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## The Narrative Presentation of Orality in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*

Willi Erzgräber

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Among twentieth-century writers James Joyce is unsurpassed in the diverse kinds of learning that he brought to his work. Using a phrase that Hildegard Tristram has taken from Irish literature, he can be characterized as a writer “who lost his brain of forgetting.”<sup>1</sup> Everything that Joyce heard or read was imprinted so deeply in his memory that even without jottings or notebooks, which he liked to use, he always had at his command an impressive amount of encyclopedic knowledge. The first two paragraphs of *Finnegans Wake* will serve to illustrate the range of knowledge present in his memory and the special way he weaved the elements of it into his narrative:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend  
of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to  
Howth Castle and Environs.  
Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passen-  
core rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy  
isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his peniolate war: nor  
had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe  
to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper  
all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to  
tauftauf thuartpeatrick: not yet, though venissoon after, had a

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<sup>1</sup> Tristram (1989:230) comments on the phrase “brain of forgetting” in the following way: “the *brain of forgetting* is a splendid image for their authors' intensive concern to preserve in writing at an advanced stage of cultural interaction what would otherwise be irretrievably lost. So James Joyce *also* had to lose his brain of forgetting in order to be able to *complete* his *Finnegans Wake*.”

kidskad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all's fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arclight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.<sup>2</sup>

These lines touch upon the following areas of knowledge:

1. The Old Testament

“past Eve and Adam’s” (1): the beginning of human history; “old isaac” (11): a concealed reference to Jacob and Esau, whose brother conflict is one of the main themes of *Finnegans Wake*.

2. Roman history

“commodius” (2): allusion to the Roman emperor Commodus.

3. Irish history

“thuartpeatrick” (10): Saint Patrick’s mission to Ireland. “Sir Tristram” (4): allusion to Sir Almeric Tristram, who with Henry I conquered Ireland and built Howth Castle. The name “Tristram” also refers to the Breton epic cycle and the story of Tristan and Isolde.

4. Dublin’s history

“nathandjoe” (12) is an anagram for Dean Jonathan Swift; “sosie sesthers” (12) are the two women, Stella and Vanessa, who were close to Swift and were both called Esther.

5. Dublin’s topography

A reference to Dublin’s topography is included in the phrase “Eve and Adam’s” (1); there is an Adam and Eve’s church on the bank of the river Liffey.

6. Vico’s model of universal history in *Scienza Nuova*

This model underlies Joyce’s entire novel; the epic events of the novel pass through Vico’s four phases of history four times. According to Vico history unfolds itself first in the age of the gods, followed by the age of heroes and the age of man, which leads finally to a dissolution of the respective level of attained civilization and begins anew in a *ricorso* (Joyce devotes the last, the 17th episode, of the novel especially to this theme). Vico’s view of history is already

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<sup>2</sup> I quote from Joyce 1975:3.1-14.

pointed to in line 2 of the novel in the phrase “vicus of recirculation.”<sup>3</sup>

Although it is clear that Joyce obtained his knowledge of Vico’s philosophy of history via the printed word, in other cases it will have to remain an open question whether Joyce was initially acquainted with an oral or a written source. In several cases we must assume that there is an inseparable relationship of mutual exchange between the oral and written traditions, as, for example, in the stories from the Old Testament, which Joyce undoubtedly heard in his earliest childhood before he was able to read.

Apart from the areas already indicated in the first two paragraphs of the novel, Joyce’s encyclopedic store of knowledge also includes a comprehensive knowledge of classical and modern European literature from Dante to Ibsen and from the Greek tragic poets to Shakespeare. Furthermore, there are references to esoteric knowledge, such as the Egyptian Book of the Dead; to ethnological and historico-religious literature, such as Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*; and to modern natural science and psychoanalysis. Joyce alludes to both Freud and to C. G. Jung, the latter of whom he was personally acquainted with in Zürich. Finally, Joyce’s extensive knowledge of languages should be mentioned, which he superimposed in “portmanteau words,” and which can often only be analyzed with the help of linguistic commentaries. In this novel Hebraic and Finnish, Celtic and Slavic, Hungarian and German vocabulary enter into a synthesis and make it the first linguistic representative of a multicultural society, but also into a document in which the consequences of the mythical tower of Babel can be seen. Many of those who read Joyce long enough tend to see a linguistic as well as a thematic connection between the noun “Babel” and the verb “to babble.”<sup>4</sup>

It would be one-sided to interpret *Finnegans Wake* purely as an esoteric creation, an ingenious, artificial, and manneristic construction of a *poeta doctus*. *Finnegans Wake* has these features, but at the same time it is based squarely on the rhythms of the spoken language. As I have already emphasized in a 1988 study of aural and visual effects in *Finnegans Wake*, we should remember “that Joyce wrote this novel in exile, that he is

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<sup>3</sup> For an interpretation of the beginning of *Finnegans Wake*, see Campbell and Robinson 1947:28-38.

<sup>4</sup> *OED*, sub. “to babble: Perh. affected in sense by *Babel*.”

recalling the milieu in which he grew up, that in his faculties of perception and memory the acoustic side was more pronounced than the visual. . . . *Finnegans Wake* is the sum total of the sounds and voices of the Dublin environment in which he grew up and lived until his emigration, and which remained vivid for the rest of his life. The memories originated, in other words, in the oral character of everyday life in Dublin and form the acoustic foundation for his description of human destinies insofar as they are preserved in human dreams" (112).

The oral forms of knowledge handed down in Joyce's speech community that he used in his novel come from two sources: the spoken word and song. The experiences of the Anglo-Irish found expression in the realm of the spoken word above all in proverbs and proverb-like expressions, which also include phrases from the Bible that entered into the general language and the nursery rhymes. The best example of the importance of the song in Irish oral tradition is the folksong, in addition to which the Scottish, English, and American folksongs should also be mentioned. These songs are comparable to those from the English music hall and the arias from Italian operas that were so popular in Ireland. Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* (written between 1801 and 1834) were especially well-known; this collection was owned by most middle-class families in Dublin. An indication of how strongly Joyce was influenced by this popular folksong tradition can be seen in the fact that of the 124 songs in Moore's collection 122 are quoted in *Finnegans Wake* (Hodgart and Worthington 1959:9). As demonstrated by "The Lass of Aughrim" in "The Dead," the last short story in Joyce's collection *Dubliners*, the song was not only a source of entertainment: for Gretta the song evokes the memory of her first love, Michael Furey; for Gabriel Conroy it leads to an "epiphany," an experience that has a disillusioning effect on him.

The proverbs that Joyce worked into his novel *Finnegans Wake* have been compiled by Clive Hart in his monograph *Structure and Motif in "Finnegans Wake"* (1962). I would like to cite a few examples and to include the dates of their earliest recorded appearance in the language, as found in the *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (ODEP 1970). These dates, however, should be treated with caution, since they are most certainly not identical with their actual dates of origin, as is clearly indicated by occasional comments found in the *Dictionary* such as "an old doggerel." Finally, it should be noted that many proverbs only gradually took on the form in which they are known to us today. Here too there were occasionally preliminary stages; we shall, however, not go into these. The examples are as follows:

1. “Out of the frying-pan into the fire” (1528).
2. “Make hay while the sun shines” (1546).
3. “One man’s meat is another man’s poison” (1576).  
The entry from 1604 has the remark “old proverb,” and the editor includes a corresponding proverb from Lucretius: “Quod cibus est aliis, aliis est acre venenum.”
4. “Let bygones be bygones” (1577).
5. “You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear” (1579).
6. “The pitcher that goes to the well”  
or  
“The pitcher goes so often to the well (water), that it is broken at last” (1591).
7. “Handsome is that handsome does” (1670).
8. “If ifs and ands were pot and pans there’d be no more work for the tinker’s hands” (1850); designated in 1886, however, as “old doggerel.”

What is striking in the above examples is that all but two have been recorded in the language and literature since the sixteenth century, and thus represent very old examples of popular wisdom that have continued to be used in the English and the Anglo-Irish speech community.

It is characteristic of Joyce’s use of traditional songs and proverbs that he never incorporates them into his novel without changes. He presupposes the reader’s knowledge of them (thus directly addressing the speech community with its commonly held store of knowledge) and transforms the traditional formulations, often in a very subtle and veiled manner. Traditional forms of popular wisdom do not remain sacrosanct, as though they represented some ancient authority, as can often be observed in medieval literature, which was fond of referring to the “authorities” and could, correspondingly, draw upon a comprehensive treasury of quotations. Joyce frequently adopts only the basic rhythmic structure and the syntactic pattern of the proverbs, allowing them to only slightly resemble the commonly known versions. Or he takes individual words out of a proverb and replaces them with others in order to give the familiar formulation a new sense. In this manner Joyce works against the tendency of the reader to adopt traditional verbal expressions uncritically and thus, via their stylistic form, to accept their content. By modifying the pre-established form, Joyce distances himself from knowledge already made rigid by tradition, and by means of his parodic transformation, induces a critical attitude in the reader toward traditional knowledge and the verbal form in which this knowledge is preserved. The reader is thus drawn into the dialogue that Joyce is conducting with the tradition of popular song and

storytelling.

The range and techniques of variation in Joyce's use of proverbs can be illustrated with the example "Boys will be boys" (cf. Hart 1962:218).

(1) At 11.08 the proverb appears in the form: "till byes will be byes." Here Joyce is also alluding to the expression "let bygones be bygones." The passage describes a hen that, during a moment of truce on a battlefield, is gathering up remains. The irony of this passage consists in the fact that the hen is after all not letting bygones be bygones. By collecting remains of the past the hen is—as it will later turn out—serving the future.

(2) At 245.04-05 the variation reads: "Brights we'll be brights." It is said in connection with children at play who have been called home for dinner. The meaning of the phrase: "Brights we'll be brights" is reinforced by the preceding exclamation: "Lights, pageboy, lights!" and by the following statement: "With help of Hanoukan's lamp" (cf. McHugh 1980:245).

(3) At 246.21-22 in the same context the children are characterized by the phrase: "Childs will be wilds."

(4) 312.33: The fourth example is found in Book II, Chapter 3, in a scene that is set in a pub. The phrase "plubs will be plebs" marks the pub as a meeting place for the plebs; the form "plubs" is a partial anticipation of "plebs."

(5) 406.34: In a description of Shaun's eating habits in Book III, Chapter 1, Joyce uses the phrase "biestings be biestings," which, according to Clive Hart, can also be understood as a variation on the proverb "Boys will be boys." In Anglo-Irish "biestings" denotes "milk from a cow that has just calved" (McHugh 1980:406); at the same time, however, it contains an allusion to the English word "beast," and especially to its German equivalent *Biest*.

In addition to proverbs and nursery rhymes as examples of the simpler forms of popular oral tradition, the ballad can be mentioned as a form of oral tradition in which the mentality of the Irish people is reflected. At the same time it may also be understood as a storehouse for the basic individual, social, and historical experiences that Joyce was attempting to draw upon for his novel. A complex process of artistic creation and transformation can also be observed in Joyce's use of the ballad. In

*Finnegans Wake* the popular ballad literature is incorporated into a highly artificial system of references; but, since the memory of the ballad tradition is never completely obliterated, the skillfully constructed work never hardens into a manneristic, as it were, “bloodless” artifact. To remain with the circulatory image for a moment: the tradition of popular oral literature supplies modern art again and again with new life and allows the reader to feel the pulse-beat of the spoken and musical literature of the Irish people.

The best example of the importance of the popular ballad tradition in James Joyce’s work is the ballad that gave the novel its title, “Finnegans Wake.” In the edition from which I have taken the melody and text of this ballad, the following remark can be found: “Dedicated, no doubt, to the Irishman’s love of funerals and Whiskey, this song is extremely well known on the British club scene” (Winter 1974:20). Jane S. Meehan, in a short essay entitled ““Tim Finigan’s Wake”” (1976), was the first one to call attention to the fact that the author of this ballad on Tim Finigan, as it was originally called, was John F. Poole. Poole came from Dublin and in his early youth went to the United States, where he became a well-known theater manager and dramatist who distinguished himself by his “genuine Irish wit and humor” (69). He liked to write farces in which typical ethnic figures such as Irishmen, Germans, and blacks appeared. He was also active as a writer of songs, many composed especially for Tony Pastor, a popular music-hall singer. The ballad “Tim Finigan’s Wake” can be found in the collection *Tony Pastor’s ‘444’ Combination Singer*. It speaks for the popularity of this ballad, which must have been written in 1861 or 1862, that during the 1870s in the United States, texts were circulated and modified, and the name of the author completely disappeared. Joyce may have heard this song in the 1890s in the Dublin music halls. It is noteworthy that this ballad also has a forerunner: John Brougham’s song “The Fine Old Irish Gentleman” (ca. 1840). In outline this song tells the same story: an Irishman in his complete drunkenness is thought to be dead, but when a whiskey bottle is opened at his wake he revives. All in all the background history of this ballad shows similarities to the folk song: a clever writer of music and lyrics adapted already known material in such a skillful manner that it quickly became common property.

Here is the text (Winter 1974:20-21):

Ah Tim Finnegan lived in Walkin Street,  
 A gentleman Irish mighty odd,  
 Well, he had a tongue both rich and sweet,  
 An’ to rise in the world he carried a hod.  
 Ah but Tim had a sort of a tipplin way

With the love of the liquor he was born,  
 An' to send him on his way each day,  
 He'd a drop of the craythur ev'ry morn.

(Chorus:)

Whack fol the dah will ya dance to yer parner  
 Around the flure yer trotters shake  
 Wasn'n't it the truth I told you?  
 Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake.

One morning Tim was rather full,  
 His head felt heavy which made him shake,  
 He fell off the ladder and he broke his skull,  
 And they carried him home his corpse to wake,  
 Well they rolled him up in a nice clean sheet,  
 And they laid him out upon the bed,  
 With a bottle of whiskey at his feet,  
 And a barrel of porter at his head.

Well his friends assembled at the wake,  
 And Mrs. Finnegan called for lunch,  
 Well first they brought in tay and cake,  
 Then pipes, tobacco, and brandy punch.  
 Then Widow Malone began to cry,  
 "Such a lovely corpse, did you ever see,  
 Arrah, Tim avourneen, why did you die?"  
 "Will ye hould your gob?" said Molly McGee.

Well Mary O'Connor took up the job,  
 "Biddy," says she, "you're wrong, I'm sure,"  
 Well Biddy gave her a belt in the gob,  
 And left her sprawling on the floor;  
 Well civil war did then engage,  
 Woman to woman and man to man,  
 Shillelagh law was all the rage,  
 And a row and a ruction soon began.

Well Tim Maloney raised his head,  
 When a bottle of whiskey flew at him,  
 He ducked and, landing on the bed,  
 The whiskey scattered over Tim;  
 Bedad he revives, see how he rises,  
 Tim Finnegan rising in the bed,  
 Saying, "Whittle your whiskey around like blazes,  
 T'underin' Jaysus, do ye think I'm dead?"



The following remarks can be made concerning the theme of the ballad with regard to Joyce's novel: Tim is an Irishman who earns his living as a hodman (a laborer who carries mortar) and who partakes freely of the bottle: "with the love of the liquor he was born." As a consequence of this, one morning he falls from a ladder and breaks his neck. He is brought home by some friends who according to Irish custom hold a wake. The men drink and the women quarrel with one another. A fight breaks out and a bottle of whiskey falls on the dead man, who is revived.

This ballad appears to be nothing more than a curious anecdote, but it contains two themes that were important for Joyce: (1) the rise and fall of a man and of humanity in general; (2) the death and rebirth of the protagonist. A characteristic of Joyce's treatment of the ballad in the novel is that he does not quote directly from the text. As in the case of the proverbs, he is assuming that the reader is already familiar with the ballad, since it is part of the popular oral tradition. Joyce begins with the fall of Tim Finnegan and remarks: "The fall"—here followed by one hundred sounds of an imitated crash—"of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy" (3.15-18). Joyce makes it clear in this sentence that Tim's fall is more than just a fall from a ladder. The fall is brought into connection with the Wall Street crash and the protagonist is called "oldparr" (i.e., "a centenarian accused of incontinence" [McHugh 1980:3]). The fall is thus placed in a moral and sexual perspective. The phrase "all christian minstrelsy" also relates it to the Christian, that is, the general religious tradition. The verb form "retaled" signifies the special manner of its transmission: "tale" refers to the telling of the story; "retale" suggests a retelling of the story, since the homonym "retail," which the reader is also intended to hear, means, among other things, "to recount the exact details." Thus, having given an indication of the large number of variations that have arisen from the ballad of Tim Finnegan's fall, we are ready for the appearance of the novel's protagonist HCE ("Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker"), who will take Tim Finnegan's place.

Let us stay for a moment with the figure of Tim Finnegan. The introductory remarks concerning him suggest that his death does not mean his absolute end, since it is said: "Hohohoho, Mister Finn, you're going to be Mister Finnagain!" (5.09-10). And it is immediately added: "Hahahaha, Mister Funn, you're going to be fined again!" (5.11-12). Tim Finnegan will be reborn, will incur new guilt, and for his guilt will again be punished ("fined again"). The ballad material can thus be connected with a view of history as the circular movement that Joyce adopted from Vico (perhaps

even the four “hos” refer to Vico’s four cycles). In keeping with this view of history, it is reported that Finnegan is forced back into the coffin by his friends with the explanation that he would only lose his way in Dublin. The real reason for their action, which the Four Old Men reveal, is that his successor, HCE, has already arrived. This sequence of events could be explained according to Vico as the giant from the first age being replaced by a patriarch from the second.

In the second chapter of Book I the protagonist, HCE, moves into the center of the narrative along with the theme of guilt that, in respectively different accents, characterizes the individual episodes of the work. Repeated attempts are made by a very diverse group of people to find out something about a transgression that HCE is supposed to have committed one evening in Dublin’s Phoenix Park. When we bear in mind, however, that the initials HCE can stand not only for an individual person but also for “Here Comes Everybody” (in other words, that in spite of being an individual, HCE also stands for the *humanum genus*, like the hero of a late medieval morality play), then we realize that what Joyce is aiming at (often without those who are asking questions, making inquiries, or carrying out investigations realizing it) is to discover something about the guilt that humankind collectively carries around with itself. Joyce makes the reader realize that it is not only impossible to attain a definitively clear picture of specific transgressions, but that all processes of inquiry and communication are themselves corrupted. The individual persons who relate detailed knowledge about Earwicker contribute to a constant distortion process, whose initial impetus may have been some fault of Earwicker’s, but which increasingly evades the grip of language the further away the one who is reporting it is from the happening.

When we attempt to discover what actually lies at the basis of this entangled web of rumor, we can point to the following facts.<sup>5</sup> It is certain that Earwicker entered Phoenix Park one night (around midnight) and went into the bushes to relieve himself, where he was observed by two girls who laughed at him. They in turn were observed by three soldiers who further spread the story of this incident. It remains unclear whether Earwicker was urinating or masturbating, whether he wanted to provoke the girls, or they wanted to provoke him, that is, whether he was the tempter or they were the temptresses, whether they behaved in a manner similar to Gerty MacDowell in the Nausicaa-episode of *Ulysses* and HCE behaved like Leopold Bloom. Finally, the role of the soldiers, of whom it is said in the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. also Glasheen 1977 and McCarthy 1980.

novel that “They were watching the watched watching” (509.02-03), remains to be clarified. They are occasionally compared to the sons of Noah, Ham, Sem, and Japhet, who, according to the first Book of Moses (9, 21-23), covered their father’s nakedness after Ham had discovered the drunk and naked Noah in his hut.

Another reminder of the Book of Genesis in the account of HCE’s transgression can be seen in the name of Phoenix Park—which really exists in the center of Dublin. This park is compared to the garden of Eden; there are constant allusions in the novel to the biblical account of the fall of Adam and Eve. As (a possible) tempter Earwicker recalls Satan; as victim, the temptation of Adam. And when the first Book of Moses 3,7 is cited, “They opened their eyes and were aware that they were naked,” it is alluding to the reports of Earwicker and the two girls. In the reports of Earwicker and the two girls, the motif of nakedness plays a continuing role (it finally remains open whether their intentions are exhibitionist).

It is important to keep in mind that Joyce, in spite of the many references he makes to the religious tradition that formed him since his early youth and from whose basic beliefs he could not entirely free himself for the rest of his life, did not intend to write a religious allegory. He was not interested in working out a modern version of the Old Testament, but rather in investigating the basic phenomenon of human guilt and sexuality. For Joyce the artist the basic question was to what extent something could be said in the appropriate form, how far one could find the truth with the help of language. In his description of the workings of oral tradition and through his narrative reflection on the nature of oral communication in his novel, Joyce came to hold a view similar to one that Chaucer had already expressed in an earlier work, *The House of Fame*, in the description of the “House of Tydings”:

Thus saugh I fals and soth compounded  
Togeder fle for oo tydyng.<sup>6</sup>

Truth and falsity, what men above all meet in oral reports, are inseparably bound together.<sup>7</sup>

In the description of the word-of-mouth reports being spread about HCE, the narrator of *Finnegans Wake* begins with the reports concerning Earwicker’s name. One report traces the name back to a meeting of the

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted from Benson 1988 (ll. 2108-9).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Erzgräber 1985.

protagonist with William the Conqueror, who asks Humphrey for an explanation of the numerous potholes that can be observed at a turnpike. Humphrey answers that he collects “earwigs.” From “earwigs” developed the name “Earwicker” (the second part of the name refers to the Old Norse; cf. *OED*, sub. “wicker”: “East Scandinavian: 1. A pliant twig or small rod, usu. of willow [...] 3. A basket, cradle, chair, etc. of wicker.”) A second interpretation of the name is connected with an event in Earwicker’s life that happened in Phoenix Park, where he is asked one day around noontime for the time by a cad, a fellow of low manners. Since Earwicker does not understand the Irish greeting—he regards it as the special slang of the English homosexuals—he begins to speak hesitantly, to stutter, and to protest that he is not a homosexual. The cad remains convinced, and later recalls, half aloud and without being very exact, what he remembers of Earwicker’s statements. His wife happens to overhear what he is saying and confides it to Mr. Brown, a Jesuit priest, who in turn passes it on in a modified form to Philly Thursten, a teacher of agriculture and orthophonetics. Again, this report of the story is accidentally overheard by other persons, this time by Treacle Tom and Frisky Shorty. Treacle Tom repeats fragments of the story while sleeping off his drunk, so that it is now taken over by Peter Cloran, O’Mara, and the unsuccessful poet Hosty. Hosty first gives Earwicker the French name “perce-oreille,” which he then transforms in the Irish manner into Persse O’Reilly. It is possible here that Joyce had an actual historical figure in mind; there was a John Boyle O’Reilly who lived in Dublin and who Roland McHugh informs us (McHugh 1974:28) “was in the Army as an agent of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Many treacherous ballads proceeded from his unit. Because of this, it is conceivable that the *Ballad of Persse O’Reilly* takes its name from him.”

This ballad, which Joyce wrote in the style of an Irish street ballad and presents in the novel *in extenso* along with the musical notes belonging to it (cf. 44-47), is conceived as a complement to the ballad of “Finnegan’s Wake.” It is a libel against Earwicker and presents a tissue of lies about him. It is the sum of all the rumors and slander that have been put into circulation and a perfect example of the gradual distortion of the originally questionable word-of-mouth reports on the protagonist. But the ballad does have some informative value (and paradoxically some truth content) in that it allows us to recognize the fictitious picture of the protagonist that has arisen in the consciousness of the Dubliners on the basis of rumor, gossip, and unscrupulous chatter.

At the beginning of the ballad, HCE is equated with Humpty

Dumpty. The motif that establishes the inner connection between both figures is that of the fall. The identification with Humpty Dumpty, however, is a preparation for a second motif: the figure once destroyed cannot be restored. So it is reported at the end of the nursery rhyme: “all the king's horses and all the king's men / Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty together again.” And in Joyce's version Hosty's ballad ends with the following words (47.26-29):

And not all the king's men nor his horses  
Will resurrect his corpus  
For there's no true spell in Connacht or hell  
(bis) That's able to raise a Cain.

Hosty gives the ballad its own particular twist by connecting phrases and ideas from the nursery rhyme with religious ideas: a resurrection is unthinkable for HCE. Here the contrast to the ballad of Tim Finnegan is clearly indicated, for there just the opposite possibility is opened up—the return to life. Hosty's ballad, by contrast, is a satire that wants to strike at and destroy its enemy and even mentions this intention.

The ballad of “Finnegan's Wake” could be described, using a term from Wolfgang Iser, as an “archetypal empty form” (*archetypische Leerform*), which includes the condition that the archetype can be developed in different ways. The empty form underlies all forms already realized and is at the same time the basis of their variation (Iser 1979:352). The motive that determined Hosty's particular version of the traditional archetype, namely the fall of the protagonist, in a way not suggested by the ballad of Tim Finnegan, must be searched for in the political realm. The name “Lord Olofa Crumple” in the first stanza refers to Oliver Cromwell, and it is to him that the saying “To Connacht or hell,” which Joyce put into the last stanza of the ballad of Persse O'Reilly, is attributed. Just like Humpty Dumpty, Lord Oliver Cromwell is also an incarnation of HCE and of all the conquerors of Ireland, to whom Joyce refers with the phrase “that hammerfast viking” (46.12) and with the following lines (47.20-25):

Then we'll have a free trade Gaels' band and mass meeting  
For to sod the brave son of Scandiknavery.  
And we'll bury him down in Oxmanstown  
Along with the devil and Danes,  
(Chorus)       With the deaf and dumb Danes,  
                  And all their remains.

Joyce is alluding here to the conflict between the Irish and the vikings, who

had pillaged and plundered Ireland since 795 and then settled down there and remained an influence in Irish history until the thirteenth century.

HCE thus becomes the embodiment of all the oppression that Ireland has suffered from Scandinavia and England, and that extends to the political situation in the twentieth century. For, with the phrase, “saw his black and tan man-o’-war,” Hosty is hinting at the English occupation soldiers, the “Black and Tans,” who, at the beginning of the 1920s, were brutal in their suppression of Irish attempts to gain independence. And when finally the protagonist is called “fafafather of all schemes for to bother us” (45.13), the author of the ballad is referring to HCE’s speech impediment, whose stuttering at the meeting with the cad betrayed his guilt. In the satire the homosexual and the heterosexual transgressions that the protagonist is said to have committed are also included. The name Oscar, which is meant to recall Oscar Wilde, who was born in Dublin, is an allusion to the homosexual behavior of which the Dubliners accuse him. And with respect to his behavior toward the female sex, the following stanza of the ballad reports (46.24-29):

It was during some fresh water garden pumping  
Or, according to the *Nursing Mirror*, while admiring the monkeys  
That our heavyweight heathen Humpharey  
Made bold a maid to woo  
(Chorus)      Woohoo, what’ll she doo!  
                    The general lost her maidenloo!

HCE appears in the ballad as the scapegoat who must suffer for every kind of possible crime. Patrick A. McCarthy (1980:592) has called him accordingly “a scapegoat for all crimes committed against Ireland in all ages.”

The motif of the scapegoat is also referred to in a very subtle way by the use of the substantive “the rann,” which appears in two passages connected with the “Ballad of Persse O’Reilly.” In the passage where the ballad and its composer are first introduced, it is said: “he’s the mann to rhyme the rann, the rann, the rann, the king of all ranns” (44.16-17), and during a short interruption within the ballad, it is repeated: “Rhyme the rann, the king of all ranns!” (45.26). A “rann” is, according to Campbell and Robinson (1947:58, n. 1), “an ancient Celtic verse form,” which they explain with the added remark: “There are many stories of Irish poets who revenged themselves against ungenerous or brutal kings by composing satires against them; and frequently (or so they say) the kings literally died of the shame.” The motif of the scapegoat becomes apparent when we

understand “rann” as an allusion to “wren” and when we hear the verses that, according to a popular Irish tradition, are sung in memory of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who is honored on the 26th of December:

The wren, the wren,  
The King of all birds,  
Saint Stephen's his day,  
Was caught in the furze.

On this day it was customary to kill a wren—as a kind of scapegoat—and to hang him on a stick and carry him through the streets. Like St. Stephen the wren and with him HCE are killed in order to cleanse the city from all its sins.

Hosty's ballad soon makes the rounds in Dublin and wins him great popularity, because, with his satire on HCE, who came from England and was a Protestant, he gave expression to the antipathies of the Irish people against the Protestant ruling class and released the pent-up feelings of hate against the oppressor. The ballad as an example of orally transmitted knowledge preserved in artistic form is not an instrument of documentary information, but rather the expression of an emotional reaction to actual conditions. At the same time it formulates an attitude that takes on archetypal characteristics, and for this reason it can be placed in the neighborhood of materials that have been investigated and interpreted by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, a work of fundamental importance for modern English literature.

The first ballad takes up the theme investigated by Frazer of the “dying and reviving god”; in the second ballad this theme is only pursued until the death of the protagonist. According to Frazer there are examples for both variations of the myth concerning the Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris. It is reported, among other things, that Osiris' corpse is torn into fourteen pieces and strewn over the earth. According to one version, Isis, who is at once both sister and wife to Osiris, found each piece and buried it where she found it. In a second version, which calls the ballad of Tim Finnegan to mind, Isis lamented the death of Osiris along with her sister Nephthys, whereupon the Sun-God Ra took pity on her and sent a jackal-headed god who, together with the two sisters and with the help of Toth and Horus, joined together the torn pieces of the murdered god; “Osiris revived, and thenceforth reigned as king over the dead in the other world” (Frazer 1922:13). That Joyce was well acquainted with Frazer's work can be seen in the veiled allusions to details of rituals described in *The Golden*

*Bough* that are contained in *Finnegans Wake*. In this connection I should mention James S. Atherton, who points out (1960:193) that “Joyce probably used Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, and seems, like his friend, T. S. Eliot, to ‘have used especially the two volumes *Atthis, Adonis, Osiris*.’”

Whereas the second chapter of Book I of *Finnegans Wake* describes the labyrinthian path of the stories about HCE in Dublin, that is, from a spatial point of view, the third chapter is concerned with the equally labyrinthian path of the oral statements and reports about HCE from the point of view of time. The blurring of the names that are used in the oral reports mirrors the growing temporal distance between the original event and its oral transmission. Hosty appears after some time as Osti-Fosti (48.19), M’Mara as A’Hara (49.03; he himself adopts the name of Blanco Fusilovna Bucklovitch), Peter Cloran changes into Paul Horan—a transformation on which Bernard Benstock (1965:195) comments as follows: “born as St. Peter, he dies as St. Paul.” As soon as the author of the ballad and his friends disappear from the Dublin scenery, all knowledge of details is lost. About Osti-Fosti we only hear: “no one end is known” (48.24); A’Hara is killed in action: “it came about that on the field of Vasileff’s Cornix inauspiciously with his unit he perished” (49.12-14). Paul Horan ends in a lunatic asylum: “Poor old dear Paul Horan, to satisfy his literary as well as his criminal aspirations, at the suggestion thrown out by the doomster in loquacity lunacy, so says the Dublin Intelligence, was thrown into a Ridley’s for inmates in the northern counties” (49.15-19). Nevertheless, people never forget Earwicker—this is mainly due to “Madam’s Tshowus waxes,” Mme Tussaud’s waxworks, and the National Gallery that appears in Joyce’s diction as “our notional gullery” (57.21).

The individual interviews with over twenty people reported in the third chapter of Book I offer all in all a many-sided picture of the public opinion that developed with respect to HCE after the disappearance of the author of the ballad of Persse O’Reilly. At the beginning of this colorful spectrum of viewpoints there stands the opinion of the three soldiers: “It was the first woman, they said, souped him, that fatal wellesday, Lili Coninghams, by suggesting him they go in a field” (58.28-30). The name Lili is meant to suggest Lilith, who in popular Jewish belief was an evil demon (cf. 34.14); according to Talmudic tradition she was Adam’s first wife. Meager’s opinion stands at the end of the series of interviews. Meager is a British seaman who suspects that the soldiers are behind all the stories: “but I also think, Puellywally, by the siege of his trousers there was someone else behind it—you bet your boughtem blarneys—about their three drummers down Keysars Lane. (Trite!)” (61.24-27).



The remainder of the opinions lie somewhere in between. As representative of these I should like to quote two examples:

1. A bar-maid says: "It would be skarlot shame to jailahim in lockup...." (60.04-05) and
2. Briam Lynsky remarks: "Them two bitches ought to be leashed, canem!" (60.14-15).

The greater the temporal distance between the original fact, that is, Earwicker's "guilt," and its oral transmission, the milder the judgment that is passed on Earwicker. A sentimental-nostalgic note creeps in, which Joyce also found in the modern renderings of Old Irish legends and heroic lays that were published in the nineteenth century and that he mostly criticized ironically. Benstock comments on this fact in the following way (1965:195):

The series of reports on the happenings of the epic fall continues under a haze of time-obscured hearsay; there is never a single accurate account of the important occurrence. This handling of the material of the *Wake* attempts to present the contemporary epic as a version of the past as seen by the present; the nonheroic age retells the heroic story in its own versions.

The interviews as a whole also do not lead to an unequivocal judgment of HCE. What we possess are only variations of the original story and every new means of propagating it. The various media named in this chapter include newspaper, radio, film, telephone, and even television. The film mentioned in this chapter is about "an old geeser who calls on his skirt" (65.05-06), an allusion to a scandal from the 1920s caused by an American, Daddy Browning, "and his two peaches" (McHugh 1980:65). Here Joyce may also have had Swift and his two girlfriends, Stella and Vanessa, in mind.

In summary it can be said that orally transmitted knowledge such as Joyce describes with respect to HCE retains only isolated pieces of information, sometimes only isolated impressions. This information is in most cases not based on immediate experience or observation, but on reports from others. What originally happened remains questionable because each participant interprets the happenings in his or her own way, and either displaces the guilt onto someone else, or exaggerates his own guilt, as is the case with Earwicker.

In spite of the uncertainties inherent in oral tradition, one thing is clear, namely, that all human beings take part in some way in the guilt that is personified by HCE, even if it is only to the extent that they willingly or

unwillingly continue to falsify information that in itself already contains untruth. Margot Norris has described this state of affairs as follows (1976:45-46):

An essential characteristic of both theological and psychoanalytic primal sins, the sin of Adam and the crime of Oedipus, is their legacy to progeny and populace: all men are born with the stain of Original Sin, and all will be guilty of oedipal wishes. An individual, private crime becomes a public, universal, and unconscious sin. This essential relationship between private and public acts, which is dramatized in the primal scene, forms a major theme in *Finnegans Wake*. HCE's sin is private and hidden, buried in the past, and perhaps even lost to consciousness. Yet the sin in Phoenix Park becomes a public matter, a "municipal sin business" (5.13), a scandal that dominates universal concern and conversation.

The inquiries into and the reflections on the nature of this guilt never come to an end in *Finnegans Wake*, so that one might say that this motif actually provides the motor for the epic events. A new dimension is opened, however, when the fragments of a letter, which a hen digs out of a dunghill, are called to our attention. The letter was written by Anna Livia Plurabelle, Earwicker's wife, and is supposed to contain information about him. The inquiry into the contents of the letter, their meaning and correct interpretation, lead us into another thematic area. Joyce moves into the realm of the written word. The question that he asks the reader to ponder is this: can the written word express the truth about HCE, that is, about human beings and humanity in general; is the written word superior to the inexact spoken word, or is the written word that Joyce has in mind an instrument of communication as fragile and thus problematic as the orally transmitted word?

The fifth chapter of Book I reveals that Joyce approaches writing with the same critical scepticism as oral expression. He parodies the methods that attempt to reconstruct unreadable passages in a manuscript with the help of chemical processes or ultraviolet light, and his satire is also directed against the psychoanalytic Freudian and the politico-marxist principles of interpretation (115.11-35 and 116.10), because their underlying assumptions oversimplify the complexity of the text to be interpreted. Behind all of this there is doubtless also a reply to the censor who, during the First World War, was of the opinion "that '*Ulysses* was a prearranged pro-German code'" (quoted in McCarthy 1980:598).

The washerwomen dialogue in Chapter 8 of Book I points to a certain solution of the problem of guilt: Anna Livia Plurabelle, whose second name stands for the river Liffey, accepts HCE's sins (or rather dissolves them)

and thus cleanses him of his sins no matter how great they may have been, and no matter what may have been said about him, either by word of mouth or in writing. In this context a statement in ALP's concluding monologue is worthy of note: "I thought you the great in all things, in guilt and in glory. You're but a puny" (627.23-24). Be that as it may, the guilt will be taken up and dissolved in the river that symbolizes a continuous renewal of life. The solution to the conflict, which could be called a kind of worldly "salvation," is mediated by a woman. For this reason the first word of the novel is "river," and the first proper name that is mentioned is "Eve": "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

*Universität Freiburg*

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<sup>8</sup> A German version of this essay was published as Erzgräber 1990.

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