

SIGNING OFF: POSTING THE LETTER AND THE
POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION
IN EINNEGANS WAKE

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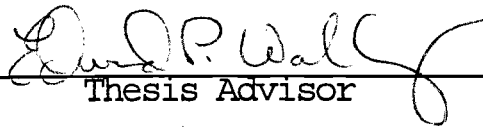
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PREFACE

Hugh Kenner characterizes Ulysses as a book "from which we are systematically taught the skills we require to read it." If this is true, then we might say Finnegans Wake seemingly offers little or no help at all as we try to read and "make sense out of" the text. It repeatedly undermines those skills we would like to think we possess as "close readers," while at the same time raising questions about the merit or usefulness of any number of critical approaches to the text. Working with the text over the last two years, I have been made both joyfully and painfully aware of this quality, this difficulty or "problem" with reading the text, and, consequently, have developed a real love/hate relationship with Finnegans Wake. The book was spoon-fed to me my first semester as a graduate student, but I knew even at that time that I would work with it for my thesis--a kind of love at first sight. My feeling then was that it would afford an opportunity to explore my interest in critical theory, to *bring* certain concerns to the text since it seems opaque enough to accommodate *anything*, as the history of criticism on the Wake suggests. What has happened along the way is that reading the text has helped define my interest in theory more clearly, or at least more carefully, allowing

me to formulate and begin to answer certain questions about what it means to read literature. At the same time, the text for me has always managed to keep its distance, always holds the reader at bay, along with his or her interpretive assumptions. This frustration that is so much a part of reading the text makes it a difficult book to love.

But those who respond to the text in this way, with frustration at not being able to make the text "make sense," would seem to miss out on the fun involved in reading a text like the Wake; they remain unaware of what it means to laugh along with Joyce and to bring that response to the text as well. Letting myself in on this laughter, reading the text with this mixed response, I would agree with Susan Shaw Sailer when she writes that "Learning to read Finnegans Wake has changed the way I read." In this sense, it is not entirely true that the Wake offers no help to its readers, as I attempt to argue in this thesis. There are no skills that I would claim (for myself or the text), as Kenner suggests, but that is part of the lesson, I think.

I thank the members of my committee for working with me on this project and others over the past few years. I owe much to Dr. Whitsitt, who met with several of us outside of class in small reading groups at various times to talk about "theory," and Dr. Austin, whose comments have helped me think more carefully about feminism and politics. Dr. Walkiewicz, my advisor, whose classes I have taken more than

my share of, has consistently created a classroom environment where his students can explore ideas and make connections with confidence and support. It was in his seminar on the Wake my first semester where the ideas for this paper were first muddled through, and I am grateful to him for bearing with me.

I would also thank my mother, Doris, for her confidence in me and all the patience she shows for her "professional student"--in many ways I have continued my education for her. And my wife, Amy, who read various parts of this thesis at different stages. She was and is always quick to remind me of what "all these words" really mean and to call me on it when I lose sight of that.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

SO WHY, PRAY, SIGN ANYTHING?

So why, pray, sign anything as long as every word, letter, penstroke, paperspace is a perfect signature of its own?

(FW 115.6-8)¹

Signing On

Perhaps more than any other literary text, Joyce's Finnegans Wake forces its readers to confront both what it means to interpret literature and the critical assumptions that inform a given interpretation. Especially in the context of recent post-structuralist responses to the Wake, the problem of interpretation has become central to any discussion of the text. For nearly twenty-five years, Joyce has stood as an important figure in French theoretical circles, drawing the attention of such influential post-structuralist thinkers as Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva. Joyce's text in many ways foregrounds the concerns of their own writing, especially the problematics of language and meaning or the way language plays into notions of subjectivity as understood in Western thought. For those critics who view the text in this post-structuralist

"context," the Wake's unusual use of language, its indeterminacy of meaning, not only at the level of individual words, but also at a syntactical level where the text repeatedly undercuts linear construction, call attention to and problematize oppositions between writing and speech, author and critic, reader and writer, male and female. But those oppositions, when not questioned or called attention to as problematic, also underpin a certain logic which makes many readings of the Wake possible, understood as depending on, as Michael Patrick Gillespie points out, "exclusive, cause and effect correspondences" (2). Hence, various critics find themselves charged with the responsibility of rewriting the text to make it "readable," to uncover its thematic patterns and characters,² its historical and socio-political and mythological allusions and make them apparent. "Readability" in this sense depends on a clear relation of influence involving Joyce and his "world," where we may talk about and identify those books he read or the culture that "produced" him (and by extension the text) or the literary period out of which he emerged.

Or, if not depending on such relations of influence, the readability of Finnegans Wake requires that the critic's understanding correspond with Joyce's intentions "behind" the text, or that he or she identify patterns which correspond to patterns "outside" the text (whether they be

historical or mythical, political or archetypal). The ability to identify what is "outside" from what is "inside," in this sense, is necessary for that reading and for the critic, whose location "within" an historical moment or cultural situation is assumed not to matter. Any awareness of the critic's location "inside," and the ways that position might encode his or her reading, is "excluded," in Gillespie's term, while that critic interprets the text.

Mythic readings of the text, which often follow early work on Finnegans Wake by Joseph Campbell, perhaps most clearly illustrate the linear structure imposed on the text. These readings direct the reader towards mythic patterns which are presumed to exist in the world at various levels of experience, including literature, history, individual psychology, etc.. For Campbell and Robinson, in their Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake, because of the overriding mythic structure of the text, the characters of ALP and HCE (as well as Issy and her brothers Shaun and Shem) lend themselves to various archetypal associations, all organized and "unified" in terms of a mythic structure the dynamics of which often parallel Christian themes.³

Drawing from these early readings which mark a kind of seminal approach to the text, preoccupation with the Wake as reflecting different mythic patterns directs readers "outside" the text in other ways, towards the political. It has led feminist critics to key in on (with varying degrees

of reservation or apology depending on their relation to post-structuralist theory)⁴ essential qualities in many of the characters which enable a political critique of patriarchal systems that affect language and our understanding of gender roles. Often that critique involves identifying other myths in the text centered on the female subject which subvert patriarchal models of power. Femininity understood in essentialist terms allows the possibility of imagining an alternative to patriarchy and the history of violence and injustice that Joyce would seem to associate with it.

Other feminist work with Finnegans Wake raises questions about and problematizes such essentialism as it appears grounded in myth, choosing instead to concentrate on the way language plays into the construction of gender roles. But even the notion of "feminine writing" (a particular feminism that becomes central to my discussion of the politics of reading in this thesis), understood as that which calls attention to the juncture at which language and subjectivity come together and to the dynamics of desire which upset or transgress gender construction, runs the risk of reestablishing a kind of biological essentialism. Insofar as feminine writing, if it is to be effective politically, must be applied in "practice" (i.e. in the practice of literary criticism), it necessarily operates in terms of a "universal" opposition, between a patriarchy

understood as informing Western discourse and that which transgresses or exceeds it as "the 'she-truth' of female *jouissance*" (Henke 7).⁵

A seemingly more radical resistance to such grounding outside the text becomes an approach in itself, an occasion for any number of readings we might label as post-structuralist. Jean-Michel Rabaté, Stephen Heath, and Jacques Derrida offer readings which maintain a kind of respect for or sensitivity to (or at least an awareness of) the "unreadability" of the text, understood in part as the text's resistance to linear models of interpretation. Linearity, as used here and throughout this discussion, suggests an interpretive move outside the text to authorize reading.⁶ Understood in terms of this problem of reference, linearity presents difficulty for the reader of Finnegans Wake, whether that problem is dealt with expressly, as in more recent theoretical accounts, or simply assumed not to matter, as in certain earlier readings which depend implicitly on this cause and effect or linear relationship between the reader and text, and the text and author.⁷ It is a problem that goes beyond the unreadability of the text as "experimental" and the formal difficulties in making it readable, understood as tracking down allusions or identifying cryptophoric symbolism. The problem has opened up to more serious questions insofar as recent post-structuralist responses to the text, drawing largely from

ideas related to deconstruction, often view Finnegans Wake as a self-reflexive example of what makes every text unreadable. In this view, the text calls attention to the way our sense of narrative is always formally disrupted at some point in the act of reading, to the way cause and effect relationships established in any text always break down.

Insofar as the problem of linearity and interpretation is one that affects the history of response to the Wake, even in its most recent critical context, the question becomes: What does it mean to read Finnegans Wake? Does the Wake justify formally this pointing outward to patterns in myth?⁸ What about those readings which attempt to locate political significance in the text, which depend on speaking of identity (as in feminist response to the Wake) in essentialist terms, and which, in so doing, establish another linear model of reading based on history and culture? How might the text move in the direction of history and politics after those post-structuralist readings which call attention to the textual impossibility of such a move?

These questions about reading the Wake begin to take shape as we consider how the text reads itself at the textual site of writing and reading, in the posting and delivery of the Letter.⁹ At the site of the Letter, as I will argue, the text seems to offer an interpretive model

that addresses questions about the Wake's unreadability and the unreadability of any text "after" deconstruction. This model of reading allows for the necessity of such deconstructive questioning of linearity, while at the same time insisting on a move outside the text to account for the historical and political. The move outside the text makes Finnegans Wake "readable," at the moment the critic self-reflexively considers the impossibility of making that move "outside," but nevertheless moves in that direction in order to interpret the world as historical and political context for his or her reading.

The Letter as Site of Interpretation

At the site of the Letter, Finnegans Wake would seem to allegorize itself and its reception over the past fifty years by foregrounding certain difficulties associated with interpretation, difficulties that we find ourselves faced with in the present theoretical climate. Raising questions about its origin and destination, writer and recipient, and the postal system that organizes delivery and makes reading possible, the Letter never fully develops as something we might with perfect ease refer to as a thematic aspect of the text; instead, the Letter arrives in various ways and in multiple forms, a complex motif that manifests itself at different moments in the Wake.¹⁰ As Suzette A. Henke points out, "each of the multiple versions of the letter serves as

a textual paradigm for the Wake itself, acting as a semiotic microcosm of the linguistic macrocosm in which it has, like a puzzle or rebus, been playfully embedded" (James 185).

The Letter as "textual paradigm" might be understood as an interpretive model for its own reading by which we can begin to account for the history of critical response to the text in general, looking in particular at the problem of linearity and interpretation in specific readings of the Wake.¹¹ With this in mind, and bringing the text into our most recent critical context, I will offer a reading of the Wake focused on the Letter as the site of interpretation to examine how the text accounts for the seeming conflict between deconstructive responses to the text and those that would argue its political significance.

The Wake may be said to enact this conflict between deconstruction and political activism, always returning, however, to an awareness of the "materiality" of the Letter. This materiality involves, in one sense, the identity of the body writing, very often associated with the feminine presence of Issy. To the extent that Issy writes the letter, but also embodies it, the Letter itself suggests possibilities for a feminist reading of the Wake, as various critics have attempted. At the same time, the Wake calls attention to the critic's role in identifying the materiality of the Letter (as the site of the body as feminine) and reconstructing the context out of which that

identification takes place. The Wake points to the necessity that the critic allegorize his or her own political identity in a reading attempting to establish or recognize identity politics at work in the text. Allegorizing the reader's role is always informed to some degree by the need to write about otherness and always depends on claiming limited awareness of the reader's own political situation. Through various techniques, the Letter calls attention to the fictionality of the critic's interpretive frame that allows for provisional recognition of that historical and political context. At the same time, the Letter itself is personified in order to mark the space at which we might identify those forces which constitute sexual difference.

I will demonstrate this apparent movement in the text which returns the act of interpretation back to history and politics (in the wake of deconstruction) through a discussion of *écriture féminine* and the Letter, arguing that such a reading works as an example of "political allegory" in the text. This particular feminism associated with feminine writing in many ways already poses certain questions concerning deconstruction and political identity, insofar as it seems to draw from the rigorous questioning of identity associated with deconstruction. Hélène Cixous' work with Joyce and Julia Kristeva's theory of the body and poetic language both suggest possibilities for identifying

feminine writing in the Wake, but also foreground (self-consciously or not) certain difficulties having to do with identity and essentialism.

The chapters that follow examine the way the text might be characterized as feminine writing, but only to the extent that the critic self-reflexively insinuates himself or herself into the text to identify it as such (as the text itself requires). In Chapter 2, I argue that ALP's "untitled mamafesta" in I.5 and Issy's letter to herself in III.2 embody writing in a way that confronts and undermines a certain phallogentric logic that enables identity and meaning. But the text also points to the ways in which feminine writing establishes a kind of essentialism, as discussed in Chapter 3; the letter often contains such a reminder, never stable, always "a multiplicity of personalities" that disrupts a reading of feminine writing by signing the letter otherwise (as Derrida's discussion of signature reminds us). However, signature also suggests the possibility of the reader signing over the letter and the text. In Chapter 4, I suggest this signing over the letter is required by the text's own invitation; as the reader signs the text, that reading may locate and identify the (feminine)¹² body in a way that requires notice on different terms than those offered in Joyce's (and our own) experience of the world, of Irish culture, Western civilization, patriarchy, etc.. The reader's "producing" or participating

in meaning, always depending on a limited awareness of historical and political context, leads necessarily to qualifying the critical use of feminine writing. This qualifying awareness of *écriture féminine* backs away from the "universal" (and essentialist) implications that occur in those feminist readings which identify such writing, to suggest instead more "local" (that is, historically contextual) significance.

In the last chapter, I address the reading of feminine writing in the context of the perceived conflict between deconstruction and political activism, explaining more fully the need to understand feminine writing as political allegory and the way feminine writing itself leads to refiguring agency in reading. Although the text always reminds the reader of the constructiveness of the authority of his or her own reading, Chapter 5 points to the textual insistence on a move "outside" through a response that involves both laughter and a sense of violence. This "mixed response" implies an awareness of the way reading may empower the reader through its transgression of textual (and political) limits, even while it risks setting up other limits. Bringing to the text this "mixed response," responding to the text by responding to our own historical context as that which comprises what we bring to the text in the first place, only then may we "twist the penman's tale posterwise" (483.1-3). In this sense, the reader ventures

not only into the world of the Wake when opening the book,
but also into the politicized world outside the text.

CHAPTER II
WAKING TRACES:
ISSY WRITING THE LETTER

The Geamatry Lesson

. . . paradismic perimutter, in all directions . . .
(FW 298.28-29)

Finnegans Wake foregrounds a certain relationship between writing and the body. Whether it involves Shem's writing comprised of excrement ("when the call comes, he shall produce . . . from his unheavenly body a no uncertain quantity of obscene matter not protected by copriright" [185.28-30]), or Kate's bringing the letter "of eyebrow pencilled, by lipstipple penned" (93.25), Finnegans Wake writes the body and requires that we account somehow for the relationship between text and body in our reading. It is apparent throughout the text, in the catalogue of titles which approximate "the name of Annah the Allmaziful," whose "rill be run" (104.3), figured as a body of water, but also the body of the mother, "her untitled mamafesta" (104.4), or Issy's footnote in the "lessons" chapter (II.2) suggesting

that "writing a letters" (278.13) is akin to excretion, so that "when you're done push the chain."¹³ As the Shaunian narrator tells us about his brother "Shem's bodily getup" (169.11), implying what it means to read the body as writing, "Putting truth and untruth together a shot may be made at what this hybrid actually was like to look at" (169.8-11). The body as seeming historical and political "truth," the necessary "untruth" imposed self-reflexively on the text as that body, our reading constructs this "hybrid," as it would seem focused in the text at the site of sexual difference.

For Cixous, Joyce "writes the body" in much of his work, in such a way that his writing holds open the possibility of *écriture féminine*, or feminine writing. As Chiara Briganti and Robert Con Davis point out, "Writing [for Cixous] is constituted in a 'discourse' of relations social, political, and linguistic in makeup, and these relations are characterized in a masculine or feminine 'economy'" ("Cixous" 162). An *écriture féminine* would resist "patterns of linearity and exclusion (patriarchal 'logic') [which] require a strict hierarchical organization of (sexual) difference in discourse." Certain "culturally achieved conventions" (162) associated with woman, such as "openness," suggest characteristics of feminine writing which undermine the "patterns of linearity and exclusion" typical of patriarchal "logic" and inherent in language.¹⁴

One critic whose work is important to understanding feminine writing in the text is Julia Kristeva. Reading Finnegans Wake in light of Kristeva's theory of the body has enabled any number of feminist readings to identify the text as an example of feminine writing. For Susan Shaw Sailer, who reads the Wake in connection with Kristeva's theory (although not for purposes of a feminist reading),¹⁵ the five major characters in the text figure, at least in some instances, as "biopsychological dynamics of its writing, each of whom is directly involved in the writing of that Letter" (40). These five characters "embody" the writing of the Letter in terms of "its subject, splintered; the elusive pursuit by memory through desire of this subject; the writer, suspect by social standards; the (limited) social transmission of the writing; the words desiring transmission, sensual signifiers eluding capture" (40-41).

Sailer associates certain dynamics in Kristeva's work, including the chora, the thetic, the semiotic, the symbolic, and jouissance, with the characters ALP, HCE, Shem, Shaun, and Issy respectively. ALP as the chora may be defined "as energy regulated in accordance with constraints imposed on the body by family and social structures and generated by the drives," but as having "neither unity of meaning nor identity" (Sailer 44). Instead, as Kristeva writes, the thetic is "the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the

process of charges and stases that produce him" (Revolution 28). ALP as "unending river flow, generating matrix, and disappearing mater" (Sailer 44), all suggest the thetic as Kristeva identifies it.

The chora, as Sailer associates it with HCE, is that which Kristeva opposes to the thetic, that "crucial place on the basis of which the human being constitutes himself as signifying and/or social" (Revolution 67). Formed, as Sailer paraphrases, through "proposition and judgement" (45), HCE represents these impulses towards identity in language (as declarative statement), right down to his "positional and positing . . . consonant with his mountain, land, and city identity" (Sailer 45).

Those activities of Shaun, the postman, are consistent with the symbolic as Kristeva defines it, which is concerned with "communicativeness in the form of sentences and sequences that follow from recognition of boundaries set by social, cultural, and linguistic constraints" (Sailer 46). This is apparent in his identification with his father, his attempts to control "what he perceives as Shem's defiance of laws," and "his insistence on social and religious prescripts" (46), especially directed towards his sister and the leapyear girls.

Just as the symbolic comes into play through the thetic, the semiotic for Kristeva involves the chora and is represented by Shem in Sailer's reading. Shem, the penman,

produces "a comedy of letters" (425.24) as Sailer points out, a kind of writing which might be understood as a "heterogeneousness to meaning and signification," introducing "wandering or fuzziness into language" (Desire 133, 136). Shem's closer relationship with his mother would suggest this also.

Issy represents jouissance in language, "openly inviting all to desire and enjoy her, endlessly available in potentiality" (Sailer 47). As Sailer points out, Kristeva's notion of jouissance includes the sense of a "totality" of enjoyment, on all levels including sexual, spiritual, physical, etc.. The Wake itself captures such a totality, but Issy most clearly embodies jouissance in the text.

Insofar as writing in the Wake calls attention to certain oppositions that Kristeva argues play out at the level of subjectivity and in language, that "biopsychological dynamic" comes close to representing what Cixous calls feminine writing, introducing into language a certain "wandering or fuzziness" that resists patriarchal linear logic. As Suzette Henke points out, the Wake evokes a certain Kristevan understanding of the body in relation to language: "The whole of the Wake flows from the eggburst of ALP's hen-missive, a litter of letters that subverts the gospel of grandpa's [HCE's, a "Viconian Father-God" (208), old "Father Ocean's" (209)] repressive Oedipal codes" (211). It is at the site of ALP's letter that we might begin to

read the text as feminine writing, insofar as the text enacts this "subversion" of the discourse of the Father, that force which "suggests paternal power projected through imaginary tropes onto a world of nature that invites appropriation but eludes human mastery" (210). Other critics, such as Shari Benstock, also characterize feminine writing in the text as a subversion of patriarchal authority. Drawing extensively from Derrida's work, Benstock points to the missing apostrophe in the title as manifesting the law of apostrophe which disallows the subject to be bound to a single identity. Her focus on various oppositions in the text leads her to argue that boundaries between these oppositions are blurred in the Wake.¹⁶

The pervasive, "inaccessible" presence of the name of the Father, the patriarchal authority of which signifies "a transcendent law" that informs language and subjectivity, gives way in the text, at the site of the Letter, to "an endless riverrun of maternal/pre-Oedipal pulsions" (210). ALP's letter, in this sense, might be read as tapping into the semiotic *chora*, that bodily trace in language which exceeds the sign and signification. ALP's letter, understood in relation to the body, anticipates, on the basis of a certain correspondence between characters and theoretical constructs, the reading of Issy and her letter addressed to herself or to her brother Shaun.¹⁷ In the

discussion that follows in this chapter, I want to make use of certain ideas associated with feminine writing, drawing from the work of Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigiray, but not in some schematic way where characters are identified exclusively with specific constructs--it is not my intention, in other words, to produce a "Kristevan" reading of characters in the text such as Sailer attempts. Nor is it worthwhile, I think, to forget the differences among these writers, and others who work more directly with Joyce in a feminist context, even when bringing their ideas into play to support a different reading--as carefully as possible I have attempted to discuss those differences in the endmatter. What this chapter offers is "another" reading of feminine writing in the text, making connections to these other works when they seem most germane, but only to lay out the theoretical frame through which we may move on to a discussion of how the text allows for and problematizes its political reading.

Her untitled mamafesta

The catalogue of names for ALP's letter in I.5, her "untitled mamafesta," disrupts what Henke refers to as "the male logic" inherent in the process of naming by exaggerating that process, turning it into "babbling, carnivalesque play" (210). The list of names in one sense represents a gesture towards totalization, an effort by

ALP's sons, Shem and Shaun, to appropriate and master the body of the Mother by situating her in some context (the individual names contain allusions that range from literary to geographical to philosophical to mythological to personal), to place her in the *thetic* organization of the sign so that she might signify. At the same time that catalogue (as necessarily incomplete) shows the limit of this gesture. The passage questions the way language itself excludes totalization, by calling attention to that which always exceeds it in the form of the "pre-*thetic*" semiotic *chora*. For as the list of names approximates the letter, draws closer to it in an attempt to detail it, it also shows how language substitutes or stands in the place of the body of the Mother.

The desperate attempt to name suggests that "the archetypal patriarch," as Henke points out, "'the great Finnleader himself in his joakimono on his statue riding the high horse there forehengist' [FW 214.11-12], longs to inscribe his phallocratic signature onto the resistant body of a resilient Mother Earth" (James Joyce 210). The Wake as feminine writing collapses this "phallocratic" inscription through establishing a space for the name of the Mother, a name that precedes all others:

In the name of Annah the Allmaziful, the Everliving,
the Bringer of Plurabilities, haloed be her eve, her
singtime sung, her rill be run, unhemmed as it is

uneven!

Her untitled mamafesta memorialising the
Mosthighest has gone by many names at disjointed times
. . . (104)

By "scattering the seeds of male logic" (Henke, James Joyce
210),

the Wake writes itself in the wake of Anna's riverrun
. . . The meaning of the text resides in slippage--in
those symbolic gaps that deracinate language from
logical formulations and create a world of words that
indefinitely defers both meaning and closure. Anna's
letter is not merely part of the larger text, but a
microcosmic mamafesta that forms a nexus in the Wake's
linguistic unconscious. (210-11)

That "slippage" in language is apparent not only in the
frustrated attempt to name, to inscribe the name of the
Father on the space of the Mother, but also in the act of
divinely proclaiming the Mother's name. The reference to
"Annah the Allmaziful" serves to frame ALP's letter in the
context of Islam, echoing the Koran's "In the name of Allah,
the Merciful, the Compassionate." The gender-switching
implicit in the Wake's particular "twist" on the allusion
calls attention to another "slippage" insofar as it
undermines the authority of the "Word," guaranteed by
patriarchal authority (in the name of Allah).

In the parody of literary analysis that follows the

cataloguing of names in this chapter, manifested in the various attempts to open the letter and read its contents, Finnegans Wake foregrounds other examples of those "symbolic gaps that deracinate language from logical formulations" and which help characterize the text as feminine writing. The logical assumptions which support psychoanalysis, as Joyce reads it, also get parodied in this context in the attempt to read the letter with reference to the maternal body. With this in mind, it might be appropriate to look at certain passages which follow the catalogue of names in I.5 in the context of Luce Irigaray's reading of psychoanalysis in order to locate in the text what we might call feminine writing. Although the possibility for such writing remains suspect in the context of Irigaray's writing, her critique of psychoanalysis reminds us of the way "conceptualizing female sexuality within masculine parameters . . . cannot say anything about woman and her pleasure and cannot account for woman, for the 'dark continent,' and enacts a contradiction in relation to her" (Briganti and Davis, "Irigaray" 405). To this extent, we might more narrowly deploy her reading to suggest that the text in this instance "speaks" (as) woman, in a way more typically associated with feminine writing as the term gets applied in other feminist readings of the Wake drawing more from the theory of Kristeva and Cixous. The text itself offers analysis of the Letter as the manifestation (or

mamafestation) of a maternal *langue*, raising questions about the possibility that woman speaks through the letter, especially as that speech conflicts with the discursive scrutiny of analysis under the male gaze:

Some softnosed peruser might mayhem take it up
erogenously as the usual case of spoons, *prosituta*
in herba plus dinky pinks deliberately
summersaulting off her bisexycle, at the main
entrance of curate's perpetual soutane suit with her
one to see and awoh! who picks her up as gingerly as
any balmbearer would to feel whereupon the virgin was
most hurt and nicely asking: whyre have you been
so grace a mauling and where were you chaste me child?
Be who, farther potential? and so wider but we
grisly old Sykos who have done our unsmiling bit on
'alices, when they were yung and easily freudened, in
the penumbra of the procuring room and what oracular
comepression we have had apply to them! . . . (115.13-
24)

The relationship between the maternal body, or its inversion (as "virgin"), and the text of the letter is foregrounded in this passage, as is the desire to appropriate that body into the discourse of psychoanalysis. The preoccupation with the letter as "virginal" and with maintaining it as such makes apparent (at the same time) the obsession with violating the body of the text and the text of the body ("where were you

chaste me child?"). That maternal body and the maternal *langue* that it produces convey themselves through the letter as it is set in conflict with the male logic of psychoanalysis, by calling attention to the frame imposed on the maternal body in the familiar terms of a virgin/whore dichotomy.

Psychoanalysis, as Luce Irigaray points out, to the extent that it "does not see two sexes" (as it seems incapable of doing in the passage above), describes the "feminine" in terms of "deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex" (69). Insofar as the letter "speaks" the (m)other, in the context of this passage, it seems to ask, "Does this mean that woman's sexual evolution can never be characterized with reference to the female sex itself?"

Even as the letter is "capable of being stretched, filled out" (109.27), woman stretches to accommodate man, sexually and otherwise, "as governed by her longing for, jealousy of, and demand for, the male organ" (The Sex 69). She is a sheath, an envelope, waiting to be filled. The text here points to itself as both letter and envelope, confusing inside and outside, in the same way that female anatomy infolds at the site of the vaginal wall, never clearly inner or outer. This confusion enables the text to fill out/in the Letter, to sign it, as it asks a question: "Who in his heart doubts either that the facts of feminine

clothiering are there all the time or that the feminine fiction, stranger than the facts, is there also at the same time, only a little to the rere?" (109.30-33). Embedded in the portmanteau word is "clothier," suggesting the buying and selling of these feminine "facts," an economy of exchange in patriarchal language where those facts are hopelessly lost. But the "facts of feminine clothiering" would seem to suggest the power to (ad)dress oneself, a possibility for identity which precedes the space (nudity) that is filled. The desire for a prior identity is evoked in the opposition between feminine "fact" and "fiction." The "feminine fiction," juxtaposed against and even "stranger than the facts," calls attention to the Otherness associated with the body and serves to invert the hierarchical relationship between "fact" and "fiction," further complicating the difference between inside and outside, letter and envelope.

The location of the "feminine fiction" ("a little to the rere"), insofar as the context for the letter here hearkens back to the family of HCE and ALP at breakfast, as John Gordon points out (ALP's "mamafesta" is mother's feast [145]), also reminds us of the ulterior motives of the husband HCE, who prefers "'to close his blinkhard's eyes' to the 'enveloping facts,' abstracting a 'vision' of his wife as 'plump and plain in her natural altogether'" (Gordon 146). But the wordplay apparent in "rere" suggests the

possibility of an identity which precedes (*arrere* in French meaning "behind") the male gaze of HCE and the logic of identity which informs the desire leading to the question in the first place. The effect of the question itself, the uncertainty or ambiguity of its effect, whether it is rhetorical only (as HCE might intend it) or whether it demands a response which always exceeds the logic that informs the question, a response (of Otherness) that the question may never anticipate or fully allow for (as all questions contain elements of their proper or logical response), this uncertainty or doubleness "reveals" the Other, uncovers her "nakedness" to reveal her as already clothed, as capable of clothing herself.

Reversing the order of the letter's "delivery" by complicating the differences between certain oppositions associated with reading the letter (such as inside and outside), inverting the hierarchical relationship between feminine "fact" and "fiction" (and what it means to read the body in these terms), the text "uncovers" the female subject in her own "clothiering," calling attention to the way the female body is always already (ad)dressed, but also suggesting the presence of identity which precedes this moment; however, her "clothiering" may only be understood in terms that strip from her those "clothiering" in order to redress her. The problem with identifying the priority of the body, or the way that identity always depends on

recognizing other "clothing," the body (ad)dressed rather than undressed in its full presence, is one that I take up in Chapter 3. But understood in the context of this parody of psychoanalysis, the Wake seems to embody feminine writing, suggesting the possibility for a psychology of woman in which she is aware of her own body, an awareness never fully realized in Freudian psychology except as lack, or in terms of what is missing and what may only be recovered in relation to the phallus.¹⁸

Issy Writing the Letter

Insofar as the maternal body (understood in the context of Kristeva's theory of semiotics) speaks through ALP's letter, subverting the *thetic* force of patriarchal discourse which attempts to label and limit that body, Finnegans Wake embodies what we might call feminine writing. ALP's daughter Issy in III.2, as she writes a letter to herself, as she addresses herself in the mirror, but also responds to her brother Shaun in this exchange, suggests another context in which we might identify feminine writing and discuss the way sexual difference is figured in the Wake.

Issy's identity is figured perhaps exclusively in the context of her mirror-image, as disembodied; hence, her relation to language is problematic, as various critics have pointed out, especially if language is understood (as it is in Kristeva and Cixous) as necessarily involving an

awareness of the body (and bodily forces or desires, the *choric*) in the dynamics of language and the speaking subject. As Juliet Flower MacCannell suggests, drawing from Lacanian theory (certain assumptions of which play into conceptions of feminine writing),¹⁹ "Language delivers us not to life but to death, [sic] at least symbolically, it replaces the body" (xiii). This is not to say that Issy may not be figured in terms of her body. In fact, as Bonnie Kime Scott points out, "Many find Issy not just attractive, but a veritable temptress, and draw the perennial critical dichotomy of virgin vs. whore to describe the aspects of her personality" (185). If the time she spends in the mirror suggests some consciousness of her physical appearance, it is only insofar as she fits the role of the temptress. But to what extent may we read Issy's mirror-image as suggesting self-sufficiency, as somehow assuring the presence of the body to the speaking subject which is necessary to imagine the possibility of feminine writing?

Even if she addresses her mirror-image in the context of III.2, seemingly self-addresses the letter, her letter writing, as Claudine Raynaud points out,²⁰ also responds to Shaun's lesson, as it does in the studies chapter (II.2) when they would "conjugate together" (279.17-18): "I will pack my comb and mirror to praxis oval owes and artless awes and it will follow you pulpically" (458.35-36). If Issy addresses her "benjamin brother" here, asks him to "drawher

nearest" (457.26), she calls attention to her own subjectivity as already "drawn," to the way in which Shaun "draws" or figures her in response to male desire. "I want, girls palmassing, to whisper my wish" (457.30) she says, but her wish is spoken in a way that would evoke that desire, so that it is the *whisper*, more than the wish itself, that answers Shaun's "quickturned ear," only "sweet nunsongs" which fill it, and in turn are filled (in). Here, certain "culturally achieved conventions" ("Cixous" 162) associated with woman, evoked in the discourse of sentimentality ("sweet nothings"), always undermine that "bodily awareness" by calling attention to it as fantasy, culturally, textually constructed, as with Gertie's narrative in the "Nausicaa" episode of Ulysses. But the suggestion of "openness" implied in the "quickturned ear" also works to suggest Otherness, in this instance, Issy's awareness of her body's desire. It is that same breath which arouses Shaun in the "whispered wish" that also *embodies* Issy, suggesting Issy's own bodily awareness, always standing in opposition to the female body *projected* by male fantasy, the imagined site of desire that always evokes the Other's desire.

Mind your veronique

If Issy offers Shaun here a "lost moment's gift of memento nosepaper" (457.33-34), it is an exchange which

fails to occur insofar as this reminder or memo is only the letter, marked "X.X.X.X." (458.3), missing kisses, calling attention to the way Issy may never "sign" herself, but also marking the absence of the body in this exchange, insofar as it is never fully governed by Shaun. In this sense, these marks occupy her body, the space of desire, but not quite in the same way as the markings on Queequeg's hieroglyphic body in Melville's Moby Dick which Queequeg is unable to translate. Issy's signature, as it marks the site of the letter and the body, may also be understood as marking the desire of the Other as feminine writing.

The letter itself is transformed here, gets figured as a "veronique" (458.14), veronica, "a sprig of blue speedwell" (458.13-14), a pharmaceutical that is both poison and cure. In this sense, Shaun's identity is structured on his relation to his sister in that mirror-image and maintains itself by the repression of her image at the same time that the trace of the Other (that other image) threatens to collapse, to contaminate and poison, this patriarchal system of identity formation. The "veronique" is also a verónica, a pass in bullfighting in which the matador plants his feet while he swings the cape slowly away from the bull. Its reputation as the most beautiful pass makes an interesting point about the nature of reading and the rules that govern it. Here, Issy's "priceless" gift is one that has aesthetic value in opposition to all other

value systems, in the sense that "art" claims a fictional status "above" these systems. And the potential to "justify" that gift in terms relating to art, and its production, suggests the power to read/write "other" stories, works of fiction justified "for their own sake," or at least to the extent that they oppose other "justification," where what is right writes over and erases. The letter as "veronique" also alludes to the handkerchief St. Veronica handed Christ, which he returned with his face imprinted on it. Issy's gesture to offer herself up as a clean slate ("please to write," 458.18) may also serve to empower her. Raynaud calls attention to Issy's "ambivalent power to duplicate the image of the male" (323). This ambivalence, as Raynaud refers to it, asserts the priority of the image of the male, but also suggests the trace of female subjectivity figured in its own right, in relation to woman's body.

For Shaun, the letter is a "moment's gift" always "lost," or too late for Shaun the postman, who must deliver this missing letter (the site of Issy's body) as he continues his "longroutes for His Diligence Majesty" (457.23), the signifying organization governed by the Law of the Father. In this sense, it is Shaun who leaves the memo, writes the letter as he writes over the Other. As Raynaud writes, "Man, the writing master, will write to himself through the coached other, woman, the daughter, the sister,

the lover, the pupil (ideally they are all one)" (314). As in the correspondence between Swift and Stella that Raynaud discusses, in which language is made private to exclude outside interference, reduced to a kind of narcissism in order to maintain this tutor-pupil relationship and privilege that which the instructor may "toot toot" (457.22), Issy is still "much left to tutor" (458.2-3), an "absendee," never present to that which she sends or receives.

Issy's relation to her mirror-image here is the same as that between Shaun and his reflection. But that narcissism, as represented in the relationship between tutor and pupil, or "man, the writing master" and "woman, the letter writer" (418-419), only succeeds insofar as it resists outside interference, that which would disrupt male narcissistic identity. If Issy intended the "memento" for Shaun, then "Tizzy intercepted" it (457.27), suggesting an exchange which may preclude that which Shaun insists on throughout. He may "prize"/price her, but she falls outside that economy which would fix her, in socio-economic terms, but also fix her, pin down what is "too perfectly priceless for words" (458.6-7). Issy's ability to duplicate Shaun ("your lovely face of mine," 459.33-34), to tell him what he wants to hear, may be heard in her response to his demands for fealty, in the way she parodies herself and Shaun's desire for her:

. . . I'll strip straight after devotions before his
fondstare--and I mean it too, (thy gape to my gazing
I'll bind and makeleash) and poke stiff under my ison-
bound with my soiedisante chineknees cheeckchubby
chambermate for the night's foreign males and your
name of Shane will come forth between my shamefaced
whesen with other lipth I nakest open my thigh when
just woken by his toccatootletoo my first morning.

(461.21-28)

Issy's letter is figured in this passage as the inverted "reflection" of Shaun's desire in a parody of her sexual compliance; hence, her bodily awareness seems governed, as the reference to "chineknees" (Chinese) would suggest, by a patriarchal system of coercion and cruelty, apparent in the fashion of her attire as much as it is in her use of language. Her words merge with those of Shaun as he overcomes and expresses his desire for her. It is imposed on her through his gaze which works to shut off the power of her own ("thy gape to my gazing") and enclose the body ("I'll bind and makeleash"). Issy promises to speak "the name of Shane," that she will whisper his name when she is with "the night's foreign males." at the moment when Shaun's fears are the greatest that her desire will transgress its proper domain. But at the same time Issy calls attention to the difference "between" her face(s), the mirror image figured as male narcissism, and that image that exists

outside the moment when the letter is written, that Other sealed in the letter by "other liphth" as the possibility of feminine writing.

CHAPTER III:
ISSY, WRITING, THE LETTER:
SIGNING THE LETTER OTHERWISE

There are problems with "applying" the notion of feminine writing to the text of the Wake. One such problem is that its political effectiveness is undermined when feminine writing becomes caught up in a certain logic of identity involving the female body, even when characterized at the level of a "biopsychological dynamic" undermining and disrupting language, and even though its application or "recognition" is intended to question that very logic. It is a point that we must address if we are to understand the text as allowing for a political reading, and also one that will move us further towards an understanding of feminine writing as refiguring notions of political identity and agency.

Some feminist critics challenge the notion of feminine writing itself. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, claim that Joyce's writing is not feminist at all and raise questions about what it means that he portrays

woman writing with her body. In their essay "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality," they suggest that the Wake may be read as feminine writing. But for them, such a possibility becomes a dubious construct, especially in Joyce, who seems to represent it often as "a calligraphy of shit" (524), that "issues from the many obscene mouths of the female body" (523). Gilbert and Gubar situate Joyce in a "long masculinist tradition that identifies female anatomy with a degrading linguistic destiny" (523). Pointing to Joyce's letters to Nora and their scatological requests (for Nora to "'write the dirty words big . . . and hold them in under [her] dear little farting bum'" [540]), their argument stands as an important critique of feminine writing and Joyce's use of it. One may question, however, whether or not the reference to a "degrading . . . destiny" for women in Joyce is more a result of Gilbert and Gubar's "puritanism" rather than Joyce's sexism, since he always sees shit and urine as creative. Moreover, this creative aspect is a characteristic that Shem shares with Issy, making it less a quality of sexual identity and more a desire to subvert a certain kind of (male) logic.

Even though various critics write about Joyce and the Wake in relation to feminine writing, some endorsing the text as an example of such writing, others denying the possibility, and still others criticizing the notion of

feminine writing as politically effective, many of those critics fall into an essentialist trap when framing their discussion of Joyce's treatment of sexual difference in terms of a universal opposition. Even those most careful to problematize sexual difference as oppositional (such as those critics drawing from deconstruction) often base their argument on an appeal at some level to sexual difference as universal and as depending on essentialist characteristics.

As shown in the previous chapter, Finnegans Wake would seem to support a reading of feminine writing, but it always also raises questions about and problematizes identity, even in the context of a kind of feminism which depends on reading the text in a deconstructive way in order to question phallogentric logic in discourse and "reclaim" as Other the margins which such logic gives rise to. It is an issue that critics like Henke attempt to address by pointing to a certain bisexuality in Wakean discourse that escapes this problem of identity by radically refiguring it. Also, feminine writing, as Cixous has suggested about its possibility in discourse, is always deferred to some idealized future moment where such writing may occur in order to avoid the trappings of the logic of identity. Although the text seemingly supports either reading, it also points to another model of interpretation which, while necessarily depending on the logic of identity, refigures the "nature" of identity as a product of the active

participation in the text through a political reading. This model takes us back to the reading of Issy and her brother Shaun, but now in order to reemphasize the self-reflexive (and self-reflecting) relationship between Issy and her mirror image.

The enveloping facts

As we have seen, the text itself in I.5 suggests the possibility of feminine writing in the apparent undermining of the logic of identity as it informs the male gaze of psychoanalysis. But "examining" the letter in the context of the feminist reading offered in Chapter 2, however much that reading attempts to undermine the controlling gaze of psychoanalytic discourse (and by extension the male logic which informs all discourse), calls attention to feminine writing as reestablishing or depending upon a logic of identity in suggesting the Otherness of the letter and characterizing it in relation to the female body. Again, the move to establish identity is parodied in the discourse of literary analysis (and psychoanalysis) in the attempt to answer how the letter may be made to read (as feminine writing):

Closer inspection of the bordereau would reveal a multiplicity of personalities inflicted on the documents or document and some prevision of virtual crime or crimes might be made by anyone unwary enough

before any suitable occasion for it or them had so far managed to happen along. (107.23-38)

The letter may be inspected, drawn closer to, to elicit a sense of intentionality that, in order to identify feminine writing, must depend on a recognition of the female body as intending the letter. But the text calls attention to that recognition as "infecting" the letter; the "multiplicity of personalities" disallows this identity and creates a space or absence which opens up the letter, but giving rise only to substitutions, other personalities or identities. "In fact, under the closed eyes of the inspectors the traits featuring the chiaroscuro coalesce, their contrarities eliminated in one stable somebody. . ." (107.28-30). The inspectors may read the letter (even as we risk identifying feminine writing in the text), but only if they fail to see it, and fill the space already (dis)allowed by the multiplicity of the letter. The means of "curing" the letter is already "infected" with its disease, insofar as the medium or agent for both is language and through the logic of identity which enables meaning to occur in language.

The passage associates criminality with the letter, "some prevision of virtual crime or crimes"--"prevision" as provision, measures to correct the letter's infliction (its "multiplicity"), but also "prevision," transgression already part of the letter, before it is ever seen or failed to be

seen. This duplicity, a reading that corrects the letter and one that resists correction, is the law of the letter, the law that gets challenged by feminine writing, but also the same law which allows the possibility to imagine a feminine writing in the text in the first place.

The law inscribes the letter as "bordereau," but it is not the same letter--it requires different reading(s). It is "border," boundary; "eau," water in French; it is wine, "bordeaux," or water/wine, a reference to Christian transmutation. It is also "you," if spoken and Germanized. It is ALP as the river, as it is always the Other, that which always resists subjectivity. It is a memorandum, a reminder, a trace, that which asks not to be forgotten.²¹ But the sign(ing) that substitutes for and supplements the letter, marks presence to or identity with the letter, always at the same time adds to it, as the reading of feminine writing operates at some level according to the logic of identity. The signature necessary to guarantee the presence of something like feminine writing in the text, which depends on the trace of the body, always also retains the trace of difference which disallows the possibility of such writing; the trace draws attention to the *fiction* of the body established in feminine writing, to the way body as trope is only one substitution in a field of play in language. The text permits that trace to appear as Other (as feminine, as ALP's letter) but also makes it disappear

in the resigning of the letter, as it calls attention to the supplementarity of signature.²²

As the text names, titles, the "untitled," manifests (m)other ("mamafesta") in the letter, it also undermines the possibility of identification in "naming" the letter through a reading of feminine writing in the text by calling attention to the reading that enables that identity. As it names, it "signs" (over) the letter. In this sense, reading becomes the site of signature, the inscription of one who reads and signs the letter otherwise. But this signing otherwise which enables a political reading of the text as Other, always effaces itself and the one who signs. A signature, for Derrida, "is tethered to the source" as "the pure reproducibility of a pure event" ("Signature" 20). It is "the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form" that assures "presentness," identity, proper identification. But a signature must always already be written if it is readable, recognizable. In this sense, it is never present, identical, only duplicated. "It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal" (20).

Issy, Writing, the Letter

In light of this problem of identifying feminine writing in the text, another strategy with which critics like Suzette Henke have attempted to read the text is by

suggesting that language and meaning may be refigured in Finnegans Wake in terms of bisexuality. The possibility of achieving

A "nonphallogocentric" language that refuses to ascribe univocal truth-value to a single work, phrase, sentence, or proposition need not be either "vaginocentric" or "uterocentric." It could embrace, instead, an anarchic and polymorphous model structured around the bisexual organization of the psyche originally posited by Freud.²³ (38)

It is a suggestion that figures into Cixous' insistence, as Diane Elam points out, that "bisexuality is a notion meant to call attention to the multiplicity of possible sites for desire and pleasure" (245). In this sense, the multiplicity of personalities apparent in the letter in the passage above might suggest precisely the multiple sites of desire and pleasure characteristic of "woman's instinctual economy" that "cannot be identified by man or referred to the masculine economy" (Newly 82). But in the context of the Wake, this bisexuality is called attention to in terms other than multiplicity or excess of desire and pleasure. The text also holds this bisexuality in tension in order to point towards an understanding of political agency behind a given reading which always produces such a reading of bisexuality and of feminine writing.

Such tension is apparent in the complex triangle of

desire involving Shaun's relationship with his sister Issy and Issy's with her mirror-image, the latter always exceeding the incestuous and heterosexual desire apparent in Shaun's sexual preoccupation with his sister by conflating and confusing the two. But the possibility (as suggested at the end of Chapter 2) that this mirror-image points to a female sexuality that, as Irigiray writes, "through the pleasure of the 'body'--of the Other? . . . might articulate something" (100) is made problematic insofar as such "articulation" is the result of Shaun's lesson in the form of a list of prohibitions, what Issy and the schoolgirls are "never to." Sexual in nature, many of them place restrictions on whom the girls may "collide with" (433.32). He is careful to keep them from self-awareness in the form of self-gratification: "Never let the promising hand use make free of your oncemaid sacral. The soft side of the axe! A coil of cord, a colleen coy, a blush on a bush turned first man's laughter into wailful moither" (433.27-30). The "first man" hearkens back to Adam, and his downfall after Eve's sampling of forbidden fruit, while identifying him with phallogocentric logic that always compromises the possibility of the Other ever speaking.

Part of the interdiction here is for the girls to keep out of Shaun's sight, to avoid temptation. But it is Shaun who stands to be tempted:

First thou shalt not smile. Twice thou shalt not

love. Lust, thou shalt not commix idolatry. Hip
confiners help compunction. Never park your brief
stays in the men's convenience. Never clean your
buttoncups with your dirty pair of sassers. Never
ask his first person where's your quickest cut to
our last place. (433.22-27)

Shaun instructs Issy not to smile, not to love, and in the
"last" commandment, also addresses her as "Lust," drawing
more attention to his own (how she is *his* lust) than any she
might be "guilty" of. Shaun reveals his desire at the
moment his discourse "uncovers" that which he would have
Issy "conceal."

His desire to protect her is the desire to possess her,
that she "have no other gods before him," but rather only
"commix" with him. If his commandments work to remove her
from an exchange economy in which women are valued as
commodity, in terms of worth in marriage, they are only
intended half-heartedly: "Collide with man, collude with
money" (433.32-33). Shaun seems to desire to take her out
of this exchange economy and situate her in a private one in
which he alone assigns value: "Ere you sail foreget my
prize" (433.33) It is a move, however, that always disrupts
privacy and reestablishes that exchange economy, always
reinscribing Issy as commodity. Issy should forgo others,
and let her brother "pri(c)e" her as he will, but the
anxiety apparent in his command suggests the inability to

maintain Issy within either private economy (governed by male desire) or public discourse (comprised in language).

But Issy speaks with "other lipth," speaks (for) the Other, and asks to be heard: "I understand but listen" (457.26). The need to defer this speech to a future moment, and the possibility of ever listening to the Other, is necessary to avoid enclosing feminine writing in the male logic of identity. Cixous's conception of *écriture féminine* depends on her imagining a future condition which would allow such writing to occur. As with her discussion of a *langue maternelle*, Briganti and Davis write,

she speaks in the future tense: she sets out, not to say what it is, but to speak "about *what it will do*."

. . . The exclusion of women from writing (and speaking) is linked to the fact that the Western history of writing is synonymous with the history of reasoning and with the separation of the body from the text. The body entering the text disrupts the masculine economy of superimposed linearity and tyranny: the feminine is the "overflow" of "luminous torrents." . . . ("Cixous" 162-63)

This emphasis on body and text as feminine writing, or as *langue maternelle* in a different context, is an attempt to get back to a pre-Oedipal stage, in Freudian/Lacanian terms, that precedes language as informed by patriarchy. Cixous is careful to avoid claiming such writing for the present, as

implied in her use of future tenses to characterize it, in order to maintain it as incapable of being "theorized or defined, enclosed or encoded" (Elam 243).

Cixous's strategy of hesitation in not claiming it as "theory" might be refigured here, as the Wake calls attention to it, to suggest the active participation in the text that arises from Issy's reading of herself in the mirror. Issy's reflection in the mirror reminds us of the self-reflexivity necessary in accounting for her relationship to the particular reading of history that Shaun's series of prohibitions would seem to call attention to (from the "first man" on). But that awareness of history only arises through Issy's reading of herself, even though that reading always follows Shaun's lesson, always listens to and responds in accordance with that lesson (and the logic of identity that it reveals as necessary). By calling attention to the limits of feminine writing as Issy embodies it, the Wake reminds us of the political force inherent in the reading of feminine writing by calling attention to the active participation in the text by the reader. This self-reflexive reading always depends on positing identity which can never be assured, always only makes substitutions in the field of language; but the Wake offers a model here for political reading which leads to the rewriting of the history of "prohibitions" (insofar as that history is the product of another reading), apparent as Shaun recalls the

way he used to teach Issy and how she "used to write to us the exceeding nice letters for presentation" while at the same time he feels "so narrated by thou" (431.33).

In this sense, the voice that emerges belongs to the body (with its lisp, with "other lipth"); but more than a fiction of the body, Issy's self-reflexive reading also reminds us that the body is a necessary fiction. If Issy's orgasm here ("ah ah ah ah. . . ." 461.32) is completed by/with Shaun ("--MEN"), it also speaks for her, in the sense that she has created a context here where she may play by Shaun's rules and her own as well, complete with an awareness of her body that Shaun forbids. Because the Other may never be fixed, always regresses as the questions which frame it open up to other questions, there is a certain imperative to answer the question, to listen for the Other and make it speak, with a certain self-reflexivity that always potentially undermines that reading/writing. It is this aggressive reading only that may ever answer (for) Issy, make her master writer in her own right, as Shaun finally acknowledges. For as his and Issy's mutual orgasms combine to form an "ah-MEN," *truly*, this truth is inherently ambiguous, always depends on the way it is read, or inflected outside the text with the reader's voice, always *embodied*, existing in an historical moment.

Hence, "ah ah ah ah. . . .--MEN" may be read *differently* in the way we say it, no longer as phallogentric

assertion with its claim to full presence without margins. Shaun now assumes Issy's voice in the moment they both assume our own. The strategy of hesitation, as Cixous might read it, apparent in the stuttering quality of this proclamation, is called attention to as a product of political reading that always hesitates. But at the same time, the subject reading also always risks narrative proclamation in the act of reading the subject in history, reading history "itself," and rereading the "truth" as history represents it. Amen.

CHAPTER IV
TRACING OTHER OTHERS:
SIGNING THE LETTER OVER

Post-L(et)teral Reading

Always asking about the letter afterwards, the Wake reads itself, calling attention to the reader's role in actively producing meaning in the text. In my reading of feminine writing in the previous chapters, the text points to the impossibility of ever reading the body (and making the political claim for identity that accompanies such a reading)--unless we begin to understand the activity of reading as a kind of writing: "What can't be coded can be decoded if an ear aye sieze what no eye ere grieved for" (482.34-36). In this textual system of coding and decoding, the "ear aye" sees, listens to what it reads; but the sense of immediacy or presence in that code, as governed by the ear and the eye, by vision and voice, is already deferred, decoded, as a (re)co(r)ding, always after the fact. That which would guarantee the presence of meaning in the system, affirm it forever (the archaic "aye" as "yes" and "always") as an identity, and reading as identification, is only a

decording, a message intended to repeat that only unravels, comes apart.

The Wake models a reading which allows for this desire to recover (record, decode) "what can't be coded" in terms other than a nostalgic regard for origin(s), "what no eye ere grieved for," missing presence. Because what is missing is always missing from language--with this deconstructive awareness of difference and its effect on identity politics, Finnegans Wake seems to refigure interpretive agency by attributing to the subject reading the necessary power of writing over the text. In this sense, the subject is always missing, always complicit in centering the text and arresting meaning in reading.²⁴ Because "if an ear eye sieze," seizes control of the text, then reading may be understood as the product of those political forces which comprise the subject in a given historical moment, as always attempting to right the text as it writes over it. This self-reflexive reading of history undermines the subject's assumed relationship to history based on an immediacy in seeing, disrupts it with something more, an excess that the subject may attempt to govern by reading his or her own political context. "The raiding there originally" (482.32), the reading there originally, is the site of writing.

"The four," Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who represent the "single" voice of authoritative interpretation throughout the text, as "mamalujo," are not concerned with

"what can't be coded," nor is Shaun (the postman, who is set in opposition to his brother Shem, the penman). But it is Shaun whom the four attempt to deco(r)d(e): "I will let me take it upon myself to suggest to twist the penman's tale posterwise" (483.1-3). Their "strong suspicion" here that Shaun is not who he says he is (a lurking distrust throughout the text that always undermines Shaun's competence to deliver the "message," the letter), turns back on the four, as their voices become confused, not only with one another, but with the one they accuse here, as well as all the other "major characters" in the Wake. This suspicion empowers the act of reading, and enables the four (and Shaun) to "twist" the text, in order to "post" it where they will. The letter is signed (over), as it is read. So it is written.

Reading this "book of kills" (482.33), then, with a kind of radical suspicion that extends not only to the text but to the critic reading/writing as well, becomes in effect an act of suicide.²⁵ In the same way, the four's suspicion of Shaun's authenticity is articulated in a voice already contaminated with the same uncertainty that leads to their indictment of Shaun. This uncertainty of voice, and the death of the reader that it implies, however, also revives the reader, insofar reading actively produces meaning in the text, just as the "book of kells" implies the possibility for resurrection.²⁶

How do you figure?

Reading as a moment of identification is valued in Finnegans Wake insofar as it may call attention to what is left out of that identity, but also because it may speak (for) Otherness as it risks claiming political identity. In contrast, the kind of reading that would posit the letter as simple metaphor, where what the letter signifies has a one-to-one correspondence with the letter itself, is never possible, as there are no grounds upon which to locate the actual difference between the "figural" (metaphor) and "literal" (that which metaphor *means*). Language in the Wake is always rhetorical, figural.²⁷ Stephen Heath questions the force of rhetoric in Joyce's work and the reading that would identify it: "According to what criteria are any particular elements to be identified as metaphors in a text in which every element refers to another, perpetually deferring meaning?" (41) The Wake poses in itself "a critical self-reflection and it is precisely this reflexiveness on which rhetoric can have no hold." It is this power of self-reflection, however, in the text, but also in the reader, that may be productive (rather than metaphorically reproductive) in reading and writing.

Julia Kristeva discusses this productivity in reading as a kind of violence. She traces the etymology of "to read" back to the Ancients and applies its meaning(s) to literary practice. "To read" was also "to pluck," "to

recognize traces," "to steal." She writes: "'To read' thus denotes an aggressive participation, an active appropriation of the other. 'To write' would be 'to read' become production, industry: writing-reading, paragrammatic activity, would be the aspiration towards a total aggressiveness and participation" (Semiotiké 181). Hence, reading always writes the letter, always writes over the text at the very moment it would identify what lies behind it, what might be understood as sealed in the envelope. And so it is the female body, in our reading of feminine writing, that is the envelope written over. But still (in this sense of "signing over") the letter "arrives," in a quite everyday looking stamped addressed envelope. Admittedly it is an outer husk: its face, in all its featureful perfection of imperfection, is its fortune: it exhibits only the civil or military clothing of whatever passion pallid nudity or plaguepurple nakedness may happen to tuck itself under its flap.

(109.7-12)

The envelope is the letter insofar as it contains the letter. Reading the letter depends on being able to "open" it, the envelope, metaphorically, the letter. But the envelope is always apart from the letter, as an "outer husk," something separable, as standing for, metonymically, the letter. The law of the letter (its "civil or military clothing") (ad)resses the envelope, metaphorically, fills

the letter ("to tuck itself under its flap"), and at the same time, metonymically, only writes over the letter (on the envelope).

"Nakedness" must be covered. The (ad)ressing here, the signing of the letter, is on the line that divides the letter from itself. The reading of the letter as signed (as a reading present to the letter) and the reading of the letter as signed over (as it is supplemented, read on to), instead of cancelling each other out, may be written at the same time, signed with another name, the name of the Other.

Reading, understood as writing over, arises from the impossibility of ever distinguishing between the literal and the figural, from the awareness that there might only be the envelope forever posted or deferred and always different from itself. A productive reading of the letter and the Wake may hope to confound the distinction between literal and figural in the way it figures (or writes) the difference differently. In the first place, then, the Wake posts the letter. If not an origin, this "first place" is at least the place to begin reading, as our political reading of feminine writing illustrates. There is an audacity implied here, one that this text claims to find in the Wake, to rewrite, not what is original, but what is already written. Reading amounts to "stealing" the text, taking it over, in order to participate in Joyce's own rewriting of history,

language, the subject, to show what gets left out of their traditional representation, to explore the limits of our metaphorical, metaphysical, and political understanding of these "texts" as readers.

Tracing Other Others

With this sense of political productivity associated with reading, we might return to the question of feminine writing in an attempt to address certain questions as they comprise our own historical context insofar as we may read it (and as it pertains specifically to the context of issues in literary theory). Among those problems associated with feminine writing, many of which are called attention to by critics like Cixous, and others which crop up inadvertently, there are problems with applying Kristeva's theory of the body to the text in order to identify feminine writing, as she herself argues:²⁸

. . . does not the struggle against the 'phallic sign' and against the whole mono-logic, monotheistic culture which supports itself on it, sink into an essentialist cult of *Woman*, into a hysterical obsession with the neutralizing cave, a fantasy arising precisely as the negative imprint of the maternal phallus? . . . In other words, if the feminine *exists*, it only exists in the order of the signifiante or signifying process, and it is only in relation to meaning and signification,

positioned as their excessive or transgressive other that it *exists, speaks, thinks* (itself) and *writes* (itself) for both sexes. (qtd. in Moi 11)

The danger for feminism, as Kristeva implies, and as a critic like Teresa de Lauretis points out more explicitly, is that sexual difference is defined "within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition" (2). But this does not preclude the effectiveness of such oppositional thinking, however essentialist it runs the risk of becoming. It is a point that the Wake calls attention to as it reads femininity, while at the same time reading the critic reading femininity. As Patrick McGee points out, "Sexual difference may not be representable as essence, but there are certainly historical markers or signs of gender" (423). The space which locates these "historical markers" is always called attention to in the text in relation to the critic who must read them, identify them as such, in the context of our discussion, as "signs of gender." It is in this sense that the Wake offers a paradigm for reading and interpretation:

The revolutionary effect of Joyce's work is not immanent but institutional: it emerges from within the discourse of feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and so forth. Joyce is the effect of historical processes, but those processes do not come to a halt with the completion of his work. His

authority and value are reconstituted, and sometimes deconstituted, in different critical arenas to produce uneven and heterogeneous effects.²⁹ (425)

Even though the notion of feminine writing has been used with reference to Joyce's writing, my reading not only identifies feminine writing in the text but also accounts for the way the text calls attention to the critic's role in identifying such writing. In this sense, the presence of the female body necessary to guarantee something like feminine writing in the text is a *fiction* of the body. It is the critic's own political productivity, in the act of asserting that identity, which enables a reading of feminine writing; the critic *signs* in the place of the body to read the Wake as feminine writing (as the Letter embodies it), but at the same time, insists on a qualifying awareness of the theoretical construct of feminine writing in order to allow for differences over time and from one culture to the next (as opposed to organizing sexual difference as universal). That moment of identification becomes a political move that the Wake inscribes, always referring outside itself to the historical and political context of the reader.

As McGee sums up the arguments of de Lauretis and Spivak and others who "question the concept of 'sexual difference' itself" (424) and, in turn, raise questions about the political effectiveness of feminist discourse,

"The point is not really to abolish sexual difference as a critical category but to historicize it." It is in this sense that the Wake models the act of reading as political allegory, making use of, undermining, and then reinscribing, the notion of feminine writing.

Reading as writing, in this sense, always takes shape, sets margins, but calls attention to those margins, instead of seizing control of language (a kind of "required reading"). The "penman's tale," the letter posted, may be read as subjectivity, to the extent that the letter serves as a trope for subjectivity, always reading itself, as it reads others. Figuring the subject, shaping identity, is governed by the Law of the Father, the law of "the letter" (reading/writing), but never completely. For Jean-Michel Rabaté, "It is in woman's lap that the dream of the contradictory (hi)stories performed by man in periodic times occurs and recurs...she does not produce (hi)stories (like the Father) but matter: she spreads signifiers." "The whole problem" is for the Father to "geometrize her, master her, by making her a sex, a triangle, or her pure function, that is, to be THE mother" (95), "The Gran Geamatron" (FW 257.05).

But as she spreads signifiers, the "Gran Geamatron" suggests a model for another geometry of reading, even as this model calls attention to its relation (as matronly) to the Law. That is, she may simply tell stories, but they are

(his)stories, also. But they are (her)stories, also. This power to retell is the power to sign (over); a geametry of reading resides in the (as)sign(ing) which transgresses the Law of the Father, of "the letter" (as always posted, addressed afterwards). This transgression is part of its interdiction. For Derrida, "the signature does not come after the law, it is the divided act of the law: revenge, resentment, reprisal, revendication as signature" (158). It is always "a counter-signature, it confirms and contradicts, effaces by subscribing." As it reads, as we read it, the Wake celebrates the power to sign (the Other), to sign (otherwise), to sign (over).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

POSTAL SYSTEMS: THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE TEXT

Reading the Wake always returns the reader to the material body in history, the body politicized, and the critic's role in creating that reading of the body. The Letter as the site of interpretation, as we have situated it in the context of certain pressing critical questions, brings our attention to the way deconstruction has been perceived as disallowing the possibility of "identity politics." In this concluding chapter I want to discuss more fully the way deconstruction might be used to activate a political reading by questioning the notion of identity and political agency. The reading of feminine writing in the preceding chapters might be understood as moving towards a different understanding of agency involved in the act of reading, an understanding that does not so much question the political effectiveness of feminine writing, but points to its effectiveness in terms of the subject reading and writing over the text. Finally, the last section looks at the ways in which the text itself attempts to govern agency

in the act of reading by modelling certain emotional responses. By engaging Derrida's reading of the Wake, it is possible to identify the ways in which deconstruction necessarily gives rise to a political critique through the mixed response of laughter and violence and bringing both to any reading of the text.

In the Wake of Deconstruction³⁰

As has become a commonplace, deconstruction is understood as working against essentialist definitions of self. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck point out, "In deconstruction, identity has no priority or authority; subjectivity is the inevitable aftermath of a play of cultural forces; it never precedes, but is only constituted in language" (qtd. in Johnson 28). The Wake raises serious questions about the nature of interpretive agency, especially that which establishes itself as "essential" in some way, whether grounded in myth or in political identity.

By calling attention to the inadequacy of linear interpretation in either context above, the Wake would seem to alter the terms of this linear model where reading is understood as grounding authority outside the text. The linear model seemingly endorsed by the text suggests the need to refigure the "outside" in such a way that it is viewed as product of the critic's own political context. The reader's role understood as politically productive may

direct the reader to consider Joyce's own historical and cultural context, or the conceptions of femininity (and masculinity) that that context gives rise to, as well as to ask questions about the current critical context in which the critic finds himself or herself and the usefulness of certain theoretical and political constructs as they shift or as conversation and dialogue modify them over time.

By allegorizing both its writer and reader (an allegory understood as the product of a given political reading), the Letter as site of writing enacts the death of the writer by offering the possibility of multiple authorships, always resisting the identification of a single author. At the same time, the reader's role in recognizing context by identifying authorship (to make the text "readable") is foregrounded as a move with political significance, insofar as it requires the reader to exert control over the text at the moment he or she establishes context and limits authorship.

The roles of both reader and writer may be understood as allegorical in this sense, since both depend on an understanding of identity that is always provisional as "non-presence," never the result of textual immanence or the product of complete self-awareness in the act of reading. Such allegorizing raises questions about the historical reality that deconstruction is perceived as disallowing. As Barbara Johnson argues, the problem with

the "close reading" of deconstruction that "urges a suspension of projection and resolution out of respect for the otherness of the text" is that it "absolutizes the text's authority and frame of reference and reduces the reader to a neutral, impersonal, 'objective' function of textual structures" (31). Further,

While the 'close reading' de Man recommends is an act of respect for, and receptiveness to, the text itself, it cannot give access to what the text denies, excludes, or distorts. While not hiding one's non-knowledge may be a way of avoiding projection, treating the text as all-knowing disregards the ways in which the text's blindness may be historical and political rather than structural and essential. (36)

Deconstruction, as Johnson points out, "neutralizes the ways in which the text and the reader are both participants in a field of struggle. But it does bring out the ways in which such struggles take place as much among personifications as among persons." This tension between personifications (as confined to textual device) and persons (the author, critic, the reader and writer in an historical context), a tension that deconstruction always maintains, is necessary to reading the Wake.³¹ It reminds us of the way identity has no "priority or authority," but at the same time calls attention to those "cultural forces" which comprise identity insofar as we may identify them. To the extent that

deconstruction takes us "outside the text," at the moment that reading refuses to "absolutize" the text as "all-knowing" (as occurs in Johnson's reading of de Man), then the critic is brought back into history and politics, to a discussion of the historical and political significance of the author's relationship to the text, and the critic's role in interpreting that relationship. My own reading of the Letter and feminine writing as political allegory illustrates this self-reflexive movement which accounts for the desire to reckon with the text (and the world inscribed in the text) in political terms. Lastly, in order to account for that which gives rise to the desire to interpret the text (and the world) in political terms, it is necessary to consider the attitudes towards reading implicit or explicit in several interpretive systems, including deconstruction and feminism, and compare them to those "postal systems"³² that we find in the Wake.

Postal Systems: Laughter and Violence

Over the course of my reading, implied in the movement towards a reading of feminine writing as political allegory are seemingly conflicting critical attitudes or emotional responses that are treated thematically in different passages in Finnegans Wake. As various critics have suggested, interpretation often evokes a response of laughter similar to that which ends II.1 ("Ha he hi ho hu.

Mummum.") and which occurs in the context of a parody of Biblical writing. Such laughter calls attention to and undermines the possibility of interpreting the text (as sacred) and the authority necessary for such interpretation. But that laughter also suggests interpretive violence, insofar as it reminds the critic of the way in which his or her reading of the text "writes" over the text itself (but not as a politically empowering move as in our reading of feminine writing). These different critical responses, one associated with laughter, the other marked by a kind of violence, attempt to draw from or mirror textual responses that echo throughout the Letter and its interpretation. It is in the play of differences in critical attitudes and emotional responses to the text that the Letter provides a model of reading, one that addresses the conflict between deconstruction and political activism.

In the first instance, laughter is characteristic of the Kristevan response to the text, as Sailer points out: "For Kristeva laughter is the means by which the speaking subject escapes the control of social prohibitions; it is the product of an impossible contradiction between the force of the instinctual drive and the demands of the social/cultural order" (30). This reaction is not unlike that which is evident in various post-structuralist readings in which the critic celebrates the freeplay of language, more or less following what he or she perceives to be

Joyce's own cue in the text, and reacts to the Wake with laughter--reading the Wake becomes a celebration of the freeplay of language and of interpretation.

Laughter understood in this sense implies another attitude or response to the text, one involving violence. Just as the thetic and the chora interact, one overturning the other, both in conflict, laughter violently enacts a kind of escape, although that escape is never fully allowed as Kristeva discusses it. For a critic such as Suzette Henke, violence is figured differently from that which Kristeva suggests, more explicitly in terms of gender. The Wake demonstrates violence thematically, through its dependence on the maternal (through ALP, as vitalizing force) to enact "the world of art" which

might, in some sense, be interpreted as a magnificent couvade, a hymn by the male artist to those feminine creative powers that man can only imitate through art or war--through a poetic reshaping of the material world or by aggressive conflict that asserts a phallogocentric will to power in grandiose acts of conquest and destruction. (165)

In this instance the violence which charges so many of the episodes and relationships among characters in the text exemplifies both the violence necessary to maintain patriarchal control ("awethorrorty" [516.19], as Henke reminds us) and the force of feminine difference which

undermines it, calls attention to it as illusory (but not without "real" historical/cultural and situational consequences).

Other critics, such as Jacques Derrida, call attention to the violence inherent in reading, in the act of interpretation itself, insofar as it involves limiting the freeplay of meaning in the text. Joyce's laughter, which Derrida finds echoing throughout the text, is directed at the God of Babel (in the context of the end of II.1) who requires interpretation but forbids it at the same time. The critic's role (as Derrida implies) would seem to require that he or she remain posed on the brink of a "beyond" that Joyce's laughter marks out the space for, a "beyond" in which it is impossible to decide if the text is still "calculable," beyond even "the world of calculation" (158). It is a "beyond" similar to that which Cixous marks with feminine writing, one which echoes with laughter. But the difference lies in Derrida's doubts about what it means to announce that "beyond" politically, which depends on a sense of political identity as implied in Cixous' feminine writing. In order to engage these different attitudes towards political identity and attempt to reconcile them, I want to consider Derrida's essay more closely by examining the assumptions he makes about interpretation, the different ways of responding to the text, and how the text inscribes those responses.

Two Words for Derrida

In "Two Words for Joyce" Derrida asks about the "essence of laughter" and what we may learn about it from reading the Wake (157). His reading addresses the violence associated with the act of interpretation as implied in two words, "He war" (258.12), but also attempts to account for the laughter which resonates through the text and how the critic should respond to that laughter or if any response is possible. Derrida discusses the problem of interpretation in Finnegans Wake in terms of the law of language, characterized as God's law in the context surrounding those two words, that both requires interpretation and makes interpretation impossible.

In the landscape immediately surrounding the "he war," we are, if such a present is possible, and this place, at Babel; at the moment when YAHWEH declares war, HE WAR (exchange of the final R and the central H in the anagram's throat), and punishes the Shem, those who, according to Genesis, declare their intention of building the tower in order to make a name for themselves. Now they bear the name 'name' (Shem). And the Lord, the Most High, be he blessed (*Lord, loud, laud . . .*), declares war on them by interrupting the construction of the tower, he deconstructs by speaking the vocable of his choice, the name of confusion, which in the hearing, could be confused with

a word indeed signifying 'confusion.' Once this war is declared, he was it (war) by being himself this act of war which consisted in declaring, as he did, that he was the one he was (war). (153-54)

Violence, spoken in the declaration of YAHWEH, marks a condition of language, directed at those who would name, make a name for themselves. And in that declaration, in which God announces identity (as YAHWEH, "He was") that is always different (as "he war"), the activity of translation is marked by a violence, implicit in the act of declaring identity, which makes translation impossible, as a move towards reclaiming identity (which is always already different): "The God of fire assigns to the Shem the necessary, fatal and impossible translation of his name, of the vocable with which he signs his act of war, of himself" (154).

Derrida's reading of laughter in the text is figured in one sense as God's laughter. For Derrida, that laughter is directed at the reader who tries to interpret the Wake. God's signature, as that which enacts the law, does not quite precede the law, because the God of Babel had already tortured his own signature; he was this torment:

resentment a *priori* with respect to any possible translator. I order you and forbid you to translate me, to interfere with my name, to give a body of writing to its vocalization. And through this double

command he signs. The signature does not come after the law, it is the divided act of the law: revenge, resentment, reprisal, revendication as signature.

(158)

Derrida uses "resentment" in the opening passages to describe his own reaction to Joyce's text as a kind of "admiring resentment" (148), which keeps the reader, as Derrida points out, forever only "on the edge of reading Joyce." This emotional response to the text becomes in the passage above a kind of resentment that suggests a condition of reading, *a priori*, insofar as it marks the activity of translation by both requiring and forbidding the possibility of translation. In this respect we may think of it as one of several "non-synonymous substitutions" that Derrida writes about, including differance, supplementarity, or trace.

But Derrida also recognizes laughter in the text that is Joyce's own, directed at God, who enacted the law. Insofar as we may talk about the way laughter is embraced in the texts of critics writing about the text, as the possibility of freeplay in interpretation, it becomes more difficult to identify the way laughter signifies in Joyce, in Joyce's text. Derrida suggests as much in that he argues "everything is played out between the different tonalities of laughter, in the subtle difference which passes between several qualities of laughter" (146). The play between

"different tonalities" allows Derrida to suggest the possibility of Joyce's own laughter. Rather than the text simply enacting the laughter of a God who requires and forbids the text's translation, Derrida "hears" the possibility of other laughter, that which allows Joyce a kind of "revenge with respect to the God of Babel" (158). "This is art," Derrida argues, "the space given for [Joyce's] signature made into the work" (158). Even though that signature is always "countersigned" by God, there is always Joyce's own signature, and a "laugh down low of the signature." Derrida risks the identification of Joyce's laughter, of his signature, risks it insofar as God's laughter always forbids that identification, always divides signature. For Derrida, laughter "traverses the whole of Finnegans Wake, thus not letting itself be reduced to any of the other modalities, apprehensions, affections, whatever their richness, their heterogeneity, their overdetermination" (157). What is "calculable," as Derrida refers to it, is

outplayed by a writing about which it is no longer possible to decide if it still calculates, calculates better and more, or if it transcends the very order of calculable economy, or even of an incalculable or an undecidable which would still be homogeneous with the world of calculation. (158)

But there is a "certain quality of laughter" which "would

supply something like the affect (but this word itself remains to be determined) to this beyond of calculation, and of all calculable literature" (158). This "beyond" is prayed for in the language of the text. "It is perhaps (perhaps) this quality of laughter, and none other, which resounds, very loud or very soft, I don't know, through the prayer which immediately precedes the 'Ha he hi ho hu. Mummum.' at the end."

Derrida's language here, only tentatively announcing this "beyond" with a "perhaps (perhaps)," is necessary, in one sense, to maintain the space of an "escape" from the order of "an incalculable or an undecidable which would still be homogeneous with the world of calculation." This "beyond" points to what lies outside "signature" (as identity) through "prayer and laughter," both of which "absolve perhaps the pain of signature, the act of war with which everything will have begun" (158). There is a last word:

He war, it's a counter-signature, it confirms and contradicts, effaces by subscribing. It says 'we' and 'yes' in the end to the Father or to the Lord who speaks loud, there is scarcely anyone but Him, but it leaves the last word to the woman who in her turn will have said 'we' and 'yes.'

Joyce's laughter is feminine in the way the woman, for Derrida, has "the last word" (158), a last laugh that

suggests the possibility of a "beyond," not only beyond sense, what is "calculable," but also the order which makes the distinction between calculable and incalculable possible.

But Derrida's language here, charged with personal and emotional response to the text, also points to another model, one different than that which Derrida (perhaps) explicitly suggests, for understanding the critic's relationship to the text, the activity of interpretation, and the nature of these conflicting responses to the text implied in laughter and violence. Derrida's reading begins by focusing on a personal and emotional reaction to the experience of reading Finnegans Wake, and returns to such response, insofar as prayer evokes, at the same time, agency and hopefulness. (Prayer also suggests the power of enacting something.) The temptation might be to read such personal response to Joyce as symptomatic of feeling threatened: "I'm not sure I like Joyce . . ."; "One can admire the power of a work and have, as they say, a bad relationship with its signatory . . ."; "I've never dared to write on Joyce . . ." "Who can pride himself on having 'read' Joyce?" Although, in the last instance, Derrida means to suggest the problem with referring to the writer in place of his work, as if reading had access to intentionality and meaning in that way. But the question implies more than simply "the admiring resentment" that

Derrida points to in his own response and from which he later detaches himself when he discusses "resentment" as a condition of reading *a priori*. In a sense, Derrida indicts himself when he writes about Shem's punishment for trying to make a name for himself. Derrida's reaction here might be tinged with the awareness that Joyce has "bypassed" precisely that double bind which Derrida finds himself in insofar as his writing is philosophical discourse (with the exception of La Carte Postale, which he calls attention to repeatedly in this essay), limited by its very structure in its capacity to announce the "beyond" that he finds in Joyce's laughter. The fact that there is no room in the text for Derrida's reading gives rise to this resentment; Joyce declares war on any reading that moves towards the calculable reduction to "modalities," even as that occurs in the recognition of that which Derrida calls resentment *a priori*, because that resentment might very well have its origin elsewhere in what Derrida leaves unspoken in the personal response to Joyce with which he begins. In this sense, Joyce's laughter is directed at Derrida, insofar as Derrida may never announce in the same way that "beyond" suggested in Joyce's laughter.

Derrida implies a certain role for the critic, who should recognize the way interpretation is necessarily divided against itself, incapable of speaking about the text, and at best, only on the verge of announcing that

which can never be uttered in the text. The critic's laughter then is similar to that which accompanies a joke of which others are unaware, those who would attempt "translation" in the act of reading. But at the same time Joyce's laughter would seem to enact a "beyond," which the critic can only at best position himself or herself on the verge of, and maintain that position "prayerfully," always hopeful, trusting in a certain critical vigilance to keep as close to the verge as possible by being rigorously mindful of whatever weakens the logic that enforces that position.

But Derrida also suggests the possibility that Joyce "enacted" that beyond through laughter. Derrida insists on marking the space of that "beyond" with laughter, which, to the extent that it fails to communicate anything, defers the possibility of that "beyond," and maintains a certain prayerful silence in front of it. But, as Derrida's own emotional response suggests, the critic may locate that "beyond" out of which Joyce's laughter echoes outside the text, in the critic's present historical and political situation. Rather than maintaining an expectant silence ("let us laugh"), Joyce in effect models that laughter for the critic in order to direct his or her attention to a reading of what lies "beyond" the text. Derrida's examples suggest as much, as when he points out that the maternal syllable "Mummum" in that laughter ("Ha he hi ho hu. Mummum.") calls to mind, among other textual references,

"any woman you can think of" (157). Rather than marking an impossibly attainable moment in the future, Joyce's laughter becomes that which directs the reader to an interpretive response he or she is capable of (at least provisionally) in the present.

Derrida translates the prayer which precedes the laughter at the end of Book 2, Chapter 1: "Laugh down low of the signature, calm the crazy laughter and the anguish of the proper name in the murmured prayer, forgive God by asking him to let us perform the gesture of giving according to art, and the art of laughter" (158). The "anguish of the proper name," later "the pain of signature," both suggest something beyond an ontological condition, and the condition in language which enables the location of the "ontological," that Derrida's writing points to, reeling with echoes of "crazy laughter." Instead that "anguish" and "pain" involve the "proper name" as a subject in an historical and political context. As Derrida suggests, the "last word" is left to the "woman who in her turn will have said 'we' and 'yes'." But "woman" becomes more than just trope for difference, as that which marks the space of that "beyond" in the same way that Derrida's reading of Joyce's laughter does. In a sense, as Derrida himself suggests, "woman" takes on an historical and political significance. Even though laughter marks the difficulty in identifying the context for that significance, it also always points to the

world outside the text. It is in this sense, finally, that laughter, such as that which Cixous associates with feminine writing, might be understood as belonging not to the text, but to the subject reading.

The World Outside the Text

The Wake requires a response that involves both reactions to the text that Derrida discusses above, but it is a response that the text (as I have argued) always directs outside itself, towards participating in the active production of a political reading. Laughter, understood as a detached awareness of the freeplay of language, enables the critic to imagine the transgression of limits that determine the subject in history (including the critic writing). Violence marks the reader's complicity in setting up margins once that reader risks interpretation through discourse. Those readings which emphasize solely the freeplay of interpretation and the laughter which accompanies it often ignore the way Joyce's text points the reader outside towards a world whose political conditions are no laughing matter. Or else that laughter is confined to the text only and directs itself at the reader for attempting to restore the historical context that the Wake always insists on restoring. That violence characteristic of interpretation in the text at the site of the Letter, while seemingly intended at those who would force meaning,

never prohibits interpretation. Instead it serves as a reminder of what occurs in reading, not to discourage, but in a certain sense, to empower reading, in spite of the risk of doing violence in the linear move outside the text, always reading and rereading history. It is a point that is made in the reading of Finnegans Wake as feminine writing, which requires that the reader engage his or her own political situation in locating political identity and refigure the notion of agency which informs our understanding of what it means to read the text.

Both responses should be understood in relation to allegory, as the "story" that the Wake tells about interpretation and which insists on reading the political. In this sense, there is laughter at the joke of this allegory which appears as (political) identity, but which "designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference" (de Man, qtd. in Johnson 33). The "desire to coincide," to announce a political identity and collapse this temporal distance, is the risk of violence that always accompanies our response to reading Finnegans Wake.

NOTES

¹ Reference to Finnegans Wake will be abbreviated within parentheses as FW or with a page reference only when the context is clear. In either case, line numbers will accompany the page reference (i.e. FW 274.36).

² The identification of character is always problematic in Finnegans Wake insofar as identity is never stable. The nature of that instability, however, whether or not there is a "method" to Joyce's playing with identity, is subject to disagreement. Ellmann suggests that

If he hides the name of Abraham in 'abramanation' or 'Allbrewham,' or the name of Anna Livia in 'Hanah Levy' or 'allalluvial,' it is not to pull our legs but to stretch our daytime imaginations. That the mind works this way in certain states of tension or repose was recognized long before Joyce, as before Freud.

(Ellmann v)

This view, that Joyce attempts to capture the working of the mind (even if not depending solely on a Freudian model of the unconscious), informs Glasheen's A Second Census of Finnegans Wake and more recent works like Bishop's Joyce's

Book of the Dark. Such a view may be contrasted with Cixous's understanding of the text as questioning notions of identity, undermining the subject's stability and the "world of western discourse" ("Joyce" 15) in which it is grounded.

³ Hence, ALP is "a river, always changing yet ever the same . . . which bears all life on its current" (10). ALP returns to the father, the "everlasting primal form of HCE," who represents "unity" (13). This theme of feminine return to primal patriarchal unity is one that Campbell and Robinson read as part of "the eternal dynamic implicit in birth, conflict, death, and resurrection" (14).

For Margaret Solomon in her book The Eternal Geomater, the first extended reading of femininity in Finnegans Wake (if not a self-defined feminist reading), ALP possesses a "geometry" of her own, or patterns that exist outside the patriarchal myth at work in The Skeleton Key. Solomon's point about the possibility of another geometry implied in ALP also suggests a different geometry of reading, one that might oppose linearity as always pointing outside the text and back to identifiable mythic associations. Her reading suggests the possibility for identifying multiple myths and the way they proliferate throughout the Wake, working against one controlling pattern. The act of refuting such a pattern, however, often reinstates a different one or makes another linear appeal, as Scott points out about Solomon's reading which "concludes on HCE as father God,"

emphasizing his more totalizing "cubic geometry" (James 138).

This structural unity depending on mythic/archetypal patterns, and always enacted by a linear appeal outside the text to seek the critic's authorization in those patterns, may be reinforced by reading the Wake as a dream. Those who approach the text in this way often argue about whether there is only a single dreaming subject (ALP or HCE or Issy or one of the sons) or multiple dreamers. Clive Hart's argument for a "dream-whole centered on a single mind" (83) is an influential one for later critics like Shari Benstock who depend on the idea of a "dream-whole," a unified structure out of which recognizable patterns emerge, archetypes that enable a reading of HCE and ALP as "the principle male and female principles of the novels" ("The Genuine Christine" [171]). Or else, as Bonnie Kime Scott points out, HCE is more commonly read as the dream-narrator, denying the possibility of ALP's narrative voice (James 107).

⁴ See Scott's second book on Joyce and feminism, James Joyce. There she pays careful attention to the major arguments or camps that have emerged within feminism itself, fitting Joyce "in a matrix of feminist theory" (1) and including a useful diagram of this matrix.

⁵ Henke's use of Kristeva's theory of the body and poetic language here is typical of many feminist readings

which attempt to locate in the text a feminine writing. Kristeva becomes important to my own reading in Chapter 2, where her theory is explored in greater detail.

⁶ My use of the term should not be confused with the more common reference to linearity in the context of narrative technique (wherein it might be contrasted with spatiality or circularity), but primarily involves the problem of reference that accompanies interpretation. Certain readings we identify in the context of post-structuralism deal with the problem of linearity that the text presents by self-reflexively grounding authority solely in the reader, arguing that the text requires this linear move outside in order for meaning to occur. The problem for critics who argue the text's unreadability in this respect is that interpretation threatens to become cut off from the text, a product of "the reader's own activity," as Colin MacCabe has suggested of Joyce's experiment with meaning in all of his works. This amounts to a kind of "absolute" linearity in which reading results in an awareness of the text as pointing solely outside itself, insofar as the text resists any single meaning or interpretation, always reminding the reader of what he or she does to fix or attain that meaning. "Authorizing" reading becomes self-consciously a matter no longer "belonging" to the text, but must always reckon with the need to reconcile "new" readings with those that have come before. Such self-reflexive

"authorizing" closely resembles the ascribing of political significance to the act of reading that I argue in this essay, if understood as foregrounding the critic's situation within an historical and cultural context and less in terms of a reader-response "formalism."

Those critics who would identify their readings with what has come to be known as deconstruction are also sensitive to the unreadability of Finnegans Wake, but insist on resisting that linear move outside the text (however absolute) to ground authority for reading. Instead, to simplify a wide array of what we might identify as deconstructive responses to the text, the critic attempts to follow the logic of the text to show how meaning is never possible, how there is no ground by which the critic might distinguish the literal from figural, outside from inside. As Phillip Herring points out, commenting on deconstruction and its impact on reading Joyce, "All readings are thus misreadings; we are left with fragments of a truth we can never see whole" (47). (Herring's implied claim that deconstruction "fragments" truth, disabling any sense of "wholeness" that we might "see," seems more symptomatic of his own resentment towards deconstruction rather than characteristic of many of those whose writings are associated with such theory. His statement would seem to imply a certain nostalgia for that wholeness as truth that a writer like Derrida critiques in others and attempts to

foreground in his own texts.)

Although Herring conflates MacCabe's argument with those associated with deconstruction (Herring identifies Derrida and J. Hillis Miller as representatives of such readings), suggesting that both hold "similarly skeptical views about the possibility of meaning occurring in reading" (47), one way of thinking about the difference lies in the domain in which meaning (or lack of meaning) is said to "occur": either in the reader (in the case of MacCabe) or in the text itself (as Herring implies about deconstruction). In the latter case, the close reading of deconstruction would show the way the text seems to establish paradigms for interpretation, but always undercuts those paradigms, whether seemingly authorized (in the text) by the Church, or societal roles or cultural expectations (with reference to gender or national identity), or models of selfhood (as autonomous or transcending history), or notions of progress (at the level of history, technology, society, psychology).

For a critic like Jacques Aubert, who admits the way the text "constantly calls representation into question" (77), Finnegans Wake is not hopelessly unreadable. But that readability depends on "as rigorously as possible" defining "the interconnections between the various systems it uses." Readability is still "shut off," as it is in many other post-structuralist readings, from questions of

representation and reduced to the critic's explanation of relationships as they occur "within" the text.

⁷ Other critics, such as Suzette Henke, have identified (perhaps oversimply) two basic approaches to Finnegans Wake: either as Campbell reads it with an emphasis on myth or with a post-structuralist emphasis on the freeplay of language (165). This latter group of readings often includes (without clear distinction) those that self-reflexively call attention to the interpretive violence done in the act of reading as a consequence of that freeplay. This distinction, between "freeplay" (and the laughter which critics often point to in the text as accompanying that recognition of freeplay) and violence becomes important in the last chapter of my thesis. There it becomes a "mixed response" in reading that (re)turns the reader outside the text to an awareness of his or her own historical and political situation, in such a way that the problem of "linearity" is refigured to point out the role the critic plays in reading and writing that "outside."

⁸ Another question along these lines is one that Michael Patrick Gillespie raises concerning an appeal outside the text to previous readings which comprise "generally held perception" (5) of the Wake. Gillespie grapples with the problem of linear models of interpretation when reading the Wake from a position that locates him within a post-structuralist context. He insists on the need

for identifying patterns in the text, but in such a way that the critic's ontological position "outside" the text should always be brought into question:

My contention remains that Finnegans Wake demands a form of patterning that stands in opposition to traditional cause and effect thinking. Further, I believe that, no matter what pattern an individual reader chooses to impose, it can at best be implemented only as a provisional attempt at interpretation. (3)

He goes on to advocate a "writerly" approach to the text (following Roland Barthes' model of reading), suggesting that one "plays within a piece of art" (4). The problem occurs when readers who fashion meaning in this "writerly" way, from "the freeplay of our imaginations," then go on to produce "readerly" criticism, which imposes limits on that freeplay. Gillespie denies the physicality of the text, opting instead for a "metaphysical" (4) definition, viewing it "as only one of possible responses, conditioned both by the reader's experiences (retentions) and by his or her expectations (protensions)". Following Wolfgang Iser's reader-response criticism, Gillespie attempts to identify those dynamics in the act of reading which comprise the text. But Gillespie also imposes a limit on imaginative response or freeplay in the act of reading when he points out that,

If one makes interpretive claims about Finnegans Wake,

then those claims must function within generally held perceptions of the Wake. According to this logic, the piece of art itself acts as the ultimate validator of all claims to interpret it, and I am asserting that the structure of Finnegans Wake calls into question the efficacy of the conventional hermeneutic assumptions of many of the interpretations now in the critical canon.

(4-5)

The possibility that a reader's "experiences" might bring something different to the text, that his or her "expectations" might exceed the "generally held perceptions of the Wake," must be taken out of the equation. Even though, as Gillespie argues, the structure of the Wake questions hermeneutic assumptions, recognizing that structure depends on being consistent with conventional perception which rightfully governs response to the text. The Wake requires a model of reading which avoids appeals to linearity, even at this level of what Gillespie might just as well have identified as "discursive community" (to borrow Fish's term). By identifying the text with reader response as defined by accepted interpretations, Gillespie sets up parameters for reading which reinstate the linear model he critiques. This implied contradiction in Gillespie's argument points to a certain political stance with regard to the canon. That position suggests a reluctance to question traditional reception of the novel and, to that extent,

reinforces the canon and the political process of selection which maintains it.

⁹ Any reference to "the Letter" (with a capital L) is meant to suggest its general use in the novel, insofar as we can generalize about its significance as trope. When referring to Issy's "letter" or ALP's, the use of lower case calls attention to the Letter as it appears in a specific context associated with a specific character.

¹⁰ The Letter shows up as ALP, or as ALP's dream, as Issy's "lesson" taught to herself, or by her brother, offered to him as her handkerchief or her soiled panties; the letter also very likely arrives in the form of the text itself. The letter turns up everywhere, as it gets represented in and throughout all of history, from "the fall," "past Eve and Adam's" (3.1), from European history, down to Ireland's pre-Christian pre-colonial past through Joyce's present Dublin. It shows up as literary history as well, with allusions from the Bible to Shakespeare, from Gay and Pope, to Eliot and Pound, from Scandinavian folklore to Egyptian mythology and Irish legend. It also gets figured with reference to non-literary tradition, manifested in part as an emerging 20th-century "pop" culture, with new inventions like film and radio, the formal qualities of which as media of representation the letter often mimics to present itself.

Critics read the Letter in a variety of ways, organize

its delivery (in terms of their own critical reading) depending on the frame or linear model they would impose on the text. Hence, John Gordon identifies the Wake's "famous letter" as the "ever-reinterpreted memory of HCE and ALP's life together, as called forth during one exchange" in I.5 (144). Gordon claims from the outset a "thoroughly reductive" account of the text (2), with no apologies, insisting on reading the Wake as centered on family. Campbell and Robinson take a similar view, but extend that reading of family to make associations with myth.

Regardless of the multiple versions of the Letter, for purposes of this study, the features of the Letter most important are those that call attention to the activity of interpretation. In this sense, a reading such as Gordon's provides an example of this activity in his characterization of "Mamalujo," a major interpretive force in the novel as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. (For an interesting commentary on the significance for Joyce of "sacred texts," see Hugh Kenner's "Berlitz Days" in which he discusses the preoccupation of Joyce and his contemporaries like Yeats with somehow shaping their art to achieve the equivalent of this sacred quality.) Gordon associates the "Four" with the four bedposts surrounding the bed of HCE, which in turn suggest (as Gordon points out) the four provinces of Ireland (18-19). Another feature of the Letter that raises questions about interpretation is the role of ALP as hen,

picking over the midden heap (the site of history), and thereby writing the Letter. Both direct attention towards an historical context and characterize certain relationships between that context and the Letter, the critic and the text, and the critic and his or her own historical context.

In another early reading, Tindall identifies the Letter as containing all of life from alpha to omega, as apparent in the direct response to the text's own question about the Letter: "What was it?" (94.20):

A.!

?0!

Such inclusiveness, however, threatens to collapse the difference between the Letter as container (as the text) and that which it contains (all of life, including the text). It is a point brought out again in the parody of psychoanalysis in I.5 through the "officiality" of the envelope in which the Letter arrives. The Letter in these instances, insofar as they represent the text itself, becomes a kind of mobius strip. The inside/outside distinction which breaks down with that image, as it does in Barth's "Frame-tale" to Lost in the Funhouse, is one that the Wake always returns to insist upon, not without calling attention to the undecidability of this inside/outside, but for reasons that, I hope to show, move towards something other than that undecidability of reference.

¹¹ The suggestion here that the text is prophetic is

consistent with the body of myth perpetuated about the novel and is one that Joyce would have of course relished. There is that in the text which implies this critique, as in the parody of Eliot and Yeats, and from that we may infer a commentary on the conceptions of modernism that evolve around them (and after them). Moreover, the mythic paradigms in the novel, such as the cyclicity associated with Vico's view of history, are often considered fundamental to certain aspects of modernism. But ascribing that prophetic quality to the Wake is more a product of my own reading and the desire to account for the way the text includes elements which disallow a number of readings, especially those that involve myth, but also those which center on the unreadability of the text, as in the most recent post-structuralist context of response.

¹² Reading understood as political allegory might also direct attention and attempt to rewrite the male subject's relation to his body. Such a reading would lead possibly to other rewritings of the way patriarchy has been conceived in feminist discourse. Allegorizing the body in either case would always be contingent on identifying historical and cultural forces specific to and comprising the materiality of the body, always understood in relation to the critic's own political context which enables and informs the discussion of that materiality in the first place.

¹³ Claudine Raynaud suggests this reading of Issy and

her relationship to the Letter in "Woman, the Letter Writer; Man, the Writing Master."

¹⁴ Cixous' "Joyce: The (r)use of writing" focuses on his ruse and use of writing, a doubleness important to the conception of *écriture féminine*. For Cixous, Joyce's work may be read as contributing to the death of the subject in recent literature. His questioning of the subject as autonomous, as an agent governing discourse, finds its most radical expression in the Wake. Writing (as understood in Western discourse) involves a relationship of mastery, in which the signifier is subordinate to the signified, and language is subordinate to meaning. The Joycean subject undermines this structure, insofar as he or she hesitates to interpret (language, self, others). This hesitation in the Wake mocks the desire to control language. It leads to the liberating of the signifier from the signified, a relationship often characterized in terms of gender. At the same time, it raises questions about the new direction language should take. The theme of the Letter and its "return to sender" invites a different understanding of the subject writing and the written subject and allows for the reading of something like feminine writing in Finnegans Wake. Also, Cixous refers to the disruption of unity in the text, to the way the text "decords" (FW 482.35) as it decodes, as "luxury writing" (19). The narrative economy, understood in this sense, "refuses to regulate itself," or

impose a "systematic use of networks of symbols and correspondences."

¹⁵ Even though Sailer suggests that Kristeva's theory may be used to define the relationship between writing and the body, she stops short of positing anything like a feminine writing in the text, for reasons that have to do with her own professed interest in reader-response theory and her thesis that meaning occurs in the reader through his or her response to the play of tropes merging out of "incoherence." Moreover, the association of specific characters in the Wake with these Kristevan theoretical constructs limits the effects of Kristeva's analysis, subsuming those effects under the "thetic" in the desire to organize a reading and "label" (with reference to particular characters) those forces which comprise it.

¹⁶ But Benstock's rigorous use of deconstruction in this reading ("Apostrophizing the Feminine in Finnegans Wake") points to the limitations of Derrida and deconstruction for feminist discourse and the problems with a notion of feminine writing. Her reading finds the critic caught in a double bind, one that for the feminist disables any knowledge (and expression) of sexual difference at the moment that knowledge is professed by the critic. She runs into these difficulties elsewhere in "Nightletters: Woman's Writing in the Wake." In Benstock's discussion of the hymen (understood in a Derridean sense), she reads ALP as the hen

picking over the midden heap, and thereby writing the letter, yet at the same time, written over by patriarchal discourse. But, as Scott points out in response to Benstock's Derridean reading, the hymen is "unlikely stationery for the sexually-experienced ALP. Derrida retains the penis as writing instrument, while the hen has her own beak" (James Joyce 140). If Scott finds a way past Benstock's (and Derrida's) problem of doubleness, she depends on the ability to *imagine* a feminine writing which escapes that doubleness. But this imagining also brings the feminist position back to the problem of essentialism because feminine writing would seem to assert an autonomous status that depends on ignoring historical and cultural differences (within femininity). The problems that Derrida would seem to create for feminism are in many ways already taken into consideration at least in Cixous' understanding of and work with feminine writing (if not in that of other Joycean feminists). My own reading of the text as feminine writing attempts to follow the implications of Derrida's work (especially with signature) in order to revise the way feminine writing gets identified in the text, but also to show how feminine writing might itself offer another way of thinking about politics in the text after deconstruction.

¹⁷ The desire to organize the text in this way is important to the discussion later in Chapter 4 which calls attention to the way reading understood as political

allegory involves foregrounding this desire in the critic and situating it in that critic's historical context. But the relationship between mother and daughter goes unquestioned here, as depending on essential properties as they manifest themselves in the dynamics of language and which might be read as subverting the Law of the Father.

¹⁸ Here Irigiray discusses "woman analysts" against the Freudian point of view, 49-67.

¹⁹ If the Letter also turns up as ALP's dream (at least perhaps), then Finnegans Wake calls attention to a dream loop necessary for the circulation of the letter in the context of Lacanian theory. This circular economy, or looping, underlies subjectivity, as Lacan views it. All identity is illusory, to the extent that it is composed of and in language. The circularity of desire which informs the subject in Lacanian theory, as Sheldon Brivic points out, is derived from the model of Saussurean linguistics and its discussion of signification as always depending on other signifiers (62). The sign always has to work in opposition to others in order to exist: "A subject is constituted by the interchange of speech with another, so that identity is a process of return, just as a word has meaning only by relation to other words. The subject is constantly changed by its circulation . . ." (3). For Lacan, "the Other is identifiable as whatever slips beyond formulation" (7). In this sense, Lacan might be appropriated for a feminist

reading of feminine writing in the text.

²⁰ Claudine Raynaud's "Woman, the Letter Writer, Man, the Writing Master" points to the problem feminist discourse faces in imagining the possibility of woman ever speaking for herself, of ever writing the Letter. The constant shifts in representation of the letter, Raynaud argues, call attention to the instability of identity and those forces which comprise it. Writing the letter may be understood as either an expression of self-sufficiency or as the subject's desire for the Other. Issy's exchange with her mirror-image seems to suggest both possibilities. That is, the possibility of self-sufficiency for shaping her identity is coded in the laws of patriarchy. So Issy's writing to herself is always a communication dictated by her brother Shaun who teaches her how to write. The question then becomes, will the female subject ever speak for herself? While Raynaud seems to doubt Joyce's ability to write the feminine, to "allow" her to speak, her argument depends on anticipating a future condition at which time such speech might be possible.

²¹ Derrida on the trace (in "Differance"): "as rigorously as possible we must permit to appear/disappear the trace...(of that) which can never be presented, the trace which itself can never be presented...Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself" (23).

²² Rabaté figures this cycle in terms of "the father's perversity" (as Shaun represents it as incestuous desire) and "the mother's constancy" (Issy and her mirror image) ("A Clown's" 111). He suggests that the text reproduces a pattern, one "constituting a feminine receptacle of language through the acceptance of a symbolic castration 'which can never be healed.'" (111) That is to say, even as that receptacle works to "spread signifiers," this "symbolic castration" is never "healed" because the cycle, or pattern remains inevitable in the sense that language can never go back to an origin or source, may only post the letter: "Whether origins are alternatively identified with the father's law or with the dual relation to the mother, the fall has already separated the text from the hallucinated meaning" (111).

²³ Suzette Henke considers the possibility of feminine writing as bisexuality in discourse in her essay "Anna the 'Allmaziful': Toward the Evolution of a Feminine Discourse." Her reading of the end of the Wake, in which Anna returns back to her father, shows the inadequacies of the archetypal reading of Campbell and Robinson and the Christian associations they make with ALP. That reading dependent on myth fails to account for Anna Livia Plurabelle's final thoughts and the way they "cast off the emotional ties, as well as the stereotypical female roles, that have shackled and defined her" (46). Jacques Aubert's

"riverrun," a reading of the first word(s) of the text, may be read in contrast with Henke's reading of the end of the novel, since the text is structured (as commonly argued) in a circular fashion, the first sentence completing syntactically the last sentence (in a looped continuation of ALP's river-return). Aubert's radically close deconstructive focus on the word itself ("riverrun") raises questions about the possibility of reading the text (and femininity) in the first place (literally the first word). Aubert's deconstruction (or deconstructive reading) of the word "riverrun" seems to disable Henke's reading of the river as ALP which enables her more politically hopeful position with regard to the "evolution" of a feminine discourse, or feminine writing.

²⁴ In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida discusses the notion of center in relation to structuralism, in particular Levi-Strauss. For Derrida, "the sign which supplements it (here, structuralist "center"), which takes its place in its absence . . . always adds itself, occurs in addition" (240).

²⁵ See Paul De Man's discussion of the reader's suicide in "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau," 110.

²⁶ The Book of Kells, an ancient Irish illuminated text on which Joyce repeatedly puns, contains references to Christian resurrection.

27 Heath seems to borrow from De Man's outline of the difference between literal and figural writing in "Semiology and Rhetoric."

28 Spivak and Kristeva differ with regard to Joyce's relation to feminism, as McGee points out. For Kristeva, who sees in "woman" something "that cannot be represented," Joyce seems aware of this and never stops writing about it. Spivak questions Joyce's ability to announce "the proper mind-set to the woman's movement." She wonders about the "necessarily revolutionary potential of the avant-garde, literary or philosophical" and chooses instead to historicize it, asking questions about the extent to which sexism informs that movement and, by extension, Joyce (qtd. in McGee 422).

29 For Derrida, reference to "Joyce" also exceeds the text, but that excess may not be identified within "critical arenas" in such a way that his "value and authority" may be measured with any certainty. Instead that excess is the site of undecidability, so that "reading Joyce" is always "being in memory of him" or being "in his memory . . . which is henceforth greater than all your finite memory can . . . gather up of cultures, languages, mythologies, religions, philosophies, sciences, history of mind and of literatures" ("Two Words" 147).

30 Barbara Johnson's The Wake of Deconstruction, and particularly the essay "Double Mourning and the Public

Sphere," are central to my discussion here regarding this perceived difference and conflict between deconstruction and political readings. She summarizes the way so-called deconstruction has been perceived as disallowing the possibility of maintaining a political stance. Her reading goes on to demonstrate what is implicit to the close reading of deconstruction, insofar as that reading absolutizes the text, confining the reader's domain to what occurs "inside" the text. Understood in this sense, her deconstruction of deconstruction requires a political move "outside" the text.

³¹ My own personification of the Wake throughout this essay ("The Wake calls attention to . . ." or "Finnegans Wake reads itself . . . ," etc.) is intended to point away from Joyce's historical context and those reasons which lead him to portray women as he does. Scott's first book, Joyce and Feminism, is in many ways concerned with pointing out those biographical and historical influences which suggest reasons why Joyce was concerned with issues related to feminism. In this sense, Scott personifies "Joyce," the reference to the proper name, to center our attention on the historical person caught up in historical and political forces. By personifying the Wake, my intention is to focus on the site of reading that our own historical situation gives rise to, involving the current reception of the text and certain theoretical questions that seem pressing.

³² The Letter as trope is a significant one in a number

of post-modernist texts (as well as those associated with post-structuralist theory). For Pynchon, the Letter becomes the message of truth that Oedipa Maas anticipates in The Crying of Lot 49 as she searches for the origins of what would appear an underground postal system. That system presents Oedipa finally with certain binary choices which require her to embrace either feelings of paranoia (which points to a sense of order which can never be fully ascertained) or anti-paranoia (maybe worse, the possibility that meaning is reduced to randomness in the coincidence of events). It is such preoccupation with binaries, and the anxiety and nostalgia symptomatic of the need to "decide" which informs the ending of the novel, that perhaps leads Pynchon to disavow the work, as he has suggested, and the postal system which organizes it. But Lot 49's focus, especially at the level of character, on the "excluded middle" ("bad shit") suggests a structure which seems to imply another way of thinking about the novel's organization (another postal system), one that undermines the otherwise binary structure on which the novel's development seems to depend. The representation of Oedipa offers somewhat of an alternative to traditional gender roles and the controlling Oedipal myth which organizes our Western understanding of identity.

Another example of using the Letter as trope and the postal system as an organizing principle in post-modernist

fiction is A.S. Byatt's Possession. The novel self-reflexively deals with those who practice literary theory and the way we think about the study of literature, centering on a number of recently discovered letters between two nineteenth-century poets and the attempt of two scholars to reconstruct their love affair, which will in turn alter current scholarship about those two poets. The novel holds open a certain space to call attention to the reconstruction of the past as narrative. At the same time, however, the awareness of the past as reconstruction is glossed over at the level of narrative insofar as it shifts to portray events "firsthand," as they happen between the past lovers, collapsing the critical distance that the two scholars are forced to maintain (and which the reader maintains as well). This doubleness, implied in the title of the novel, but also in the irony of its subtitle "A Romance" (insofar as the novel is formally a romance, but so categorically "unromantic" in its thematic treatment and often parody of "theory"), moves the text towards something that tentatively goes beyond Oedipa's preoccupation with binary structures.

That beyond is what the Wake would seem to announce in its treatment of the Letter. The text may be characterized as moving beyond "post-modernism" insofar as various critics define that "condition," as Satya P. Mohanty paraphrases, as being "wary not only of the grand narratives that Lyotard cautions against but also of every account that claims to

explain something objectively" (113). The inhibiting nature of this respect for otherness (what eventually gives way in Byatt to the "kick galvanic," that which exceeds textual reference for the two scholars, which takes them over and possesses them) leads the writer or critic to resist such attempts to objectify or to narrate. What Mohanty calls "a post-positivist view of objectivity" (110), while it inverts the hierarchical relations that language and representation are caught up in, also insists on representation in language and risks narrative as objectivity. It is that which Byatt and Pynchon (to a lesser extent) achieve and which the Wake's model of reading points to, especially with regard to sexual difference and the critic's role in defining the history of that difference.

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