

Introduction

James Joyce is probably the greatest stylist in the English language. *Finnegans Wake* is his last book, to which he devoted more energy than to any other. It is immensely difficult to read: I should in fact say that it is not a reasonable thing to expect any unaided person to attempt *Finnegans Wake*. There is in consequence a pressing need for exegetical studies which actually work, as opposed to producing a mere tranquillizing effect.

The earliest appraisals of *Finnegans Wake* (hereafter abbreviated *FW*) were essays published during the book's composition, the most important constituting *Our Exagmination round his Facitification for Incamination of Work in Progress*.¹ The first comprehensive analysis was Campbell and Robinson's *A Skeleton Key to 'Finnegans Wake'*, which appeared in 1944.² Despite its frequent lapses into uninformative paraphrase the *Skeleton Key* musters a stronger conviction of its subject's dignity than any earlier study, and supports this conviction with an impressive bulk of novel interpretation. The popular image of *FW* is the image created by Campbell and Robinson: several recent 'guidebooks' seem to owe little to any subsequent investigators.

The difficulty of absorbing *FW* results not merely from the highly fragmented nature of its text but also from the fragmented nature of the absorption process itself. In reading *FW* one makes a succession of isolated discoveries pertaining to various disciplines and stationed randomly throughout the volume. Appearing in no special order, they are soon forgotten unless some form of cataloguing is attempted, which is an occupation repugnant to most persons in search of aesthetic ends.

Three books of the 1950s attempted to catalogue their authors'

¹ By Samuel Beckett and others (London, Faber and Faber 1929).

² Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to 'Finnegans Wake'* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1944; London, Faber and Faber 1947).

discoveries in three fields. They were *A Census of 'Finnegans Wake'*,³ *The Books at the Wake*⁴ and *Song in the Works of James Joyce*.⁵ But many of the glosses appropriate to particular *FW* words are neither personal, literary nor musical, and the essential vehicle for publishing scattered minutiae did not materialize until 1962. At this point Clive Hart and Fritz Senn founded *A Wake Newslitter*,⁶ as a forum for discussing approaches to *FW* as well as a receptacle for untreated data.

Apart from Mr Hart's *Concordance to 'Finnegans Wake'*⁷ and the second edition of the *Census*, the most important products of the 1960s were language lists. The *Newslitter* published studies of various minor languages, and three extended linguistic analyses also appeared, *Scandinavian Elements of 'Finnegans Wake'*,⁸ *A Gaelic Lexicon for 'Finnegans Wake'*,⁹ and *A Lexicon of the German in 'Finnegans Wake'*.¹⁰

Unfortunately, much published exegesis exhibits a depressing indifference to context and continuity, which results from the disproportionate acquaintance with the text possessed by most exegetes. Chapters I.1 and I.8, for example, are more familiar to most of us than, say, the book II chapters. The cohesion of parts will be appreciated only when the reader has formulated canons for distinguishing them. I propose here to try to assist him.

Ideally, we should try to remain conscious of the dual function of every word. There is a linear function, a contribution to the syntactic complex in which the word stands. We must be able to account for the position of any unit in *FW* as a transition between the units on either side of it. Secondly there is a systemic function, a contribution to the tone of the section. Very common words are chiefly linear in function; names such as the thousand or so rivers mentioned in I.8 are chiefly systemic, in this case enhancing the watery quality of that chapter. But every word must be allowed its contribution to texture. Just as the eighteen chapters of *Ulysses*

³ By Adaline Glasheen (1956; second edition, *A Second Census of 'Finnegans Wake'*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press 1963).

⁴ By J. S. Atherton (London, Faber and Faber 1959).

⁵ By Matthew J. C. Hodgart and Mabel P. Worthington (New York, Columbia University Press 1959).

⁶ Currently published by the Department of Literature, University of Essex.

⁷ (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press 1963).

⁸ By Dounia Bunis Christiani (Evanston, Northwestern University Press 1965).

⁹ By Brendan O Hehir (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press 1967).

¹⁰ By Helmut Bonheim (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press 1967).

possess individual styles, moods and atmospheres, so each of the seventeen *FW* chapters has a private aura. It was very rare for Joyce to transfer any partly-composed material from one chapter to another. The only instance of any length which I can give is the paragraph 223.35–224.07, which if retained in its original place would have separated 369.05 and 06.¹¹

The reader who has not recognized chapter unification may assume that, since almost any passage includes the main themes or obsessions of *FW*, he need only pick one at random and admit every allusion its words can be contorted to produce. The usual consequence is temporary fascination followed by loss of the faculty for drawing lines of exclusion, leading to conceptual overload, psychic saturation.

In the initial stages I consider familiarity to be more important than comprehension. Although in the present work I have tried to restrict the repetition of other exegetes' conclusions, I think that a reader lacking experience of other *FW* studies should be able to understand and derive benefit from the things I have to say. Painful as it may seem, I would urge the reader to make some attempt at reading through *FW* before beginning this book, if only to form some idea of the physical dimensions of the chapters.

The distinguishing feature of my approach to *FW* is my concern with Joyce's *sigla*. These marks appear in the author's manuscripts and letters as abbreviations for certain characters or conceptual patterns underlying the book's fabric. The only extended treatment of sigla so far by any other exegete appears in Mrs Glasheen's *Census*, as a table 'Who is Who when Everybody is Somebody Else'.¹² This however deals almost entirely with five sigla, and being tabular can posit correspondences but cannot discuss them. I propose to deal with fourteen sigla, and to describe each in relation to the gross structure of *FW*. I hope thereby to establish a series of pathways between the chapters which should facilitate their penetration.

The reader should have a copy of *FW* at hand whenever using this book. I am using the fourth edition (London, Faber and Faber 1975). References are given in accordance with the system of conventions adopted in *A Wake Newslitter*. All locations appear as five-digit statements, e.g. 003.01 for the first line of text. Chapters are connoted by book and number, e.g. I.1 (book I, chapter 1). In II.2 the right and left marginal notes and the footnotes are given

¹¹ British Museum Add. MS 47480, 210, 237–8; 47477, 275, 301.

¹² Pages lx–lxvi in the second edition.

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the letters R, L and F, preceding the number of the note. I have further adopted the practice of appending a number to I.6 references to indicate the twelve questions into which this chapter is divided: I.6.5 for instance refers to its fifth question.

References to pages of the Buffalo Notebooks are preceded by the numeral VI and the appropriate letter. Thus VI.B.I.I means page I of notebook B.I. Internal cross-references to pages of my own book are preceded by 'p.' or 'pp.'.

The following abbreviations are used for works frequently referred to:

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| <i>AWN</i> | <i>A Wake Newsletter</i> |
| <i>Books</i> | J. S. Atherton, <i>The Books at the Wake</i> (London, Faber and Faber 1959) |
| <i>CG</i> | Michael H. Begnal and Fritz Senn (eds.), <i>A Conceptual Guide to 'Finnegans Wake'</i> (University Park and London, Pennsylvania State University Press 1974) |
| <i>JJ</i> | Richard Ellmann, <i>James Joyce</i> (Oxford University Press paperback 1966) |
| <i>Letters I</i> | Stuart Gilbert (ed.), <i>Letters of James Joyce I</i> (London, Faber and Faber 1957) |
| <i>Census II</i> | Adaline Glasheen, <i>A Second Census of 'Finnegans Wake'</i> (Evanston, Northwestern University Press 1963) |
| <i>SMFW</i> | Clive Hart, <i>Structure and Motif in 'Finnegans Wake'</i> (London, Faber and Faber 1962) |
| <i>GL</i> | Brendan O Hehir, <i>A Gaelic Lexicon for 'Finnegans Wake'</i> (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press 1967) |