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Drawing on *Finnegans Wake*

“the one the pictor of the other”

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I have been reading *Finnegans Wake* off and on for forty years, since I took a class on James Joyce with Roland McHugh at the School of Irish Studies in Dublin.¹ Not an “ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia,” I still have a long way to go (*FW* 120:13–14).

Sometimes, I must admit, I don't read the text. I just watch the words, picture the pages. I spelunk among the speleological openings: the caverns and linguistic apertures that the letters and punctuation marks present. I investigate the lush and overgrown gardens of “buaboababbaun,” the tumble and roll of the first “lapapple,” and the soft, gentle, rippling waters of the “liffeyette” (*FW* 126:12, 17, 13). I trace the meandering pathways articulated by the linear and curlicue markings: the cactus-barbed spires of *t* and *k*; the folds of linen cloth draped over an *m*; the bulbous, jaunty personality of *g*. (These are my sigla.)

The conversations that I overhear between initials and images, among visuals and verbals, amid swirling stories and sketches, have always fascinated me. In my published materials and in my intuitive interests, I move back and forth between these twinning attractions.

In early 2016, as a way to explore these doublings, these omnilingings, and as a way to continue familiarizing myself with a text that many consider fundamentally unreadable—McHugh, Seamus Dean, and John Bishop among them²—I started on a six-year project to annotate/illustrate/disrupt the 628 pages of *Finnegans Wake*.

On the title page of my project, *LOTS OF FUN WITH FINNEGANS WAKE*, I refer to what I'm doing (scribed in archival, nontoxic, red felt pen on 80-pound, 100 brightness, acid-free cover stock) as a form of “intellectual folk art.” On other pages, in other random colors, I reference

my yoking together of the illustrative and the intelligible, the optical and the oral.

“Words. Was it their colours?” asks Stephen Dedalus.

He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold, the russet and green of apple orchards, azure of waves, the greyfringed fleece of clouds. No, it was not their colours: it was the poise and balance of the period itself. . . . was it that . . . he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language manycoloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose. (*P* 166)

Despite Stephen’s negative and equivocating answer, it is their colors that attract him. And their physicality. Their reflection. Their prismatic, manycolored richness. That’s what Joyce’s lucid supple periodic phrases use as grist. That’s the stuff from which the poise and balance is built.

We dream and conjure in images. The whole spread: splintering, perverting, recurring, exaggerating, animating, distorting. Melodramatic. Foggy, fractured. Why shouldn’t a book attempt such a self-referential and expanding gathering of gestures? Some have said that we can’t visualize the text of *Finnegans Wake*, that we can’t picture for ourselves what a Mookse or a Gripes or the leapgirls or Anna Livia might look like. I disagree. Just don’t look for documentary verisimilitude. Don’t allow logic, the familiar, to get in the way. It’s preferable to see it new, or *Make It New*, as Ezra Pound, Joyce’s intellectual ally, said in his 1935 collection of essays. After all, “understanding is a very dull occupation,” Joyce’s intellectual adversary, Gertrude Stein, said in her 1937 book, *Everybody’s Autobiography*.

In the Joyce-escorted essay “The Revolution of Language and James Joyce” from *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, Eugene Jolas writes:

The real metaphysical problem today is the word. The epoch when the writer photographed the life about him with the mechanics of words redolent of the daguerreotype, is happily drawing to its close. The new artist of the word has recognized the autonomy of language

Big Ben, nickname for the Great Bell (as I write this, I make a series of mistakes, which WAS of the clock at the north end of the Palace of Westminster, have to be corrected, integrated, and London. When completed in 1859, it was says clockmaker Ian Westworth, apted - all on the fly) IS "the prince of timekeepers: the biggest, most accurate, bain L. fruit: he was Ger. ist / L. est: is SHALL BE te four-faced striking and a horologe unstoppable and the Benn of all bells; fruit, isst and compared with the (my stan chiming clock in the world" a horologe unstoppable and the Benn of all bells; fruit, isst and compared with the (my stan L. heri: yesterday L. erit: he herit and though he's mildwastaned he's mouldystoned; is a quer-wal with the") permanence of stone. will be Quercus: genus of oak trees plane tree Megalopolis: ancient capital of Arcadia, a vision of past a series of contrasts: the cuss in the forest but plane member for Megalopolis; mountun-oralism and harmony wi keeper of time, but the bain of other mountainous fauna th nature. Arcadia is seen as a lost Edenic bells; fleeting but perman mighty, faunonfleetfoot; plank in our platform, blank in our form of life, contrasting ent; of the forest but also of the blanks in the scrotumpicking with the progressive nature of Utopian city; mountainous but al scouturn; hidal, in carucates he is enumerated, hold as an earl, desires. The inhabitants so fleet of foot; interested in in hidalgo: lower Spanish nobility up on of Arcadia are regarded as living diividal words and also he counts; shipshaped phrase of buglooking words with a form of the longer, bookish project; carucate: in feudal system, as the stainerice that corrupted other reli the contrast of law and like the easing moments of a graminivorous; to our dooms above, a blot on the BS gions. will; over, under and aqueducted!; much land as could be tilled cutcheon is a stain or mark against e rough socks and silk sto brought he law, our manoirs he made his vill of; was an over- one's reputation or the e ckings; of the people and a graminivorous: getting with 1 plow in 1 year of one's family (an escutcheon is an gentleman, as easing mome grind to the underground and acqueduct for fierythroats; sends heralatic shield that bears et cetera usual nts... Shitting London Underground vill: a few here: villa, will, civil, villaing family's coat of arms JJ commenting, It. acque: w boys in socks, acoughawhooping when he lets farth his carbon- the Dublin superstition that the air from the he lets unit corresponding earth upon his carbon monox atery (the Dublin superstition that the air from the he lets unit corresponding earth own writing, ide, aconstituent oxide and silk stockings show her shapings when he looses hose fortha part: to a water where he of coal gas cock-a-hoop: extrem powder gasworks cured whooping cough Advertisement for Pale People easily mixes ely and obvious on hers; stocks dry puder! for the Ill people and pinkun's pellets "Pink Pills for Pale People" big sound in gisly pleased: from "set cock a hoop" denoting Lundy Foot, Dublin tobac words with turning on the tap for all the Pale; gave his mundyfoot to Miserius, her pinch to Lundy Foot, Dublin tobac number, grass- to let liquor to ALPPALS. Slattery's Mounted Foot consist, sold "super-fine pig-tails for ladies." J level ones... flow (from mid base) Anna Livia, that superfine pigtail to Cerisia Cerosia and quid John Philpot Curran told him to Caius and Sempronius are characters in Shake spea h. Ceresia: cherry inscribe "quid rides" (L. "what are re's Titus Andronicus "what rides to Titius, Caius and Sempronius; made the man who had you laughing at") on his ca need you, being come to sense, But Napoleon eat Wellesley, 1st Duke of Cas rriage (one of those ann fumble in a greasy till And no notion of shopkeepers feel he'd rather play the duke than play otations that I don't add the halfpence to the pence And led the English Wellington who defeated Kets thing I would have un prayer to shivering prayer, the gentleman; shot two queans and shook three caskles when covered on my own, until You have dried the marrow from a nation of S Napoleon at Waterloo symbolist there are 3 castles on the bone; For men were born he won his game of dwarfs; fumes inwards like a strombolist till on the Dublin coat of arms sl. quean; whose sl. shot to pray and save; Romantic dead Jesus o keepers" he smokes at both ends; manmote, betier of him, womankind, woman king tucked be Ireland's dead and gone, It's with O'Leary in the grave; he smokes at both ends; manmote, betier of him, womankind, woman king tucked be Yeats September 1913 - whie I thought of when I say this notion of shop keepers white and gold. liturgical colours the heather on Howth Violet is the liturg ical colour of r epenance "se representation of filth and filth" pietad!; shows one white drift of snow among the gorsegrowth of his crown and a chaperon of repentance on that which shed Bandal's (the Irish P/Q split) went by metro for the polis and Dublin Metropolitan Police gore; pause and quies, triple bill; L. quies: rest principal town ining (Triple Bill) followed. Souvenir of the 25th Anniversary of Gairty Th then hovey by; to the finders, hail! woa, you that seek!; whom "If Death laid her hand on him and Famine devoured his filth had plenshed, dearth devoured; hock is leading, cocoa comes and is a store: speeches and a Mohamad Lane. Poolie, O'Brien, next, emery tries for the flag; can dance the O'Bruin's polerpass sl. pole: penis are there and here Brown + Nolan orchestra accompaniment; took place fuckned to sexual slang. Sheilagh's mot ugh informs us that "orchestra": it's slang at Noolakn to his own orchistruss sheilagh's mot ugh informs us that "orchestra": it's slang before the internatural convention of catholic midwives and for "testicle" her, Siobhan's grandmother, was a Catho "orchestra": it's slang found stead before the congress for the study of endonational in Ireland before catholic "orchestra": it's slang calamities; makes a delictuous entree and finishes off the course international ca: it's slang between sweets and savouries; flouts for forecasts, flairs for finds of food and sex: it's slang between the sweet and little Moses" (a game I know nothing of: 365 there were 360 idols in Ka'aba, the savoury; and the fun of the fray on the fairground; cleared out three hun- in Mecca, which were destr once again, in the midst of this colossal El-Khalasa: the stone eyed by Mohammed Before Moh meat I seen dred sixty five idles to set up one all khalassal for henwives hoping ammed's birth a prophet was the sexual Ang. In. flahoolagh: princely, block in the Ka'aba expected: women hoped for male the Faith to have males; the flawhoolagh, the grasping one, the kindler of children and "hanif's" denied er, the son, and the generous fothardy popular superstitions quite a few burning word paschal fire; forbids us our trespassers as we forgate him; the s here abouts cinders zimmers spirit! St. Patrick's Paschal fire - set in direct defiance of the pagenkings of nearby and phoenix be his pyre, the cineres his sire!; piles big pelium on Tara (the Hill of Slane maybe) here the Dedipus, eat-a-pussy complex - and with the well-used sl. pussy for little ossas like the pilluls of hirculeads; has an eatupus complex cunt (in use since the 1800s, Pillars of Hercules, Gibraltar oh, there are layers upon layers of familial complexes (and some good old fashioned, low sexual humour thrown into Pelion: a woo L. hircus: 128 ded mountain in Greece, near the coast of SE Thess goat aly, in Greek mythology held to be the home of the centaurs, and the giants were said to have piled Mounts Olympus and Ossa on its summit in their attempt to reach heaven and destroy the gods. "pile Pelion on Ossa": add an extra difficulty or task to som "pile Pelion on Ossa": add an extra difficulty or task to som etting which is already difficult or onerous.

Vico, New Science: "the first language in the first mute language of physical objects" have begun with signs, whether gestures of physical objects

hope stick to futurism; light legliffers cense him souriantes from Fr. L. futuete: : tuck! sl. legliffers: fornicator souriantes:

afore while boor browbenders curse him grommelants to his smiling light of its past: Mr Brow Bender Fr. grommellants: grumbling hindmost; between youlasses and yeladst glimse of Even; the Moorees

Lug his peak has, the Luk his pile; drinks tharr, and wodhar forlimpse of his asama and eats the unparishable sow to styve off reglar rack; As

the beggars cloak them reclined about his paddystool, the whores vol winken him as they walk their side; on Christmas at Advent

Lodge, New Zealand, after a lenty illness the roeverand Mr peritonitis: inflammation of tissue around abdominal organs

Easterling of pentecostitis, no followers by bequest, fanfare all no flowers private; Gone Where Glory Waits Him (Ball, bulletist) but Not

Here Yet (Maxwell, clark); commixed under articles but phoe-is morning. nished a borgiess; from the vat on the bier through the burre in beer and butter

the dark to the buttle of the bawn; is A1 an the highest but Roh Borja) acknoleg Battle of the Boyne, 1690 L. commixit: he defiled ed fathering sever

re his root; filled fanned of huckleberries whenas all was tuck THE al children by his' STEAL tracking down the tra

and toss up for him as a yangster to fall fou of hockinbechers I dering around Ovid after rap rustics, tams turmoil; sas seed enough for a semination but ARE I come across a few lines

until he could recite effortlessly rup=break sa=sow, su= THEODORE her's foul adultery

the gleam of the glow of the shine of the sun through the dearth of the dirth on the blush of the brick of the viled ville of

Barnehulme has dust turned to brown; these dyed to tartan him, died tried

rueroot, dulce, bracken, teasel, fuller's ash, sundew and cress; long

but grew girther, girther and girther; he has twenty four or so Gaity

cousins germinating in the United States of America and a Dublin namesake with an initial difference in the once kingdom of

Poland; his first's a young rose and his second's French-bud ad 24 places called "Dublin" in the U.S. then a null bid! Christie's

water last trade overseas; buyshop of Glintylook, eorl of Hoed; nguishd of all living archite

you and I are in him surranted by brwn bldns; Elin's flee duuced the eye/into a maze of

Welsh brunt: Dublin's brown buildings was one of your wandering passages. "And Siobhan

highbigpipey boys but fancy him as smoking fags (his at) time a Now



Water another day at my desk... random plucked amplified Mangan and Berkeley valued for water as a medicine vodka... Longish grey... He never... a few coins into his... my pocket so crossed the street... He ruffled said thanks... I walked through a stack... Easterling of pentecostitis... private; Gone Where Glory Waits Him... Here Yet (Maxwell, clark); commixed under articles... nished a borgiess; from the vat on the bier... the dark to the buttle of the bawn; is A1 an the highest... re his root; filled fanned of huckleberries... and toss up for him as a yangster to fall fou of hockinbechers... wherein he had gauged the use of raisin; ads aliments, das doles... raps rustics, tams turmoil; sas seed enough for a semination but... until he could recite effortlessly rup=break sa=sow, su=... the gleam of the glow of the shine of the sun through the... dearth of the dirth on the blush of the brick of the viled ville of... Barnehulme has dust turned to brown; these dyed to tartan him, died tried... rueroot, dulce, bracken, teasel, fuller's ash, sundew and cress; long... but grew girther, girther and girther; he has twenty four or so... cousins germinating in the United States of America and a Dublin... Poland; his first's a young rose and his second's French-bud ad 24 places called "Dublin" in the U.S. then a null bid! Christie's... water last trade overseas; buyshop of Glintylook, eorl of Hoed; nguishd of all living archite... you and I are in him surranted by brwn bldns; Elin's flee duuced the eye/into a maze of... Welsh brunt: Dublin's brown buildings was one of your wandering passages. "And Siobhan... highbigpipey boys but fancy him as smoking fags (his at) time a Now

with any graphic enterprise of expression, the thin... and skittishness that implies. I try not to... the process, there are times when I imagine... ide the idea what the final look like - I... bandon to

and, aware of the twentieth century current towards universality, attempts to hammer out a verbal vision that destroys time and space.³

I'm not quite sure what Jolas means by destroying time and space, but avoiding the daguerrotypical seems like a worthy, if not entirely new, enterprise. This has, after all, been the intent of writers from Homer and Hesiod onward.⁴ Jolas's remark prompts several questions: How can words approach photographic realism, what would that look like anyway, and why would writers seek this?

In his essay "I Don't Know What to Call It But Its Mighty Unlike Prose," Victor Lloná also from *Our Exagmination*, notes that in the *Wake* a

vast company of actorwords—not only of the English, but of many languages, both dead and alive—cavort here in a whirlwind dramatic ballet to a polyphonic orchestral accompaniment, while the eyes of the audience are dazzled and soothed in turns by a display of colours which runs the gamut of a lavish palette. (95)

Lloná here binds together lexemes and likenesses, as though the two cannot exist but in concert. I've always loved the testy intellectual swagger of Samuel Beckett's contribution to this loose assortment of essays (and I continue to think his contribution is the most insightful) but Jolas and Lloná do have colorful and euphonic observations to make.

We start with the visual. In the caves of Timpuseng and Chauvet and Caliboaia and Tassili n'Ajjer and El Castillo and Lascaux, we start with hands and bulls and swirls and horizontal people (sleeping, swimming, floating?). Only later—20,000 or 30,000 or 40,000 years later—do we get what we now call hieroglyphs and pictograms and cuneiform. And words. It took us a while to develop the vision, the eyesight that's necessary to read words and apprehend the pictures they present.

A few Joyceans have explored elements of the visual in his works. "When we are in an environment of competing visual stimuli, comprehension is preceded by perception, which is, in turn, preceded by attention," Garry Leonard notes in his discussion of visuality and visual culture in Joyce.⁵ Yet whenever I've shown pages of my project to anyone—Joyceans or not—the first thing that they respond to is the representational, the familiar, and only later can I nudge them toward some sort of perception, or comprehension, to use Leonard's words.

Invoking the Surrealists' *cadavres exquis*, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, and Pablo Picasso's collages as representative of the avant-garde, Catherine Flynn talks about *Finnegans Wake* as "an experiment in collective reading" and as "a kind of collective writing."⁶ It could also be, I would suggest, an experiment in collective image making. We create—collectively—images out of the lallation and agglutination offered (see the beginning of the first thunderword at *FW* 3:15—"bababadalgharaghtak . . ."—for this lallation and agglutination, this combinatorial baby-talk, in action). Flynn also references Joyce's words "electric eyes" as the very last note on VI.B.37:122 in *The James Joyce Archive*, which she says is "Joyce's attempt at, or a placeholder for, a technological equivalent to the organ of vision, which is replaced in the radio passage by the more felicitous 'circumcentric megacycles' (*FW* 310.07)" (291).

Much has been made of the music, the noise, the cacophony, and the thunder of *Finnegans Wake*, but before any of that can occur, it has to be read. The audience has to look at the text, with their eyes.

The text enters our eyes before it enter our ears.

It's important to remember that Joyce suffered from serious vision problems, and this threat to his sight may have increased his interest in film and his efforts to establish the Volta cinema in Dublin, in 1909. Certainly, Joyce's use of sigla helped cut back on optical, word-based stress.

Samuel Beckett, in his frequently cited contribution to *Our Exagmination*, "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce," observes:

This writing that you find so obscure is a quintessential extraction of language and painting and gesture, with all the inevitable clarity of the old inarticulation. Here is the savage economy of hieroglyphics. (15)

There is something simple and primitive about the image, the picture, here yoked by savage violence together with the spoken and the written. The effect on the reader/listener/viewer is (or can be) instantaneous.

At the end, in my continuing project, I absorb the text's world through images as much as I absorb it through words. I'm okay with thinking about thinking, but I'd rather not hierarchize markings made by letters over those made by visualities.

“What is audible is presented in time, what is visible is presented in space,” says Stephen Dedalus (*P* 249). Eugene Jolas may not need time and space, but Stephen does, and so do I.

Joyce invites us to “come into the pictures” (*FW* 243:1) and perhaps “the one the pictor of the other” (*FW* 164:4–5) is a way for viewers (and readers) to regard this project. (See what I mean?)

The illustrations that accompany this description of my project can be found on pages 126–33 in *LOTS OF FUN WITH FINNEGANS WAKE*. They were done with felt pen, acrylic, graphite, and found objects on archival card stock. Each page is 11 inches by 8.5 inches.

Viewers and readers will note that I do not follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* in my felt-penned markings. I plunder annotations, critical observations, musings, and quotations from various sources, all of which I try to note at the spot, or capture in overview citations elsewhere in the project. More pages from the project are viewable at tpob.me.

NOTES

1. In *The “Finnegans Wake” Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), Roland McHugh talks about his role as the curator of the James Joyce Tower in Sandycove, but leaves out information about his teaching a course on Joyce at the School of Irish Studies (founded 1969, closed 2003). While I was there, for the academic year 1977–78, the school had a distinguished roster of professors, including Eavan Boland, Augustine Martin, and J. C. C. Mays.

2. Many people, myself included, consider *Finnegans Wake* “unreadable”—using any pedestrian definition of that word. I think this assessment carries additional weight when noted Joyceans also use the word, or variations of it. See the third sentence in Roland McHugh’s Introduction to *The Sigla of “Finnegans Wake”* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1976), 1: “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*,” 1; see the first sentence in Seamus Deane’s Introduction to the 1992 Penguin edition of *FW*: “The first thing to say about *Finnegans Wake* is that it is, in an important sense, unreadable” (Joyce, James, *Finnegans Wake*, with an Introduction by Seamus Deane, Penguin, 1992), vii; and see the first sentence in John Bishop’s 1999 Penguin edition of *FW*: “There is no agreement as to what *Finnegans Wake* is about . . . or even whether it is, in any ordinary sense of the word, ‘readable.’” (Joyce, James, *Finnegans Wake*, with an Introduction by John Bishop, Penguin, 1999), vii.

3. Beckett, Samuel et al., *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of "Work in Progress"* (New York: New Directions, 1972), 79. Future citations will be indicated by page number parenthetically in the text.

4. In Emily Wilson's translation of Homer's *The Odyssey*, Hermes, the messenger of the gods, "casts a spell to close men's eyes/or open those of sleepers when he wants": Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by Emily Wilson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), 507; and Dorothea Wender has Hesiod recommend that you "let your mind be open as your face": Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days/Theognis, Elegies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 82. My point here is simply to say that words are not mirrors or windows of photographic repetition or representation that we set up to our bodies, our souls, or any other part of us. They have their own intent. And it's not about mimesis.

5. See Garry Leonard, "He's Got Bette Davis Eyes: James Joyce and Melodrama," *Joyce Studies Annual* 2008, 80.

6. See Catherine Flynn, "Finnegans Wake's Radio Montage: Man-Made Static, the Avant-Garde, and Collective Reading," *James Joyce Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (Winter 2015), 287. Future citations will be indicated by page number parenthetically in the text.