it enabled God to demonstrate his infinite mercy, and men to achieve a deeper awareness of the significance of sin and of salvation. There are several allusions to the "happy fault" in *Finnegans Wake*, and the connection that it establishes between fall and rebirth - indeed, the stress on the necessity of redemption being already

¹⁵ The title chosen for the Italian translation of the "ALP" chapter (I.8), which Joyce wrote with the help of Nino Frank and, later, of Ettore Settanni, was "I fiumi scorrono", literally "the rivers run", which links the opening of the *Wake* with the flowing of ALP's voice. I shall come back to the (feminine) river of words in chapter 4 (esp. pages 228-231), but in this context it may be interesting to recall Boccaccio's definition of the *Divine Comedy* as "a great river, shallow enough for lambs to paddle in, and yet deep enough for an elephant to swim" (quoted in Patrick Boyle, *Night Thoughts on Italian Poetry and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1985), 1.
implicit in the sin - makes it one of the major structural notions underlying the
ovel.\(^{16}\) The motif appears for the first time just after the episode of the
Prankquean (FW 21.05-23.15) as "O fœnix culprit!" (23.16). Following the
"skirtmisses" (21.19) between the Prankquean and Jarl van Hoothe, the story
ends on a note of restoration of peace and of general welfare for the whole town,
summed up in the rewriting of the motto of Dublin city (\textit{Obedientia civium urbis
felicitas}) as "Thus the hearsomeness of the burger felicitates the whole of the polis" (23.14-15); on a similar note, the following paragraph expresses relief and
admiration for the way good follows from evil: "O fœnix culprit! Ex nickylow
malo comes mickelmassed bonum" (23.16). On the protean page of the \textit{Wake},
the Augustinian formula has however much larger and ambiguous implications,
evoking for instance both the legendary phoenix that rises from its own ashes after
its death as well as Dublin's largest park, on the banks of the river Liffey, the
Phoenix Park where H. C. Earwicker allegedly commits his sin. This sin, the
"culpa", is transformed by metonymy into the "culprit", and Phoenix Park is thus
also assimilated to the garden of Eden where the first, original fault was committed;
the "culprit", that is, is both Adam and HCE, and the following sentence ("Ex
nickylow malo comes mickelmassed bonum") puns on the double meaning of
"malo" (Latin \textit{malum}, both "evil" and "apple") and can be read either as a sort of
general rule (good follows from evil) or as a more precise reference to Adam and
Eve's eating of the apple and its "happy" consequence.

\(^{16}\) A list of twenty occurrences of the "felix culpa" motif is offered by Niall Montgomery in
"The Pervigilium Phoenicis", \textit{New Mexico Quarterly}, XXIII, Winter 1953, 470-71; Clive Hart
Paul Riquelme interprets the act of writing itself as a \textit{felix culpa}: "repeatedly in the \textit{Wake}, self-
destruction characterizes the activity of aesthetic creation. It does so in part because artistic
making, as a central element in the presentation of HCE and his family, becomes a metaphor
embracing birth, sexuality, and death. For Joyce, writing is the copula as copulation linking birth
and death. Specifically, it is a \textit{felix culpa}, a fortunate fall that results in a creation like birth and in
an expenditure of energies leading to death". P. Riquelme, \textit{Teller and Tale in Joyce's Fiction}
Now, whereas the Original Sin and the Flood have already found a solution - the former through God's sacrifice of himself through the Son Jesus Christ and his death on the cross, the latter in the covenant symbolised by the rainbow - the sin of Babel is still unredeemed and languages are still confused. However, in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante implies that this redemption is possible. God is the loving father who punishes - or rather, mercifully corrects ("pia correctione") - out of love and for the good of his sons ("non hostili scutica, sed paterna"). In His encompassing design, every episode moves towards a final good:

O sine mensura Clementia celestis imperii! Quis patrum tot sustineret insultas a filio? Sed exurgens non hostili scutica, sed paterna et alias verberibus assuet, rebellantem filium pia correctione necnon memorabili castigavit.¹⁷

*(Dve Ivli.5)*

The sin committed at Babel is another *felix culpa*, this time a linguistic one, and one which still has to produce its "happy" outcome: Dante, implicitly, steps forth to accomplish this task. It has to be pointed out that this reading of Dante as self-fashioned redeemer is not common among Dantologists. A well established line of criticism regards the *De vulgari eloquentia* as the work in which Dante seeks to overcome the impasse of the corruption of language and of the multilingualism originated at Babel by means of a noble illustrious vernacular,¹⁸ but none of these critics interprets Dante's view of the sin of Babel as a proper linguistic "felix culpa", or Dante as a self-appointed "redeemer"; the *vulgare illustre* is, rather, a patch, a piece of remedial work to limit the damage done. Robert Hollander, on the

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¹⁷ "O boundless clemency of the Heavenly Power! What father would bear so many insults from a son? But, rising up, not with the scourge of an enemy, but of a father, and [with a scourge] accustomed at other times to give stripes, He chastised His rebellious son with correction at once pitiful and memorable."

contrary, links Dante's views of Babel and of the primal sin when he states that one
of Dante's goals is "to return to the vernacular its God-given properties as the
language of Grace", which he would achieve, at least metaphorically, in the *Divine
Comedy* by relating childish speech, his own vernacular and the primal speech of
Adam. Hollander explicitly writes of Dante's theories in terms of "linguistic fall",
but for him Dante's position is that it is "gramatica", and not the vernacular, that
can provide "a sort of redemption of the linguistic 'Fall'". However, Dante has
explained that after the confusion of languages which made it impossible for men to
communicate through time and space, "grammar" (Latin) was *invented* in order to
restore the possibility of communication, and it is therefore an artificial language,
unchangeable and incorruptible, rationally constructed on fixed rules but not natural
to men. Of the two varieties, it is the vernacular tongue that is presented in the *De
vulgaris eloquentia* as the nobler ("nobilior", *De* I.i.4). The possibility of
redemption, it seems clear to me, is not in Latin but in a language that still needs to
be fashioned and formalised by the poet, what Dante defines as "vulgare illustre,
cardinale, aulicum et curiale". In this project Dante figures as the "redeemer" of a
linguistic fault that can thus turn out to be "happy"; through this planned
"redemption", the vernacular will be shown to be not just *as capable of regular use
as* Latin, but *superior to* Latin, in that it is natural and coextensive with man's
rational nature.

19 "In short, one might argue that Dante's amazingly ambitious linguistic program involves
the theoretical justification of the vernacular in the realm of nature and theology, and the practical
justification of the vernacular in the realm of art, where it will be shown to be as capable of
regular use as Latin." Robert Hollander, "Babytalk in Dante's *Commedia*", in *Studies in Dante*,
115-129: 120.
20 "Babytalk in Dante's *Commedia*", 120.
21 "Hinc moti sunt inventores grammaticae facultatis; quidem grammatica nichil aliud est quam
quedam inalterabili locutionis idemptitas diversis temporibus atque locis. Hec cum de comuni
consensu multarum gentium fuerit regulata, nulli singulari arbitrio videtur obnoxia, et per
consequens nec variabilis esse potest." ("Hence were set in motion the inventors of the art of
grammar, which is nothing else but a kind of unchangeable identity of speech in different times
and places. This having been settled by the common consent of many peoples seems exposed to
the arbitrary will of none in particular, and consequently cannot be variable." *De* I.i.11)
The interpretation of the *De vulgari eloquentia* as an attempt to "redeem" Babel has been altogether rejected by other critics; Ileana Pagani, for instance, opposes what she calls the "religious-philosophical-metaphysical" reading, and argues that Dante does not aspire to recuperate an idealistic Edenic condition, and therefore does not deny concrete dialectal and linguistic differences; on the contrary, these differences constitute his necessary starting point and he fully accepts them. I agree with many of Pagani's conclusions and with her interpretation of the *De vulgari eloquentia* as not seeking to return to pre-Babelic conditions, but I find it difficult to accept her hostility to any interpretation of Babel as a sinful and negative moment in the linguistic history of mankind. The point is not to recuperate an inevitably lost condition, which would indeed be impossible, but rather to redeem men - insofar as they are users of language - from a sin which has caused the loss of the pre-Babelic condition, in the same way as Christ's Redemption does not establish again the Edenic prelapsarian condition but offers to man the opportunity to achieve purity again through the knowledge and the experience of sin. In fact, I would say that Babel needs to be a sin in order for Dante to cast himself in the role of redeemer.

Umberto Eco has recently proposed an interpretation similar to the one I am sketching here:

an illustrious vernacular [...] was, to Dante, the only way in which a modern poet might heal the wound of Babel. [...] Out of this bold conception for the restoration of a perfect language, and of his own role within it, comes a celebration of the quasi-biological force displayed by language's capacity to change and renew itself over time instead of a lament over the multiplicity of tongues. The assertion of language's creativity, after all, stands at the base of Dante's own project to create a perfect, modern, natural language, without

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recourse to a dead language as a model. [...] Thus Dante puts forth his own candidacy as a new (and more perfect) Adam.23

There are some problems in Eco's view of Dante casting himself in the role of Adam, and other problems generally in Dante's position that remain unsolved: Adam named things, but Dante finds them already named - perhaps what he is implicitly aspiring to is to become not a new Adam but a new Christ. What he can "invent" is the universality of the natural tongue through the formulation of a set of rules that everyone would have to respect, but given the "most unstable and changeable" (Dve LIx.6) nature of man, surely he could not hope for his universalising rules to last. In fact, while Dante has to emphasise, as Eco points out, the quasi-biological nature of language that will in theory allow him to achieve a modern universal idiom, at the same time he is in practice caught in the paradox that this very linguistic organicism will quickly make his model corrupt and obsolete. It is this impasse that probably led Dante to abandon the project; but again - somewhat similarly to his brushing aside the problems implicit in his application of the four levels of exegesis to his poetry in Convivio (and later in the Epistle to Can Grande, if he wrote it) in order to make a point about the near-sacredness of (his own) non-Scriptural poetry and establish an exegetical model for it - it is not the feasibility of the project or its logicality that matters, but the assertion of a principle: that the poet has the solution, that poetry is the solution (maybe permanently in progress), that the struggle goes on and the poet - despite all his disclaimers - will not bend his head before God's judgement. Blake was right: the poet is satanic, and, as we shall see, in his pride and Ulyssen deviousness (Ulyssen "polytropy"?) Dante comes perilously close, like Shem to Lucifer, like HCE to Nimrod and to the fallen Adam; if he is a redeemptor, he is also a

23 Eco, The Search for the Perfect Language, 45-46.
"tempter" (FW 154.06), successfully saving the language by successfully tempting himself into the sin of pride.

Thus, despite the linguistic and ideological discrepancies between the De vulgari eloquentia and the Convivio, where it is Latin that is declared nobler than the vernacular, the whole conception and structure of the latter (the choice to write it in Italian and to apply the theory of the four levels of meaning to vernacular poetry) is part of the same project of "redemption" as the rules of vernacular poetic composition of the former. The language thus refined would not and could not be the same as the perfect language spoken before Babel, but it can be just as good in harmony, nobility and expressiveness. If this project is realised, then the sin of Babel will be expiated, the language redeemed, and the fault will truly have been happy. The closing lines of the first book of the Convivio also show the sense of the religious task of the poet and of the sacredness of (his) language:

Questo sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonderà, e darà lume a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscurità per lo usato sole che a loro non luce.25

(Conv I.xiii.12)

The very ambitious task of the poet / theorist in the De vulgari eloquentia is to make the "new light, new sun" of the language rise and shine: the poet is the light-giver, light-bringer - a Lucifer who models his words on the language of the

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24 There are several other contradictions or paradoxes: if Babel was the origin of the vernacular languages and their decay, and Latin was invented to make up for their deficiency, Latin should logically be the nobler of the two, rather than the vernacular that results from sin. Particularly intriguing is also the paradox of the use of Latin in the treatise that declares the vernacular the nobler language, and the use of vernacular in the book that asserts the greater nobility of Latin. Another "curiosity" (which is by some critics interpreted as a further contradiction) is that the naturalness of the vernacular that signals its superiority over artificial Latin would be undermined by the project to fashion an illustrious language which draws its components from all the existing dialects, a superior but "synthetic" and in the last analysis "artificialised" idiom modelled (at least in part) on the rational structure of Latin.

25 "This shall be the new light, the new sun, which shall rise when the wonted sun shall set, and shall give light to them who are in darkness and in shadow as to the wonted sun, which shines not for them."
Scriptures: the passage just quoted closely echoes the Gospels, and the light of Christ's coming becomes the light of the advent of the new language. As we have seen, Beckett quotes these words in "Dante... Bruno. Vico., Joyce" as an appropriate description of Joyce's renewal of the formal characteristic of literary language ("DBVJ", 19-20); Dante is thus by implication given the role of inspiring light for Joyce's new language, but there we find the usual ironic counterpoint: the "new light, new sun" is in fact turned into the obscure language of the "nightynovel" (FW 54.21), thereby circularly placing again this self-fashioned, presumptuous light-bringer at the centre of darkness (like the "real" Lucifer in Dante's own Inferno).

In a typical instance of "circumstantial similarity" ("DBVJ", 17), like Dante's works, Finnegans Wake also links echoes of the tower of Babel or its consequences with references to the original sin as felix culpa. After all, for both Dante and Joyce, Babel may be said to be the happy event which justifies their work: without the confusion of the tongues, neither the De vulgari eloquentia nor the Wake would have been written. Thus it is not by coincidence, I think, that the "Nightlesson" of Finnegans Wake (chapter II.2) echoes and parodies the concrete example of (already pre-Babelian) linguistic change that Adam gives Dante in Paradiso XXVI, the evolution of the word used for God's name from "I" into "El": in the Wake, the identification of God's name as "El" ("God es El", FW 246.06) is followed shortly by references to Babel ("bubbles", 246.11) and to the "felix culpa" motif ("felix ed is who culpas does", 246.31), in an indirect confirmation both of Dante's link between original language, original sin and Babelic confusion, and of the possibility of reading Babel as another "felix culpa".

26 Mathew, 4.16: "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." Cf. also Isaiah 9.2.
If the tower of Babel is an equivalent of the original sin, a re-enactment of the Fall, then the various characters or actors or caricatures ("charictures") that take part in the "drame" (FW 302.32) must be involved in some form of role-playing, of being themselves and embodying someone else (at times something else) at the same time; and we need therefore to start looking at the Nimrodic roles of Dante’s works and of Joyce’s, at the culpa and the culprits, and at the tower itself. This analysis will continue in the next chapter with the saviours and the remedies; for the moment I shall still concentrate on the pars destruens of Dante’s treatise and the blurring of roles that both texts suggest.

**Awful tors and visionbuilders**

During the trial of Festy King in chapter 1.4, the theme of Babel and the "happy fault" motif are drawn together when the witness "W.P." is cross-examined and is asked whether the initials of the names of HCE add up to HERE COMES EVERYBODY. The witness’s reply - "Holy Saint Eiffel, the very phoenix!" (88.23-4) - can be read in more than one way. It could be an exclamation followed by the requested identification (such as could be, "Holy Jesus, yes, that’s the very man!”), but the entire sentence could also refer to HCE and identify him with both the tower and the phoenix. HCE is a sort of towering giant who recalls Dante's Nimrod, likened in the Inferno to a gigantic tower.29 As "Eiffel tower", HCE is a modern giant committing a modern fault, and both the giant and the fault

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28 In the trial the identities of the accused and of the witness are confused and keep shifting as the two structural oppositions of the book (warring brothers and father / son ) are superimposed onto the trial of HCE. I shall come back to this episode in chapter 3, p. 162-165.

29 "Me parve veder molte alte torri; [... ] sapli che non son torri, ma giganti; [...] però che, come su la cerchia tonda / Monteriggioni di torri si corona, / coa la proda che 'l pozzo circonda / toregegavan di mezza la persona / li orribili giganti" ("I seemed to see many lofty towers; [...] «know that these are not towers, but giants» [...] for, as on its round wall Monteriggioni crowns itself with towers, so here the horrible giants [...] bewowered with half their bodies the bank that encompasses the pit", Inf’XXXI, 20-44).
are "holy" and "felix" ("phoenix" has acquired this overtone since "O foenix culprit", *FW* 23.16), like the phoenix foreshadowing rebirth. In "O foenix culprit" fault and culprit dovetail through a metonymy that transforms the action into the agent; now, following Dante's suggestion in *Inf XXXI*, the shift is from the agent (Nimrod) to the material product of the action (the tower).

A more complex compounding of motifs and themes occurs in chapter III.3 (another trial) when Yawn is examined by the four old men. During the questioning HCE intervenes (or is summoned), his version of the story is broadcast, and his words alternate at times with those of a T.V. speaker. HCE begs ALP to pity him ("Pity poor Haveth Childers Everywhere with Mudder!") 535.34-35), but the speaker interrupts him in a patronising and scornful voice, and explains, drawing Babelic confusion and *felix culpa* together again:30

He has had some indiejestings, poor thing, for quite a little while, confused by his tonguer of bauble. A way with him! Poor Felix Culapert! (FW 536.7-9).

If "Haveth Childers Everywhere" is Adam, the father of all, "indiejestings" may also refer to the eating of the apple which caused a very severe spiritual "indigestion" to Adam and Eve and their descendants. The indigestion seems however to have been taken as a sort of joke - "in the jesting" - combining mirth and the ensuing sorrow or pain in yet another echo of the motto from Giordano Bruno's *Candelio*, "In tristitia hilaris, in hilaritate tristis". Another layer of meaning is brought to bear on the passage by the echo of Oliver Cromwell's retort "Away with these baubles".31 The obscene pun on "culpa" or "culprit" in "Poor Felix Culapert" probably comes from the Italian "culo aperto" (literally, "open

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30 There are countless instances of passages drawing together Babel and original sin in the *Wake*; cf. e.g. the description of HCE as "swobbing broguen eerish myth brockendootsch, making his reporterage on Der Fall Adams" (70.04-05). "O'Phelim's Cutprice" (72.04) and "Swayed in his Falling" (72.07) figure among the "abusive names" he is called.

31 Cf. McHugh, *Annotations*. 
arse"), a vulgar expression alluding to sodomy, also used when somebody is reproached, punished or subjected in a harsh, humiliating manner. This of course applies to Adam and Eve and to the men after Babel, but in context it takes a political colouring: HCE is the representative of the Irish race, conquered and humiliated by Cromwell, yet "felix" in its subjected state, self pitying and acquiescent, incapable of "manly" reaction. Obedience, after all, is the motto of Dublin city ("obedientia civium urbis felicitas"), and the motifs of the felix culpa and Dublin's motto often appear together, favoured by the cognate words "felix" and "felicitas" (the connection is further enriched through Milton's Paradise Lost, whose first line, "Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit", is often parodied by the Wake, as in "Of manifest 'tis obedience and the. Flute!", FW 343.36).

After HCE's appeal for pity and the speaker's interposition, the "Communicator" (HCE himself) advocates order and peacefulness in a long speech in which he mentions a version of Dublin's motto: "Obeyance from the townsmen spills felicity by the town" (FW 540.25-26). He goes on praising his own achievements in the city and, in particular, the building of a cathedral with high spires and towers:

by awful tors my wellworth building sprang sky spearing spires, cloud cupoled campaniles; 

The repeated allusions to the building of the tower of Babel are masked under the building of a cathedral, an achievement made possible by raising money through unscrupulous taxation, financial speculation, cheating ("fineounce and imposts"). The tone betrays the material intent of money-making beneath the hypocritical boasting of a pious purpose. The Eiffel tower returns also in this passage ("awful tors"), turning the building into a proud attempt to outrageously outreach
anything previously built - what the men who built the tower of Babel also wanted to do - and to pierce the sky with its spires, rather than build monuments to heaven's praise. The sexual allusions ("I got and grew and by grossscruple gat I grown outreachesly") liken the building of the tower to a sexual erection. In the geography of *Finnegans Wake*, the Wellington memorial in Phoenix Park is Finn MacCool's penis; it may be worth recalling that Wellington was a son of Ireland who had led British empire to many victories - the most famous was of course that over Napoleon at Waterloo - and it is therefore ironic that HCE should see the memorial as a sign of redemption ("that sign of oururu redemption", *FW* 36.24-25). The sexual allusions together with the possible reference to the Wellington memorial connect this passage to HCE's "fall" in Phoenix Park, although the violence of the language ("sprang", "sky spearing spires", "outreachesly") suggest rape rather than the milder sin of voyeurism and exposition of himself with which he is usually associated, and hint at a much more serious offence.

*FW* 541.5-9 echoes an earlier passage from *Finnegans Wake*. It is the first description of the building of the tower of Babel, dovetailing with the story of Tim Finnegan:

Bygmester Finnegan, of the Stuttering Hand, freemen's maurer, lived in the broadest way immarginable in his rushlit toothfarback for messuages before joshua's judges had given us numbers or Helviticus committed deuteronomy [...] and during mighty odd years this man of hod, cement and edifices in Toper's Thorp piled buildung supra buildung pon the banks for the livers by the Soango. He addle liddle phifie Annie uged the little craythur. Wither hayre in honds tack up your part inher. Oftwhile balbulous, mithre ahead, with goodly trowel in grasp and ivoroided overalls which he habitacularly fondseed, like Haroun Childeric Eggeberth he would caligulate by multiplicables the altitude and mulitude until he seesaw by neatlight of the liquor wheretwin 'twas born, his roundhead staple of other days to rise in undress mansionry upstanded (joygranit!) a waulworth of a skyscrape of most eyeful hoyth entowerly, erigenating from next to nothing and ecleccalising the himals
and all, hierarchitectitiptipotopical, with a burning bush abob off its bauble top and with larrons o'toolers clottering up and tombles a'buckets clottering down.  (FW 4.18-5.04)

The Eiffel Tower returns ("eyeful hoyth entowerly"), as well as the Woolworth building in New York, skyscrapers in general and references to the activity of building. The sexual allusion is present too, together with the pattern of growing and expanding ("tuck up your part inher"; "he would caligulate by multiplicables the alltitude and malltitude [...] to rise in undress maisonry upstanded (joygrantit!) [...] with a burning bush abob off his bauble top"). The same web of associations can be found in several other passages in the *Wake*. In chapter II.3, for instance, there is a paragraph in which drunkenness, building, "finance", tower of Babel, Eiffel Tower, Fall and foul (sin), descent, creation are once again intertwined:

Thus as count the costs of liquid courage, a bullyon gauger, stowed stivers pengapung in bulk in hold (fight great finnence! brayvoh, little bratton!) keen his kenning, the queriest of the crew, with that fellow fearing for his own misshapes, should he be himself namestakely a fouly fallen dissentant from the peripulator, saed towards Meade-Reid and Lynn-Duff, nabbing the hodden son of a poolal, leaden be light, lather be dry and it be drown'd on all the ealsh beside, how the camel and where the deiffel or when the finicking or why the funicking, who caused the scaffolding to be first removed you give orders, babling, were their reidey meade answer when on the cutey (the corespondent) in conflict of evidence drew a kick at witness but (missed) and for whom in the dyfflun's kiddy removed the planks they were wanted, hoob.  (FW 313.29-314.06)

And a similar, very synthetic, conflation of themes can also be found in "this habby cyclic erdor be outraciously enviolated" (285.1-2), where an echo of the motto of Dublin city can be heard together with the references to the outrageous attempt to reach heaven and to the sexual violence.

If HCE can be a tower like Dante's Nimrod, other traits also identify the two: like Nimrod, HCE is a giant and a hunter, speaks a confused language, and is described in ways that explicitly recall Nimrod:
Ever read of that greatgrand landfather of our visionbuilders, Baaboo, the bourgeoismeister, who thought to touch both himmels at the punt of his risen stiffstaff and how wishywashy sank the waters of his thought? (FW 191.34-192.01)

The project, or vision, whose construction he inspired, was an attempt to reach heaven - likened once again to a sexual erection ("his risen stiffstaff") - inevitably followed, as in the rule of contrappasso, by a fall ("sank"). More important still, this passage could be read as referring to Dante himself, the (greatgrand)father of all visions, the town "master" (he was a priore of Florence before the exile) whose inspiration to reach heaven came from Love (God, Beatrice). (In fact, I do not think this excerpt is meant as an allusion to Dante; but the text, whatever the authorial intention behind it, allows such associations; more on Dante and Nimrod in the next chapter.)

But HCE also points back to another fall, preceding that of Nimrod, preceding even that of Adam: the fall of the rebel angels led by Lucifer. It is another sin of pride, an outrageous attempt to reach higher followed by the inevitable contrapuntal fall. The episodes follow the same pattern, and the Wake weaves them together:

This wasto have been underground heaven, or mole's paradise which was probably also an inversion of a phallopharos, intended to foster wheat crops and to ginger up tourist trade (its architect, Mgr Peurelachasse, having been obcaecated lest he should petrifake suchanever while the contractors Messrs T. A. Birkett and L. O. Tuohalls were made invulnerably venerable), first in the west, our misterbilder, Castlevillainous, openly damned (FW 76.33-77.04)

32 In chapter II.3, Butt links together tower, ascending / descending movement, vulgarity and building activity in the story of the Russian General: "[...] that tourrible tall rudean cathargic, lugging up and laiding down his livepelts [...] by manurevring in open ordure to renewmurature [...]" (344.13-15). I shall discuss this episode in chapter 3.
Buried in his (temporary) grave before his disappearance and "rebirth" (first down, then up), HCE is in his inverted and not quite successful ("wastohavebeen") paradise (when Dante was "down", he was in Hell: he had no doubts that he had to go "up" again before he could reach heaven), in turn presented as an inversion of Lucifer ("phallopharos" can be read as variations on faro, "lighthouse", and -ferous, from -fer, "to bring"; and, as we know by now, HCE has a phallic relationship with heaven), who, in Dante's cosmology, is at the centre of the earth, upside down for those who are on their way out of Hell (cf. Inf XXXIV). 33

At times, Joyce seems to be referring to the details of the building of the tower of Babel through Dante's version. In the excerpt from FW 4.18-5.04 quoted above, one can hear echoes of Dante's account of the episode:

Siquidem pene totum humanum genus ad opus iniquitatis coierat, pars imperabant, pars architectabantur, pars muros moliebantur, pars amussibus regulabant, pars trullis linebant, pars scindere rupes, pars mari, pars terra vehere intendeant, partesque diverse diversis alitis operibus indulgebant, cum celitus tanta confusione percussi sunt, ut qui omnes una eademque loquela deserviebant ad opus, ab opere multis diversificati loquelis desinerent et nunquam ad idem commertium convenirent. Solis etenim in uno convenientibus actu eadem loquela remansit: puta cunctis architectibus una, cunctis saxa volventibus una, cunctis ca parantibus una, et sic de singulis operantibus accidit. Quot quot autem exercitii varietates tendebant ad opus, tot tot ydiamatibus tunc genus humanum disiungitur; et quanto excellentius exercebant, tanto radius nunc barbariusque locuntur. 34 (Dve I.vii.6-7)

33 Mary Reynolds finds in the "Mime" (FW II.1) a reference to the position of Lucifer at the bottom of Hell and Dante and Virgil's climbing down his body in order to go up: "But vice-reversing therefrom from those palms of perfection to anger arbour, treerack monas, scroucelly out of scott of ocean, virgd with woad, what tourments of complementary rages recked the divum from his punchpott to his tummy's shentre as he displad all the oathword science of his visible disgrace." (FW 227.19-23). Cf. Reynolds, Joyce and Dante, 309.
34 "For almost the whole human race had come together to the work of wickedness: some were giving orders; some were acting as architects; some were building the walls; some were adjusting the tiling with levels; some were laying on the mortar with trowels; some were quarrying stone; some were engaged in bringing it by sea, some by land; and different companies were engaged in different other occupations, when they were struck by such confusion from heaven, that all those who were attending to the work, using one and the same language, left off the work on being estranged by many different languages, and never again came together in the same intercourse. For the same language remained to those alone who were engaged together in the same kind of work: for instance, one language remained to all the architects: one to those rolling down blocks of stone, one to those preparing the stone; and so it happened to each group..."
Whereas the Bible describes the event in very few words,35 Dante embroiders the story with plenty of original, vivid details. The frantic activity of the men is rendered by the accumulation of phrases beginning with the anaphora "pars". Suddenly the parallel series is interrupted by the time clause "cum celitus tanta confusione percussi sunt", which introduces divine intervention; the account of the consequences follows. Repetitions and parallelism return: this time, however, their function is to emphasize the differences. The figure of epiphora now accompanies anaphora: "cunctis... una". The stress thus laid on the word "una" is quite ironical in its contrast with the true "one" language that existed before: then everyone shared one language and one common goal (anaphora, parallelism); now their activity is fragmented, their language confused. The only link that remains is the common fate that condemns men to dispersion and misunderstanding. The groups are no longer parts of a larger unit ("pars") but different, separate units ("cunctis... una") that add to a multiplicity.

Joyce's "description" of the building (4.19-5.04) seems to owe as much to Dante's expanded version as to the Bible. Compare, for instance, Dante's "architectabantur [...] architectoribus" with Joyce's "hierarchitectitiptiploftical"; Dante's "pars trullis linebant" with Joyce's "with goodly trowel". The several jobs of the workers co-operating in the building of the tower are summed up in the figure of Tim Finnegan / HCE, mason, architect, engineer and surveyor ("he would caligulate by multiplicables the altitute and mallititude"), joiner ("seesaw"),

of workers. And the human race was accordingly divided into as many different languages as there were different branches of the work; and the higher the branch of work the men were engaged in, the ruder and more barbarous was the language they afterwards spoke."

35 "And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." (Genesis, 11.3-4).
who carries and piles materials and buildings on the bank of the river(s) (cf. Dante's "pars mari, pars terra vехere intendebant"). It may also be possible to hear an echo of the situation described by Dante's words "et quanto excellentius exercebant, tanto radiun nunc barbariusque locuntur" (those who were highest in the hierarchy of tasks fall lowest in the attribution of language) in "with larrons o'toolers clittering up and tombls a'buckets clottering down" *(my emphases)*. A close echo of these words can be heard at *FW* 114.17-18: "and with lines of litters slittering up and louds of latters slettering down", in a context (that of the analysis of the "letter" in I.5), which has been shown in the previous chapter to be densely woven with references to Dante's *Convivio*, and, as we shall see in the next pages, may also contain several allusions to the *De vulgari eloquentia*. The word "hierachitectitiptitoploftical" too seems to hint at the higher rank in the hierarchy, that of architect, as being the loftiest and the most likely to fall, or tip off (as a consequence of being tipsy). Finally, Dante's specification that the builders of Babel would never be able again to come together ("coierat") in such commerce or intercourse ("commertium") may suggest to the reader some - most probably unintended - jokes on a sexual overtone of the sin (like the Fall) and of building as commercial activity - like HCE's building of towers and fake cathedrals.

"Bygmeester Finnegar, of the Stuttering Hand" *(4.18)* refers both to Tim Finnegan and to the main character of Ibsen's *Masterbuilder*, Bygmeester Solness. The "Stuttering Hand" alludes to one of HCE's characteristics, the stutter (at 4.30

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36 The names and vicissitudes of Lawrence o'Toole, archbishop of Dublin, and of his less successful contemporary Thomas à Becket are one of the several layers of the passage: these two historical figures crop up time and time again in the *Wake* and can be linked with Shaun and Shem respectively.

37 This pattern of going up and coming down (of letters, of people), a sort of counterweight systematisation of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, is taken up time and again in the *Wake*, often with echoes of this first occurrence. Cf. e.g. "the toposes that toppled on him, the types that toppled off him" *(FW* 136.15-19), followed shortly after by: "he crashed in the hollow of the park, trees down, as he soared in the vacuum of the phoenix, stones up" *(136.33-35). Perhaps a hidden allusion to Dante may be discovered here, if "sounds like a rude word" *(136.36) suggests the "vulgar" words of the *De vulgari eloquentia* and "you might find him at the Florence" *(137.04-05) hides Dante's hometown behind the name of a pub.*
he is described as "oftwhile balbulous"); Tim Finnegan's hand is "stuttering", i.e.,
shaking, because he is drunk; at the same time, as Mary Reynolds has pointed
out,38 in attaching the attribute to "Hand", Joyce may also have meant to
introduced in this context a reference to Dante's Paradiso: "l'artista / ch'a l'abito de
l'arte ha man che trema"39 (Par XIII, 77-78). In this canto, Thomas Aquinas
explains to Dante that Adam's and Christ's wisdom cannot be equalled in anyone,
because only they were created directly by God. All other men, on the contrary, are
God's creatures through nature: as nature is imperfect, so they must also be
imperfect, and Aquinas illustrates the imperfection of nature's shaping of things by
comparing it to the work of the artist whose hand trembles.

If this is indeed an allusion to Dante's line, it brilliantly highlights Joyce's
method of intertextual allusions, conflating different sources and deflating them.
The paragraph would start with an allusion to the Paradiso and the inadequacy of
the artist, and then go on to illustrate the episode of Babel by echoing a different
text, the De vulgari eloquentia, where Dante claims that the artist can make up for
the disastrous consequences of the Babelic confusion by raising the vernacular
language to a newly founded nobility and worthiness. The allusion would thus
acquire multiple implications. It identifies Tim Finnegan, hod carrier and
masterbuilder, with the artist whose shaking hand makes it impossible for him to
realise a perfect work of art, and certainly neither Tim nor the builders of Babel had
any hope of achieving perfection, always already condemned to a fall by the texts
that inscribe them. But if Babel is a felix culpa, it makes sense to draw part of the
allusion from the canto of Paradiso in which Aquinas speaks of the perfect wisdom
of Adam, the first man and sinner who was in Eden and then fell down to earth,
and of Christ, the Saviour who came down to earth, was buried underground in his

38 Joyce and Dante, 302.
39 "The artist who in the practice of his art has a hand that trembles".
"mole's paradise", and rose again after three days, taking Adam with him. At the same time, Dante, who (implicitly) puts himself forward as the "saviour" of the vulgar tongue, is, ironically, like Tim, the drunken sinner whose hand trembles and who falls, the artist whose work can only be imperfect. The varieties of idioms from which he sought to distil a unique, worthy "illustrious vernacular" still exist, confused and dispersed, and the Italian vernacular from which Dante hoped to get his triumph, has not triumphed: it did not last, and Dante's attempt has failed - but it has "happily" failed, leaving languages scattered, not foreclosing the possibility of existence for another synthetic (in fact, analytic) work like the *Wake*, which also needs linguistic differences in order to exist - to exist not (like Dante's "ungrateful" treatise) in order to suppress the differences it feeds on, but to achieve through them the highest and widest possible polysemy. For Dante, plurality maintains a positive value only when it implies the possibility of several significant layers within the word (and, of course, within the text), when the differences can be reduced to a common mould and do not contrast with one another. On the contrary, it acquires a negative meaning when it reveals difference without complementarity and is due to the evolution (or, in Dante's terms, corruption and decay) of the individual languages in diverse directions. But this is only the surface, the "beautiful lie" that envelops Dante's real implications: on the one hand, the possibility of polysemy is only a remedial strategy for a language that has lost the capacity of deixis, the capacity that is to point exactly to what it says, and it is then as fundamentally sinful as post-Babelian linguistic difference; by accepting and claiming it for his work, Dante may be implicitly forgoing the role of "saviour" that he has set himself in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. On the other hand, at the same time as he condemns the corrupt variety of languages, he needs them in order to play the highest role a poet can hope for, that of Christ-like saviour of the word. The unlimited polysemy of *Finnegans Wake*, unashamedly founded on the gift of
linguistic plurality and rejecting the didacticism of the moral sense in favour of a less univocal tropology, may finally be more honest, more innocent, like Tim's drunkenness, and a great deal simpler than Dante's.

Confusioning

According to the *De vulgari eloquentia*, after God's chastisement, the men who shared the same tasks remained united in one language but could no longer communicate with those who had been engaged in different activities (*De* I.vii.7), and from this moment they started to disperse on the face of the earth. It may be relevant in this context that in *Finnegans Wake* the encounters between opponents (HCE and the cad, and the subsequent re-enactments of their first meeting in Phoenix Park) are carried out through languages described by different adjectives or expressions, and often defined with an emphasis on their vulgarity, obscenity or on their derivative nature. HCE's encounter with the "cad with a pipe" (*FW*1.2)\(^49\) takes place on the anniversary of the "confusioning of human races" (*FW* 35.05), a phrase which fuses together the confusion of languages with the division of men into different peoples and their scattering on earth. HCE and the cad make use of different varieties of language: "my British to my backbone tongue" (36.31-32); "repeated in his secondmouth language" (37.14-15). In a later re-enactment, the "attackler" (81.18) and the "Adversary" (81.19-20) are described as "making use of sacrilegious languages" (i.e. post-Babelic, 81.24), while "the same man" (82.10-11) "asked in the vermicular" (82.11-12). After some "collidabanter"

\(^49\) Among the essays on the chapter, cf. in particular Seán Golden, "Parsing Rhetorics: the Cad As Prolegomena to the Readings of *Finnegans Wake*", in Bernard Benstock (ed.), *The Seventh of Joyce*, 173-177, which considers some of the linguistic and political meanings involved in the episode of the meeting with the Cad,
(82.15) and exchange of money, calm intervenes and "the starving gunman" (83.06) makes a remark "in languardly" (83.15).

Different, decayed languages are also used by Kersse the Tailor and the Norwegian Captain in chapter II.3: "he sagd in the formicular" (FW 319.28), "our raw language" (323.05). In the same chapter, Butt and Taff highlight individual linguistic differences when they recount the story of Buckley and the Russian General: "Endues paramilitairy langdwage" (338.20), "Stranaslang" (338.22), "lipponease longuewedge" (339.01), "lwdbrogue" (343.31), "scimmianised twinge" (344.08, which reverts Butt's tongue to an animal, apish type of language).

The use of various idioms, registers, jargons due to different jobs (as in Dante's theory of the origin of the diverse languages), social class or group is reflected in chapter I.2 in the spreading rumours about HCE and in the composition of the ballad which decrees his public fall after the "private" fall in Phoenix Park - this seems to replay the "private" Fall of Adam and Eve in Eden, which left a perpetual stain on men's soul and the "public" fall of men at Babel, affected ever after by the confusion of tongues in their social life. A similar pattern can be found in chapter I.3, in the attempt to track down the confused destinies of the authors of the ballad, all of them gone to different parts of the globe and now dead. We do not know anything about the first character (Hosty, now appearing as "Osti-Fosti", FW 48.19), except that he is dead: "Ei fu" (49.02). Of the others we learn that before dying they scattered all around the world: "A'Hara" was in the Crimean war (49.02-15); "Paul Horan" went into a mental hospital "in the northern counties" (49.15-21); "Sordid Sam" passed away "propelled from Behind into the great Beyond" (49.21-50.05); "Langley" disappeared from "that austral plain" (50.05-

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41 There may be a reference here to Alessandro Manzoni's poem "Il cinque maggio", written to commemorate Napoleon on the day of his death, opening precisely with the words "Ei fu.".
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18); finally "Father San Browne", a.k.a. "Padre Don Bruno", died. The words through which their deaths are announced are "he was", each time in a different language: "Ei fu" (Italian), "Booil" (Russian "Byl"), "He was", "Han var" (Danish), "Bhi she" (Irish "bhi sé"), and "Fuitfuit" (Latin "Fuit"). There is method in this plurality: the death of Osti-Fosti (Italian "fosti" = "you were", second person singular), the main author and singer of the ballad, is announced in Italian, which for Joyce was the language of music par excellence; A'Hara's, who fought in the Crimean war, in Russian; Father San Browne's, a clergyman, in Latin.

After describing the fate of the authors of the ballad, chapter 1.3 goes on to tell about the different versions of HCE's fall, and what happened to him. At a certain point, introduced by the words "Favour with your tongues! Intendite!", we read the following paragraph:


(FW 54.07-19)

Different languages, peoples, political groups or parliamentary institutions,\textsuperscript{42} forms of greeting or of polite conversation, offers of drinks and food, exchange of money in different currencies, mention of different items of clothing (all of them representatives of different cultures) are juxtaposed, but do not actually harmonise:

\textsuperscript{42} McHugh annotates: Ulema = Moslem group in pre-war Turkish government; parliaments: Sobranje (Bulgaria), Storthing (Norway), Duma (Tsarist Russia). Roland McHugh, \textit{Annotations}. 
even if the word "Casaconcordia" appears in this context and there are many expressions of polite conversation, in fact the sentences do not allow any pattern of coherent, meaningful conversation to emerge, and they remain unrelated, pointing to a lack of "concordia" and to the difficulty of communicating after the confusion of tongues at Babel determined the independent and unrelated development of the peoples and their cultures. Before the end of chapter II.1, the "Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggies", a relationship of interdependence is established between the sequence of generations and linguistic change on the one hand and different languages in space (or the spreading of peoples on the earth) on the other:

He does not know how his grandson's grandson's grandson will stammer up in Peruvian for in the ersebest idiom I have done it equals I so shall do. He dares not think why the grandmother of the grandmother of his grandmother's grandmother coughed Russky with suchky husky accent since in die moudiart of the slove look at me now means I once was otherwise. Nor that the mappamund has been changing pattern as youth plays moves from street to street since times and races were otherwise. Nor that the mappamund has been changing pattern as youth plays moves from street to street since times and races were (FW 232.35-253.07)

In the De vulgari eloquentia Dante applies to the sinners of Babel the same law of analogy and contrappasso that regulates the distribution of penalties in the Divine Comedy: those who held the highest functions are punished with the harshest tongues ("et quanto excellentius exercebant, tanto radius nunc barbaribusque locuntur"). In the Inferno the giant Nimrod, instigator of the construction of the tower, is punished with a variety of the law of contrappasso, an incomprehensible language known only to himself:

«Raphèl mai amècche zabi alni.»
comincid a gridar la fiera bocca,
The early commentators of the *Divine Comedy* thought that Nimrod’s words had been invented by Dante in order to give a concrete example of the effects of the Babelic confusion of tongues, and that it was therefore useless to try and interpret their meaning. Modern readers have argued that Dante probably formed the giant’s words by distorting Hebrew words which he could find in the Bible or in medieval lexicons: what matters is that Dante clearly meant these words to be perceived as incomprehensible sounds (“*cosi è a lui ciascun linguaggio / come l’ suo ad altrui, ch’a nullo è noto*”); listening to him is just a waste of time (“*non parliamo a voto*”).

A similar procedure of deformation can be found in the *Inferno* when Pluto, the monster guardian of the fourth circle of Hell, cries:

«Pape Satàn, pape Satàn alope!»

(*Inf* VII, 1)

In this case too, scholars, from the early commentators to the moderns, have advanced a number of interpretations to explain the meaning of the cry, referring to Hebrew, Latin, Arabic words, but, again, no definitive reading has prevailed.45 A conclusion can be drawn from the comparison of these two lines of distorted

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43 “Raphèl may amecche zabi almi,” the fierce mouth, to which sweeter psalms were not fitting, began to cry”.
44 “This is Nimrod, through whose ill thought one sole language is not used in the world. Let us leave him alone and not speak in vain, for every language is to him as his is to others, which is known to none.”
45 On the interpretation of these lines of distorted languages cf. however Hollander’s "Babtalk in Dante’s *Commedia*,” 121-122.
language, i.e. that their value must be different: in the former instance only Nimrod knows what his words mean, in the latter, although neither Dante nor the readers know the exact significance of Pluto's utterance, Virgil understands the meaning it wants to convey:

*e quel savio gentil, che tutto seppe,
disse per confortarmi: «Non ti noccia
la tua paura, ché, poder ch'elli abbia,
non ci torrà lo scender questa roccia».

Poi si rivolse a quella 'nfiata labbia,
e disse: «Taci, maladetto lupo!
consuma dentro te con la tua rabbia».

Virgil knows that Pluto's words are an expression of his rage, intended to scare off Dante and his guide; he also knows that they need not be scared and can continue their descent, willed by Heaven.

Ettore Settanni, who briefly collaborated with Joyce and Nino Frank on the translation of "Anna Livia Plurabelle", remembers Joyce's reaction to his puzzlement at the chapter:

Joyce sorrise, si avvicinò alla biblioteca, poi venne verso di me e mi indicò il gioco dantesco di "Pape Satan Pape satan aleppe" [sic]. "Padre Dante mi perdoni, ma io sono partito da questa tecnica della deformazione per raggiungere un'armonia che vince la nostra intelligenza, come la musica." 

46 "And that gentle sage who knew all, said, to reassure me, 'Do not let your fear harm you; for, whatever power he have, he shall not keep us from descending this rock.' Then he turned back to that bloated visage and said, 'Silence, accursed wolf! Consume yourself inwardly with your own rage."

47 Ettore Settanni, James Joyce e la prima traduzione italiana del Finnegans Wake (Venice: Cavallino, 1965), 30. Willard Potts' translation reads: "Joyce took a copy of the Divine Comedy and pointed out Dante's line, 'Papé Satan, papé Satan aleppe' [sic]. 'May Father Dante forgive me,' he said, 'but I took this technique of deformation as my point of departure in trying to achieve a harmony that vanquishes our intelligence as music does'" (quoted in Reynolds, Joyce and Dante, 203-4).
Joyce was aware then of the importance of Dante's "technique of deformation" as a means to obtain effects that go beyond the conventional relationship between sound and meaning, beyond reason, in order to appeal to the senses and imagination. Talking to Settanni, he chose to quote the example of deformed language from *Inferno* VII, 1. He could have selected the other instance of Dante's "technique of deformation", Nimrod's cry, which would also have offered an explicit link with the central episode of Babel. Joyce's choice may have been just a coincidence, of course; however, readers realise that whereas Nimrod's utterance is incomprehensible to anyone else but him, Pluto's words escape Dante's comprehension but are understood by Virgil, at least as far as their general meaning and intended effect are concerned. It is perhaps possible to suggest that Joyce selected the line from *Inferno* VII as his "starting point" because it allowed for the possibility of meaningful interpretation under the difficult, obscure surface: *Finnegans Wake* is not intended as a book written in perfectly solipsistic language, like Nimrod's impossible to understand - quite the contrary: the language of the *Wake* is difficult, obscure, but it is such insofar as it incorporates many other languages while deforming them, like the line spoken by Pluto, allowing for the interpretation of its meanings.

*Oblivio*

The different languages that followed Babel had to be "reinvented" by the men who then scattered all over the earth. The means of God's punishment, Dante declares in his original interpretation, was the forgetting of the previous common language:

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48 On the importance of this "tecnica della deformazione" and Joyce's criteria and use of Dante in his translation of the "Anna Livia Pluribelle" chapter into Italian, cf. Jacqueline Risset, "Joyce traduce Joyce".
Cum igitur omnis nostra loquela (preter illam homini primo concretam a Deo) sit a nostro
beneficatoa reparata post confusionem illum, que nil fuit aliud quam prioris oblivio, et
homo sit instabilissimum atque variabilissimum animal, nec durabilis nec continua esse
potest, sed sicut alia que nostra sunt, puta mores et habitus, per locorum temporalique
distantias variari oportet.49

(Dve Lix.6)

Men had to reinvent their languages, and they did so according to their own
nature, changeable and unstable. Introducing the notion of forgetfulness, Dante
accounts for both the initial fall and the progressive decay of the new idioms which
causes them to differentiate more and more in the course of time. Each new act of
speech is, in a way, an attempt to remember, to "balbly call to memory" (FW
37.16) the original and lost language; since the linguistic fall, each language is
foreign, barbarous, a "stuttering", "ballulous" idiom. So is the "nat language"
(FW 83.12) in which Finnegans Wake is written. When we fall asleep, we
"forget" the day world and its language with its conventions. What we remember
are "bits and pieces", fragments woven together in new relations, according to laws
different from those that govern waking life. When we wake up we try to
remember the dream, but we can recall only the bits and pieces and try to join them
together according to rules that are different from those of the night. A dialectic of
forgetting and remembering governs the whole of the Wake, from its stuttering
beginnings to the final monologue when ALP tries to remember but can only
forget, or perhaps tries to forget but is forced to remember: "Impossible to
remember persons in improbable to forget position places" (FW 617.08-09);
"Forget, remember!" (614.22). Like in Dante's version of Babel, where the

49 "Since therefore every language of ours, except that created by God with the first man, has
been restored at our pleasure after the Confusion, which was nothing else but forgetfulness of the
former language; and since man is a most unstable and changeable animal, no human language can
be lasting and continuous, but must needs change like other properties of ours, as, for instance,
our manners and our dress, according to differences of time and place".
memorable punishment was the forgetting, memory and oblivion are inextricably bound together in reciprocal implication.\textsuperscript{50}

Man is forever exiled from the original language, scattered on the earth, yet again in exile from the original land (\textit{Dve I.viii.1}) after having been exiled from Eden. This post-Edenic, post-Babelian condition is also that of the artist who, exiled, encounters languages different from his own. The \textit{De vulgari eloquentia}, written in the first years of Dante's exile, would have been inspired and prompted by a direct contact with dialectal differences and by the reflection that must have ensued on the origin of languages, the cause of their differences, their formal and phonic values. Away from Florence, Dante had to reconsider his role as a poet, the composition of his readership, his relationship with it, the language in which he should address it. Both the \textit{De vulgari eloquentia} and the \textit{Convivio} reflect Dante's awareness of the link between exile and language, and indeed suggest that Dante needed exile just as he needed the sin of Babel to become the "saviour". Beckett refers to Dante's antimunicipalism as an example of heroic superiority ("DBVJ" 18), yet the complacency of the poet for his role of great man without a home can be read between the lines of Dante's scorn of municipalism and of his self-pity:

\begin{quote}
\textit{nè io sofferto avria pena ingiustamente, pena, dico, d'essilio e di povertate. Poi che fu piacere de li cittadini de la bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza, di gittarmi fuori del suo dolce seno - nel quale nato e nutrito fui in fino al colmo de la vita mia, e nel quale, con buona pace di quella, desidero con tutto lo cuore di riposare l'animo stancato e terminare lo tempo che m'è dato -. per le parti quasi tutte a le quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato.},\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} I shall come back to the issue of memory and forgetting in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{51} "Nor should I have unjustly suffered penalty, the penalty I mean of exile and of poverty. Since it was the pleasure of the citizens of the most beauteous and the most famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth from her most sweet bosom (wherein I was born, and nurtured until the culmination of my life, wherein with their good leave I long with all my heart to repose my wearied mind and end the time which is granted me), through well-nigh all the regions whereto this tongue extends, a wanderer, almost a beggar, have I pacing".

\textit{(Conv I.iii.3-4)};
Joyce’s case is similar to Dante’s: exile, although chosen and not imposed, brought him into contact with different cultures, traditions, idioms. From his school years Joyce had manifested his interest in foreign languages: he learnt French, Italian, Dano-Norwegian, German, took lessons in Irish, Spanish, Dutch, Russian. For Stephen, in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, the language spoken by the English dean of studies is an “acquired speech”:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (P 189)

The artist’s awareness of linguistic difference is that of the exile, whose original language is not, nor can ever be, “his” any longer, whose present language is a foreign one, one that has had to be learned because the old one had to be forgotten. For Joyce, as for Dante, the solution is not in going back to the irrecoverable pre-Babelian (Celtic) language, nor in quietly accepting the present one, but in taking

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52 “For whoever is so offensively unreasonable as to suppose that the place of his birth is the most delightful under the sun - such a one, I say, may be allowed, into the bargain, to place his own vernacular (that is, his mother-tongue) before all others, and consequently to believe that it actually was that of Adam. But we, to whom the world is our native country, just as the sea is to the fish, though we drank of Arno before our teeth appeared, and though we love Florence so dearly that for the love we bore her we are unwillingly suffering exile - we rest the shoulders of our judgement on reason rather than on feeling”. Typically, Beckett does not mention that, to a large extent, Dante’s anti-municipalism was in fact due to his hostility against the rulers of the town that had exiled him.
advantage of differences and making the most of them. As in Dante's case, Joyce's spontaneous awareness of multilingualism was naturally enhanced by life on the continent and by the conditions that he found in the cities where he resided, all of them the recipients of polyglot communities where languages could be observed in action, listened to in their peculiar accents, inflections, intonations - an inexhaustible quarry for interlinguistic puns, and an ideal habitat for Joyce.

And again, as in Dante's case, Joyce relished his condition of exile; indeed, exile was one of the key factors which released for Joyce the spring of identification (with Dante in this instance, but also with other exiles, such as Giordano Bruno). In December 1918, when he was almost 37, Joyce wrote in a letter to Martha Fleischmann that he felt old and that he was 35 years of age, the same age that Shakespeare was when he conceived his passion for the Dark Lady, the same age "que le Dante a eu quand il est entré dans la nuit de son être" (Letters II.432). Biographical data are altered and made to conform to the "spiritual" biography modelled on the lives of his predecessors.

In the *Wake* there are several passages that refer to the exile of the artist, often in connection with the vicissitudes of language after Babel. The "Letter" or "Mamafesta" chapter, which I have discussed above in relation to the theory of the four levels of meaning, also correlates Babelic confusion and dispersion of people and echoes the *De vulgari eloquentia*.

Because, Soferim Bebel, if it goes to that, (and dormerwindow gossip will cry it from the housetops no surelier than the writing on the wall will hue it to the mod of men that mote in the main street) every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle anyway connected with the gobbllydumped turkery was moving and changing every part of the time: the

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53 Trieste was an active port town where Italian (in the distinctive local accent), Slavonic, German, Turkish, Albanian and other languages could be heard in the streets. Joyce found a similar situation in Zurich and Paris; the former was a shelter for refugees, exiles, expatriates of many nationalities; the latter the centre of European culture, the mythical city of transgression and novelty where artists congregated from all over the world.
travelling inkhorn (possibly pot), the hare and turtle pen and paper, the continually more and less misunderstanding minds of the anticollaborators, the as time went on as it will variously inflected, differently pronounced, otherwise spelled, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns. (FW 118.18-28)

"Soferim Bebel", "suffering Babel"; suffering, that is, the dire consequences of the construction of the tower of Babel described in the lines that follow: a world dominated by chaos ("chaosmos") where everything and everyone continually moves, changes, emigrates. Language is also moving and changing: "every person, place and thing" is part of a riddle whose answer is "the noun".\(^\text{54}\) The list of all the things that move and change culminates in a description that fits the state of practically every natural language ("variously inflected, differently pronounced, otherwise spelled, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns"), but may also echo passages of the De vulgari eloquentia: "Dico autem 'formam' et quantum ad rerum vocabula et quantum ad vocabulorum constructionem et quantum ad constructionis prolationem"\(^\text{55}\) (Dve I.vi.4; these words follow the passage on exile quoted above). Compare also this passage on the mutability of man and language: "omnis nostra loquela […] per locorum temporumque distantias variari oportet […] Si ergo per eandem gentem sermo variatur, ut dictum est, successive per tempora, nec stare ullo modo potest, necesse est ut disiunctim abmotimque morantibus varie varietur, ceu varie variantur mores et habitus, qui nec natura nec consortio confirmantur, sed humanis beneplacitis localique congruitate nascentur"\(^\text{56}\) (Dve I.ix, 6-10) and,

\(^\text{54}\) McHugh, Annotations, reports other occurrences of the same motif and refers to Ogden's Notes in Basic English on the Anna Livia Plurabelle Record, where Ogden explains that it means "the noun".

\(^\text{55}\) "And I say, 'a form,' both in respect of the names of things and of the grammatical construction of these names, and of the utterance of this grammatical construction".

\(^\text{56}\) "Every language of ours […] must needs change […] according to differences of time and place. If, therefore, the speech of the same people varies (as has been said) successively in the course of time, and cannot in any guise stand still, it must necessarily happen that the speech of people living apart and removed from one another will vary in different ways; just as manners and dress vary in different ways, since they are not rendered stable either by nature or by intercourse, but arise according to men's inclinations and local fitness".
finally, Dante's definition of the "vulgare" as the nobler of the two languages, vernacular and Latin: "[...] tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversas prolaciones et vocabula sit divisa [...]" (Dve I.i.4).

Languages change, and the peoples are scattered "even to the hindmost coignings of the earth" (FW 118.36-119.01) and can no longer communicate with one another because of the "the continually more and less intermiserunderstanding minds of the anticollaborators" (118.24-25). "The travelling inkhorn (possibly pot)" includes writers in the list, especially the exiled ones (homeless, therefore "travelling"). The variety of languages and linguistic forms is described:

It is told in sounds in utter that, in signs so adds to, in universal, in polygluttural, in each auxiliary neutral idiom, sordomutics, florilingua, sheltafocal, flayflutter, a con's cubane, a pro's tutute, strassarab, ereperse and anythongue athall. (FW 117.12-16)

The determination of time - "at this deleteful hour of dungflies dawning" (118.32) - seems to recall the De vulgari eloquentia more explicitly. The hour is "deleteful", both "delightful" and "oblivious" - that is, the time when everything is "deleted", cancelled from the mind: it is evening (flies' dawn), when we get ready to go to sleep, but also the moment in history when languages were forgotten, "deleted" from men's minds. Nevertheless, "we ought really to rest thankful" for this (118.31-32): the moment is delightful because it is the felix culpa that paves the way for Dante's project of redemption and Joyce's celebration of the confusion. After all, it is a "pardonable confusion" (119.33) - confusion in the text, maybe in the reader's mind, but "pardonable" because a "pia correctione" (Dve I.vii.5). The confusion of languages is symbolised by the many different characters referred to: Greek (120.19); Ostrogothic (120.22); Etruscan (120.23). The "aphasia", or loss

57 "Because the whole world makes use of it, though it has been divided into different forms of utterance and words."

58 Hebrew "soferim" = writers; cf. McHugh, Annotations.
of language (at Babel and each night as we fall asleep) is the general amnesia which led necessarily to reinvention of new idioms, to giving new names (inevitably misnomers) to things, and the vicissitudes of language, of the artist, of the mind falling asleep, are finally bound together:

the vocative lapse from which it begins and the accusative hole in which it ends itself; the aphasia of that heroic agony of recalling a once loved number leading slip by slipper to a general amnesia of misnomering one's own

( FW 122.03-6)

It is now time to see how Dante manages to emerge successfully from the "accusative hole" of linguistic confusion and positively build his vision in the synthetic phase of his treatise.
Chapter 3

Distilling vulgar matter

"Whatever gold one might sift ex sterco Vergilii, excrement was still excrement"
(Robert Hollander, "Dante Theologus-Poeta")
"encaustum sibi fecit indelibile"
(FW 185.26)

In the previous chapter we have seen how *Finnegans Wake* borrows, exploits and subverts Dante's historical account of the breakdown of the one original language into a multiplicity of different, decayed idioms. This chapter will show how the constructive part of the *De vulgari eloquentia*, the "proposal" to overcome differences through a noble, illustrious language, represents an important force behind the *Wake's* experimentation with narrative form, its exploration of new notions of character, its integration in such typical and pervasive themes as the father/son battle or the artist's original creation and his transcendence of the vulgar, the commonplace, the daily - even the excremental - into the eternity of art. I shall look at the story of HCE's naming, ennobling and fall in I.2, at Shem's distillation of an indelible ink from his own excrement in I.7, and at HCE's concoction of a new cocktail from the dregs of his customers' glasses in II.3 to show how Joyce's narrative, poetic and linguistic masterpiece situates itself at the intersection between a radically modern narrative technique and a medieval poet's linguistic theory. According to a medieval topos, all secular literature, even the best poetry - i.e. that written in imitation of Virgil - was "excrement"; in the words of Robert Hollander, "[w]hatever gold one might sift ex
Dante walked in the wake of Virgil, and it is quite appropriate that Joyce's text, written in the wake of Dante, should also treat as precious excrement the theory from which it "sifts" the "gold" of narrative, thematic and linguistic material.

The Wake's direct echoes from the De vulgari eloquentia and its use of Dante's theory also point to a method of linguistic composition which is in many respects similar for the two authors. Although I would not claim that Joyce directly derived his theory of a multilingual, universalising idiom for the Wake from the De vulgari eloquentia, I would suggest that Dante's treatise presented him with an important antecedent, strikingly similar in the method although different in scope. Joyce could turn to the medieval model both as source-material for the linguistic structure of the Wake (similar to his turning to Vico and Bruno for narrative and thematic antecedents) and as model in relation to which he could define his own multilingual theory and practice. This chapter will therefore also look at how Dante's definition of the vulgare and its qualities - "illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale" (Dve I.xvi.6) - can be legitimately employed as a useful descriptive metaphor for the language of Finnegans Wake in order to show both the analogies with Dante's theorised idiom and the ways in which "Wakese" aims to surpass it; as we shall see, this investigation may also open up the possibility of interpreting aspects of Joyce's earlier works in the light of Dante's theory.

As in the previous chapters, it will be useful to start by giving an outline of Dante's argument, highlighting and briefly commenting on the main issues raised by Dante's treatise in order to provide a context for the following discussion of how these elements are incorporated and dramatised in Finnegans Wake.

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1 "Dante Theologus-Poeta", in Studies in Dante, 49. Hollander reports in a footnote that the expression probably originates in Donatus's Vitas of Virgil, and was a widespread interpretation of the classics in the Middle Ages.
In the *De vulgari eloquentia*, after the historical account of the origin and significance of linguistic differences, Dante examines the great variety of Italian dialects and the myriad subordinate distinctions which exist even within the walls of the same town, from street to street (*De I.ix-x*). Dante describes it as a thorny and intricate linguistic forest. In this tangled wood, Dante hunts for the "beautiful panther", the illustrious Italian language:

\[\text{Quam multis varietatibus latio dissonante vulgari, decentiorem atque illustrent Ytalie venemur loquelam; et ut nostre venationi pervium callem habe possimus, perplexos frutices atque sentes prius eiciamus de silva}^{2}\]

(*De I.xi.1*)

The worst\(^3\) dialects are "uprooted" and "cleared away", the rest is "sifted" ("exaceratis") in order to find "the more honourable and respectable of them" ("Honorabilius et honoreficentius", *De I.xii.1*). However, the search does not lead to any satisfactory result, although some traces of the illustrious vernacular language can be "scented" in many places:

\[\text{Postquam venati saltus et pascua sumus Ytalie, nec pantheram quam sequimur a dniivenimus, ut ipsam reperire possimus, rationabilius investigemus de illa, ut solerti studio redolentem ubique et necubi apparentem nostris penitus irretiamus tenticulis.}^{4}\]

(*De I.xvi.1*)

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2 "As the Vulgar Italian has so many discordant varieties, let us hunt after a more fitting and an illustrious Italian language; and, in order that we may be able to have a practicable path for our chase, let us first cast the tangled bushes and brambles out of the wood."

3 Dante's criterion of selection is based on purely subjective aesthetic motives, and the different degrees of "goodness" or "badness" depend on the measure of his liking or disliking the sounds of the dialect under observation. Nevertheless, although Dante describes and condemns dialects on the basis of this subjective aesthetic principle in the treatise, in his poetic practice he does exploit the semantic capacity of harsh and "inharmonious" sounds - cf. for instance the *canzoni* of the "Donna Petra" and, in the *Inferno*, his "rime aspre e chioccio" ("harsh and grating rhymes", *Inf.XXXII.*, 1).

4 "After having scourcd the heights and pastures of Italy without having found that panther which we are in pursuit of, let us now track her out in a more rational manner, in order that we may with skilful efforts completely enclose within our toils her who is everywhere felt but nowhere seen." (The 1904 translation reads, "Fragrant everywhere but nowhere apparent.")
The panther which, in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, symbolises the illustrious language is one of the animals that appear in medieval bestiaries and in the works of many medieval and ancient writers. Whereas the allegorical meaning attributed to the panther may vary (for example, it can stand for Christ, or for ardent love), one of its constant characteristics is that it attracts other animals with its smell. Because the panther, and therefore the vernacular, is for Dante "necubi apparentem", it is also connected with the phoenix, which, in one version of the myth, does not appear in any place. This confirms the link between the phoenix and the fall and rebirth of language, a link which, as we have seen, also operates in *Finnegans Wake* through the fusion of "phoenix" and "felix culpa" and through the association of the original sin in Eden with the linguistic sin of Babel.

All of the vernaculars examined carry some trace - some "scent" - of the illustrious vernacular, but none of them can be identified with it. The opposition between multiplicity and oneness which Dante set up when he discussed the story of the tower of Babel is now taken up again and developed. Multiplicity still represents the negative pole, and it is contrasted with the perfection of the one. Dante now links the opposition one vs multiple to the concept of the *unum simplicissimum*, and phrases this explanation in a way that is reminiscent of the Babelic origin of linguistic multiplicity: compare, for instance, the sentence "sicut in número cuncta mensurantur uno" (*Div* I.xvi.2) with the repetition of the form "cunctis...una" used in the description of the confusion following God's punishment. The similar use of such an

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5 The concept of "unum" as the *metron* of everything goes back to the Pythagoreans who thought of the monad as the essence of being. It was taken up and transformed by Aristotle, who added to this abstract entity a determinate and particular substance; therefore, insofar as the "unum" is "genus", it is universal and abstract; and it is "simplicissimum", indivisible and "optimum"; at the same time, insofar as it shares of the particular features of reality (of things), it is also concrete. In Dante's treatise it is made to represent the perfection of the unified Italian language, similar to the number one and to all other unifying concepts, standards in relation to which everything else of the same kind can be evaluated. Dante's Aristotelianism in dealing with the number one is in fact mingled with a neo-Platonic reverence for its mystic qualities. Cf. Patrick Boyle's brief but informative discussion of the sources and significance of number one in Dante's works in *Dante Philomathes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), 217-220.

important linguistic construction in the two chapters of the *De vulgari eloquentia* (the first time in the negative context of the Babelic sin and the ensuing corruption of language, the second in the positive context of the rational discovery of the illustrious vernacular) once again supports the interpretation of Dante's project of founding a *vulgare illustre* as the "happy" outcome of a previous fault, and of his own role as the opposite of Nimrod's (or, indeed, as 'double' of the giant). The reduction of the linguistic necessity of a unified and unifying language to the concept of the *unum* also anticipates the terms of the description of the *vulgare illustre* and its qualities, and thus becomes in Dante's theory the pivotal point which marks the passage from multiplicity to unity and turns what is negative into something positive.

Through the recourse to the concept of *unum* in his quest, Dante qualifies the illustrious vernacular as the standard in relation to which all other linguistic manifestations must be weighed and measured, the perfect entity which does not appear anywhere in particular but is reflected, according to different degrees of perfection, in all the particular vernaculars and reflects them in itself. The *vulgare illustre* is qualified therefore as the "optimum" of vernaculars. As it does not exist anywhere in particular, the task of the poet is to "recompose" it, starting from the multiplicity of local vernaculars and selecting from them what best reflects the perfection of the "one" - that is to say, extracting the noblest elements and reconstituting them in the *vulgare illustre*, a language which will then be elegant, expressive, worthy of dealing with the highest subjects.

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7 "Que quidem nobilissima sunt earum quae Latinorum sunt actiones, hec nullius civitatis Italic propria sunt, et in omnibus comunia sunt: inter que nunc poeot illad discerni vulgare quod superius venabamur, quod in qualibet redolet civitate, nec cubat in ulla. Postest tamen magis in una quam in alia redolet, sicut simplicissima substantiarum, que Deus est, in homine magis redolet quam in bruto animali" ("Now, the noblest of those actions which belongs to us as Italians are peculiar to no one town in Italy but are common to all; and among these we can now distinguish that Vulgar Tongue which we were pursuing above, and which is perceptible in every town, but abiding in none. It may, however, be more perceptible in one than in another, just like the simplest of substances, which is God, who is more perceptible in a man than in a brute," *De Livi*.5).

Dante concludes this chapter by asserting that he has finally found the Italian vernacular. As it could not be encountered empirically, Dante has "discovered" it through the rational method of deduction. He defines the language:

Itaque adepti quod querebamus, dicimus illustre, cardinale aulicum et curiale vulgare in Latio, quod omnis latie civitatis est et nullius esse videtur, et quo municipalia vulgaria omnia Latinorum mensurantur et ponderantur et comparantur.9

The opposition "omnis" / "nullius" recalls the one between "ubique" and "necubi" referred to the panther. The close parallel between the fall of man in Eden and the fall of language at Babel, and Dante's implicit presentation of his illustrious vernacular as a redemptive step, parallel to Christ's redemption of man,10 are asserted again through the use of the words "mensurantur et ponderantur et comparantur" which echo the praise of divine wisdom in the Scriptures: "omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti"11 (Sap. XI, 21).

It will be useful to report here Dante's definition of the four attributes through which he describes the Italian vernacular. The elements which appear to be relevant for an analysis of the relationship between the De vulgari eloquentia and Finnegans Wake will be examined in more detail later.

The first adjective, illustre, is thus defined:

Per hoc quidem quod illustre dicimus, intelligimus quid illuminis et illuminatum prefulgens:
et hoc modo viro appellamus illustres, vel quia potestate illuminati alios et iustitia et caritate illuminant, vel quia excellenter magistrati excellenter magistrant, ut Seneca et Numa

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9 "Having, then, found what we were looking for, we declare that the Illustrious, Cardinal, Courtly, and Curial Vulgar Tongue in Italy is that which belongs to all the towns in Italy, but does not appear to belong to any one of them; and is that by which all the local dialects of the Italians are measured, weighed and compared."

10 This is confirmed on the one hand by the symbol of the panther which, as we said, is in many Medieval interpretations associated with the image of Christ; on the other hand, it is conveyed by the use, for the vulgare illustre, of the concept of the unum simplicissimum, whose highest abstraction is, of course, God.

11 "You ordered all things by measure, number, weight". The reference has been pointed out by Marigo in his footnote to this passage of the De vulgari eloquentia.
Pompilius. Et vulgare de quo loquimur, et sublimatu est magistratu et potestate, et suos honore sublimat et gloria.

Magistratu quidem sublimatum videtur, cum de tot rudibus Latinorum vocabulis, de tot perplexis constructionibus, de tot defectivis prolationibus, de tot rusticis accentibus, tam egregium, tam extricatum, tam perfectum et tam urbanum videamus electum, ut Cynus Pistoriensis et amicus eius ostendunt in cantionibus suis.

Quod autem exaltatum sit potestate, videtur. Et quid maioris potestatis est quam quod humana corda versare potest, ita ut nolentem volentem et volentem nolentem faciat, velut ipsum et fecit et facit?

Quod autem honore sublimet, in promptu est. Nonne domestici sui rege, marchiones, comites et magnates quoslibet fama vincunt? Minime hoc probatione indiget. Quantum vero suos familiares gloriosos efficiat, nos ipsi novimus, qui huius dulcedine glorie nostrum exilium postergamus.

Quare ipsum illustre merito profiteri debemus.\(^\text{12}\) (Dve l.xvii.2-7).

The second quality of the Italian vernacular is its "cardinality", and the language is defined *cardinale* for the following reasons:

Neque sine ratione ipsum vulgare illustre decusamus adiectione secunda, videlicet ut id cardinale vocemus. Nam sicut totum hostium cardinem sequitur, ut, quo cardo vertitur, versetur et ipsum seu introrsum seu extrorsum flectatur, sic et universus municipalium grex vulgarium vertitur et revertitur, movetur et pausat secundum quod istud, quod quidem vere pater familias esse videtur. Nonne cotidie extirpat sentosos frutices de ytala silva? Nonne cotidie vel plantas

\(^{12}\) "Now, whatever we call Illustrious we understand to be something which shines forth illuminating and illuminated: and in this way we call men Illustrious, either because, being illuminated by authority, they illuminate others by the display of Justice and Charity; or else because, having been excellently trained, they in turn give excellent training, like Seneca and Numa Pompilus. And the Vulgar Tongue of which we are speaking has both been exalted by training and authority, and also exalts its followers by honour and glory. Now, it appears to have both been exalted by training, inasmuch as we see it purified from so many rude Italian words, involved constructions, faulty expressions, and rustic accents, and brought to such a degree of excellence, clearness, completeness, and polish as is displayed by Cino of Pistoja and his friend in their *Canzoni*. And that it has been exalted by authority is plain, for what is of greater authority than that which can sway the hearts of men, so as to make an unwilling man willing, and a willing man unwilling, just as this language has done and is doing? Now, that it exalts its followers by honour is evident. Do not they surpass in renown kings, marquises, counts, and all other magnates? This has no need at all of proof. But we ourselves know how glorious it makes its friends, for the sweetness of this glory makes us cast even our exile behind our back. Wherefore we ought deservedly to proclaim this language as Illustrious."
 insertit vel plantaria planta? Quid aliud agricole sui satagunt, nisi ut amoveant et admoveant, ut dictum est? Quare prorsus tanto decusari vocabulo promeretur.\textsuperscript{13} (Dve I.xviii.1)

The third adjective is \textit{aulicum}, and it is explained as follows:

Quia vero aulicum nominamus, illud causa est, quod, si autem nos Ytali haberemus, palatium foet. Nam si aula totius regni comuni est domus et omnium regni paritum gubernatrix augusta, quicquid tale est ut omnilbus sit comune nec proprium uilli, conveniens est ut in ea conversetur et habitet; nec aliquod aliud habitaculum tantum dignum est habitante: hoc nempe videtur esse id de quo loquimur vulgare. Et hinc est quod in regis omnibus conversantibus semper illustri vulgari locuntur; hinc etiam est quod nostrum illustre velut accola peregrinatur et in humilibus hospitatur asilis, cum aula vacemos.\textsuperscript{14} (Dve I.xviii. 2-3)

Finally, the fourth characteristic of the illustrious vernacular is \textit{curiale}:

Est etiam merito curiale dicendum, quia curialitas nil aliud est quam librata regulae eorum que peragenda sunt; et quia statera huiusmodi librationis tantum in excellentissimis curis esse solet, hinc est quod quicquid in actionis nostris bene libratum est, curiale dicatur. Unde cum istud in excellentissima Ytalorum curia sit libratum, dici curiale meretur. Sed dicere quod in excellentissima Ytalorum curia sit libratum, videtur nugatio, cum curia careamus. Ad quod facile respondetur. Nam licet curia, secundum quod una accipitur, ut curia regis Alamanie, in Ytalia non sit, membra tamen eius non desunt; et sicut membris illius uno Principe uniuntur, sic membra huius gratioso lumine rationis unita sunt. Quare fatsum esset

\textsuperscript{13} "It is not without reason that we adorn this Illustrious Vulgar Tongue with a second epithet; that is, that we call it Cardinal: because, as the whole door follows its hinge, and whither the hinge turns the door also turns, whether it be moved inwards or outwards; so the whole herd of local dialects turns and returns, moves and pauses, according as this Illustrious language does, which really seems to be the father of a family. Does it not daily root out the thorny bushes from the Italian wood? Does it not daily insert cuttings or plant young trees? What else have its foresters to do but to bring in and take away as has been said? Therefore it surely deserves to be adorned with so great a name as this."

\textsuperscript{14} "Now, the reason we call it Courtly is as follows: if we Italians had a Court it would be an Imperial one; and if a Court is the common home of all the realm, and an august ruler of all parts of the realm, it would be fitting that whatever is such a character as to be common to all parts without being particular to any should frequent this Court and dwell there; nor is there any other abode worthy of so great an inmate. Such, in fact, seems to be that Vulgar Tongue of which we are speaking; and hence it is that those who frequent all the royal palaces always speak the Illustrious Vulgar Tongue. Hence, also, it happens that our illustrious language wanders about like a wayfarer, and is welcomed in humble shelters, seeing we have no Court."
What appears to be particularly striking in Dante's treatise is the constant identification between the language and the poet. The illustrious vernacular is enlightened by the poets who use it, and gives lustre to them. Dante has to seek the language through the wood of dialects and must prune and weed and extirpate bushes, and the language is likened to a gardener that weeds and cut brambles and keeps the garden tidy. Both the poet and the illustrious language are exiled, and must wander and seek shelter in other people's houses. This connects their fates to that of humankind after Babel and of Adam's lot after the original sin. Dante's search for the "panther" through the forest of the vulgari, where he has to weigh the various dialects, evaluate them, and give his "verdict" on each, reflects the "curiality" of the illustrious vernacular, the quality which renders it worthy of being spoken in the court of justice, in the royal court and (in another meaning of the term) in the assembly of the noble men of the kingdom who were summoned by the prince and consulted on matters of general interest. It is therefore the standard for taking important decisions, both as criterion of evaluation and as medium. Most of these elements acquire a relevant role in Finnegans Wake, and they will be considered in turn in the rest of this chapter.

15 "This language is also deservedly to be styled Curial because curiality is nothing else but the justly balanced rule of things which have to be done; and, because the scales required for this kind of balancing are only wont to be found in the most excellent Courts of Justice, it follows that whatever is well balanced in our actions is called Curial. Wherefore, since this illustrious language has been weighed in the balances of the most excellent Court of Justice of the Italians, it deserves to be called Curial. But it seems mere trifling to say that it has been weighed in the balances of the most excellent Court of Justice of the Italians, because we have no Imperial Court of Justice. To this the answer is easy. For, though we have no Court of Justice in Italy in the sense of the one Supreme Court of the King of Germany, still the members of such a Court are not wanting. And just as the members of the German Court are united under one Prince, so the members of ours have been united by the gracious light of Reason. Wherefore, it would be false to assert that the Italians have no such Court of Justice, though we have no Prince, because we have a Court, though, as a body, it is scattered."

Nominigentilisation

Both the process of linguistic composition and the theme of the linguistic quest play an important part in Joyce's novel, together with the more general narrative / thematic recurring pattern of the (always frustrated) search for an explanation, for an object, for the origin of a name, and so on. Although several "curial" situations occur throughout the Wake, no satisfactory or definitive solution is ever found. There are many trials and interrogations, such as that of Yawn in book III or the trial of Festy King in chapter I.4; quests for objects which are never found or discovered, like the colour of the Maggies' drawers or the quest for the "heliotrope" in the "Mime" chapter.17 This happens from the beginning: on page 5, for instance, after the first "introductory" paragraphs and the interweaving of the story of Tim Finnegan's fall with the story of the tower of Babel, the question is asked, "What then agentlike brought about that tragedy thundersday this municipal sin business?" (FW 5.13-14). The "search" becomes almost a prayer for an answer ("Stay us wherefore in our search for righteousness, O Sustainer", 5.18-19), and then two possible explanations for the fall of Finnegan are offered: "It may half been a missfired brick, as some say, or it mought have been due to a collapsus of his back promises, as others looked at it"; an insertion in brackets, however, already multiplies the possible interpretations of the fall and the stories that narrate / explain (or fail to explain) it to a very large and significant number (the one thousand and one stories of the Arabian Nights); "(There extend by now one thousand and one stories, all told, of the same)" (5.26-28).

Chapter I.2 attempts to reconstruct the story of HCE's acquisition of his name in terms which remind us very closely of Dante's search for the illustrious vernacular.

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17 For a study of the link between the quest for the origin of language and the quest for the origins of the river and with the motif of the Letter in the Wake, cf. Laurent Milesi, "Metaphors of the Quest in Finnegans Wake".
True, the investigation into these origins looks like a doomed quest from the start, more likely to raise doubts than to dispel them:

"Comes the question are these the facts of his nominigentilisation as recorded and accolated in both or either of the collateral andrewpaulmurphy narratives. Are those their fata which we read in sibylline between the fas and its nefas? No dung on the road? [...] We shall perhaps not so soon see" (FW 31.33-32.02)

When HCE is given the nickname "Here Comes Everybody" (32.17-18), his universality is emphasised ("magnificently well worth of any and all such universalisation", 32.20-21). HCE, who in the first two pages of the chapter is described as a "grand old gardener" (30.13, like Dante and the Italian vernacular in the De vulgari eloquentia), a "bailiwick" and a "turnpiker" (31.27), soon becomes a viceroy, observing from "his viceregal booth" (32.36) a representation of A Royal Divorce. Elevated to a kinship with royal figures and through the coincidence of his personal story with the performance of the comedy staged before him, HCE is the protagonist of a "comic" plot that can be described as going "from good start to happy finish" (32.24-25), a formula which also describes the story of the language according to the salvational narrative of the De vulgari eloquentia (from Edenic language to the "happy" linguistic fall of Babel to Dante's redemption of the Babelic confusion) and may parody Dante's own definition of comedy as that which "begins with sundry and adverse conditions, but ends happily".18

18 In the Epistle to Can Grande della Scala Dante justifies the title of his poem: "Libri titulus est: 'Incipit Comedea Danis Alaghieri, [...] Ad cuius notitiam sciendum est, quod comedea dicitur a cornes villa, et odo quod est cantus, [...] Differt ergo a tragedia in materia per hoc, quod tragedia in principio est admirabilis et quaeta, in fine sive exitu est foetida et horribilis; et dicitur proper hoc a tragos quod est hicrus, et oda, quasi cantus hircinus, id est foetidus ad modum hirci [...] Comoedia vero inchoat asperitatem aliqua rei, sed eius materia prospere terminatur" ("The title of the book is 'Here begins the Comedy of Dante Alighieri [...]'. For the understanding of which it must be noted that 'comedy' is so called from cornes, a village, and oda, a song; whence comedy is as it were a 'rustic song'. [...] It differs, then, from tragedy in its subject-matter, in that tragedy at the beginning is admirable and placid, but at the end or issue is foul and horrible. And tragedy is so called from tragos, a goat, and oda; as it were a 'goat-song', that is to say foul like a goat [...]. Whereas comedy begins with sundry adverse conditions, but ends happily". Epistle to Can Grande, §10). Joyce also employs the etymology of the word "tragedy" ("tragoady", 5.13) and "hircus" (Latin he-goat) is one of
The setting of HCE's "nominigentilisation" supports the identification with the illustrious and courtly language assembled from the local "vulgar" dialects: the scene takes place "in that King's treat house of satin alustrelike", where "a truly catholic assemblage gathered together" (FW 32.25-26) by a "courteous permission for a pious purpose" (32.30-31), while HCE looks on, a "cecelticocommediant in his own wise" (33.03-04), perhaps a Celtic embodiment of the "divine comic Dentl Alligator" (440.06) and of his supreme work, the pious and divine Comedy. Many of the ingredients from the De vulgari eloquentia are present here: the method of assemblage from different vulgar dialects finds its correspondent in the gathering together of the populace; the illustriousness of the vernacular may appear in "alustrelike", and its characteristic of being aulicum (i.e. spoken in the royal court and residing there), is translated into the representation of the "comedy" A Royal Divorce and into its taking place in the "king's" house (cf. "palatinum foret"; "conveniens est in ea conversetur et habitet", Dve Lxviii.2). Finally, HCE is the "folksforefather", the father of the people; being an avatar of Adam, he is naturally the father of the entire human race, and being identified with Finn MacCool, he is an ancestor of the Irish people. He is "Haveth Childers Everywhere" (535.34), the "multipopulipater" (81.05) and the "folkenfather of familyans" (382.18) who has "the entirety of his house about him" (33.4-5): he is in the same position as Dante's vulgare cardinale, the "pater familias" and hinge around which the family of the Italian dialects turn and revolve (Dve Lxviii.1).

If a parallel of the story of Tim Finnegan with the story of Babel and of the fall of language was established since the beginning of FW I.1 (p. 4-5), the analogy is now carried further: HCE's predicament and the story of his name also find an
equivalent in the situation of the dialects contemporary to Dante and his attempt to
transcend their multiplicity. The "nominigentilisation" of HCE (the ennobling of his
name) corresponds to an ennobling of his social position, and this elevation of his
status parallels the De vulgari eloquentia's elevation of the "populace" of vulgares into
a single, superior language representative of the whole class of Italian vernaculars as
well as of the notion of "Italianness" itself (Dve I. xvi. 2-5).

In the second part of chapter I.2, when the story of the "nominigentilisation"
shifts to HCE's meeting with the "cad with a pipe" in Phoenix Park, the narrative too
seems to shift from the analogy with the unifying part of Dante's treatment of the
vernaculars to a parallel with the historical part of the treatise, more concerned with
Babelic fragmentation and the decay of tongues. As pointed out in the previous
chapter, the exchanges between the two antagonists HCE and the cad take place in
derivative or vulgar languages ("backbone tongue", "secondmouth language"; in a
later re-enactment of the episode, in FW I.4, they make use of "sacrilegious
languages" and speak in the "vermicular"), and their encounter happens on the
anniversary of the "confusioning of the human races" (35.05). As HCE's
"misdemeanour" in Phoenix Park can be read as Adam's sin in the garden of Eden,
the specification of the date would on the one hand conflate the two episodes of Babel
and of the original sin, while on the other it inverts the chronological order of the two
events, making the original sin happen on the anniversary of Babel.

The erection of the tower now appears together with a reference to the
development of the human species as it began to walk erect ("now standing full erect",
FW 36.14; "Heidelberg mannleicht cavern", 37.01); this implies a progress for

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19 As an ironic contrapuntal note, the story of the meeting is described in a bracketed passage as "(an
amalgam as absorbing as cellium chloroeyds and hydrophobe sponges could make it)" (35.01-02).
"Amalgam", beside being an alchemical instrument for mixing substances, hints not so much at the
fragmentation which is suggested in the story at that point, as at a "synthetic" or unifying operation
similar to the one presented in the first part of the chapter.

20 In connection with the theme of the evolution (= decay) of the language and the evolution of man,
see also the regression of Butt's language to a "scimmianised twinge" in chapter II.3 (344.08).
humankind through the performance of the sin (as it had already happened to Adam and Eve when they gained knowledge through the sinful eating of the apple). As in other allusions to the building of the tower of Babel, a connection is made with an erect penis through the reference to the obelisk of the Wellington monument in Phoenix Park ("his duc de fer's overgrown milestone", FW 36.18), and, in an implicit confirmation of both the vision of Babel as a felix culpa and the subversion of values in the Wake, the monument is described by HCE as a sign of redemption: "I am wo willing to take my stand, sir, upon the monument, that sign of our ruru redemption" (36.23-25); in fact, the Wellington monument should be symbolic of neither linguistic nor political redemption, as it stands for the tower of Babel and celebrates a historical figure who led Britain to reinforce the international power of its empire - that same empire which also subjugated Ireland. The ensuing act of language is an attempt to "balbly call to memory" (37.16) the words heard or spoken before, which, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, evokes Dante's interpretation of the punishment suffered by the builders of Babel, the forgetting of the original language. Later, as the cad ends his evening eating and drinking, the rumours of HCE's misdemeanour begin to spread and grow increasingly more imprecise, and they get "corrupt", with a fate similar to that of the post-Babelic languages, until Hosty composes the ballad and sings it, inviting the listeners to silence in the curia ("silentium in curia", 44.04). Thus, the chapter which had begun in a "curial" situation of investigation into the origin of name / language, follows the viciissitudes of this name (both in the sense of proper name and of good or bad reputation) until, with the spreading rumours / decay, we find ourselves once again in the curia, not having been able to discover anything precise about any of the matters in question, being left in doubt also about what happened exactly on "that" (indeed, it is not clear which) (in)famous day. We are in fact still uncertain even about the name of the hero of the ballad, of whom we are told that "Some vote him Vike, some mote him milke, some
dub him Llyn and Phin while other hail him Lug Bug Dan Lop, Lex, Lax, Gunne or Guinn. Some Apt him Arth, some bapt him Barth, Coll, Noll, Soll, Will, Wel, Wall". The only solution is to invent an arbitrary name for him: "but I parse him Persse O'Reilly else he's called no name at all" (44.10-14), which may recall what happened after Babel, when new (arbitrary) names had to be invented to describe things because the original ones were irretrievably lost.

A puling sample jungle of woods

The quest for the language is naturally an outstanding feature of the linguistic puzzle of the *Wake*. The question about what is the language spoken crops up time and again in the text. During the interrogation of Yawn in III.3 we read: "Are we speachin d'anglas landadge ore are you sprakin sea Djoytsch?" (FW 485.15-16). At the beginning of their dialogue (in *FW* I.1), Mutt and Jute embark on an attempt to establish a common language: "You tollerday donsk? N. You tolkatiff scow egian? Nn. You spigotty anglease? Nnn. You phonio saxo? Nnnn." (16.05-07). The answer is, precisely, "Nnnn", and the language is never defined. On the other hand, as Colin MacCabe has pointed out, even if *Finnegans Wake* is seen as a continuous lapsus, "[o]ne consequence of recognising the importance of the lapsus is that it implies that *FinnegansWake* is written in English". MacCabe goes on: "[t]he answer to the question 'Are we speachin d'anglas landadge' (485.12/13) must be 'yes' because if there was not some continuity within the text then the lapsus would be impossible". In other words, interpreting the *Wake* implies measuring its distance from the standard of the language, and this can be done only if we assume that a standard - everywhere present though nowhere apparent - can be recovered in the intricacies of the text.

Reading the *Wake* is, one could say, like being lost in the forest of a thorny and intricate multiplicity of languages and of different accents, and having to sift them, or hunt in them, in a quest, certainly not for "the" one, noble language, or for elegance, as it is in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, but for sense. The feeling most readers of *Finnegans Wake* are likely to experience is probably in consonance with the following question, asked in the "Mamafesta" chapter, where the "letter" / *Finnegans Wake* is examined: "You is feeling like you was lost in the bush boy?" (*FW* 112.03). As the "letter" is found by the hen in the dung, it is appropriate that the puzzled person to whom the question is asked should "shout out", "Bethicket me for a stump of a beech if I have the pouliest notion what the fairest he all means" (112.05-6) after exclaiming, "It is a puling sample jungle of woods" (112.04). The problem of obscurity is associated with woods, trees and forests ("jungle", "woods", "thicket", "fares" [= "forest"]). In one sense, it is a "pure and simple jumble of words". At the same time, however, "puling" may remind Italian ears of the word *pula* (Italian for "chaff"), what is thrown away to clean the wheat. Dante hunts the panther / language in the wood and sifts the dialects in order to separate the good ones from the bad ones, the wheat from the chaff. In *Finnegans Wake* Dante's sifting of the language for illustriousness is turned into the necessity for the reader to sift the Wakean idiom for meaning - and even then, the reader cannot throw away much and must keep and accept different readings as it is too often impossible to tell the chaff from the wheat or the wood from the trees: it is a polysemic "jungle of woods" in which even contrasting layers of meaning coexist.

However, whereas the panther eludes Dante's careful chase and the *vulgare illustre* must therefore be found rationally, elusiveness is an important element of the semantic system of the *Wake* which cannot be done away with, even through systematic and scrupulous reasoning. Much as possible meanings may be discussed and the understanding of the text increased by scholarship, there always remains a
degree of non-activated possible significance which the reader cannot decipher. By means of its programmatic all-inclusiveness and through the assumption of the concept of the microcosm containing the macrocosm, each individual word refers to another, and this one to yet another, and so on, in a virtually never-ending chain, so that "word" and "world" potentially coincide and definitive meaning must inevitably elude the "hunter" in *Finnegans Wake*.

Entering the *Wake* arouses in the reader sensations similar to the ones that Dante experiences when he walks through the gate of Hell in *Inferno* III - a condition that the little boy in "The Sisters" was also familiar with. The first impressions Dante registers are obscurity - both a difficulty in understanding and physical darkness - and a confusion of voices and of different, distorted accents:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Diverse lingue, orribili fivelle,} \\
\text{parole di dolore, accenti d'ira,} \\
voci alte e fioche, e suon di man con elle} \\
\text{facevano un tumulto, il qual s'aggira} \\
\text{sempre in quell'aura sansa tempo tinta,} \\
come la rena quando turbo spira. \text{[Inf III, 25-30]} \\
\end{align*}
\]

As they travel through the Inferno, Dante and Virgil are recognised by the sinners and recognise them thanks to their accents: Lombard, Florentine, Bolognese, and so on, and the list of languages must include the instances of invented or deformed speech discussed in the previous chapter. While they proceed in their journey through this post-Babelic multiplicity, they meet its cause, Nimrod. What Dante sees in the journey which begins in a forest, therefore, reflects, in a way, also

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22 Cf. my "The Sisters and the *Inferno*: An Intertextual Network".
23 "Strange tongues, horrible outcries, utterances of woe, accents of anger, voices shrill and faint, and the beating of hands among them, were making a tumult that swirls unceasingly in that dark and timeless air, like sand when a whirlwind blows."
the fate that he has described for the forest of post-Babelian languages. In the essay "Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce", Beckett writes that Dante supported in the De vulgari eloquentia a "synthetic language" assembled from "the purest elements from each dialect", and affirms that this is "precisely what he did. He did not write in Florentine any more than in Neapolitan" ("DBVJ" 18). In fact, as I pointed out in the "Prelude", this is not true, and indeed Neapolitan elements are very hard to find in the Commedia. The skeleton of his language is illustrious Florentine; on this main frame, Dante inserts a large number of borrowings from more vulgar (in the sense of "low") registers (predominant in the first cantica and diminishing as Dante ascends higher through Purgatory and Paradise), and of words, expressions, sometimes entire sentences, taken from other dialects or languages (especially Bolognese, illustrious Sicilian, and some Lombard, and then Provençal, French, and, of course, Latin). Most of these are very often adapted or Italianised, and their use is justified by the fact that Dante is accompanied by Virgil, who is sometimes allowed to speak in his native Lombard, and by the fact that Bolognese, Sicilian, Provençal, French, Latin already had established poetical traditions and could be considered languages of "high culture".

The Italian linguist Giacomo Devoto affirms categorically: "Dante used an essentially homogeneous vocabulary, he did not strive to achieve a lexical synthesis, like the one that his theory required"25 Another expert historian of the Italian language, Bruno Migliorini, explains:

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has a strict limitation: whereas the poet readily admits, when he needs them, Florentine forms and words, the others must have had some sort of literary consecration.26

The language of the *Wake*, therefore, can be placed somewhere in between Dante's theory and practice, borrowing while at the same time distancing itself from both. It is very similar in method of composition and conception to the principles set forth in the *De vulgari eloquentia* in that it is an idiom which has been "invented" especially for this book, constructed by extracting lexical, morphological, phonetic elements from a very large number of different existing languages and by grafting them onto the structure of Anglo-Irish.27 The idiom thus obtained bears traces ("redolet", in Dante's metaphor) of all those languages, but is none of them. As in the forest of dialects searched by Dante, some vernaculars come closer to the *vulgare illustre*; similarly, so do different languages contribute to "Wakese" in different measures, some of them more, others less. Laurent Milesi has demonstrated, on the evidence of Joyce's notebooks and drafts, that the questions of Babel and multilingualism were linked and developed together during the early years of the composition of the *Wake*.28 Joyce could draw all along from the languages he spoke fluently or knew well, while the use of "decorative languages" can often be dated more accurately thanks to the lists of items that Joyce drew either from printed material or with the help of friends and private lessons. Some of the languages used have a specific function (for instance, Norwegian is mostly linked with the appearance of HCE, who is of Viking origin). Milesi argues that whereas most of the languages,

28 Laurent Milesi, "L'idioma babélien de *Finnegans Wake*. Recherches thématiques dans une perspective génétique". In Claude Jacquet (ed.), *Genèse de babel: Joyce et la création* (Paris: CNRS, 1985), 155-215. I have not researched the *Finnegans Wake* drafts in any detail, but from a first glance it seems to me that a large part of the textual elements that may derive from the *De vulgari eloquentia* began to enter the text at the same time as Joyce was developing the babelic theme, whereas possible references to other Dantean material - namely the theory of the four levels of meaning - were inserted in the text as early as December 1923.
whenever they appear, are usually fused with English or other idioms, Anglo-Irish is very seldom contaminated. This confers on Anglo-Irish a sort of superiority or nobility which no other language achieves in the text, and supports the analogy drawn above with Dante's use of Florentine as the prevalent frame in the *Divine Comedy* over other linguistic borrowings.

Joyce's language, like that proposed by the *De vulgari eloquentia*, is both abstract - in that it does not coincide with any actual existing language and is "abstracted" / extracted from them - and concrete, in that it is concretely realised in the *Wake* itself. But Joyce's method of assemblage and accretion goes beyond - or beneath - Dante's. The "vulgare illustre" is a language that has been sieved, purified of any base, rough-hewn element, and is therefore the result of a process of distillation which grants it the status of a noble language, suitable only for the worthiest subjects. On the contrary, the "night" language of the *Wake* draws its materials from several tongues (contemporary or dead, natural or artificial), incorporating every element, from the basest to the highest ("a baser meaning has been read into these characters the literal sense of which decency can safely scarcely hint", *FW* 33.14-15), and can deal with any subject, the most material or vulgar or the most spiritual - indeed, very often it does it simultaneously, neutralising all difference between "low" and "good" language.

Once the reader has acknowledged and accepted that the procedure of reading *Finnegans Wake* involves recognising and interpreting all these differences in the text, the same process can be extended also to those words in *Finnegans Wake* which are apparently written in straightforward English (generally in its Irish variety) and whose comprehension would therefore not normally pose any problems. Although Anglo-

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29 Milesi, "L'idiome babélien...", 163.
30 In the same way as Joyce had neutralised in *Ulysses* the distinction between "low" and "worthy" subjects, for example by presenting Bloom to the reader as he enjoys his breakfast of kidneys and their "fine tang of faintly scented urine" (*U* 53), and as he goes to the toilets, or by having Stephen and Bloom's moment of "communion" take place as they urinate together (*U* 655).
Irish constitutes the skeleton of the Wakean language, it also becomes "foreign" in the book and requires the reader to treat it as such, to regard it in a new way. To adapt Dante's metaphor, "Wakese" becomes the "metron" for all the other languages used in the book, which must submit to the rules not of their own individual phonological, grammatical, semantic systems, but of the new system established by the "nat language" of Finnegans Wake. We may recall again Stephen's conversation with the dean in A Portrait of the Artist, when he thinks of English as an "acquired language" for him and for all the Irish. In a way, it could be said that while Joyce exploits and goes beyond Dante's project, at the same time he reverses it, expanding the potentiality of the "one" language (English, or, to be more precise: Anglo-Irish) to include the numberless varieties (both "high" and "low") offered by multilingualism so as to create a new idiom which is, simultaneously, both the synthesis of a multiplicity and an extension (a "pluralisation") of the "one".


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Chimerahunter

What strikes one in the De vulgari eloquentia is that Dante as hunter of the panther (the illustrious language) casts himself once again into the role of Nimrod, the giant and hunter who instigated the building of the tower of Babel. Of course, whereas the hunter Nimrod caused the language to break up into a multiplicity, Dante now dons a similar role in his quest but reverses its function and searches through the confused plurality in order to transcend differences and found a unified, unifying language.

HCE, both hunter and hunted, also embodies this coincidentia oppositorum: in chapter I.6 "hounded became haunter, hunter became fox" (132.16-17), and in the last chapter the "huntered persent human" (618.36, my emphasis) combines both roles. Sometimes disguised as "Ramrod, the meaty hunter" (435.13-14), HCE is Nimrod
and, like Dante's "Nembrotto" in *Inf* XXXI, he is both a giant and a tower. The panther-hunter (Dante himself) is now downgraded to a "molehunter" (576.25; as we have seen in the previous chapter, HCE was buried and spent some time in an "underground heaven, or mole's paradise", 76.33-34), and becomes "the eternal chimera hunter Oriolopos" (107.14), the hunter of the mythical monster with a composite body, a fancy which does not actually exist anywhere and which is made up from parts of different animals, as the *vulgare illustre* is made up of parts taken from many different dialects. "Oriolopos" fuses an allusion to the mythical giant hunter Orion with a reference to the episode of the meeting with the cad in the Park, when HCE is asked the time and is indicated as the "oriolate" (35.11). Through the identification with such fragmented, shattered or dismembered characters as Humpty Dumpty or the Egyptian god Osiris, and through the dismembering of HCE himself in I,4, HCE can also become one with the fragmented condition of post-Babelic languages and with the (chimerical?) recomposition of the language achieved through the illustrious vernacular. The buried HCE can also identify with the coffin and with the letter dug out of the midden heap by the hen. The damaged letter which re-emerges from the dung and is analysed in I,5 can thus be both the text and the remnants of the fragmented / fragmentary body of HCE. Not being whole and thus needing (re)composition, the letter / language / HCE, or its parts, are also subject to being changed, modified in "variously inflected, differently pronounced, otherwise spelled, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns" (118.26-27).


32 Orion, who was blind, recovered his sight by looking at the rising sun, and then wandered on the earth looking for his fosterfather, the cause of his blindness, killing all the animals he met, until he died and was assumed in heaven as the constellation that bears his name.

33 The combination of hunter, giant and "oriel" returns again later, in chapter II,3: "the bulkily bullwight, hunter's pink of face, an oriel oriolated" (310.26-27).
HCE, the "grand old gardener" (30.13), also subsumes Adam's role as "gardener" of Eden and the one described by Dante and shared by the illustrious language and the poet: Dante must cut off branches and root out the bushes in the tangled wood of dialects, while Dante rhetorically asks of the activity of the vulgare cardinale: "Nonne cotidie extirpât sentosos frutices de ytala silva? Nonne cotidie vel plantas inserit vel plantaria plantat? Quid aliud agricole sui satagunt, nisi ut amoveant et admoveant, ut dictum est?"34 (Dve I.xviii.1).

Shem the Penman, the poet-figure in the Wake, also shares something of this function with HCE, probably having inherited it from the father (however, as we shall see, the father's and the son's roles are essentially different despite the similarities). As a child in the "garden nursery", just before asking "the first riddle of the universe" (170.04), Shem plays with "thistlewords" (169.22-23) and is described as having "an artificial tongue with a natural curl" (169.15-16), reminiscent of the vulgare illustre, a natural tongue (cf. Dve I.i) extracted by Dante from the local dialects but which, through a process of refinement, is transformed into a somewhat artificial product.

*And made synthetic ink*

Shem, the "low hero" described by his antagonist twin brother Shaun in I.7, consistently prefers artificial to natural products, including food. Artificiality comes quite naturally to Shem the artist, "Vulgariano" (FW 181.14), and this could be related to Dante's theories of the natural and artificial tongues, especially if one reads Shem's gathering of the crumbs of other people's table talk as a parodic allusion to the Convivio:

34 "Does it not daily root out the thorny bushes from the Italian wood? Does it not daily insert cuttings or plant young trees? What else have its foresters to do but to bring in and take away as has been said?"
All the time he kept on treasuring with condign satisfaction each and every crumb of trektalk, covetous of his neighbour's word, and if ever, during a Munda conversazione committed in the nation's interest, delicate tippits were thrown out to him touching his evil courses by some wellwishers, vainly pleading by scriptural arguments [...] he would pull a vacant landlubber's face [...] let a lent hit a hint and begin to tell all the intelligentsia [...] the whole lifelong swine story of his entire low cornaille existence [...] unconsciously explaining, for instands, with a meticulosity bordering on the insane, the various meanings of all the different foreign parts of speech he misused [...] (FW 172.29-173.36)

Compare Dante's words in Convivio: "E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ma, fuggite de la pastura del vulgo, a' piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade [...]"35 (I.10). As we know, in his treatise Dante explains with "meticulosity" the "various" (four) levels of meaning of his own poems - layered texts, similar to the "palimpsests" which Shem piously forges ("how very many piously forged palimpsesta", 182.02).

Dante's vulgare illustre is, in a way, the result of a process of distillation of the existing imperfect dialects. Somewhat similarly, Shem the Penman fabricates a "synthetic",36 "indelible ink" out of his own excrement, after having produced speech as if through culinary-alchemical processes often reminiscent of sorcery.37 He plays "lallaryrook cookerynook" (184.16-17) to make a recipe which requires the use of such ingredients as "whites and yolks and yilks and whotes" (184.18-19), and is prepared "with cinammon and locusts and wild beeswax and liquarice" (184.20-21) and other strange components. They must be "brooled and cocked and potched" (184.17-18) and go through various other food-processing activities such as "frulling".

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35 "And I, therefore, who sit not at the blessed table, but, having fled the pasture of the common herd, gather, at the feet of them who sit at meat, of that which falls from them [...]"
36 Samuel Beckett defines the language constructed by Dante as a "synthetic language" ("DBVJ", 18), similar in method of composition and scope to that of the Wake. Between Dante and Shem the Penman, he furthermore writes, "there exists considerable circumstantial similarity" (17).
(184.19), while Shem, who is "chanting" (184.23) "his cantraps of fermented words" (184.25-26, my emphasis - another suggestion of distillation) and pronouncing magic formulae, is boycotted, so that

he winged away on a wildgoup's chase across the kathartic ocean and made synthetic ink and sensitive paper for his own end out of his wit's waste. You ask, in Sam Hill, how? Let manner and matter of this for these our sporting times be cloaked up in the language of blushfed porporates that an Anglican ordinal, not reading his own rude dunsly tunga, may ever behold the brand of scarlet on the brow of her Babylon and feel not the pink one in his own damned cheek. *(FW 185.5-13)*

The passage may carry biographical references to the linguistic and literary training which enabled Joyce to achieve the artistic maturity and independence which, in turn, made it possible for him to "fly by" the "nets" that kept Ireland in cultural as well as political and social subjugation and which he escaped through the choice of voluntary exile (cf. the "wildgoup's chase"). Intersecting with this biographical strand, references to Dante's project of synthetic linguistic composition accumulate after the significant mention of the "synthetic ink": "ordinal", in opposition to "cardinal" and through the association with "Anglican"* and "blushfed porporates" (the colour of the cardinal's robe), suggests both *cardinale* and *curiale*, insofar as it refers to ecclesiastical matters; purple, on the other hand, is also the colour that symbolises royalty, and may therefore also hint at *aulicum*, while the "rude [...] tunga" evokes a "vulgar tongue". In this context, the "chase" can then acquire overtones of Dante's chase of the illustrious vulgar language while already in exile. Finally, the words "Let manner and matter [...] be cloaked up" may conceal a suggestion of the method of fourfold interpretation, according to which the literal

*DiBernard explains that this refers to Thomas Norton's *The Ordinall of Alchimy*, included in Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* in 1652 and reprinted in Waite's *The Hermetic Museum* in 1893, one of the books referred to in the Wake (*Alchemy*, 5, 134).
meaning "clothes" the allegorical; as we saw in the first chapter, the clothes metaphor was used in the analysis of the "letter" or "Mamafesta" ("clothiering", FW 109.31).

Having fed on artificial, processed aliments, Shem now re-processes his food by digesting it, and from the "by-products" he concocts the "synthetic ink" as the artist who, making use of all the elements at his disposal, including the basest ones, re-elaborates them, digesting them as it were, and transforming them into an indelible and eternal work of art:

Primum opifex, altus prosator, ad terram viviparam et cunctipotentem sine allo pudore nec venia, suscepto plaviali atque distinctis perizomatib, natibus nudis uti nati fuisse, sese adpropinquans, flens et gemens, in manum suam evacuavit (highly prosy, crap in his hand, sorry!), postea, animale negro exoneratus, classicum pulsans, stercus proprium, quod appellavit dejectiones suas, in vas olim honorabile tristitiae possuit, eodem sub invocatione fratrorum geminorum Medardi et Godardi loete ac mellifluae minxit, psalmum qui incipit: Lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribenti: magna voce cantitans (did a piss, says he was dejected, asks to be exonerated), demum ex stercore turpi cum divi Orionis incunditate mixto, cocto, frigorique exposito, encaustum sibi fecti indelibile (faked O'Ryan's, the indelible ink).39

(FW 185.14-26)

The process of artistic creation is thus connected to the complete biological-physiological cycle of nutrition (eating, digestion and defecation) and fertilisation, or re-employment of the wastes of digestion (and of his mind: "out of his wit's waste", 185.07-08) as nourishment for the artist's creation of the work of art. Shem, the twin associated with the tree in the Wake, lives on the humus of the earth, and needs the soil to be fertilised. Thus, the numerous allusions in Finnegans Wake to defecation

39 McHugh's translation in the Annotations reads: "first the artist, the eminent writer, without any shame or apology, pulled up his raincoat and undid his trousers and then drew himself close to the life-giving and all-powerful earth, with his buttocks bare as they were born. Weeping and groaning he relieved himself into his own hands. Then, unburdened of the black beast, and sounding a trumpet, he put his own dung which he called his "downcastings" into an urn once used as a honoured mark of mourning. With an invocation to the twin brethren Medard and Godard he then passed water into it happily and mellifluously, while chanting in a loud voice the psalm which begins 'My tongue is the pen of a scribe writing swiftly'. Finally, from the foul dung mixed, as I have said, with the 'sweetness of Orion' and baked and then exposed to the cold, he made himself an indelible ink".
and excrement may often also imply an allusion to the production, or product, of art. At the same time as it celebrates a process of distillation (and therefore renovation), the episode seems to carry over some echoes from the implicitly ambiguous position which I have already described for Dante, who seeks a noble, redemptive language while taking up Nimrod's role as hunter and builder of the tower of Babel and sharing his sinful pride. Shem, called "divi Orionis" (we have seen above that HCE was associated with the mythical hunter Orion at FW 107.14), also shares traits of the hunter (like Dante and Nimrod): he sounds a trumpet and sings a psalm, rather like Nimrod who sounds a horn (Inf XXXI,12,71) and whose confused babble is ironically described by Dante as a "psalm" (Inf XXXI, 69).

Interestingly, Shem's distillation episode is written in Latin: as set passages in a foreign language within the Wake are often precise references or "quotations", one may wonder whether this Latin account of Shem's distillation of vulgar matter may refer to Dante's Latin account of the history and "distillation" of the vulgares. One could however also be reminded of the custom, still widespread until the first part of the century, of masking obscene or saucy passages under the appearance of a learned language which not everyone would be able to read, or, in the case of translations, of leaving them in the original language. Following the exactly opposite convention, when Shem fabricates his excremental ink, short but very explicit English interpolations give us the down-to-earth substance of the Latin descriptions: "(Highly prosy, crap in his hand, sorry!) [...] (did a piss, says he was dejected, asks to be exonerated) [...] (faked O'Ryan's, the indelible ink)."

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40 Cf. for instance Edward Gibbon's remark in his Autobiography: "My English text is chaste, and all licentious passages are left in the obscurity of a learned language" (London: Macmillan, 1930), 173-174. As an example of untranslated passages, Pieter Buijze told me of an early twentieth century family edition of Boccaccio's Decameron in which the more daring passages were left in Italian in the text and translated on separate sheets which could be kept in a folder and away from the wives and children.
Not unlike Dante's "synthetic" universalising of the vulgare into an illustrious redemption of Babel, Shem’s production of the indelible ink performs an alchemical act of linguistic distillation and prepares one of literary production, while at the same time performing an eucharistic transubstantiation that transforms bodily matter into something transcendent and eternal. Shem poses as the "priest of the imagination" who can convert "the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own". This process of depuration can be especially performed and achieved by the artist who has purged himself by flying into exile "across the kathartic ocean" (185.06). If in the Middle Ages "[w]hatever gold one might sift ex sterco Vergilii, excrement was still excrement", yet the modernist Shem-like Joyce, in distilling the "excrement" of Dante’s theories, was also transubstantiating the poet’s remedial linguistics into a new technique of characterisation, a narrative of fall and rebirth, of sons overturning fathers (see below), and into a plot of artistic redemption of the commonplace or trivial (literally, what is found at the trivium or crossroads, the encounter between different texts and traditions - one could actually say "the intertextual") into a gigantic epiphany of language. In both cases, the common (and trivial) Irish expletive "Holy shit" becomes highly and uncannily appropriate.

**Parleyglutton**

Shem's artistic distillation of excrement is counterbalanced by his father's more prosaic brewing and drinking of alcohol, but the linguistic substratum is still there; the similarity between "gluttony", or "glutton" and words related to language and production of sounds ("glottal", "polyglot", "glottology", etc.), and the fact that the acts of eating, drinking and speaking use the same organs make it possible in the

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41 Quoted in Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper* (New York: Viking Press, 1958), 103-104. The eucharistic theme is present also in Dante, especially in the *Convivio*, where the author provides his readers with some "crumbs" of the "table where the bread of angels is consumed" (*Conv* I).
Wake to shift easily from the one aspect to the other. Thus, HCE is a "parleyglutton" (FW 240.27-28), and the men in his pub drink "through their grooves of blarneying" (371.15-16), that is, through channels of speech ("blarneying") and drinking. At the end of chapter II.3, after the closing of the pub, HCE uses all the dregs left in his customers' glasses (not the noblest parts from each glass, as Dante would certainly have done) and mixes them - recycles them, as it were - in a new alcoholic concoction produced from "pre-distilled" material. Carole Brown has identified several theories of language in the last pages of the chapter; beside Grimm's Law ("Gramm's laws", 378.27), these include three humorous speculations on the origins of speech formulated by philologists at the turn of the century: the Pooh-pooh theory, the Bow-wow theory and the Ding-Dong, Tick-Tock, Bang-Bong, or Knock-Knock theory. To this list of fanciful theories we could add Dante's rather more serious but equally debunked vulgare illustre.

As HCE drinks his composite brew, he is "thruming through all to himself with diversified tongued" (381.20), "like a blarney Cashelmagh crooner" (381.22), and sending it down "his woolly throat" (381.26), "in some particular cases with the assistance of his venerated tongue" (381.31-32). Among other dregs, HCE drinks the remnants from a product of the "Phoenix Brewery" (382.04), thus bringing together the theme of the rebirth in and of language by now indistinguishable from the motif of the linguistic and spiritual felix culpa.

The echo of "blarney" is interesting in this context, as it is related to Blarney Castle and its famous Blarney stone, said to confer the gift of eloquence on those who kiss it. In order to receive the gift, however, the stone must be kissed by lying down supine and bending the head backwards, a gesture that may be seen as representative of the treatment to which Dante's "vulgar eloquence" is submitted, put to sleep and

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turned upside down, together with all other sources and languages ("I have put language to sleep", Joyce is reported to have said of the technique of Finnegans Wake).

A correlation between Blarney and the vulgare seems to have already been active at the end of book I. In chapter I.8, among the gifts that ALP distributes to the children, she gives "a pair of Blarney brags for Wally Meagher; a hairpin slatepencil for Elsie Oram to scratch her toby, doing her best with her vulgar fractions" (211.11-13). Together with the sexual connotation, there is an association of Blarney (therefore eloquence) and vulgar fractions, a mathematical term but one which may in this context also refer to fragments of vulgar language(s). Roland McHugh annotates Elsie Oram as "Elsie Oram: folklore character; notorious liar": under the feminine name there hides a liar, and because this liar gets a pencil, one may perhaps assume that we are dealing with a prospective forger (in the double sense of one who "creates" and one who fakes), somebody who tells lies in writing, and that therefore a persona of Shem may be involved. This would indeed make sense, as Elsie Oram is invited to make her (his?) best with the "vulgar fractions" of numbers / vernaculars.

Ironically, it is at the end of II.3, after drinking all the leftovers in his customers' glasses - after distilling his own synthetic language / drink - that the "folkenfather of familyans" (382.18), saturated with his alcoholic mixture, drops down to the floor (this is also what happens to all the languages in Finnegans Wake, "collapsed" and put to sleep), in his drunken fall evoking both Tim Finnegan and Dante, who is not immune from this treatment in his own Divine Comedy: in canto III of the Inferno, as an earthquake strikes and a high wind rises, Dante falls down "come l'uom cui sonno piglia" ("like a man who is seized by sleep", Inferno III, 136) and, at the beginning of the next canto, he is wakened up again by a "greve truono" ("a heavy thunderclap broke the deep sleep in my head", Inferno IV,1; shortly after Dante,

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43 See JI 546.
moved by Francesca's story, drops down "come corpo morto cade"\(^{44}\), whereas HCE, his mind clouded by alcohol, "just slumped to throne" (\(FW\) 382.26).

**Manurevring in open ordure**

Sitting on the throne, or slumping on it, brings us back to Shem's distillation of his excrement\(^{45}\) but the best known instance of defecation in *Finnegans Wake* is in the episode of "How Buckley Shot the Russian General", in chapter II.3.\(^{46}\)

But / Buckley, who tells the story in the first person, tells about the moment when, during the battle of Sebastopol, he saw the Russian general defecate and did not have the heart to shoot:

But when I seeing him in his oneship fetch along within hail that tourrible tall with his nitshynkopfknob and attempting like a brandylogged rudeman cathargic, lugging up and laiding down his livepelts so crushingly like Mebbuck at Messar and expousing his old skinfful self talltottom by manurevring in open ordure to renewmurature with the cuwruads in their airish pleasantry I thanked he was recovering breadth [...] and I couldn't ever nerer to tell a liard story [...]. But when I got inoccupation of a full new of his old basemiddelism, in ackshan, pague pogne, by the veereyed lights of the stormtrooping clouds and in the sheenflare of the battleaxes of the heroim and mid the shieldfails awail of the bitteraccents of the sorafim and caught the pfierce smell of his aurais, orankastank, a suphead setrapped, like Peder the Greste, alitpulr, my bill it forsooks allegiance (gut bull it!) and, no lie is this, I was

\(^{44}\) "[A]s a dead body falls" (\(Inf\)\(^{V}\), 141).
\(^{46}\) Ellmann reports that the story was a favourite of Joyce's father, who told how Buckley, an Irish soldier in the Crimean war, having an opportunity to shoot a Russian general, did not have the heart to do it when the general, in a very human and helpless plight, lowered his trousers in order to defecate. But when the general wiped himself with a piece of grassy turf, Buckley's pity vanished and he fired. Ellmann adds that Joyce was at a loss as to how to use it in *Finnegans Wake*, and was offered the key by Samuel Beckett who, on being told the story, at the moment when the general wipes himself with the green turf, remarked, "Another insult to Ireland." (\(JJ\) 398). In this regard, cf. also Nathan Halper, "Another Anecdote in Ellmann", *A Wake Newsletter* \(V\), 6 (1968): 90-93.
babbeing and yetaghain bubbering, bibbelboy, [...] I confesses withould pridejealice [...] I
adn't the arts to. (FW 344.10-345.03)

In the flare of the Babelic battle of Sebastopol, amid the clash of weapons and
the "wail" of "bitteraccents", Butt / Buckley stands "babbeing" and "bubbering", like a
"bibbelboy", watching the father-figure of the Russian general ("altipaltar") expose his
bottom and defecate to produce dung-bricks ("manurevring in open ordure") with
which to build anew ("to renewmurature") something that sounds suspiciously like a
new, tall, terrible tower of Babel ("that tourrible tall").47 HCE as Russian General
frequently appears as an embodiment of the Tsar ("Peder the Greste"), traditionally
endowed with the title of "little father of all the Russians", but the punning on the
regal title through vocalic variations on the pan-Slavic root ser, "shit", ("Saur", 344.33; see also "the sur of all Russers", 340.35) also makes him into the excrement
he produces. At the same time, if we follow up associations previously made, the
general / HCE is that same "tourrible tall", a towering gigantic Nimrod-figure, the
"Creman hunter" (342.20).

It is only when the general wipes himself with the "Irish" sod of turf that
Buckley shoots him, causing his death / fall: "I shuttm [...] Hump to dump!
Tumbleheaver!" (352.14-15); "At that instullt to Igorladns! [...] Sparro!" (353.18-21;
sparo, Italian "I shoot").48 The shooting of the Russian general / builder re-enacts
God's "thundering" punishment of Nimrod and of the builders of Babel. Buckley's
shot and the general's fall are immediately followed by an "interpolated passage"
which illustrates the consequences of Babel:

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47 Echoes from other Babel passages confirm that a new tower is being built; cf. for instance the up /
down motif ("lugging up and laiding down").
48 For an interpretation of the story, cf. in particular Nathan Halper, "James Joyce and the Russian
General", Partisan Review XVIII (1951): 424-431, and the essays by Rabaté and Milesi mentioned in
footnotes 51 and 56 below.
Universal confusion, the result of God's blow from heaven ("cum celitus tanta confusione percussi sunt", *Dve* I.vii.6) coincides with the loss of the language shared until that moment, a loss which can be described as an "annihilation of the etym" insofar as it consisted, according to the interpretation given by Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, in the oblivio (forgetting) of the original tongue (which, in Wakean terms, takes place "at this deleteful hour", 118.32). By annihilating the etym the history of the language (its memory) is erased, and man is left in a condition of "general uttermost confusion" to reinvent new languages *ab nihilo*.\(^{49}\)

The fusion of "How Buckley Shot the Russian General" and the story of Babel, patterned on Dante's linguistic narrative, and their insertion into the basic plot-structure of the *Wake* (the son overturning the father) involves yet another inversion of the Italian model. In the *De vulgari eloquentia*, at the precise moment when confusion sets in, hierarchical order is nevertheless reaffirmed in the punishment that God-the-Father "mercifully" inflicts on his sons ("non hostili scutica, sed paterna [...] rebellantem filium pia correctione necnon memorabili castigavit"\(^{50}\)). In the story of the Russian general, however, it is the son who punishes the father, and ends by taking his role (Taff calls Butt "ye, bragadore-gunneral", *FW* 352.23). Significantly, in the sentence "His Cumbulent Embulence, the frustate fourstar Russkakruscam" (352.32-33) the "frustrated" general becomes "frustate" (It. *frusta*, "whip", "scourge"; frustate, "whiplashes"), as if he was directly hit by the metaphorical "scutica" of Dante's God (in his role as the Hun Attila, literally "the scourge of God", HCE had earlier appeared


\(^{50}\) "Not with the scourge of an enemy, but of a father [...] He chastised His rebellious son with correction at once pitiful and memorable" (*Dve* I.vii.5).
both as the scourge itself and its victim: "Attilad! Attattilad! Get up, Goth's scourge on you!" [FW 252.01-02]).

Jean-Michel Rabaté's brilliant interpretation of the Russian general story has shown how oedipal, homosexual and incestuous themes and the father-son relationship interweave with the political significance of the episode, and how the political theme is indivisible from the linguistic one, linking together idiom, idiolect, and ideology. Al glides between such similar words as "arse", "erse" or "aerse", and "ark" may transform the general defecating before Buckley's eyes into Noah's drunken exposition of himself, while implying that Erse "plays in Finnegans Wake the role of a 'father-tongue': it appears as the metamorphosis of a native language, voiced and soiled by the father, returning to the materiality of loam or humus. Only then can it really referilize the earth".

Rabaté recalls that in Vico's Scienza nuova, the giants at the beginning of human history were left by their mothers to roll in their own dirt in the post-diluvian primal forest. Excrement fertilised the earth and contributed to the origins of civilisation: "it creates a new language, one blended with body products, that amalgamates 'humus' and 'human nature' in a type of very special 'humor'". As Rabaté comments, when Shem, who has inherited this language from his father, threatens to wipe the English language off the face of the earth / arse (FW 178.6-7) he is actually breaking down the (linguistic) English rule through the use of foreign languages: "Arse and Erse allied to a multinational earth both effect the murder of the mother language. The murder of the father is in fact only a dialectical climax in this indefinite struggle".

52 Rabaté, James Joyce, 140.
53 Rabaté, James Joyce, 141.
The story of Buckley and the Russian general and Rabaté's interpretation help to throw new light on Shem's production of a synthetic ink. Both Shem and the general (HCE) use excrement in order to produce something new. However, whereas HCE uses the bricks to build something which is fated to fall and "abnihilate", or "delete" the "etym", Shem's "indelible" ink will be used to write a poetry which is supposedly destined to remain eternally undeleted. Dante's performance of a role analogous to that of Nimrod's but with opposite results is reflected in HCE and Shem both performing the same action but to opposite ends. Furthermore, the analogies discussed above between HCE's physical features and vicissitudes and the post-Babelic vulgar, fragmented tongues imply that he is fated to be superseded by the "synthetic" creative act of the son.

Shem extracting a synthetic ink from excrement may parallel the hen digging out the letter from the dung heap, but Biddy Doran extracting the letter from the dung of the battlefield during a truce in chapter I.1 (FW 11.08-28) also anticipates the episode of Buckley and the Russian general. When chapter I.2, retracing the genesis of HCE, asks, "No dung on the road?" (31.36-32.01), then, the answer must be "yes". HCE, builder of Babel, tower of Babel and fragmented consequence of Babel, will himself return to the earth when dead in order to be dug up again as letter by the hen, and purified into gold by his alchemist-poet son. The son, that is, has to kill the father (and the "father-language") in order to find, in his own biological origin, the materials and instruments to "forge" his own original creation and his individual poetic language. Through this process, the "sodomitic" gun of his obscene defeat of the father can be transformed into the "fertile" pen / penis of the poet.

However, part of Shem's activity as creator also implies transforming himself into a written-over "integument" (FW 186.01), a polysemic text which will finally coincide with the Letter and will thereby grant him the (unstable) status of "father". Although dispossessing the father will lead to the inevitability of one's own further
displacement in the (Vichian) "cyclewheeling history" (186.02) of the Wake, what is stressed in this phase of the oedipal struggle are the differences implicit in the parallel between father and son: whereas the underlined features of the father-aspect are the fragmentation, the burial and the reduction to dung before being extracted / recreated, the son-aspect of the theme emphasises this synthetic, creative phase, the extraction and writing. Thus the Letter and all it stands for - literature, and Finnegans Wake in particular - becomes the locus of both literary creation and biological generation and transformation - in the sense of filiation, but also of life-producing and life-giving discourse (cf. Stephen forging the conscience of his race in A Portrait) which is, in one sense, also the transmission of literary and linguistic material, transformation (and appropriation) of previous literary / linguistic sources (such as, for instance, Dante's) in order to generate a new, independent text / language (such as Finnegans Wake / Walcese). Babel is thus, as it is in the De vulgari eloquentia, a linguistic "happy fault" which can afford the poet the role of redeemer, and at the same time enable the later writer to retrace his origin back to his medieval "father" while defeating him through his superior artistic achievement. All these threads are brought together in chapter III.4 when the child Shem / Jerry wakes up from a wet dream in the middle of the night, teething, having spilled tears from his eyes and (ink)drops from his pen(is):

Hush! The other, twined on codliverside, has been crying in his sleep, making sharpshape his inscissors on some first choice sweets fished out of the muck. A stake in our mead. What a teething wretch! How his book of craven images! Here are posthumious tears on his intimelle. And he has pipetthshly bespilled himself from his foundingpen as illspent from inkinghorn.55

FW 563.01-06, my emphases

54 Cf. also chapter 4 infra (esp. 215-217) where the mother becomes both life-giver and logos-giver.
55 Mary Reynolds has shown that Joyce's manuscript draft works into the description of sleeping Shem ("[...] but you cannot see whose heel he sheepfolds in his wrought hand because I have not told it to you. O, foetal sleep!", FW 563.08-10) a verse from Paradiso XXV, 5 which portrays Dante's native Florence as "the fair sheepfold where I slept as a lamb" ("il bello ovile ov'io dormii' agnello"). As Reynolds reconstructs, 'In his first version the line is: 'You cannot see what he holds in his hand because I have not told you.' He crosses out 'what' and 'in' and changes 'folds' to 'holds.' Finally he adds 'whose heel,' and 'sheepfolds.' The ultimate substitution of 'with' for 'in' was changed back in a
The treatment of Erse in the *Wake* and its relationship to Anglo-Irish find a correlative in Dante's theory of the vernacular. The poet's project of transcending regional or municipal linguistic differences is expressed in terms which enable the reader to see it, at the same time, as a project of the political and cultural unification of Italy. Dante's argument runs thus: Italy has no royal court, therefore the Italian vernacular has no seat; but if Italy had a court, this would be the place where the *vulgare illustre* would rightfully reside and be spoken (*Dve* I.xviii.4-5). The illustrious vernacular is furthermore the language that belongs to that dismembered *curia* which exists but has no permanent abode. As dialectal particularism needs to be transcended and governed by a superior, noble language, so the fragmented Italian nation must also be reunited in a superior political structure. Dante chooses the *vulgare illustre* rather than Latin as the common language: Latin is an "artificial" tongue, spoken by no Italian at birth - in fact, it was never natural for anybody. The *vulgare* (although refined and therefore vaguely suspicious of "artificiality") is on the contrary the language that babies "suckle" with their nurses' milk at birth (*Dve* I.i.2), the language spoken by "muliercolae" (see the washerwomen's gossip in I.8 and ALP's frequent description as a small woman), the common language of any street-corner or crossroads - the trivial language of the "triv and quad" (*FW* 316.12-13) learned by the children in their nightlesson in chapter II.2. Given the fundamental role attributed to language in the political and cultural unification of Italy, it follows that, for the poet who has taken upon himself the mighty task of redeeming the language, every

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57 Literally, "small women", *Epistle to Can Grande*, §10. Toynbee translates it as "women-folk", but Dante's word has a more depreciatory tone.
instance of linguistic use - not only the choice of subject matter but even the choice of words and structures - is also a political act: fragmentation and municipalism are rejected in the name of a linguistic and political universalism.

While Joyce may not have shared the religious implications of Dante's project (except perhaps in order to exploit them jocularly for a pun), the linguistic-political significance of the treatise might have appeared more interesting to him. Joyce had always rejected the Celtic Revivalists' plea for a return to Gaelic language and culture as artificial: the language "suckled" by the majority of the Irish children with their mothers' milk and the language of modern emancipated Ireland was not Gaelic, and it could only be Anglo-Irish. Ireland could be a bilingual nation, but could not turn back to a language that would have been as artificial as any imposed one. If Erse, as Rabaté has shown, is the "father-language", the language to be defeated and overturned, HCE can be called "Emancipator, the Creman Hunter" (*FW* 342.19-20) only ironically, through an inversion similar to the one that makes him see the Wellington monument as the "sign of oururu redemption" (36.24-25).

But the politics of Dante's medieval linguistics may have crystallised what a rather paradoxical circumstance was perhaps already suggesting. As Giorgio Melchiori has pointed out, Joyce's "only public pronouncements in the political field on the state of Ireland and of the world in general, are in Italian", and, at the time of these public political statements - the articles in the Triestine paper *Il Piccolo della sera* - Joyce was living in an environment where the variegated Italian of the Triestine "cross-roads of civilization" was commonly used as *lingua franca*. Joyce himself, as a consequence of his decision to leave Ireland, used the Triestine melting-pot version of Italian as the "lingua franca" of the exile both in taking his "political" position about his country and within his family, arguably turning into a personal truth Dante's

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metaphorical statement about Italian as the language that babies learn from their nurses. Personal circumstances and medieval linguistics appear to intersect from an early stage, but by the time Stephen Dedalus had left the stage to Shem the Penman, "Father Dante" had also been overturned in the battle for literary dominance, trivialised and reduced, in true medieval tradition, to "excrement" from which gold could be sifted in order for the poet-son to re-create himself and his race. At the cross-roads between literary borrowing, aesthetic inspiration and biographical model,59 Joyce's oeuvre and its relationship with Dante's may then remind us that "intertextuality" need not be conceived of as only the pure and a-chronic textuality that, for instance, Barthes's theorisations opposed to old-fashioned studies of sources and influence (nor need the latter be restricted to Harold Bloom's doomed oedipal struggle), but that, on the contrary, it may be more fruitful to see it as an intentional and historically grounded practice in which artistic choices reveal political / ideological implications and inscribe within the (inter)text the author's negotiations (also in terms of metaphorical filiation and of dispossession of the "father") of his / her own place within the literary tradition.

The Haunted Inkbottle

As I said in the introduction to this chapter, while the language theorised by Dante can be put to such strikingly different use in Finnegans Wake as even becoming a model for the characterisation of the novel's unusual and protean "protagonists", it can also be used by the critic as a descriptive metaphor for the language of the Wake; as in the case of the four levels of meaning, this is not a case of "borrowing the

59 If Shem turns "the only foolscap available, his own body" (FW 185.35-36) into "one continuous present tense integument" (185-36-186.01), Dante had already produced what is probably the greatest self-textualisation of the Western world.
terminology of the Middle Ages" to make up for our lack of "critical equipment", but a critical approach legitimated by the text itself.

When Dante explains why the vulgare illustre deserves to be called cardinale, he stresses that it functions as a hinge (Latin cardo) around which the other dialects turn, like a door: the door turns towards the inside and towards the outside, its movement "governed" by the hinge, and so do the local vernaculars, governed by the illustrious and cardinal language. "Walcese" "goes" the multiple languages that contribute, in different degrees, to its composition; it is the idiom that, like the vulgare illustre, "illuminans et illuminatum prefugens", throws light on the other languages, showing how they can be interpreted and to what new conventions of reading they must be subjected. This also applies to the single word and the portmanteau. The term "word" is of course ambiguous in this context, and it oscillates between the standard definition as "sound or combination of sounds that expresses a meaning and forms an independent unit of the grammar or vocabulary of a language" (OED) and an ad hoc very general meaning of any sequence of letters between two blank spaces. Thus, maintaining this ambiguity, we can say that each word has in the Wake multiple valencies, directed towards the inside and towards the outside ("seu introrsum seu extrorsum lectatur"): towards the inside, in the manifold meanings layered within the word, as well as in the etymology (often etymologies) which provides more ramifications in the root, and towards the outside in the many ramifications and associations (phonetic, semantic, graphic) which branch off from the word in many different directions. When the word is a portmanteau, all the meanings inscribed in it, towards the inside and the outside, are of course multiplied, and they combine among

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59 Levin, James Joyce, 133.
60 In chemistry, "the power or capacity of certain elements to combine with or displace a greater or less number of hydrogen (or other) atoms" (OED). In this context, the capacity of the word to combine with other ones in forming new significant phrasal or textual (often interlinguistic) units, at the same time displacing the original standard meaning and resetting them in the new contexts thus created.
themselves producing potentially endless strings of meanings. The word is thus the hinge at the centre of a multiplicity of meanings: these meanings "are there", but they are the result of an interpretation, and therefore "are not there", not actually printed black on white on the page. The word or portmanteau only contains a trace of them, a spoor, or, to take up Dante's metaphor more explicitly, a scent of them, "redolentem ubique et necubi apparentem".

The language of the Wake, like that of Dante's theory, is a language which, in actual fact, exists nowhere except in the book that "creates" it. As the vulgare illustre can be described as the super-regional language of a hypothetical aula, so can the language of Finnegans Wake be described as the synthetic (fictional) translation of a language which "resides" in a (fictional) sleeping or dreaming mind, a "museyroom" (8.09; 10.22), the room where one "muses" (OED: "to muse, to think deeply or dreamily"), the room where all the past and present, history and legend, reality and fancies are exposed as in a museum; the aula where the language of the court, King's English, is put to sleep or even murdered by (the) King himself: "King, having murdered all the English he knew [...]" (94.01-02).

Language becomes in Dante the shelter for the poet and the members of the curia. The political and personal significance of Dante's treatment of the language - dismembered, exiled and homeless - is reflected in the Wakean word and in the metatextual references of the Wake to itself. The exiled post-Babelic languages find in the text a common ground where they can meet and fuse together in a sort of regained unity (which simultaneously also reiterates their differences), and the pun or portmanteau becomes a shelter for words and meanings that have been exiled from the univocal correspondence with the thing they describe. These languages and meanings wander like pilgrims from one "word" (in the Wakean sense of sequence of letters

61 Laurent Milesi discusses the Pentecostal theme of the linguistic unity in "Finnegans Wake: The Obliquity of Trans-lation", in Morris Beja and David Noris (eds.), Joyce in the Hibernian Metropolis, 279-289.
between two spaces) to another and (temporarily) inhabit it by disposing themselves in various layers of significance.

If the words are shelters, the book itself is a house: question 3 in chapter 1.6 begins, "Which title is the true-to-type motto-in-lieu for that Tick for teac thatchment painted withe wheth one darkness […]" (139.29-30; Irish Tig or teach, house). One possible reading suggests that the title is the word or word-place for the house-thatch, i.e., that the title is the book's roof (it is on the cover, a sort of roof for the book / house). Although the answer in this case is one of the several versions of the motto of the coat of arms of Dublin City ("Thine obesity, O civilian, hits the felicitude of our orb!", 140.06-07), the title which was for a long time the actual object of a riddle is "Finnegans Wake" itself, which Joyce kept secret and sheltered under the provisional "Work in Progress" until Eugene Jolas guessed it in 1938 (JJ 708).

The siglum which Joyce used until Jolas's discovery was a square: a receptacle or container for all the materials of the text. Its four sides may indicate the four provinces of Ireland, or the four old men, or the four books of the Wake, or any fourfold pattern which contributes to its structure - including perhaps the four levels of meaning and the four qualities of its "illustrious" language. The four corners of the square may also be its cardinal points (which correspond sometimes also to the four old men) and - if the book is meant to represent the world - the cardinal points of the world. This may also be part of the paradoxical attempt to reconcile the square and the circle in the Wake, which at the same time humorously counters and reflects Dante's explanation of cardinale, according to which the "cardinal" point of the language is its centre, and the rest of the world of languages turn around it.

Shem's house, "known as the Haunted Inkbottle" (FW 182.30-31), has many points in common with the book Finnegans Wake, with the ink and excrement theme,

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52 Cf. McHugh's Sigla, 113-121.
53 "I am making an engine with only one wheel. No spokes of course. The wheel is a perfect square" (Letters, 251). I shall discuss this aspect at length in chapter 4.
and with literature in general. Of the house we read that "this was a stinksome inkenstein, quite puzzonal to the wrottel" (183.06-07). Thus, the vulgarity of his materials and the excrement-made-ink process are inscribed in the building where the poet lives. The floor and the "soundconducting walls thereof", we are told, were "persianly literatured with burst loveletters, telltale stories" (183.10-11), and among the items of furniture there are "alphabetyformed verbage", "ineffible tries at speech unassyllabed", "borrowed brogues", "upset latten tintacks" (Latin syntax), "twisted quills", "once current puns, quashed quotatoes, messes of mottage", "spilt ink", "borrowed plumes", and so on (183.12-32). The list continues with a category of items interesting in a Dantean context: a long series of words for "yes" in different languages ("ahs ohs ouis sis jas gias neys thaws sos, yeses and yeses and yeses", 184.01-02) which, as well as alluding to the end of Molly's monologue in Ulysses, may also recall Dante's criterion for distinguishing languages through the word used for "yes": "sì" (Italian), "oc" (Provençal) and "oil" (French) (Dve I.viii.8-9); this distinction is clearly echoed again in the Wake when the children are trying to discover the solution to the geometrical problem of the mother's sex: "Oc, tell it to oui, do, Sem! Well, 'tis oil thusly" (FW 286.31). The same affirmative identification of language and country is employed by Dante when he refers to Italy as the "bel paese là dove '1 si suona" ("the fair land where the si is heard", Inf XXXIII, 80) and, again, this appears in Finnegans Wake as "Ilibelpaese" (129.27).

The inventory of the items of furniture in Shem's house ends with "breakages, upheavals, distortions, inversions" (184.03-04) - of course an outstanding characteristic also of the Wake. To confirm finally that as we talk about the house we are talking about Finnegans Wake, we learn that the poet Shem is "writing the mystery of himself in furniture" (184.09-10). The furniture, in other words, is part of the writing of the text, it is the material in / on which the work is written, and the

64 The language of ineffability will also be discussed in the next chapter.
environm ent in which the transformation of the vulgar matter into indelible ink is performed, Shem himself being part of this process. As he finds that his skin is the only "foolscap" available, he transubstantiates into the text which will be lost, forgotten, found again and interpreted:

[...] he shall produce nichthemerically from his unheavenly body a no uncertain quantity of obscene matter not protected by copyright in the United Stars of Ourania or bedeed and bedood and bedang and bedung to him, [...] through the bowels of his misery, [...] the first till last alchemist wrote over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body, till by its corrosive sublimation one continuous present tense integument slowly unfolded all marryvoising moodmoulded cyclewheeling history (thereby, he said, reflecting from his own individual person life unlivable, transaccidentated through the slow fires of consciousness into a individual chaos, perilous, potent, common to allflesh, human only, mortal) but with each word that would not pass away the squidself which he had squirtscreened from the crystalline world waned [...].

(FW 185.28-186.08)

Shem, through (al)chemical processes, transaccidentates himself into paper, ink, and, finally, an "integumental", all-enveloping text. "Integumentum" is one of the terms used in the Middle Ages to refer to the "external" meaning of a text, or literal level: Shem, in other words, transforms himself into the Letter (its exterior, its interior: letter and envelope) which stands in Finnegans Wake for all literature and, in particular, for the Wake itself and which is in I.5 and through most of the Wake identified with HCE. Yet again, the son is working on himself to dispossess the father.

*Ask Kavya for the key*

The murdering of the King's English mentioned above takes place in chapter I.4, where the trial of Festy King (one of the many "curial" situations of the Wake) is celebrated. The situation is very confused and it is difficult to distinguish the identities
of the figures involved. A trial of HCE is juxtaposed with the father/son and Shem/Shaun oppositions. Festy King seems to represent a Shem-like type (HCE as Shem), while the "eye, ear, nose and throat witness" (FW 86.32-33), suspected to be "a plain clothes W.P." (86.35), would identify with Shaun (he is "patrified to see, hear, taste and smell", 87.11-12, my emphasis). This witness accuses the opponent Hyacinth O'Donnell (Festy King has a hyacinth, 86.15). The two soon begin to merge, as usual in Finnegans Wake: Festy King becomes "the senior king of all, Pegger Festy" (90.36-91.01), and speaks "in a loudburst of poesy" (91.03), which still confirms his identity as Shem, but then the names change again to "Pegger's Windup" and "Wet Pinter", with an inversion of the initials: the former would be Festy King, the latter the "W.P." witness, but their identities are already almost impossible to distinguish:

The hilarioooot of Pegger's Windup canjusted as neatly with the tristitone of the Wet Pinter's as were they isce et ille equals of opposites, evolved by a onesame power of nature or of spirit, isce, as the sole condition and means of its himunder manifestation and polarised for reunion by the symphysis of their antipathies. (FW 92.6-11)

These lines invite the reader to appeal to Giordano Bruno's theory of the identity of opposites and recall the "tristitia-hilaris" motto of his comedy Candelaioi. In the following page the names of Shaun the Post and Shem the Penman are recovered, and items which had belonged to either Festy King or to the witness figure among their characteristics: "Show'm the Posed" (92.13) is nominated for the "swiney prize" (92.15), which had been associated with Festy King and Pegger Festy (on pages 86 and 91 of Finnegans Wake), while the girls compliment him "on his having all his senses about him" (92.16), originally a characteristic of the "eye, ear, nose and throat

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witness" ("W.P."), and put hyacinths into his hair ("stinckg thysacinths through his
curls", 92.16-17), a feature again associated with Festy King.

At the conclusion of the trial the text instructs the reader to "Ask Kavya for the
day" (93.22-23). One of the poets (Sanskrit Kavya, "poet") we can ask for the key is
perhaps Dante: after Festy King’s "murder" of English, several converging elements
suggest that "obvious" references to Bruno and Vico’s thought may in fact also
conceal allusions to Dante’s theory of the vulgare illustre. The judges (the Four Old
Men) "laid their wigs together" (92.35) in order to

promulgate their standing verdict of Nolans Brumans whereonafter King, having murdered all
the English he knew, picked out his pockets and left the tribunal scotfree, trailing his
Tommeylonnyey’s tunic in his hurry, thereunder proudly showing off his blink pitch to his
brights to prove himself (an’t plac yo!) a rael genteel. To the Switz bobbyguard’s curial but
courtlike: Commodore valley O hairy, Arthre jenayrosy?: the firewaterlooover retourted
with such a vinesmelling fortyndor ages rawdownhams tanyouhile as would turn the latten stomach
even of a tumass equinous […] so that all the twofromthirty advocateasses within echo, pulling
up their briefs at the krigkry: Shun the Punman!: safely and soundly soceeded that fenemine
Parish Poser, (low dare he!) unprumpu rightoway hames, much to his thanks, gratiasagam,
to all the wrong donatrices, biss Drinkbattle’s Dingy Dwellings where (for like your true
venuson Esau he was dovemised as the dars at Bottome) he shat in (zoo), like the muddy
goalbind who he was (dun), the chassetitties belles conclaiming: You and your gift of your
girt of your garbage abaht our Farvver! and gaingridando: Hon! Verg! Nau! Putor! Skam!
Schams! Shames!

(FW 92.36-93.21, my emphases)

King / Shem the Penman, the poet who writes Finnegans Wake, murders
English, picks his pockets and shows his "blink pitch" (blank / blind patch, like the
one that Joyce wore for a time) in order to prove himself a "rael genteel". Ennobling is
achieved through the subversion of the standard of the English language and of the
illustre and aulicum noble vernacular that Dante would have liked to hear spoken in the
court. "Curial" and "courtlike", justified by the fact that they describe the speech of the
Swiss guard of the Vatican and of the "Curia" (the Papal Court), may betray references to the Italian vernacular aulicum et curiale. Elements that would normally be interpreted as referring to the recurring patterns of the Vichian cycle of corsi and ricorsi, like "returted [...] turn", or to Bruno the Nolan ("Nolans Brumans") acquire a new layer of meaning when read in the context of the description of Dante's illustrious vulgar language, capable of swaying hearts, making the willing unwilling and the unwilling willing ("nolentem volentem et volentem nolentem faciat", Div I.xv.4), and situated at the centre of a grex vulgarium which turns and returns as it moves around. The hearts of the girls are certainly swayed, as they shun Shem at the "krigery," (war cry) "Shun the Punman!", while Shem sat / defecated ("shat"), perhaps already planning to "produce" the "indelible ink" from his excrements, the "gift of your [Shem's] [...] garbage".

Even the "latten stomach" of Thomas Aquinas ("tumass equinous") would turn at Shem's "vinesmelling fortytudor". That the stomach chosen to be turned is precisely that of Aquinas may be due to the fact the Angelic Doctor would be disgusted and turn in his grave at having Joyce rather arbitrarily overturn his words and theories through his literary personae Stephen D(a)edalus and Shem the Penman. However, another reason to call Aquinas in question may be that the illustriousness that makes it possible for Dante's vernacular to turn the hearts of men, volentem nolentem or nolentem volentem, may have borrowed its name from Thomas Aquinas's theory of art and the claritas that makes an object beautiful. In Aquinas's famous theory, pulchritudo (beauty) manifests itself through integritas sive perfectio (integrity or completeness), debita proportio sive consonantia (due proportion of the parts or harmony), and, finally, claritas (splendour).
In *Stephen Hero* and in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen appropriates Aquinas's theory in order to found his own. The lengthier discussion is in the former novel, where Stephen talks to his friend Cranly. After explaining the meaning of the first two requisites of beauty, ("integrity" and "symmetry"), he says of the third:

> Now for the third quality. For a long time I couldn't make out what Aquinas meant. He uses a figurative word (a very unusual thing for him) but I have solved it. *Claritas* is *quidditas*. After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. *(SH 190)*

Only one or two pages earlier Stephen had given the well-known definition of the epiphany:

> By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture, or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. *(SH 188)*

The source of the word "epiphany" was first identified by Umberto Eco in Gabriele D'Annunzio's work.\(^59\) The D'Annunzian connection has been further explored by Corinna del Greco Lobner in her study of the role of Italian and Italian literature in the development of Joyce's writing techniques.\(^70\) Lobner emphasises the analogy between the *trasogno* of D'Annunzio's *Venturiero senza ventura* (1911), where vision is "a kind of practical magic exercised upon the most common objects with associations of appearances and of essences", and Stephen's definition of the epiphany. Lobner (who does not claim that Joyce would necessarily have been acquainted with D'Annunzio's novel and points out the similarity of their conceptions), comments that the only apparent alteration between the two definitions

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is "Joyce's substitution of 'vulgarity of speech' for D'Annunzio's 'common objects.'"  

Tentatively, I would suggest that if Dante is added to the sources of Stephen's theory, the substitution in the definition of the epiphany of "common object" with "vulgarity of speech" can perhaps be accounted for. "Vulgarity of speech" closely recalls Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, the title and subject of the treatise in which Dante demonstrates the worthiness of a vulgar tongue purified, refined, chosen from the noblest elements of the local dialects, made capable of treating of any noble or spiritual matter. Stephen plans to collect epiphanies in a book, carefully recording the "most delicate and evanescent of moments" (*SH* 188), and Joyce did actually record these epiphanies and later included them in his work. The elaboration and choice of the epiphanic moments in language develops in Joyce's production through *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* to include increasingly "vulgar" instances of words or events, until the artist is shown to produce the primary material of his writing by starting from excrement and distilling from it the "indelible ink" that will enable him to write an indelible art.

One of the characteristics of the Dantean analogue for literary language is that it is *illustre*: luminous, radiant, bestowing splendour on those who use it and receiving it from them. This splendour derives from the same *clarias* which leads, in Stephen's theory, to the epiphanic moment: "The soul of the commonest object seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany" (*SH* 190). The conclusion of Stephen's argument restores the D'Annunzian element which had been dropped from the definition of the epiphany to introduce perhaps a reference to the *De vulgari eloquentia*; all Thomistic, D'Annunzian and Dantean elements would thus be drawn together.

Lobner also explores the parallel between Joyce’s idea of art as “Eucharistic”
transmutation and D’Annunzio’s vision of the artist as the “high priest of nature”.
Linking this aspect to the theory of the epiphany, Lobner writes:

Although Stephen’s “sudden spiritual manifestation” includes “vulgarity of speech” and thus
offsets D’Annunzio’s exalted mysticism (Aristotle, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas
play an important role in Joyce’s demystification of D’Annunzio’s epiphany), the stress on
words as the ultimate goal of “the priest of the imagination” is inextricably bound to
D’Annunzio’s aesthetics.72

But if “vulgarity of speech” is accepted as an echo of the De vulgari eloquentia, the
D’Annunzian “exalted mysticism” appears no longer “offset” but, rather, “reset” in a
new perspective which does not, after all, contrast with D’Annunzio’s poetics of the
word.

Stephen discusses his theory again in A Portrait, this time with his friend
Lynch. The theory is expounded now with greater economy of words and rejected as
“literary talk” (after all, Dante’s talk too is “literary talk”). The definition of the
epiphany is also dropped; however, the references to light, splendour and luminosity
are carried over from Stephen Hero (“light”, “outshine”, “radiance”, “luminously”,
“luminous”, P 212-213).

When Joyce writes Finnegans Wake, he has travelled a long way from the early
novels and the collection of epiphanies. These had already been treated dismissively
by Stephen in Ulysses (“Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply
depth, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including
Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years […]”, U 41);
now the epiphanic revelation ceases to emerge only from vulgarity of speech, of
gesture, or from memorable phases of the mind. In the language of the Wake, every

72 Lobner, Joyce’s Italian Connection, 68-69.
word, theme, motif, and the book as a whole can be the occasion of an epiphany, the
revelation of the essential nature of what is known, what pertains to everyday reality,
to history, to myth. Any element can acquire deeper and more comprehensive
meanings thanks to the network of linguistic links that throw light on them
("illuminans et illuminatum prefulgens") and shows them all to be intimately related. It
is the very concept of epiphany that has undergone a profound re-elaboration.
"Vulgarity" (perhaps owing its name to Dante) is now more properly "triviality"
(maybe still partly thanks to Dante's theories), the encounter of many common and
peregrine (exilic, migratory) words and meanings at the crossroads of the Wakean
"words" and of the text; the object is no longer selected in a "luminous silent stasis" (P
213) but in a dynamic apprehension of its being part of larger systems, in the
discovery of common roots and analogous patterns of development. As Giorgio
Melchiori writes,

What else is the language of Joyce's last work if not the epiphanisation of what is known,
familiar, banal in our language, through its projection into a metalanguage which intensifies
its semantic contents to its extreme limit, so that banality becomes memorable? *Finnegans
Wake* is a single, gigantic epiphany: the epiphany of the human language.72

Walton Litz, who describes the evolution of the concept of epiphany in Joyce's
work as a "movement from 'centripetal' to 'centrifugal' writing", gives us a clue to
interpret Joyce's continuing appeal to Dante's linguistic theory, despite the profound
change in his method of composition and in his writing techniques:

A process of selectivity harmonizes with his early notion of the 'epiphany', which assumes
that it is possible to reveal a whole area of experience through a single gesture or phrase. In
shaping the *Portrait* Joyce sought continually to create 'epiphanies', and to define Stephen's
attitudes by a stringent process of exclusion; later in his career he attempted to define by a

72 G. Melchiori, "Introduzione", *Finnegans Wake: H.C.E.* (Milan: Mondadori, 1982), xvi (my
translation).
process of inclusion. The earlier method implies that there is a significance, a 'quidditas', residing in each thing, and that the task of the artist is to discover this significance by a process of distillation. In the later method it is the artist who creates the significance through language. Thus in the Portrait a single gesture may reveal a character's essential nature; but in Finnegans Wake Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker's nature is established by multiple relationships with the fallen heroes of history and legend.73

The principle of selectivity and the process of distillation which characterise Joyce's early work may partly explain why Dante's theory of linguistic selection and "distillation" from the "vulgares" was needed. In Finnegans Wake "distillation" becomes one of the central themes and a symbol for poetic creativity, while the accretional method of composition still continues to resort to Dante's synthetic theory in order both to accommodate the technique of drawing materials from different linguistic sources and, at the same time, to subvert it by applying to it Dante's own weapon of the law of analogy and contrappasso. Claritas is thus a quality also of the obscure "nat language" of the Wake, where meanings "shine forth" through the surface and "radiate" in all directions, spreading from the central "cardinal" point, combining with other "illustrious" words, illuminating them and receiving light from them and from the whole.

Chapter 4

Figures of Ineffability

*E cost, figurando il paradiso,
convien saltar lo sacrate poema*¹

*(Par XXIII, 61-62)*

"ineffible tries at speech unassyllabled" ²

*(FW 183.14-15)*

The Divine Comedy has been variously interpreted as a vision, ² a mystic itinerarium mentis a Deo,³ a fiction based on the assumption that it is not a fiction,⁴ a dream or dream-like experience which starts in the sleepy atmosphere of Inferno I (*"Io non so ben ridir com' v'intrai, / tant'era pien di sonno [...]"*, Inf I, 10-11) and ends with a similarly dream-like vision and a loss of individual will and consciousness in Paradiso XXXIII (*"Qual è colui che sognando vede [...]"*, Par XXXIII, 58; "ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle [...]", Par XXXIII, 143⁵). Within this dream, vision, or journey, what we get is a summa of medieval culture, an epic in which Dante meets and talks to historical, legendary and fictitious people from different times and cultures and who tell their stories, revealing unknown truths and unfolding unseen, arcane connections between the different phases of the history of mankind; they explain the laws of nature, illustrate the divine laws

¹ "And so, figuring Paradise, the sacred poem needs to make a leap".
² *The Vision: or Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise* was for instance the title by which Henry Francis Cary's early-nineteenth century translation of the *Commedia* was known.
³ Cf. e.g. G. Padoan, "La mirabile visione' di Dante e Epistola a Can Grande".
⁴ Charles Singleton, "The Irreducible Dove", 129.
⁵ "I cannot rightly say how I entered it, I was so full of sleep [...]".
⁶ "As is he who dreaming sees [...]"; "but already my desire and my will were revolved [...]".
that regulate this and the other world, prophesy future events. Erich Auerbach has encapsulated the encyclopaedism of Dante’s “vision” thus:

The Comedy, among other things, is a didactic poem of encyclopedic dimensions, in which the physico-cosmological, the ethical, and the historico-political order of the universe is collectively presented; it is, further, a literary work which imitates reality and in which all imaginable spheres of reality appear: past and present, sublime grandeur and vile vulgarity, history and legend, tragic and comic occurrences, man and nature; finally, it is the story of Dante’s - i.e., one single individual’s - life and salvation, and thus a figure of the story of mankind’s salvation in general. Its dramatis personae include figures from antique mythology, often (but not always) in the guise of fantastic demons; allegorical personifications and symbolic animals stemming from late antiquity and the Middle Ages; bearers of specific significations chosen from among the angels, the saints, and the blessed in the hierarchy of Christianity; Apollo, Lucifer, and Christ, Fortuna and Lady Poverty, Medusa as an emblem of the deeper circles of Hell, and Cato of Utica as the guardian of Purgatory.  

"The danger is in the neatness of identifications" ("DBVJ", 3), Samuel Beckett warned the readers of Work in Progress and the future critic who would follow in his steps and try to investigate the function of Dante’s (as well as Bruno’s and Vico’s) work in Finnegans Wake. It is not an exercise in "analogymongering" ("DBVJ", 3) I hope to point out that, with a few adjustments, it would not be difficult to read the above paragraph as a description of Finnegans Wake instead of the Divine Comedy. Dante’s all-encompassing, epic journey of salvation and of metamorphosis is in fact one of the closest antecedents of the encyclopaedic nocturnal epic of mankind and of the universal laws of death and rebirth embodied, at one of the several levels of the Wake, in the transformed events of the ordinary day of a Dublin man, at once an individual and Everyman. Indeed, Auerbach’s

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7 Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), 164-165.
description of the Comedy is strikingly similar to Levin's attempt at a fourfold interpretation of Finnegans Wake discussed in chapter 1.

Allusions to the Divine Comedy are scattered throughout the Wake but it is not my intention here to trace as many of them as I can. The densest chapters are probably the "Mime" (FW II.1) and the "Nightlesson", or "Geometry Lesson" (FW II.2). Many of the allusions to Dante in this chapter have been discussed by Mary Reynolds and James Atherton; the latter for instance points out that one of the main reasons for this wealth of references is that this chapter, as a "lesson", wants to impart "all" knowledge, and Reynolds shows that the geometry problem of the mother-triangle, the "eternal geometer" (FW 296.30-297.01), was inspired by Dante's analogy in Paradiso XXXIII between the incapacity of man to comprehend God and the doomed effort of the geometer that tries to solve the mystery of the squaring of the circle (I shall discuss this geometrical simile later in the chapter). Atherton in particular finds in FW II.2 several echoes of Inferno V and its moving story of the adulterous love of Paolo and Francesca, perhaps Joyce's favourite canto but also one of the best-known by English poets and critics. The Wakean motifs of the warring brothers and Issy's attempts at seduction are a fitting context for the episode of Francesca's adultery with her husband's brother. Atherton identifies two quotations from this canto in FW II.2:

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8 James S. Atherton, The Books at the Wake, 79; see also Letters II 248.
9 The fifth canto of the Inferno, together with that of Conte Ugolino (Inf XXXI) is one of the most translated into English. See Gilbert Cunningham, The Divine Comedy in English: A Critical Bibliography 1702-1900 (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), passim; and David Wallace, "Dante in English", in The Cambridge Companion to Dante, Rachel Jacoff (ed.), 237-258.
10 Atherton also identifies another allusion to Inf V nine pages before the beginning of II.2: "Look at this passage from Galiliento", which in the text is alleged to come from "the lingering lacerous book of the dark" (251.24-25) (Books at the Wake, 80-81). Galahad or, in Italian, Galeotto, the go-between of Lancelot and Princess Guenevere becomes in Dante the book itself which made Paolo and Francesca fall in love and kiss, and thus commit adultery like the characters of the Arthurian cycle they were reading about. But in Joyce's text, as Mary Reynolds points out (Joyce and Dante, 216), Francesca's story is brought down to the level of a teacher seducing his pupil.
Joyce would know that Dante's editors disagree about the meaning of *tuo dottore*. Some say it means Virgil and refers to the line, 'Infandum, regina, jubes renovare dolorem' (*Aeneid*, II, 3). Others point out that the situation there is the opposite of the situation in *Inferno*, since Aeneas was being asked to remember sorrow in the midst of joy, and they maintain that Dante is quoting a passage from Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae* (II, iv, 4). But they agree that on every other occasion when the words *tuo dottore* are used in the *Divine Comedy* they mean Virgil. Joyce is creating here one of the mirror effects of which he was fond. His own passage is not comprehensible without a knowledge of a hidden quotation which is itself a passage containing a quotation about which scholars differ. 'Petrarc', which is explained in *A Census to Finnegans Wake* as meaning Petrarch, is put in here mischievously by Joyce as a key to the wrong Italian poet. Logically the trope could be described thus: as Dante says *tuo dottore* which in his work should mean Virgil, to follow a quotation from Boethius; so Joyce says 'Petrarc', which in his language should mean Petrarch, to precede a quotation from Dante.13

Allusions and misquotations, in short, are selected for their context and function in the original and then re-contextualised and given a new function in the *Wake*. But my argument is that the presence of Dantinean allusions in *Finnegans Wake* is much more wide-ranging than has been suggested by either Atherton or Reynolds. Some allusions may simply serve to support a textual point within a

11 "Love, which is quickly kindled in a gentle heart".
12 "There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in wretchedness, the happy time; and this your teacher [lit.: doctor] knows".
limited context and do not necessarily take part in a wider system of thematic or structural cross-references, but they also contribute to a more general purpose: that of distributing through the *Wake* examples of Dante's poetic figuration of the other-world and of his poetics of ineffability - in fact his self-celebration of the poet's success in saying the unsayable, an issue that is also central to the *Wake*’s experimentations with "nat language" (*FW* 83.12; night language, not language).

With some degree of simplification, it is correct to say, I think, that Dante's and Joyce's problem is the same: how to express what language cannot say, how to mediate successfully between the linguistically representable and the unrepresentable. Thus, the echoes, references and irreverently "quashed quotatoes" (*FW* 183.22) scattered through the text point in fact to a common conception of poetics and of the artist's task.

No one before Dante had ever attempted a poetic representation of the other-world which would account for its complete and complex structure, its parts and its laws with such a profusion of precise and coherent detail: the world posited by Dante for his pilgrimage is totally heterogeneous to our day-to-day experience, and it requires therefore much more than the usual repertoire of words and idioms - the more so since at the beginning of the fourteenth century vernacular Italian was still a young and limited language. Thus, the poet must compose or invent (Latin *invenio*, "I find", hence the *inventio* of classical rhetoric and its precept to "find" in the loci of one's mind and one's culture the material for the literary work) a "new" language which can not so much *describe* - since the reality of the other world is immaterial and certainly beyond the human faculties of representation - as, rather, *evolve* the supernatural experience.14 To this end, Dante embarks on a poetic pilgrimage that ventures to the extreme reaches of the language in order to convey

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14 Cf. "trasumanar", *Par* 1, 70, an untranslatable word that Singleton renders through a periphrasis, "the passing beyond humanity". See also *infra*, p. 181.
to the reader "a shadow" of the truth (Par I, 23; XIII, 19) so that s/he can, in turn, "recreate" or re-experience the extraordinary journey into the world of eternity. I would argue that this necessary renewal of language and the construction of a poetics of the "ineffable" (which, as we shall see, may be turned in Joyce's text into a poetics of the unspeakable), rather than the Wake's use of precise themes and images from Dante's epic, is the Comedy's most significant contribution to the Wake. Thus, although Beckett implied in "Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce" that the greatest similarity exists between Finnegans Wake and the Purgatorio, and although the night world and obscure language of the Wake would intuitively suggest a greater analogy with the Inferno, it is on the Paradiso and its linguistic battle with the ineffable that I shall concentrate in the final stage of this pilgrimage through Dante's and Joyce's works.

If the Word cannot be spoken, the journey towards God will have to be a quest for the words to fill the silence, to make silence itself speak. I shall therefore look at the dialectic of speech and silence and at the function that vowels - "the soul and juncture of every word" (Conv IV.vi.3-5), what allows words to be voiced that would otherwise be silent - acquire in this dialectic. To follow this thread, it will necessary to go back to Stephen's articulation of his theory of literary creation, of authorial identity, of literary, biographical and material debts in "Scylla and Charybdis", the chapter in which, as Jean-Michel Rabaté has demonstrated, Stephen is in turn indebted to Dante's vocalic bond in the Convivio. We shall then look at how Issy's vocalic ties in Finnegans Wake may be seen to offset Stephen's weaving together of these issues; in fact, I will argue that Stephen's attempts at expressing a theory of artistic creation in "Scylla and Charybdis" - and, even earlier, in A Portrait and Stephen Hero - are part of a subtext that crosses most of

15 Joyce too claimed, "Je suis au bout de l'anglais" (JJ 546).
16 Cf. "A Portrait of the Author as a Bogeyman", in James Joyce, Authorized Reader, 150-184.
Joyce's works, a transversal text-in-progress that Joyce never stopped writing and re-writing, and which he continually ironised as he was writing it. Thus Stephen's theory, finally resolved in a deluding and unconvincing "French triangle", will serve as a starting point for an examination of the geometrical problems of FW I.6 and II.2 (originating in Dante's simile of the geometer in *Paradiso* XXXIII) in order to tie together Joyce's and Dante's articulations of vowels and letters, figures of speech and of geometry, quests for the origin and the end, and the two writers' ongoing quests for the language that endeavours to voice the ineffable or the unspeakable but whose words are ultimately condemned to remain silent.

*To dislocate if necessary language into meaning*

Although the issue of the (un)expressible may be said to stand at the centre of the two writers' poetics, the concept of ineffability and its value are different for Joyce and for Dante: for the latter the ineffable is the divine, the transcendent, the eternal, what is immutable; it cannot be said because it is incommensurate with language. For Joyce, on the contrary, the ineffable derives from the inexhaustibility, transience and fluidity of the real which cannot be grasped, and from the (modernist) awareness and thematisation of the "mismatch" between the real and any linguistic representation of it.

For Dante, words and referents do not correspond perfectly because, as we have seen in the previous chapters, post-Edenic language is an improper, insufficient means of communication which can never hope to bridge the immeasurable gap between the human and the divine, and has therefore to rely on a

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17 "You are a delusion, said roundly John Eglinton to Stephen. You have brought us all this way to show us a French triangle. Do you believe your own theory?" 'No', Stephen said promptly" (*U* 205). As we shall see, Eglinton's "round" remark not only wraps up and dismisses Stephen's theory but also paves the way for the *Wake's* inscription of the triangle within the circle.
polysemic conception of writing and reading. For Joyce, on the contrary, it is language itself that creates its own subject, just as style creates the subject-matter of the individual chapters of *Ulysses*. The unrestrainable proliferation of meanings that issue from the materiality of language can transubstantiate into ever-deferred, evanescent meanings - as in Dante's allegories ("other" sense) - but only because, unlike for the medieval poet, these meanings are a result of, and do not pre-exist, the verbal creation of the artist.

The paradox of representation is of course that language is insufficient for and incommensurate with the reality it tries to represent, but it is the only means the poet or the novelist can use. Writing thus becomes a struggle against language and its limits, an effort to stretch those limits, expand boundaries, bend what is scarcely flexible. Overcoming this resistance means "inventing" a way of using language to signify in a different, novel way. It is in this sense that the poetics of the ineffable has to become an experimental poetics of the *novum* (the new, the marvellous, the extraordinary): a poetics, that is, of the as yet unattempted, undiscovered, undiscoverable in the *loci* of one's mind, almost the contrary of *invenio*, a paradoxical search for what cannot be found.

This renewal of poetic language takes several forms: one of them is the technical "invention" of the terza rima, a structure that can be read as "one and triune", like the Trinity conflating oneness and multiplicity, which enables the poet to join the discrete parts in a linear continuous chain which is however also circular and which reflects both the structure of the whole (one poem, made of three enrowned *cantiche*) and the final vision of God, both linear (the river) and circular (*Par XXX- XXXIII*).

This rhythmical mirror-reflection of the parts in the whole and the whole into the parts is typical of *Finnegans Wake* too, but Joyce's fascination with Dante's terza rima was already explicit in Stephen Dedalus' musings in "Aeolus", when he
thinks that his masculine and "leadenfooted" rhymes do not stand up to Dante's lithe, varied, feminine and colourful model:

South, pout, out, shout, drouth. Rhymes: two men dressed the same, looking the same, two by two:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{la tua pace} \\
\text{che parlar ti piace} \\
\text{mentre che il vento, come fa, si tace.}
\end{align*}
\]

He saw them three by three, approaching girls, in green, in rose, in russet, entwining, per l'air perso in mauve, in purple, quella pacifica oriflamma, in gold of oriflame, di rimararf più ardenti. But I old men, peninent, leadenfooted, underdarkneath the night: mouth south: tomb womb.\(^\text{18}\) (U 133)

Three by three, Dante's entwining rhymes nearly form the rainbow that Issy and her six friends will come to embody in *Finnegans Wake*, lightly dancing, like the angels in Dante's *Paradiso*, in the circles and garlands of the "Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggies", joining the rhythms of rhymes with the grace of flowers (of speech) and the variety of their clothes:

So and so, toe by toe, to and fro they go round, for they are the ingelles, scattering nods as girls who may, for they are an angel's garland.

*Catchmire stockings, libertyed garters, shoddyshoes, quicked out with silver. Pennyfair caps on pinnyfore frocks and a ring on her fomcing finger. And they leap so loopy, loopy, as they link to light. And they look so lovelit, loovelit, noosed in a nuptious night. Withashy glints in. Andecoy glants out. They ramp it a little, a lesser, a lissle. Then rompride round in rout.*

Say them all but tell them apart, cadenzando coloratura! R is Rubetta and A is Arancia, Y is for Yilla and N for greeneriN. B is Boyblue with odalisque O while W waters the fleurettes of novembrance. Though they're all but merely a schoolgirl yet these way went they. I' th' view o' th'avignue dancing goes entrancing roundly. (FW 226.21-35)

\(^{18}\) This passage is discussed in Reynolds, *Joyce and Dante*, 86-87.
To win Issy's graces - her letters, rhymes and colours, "including science of
sonorous silence" (FW 230.22-23) - Nick / Shem will have to try poetry - "have
recourse of course to poetry" (230.23-24). But his quest in the Mime is, as any
quest in the Wake, as any attempt to say the ineffable, doomed to failure, and Nick
will not guess the heliotropic colour of the Maggies' drawers. In the Divine
Comedy Dante stresses time and time again the problem of insufficiency and the
inevitability of failure: the failure of the human language to represent adequately the
divine; of his intellect to apprehend the sublime; of his memory to comprehend, to
contain and retain the excess of the otherworldly experience. Versions of the topos
of ineffability punctuate Dante's ascent towards God and his progress towards
the completion of the book, and become the main framework of the third
cantica. As with the four levels of meaning that Dante borrowed from both the literary and
the Biblical traditions and transformed into a completely new interpretative and
poetic system, in the case of ineffability too he completely transforms the topos. An
index of the novelty is the word inefrabile itself, used for the first time in
vernacular Italian by Dante, in the phrase "ineffabile cortesia" (VN III,1). As
Manuela Colombo has pointed out, although this may not strike a modern reader as
unusual, the conflation of a term canonised by the tradition of the
trouvères and of the Italian love lyric with one that had until then belonged only to the writings of
the mystics would have been quite unsettling to Dante's contemporaries.

19 Ernst Robert Curtius's European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (London: Routledge
and Kegan Paul, 1979) offers a useful discussion of the topos of inexpressibility in ancient and
medieval literature; cf. esp. 159-162. Manuela Colombo, Dai mistici a Dante: Il linguaggio
dell'ineffabilità (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1987) is entirely devoted to the history of the topos,
how it passed into Dante's works from the writings of the mystics, and its development in post-
Dantean vernacular literature. I have found Peter Hawkins's "Dante's Paradiso and the Dialectic of
Ineffability" (in Peter S. Hawkins and Anne Howland Schotter (eds.), Ineffability: Naming the
20 There are of course examples of the topos before, starting from the very first canto ("quanto
dir qual era è cosa dura [...]"
"how hard it is to tell what [that wood] was...", Inf I, 4); but it is in
Paradiso that it becomes the leading theme.
21 Cf. Colombo, Dai Mistici a Dante, esp. 32-35.
If in the *Vita Nuova* the association was unexpected, in the *Comedy* the use of a mystical lexicon may appear justified and legitimised by the context and the theme. However, even in the *Divine Comedy* the concept is used in a disturbing manner: its referent is no longer exclusively the divine, and the attribute is now applied to the poem itself and the poetic activity of the author - a move potentially as risky as applying the four levels of meaning of Biblical exegesis to his own worldly poetry. Thus, the polysemic exegesis of his *canzoni*, the elevation of the vernacular to illustriousness and the renovation of language I have dealt with separately come together and must be seen as various facets of the same activity: the construction of a new role for the poet and a new function for his work. Dante's theme and technique, then, are inseparable, as they are in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, where style and subject-matter coincide - or, even further, where style creates its own subject-matter: it is not so much the choice of the theme that entails a stylistic adaptation of the topos of ineffability, but the project of the modernisation and elevation of the poetics that requires such a theme. The stress shifts in other words from the exceptionality of the topic to the uniqueness of the poetic enterprise, from the "vista nova" (*Par* XXXIII, 136) to the "novelty" of the work, and the *Comedy* can call itself "sacred poem" (*Par* XXIII, 62; XXV, 1) and be labelled *Divine*.

The poetics of ineffability of the *Paradiso*, however, involves serious consequences for the tenability of the fourfold exegetical / interpretative model. If the divine cannot be rendered in language, the literal level of the poetic construction inevitably fails: any attempt at a literal description of what "actually" happened or what Dante "actually" saw and heard can only be an evocation or a trope: "trasumanar / significar per verba non si poria" ("The passing beyond humanity may not be set forth in words", *Par* I, 70-71, my emphasis). As Peter Hawkins has pointed out, a literal "significar" is out of the question from the start of the
cantica, and the process of signification can therefore only be founded on a conception of language as pure tropology: language can be endowed with the three layers of meaning that in the *Epistle to Can Grande* are united under the more general label of "allegorical", but no "literal", "historical", "enveloping" or "anterior" sense may exist as such. The impasse reached by Dante's theory and which, as we have seen in chapter 1, Joyce exposes in the "Mamafesta" chapter of the *Wake* is therefore a consequence already implicit in Dante's poetics. In fact, the poetics of *Paradiso* points to what modern hermeneutics has indicated as the inevitable condition of language: the unbridgeable gap between any semiotic system and the real. What Paul de Man has described as being caught in the tropological system of language is what Dante experiences in his poem and makes his readers experience with him through an intensification of the rhetorical density and difficulty of the poem. This is however also what makes it possible for the poet to arouse in his readers a suggestion of the unutterable vision, and the foregrounding of the ineluctable representational mismatch, the exploitation of the "tropological" ("other", "alien"; or even "alienating") nature of language, is finally what enables Dante to circumvent the problem of representation and the impossibility of a literal level: the poem refuses to represent, and language becomes an experience rather than a mediation of meaning. This may explain to a large extent the modernists' fascination with Dante's work (one is reminded of Eliot's dictum that poets "must be difficult" and that the poet must "force, [...] dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning"), and may suggest why such writers as Joyce, Eliot and Pound,

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22 "Dante's *Paradiso* and the Dialectic of Ineffability", 7. See also Jeremy Tambling's subtle analysis of Dante's "significare" and "vo significando" in *Dante and Difference. Writing in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1988), esp. chapter 4, 96-128.

23 "Nam allegoria dicitur ab alleon graece, quod in latinum dicitur alienum, sive diversum" (*for the word "allegory" is so called from the Greek alleon, which in Latin is alienum or diversum*, Epistle to Can Grande, §7).

felt the need to return to the Medieval roots of modern European culture in order, as Pound's slogan goes, to "make it new".

Silent leaps

Dante tries to remember and to say, but cannot, memory and language do not suffice—like Shem, he is "in his bardic memory low" (*FW* 172.28), and the *Comedy* thus takes the form of an imperfect copy from the book of memory, which in turn is only an imperfect copy from the book that Dante has seen in his final vision (*Par XXXIII*, 85-87); in fact, his 13,000-plus lines of poetry are a huge effort to remember the vision while creating it (*invenio*), just as the 600-plus pages of the *Wake* are a huge effort to both remember the dream and invent it. Both works are the equivalent of a post-Babelian effort to remember what cannot be remembered, to "balbly call to memory" (*FW* 37.16) the original forgotten language while inventing new ones, a remedy to and an exploitation of the linguistic fall and the limits of memory.

The reader, then, shares with the poet a (fictional) awareness of inadequacy, of not being able to "retell" and, consequently, the need for an extraordinary creative effort; paradoxically, the (fictionally) failed attempt to retell, or, to borrow a word from the *Wake*, "retale" (cf. *FW* 3.17), is the main activity of the *Comedy* since its very first lines: "io non so ben ridir com'i v'entrai" ("I cannot rightly retell how I entered it", *Inf* I, 10). In conjunction with the protests of poetic or mnemonic inadequacy, the rhetorical depth grows significantly, exhibiting an exceptional concentration of figures and tropes as if to underscore the disjunction between the real and the tropological system of language of which the poem is part. In fact, the poet's assertions of incapacity that punctuate all the cantos of the *Paradiso* can be read as a massive instance of *praeteritio*, the metadiscursive figure
through which the speaker explicitly announces his intention not to deal with a
certain subject. But the preterition is soon transformed into a performative form of
litotes in that, while it asserts that something is not going to be dealt with, it
actually deals with it through its negation. Ineffability becomes a challenge which
the author declares to be insurmountable but which is in fact taken up, fought
against and at each occurrence overcome throughout the poem.

Despite its length, it is worth quoting the following passage in its entirety, as
it is one of the most complete and interesting instances of the topos of ineffability in
the *Divine Comedy*:

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Come foco di nube si diserra
per dilatarsi si che non vi cape,
e fuor di sua natura in gin s'atterra,
la mente mia così, tra quelle dape
fatta più grande, di sé stessa uscìo,
e che si fece rimembrar non sape.
«Apri il occhi e riguarda qual son io;
tu hai vedute cose, che possente
se' fatto a sostener lo riso mio».
Io era come quel che si risente
di visione oblita e che s'ingegna
indarno di ridarsì a la mente,
quand'io udì questa proferta, degna
di tanto grato, che mai non si stingue
del libro che 'l preterito rassegna.
Se no sonassero tutte quelle lingue
che Polimnia con le suore fero
del latte lor dolcissimo più pingue,
per aiutarmi, al millesimo del vero
non si verria, cantando il santo riso
e quanto il santo aspetto facea mero;
e così, figurando il paradiso,
convien saltar lo sacra poema,
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These lines begin with a simile drawn from the natural world in order to compare the meteorological phenomenon of the lightning with the *excessus mentis* provoked by the vision of Christ, and is immediately followed by the first assertion of the inadequacy of his memory that cannot retain the experience. Beatrice then calls Dante inviting him to look at her (46-48), and this gives the occasion for another claim of the insufficiency of memory through a second simile (49-51) followed by a *terzina* in which Beatrice's words are described as such that they can never be forgotten. The contrast is striking: the *excessus mentis* is such that memory will not contain it, but at the same time the intellective, mnemonic and sensory powers of the poet have been so strengthened that he will from now on be able to apprehend and retain other similar experiences; the improvement explicitly described for the sense of sight (46-8) is implicitly affirmed for memory too, but the capacity just acquired is immediately offset by a new version of the topos of ineffability which this time concerns language's incapacity to render the supernatural experience.

25 "Even as fire breaks from a cloud, because it dilates so that it has not room there, and contrary to its own nature, falls down to earth, so my mind, becoming greater amid those feasts, issued from itself, and of what it became has no remembrance. «Open your eyes and look on what I am: you have seen things such that you are become able to sustain my smile.» I was as one that wakes from a forgotten dream, and who strives in vain to bring it back to mind, when I heard this proffer, worthy of such gratitude that it can never be effaced from the book which records the past. Though all those tongues which Polyphemia and her sisters made most rich with their sweetest milk should sound now to aid me, it would not come to a thousandth part of the truth, in singing the holy smile, and how it lit up the holy aspect; and so, depicting Paradise, the sacred poem must needs make a leap, even as one who finds his way cut off. But whoso thinks of the ponderous theme and of the mortal shoulder [lit.: humerus] which is laden therewith, will not blame it if it tremble beneath the load. It is no voyage for a little bark, this which my daring prow cleaves as it goes, nor for a pilot who would spare himself."
adequately. This new difficulty is conveyed through the opposition between "tutte quelle lingue" and "un millesimo del vero", with its pun on "lingue" as both tongues - i.e., with a further trope, poets’ voices and poems - and natural languages. The disproportion between divine and human means, even when the greatest poets are appealed to, is overwhelming, and the hyperbole is resolved into a preterition, the abandonment of the attempt to describe the experience itself. Dante insists on the necessity for the poem to "leap", inviting the reader to reflect on the disproportion between the "ponderous" theme and the "omero mortale" - the shoulder but also Homer - a trope onto which the successive metaphors of the boat and of the "ferryman" are grafted through a noun, "pareggio", translated by Singleton as "voyage" but which also suggests in Italian the inevitably doomed attempt to "compare", make equal, be equal to the task.

Echoes of this figuration of ineffability resound in the following lines of Paradiso XXIII (77-78, 87, 97-102, 118-119, 129), while this expression of the topos in turn resounds with echoes from other cantos - the image of the boat that must sail a rough sea in order to arrive at a safe harbour which has been used to refer either to the poet or the reader, or both; the metaphor of the book of memory; the simile of the lightning. And each of these echoes may, in turn, refer to other passages: the "necchiero" cannot but recall Dante's entrance into Hell, when he is ferried across the Acheron by Charon in Inferno III, or into Purgatory (the "celestial nocchiero" of Purg. II, 43); the topos of the boat cannot fail to bring to mind the "folle volo" ("mad flight") of Ulysses, whose doomed, tragic voyage is often contrasted to Dante's successful "flight" to God (can we perceive in these words yet another instance of Dante's "pride", and maybe also a premonition of Stephen's invocation of his artificer-father Dedalus at the end of A Portrait?).

26 Cf. e.g. Purg I, 1 ff.; Par II, 1; XXIII, 57.
27 Cf. e.g. Inf II, 8-9, but, further back, also the beginning of the Vita Nuova.
28 Cf. e.g. Par I, 135.
Through these echoes and linguistic, rhetorical or thematic reprises, the poem builds an increasingly complex web which gives the poem a tighter unity than the linear disposition of the verse can offer - a trait which is typical of all poetry but which in Dante's poem acquires a rarely achieved density and whose nearest parallel can probably be found in Joyce's work, from *Dubliners* onwards, but especially in the "Echoland" of *Finnegans Wake* (13.05), whose "meandertale" (18.22) requires an equally meandering reading of the tale.

Taking the cue from the lines quoted above, one could say that Joyce takes up Dante's implicit challenge: "Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue [...]", and all those tongues and languages seem to be literally made to resound in order to try to obtain, not "a thousandth of the truth", but its totality. Unfortunately, this totality could only be comprehended by an ideal reader whose most important asset would be insomnia - "that ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia" (*FW* 120.13-14) who could ideally decipher the "letter" of *FW* 1.5. But this ideal reader, whose powers of concentration and retention must be so strong, comes too close to resembling God, and the human minds of us non-ideal readers can only approach "a thousandth of the truth". Even Dante, whose powers have so increased in his ascent to the Empyrean, needs to rest from the lesson that St Bernard gives him on the composition of the "rosa dei beati", because he is getting sleepy:

Ma perché 'l tempo fugge che t'assonna,
qui farem punto, come buon sartore
che com'elli ha del panno fa la gonna\(^{29}\)  
(Par XXXII, 139-140)

In the simile of the tailor (a significant one in the *Comedy* that also appears in *Inferno* XV, when Dante and Virgil encounter the host of the sodomites among

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\(^{29}\)"But because the time flies that brings sleep upon you, we will stop here, like a good tailor that cuts the garment according to his cloth".
whom is Brunetto; see *Inf X V*, 16-21), the shortness of the cloth is the shortness of Dante's faculties, but it will soon become the "shortness" of a language itself, incapable of conveying the memory of his vision: "Omai sarà più corta mia favella" (*Par XXXIII*, 106). The entire *Comedy* is indeed inscribed within a paradox: Dante enters the forest in a slumber that signifies sin ("tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto / che la verace via abbandonai", *Inf I*, 11-12), but the salvific vision too is achieved in a dream-like experience: "Qual è colui che sognando vede, / che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa / rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede [...]" (*Par XXXIII*, 58-60). And yet Dante is prevented by St Bernard from falling asleep *in order that* he may see this vision. It is the same paradox of *Finnegans Wake*, whose ideal reader must suffer from insomnia and stay awake in order to experience what has been variously interpreted as the language of dream, the language caught between sleeping and waking, "nat language", the language of the night, not-language.

Not many readers can fulfil these ideal requirements, whether of *Finnegans Wake* or of the *Divine Comedy*. While readers are made to participate in the signifying process of the text, they are also selected, streamed as it were, because of the difficulty of the task. The text is full of leaps that have to be taken, of gaps that have to be filled in; only some will be able to follow (in) the wake *Wake* (see *Par II*, 1-18, quoted in the epigraph of the introduction), and the artist, while requiring the co-operation of the readers, at the same time leaves them to fend for themselves:

A descriver lor forme più non spargo
rimo, lettor; ch'altra spesa mi stringe.

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30 "Now will my speech fall [literally, "be"] more short". I shall come back to the "shortness" of language, cf. pp. 188-189 *infra*.
31 "I was so full of sleep at the moment I left the true way".
32 "As is he who dreaming sees, and after the dream the passion remains imprinted and the rest returns not to the mind [...]"
The poet's concern is not explication but the form of his subject(-matter). The "keys" are "given" in the text (FW 628.15); it is up to readers to find them and fill the gaps, "put together again" the bits and pieces of these difficult, Humpty Dumpty-like, works. The text, then, is the result of a dialectic between the "presence" of the words and the "absence", the blanks, or gaps, or leaps which the reader has to (ful)fill. Where Dante's privileged trope for this is the "leap", in the Wake it is more often a pun combining opposites: "whole / hole", "word / void", together with an insistence on gaps, holes, and on absence. Critics have pointed out the importance of "absence" in Joyce's work from the very first page of Dubliners, where the "gnomon" - the term from Euclidean geometry that describes an incomplete figure, a parallelogram from which a smaller parallelogram has been cut out - becomes the symbol of the incomplete lives of the Dubliners, but also of Joyce's method of composition.

This "streaming" of the readership, however, should not be seen only as a writing for the happy few ("Voialtri pochi che drizzaste il collo / per tempo al pan de li angeli [...]", Par II, 10), the elitism which Modernism too has often been accused of. In fact, it is exactly this difficulty and the presence of these gaps that makes it possible for the text to be potentially infinite, for every reader to

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33 "To describe their forms, reader, I do not lay out more rhymes, for other spending constrains me so that I cannot be lavish in this; but read Ezekiel, who depicts them as he saw them..."

34 A fascinating and thorough treatment of this aspect is offered by John Bishop's Joyce's Book of the Dark (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1987), in particular in the second chapter, significantly titled "Nothing in Particular: On English Obliterature", in which Bishop emphasises the importance of void and of absence in the Wake and relates them to the loss experienced at night, in dream, during sleep, of the faculties that dominate waking life.

35 Cf e.g. Philip Herring, Joyce's Uncertainty Principle (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U P, 1987). I shall come back to the gnomon later in this chapter.

36 "You other few who lifted up your necks betimes for bread of angels [...]"
experience directly the difficulty of comprehending infinity and the ultimate defeat of a poetics of the ineffable and of the truly novum: such a poetics will only finally allow for texts which, because they cannot tell, are ultimately silent.

If the poet is caught in the tropology of language, all he can do is catch his readers in the game. After all, this silent "leaping" may just be a matter of deviously suggesting while avoiding the issue; it forces the reader to assume that beyond the text there is something else, something more, and that this "something more" is indeed what matters. As Clive Hart put it, "Joyce also aimed at giving his audience the impression that there was always something more beyond what they had understood, something more to be striven for, and this is certainly one reason for the book's great load of allusion and reference".37 Some readers may refuse to be "caught"; Ezra Pound - "jaded, disillusioned, fastidious"38 - complained: "Nothing so far as I make out, nothing short of divine vision or a new cure for the clapp can possibly be worth all the circumambient peripherization" (Letters III, 145, my emphases). Pound might have thought that he was being dismissive, but he was missing the irony of his own words: it is precisely a "divine vision" that inspired Dante's leaps, and Dante's linguistic leaps, due to the "shortness" of words for divine vision, that partly inspired Joyce's "circumambient peripherizations".

In the Divine Comedy the artifice whereby the artist claims not to be able to say the ineffable is part of a larger issue, the silence about or over certain topics, a preterition that in the course of the Comedy may take many different forms. In the Paradiso it appears mostly as dialectic between wanting or having to say vs not

37 Clive Hart, Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake, 30.
38 Like the reluctant reader that Henry James wanted to "catch" in his own writing: "it is a piece of ingenuity pure and simple, of cold artistic calculation, an amusette to catch those not easily caught (the "fun" of the capture of the merely witless being ever but small), the jaded, the disillusioned, the fastidious", he wrote of The Turn of the Screw, another text which has encouraged hundreds of critical essays and frustrated attempts at interpretation precisely because, in James' own words, it was "a shadow of a shadow" "wrapped up" in "thinness" which had the "immense merit of allowing the imagination immense freedom of hand", Henry James, Preface to The Turn of the Screw (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) 36-39, passim.
being able or allowed to say. The prohibition to retell what Dante has learned
remains episodic (there are only two examples of it in *Paradiso*39), but it is equally
significant within the larger context of the "silence" and the "leaps", insofar as we
know that something has been revealed to Dante, but this revelation is now
withheld from us. The reader's co-operation seems no longer required here, and
s/he is indeed excluded from the process of communication and meaning-
formation. The "leap" is now governed by a different logic: the issue is no longer
one of ability but of licitness. Yet, the reader still has to attempt to fill in the blanks.
As in the "nominigentilisation" of HCE, the question will have to be asked: "Are
those their fata which we read in sibylline between the *fas* and its *nefas*?" (*FW*
31.35-36). And as in the case of the prophecies disclosed to Dante, which will not
be explained for some years ("'Taci, e lascia volger li anni'"), "we shall perhaps
not so soon see" (*FW* 32.02). There is a striking coincidence between the
"nominigentilisation" in which HCE's name and rise are discussed, and
Cacciaguida's "parlar profondo" ("deep speech", or "profound speaking"; cf. *Par*
*XV*, 39). Cacciaguida is Dante's progenitor, and Dante learns from him about his
fate (exile), about his own ascendancy and about the origins, decay and fate of
Florentine society; it is he who predicts divine revenge and forbids Dante to reveal
the content of his prophecy (one of the meanings of *fatum*). Likewise, sinful and
obscene, illicit actions are suggested in the history of Humphrey Chimpden
Earwicker's name and origins: *fas* is what is licit, rightful, it is (divine) law, and
what one can say without fear of punishment (cf. Latin *fari*, I speak),

39 "[M]a disse: «Taci, e lascia volger i anni»; / sì ch'io non posso dir se non che pianto / giusto verrà di retro ai vostri danni" ("But he said, «Keep silence, and let the years revolve»; so
that I can say nothing except that well-deserved lamentation shall follow on the wrongs done to
you", *Par* IX, 4); "E porterà ne scritto ne la mente / di lui, e ne dirà" ("And you shall bear
hence written of him in your mind, but you shall not tell its", *Par* XVII, 91-92).
etymologically related to *fatum, fata* (fate, destiny, what is written). Its contrary, *nefas*, denotes what is impossible, illicit, unjust because contrary to the divine word. Between the "fas" and the "nefas" stand both human existence and the text, all to be deciphered ("sibylline").

In a way, the *Divine Comedy* is the attempt to save as much as possible of the vision from the silence to which the failing of memory will otherwise consign it. Yet, it is only through silence that the final vision of the Word can be spoken: "The silence speaks the scene" (*FW* 13.02-3), and it is to this silence that one must listen. The *Wake* tells us that one option may be to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear ("We may see and hear nothing if we choose", 12.25-26), but we cannot escape the archetypal quest for the origins and the mystery of life: "But all they are all there scraping along to sneeze out a likelihood that will solve and salve life's robulous rebus" (12.32-34; *rebus* = word puzzle, or perhaps with a slight twist, "Word puzzle"). We will encounter again Romulus and Remus, the fighting twins at the origin of Rome.

At the centre of this inquiry backwards and forwards again into the book of history and into genealogical origins stands the moment of silence between the ages ("Silent", *FW* 14.06), the Ginnunga-gap of Norse mythology in which the scroll (the letter, the text, the book of history itself) disappears, stolen (or saved?) by the抄isten, to resurface again in the midden heap of history, in fragments, incomplete, to be endlessly re-interpreted:

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40 My thanks to Laurent Milesi for pointing out that in Roumanian *fata* means "daughter": this adds a further layer of meaning whose importance will become more evident when I discuss the threading together of vowels and syllables in the speech of Syvia Silence, one of Issy's several alter egos. Cf. p. 194-196 infra.

41 There may be a more precise echo here of Par XXXIII 65-66: "così al vento ne le foglie levi / si perde la sentenza di Sibilla" ("thus in the wind, on the light leaves, the Sibyl's oracle was lost"). I shall come back to these lines later in this chapter.

42 Cf. *FW* 13.29-14.27, where the pages of the "boke of the deeds" are being turned by the wind and historical chronology is first reversed (1132 A.D., then 566 A.D.), and then, after a moment of silence, redressed into 566 A.D. followed by 1132 A.D.
Somewhere, parently, in the ginnandgo gap between antediluvian and annadominant the copyist must have fled with his scroll. The billy flood rose or an elk charged him or the sultrup worldwright from the excelsissimost empyrean (bolt, in sum) earthspake or the Dannamen gallous banged pan the bliddy duran. A scribicide then and there is led off [...] (FW 14.16-20)

In the silent gap, something happened: a flood, or a bolt from heaven (like the one that struck the builders of the tower of Babel, or the one that signals the end of a cycle and the start of the next one in Vico's view of history); or else, a hen (Biddy Doran) was laid by a cock (Lat. gallus), or killed, or "banged" into a pan (one almost wants to ask, what came first, fried chicken or the omelette? and, what was laid first, the hen or the egg? In the cheekiness of the questions is yet again the quest for the origin); or perhaps "Dannamen gallous" just banged shut the "bloody door", closing the gap, thereby also preventing any recovery of the scroll (shortly after, we get the hint that closing the door shuts out polysemy, maybe even meaningfulness: "So you need hardly spell me how every word will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypical readings throughout the book of Doublends Jined [...] till Daleth, mahomahouma, who oped it closeth thereof the. Dor."). Indeed, by the time the scribe is killed ("a scribicide is led off"), the scroll of history - the book where the memory of mankind is recorded - is lost. The silence between the ages, the dark ages between the stealing of the text and its reappearance in the midden heap are also the silent gap between the end of the Wake and its (re-)beginning, the moment of silence in the Divine Comedy between the vision of God and the writing of the poem which leads to (indeed, is) the vision.

The origin of HCE in FW 1.2 - of man - is equally obscured by a mysterious silence: "(One still hears that pebble crusted laughta, [...] and still one feels the amossive silence of the cladstone allegibelling [...]"") (31.29-32). There has to be
an inquiry into the shadows of the past, into the shadowy past of alleged crimes
("allegibelling", 31.32) (is it smear or guilt?): "Comes the question are these the
facts of his nominigentilisation as recorded and accolated [...]. Are those their fata
which we read in sibylline between the fas and its nefas? No dung on the road?"
(31.33-32.01).

After the meeting with the cad and the inquiry that does not dispel the doubts
despite the disclaimers, the cad himself becomes the gap ("Gaping Gill", 36.35
and "gildthegap Gaper" 37.08) into which the memory of the truth - HCE's story
and words - disappears to resurface in broken and badly remembered talk:
"repeated in his secondmouth language as many of the bigtimer's verbatim words
which he could balbly call to memory" (37.14-16), like the sinners' striving to
speak after Babel or Dante's futile attempt at recalling his vision.

In the very different plots of the Divine Comedy and Finnegans Wake, the
origins and the end are in silence, and need silent leaps to be "retaled". That is why
the "girl detective" who helps in the quest for the truth about HCE in chapter I.3 is
called "Sylvia Silence":

Sylvia Silence, the girl detective (Meminerva, but by now one hears turtlings all over
Doveland!) when supplied with informations as to the several facets of the case in her
cosydorxy bachelor's flat, quite overlooking John a'Dream's mews, leaned back in her really
truly easy chair to query restfully through her vowelthreaded syllabelles: Have you evew
thought, wepowtew, that sheew gweatness was his twadgedy? (FW 61.01-07)

The "several facets of the case" anticipate the description of the "mamafesta" as a
"polyhedron of scripture" (107.08). (Sylvia) Silence may help to solve the

43 "To such a suggestion the one selfrespecting answer is to affirm that there are certain
statements which ought not to be, and one should like to hope to be able to add, ought not to be
allowed to be made, [...]. Truth, heard on prophet, compels one to add that there is said to have
been quondam (pfluit! pfluit!) some case of the kind implicating, it is interdum believed, a quidam
[...](33.18-35); "there is not one titl of truth, allow me to tell you, in that purest of filfib
fabrications" (36.33-34).

44 Gaping Ghyl is a vertical shaft in Yorkshire (McHugh, Annotations).
mystery, find ("invent") the solution, "solvere il nodo" (untie or loosen the knot) of the quest through poetic *tropes*. This vocal Sylvia Silence who threads together beautiful syllables and who clearly is an emanation of Issy, once again presents us with another paradox: vowels are the "voice" of otherwise mute, silent words whose consonants could not be pronounced, but it is this vocal silence that weaves, threads, or binds together voices and vowels to form resonant words and sentences. Sylvia Silence will resurface later, in chapter II.3, when her beautiful syllables are recast into beautiful thoughts ("Suppose you get a beautiful thought and cull them sylvias sub silence" 337.16-7). Issy, in the meantime, has threaded or tied together vowels and semi-vowels in chapter II.2:

Where flash becomes word and silents selfloud. To brace congeners, trebly bounden and asservaged twainly. Adamman, Emhe, Issessianusheen and sometypes Yggely ogs Weib. Uwayoei! So mag this sybilette be our shibboletli that we may syllable her well! Vetus may be occluded behind the mon in Veto but Nova will be nearing as their radiant among the Nereids. (FW 267.16-21)

These "silents selfloud" (German *Selbstlaut:* "vowel"), the silent vowels that Sylvia can thread together in "syllabelles", reverse the Incarnation (flesh now becomes [the] [W]ord, add to the list of five vowels the two semivocalic W and Y to form the rainbow-like "Uwayoei", thus suggesting Issy's split identity in the splitting of the U (you) into the W and the I into the Y (thereby also questioning identity: I → Y = "why?"). Issy's vocalic operations and questioning of identity, and Sylvia's

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45 There are several instances in the *Divine Comedy* of the metaphor of "untying the knot": it often means to answer a question, explain something which is hard to understand (cf. e.g. *Par* VII, 54 and *Inf* X, 95). In the *Purgatorio* the knot is most often the sin from which the repentant souls will soon be freed, and "solvere" thus means expiate; but cf. also *Purg* XXXIII, 46-50, where Beatrice promises that her obscure prophecy will soon be "solved": "solveranno questo enigma forte" ("will solve this hard enigma", *Purg* XXXIII, 50). Cf., in ALP's final monologue, "Every letter is a hard but yours sure is the hardest crux ever" (FW 623.33-34).

46 Cf. Latin *tropare*, "to make tropes, sing", and French *trouver, trobar, trouvère* and *troubadour*.

47 I am relying on Laurent Milesi's subtle "Italian Studies in Musical Grammar", which brilliantly analyses the intricacies of Issy's vowels and grammar.
corresponding vocalic silence may also be seen as an elaboration or a supplanting of Stephen's earlier binding together of vowels in "Scylla and Charybdis", when his "I" had been inscribed at the centre of a bond of material and literary debts:

-But this prying into the family life of a great man, Russell began impatiently.
  Art thou there, truepenny?
-Interesting only to the parish clerk. I mean, we have the plays. I mean when we read the poetry of *King Lear* what is it to us how the poet lived? As for living, our servants can do that for us, Villiers de l'Isle has said. Peeping and prying into greenroom gossip of the day, the poet's drinking, the poet's debts. We have *King Lear* and it is immortal.

[...]

How now, sirrah, that pound he lent you when you were hungry?
Marry, I wanted it.
Take thou this noble.
Go to! You spent most of it in Georgina Johnson's bed, clergyman's daughter.

Agenbite of inwit.
Do you intend to pay it back?
O, yes.
When? Now?
Well... no.
When, then?
I paid my way. I paid my way.
Steady on. He's from beyant Boyne water. The northeast corner. You owe it.
Wait. Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound.
Buzz, Buzz.
But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under everchanging forms.
I that sinned and prayed and fasted.
A child Connemara saved from pandies.
I, I and I. I.
A. E. I. O. U.  
(U 181-82)

Through his I.O.U., Stephen acknowledges his material debt of a pound to A.E. (George Russell) but releases himself from the obligation of paying it through a casuistic argument that relies on a pseudo-biological negation of identity
("Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound"). In so doing, however, as Jean-Michel Rabaté has shown in his "Portrait of the Author as a Bogeyman", Stephen incurs a literary debt to Dante's formulation of literary authority and authenticity through the vocalic bond in the fourth book of the Convivio, where the word **autore** is made to derive either from the Latin *auere*, "I tie" or "bind", or from the Greek *autetin*, "trustworthy" (hence "authentic"):  

![Image of a page from a book with text](https://example.com/image.png)

Dante's argument is indeed a threading together of the vowels A E I O U, the "the soul and juncture of every word". Stephen's - and the chapter's - weaving of literary references to Dante, among other poets, is in a way an accretion of literary interests; but, disregarding Mr Deasy's earlier advice in "Nestor" - "the proudest word you will ever hear from an Englishman's mouth" is "I paid my way" (U 30-31) - Stephen is not going to pay his way: this "immense debtorship" (U 191) is of a kind that cannot be paid off; it can only be worded away through casuistry (or, as Buck Mulligan would have it, by algebra, U 18). Stephen uses the vocalic bond to

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48 This essay by Rabaté and the one by Milesi mentioned in the footnote above offer the best and most extensive treatment of the relationship between language (letters) and identity or subjectivity, and I have refrained in many cases from covering ground already brilliantly explored by them.

49 "And whoso regards it well, in its first form, will clearly perceive that it shows its own meaning, for it is made of nought save the bonds of words, that is to say of the five vowels alone, which are the soul and juncture of every word; and it is composed of them in like manner, to figure the image of a tie. For beginning with A it turns thence to U, and then goes straight by I to E, whence it goes back and returns to O, so that truly they image forth this figure, which is the figure of a tie. And in so far as 'author' is derived and descends from this verb, it is understood only of poets, who have bound their words with the art of the muses."
reject his biological and material debt through a Cartesian neat separation of the bodily I from the I of memory, thus hoping to preserve his psychological identity and integrity. But Issy will subvert this theory by asserting in her feminine grammar her split identity through the vocalic and semivocalic multiple knot and through the voicing of her desire of a (sexual) binding to the father through the unlawful knot of incest. Thus the debt of life that Stephen had argued away, returns in the *Wake* as an incestuous version of Dante's spiritual "Maker mates with made" (*FW* 261.08) in St Bernard's prayer to the Virgin:

*Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio,*
*umile e alta più che creatura,*
*termine fisso d'eterno consiglio,*
*tu se' colei che l'umana natura*
*nobilitasti sì, che 'l suo fattore*
*non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura.*

(*Par XXXIII, 1-6*)

Unlike the *Commedia*, whose stress falls on the paradoxical nature of the mystery of the Incarnation, Joyce's text brings out the incestuous nature of the oedipal relation, foreshadowing an illicit mating of "maker" with "made", father with "maid", which the following bracketed, slightly outraged exclamation, "(O my!)", also betrays.

But with Stephen's theory of fatherhood as self-engendering and Issy's vocalic desire of the Father, we are already getting entangled in a "family umbroglia" (*FW* 284.04), and in order to solve this rebus we shall have to venture even deeper into it by following the thread of the twins' quest for the mother-as-

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51 "Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son, humble and exalted more than any creature, fixed goal of the eternal counsel, thou art she who didst so enoble human nature that its Maker did not disdain to become its creature."
origin (the mother's sex as their origin) in the geometry lesson of chapter II.2; as Dante knew, the shortest way may not be the right one, and this inquiry will also have to take a detour back through various phases of Stephen's poetics from *A Portrait* to *Ulysses*.

**Unspeakable Geometries**

Modern philosophical inquiry into or about geometry has often been - as in the work of Kant and Husserl for instance\(^{52}\) - an inquiry into its origin as well as into its function of mediating between the transcendent and the immanent, the ideal and the material. However, already in the Middle Ages geometry had served the purpose of mediating origin and end, transcendence and human perception. At the height of his pilgrimage and great feat of linguistic invention, Dante strives to convey to the reader his effort to see God (in the journey) and represent him (in the poem) through the image of the geometer who gazes into the mystery of the squaring of the circle and yet cannot find the solution:

\[
\text{Qual è il geomètra che tutto s'affige} \\
\text{per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova,} \\
\text{pensando, quel principio ond'elli indige,} \\
\text{tal era io a quella vista nova:} \\
\text{veder volea come si convenne} \\
\text{l'imago al cerchio e come vi s'indova}\(^{53}\)
\]

(Par XXXIII, 133-138)

The comparison with this frustrated geometer is both appropriate to Dante's impossible attempt to see God, and paradoxical, as the geometer is, literally, he

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\(^{53}\) "As is the geometer who wholly applies himself to measure the circle, and finds not, in pondering, the principle of which he is in need, such was I at that new sight. I wished to see how the image conformed to the circle and how it has its place therein".
who measures the earth, whereas Dante is trying to encompass linguistically concepts that are by definition beyond any measure.

In an equally paradoxical way, the image of the geometer who strives to see into the mystery of the squaring of the circle, a metaphor for the divine radiance of the vision, also recalls an earlier episode of striving to see into the darkness: in *Inferno* XV Dante and Virgil meet a host of souls,

\[
[...] e ciascuna
ci riguardava come suol da sera
guardare uno altro sotto nuova luna;
e si ver' noi aguzzavan le ciglia
come 'l vecchio sartor fa ne la cruna.\textsuperscript{54}
\]

\textit{Paradiso} \textit{XXXII}, 139-141), Dante's human "favella" (speech, language) is too "short" to convey even the memory of his vision - let alone the vision itself:

\[
Omai sarà più corta mia favella,
\textit{(Inf} XV, 17-21\textit{)}
\]

I have argued elsewhere\textsuperscript{55} that this image may have been used by Joyce for the first paragraph of the short story "The Sisters", where the desire to learn and the mystery of words and death are associated with that puzzling concept of Euclidean geometry, the "gnomon", which suggests incompleteness but is also etymologically related to knowledge. The simile of the tailor is, as I have already suggested,\textsuperscript{56} also important in the context of Dante's final vision. As for the tailor in the image used by St. Bernard in the previous canto to allude to Dante's limited powers ("qui farem punto, come buon sartore / che com'elli ha del panno fa la gonna",\textsuperscript{57} *Paradiso* \textit{XXXII}, 139-141), Dante's human "favella" (speech, language) is too "short" to convey even the memory of his vision - let alone the vision itself:

\[
Omai sarà più corta mia favella,
\]

\textsuperscript{54} "[...] and each looked at us as men look at one another under a new moon at dusk; and they knit their brows at us as the old tailor does at the eye of his needle."

\textsuperscript{55} "The Sisters' and the *Inferno*, 455-57.

\textsuperscript{56} Cf. pp. 187-188 supra.

\textsuperscript{57} "We will stop here, like a good tailor that cuts the garment according to his cloth."
pur a quel ch'io ricordo, che d'un fante
che bagni ancor la lingua a la mammella.58 (Par XXXIII, 106-108)

Oh quanto è corto il dire e come fioco
al mio concetto59 (Par XXXIII, 121-122)

The geometer's efforts fall short of solving the mystery, Dante's speech is short: the poet must end his poetic journey here because his measure - his length of cloth - is finished. At the height of his journey to God, the "father" of the Italian language cannot grasp the mystery of the son, the father and the Word, nor invent a language to "say" it, and has to revert to the condition of a small child who is just learning to say his words ("fante", just one step ahead, as it were, of the "Infant" of Singleton's translation), and St Bernard has to ask for the Virgin Mother's intercession to grant Dante the vision his limited powers cannot give him (Beatrice is already praying God): from the man Dante to God the Father, from the author of words to the Word, the necessary bridging measure can be granted only through the agency of saintly, virginal women.

In the Geometry Lesson of Finnegans Wake - Joyce's own attempt at "circling the square" (FW 186.12), structurally realised in the transposition of the siglum for the book, a square,60 into the circle formed by the continuation of the last sentence into the first - the children learn their "triv and quad" (FW 306.12-13), and Dante's questing geometer is transformed into the quested "geomater"61 - mother earth, mother of the earth - whose "whome" (the womb, the origin, the

58 "Now will my speech fall [literally, "be"] more short, even in respect to that which I remember, than that of an infant who still bathes his tongue at the breast."
59 "O how scant [lit.: short] is speech, and how feeble to my conception!"
60 Also the polygon ideally formed by any fourfold pattern of interpretation, whether linguistic, historical or other.
61 Through an anagram no doubt made even easier by the change of stress in Dante's line from the usual "geômetra" to "geomètra" to preserve the rhythm of the endecasyllable.
telos; a feminised alpha and omega) Shem / Dolph wants to reveal to Shaun / Kev: "I'll make you to see figurativealy the whome of your eternal geomater" (FW 296.30-297.01). At the same time, the inscription of the river Liffey / ALP, figured through the triangle of her delta, in the circle (see the diagram on page 293 of the Wake, reproduced in figure 1 below, p. 214) may transpose Dante's inscription of the river into the circle of the one and triune face of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the last cantos of Paradiso.

Before we proceed, Joyce's geometrical steps must be retraced briefly; a checklist leading up to II.2 would include at least the gnomon in "The Sisters", the French triangle in "Scylla and Charybdis", Miss Portinari as an isosceles triangle in "Eumaeus" and the "isoscelating biangle" (FW 165.13) constructed by the twins within the story of Burrus, Caseous and Margareen (FW 1.6).

The "gnomon" did not appear in the first version of "The Sisters", published in 1904 in The Irish Homestead; it was added, together with the words "paralysis" and "simony" and the entire Dantean intertext, when Joyce radically rewrote the story in 1906.33 Perhaps one could identify this as the period in which Joyce developed an insight into the uses to which Euclidean geometry might be put for literary ends, and one way of looking at this issue may be to see it in the context of the use of scientific metaphors for the literary activity by many artists at the turn of the century and in the first decades of the twentieth century. Apart from Cubist and Futurist uses of geometrical drawings and metaphors, one can think for instance of Eliot's image of poetic activity as a chemical process, which he condensed in the

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62 Mary Reynolds, in a brief discussion of Joyce's allusions in Finnegans Wake to the last canto of Paradiso writes that Joyce's adaptation of the geometry problem from Dante's "geometra" transformed it into a "grotesque" and "ludicrous distortion". It will be clear from the rest of the chapter that I do not agree with this interpretation; the transformation is comical, but its premises and function too serious to be treated only as a mere distortion which "[i]n part [...] can be traced to the free-association of the dream, and in part is a reminder that Dante's own sublimity includes and poetically uses grotesque components" (Joyce and Dante, 212).

63 Boldrini, "The Artist Paring His Quotations".
well-known simile of the "catalyst",64 or Conrad's process of "crystallization".65 Another important example would be Pound's reliance on scientific theories of energy, including Cartesian geometry, for his vorticist poetics and for his later writings.66 In this sense, Joyce's gnomon and, later, the circles and triangles of Finnegans Wake, would be related to the use of other scientific images, such as Luigi Galvani's "enchantment of the heart", analogous for Stephen to the epiphanic moment when the Aquinian radiance of the aesthetic object arrests the mind (P 213). It is certainly possible that some geometrical/literary figures in Joyce's work may have been favoured by this widespread attempt to re-define art as a scientific and precise activity rather than one inspired by a kind of Romantic and unaccountable genius, and that Pound's reliance on geometry in the definition of his poetics and in his criticism in the 1910s (especially his analogy between the Divine Comedy and the equation that relates the right-angle triangle to the circle in analytical geometry), may have offered a more or less conscious source for some of Joyce's own geometrical images in Ulysses and especially in Finnegans Wake.67

In The Spirit of Romance (1910) Pound wrote:

The Commedia, as Dante has explained in the Epistle to Can Grande, is written in four senses: the literal, the allegorical, the anagogical, and the ethical. For this form of arcana we find the best parallel in the expressions of mathematics. Thus, when we are able to see that one general law governs such a series of equations as 3x3 + 4x4 = 5x5, or written more simply, 3² + 4² = 5², 6² + 8² = 10², 12² + 16² = 20², etc., express the common

66 Cf. Ian F. A. Bell, Critic as Scientist: The Modernist Poetics of Ezra Pound (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), and in particular the first chapter, "Poet as geometer", 5-42, which discusses Pound's interest in James McNeill Whistler's art and in Cartesian analytic geometry for the development of his Vorticist theories.
67 This is a purely speculative hypothesis, as I have found no indication that Joyce and Pound exchanged ideas about geometry. But Pound's use of circles and triangles in his criticism of Dante and Joyce's inscription of the "geometer"'s triangle in the circle in the Wake, as well as the literary friendship between the two in the second half of the 1910s, suggest that the possibility should not be discounted altogether.
relation algebraically $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. When one has learned common and analytical
gometry, one understands that this relation, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$, exists between two sides of the
right angle triangle and its hypothenuse, and that likewise in analytics for the points
forming the circumference of any circle. Thus to a trained mathematician the cryptic $a^2 +
b^2 = c^2$ expresses:

1st. A series of abstract numbers in a certain relation to each other.
2nd. A relation between certain abstract numbers.
3rd. The relative dimensions of a figure; in this case a triangle.
4th. The idea or ideal of the circle.

Thus the Commedia is, in the literal sense, a description of Dante's vision of a journey
through the realms inhabited by the spirits of men after death; in a further sense, it is the
journey of Dante's intelligence through the states of mind wherein dwell all sorts of
conditions of men before death; beyond this, Dante or Dante's intelligence may come to
mean "Everyman" or "Mankind", whereas his journey becomes a symbol of mankind's
struggle upward out of ignorance into the clear light of philosophy. In the second sense I
give here, the journey is Dante's own mental and spiritual development. In a fourth sense,
the Commedia is an expression of the laws of eternal justice.

It is evident that for Pound, at this stage, analytical geometry provided a system
which, thanks to its abstract formulas, could account for what he saw as the
"arcane" relations within the literary work, in this particular case Dante's four
levels of meaning. The parallel, however, remained quite mechanical, and in no
way is the geometrical example brought to bear on Dante's poem. On the
contrary, Joyce's use of geometry in his works seems to suggest, rather than a

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69 Eight years later, in the preface to the catalogue of the Gaudier-Brzeska memorial
exhibition, Pound found in the sculpture "The Dancer" the occasion to return on the relations
between triangles and circles in a way that goes beyond the purely analogic and sees geometry in
the sculptor's work as part of the artistic exploration of forms. "The Dancer" is for Pound "almost
a thesis of [Gaudier-Brzeska's] ideas upon the use of pure form. We have the triangle and the circle
asserted, labeled almost, upon the face and right breast. Into these so-called "abstractions" life
flows, the circle moves and elongates into the oval, it increases and takes volume in the sphere or
hemisphere of the breast. The triangle moves toward organism it becomes a spherical triangle (the
central life-form common to both Brzeska and Lewis). These two developed motifs work as
themes in a fugue. We have the whole series of spherical triangles, as in the arm over the head, all
comand culminating in the great sweep of the back of the shoulders, as fine as any surface in all
sculpture. The "abstract" or mathematical bareness of the triangle and the circle are fully incarnate,
made flesh, full of vitality and of energy." (Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir, New York: New
metaphor or an analogy for the poetic activity, a field that is woven into the reflection on the poetic and opens up the possibility of an inquiry into the broader question of origins and of the potentiality as well as limitations of language. It is therefore fitting that the use of geometry should be part of an intertextual practice (which, it should be clear by now, I understand as a practice in which the issues at stake also need to include the relationships between source and outcome, literary fathers and necessarily irreverent sons, original model and transformed rewriting) in which one of the main sources, Dante, also used geometry in his attempt to "stretch" language beyond its limitations and, in the process, had to admit his own limitations, his own regression to a state of near-infancy, and the ineluctable "shortness" of language.

It will not come as a surprise, then, that Joyce's use of geometrical figures very often appears in a context where Dante is also appealed to in one form or another. Stephen's rather puzzling definition of Dante's historical referent for his poetic Beatrice, Bice Portinari, ("Then, Stephen said [...] we have the impetuosity of Dante and the isosceles triangle. Miss Portinari, he fell in love with", U 592), can perhaps retrospectively be read as a first appearance of what Joyce would develop in Finnegans Wake, the female (sex) as triangle and the opposition between isosceles and equilateral (see below). Translated into a less sophisticated idiom, Stephen's words would have to read something like, "the impetuosity of Dante and that cunt, Miss Portinari, he fell in love with." As Stephen's previous mention of Dante's (platonic) love of Beatrice was put in terms of "the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri" (P 252), one notices how that frigidity is now transposed into the perhaps cold logic of a geometrical figure, yet one cannot but be struck also by the incongruity of Dante's "impetuosity", which suggests something rather more passionate than a refrigerator. "Isosceles", defined in "the Euclid" (D 9) as "that
which has two equal sides”, etymologically means “equal-legged” and can therefore evoke the image of the compasses (as in FW 295.27, where the “daintical pair of compasses” encompasses a pair of dainty and accomplished lasses, as well as the [Dantean?] pair of compasses needed to encircle the triangle in the problem set to the twins and illustrated in the diagram on FW 293), but it also suggests, perhaps more appropriately in the context of Stephen’s bitter remark, the triangle at the apex of that equal-legged, if spiritualised, creature loved by Dante.71

No wonder it is misogynist Stephen who uses this (tri)angular image for Beatrice, while Bloom’s rejoinder draws attention again to the rotundity of the female form: “I was just looking at those antique statues there [in the Kildare Street Museum]. The splendid proportions of hips, bosom. You simply don’t knock against those kind of women here. An exception here and there. Handsome, yes, pretty in a way you find, but what I’m talking about is the female form” (U 592). (One can also think of “Ithaca”, where Bloom’s attention is drawn to the round shape of Molly’s buttocks.)

One suggestion comes to mind: if ALP is the triangle inscribed within the circularity of a river-like flow of words in turn inscribed within the square that is the book according to Joyce’s siglum for Finnegans Wake, it is possible to see the Wake as offering a compromising and encompassing solution to the alternative between Stephen’s and Bloom’s figurations of the female form. But the Wake’s trigonometry extends and redefines the relationship between the female and the geometric in other ways too, which include the relationship between the maternal

70 This definition can be found in any textbook of Euclidean geometry; I borrow the bibliographical reference from Fritz Senn, “The aliments of jumeantry” (A Wake Newsletter, Vol. Ill, No 3, June 1966, pp. 51-54), who relies on Euclid’s Elements, edited by Isaac Todhunter in 1862 and mentioned more than once in the Wake’s “Geometry Lesson”. Senn’s article is the earliest and still the most comprehensive demonstration of the extent of Joyce’s reliance on “the Euclid”.

71 My thanks to Fritz Senn for pointing out that the German for isosceles, “gleichschenklig” (literally, having equal-thighs) supports the sexual meaning of the triangle even more explicitly.
and the paternal, the linguistic and the ineffable and/or unspeakable. It is necessary therefore to take a digressive path through Stephen's musings in "Scylla and Charybdis", the chapter where Stephen's reflections on the material and maternal link of filiation, symbolised in the early chapters of Ulysses by his insistence on the umbilical cord as both maternal and mystic link, shift to an allegiance to the paternal and the immaterial. In "Proteus" the "navelcord" (U 38) constitutes a biological link through all generations, back to the navel-less Eve, and also enables the mystic vision:

The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh. That is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos. Hello. Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one. Spouse and helpmate of Adam Kadmon: Heva, naked Eve. She had no navel. Gaze. Belly without blemish, bulging big, a buckler of taut vellum, no, whiteheaped corn, orient and immort, standing from everlasting to everlasting. Womb of sin. Wombed in sin darkness I was too, made not begotten. By them, the man with my voice and eyes and a ghostwoman with ashes on her breath. (U 38).

The materiality of this maternal connection shifts in "Scylla and Charybdis" to the immateriality of the paternal link, a void, a legal fiction but nevertheless now more stable and resistant - because uncertain - than any maternal cord, at least in the processes of literary, rather than biological, creation:

- A father, Stephen said, battling against hopelessness, is a necessary evil. He wrote the play in the months that followed his father's death. If you hold that he, a greying man with two marriageable daughters, with thirtyfive years of life, nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita, with fifty of experience, is the beardless undergraduate from Wittenberg then you must hold that his seventyyear old mother is the lustful queen. No. The corpse of John Shakespeare does not walk the night. From hour to hour it rots and rots. He rests, disarmed

Footnote: A shift which can be seen also in the diverse associations that towers and pillars evoke in Stephen: the umbilical Martello tower, the "omphalos" (U 17) from which he is evicted, and the phallic Nelson Pillar of his Parable of the Plums, from which the two "Dublin vestals" spit plum stones on to the city (U 139-42).
of fatherhood, having devised that mystical estate upon his son. Boccaccio's Calandrino was
the first and last man who felt himself with child. Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious
begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only
begetter to only begotten. On that mystery and not on the madonna which the cunning
Italian intellect flung to the mob of Europe the church is founded and founded irremovably
because founded, like the world, macro and microcosm, upon the void. Upon incertitude,
upon unlikelihood. Amor matrix, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true
thing in life. Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son
should love him or he any son?

(U 198-199)

"A mystical estate, an apostolic succession": like the navelcords of "Proteus",
fatherhood acquires the status of a (mystic) chain leading back to the origin, but
this time without any material ties; in this widely commented passage, the shift
from motherhood to fatherhood is also a shift from the concrete to the nebulous,
from the clear identifiable origin to the incertitude of authority. The maternal is now
reserved only for the biological relationship, but as we have seen, Stephen has
already rejected his biological self ("Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other
I got pound", U 182) in favour of the psychological, immaterial identity based
solely on memory.

Stephen's words, hopelessly cast against the Platonism of Dublin's
intellectual circle, should be seen as a further development of the theory of the
artist's "impersonalisation" that emerged in A Portrait out of Stephen's "true
scholastic stink" (P 214). In the earlier novel, literature is for Stephen the most
spiritual of arts, in which forms are not, but should be, clearly distinguished:
"Even in literature, the highest and most spiritual art, the forms are often confused"
(P 214). It is perhaps in response to Russell's Platonist advocacy of literature as the
expression of the "formless spiritual essences"73 (a phrase Stephen mentally

73 "Art has to reveal to us ideas, formless spiritual essences [...] The deepest poetry of
Shelley, the words of Hamlet bring our mind into contact with the eternal wisdom, Plato's world
of ideas. All the rest is the speculation of schoolboys for schoolboys." (U 177)
repeats in conjunction with other theosophist concepts, *U* 178) that Stephen is spurred into reworking the theory in which he had defended to his friend Lynch the clear definition and separation of literary forms. In his morphogenesis of literary genres, Stephen identifies the lyrical as the most primitive, instinctual and purely expressive:

The lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. He who utters it is more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion.  

*(P 214)*

The second phase, the epical, figures as an extension of the lyrical, when a self-reflexive attitude emerges in the subject and the subject knows himself as a subject: "The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event" *(P 214)*. This progression finally leads to the third step, the artist de-centring himself, becoming only a point in the circle of the literary work: "and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal" *(P 214-15)*. Stephen continues:

The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. [...] The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination.  

*(P 215)*

In the words used by Stephen in "Scylla and Charybdis",

*[a]*s we [...] weave and unweave our bodies [...] from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image. And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff
time after time, so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth.  

Betraying his reliance on the theory explained to Lynch in *A Portrait*,\(^74\) which in turn is a re-elaboration of the theory of the epiphany illustrated to Cranly in *Stephen Hero*,\(^75\) Stephen continues: "[i]n the intense instant of imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal, that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be" (U 186-87).\(^76\)

In *A Portrait*, Stephen's conclusion - perhaps one of the most quoted sentences from Joyce's works - anticipates both the theme of the mystical and the necessity of the "void", of the unstable, the unlikely of "Scylla and Charybdis":

The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails. (P 215)

Stephen's shift to the paternal in matters aesthetic in *Ulysses* has then already been prepared by *A Portrait*. Is it because of the artist's need to impersonalise

\(^74\) "This supreme quality is felt by the artist when the aesthetic image is first conceived in his imagination. The mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal" (P 213).

\(^75\) And it is striking that the younger self Stephen Dedalus looks back at while heroically countering Dublin Platonist attitudes, is as much the Daedalus of *Stephen Hero* who had declaimed his theories to Cranly (mentioned four times in the Library chapter), as the Artist of *A Portrait* who recited them to Lynch.

\(^76\) Typically, Stephen has already undermined his theory of the artist weaving and unweaving his images to become a father unto himself when, in his history lesson in "Nestor", his own musing on the possible are treated as futile weavings of wind: "They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted. But can those have been possible seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible which came to pass? Weave, weaver of the wind" (U 25). In the previous chapter, "Telemachus", when he thinks of the theory he will not expound until "Scylla and Charybdis", Stephen prophesies: "The void awaits surely all them that weave the wind" (21) (see Dan Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated* Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: U of California P, 1988, 26 for Stephen's sources). Retrospectively, Penelope / Molly's weavings in the last chapter of the book also provide a female counterpoint to Stephen's "male" weavings.
himself that biological generation (female, material) cannot constitute the model for 
Stephen and a mystical, trinitarian and all-male one has to be relied upon, while the 
woman - the "madonna" invented by the "cunning Italian intellect" - plays a merely 
 marginal role and can safely be "flung to the mob of Europe", her status demoted 
from Virgin to Adulteress, her form from the circular (of which Bloom remains a 
champion) to the angular? Maybe, then, it is in the context of this shift of 
allegiances from the material to the "void" that Stephen's later definition of Beatrice 
as isosceles triangle in *Ulysses* should be read: a Platonically ideal but sterile form, 
frigid despite Danto's impetuosity, incapable of (Aristotelian) generation and 
therefore, because fruitless, a sexual being unredeemable by any spiritualisation 
(but unexplicitly sexual: the unmentionable is figured, not said).

In fact, to continue this quest back into the origins and evolution of aesthetic 
theories, Joyce's early essay "Drama and Life" (1900) encapsulated the core of the 
principle of impersonality in ways which already foreshadowed the linking of 
poetics with the problem of the ineffable, the divine, and the need to mediate 
between the transcendent and the immanent: "[t]he artist foregoes his very self and 
stands as a mediator in awful truth before the veiled face of God" (*CW* 42). In 
order to mediate, the artist has to void his self and diffuse it - weave and unweave it 
- into language; but the veiled face of God, which the artist's mediation unveils, 
will become for the mature artist the veiled equilateral sex of the mother which the 
artist-child, Shem / Dolph, promises to unveil by lifting her skirt in his "maieutic" 
quest for knowledge.

But does *Ulysses* in fact support Stephen's claim for an all-male fiction of 
creation, or does the novel ironise his artist-protagonist's speculations as *A Portrait* 
had done by reverting from the third-person impersonal narration to the first-
person, lyrical (more primitive) form of the diary in the last pages? I would suggest 
that *Ulysses* may indeed be read as undermining the theory of art as male gestation
and (re)production, and not only because the mythical weaver and unweaver, Penelope, a woman, has the last word. *Ulysses* is a book of many climaxes: in "Sirens", when, during Bloom's imagined seduction of Molly by Boylan, the seductions of the sirens at the bar include Simon Dedalus's song, transformed by Bloom's monologue into an intersubjective, communal orgasm or orgasmic communion; in "Nausicaa" for Bloom, Gerty, the Roman candle and the crowds watching it, the congregation in the church, the narration in its rhythms, even the readers in their voyeurism of Gerty's and Bloom's voyeurism; in "Ithaca" in the libretto's "final indications" for *Love's Old Sweet Song* sung together by Boylan and Molly: "ad libitum, forte, pedal, animato, sustained, pedal, ritirando, close" (U 659). *Ulysses* is also a book that denies its readers a single narrative climax, when Bloom and Stephen come together but do not stay together, when the Blooms may be reconciled but perhaps are not reconciled, and so on. *Ulysses* is a book without an individual culmination because it allows for multiple climaxes. Some years after the publication of *Ulysses*, Orlando's biographer in Virginia Woolf's novel has to admit, finally:

[…] and we must snatch space to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination to which the whole book moved, this peroration with which the book was to end, should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place - climinations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man.78

Bloom is "the new womanly man" (U 465), the man who menstruates (in "Circe"), who experiences in "Ithaca" the "surety of the sense of touch of his firm full masculine feminine passive active hand" (U 627). Bloom, less than Orlando, less than Tiresias, but certainly more than Stephen, is one of the several

77 "Come. Well sung. All clapped. She ought to. Come. To me, to him, to her, you too, me, us" (U 265).
androgynous or semi-androgynous figures of modernism (Shakespeare too is briefly discussed in "Scylla and Charybdis" as an androgynous figure). Can one suggest that, like its semi-androgynous protagonist, *Ulysses* itself, with its possibility of multiple "culminations and perorations", becomes a semi-androgynous narrative that undercuts in its literary practice the literary theory of its other, misogynist, protagonist who would see literary creation as founded on a mystical and nebulous male fiction of fatherhood and male self-engendering proved by algebra and figured in a French triangle? Does the poly-climactic narrative structure of *Ulysses* suggest that this is, precisely, a fiction?

If this is the case, the female geometry of *Finnegans Wake* may be seen as yet another extension (and perhaps undercutting) of Stephen's reflection on maternal and paternal origins, on the divinity of engendering and self-engendering, and of the need to go in search of the origins - one's own origins, as well as the origins (but also the end) of an author's authority and language; and, finally, in search of how much language can be stretched, and when it becomes "too short". In fact, there is a possibility that what I have just called "female geometry" - the triangle inscribed within the double circles in the diagram on p. 293 (figure 1, p. 214) - should perhaps be reinterpreted as "androgynous geometry", if the striking similarity between the *Wake*’s diagram and Giordano Bruno's figuration of the unity of opposites, which has also been interpreted as the simplest figuration of androgyny is observed (fig. 2, p. 214).

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figure 1: *FW 293*, the "whome" of the "eternal geomater"

figure 2: Bruno's union of opposites

(The area common to the two circles is in both cases the *vescica piscis*;[^82] "at the centre of this area artists used to represent both the Virgin and Christ because it is the space where two are one"[^83])

[^82]: Clive Hart has examined various symbolic figures and diagrams of *Finnegans Wake*. See Structure and Motif in *Finnegans Wake*, esp. chapters 4 and 5, on the circle and the cross respectively. Of the diagram of *FW 293* Hart writes: "In a celebrated drawing by Leonardo, genitals and navel are the centres of the square and the circle which circumscribe the human figure drawn in two superimposed attitudes, approximating a *tau* cross and a quincunx respectively. [...] In any case, for Joyce navel and genitals are equivalent; they are contraries - the beginning and the end of birth - and so coincide. In the diagram on page 293 the navel and genitalia are respectively the upper and lower vertices of the central rhombus" (137-38).

[^83]: Elémire Zolla, *Incontro con l'androgino*, 84.
During the various pseudo-geometrical demonstrations of *FW* II.2, the logarithmic "quarrellary" of an "unpassible" (*FW* 298.18) proposition in which eternal self-reproduction turns into poetic self-propagation is that "The logos of somewome to that base anything, when most characteristically mantissa minus, comes to nullum in the endth" (298.19-21). "[S]omewome" suggests someone, some woman, some womb, and therefore also some "whome", since the aim of the whole geometrical exercise is to show the "whome" of the "eternal geomater". "The logos of "somewome" points to the possibility of a feminine logos, or Logos, through which ALP would achieve the status not only of a pagan mother-earth goddess, but also of a feminised version of the Christian God as Word - a word which now transcends the gossip of the washerwomen in order to become the divine Logos for which human language eventually fails, falls short, and inevitably therefore fades away into silence ("comes to nullum in the endth").

Finally, perhaps, Stephen's theory of filiation, patterned both on the French triangle of *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's biography and on the triangle of the Trinity to which the female is only instrumental, is transformed into a female Word Goddess

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84 In her *Eternal Geometer: The Sexual Universe of Finnegans Wake* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois U P, 1969), Margaret Solomon discusses the geometrical problems of *FW* II.2 in the chapter "Plain geometry" (103-112). Her approach aims at showing how in each expression of the problem the *Wake* manages to include references to all the characters and their sexuality and how, therefore, each geometrical figure becomes an expression of completeness and all-inclusiveness. While I find some of Solomon's identifications and solutions convincing, her interpretation is a rather mechanical list of correspondences between the sigla and the figures; moreover, my general understanding of the function of geometry in the *Wake* is, as will be made even clearer in the discussion below, the exact opposite: while Solomon tends to solve all the problems through these identifications, it is my view that what matters is that the problems constructed in II. 6 and 1.2 cannot be solved in geometrical terms (of course, this does not mean that they may not include the configurations of the various sigla pointed out by Solomon).

85 "[R]eurnally reproductive of themselves" (298.17-18) suggests "reproductive" of the word, of poetry (Latin and early Italian *dictare*; to dictate, to compose poetry; German *Dichtung*, poetry, *Dichter*, poet), also recalling the world's (and the *Wake's*) mysterious and self-engendering writing ("But the world, mind, is, was and will be writing its own runes for ever", *FW* 19.35-36).
endowed with attributes that appear to be the same as those of an ever-expanding divinity whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is infinite:86

to expense herself as sphere as possible, paradismic perimutter, in all directions on the bend of the unbridalled, the infinitissimalls of her facets becoming manier and manier as the calicolum of her undescrribables (one has thoughts of that eternal Rome) shrinks from schurtiness to scherts. (FW 298.27-299.01)

The "undescribability", unmeasurability, ineffability of the divinity is mixed, as always, with the unmentionable, the sexual, here the shrinking of the shirt (which will be lifted by Dolph to show the mother's sex to Kev) as well as the shortness of the words to tell about it; the ever-expanding, all-comprehending god/dess and the (sexually) spending mother, her perimeter encompassing all - not just the earth, but the spheres, the heaven, the paradisiacal: "paradismic perimutter."87

It is possible then to surmise that this expansion and creation of a "divine" mother-language (as well as of a divine mother) is what enables the transcension of the paternal into the maternal (and maybe further into the androgynous), and what allows, on the one hand, the overcoming and the overturning of the father and the father-language (Erse) in FW II.3 (in the episode of Buckley and the Russian

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86 Compare the definition that Love gives of himself in the Vita Nuova, denying Dante a similar completeness and centrality: "Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui similis modo se habent circumferentiae partes: tu autem non sic" ("I am like the centre of a circle, in relation to which all points are always at the same distance: but you are not the same"), Vita Nuova XIII.

87 In fact, it is her "holy" nature that mediates between divinity and the hole, gap or void of the triangle, and it is again interesting to point out that already in "The Sisters" the geometrical had the function of mediating between the materiality of the word ("I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work", D 9) and the void or incompleteness of the gnomon.

Fritz Senn has recently argued in a conference paper that while the gnomon has traditionally been read as pointing to incompleteness, it can also be seen as producing a new shape, in fact two: the parallelogram with the piece missing, and the new, smaller parallelogram. In the light of what I have written above, I am tempted to interpret Senn's argument as pointing to a reproduction of the geometrical figure by parthenogenesis or hermaphroditic sexuality. After all, it appears in the context of a relation between pupil and teacher that has often been read as hinting at an unexpressed homosexuality (or, as Stephen says in "Scylla and Charybdis" when talking about Shakespeare, at a "love that dare not speak its name [U 194] and for which therefore an alternative, "figural" language has to be devised).
general I have discussed in chapter 3) and, on the other hand, retrospectively, the reversal of the trajectory delineated by Stephen and which now moves back again from the paternal to the maternal. Incidentally, this reversal also goes through the necessary redefinition of the feminine as nebulous (Issy is Nuvoletta, ALP is and has been a cloud too) and as continually refining itself out of existence (through evaporation, rain, disappearance into the sea) in order to pervade the entire creation.

As we know, however, Joyce's texts are never straightforward, and despite the reversal of gender relations with regard to poetic as well as biological and biographical engendering, the treatment of the geometrical problems of chapters I.6 and II.2 suggests a much more complex answer for the schoolboys in this text. The risk is that the hi/story will not change and will go on repeating itself: if Stephen's French triangle in "Scylla and Charybdis" was a story of adultery and betrayal, of broken promises and unpaid debts, FW I.6 involves an "absolutely unadulterous" Burrus and a Caseous who is "obversely the revise of him", while FW II.2 is also a tale of "trifid tongues" (281.16) and of a "bifurking calamum" (302.15-16), of double if not even treble talk, of forked tongues, of betrayal.

As the grammatical form suggests, the "isoscelating biangle" of FW 165.13 is a triangle in progress, whose only possible shape (figure 3, p. 218) seems to offer the exact opposite of what its name ("equal-legged") suggests (figure 4, p. 218). The twins' "isoscelating biangle" is then a sort of contradiction in terms, and it is only through the junction of the actual drawing and the literal name that we

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88 The "isoscelating biangle" has been discussed, within the context of the genetic relation of I.6 to II.2, by Laurent Milesi in "Killing Lewis With Einstein: 'Secting Time' in Finnegans Wake", in Andrew Treip (ed.), Teems of Times: European Joyce Studies 4, Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994, 9-20.

89 Incidentally, figure 4 corresponds to the siglum Joyce used for Shaun. Whether this is coincidental or whether it should suggest a femalehood that can be completed only through the participation of a male component (or, to pursue the line explored above, a completeness that can be achieved only in the androgynous), remains in question.
do obtain a Euclidean isosceles triangle. And seen in another way, the "isoscelating biangle" is also a gnomonic figure, an isosceles triangle from which an isosceles triangle has been cut out (figure 5):

figure 3: the "isoscelating biangle" (FW 165.13)

figure 4: equal-legged

figure 5: the gnomonic triangle

The "isoscelating biangle", or even the more complete but still Platonically limited isosceles triangle, will have to grow into a full-blown and equilateral triangle in order to graduate from the frigid, two-legged and incomplete (in progress) or purely spiritual and sterile one (like Beatrice) to the earthly and motherly (possibly androgynous) triangle of the "geomater".
If FW I.6 begets a figure which is a contradiction in terms, similarly the problem in chapter II.2 has no solution: as it were, a "family umbroglia" (Italian *imbrolio*, both "swindle" and muddled, confused, entangled situation):

Show that the median, *hce che ech*, intersecting at right angles the parilegs of a given obtuse one bisects both the arcs that are in curveachord behind. Brickbaths. The family umbroglia. (FW 283.32-284.04)

It is impossible to draw the figure as requested: we are asked to draw a median line (and are given three points for it, "hce che ech", which is either misleading or useless, because a straight line only needs two points to be drawn) that intersects at right angles the obtuse angle of an isosceles triangle ("the parilegs [= equal legs, = isosceles] of a given obtuse"), but the only possible median of an obtuse angle will form two equal angles that can only be acute (figure 6); they certainly cannot be right because only an angle of 180° can be bisected into two right angles - in which case it is no longer an angle (certainly not part of a triangle) but a straight line (figure 7, p. 220).90 The only way one can form right angles is through two secting lines (figure 8, p. 220).

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90 As Solomon points out, the result, a T-shaped figure, would be the siglum for Issy (*Eternal Geomater*, 103-105).
The median should also bisect the arc behind ("curvechord": in fact another contradiction in terms, because the chord is straight and cuts the curvilinear arc), or bis-cut it, i.e., cut it twice, which, again, is impossible: in order to have two arcs they need to meet the angle at the apex, and in that case the median, or whichever line secting the angle, can only cut it once (figure 9);\(^{91}\) to make it possible for the median to cut the arc twice, the arc should be extended into a circle, so that the median could cut it again at the opposite side (figure 10, p. 221).

\(^{91}\) The angle, the arcs and the possible "median" of figure 9 form an umbrella-like shape: is this a version of the "family umbroglia"?
The situation is again that of the contradictory "isoscelating biangle" of I.6. The *Wake* consistently creates problems which are impossible to solve ("cruxes"), not unlike the one faced by the geometer of Dante's *Paradiso*. Moreover, that three letters are given for the median which would only need two, also reproduces the pattern of incommensurable twos and threes (the isosceles triangle having two legs, etc), of "bifurking calamums" and "trifid tongues" that has haunted Stephen first, the twins next, in the attempt perhaps somehow to reconcile the irreducible opposition between the number of the ideal couple - two - and the number of the adulterous couple - three - which is also, inevitably, the number of the trinitarian deity (and of course two and three - the two prostitutes and the three soldiers - are also the numbers that recur in conjunction with HCE's hetero- or homosexual sin in Phoenix Park).

As in "The Sisters", where the child is "learning" from Father Flynn and is fascinated by the power and action of words, "Scylla and Charybdis", *FW* I.6 and *FW* II.2 all evoke a context of learning, of seeking to know, perhaps, like in *Paradiso* XXXIII, of regression to a state of near-infancy. In the Library chapter, to Russell's retort that "Art has to reveal to us ideas, formless spiritual essences. [...] All the rest is the speculation of schoolboys for schoolboys", Stephen responds "superpolitely" that "[t]he schoolmen were schoolboys first [...] Aristotle was once Plato's schoolboy." (*U* 177). In this chain of philosophical teachers and
pupils, Stephen too proves himself a good disciple of Socrates, who in turn had been a good disciple of his wife, from whom he had learned dialectics, and of his mother, from whom he had learned maieutics (U 182-83). Maieutics can, in this context, be defined as drawing knowledge out of the mother’s womb, which is, figuratively, or “figuratleavley” (296.31), what the children are also attempting in chapter II.2: to know about their origins, about origins, to learn (out) of their mother’s womb. (As an aside, one can also point out that one of the midwife’s tasks during childbirth is to measure the size of the mother’s womb - she too is a geometer of sorts).

However good a disciple Stephen is in “Scylla and Charybdis”, there is a lesson in Dante that he has not learned. Stephen wants to become his own father, thus forgoing his status as the son of an unknowable father. Yet what Stephen is missing in Dante’s model - what in the last analysis makes his theory as sterile as Miss Portinari’s Platonic isosceles triangle - is that Dante himself can become the father of the Italian language only by reverting to the condition of a child, a barely speaking son (cf. e.g., “fantolino” Par XXIII, 121; “fantin”, XXX, 82; “fante”, XXXIII, 107); indeed, the vernacular is consistently for Dante the language of babies: “vulgarem locutionem asserimus, quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus” (“we say that the Vulgar Tongue is that which we acquire without any rule, by imitating our nurses”, Dve I.i.2). In what could be read as a complete reversal of Stephen’s model, Dante - himself claiming the title of “miglior fabbro del parlar materno” 92 - turns himself into a son in order to become the father of the mother-language. 93

92 [A] better craftsman of the mother tongue”. This is the title that Dante bestows on Arnaut Daniel in Purg XXVI, 117.
93 A Robert Hollander has shown, in so doing Dante also turns both Virgil, otherwise consistently treated as father, and the Aeneid, into “mothers” (cf. Purg XXI, 97; XXX, 40, 52). Was Dante (unwittingly) already constructing semi-androgynous figures? See Robert Hollander, “Babyspeak in Dante’s Commedia”, which discusses in very subtle and convincing terms the
If the *Wake's* "geomater" is traced back to the "geometra" of *Paradiso* XXXIII, one inevitably wants to pursue the Dantean intertext and read in "figuratleavley" yet another echo. Not long before the image of the geometer, and just before the vision of the universe as a book whose scattered leaves are bound together by love, the fading of the divine vision in the poet's memory is rendered through the image of the scattering of the leaves in whose mysterious figurations the Sibyl read her prophecies:

\[
\text{Così la neve al sol si disigilla;}
\text{così al vento ne le foglie levi}
\text{si perde la sentenza di Sibilla.}\]

These sibylline leaves of mystery that have come to us through at least the classics, the medievals (Dante) and the romantics (Coleridge) and have become in *Finnegans Wake* the sibyl-lines of obscene, therefore unspeakable meanings ("Are those their fata which we read in sibylline between the *fas* and its *negas"? *FW* 31.35-36: that is, between the speakable and the unspeakable) may then reappear (in) "figuratleavely" in the children's attempt to discover the mystery written in the leaves of their mother's book, their mother's equilateral sex.

It appears then that the science whose aim is to measure the earth - the physical world - becomes necessary when the end is to look for the origin, for the metaphysical, the alpha and the omega - but also the essentially and originally physical: the sexual. Geometry has to be relied upon when the end is to speak of

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93 "Nel suo profondo vidi che s'intema, / legato con amore in un volume, / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna" ("In its depth I saw ingathered, bound by love in one single volume, that which is dispersed in leaves throughout the universe" *Par* XXXIII, 85-87).

94 "Thus is the snow unsealed by the sun; thus in the wind, on the light leaves, the Sibyl's oracle was lost."
the unspeakable - the ineffable, the mysterious, the mystic, the obscene; it offers the meta-language (the language about language, the language beyond language) when language fails, falls short, when language itself is found to be "short".

I would suggest that perhaps this is one of the main reasons why, despite the striking analogies in the choice of theme and figures, Pound's and Joyce's uses of geometry are essentially different, and why, while Pound's allegiance goes to Cartesian analytical geometry through which, in his own words, "one is able actually to create" by forgoing the reliance of Euclidean geometry on figures and thus achieving an independence from the material world, Joyce continued to rely in his works on the more concrete and "figural" Euclidean geometry that mediates between ideal, perfect forms and their actual manifestations, and can therefore be adopted by the artist in his own attempt to mediate between the transcendent and the immanent, language and the ineffable, but can also, in the artist's weaving together of figures and letters that evoke the ineffable, be itself the means through which "one is able actually to create".

The equilateral triangle restored in II.2 and inscribed within a perfect circle is indeed both a geometrical figure and a letteral (literary, literal) one, woven on a problematic "loom" that has ceased to weave simple threads, like Penelope's, in favour of vowel- and letter-threads, and which perhaps prefers weaving water to Stephen's weaving of wind:

Problem ye ferst, construct ann aquilitoral dryanle Probe loom! With his primal handstoe in his sole salivarium. Concoct an equnangular trillitter.  

97 Issy's note to the problem reads: "As Rhombulus and Rhebus went building rhomes one day" (FW 286, F1), tying up again the origins of Rome (cf. also "one has thoughts of that eternal Rome", 298.31-32, quoted earlier on p. 216) with the mother's sex from which the children originate and to which their quest leads.
While the problem and its explication by Dolph to Kev may suggest the boys' oedipal desire for the mother (equivalent to Issy's desire for the father), these letters / litters (the three children) complement Issy's vocalic and semivocalic bond by linking vowel (A) with liquid (semi-)consonant (L) and consonant (P) in a double alphabet (A L P and α λ π) and in a stereoscopic\(^{98}\) ("The doubleviewed seeds", *FW* 296.01\(^{99}\)) system of relations that, on the one hand, transforms the plane geometry of page surfaces into the solid geometry of volumes (the book as "polyhedron of scripture"), and, on the other hand, articulates identity (sameness, equality) into variable linguistic and figural weavings by combining "geometrical grammar" (a figural linking of letters in geometrical shapes, such as the sigla) with "grammatical geometry" (a wording of geometrical figures and unsolvable problems).

However, in Joyce's works, geometry is used not only to hint at issues of origin, sexuality and transcendence; it also becomes a means through which to express one's frustrations, antagonism (Stephen's bitterness and misogyny, the twins' antagonism in their eternal battle, the adulterous triangle of "Scylla and Charybdis" but also of *Exiles*). Is it because, as was shown in chapter 1, anagogic transcendence always implies in the Wakean system a literal baseness ("a baser meaning has been read into these characters the literal sense of which decency can safely scarcely hint", 33.14-15); because whatever transcendence we try to read in these characters (graphic signs or letters as well as narratological entities) and between these lines is in fact written in the "sibylline[s]", in the evanescent lines of mystery? Is it because to the problem of transcendence there is no possible transcendent solution, and the only answer can be an attempt at mediation (maybe, like Dante's *geometra*, doomed from the start); why the geometrical problem needs

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\(^{98}\) A stereoscope blends two pictures of an object into one image, so as to give an impression of solidity.

\(^{99}\) Also W, or α; but with the "seeds", the W forms a "WC".
not just one but several medians aspiring to be "right" (to form right angles) but doomed to be imprecise?

The speculation on Dante's levels of meanings led us, as I argued in chapter 2, to acknowledge the impossibility of distinguishing the sense "other" (allegory) from the "letter" because, among other things, the figural use of language could be ascribed neither to the letter nor to the allegory. We come now to yet another paradox: in this polymorphic, polysemic, polyhedral articulation of letters and figures, it is only language and "letterature" that can supply the alternative to the identity of geometry, the repetition of the same as same which is necessary to Euclidean geometry but which the Wake rejects by proposing problems impossible to solve and incomplete shapes (as shown above, even when the shape is complete, like the mother's equilateral triangle, there is no simple solution to the geometrical exercise). Thus if "gnomonic" geometry offers, as I have suggested, the metalanguage when language fails, the necessary length when language is "short", then language and its "sonorous silence" must conversely provide the necessary depth when geometry itself falls short of solving the problem.

Another reason why Euclidean geometry on its own cannot suffice is that Finnegans Wake is, like the Divine Comedy, a book of changing shapes, of metamorphoses: of the object observed, but also and more importantly perhaps, of the observing subject. Metamorphosis is a two-way process which leaves neither side untouched, in which identity is a process of becoming and of mutual influences, and in which the "truth", even for Dante who finally would ground it in a transcendent God, is constantly displaced by the necessity of interpretation, of finding the sense "other". The "truth" can only be approached when the "I" becomes a "you" and a "he" ("intuarsi", "inluiarsi") and opens itself up to the
other, ("immiarsi"); when the "I", that is, ceases to be either a subject or an object, and is both, relinquishing its boundaries and individuality: as Anna Livia wonders towards the end of her course, as she flows into the sea, "you're changing from me, I can feel. Or is it me is? I'm getting mixed" (FW 626.35-36).

In at least two episodes in the Divine Comedy - Purgatorio XIX and Paradiso XXX-XXXIII - Dante's vision changes as he watches, but indeed it is Dante who changes because he is watching; the objects of his visions, the "femmina balba" in Purgatorio and God and the Empyrean in Paradiso, transform as an effect of Dante's own metamorphosis. A vision of sin and one of God, joined by the metamorphosis of the observing subject: "così lo sguardo mio le facea scorta / la lingua" ("so my look made ready her tongue", Purg XIX, 12-13); "ma per la vista che s'avvalorava / in me guardando, una sola parvenza, / mutandom'io, a me si travagliava" ("but through my sight, which was growing strong in me as I looked, one sole appearance, even as I changed, was altering itself to me", Par XXXIII, 112-14). The object, in fact, always remains the same: "tal è sempre qual s'era davante" ("ever is such as it was before" Par XXXIII, 111).

The goal - salvation in Dante's itinerario a Deo, but also and especially poetic success - can be achieved only through the relinquishing of one's subjectivity ("immiarsi", "inluarsi", "intuarsi"), the recognition of the necessity of one's psychological permutations. When in "Scylla and Charybdis" Stephen claims to be biologically another because "molecules all change" but the same psychologically thanks to the agency of memory, he is in effect advocating a serial form of the self and of identity: "everchanging forms" (self-images) threaded together by memory (U 182). In the Wake, memory does not have the stability that could grant even this

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100 Cf. e.g. "Dio vede tutto, e tuo veder s'inalula" (Par IX, 73); and "s'io m'intuassi come tu t'innii" (IX, 81). Singleton's translations read: "God sees all, and into Him your vision sinks" and "were I in you, even as you are in me"; but a literal rendering of Dante's neologisms would have to sound positively wakese: "God sees all, and your vision inhinds", and "if I inyued myself as you inme yourself".
serial notion of the self. Memory is "m'm'ry" (460.20, a silent "mummery"\textsuperscript{101}), deprived of the vowels that signal authenticity, authority, subjectivity. As after Babel, the effort to remember comes against the wall of inevitable oblivion: no permanence of a unified self is possible because Stephen's conception of a stable memory fails: "m'm'ry's leaves are falling" (460.20).

**Only a leaf, just a leaf and then leaves\textsuperscript{102}**

Anna Livia of the multiple beauties, like Dante's Virgin Mother a Brook of life (FW 306.F1; 264.06) adorned with leaves who has however equilaterally lost her virginity, and a "living fountain of hope" ("Elpis, thou fountain of the greeces," FW 267.04; Greek elpis, "hope"),\textsuperscript{103} is then herself a book, the b(r)ook of life and hope; and the flowing and babbling, "hitherandthithering" (FW 216.04) waters of the brook are also the flowing, turning and returning leaves and words of the book, turned by the wind ("how idlers' wind turning pages on pages, [...] the leaves of the living in the boke of the deeds", FW 13.29-31), scattered sibylline leaves slipping into silence (13.29-14.27) "before the bookflood or after her ebb" (FW 118.11-12). The quests for / questionings of the origins, or sources of the river foregrounded throughout the *Wake*,\textsuperscript{104} are ultimately inaccessible - like the problem of the squaring of the circle, like the Nightlesson's several unanswerable problems, like the origin of "that eternal Rome" whose history should go back to the twins fed by the she-wolf but which is transformed once again into a riddle ("robulous rebus", FW 12.34; "As Rhombulus and Rhebus went building rhomes

\textsuperscript{101} Mulligan calls Stephen "the loveliest nummer of them all", *U* 5.
\textsuperscript{102} *FW* 619.22-23.
\textsuperscript{103} "Speranza fontana vivace" ("a lively fountain of hope", *Par* XXXIII, 12).
\textsuperscript{104} Laurent Milesi's "Metaphors of the Quest in *Finnegans Wake*" shows how the question of the sources of the Nile (Nil) inevitably lead to a "Nyanza" (Nyanza, no answer).
The boundless circle will become first the vision of the universe as scattered leaves gathered together in a book by Love (Par XXXIII, 85-87), and then, binding together the river and the Word, the circular and triple vision of the Trinity:

... una sola parvenza,
mutandom'io, a me si travagliava.
Ne la profonda e chiara assistenza
de l'alto lume purvemi tre giri
di tre colori e d'una contenenza;
e l'un da l'altro come iri da iri
parea riflesso, e 'l terzo parea foco

105 "No infant, on waking after its hour, so suddenly rushes with face toward the milk, as then did I, to make yet better mirrors of my eyes, stooping to the wave which flows there that we may be bettered in it".
But the metaphor of the river as word was introduced into the Commedia much earlier, in the first canto of the Inferno, when the pagan Virgil - allegorically, reason without grace, to whom the final vision of God is forbidden - had appeared to Dante as an envoy of Beatrice in order to save him from the dark forest of sin:

"Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte che spandi di parlar si largo flume?"  

(Par XXXIII, 113-120)

Dante's poem is then a journey between two rivers, the river of words and the river of the Word: the former is the river whose words are interpreted in the allegorical tradition and in order to see one's fate, as in the practice of the sortes virgilianae that Issy also tries ("volve the virgil page and view", FW 270.25) only to find that "the O of woman is long" (270.25-26: a long "o", like the omega [Ω] - stretched maybe into the symbol of infinity [∞] ? - or perhaps not quite a perfect circle, elliptical therefore like the celestial courses of the planets and the stars, but if elliptical then perhaps also "gnomonic", incomplete); and the latter is the Word (also, and more legitimately, symbolised by the Omega) which the exegetes have to interpret and which can make things mean "this and that". Anna Liffey, the leafy, the "leafiest", unlike the God of Dante's vision, sheds her leaves in her final flowing into the sea, as she approaches the end of her course, as the book has used up all its leaves. Anna Livia, the female goddess posited by IL.2, appears then more like the immanent universe in which the book "si squaderna" than the God in

106 "[...] one sole appearance, even as I changed, was altering itself to me. Within the profound and shining subsistence of the lofty Light appeared to me three circles of three colors and one magnitude; and one seemed reflected by the other, as rainbow by rainbow, and the third seemed fire breathed forth equally from the one and the other."

107 "Are you, then, that Virgil, that fount which pours forth so broad a stream of speech?"

108 The Biblical Eden is also located between two rivers, like the cradle of Western culture, Mesopotamia, the land between the rivers. Rivers seem to enclose any dream or vision of a perfect, divine or semi-divine location, places sought for, the objects of a quest.
whom the leaves are bound together: as she leaves, Anna Liffey's leaves are shed
and lost. As God "unquires" himself in the universe, so that its meaning has to be
sought for through a fourfold method and yet can never be fully recovered, so do
the sentences of the Sibyl, written in light leaves, disperse their truths at the
opening of the door that lets the wind in, at the banging of the door that shuts the
meanings out. The dispersal of the leaves is the fading of truth into silence, and the
silence can only be filled, partially, by the nth quest for the origin that will always
only lead to a hole, a gap, another silence, which will always "come to nullum in
the endth". Dante has been to God, but the vision is lost and only its sweetness
lingers on, an imperfect memory, the dreamer's imperfect desire to recall upon
awakening (Par XXXIII, 58-64) an experience "impossible to remember" but
"improbable to forget" (FW 617.08-09). As for ALP in her final moments before
coming to "nullum", the confusing orders are "Forget, remember!" (614.22);
"Forget!" (614.26); "Don't forget! [...] Remember" (617.25-27), as the sun rises
and the dream is fading while its sweetness lingers on.
Bibliography

Note: Given the quantity of books and essays published on Joyce and on Dante, it would be impossible to include in this bibliography everything that is relevant to the topic, or even everything I have read on it. This is therefore mainly a "works cited" list, although I have also added other items that have contributed in some ways to the development of my argument. Dante's and Joyce's primary works, works of criticism on Joyce and / or Dante, and other texts cited have been divided in separate sections. In the few instances when an essay or chapter from a book has been listed whose full bibliographical details appear in a different section, a note to that effect has been added.

Primary Texts

Dante


De vulgari eloquentia. Ridotto a miglior lezione, commentato e tradotto da A. Marigo, con introduzione, analisi metrica della canzone, studio della


Joyce


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