THE DREAM PROCESS

The critical assessment of the language of *Finnegans Wake*, with its lexical deviance and semantic density, depends finally on an understanding of the status and function of words in the dream. Those serious *Wake* critics who have judged the linguistic complexity of the work as superfluous—ornamental, perhaps, but nonfunctional—have also harbored serious misconceptions about the nature of the dream and the expression of the dream in *Finnegans Wake*. In his 1931 essay in *Axel’s Castle*, Edmund Wilson complained that *Wake* language at times gives the book a “mere synthetic complication.” He went on to write, “And as soon as we are aware of Joyce himself systematically embroidering on his text, deliberately inventing puzzles, the illusion of the dream is lost.”¹ Thirty years later, Clive Hart echoed Wilson’s criticism in his conviction that *Finnegans Wake* is an essentially simple narrative, burdened with a “massive superstructure of interwoven motifs.”²

Both Wilson and Hart misrepresent two crucial aspects of the nature of the dream. The first is the status of knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, in the dream. When Wilson remarks that *Finnegans Wake* plunges us directly into “the consciousness of the dreamer itself,”³ he voices the same contradiction found in Hart’s statement,
"The Dreamer is omniscient." The dream is precisely the arena in which the conscious subject discovers himself enthralled to another, who is himself, and yet remains inaccessible, barred from his conscious thought. The dreamer is not unitary, or conscious, or omniscient. Therefore, if *Finnegans Wake* can be assumed to represent a dream, traditional notions of point of view do not apply. The vantage point of the work is not an area of consciousness, but rather is a place where the unconscious—the essentially "unknowable" self—tries to communicate with the dreamer's conscious self. The unconscious is unknowable except by the processes or operations it employs to reach the surface of the dreamer's mind. If we assume that the dreamer can be found there, where conflicts and tensions appear in the language of *Finnegans Wake*, we have made a giant step toward locating his function, as well as having rendered nugatory the question of his identity.

Both Wilson's and Hart's concepts of the dream form in *Finnegans Wake* are essentially incompatible with the complicated, deviant language of the work. Hart determines three levels of dreaming in *Finnegans Wake*. He contends that Joyce patterned these levels on the AUM states of the Upanishads and that the descending dream levels represent a "mystical pilgrimage of Earwicker's spirit, seeking salvation through self-knowledge." The Freudian dream, however, is not a progressive penetration into the unconscious—a peeling back of layers or lifting of veils to disclose successive states of psychic truth. In the dream, the unconscious manifests itself through certain structural operations, such as the ordering and organization of materials, preferential selections, and substitutions—the processes Freud called distortion, displacement, and condensation. In other words, the dream is a rebus—a puzzle with an important linguistic component. Freud's dream-analyses revolve time and again around key words ("propyl, propyls... pionic acid... trimethylamin" in the dream of Irma's injection, such puns as "norekdal" and "gen Italien," and the marvelous multivalent pun of "Espe" in the Wolf Man's dream). When Wilson laments that the language of the *Wake* spoils the "illusion of the dream," he calls for an imitative form of the dream, presuming that the dream has a model form. Yet insofar as the dream is a rebus, Joyce's "deliberately inventing puzzles" imitates precisely the activity of dream-work.

*Finnegans Wake* is not merely the "illusion" of a dream, or the "surface" of a dream, as it were. The work, in fact, explores the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, and the
strange, cunning, antagonistic communication that is effected between them in dreams. A special language had to be forged for this purpose, as Joyce explained to Harriet Shaw Weaver, "One great part of every human existence is passed in a state which cannot be rendered sensible by the use of wideawake language, cutanddry grammar, and goahead plot."9

In its simplest description, the language of *Finnegans Wake* is a combination of prose and poetry. But the linear narrative line and the poetic forms embedded in it work at cross-purposes to one another. It is the function of the labyrinthian prose to lead the hearer astray, to reduce the issue at hand to confusion, to digress until the main point of the narrative is lost. At the same time the poetic forms, the metonymies, puns, klang-associations, neologisms, and portmanteau words short-circuit that intention and erupt in spontaneous, involuntary confessions in the midst of the narration. The first question of the "nightly quisquiquock" (126.6) or "Who's Who?" in 1.5 unfolds over some fourteen nonstop pages of eulogizing description of the subject, Finn MacCool, the "secondtonone myther rector and maximost bridgesmaker" (126.10). Yet the individual items of the long catalogue of attributes expose some of the "false hood of a spindler web" (131.18) through klang-associations and other devices. This exposure is familiar and often literal, as, for example, when we hear that the hero "shows he's fly to both demisfairs but thries to cover up his tracers" (129.21). Showing that he's a fly, insect, or earwig simply identifies Finn MacCool with HCE, while showing his fly to the two disreputable women is the exhibitionism at which the three soldiers surprise him.

In devising a language to explore the world of the dream, Joyce made a discovery that was facilitated by the works of Freud, and whose full implications have only recently been explored by psychoanalysts like Jacques Lacan and linguists like Roman Jakobson. This discovery was the correspondence between traditional poetic devices and the processes of dream-formation. When the unconscious communicates with the conscious in a dream, it uses such operations as displacement, condensation, and distortion, allowing the shifting of meaning and the expression of several meanings at once. The poet also uses verbal structures that allow words to mean many things at once—stylistic tropes such as metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche.10

These psychological and poetic forms are not only functional, but are aesthetically pleasing as well, which explains why so many of the
dreams in Freud’s dream book sound like small poems or fictions. In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce clearly endeavors to allow the language its fullest scope both functionally and aesthetically. Like a poem, or a dream, we should ask of the work not only what it means, but also how it means.

**DISPLACEMENT**

Novices to *Finnegans Wake* might well note that the language is riddled with “errors”—misspellings, nonsense words, malapropisms. They would be right, of course, but only if they took them as seriously as Freud took “errors” in his famous treatise on errors, “The Psychopathology of Everyday Life.”¹¹ Joyce uses such deviations and word play for a legitimate psychological purpose—to correct the conscious untruths of speakers with unconscious truths. This technique is by no means new in *Finnegans Wake*; Bloom occasionally reveals a repressed fear or guilt by a slip of the tongue, as when he inadvertently substitutes “admirers” for “advisors” in a reference that reminds him of Boylan’s relationship to Molly (*U*, p. 313). In *Ulysses* these slips occur infrequently and deliberately. In *Finnegans Wake* they occur so densely that they become the norm rather than the occasional blunder.

One of Joyce’s most frequently used “errors” in *Finnegans Wake* is the klang-association, in which the sound of a word or phrase instantly recalls another, similar in sound but not necessarily in meaning. The density of klang-associations in the *Wake* frequently generates a line of “double talk,” in which the line of discourse in the *Wake* recalls an association, a silent second line of discourse in the reader’s mind. The two conversations are generally at odds. Attempts to paraphrase the work fail for this reason: they destroy the contrapuntal tension that exists between the written word and the resonating line of thought.

“Double talk” in *Finnegans Wake* can be readily demonstrated by a few examples. A line in HCE’s conversation with the twelve custom- ers/jurors is written, “The rebald danger with they who would bare whiteness against me I dismissem from the mind of good” (364.1). Through this sentence HCE expresses two very different thoughts at once. “The real danger with they who would bear witness against me, I dismiss them from the mind of God,” suggests that HCE dismisses the threat of his slanderers and damn their. On the other hand, the “ribald danger” of the temptresses, whom HCE is rumored to have watched
while they urinated, is displayed when they "bare whiteness" against him, and therefore divert him, or he diverts them, "from the mind of good" or the intention of good. In the latter case, "dismissem" might possibly refer to undoing misses or virgins ("dis"—an undoing or depriving of character, quality, or rank as in "disable" or "dishonor"), or "missem" might refer to "misseem" (an archaism denoting unbecoming action); HCE's self-righteousness is always self-defeating. He claims he should have his temptress arrested ("was she but thinking of such a thing"—presumably his alleged misconduct toward her). But the words, "was she but tinkling of such a tink" (532.28), betray that HCE's thoughts have returned to the urinating girls in Phoenix Park. The children, like their father, are prone to the same self-revealing speech. During the homework lesson they suggest, "Have your little sintalks" (269.2), a more interesting subject than syntax, to be sure. One of the brothers asks the other, "As my instructor unstrict me" (295.21)—a request apparently granted, for the homework lesson does as much to undo the strictures against sexual knowledge as to instruct. Issy's pronouncements, which are often considered inane and ridiculous, are sometimes given a fine cutting edge by the revelation of her secret thoughts. "How he stalks to simself louther and lover, immutating aperybally" (460.11) seems like an innocuous enough remark, presumably referring to her aged lover, or to HCE ("How he talks to himself, louder and lower, imitating everybody"). But the sentence simultaneously conjures up the image of an apelike or simian (simself) creature, stalking about, a loutish as well as Lutheran (louther) lover, too established in his brutishness ("immutating" or unchanging) to ascend the evolutionary ladder. Issy's wantonness is often disguised by virginal piety ("So now, to thalk thildish, thome, theated with Mag at the oilthan we are doing to thay one little player before doing to deed" [461.28]). "So now, to talk childish, come, seated with Mag at the organ we are going to say one little prayer before going to bed," is fraught with the naughty suggestions of doing some deed with "a little player" (perhaps while seated at the oilcan?). A good many of the thoughts in Finnegans Wake lead to Phoenix Park and its mysterious sexual guilts. Even talk about the weather—the epitome of bland conversational subjects—conceals more serious matters in the Wake. What seems to be the simple comment, "Strangely cold for this season of the year," is expressed as "Strangely cult for this ceasing of the yore" (279.2), suggesting bizarre funeral rites or rites of passage.
Likewise a weather forecast doubles as a prediction for nuptial outlook; the phrase, "and incurred a sudden stretch of low pressure, mist in some parts but with local drizzles, the outlook for tomorrow . . . seemed brighter, visibility good" contains an extra dimension as expressed in the *Wake* ("and incursioned [penetrated] a sotten [drunken] retch [wretch] of low pleasure, missed in some parts but with local drizzles, the outlook for tomary . . . beamed brider, his ability good" [324.31]).*

These examples of "double talk" demonstrate the process of displacement in dream-formation. In order to by-pass the dream censor, elements of high psychic intensity are displaced onto elements of little value in the dream. In *Finnegans Wake*, however, this process is reversed as banal words are replaced by piquant words: syntax/sintalks, real/rebald, thinking/tinkling, pressure/pleasure, everybody/aperybally, and cold/cult. In ordinary dreaming, the displaced matter—the highly charged, guilty, sexual thoughts—would need to be inferred through free association and analysis. Since analysis is impossible within the dream framework of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce must have decided to make the dream transparent, as it were, by giving the reader access to the repressed material. In *Ulysses* we see the personae repressing their fearful, guilty thoughts all day, only to let them surface dramatically at night in "Circe." In *Finnegans Wake* we see the repression and revelation occur simultaneously in the same line of discourse.

These paired words that sound alike often represent extreme differences in meaning, and, at times, antonyms. The tension of the pairing is heightened because one term might be brashly profane, while its echo is sanctimonious and pure. Joyce thereby demonstrates the essential nature of repression: that blasphemous and obscene words have no particular significance without their opposites.

The expression, "boob's indulgence" (531.2), becomes irreverent only with the rhythmic and phonetic resonance of "Pope's indulgence" (boob's dull intelligence, and Pope's self-indulgence, as well as the Catholic remission of punishment due to sins). Likewise, "I popetithes thee" (326.6) refers to the financial obligation to support the Church; the echo of the sacramental words, "I baptize thee," suggests that the sacrament of baptism involves the extortion of tithes. The transcribed children's songs, "Lonedom's breach lay foulend up" (239.34) and

*Bracketed inserts mine.*
"Psing a psalm of psexpeans" (242.30), suggest the unsuspected obscenity of small children only in the context of the innocent rhyme. This aspect of *Wake* language proves Bruno's dictum—"every power in nature must evolve an opposite in order to realize itself"—both in the linguistic and in the psychological realm. The principle of phonemic binary opposition and the semantic notion that signifiers have meaning only in relation to other signifiers are major cornerstones of modern linguistics. Joyce, like Freud, seems also to have believed that we would be as polymorphously perverse as babies if only we didn't feel so guilty about it and try so hard to repress it.

Judging from the most obvious of such cases—the pun on *wake* itself—it seems quite likely that puns, klang-associations, and ablaut series determine some of the larger themes and motifs in the work. Joyce's *Masterbuilder* may be a *masturbator* because the two words suggest one another. *Earwicker* is an *earwig*; Anna Livia, the Liffey; and Isabel, is a *belle*—thanks to similarities in sound. Perhaps because Earwicker is an earwig or bug, he is also a bugger or buggered, since buggers, like earwigs, penetrate unorthodox orifices. Because the unconscious treats words like objects, it is alive to their sounds, their literal and archaic meanings, and their uses in every known context. Words alone, therefore, can generate images and scenarios in dreams. Freud's patient, feeling himself rejected by women because of his settled habits, dreamt of being settled in a chair while trying to charm a young woman. Joyce seems to have borrowed this technique from dream-work, letting words suggest entire scenes. The auditory contiguity of *letter* and *litter* may have prompted the merger of ALP as scavenger with ALP as author of the Letter, in the image of the hen scratching the Letter/litter from the dump. Verbal contiguity may likewise have brought about the *shooting* of the *shitting* Russian General. More likely the *thunder* has a hundred letters because of the klang-association than because of a mystical number value, and Joyce may have chosen wars and drunkenness as two manifestations of the fall because of the similarity of battle and bottle.

The tension of repression inherent in *Wake* language places a particular burden on the interpreter of the Wakean dream. In Freudian dream-analysis, the individual dream elements must be researched and traced to their source; then the function of the element in the total dream-work must be determined. Likewise, the discovery of an allusion
in the *Wake* is only part of the analysis. Shaun is asked during his "psychosinology,"

—I put it to you that this was solely in his sunflower state and that his haliodraping het was why maids all sighed for him, ventured and vied for him. Hm?
—After Putawayo, Kansas, Liburnum and New Aimstirdames, it wouldn't surprise me in the very least (509.21).

It is not enough to know that "sunflower" is an allusion to Oscar Wilde, who wore a boutonniere at his trial for homosexuality.\(^{13}\) Shaun's psychic state is only fully revealed if we note that he ignores the homosexual reference and replies as though "sunflower state" signified something merely geographical, like the nickname of Kansas, to him. The allusion takes on the significance of a guilty desire only through the force of the repression.

In the dream and in poetry the sounds of words are as important as their sense. The source of this common ground is the tendency of the unconscious to treat words like objects or things, to play with words in the way infants play with lettered blocks: delighting purely in their physical characteristics rather than in any message that might be formed with them. The displacements in Joyce's "double talk," "whiteness" for "witness," for example, are based not only on the disparity of their meanings, but also on the similarity of their sounds. Since words related by klang-association have contiguous sounds, they constitute a poetic metonymy.\(^ {14}\) The phonetic word-play in *Finnegans Wake* is therefore psychoanalytically justified, as Joyce was well aware. In another example from Shaun's interrogation, Shaun is asked, in regard to the Phoenix Park incident, "Did any orangepeelers or greengoaters appear periodically up your sylvan family tree?" (522.16). Shaun, misinterpreting "sylvan" and thereby diverting the reply from the matter at hand, replies, "It all depends on how much family silver you want for a nass-and-pair" (522.18).\(^ {15}\) The inquisitor indignantly asks, "Can you not distinguish the sense, prain, from the sound, bray?...Get yourself psychoanalised!" (522.29). He has apparently recognized the substitution of "silver" for "sylvan" as the type of phonetic metonymy that signals an unconscious displacement.

While the displacements effected by "double talk" are generally quite transparent, the need to evade the censor results in even more ingenious displacements in the work. The sin in Phoenix Park, which is
the source of so much anxiety for speakers, is represented in the discourse through a displacement based on a series of synecdoches. In order to avoid all reference to the specific misdeeds committed, the incident is most often replaced by a reference to the principals, two girls and three men. William York Tindall, who, fortunately, counts things in the *Wake*, reports over two hundred such references,16 many of them even further disguised, such as "duo of druidesses... and the tryonforit of Oxthievious, Lapidous and Malthouse Anthemy" (271.4). However, frequently this synecdoche is even further abbreviated, so that only the numbers "two" and "three" remain to signify the entire incident. For example, in the following instances the girls and boys appear as animals ("twalegged poneys and threehandled dorkeys" [285.13]), articles of clothing ("threesurtouts wripped up in itchother's, two twin pritticoaxes" [546.15]), abstractions ("two cardinal ventures and three capitol sinks" [131.1]), and vehicles ("bikeygels and troykakyls" [567.33]). There are even instances of just the numbers themselves, as in "you too and me three" (161.30), where even the number "two" is replaced by a phonetic metonymy. This last example is surely the apex of literary indirection: the little word "too," a word virtually devoid of semantic content, used to represent a pair of tempting young women. These particular examples of synecdochic displacement demonstrate further that the unconscious interconnections between words need not be semantically determined. In the case of the "two and three" synecdoche for Phoenix Park, the numbers correspond to the count of the principals; however, they may also have been chosen because of a graphic value. Since many of the terms associated with the "two and three" refer to legs or pants ("twalegged," "sycopanties," "Legglegels in bloom," and the like) they perhaps refer to two-legged and three-legged in a Wakean version of the riddle of the Sphinx. The third leg is presumably Shaun's "supernumerary leg" (499.20). "Two and three" may therefore stand for women and men with a specific reference to their sexual difference.

The occurrence of the "two and three" synecdoche in the discourse of the *Wake* serves as a code in the sense that codes are used to protect secrets from the enemy, or from a disapproving snooper. The conscious speaker would not approve the unconscious, guilty, Phoenix Park remembrances or fantasies, and he is therefore entrusted with two neutral numbers whose significance he does not fully understand. This
particular synecdoche, therefore, represents a private code that makes sense only in the context of the information supplied in the *Wake*, like the rats that signified his father’s financial complications to Freud’s neurotic patient. Like any code, once cracked it results in an enormous betrayal of psychic secrets—a phenomenon the more wonderful since it proves the extent to which our hidden lives are invested in the word or even the alphabetical letter. Jacques Lacan writes, “The claims of the spirit would remain unassailable if the letter had not in fact shown us that it can produce all the effects of truth in man without involving the spirit at all.” In this sense, Joyce—perhaps better than any writer of the century—knew the value of the word.

Not all allusions with guilty associations are contained within a private code in *Finnegans Wake*, as the frequent mention of “sunflower” and “hesitancy,” catchwords for homosexuality and lying in reference to Wilde and Pigott, demonstrate. As many of Freud’s case histories and dream-analyses show, the psyche is quick to attach words and items of language, already invested with special meaning by the public, to its own concerns and obsessions. All allusions to materials external to the work—literary, biblical, historical, and autobiographical—reflect the preoccupations of Wakean figures: fraternal and paternal rivalries, incestuous wishes, the Letter, and the like. For example, allusions to the Dublin coat of arms generally intersect with the Phoenix Park obsession via the “two and three” reference: the coat of arms is embellished with the figures of three flaming castles and two women, their skirts slightly raised.

The most notable example of synecdoche in *Finnegans Wake* is found in the initials of HCE embedded in the three-word sequences. The full name of HCE, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (we surmise), is never stated as such in the work. Yet HCE is ubiquitous, occurring in word sets that are seemingly arbitrary and highly diversified (“Howfor-him chirrupeth evereachbird” [98.36], “Haroun Childeric Eggeberth” [4.32], “Hostages and Co, Engineers” [518.16], and so on). Joyce’s use of these synecdoches may have several functions. They may indicate a repression of the thought of HCE by substituting another, less disturbing thought in its place, with only the initials to show that HCE ever occupied the thought at all. Conversely, certain word groups may unconsciously recall HCE. For example, when Shaun is accused of “homosexual catheis of empathy” (522.30), the embedded initials
suggest that perhaps Shaun is indeed guilty of homosexual incest with his father. Such use of initials in the dream has a perfectly respectable precedent in the "Espe" (S.P.) of Freud's Wolf Man.

CONDENSATION

The difference between displacement and condensation is very slight. In the first case, one element is expressed that implies or suggests another; condensation, however, preserves the simultaneous presence of two elements through superimposition. The best-known forms of condensation in *Finnegans Wake* are the portmanteau words, which are generally a composite of two phonetically similar but semantically dissimilar words, thereby expressing an unlikelihood or contradiction. For example, "colluppus" incorporates "collapse" with that which collapses, the "colossus," the seemingly invulnerable giant. In "phoeni-" "finish" is co-present with "phoenix," the symbol of resurrection and rebirth. If Joyce learned this device from Lewis Carroll, he learned it well—a thousand such forms could easily be cited in the *Wake*.

Puns in *Finnegans Wake* are only incidentally entertaining, as Joyce, like Shem, seems to be "letting punplays pass to earnest" (233.19). The pun on "fly," meaning a lure in fishing and a man's trouser buttons or zipper, has multiple functions in the work. The fly pun links two important animal images of HCE, the insect (earwig) and the fish ("too funny for a fish and has too much outside for an insect" [127.2]). But the notion of a fly as lure or bait juxtaposes the fishing image with the exhibitionism of HCE by which he tempts and lures the two girls and three soldiers ("shows he's fly to both demisfairs" [129.21]). The pun therefore connects two important episodes in *Finnegans Wake*: the naming of HCE in the second chapter and the display of HCE's erection to the children in the second chapter from the end. The king asks the turnpiker "whether paternoster and silver doctors were not now more fancied bait for lobstertrapping" (31.7). The lobsters to be trapped may be the three soldiers, the "three longly lurking lobstarts" (337.20), or perhaps HCE, "the grand old greeneyed lobster" (249.3), who is also the earwig, or bait, himself. But the real lure is clearly the erect penis, topped with a condom—a flowerpot in I.2 and a "buntingcap of so a pinky on the point" (567.7) in III.4—and borne "aloft amid the fixed pikes of the hunting party" (31.1) like a
colorful banner or fishing lure which "shall cast welcome" (567.11) to the hunters.

Puns are plurisigns that serve the same function in dreams as a switch on a railroad track: they move thoughts from one channel to another without hiatus. As the most economical form of "double talk," they also express simultaneous thoughts, "two thinks at a time" (583.7).

Because it employs words and images that refer to several things at once, the process of condensation in dreams corresponds to the creation of poetic metaphors. In novels and prose fiction, the use of extended metaphors is quite exceptional. Dickens, for example, introduces Twemlow in Our Mutual Friend as an "innocent piece of dinner-furniture that went upon easy casters and was kept over a livery stableyard." We believe in the metaphor for only a moment, however, before it becomes quite clear that Twemlow is really a harmless old gentleman who serves as a convenient and frequent dinner guest. Anna Livia Plurabelle, on the other hand, is not just like a river; she is the Liffey as much as she is the woman.

The ALP chapter, I.8, is virtually controlled by metaphors that create multiple frames for the section: two washerwomen gossiping about a Dublin neighbor, the Celtic banshees washing the bloody shirts of the soon-to-die heroes, the opposite banks conversing about the river, and the rival sons airing the family's dirty linen as they probe once more into the mystery of their parentage. But here, more than in any other section of the work, the metaphors will not allow for a reduction into levels of meaning; the "reality" of Anna Livia Plurabelle is suspended forever at a conjunction of images, from which she cannot be extricated. As her young girlhood, her sexual blossoming, is described, the anthropomorphic tendency of the description is poised so precisely by the river imagery that it is never allowed to dominate or to establish itself as the paramount point of reference. The infant Anna, toddling and falling into a puddle and lying there laughing with her limbs aloft is the nascent river bubbling merrily under the hawthorne trees. The bawdy image of little Anna, licked by a hound "while poing her pee" (204.12) is also the innocent picture of a dog lapping the running waters of the rivulet. Prepubescent Anna has a brush with two boy scouts, who wade through her in their bare feet before she is strong enough to support a canoe, let alone a barge. And the beautiful, erotic
image of the hermit Michael Arklow, plunging his hands into Anna’s streaming hair, “parting them and soothing her and mingling it” (203.24) and kissing her freckled forehead, is balanced by the image of the austere young monk, tempted in spite of himself to wash his hands and wet his lips in the sweet, cool water of the dappled brook.

Wakean metaphors cannot, and must not, be split into a point of reference and its description, or “real” and “figurative” components, without destroying the plurisignification that distinguishes dream thoughts and fantasies from waking thoughts. Unlike Stephen, the Protestant children of *Portrait* do not understand metaphors (“Tower of Ivory, they used to say, *House of Gold!* How could a woman be a tower of ivory or a house of gold? [P, p. 35]). But Finn MacCool, according to the quiz in I.6, is a house (“shows Early English tracemarks and a marigold window with manigilt lights” [127.33]), a clock (“is a horolge unstoppable and the Benn of all bells” [127.36]), writing (“shipshaped phrase of buglooking words with a form like the easing moments of a graminivorous” [128.6]), a mountain, a white-haired old man, or thorn-crowned Christ (“shows one white drift of snow among the gorsegrowth of his crown” [128.20]), a mealtime (“is Breakfates, Lunger, Diener and Souper” [131.4]), a eucharistic food (“figure right, he is hoisted by the scurve of his shaggy neck; figure left, he is rationed in isobaric patties among the crew” [133.3]), a utopia (“either eldorado or ultimate thole” [134.1]), and so on. All these things are metaphors, figurative descriptions, for Finn MacCool. At the same time, such metaphors are all we know of him and have of him. In substance, Finn MacCool, like all figures in the *Wake*, is himself a metaphor—standing for those monuments of civilization that rise and fall in *Finnegans Wake*.

In a sense, all figures in dreams are metaphors and reflections or descriptions of someone or something else. Freud writes of the Irma dream, “None of these figures whom I lighted upon by following up ‘Irma’ appeared in the dream in bodily shape. They were concealed behind the dream figure of ‘Irma,’ which was thus turned into a collective image with, it must be admitted, a number of contradictory characteristics.”19 “Bygmester Finnegan” is such a collective image. Occurring early in the work, he embodies Finn MacCool, Ibsen’s Masterbuilder, Tim Finnegan, and HCE, like Solness, the father of twin sons. The line, “he seesaw by neatlight of the liquor wheretwin ‘twas born” (4.33), illustrates this multiple metaphor. The first image is that
of a builder looking at a level, a device used to establish a horizontal line. A level consists of a glass tube filled with alcohol or ether, which encloses a movable bubble; presumably the builder looks at this glass tube as into a crystal ball, envisioning the edifices he will erect in the future and their crashing down. The second image is a paternal fantasy, the father imagining the womb filled with amniotic fluid, bearing his progeny, his twin sons, the future fruit of his sexual erection, who will fell him at their maturity. Thirdly, the image of Tim Finnegan is suggested, the drunken hod-carrier of the ballad who looks into his glass of whiskey and sees prefigured in it his climb to the top of the building and his fall. Joyce extrapolates the maximum semantic possibility from his words in this line; “seesaw” relates to the image of the builder’s level, to seeing in two separate time planes at once, to the unsteady reeling of the drunk, to the precariousness of fate with its untimely ups and downs, and to the warring twins, who seldom achieve equilibrium in the work. Likewise, the “neatlight of the liquor” suggests the alcohol in the tube of the level, the “neat” or unadulterated fluid of the womb, and Tim’s straight whiskey. If Joyce, like Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty, had paid his words for working extra, he soon would have been bankrupt.

SUBSTITUTABILITY

Dream logic differs from conventional logic because relationships and feelings are more important than substances and facts. For example, when small children say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me,” they not only differentiate between the physical and mental natures of sticks and names, respectively, but between their logical effects as well. If one is concerned only about one’s physical safety, the saying makes good sense. Yet, the saying is precisely the child’s way of defending the hurt feelings caused by the names. In the world of the dream all effects are psychological, and sticks and names can be substituted freely for one another in an attack. The assailant of the incarcerated HCE, therefore, does both for good measure. He pegs smooth stones at HCE (72.27) and calls him a list of names, on the telephone (“hello gripes” [72.20]), or cruelly “hog-calling” (70.20) through the keyhole, through which he blew Quaker Oats before he started pegging stones. The specific nature of the projectiles is not important: the dreamer, like Polyphemous (“nobody-atall with Wholyphamous and build rocks over him” [73.9]), knows
that rocks are not enough for "touchin his woundid feelins" (72.22), and that one needs names to call as well.

While conventional waking logic demands that events move from causes to effects, the actions of dream events can be reversible, as the incarceration theme in *Finnegans Wake* illustrates. This theme has precedents in the early works, notably in the outhouse episodes of *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, in which the "square" or the jakes is the scene not only of excretion, but also of reading, writing, mysterious sins and their attendant guilt, and paranoia.

Wakean figures are confined in a space that has many forms. For Persse O'Reilly it is "the penal jail of Mountjoy" (45.17), for Shem, "the Haunted Inkbottle" (182.31). It is a mere hole in the wall (69.5) and the garden of Eden; the magic circle of Stonehenge (69.15) or a place shared with animals, such as the cave of Polyphemous with its sheep and goats, or Noah's (178.12) ark with its "antediluvial zoo" (47.4), or Daniel's lions den ("diablen lionndub" [72.34]). It is a room on the night of the Passover ("every doorpost in muchtried Lucalizod was smeared with generous erstborn gore" [178.9]) and the cénacle in which Christ performed the Last Supper ("give him his... thicker-thanwater to drink and his bleday steppebrodhar's into the bucket" [70.25]). It is a phone booth (72.20), a coffin, and, of course, a toilet ("a bedstead in loo thereof to keep out donkeys" [69.22] or asses—with Shem's "cheeks and trousers changing colour every time a gat croaked" [177.6]).

Both HCE and Shem are victims of incarceration. Their enclosure serves as both prison and asylum, as protection of the "nigger bloke" (177.4) against the lynch mob, and as "archicitadel" (73.24), sheltering its inmates "behind faminebuilt walls" (71.2). The attack from the outside both stimulates and inhibits creative activity on the inside. This activity is essentially transubstantiation, activity at once sacred as in communion, profane as in digestion and excretion, domestic as in cooking, mysterious as in alchemy, and artistic as in writing. For example, the state of siege ("last stage in the siegings" [73.24]), entails, among many deprivations, the extreme fear of starvation, which conjures up the extreme remedy of cannibalism. Joyce, like Voltaire and Chaplin, recognized the comic potential of this situation, which in the *Wake* evokes reference to the assailant offering to break HCE's head and give him his own blood to drink, in communion parody, or perhaps like the cannibalistic Polyphemous, demanding "more wood alcohol to
pitch in with” (70.27) and opening the “wrathfloods of his atillarery” (70.31) “without even a luncheonette interval” (70.33). Forced to be a “self valetor by choice of need” (184.11), Shem cooks up egg dishes (“whites and yolks and yilks” [184.18]) with a variety of human discharges (“Aster’s mess and Huster’s mixture and Yelownik’s embrocation and Pinkingsone’s patty and stardust and sinner’s tears” [184.22]). HCE, buried, or hibernating, in his watery grave, consumes his own body (“secretly and by suckage feeding on his own misplaced fat” [79.12]), as Shem, deprived of writing implements, produces ink and paper out of “his wit’s waste” (185.7).

Joyce’s own biography demonstrates how a Philistine public’s efforts to inhibit an artist’s activity may, inadvertently, foster it. Through the incarceration theme in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce shows the relationship of society and the artist to be one of mutual aggression. If HCE’s assailant hurls words and stones into the enclosure, Shem spits out (178.29) and writes graffiti or “nameless shamelessness about everybody ever he met” (182.14). The hostility of the assailant and the prisoner is represented most economically in the mirror image of the opposite sides of the keyhole: Shem voyeuristically looks out at the rainbow girls through a telescope (178.27), while the revolver looks in (179.3). The image also refers to the Buckley–Russian General episode, since the gun is aimed at a defecating ass (“had been told off to shade and shoot shy Shem should the shit show his shiny shnout” [179.5]). The action may be an aggressive response to the offensive wiping gesture of the Russian General figure, which here takes the form of Shem’s verbal threat that “he would wipe alley english spooker, multaphonically spuking, off the face of the erse” (178.6).

Incarceration in *Finnegans Wake* is not a novelistic event but a poetic image. Its meaning is not to be found by asking journalistic questions such as who is imprisoned by whom, where, when, and why. Any number of names, places, times, and reasons could be substituted for the answer without shedding any more light on the meaning or on the importance of the event. Freud insisted at the outset that the dream must be studied not as a whole, but in its parts, “*en détail* and not *en masse*.”20 By examining the details of the incarceration theme and by following their trail of allusions and associations, the rich and multiple meaning of the whole emerges as though from a poetic image. Structurally, the incarceration theme involves the problem of containers and orifices, the passage of substances from inside to outside or outside to
inside, and the changes such passages produce. Psychologically, it concerns the simultaneous feelings of fear and anger aroused in the dreamer by these movements and changes of substance.

WIT

Regretably, the critical essay on the humor in *Finnegans Wake*, which Joyce planned to include in the sequel to *Our Exagmination*, was never written. The question of Joyce’s humor is complex on many counts. From the bleak and somber beginnings of *Dubliners*, Joyce’s fictions became funnier with time, until the rollicking, bawdy, sophisticated wit of *Finnegans Wake* erupted in a sustained torrent during seventeen years of illness, advancing blindness, professional disappointment and frustration, and alarm over his daughter Lucia’s worsening condition. Only perilous links between the literary humor and Joyce’s disposition during this period can be made. The more significant connection between the comic later works and Joyce’s deepening interest in the unconscious mind suggests that the humor of *Finnegans Wake* emerges as a stylistic necessity in the writing of a dream-work.

Wakean humor differs from that found in *Ulysses* because the later work contains no conscious jokers such as Mulligan. In fact, the social teleology of humor, the joker’s need for the laughter and endorsement of a listener to achieve pleasure, is not present in the *Wake*. The washerwoman who snaps to her friend, “You’d like the coifs and guimpes, snouty, and me to do the greasy jub on old Veronica’s wipers” (204.29), is oblivious to the outrageous comparison between Veronica’s veil, bloodied by the imprint of Christ’s face, and a woman’s menstrual napkin. The humor in *Finnegans Wake* is as unpremeditated and spontaneous as the humor in the dream. Shaun interrupts a critical moment in his interrogation with laughter; when reproved by his inquisitors, he claims to have laughed involuntarily (“I didn’t say it aloud, sir. I have something inside of me talking to myself” [522.25]). Freud tells us that the joke is, in fact, involuntary, and that, strictly speaking, we do not know what we are laughing about.22

The genesis and rationale of Joycean humor may be traced to the famous discussion of aesthetic theory in *Portrait*. Founding art on a principle of “stasis,” Stephen’s own elegant exposition exemplifies all the conditions of the classical and rational art he describes. Lynch’s responses and comments, in contrast, express the restless cravings of the id, the sexual, the profane. Grossly physical, erratic, excitable, he
punctuates Stephen’s cool, formal discourse with curses and laughter. Their dialectical discussion resembles a parody of the confrontation of man’s higher and lower nature, reason and instinct, angel and demon. In Finnegans Wake, this dialectical discussion is condensed into the single line of discourse. The unconscious continually erupts in the humorless discourse, exerting its infantile claim to pleasure in jokes, puns, and double entendres. The speakers of the discourse pass over these outbursts without notice, like Stephen, who either ignores or dismisses Lynch’s humorous banter (“As for that, Stephen said in polite parenthesis, we are all animals. I also am an animal. . . . But we are just now in a mental world” [P, p. 206]). Stephen is the supreme pompous ass in this scene, and his cold, aristocratic theory of art is subverted by the coarse, proletarian cravings of Lynch. In Finnegans Wake these personifications yield to the portrayal of a single self exhibiting these conflicting aspects.

Wit and humor in the dream or in waking life result from the unconscious resistance to the repression of pleasure. The thrust of the dream is wish-fulfillment, Freud tells us, and the unconscious produces puns and comic effects in its attempt to outflank the censor. This causal relationship between repression and wit is best delineated in Freud’s theory of errors as presented in “The Psychopathology of Everyday Life” and the General Introduction. Many of the errors are hilarious, particularly slips of the pen such as “clown prince” for “crown prince.” The error is caused by the repression of the writer’s true feelings and their unconscious eruption in the misprint. The humor resides in the incongruity or discrepancy between the two descriptions of the same man—an incongruity existing originally between the honest and hypocrical expressions of the writer.

A comic theme in Joyce’s work whose source is a psychological conflict is that of the lecherous instructor. The theme is developed to best effect in the portrait of Jaun before the girls of St. Bride’s, where the severity of the moral injunction fails to hide the prurient interest of this preacher (“asking coy one after sloy one had she read Irish legginds and gently reproving one that the ham of her hom could be seen below her hem and whispering another aside, as lavariant, that the hook of her hum was open a bittock at her back” [431.4]). Shem indulges a similar fantasy, imagining he would be a good tutor to Issy, “turning up and fingering over the most dantellising peaches in the lingerous longerous book of the dark” (251.23). Perhaps Shem is only thinking of turning up and fingering the most tantalizing pages of the Egyptian
Book of the Dead, or perhaps, as Campbell and Robinson suggest, he desires, like Dante's Paolo, to seduce a Francesca with a love story in a book, perhaps the Inferno itself. But tantalizing peaches, besides whatever ad hoc sexual images they conjure up, are the two young girls pursued by the old geezer in an earlier version of the Phoenix Park sin (65.26), and Shem's "turning up and fingering over" sounds far from innocent.

Without the element of conflict, the theme of the lecher or the instructor, which occurs in Joyce's early fiction, loses its humor. Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case," for example, becomes Mrs. Sinico's instructor ("He lent her books, provided her with ideas, shared his intellectual life with her" [D, p. 110]). But Mr. Duffy's sexual repression is so complete that he recoils from the smallest demonstration of affection. Conversely, a confirmed seducer like Corley in "Two Gallants" never represses his shabby desires at all.

Yet conflict itself is not enough to produce humor. In the preacher Davidson of Somerset Maugham's "Rain," repressed sexual desires erupt like a volcano as he rapes the prostitute he has converted. The ironic incongruity of conflicting impulses existing side by side is sacrificed in favor of showing Davidson's destruction by the extremes of his nature. The humor that could have resulted from the successful victory over repression is blocked by the ultimate triumph of Davidson's superego, which drives him to suicide.

The reverse of the theme of instruction/seduction is the theme of academic/sexual learning. While the young narrator of "The Encounter" discovers homosexual sadism while playing hookey, young Stephen Dedalus learns of it right there at Clongowes, at school. By the time he elaborates the relationship between scientific and erotic knowledge in the lesson chapter (II.2) of Finnegans Wake, Joyce shifts the object of curiosity from the peripheral perversities of the schoolboy to the oedipal heart of the matter. At the same time, the fright that the little boys in the early works receive from their new knowledge is supplanted by a humor born of incongruity and economy. In the lesson chapter it is the academic studies themselves, not truant adventure or playground gossip, that disclose the sexual secrets of the parents to the young boys. As the subjects become drier and more abstract, the sexual knowledge becomes juicier and more blatant, until a geometric diagram reveals the mother's pudendum ("the whome of your eternal geomater" [296.31]). The Freudian justification for the link between scientific
and sexual curiosity is concisely stated in a footnote in the Skeleton Key. 25

The lesson chapter (II.2) owes much to the jokes and puns of Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland. But while Carroll’s “fishy education” is finally an arbitrary one-joke gimmick—“Fainting in Coils” having little to do with Painting in Oils 26—Joyce’s inventions seem logical by comparison. For example, the grammar lesson, conducted by a wise and experienced grandma, properly concerns relationships since the discipline has traditionally encompassed both the arrangement and function of words in a sentence as well as linguistic etiquette. But while “gramma” advises the young girls about first, second, and third persons, masculine, “mascarine,” feminine, “phelinine,” and neuter, “nuder” (268.17), she herself confuses the cases utterly as she tells of “when him was me hedon and mine . . . his analactic pygmyhop” (268.26) (Anna Livia Plurabelle; analactic: composed of fragments, “pygmy-hop”: small, doll-like, therefore a rag doll; intellectual pick-me-up?). Other bits of grammatical jargon come to life as they enact their literal meanings (“dative” and “oblative” [268.22] refer to grandpa’s comings and goings, “even if obsolete, it is always of interest” adds “gramma” philosophically; “tense accusatives” become emotional and dramatic without strict reference to time and inflections; “all them fine clauses in Lindley’s and Murrey’s never brought the participle of a present to a desponent hortatrixy” [269.29] turn Lindley and Murray’s grammar into a law partnership whose legal “clauses” yield no benefits to the sad defendant, a young female gardener or a downcast whore). This section owes its wit not only to incongruity and economy, but also to a final plausibility, a recognition that with the barest flick of the imagination, a grammar lesson could indeed turn into a lively narrative of persons, cases, and moods.

The style of Finnegans Wake is often compared to those visual art forms whose glory lies in a luxuriance of ornamentation—the baroque, rococo, and arabesque. Tindall writes, “It seems an arabesque—the elaborate decoration of something so simple that it evades us. This simple text, like that on some pages of the Book of Kells, is lost in the design.” 27 I would argue that there is no such “simple text” in Finnegans Wake. Insofar as literature must proceed from the human mind, the complexities of Wake language are highly functional in representing the dreaming state. They show the work of the dreamer as he constructs and observes the incredible artifact of his dream. Like the
builders in the *Wake*, he builds, using thoughts, images, words, memories, and sounds. He sorts through his repertoire of words, pairs some that sound alike, and places some next to others because their context is similar. Sometimes he hides an important idea under a trivial one, or buries an idea beneath such a heap of associations that he must later trace his way through them like Theseus winding the clue ball through the labyrinth. He can move backward and forward in time, be in two places at once, disguise others, and disguise even himself so that he cannot recognize himself. He indulges in a sophisticated kind of play, which resembles nothing so much as the work/play of the poet, and has the same purpose—to communicate and to be understood.

Whatever beauty there is in the style of *Finnegans Wake* lies not in the ornate surfaces or the embellishments. It lies rather in the interstices between words and ideas, in the intricate and devious connections between things, and in the infinite details, carefully sorted and grouped according to the demands of some inarticulate psychic need.

There is something a little inhuman about *Finnegans Wake*, Compared to, say, *Ulysses*. Perhaps this is merely because it is strange, as dreams are strange and alien—so much so that for centuries they were regarded as messages from another, a supernatural or inhuman other. Dreams are poems written in sleep by an unknown other self. Their puzzling quality comes from feelings heavily “defended,” to use the psychoanalytic term. *Finnegans Wake* resembles a later genre of films that also defies journalistic curiosity—what Norman Holland calls the “puzzling movies” of the late fifties and sixties. It is closer, in style, if not in content, to Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries*, to Fellini’s 8½, or to Resnais’s *Last Year at Marienbad*, than to *Ulysses* itself.