DECONSTRUCTION

When Samuel Beckett wrote of *Work in Progress*, “Here form is content, content is form,”¹ he seemed to beg the same question that Yeats so wisely left in rhetorical form at the end of “Among School-children.” Beckett goes on to support his comment by noting, “His writing is not about something; it is that something itself. . . . When the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep. . . . When the sense is dancing, the words dance.” True, of course, but the same could be said even more convincingly about *Ulysses*, particularly the *tour de force* of “Oxen in the Sun,” and the musical form of “Sirens.” Questions of content and form in *Finnegans Wake* must at least explain its difference from *Ulysses*, and this difference is quite simple. Whatever its mythical underpinnings, *Ulysses* is about three people, Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and Molly Bloom, in Dublin, Ireland on 16 June 1904. On Bloomsday, every 16 June, we can take Bloomsday pilgrimages in Dublin because we know exactly where Bloom spent his entire day. In fact, we know Bloom as well as we are ever likely to know any fictional character. On the other hand, Nathan Halper notwithstanding, we don’t know when Earwicker dreams, or if he dreams, or if his name is really Humphrey (it could be Harold) Chimpden Earwicker (it could be Porter or Coppinger or O’Reilly). We know that Molly is voluptuous, but
Earwicker's hunchback, for all we know, could merely be that suspicious parcel he is sometimes reported to be toting around. The major difference between Ulysses and Finnegans Wake is clearly that in Ulysses we can be certain of most things, whereas in Finnegans Wake we must be uncertain. The greatest critical mistake in approaching Finnegans Wake has been the assumption that we can be certain of who, where, and when everything is in the Wake, if only we do enough research. The discovery that Maggie is ALP may be true enough, but it doesn't mean anything. ALP is also Kate, the old slopwoman, and Isabel, the daughter, and Biddie Doran, the hen, in a way that Molly Bloom is decidedly not Mrs. Riordan, or Milly, or Josie Breen.

In the course of several chapters, I have examined this lack of certainty in every aspect of the work. Events in Finnegans Wake repeat themselves as compulsively as Scheherazade did, spinning her tales, until there are so many versions of the event that one can no longer discover the "true" one. Wakean events can reverse themselves so that we do not know if father seduces daughter or daughter tempts father. The Wakean family is therefore in chaos because, through incest and parricide, family roles and family relationships are violated in such a way that figures can no longer be defined. Consequently identities are unstable and interchangeable, and the self is constantly alienated from itself and fails to know itself. This self-alienation is manifested in a language which is devious, which conceals and reveals secrets, and therefore, like poetry, uses words and images that can mean several, often contradictory, things at once.

The formal elements of the work, plot, character, point of view, and language, are not anchored to a single point of reference, that is, they do not refer back to a center. This condition produces that curious flux and restlessness in the work, which is sensed intuitively by the reader and which the Wake itself describes as follows.

Every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle anyway connected with the gobblydumped turkery was moving and changing every part of the time: the travelling inkhorn (possibly pot), the hare and turtle pen and paper, the continually more and less intermisunderstanding minds of the anticollaborators, the as time went on as it will variously inflected, differently pronounced, otherwise spelled, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns. (118.21)

The substitutability of parts for one another, the variability and uncertainty of the work's structural and thematic elements, represent a
decentered universe, one that lacks the center that defines, gives meaning, designates, and holds the structure together—by holding it in immobility. Samuel Beckett acknowledges this when he calls the book a purgatorial work for its lack of any Absolute.²

The literary heterodoxy of Finnegans Wake is the result of Joyce's attack on the traditional concept of structure itself. This attack was not isolated, but belonged to an "event" or "rupture" in the history of the concept of structure, which, according to philosopher Jacques Derrida, took place in the history of thought sometime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The destructive impact of this "event" becomes clear only in view of the history of metaphysics, which Derrida characterizes as belief in being as "presence." "The whole history of the concept of structure, before the rupture I spoke of, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center."³

A clear illustration of this historic concept of structure can be found in T. E. Hulme's influential work, Speculations. Hulme evaluated Classicism and Romanticism, whose dialectics he regarded as forming the basis of the history of art, in terms of a single fundamental premise: that belief in a Deity constitutes the fixed part of man's nature.⁴ Hulme denounced Romanticism as the displacement of that fixed belief in Deity from the religious sphere, to which it properly belongs, to the human sphere, that is, the belief in man as a god. Fundamental to Hulme's tenets is, therefore, the notion of a center according to which man defines himself; the issue is merely who or what shall occupy that center.

The "rupture" in the history of structure—brought about, as Derrida says, by our being self-consciously forced to "think the structurality of structure"—results in the idea of a structure in which presence is not so much absent as unlocatable. The center is ex-centric, and the structure is determined not by presence but by play. This "rupture" is manifested most purely in certain destructive discourses of the early twentieth century.

Where and how does this decentering, this notion of the structurality of structure, occur? ... I would probably cite the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without truth present); the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerean
destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of being as presence.⁵

Among these destructive discourses of the early twentieth century, *Finnegans Wake* served as a literary exemplar, and in doing so inaugurated a new concept of literary structure, which itself could not be deciphered so long as critical formalism was ruled by concepts like Hulme’s.

As an artist deeply concerned with the philosophical implications of the creative process, Joyce must have faced the special difficulties of trying to create something truly “new” in his last work. He was clearly aware of a problem whose linguistic and anthropological implications are of great interest at the present time: that the *Weltanschauung* of a writer is limited by the language he employs. The image of Shem writing with his own shit on his own body about himself indicates not only the scatological and solipsistic nature of the creative act, but also the entrapment in what is apparently a closed system. The writer who tries to escape the epistemology of his culture is confronted by a language embedded with inherited concepts; to criticize these concepts he must still make use of a language in which they are embedded. Jacques Derrida writes, “It is a question of putting expressly and systematically the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage itself.”⁶ In other words, a “new” literary vision that seeks to critique previous literary modes must use the tools of those same modes—language, concepts, themes, conventions—in the process of the critique itself. William Carlos Williams describes this frustration in *Spring and All*, where the artist imaginatively annihilates the universe to create it anew, only to discover that “EVOLUTION HAS REPEATED ITSELF FROM THE BEGINNING. . . . In fact now, for the first time, everything IS new. . . . The terms ‘veracity’, ‘actuality’, ‘real’, ‘natural’, ‘sincere’ are being discussed at length, every word in the discussion being evolved from an identical discussion which took place the day before yesterday.”⁷ To outflank this contradiction, Joyce needed to decenter the literary structure, a process that would affect every aspect of the work so radically as to make it unique in literary history. The traditional concept of structure, which implied a center or presence, also implied a formal wholeness of the work of art, in which each of the particular elements referred always back to the center. Decentering of
the structure, then, suggests another, as yet uncategorizable sense of form—which modern poets often call “open” in contrast to “closed,” but which is more conveniently defined here as “freeplay.” Jacques Derrida describes this freeplay of a decentered system of language as follows. “This field is in fact that of freeplay, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble. This field permits these infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and founds the freeplay of substitutions.”

The freeplay of elements in *Finnegans Wake* has long been recognized without pursuit of its implications for the total structure of the work. William York Tindall writes, “As God’s world, created by the Word, is an endless arrangement and rearrangement of ninety-six elements—give or take a couple—so Joyce’s closed system is an endless arrangement and rearrangement of a thousand and one elements that, whatever their multiplicity, are limited in number.”

It is freeplay that makes characters, times, places, and actions interchangeable in *Finnegans Wake*, that breaks down the all-important distinction between the self and the other, and that makes uncertainty a governing principle of the work. In order to effect this “new” decentered literary structure and to implement freeplay not only in the themes of the work but in the language as well, Joyce instituted two major techniques: a new application of “imitative form,” and a building technique I will call *bricolage*, borrowing a term from anthropologist Lévi-Strauss.

**IMITATIVE FORM**

*Finnegans Wake* includes those imitative techniques so successfully employed in *Ulysses*: the imitation of printed formats as in “Aeolus” and the “Triv and Quad” chapter (II.2), the imitation of sounds in “Sirens” and “Anna Livia Plurabelle” (I.8), and the imitation of pedagogical modes as in the catechism of “Eumaeus” and the quiz show of I.6. But the *Wake* language far surpasses the experiments of *Ulysses* as a type of verbal simulation. The stylistic incorporation of the novel’s themes depends on the most fundamental correspondence between social and linguistic structures. The law of man and the law of language are homologous systems because they share an identical unconscious
structure. The father's symbolic function as figure of the law is therefore analogous to the semantic function of language, which assigns to lexical items their meanings and their grammatical functions. The primordial law of the father, the incest taboo and the kinship regulations, function like those laws of phonological combination which permit certain sounds to be combined only in certain ways in the formation of words, and those laws of syntax that regulate the relationships of words in the formation of the sentence. That the theme of the fallen father, the fallen God, has linguistic repercussions is suggested in the Wake itself ("Gwds with gurs are gttrdmrnn. Hlls vlls. The timid hearts of words all exoemnosunt" [258.1]). The vowels are here the "timid hearts of words" which flee with the defeated gods: the words can no longer be spoken, like many of the words in the Wake, and their meaning becomes dislocated, uncertain. The familial/linguistic correspondence is also revealed in the passage that describes the shooting of the Russian General, a type of parricide ("The abnihilisation of the etym by the grisning of the grosning of the grunder of the first lord of Hurtleford expolodotonates through Parsuralia with an ivanmorinthrorromubre fragoromoassity amidwiches general uttermosts confusion are perceivable moletons skaping with mulicules" [353.22]). The "etym," or word, is also "etymon," which, as the primary word from which a derivative is formed, corresponds to father. Although the construction of the phrase, "abnihilisation of the etym," is essentially ambiguous—it is not clear whether "etym" is the subject or object of the action implied in abnihilisation, or a creation out of nothing—the implication is that in either case, the fall of the father creates first of all noise, an "ivanmorinthrorromubre fragoromoassity." The equation of word and void occurs also in a parody of St. John's gospel prologue in II.2 ("In the beginning is the woid, in the muddle is the sounddance and thereinofter you're in the unbewised again" [378.29]). If the father signifies the semantic function of language, the act of giving names to things or assigning meanings to words, then the fall of the father in Finnegans Wake signifies that severing of words from their referents which creates a linguistic freeplay, a "sound-dance," or "variously inflected, differently pronounced, otherwise spelled, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns" (118.26), and therefore one is clearly in the "unbewised," the unproven (German: Beweis), the uncertain, again. Hugh Kenner, after quoting a sentence from the Wake, remarks, "It is worse than useless to push this
toward one or the other of the meanings between which it hangs; to paraphrase it, for instance, in terms of porter being uncorked and poured. It is equally misleading to scan early drafts for the author's intentions, on the assumption that a 'meaning' got buried by elaboration. Joyce worked seventeen years to push the work away from 'meaning,' adrift into language; nothing is to be gained by trying to push it back."\textsuperscript{11}

If the ultimate meaningful word is the theological Logos, the Word of John's prologue, then its antithesis might be Stephen's recurrent notion in \textit{Ulysses} ("God: noise in the street" [\textit{U}, p. 186]). The fall of the father, which marks the disjunction of word from meaning, results in noise, as the \textit{Wake} passage cited earlier seems to suggest. The \textit{Wake} repeats Stephen's concept of God as a noise in the street and amplifies it to thematic proportions. At the end of II.1, there appears a litany which includes the invocation, "Loud, hear us!/Loud, graciously hear us!" (258.25). The substitution of "Loud" for "Lord" is, of course, consistent with the Wakean proposition that the voice of God, the voice of the father, is the sound of thunder, and that the thunder announces the father's fall (cf. 3.15). Other associations of the father's fall with noise include reference to the tower of Babel: the fallen giant MacCool, marking with his body the geography of Dublin, is described as an "overgrown babeling" (6.31), a fallen tower of Babel or babbling baby. Both babble, the first speech of the infant man, and thunder, the first word of God to postlapsarian man, represent sound without meaning or signification.

The events of \textit{Finnegans Wake} are steeped in noise: the crash of falling towers, bridges, men, Wall Street, and civilizations; the clamor of countless battles; the boisterous happenings in Earwicker's pub; the angry invective of quarrelers antagonists. As someone says in the midst of the drunken shouting and raucous merrymaking at Finn MacCool's wake, "E'erawhere in this whorl would ye hear sich a din again?" (6.24). Furthermore, the gossip, rumor, and slander discussed in the previous section illustrate an archaic definition of the word "noise" as "common talk, rumor, evil report, or scandal"—a definition that still survives in the dual meaning of the word "report." In its perfect fusion of noise and rumor, \textit{Finnegans Wake} resembles nothing so much as Chaucer's \textit{The House of Fame}.

The noise that characterizes the thematic events of \textit{Finnegans Wake} is expressed stylistically by a number of technical devices. There
are many "voices" in the _Wake_—numerous utterances by the various figures, frequently unidentified, and often seeming to occur all at once, like many people shouting and clamoring simultaneously ("Mulo Mulelo! Homo Humilo! Dauncy a deady O! Dood dood dood! O Bawse! O Boese! O Muerther! O Mord! . . . Malawinga! Malawunga! Ser Oh Ser! See ah See! Hamovs! Hemoves! Mamor!"

[499.5]) In addition, any given utterance can be considered to contain a number of voices, as Clive Hart notes, "In theory, highly controlled choral speaking by a small group would be the only satisfactory solution to the problem of how to read _Finnegans Wake_ aloud, each speaker adhering to one "voice" of the counterpoint and using the appropriate accent and stress."12 Stylistically, however, the _Wake_ not only simulates the sound of "noise," as in the onomatopoeic thunder, but the concept of noise as an obstruction to the understanding of a message, as well. As a principle of information theory, noise is any interference in the transmission of information. "Whatever medium is used for the purpose of transmitting information, it will be subject to various unpredictable physical disturbances, which will obliterate or distort part of the message and thus lead to the loss of information. If the system were free of redundancy, the information lost would be irrecoverable."13 If we grant that little information is transmitted to the reader of _Finnegans Wake_ even when we disregard the interference generated by the labyrinthian progress of the narrative or the interference inherent in the linguistic distortions, another rationale for the work's length and extraordinary redundancy becomes apparent. Joyce clearly followed a sound principle of information theory in _Finnegans Wake_: a work with an unprecedented amount of "interference" requires an unprecedented amount of seemingly gratuitous repetition in compensation.

The familial/linguistic homology can be most simply illustrated with reference to simple grammatical slot and filler technique. The family consists of certain slots or positions which are occupied by certain individuals—for example, slot F (father) is occupied by HCE, slot M (mother), by ALP, slot D (daughter), by Isabel. The incest taboo decrees that slot M can be filled by any woman except Isabel, the daughter, HCE's mother or sister, and so on. The laws that govern the combinations of sounds in words, or words in sentences, work in a similar manner. In the potential English word "_lan_" for example, the initial slot cannot be filled by the sounds of "m," "n," "d," "t," "r," or "v." In the sentence "The____told us," the slot may not be filled by
another article like "a" or "an," a preposition like "into" or "from," a pronoun like "she," or even a proper noun like "George." In other words, the social structure of the family and the linguistic structure of the sentence is intelligible only if certain laws of combination are observed. The theme of incest in *Finnegans Wake* is stylistically simulated in a language that violates linguistic laws of combination, that is, phonotactic or syntactic laws.

While the rules of permissible phonological combinations must account for all the actual words in the English lexicon, they also encompass words that are not, in fact, actualized in the language, but could be without violating these rules. John Lyons notes some interesting applications of these "potential" words.

Many of the non-occurent combinations of phonemes would be accepted by native speakers as more 'normal' than others; they are, not only easily pronounceable, but in some way similar in form to other words of the language. . . . It is noticeable, for instance, and it has often been pointed out, that writers of nonsense verse (like Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear) will create 'words' which almost invariably conform to the phonological structure of actual words in the language; and the same is true of brand-names invented for manufactured products.  

The bulk of Joyce's "nonsense" words in the *Wake* are such potential English words: "flosting" (501.33) and "marracks" (15.36), for example. In many words, however, the combination of sounds is quite impossible in English: "tuavnrr" (54.15), "dgiaour" (68.18), "stlong-fella" (82.13), "trwth" (132.5), "tsifengtse" (299.26), "remoltked" (333.13), or "grianblachk" (503.23).

The task confronting Joyce in letting the language reflect a universe whose structure is determined by substitutions and freeplay, is to deconstruct the language itself. Of course, this involves the paradox of critical language, the need to use language to represent the deconstruction of language. One of the strategies Joyce uses to communicate a deconstructed language involves his interesting manipulation of structure words. Structure words—articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, intensifiers, and the like—have essentially no semantic content but act like the mortar that holds the lexical bricks of the sentence in place. Sometimes Joyce substitutes descriptive words for these structural items as in "How wooden I not know it" (16.33) and "you skull see" (17.18), where "wooden" and "skull" replace "wouldn't" and "shall" in the auxiliary slots in the sentence. The *Wake* sentences are now ungrammatical, but they still communicate because the reader unconsciously
recognizes the slot and knows the correct filler. Such substitutions also occur frequently in cases not involving structure words. For example, the items "who eight the last of the goosebellies" (142.2) and "were we bread by the same fire" (168.8), show questionable substitutions in slots that are usually occupied by verbs.

Besides filling linguistic slots with impermissible fillers, Joyce further disrupts linguistic structure by ignoring internal junctures. Internal junctures, the meaningful pauses between words, are treated as suprasegmental phonemes in modern linguistics because they function to distinguish the meanings of otherwise identical units, as for example the joke in W. C. Fields's *The Dentist*, where there is confusing talk of either "an ice man" or "a nice man." In the *Wake* we find such expressions as "an earsighted view" (143.9) and "the course of his tory" (143.12)—irregular expressions produced by incorrect junctures. Joyce also used junctures to perform such interesting substitutions as "to be cause" (16.18), "dumptied the wholeborrow of rubbages on to soil here" (17.4), and "they are in surgence" (17.25). He clearly realized that many prefixes sound like prepositions. So the "be" of "because" becomes a verb on the order of "to be sure"; the "to" of "onto" becomes an infinitive that changes "soil" from a noun to a verb; and the prefix "in" of "insurgence" becomes a preposition that changes the meaning of "are" from "may be identified with" to "are located."

Violations of junctures also produce other interesting linguistic aberrations. The expression, "how he stud theirs" (234.10), probably derives from an artificial juncture in the resonant "how he stutters." "As bold and as madhouse a bull in a meadows" (353.13) ignores the junction between "mad as" to create "madhouse." An interesting case of overlap occurs in the expression, "pleasekindly communicae with the original sinse we are only yearning" (239.1), where the juncture can come either before or after "sinse" depending on whether it is read as "sins" or as "since." These examples demonstrate how syntactic disruption produces the uncertainty and ambiguity that must characterize a decentered language.

Joyce introduces ungrammaticality into *Finnegans Wake* deliberately. The expression, "after having said your poetry," is quite all right, while "after having sat your poetries" (435.26) is ungrammatical because "sat" is an obligatory intransitive and cannot take a direct object. To return to the correspondence between social and linguistic structures in *Finnegans Wake*, we can charge much of the thematic con-
fusion and ambiguity to a kind of ungrammaticality. For example, a very common basic sentence pattern, illustrated as "____-kills-____" shows the importance of syntactic structure. When Alice reads the nonsense poem "Jabberwocky" in Alice in Wonderland, she knows, without understanding all the words, "somebody killed something: that's clear, at any rate." Yet it is precisely these crucial relations between subjects and objects that are often deliberately ambiguous in Finnegans Wake. As with Oedipus and Laius, father-son enmity is complex and Laius tries to kill Oedipus as surely as Oedipus does kill him. So in Finnegans Wake, there is enough confusion to have to ask "who struck Buckley though nowadays as thetimes every school-filly ... knows as yayas is yayas how it was Buckleyself ... struck and the Russian generals, da! da!, instead of Buckley who was caddishly struck by him when be herselves" (101.15). The many reversible actions in Finnegans Wake serve precisely to make distinctions between subjects and objects difficult. The questions that surround the sin in Phoenix Park are reduced continually to this kind of ambiguity: Did HCE seduce the girls or did the girls tempt HCE? Did HCE watch the girls urinate or did the girls watch HCE deliberately expose himself? Did ALP start the wars and deluge that mark the collapse of civilization, or did she merely clean up the rubbish afterwards? Did Shem forge the Letter or did Shaun steal the Letter from Shem? The subject/object confusions are types of thematic ambiguity that approximate the syntactic ambiguity of the language.

Joyce's inclusion of multitudinous fragments of foreign languages in the Wake is also consistent with the principle of freplay. Unlike artificial or "auxiliary" languages whose purpose is to overcome the Babelian diversity of national languages, Joyce's "muttering pot" (20.7) in the Wake appears to be a dump or rubbish heap like ALP's scavenger sack, in which the fragments merely mix and mingle to be distributed anew. Citing examples, Ronald Buckalew notes, "Joyce's foreign language is often distorted and mixed to produce puns and jokes." The mixing of various languages in the same work may represent a type of linguistic miscegenation that imitates the thematic incest. The parallel is not inappropriate, particularly since we speak of the historical development of languages in terms of the relationships of language "families."

Joyce once wrote of Finnegans Wake, "What the language will look like when I have finished I don't know. But having declared war
shall go on *jusqu’au bout.*”17 If Joyce violates the laws of language, he does no more than to adapt the language to a vision in which law has been supplanted by play—a linguistic freplay that is the fertile ground for new semantic and syntactic forms, for a thoroughgoing linguistic originality.

**BRICOLAGE**

Richard Ellmann aptly describes *Finnegans Wake* as “a wholly new book based upon the premise that there is nothing new under the sun.”18 This paradox is clearly the crux of the philosophical problem that Joyce set out to solve technically in *Finnegans Wake*. Hart and Atherton attribute Joyce’s artistic dependence on the inherited matter of the cultural and personal past to a sense of religious prohibition, a guilt which Joyce associated with the creative process. However, judging from the profanity which, no doubt, qualifies *Finnegans Wake* as one of the most aggressively sacrilegious books in the language, the notion of Joyce’s fearing “the presumption of human attempts at creation”19 is untenable.

More plausibly, Joyce realized that he could not escape his debt to the culture, the language, and the literature. The well-known works on comparative mythology, which so influenced Eliot and Yeats, impressed Joyce also with the persistence of mythic structures, as we know from *Ulysses*. The artist has no choice but to plunder his heritage, and Joyce, at least, acknowledges the debt grandly, calling *Finnegans Wake* an “epical forged cheque” (181.16) and “the last word in stolen-telling” (424.35).

To confront this dilemma, Joyce resorts to a technical method which critics have already identified in their comparisons of *Finnegans Wake* to the “objet trouvé” collage. “Bits and pieces are picked up and incorporated into the texture with little modification, while the precise nature of each individual fragment is not always of great importance.”20 Borrowing a term which Lévi-Strauss applies to mythical thought and mythological activity in *The Savage Mind*, this practice of using bits and pieces of heterogeneous materials without regard to their specific function, may be called *bricolage*. Joyce once asked his Aunt Josephine, send “any news you like, programmes, pawntickets, press cuttings, handbills. I like reading them.”21 Joyce is like Lévi-Strauss’s *bricoleur*, collecting and saving things “on the principle that ‘they may
always come in handy." That Joyce's method certainly approximated that of the *bricoleur* is most evident in his voluminous working notebooks for the *Wake*, crammed as these are with list upon list of apparently unrelated words, phrases, snatches of thought, and bits of data.

More important than Joyce's writing practice, however, is the way in which this method, *bricolage*, allows Joyce to liberate materials from their old contexts, to juxtapose them freely, and allow them to enter into new and unexpected combinations with each other. Lévi-Strauss writes of the *bricoleur*, "Now, the characteristic feature of mythical thought, as of 'bricolage' on the practical plane, is that it builds up structured sets, not directly with other structured sets but by using the remains and debris of events: in French 'des bribes et des morceaux,' or odds and ends in English, fossilized evidence of the history of an individual or a society."

Some of Joyce's puns and verbal jokes demonstrate this technique of salvaging bits and pieces for new purposes and uses. In *Ulysses*, the pornographic *Ruby, the Pride of the Ring* becomes a ruby ring which Bloom slips romantically on Josie Breen's finger during the Nighttown hallucinations (*U*, p. 445). Our understanding of Joyce's use of the battle of Waterloo in the *Wake* will be little improved by checking up on facts in a history book. In *bricoleur* fashion, Joyce uses the event as it comes to hand, and what seems to interest him chiefly is the word-play potential which makes the battleground the site of urinating girls. The Crash of Wall Street resulted in the Great Depression, and if it is a giant or an egg that falls from the wall, then the economic disaster of the thirties becomes merely an enormous imprint of the fallen giant's body on the topography of Dublin.

*Finnegans Wake* is unmistakably original—and just as self-consciously unoriginal. In its bizarre, distorted language are lodged all of Joyce's immense, but thoroughly familiar, preoccupations: the Dublin of his youth, familial relationships, sexual obsessions, bits of military and political history, allusions to a multitude of literary works, sacred books, arcane writings, old myths, fables, fairy tales, children's games, songs, riddles, and great quantities of talk. But his technique of taking bits and pieces of the old and using them to create something new is, perhaps, best illustrated by showing how various themes and motifs from the early works take on new life in *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce's earliest known fiction attempts, a story intended for *Tidbits*
and a sketch from *Silhouettes*, both remembered by Stanislaus, reappear in the *Wake*. The *Tidbit* story is recounted as follows. "In it a man who has attended a masked ball dressed as a prominent Russian diplomat is walking by the Russian Embassy on his way home, thinking about the 'laughing witch,' his fiancée, when a Nihilist tries to assassinate him. The police arrest him as well as his assailant, but his fiancée, hearing of the attempt, realizes what has happened and comes to the police station to explain and release him." The incident reflects the many versions of the encounter with the assailant that recur throughout *Finnegans Wake*—for example, the HCE-cad encounter and Buckley's shooting of the Russian General. It includes all the usual elements: the oedipal case of mistaken identity, the arrival of the constable, and the woman as temptress and redeemer of the fallen man.

Stanislaus describes the scene from *Silhouettes* as "two figures in violent agitation on a lowered window blind illuminated from within, the burly figure of a man, staggering and threatening with upraised fist, and the smaller sharp-faced figure of a nagging woman." A similar scene is reenacted in the dumbshow of III.4, where the couple is described as "Man looking round, beastly expression...exhibits rage....Woman, sitting....haggish expression, peaky nose...exhibits fear" (559.22). In the same chapter, the voyeurism of the narrator watching the illuminated blind becomes explicit when the couple's copulation is flashed in silhouette on the screen of the blind.

*Dubliners* is filled with images of the fallen father, a collection of family men in various stages of brutalization and Dublin paralysis. Once drunk, they threaten their small children like the anonymous man in the *Silhouettes* story. Eveline's father rudely invades the children's games, brandishing his blackthorn stick, much like the father (II.1) in *Finnegans Wake* ("Housefather calls inthreateningly...In thundercloud periwig. With lightning bug aflash from afinger" [246.6]). Insofar as the children's games are social and sexual in nature, the threatening father who calls the children home is Vico's thunder, which frightened the copulating couples into taking shelter in the caves and which they interpreted as the voice of a commanding God. Joyce once wrote to Harriet Shaw Weaver, "Children may just as well play as not. The ogre will come in any case."

Other frightening fathers in *Dubliners* include the hard-drinking, brutal Farrington of "Counterparts," and Little Chandler, who in parody of Farrington merely drinks a few exceptional whiskeys on a
special occasion and then, shockingly, shouts at his infant. ALP, like Chandler's wife, soothes her child who is frightened by "thunner in the eire" (565.17). He is only dreaming, she tells him, and frightened of phantoms ("No bad bold faathern, dear one" [565.19]).

A Dubliner precursor of the Wake's Tim Finnegan image is Tom Kernan in "Grace," who falls down the steps of the bar while drunk. A constable comes and he is taken home and put to bed. Next day, his friends gather round the bed and, amid bottles of stout, urge Kernan to renew himself spiritually through a religious retreat. Joyce uses a similar version of this incident to recapitulate the Tim Finnegan/Finn MacCool wake of 1.1 later in the book when the publican falls drunkenly to the floor and stumbles up to bed for renewal in sleep and dream. The incident involving the drunken Stephen and the two soldiers at the end of Ulysses follows the same pattern. However, in addition to the theme of the fall of the drunken man, Stephen's incident includes an HCE-like quarrel with the soldiers over the whores. "Up, guards, and at them!" (U, p. 596), yells Major Tweedy in "Circe," a refrain that reverberates throughout Finnegans Wake. Furthermore, all the suspicion of buggery surrounding the involvement of HCE and the three soldiers "When some bugger let down the backtrap of the omnibus/and he caught his death of fusiliers" [47.9]) may be a literal animation of the bawdy expressions of Privates Carr and Compton, "Here bugger off, Harry" (U p. 602) or "God fuck old Bennett! He's a whitearsed bugger" (U, p. 603). The "whitearsed" bugger may also be a source for Wellington's white horse which, covered with Napoleon's hat, is blown or shot "off of the top of the tail on the back of his big wide harse. Tip (Bullseye! Game!)" (10.19), like a target on a pinball machine, or the Russian General, or buggered HCE himself.

The image of melancholy men in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" reminiscing about Parnell, or the Dedalus family discussing the old scandal at Christmas dinner, recurs in similar patterns in Finnegans Wake. The pub customers of II.3 discuss several affairs, including the Norwegian captain story and the Butt/Taff skit, while drinking heartily. The sorrowful and reverent poem on "The Death of Parnell" (D, pp. 134, 135) recurs without reverence or solemnity of either style or spirit as "The Ballad of Persse O'Reilly" in the Wake (45.7, 47.26). The poems have many reversed parallels. "He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead" becomes "He was one time our King of the Castle/Now he's kicked about like a rotten old parsnip." Parnell's lofty ideals ("He
dreamed [alas, 'twas but a dream!]/ Of Liberty”) give way to HCE’s vulgar ones (“We had chaw chaw chops, chairs, chewing gum, the chickenpox and china chambers/ Universally provided by this sffa-soaping salesman”). While Parnell’s second coming is joyously anticipated (“But Erin, list, his spirit may/Rise, like the Phoenix from the flames”) hope of HCE’s rebirth is fatalistically and sensibly squelched (“And not all the king’s men nor his horses/Will resurrect his corpus”).

The themes of games and competition, which express the brother antagonism in the *Wake*, occur in the early works as trials of brawn, as in “Counterparts,” and brain, as in “Little Cloud.” Games and competition involving nationalism and women are particularly germane to *Finnegans Wake*. The nationalistic implications of the games in “After the Race,” prefigure the imperialistic conflicts of the later works, Bloom’s encounter with the Cyclops, and the various native-invader quarrels in the *Wake*. Rivalry over women is most prominent in “The Dead,” where Gabriel must compete with a dead boy for Gretta’s love, and in the jealous triangles in *Exiles, Portrait*, and *Ulysses*. Stephen’s quarrel with the soldiers at the end of “Circe” is particularly interesting in this regard, because it involves both nationalism and women—Stephen’s insult to the King and his attentions to Cissy Caffrey.

Many figures in *Dubliners* have secrets: Father Flynn, the truants of “An Encounter,” the boy of “Araby,” Eveline, Mr. Doran of “The Boarding House,” and, of course, Greta Conroy in “The Dead.” The coupling of secret and confession in “The Dead” is given an ironic twist in *Ulysses*, where Bloom’s secret pleasures, lusts, fears, and regrets are confessed to himself in “Circe,” to achieve the kind of healing usually reserved for the priestly confessional or the psychoanalytic couch. In *Finnegans Wake* secrets and confessions become combined in a single operation that conceals and reveals—the dream.

The many complicated roles of women in *Finnegans Wake* are adumbrated in Joyce’s early works as well. The washerwomen, gossiping about the father’s downfall, are prefigured by the two old women at Father Flynn’s wake, who, having washed his corpse and laid him out, discuss his failures and his death.

The temptresses are too numerous to mention. They appear first as lovely apparitions to the boyish imagination: Mangan’s sister in “Araby,” Emma Clery in *Stephen Hero*, and the fair maid in *Chamber Music*—“My love goes lightly, holding up/Her dress with dainty hand” (*CM*, p. 15). Eveline is a particularly interesting temptress because she is
identified both with the dying ALP of *Finnegans Wake*,28 and with Isabel, the daughter, who is the object of competition between father and lover. Eveline’s father forbids her to see Frank. Like ALP, Eveline cooks and cares for a man who threatens and abuses her. A drunken father also abuses Gerty MacDowell, who in turn tempts the older Bloom by exposing herself, like the girls in Phoenix Park.

“The Mime of Mick, Nick, and the Maggies” (II.1), deserves a careful comparison with “Nausicaa” in *Ulysses*. In both chapters the children’s games at twilight are suspended in ironic conflict between the religious ceremony of evening Benediction and the sexual ceremonies of seduction. Both ceremonies are conducted in the language of gesture. The priest dispensing incense from the swinging censer is mimicked by Gerty waving her perfumed sachet to Bloom. Notwithstanding the abundance of flowers, less pleasing fragrances prevail in *Finnegans Wake*, thanks to Glugg’s urination and flatulence (“holding their noises, they insinuate quiet private, Ni, he makes peace in his preaches and play with esteem” [225.5]). Other types of nonverbal communication in the chapters include the semiotics of colors, flowers, clothing, and scents—codes found in Church liturgy, romantic lore, and at the base of children’s games and riddles. The baby’s game of peek-a-boo is mimed in Gerty’s exposing herself to Bloom, an exposure that reminds Bloom of open flowers and Matt Dillon’s bevy of daughters, who play charades like Isabel’s trooping girls. “Still it was a kind of language between us” (*U*, p. 372), Bloom thinks of their silent exchange.

While Gerty is involved with the older, paternal Bloom, Cissy Caffrey and Edy Boardman are involved with three little boys (like the soldiers of Phoenix Park), Cissy’s brothers, Tommy and Jacky Caffrey, who are quarreling twins, and Edy’s baby brother. To three flirtatious questions with mildly incestuous overtones, Tommy gives sullen, negative answers.

—Is Cissy your sweetheart?
—Nao, tearful Tommy said.
—Is Edy Boardman your sweetheart? Cissy queried.
—Nao, Tommy said.
—I know, Edy Boardman said . . . Gerty is Tommy’s sweetheart.
—Nao, Tommy said on the verge of tears. (*U*, p. 347)

Unlucky Glugg in *Finnegans Wake* (II.1) has a similar experience.

—Haps thee jaoneosergs?
—Nao.
—Haps thee mayjaunties?
—Naohao.
—Haps thee per causes nunsibellies?
—Naohao Hao. (233.21)

While Glugg tries to guess the color of flowers and underdrawers, Bloom makes three guesses at Gerty’s perfume, one of them being Glugg’s correct answer, “What was it? Heliotrope? No, Hyacinth? Hm. Roses, I think” (U, p. 374).

The liturgical references shape the Mime chapter, from the initial sign of the cross (222.24) through ceremonies which appear to include reception into the Sodality (235–37), hymnsinging and censer swinging (234.34), the girls “prostitating their selves” (235.2) before the altar, like novices, and a final prayer, “Loud, hear us!” (258.25)—like Bloom’s profane echoes of the Benediction on Sandymount Strand, “O Lord, that little limping devil” (U, p. 370), “Lord, I am wet. Devil you are” (U, p. 372).

The most surprising transformation of a character from the early works into a Wakean figure occurs in the case of little Maria of Dubliners’ “Clay,” who reappears as ALP in her guise as peacemaker in Finnegans Wake. Maria works in a laundry (“She was always sent for when the women quarrelled over their tubs and always succeeded in making peace” [D, p. 99]). The bickering washerwomen on the banks of the Liffey may have originated in Maria’s laundry. Maria extends her peacemaking efforts to the quarreling brothers Joe and Alphy, but is not as successful as ALP who manages to bring about “reconciled Romas and Reims” (209.25). Maria is “a very, very small person indeed” (D, p. 99), like ALP, who is a “Wery, weeny wight” (102.18), “not up to your elb” (207.36) in height. When she laughs, Maria looks like a witch (“the tip of her nose nearly met the top of her chin” [D, p. 101]) as does ALP (“Fenny poor hex she must have charred” [208.31]). And Maria, like ALP, is a great bringer of presents, buying penny cakes and plumcake for the Donnelly family, although she loses the plumcake on the way, and although her gifts do not bring about the peace that ALP’s scavenged presents create. However, unlike the spin-sterish, prim Maria, little sharp-faced ALP belongs to the genre of exhausted, nagging wives of drunken, brutish husbands. Their respective songs present this contrast nicely. Maria sings, “I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls/With vassals and serfs at my side” (D, p. 106). No dweller
of marble halls, ALP has “Sold him her lease of ninenin
ineteen... Hoo was the C.O.D.?" (102.33). Maria sings, “I had riches
too great to count; could boast/Of a high ancestral name,” while ALP
wails, “We’re all up to the years in hues and cribies” (103.5).

When Joyce wanted to write an epic about common, modern man,
he took Homer’s Odyssey and systematically inverted its values and
deflated its dimensions. Yet the result was not an anti-epic, nor is
Bloom an anti-hero. Joyce had used a structured set to build up another
structured set, in the language of Lévi-Strauss. The result was a work
with an almost identical structure but a different ambience; Ulysses is
simply a modern epic.

When Joyce first began Finnegans Wake, he sorted out the
unused notes from Ulysses and exhumed old anecdotes and tales.29
The materials for the new book were already in existence—unlike
Portrait, his later works were not autobiographical and we have no
fiction about his mature life on the continent. But he used these worn
things freely as we can see from his transformation of the sources. As in
the dream, where trivial details are invested with important values,
Joyce sometimes took the least important details of stories—for exam-
ple, the quarreling adult brothers, Joe and Alphy, from “Clay,” and the
fighting child twins, Jacky and Tommy from “Nausicaa,”—removed
them from their old contexts, and made them into major configurations
in Finnegans Wake. Joyce eschewed an established model, a structured
set, in favor of using bits and pieces, “a jetsam litterage of convolvuli of
times lost or strayed, of lands derelict and of tongues laggin too”
(292.15). He wrote to Harriet Shaw Weaver, “The construction is quite
different from Ulysses where at least the ports of call were known
beforehand.”30

The bricoleur does not begin, like the engineer, with a fully
conceived project, a detailed model whose actualization depends on the
procurement of tools and materials precisely designed for the purposes
of the project. The bricoleur uses whatever is at hand for his tools and
materials, and the result of his labors will never conform exactly to his
original aim, which is sketchy at best.31 As a result, the project of the
bricoleur proceeds like an organic growth; Joyce often spoke of Fin-
negans Wake as though it had an independent life of its own, as though
it achieved its form without his direction or intervention.32 Perhaps the
difference between Joyce’s method in Portrait and in Finnegans Wake
can be described by the different meanings that the important word
"forge" holds for each work: in Portrait, Joyce fashions and tempers his elements into an impeccably designed artifact; in the Wake, he uses essentially devious means, compared with those of the artisan, to create an impressively original design, which on closer inspection consists of unaltered and familiar pieces of junk, borrowed or stolen from the smithies of countless others ("The prouts who will invent a writing there ultimately is the poeta, still more learned, who discovered the raiding there originally. That's the point of eschatology our book of kills reaches for now in soandso many counterpoint words. What can't be coded can be decoded if an ear aye seize what no eye ere grieved for" [482.31]).

Like the Book of Kells, which weaves an imaginative graphic text from the pretext of the Gospels, Finnegans Wake is woven from a multitude of earlier literatures. Implied in this process is a plunder ("the raiding there originally"), the hoax of Father Prout. The countless modern versions of ancient myths and themes is proof not of the barrenness of the modern imagination, but of the limited vision of human life permitted the artist. A breaking up of the old structures and recombination of the bits and pieces is the only mode of escape. Eliot suggests as much in The Wasteland when he writes, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." William Carlos Williams speaks of it also in relation to Joyce's style in Work in Progress. "If to achieve truth we work with words purely, as a writer must, and all the words are dead or beautiful, how then shall we succeed any better than might a philosopher with dead abstractions or their configurations? ... There must be something new done with the words. Leave beauty out, or, conceivably, one might begin again, one might break them up to let the staleness out of them as Joyce, I think, has done."33

The technique of bricolage is most striking at the level of words themselves, where it consists of breaking up words and phrases and reassembling them as they come to hand, without regard to their original functions. A phrase like "goat along nose" (413.28) takes the expressions "God alone knows" and "got a long nose" and invests them simultaneously in the words "goat" and "along" which have nothing to do with either of them, but which refer to earlier pasture jargon, "kidding" and "totether." Grammatically the phrase is meaningful only if we picture a goat at the side of a nose—a novel image indeed, God knows, the result of bricolage.

As a result of bricolage, the reader of Finnegans Wake is required to learn to read all over again, both at the word level and at the greater
level of myths and themes. In fact, the process of learning to read may be that primitive act suggested in the coding/decoding passage (482.31) as the raiding (reading) there originally, "reading" in the full sense of the German word lese, which is both a reading and a gathering. The reader, like the artist and the bricoleur, works by putting one thing with another as it comes to hand, like the child who first learns to read ("We are once amore as babes awandering in a wold made fresh where with the hen in the storyaboot we start from scratch" [336.16]).

In constructing a work from its fragments, broken up and considered with an innocent and unbiased eye, Joyce must have learned again what poets may have forgotten, but what contemporary linguists are now teaching: the significance of linguistic structure. The form of the language is learned unconsciously—even young children who have never heard of an "article" know that "the ball" is correct while "ball the" is not. Throughout Finnegans Wake, at all levels of construction, Joyce makes structure meaningful, makes it communicate quite independently of content. Therefore, it is fitting that Joyce ends Finnegans Wake with a structure word, pure and simple. Although it is commonly supposed to be so, I recall no conclusive evidence that the last word of the book connects with the first to form a complete circle. But even if it does, the last "the" stands alone at the end of the work, completely devoid of semantic meaning, and followed only by the remaining blank paper of the page. For "the," although it means nothing in itself, means something in relation to other words. Its sole purpose is to anticipate the next word, to guarantee that something will follow, something definite and particular. The "the" at the end of Finnegans Wake anticipates nothing—a definite nothing, the void, the silence, the death of ALP.

The problems of deconstruction in Finnegans Wake are not without implications for critics and criticism of the work. A commentator on Finnegans Wake ignores at her or his peril the fact that the book is itself about the quest for truth, the "true" facts, the correct interpretation, the "authentic" version, and that it purposefully levels all such pretensions. The results of critical efforts are not important in the Wake, but rather the compulsions and motives of the questors, their styles and methods, their quarrels, their self-justifications, and their own implication in the object of their study. Hermeneutics is an important issue in Finnegans Wake. It is possible, therefore, that just as Joyce provided for diverse interpretations of the hen’s Letter or ALP’s "mamafesto" in 1.7 of the Wake itself, so he provided for diverse
interpretations of *Finnegans Wake*. *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incarnation of Work in Progress* is a veritable extension of *Work in Progress*. While Joyce merely supervised the work of the "twelve Marshals"³⁴ and allowed them to write serious critical essays, he collected these into a volume that belongs nicely to the *Wake*. Besides the Wakean title, which Joyce invented and to which there is reference in the work itself (284.20), the number of essays corresponds to the number of customers and judges in the *Wake*, to the twelve apostles, twelve jurors, and so on. *Our Exagmination* was designated with a symbol (⊙), a designation not unlike those belonging to the *Wake* (⊙) and the members of the Earwicker "doodles" family: HCE (m), ALP (△), Mamalujo (X) (see 299, F4). Another projected book of four essays, to correspond to the four annalists, historians, teachers, and evangelists in the work was designated as X, but was never produced. Joyce included two letters of protest in *Our Exagmination*, one of them the priceless contribution of Vladimir Dixon, which, of course, was Joyce's own. Nothing could be more Wakean than this self-reflexive act of writing a letter to oneself about oneself.

By writing *Finnegans Wake* as he did, Joyce confirmed the impossibility of metalanguage, that is, the impossibility of making a critique in language of the epistemology embedded in language. This problem applies also to commentary on the *Wake*. It is difficult to write or talk about *Finnegans Wake* in conventional language. Wakean titles of critical studies, *Eternal Geometer* and *Joyce-Again's Wake*, for example, and often the text itself—"The hen's 'culdee sacco of wabbash' (210.1) does not sound too hopeful, nor does the prospect of 'potluck' for her children 'for evil and ever' " (210.5-6), writes Tindall³⁵—confirm the dependence of the critic on *Wake* language. Perhaps *Wake* critics and their interpretations form merely one dimension in the infinite regress that characterizes the hermeneutic theme of *Finnegans Wake*. Perhaps like the *Wake* citizenry itself, we investigate the sin in Phoenix Park, wondering what happened, trying to identify the principals, quarreling among ourselves, coming up with conflicting and contradictory versions, engaged in a love/hate relationship with the father, Joyce, and all the while examining insomniacally the seemingly unintelligible Letter under lamplight, muttering softly, "Bethicket me for a stump of a beech if I have the poultriest notions what the fairest he all means" (112.5).