

“I Shall be Misunderstood if Understood”: The Art of not Understanding James Joyce’s

Finnegans Wake

by

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ABSTRACT

By investigating and comparing critical responses to James Joyce's final novel *Finnegans Wake*, this project attempts to dismantle the idea that the work is difficult and unreadable by demonstrating the ways in which it both invites an overflow of potential meaning and works against the notion of critical interpretation. Focusing on the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" section, my research utilizes the theories of Susan Sontag and Rita Felski to reveal the shortcomings of viewing the *Wake* through an interpretive framework. Rather than interpreting the novel, I explore how the work redefines the reading experience through the use of sound and polyhedronic language, thereby allowing the reader to interact with the work in a multitude of ways. In doing so, I demonstrate how *Finnegans Wake* encourages readers to find value in the work's aesthetic and in the experience of reading, rather than through interpretation.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS USED

Δ Symbol for Anna Livia Plurabelle

ALP Anna Livia Plurabelle

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Joycean critic Tim Conley coyly asks, “who *isn't* afraid of *Finnegans Wake*?” (Conley, “Performance Anxieties” 71-72). Commonly referred to as an “unreadable master-text” (Norris, “Finnegans Wake” 175), much has been made of how to approach and understand James Joyce’s final and most feared novel. The work is often noted for its obscurity and perceived difficulty, notions which culminate in the novel being regarded as inaccessible to most readers. Critic David Overstreet aptly writes that readers of the *Wake* are often met with “a nausea of erudition shock” (Overstreet 51) when encountering the novel. It is this response to the novel which I wish to examine. Using the famous “Anna Livia Plurabelle” episode of the *Wake*, I aim to dismantle the idea of *Finnegans Wake* as a difficult and unreadable text by demonstrating the ways in which the work both invites an overflow of potential meaning and works against the notion of critical interpretation. By investigating important critical responses to *Finnegans Wake*, I will explore how the reader can approach Joyce’s text from a perspective which works against common notions of understanding and invites all readers to experience the text in a variety of ways. I will illustrate the shortcomings of criticism that aims to fix a meaning onto the text, despite contentions that meaning in Joyce is ultimately indeterminate, and demonstrate how classical, or what Margot Norris calls “novelistic” (Norris, *The Decentered Universe* 10), interpretation limits the reader’s ability to perceive value in works that appear difficult to understand. Notably, Michael Patrick Gillespie asserts that critics of the *Wake* have “conformed to the expectations of a culture that has a privileged linear, cartesian logic as the most effective form of analysis” (Gillespie, “Reading on the Edge of Chaos” 36). Yet Joyce’s novel works against this form of interpretation and redefines what it means to read a text by undermining notions of linearity, form, content, plot, and linguistic structure. Further, the aural aspects of the

novel, which have been the subject of much critical debate, not only illustrate the different ways in which readers can interact with the text, but also how they can experience the text without attempting to understand it by simply listening to it. *Finnegans Wake* encourages readers to find value in a work's aesthetic and in the experience of reading, rather than through interpretation, by embracing multiplicity and undermining linear knowledge as a path to understanding.

CHAPTER 2: "Latin me that, my trinity scholar": Interpreting the *Wake*

Many critics have commented on how to interpret the *Wake*. The novel's reputation as being "unreadable" means that scholars often focus on elucidating the obscure and difficult aspects of the text in an attempt to make it not only "readable," but also interpretable. Volume upon volume have been written to offer critical guidance, painstakingly accounting for every reference and allusion in the novel. In books such as *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*, *Annotation to Finnegans Wake*, and *The Books at the Wake*, many early critics have treated the novel as a problem to be solved, a mystery which needs to be clarified and explicated for the reader, in order that they may have a valuable reading experience. More contemporary critical response to the *Wake*, however, have moved away from elitist notions of the novel being accessible only to the most scholarly and erudite (see Atherton, Begnal, McHugh) to the idea that the novel undermines the reading process itself (see Sartiliot, Attridge, Gillespie). The notion that the novel must be read alongside several critical guides and through certain interpretive lenses is slowly giving way to differing ideas about how the reader can approach and engage with the text. Building off the work of such scholars as Derek Attridge, Susan Shaw Sailer, Tim Conley, and Michael Patrick Gillespie, I aim to explore the ways in which the contemporary reader of *Finnegans Wake* can interact with the text without critical guidance and arduous study by rejecting the notion of interpretation and instead embracing the multitude of meanings created in each reading experience of the text.

Interpreting a text can be defined as the aim to obtain "fixity, permanence, and truth" (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 120), notions in which a multitude of signifiers culminate in the sense of having clarified what has been written before us on the page. Interpretation in this sense is meant

to free us from misunderstanding. Notably, in her postcritical work *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski writes that critical reading is “imagined as an act of digging down to arrive at a repressed or otherwise obscured reality” (Felski 53). While Felski may be overstating her case—not all critics attempt to interpret texts in this reductionist way—what many critical readings often aim at is explication, rather than the reader’s experiential or aesthetic response to the text, as a way of creating meaning. In interpretive critical readings of this sort, critics assume that the text has a “God-given, author-sanctioned meaning” (Felski 109) which must be uncovered. This meaning is seen as offering an answer to the text. The notion of “author-sanctioned meaning” (109) is also presented by Roland Barthes in his discussion of the Author figure in “The Death of the Author” when he declares that “to give the text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a signified, to close the writing” (Barthes 147). Likewise, Barthes demonstrates the relationship between the Author figure and critical interpretation, asserting that the Author “suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is explained” (Barthes 147). The desire to have the text “explained” is demonstrated by the numerous scholarly works on *Finnegans Wake* dedicated to this task (see Atherton, Bishop, Glasheen, McHugh). Yet critical readings which aim at explication inevitably fall short when applied to the *Wake*. Meaning in the text must be taken as something subjective, fluid, and multitudinous; critical interpretation, on the other hand, often attempts to assign meaning to the work as something singular and fixed.

Problematically, many critical readings simplify the *Wake* by reducing it to a single digestible interpretation, thereby ignoring the overwhelming number of textual layers in the work in order to make easier that which is perceived to be obscure and difficult. For instance, Harry

Burrell reads the *Wake* as a rewriting of the Bible (Burrell 7), Adaline Glasheen reads it as a rewriting of *Paradise Lost* (Glasheen 169), John Bishop as a reconstruction of the night (Bishop 27), Claudette Sartiliot as a family drama about sin (Sartiliot 408), Frederick J. Hoffman as an autobiographical account of Joyce's relationship with his father (Hoffman 21), and Bernard Benstock as a "comic epic of contemporary man" (Benstock 264). Others rely on outside sources as the key to interpreting the novel, asserting that knowledge of Giambattista Vico's *The New Science* (see Bishop) or Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (see Devlin) are vital to the *Wake* reader. Still, the most common of all interpretations of the *Wake* is the dream interpretation, in which the book is taken to be the representation of a dream. Variations of this interpretation include scrupulous attempts to discover who the dreamer is, with some believing that it is Joyce himself (Atherton 12), that it is the male protagonist Earwicker (Halper 72), that it is not one person, but rather a "composite figure" (Devlin 20), or that it is Molly and Leopold Bloom, dreaming after having fallen asleep at the end of *Ulysses* (Benstock, "L. Bloom as Dreamer in *Finnegans Wake*" 107). What these critical interpretations of the *Wake* do is attempt to find an answer to the novel by explicating it in an attempt to, as Derek Attridge puts it, "translate what is apparently 'confused' into a language which will be entirely transparent, to unweave the polyglot textual fabric into the monoglot thread" (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 158). Such critical readings clearly demonstrate the limitations of interpretation, as they oversimplify the novel's complexity, reduce its multiplicity, and ignore large portions of the text in order to, as Susan Sontag asserts of interpretation, make art "manageable, comfortable" (Sontag 8).

The tendency of many critics to attempt to provide an answer to the novel is expressed by Michael H. Begnal when he states that "the overwhelming crux of the *Wake* is undeniably explication" (9). Though many scholars contend that there is no single explanation for the text,

many still assert that there are certain correct ways of reading the *Wake*. Notably, Begnal writes that “we can arrive at a ground of “right” or admissible views which can be tolerated or allowed by sticking as closely as we possibly can to the actual text” (9). While Begnal is right that we should stick to the text itself, it is a fallacy to believe that there are certain “right” ways of viewing or reading *Finnegans Wake*. The text itself works against such an idea by undermining knowledge as a path to meaning through its rejection not only of linearity, but also of “the most cherished intellectual preconceptions of Western culture” (Norris, “The Consequences of Deconstruction” 130). Knowledge, taken here to mean what Norris refers to as the “realist epistemology that has dominated prose fiction since the eighteenth century” (Norris, *The Decentered Universe* 11), relies on linear logic and a linguistic framework in which signifiers point to one signified, novelistic conventions which Joyce’s novel clearly rejects.

Yet similarly to Begnal, critic Roland McHugh contends that “what we need, in order to understand Joyce, are reliable facts” (McHugh, *The Finnegans Wake Experience* 46). Here, McHugh aligns understanding with meaning, yet, as I will later discuss, meaning can exist without understanding in the sense of “realist epistemology” (Norris, *The Decentered Universe* 11). While there are undeniable facts of the text, such as Anna Livia’s relation to the River Liffey, these do not offer a meaning to the work, but are rather further complicated by its multitudinous nature. As Margot Norris points out, criticism is often “characterized chiefly by a belief that the work contains fixed points of reference in the manner of the traditional novel” (Norris, “The Consequences of Deconstruction” 130). However, we can see that Anna Livia’s role is compounded and complicated by the over 800 references to other rivers in “Anna Livia Plurabelle” (Bishop 336), as well as her symbolic representation as Δ , and the continuous punning on her name which undermines any attempts to fixate her as a signifier in the text.

The shortcomings of interpretation are also demonstrated by the critical response to the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” episode, in which critics most often focus on the content of the episode, summarized by John Bishop as a mash-up of “an absent man who will not listen, genealogies, laundering, and Anna Livia” (Bishop 352). While more recent criticism has centered on the personification of the River Liffey as evidence of Joyce’s environmentalism (See Lactivia et al., Nisbet), this critical lens falls into the trap of attempting to isolate certain pieces of content from the whole. The critical obsession with exegesis ignores that the novel is not divisible, and most importantly, that the content of the work is inseparable from its form (Norris, “*Finnegans Wake*” 161). As Samuel Beckett summarizes, “here form *is* content, content *is* form” (Beckett 14). This can be seen in the symbolic representation of characters, such as ALP’s symbol Δ , as well as in the opening lines of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” which also takes the shape of a triangle (196.1-3). The novel’s emphasis on visual aesthetics demonstrates that it is not meant to be read simply as text, but rather as a composite work of art. Attempts made by critics to interpret art by simply reducing it to content demonstrate the violent “refusal to leave the work of art alone” (Sontag 8) which Susan Sontag ardently opposes in her essay *Against Interpretation*. Moreover, as Fred Rush summarizes in “Appreciating Susan Sontag,” this kind of critical work “tends towards exclusion and reduction” (37) and robs the art object of “its singularity or uniqueness” (Rush 38). What is unique and valuable about *Finnegans Wake* is that its irreducibility as a text allows it to appeal to all kinds of readers, all of whom will find something different in the novel as an interactive piece of art, and it is this irreducibility that is lost in interpretation. Further, Sontag writes that interpretation is a “conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain “rules” of interpretation” (5). Since the *Wake* undermines novelistic and linguistic conventions, the “rules” of explanatory interpretation favoured by many critics cease to be applicable to the

work. While critics such as Derek Attridge, Margot Norris, and Michael Patrick Gillespie have shown that there are other ways to critically read the text, Sontag demonstrates an important point about how interpretation can often take away from a work by reducing its ability to have multiple meanings.

Another problem with critical readings of the *Wake* is demonstrated by Sontag when she writes that interpretation tends to “make art into an article for use” (10). Rather than experience the art object as it is, critical interpretation attempts to stabilize and fixate the work into something definable. Interestingly, in his assessment of Joyce’s works, *Useless Joyce*, Tim Conley calls *Finnegans Wake* Joyce’s “most “useless” book” (Conley, *Useless Joyce* 8). For Conley, as for Sontag, a text’s usefulness arises out of its ability to be interpreted, and consequently, Joyce’s uninterpretable novel is useless for the reader. If we adhere to his axiom of “no interpretation but in use” (Conley, *Useless Joyce* 23), then the point of the novel is to continuously undermine the reader’s ability to make use of it. Being useable and being readable in this sense are not analogous, since in relation to the *Wake*, “readable” must be taken as experiencing and interacting with the text itself, without attempting to fixate the work within an interpretative frame. In this case, what makes Joyce’s work especially useless is that its irreducibility does not allow for any textual hierarchy. If content and form are inseparable, then one cannot be more important than the other. Thus, in “Anna Livia Plurabelle,” the river names are not more important than the episode’s triangular aesthetic, or the details revealed about Anna Livia, or the poetic nature of the writing; but rather, all aspects of the episode are related and indivisible. As Louis O. Mink summarizes, “there are levels and always more levels but no correspondence between levels of meaning and levels of importance” (Mink 45). This lack of hierarchy inhibits the ability of critics to interpret the work because in doing so, they must isolate

certain parts of the text and ignore others, thereby disregarding other equally important aspects of the novel. That Joyce's text actively works against its own interpretation, thus making itself useless to its readers, demonstrates that *Finnegans Wake* can be experienced as a work of art, rather than simply read as a written text. What is valuable about the work is its openness not only to aesthetic as well as textual experience, but also, as will later be discussed, to aural experience.

Moreover, Conley aptly points out that "the hermeneutics of *Finnegans Wake* depend upon what connections or allusions readers may find "useful," what interpretive suggestions give coherence or context" (Conley, *Useless Joyce* 20). The text's uselessness is thus directly related to its incoherence. In *On the Void of to Be*, Susan Shaw Sailer states that "the *Wake*'s incoherence names a range of responses generally delineated by the observation that one is reading words but can't "do" anything with them" (Sailer 5). This is because Joyce's use of language destabilizes the relationship between the signified and the signifier, thereby causing readers to attempt to control the text through "the violence of metaphysical constructs—by rooting it in a transcendental signified" (55). Notably, readers can recognize the patterns of the text, and realize that when Joyce writes "Annushka Lutetiavitch Pufflova" (207.08-9) this is related to "Anna Livia Plurabelle," Δ, and the River Liffey, but the anti-hierarchical nature of the text does not allow this chain of signifiers to lead them to a meaning. Consequently, critics commonly attempt to locate the text outside of itself by reaching after references and allusions as keys to interpreting the work (see Atherton, Bishop, Hart, McHugh), thereby forcing the multitude of signifiers to correlate to one signified. Yet this type of reading is by necessity reductive and therefore ineffective, since, as Conley points out, it is an attempt to make use of what is useless (Conley, *Useless Joyce* 23).

The uselessness of the *Wake*, and thus its inability to be critically interpreted, is further evident in Joyce's interruption of the signifying chain. Sailer posits that the novel "challenges our sense of what constitutes signification, forcing us to become active participants in its production, rather than allow us to capture meaning as it hides circumspectly, waiting to be discovered" (11). Experiencing *Finnegans Wake* as *itself* means interacting with it, and in order to do so, the reader must embrace ambiguity as a central aspect of the text. What Sailer refers to as incoherence in the text is its "endless multiplicity" (61), which is apparent in the way that "any of the *Wake*'s sentences models the signifier's liberation from subservience to an underlying teleology and announces the role of the signifier as generator of more and more signifiers/signified" (56). Rather than having a signifier enclose meaning through direct reference to a signified, Joyce uses language to open up the signifier to a multitude of meanings. The openness of the text rejects interpretation not by evading meaning, but by multiplying meaning. Consequently, as Sailer points out, "no single interpretation can be abstracted from the text and shown to have primary significance" (56). If interpretation is understood as fixating the text, and stabilizing the signifier (55), meaning is understood as recognition (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 121), which moves and changes with the text itself. In *Finnegans Wake*, meaning is not "something solid and unchanging beneath the words" (Attridge, *Reading Joyce* 11), but rather, as Louis O. Mink writes, "like the faces in clouds which one can see if one is determined to" (Mink, *A Finnegans Wake Gazetteer* xiv).

The movement and multiplicity of meaning in the text demonstrate Derek Attridge's assertion that "rather than attempting to control the mass of fragmentary detail to *produce* meaning, Joyce's major texts *allow* meaning to arise out of that mass by the operations of chance" (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 120). Chance, as a major aspect of the writing and reading of

Finnegans Wake, both deters interpretation and propagates meaning. In “Anna Livia Plurabelle” the relational aspect of reading the text, as seen in the equation “Annushka Lutetiavitch Pufflova” (207.08-9) = ALP = Anna Livia = Δ = River Liffey, is not one of authorial intent but rather one of visual and auditory coincidence. Likewise, these signifiers do not create a closed loop of meaning, but rather point continuously, and coincidentally, to other meanings. Furthermore, Attridge’s study of chance in the *Wake* demonstrates that what Joyce intends to write is different from what he does write in the novel because his “portmanteau style is entirely fabricated out of the multiple coincidences of language” (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 121). In other words, the pattern of signifiers for Anna Livia Plurabelle does not arise because Joyce is intending to construct a pattern, but rather from the fact that its construction is possible. Notably, on the writing of the *Wake*, James Mercanton records Joyce stating that “chance furnishes me with what I need. I am like a man who stumbles along; my foot strikes something, I bend over, and it is exactly what I want” (Mercanton 710). The process of reading the novel is the same: it presents readers with multitudinous meanings by chance, and it is chance that allows each reader to find alternate meanings in the text. The *Wake* can therefore be seen as “one great coincidence” (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 124), of which all meanings are also coincidental; they are chance encounters between the reader and the text, which are unsustainable as the text moves forward. Holding onto an interpretation of the novel thus becomes impossible, since the experience of the text is also the experience of chance, and thus a “singular event” (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 118) that cannot be recreated upon rereading.

Critical interpretations of the *Wake*, and the many exegetical works which have arisen out of them (see Atherton, Burrell, Hart, McHugh), also demonstrate the tendency of interpretation to categorize and define the art object. In his response to the publication of *Finnegans Wake*,

Samuel Beckett writes that “the danger is in the neatness of identifications” (Beckett 3). For readers and critics, attempting to identify certain aspects of the novel means grappling with contradiction, obscurity, ambiguity, and a seemingly endless trail of signifiers. Consequently, assessments of the novel that rely on categorizations such as plot, theme, subject, and protagonist will always be incomplete. As Margot Norris points out, the text continuously resists the categorization of its content, as the figures of the *Wake* “like the “shape-shifters” of fairy tales, slip as easily into animals, geographical features, household objects, edibles, and abstract concepts as into human guises” (Norris, “The Consequences of Deconstruction” 131).

Attempting to define anything in the novel therefore becomes problematic. Additionally, Derek Attridge points out that Joyce’s frequent use of portmanteau words and puns “denies that single words must have, on any given occasions, single meanings” (Attridge, “{The Peculiar Language of *Finnegans Wake*}” 75). This is compounded by Joyce’s use of symbols to represent characters, as with Δ correlating to Anna Livia Plurabelle, as well as his frequent play on their names. The language of the *Wake* demonstrates Joyce’s “insistence that meaning is an *effect* of language, not a presence within or behind it, and that the effect is unstable and uncontrollable” (Attridge, “{The Peculiar Language of *Finnegans Wake*}” 75). Further, as Beckett notes, trying to interpret the work is against the point, since the novel is comprised of “direct expression” (Beckett 13) and as such is uninterpretable. What is meant by “direct expression” (13), is that language does not correlate to meaning, and as such is uncategorizable. Eugene Jolas summarizes this idea by stating that speech, in *Finnegans Wake*, is “in a constant state of becoming” (Jolas 82). As such, the novel can never be said to be explicated, as its meaning is continuously shifting and multiplying.

CHAPTER 3: “Changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns”: Reading the *Wake*

Wakean criticism has focused not only on offering various interpretations of the novel, but also on how to read the novel, and importantly, *who* should read it. The notion of the “ideal reader” (Conley, “Performance Anxieties” 76) discussed by Tim Conley is often pictured as one who dedicates themselves to the extensive study of other texts in order to comprehend the varied references and allusions of the *Wake* (Conley “Performance Anxieties” 77-78). The texts most commonly noted as being essential to an understanding of the novel are Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Vico’s *The New Science*, and the writings of Giordano Bruno (Conley 78). Yet reading, in the case of *Finnegans Wake*, requires a redefining of what it means to engage with a text, and thus, a redefining of what makes an “ideal reader.” It is my contention that the text undermines the notion of the “ideal reader” by destabilizing the reading process itself. The “Anna Livia Plurabelle” episode vividly demonstrates the multiplicity of ways in which *Finnegans Wake* can be experienced by the reader. It can be read as music, as poetry, it can be read as an encyclopedia of river names for the reader to catalogue, it can be read as pure sound, imitating the flow of a river, or as the polyphonic narration of two washerwomen. Importantly, it can be read for any one of these things, or for all of them. The text, rather than limiting readerly interaction through a controlled, linear plot and clear narrative structure, invites an overflow of potential ways for readers to engage with it. Finn Fordham summarizes this aspect of the novel when he writes:

you can read it like a grasshopper, jumping about and producing your own set of musically phrased series, or like an ant, moving in sequence diligently from beginning to middle to end, to finish (again) where you began. You can read its surface as a kind of

pure nonsensical but expressive sound, caring little about skimming the scant appearance of sense, or you can submerge yourself deeply, pursuing the labyrinthine trails and clues that lead to other texts or discovering hidden but connected contexts (Fordham 72).

The circular form of the novel is also important to note in relation to the readers' experience of the *Wake*. As Fordham observes, the novel ends where it begins (72), and consequently, the very notion of the novelistic beginning and ending are undermined in the text. The reader's ability to find meaning and resolution in the novel's conclusion is hindered by the text's return to its own beginning. Thus, critic John Bishop contends that the book can be opened and begun from any point (Bishop 27). Likewise, the episodic structure allows for sections of the novel to be read separately from the whole. Readers can read the entire novel, or they can read only one section, one page, or one word. The work's ambivalence towards literary convention means that the ways of interacting with the text are innumerable. Rather than being a book "whose function is the intimidation and humiliation of the common reader" (Norris, "*Finnegans Wake*" 175), the *Wake* undermines conventional notions of the reader's relationship to the text by inviting an array of disparate and, at times, contradictory ways of interacting with the text.

Notably, critic Michael Patrick Gillespie moves away from explanatory literary criticism by demonstrating how reading differs from interpretation in the *Wake*. He writes that "an exegesis often does not present a critic's full aesthetic experience with a work—a reading—but instead offers an abridged and adapted version emphasizing the validity of one or two impressions—an interpretation" (Gillespie, "Reading on the Edge of Chaos" 360). As Gillespie asserts, the complexity of the *Wake* offers the reader an aesthetic experience which cannot be captured and explicated through interpretation. Rita Felski also emphasizes the limitations of critical readings that focus on interpretation, writing that "we are urged to respect the autonomy

or the singularity of the work and warned—at all cost—against imposing our own passions, prejudices, schemas, or meaning patterns upon it” (Felski 28). Yet this type of subjective, emotive reading is just what the *Wake* invites, as it allows the reading experience, and therefore the meaning(s) of the text, to be made by each individual reader, and to shift with each reading.

While the accessibility of the *Wake* has long been a point of contention among critics (Begnal 23), the novel’s use of wide-ranging language, reference, and allusion opens up possibilities of textual interaction with readers from all backgrounds. Despite being commonly called “unreadable” (Norris, “Finnegans Wake” 175), more contemporary criticism demonstrates that the *Wake* may in fact be the most readable text ever written. Joyce’s creation of what Laurent Milesi has called a “transnational literary language” (Milesi 11) through his use of polyglot puns, portmanteaus, and international geographical and historical references, allows the text to transcend English language and culture, and to expand language beyond linguistic lines. For instance, when Joyce writes in “Anna Livia Plurabelle,” “alesse, the lagos of girly days!” (203.08), “lagos” can be read as the Lagos river, French slang for a prison in Paris, or the Italian word “Lago,” meaning “lake” (McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* 203). Yet it is not crucial for every reader to understand all the references being made in the text, since experiencing a work of art and understanding it are not mutually dependent. While tracing allusions, references, and puns throughout the text can offer a richer experience to those who wish to study it, it is not necessary for all readers to do so. In *Reading Joyce*, Derek Attridge explicates this idea when he writes that, “far from demanding exhaustive knowledge, it can be seen as offering every reader, from every background, *some* familiar ground to walk on, precisely because it incorporates so much of the world’s linguistic, cultural, and historical knowledge” (Attridge, *Reading Joyce* 10). The universal component of the novel is evident not

only in Joyce's use of language, but also in the flow of river names that runs throughout "Anna Livia Plurabelle," which appear from all corners of the globe. Attridge's anecdote about recognizing a river name in the *Wake* from his time growing up in South Africa neatly demonstrates this point (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 121). The ability of the *Wake* to be accessed by such a wide range of readers is in part what makes the work so valuable, not only in its use of languages from all over the world, but also in the way it allows a multitude of additional meanings to be found in the text.

The accessibility of the *Wake* is not only due to the international features of the text, but also to the infantile aspects of Joyce's writing. Notably, critic Thomas Docherty studies the "relationship between infancy and experience in Joyce" (Docherty 113). Infancy, he writes, is a state divorced from understanding, and as such, is "writing's anathema" (112). Likewise, *Finnegans Wake*, taken as a text which invokes the play and indeterminacy of infantile expression, is its own anathema, if reading it is equated with understanding. As Docherty writes, "the language of the *Wake* is a language which tries not to be language, but to be plastic, sculptural, gestural even" (121), and consequently, interacting with the text is "hardly like "reading" at all" (Mink, "Reading *Finnegans Wake*" 38). Joyce's playful use of language allows reading also to become a playful experience, in which the act of reading itself must be redefined. Notably, Docherty posits that in the *Wake* Joyce "reproduces what we might properly call *the possibility of reading for the first time*" (123). The reader, upon first encountering the text, is put in the position of an infant learning to read, and yet, reading *Finnegans Wake* is more a process of unlearning than of learning. In order to interact with the *Wake*, readers must abandon notions of explicatory understanding and avoid searching for a "thread for the labyrinth" (Litz v). Instead, they must learn to simply experience the labyrinth itself. Far from being available only

to erudite scholars, this infantile experience arguably opens the text up to all readers, as all begin at this same basic infantile level of “*reading for the first time*” (123).

If reading is divorced from interpreting, then the ways to read the *Wake* are infinite, and, indeed, if we read for the sake of reading rather than to interpret, each time we open the text we have the infantile experience of “*reading for the first time*” (Docherty 123). The relation of the reader to the text is an important aspect of the work itself. Notably, Derek Attridge summarizes that “all reading, the *Wake* insists, is an endless interchange” (Attridge, *Reading Joyce* 11). Importantly, the individuality of the reading experience plays a significant role in the text, as it can offer something to any reader who encounters it. Likewise, since the text is meant for the reader to interact with, the experience of the *Wake* is different for each of its readers. The novel thereby undermines the notion of the “‘typical reader’” (Attridge, *Reading Joyce* 11) and contends that “different readers find different things in a text” (11). The *Wake* is thus open to all readers as long as reading is not analogous to understanding. As Attridge asserts, readers must avoid two predominant assumptions about reading: “one is that reading is an act of mastery whereby the text is made to yield up all its secrets and allowed to hold nothing back; the other is that reading is a passive experience whereby the reader receives meanings unambiguously communicated by the text” (Attridge, *Reading Joyce* 11). In other words, when interacting with the *Wake*, reading is no longer an act which leads directly to a straightforward understanding. Where Attridge recognizes the Dusi river (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 121) when Joyce writes “a bakereen’s dusind” (212.20), other readers will not, but will find other areas of recognition in the novel (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 121). It is in this way that the “oppositions between the ‘intended’ and the ‘accidental’ begins to break down” (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 121) in the novel. It is not Joyce’s intention for every reader to recognize every word of *Finnegans Wake*, as to do so would

be an impossibility. However, all readers will recognize some aspects of it. When reading the *Wake*, the goal is not to recognize in order to understand, but rather to interact with, and experience the text itself. The ambiguity of the text and Joyce's use of a transnational language arguably makes *Finnegans Wake* more accessible to a wider range of people, than any other literary work as it is one in which "the reader is joined as a maker-up" (Senn 57) through the act of recognition.

In *Citation and Modernity*, Claudette Sartiliot writes that in *Finnegans Wake*, the reader should "understand the text otherwise than with the mind" (80). The infantile, playful, and humorous aspects of the novel encourage readers to move away from explanatory notions of understanding and to embrace the openness and ambiguity of the text. In particular, Richard Beckman reads the novel as "a parody version of Kant's idea of how limited human knowledge is" (Beckman 63). This reading is useful not as an interpretation of the text but as a way of interacting with the text. Beckman demonstrates that the novel undermines every attempt by the reader to reach after knowledge, or Norris' "realist epistemology" (Norris, *The Decentered Universe* 11) as a way of understanding. What Joyce's novel does is assert that "direct knowledge is not attainable" (Beckman 82), and thus, reading it is not a gathering of facts which lead to a conclusive answer, but rather an experience only of the text as *itself*. Notably, Fred Rush reiterates Susan Sontag's assertion that "knowledge is domination" (Rush 38), summarizing that "understanding a thing necessarily involves bringing it into connection with what is already known" (Rush 38). Yet *Finnegans Wake* challenges the notion that knowledge can be used to make the novel understandable. Consequently, the reader is forced to interact with the novel without a pre-set model of reading, and without attempting to understand it through knowledge and interpretation. Readers who find difficulty with the novel are those who "attempt

to totalize its polysemia” (Sartiliot 82) and to create an overarching understanding from the irreducible mass of text that makes up the *Wake*.

The novel also undermines the process of reading, and thus of interpreting, as a linear experience in which meaning is contained between a novel’s beginning and end. The instability of meaning in the text is demonstrated by Fritz Senn in “A Reader Exercise in *Finnegans Wake*” in which he posits that “the text sometimes tempts us to go back, to retrace our steps, before we can advance again” (Senn 51). Simply reading the text linearly does not mean that it will be without meaning, but reading it backwards, as well as forwards, thereby mimicking the way the text looks back upon itself, simultaneously multiplies and changes the meanings of the text. Thus, Senn points out that hindsight plays a significant role in the *Wake*, as it, “affects the linguistic structure” (50) of the novel. Just as Senn uses the example of Joyce’s repetition of phonetically similar words to “Buckley Shot the Russian General” (49), his play on the name of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” demonstrates the same point. When, on the second page of the novel Joyce writes, “addle liddle phifie” (4.28), the reader will not recognize this as relating to “Anna Livia Plurabelle.” However, if the reader returns to this page, after having read further to “her name is A.L.P” (102.23), “*Amnis Limina Permanent*” (153.02), “Aches-les-Pains” (213.18), and “tell me all about Anna Livia!” (196.01), these words take on a different set of meanings. Consequently, the reader’s experience of the text departs from any preconceived notion of reading as a process of simply moving forward. The *Wake* refers back to itself and thereby creates a readerly experience in which looking backwards and forwards creates a deeper reading experience. As Senn summarizes, “we, as readers, are induced to depart from ordinary, linear progression in favor of what is a series of (hopesomely) illuminated leaps” (58).

The non-linear movement of the text and the mutability of meaning therein demonstrates the limitations of reading the work by attempting to fixate it within any interpretive frame. This problem is summarized by Clive Hart, when he writes that “the reader who attempts to follow the mercurial arguments of *Finnegans Wake* through more than one or two consecutive paragraphs finds the greatest difficulty in keeping from one moment to the next, a stable foothold on his chosen interpretive vantagepoint” (Hart 13). While Hart still reaches after the notion of a “complete exegesis” (15) of the *Wake*, he recognizes the multiplicity of meaning inherent in the text. One important part of interacting with the text’s overwhelming amount of potential meanings is an “acceptance of ambiguity” (Gillespie, “Raiding Fur Buginners” 87). If the reader accepts the text’s overall ambiguity, they can no longer reach after interpretation as a way of creating meaning. As Gillespie contends, “either/or questions give way to both/and answers” (Gillespie, “Raiding Fur Buginners” 87). Further, if we interact with the text by moving away from interpretation and towards an aesthetic or experiential form of reading, the ambiguity of the text becomes an essential aspect of the reader’s response towards it. Gillespie points out that any rereading of the novel, or of a passage therein, “will never lead to the same aesthetic experience because variations within the act of reading—experience, imaginative disposition, emotional connotation, and other elements—change the response radically” (Gillespie, “Reading on the Edge of Chaos” 370). Consequently, the text itself changes not only with each individual reader, but also with readers who return to the text.

Embracing ambiguity is essential to experiencing the text as *itself* since it is never only one thing. Finn Fordham summarizes the multiplicity of the *Wake* when he writes that “it is neither a novel, nor an anti-novel: it is rather, both. This means that there is a plot and there is not a plot, protagonists emerge but all subjects are dissolved, it makes sense and is nonsense”

(Fordham 71). Fordham's description of the text demonstrates another important point: that the ambiguity of the text is characterized by contradiction. We can see this clearly in the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" episode's call of "tell me all about Anna Livia!" (196.01-02), though the reader is never given the whole story, and the "telling" is frequently interrupted. While James S. Atherton asserts that an "interpretation must be found which resolves the contradictions" (Atherton 18) of the text, this notion works against the ambiguity of the novel rather than with it. In attempting to enclose meaning by viewing the text as a problem which can be solved, critics like Atherton demonstrate what Sontag calls a "dissatisfaction (conscious or unconscious) with the work, a wish to replace it with something else" (Sontag 10). In order to avoid transforming the text to conform to exegetical processes of reading, readers of the *Wake* should embrace the work's ambiguous nature. Notably, Gillespie posits that "the problem does not turn upon a resolution of contraries but upon a reconciliation with them" (Gillespie, "Raiding Fur Buginners" 87). The ambiguous, contradictory nature of the text allows readers to abandon exegesis in favour of experiencing the work of art as a continuous process of transformation, and to embrace meaning as something fluid and multiplicitous.

Further, Atherton's assertion that the contradictions of the text be resolved likewise misses the role that contradiction plays in multiplying the meanings of the text. Contradiction plays an important part in the *Wake* by forcing the reader to attempt to find unity in opposites. David Overstreet posits that in the novel Joyce uses "oxymoronic language" (Overstreet 38) to not only demonstrate how opposites can be united in language, but also as part of the novel's aesthetic experience (Overstreet 56). Apparent throughout the novel, but perhaps captured most vividly in the title itself, oxymoronic language is displayed by the word "Finnegan," which can be broken apart into "Finn," meaning "end" and "egan," meaning "again" (Overstreet 52), neatly

encompassing the unity of opposing ideas which pervades the novel. Overstreet asserts that “by conceptualizing an oxymoron, opposites are joined, and one can conceive the inconceivable” (37). Oxymoronic language thereby “creates oxymoronic logic” (38). Such logic is characterized as being “more openly associative than does restrictive linear logic” (39). This way of thinking is also described by Overstreet as “Janus thinking” (46), in which one is able to look in two opposing directions at once (46), a concept which is imperative for readers of the *Wake*. The ability to look forwards as well as backwards, and to be comfortable with opposites, allows readers to interact with the text in a way which does not involve complete exegesis, but rather assumes the ability to experience the text by embracing contradiction. Further, Overstreet writes that in oxymoronic language “unity is perceived. This mystical yoking of discrete opposites into a metaphysical union is aesthetic” (37). Through oxymorons, Joyce creates “aesthetic experiences wherein the perceiver creates out of the polar elements the third elements, synthesis, in which a trinity of elements are imaginatively perceived as one “true sense” (56). Synthesis, in this sense, is an understanding based not on the “fixity, permanence, and truth” (Attridge, *Joyce Effects* 120) that characterize interpretation, but rather on the non-linear and fluid understanding of “oxymoronic logic” (38), which allows the reader to embrace opposing ideas and to create new meanings out of contradiction.

Like Overstreet, Michael Patrick Gillespie also offers an alternative way of reading by embracing the text’s complexity. In “Reading on the Edge of Chaos: *Finnegans Wake* and the Burden of Linearity” he examines the novel by utilizing the complexity of the text as a guide to finding meaning. Combining literary studies with complexity studies in physics, Gillespie posits that the *Wake* “fits the description of any dynamic nonlinear system: “locally unpredictable, globally stable.” Responses to it—whether made in public or in private—retain a viability and

validity in direct proportion to their resistance to conventional epistemology.” (Gillespie, “Reading on the Edge of Chaos” 371). While Gillespie does not dismiss traditional interpretations of the novel and acknowledges the usefulness of reference guides, he emphasizes that there are alternatives to this type of reading, and that understanding the *Wake* does not have to be the goal of reading it. Rather than attempting to simplify the novel, he asserts that readers “need to retain a sense of its mystery” (Gillespie, “Reading on the Edge of Chaos 371). Though passages of the novel can appear to be overly difficult, the reader must learn to “respond to information derived from the narrative in a manner that refuses to sacrifice multiplicity for a kind of clarity or ambiguity for a systemic tidiness” (Gillespie, “Reading on the Edge of Chaos” 369). Gillespie’s assessment of the text demonstrates that complexity is an important aspect of the novel which should be retained, rather than sacrificed in order to create a comprehensive interpretation which reduces the multiplicity of the work. Further, allowing the text to remain fluid can increase the reader’s pleasure in experiencing it. Gillespie affirms that “*Finnegans Wake* will most represent our aesthetic pleasure when our writing acknowledges chaos as commensurate with clarity and complexity as preferable to closure” (Gillespie, “Reading on the Edge of Chaos” 371). Since the novel interrupts the novelistic linear structure of story-telling and undermines the notion of closure by creating a never-ending loop of text, the reader is forced to find a resolution which does not revolve around explication, but instead focuses on embracing complexity as a meaningful and unsolvable component of the work itself. Importantly, Gillespie also demonstrates that pleasure plays an important role in the reader’s experience of a work, and that readerly pleasure does not correlate to understanding.

CHAPTER 4: “Will you hold your peace and listen to what I am going to say now?”: Hearing the *Wake*

While reading, when divorced from interpreting, is one way to interact with the novel, this is not the only way to experience the text. As Samuel Beckett contends, “it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to” (Beckett 14). It has been previously discussed that the visual aspects of the novel are demonstrated by the symbols used to represent characters (299.36), in the opening of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” (196.1-3), as well as in other episodes such as “Nightlessons” (see 293.12, 308.29). However, listening to the text is another significant way in which readers can interact with and experience *Finnegans Wake*. Many notable critics have written about the role of sound in Joyce’s writing, such as Michael Patrick Gillespie, James Steven Saucedo, and Cynthia Whissell. I aim to enter into this critical discussion in order to demonstrate how sound can impact the way in which readers encounter the text, as well as the way in which sound can enhance the reader’s ability to create meaning. Critical responses to sound in *Finnegans Wake* can generally be divided into two categories: those who think that the novel should be read out loud in order for the reader to have a meaningful experience (see Docherty, Saucedo, Whissell), and those who think that sound is no more important in the novel than any other aspect of Joyce’s writing (See Hart). The critical discussion of this topic has been influenced by Joyce’s own 1929 recording of his reading of the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” section (Joyce and Cusack), which is often used in critical readings to support the idea that the *Wake* is meant to be read out loud (see Curtain). Richard Ellmann’s biography, *James Joyce*, also presents Joyce’s desire that the novel be listened to, recording that “one day a visiting English-woman listened to him reading a passage from the book and sternly remarked, ‘that isn’t literature.’ ‘It was,’ Joyce replied, meaning that it was while she was listening to it” (Ellmann,

James Joyce 702). The transient quality of what is considered “literature” is important to note here, as Ellmann’s quotation suggests that Joyce views literature as a fluid, and fleeting, experience. Moreover, while sound is often perceived as a way of making greater sense of Joyce’s extraordinary language, Clive Hart argues that, “sound and rhythm are no more than a part of the total pattern and have, I believe, been overstressed. Most of Joyce’s neologisms are more easily understood by eye than by ear” (Hart 36) and contends that in the novel, “the great bulk of the imagery remains essentially visual” (37). On the other hand, James Steven Saucedo claims that the novel “must literally be *heard* to be understood” (Saucedo 125). Problematically, the assertions of both Hart and Saucedo fall into the trap of reductive and exclusionary critical interpretation. In contradiction, I do not posit that Joyce must be read in silence or that he must be read out loud, but rather that the novel can be read either way, as it is open as much to the eye as to the ear. Both the aural and visual aspects of the novel offer the reader different ways of interacting with the text. However, listening to the text is one way that readers can learn to experience *Finnegans Wake* as *itself* without attempting to understand or interpret it.

Joyce’s own emphasis on sound in the novel is candidly demonstrated throughout “Anna Livia Plurabelle,” beginning with the episode’s first words, “O, tell me all about Anna Livia! I want to hear all about Anna Livia” (196.01-03). This section of the text constantly draws attention to its own aural quality, asking the reader to “listen now. Are you listening?” (201.03) and imploring us to “hear it all, aviary word! (206.20). The repeated emphasis on telling, hearing, and listening demonstrates not only that the text can be read aloud, but also simplifies the reading process by showing the reader that the words on the page can simply be listened to as sound, rather than being understood as text. In entreating the reader to listen, the text also brings attention to its own unconventionality, by mirroring the reader’s reaction to Joyce’s writing when

he declares, “well, I never now heard the like of that” (198.27-28), while compelling the reader to continue listening. In doing so, Joyce makes the reader aware that the novel is not meant to sound, or be experienced, in a conventional way. Likewise, Joyce brings attention to the sound of the written words by using onomatopoeic language to express the aural aspects of the text, as exemplified when he writes, “make my hear it gurgle gurgle, like the farest gargle gargle in the dusky dirgle dargle!” (206.16-18). The use of onomatopoeia asserts that the words themselves are oral, thereby encouraging the reader to listen to the what is written on the page as sound. In addition, the use of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance create what Thomas Docherty refers to as “sound sense” (Docherty 122) in the novel. This is stressed not only in the use of onomatopoeic words which only literally make sense as sound, but also in the novel’s use of repetition to emphasize sound, rhyme, and rhythm, which is notable in lines such as “O gig goggle of gigguels” (206.14), “in fear to hear the dear so hear or longing loth and loathing longing” (204.25-26), and “Letty Lerck’s lafing light throw those laurels now on her daphdaph teasesong petrock” (203.29-31). These lines illustrate that even though the words may not make sense to the reader as written text, when heard out loud they will still make sense to the listener as a pattern of familiar sounds. As Jennie Wang perceptively notes, “the ear does not demand the kind of reason or rationality as the eye does, such as spelling, grammar, syntax” (Wang 215). Thus, words which do not appear correct to the eye can still retain some form of sense and meaning when heard by the ear.

The “sound sense” of the novel is further emphasized by the references to music and musical instruments that pervade the text. For instance, in “Anna Livia Plurabelle” Joyce writes, “tune your pipes and fall ahumming” (197-8.36-01), “ribble a reedy derg on a fiddle” (198.25), “she’d esk to vistule a hymn” (199.27), and “sing us a sula, O susuria!” (209.35). Lines such as

these accentuate the musicality of the *Wake* and suggest that readers can find meaning in the text by simply listening. Claudette Sartiliot summarizes this aspect of the novel, positing that “meaning, in the sense of something exhausted in the process of understanding, is not the aim of the *Wake*. It’s meaning is closer to the effect of music, the language that speaks to the ear” (Sartiliot 80). By asking the reader to listen, and bringing attention to the musicality of the work, “Anna Livia Plurabelle” invites readers not to understand the text, but simply to listen to it, and in doing so, works against the form of critical interpretation opposed by Felski and Sontag.

The musical aspects of the *Wake* also encourage ideas about performance as one way for the reader to interact with the text. In “The ‘Wordloosed Soundscrip’: Performing James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*” Saucedo presents performance as an essential way of experiencing the text, writing that “Joyce has constructed his final opus upon “polyhedronic” prose, an innovation of language that is unprecedented in its aurality and therefore requires oral utterance to be realized” (Saucedo 125). While Saucedo is correct in his assertion that performing the text can emphasize important areas of meaning for the reader, namely, the vocal and theatrical dimensions of the work (125), his stance that the text must be performed to be understood is ultimately an oversimplification of the work. While the musical attributes speak to performance, treating the text as something meant to be performed sets boundaries on how readers are meant to interact with it. Performing the text, as Saucedo desires, would likewise require a redefining of what it means to perform. As the *Wake* undermines the process of reading and of expressing, it also undermines the process of performance. Another problem with Saucedo’s argument is that he emphasizes sound in the *Wake* only as a tool for interpretation, concluding that “performance, then, provides the missing critical tool organically suited for interpreting this highly experimental text” (125). While I do not disagree that sound and performance are ways in which

readers can experience the work and create an array of meanings without treating the text as text, these aspects of the *Wake* should not be treated as critical lenses for interpretation, but rather as paths to exploring the multitude of ways that readers can interact with, and experience, the work.

One aspect of sound in the *Wake* rarely focused on by critics is the connection between sound and emotion. Notably, Cynthia Whissell takes another approach to sound in the *Wake* by psychologically analyzing the words and non-words of the text to determine the emotional meanings of specific sounds (Whissell 257) in order to demonstrate that “sound emotionality is one of the alternative paths to meaning” (258) in the *Wake*. As previously discussed, readers from all backgrounds may find some meaning in the polyglot language of *Finnegans Wake*. Yet what has not been explored is what to do when the reader encounters unrecognizable words, or what Whissell calls Joyce’s “non-words” (257). Sound, she posits, is one of the ways in which readers can find meaning even in words which they do not recognize, contending that “a portion—though certainly not all—of the meaning of a group of letters resides in its sounds, and in some cases sound is the only access to meaning that the reader may have” (258). Further, she posits that “the meaning of sounds in the *Wake* is foregrounded because a key source of meaning that readers normally rely upon (the verbal sign) has been intentionally corrupted by the author in a specific effort to redirect the search through alternative channels” (270). Joyce’s removal of the signifier from the signified can disrupt the reader’s ability to make meaning out of written words, thereby encouraging them to use sound as a method of meaning-making. This is notable in Joyce’s use of sound to create relationships between words. For instance, when a reader sees the words “appia lippia pluvavile” (297.25) they may not understand the individual meaning of each word but can recognize that they sound like “Anna Livia Plurabelle.” Moreover, Whissell demonstrates that the method of creating meaning differs between the aural and visual. She

writes that sounds, unlike written words, “do not rely on a convention of signs for their meaning” (260), and that the “emotional meaning of a sound comes in part from the expression involved in enunciating it. The meaning is associated first with spoken sounds and then with heard and written/read ones as well” (260). Consequently, she argues that the act of sounding out words is “central to instinctive emotions” (270) which allow the reader to create meaning out of words regardless of whether or not they understand them as written language. Unlike other critics, Whissell does not offer an analysis of sound as a way of interpreting or understanding the text, but rather as one way for readers to find meaning even in the “non-words” (257) used by Joyce, and importantly, demonstrates that this is only one aspect of meaning making that the *Wake* offers to readers.

The emotive aspects of listening to the novel being read out loud are also emphasized in Adrian Curtain’s study of Joyce’s “Anna Livia Plurabelle” recording, “Hearing Joyce Speak: The Phonograph Recordings of “Aelous” and “Anna Livia Plurabelle” as Audiotexts.” Like Whissell, Curtain emphasizes that there are additional layers of meaning to be found in the emotions created by the sound of written words. Curtain investigates the “intersection of the verbal and the vocable” (Curtain 271) in Joyce’s work in order to demonstrate how listening to the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” recording can shift and enhance the readers experience of the *Wake*. He posits that Joyce’s oral reading is “deeply imbued with feeling on the speaker’s part: a feature of Joyce’s art that is not always immediately apparent to the reader” (272). Curtain reveals the recording’s importance to critical discussions of the *Wake* by demonstrating how sound and emotion interact in Joyce’s work. He writes that “certain phrases that may seem relatively unremarkable on the page are made especially beautiful by Joyce’s delivery, which is surprisingly tender, such as “[i]t’s that irrawaddyng I’ve stoke in my aars. It all but husheth the

letheist zswound” (*FW* 214.09-10). Joyce treats the iambs in the second sentence as though they formed a lullaby” (273). As Curtain demonstrates, listening to Joyce’s recording can offer new ways for the reader to experience the work, and to find additional meanings which are not apparent from the written word alone. The recording ultimately “destabilizes the boundaries between a text for reading and a script for performance, the verbal and the vocable, semantic utterances and non-semantic utterances, and the oral and the aural” (276-277). While Saucedo is correct in his assertion that the novel *can* be performed, it is a fallacy to say that it *must* be performed in order to be understood. What Curtain’s analysis of the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” recording reveals is not only that the text is multifaceted and suited to more than one mode of expression, but also that listening to the work can create additional meanings to reading the text as a written work.

The focus that both Whissell and Curtain put on the emotional aspects of sound and of listening to a text are aspects of reading which are largely disregarded in Joycean criticism. As Michael Patrick Gillespie points out, is it the intent of the writer that is more often focused on than the response of the reader (“Reading on the Edge of Chaos” 361), and consequently the emotional aspects of a work are frequently disregarded. Yet the simplicity of finding meaning in the emotional response evoked by a work was something highly regarded by Joyce himself, who wrote in a letter to his daughter, Lucia, that *Finnegans Wake* “is pleasing to the ear. And your drawings are pleasing to the eye. That is enough, it seems to me” (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 702). Joyce’s implication that art is meant to evoke pleasure disregards interpretation as the goal of the audience, and places emphasis instead upon the evocation of emotional response. Likewise, Joyce’s uses of puns, portmanteaus, and polyphonic words is a form of word play that can be enjoyed equally by the reader and the listener. Listening to the *Wake* as something meant to

evoke emotion, rather than something to be understood changes the perception of the text as something obscure and difficult, to something pleasurable. It is worth noting that Whissell's analysis of sound emotion in the *Wake* classifies the emotional sound character of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" as sad (Whissell 267), and largely without any "positive emotional sounds" (267). Further, she concludes that there are "significant differences in emotional tone among chapters" (266). What can be gleaned from this analysis is that Joyce's work is highly emotional, and one in which sound emotion plays an important role in the reader's experience of the text. The fact that the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" episode is categorized by Whissell as being sad demonstrates that, like music, the sound of the text is meant to evoke a specific emotional response, a notion which is emphasized by Joyce's own solemn recording of the episode (Joyce and Cusack). Moreover, the erudite nature of the work which many scholars focus on is undermined when the text is listened to and appreciated not for how it is written but for the emotions it evokes in the listener.

The relationship between sound and the reading process in the *Wake* is further explored by Paul Magee in his article, "How do we Read *Finnegans Wake* in Silence?" In response to Saucedo, Magee points out that despite the emphasis on sound the book is more likely to be read silently (Magee 353). Yet by investigating Joyce's use of language, Magee demonstrates that the text's inner auralness is apparent even to readers who choose to read in silence. He asserts that:

Poetic and homophonous language of the sort we find on every page of Joyce's last book will, when read silently, tend to be heard as voiced in the reader's head. Furthermore, such language will tend to be subvocalized as well, with nerve pulses going out to activate the throat, chest, and tongue as we read it. In sum, we can infer that the *Wake*'s tongue-twisting,

incipiently metrical and homophonic properties are likely to be subvocally and auditorially experienced by readers approaching the book in silence (Magee 357-358).

As Magee demonstrates, even when readers treat the text as *text*, the sound of the words play an important role in their experience. Notably, Magee refutes Saucedá's assertion that the text be performed out loud by emphasizing that even silent reading can encompass performative aspects of the work (368). For instance, he notes that in many areas of the text "clear emotional markers contain an equally clear sequence of changes in vocal pitch" (362), such as in the opening of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" when Joyce writes, "O tell me all about Anna Livia!" (196.01-03). The exuberance and energy of these lines are still apparent and auditorily felt even when the text is read silently because, despite Joyce's use of polyphonic puns and portmanteaus, his sentences remain syntactically clear (354). Consequently, Magee points out that "if the syntax of a given sentence is clear, we tend to know how to say that sentence *as if we meant it*" (354). Thus, the sound of the text is an important component of the work even if it is not read out loud.

Magee's assessment of silent reading illustrates that critics like Saucedá, who assert that the text must be read in a certain way in order to be understood, largely miss the point of the *Wake*. In response to Saucedá's assertion that the *Wake* is meant to be performed (Sauceda 125), Magee asks, "why not write a stage play?" (Magee 353). Indeed, the fact that the *Wake* is not a stage play demonstrates that performance is only one aspect of the text, to be embraced by some readers and not by others. Michael Patrick Gillespie summarizes that readings "encompass multiple responses that grow out of a creative engagement with words on a printed page" (Gillespie, "Reading on the Edge of Chaos" 360). Consequently, understanding can, but does not have to be, an aspect of reading the *Wake*. Notably, rather than seeing the novel's phonetic qualities as evidence that the

text is meant to be read out loud, critic Jennie Wang reads sound in the *Wake* as another way in which Joyce opens his text up to a multitude of meanings. She writes that:

Creating a text of irregular spellings, Joyce seems to assert the notion that the meaning of a written word correctly spelled is always limited because it is determined by its function within a certain linguistic hierarchy, grammatical structure, or the arbitrary assumptions of conventional meaning. A defamiliarized letter, then, may open infinite possibilities of meaning by freeing itself from the fixed rules of that hierarchy or structure or assumptions. In order to do so, Joyce plays with sound as a medium just to free the word from its spelling (Wang 215).

The aural components of the *Wake*, then, can be seen as yet another way in which Joyce frees his text from any fixed meaning, and from any fixed way for the reader to interact with it. Since Joyce has created a text that simply refuses to fit anywhere—linguistically, novelistically, aurally, or performatively—it is up to each individual reader to decide how to engage with the work. As Magee states, “readers will have their own experiences” (Magee 367), and Joyce encourages them to do so by opening his text up to an array of possible interactions for the reader.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Joyce frees his novel from novelistic conventions of language, spelling, story-telling, structure, and plot not to make a text that is difficult for the reader, but rather to demonstrate that the reading process is a creative endeavor which is not limited to interpretation and understanding. The multi-layered and anti-hierarchical nature of the text asserts that there are a multitude of ways to read and interact with it, and allows the reader to, as Jennie Wang states, “break the text apart and put it together himself/herself” (Wang 213). Reading *Finnegans Wake* is thus not an act of explication but rather an act of creation; each reader creates the meanings of the text as they interact with it. Moreover, the complexity of the novel, rather than closing off the text, opens it up to alternative possibilities for reading and experiencing literature. Not only does the polyhedronic language of the text make it accessible to more readers, it also points to the transient and fluid nature of the reading experience. As Roland Barthes writes, “every text is eternally written *here* and *now*” (Barthes 145). Consequently, while the *Wake* can be reread, it can never be reexperienced in the same way, as the text shifts and changes with each reading, and with each reader. Similarly, the novel allows for an array of interpretations, yet the reader does not have to rely on explicating and understanding the text in order to have a valuable reading experience. David Overstreet writes that when encountering the *Wake*, it is important to “overcome the fear of not understanding and instill the love of wordplay” (Overstreet 51). Simply taking pleasure in the text, whether visually, aesthetically, linguistically, or aurally, is enough; readers need not understand *Finnegans Wake* in order to do so.

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