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PEDAGOGY AND IDENTITY IN “THE NIGHT LESSONS” OF *FINNEGANS WAKE*

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

ZACHARY P. SMOLA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores chapter II.ii of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939)—commonly called “The Night Lessons”—and its peculiar use of the conventions of the textbook as a form. In the midst of the *Wake*'s abstraction, Joyce uses the textbook to undertake a rigorous exploration of epistemology and education. By looking at the specific expectations of and ambitions for textbooks in 19th century Irish national schools, this thesis aims to provide a more specific historical context for what textbooks might mean as they appear in *Finnegans Wake*. As instruments of cultural conditioning, Irish textbooks were fraught with tension arising from their investment in shaping religious and political identity. Reading “The Night Lessons” as an Irish textbook, this thesis argues that systemized knowledge and the nationalized education that disseminates it possess a threatening capacity to shape and limit identity and experience. Joyce uses the chapter both to examine this threat and to advance modes of experience unaccounted for in systems of knowledge reliant on language—and thus unamenable to educational forces' attempts to colonize identity. The thesis examines the 19th century pedagogical notion of apperception as a nexus of Joyce's binding preoccupations of memory and perception, and investigates its role in the capacity of generate abstraction and metaphysics in unconscious mind as depicted in *Finnegans Wake*. Ultimately, this thesis reads “The Night Lessons” as a textbook exercising the mind's malleability instead of imposing stabilizing limits upon it.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of singular strangeness that mankind often finds dreams *instructive*. That dreams have been taken as fascinating, emotionally charged, or even prophetic somehow seems less peculiar than the fact that they are often taken as *educational*, conveying what can only be called knowledge about the waking world from the strange remove of sleep. Since as early as *Gilgamesh*, our literary exploration of dreams has made visible an abiding faith that they contain something to be learned, some kind of information which will bring a necessary change to how we experience waking life; from the Old Testament to *Julius Caesar*, dreams are imbued with a near supernatural degree of meaning and received with almost unquestioning acceptance as the unique vessels of a certain brand of particularly important knowledge. It is not remarkable merely that we believe dreams can teach us, but that we believe there is a certain province of education made possible only through dreaming. It is counter-intuitive to nearly everything else held true about knowledge.

The turn of the 20th century saw exploration of this phenomenon take on an unprecedented formal rigor in the form of Freud's seminal *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Through sheer force of systemization, *The Interpretation of Dreams* displaced the supernatural as the source of meaning in dreams and refigured them as products of the unconscious—the still dominant idea that a significant province of the mind operates invisibly and unaware of itself,

especially during sleep. Freud's work displaced art and religion as the institutions with the authority to explore and explain dreams, replacing them with psychology¹. Yet as much as it worked to demystify dreams and "elucidate the processes to which the strangeness and obscurity of dreams are due," *The Interpretation of Dreams* remains valuable now mostly as an index of a zeitgeist if not as an effective totalizing account of the unconscious (Freud 35). Over the course of the late 19th and early 20th century, attempts to achieve greater understanding of interiority are general across both the sciences and arts, and increasing claims to power and validity on the part of science only saw the arts reassert themselves as productive and essential tools of epistemological inquiry. As Michael Bell argues in "The Metaphysics of Modernism," "The modernist generation, both critically and creatively, was centrally concerned with the relations between literary form and modes of knowledge or understanding" (Bell 11). He uses Nietzsche to trace out this signal modernist preoccupation:

As Nietzsche put it in 1872, "great men...have contrived with an incredible amount of thought, to make use of the paraphernalia of science itself, to point out the limits and relativity of knowledge generally, and thus to deny decisively the claim of science to universal validity and universal aims." This was crucial to several modern writers who deliberately used science as just one of the possible orders of understanding rather than as the ultimate form of truth statement. (Bell 12)

Modernist writers often used scientific forms² to subversively undermine the cultural tendency to prize systemization as the highest form of knowledge. Nowhere is Freud's systemization of the

¹ Albeit a model of psychology rife with symbolism and oriented around the operating metaphor of the unconscious as a theater. It is perhaps as indebted to aesthetics and art as any science (or religion) has ever been.

² Bell cites Joyce's Ithaca chapter of *Ulysses* as a prominent example of this tendency (Bell 12)

unconscious undermined more than in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), and nowhere is the formalizing tendency of systemized epistemology called into question more overtly than in that text's "The Night Lessons" of section II.ii.

Seeking not to interpret the unconscious so much as depict it, *Finnegans Wake* advances a model of the unconscious mind and what can be learned from it in direct opposition to Freud, one which "looks for revelation, not scientific explanation" (Ellmann 85). "The Night Lessons" take the form of a textbook to openly explore the difference between these two types of knowledge. Textbooks not only offer a promise that knowledge is orderly but also assert that orderliness is the chief characteristic of knowledge. This thesis argues that Joyce employs the form of the schoolbook in "The Night Lessons" to call the epistemological mechanism of systemization into question. Joyce sees it as an outgrowth of the biological function of *apperception* in the mind—the drive to reconcile every sensory impulse to the acquired body of stored sense-memories, explored so rigorously as a component of education in 19th century pedagogy. My work explores how the apperceptive drive manifests itself as an innate part of 19th century education's growing interest in its power to shape identities on an unprecedented scale through national education; how in the unconscious mind of "The Night Lessons," apperception is cut from the senses and turned on itself, producing the pure abstraction of metaphysics; and how the unconscious mind as represented in *Finnegans Wake* abounds with drives and forces unamenable to the apperceptive compulsion to subsume experience under the umbrella of language.

While Joyce manifests a deep skepticism towards some of the most foundational ideas of how we experience our world—language, education, metaphysics—it is limiting to interpret the

text simply as a remote and abstract philosophical exploration unmoored from concerns in historical realities. Prior to any direct analysis of “The Night Lessons,” it is important to establish a firmer context for what it actually means for Joyce to use the form of a schoolbook in the center of *Finnegans Wake*. As a form familiar to almost all readers, schoolbooks often establish the status quo for reading as an experience by acting as one. Because they act so fundamentally as normative texts, it is easy to overlook how distinctly they manifest the unique concerns of their nations and eras. In *Wake* criticism, this tendency has manifested itself in a tradition of reading “The Night Lessons” as a sort of Ur-textbook, “an image of studenthood in general” which explores “the great scholar tasks that have occupied mankind from the beginning” (Campbell 162). The chapter is taken as a commentary on epistemology writ large, especially epistemology’s peculiar position as it dissolves at the frontier of the unknown unconscious. The text is “an antiprimer and a primer both, a dismantling of the bases of human learning and culture and a return to the primordia of knowing” (Bishop xxii).

Yet to read the form of “The Night Lessons” exclusively as a symbol for epistemology and education is perhaps to make one of the chief mistakes common to dream interpretation—to interpret a symbol as universal at the expense of its meaning to an individual. While Joyce subverts the systemizing tendency of epistemology in general, it is a grievous omission to overlook the deeply rooted cultural and historical concerns inherent in this subversive streak. The concerns in “The Night Lessons” are universal in their scope, but they are also specifically informed by the textbook as Joyce would have known it as an Irish schoolchild in the late 19th century: that is, as an instrument invested in shaping religious and political identity. The Irish national system of education was a bitter battleground between church and state—a forum with a

nationwide scope, unprecedented resources, and a unique shaping function within the lives of Irish citizens. Joyce's commentary on education is uniquely the product of the education he received. By looking at the textbook as it operates within "The Night Lessons" more closely as a form, and not merely a symbol, it becomes clear that the polarized politicization of Irish education left Joyce with a deep anxiety about education's use as an instrument of cultural condition, but also left him with an abiding faith that the mind has means of actively, if unconsciously, resisting such conditioning.

Ultimately, this thesis reads "The Night Lessons" as a textbook promising a liberating anti-education against the limitations of systemized knowledge and verbal consciousness, and consequently a liberating force working against singular models of nationhood, citizenship, and identity such systemization makes possible. Joyce advances possibilities that an education which embraces problems, errors, flukes, and ineffability can perhaps act to immunize the mind of the student against the cultural forces which work to shape it, and advances "The Night Lessons" as an example of how a textbook capable of instilling this type of education must operate.

CHAPTER I
TEXTBOOKS AND PEDAGOGY IN 19TH CENTURY IRELAND

Textbooks have been a frontline in culture wars since the dawn of public education, and their role in Irish schools in the 19th century was particularly divisive. The system of education Joyce passed through as a citizen of Ireland was one that, since the sixteenth century, had been “entwined in issues of religious and national identity” (Raftery 72). Public education became an outright ideological battleground after the establishment of the national system of education in 1831. Created by the British government in response to the Stanley Letter, a document which devotes much itself to outlining the dangers inherent in allowing Irish education to be conducted primarily through the clergy³, nationalized education came into being in Ireland “almost four decades before England, its ostensibly more advanced neighbor” (Akenson 5). For England, Ireland became a test case for the viability and capabilities of a nationalized system of education⁴. It is virtually impossible to interpret the establishment of the national system without implications of control and colonization on England’s part, especially in light of the facts that “...Ireland underwent no industrial revolution, no significant urbanization, no breakdown in the agrarian order and family structure, and did not experience any of the other forms of social revolution that usually presage the creation of state systems of formal education” (Akenson 3).

And yet it was a change many citizens of Ireland were particularly amenable to, with “the

³ Catholic education prior to 1831 was most typically characterized by hedge schools, religious education so threatening to the British government as to be “described as ‘a kind of guerilla war’ in education” (McManus 16).

⁴ The title of the most highly regarded text on the subject speaks volumes: *The Irish Education Experiment* (1970).

Irish peasantry show[ing] a striking desire for their children to be schooled” (Akenson 17). It is clear even from Irish education’s earliest moments as a public institution that opposing forces of Irish nationalism and British colonialism saw it as an unprecedented tool for identity shaping, and therefore nationbuilding. “Central to both the social and political function of the national schools was the creation of the citizen,” and the subsequently shifting definition of “citizen” brought on by an influx of Catholic influence in ostensibly non-denominational public schools is hard to understate as a force essential to shaping the emerging democratic ideas which would culminate in the Irish Free State nearly a century later (Raftery 75). Nowhere is the conflict anchored in issues of religious and national identity in Irish education more apparent than in its textbooks.

Textbooks in 19th century Ireland are notable for their preoccupation with matters of *identity*. While every system of national education can be evaluated as making some implicit claims about the definitions and priorities of a citizen, the assimilationist bent of the schoolbooks used under the Irish national system is rather blunt: “advanced readers included lessons on the British monarchy, the geography and history of England, and natural science” along with the work of Protestant evangelical writers (Raftery 75). Conversely, the texts “contained reference to Ireland as a geographical entity but as little else,” so completely evading anything that might stoke nationalism that “Irish children...go through school without ever hearing of the history and culture of their own country” (Akenson 238). As a distillation of ideal British citizenship, the books were effective. Considered “the best set of school books produced in the British Isles,” the texts were eventually exported to “more than a dozen countries,” bringing with them their uniquely British priorities (Akenson 229). And yet if “the reading books strongly reflected

Britain's cultural assimilation policy for Ireland," the emerging force of Catholicism in education was no less focused on shaping the identities of Irish schoolchildren (Raftery 75). Frustrations with the curriculum's "religious content being neutral as between Christian denominations" were a point of public contention⁵ (Akenson 235). Initially, most instructors simply latched onto these vagaries and bent them to their own religious and political affinities behind the closed doors of the classroom:

The religious quality of the books, despite their dogmatic neutrality, gave the teachers of every national school in Ireland an opportunity to mix religious instruction with literary instruction; and when a presbyterian, Roman Catholic, or Anglican teacher gave religious instruction of this kind it is altogether unlikely that the instruction was apt to be unfavourable to his own denomination. (Akenson 237)

If anything, Catholic education only redoubled efforts to use the classroom as the foundry of identity. As Deirdre Raftery and Martina Relihan observe:

According to Irish bishops, 'the purpose of education was chiefly to prepare man for the world to come'. They stated that education implied 'the training and development of the whole man...for the purpose not merely of fitting him for a career of usefulness⁶ and honour in this life, but also and still more for the purpose of guiding him to attain...the life to come.' (79)

Instead of resisting or limiting nationalized education's power to shape identity, Catholic

⁵ As R. F. Foster notes, the readers taught "a utilitarian diet of values that might be seen as a rather crude attempt at social control, but were at least secular. They therefore pleased nobody" (Foster 304).

⁶ Here the Irish national system perhaps stands in contrast to those of nations developed in response to industrial revolutions which sought less to shape the character of students so much as to render them "useful" at newly essential tasks.

educators simply altered expectations for what that identity should be: education was openly a matter of the soul. Expectations for textbooks and education in Ireland were ontological as much as they were epistemological. As such, Joyce's rigorous investigations of how education and identity are intertwined arise naturally out of the form he couches them in: even at their strangest moments, "The Night Lessons" behave in much the same way as the textbooks Joyce was educated with.

Even beyond their implications as tools of shaping identity, the textbooks of the Irish national schools bear an immediate affinity with *Finnegans Wake* for the singular strangeness of their language and content. Especially in their first volume, which offers reading and language instruction, the lessons are jarring in their peculiarity to any modern reader. The demonstration sentences, "although arranged in a paragraph were often merely a series of *non sequiturs*, with no story to give continuity" (Akenson 232), a descriptor which could just as easily be applied to *Finnegans Wake* and its adherence to the grammatical and formal bases of the English language in the face of its radical disruptions of narrative and constant neologisms. Example sentences culled from these texts are *Wake*-esque to say the least: "Snap bit a rat; its leg bled; it is in a trap; do not let it slip...The beef is quite raw; will you roast it? A flail is used to part the grain from the straw" (Akenson 232)⁷. The course of an education in an Irish national school proceeded from the first volume's ground-up approach to language, "intended to make the child familiar with the forms of the letters and thence to teach him how to read words of one syllable and then how to form and understand short written sentences," to the fifth and final volume

⁷ A certain degree of nonsensical energy is, to be sure, general in writing produced for children, but is often traced out in *Finnegans Wake* through its relation to children's literature, especially the work of Lewis Carroll, in lieu of its presence in formalized textbooks.

which rendered students “able to read most books in the English language” (Akenson 232-233). The subject matter covered from one volume to the next increased in complexity from the nonsense of the first volume to rigorous lessons in geography, history, and anatomy in later volumes⁸; it often made leaps between volumes most students could not keep pace with. Key here is the fact that as the education offered to students increased in complexity, it arguably decreased in applicable relevance. The texts ultimately had, according to critics at the time, “*no direct bearing on the future career of the pupils*. They are trained to exercise their memory, to be passive recipients of knowledge, to be quiet, submissive, and obedient, and occasionally to sing the national anthem” (Akenson 235). Any advancement in education was tied to increased language proficiency, and as such Irish national education prioritized the theoretical over the applicable. Increased intelligence was largely a phenomenon of language.

For all their attempts to remain steadfastly non-denominational in their content, the textbooks of the Irish national system were still heavily inclined towards religious instruction, one that also followed a similar scaffolding as language skills progressed. The *First book of lessons for the use of schools* contained elementary expressions of religious sentiment such as “God loves us, and sent his Son to save us. The word of God tells us to love him;” from there, the textbooks proceeded through “a great deal of biblical history,” including “a paraphrase of the creation story” (Akenson 236). The final books “dripped religion from every page,” eventually focusing on in-depth explications of theology⁹ (Akenson 236). Yet the religious content, while prominent, always strove towards a non-denominationalism problematic for its supposed

⁸ This stratified model of education tied to language proficiency is also visible throughout the structure of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as it increasingly builds from the nonsense of childhood language to eventually wrestle with problems of aesthetics and theology.

universality. Its very neutrality made it politically charged. The Stanley Letter set out to establish a national “system of education from which should be banished even the suspicion of proselytism, and which, admitting children of all religious persuasions, should not interfere with the peculiar tenets of any” (Stanley 393). If the aim was “to connect religious with moral and literary education, and, at the same time, not to run the risk of wounding the peculiar feelings of any sect by catechetical instruction or comments which might tend to subjects of polemical controversy,” the Irish national system cannily leaves unspoken that omission can be a tool of proselytism (Stanley 394). The problems inherent in such a system were not invisible to educators and clergymen in Ireland, however; Catholics, “along with the Anglicans and Presbyterians...worked from the beginning to destroy the mixed principle of the schools” (Titley 5). Recognizing both the danger of national education as a tool of colonization and the value of the resources it made available, the “clerical crusade which was prompted by its opposition to ‘mixed education’” worked diligently so that “by the later half of the nineteenth century the primary system was denominationalised in all but name” (Pašeta 10). Irish education, in the fight for the identities and allegiances of its students, particularly “placed the ‘Catholic youth of Ireland’ at the centre of a prolonged campaign which saw them become the ‘football of church and state’” (Pašeta 6). Despite its attempts to work against Catholic influence,

the sheer weight of numbers saw Catholics gain most from the national school system. Not only did the government relieve the church of the burden of educating Catholic increasingly eager for education, it also shouldered the extensive cost of this ambitious scheme. (Pašeta 10-11)

⁹ It is telling that “The Night Lessons” also paraphrase Genesis and “drip religion” from nearly every page.

If its history shows church influences progressively winning the game, it is above all else important to recognize that nationalized education offered a playing field of unprecedented scope.

Yet if the advent of national education brought about a type of instruction invested in identity politics rather than an apprenticeship-style model of instruction towards activity, it is also important to note other forces working to systemize education and shape identity to other ends. For if the Irish national system aimed towards ordered and totalized education, the same trends are visible in the burgeoning field of pedagogy at the time, minus the politicized priorities of a government agency. Just as the century saw broader philosophical concerns become formalized and systemized enough to become psychology, more abstract concerns of epistemology were met with enough rigorous formality to create actionable models of pedagogy. Metacognition, in short, lost the stigma of speculation. In both cases, the inner-workings of consciousness, previously kept at arms' length in the realm of epistemological abstraction, became formalized enough to achieve not just greater credibility but also institutional implementation. In the case of pedagogy, this growth is in tandem with education beginning to serve a much wider population as nationalization and compulsory education became increasingly desirable. As Gabriel Compayré argues in *The History of Pedagogy* (1891), the field's progress over the 19th century was characterized by:

An effort more and more marked to organize education in accordance with the data of psychology and on a scientific basis, and to co-ordinate pedagogical models in accordance with a rational plan; a manifest tendency to take the control of education from the hands of the Church in order to restore it to the State and to lay society....a faith more

and more sanguine in the efficacy of instruction, and an ever-growing purpose to have every member of the human family participate in its benefits. (Compayré 508-509).

More than anything, the overarching trend of pedagogy in the 19th century is less a matter of theoretical content itself and more a matter of education theory finding widespread outlets in education practice. Yet while institutionalized education granted pedagogy a forum to put theories of learning and instruction into use, these theories in most cases attempted to transcend issues of politics and national identity. Indeed, most aspired to find something universal within education, and if this shows a tendency to totalize within pedagogy, it also necessitates at least a nominal detachment from politics and religion in an attempt to rise above them. This push and pull between different totalizing forces, one towards a metaphysical universality in education and the other towards an education in national and religious priorities, animates much of “The Night Lessons.” Joyce ultimately finds them both identically frustrating.

Largely in the wake of titanic pedagogical theorists like Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Freidrich Fröbel, and Johann Freidrich Herbart, 19th century education also began to include an obligation to cultivate the *senses* and educate the conscience as opposed to merely transmitting a body of information. These theorists began to see education as a process of educators drawing out something from within students as opposed to students drawing in something from educators. At the forefront of this movement was Pestalozzi, whose goal “above all else was to develop the moral sentiments and interior forces of the conscience” of his pupils (Compayré 424). Where the church-based instruction of the past and contemporary nationalized systems of education sought to impose national and religious identities on students, this strain of pedagogy made recourse to the language of interiority and individuality. As Pestalozzi says of his students:

The children very soon felt that there existed within them forces which they did not know, and in particular they acquired a general sentiment of order and beauty. They were self-conscious....They willed, they had power, they persevered, they succeeded, and they were happy. They were not scholars who were learning but children who felt unknown forces awakening within them, and who understood where these forces could and would lead them...(Compayré 425).

This influx of pedagogical focus on perception brought into education a host of concerns in many ways new to a field previously dominated by religious instruction or practical apprenticeship. In general, the trend has been classified easily (albeit reductively) as the emergence of Romantic tendencies in education. As education extended its reach to include instruction in matters of sentiment, perception, intuition, and even the physical body, the field began to focus on a secularized cultivation of the inner life, presenting methods of instruction solidly oriented around the *student* as opposed to the instructor or the curriculum. As such, 19th century pedagogy in Europe was just as engaged in exploring education's possibilities as a tool for shaping identity as was the Irish national system; the chief difference is continental pedagogy's abiding faith in the individual. Here, a brief look at Pestalozzi is helpful as he acts as the harbinger for the eventual flourishing of these ideas; he identifies some of the essential principles of his framework as follows:

1. To give the mind an intensive culture, and not simply extensive: to form the mind, and not to content one's self with furnishing it.
2. To connect all instruction with the study of language;

3. To furnish the mind for all its operations with fundamental data, mother ideas.
(Pestalozzi, quoted in Compayré 439).

These elements, over the course of the ensuing century, galvanized into a model of education that can be expressed in a single word: the cultivation of *apperception*.

Taken from the philosophical conversation of the previous century where it was explored in works of figures like Descartes, Kant, and Leibniz, apperception essentially refers to the body of knowledge, memories, and associations that arise in response to any sensory perception. The term found ready employment in the growing field of psychology, but its applicability in the rhetoric of pedagogy was boundless. In fact, the term so pervaded the field that a case can be made that it was the first educational buzzword of the modern era; by 1899, William James, in his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology; and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals*, delivered a necessary clarifying lecture in response to the idea's pollution at the hands of rampant hucksterism and obsessive over-classification, declaring that apperception "mean[s] nothing more than the manner in which we receive a thing into our minds" (James). It is, in essence, the epistemological frontline where sensation becomes knowledge. The general question apperception seeks to explore in pedagogy is essentially, "What part is played by the Art of Education in this transition from vague sense impression to definite ideas?" (Boyd 324). It is a question any reader of Joyce has a vested interest in, for few writers in history have been so preoccupied by perception, memory, and the relationship between the two. Apperception operates at the nexus where memory and perception meet; it is the process of perception being subsumed into recognition and eventually memory. As Joyce puts it in one of the clearer moments of "The Night Lessons," "After sound, light, and heat, memory, will, and

understanding” (*FW* 266).

As James puts it, “Our people, especially in academic circles, are turning towards psychology nowadays with great expectations; and if psychology is to justify them, it must be by showing fruits in the pedagogic and therapeutic lines” (James 117). Because of its use as a concept in both fields, apperception acts as a handy means of reconciling psychology and pedagogy; it has been called “that realm of educational thought in which the results of modern psychology must be an indispensable factor” (De Garmo ix). Each theorist obviously brings a different set of preoccupations and inflections to this term. Herbart, the most rigorously analytical and scientifically-minded to write on the subject, introduces his *ABC of Sense-Perception* with a bracing directness, asserting that the work “rests upon two presuppositions—first, that seeing is an art; second, that the apprentice in this as in every other art must go through a certain series of exercises” (Herbart 132). Conversely, Karl Lange’s *Apperception: A Monograph on Psychology and Pedagogy* (1899) poses the issue in grander and more lyrical terms, arriving at questions intimately familiar to any reader of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Finnegans Wake*:

Man enters life as a stranger; he knows nothing of the world that receives him: it is to him a new, unknown country, which he must explore, which he must conquer. How is this to be done? Nature assails his senses with a thousand allurements; she sends the rays of light that she may open his eyes to the innumerable things of the outer world, she knocks upon the door of the human spirit with excitations of tone and touch and temperature and all the other stimulations of the sensitive nerves, desiring admission. The soul answers these stimuli with sensations, with ideas; it masters the outer world by perceiving it.

(Lange 1)

For James, it is a faculty impossible to ignore, rendering pure unmediated perception impossible: “Every impression that comes in from without...no sooner enters our consciousness than it is drafted off in some determinate direction or other, making connection with the other materials already there, and finally producing what we call our reaction” (James 2). It is also important to note that for all of these theorists, apperception acts as the frontier where the mind and body intersect—it is the process that “transforms a physiological occasion into a psychical result” (Lange 2). It is the crossroads where world and individual, sensation and understanding meet, and, as such it is a rewarding foothold to approach Joyce’s work, especially “The Night Lessons.”¹⁰ The belief that there is an interior compulsion towards education is one that he sees as uniquely vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of national and religious forces, but also uniquely fascinating for its ability to take in the sensory world and shape it into an outwardly projected individual identity.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, apperception will be used only in its most general sense—as the outward-moving body of sense memory that receives and subsumes any sensory impression. While these pedagogists explored the idea in singular and nuanced ways, Joyce does not seem to have engaged any of their ideas specifically enough for any one-to-one correspondence of particular value to emerge. It also perhaps self-evident that any study of the faculty of the mind responsible for classification will inevitably fall into the trap of proliferating overclassifications, often to the point of impracticality; apperception is not immune to its own tendencies as it studies them. For an overview of some major differences between thinkers, Lange’s chapter “History of the Idea of Apperception” in pages 246-279 of his *Apperception* is helpful, but James’s plainspoken operating definition will take us more than far enough. “The Night Lessons” are about nothing if not the unending strangeness inherent in “the manner in which we receive a thing into our minds.”

CHAPTER II

APPERCEPTION AND THE GENERATION OF ABSTRACTION IN THE *WAKE*

“The Night Lessons” do not act just as a general commentary on epistemology in relation to the unconscious but everywhere bear the distinctive stamp of 19th century education’s abiding interest in *apperception* as the key faculty of knowing; knowledge is not just a static body of information but instead colors how all other information is brought into the mind, thrilling in its ability to shape consciousness and dictate how one experiences the world at the fundamental level of sensation¹¹. Theories of apperception acknowledge that the world is experienced differently by each individual, and yet the application of these theories into systemized practice in schools innately prizes a “correct” way of experiencing the world; for all their liberating potential, they are bound to be used in the name of normativity. As a concept, the notion of apperception offers a model for where epistemology and ontology meet. Knowing and being cannot be easily extricated from one another in such a model. Everything learned changes being. Yet in this model of pedagogy Joyce rightly sees something problematic, even suspicious. As education moves towards increasing systemization, there then looms a tandem threat of the standardization of experience, a notion obviously loathsome to the man who wrote *Ulysses*. The “DYNASTIC” accumulation of apperception over time, not just for the individual but for the

¹¹ The idea that different apperceptions yield different perceptions seems like a clear precursor to Modernism’s pronounced interest in artistically exploring different responses to the same phenomena—visible in trends like the use of stream-of-consciousness narrative, multi-vocality, and Cubism.

human race as well, also suggests that modes of experience may have been totally lost, or that errors may have been included into the apperceiving mass that cause experience to be fundamentally undermined. There are also conspicuous gaps and ontological mysteries to the model: when and how does sensation first become memory? Why and how does it happen at all? Seeing very real limiting elements in such a model of epistemology, Joyce uses “The Night Lessons” to explore one dominant question: if apperception is how the conscious mind receives information and shapes itself into an identity, what happens to this faculty during the unconscious hours of sleep? By shutting out perception, “The Night Lessons” shows the apperceptive faculty turned in on itself in a sort of feedback loop, reveling in the freaks and errors that arise like an unsettling overtone when the apperceiving mass is granted free-play, and exploring the potentialities of “INFRALIMINAL INTELLIGENCE” unrecognized by the conscious mind (*FW* 276 rm). It becomes the foundry of pure metaphysical abstraction.

Joyce’s fascination with apperception as a faculty of the mind tied to learning began in his earliest attempts at writing. As he developed the body of work that would eventually be published as *Dubliners* (1914), Joyce developed a revealing coinage for what he sought to depict in his short stories: *epiphanies*. For Joyce, “The epiphany was ‘the sudden revelation of the whatness of a thing,’ the moment in which ‘the soul of the commonest object...seems to us radiant.’ The artist, he felt, was charged with such revelations” (Ellmann 83). Epiphanies are essentially heroic acts of apperception, moments in which, “The apperceived impression is engulfed...and the result is a new field of consciousness, of which one part (and often a very small part) comes from the outer world, and another part (sometimes by far the largest) comes from the previous contents of the mind” (James). What fascinates Joyce in this process is both

the radical newness which arises when this “new field of consciousness” is born, and the moments in which apperception can act with unaccountable strength in order to generate them; often “their brilliance lies in their peculiar baldness, their uncompromising refusal of all devices which would render them immediately clear” (Ellmann 84). If the epiphanies are moments when perception and apperception collide with inexplicable force, they often demonstrate that the sum of the process is greater than its parts, to “suggest the secret life of the spirit” (Ellmann 85). In form they followed function, stripped of any didactic explication of their “intended but always unstated meaning” to test the apperceptive ability of the reader herself (Ellmann 85). As a sort of sublime overtaxing of apperception, the epiphany experienced by a character should generate the same effect in the reader. The vestigial religious implications of the term should not be ignored: these are moments when a process of understanding so pedestrian as to be involuntary yields results that arrive with the force of religious revelation.

Even Joyce’s earliest works demonstrate a fascination with the meeting of perception and apperception, and this fascination is invested specifically in moments where the process functions unusually: moments where it operates disproportionately, yields inexplicable results of new knowledge, or seems to betray some type of interference or input from some unnamed internal force. As Robert Sage argues in “Before *Ulysses*—and After,” these moments evoke...more intense emotions than the phenomena of the outer world. This is not an affectation. It is as vital a part of Joyce as his Irish birth or his Catholic training” (Sage 153). What Sage seems to overlook is that these moments are perhaps the very antithesis of that birth and training, instances that stretch beyond the capacities instilled in the mind by education. While Joyce’s work always centers on a rigorous exploration of consciousness and its

components, it is not until *Finnegans Wake* that Joyce undertakes a full exploration of what goes on beyond the conscious mind's ability to observe and describe itself. His focus changes to the "shifting and changes and chances of the unconscious mind in its dreaming" (Joyce in Ellmann 544). If the epiphanies of *Dubliners* depict but do not investigate such chance overpowerings of consciousness, "The Night Lessons" of the *Wake* show the constitutive elements of these misfirings and flukes in exhaustive and exhausting detail.

Before it opens, "The Night Lessons" receives a brief preamble introducing its concerns in the closing pages of the previous chapter, often referred to as "The Children's Hour." An invocation is offered up "that thy children may read in the book of the opening of the mind to light and err not in the darkness of afterthought of thy nomatter..." (*FW* 258). The imagery is telling and primes the reader to view much of what comes as a commentary on education and epistemology. Already a religious inflection is clear, and the operating metaphor for education foregrounds a concern with sensory perceptions in their relation to knowledge; like pedagogical texts designed to cultivate apperception, the central text of the chapter is "the book of the opening of the mind to light," a guide for how to shape the mind to receive sensory phenomena (*FW* 258). The chapter also foreshadows how completely this process of education molds the conscious identity: "still he'd be a good tutor two in his big armschair lerningstoel, and she be a waxen in his hands. Turning up and fingering over the most dantellisng peaches in the lingerous, langerous book of the dark" (*FW* 251). Education takes on a shaping function, expressed in eroticized physical terms. In another method of complicating apperception, the imagery takes on a prominent synesthetic quality confusing the senses. Reading is depicted as a tactile process instead of a visual one, and pages are factored as "peaches," stimulating the taste buds more than

the eyes (McHugh 251). Yet for all the charged imagery of the senses, these preambles are imbued with a sharp irony, for sleep is the time when the mind is *closed* to new sensory input—as the invocation says, “thou hast closed the portals of the habitations of thy children and thou has set thy guards thereby...” (*FW* 258). Our study hour will be shielded from new sensations as the children study “the book of the dark” and its epistemology of “the darkness...of afterthought.” The chapter explores what happens when the apperceptive appetite for knowledge is starved of the nourishment of the senses.

And yet even as it opens, “The Night Lessons” seems to offer a picture of knowledge valuable for its very freedom from sensory input, a depiction of “Real life behind the floodlights as shown by the best exponents of a royal divorce” between perception and apperception (*FW* 260). This knowledge freed from the senses could perhaps best be labeled metaphysics. Samuel Beckett, in his seminal essay “Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce” in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, parses the issue with signature precision: “Metaphysics purge the mind of the senses and cultivate the disembodiment of the spiritual” and are “most perfect when concerned with universals” (Beckett). “The Night Lessons” are then overtly invested in metaphysics. As John Gordon points out in *Joyce and Reality* (2004), “...*Finnegans Wake*, like *Portrait* before it, appears to instantiate a universal protocol of creation and destruction that applies equally to the formation of thought and the formation of stars” (Gordon 259). As such, the chapter, as occurs often in the *Wake*, makes a return to the first hours of creation to explore further the first moments of thought. Its initial concerns are orientational. The unconscious presents everyone with an “apersonal problem, a locative enigma,” and “The Night Lessons” open in an attempt to answer the “UNDE ET UBI” [when

and where] fundamental to any form of knowing, proceeding from a senseless absence of bearings through the development of language to eventual totalized systems of knowledge: “As we there are where are we are we there from tomtittot to teetootomtotalitarian” (*FW* 135, 260). The impulse to blindly guess at names evoked by the reference to Tomtittot, a Rumpelstiltskin story, is seen as the same force that eventually allows systemized knowledge to agglomerate.

This preoccupation with naming foregrounds that language is a fundamental part of apperception, the primary tool that allows orientation and navigation of the “chaosmos” of unconsciousness (McHugh 260; *FW* 118). And yet it is also a brief statement of purpose for the obscure epistemological goals of *Finnegans Wake*, an attempt “to draw a reader deeply into a ‘blank memory’ of the ‘percepted nought’ experienced in the night....open[ing] all manners of inquiry into what precisely the “vacant: mined” could have been about in those parts of its life when it seemed not to be there at all” (Bishop 63). Perceiving nothing, and therefore having nothing for its memory to apperceive, the impulse to know, to navigate, and to order persists nonetheless in the face of the “nightly decreation” in which “the world is hurled back to the ‘primeval conditions’ that obtained before its genesis” (Bishop 218). “The Night Lessons” bring the reader back to those primeval conditions to show that the instinct towards knowledge is unflagging even in the unconscious; as Joyce puts it, “And howelse do we hook our hike to find that pint of porter place?” (*FW* 260).

Joyce’s initial questions about apperception in “The Night Lessons,” then, are oriented more around how it can presume, through language or otherwise, to reveal or construct a world *ex nihilo*. It attempts to trace out some kind of “universal way” of knowledge, and in its third paragraph runs through a gauntlet of references to thinkers of intellectual importance—

historians, linguists, physiognomist, mathematicians, astronomers, metaphysicians, painters, and music theorists—many of whom work in fields that offer types of knowledge outside what would conventionally be considered language (Campbell 165). What is perhaps most interesting about this list, however, is not its contents but the way in which it presents them by fashioning them as places, stops on the pathway to solving the “locative enigma” of being:

Long Livius Lane, mid Mezzofanti Mall, diagonising Lavatery Square, up Tycho Brache Crescent, shouldering Berkeley Alley, querfixing Gainsborough Carfax, under Guido d’Arezzo’s Gadeway, by New Livius Lane till where we whiled while we withered. Old Vico Roundpoint. (*FW* 260)

The text bears more than a passing resemblance to the *Wake*’s path-tracing opening sentence, and its final reference to Vico acts as a recapitulation of the *Wake*’s first great epistemological impossibility: how do you find the beginning of a circle? How does apperception begin? “The Night Lessons” recognize that all epistemology and education is founded on an attempt to reveal “the secret of their soorcelossness,” an endeavor to find an impossible beginning (*FW* 23).

This search for beginnings is both epistemological and spiritual, and the two tones can coexist comfortably within a textbook format. Both the pervasive religious content of “The Night Lessons” and its retelling of creation can be read as a mirroring of the structure of Irish textbooks as Joyce would have known them. In *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson concisely sketch out the structure of ‘The Night Lessons’:

“The chapter opens with a review, in allegorical terms, of the process of creation; twenty-six pages (260-286) are devoted to the description of the descent of spirit into time and

space. First, the will to create moves the world father to beget the universe; then the world becomes possible, takes form, actually appears. Man comes into being with his primitive lusts and taboos, and becomes localized in the tavern of HCE. There, in the nursery of the children, the entire human comedy presents itself in miniature.” (Campbell 163).

Joyce’s return to the moment of creation as he investigates the most fundamental constitutive elements of knowledge is in keeping with the preoccupation with origins present throughout *Finnegans Wake*, but this move also has a very real precedent in the structure of Irish textbooks. If the references to “the esoteric doctrines of the Cabala” (Campbell 163) peppered throughout the chapter initially seem perplexing when juxtaposed with more conventional educational fare like mathematics and grammar, it is perhaps merely reflective of the curriculum of Joyce’s Ireland in which “exercises came to centre almost entirely on New Testament religion” just as they broadened into the fields of physics and history (Akenson 236).

The structure and content of the Irish national system’s textbooks seem to have significantly informed Joyce’s preoccupation in “The Night Lessons” with how systemized knowledge can be used as a tool for shaping national identity and spiritual affinities. By stratifying a uniquely impractical education in parallel with language education that begins from nonsense, the textbooks of the Irish system make clear that education was treated as a tool to cultivate identity rather than inculcate skills. Like an Irish textbook, education in “The Night Lessons” proceeds “from tomtittot” (naming) “to teetootomtotalitarian,” becoming a totalizing force of civilization (*FW* 260; McHugh 260). This progress moves “FROM CENOGENETIC DICHOTOMY...TO DYNASTIC CONTINUITY,” proceeding from the originary separation of

being and nothingness at the moment of creation to eventually become a structure of uninterrupted institutional power (*FW* 275). Education is a means of colonizing consciousness, and its increasing tendencies towards nationalization over the course of the second half of the 19th century are visible in Joyce's use of the language of totalitarianism and dynasty within his own schoolbook of the unconscious.

Within *Finnegans Wake*, all knowledge is a type of "broken heaventalk," a poor attempt at speaking the language of the cosmos (*FW* 261). Campbell and Robinson interpret this "heaventalk" as "paradoxical, metaphorical, half-statements, which rather point toward than define the problem," but this seems to misuse what Joyce presents (Campbell 166). The examples of "heaventalk" provided are not remotely evasive, but instead some of the most direct questions humankind can frame: "is he? Who is he? Whose is he? Why is he? Howmuch is he? Which is he? When is he? Where is he? How is he? And what the decans is there about him anyway, the decent man?" (*FW* 261-262). These are not oblique or gestural questions as Campbell and Robinson suggest but instead the most acute questions language can pose, questions of being, identity, possession, purpose, quantity, type, temporality, causation, and relevance. They are the foundational questions on which an empirical reality is based, and Joyce seems to assert that the problem is not with the questions, but rather with nature's reluctance to provide answers. The passage concludes with "Easy, calm your haste! Approach to lead our passage!" another of Joyce's plays on the abbreviations HCE and ALP scattered throughout the *Wake*, but also another phrase with a mirror at its center which seems to imply that attempts to trace out our origins in any direction through "broken heaventalk" will ultimately only lead back to where one began the search (*FW* 262).

Yet Joyce's "broken heaventalk" and sense of disorientation can be approached even more specifically through their peculiar resonances with the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah. Made immediately visible in the chapter's reference to "Ainsoph," "The Night Lessons" are drawn to the Kabbalah as a tradition which believes God "created His universe by the three forms of expression: Numbers, Letters, and Words" (Sefer Yetzirah 4). Language is a means of creation, a constitutive part of the universe. And yet the universe is also imbued with the ten *sefirot*, the "ten mysterious emanation of God" which are ineffable energies eternally, infinitely, and interconnectedly running through the universe. As a result, the numeral ten becomes intertwined throughout "The Night Lessons" (for example, our ten questions of "broken heaventalk" pointedly culminating in "what the *decans* is there about him anyway, the *decemt* man?). The Kabbalah also figures four of the ten *sefirot* as the cardinal directions, showing another means of solving the "locative enigma" at the source of all problems of knowledge (Sefer Yetzirah 6). The tradition's ultimate appeal to Joyce is likely its belief that the universe is created out of language but contains energies within it that cannot be subsumed back into language; like many mystic traditions, it thrives on a sense of hiddenness. The Kabbalah believes language is a uniquely powerful, elemental force, yet recognition of God's true manifestations requires one to "close thy mouth lest it speak and thy heart lest it think" (Sefer Yetzirah 5). If the Kabbalah believes the universe is created of language, it also presents a metaphysics in which access to the unconscious beyond language is the ultimate means of encountering the ineffable emanations of God.

As another of the *Wake*'s investigations of creation, it is suitable that "The Night Lessons" are riddled with the language of the Edenic fall. Here more than elsewhere in

Finnegans Wake, the original sin is figured as a sin of *knowledge*, an epistemological crime; it is, after all, the fruit of the tree of knowledge that causes Adam and Eve's expulsion. In a tour-de-force passage, Joyce explicates the fall of man as the birth of knowledge into the world:

The tasks above are as the flasks below, saith the emerald canticle of Hermes and all's loth and pleasestir, are we told, on excellent inkbottle authority, solarsystemised, seriocosmically, in a more and more almightily expanding universe under one, there is rhymeless reason to believe, original sun. Securely judges orb terrestrial. *Haud certo ergo*. But O felicitous culpability, sweet bad cess to you for an archetypt! (263)

St. Augustine's notion of the fortunate fall, a recurring motif in *Finnegans Wake*, can be interpreted here not as purely a gateway for rebirth and redemption, but also as the origin of the "original sun" of ordering knowledge that "solarsystemised" existence (*FW* 263). Knowledge throughout is figured as some kind of communication between the divine and man, as is immediately evident in the overt reference to messenger god Hermes and its implied reference to Hermes Trismegistos' precept that the divine and earthly share one substance (McHugh 263). Epistemology develops earthly "flasks" to contain divine "tasks," but these can only ever be provisional, evident in the uncertainty in "*Haud certo ergo*" [Therefore, no certainty] (McHugh 263). This knowledge is laughably compromised (hence the pun "seriocosmically" for seriocomically), leading to the ultimate curse of "bad cess" upon the "archetypt," a multivalent word which could be interpreted as architect (God), archetype (Adam), or even a typographic pun on Adam as the first man written¹² (McHugh 263).

It is also essential to note that Joyce figures his own first man, HCE, in reverse

¹² Or HCE as all men written.

throughout his descriptions of creation. In phrases like “emerald canticle of Hermes,” “Easy, calm your haste!” and “Eat early earthapples¹³. Coax cobra to chatters. Hail, Heva, we hear!” Joyce reverses the familiar initials rather conspicuously (*FW* 262, 263, 271). All of these describe or surround attempts at divine knowledge. As such, the reversed initials become a stand-in for epistemology’s ultimate attempts to know the unknowable source of creation. Joyce’s abbreviation game works here to depict epistemology as a hubristic attempt to reverse-engineer creation, one which is bound to end in failure. It is an attempt to “return...to befinding ourself, when old is said in one and maker mates with made” after a rigorous investigative process of “having conned the cones and meditated the mured and pondered the pensils and ogled the olymp and delighted in her dianaphous and cacchinated behind his culosses, before a mosoleum” (*FW* 261). Joyce riddles this sentence with references to the Seven Wonders of the World to essentially state that we investigate our world in an attempt to unveil the scandalous secret of creation, the incestuous moment when “maker mates with made” (McHugh 261). Epistemology is not only faultily reliant on language and impossibly ambitious but also reduces the divine to the “gossipaceous” and subjects it to our basest prying (*FW* 195). Our highest intellectual ambitions stem from the same inquisitive impulse as our appetite for scandal.

Critic Sam Slote, in “Towards an Imperfect Wake” argues *Finnegans Wake* seeks to present issues of ontological error “immune to redress through a shifting of the referential register” (Slote 140). While the various omissions and errant inclusions in a text like *Ulysses* grate at the reader because we have some kind of normalizing reality (be it in the text or in the world we actually occupy) to compare them against and judge them imperfect, *Finnegans Wake*

¹³ It is perhaps worth noting here that “earthapples” can also be figured as potatoes and the cobra can be interpreted

actively denies the possibility of epistemological perfection by refusing to resemble anything imaginable as reality or to cohere into anything stable enough to check itself against. While it is often self-reflexive, and is perhaps at its most self-reflexive in “The Night Lessons,” no one point has any more claim to truth or accuracy than any other, making it so “it is actually not possible to determine which elements are misplaced” (Slote 148). While Slote traces this out through the figures of the Four Waves who operate as historians throughout the text, there is no point in the *Wake* better than “The Night Lessons” to illustrate the text’s refusal to act as a stable frame of reference.

“The Night Lessons” contain a fundamental skepticism towards language, clearest in its tendency to generate words with no real correspondence in the sensible world. Here, “The Night Lessons” engage in different types of what *Finnegans Wake* dubs “rhymeless reason” (*FW* 263). In light of “The Night Lessons,” it seems to point again to Slote’s conception of “ontological error,” the problems which arise because there is no corresponding coherent reality for reason to work with. While most models of knowledge purport to offer a linearity in which questions run parallel to a reality that can provide answers, “The Night Lessons” offer a circular model of knowledge incapable of ever reflecting upon itself clearly. The ultimate problem of ontological error is that it creates a vision of the world in which, without a frame of reference, all is imperfect. Yet this very creation that arises from their circularity births metaphysics into consciousness. After all, metaphysical concepts often have no sensible counterpart in waking life. Joyce investigates the difficulties of abiding in such a world through the use of self-reflexivity throughout “The Night Lessons.”

as a reference to St. Patrick, adding a distinctly Irish reading to this particular version of the creation.

If metaphysics in the unconscious arise as a product of self-reflexivity on the part of the faculty of apperception, Joyce goes to great lengths to show the reader that self-reflexivity is not an unproblematic process. This perhaps becomes clearest when the sense of self-reflexivity is manifested literally within the chapter through recapitulations of previous scenes in *Finnegans Wake*. While the chapter at large attempts an impossible reach, investigating the entire history of epistemological inquiry, in points it becomes acutely self-reflexive and depicts its three readers confronting blocks of text suspiciously reminiscent of previous points of *Finnegans Wake*. At the start of its “PANOPTICAL PURVIEW OF POLITICAL PROGRESS AND THE FUTURE REPRESENTATION OF THE PAST,” the *Wake* includes a future representation of its own past, a block of text immediately reminiscent of a segment of its own opening chapter:

...Stop, if you are a sally of the allies, hot off Minnowaurs and naval actiums, picked engagements and banks of rowers. Please stop if you're a B.C. minding missy, please do. But should you prefer A.D. stepplease. And if you miss with a venture it serves you girly well glad. But, holy Janus, I was forgetting the Blitzenkopfs! Here, Hengegst and Horsesauce, take your heads out of that taletub. And leave your hinnyhennyhindy. It's haunted. The chamber. Of errings. (272)

This demands to be read in light of an earlier moment of the *Wake* it recalls:

(Stoop) if you are abcedminded, to this claybook, what curios of signs (please stoop), in this allaphbed! Can you rede (since We and Thou had it out already) its world? It is the same told of all. Many. Miscegenations on miscegenations....They lived und laughed ant loved end left....In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that

drives desire that adheres to attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality. (18)

What we witness in “The Night Lessons” is a self-reflexive moment in which our three commentators are misreading a text not unlike *Finnegans Wake*. Significantly, this self-reflexivity is referring back to a moment in the *Wake* when it reaches out directly to the reader to state its textual preoccupations with linguistic inscrutability and cyclical history—arguably one of the most instructive passages for reading *Finnegans Wake* contained within the text. These are reinterpreted in “The Night Lessons” as a warning against linear history, the “B.C. minding” of an archaic past, and instead offer up history as a continuum via the figure of Janus, the mythological figure with one face towards the past and one towards the future (McHugh 272). Yet its warnings against the past¹⁴ are rather brusque, especially the command to “take your heads out of that taletub” and leave unexplored a “haunted...chamber. Of errings” (*FW* 272). The marginalia in reaction to this section undermines it even further: Issy notes of the insistence to forget the past that “That’s the lethemuse, but it washes off,” indicating that even forgetfulness is provisional or arbitrary (*FW* 272n); and Shem mockingly whistles at it, a tune pointedly made up of “notes: B, C, A, D” (McHugh 272). Rather than give us a clear picture of how we might read *Finnegans Wake*, the text’s characters seem to find it as inscrutable as its readers do. *Finnegans Wake* actively demonstrates the failure of any one-to-one correspondence between models of metaphysics and the world they seek to construct or describe. While it earnestly tries to point readers towards a less-linear epistemology encompassing a more circular view of history, the examples it provides of reader reactions to just such information do not seem

¹⁴ Here, both the past of our world and our history as a reader with *Finnegans Wake*.

promising. Much as Joyce's composition of *Ulysses* enacted a scorched-earth policy against the aesthetic conventions of modern literature, "The Night Lessons" retell all of scholarly history only to destabilize it by showing the mind's instability even as it constructs stable, purportedly totalizing models of metaphysics.

CHAPTER III
EDUCATION AND APPERCEPTION AS COLONIZING FORCES

If the unconscious mind can birth abstraction into the world, it is in many ways the source of ideas as complicated as nationhood and religion. Joyce clearly manifests anxiety about education's power to shape consciousness, especially when it is in the hands of a force as strong and centralized as the Church or national governments. As a means of dictating apperception, textbooks take the mind of a young student to "outstamp and distribute him at the expanse of his society. To be continued. Anon" (*FW* 302). Joyce is cannily aware of public education's almost imperial agenda to further one vision of society by working to standardize the inner lives of its diverse citizenry. The language of physical imprinting in relation to education is general through the *Wake*—from the above "outstamp" to images of "waxen" students (*FW* 251), to "the Night Lessons'" own references to "THE MIND FACTORY" (*FW* 282 *rm*), to moments that evoke tactile and eroticized descriptions of the classroom: "And my waiting twenty classbirds, sitting on their stiles! Let me finger their eurhythmic. And you'll see if I'm selfthought" [Eurhythmics being a type of pedagogy developed by Emile Jacques-Delacroze which uses dance as a primary means of instruction] (*FW* 147, McHugh 147). The alternately sexualized and mechanized images associated with this shaping of the consciousness betray Joyce's misgivings that the process of education always includes an element of violation and homogenization. If the textbooks of the Irish national system presented a perilous influence on

“a lexical student...corrected with the blackboard (trying to copy the stage Englesemen)”, “the Night Lessons” offer a text for “the disunited kingdom on the vacuum of your own most intensely doubtful soul,” the frontier of the unconscious where one is “fool, anarch, egoarch, hiresiararch” (FW 180-181, 188). Though the forces of apperception do not disappear in sleep, it becomes clear that other forces that emerge in the unconscious mind offer a type of freedom in opposition to the rigorous territorializing nature of the educated, apperceiving consciousness.

“The Night Lessons” are by no means Joyce’s first look at how identity can be stifled by the educational forces that seek to shape it. If anything, it is the central tension powering *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). That work’s culminating chapter shows how clearly Stephen Daedalus, upon completing his education, sees it as an instrument of confinement wielded by church and state: “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets” (*P* 206). He seeks an artistic apotheosis, the discovery of “the mode of life or of art whereby [the] spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom,” and if he recognizes his Jesuit education as the force that forged these fetters, he perhaps underestimates their strength (*P* 247). It takes more than willfulness to deprogram a lifetime of apperceptive conditioning. As Cranly informs him, “your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve” (*P* 241). While the closing chapter of the book can be seen as an attempted rejection of the education he has received in favor of aesthetic freedom, even his ecstasy bears the marks of that education¹⁵. He does not realize that he is bound to remain

¹⁵ It is a particularly bitter irony, then, that Daedalus ends up an educator himself when he reappears in *Ulysses*, and telling that he works under an overbearing Ulsterman with a singularly closed mind. The stark contrast between Chapter 5 of *Portrait* and the second episode of *Ulysses* can only be met with pity.

snared in these nets even if he can acknowledge them as such, and that the aesthetic freedom he seeks does not merely involve the relinquishing of a set of ideas, but a wholesale relinquishing of the conscious mind. It requires not a rebuffing of the forces that condition apperception, but a letting go of apperception itself.

He does have some intimation, however, of the importance of the unconscious mind in opposition to the educated consciousness. As the chapter takes on the form of his journal entries, Stephen records one cryptic “troubled night of dreams:”

A long curving gallery. From the floor ascend pillars of dark vapours. It is peopled by the images of fabulous kings, set in stone. Their hands are folded upon their knees in token of weariness and their eyes are darkened for the errors of men go up before them for ever as dark vapours. (*P* 250)

The image of the unconscious as a museum or gallery resonates immediately, as it is one Joyce returns to repeatedly in *Finnegans Wake*. These solemn stone kings sitting in weary judgment appear as figures of institutional disapproval, the heads of nations grieving “the errors of men.” In the unconscious, it becomes clear that to fly around the nets cast by church, state, and language takes not just a rejection of the knowledge they proffer but *error*—a failure of the apperceiving mass to function properly. Stephen rightly intuits the unconscious as the province of such revelations, the uncolonized “Errorland” of the night standing in contrast to the Ireland of the waking world (*FW* 62). His dream continues, or he perhaps records a second:

Strange figures advance from a cave. They are not as tall as men. One does not seem to stand quite apart from another. Their faces are phosphorescent, with darker streaks.

They peer at me and their eyes seem to ask me something. They do not speak. (*P* 251)

These figures stand in contrast to the statues of kings, so removed from the ordering forces that shape identity as to be indistinguishable from one another. “They do not speak,” free from the net of language, and, lacking pronounced enough consciousness to manifest identities, they are legion without being nation. They live in the “error” of unknowing, and are a striking prefiguration of one of Joyce’s signal obsessions throughout *Finnegans Wake*: the idea, borrowed from Vico¹⁶, that each nightly return to unconsciousness brings us back to a state of “poetic wisdom” native to pre-rational man. The figures that Stephen sees are “those first men, whose minds were not in the least abstract, refined, or spiritualized, because they were entirely immersed in the senses, buffeted by the passions, buried in the body” (Vico quoted in Bishop 181). They are, in short, everything of the mind outside the abstracting, subsuming faculty of apperception, unmoored from any of the distinguishing elements it affords to identity. They are also starkly oppositional to the dream’s ossified figures of rigid authority. They unsettle Stephen perhaps because they are the purest iteration of the radical freedom he desires, a picture of what it truly means to skirt the epistemological forces mankind relies on to navigate the world. Stephen is made anxious by the tension between apperception and “poetic wisdom” and cannot fully embrace either. As such, he merely trades old ideas for a body of new ones and remains firmly “under the boards of education,” embracing an ideal of freedom through art that still affords too much power to the education he has received (*FW* 166).

Portrait reveals a keen awareness that apperception dictates conscious experience and that education’s role in shaping it can be stifling, even suffocating. Yet Stephen’s adolescent

¹⁶ It is revealing that Joyce “first read and expressed a passionate interest in Vico during his years in Trieste (1904-1915)” and “worked hard on *Stephen Hero*, abandoned it completely, and rewrote it a *A Portrait* during the same period” (Bishop 180-181).

claustrophobia in his own national, religious, and familial identity cannot be remedied by mere adjustments to the apperceptive faculty; as he says himself when confronted with the notion of converting from Catholicism to Protestantism, “What kind of liberation would that be to forsake an absurdity which is logical and coherent and to embrace one which is illogical and incoherent?” (*P* 245). The answer, he knows, cannot lie in a trading of one set of ideas for another, but instead lies in a liberation from apperception itself, a reversion to the freedom of Viconian “poetic wisdom” or “ignorance” accessible most easily through sleep. “The Night Lessons” pits these two forces against one another, always to emphasize the exhilarating sense of freedom and expansiveness afforded by this “poetic wisdom” so unlike codified knowledge.

For Vico, and therefore Joyce, the shaping of apperception is not simply a process that occurs over the lifetime of a single individual, but is instead a process of aggregation of all conscious impulses over all human history in which “ancients link with presents as the human chain extends” (*FW* 254). As John Bishop notes in *Joyce’s Book of the Dark* of Vico:

His vision is primarily historical. If consciousness is a man-made property that changes in historical time, then each individual owes the way in which he thinks to the generation of his parents; yet his parents owe their thinking and behavior to the generation of their parents; and so forth, in a chain extending back to the beginnings of the gentile world.

(Bishop 183)

Vico’s *The New Science* in many ways constructs an evolutionary model of apperception, “a long-evolved language and consciousness instilled in children by the process of education” (Bishop 185). It is always oppositional to the initial unperceiving ignorance of the pre-rational world in which “men void of the learned capacity to perceive...sense nothing but their own

feelings” (Bishop 188). Yet the faculty of apperception, from which all abstractions such as religion and nationality arise in the Viconian framework, loses its primacy to this aboriginal poetic wisdom in the unconscious mind¹⁷. The Viconian progression from ignorance to systemized knowledge is traced out in “The Night Lessons,” but always with a sense that something stifling or dangerous arises when civilization is imposed from without: Joyce’s language is unequivocal as he depicts the “INFLUENCE OF THE COLLECTIVE TRADITION UPON THE INDIVIDUAL” visible throughout a “PANOPTICAL PURVIEW OF POLITICAL PROGRESS” working to “PROLIFERATE HOMOGENEOUS HOMOGENEITY” (*FW* 268, 272, 279).

The principal means of engaging the dialectic between apperception and the “poetic wisdom” of “INFRALIMINAL INTELLIGENCE” and “infrarational senses” plays out in the competing voices of “The Night Lessons” marginalia. If apperception is relentless and instinctual, even when turned in on itself in the darkness of sleep it shows a not unproblematic tendency to colonize experience by imposing a set of limits upon it. While this process may make the waking world easier to navigate and provide a richer experience of it, in the unconscious *Waking* world it seems only to make the obscurity more stifling. This is most immediately visible in the chapter’s perplexing use of marginalia and footnotes. *Finnegans Wake* declares early, after all, that it is a narrative of a figure who “lived in the broadest way immarginable” (*FW* 4). If much of the fun of the *Wake* is its boundless sense of freedom, it is in “The Night Lessons” and only “The Night Lessons” that the text becomes literally marginable, confined by voices attempting interpretation or commentary. As Campbell and Robinson read it

¹⁷ Although the apperceptive drive, as argued earlier, never disappears completely in the unconscious.

in *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, “The marginal notations are of two kinds, those in the right-hand margin (in small capitals) being solemn (Shaun-type), those in the left (in italics), smart-aleck (Shem-type)” (Campbell 163). The chapter is additionally footnoted throughout with bawdy humor typically attributed to the *Wake*’s recurring Issy character. The commentaries rarely point towards clarity, so that any reader primed by experience to think the additional notes might provide easier going feels a sore sense of disappointment as they do the opposite. For added mischief, the marginalia switches sides halfway through the chapter.

If every act of perception is “sensationseeking and idea, amid the verbiage,” that verbiage becomes markedly mock-academic in the “Shaun-type” comments found in the right hand margins (*FW* 121). As the central text recapitulates creation, a rough history of epistemological thought, “Invasions of Ireland,” and academic exercises, this supplementary voice persists in a ceaseless barrage of categorization and classification, always framed in pseudo-academic Latinate terms (*FW* xxxii). It is the apperceptive impulse at its most direct: the desire to meet an experience with a name. As William James points out, “We always try to name a new experience in some way which will assimilate it to what we already know. We hate anything *absolutely* new, anything for which a new name must be forged” (James). The familiarity of the staid, formal academic language of the “Shaun” marginalia belies the fact that it is often completely incoherent and seldom helpful at generating anything we might label “understanding.” If it is less pervaded by neologisms than much of the *Wake*, it is no clearer for it and still resorts to them out of a strange sense of apperceptive desperation:

The whole progress of sciences goes on by the invention of newly forged technical names whereby to designate the newly remarked aspects of phenomena—phenomena that could

only be squeezed with violence into the pigeonholes of the earlier stock of conceptions.

As time goes on, our vocabulary becomes thus ever more and more voluminous, having to keep up with the ever-growing multitude of our stock of apperceiving ideas. (James)

The voice alternates between the violence of “pigeonholding” phenomena into ill-fitting language and the violence of coining “newly forged technical names” laughable for their very technicality. Peppered throughout with occasional gems like “CONTRAPULSIVENESS” and “Uteralterance,” the chapter culminates in a hysterical bravura performance of faux-academese: “Pantocracy. Bimutualism....Naturality. Superfetation. Stabimobilism,” all employed in the interest of striking a “Balance of the factual by the theoric boox and coox, Amallagamated” (*FW* 281, 293, 308). That the apperceptive mechanism sinks to such outrageous depths to comment essentially on *itself* stands as a repudiation of the faith we put in it. It is innately Viconian in spirit, only wheeling in an absurd circle instead of completing cycles towards progress. If “the nature of our civilized minds is so detached from the senses...by abstractions corresponding to all the abstract terms our languages abound in,” Joyce here shows us the folly of the civilizing, abstracting, naming impulse set loose on pure abstraction itself (Vico quoted in Bishop 181). Apperception without sensory input is as ridiculous and profitless as chewing without eating.

Meanwhile, just across the page, a very different voice emerges, one more in tune with “those first men, whose minds were not in the least abstract, refined, or spiritualized” (Vico in Bishop 181). Often dubbed the “Shem-type” voice, it opens the chapter with perhaps a nod back to those first men, Vico’s prelingual giants living in ignorance before the emergence of civilization: “with his broad and hairy face, to Ireland a disgrace” (*FW* 266 LM). The margin’s opening image contains intimations of resistance to any easy alignment with national identity,

foregrounded in the reader's mind as "disgraceful" to Ireland. As a voice that characterizes the chapter's central text as "menly about peebles," it prizes raw humanity in a state of nature over the "IMAGINABLE ITINERARY" of civilization mapped out through abstraction (*FW* 260 LM, RM). Throughout, it mocks the "peregrine pifflicitive pomposity" of the conflicting voice and its endless attempts to discover the "nom de nombres" inherent in language's attempt to subsume experience (*FW* 282 LM, 285 LM). If language for the Shaun voice is a tool used to "SECURES GUBERNANT URBIS TERRORUM" [securely govern the city's terror], the Shem voice reminds us in cryptic Greek of its failure to always successfully carry out this task: "They did not capture a city" (*FW* 306, 269; McHugh 306, 269). Sensory immersion is evoked throughout, often with nods to an inability to process it properly: "Thsight near left me eyes when I seen her;" "he's s daff as you're erse;" "Puzzly, puzzly, I smell a cat" (*FW* 262, 268, 275). Awash in the ignorance of pure sensation, the organs of sense perception malfunction, unable to satisfy the apperceptive drive.

Perhaps most striking of all is the Shem voice's tendency not merely to foreground failures of perception but actually to use language as an attempt to *generate* pure sensation. In its strangest moments, like much of the *Wake*, this marginalia presents itself as pure phenomena sensible but irreconcilable to language or abstraction. That the *Wake* aims to skirt representation to present pure phenomena itself has been axiomatic since before its completion. As Beckett clarifies in his essay for *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (1929), "Here form is context, context is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read—or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; it is *that something*

itself" (Beckett 14). While this is a familiar paradigm to any reader apprised of the ensuing decades of literary theory and criticism, it is nowhere truer than it is of *Finnegans Wake*. Our prankish marginalia makes this clearest in its recourse to the musical. Phrases like "Ba be bi bo bum" leave no option aside from treatment as a sonic phenomenon (*FW* 284 LM). At points, Joyce includes musical instruction to cue the reader: "Undante umoroso. M. 50-50" gives the reader performance instructions for mood and tempo, more helpful for setting a metronome than understanding text; yet it also reframes the text as a phenomenon of space, time, and affect unaccounted for in most mechanisms of textual interpretation (*FW* 269 LM, McHugh 269).

At its most visible, this tendency not only produces sensory phenomena but essentially works to run apperception in reverse, turning an abstraction into the pure sensation of music. At one point, the central text makes a (relatively, of course) clear request of the reader to "Please stop if you're a B.C. minding missy, please do. But should you prefer A.D. stepplease" (*FW* 272). The Shaun margin responds by factoring the letters of B.C.A.D. as a phrase of musical notation matched to the corresponding notes, turning abstraction into pure sensory phenomena (*FW* 272 LM, McHugh 272). If the voice resisted and subverted the apperceptive faculty before, here it works to undo it. Sam Slote has suggested that the *Wake* is a province of "Ontological error...immune to redress through a shifting of the referential register" of educated apperception, and he also advances music as an important metaphor for the beautiful and rewarding capacities of this world without reference: "Music is the redress to ontological error...music is what cannot be calculated, evaluated, or reckoned; it is the realm where measurement and reference and their concomitant errors are erroneous" (Slote 148-149). As the positive, ineffable remainder of what can never be subsumed under apperception, it speaks volumes that Joyce uses music so shrewdly

directly opposite the *Wake's* most desperate attempts to classify and categorize itself. As Joyce himself insisted of *Finnegans Wake*, "It is all so simple. If anyone doesn't understand a passage, all he need do is read it aloud" (Joyce quoted in Ellmann 590). Where understanding founders, pure sensation prevails.

If the Shaun column can be described as the apperceptive impulse gone haywire and the Shem column factored as the advocate of pure sensation, the reader is still left with the uniquely difficult task of parsing out the footnotes attributed to Issy. The task is a challenging one for a host of reasons—she is "surely the most difficult of the *Wake's* characters to fathom," associated often with the senses, and she "never appears in unmediated singularity, but...always in apostrophic relation to an enduring male figure" (Bishop 240, 242). Here, that male figure is fashioned as some kind of instructor figure responsible for or perhaps manifest in our central text, and Issy's apostrophes are often aimed directly at him. If we have seen pure sensation and apperceptive wrangling in the marginalia, the footnotes orient their discourse around a peculiar field not quite wholly reconcilable to either: the appetites of the human body.

Issy's commentary is punctuated throughout with visceral and often bawdy references to the appetites for food and sex. That these have always been an element of the human condition is about as fundamental a truth as can be advanced, but they are notable in "the Night Lessons" for how firmly they plant the reader in the "meataerial" of the human *body* (*FW* 274). These drives possess a power beyond or perhaps prior to consciousness, explored as manifested in dreams with exhaustive rigor by Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*; his notion that food can be "auto-symbolic" for thought in dreams is particularly fascinating here¹⁸, but his abiding faith

¹⁸ It also sets up a "food for thought" pun irresistible to any self-respecting lover of Joyce.

that all dreams can be subsumed under the apperceptive consciousness of the waking mind does not seem amenable to Issy's appetites (Freud 358-361). Her "racy, colloquial wordplay" is charged with bodily energy (Buckalew 93). Speaking with an adolescent girl's panache for romantic exaggeration¹⁹, her responses to erotic frisson document instances when the body responds prior to consciousness: "Let me blush to think of all those halfwayhoist pullovers," she muses at one point. Blushing is a uniquely uncontrollable physical response, one which overpowers its conscious corollaries so completely that investigation of it became one of the originating lines of inquiry for affect theory in psychology (*FW* 268 ff 4, Tomkins 218-219). A provocative reflection on her instructor—"He gives me palpitations"—represents another physical reaction prior to conscious apperception (*FW* 276 ff 1). She prizes the unmediated bodily reaction to sensation that "just spirits a body away" and writes itself not in language but with "agrammatical parts of face" (*FW* 289 ff 2, 307 ff 7). She defends this way of unschooled interaction with the world with signature verve: "I enjoy as good as anyone," because after all, "We're all found of our animal matter" (*FW* 298 ff 1, 294 ff 5).

If Issy's affective responses to romantic excitation bear a pre-rational bodily component, her comments on food are equally tied to the body. In fact, sexuality, food, and language become inextricably connected through meditations on pregnancy ("Rawmeash...If old Herod with the Cormwell's eczema was to go for me...I'd do nine months"), nursing ("Milk's a queer arrangement"), and erotic tension ("I can almost feed their sweetness at my lisplips", "you could sugarly swear buttermilt would not melt down his dripping ducks") (*FW* 260, 276-277). In each,

¹⁹ In Joyce's pantheon, she sounds most reminiscent of Gerty McDowell from the Nausicaa episode of *Ulysses*, an ironic resemblance since Gerty is in many ways imprisoned by her narrow range of language while Issy flaunts the

the body answers its appetite for food by expressing itself *as* food—the fetus as raw meat, the strangeness of breastmilk, the lips imparting sweetness instead of receiving it, and semen figured as the pun “buttermilk” (McHugh 277). Here, Freud’s observation that food and thought are interchangeable is enlightening, and if the body dissolves back into the nourishment that constitutes it, it also has an appetite for language itself. Where Shem reverses language into pure sensory phenomena, Issy makes it a uniquely biological one. Rather than understand language, she reduces it to something the body consumes like food: “Huntler and Pumar’s animal alphabites, the first in the world from aab to zoo” subsumes language, here alphabet crackers, under the appetite for food; as she says later, “...you can eat my words” (*FW* 263, 279). For Vico, language is not a gift from the gods but instead arises from “nothing but animal appetites and fears” (Bishop 173). The Viconian belief that all languages (and subsequently systems of abstractions) arose from onomatopoeic imitation of a thunderclap is an innately biological one in light of those advanced by his contemporaries, and Issy’s binding of language, body, and food points to a time when this biological function had yet to be an agent of apperceptive abstraction: “We don’t hear the booming cursowarries, we wont fear the fletches of fightning, we float the meditarenias and come bask to the isle we love in spice” (Bishop 175, *FW* 263). Language has not yet cleft her bodily identity from the world of sensation, and she lives unabstracted in the middle world between the two. As Beckett argues of Vico, “In the beginning was the thunder: the thunder ser free Religion, in its most object and unphilosophical form—idolatrous animism: Religion produces society...” (Beckett 5). Issy, having never heard the thunder that sets identity and the social world in motion, lives a life of raw unmediated experience. Her passions are

flimsiness of these walls with a singular glee. She is also not without the bodily intelligence and humor present in

indistinguishable from the “passionate Nature” she occupies, and not uncomfortably so.

As John Gordon argues in *Finnegans Wake: A Plot Summary*, “The Night Lessons” act as “the crossroads of *Finnegans Wake*.”

Intersections are everywhere: incarnation, transubstantiation, lightning, intercourse, the ‘square imposed on the triangle’ which is ‘the Aristotelean symbol for unified body and soul,’ the descent of the Kabbala’s Ain-Soph into matter, the ‘interloopings’ circles of the geometry lesson, the crossed utensils of the final footnote, and so on. (Gordon 183)

These collisions are littered throughout the text, and in each something unaccountable arises from the rubble. Perhaps the most general way to approach all of these is to say they are each some version of sensation colliding with apperception—some kind of input colliding with abstraction, as Gordon argues, “one reality’s collision with another” (Gordon 184). As the outer world meets the abstracting force of the inner one, new paradigms and concepts emerge, a strange remainder most visible as it produces whole, coherent, stable identities in the conscious world. Yet the very plurality of voices overwhelms and undermines such a conveniently dualistic metaphor as “crossroads.” The chapter depicts “a multiplicity of personalities inflicted on the documents,” a plurality of voices asserting themselves in the mind of an unconscious individual in which “The chorus: the principles” [the formless mass are the principal characters] (*FW* 107, 266). At its own depiction of a literal crossroads within the text, “The Night Lessons” present an embarrassing clashing and mixing of signals, by no means merely two directional: “Belisha beacon, beckon bright! Usherette, unmesh us! That grene ray of earong it waves us to

Molly Bloom’s soliloquy.

yonder as the red, blue, and yellow flags time on the domisole²⁰” (*FW* 267). There is a veritable traffic accident at this intersection of epistemology and ontology “where flash becomes word” [both flesh and the “flash” of sensory phenomena becoming subsumed under the net of apperception] and acts to “silents selfloud” voices in an innately multiple, often averbal unconscious being (*FW* 267). It is an accident which produces a singular conscious identity privileging the faculties of apperception and language, but it comes at a cost: the undermining of “imeffible tries at speech unasyllabled” allowed by pure affective experience (*FW* 183); the conscription of the parts of the body to a narrow realm of physicality lesser to consciousness; and the loss of living out waking hours in the “undivided reawliity” of an unabstracted world (*FW* 292). It is apperception’s very power of omission that makes stable identity possible.

As apperception manages to divide this reality into manageable ideas, it becomes clear through resonances in “The Night Lessons” that the conflicts of state and religious identity are inextricably bound to the mechanism of education that exploits it. In its attempt to carve an individual identity out of a mind “more mob than man,” education manipulates the apperceptive process of language and wields it to often politicized ends. Joyce puts the reader in mind of this no fewer than three pages into “The Night Lessons,” using an example uniquely tied to his personal experiences with Irish education’s conflicting drives:

Thus come to a castle.

Knock.

A password, thanks.

Yes, pearse.

²⁰ The intersection signaled by a belisha beacon and confusion intimated by multi-colored signal flags waving are

Well, all be dumbled!

O really?

Hoo caved in earthwight

At furscht crack of thunder

When shoo, his flutterby,

Was netted and named (*FW* 262)

The initial valences of this game of password are clear to any reader familiar with Joyce's debt to *The New Science*: here is the Viconian dawn of society and spoken language, a thunderclap which "terrified men in a barbarous state of nature into seeking shelter in caves and so into beginning the churning wheels of social history," an event which also "caused men to try to duplicate its sound and power by babbling onomatopoeically, thereby beginning the history of language" (Bishop 175). It also factors language again as one of the restrictive nets of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a means of capturing and naming but also limiting.

But Joyce's personal education and the educational climate of turn-of-the-century Ireland appear clearly in the word *pearse*²¹. At first glance, it is a reappearance of the recurring "Ballad of Pierce O'Reilly" that first appears in the *Wake*'s second chapter. The variation presented here binds the dawn of language and society with Padraic Pearse, Irish nationalist, writer, educator, and martyr, above all else a tireless advocate for the preservation of the Irish language via instruction in Irish schools (Foster 449). "Convinced of the necessity of cultivating a nationalism inspired by the native language," Pearse is perhaps for Joyce the consummate

inflected with a sense of complication and confusion via words like "unmesh" and "earong" (erring).

²¹ A word that Ronald Buckalew, in "Night Lessons on Language," sees as a sonic puzzle intended to highlight the differences between Irish English and British Received Pronunciation (Buckalew 100-101).

symbol of the power language education has to construct national identity; he demonstrates precisely how embroiled Irish education was in this problem: “While the main aim of the schools was to provide a grounding in literacy and numeracy, the whole system had a British cultural emphasis. Padraic Pearse in the *Murder Machine* described the system as ‘grotesque and horrible’ aimed at ‘the debasement of Ireland.’” (Kelly 4)

The push and pull between English and Irish priorities in education is one Joyce maintained a clear ambivalence towards, nowhere more clearly than in his personal interactions with Pearse himself:

[Clancy] helped form a branch of the Gaelic League at University College, and persuaded his friends, including even Joyce for a time, to take lessons in Irish. Joyce gave them up because Patrick Pearse, the instructor, found it necessary to exalt Irish by denigrating English, and in particular denounced the word “Thunder”—a favorite of Joyce’s—as an example of verbal inadequacy. (Ellmann 61)

The pun becomes remarkable. The “password” that initiates man into language and society is also one that reminds Joyce at a personal level of how complicated society’s uses of language to further itself can be. As Pearse’s conviction that language and education could build a truly autonomous Irish nation propelled him forward to eventual martyrdom at the Easter Rising, Joyce’s skepticism led him conversely to embrace self-imposed exile in the knowledge that trading one system for another is also trading one set of limitations for another. This bad faith in education, specifically in Ireland, echoes throughout “The Night Lessons” from this point on.

In “Night Lessons on Language,” Ronald Buckalew argues that Joyce’s historical milieu and educational background primed the exploration of language he undertakes in *Finnegans*

Wake. “Growing up in Ireland at a time when Irish nationalism was increasing as fast as the use of Gaelic was declining, would naturally turn an intelligent boy’s attention to language. When this context was enriched by his studying in Jesuit schools where Latin played a major role, it is no wonder that Joyce majored in foreign languages at the university” (Buckalew 99). He also notes the importance of Joyce’s role as a language instructor in Paris and Trieste. Over the course of his time in classrooms as a student and instructor, Joyce would have seen or conducted class in at least five languages. Yet Joyce’s experiences in the classroom clearly did more than simply foster a general interest in language; by the writing of the *Wake*, Joyce sees language as problematically bound to matters of national identity, even in the unconscious. The technique of multilingual puns, so central to the construction of *Finnegans Wake*, is a clear statement that monolingualism is at best insufficient and at worst dangerous. It is telling that “The Night Lessons” are imbued throughout with militaristic language and the rhetoric of *invasion*, depicting education as another form of “one world burrowing on another” (*FW* 275). Joyce employs the languages he associated with instruction carefully with the *Wake*’s textbook chapter to emphasize the latent conflict and politicization built into instructional language.

Joyce’s use of Latin throughout “The Night Lessons,” both untranslated and bent into Wakeese, presents itself as an often surprisingly direct manifestation of his Jesuit education. The clearest of these is the appearance of the Jesuit motto “Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam” [For the Greater Glory of God] as its own paragraph in the form of “At maturing daily gloryaims!” (McHugh 282, *FW* 282). The author’s own education is reflected here; the initials of the motto

were required at the beginnings of essays during his time at Belvedere²² (McHugh 282). The use of Latin seems at times to favor a sort of academic detachment—Joyce includes an entire paragraph in Latin with a knowing nod that the text “exhibited...more propriety in the Roman tongue of the dead” (*FW* 287, trans. McHugh 287). Yet if Latin occupies a middle ground between the highly charged poles of compulsory English and compulsory Irish within the Irish educational climate of the late 19th and early 20th century, it is still aligned with Catholic priorities. More importantly, it still exerts affinity with control and authority within the text, for example the reinterpretation of Dublin’s motto “Obedientia civium urbis felicitas”[Citizen’s obedience is city’s happiness] as “To obedient of civicity in urbanious at felicity”(FW 277). In its occurrences with “The Night Lessons,” Latin is most often advancing some notion of the greater good at the expense of individual desire.

Perhaps Joyce’s clearest statement on the danger of education as a nationalizing force comes, suitably, at the close of “The Night Lessons” as the central voice launches into a series of essay topics. Here is one of the rare instances in “The Night Lessons” where our instructor’s voice prompts active response. Over the course of nearly three full pages, Joyce engages in a comedic tour-de-force of often outrageous and wildly diverse essay subjects. For all their comedic verve, however, the topics still turn to issues of national and religious identity, seeking less to inculcate identity than test allegiance. Many are civic minded: “Duty, the daughter of discipline,” “A Successful Career in the Civil Service,” “Why we all Love our Little Lord Mayor” (*FW* 306-307). Yet a distinct push and pull emerges between Irish nationalist ideas and British imperialist ones, often framed in questions that require the answerer to take allegiance with one

²² Issy’s footnote here mocks the formal closing required of all Belvedere students—*Laus Deo Semper* [Praise to

side or another: “Belief in Giants and the Banshee,” “What Morals, if any, can be drawn from Diarmuid and Grania?” and “Glory be to Saint Patrick!” all evoke Ireland’s mythical history²³ (*FW* 306-307). Prompts also address more “factual” and solidly historical concerns, and are still framed in a way that similarly works against equivocation or qualification: “Do you approve of our Existing Parliamentary System?”, “What Happened at Clontarf?”, “Our Allies the Hills” and “Are Parnellites Just towards Henry Tudor?” each react to pivotal figures in and elements of Ireland’s long historical struggle for independence (*FW* 306-307). The faculty of apperception complicated in the unconscious world seems to be resurgent at the chapter’s close, insisting upon the emergence of some conscious identity parsed out along the lines of national identity. The ambivalence of the questions leaves no room for ambivalence within the answerer, and this seems to be the chief commentary “The Night Lessons” raise about education: knowledge works against uncertainty and plurality, and as such will always be a somewhat unnatural force operating on minds so dividual and multiple.

God forever]—as “Lawdy Dawdy simpers,” a suitably irreverent quip (*FW* 282, McHugh 282).

²³ The “if any” here seems particularly condescending.

CONCLUSION:

“WHAT IS TO BE FOUND IN A DUSTHEAP?”

Joyce maintains an ambivalent skepticism towards apperception throughout *Finnegans Wake*, especially in “The Night Lessons,” seeing it as the “creactive mind” [creative and reactive mind] that generates consciousness and the metaphysics used to navigate the world while also seeing it as a faculty susceptible to exploitation at the hands of the “corructive mund” [corrective and corrupt world] (*FW* 300). If he uses “The Night Lessons” largely to undermine epistemology, seeing it as a limiting force which binds ideas to language and subsumes them under a single identity, does he leave us anywhere to go with knowledge? This is an especially problematic position for Joyce, since in many regards there cannot be an author more adept at the thrifty employment of the entirety of his knowledge. This is after all the man who exhausted the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in the service of *Finnegans Wake* (Ellmann 628n), who reproduced the entirety of Dublin from memory in *Ulysses*, and who was so carefully attuned to factual plausibility that he wrote back to Dublin to see “Is it possible for an ordinary person to climb over the area of no 7 Eccles street...” (Ellmann 519). While he is certainly a figure who chafes against social strictures and institutions shaping the consciousness, Joyce also does not advocate some form of total rebellion against the forces of education and social conditioning; the considerable torment he felt in the face of his daughter’s mental illness and willingness to put aside his bad-faith in psychoanalysis in hopes that it might help her are a testament to that

(Ellmann 676). Although he attacks the “schoolbooks” of codified epistemology with all the joy of a miscreant schoolboy, Joyce clearly finds some worthiness in knowledge as an enterprise. By looking at “The Night Lessons” briefly through the lens of one of its philosophical progeny and one of its aesthetic antecedents, it is possible perhaps to advance *Wokean* notions of education which skirt the apperceptive faculty’s susceptibility towards social conditioning. It becomes, in short, possible to see Joyce as laying a pathway to an education that expands and frees up identity instead of limiting and narrowing it.

Perhaps no philosophical work of the twentieth century owes as much a debt to *Finnegans Wake* as does Gilles Deleuze’s seminal *Difference and Repetition* (1968). An exhaustive study of “ontological Difference,” it attempts to advance “a Cogito for the dissolved self...a world in which individuations are impersonal, and singularities are pre-individual” (Deleuze xix, xxi). That it arrives at such a point through “the discovery in a variety of fields of a power peculiar to *repetition*, a power that also inhabits the *unconscious*, *language*, and *art*” makes it unsurprising that he frequently cites *Finnegans Wake* and Vico directly throughout the work (Deleuze xix; emphasis mine). Yet as his investigation of these themes propels him to ask how *learning* is possible, he makes a set of distinctions instructive for (and perhaps inspired by) reading “The Night Lessons.”

Like Joyce, Deleuze is wary of education’s abilities to culturally condition: “Culture...is an involuntary adventure, the movement of learning which links a sensibility, a memory, and then a thought, with all the cruelties and violence necessary, as Nietzsche said, precisely in order to ‘train a “nation of thinkers”’ or to ‘provide a training for the mind’” (Deleuze 166). Like Joyce, he sees apperception as the faculty that makes this possible, even if he does not use that

specific term. “The Idea which itself offers sense to language” or that chain “which links a sensibility, a memory and then a thought” can be taken as synonyms for the apperceptive faculty (Deleuze 164, 165-166). Yet he discredits apperception’s claim to dominant empiricism by distinguishing between *knowledge* and *learning*. “Learning is the appropriate name for the subjective acts carried out when one is confronted with the objectivity of a problem (Idea), whereas knowledge designates only the generality of concepts or the calm possession of a rule enabling solutions” (Deleuze 164). Learning is the domain of problems and uncertainty, and knowledge is merely the static body of solutions that have at times been helpful for navigating this domain. By suggesting that confrontation with the problematic is a means of “enter[ing] into the universal of the relations which constitute an idea,” Deleuze prizes the moments when apperception fails to reconcile itself with a perception as the frontier of learning (Deleuze 165). We do not learn when we process the results of an experiment but when we design to undertake one.

Key for its relevance to “The Night Lessons” is the fact that Deleuze’s notion of learning is uniquely unconscious. If apperception is the “conjugation [which] determines for us a threshold of consciousness at which our real acts are adjusted to our perceptions of the real relations,” then:

...problematic Ideas are precisely the ultimate elements of nature and the subliminal objects of little perception. As a result, ‘learning’ always takes place in and through the unconscious, thereby establishing the bond of a profound complicity between nature and the mind. (Deleuze 165)

Here we have the unconscious commentary of Issy and Shem speaking up in their charged

immediacy, evincing through their little perceptions nothing that can be called knowledge but demonstrating the constitutive power of the unconscious as the “INFRALIMINAL” vehicle for *learning*. If Deleuze offers a helpful view of learning here, his pedagogy is no more direct than Joyce’s if only because it leaves so much to the unconscious of the individual. In the face of education aimed at a “nation of thinkers,” at best he offers up “a violent training, a culture or *paideia* which affects the entire individual (an albino in whom emerges the act of sensing in sensibility, an aphasic in whom emerges the act of speech in language, an acephalous being in whom emerges the act of thinking in thought)” (Deleuze 166, 165). Yet his illustrations put any Joycean in mind of Vico and remind us of the Night Lesson’s more ontologically speculative portions in their shared thrill that an unconscious mind faced with a problem can bring birth to something utterly new.

Finnegans Wake is a notoriously difficult book, and “The Night Lessons” a notoriously difficult chapter²⁴. Even some of the *Wake*’s most dedicated readers betray a sense of frustration with Joyce’s schoolbook. Thornton Wilder, in his correspondences with Adaline Glasheen collected in *A Tour of the Darkling Plain* (2001), voices his strain with candor:

“I must confess that the publication of Hayman’s book revealed that the LESSONS chapter was a mosaic of apparently irrelevant bits and pieces that after giving it a score or two of hours I vowed never to dip into it again until you Young Ones had mapped out some of the main lines” (Wilder 489)

It has been a pillar of *Wake* scholarship since the book’s publication that much of the excitement and value of the work lie in its obscurity; yet while scholars nominally adhere to this, scholarship

innately must work to reconcile the text to what Deleuze would call “knowledge²⁵.” “The Night Lessons” adamantly stymie the faculty of apperception that makes this type of recognition and knowledge possible. It is particularly suitable for Joyce’s manifesto on learning to be his most resistant to this process. Just as the narratives in *Dubliners* attempt to generate within the reader a sense of the epiphanies they present, “The Night Lessons” depicts the unconscious processes of learning in order to engage the same process in the reader. In Deleuzian terms, *Finnegans Wake* is a problem. If it is at its most problematic when it addresses learning and knowledge most directly, it should be.

It is perhaps advantageous to view “The Night Lessons” as a form of satire, a tongue-in-cheek attempt to do what Hugh Kenner called “the historic work of great Irish writers...to regard a human dilemma as essentially an epistemological, not an ethical, comedy” (Kenner 37). Joyce is one of many to undertake a wholesale attack on epistemology itself; Voltaire and Swift leave a substantial imprint on his work, but it is perhaps Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759) which is most helpful here²⁶:

In this great harvest of our learning, now ripening before our eyes; thus it is by slow steps of casual increase, that our knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical, nautical, mathematical, ænigmatical, technical, biographical, romantical, chemical, and

²⁴ Campbell and Robinson, in the middle of their *Skeleton Key*, call it “perhaps the most difficult chapter in the book” (Campbell 163).

²⁵ This is especially present in the veins of Wake scholarship which produce annotations, concordances, censuses, lexicons, and hypertextual websites, as if the right body of knowledge could somehow “solve” the text.

²⁶ Joyce, in one of his numerous attempts to downplay the difficulty of *Finnegans Wake*, once used Sterne in a letter to Eugene Jolas as a clarifying example which arrives almost as a sort of punch-line: “Time and the river and the mountain are the real heroes of my book. Yet the elements are exactly what every novelist might use: man and woman, birth, childhood, night, sleep, marriage, prayer, death. There is nothing paradoxical at all about this. Only I am trying to build many planes of narrative with a single esthetic purpose. Did you ever read Laurence Sterne?” (Joyce quoted in Ellmann, 554).

obstetrical, with fifty other branches of it...have, for these last two centuries and more, gradually been creeping upwards towards that acme of their perfections.... (Sterne 57)

Tristram argues that attainment of total knowledge will abolish all desire to maintain it through books, and that “we shall have all to begin over again; or, in other words, be exactly where we started” (Sterne 57). Yet Tristram responds to this with suitable excitement: “—Happy! thrice happy Times!” (Sterne 57). His joy is at the prospect of being on the generative end of beginning again. The value for knowledge, for Sterne and for Joyce, is perhaps its very faultiness and instability, its constant need to rebuild itself. Our apperceptive faculties are always “returnally reproductive of themselves. Which is unpassible” (*FW* 298). If knowledge is never complete, its very cyclicity is valuable in Joyce’s eyes. If he has a deep mistrust of the mechanisms empiricism generated in the process of knowledge, he has an abiding fascination with its endless motion. It is a fascination in which *Finnegans Wake* offers a unique training. No book is better at encouraging its readers to begin again.

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