The Truce, the Old Truce, and Nattonbuff the Truce:
A Creative Reading of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*
Abstract

James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* is known as one of the most difficult texts in all of literature. A one-to-one relationship, however, between a decoding reader and a presenting author is something *Finnegans Wake* does not incorporate in any traditional sense. Because of the ways in which Joyce manipulates language through assonance and multilingual references, his words are essentially freed from their dictionary definitions and rely instead on connotations.

This essay looks at the text from the perspective of a first reading, a look that is then compared to a more ‘authoritative’ stance found in various glossaries, to see if the information found there takes precedence over the reader’s imagination, and if self-made meanings remain ‘appropriate’ in the face of the explanations.

The text is shown to become more of a *device* with which we produce meaning, rather than a story to which we are only passively listening or otherwise trying to understand. Instead, it celebrates obscure, often contradicting sense relations, which correspond to the dream-like nature of its nocturnal theme.

Despite the sheer amount of historical references contained within, the first-time reader can proceed without the many glossaries that have been written on the work, and instead rely on a more creative and less disciplined method of examination.

This essay is thus tainted with an inherent contradiction—it questions the transcriptive act epitomized by eager textual scholars set on elucidating the text’s difficulties while simultaneously committing that act, but only in order to encourage readers that *Finnegans Wake* otherwise scares away and to suggest an alternate method of reading. Readers are thereby asked to relieve themselves of their domesticated behavior, and get involved. The difficulty of *Finnegans Wake* only appears when we read it in terms of conventional understanding, and should instead encourage us into becoming creative *users*.

**Keywords:** James Joyce; *Finnegans Wake*; reader-response; formalism; intention
It is an axiomatic truth that *Finnegans Wake* is a difficult text. We have all, it might seem, agreed upon that as being true. In describing a text as difficult, however, we are probably saying that it is difficult to *understand*, that as we read it we do not acquire a satisfying sense of *understanding*. The most comprehensible of texts, then, in the same view, are essentially placed within the limits of language systems with which we are already familiar. They take parts of ideas that we *know of* and merge them to create a not-before-seen context. From formalistic perspective, those texts are but ‘recycled’ from words contained in the dictionary¹. They can only go so far in the process of making something unfamiliar (a new sequence) out of something familiar (a language system). *Finnegans Wake* is an example of a text that has slipped out of this sphere of assumed knowledge, one that lies “outside the parrotry of ... self-evident limitedness”, where “the word has become a thing by itself” (Ball 221), a text that does not directly support an external fetching of words. Steve Macone puts it rather well when he says that “it’s a bit like the introvert’s Everest” (84), or perhaps an ‘introverted Everest’—it might be thoroughly impressive, but since the implications of its existing outside these stringent boundaries of language necessitate that it does so wholly alone. Does it not seem strange that we still attempt to force a method of reading—this intense search for a kind of agreed-upon meaning—to a work that clearly exists outside the boundaries of common understanding? And does

¹ The word ‘dictionary’, as it is used here, does not refer to any physical, real-world dictionary, but is rather used in the sense that it is a representation of the sum of agreed-upon meaning, a collection from which we ‘fetch’ words that we are certain will be widely understood. ‘Dictionary’ carries with it the rule (which constitutes the ‘boundary’ of language) that a word does not exist unless it is contained within. It is a useful word to use when comparing language at large to the language of *Finnegans Wake*, since dictionaries are inherently limited, while *Finnegans Wake* is nearly limitless (‘nearly’ since it still partly relies on agreed-upon meaning, i.e. the ‘dictionary’).
it not seem right that for a text that asks for a certain perspective ought to get it, however eccentric, like most texts have the privilege to? A text is only difficult when we are struggling to find something familiar in it. If the entire text is intrinsically unfamiliar, then, how do we approach it at all? This is not an essay that follows Joseph Campbell’s and Henry Morton Robinson’s line of thought, namely, that “[Finnegans Wake] exacts discipline and tenacity from those who would march with it” (3), because in that sense ‘marching’ seems an awful lot like work—the antithesis of the “lots of fun at Finnegan’s Wake” (Brobdingnagian) from the chorus of the traditional Irish street ballad on which the title and certain themes of Joyce’s work are based. This essay instead argues that rather than enlisting to the idea of Finnegans Wake as an immense obscurity that cannot be “read ... without any help” (e.g. a reference book) (Frehner et al. 310) we must dare gain a new perspective on it, if only to get us beyond the first step—entrance—during which it is otherwise questionable that we would succeed in even approaching its monumental threshold at all. Such a reading would go against its ‘introversion’, our sense of [it as an] inward-turning, self-subsistent work disengaged from the social world” (Levenson 670). As such, we cannot move it onto our understanding, so we have to instead expand our understanding to reach it. It makes complete sense that a normal text whose author presents and whose reader decodes is drastically different than a text where the author plays and manipulates, and where the reader participates. This is something new. We will look at Finnegans Wake as more of a usable device than a formally conveyed story, a text that takes its shape as the reader turns and twists its words by their will. This reader is what we could call ‘uninformed’ since we do not assume that they have extensive access to the historical contextual knowledge that the text might at first seem to require. The third edition of Roland McHugh’s Annotations to Finnegans Wake, as well as a web-based glossary called the Finnegans Wake Extensible Elucidation Treasury² (henceforth Fweet) will then be brought to that reading in order to determine how the information found there affects the creative findings of the ‘uninformed’ reading. This is not an approach that will guarantee full ‘comprehension’ (Joyce has made sure that no reading ever will), but one that will

² Which “houses a collection of 82,500 notes ... gathered from numerous sources”, an aggregate of a large selection of major scholarly work on Finnegans Wake, including Atherthon, Begnal, Campbell and Robinson, Crispi and Slote, Clive and Senn, Lernout, McCarthy, Patell, Rose, Sawyer-Lauçanno, Schork, Troy and Van Hulle. The “core of the collection” is the first two volumes of McHugh’s Annotations to Finnegans Wake.
rather focus on achieving something that we could term *resonance*—beginnings of the idea that the malleable words of *Finnegans Wake* can open up for a new mode of creative reading.

**Background on *Finnegans Wake***

To the extent that *Ulysses* is about the day, *Finnegans Wake* is about the night. The thematic consistency throughout is that of the dream, where, as Joyce says, “all the languages are present, for they have not yet been separated” (qtd. in Anderson 33). The result is a style that, at first sight, borders on nonsense because it does not rely on words in any traditional sense, but rather on sound and on multilingual puns. Joyce’s own description of his style of writing in *Dubliners*, namely, that it is of a “scrupulous meanness”, that is, “the special odour of corruption which, I hope, floats over my stories” (qtd. in Ellmann 210) could here be renewed in order to better fit with *Finnegans Wake*: an ‘unscrupulous newness’. ‘Unscrupulous’ simply for the reason that Joyce goes beyond conventional rules of language but also because it might make us consider its antonym, ‘scrupulous’, a word with which we might appropriately describe his 17 year long process of composition, during which he was heavily criticized, even by his brother Stanislaus, who “rebuked him for writing an incomprehensible night-book” (qtd. in Ellmann 603). Joyce was, more specifically, scrupulous in his ‘unscrupulousness’, both in his unyielding attitude and his devotion to his artistic vision, but these seemingly contradictory elements are more than can be contained within a single word, unless the opposite meanings of ‘scrupulous’ and ‘unscrupulous’ could be, somehow, merged together. This is precisely the kind of play that Joyce was trying to apply to words in *Finnegans Wake*. Take the first word³ in the text, “riverrun” (3). While it could be seen as merely a creative way of saying ‘running river’, it is constructed in such a way because it *sounds like* or is otherwise similar to the Italian “riverranno” (‘they will return’) and French “rêverons” (‘we will dream’) (Fweet) and “riverain: pertaining to river” (McHugh 3). Hidden within a single word, we find two⁴ of *Finnegans Wake*’s large, overarching themes—that of

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³ The first word, that is, in structure only, since the book famously ‘ends’ mid-sentence with “A way a lone a last a loved a long the” (628) to continue again in the ‘beginning’ with “riverrun” (3). The book has no proper ending—it is circular.

⁴ In addition to the river. Just the river Liffey (that flows through Dublin) is referred to, directly or indirectly, some 144 times throughout. Other river names show up in the text 1096 times (Fweet), from
the dream and that of “recirculation” (*FW* 3). “Riverrun” could serve as a typical case for how words work in the text. There is almost always a somewhat odd yet English-sounding surface word within which there will most likely be embedded a multilingual meaning or reference. Words are made with the notion of “doubling” (Dublin, or ‘to double’ something) (*FW* 97, 197, 290, 295, 413, 462, 543), they can be both *known* and *heard*, and they resonate with us in either way, or both ways. A look at Joyce’s early drafts will reveal that the final product is a ‘jumbled’ version of a more formally told story, because he “never simply writes, he *double* writes” (Fordham 46)—a process that is mirrored in the parts of the text that are afforded to “Shem the Penman” (*FW* 125), “who is the closest thing in the book to Joyce’s *alter ego*” (Fairhall 240) who, “with this double dye”, writes “over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body, till by its corrosive sublimation one continuous present tense integument slowly unfolded all marryvoising moodmoulded cyclewheeling history” (*FW* 185-186). In trying to grasp the ways in which *Finnegans Wake* may be read, the self-referential aspects of the text will be of most interest to us, since it seems that “*Finnegans Wake* is about *Finnegans Wake*” or, further, that “*Finnegans Wake* is about our ideas about it and they are *Finnegans Wake*” (Tindall 237). In Joyce’s perception of our perception of his work, then, we might discover our own.

One of the reasons why *Finnegans Wake* is celebrated within certain circles yet widely denounced outside of them is that it provides practically endless material to study for those interested in Joyce himself, or more specifically, his long, complicated process of creating the “Book of the Night” (Anderson 16). When it is not preoccupied with other things, the text seems to speak about itself in jest, “behove this sound of Irish sense. Really? Here English might be seen. Royally? One sovereign punned to petery pence. Regally? The silence speaks the scene. Fake! So *This Is Dyoublong?* Hush! Caution! Echoland!” (*FW* 12-13). Bruce Stewart points out that, cleverly, “Joyce’s new literary *coinage* is a challenge to the sovereignty of English” (emphasis added) (“Modernist”). Contradictions come in with “silence” that “speaks” and, after asking us if we belong here (“Dyoublong?”), telling us to “Hush!” because here, in the “Echoland!”, our ‘silence’ might ‘echo’ back to ourselves. ‘Hushing’ us might seem an odd thing to do since it does not seem that we, as readers,
have the capability to respond. But why would you hush someone that could not speak? If we consider that “Joyce’s conversations with his readers function like a comic ‘user-friendly’ reader’s manual to the very complex ‘program’ that is *Finnegans Wake*” (Cahalan 306) it might seem that he belittles us to what we could compare to a tolling ant, which, in its ignorance, cannot to see the obscured larger perspective (e.g. a synopsis), to be condemned to turn over every stone only to find a joke below, which will most likely refer to our turning of it, virtually mocking us if we dare not go on. As such, the most important traits one needs when approaching *Finnegans Wake* is humility and a sense of humor.

On the surface, however, Joyce does present a “cyclewheeling” view of history and the nightly dreams of a family living in Chapelizod, Dublin and whatever else one might find in the text—fables, mythologies, songs, plays, advertisements etc. Characters come through faintly visible associations whose names reoccur thousands of times throughout in abbreviations: HCE, or Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, e.g. “*Hic cubat edilis ...*” (emphasis added) (Latin, “here sleeps the magistrate ...”) (McHugh 7)) (7) is the family man first seen as hod carrier Finnegan who falls from the ladder and dies, and is then resurrected at his wake by having whiskey poured on his corpse (events taken from the Irish ballad Finnegan’s Wake). He is later an ordinary pub keeper, an “anyman” (Bishop 135) who is thought to have made some kind of sexual transgression involving two girls in the Phoenix Park, the rumors of which event spread quickly throughout the village and are finally exaggerated to such an extent that the remaining, vital piece of evidence in his trial is a letter written by his wife, ALP, or Anna Livia Plurabelle, e.g. “... *apud libertinam parvulam*” (emphasis added) (Latin, “…with the little freed-girl” (McHugh 7)) (7), which is integral to the entire text. Their children are the two sons, the artist Shem and the postman Shaun, whose rivalrous relationship is echoed in many other fictional and mythological character pairs throughout, particularly in “Mutt” and “Jute” (16), later “BUTT” and “TAFF” (338), and their daughter, Issy, who has a split personality.

5 Which is based upon Giambattista Vico’s 1725 work *Scienza Nuova* (Eng. *The New Science*).
6 Fweet shows that, cleverly, three members of the family—HCE, ALP and Issy—are included within the name Chapelizod, too: Chapelizod for HCE, Chapelizod for ALP and Chapelizod, or Isolde, another incarnation of Issy.
7 We can, from the presence and the proximity of Anna’s and Humphrey’s acronyms being embedded in the text like this, assume that they are present in the ‘scene’ that we are currently reading, that is, as husband and wife, sleeping “early in bed” (3) together. Whenever any similar hint at the name of a character shows up in the text, we are encouraged to see it as a sign of that character’s presence.
Howard Nemerov points out that *Finnegans Wake* made him “think thoughts [he] had not thought before” (655). The reason for this newness might be very simple: a text that follows the rather strict rules of a language system *builds* its meaning, whereas *Finnegans Wake* *shapes* it. Words are like bricks in the former, and like some moldable material in the latter. Joyce really does “tell you no story” (*FW* 55), because the text is more of an object, whose ‘story’ is only indistinctly represented, and therefore cannot be retold in an explicit way. Its resonance can only be realized through exploration, and even then, it is to some degree unique to the individual. In our lacking a real consensus of what it would mean to say (in whatever traditional way we think it ought to say it) the reader is left alone to go “… scraping along to sneeze out a likelihood that will solve and salve life's robulous rebus …” (*FW* 12). We regain our sense of command when we, once accustomed to inspect it in the vein of its language, have learned to discover the multiplicity of meanings on a word-by-word level. Even, for example, in its title, ‘Fin (French, ‘end’). Again is Wake’ (reincarnation), ‘Finn Again is Wake’ (Finn MacCool), Finnegan’s ‘wake’, as in the vigil by his corpse, or ‘wake’ as in the wave of the repercussions of what he left behind, and ‘finnegans, wake!’, as in a call for the waking of all the ‘finnegans’ (the ‘anymen’) of the world. All of these came to us the same way they did to Joyce—that is, through creative imagination. It is the very playfulness of the language that invites us to participate. We might even go so far as to claim the title says, ‘Fie! Né e.g. ans Väck/Weak/Week’. In French, ‘Né’ is ‘born’ and ‘ans’ is ‘years’. While ‘väck’ is Swedish for ‘gone’, it also means ‘wake’ (as in imperative ‘*wake* them up’). It becomes a dismissive ‘life is over as soon as we are born’, or, simplified, ‘life is short’. It has a contradicting note of stillbirth versus the potential of life to it, what with the triple entendre of birth ‘being an example’ of ‘years waking’, ‘years gone’ or ‘weak years’. There is really no one stopping us from doing this—there is only encouragement—because we know that Joyce goes as far, if not further, in the text proper.

**The text as creative device**

Joyce’s remark, “[*Ulysses*] will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant” (qtd. in *Ellmann* 521), along with Samuel Beckett’s “[*Finnegans Wake*] is not *about* something; it is *that something* itself” (14) and the oft-used
rationalization that Joyce needs to be studied rather than read, all seem to point toward the idea that it would be more fitting to appreciate *Finnegans Wake* as an object rather than a story that simply happens to be told through the medium of text. Think of the most disposable objects with which you interact on a daily basis. Paper, as books, magazines, pamphlets, booklets, invoices, bills, receipts, prints, essays etc., would probably be quite high on that list. Most material text in the world still relies on the idea that a text is simply meant to transfer its information unto us, and that when we are done with the text, it is done with us. Returning to it merely achieves recollection. Where does the story actually exist? Is it somewhere in between its textual representation and our comprehension of it? Or does it simply persist as a representation of a compromised intention—an idea imprisoned in the author’s mind—that is corrupted on the page? Think of the text as a copy of a story that you might have been told in any other way. The story does not entirely exist in the text—we know the story, the text was simply a tool for us to use as a means in getting to know it. If the story exists in this transference, it simultaneously takes advantage of its medium and our understanding, but cannot rely on either. The compromise a story that can exist outside its medium and outside itself (the text) inevitably has to make is that it must allow itself to become indistinct. The story, for instance, is capable of being summarized, and it can be retold in another medium without being compromised, because the words in the text are not bound to a particular medium. The nature of the mechanics of *Finnegans Wake*, meanwhile, does not allow it to ‘go external’ because its words often cannot be referred to in places outside of itself. The long quote further down on this page is a good example of this—were it read out loud, for example, we would miss out on the various symbols and fragmented punctuation marks, which clearly provide some commentary in and of themselves. The text is only really there when it is in front of you. Many of its words would be compromised in a similar way, since we would require the stable nature of the textual medium in order to appreciate their hidden meanings. This fact alone might make it easy to consider it unsuitable for literary criticism. Tim Conley’s view that “stabilized attitudes, language, and theories brought to the text inevitably become ridiculous in the interminable course of study” (“Failing” 79) echoes in *Finnegans Wake*’s self-reflections:

Yet on holding the verso against a lit rush this new book of Morses responded most remarkably to the silent query of our world’s oldest
light and its recto let out the piquant fact that it was but pierced but not punctured (in the university sense of the term) by numerous stabs and foliated gashes made by a pronged instrument. These paper wounds, four in type, were gradually and correctly understood to mean stop, please stop, do please stop, and O do please stop respectively, and following up their one true clue, the circumflexuous wall of a singleminded men's asylum, accentuated by bi tso fb rok engl a ssan dspl itch ina, — Yard inquiries pointed out → that they ad bîn "provoked" ay ∧ fork, of à grave Brofèsor; àth é's Brèak — fast — table; ; acûtély profèssšionally piquéd, to=introduç a notion of time [ûpon à plane (?) sù `' faç'e'] by pûnc! ingh oles (sic) in iSpace?! (123-124)⁸

In treating *Finnegans Wake* as a “self-subsistent” object⁹ readers here become more like archeologists with “pronged instrument[s]” (read: yellow markers, or shovels and brushes) who pierce Joyce’s text with “stabs” and “gashes”. If we consider this an archaeological metaphor, then, the intelligent but conceited archeologist’s ‘first contact’ with the text would naturally be a desecration to the author-caveman who has his ‘property’¹⁰ encroached upon, to whom this would seem an intensely hostile act in face of the unknown reader-archeologist, who is in the privileged position to know everything about the author—quite an unfair advantage since the author knows nothing of the reader. The author can only assume things. Joyce’s hostility¹¹ is a

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⁸ The sigla “∧” stands for Shaun (rival and brother of artist Shem, who this very self-referential chapter focuses on). Siglas were “pictorial ideograms used by Joyce to designate the central characters and themes of *Finnegans Wake*” (Fweet) that mostly appeared in his notebooks, but they occasionally show up in the final text as well. See McHugh’s *The Sigla of Finnegans Wake*.

⁹ All editions of the book are of the same length—628 pages—because of how certain chapters appear, particularly the sheet of musical notes at the end of Book 1, Chapter 2 and the extensive use of marginalia and footnotes in Book 2, Chapter 2. It supports the idea of the text seen as object since there can be no false representations of its form in its entirety—it is rigidly set in stone, unlike most other strictly storytelling works of literature (where different editions often vary in length). Although we can, of course, cut out pieces of the text and present them in places external to itself, a ‘crime’ of which this essay is an example as good as any other.

¹⁰ “So now, I'll ask of you, let ye create no scenes in my poor primmafore's wake. I don't want yous to be billow-fighting you biddy moriarty duels, gobble gabble, over me till you spit stout, you understand, ... wearing out your ohs by sitting around your ahs, making areekersany round where I last put it, with the painters in too, curse luck, with your rags up, exciting your mucuses, turning breakfasts into lost soupirs and salon thay ... it's my gala bene fit, robbing leaves out of my taletold book” (*FW* 453). We can freely (but not without shame) consider the ellipses in this quote as our “robbing leaves” out of the “book”.

¹¹ Although it is always, by nature, in jest, at least as seen in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce had valid reasons to be hostile against actual ‘robbers’, considering that segments of *Ulysses* and *Work in Progress* (early drafts of *Finnegans Wake*) were pirated in the United States by Samuel Roth in his magazine *Two*
defense mechanism that aims to dissolve the vulnerability that he must feel as an author of an object that he knows will be scrutinized by many inquisitive eyes. Conley’s point about “stabilized” attitudes becoming “ridiculous” in studying *Finnegans Wake* combats the contradiction that it is a text that should be studied rather than read, because whereas *studying* carries with it connotations of organization, principle, intention and morals, even, *reading* simply does not. There is no ulterior motive to the reader, but there might be to the student. The reader will nonetheless abandon the text unless s/he consistently discovers “getatable” (*FW* 169) meaning. Michael Levenson elaborates further:

> What context surrounds the new?—the radically new that repels gestures of interpretation, that defies and disappoints the frameworks brought forth to clarify it? When not neglected but approached and gazed upon, the defiant object ... may be called non-sense. But it may also be called, or suspected of being, another language, alien and uninterpretable, with senses of its own. In this case, dismissal will be qualified, made unsteady by the thought that opacity for us is transparency for them. Who are they? it will then be asked. And what do they want? (663)

Thus driven by want (or the lack of it), the lax reader sits back and listens, whereas the enterprising student, or the “grave Brofèsor”, is ready with their pen, that is, their “pronged instrument”, about to go “punct! ingh oles” in the text, trying to “introduce a notion of time”—an arbitrary “framework brought forth to clarify it”, just like time—to where it does not seem to belong. It is vital to, at this point, point out that no particular person is here being accused—keeping with James M. Cahalan’s idea about “a comic ‘user-friendly’ reader’s manual” (emphasis added) that derides in the name of jest—the dispositions and expected behaviors of these archetypal roles are merely being questioned. They are used here in order to make the necessary distinctions of behavior that our kind of reading requires. The way toward the ‘boundary’ of language must, after all, involve some act of rejection in order to get us beyond it, to discard the old and to create the “context [that] surrounds the new”. In a *real-world*
context, however, these archetypes would clearly be much too simple to be appropriately applied to the behaviors of any single person. If we can nevertheless claim to behave neither like student nor like reader, then, we might easily assume the role of *being with* the text, laughing with it, crying with it, acting under the influence that the author exacts, in order to create a tertiary role—that of the user. In this role, we are not *looking at* the object, we are not *dissecting* the object, but we are, rather, *using* the object, and thus are we in accord with its proper real-world application. We essentially fill a non-role, and Levenson’s rather antagonistic question “who are *they*?” (emphasis added) becomes irrelevant—we do not have a solid “framework”—because in *Finnegans Wake*, we are not quite sure who it is that we are. The word ‘user’, as it is used here, does not have a fixed, agreed-upon meaning, and serves only to differentiate our indefinite behavior from ‘old’, stable “frameworks”. In our (new) eyes, the *object* thus becomes a *device*, since that is what an *object with a certain use* is. This is *our* defense mechanism for dealing with the identity crisis that arises (“Dyoublong?”) when we face an object to which our relation seems like a mystery. The author does not know who we are. If we dare let go of control and claim that we do not know that ourselves, we have achieved a level playing field with the author.

The distinction between dissection and use is an important one, and it shall be made here. Susan Shaw Sailer’s six ‘logics’ are useful when trying to understand how the text works on a broader, narrative level, but they hardly approach the intricate lexical level that we ought to explore when treating *Finnegans Wake* as a device. Her “cluster logic”, for example, explains that “each unit of text or even a section of certain units tends to proceed with a cluster of related words that reflects its mood ... or in other ways suggests how the passage may be read” and points out that “the Ondt and the Gracehoper” (*FW* 414) fable, for instance, is “packed with several hundred words relating to insects”¹² (197). It certainly seems to give us a sense of location—a hint as to the ‘where’ in Joyce’s question “where in the waste is the wisdom?” (*FW* 114)—especially considering that the “interconnections show ... the way in which every lexeme can in its turn become the archetype of an associative series that would

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¹² Which is obvious from the outset, as it is based on one of Aesop’s Fables, *The Ant and the Grasshopper*. Thereafter, Joyce goes to staggering lengths to fill the following five pages with over 200 references to insects (*Fweet*), beginning with “the Gracehoper was always jigging ajog” (414), a ‘jigger’ being a kind of flea, onward to “floh [German, “flea”] and Luse [“luse”, Danish, “louse”] and Bienie [“biene”, German, “bee”] and Vespatilla [Latin, “little wasp”] to play pupa-pupa and pulicy-pulicy [“pulicine: pertaining to fleas”] and langtennas [“anten”] and pushpygyddyum [“pygidium: terminal segment of insect” (McHugh, 414)] and to commence insects with him ...” and so on.
lead to the recuperation, sooner or later, of the associative terminals of another lexeme” (Eco 25). It is clear that these textual operations, however, require a level of discernment that is difficult to associate with usage, since they require a “framework” far beyond the basic processes involved in dealing with the words themselves, a state of use wherein it seems that Conley’s argument about “stabilized attitudes” still rings true. How we deal with the way Joyce embeds words within words (to make new words) makes the manner of our conduct so unpredictable that it has to vary from word to word. Here is an example that reverses the word-making process of Finnegans Wake: consider the words “no story” from “I tell you no story” (FW 55) and omit the ‘t’ so that it becomes ‘no sorry’. We have now freed the word from the fettered realm of the dictionary as well as make it intrinsically point to many different other words. In the right context, it could even retain its original meaning. It becomes ‘no sorry’ (no apology), ‘not soared’ (it is not as if soaring), ‘no, siree’, and ‘no’ along with the ‘s’ sounds like ‘nose’ combined with any word ending with ‘-ory’ (a concretely matching word that goes along with it is ‘factory’, so it becomes a ‘nosory’, a ‘nose factory’), and since the text encourages us to alter pronunciation, ‘sorry’ could become ‘so wry’. This particular instance demonstrates an interesting effect of addition by omission. We removed a letter and added meaning. It made us consider things we knew of as well as things we had never considered before.

A dissection, in this case, would assume intention and simply translate or correct the ‘jumbled’ word into one or more dictionary words without considering the many implications of the absence of the letter. In use, we create new ideas that only partly rest on our language-conceived conception of the world. The reason we cannot make more out of these words is that we do not know what those things would be. In Finnegans Wake we thus come exceedingly close to some arena of unknowing, some boundary of language, and at times we might have a sense for which there is no expression. Because “this is nat [‘not’ or Danish, ‘night’] language at any sinse [‘sense’ or ‘sins’] of the world [‘word’]” (FW 83). This is ‘not language’ as much as it is ‘night language’, because, as Sigmund Freud states, “we only know dreams from our memory of them after we are awake” (qtd. in Bishop 8). The same goes with the text’s language—it takes what is not language and exploits our needs for clarity in the wakeful, reading state—and adamantly refuses to give that to us. Since it is impossible to determine that “nat language” is either ‘night language’ or ‘not language’ we have to yield to the idea that it means both of these things.
simultaneously. The effect emulates the act of trying to recall a dream because it incorporates a kind of indistinctiveness and indecision that could easily lead to frustration, that is, unless we in some sense take a leap of faith toward the idea that we cannot discover a truly stable and distinct sense of meaning in most of the text’s words. If we realize that this unknowing, however, only exists because Joyce does not give us the practical privilege of being able to directly refer to the dictionary, we can essentially supplement any non-existent definition (‘sorry’) with our own inventions that are either influenced by sound (‘sorry’, ‘soary’, ‘siree’), context (e.g. ‘tell’ being in the same sentence as ‘sorry’) or reference (whatever else in the text that refers to it, i.e. through “cluster logic”), or all of them together. We are asked to “here [be] keen again and begin again to make soundsense and sensesound kin again” (FW 121). In use, the sense of sound and the sound of sense become meshed in a kind of examination that, while unique to Finnegans Wake, is inherently chaotic. The general sentiment to use words in whatever suitable way that corresponds to any or all of these operations (context, sound, reference) actually takes precedence over any exacting and structured approach, any “framework”. In each word, the text becomes mostly ours—from a non-word’s sounds we can make many senses—even though none of them might be immediately sensible (in the dictionary sense of the word).

Usage as a form of ownership

One of the implications of differentiating Finnegans Wake from more traditional storytelling texts is that it alters the function of ownership. The perception we get from a story told by a narrator or an author is that it always belongs to the person who tells it, and that we are only listening in. John Bishop concludes his book by saying that Finnegans Wake is “a book that one might easily read for a lifetime” (385). Is there a more effective statement of ownership? A text to which it seems that a lifelong act of reading can be devoted must be intensely ‘rereadable’ and must further be able to spark “thoughts [we] had not thought before” through that very reading—thoughts whose existence and recurrence, as we have seen, mostly depend on our own creativity. The nature of the text makes it become partly one’s own. What one finds in the text is always going to be more interesting than any authoritative voice (Bishop’s, for instance) because those findings belong to the discoverer—Joyce only points vaguely in their direction. If we assume the role of an unassuming reader who has
some familiarity with *Finnegans Wake*, who dares to be creatively engaging in the text but does not necessarily have the in-depth and encyclopedic contextual knowledge (of history etc.), we can look at a passage to see how the text enables a creative reading to occur. We will then compare that to an authoritative look at the passage to see if it affects our findings, or if it compromises our possessive sense of invention:

For if the lingo gasped between kicksheets, however basically English, were to be preached from the mouths of wickerchurchwardens and metaphysicians in the row and advokaatoes, allvoyous, demivoyelles, languoaths, lesbiels, dentelles, gutterhowls and furtz, where would their practice be or where the human race itself were the Pythagorean sesquipedalia of the panepistemion, however apically Volapucky, grunted and gromwelled, ichabod, habakuk, opanoff, uggamyg, hapaxle, gomenon, pppfff, over country stiles, behind slated dwellinghouses, down blind lanes, or, when all fruit fails, under some sacking left on a coarse cart? (116)

“Lingo”, as we know, is language (particularly jargon and slang), which is here “gasped” or ‘grasped’ between “kicksheets”, which, apart from implying a great number of things, suggests a sense of squirming, a struggle, if we imagine the act of kicking in bed. Or, it could perhaps self-referentially refer to the pages—the sheets of paper—of the book itself, which all might give us a ‘kick’. In “wickerchurchwardens” we recognize the name of the family in the story, “Earwicker”, in addition to displaced instances of the letters H, C and E. “Advokaatoes” might be ‘advocators’ meshed with ‘avocados’ (plump, and inside, they are green—perhaps with envy), “allvoyous” becomes ‘all of you’ or perhaps an authorial ‘all for Joyce’. “Demivoyelles” almost repeats the same structure, but adds prefix ‘demi-’ (which we know from ‘demigod’) and suffix ‘-elle’ (both French), the former of which means roughly ‘half’ or ‘lesser’, and the latter of which is a feminine pronoun. If we retain the ‘all of you’ or the “voy[s]” from “allvoyous”, then “demivoyelles” could be understood as a gender-derogatory word, especially since it might remind us of ‘goy’, a Jewish derogative for a non-Jew. “Languoaths” is a mixture of ‘languid’, ‘language’ and ‘oaths’, with ‘woe’ echoing in the pronunciation of the three vowels ‘uoa’. “Lesbiels” rather clearly takes ‘lesbian’ and the ending of something like ‘spaniel’ which, along with considering the repeated use of suffix ‘-elle’ along with “dent”,
“gutterhowls” and “furtz” (which has something ‘furtive’ to it), might make us easily come to the impression that these are rather lowly, even disparaging, descriptions. We do not know what “Pythagorean” is, but we can very well guess that it is ancient and Greek, but it also contains the words ‘python’, ‘pith’ and ‘gore’. Though we might have heard of the lexical oddity “sesquipedalian”, which is essentially a word that means ‘a very long word’ (it thus describes itself). It also echoes somewhat of a ‘pedaling sasquatch’. In “panepistemion” we recognize ‘pan-‘ (‘all’), ‘epistemology’, ‘epistle’, ‘piste’ (which are often meandering) and ending ‘-ion’ (that sounds like ‘eon’), which gives it a certain imposing mythical quality. “However apically Volapucky” mirrors “however basically English”, and might be seen as one of the text’s references to Lewis Carroll’s nonsensical poem Jabberwocky. In “gromwelled” we find ‘growelled’ and a reference to Cromwell. “Ichabod” sounds like ‘itch on bod’ (body), ‘habakuk’ sounds like the recurring “gromwells” of the book’s cavemen, “opanoff” becomes ‘up and off’ or ‘open enough’, “uggamyg” a guttural utterance (‘ugh’), “hapaxle” a ‘haphazard axle’, “gomenon” a ‘come on’ or a ‘go me not’. “Ppppffft” ends this sequence of ‘lowly’ sounds, which echo the descriptions of the speakers. If we count the speakers and the ‘jumbled’ grunts, they both amount to eight. “Advokaatoes” thus corresponds to “gromwelled”, just as “furtz” corresponds to “ppppffft”.

In having traipsed through this sentence, dealing creatively and to the best of our ability with words we have likely never read before, we might be satisfied with the resonances this lexical discovery has already given us, but that would be overlooking what the sentence actually says—it seems that there are so many things happening all at once in it that the words collectively obscure the simplicity of the original question. It might, then, be articulated, simply, as “… if … English … were to be preached [perhaps piously] from the mouths [i.e. by disparaging grunting] … where would … the human race [be] … were the [ancient, complex ideas, e.g. “sesquipedalia of the panepistemion”] [growled] [and how would society be perceived if so]?”. The sentence juxtaposes the intellectual grace of “panepistemion” with “gutterhowls”, and spoken language here seems to be merged with one’s perception of the world. It does seem that we can hazily perceive the answer to the question ourselves by looking at the words closely, since we are given an extensive amount of lexical material with which to work, or rather, create. But since, as Patrick A. McCarthy claims, “Finnegans Wake cannot be ‘answered’” (qtd. in Conley, Mistakes 137), we might, in
a contradictory fashion, supply an answer to the question by posing another: is not speech more than simply a way to channel our perceptions, but also a creative way of being in the world?

McHugh and Fweet mostly bring in more languages that explain some cases where our excavations might seem far-fetched (yet, because of the nature of the text, still wholly appropriate), as in “advokaatoes” being ‘advokaat’ which is Dutch for “barrister” (lawyer), with echoes of “vocatives”. “Voyou” is French for “guttersnipe” (street child) but also sounds like ‘vowels’, which makes “demivoyelles” “semi-voyelles”, which is French for “semivowels”. “Lesbiels, dentells, gutterhowls” become “labials”, “dentals,” “gutturals” (cf. ‘gutter’), and “furz” being German for ‘flatulence’. It tells us that “Pythagoreans [of Pythagoras, ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician] tried to keep mathematical truths secret”. “Panepistêmion” is Greek for “university (universal knowledge)”, and “Volapük” is an “artificial language”. “Grom” is Russian for “thunder”. Ichabod, “lit. where is the glory?”, is named in the Book of Samuel 4:21 as the brother of Ahitub, and Habakkuk is a prophet in the Hebrew Bible. “Hapaxle, gomenon” becomes “hapax legomenon”, a Greek “word of which only 1 use is recorded (lit. ‘once said’)”. “When all fruit fails” is an Irish proverb, which ends with “welcome haws” (hawthorn berries), used in relation to the fact that when someone fails to get what they were striving for they are often glad to accept something inferior. Finally “coarse cart” becomes “horsecart” (McHugh 116).

It was clear from the beginning that language terms are running through this passage, but these ‘elucidations’ make us realize the extent in which they do so, especially with ‘vocatives’ which is “a case of nouns, pronouns, and adjectives ... used in addressing or invoking a person or thing” (OD), and ‘vowels’, ‘semi-vowels’ as well as the three types of consonants and in realizing that ‘sesquipedalian’ more specifically means “polysyllabic” (OD). What these ‘elucidations’ bring is context and substantiality, but they do not seem vital to our reading. They add even more dimensions to the text, adding to the ones we already explored. This comparison nonetheless proves that our historically uninformed examination of the text yields a more creative inspection than the tool-assisted13 one. We are enlightened on various

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13 Also, there is something senseless about bringing a tool (e.g. a glossary) in order to use another tool, or device (i.e. Finnegans Wake), as most real-world examples would prove that those tools or devices would have some inherent use in and of themselves. Although the glossary is a tool that is dependent
lingual and historical obscurities that we otherwise would be struggling to catch. An important thing to note, however, is that these references should not condense the extent of our perusal, and in fact, we might in some cases have been better off without knowing about them. Finding out, for instance, that Ichabod is the brother of Ahitub would likely impede our imagination in wondering about the number of things the word “ichabod”, as it appears in the text, could imply, since the one seemingly ultimate answer is now right in front of us. And although one could argue that being aware of the religious references might encourage further analyses of this passage (or the text at large), we ought not consider them substitutes for “that something”, i.e. those things which we imagined the word could mean in first encountering it. More than anything they suppress the creative process of excavation in favor of a quick elucidation, which, however, in other cases, might simply make us want to ask more questions, which spawns more creative excavation, even though that might now be external to the text itself.

In our reading we have to make the distinction between doing the telling versus being told. In Finnegans Wake, however, if we are being told things we do not know (as is often the case), there is nothing else for us to do but to ‘self-subsistently’ tell the words what to tell us when they are doing their telling. There are no external aspects involved in usage. In telling the words what they are to tell, the answer to the question “his producers are they not his consumers?” (FW 497) would therefore be a resounding ‘yes’, if only because we would have to go outside the text with a “stabilized attitude” to find another answer, at which point it would no longer be about usage, but rather about study. There is, as such, a certain futility to the reference in Finnegans Wake. We can bring it to the surface by further elaborating on the student/reader/user trichotomy with a closer look two words from the passage, “hapaxle, gomenon”. In studying, we would endeavor to find out what these two words actually mean and would inevitably come to the unquestionable conclusion that they are actually supposed to say ‘hapax legomenon’. That is, “a term of which only one instance of use is recorded” (OD). If we were not already enlightened on the ways in which Joyce’s words carry multiple implications, this would be the end of the ‘puzzle’. Two non-dictionary obscurities (“hapaxle, gomenon”) made less obscure...
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and dictionary-friendly (‘hapax legomenon’) are here ultimately made into a sentence, a definition, meaning. Once the meaning—the dictionary definition—becomes clear, the implications of the form of the original signifier, whether it looks like ‘hapax legomenon’ or “hapaxle, gomenon”, become irrelevant. We know now what ‘hapax legomenon’ means. The signifiers, “hapaxle” and “gomenon” have been ‘spent’. They have been ‘cashed in’ for the definition. But in using Finnegans Wake, we are not quite satisfied with this solution because it would be ignoring the rather conspicuous movement of the ‘l’ and the ‘e’ from the second word to the first, as well as the addition of the comma. Why did Joyce do this? The universal explanation of his striving to add obscurity unremittingly by a “systematic darkening of every term” (Bishop 4), while true, would have to be elaborated to account for not only the darkening, but for (to continue along the same lines) the brightening—the multiplication of meaning—since the original Greek term is ‘darkened’ by the movement and the comma, but things are also ‘brightened’ because two new and unforeseen words came out of that modification. Every little idiosyncrasy seems meaningful. The consequences of the syllable shift and the comma are nonetheless huge. ‘Hapax legomenon’ has an extremely strict definition, and an extremely limited use. “Hapaxle” and “gomenon” refer to that term, but with them come many half-visible meanings. The term is made to sound more English-like in the two words, which is why we could see in them, for example, a ‘hapaxle, gomenon’, an ‘axle omen’, that is to say, a ‘faulty construction’, which is appropriate considering that “the great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pfiltspalte of Finnegan” (FW 3) who later “stottered from the latter. Damb! he was dud” (FW 6).

Having in mind Umberto Eco’s “archetype of an associative series that would lead to ... recuperation, sooner or later”, as well as “cluster logic”, discovering ‘axle’ embedded in plain sight like this might, then, make us consider the category of words of which it is a part, that is, a vocabulary of ‘construction’ or ‘building’ words. Associating ‘axle’ with “Bygmester Finnegan” (FW 4) and one of the text’s first ‘clusters’, we might endow it with significance it might not otherwise have had in standing on its own, even though we find it 111 pages after its more tightly packed ‘categorical’ relatives: “a skyscape of most eyeful hoyth entowerly, erigenating from next to nothing and celescalating the himals and all, hierarchitectitectiptitoploftical, with a burning bush abob off its baubletrumpet and with larrons o'toolers cluttering up and tombles a'buckett clottering down” (emphasis
added) (FW 4-5). This is part of the text’s “impulse to summon [its] own earlier phases and phrases” (Levenson 669), or rather, perhaps, our own “impulse” to do so, since this operation can rely on no one but ourselves. Bishop’s “obvious reply” to the “objection” about this “flagrant abandonment of sequential progression”, that “terms have been taken out of context”, is that “they are the context”, pointing later to the idea that “the words which follow may be taken in any order desired” (FW 121) or, as Bishop calls it, an “associative way of reading” (306).

Hence we are justified to abandon our rectitude and could further see the ‘axle’ as that on which the “cyclewheeling” world goes around, and the ‘omen’ being the inevitability of it breaking in Vico’s circular view of history, on which the structure of Finnegans Wake is based. We are now firmly situated in “Echoland!”, where silence, that is, our consulting external means to find the meaning of a term has only lead us back to itself, e.g. in ‘hapax legomenon’, “a term of which only one instance of use is recorded”. However, in our speech, that is, in our using the words, in discovering ‘axle omen’ etc., we have found our way back to Dublin and the world, having literally ‘spoken the scene’—the text itself. Ironically, the only way for Joyce to turn “hapaxle, gomenon” into an actual hapax legomenon (or two, rather) would be through obscuration, because surely the latter has occurred a relatively large number of times in all the world’s literature compared to the two new ones, which are most likely unique to Finnegans Wake. Just by looking at this case, Joyce seems to confirm our suspicion—that he wants his text not to outright require an intellectual searcher but instead to encourage a creative, uninformed user—“hapaxle, gomenon” means a lot more than ‘hapax legomenon’ if we do not know what the latter means. If we do know what the latter means, we might easily consider the former a mere misspelling. With the encouragement of exploration, we instead wrestle with the word, we listen to it, we appreciate its unknowability.

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14 The literal “Echoland!” of Dublin would be Dublin, Georgia, the county seat of Laurens County, United States, which is referred to on the first page, “... nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselse to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time ...” (3), Oconee being the river that flows through there, Topsawyer’s Rock being a formation on that river (Fweet), the city’s founder “a Dubliner, Peter Sawyer” (McHugh 3). The city’s motto was “doubling all the time” (Joyce Society) and that is where the notion of “doubling” might have come from. Words like “Dyoublong” echo Dublin (either Dublin, Ireland or Dublin, Georgia, or any of the other numerous places named Dublin in the United States), they are ‘doubled’, just as “Taubling”, “Dobbelin” (7), “dabblin” (16), “Humblin” (18), “Doublends” (20), “Nilbud” (24), and so on, are. Even so, we can never be sure which Dublin we are actually being referred to, so we are perhaps forever stuck in “Echoland!”.
Creation through resonance

We have been slowly settling upon a certain disposition. In it, we, with our creative perspective, would, for example, agree that the word ‘nowhere’ has a fixed, agreed-upon meaning, that is, “not in or to any place; not anywhere” (OD), but that we could nevertheless entertain the idea that in a certain light (like *Finnegans Wake*), the word could become ‘nowhere’, that is ‘here and now; at the current place and the current time’, because its parts can now easily be remade and reconstituted. Language becomes defamiliarized, and we see that it is merely a system constituted of honor codes. We could go further into obscurity by seeing ‘nowhere’ as ‘no, where?’, ‘no, w— (interrupted ‘what’) here?’ or ‘know where’ as in “we nowhere she lives but you mussna tell annaone …” (emphasis added) (*FW* 10). It is a disposition that allows us to make seemingly absurd lexical ideas reasonable, such as the idea that ‘soliloquy’ is not only a word that refers to ‘an act of speaking one’s thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers’ (OD), but one that also rather colorfully describes pleasurable profound alone-time on a sunny shore. Our disposition allows us to expose the idea that these codes, these axioms, are rather arbitrary, and that language and our common understanding of it is biased toward them, toward the dictionary-definition rather than any other, be it sound, etymology, connotation, reference etc.

Bishop looks, among many other words, at ‘mummery’, which occurs twice (in this form) in *Finnegans Wake*: “house of call is all their evenbreads though its cartomance hallucinate like an erection in the night the mummery of whose deed, a lur of Nur, immerses a mirage in a merror …” (emphasis added) (310) and “nine dirty years mine age, hairs hoar, mummery failend, snowdrift to my ellpow, deff as Adder” (emphasis added) (535). Clearly, and as Bishop points out (7), the use of ‘mummery’ does not strictly go by its matching definition, that is, “a performance by mummers”, a ‘mummer’ being “an actor in a traditional masked mime or a mummers’ play” (OD). Signs convince us that it is actually sound (as well as context) that provides meaning, so that it becomes ‘memory’. And yet, the surface-definition, ‘mummery’, cannot be ignored, so it becomes something like a ‘masked memory’ or a ‘miming

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15 ‘Sol’ (Latin, the Sun), ‘sole’, ‘soul’, ‘shoal’ + ‘lilo’ (‘lie low’), ‘ilo’ (Finnish, ‘pleasure’) + ‘okay’, ‘quay’, ‘key’ or ‘cay’ (“a low bank or reef of coral, rock, or sand ...” (OD)), ‘oui’ (French, ‘yes’) and ‘qui’ (French, interrogative pronoun ‘who’ or ‘whom’, suggesting the existential question ‘qui suis-je?’, ‘who am I?’).
memory’, that is, a ‘mummery’, a new word that does not have any dictionary definition. It does not, however, quite exist without connotation—because we have not agreed that this is what it means, it simply arose from its constituents. But, unlike Bishop, we are not interested in translation or the kind of splitting that he does, as illustrated in Table 1, or the many implications of that simple double meaning.

Table 1. Bishop’s splitting of the double meaning of the word ‘mummery’ as it is used in 
\textit{Finnegans Wake}. In this particular instance, Bishop looks at “mummery” (\textit{FW} 310), but since he does so “out of context”, the page reference has here been omitted.

We are interested, rather, in ‘mummery’, its \textit{non-definition}, because of the uncertainty of what that word actually comes to mean through the process of defamiliarization. If we can allow “soundsense” to convert ‘memory’ into ‘mummery’ by changing ‘e’ into ‘u’ (now m\textit{u}m\textit{m}ory), add another ‘m’ following the one that is already there (now m\textit{u}m\textit{m}ory), and change ‘o’ into ‘e’ (finally m\textit{u}m\textit{e}ry), a more etymology-conscious reconstruction of ‘mummery’ is not so far removed since we are allowed to move and mold sense and sound freely, to make them “kin again”. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. A ‘sound-etymology’ chart of the “soundsense[s]” and “sensesound[s]” related to the word ‘mummery’. Words and sounds placed further up are generally farther removed from their origin in ‘mummery’. This is built by using Dictionary.com’s ‘Nearby Words’ feature as well as through knowledge/assonance.
Mumpsimus ("a traditional custom or idea adhered to although shown to be unreasonable" (OD))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mumps (disease)</th>
<th>Mormon</th>
<th>Mormyr (elephantfish)</th>
<th>Mortar (used in brick-laying)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammee (fruit)</td>
<td>Mamalujo (FW 397, abbr. of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)</td>
<td>Mort (French, ‘dead’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamie (name species)</td>
<td>Mampluk (Egyptian military caste)</td>
<td>Merely</td>
<td>Amore (Italian, ‘love’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munch</td>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Momentum</td>
<td>‘Mory’ (cf. ‘simply’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamma/mama</td>
<td>Mammal</td>
<td>Mural (FW 628)</td>
<td>Mer (Swedish, ‘more’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mummy</td>
<td>Mummery (cf. ‘slavery’)</td>
<td>Mummery (cf. ‘bakery’)</td>
<td>“mmummy” Mämmi (Finnish Easter dessert)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mummy (Br Eng. ‘mother’)</td>
<td>Mummy (dead body)</td>
<td>Mummy</td>
<td>“mummeries” (FW 535)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“mummeries” (FW 535)</td>
<td>&quot;Momerry” (FW 378)</td>
<td>Mummery</td>
<td>Memory (mumbling) (‘um…’)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Mummery’, then, is not simply a ‘masked memory’, but “that something”, something along the lines of a ‘mummery of making a mumbling masked miming memory of a merry mummy made in a murmuring mummery’, or however one proceeds to make sense of that. As in Joyce’s remark, “it is night. It is dark. You can hardly see. You sense rather” (emphasis added) (qtd. in Mercanton 96), we sense what it means, but trying to clarify it is rather futile—it is a ‘nightly’, a “twicenightly” (FW 27) (cf. “doubling”) use of the word and thus obscure to any attempts of elucidation. We are here “reveiling” (FW 220) something, revealing and veiling (obscuring), at the same time. The only certainty that we can achieve here is the one that makes words more obscure.

The ultimate contradiction of this “reveiling” is that in creating more resonance, we are actively crippling the significance of the original ‘mummery’—significance it perhaps does not earn as overtly seated in a context but rather, covertly, as an “archetype of an associative series”. It is as such like a pool—the more things we add to it, the less attention each part gets, but its entirety gets more all the more colorful, since, after all, “Finnegans Wake [at large] is about our ideas about it” (emphasis added), and likewise, it is about our adding those ideas into it. Fritz Senn points out that “... much research has been done about it; publications have increased perhaps a hundredfold. And we do not understand Finnegans Wake” (211). Most publications all have something in common, however, they all present cohesive, clear-minded arguments, and are as such inherently incompatible with the nature of
"Finnegans Wake." The frustration in readers trying to face the its immensity only exists because they are also erroneously trying to face the immensity of history, if only because a comprehensive awareness of it is something that the text superficially seems to require. They are used to either a “framework” of reading or a “framework” of language, both of which we ought to cast aside altogether in "Finnegans Wake."

From “soundsense” is ‘mummery’ a ‘mumblery’, an echo with which connotative words can be ‘doubled’ endlessly. Words become templates: ‘mummery’ is really “m'm'ry” (FW 460), words that fit in there either wholly or partly, such as “memorial”, “mammary” or “mammal” are among a giant selection of words that one could hear in a ‘mumbling’ mispronunciation of ‘mummery’. It boils down to phonetics—‘mummery’ essentially consists of two bilabial nasal stops ([m]) with a quick back vowel ([ɑ], [o] or [u]) in between them and a long front vowel to follow ([a], [e], [i], or [y]). In other words, in the susurrus of a sleepily pronounced ‘mummery’, which becomes ‘mummy’ (as long as we assume that the tongue is relaxed and therefore cannot produce consonants), the mouth is closed (‘m’), it opens (‘u’), it closes (‘m’), and it opens again (‘y’), much like breathing. If the tongue starts moving (perhaps from the influence of a dream), however, it could go on to make all sorts of consonants, especially ‘coronal consonants’, i.e. those that come from touching the palate with the tip of the tongue. Try pronouncing ‘mummy’ while chaotically moving the tongue—it will likely faintly sound like ‘mrummy’, ‘mlummly’ and ‘mnumbly’ etc., as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. ‘Mummy’ as it might be pronounced in sleep, with the addition of coronal consonants that might occur as mumbling due to the movement of the tongue in the activity of a dream, thus justifying the presence of the many word variations seen in Table 2. Based on Robert Mannell’s Phonetics and Phonology diagrams.
If the basis of our perspective of *Finnegans Wake* is that of the dream, and the kind of speech that occurs during sleep, then we must account for the substantially different meanings that come from the slight movements the tongue makes under the influence of that dream. It seems we are here again experiencing the “Echoland!” phenomenon of always ultimately falling back to *Finnegans Wake* itself since we can now amusingly claim that it is literally *multilingual*, that is, multi-tongued—it speaks in tongues—and it uses the tongue (as the language) as if it were capable of saying more than it actually can, and as such, the last diagram in Figure 1 is, by necessity, a false, ‘multi-tongued’, representation of reality. The text is a stuttering16 ‘incantation’ of “bababadalgharaghtakaminarronnkonnbronnertonronnounthun...” (*FW* 3), “ba” being what we might imagine to be the primitive voicing of the opening and closing of the mouth in babies and in primordial man, or in dreaming, latter-day “anymen”. It comes in instinctual muscle movements and not after civilized signals from the brain have told the mouth how to behave properly—and this is the fundamental difference between *Finnegans Wake* and most other works of literature. The limitation of relying on our clear minds here is that we can only base the meanings of these utterances upon words that we know and can pronounce, or otherwise primitively construct new ones through connotation, such as making ‘more’ into an adjective like ‘fully’ in ‘mory’, as seen in Table 2. It sounds somewhat silly, but could be argued as being a word that should and could be in the dictionary, if only it was a little more Joycean17.

*Finnegans Wake* is nonetheless truly a book told in passing—if a person pronounces a word poorly in a loud place, say, an inebriated man in a crowded pub (to keep with the book’s theme), the meaning of that word will, for a split second, be whatever you thought you heard at first, before you ask ‘come again?’ It is a question that assumes both intention and foolishness—it is with the retort that we expect to be

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16 Stuttering recurs frequently throughout the text, especially when it seems that some character is speaking, such as here, “what a hauhauhauhauhaidible thing, to be cause!” (16), “shsh shake, co-comerad!”14, “hence my nonation wide hotel and creamery establishments which for the honours of our mewnem mutual daughters, credit me, I am woowoo willing to take my stand, sir, upon the monument, that sign of our ruru redemption ...” (36), “alcoh alcoho alcoherently” (40), “ex-ex-executive” (42), “chee chee cheers for Upkingbilly and crow cru cranwells Downdaboo! Hup, boys, and hat him!” (53-54).

17 Or if the world was—it is dictionaries after all (major ones, since those are the only kind that are acknowledged in this milieu) that decide whether or not a word is interred into them, based on the frequency of use among speakers. Dictionaries could therefore be seen as housing a collection of *mainstream* words, among which a large portion of the words of *Finnegans Wake* has no part.
given reason. If there is no reason to be given, it is the question itself that becomes senseless.

Table 2 is far beyond what any cursory use of *Finnegans Wake* would result in, but its extent represents the limitlessness of our imagination. One could go further still, but then we would start bleeding into other words and other word histories. Table 2 is also partly or largely idiosyncratic to its creator, because the more languages one has access to and the more sounds one recognizes in assonance, the more extensive it would become and could therefore potentially be drastically different. You could argue that it is clear that “mummery” in “… mummery of whose deed …” (“s [song] The Memory of the Dead” (McHugh 310)) and “… mummery failend …” (“memory failing” (535)) is used instead of memory. However, the distance in going from the ‘memory’ to the ‘mummery’ to the ‘mummy of the dead’ is not at all far (for the simple reason that the tongue rests in ‘mummy’ and not in ‘mummery’), considering the many references to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, which is thoroughly used in the rest of *Finnegans Wake*, and self-referentially as well, such as here: “turning up and fingering over the most dantellising peaches in the lingerous longerous book of the dark” (251). Secondary meaning (‘mummery’) seems here to characterize the primary meaning (‘memory’), but despite echoes of references (‘mummy’), the overarching linguistic inventiveness of the work provides no reason to simply stop there. We can go from tertiary meaning to nigh infinity. We can do so because we are not told where the limit is, because having Eco’s “associative series” and Bishop’s “associative reading” in mind, we know that this is precisely what makes *Finnegans Wake* special—it has many colors with which it asks us, urges us, to paint. Problems show up when we do not know what to do with the colors. If we are concerned about trying to understand everything, “‘understand’ in the most trite sense of the word” (Senn 212), we will discover that the majority of words in the text are problematic. If we are not, we can consider them limited to proper nouns. They seem rigid and fixed to us, even though they are almost always ‘mumbled’ into different-sounding words, just as we have seen with ‘memory’ in ‘mummery’. Most readers will perhaps find recognizable names in “Suffoclose! Shikespower! Seudodanto! Anonymoses!”¹⁸ (*FW* 47) but that is probably as ‘easy’ as

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¹⁸ Sophocles, Shakespeare, ‘pseudo’ + Dante (also Suddhodana, father of Buddha, as well as ‘pseudo-dentals’, perhaps a reference to Joyce’s false teeth (Stewart, “A Short Life”)) and ‘anonymous’ + Moses (Fweet), “author of anonymous Pentateuch” (McHugh 47).
it gets. One of those names, Shakespeare, becomes further reformed throughout the
text: “Chickspeer” (145), “shakespill” (161), “shaggspick”, “Shakhisbeard” (177),
“Scheekspair” (191), “Missy Cheekspeer” (257), “As Shakefork might pitch it” (274),
“As Great Shapesphere puns it” (295), “sheepskeer” (344), “chigs peell” (441),
“Shopkeeper”19 (539). It is when references are embedded into the text that they
become passable—you might easily read a short paragraph and not realize what sheer
amount of historical references that were in it20. You likely recognized the opening
phrase of Hamlet’s soliloquy in the epigraph of this essay (as well as the oath in the
title21) but that is because it is one of the most famous lines in all of literature.
Traversing through Finnegans Wake, it is questionable if we would recognize it here:
“… ken or no me ken Zot is the Quiztune …” (110), because even the surface-level
definitions might be lost to English speakers (though we can still look at the sounds,
as we have seen). “Me kene” is Albanian for “if, seeing that” (McHugh 110), ‘ken’ is
Scottish for ‘know’, ‘ken’ is also Hebrew for ‘yes’ (Fweet). Furthermore, “Zoti” is
Albanian for “God”, “zote” is German for “obscenity” (McHugh 110) or ‘dirty joke’
(Fweet), “zot” is the Hebrew feminine pronoun for “this” and “that” and “zot” is
Dutch for “fool”. “Quiztunes” is a “U.S. radio programme” (McHugh 110). The
question comes back later, in would-be Italian, “… Hanno, o Nonanno, acce’l
brubblemm’as …” (182) where ‘hanno o non hanno’ translates into ‘they have or have
not’ (Fweet). The full question would be “essere o non essere, questo è il problema”. In
addition, “… at weare or not at weare …” (319) uses Danish “at väre” (‘to be’)
(McHugh 319), or ‘we are’ or ‘at war’.

19 One might want to stop here and point out that ‘shopkeeper’ is an actual dictionary-word, and that
would be correct, but because of the nature of the text, it is, with context in mind, again used to serve
as a double meaning: “I always think in wordworth's of that primed favourite continental poet,
Daunty, Gouty and Shopkeeper, A. G. whom the generality admoyers in this that is and that this is to
come” (539). Along with the German “A. G.” (“Aktien-Gesellschaft, joint stock company” (McHugh
539)), it becomes a reference to Paris bookstore Shakespeare and Company.
20 Another great (and literary) example of this can be found in this sentence (as you read it, think of
Ibsen): “For peers and gints, quaysirs and galleyliers, fresk letties from the say and stale headygabblers,
gaiangangers and dudder wagoners, pullars off societies and pushers on rothmere's homes” (540). Eight
of Ibsen’s plays are namedropped through “cluster logic” in a single sentence, namely: “Peer Gynt”
(“peers and gints”), “Caesar and Galilean” (“quaysirs and galleyliers”), “The Lady from the Sea”
(“fresk letties from the say”), “Hedda Gabler” (“headygabblers”), “Ghosts (Gengangere)”
(“gaiangangers”), “When We Dead Awaken (Når vi døde vagnere)” (“dudder wagoners”), “Pillars of
Society” (“pullars off societies”) and “Rosmersholm” (“rothmere's houses”) (McHugh 540).
21 Which is from, “the next thing is. We are once amore as babes awondering in a wold made fresh
where with the hen in the storyaboat we start from scratch. So the truce, the old truce and nattunbuff
the truce, boys. Drouth is stronger than faction. Slant. Shinshin. Shinshin” (FW 336).
These illustrate the extreme extent to which Joyce goes to obscure meaning, demonstrating his way of making something so widely known essentially unfamiliar, while managing barely to still have a reference, e.g. going from ‘Shakespeare’ to “sheepskeer”. All that remains is an echo of the original reference, and ultimately (even if we go against the glossaries we have just used) we should perhaps not treat ‘Shakespeare’ as the translation of the referent, “sheepskeer”, but rather as but a means for Joyce to create a new word (that is, a ‘skeer’ of sheep, a ‘cheap skier’, the ‘sheep’s keer’ (Dutch, ‘time’ or ‘occasion’) and so on), just as he made ‘hapax legomenon’ doubly obscure (because it was already obscure) and simultaneously created two new words in the process of making the term more English-sounding in “hapaxle” and “gomenon”—again, addition (of new meaning) by omission (of dictionary meaning). The two new words must be more important than the reference because explicitly, they do not mean anything and are thus free to be made meaningful through connotation without requiring the knowledge of the original ‘building block’, that is, ‘hapax legomenon’. It goes with his mission of “keeping the professors busy for centuries” and simultaneously, and more importantly, with fulfilling his agenda to “reconstruct the nocturnal life” (Anderson 33). “Sheepskeer” (and all the rest) is the name ‘Shakespeare’ said in ‘mummary’, in mumbling, dreaming sleep. ‘Shakespeare’ can only be said properly outside of Finnegans Wake, in the daytime, when we have our mental faculties in such a state to pronounce it correctly.

Joyce’s vision was not self-conceited, his persistence served only to achieve an artistic end. If there is no other thing to relieve the frustration in readers of Finnegans Wake, it is the idea that it is a text not meant to be understood as readers typically go about understanding. We are either afraid of the dark or enjoy walking in the night. Once out, “it [would be] dark. We [would] hardly see. We [would] sense rather”. Turning on the floodlights would ruin all the obscured, enigmatic things that make the night the night. Using an authoritative ‘answer sheet’ (like Fweet or

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22 Though Shakespeare’s name was, in his own time, misspelled (in legal documents etc.) in a wide variety of different ways, including, “Shakesspere, Shakysper, Shaxpeer, Schakespeire, Shackper, Shexpere, Shaxkspere and Shakspeyre” (Mabillard) because “English speakers were still making up grammar, spelling, and pronunciation as they went along” (Mueller 12). Likewise, we could see Joyce’s own treatment of the name as a reference to this, as the language of Finnegans Wake is at least as nonstandardized as English was in the 16th century. Also, it strengthens further the idea of the whole work as a “palimpsest” (FW 182), especially with the recurring ‘teastains’, e.g. “blotsbloshblothe …” (280) and “… affectionate largelooking tache of tch. The stain, and that a teastain (the overcautelousness of the masterbilker here, as usual, signing the page away), marked it off on the spout of the moment …” (111). Ibsen sneaks in again with “The Master Builder” (“the masterbilker”) (McHugh 111).
McHugh’s), although useful in circumstances such as these, feels like doing something of a disservice to the work because we are bringing daylight to where it does not belong. Finding out that “sheepskeer” could refer to Shakespeare is not quite fulfilling (since it could mean many another things), it is merely a quick fix to satisfy our incessant need for understanding.

Consider this “want” a byproduct of the Information Age—we know more (or can know more) about Finnegans Wake now than we did in any other time. This essay, as it stands, could not have been possible prior to the 21st century. Easy access to that information spoils us, however, because the more we have available to us, the more we crave. In our contact with such an abnormal being as Finnegans Wake, whose true nature is a mystery to us (and could perhaps only ever be), we play the role of the hyper-advanced archeologist whose utter complexity would inevitably complicate its own attempt at understanding something so “alien”. The idea that we should stop being ourselves (our lucid selves) is intensely difficult. Yet, consider Finnegans Wake as the lyrics of a song. In listening, we enjoy the rhythm, but do not worry about the meanings of the words.

It is easy to see how James Joyce’s final work has all along been characterized, at least to a wider audience, by a false reputation. It is a text whose sheer mass and apparent complexity has been dismissed from the outside—letting in only a minority of a minority23—whose collective disposition seems rarer, even, than the certain taste for stylistically experimental writing that Ulysses seems to require in order to sustain the interest of the reader. It is a work that goes against our ordinary conception of language—words do not strictly go by their corresponding dictionary definitions but achieve their often unclear meanings through assonance, imagination, reference and multiple languages, even. The text becomes a device that we use, rather than a text that we read. We can produce meaning using it, rather than having it simply referring to things that we already comprehend. It is a process without rules, and rather than making us feel lost it makes us feel free, because the worry of not understanding in an ordinary use of language is not present here precisely because we allow ourselves to let go of those demands. Our ignorance is essentially celebrated, because it creates plenty of room for imagination. It makes one feels special in Finnegans Wake,

23 Or they let themselves in—the doors stand open. The majority, upon hearing false rumors of what awaits within, perhaps chooses not to enter.
perhaps because the nature of the work seems *cutting-edge*, because it does not *fit into* a methodology of interpretation that either existed before it or came after it as a response. The consensus that it is ‘the most difficult book in the English language’ (restricting it to English is the first sign of disregard) is a mistake that has arisen out of a fallible first impression and it has remained as such perhaps due to fear of commitment. Those few who do dare go on arm themselves with “pronged instruments” because that is the manner in which previous literary discourse has taught them to go about their business—it is the very uniqueness of the text that befuddles us in our attempts at comprehension. Our difficulty now, however, is not entrance, but distance, rather, and it is the same recklessness that imbued the author that ought to imbue us in our *use*. *Finnegans Wake* is an agglomeration of language, a celebration of the apperception of the fearless. It is a device that makes new by feeding us parts that provoke imagination. One might easily go on assuming that the one who babbles does so with the intention of speaking clearly and in a certain language, but upon having established the babbler’s persistence in behaving erratically, we would withdraw our assumption, and realize that the mistake was on us. We would then have to relieve momentarily our own conduct, and take part.
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