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# “The abnihilization of the etym”: Finnegans Wake ii.3 as oral poetry in the age of mechanical reproduction

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“The Abnihilization of the Etym”: *Finnegans Wake* II.3 as Oral Poetry  
in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

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## I. Introduction

Critics have long recognized the many ways that *Finnegans Wake* explores the inherent instability of all identities—personal, sexual, political, historical, and linguistic. It is a work that is performatively unstable though textually permanent. In this thesis, I argue that *Finnegans Wake* II.3—an especially fraught section of the *Wake* that explores instability by enacting tensions between dynamic performance and static textual identity—reveals a role that a dynamic kind of art might play in an age of seemingly static new-media technological saturation. By redeploing resources from ancient oral poetic tradition, I will argue, it modulates them for use within the contemporary media landscape, to create a form of resistance to the totalizing effects of textualized mass culture. Technologically saturated media culture often attempts to encode stable, binary identities into the fabric of sociopolitical reality; *Finnegans Wake* II.3 contrasts two alternatives to escape this oppressively rigid encoding. Beginning with an extended description of the radio-televisual device in the background of Earwicker’s pub—“their tolv tubular high fidelity daidialler” (309.14)—II.3 goes on to contrast a traditional oral-poetic narration of “Kersse the Tailor,” delivered by HCE to an underwhelming crowd reaction, with a more innovative radio broadcast of “How Buckley Shot the Russian General,” one that HCE’s patrons prefer.

A close reading of II.3 will reveal the ways HCE’s “Kersse” tale represents an anti-technological attempt to cling nostalgically to an ancient mode of storytelling, but one that lapses into cliché quickly overwhelmed by the radio broadcast its teller seeks to block. It will then demonstrate how the Butt and Taff “Buckley” radio-play—a different kind of oral production which re-appropriates the vocabulary and mediation techniques of

radio, television and advertising—can bring about a new form of what the young Joyce termed “epic savagery” (OCPW 28) and an escape from the merely literary. Butt and Taff’s telling of “How Buckley Shot the Russian general” attempts, as *Finnegans Wake* styles it, an “abnihilation of the etym,” an attempt to tear open the smallest semantic units of our culture, and hurtles us forward into a postmodern, hybrid future, away from the embrace of a naive folk-art past. This new form of art breaks down the boundaries between content and form, speaking and writing, story and interpolation, medium and message, and ultimately, art and world, to suggest an alternative to the hegemony of a cultural existence driven by oppressive binaries.

This reading will reveal a contrast which fulfills some of Joyce’s longest-held aesthetic preoccupations. To reach demonstrate this claim, in Section II, I will first establish some background about what “oral poetry” might mean, looking especially at the role that it plays for Vico in his *New Science*, a book which influenced Joyce’s work on *Finnegans Wake*. Many critics have asserted a connection between Vico’s text and important structural aspects of *Finnegans Wake* itself. Even so, almost no one has considered the influence of Vico’s chapter titled “The Discovery of the True Homer” -- one which, I will argue, provides a new context for understanding Joyce’s aesthetic oral-poetic agenda for the *Wake*. In Section III, I will explore the way the earlier parts of *Wake* (I.1-II.2) use a Bakhtinian polyphonic technique to foreshadow the tension between orality and the written word so thoroughly engaged in II.3. Building on work by McLuhan, Theall and Armand, in Section IV I will set forth a “techno-poetic” interpretation of II.3 that considers the role that radio and visual technology might play in augmenting the possibilities of ancient oral performance in the context of new media

technology, exposing both conservative limitations, in the case of “Kersse the Tailor,” and more liberating possibilities, in the case of “How Buckley Shot the Russian General.” In Section V, I will trace the impact of II.3’s climax on the rest of *Finnegans Wake*. Finally, in Section VI, I will conclude by sketching out some ways that II.3’s enactment of a newly technologically sophisticated oral poetry models a strategy for escaping the dualisms so seemingly inevitable within our own “culture industry.”

## **II. Joyce, Oral Poetry, and Vico’s “Discovery of the True Homer”**

From early on, Joyce was ambivalent about the path his working life might take. He weighed the priesthood, teaching, and even a career as a travelling singer, before settling on writing. Though those earlier options Joyce had considered all share a common interest in oral performance, ultimately Joyce became an author—someone who writes words on a page. Even so, Joyce’s writing frequently explores the relationship between written and oral authorship. In early letters, *Dubliners*, critical essays, and later in his encounter with Vico’s *New Science*, especially its section “The Discovery of the True Homer,” Joyce continues to explore this relationship, seeking a way to reconcile his work with what he saw as the unsatisfactory aesthetic options before him. Joyce was dissatisfied, on the one hand, with the elitist high-literary tradition, which shunned the oral in favor of the written; on the other, with what Joyce saw as the faux-populist Irish Cultural Revival, which elevated a naive and reactionary notion of oral tradition. Vico’s text provides Joyce with a way forward, an aesthetic agenda that situated what he saw as the best aspects of the oral-performance tradition of what Vico styles the “True Homer” within a thoroughgoing modernist perspective on technology and modern media. In

*Ulysses*, but even more in *Finnegans Wake* (especially II.3), we can see all these concerns come together in a way they did not in Joyce's earlier work.

#### A. Joyce's Earliest Writing

Joyce's interest in oral performance is reflected in his lifelong interest in popular music. Ellmann notes that Joyce, as a teenager, preferred to listen to "sentimental as well as humorous songs" (52). An early friend of Joyce's "pleased Joyce with the remark that 'The difficulty about Aquinas is that what he says is so like what the man in the street says'" (Ellmann 63). Upon returning from a trip to England with his father, Joyce let his brother Stanislaus know that "the music hall, not poetry, is a criticism of life" (Ellmann 77). Joyce's letters bear out similar preferences. During his first abortive visits to Paris, he variously asked Stanislaus to send him "a Book of British Song" (L2 21), his copy of Wagner's operas (L2 25), and another "book of Elizabethan Songs" (L2 35). He inscribed a letter to his mother with a transcription of a West Indian folk song called "Upa-Upa" (L2 30). Oliver St. John Gogarty, the real-life prototype for *Ulysses*' Buck Mulligan, earned Joyce's approval for his bawdy songs. Joyce wrote to Gogarty that he was contemplating travelling with a "lute and to coast the south of England from Falmouth to Margate singing old English songs" (L1 54). In an early letter to his future wife Nora, he lamented that his feelings were best expressed by "an old song written three hundred years ago by the English King Henry VIII – a brutal and lustful king" (L2 44) – one he quotes in full to close the letter. As he describes the very autobiographical Stephen Daedalus of *Stephen Hero*, "the songs, for him at least, were really beautiful—the old country songs of England and the elegant songs of the Elizabethans" (43). We thus see

orality, in the form of music and the affirmation of folk-wisdom, as an interest from the beginning.

Joyce's ambivalence about speaking and writing also emerges in his earliest published fiction. Consider this passage from the first paragraph of "The Sisters":

He had often said to me: "I am not long for this world," and I had thought his words idle. Now I knew they were true. Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word *paralysis*. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word *gnomon* in the Euclid and the word *simony* in the Catechism (*Dubliners* 1).

In this passage, the unnamed protagonist reflects on the differences between written and spoken language. He remembers words spoken to him by the priest and then moves quickly to a thought about the spoken sound of words that he has encountered in writing or speaking with his mentor. He "said softly to [himself] the word *paralysis*"; it "had always sounded strangely in [his] ears," just like "*gnomon*," which he had encountered in a geometry textbook, and "*simony*," in the catechism - a written text itself meant for memorization and oral recitation. Both spoken and written language mingle side by side in his consciousness, and his thoughts move back and forth between those modalities. A similar dialectic arises in many of the stories in *Dubliners*, perhaps most notably in Gabriel's worries about his dinner speech in "The Dead." We could make a similar analysis of the "baby tuckoo" story at the start of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It reads as written narration ("once upon a time..."), and then it quickly doubles back on itself as we are told that it is spoken ("his father told him that story"). In Joyce's play *Exiles*, the struggle between Richard Rowan, a playwright (i.e., the producer

of spoken art), and Robert Hand, a journalist (the producer of written news), in some ways presages the Shem-Shaun motif in *Finnegans Wake*. We see something like it in Bloom's interior monologue about a cluster of written texts he encounters in the "Calypso" episode of *Ulysses*. These texts include a letter from Molly's lover Blazes Boylan; a newsprint Zionist advertisement, with its exotically Jewish "kinnereth on the lakeshore of Tiberias... Moses Montefiore" (48) that he sees on the butcher's wrapping paper; and a section of "Matchum's Masterstroke" that he reads to himself in his outhouse. From Joyce's earliest writings onward, we find a continually evolving self-consciously dialectical interaction between the written and the spoken.

This dialectic, as seen in Joyce's fiction, also exemplifies a broader set of cultural concerns voiced in Joyce's critical work. Joyce repeatedly eschews the written word, especially in what he calls "literature." Consider a critical remark from the semi-autobiographical novel fragment, *Stephen Hero*: "the term 'literature' now seemed to him a term of contempt and he used it to designate the vast middle region which lies between apex and base, between poetry and the chaos of unremembered writing" (78). In contrast, the college-age Joyce's essay "Drama and Life," while praising Ibsen, also praises the form more generally as "essentially a *communal* art" (OCPW 26, emphasis added). In this setting, Joyce asserts, we must "draw a line of demarcation between literature and drama" (23). Though in literature "we allow for conventions, for literature is a comparatively low form of art... Drama will be for the future at war with convention" (OCPW 25). Whatever we might think of these grandiose pronouncements, they foreshadow the projects Joyce would later pursue—projects that were, at least in their apparent form, "literary." *Exiles* is Joyce's only, relatively conventional attempt at



drama (unless we count the “Circe” episode in *Ulysses* or some of the Shem and Shaun dialogues in the *Wake*), but in his apparently “literary” novels, he waged an ongoing “war with convention.”

The young Joyce could not abide by late-Victorian generic norms for fiction. In a suggestive phrase coming at the end of “Drama and Life,” Joyce laments that in the world of literature, “epic savagery is rendered impossible by vigilant policing” (OCPW 28). We can read “epic” simply as a synonym for “grand” or “important,” but something about the epic as a genre seems also to be on the table, something perhaps akin to Lukacs’s distinction between “epic” and “novel.” The former speaks the truth of an entire people in self-assured, culturally encompassing ways; the latter merely gropes after the thoughts and feelings of individuals existing within structures from which they are always already alienated. As Joyce had earlier asserted, “every race has made its own myths and it is in these that early drama often finds an outlet” (OCPW 26). Joyce here yearns to find an outlet for such expression, but finds in literature “vigilant policing.” This may be taken to refer to the social pressures of the Dublin literary world, lambasted more directly in his broadside entitled “The Day of the Rabblement,” but we can also hear a more literary-theoretical objection: books with certain expectations of plot, character, setting, diction, syntax and narration “police” their contents into neat and tidy order, constricting the “epic savagery” Joyce has glimpsed in Ibsen. In an almost Wagnerian turn of phrase, Joyce suggests: “the Folk is, I believe, able to do so much” (OCPW 25). The voice of the common people, and its products in songs, poems, epics, even light drama and advertising, for Joyce, holds wisdom the literary elite have excluded.

This idea of “the Folk,” and its concomitant forms of oral art, though, presented problems for Joyce as well. In this same period, he repeatedly criticized an important source of such popular music and spoken words: the Irish cultural revival, and its focus on Irish Gaelic instruction and the affirmation of what he saw as a mythically “pure” vision of Irish history. Often Joyce expresses his frustrations about Irish nationalism as a falsely romanticizing, violent and hyper-masculine movement that ignores the technologically advanced, cosmopolitan nature of present-day urban Irish reality. In “The Soul of Ireland,” for example, he writes of Lady Gregory’s work that “her book, wherever it treats of the ‘folk,’ sets forth in the fullness of its senility a class of mind which Mr Yeats has set forth with such delicate scepticism in his happiest book, ‘The Celtic Twilight’” (OCPW 75). Speaking more positively, in “Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages,” he implicitly criticizes the Nationalist movement using the image of a piece of woven fabric, an idea we will see Joyce consider at great length in *Finnegans Wake*:

Our civilization is an immense woven fabric in which very different elements are mixed, in which Nordic capacity is reconciled to Roman law, and new Bourgeois conventions to the remains of a Siriac religion. In such a fabric, it is pointless searching for a thread that has remained pure, virgin and uninfluenced by other threads nearby. What race or language (if we except those few which a humorous will seems to have preserved in ice, such as the people of Iceland) can nowadays claim to be pure? No race has less right to make such a boast than the one presently inhabiting Ireland. (OCPW 118)

As Ellmann summarizes Yeats’s later report of an earlier conversation between the two, “Joyce had the same contempt for both the ignorant peasantry and the snobbish

aristocracy that Yeats idealized” (102). Several of Joyce’s essays and letters, in fact, echo the contemporary criticisms that David Lloyd, in *Anomalous States*, makes of what he calls Seamus Heaney’s “pap for the dispossessed” (ch. 1 *passim*). For Joyce, British “literature” and the Irish cultural revival, though apparent contradictions, work together to preserve an underlying unity—a unity personified in Haines, the Oxonian anthropologist in the opening “Telemachus” chapter of *Ulysses*, who comes to Ireland to see the “wild Irish.” Haines is oblivious to Stephen’s anxiety about being “the servant of two masters: an English and an Italian” (U 17), a quip that encapsulates what Joyce saw as the concealed and co-productive unity between the (Protestant, British) literary tradition and the (Catholic, Irish) cultural revival. When Haines fails to grasp that the milk woman does not understand his stilted and artificial Irish, which is in fact not her language at all, we encounter Joyce’s sense of the Cultural Revival’s inauthentic embrace of oral performance, and the implicit form of collusion with Empire it represented.

#### B. Joyce’s “Discovery of the True Homer”

Joyce’s later works strive to escape the clutches of “literature,” but also labor to avoid falling back into idealized-peasant forms of purely externalized, pre-modern Gaelic “Folk” orality. An important source of Joyce’s ability to overcome this dialectical impasse, I will now argue, is Vico’s *The New Science* (1725), specifically its third book, “The Discovery of the True Homer.” This influence is primarily felt in two ways. First, in terms of Joyce’s style: Vico’s account of Homer and the Homeric texts yields for Joyce a model to enact, one which allows him to use written strategies to emulate, in a single-authored book, the polyglot, historically fluid nature of Homer’s style in *Finnegans Wake*. Second, in terms of Joyce’s “plot” (such as it is): Vico’s account of the

transmission of the Homeric texts provides Joyce with a sequence of oral and textual transmission to imitate in the dissemination and reception of many messages through the course of the *Wake*, most particularly, for our purposes, the tales of “Kersse the Tailor” and “How Buckley Shot the Russian General.”

Critics have long explored connections between Vico’s book and Joyce’s later work. Though Hughes maintains that Joyce never read this text, and only relied on others’ summaries of its contents (85), it seems reasonable—after a review of the scholarly literature surrounding this claim, effectively synthesized by Reynolds (*passim*) and Mali (75ff)—to suppose that Joyce did read Vico and learned much from *The New Science*.<sup>i</sup> The Vico-Joyce connection has been explored since the earliest critical response to the *Wake*, beginning with Beckett’s “Dante...Bruno. Vico... Joyce” in *Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, a 1936 collection of interpretations and polemical defenses of the book’s published early drafts. Most scholars have assumed that Vico’s theory of the cycles of history, manifesting three “corsi” followed by a fourth “ricorso,” had the greatest effect on the *Wake* in influencing its four-part structure.

Fewer critics have examined other connections that might exist between Vico’s and Joyce’s texts. Bishop devotes some attention to Vico’s theories of the origins of human language and etymology, asserting that the scholarly focus on Vico’s views of the cyclical nature of history oversimplifies Vico’s original text. Bishop wonders why Joyce would have been so “passionately interested” in “the news that the same things happened over and over again” (175) in history. Joyce by any account read and studied widely, and thus he would hardly need to have read Vico to discover that history repeats itself,

surely an accepted truism in any age as far back as Ecclesiastes' "there is nothing new under the sun." Mali briefly mentions a section in Vico's book, "The Discovery of the True Homer," and speculates that it may have served as inspiration for *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, but moves quickly on to other aspects of his argument, which focuses much more heavily upon Vico's theories of mythology and history more generally. That there might be other ways Vico's work influences Joyce's is a question left surprisingly unexplored. Questions have been asked about Joyce's interest in the Homeric Question (e.g., Schork 120-123), and about Joyce's history of exposure to Vico (see Verene, *passim*), but Joyce's potential interest in Vico's answer to the Homeric Question specifically has remained unexplored.

Vico's "Discovery" rests on literary, historical and philological analysis of the Homeric texts, and in each of those aspects of his argument, Vico articulates a reading of Homer strikingly like the project Joyce would enact in his nature works. For us, Vico's text may seem idiosyncratic and overly grandiose in its agenda, but both of those qualities, whatever they do for our appreciation for the logic of Vico's argument, do not diminish their potential as sources of inspiration upon Joyce's creative process. A close analysis of Vico's argument in "The Discovery of the True Homer" can therefore help shed light on the vexed question of both *Ulysses*' and *Finnegans Wake*'s style. What Vico explicates in the Homeric epics as evidence of multiple, polyglot, oral authorship, Joyce enacts in written, singly authored modern, published books. In so doing, Joyce works to embody both sides of written-spoken the binary at the same time, and thereby to deconstruct it.

Before we can see how a reading of Vico helps us read Joyce, however, we need to look at what Vico says about Homer. *The New Science* is an odd work which attempts to speak to almost every question then alive in 18th century intellectual culture, including political, ethical, religious, literary, historical and linguistic issues. “The Discovery of the True Homer” is a central part of this work. As his introductory “Idea of the Work” makes clear, Vico views Homer as “the first gentile author who has come down to us,” whose texts “have enabled us finally to descend into the crude minds of the first founders of the gentile nations” (5) -- “finally,” because, for Vico, all hitherto existing Homeric scholarship had misunderstood the nature of the messages we might read there. As he will later conclude, “the Homeric poems, having been regarded as works thrown off by a particular man, a rare and consummate poet, have hitherto concealed from us the history of the natural law of the gentes of Greece” (Vico 328). To illustrate this misunderstanding, Vico’s allegorical frontispiece shows a statue of “Homer on a cracked base” (6), cracked because earlier scholars misunderstood the text’s basis in collective oral authorship. A tablet nearby, representing the origins of written language “shows only the first letters of the alphabets and lies facing the statue of Homer” (14), because Homer’s poems were created when written language was in its infancy. Because of Vico’s study, he promises, we will come to understand what Vico sees as a very significant fact about Homer: he “left none of his poems in writing” (15). The Homeric texts bring us as close to the horizon of the creation of language as we can get. And in explaining “the beginnings not only of [spoken] languages but of [written] letters” (21), Vico also notes, in a metaphor that *Finnegans Wake* literally enacts, “philologists have believed that among the nations language first came into being and then letters; whereas

(to give here a brief indication of what will be fully proved in this volume) letters and languages *were born twins* and proceeded apace through all their three stages” (21, emphasis added). For Vico, Homer’s text is hybrid, speaking and writing commingling in its genesis, even if our only exposure to it comes through the manuscript tradition. *Finnegans Wake* explores this thesis through the figures of Shem and Shaun, twin sons of HCE engaged in a book-long sibling rivalry. Joyce’s exploration of that sibling rivalry, one that reaches its climax in “How Buckley Shot the Russian General” and its “abnihilisation of the etym” (353.23), shows his contemporaries what this conflict might teach them in their own “new media” age.

Vico’s account of the “true Homer” occupies a central position in *The New Science* as a whole: the end of his introduction explains that “by ‘The Discovery of the True Homer’ all the institutions that make up this world of nations are clarified, proceeding from their origins according to the order in which the hieroglyphs come forth into the light of the true Homer” (26). Vico’s answer to the Homeric Question makes a break from what he sees as the Platonic tradition of understanding the Homeric texts as unitary, literary, written wholes created by a “sublime philosopher.” Instead of this, Vico argues, “Homer” was no one man, but instead his work was the product of a community of oral poets. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Vico argues, give us a glimpse not into Platonic “sublime esoteric wisdom” but instead into the truly “vulgar wisdom of the peoples of Greece” (301).

To reach this conclusion, Vico deploys at least three types of arguments, all three of which are significant when viewed in light of Joyce’s work. The first, a literary analysis of plot and character, begins by examining the premise of the Platonic tradition,

which holds that Homer, though full of esoteric wisdom, told relatively “vulgar” tales to conform to his audience’s similarly vulgar expectations. This premise cannot hold, Vico argues, because no “sublime” philosopher would ever have constructed a work with such morally flawed characters, especially noting the “sheer stupidity” of Agamemnon, and the drunkenness of Odysseus (302-303). This argument would not appear all that persuasive—might not a philosopher, however “sublime,” write a book about flawed characters? —but Vico’s description of Homer’s characterization speaks to Joyce’s earlier preoccupations. Recall that Joyce had lamented the literary “vigilant policing” that prevented the production of “epic savagery.” Likewise Vico notes that Homer’s characters are “certainly not characteristic of a mind *chastened* and *civilized* by any sort of philosophy. Nor could the truculent and *savage* style in which he describes so many... battles” have been produced by a refined intellect (303, emphasis added). It is a critical commonplace to read Joyce’s Homeric character and plot parallels, especially in *Ulysses*, as a series of “mocking mirrors,” whereby Bloom, for example, becomes an anti-Odysseus. Instead of a noble prince with a faithful wife and long-lost son journeying across the known world, we find an impotent cuckold whose journey only goes a few miles from his house. Rather than reading Joyce’s characters as mockeries of Homeric heroism, though, if we accept Vico’s reading of Homer, Joyce’s characters become faithful reconstructions of their originals. And though it is difficult ever to really describe HCE, the *Wake*’s “main character” (if it has one), it is fair to say that whoever he is, he displays an ample amount of both stupidity and drunkenness through the text. We may disagree with Vico’s understanding of Agamemnon and Odysseus and



what they show about the nature of Homer's education, but our point is more to establish what such a reading might have done for Joyce's own creative process.

Vico's second and third lines of argument contending for Homer's multiple authorship rely on historical and philological observations about the Homeric texts, and attempt to demonstrate that "Homer" cannot be attributed to one singular one place or time. Among the ancient Greeks, Vico notes, almost all cities claimed Homer for their own "because almost all of them observed in his poems words and phrases and bits of dialect that belonged to their own vernaculars" (305). Homer's words reveal evidence of a geographically dispersed manner of composition, sprinkled with a little bit of many forms of different dialect groups. As for the time when they were written, by setting forth some archeological and anthropological generalizations, Vico alleges that Homer's various physical descriptions reveal inconsistencies in various technological advances, architectural styles, and religious and political customs. Vico concludes: "the two poems were composed and compiled by various hands through successive ages" (307). Again, though these arguments might not pass muster, especially by the light of modern historical scholarship, the point is the overall picture Vico is painting of Homer's text, a picture which speaks to several of the most salient characteristics of Joyce's later works. *Finnegans Wake* simulates just such dialectical and linguistic variation. The *Wake*'s four major sections each address similar themes in evolving quasi-historical moments, creating something similar to what Vico discovers in the Homeric originals. Joyce, of course, was the single author of his work—unlike the probable multiple "authors" of Homer's orally transmitted epics—but he finds a way to generate a multi-vocal sense of place and time through stylistic virtuosity. When Vico summarizes

his observations about Homer's style, including "his base sentences, vulgar customs, crude comparisons, local idioms, licenses in meter, variations in dialect, and his having made men of gods and gods of men" (325-6), he appears to foreshadow issues that would later preoccupy Joyce in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

After his literary, historical and philological "proofs" of Homer's multiple authorship, Vico goes on to describe a succession of phases whereby Homer's poems came down to his own time. Joyce constructs similar phases in the transmission of the legends of "Kersse the Tailor" and "How Buckley Shot the Russian General." Vico suggests that the Homeric tales were first performed entirely orally; in a second age they were "altered and corrupted" (310); the third age "received them thus corrupted," and wrote them down. Because the Homeric texts served to ground the Greeks' own vision of their history, Vico claims that history began as poetry: "the history of the peoples of Greece was all written by their poets" (319); only later did it turn into more conventional narrative history. Before that could happen, the texts were transmitted by "the Homeric rhapsodes, who were vulgar men, each preserving by memory some part of the Homeric poems," (318). Prior to that, these poems had been composed in performance, that is, they had been improvised, sung and passed around in less formalized settings. Those rhapsodes, Vico notes, again using a metaphor Joyce uses frequently in the *Wake*, are described as "stitchers-together of songs" (318). Eventually, the "pistratids, tyrants of Athens, divided and arranged the poems of Homer" (319). Political leaders took the texts, redacted them and created canonical versions, reserving their use for nationalistic festivals. This eventually gave rise to "servile imitators" (320), for Vico, pseudo-Homeric hacks whom he called the "cyclic poets." This process, whereby oral composition

gives way to memorization, canonization, and then second-rate written imitation, plays out over the course of *Finnegans Wake* as oral performances, often attributed to collective and feminine voices, which become “reconstricted” (36.9) in writing and later plagiarized by Shaun and his court.

From very early on, Joyce’s writing in all its forms manifests a fundamental ambivalence about the relative possibilities of high-cultural literary writing and low-cultural oral performance. Though each of his earlier works considers this ambivalence in different ways, his 1912 encounter with Vico’s *New Science* marks a departure. Vico’s account of the “True Homer” provides a model for Joyce’s authorship. It provides both a stylistic format—one that emulates the oral poetry of the Homeric epics by imitating their vulgar development of character, polyglot and historically variant use of language—and a dramatic structure that enacts the process of the creation, dissemination and reception of oral poetry into writing. This project reaches its climax in one of the *Wake*’s densest and murkiest chapters: Book II, episode 3, a complex sequence of scenes in a suburban Dublin pub describing the narration of two different oral-performance tales. It is to those tales that we may now turn.

### III. “Kersse” and “Buckley” in *Finnegans Wake* before II.3

Vico’s vision of the “True Homer” can help us understand the way that *Finnegans Wake* includes oral-performative aspects. But before we can explore this claim more specifically, it is necessary to make some general assumptions about the way *Finnegans Wake*, a notoriously confusing piece of writing, works. Bakhtin’s account of polyphony provides an initial way forward. For Bakhtin, polyphony begins as the idea of multiple “prototypical” voices. One of his examples is Dostoyevsky’s novel, *The Brothers*

*Karamazov*: the three brothers engage in dialogue with one another and, as the text develops, this dialogical aspect causes a kind of merging that reveals the voices' interdependence and inextricability. A similarly polyphonic method allows Joyce to enact the productive tensions that arise between "oral" and "written" modes of composition, by ascribing characteristics associated with oral performance to some voices, and those associated more with written performance to others. But in *Finnegans Wake*, several voices are usually present within single pages, sentences or even single words. Unlike Dostoevsky—who, to Bakhtin, depicts different prototypical characters and then forces them into dialogue—Joyce in the *Wake* presents us with characters that are already enmeshed when the reader first encounters them. The prototypes merge to the point where disentangling them consumes much of the work of reading: we must postulate their presence, because they are not narratively introduced. This makes the disentangling of two of Joyce's Bakhtinian prototypes, what Vico calls the "twins" of spoken and written language, a very difficult process.

The *Wake* embeds a suggestion for understanding its enmeshed prototypes that reminds us of the shortcomings of written texts: "For that (the rapt one warns) is what papyr is meed of, made of, hides and hints and misses in prints. Till ye finally (though not yet endlake) meet with the acquaintance of Mister Typus, Mistress Tope and all the little typtopies" (20.10-13). Besides almost literally suggesting the pursuit of "prototypes" as the goal of reading ("Mister *Typus*, Mistress *Tope*, and all the little *typtopies*," a litany that also suggests substantively the main "characters" we do actually find, viz., HCE, ALP and their children, who are described more fully below), this passage also alludes to the technologies of printing and writing. Here begins the book's

long consideration of spoken and written transmission. “Typus” suggests both “prototype” and the use of a “type”writer, augmented by the onomatopoeic sound of fingers striking keys: “typ... tope....typtop...” and the insinuation that the reader will never successfully arrive at the “tiptop,” i.e., best and definitive reading. This is partially true because written technology itself is inevitably full of “hides and hints and misses in prints.” It is full of errors in manuscripts/MSs (“misses”), omissions, lacunae, and textual complexities (“*textures*,” as we call them when speaking of fabric or animal-skin “hides”). It is also full of “misses”—a play on “Mrs.”—showing how women’s (spoken) voices might be submerged within masculine (written) discourse. This last sense of “misses” is one we will see in the pre-II.3 introductions of “Kersse the Tailor” and the story of “How Buckley Shot the Russian General.” Both of these episodes, as I will discuss, originally emerge as stories narrated by women and only later become written, or masculine, or both.

The *Wake* highlights the limitations of any discourse (written or spoken) attempting to represent anything in a stable or fixed manner. This passage does not criticize written communication or privilege the oral, per se, but it does suggest limitations inherent in print culture and scholarship that creative expression in the form of oral poetry can overcome. Earlier on the same page, we read:

the horn, the drinking, the day of dread are not now. A bone, a pebble, a ramskin;  
chip them, chap them, cut them up allways: leave them to terracook in the  
mutteringpot: and Gutenmorg with his cromagnom charter, tintingsfast and great  
primer must once for omniboss step rubrickredd out of the wordpress else is there  
no virtue more in alcoholan. (20.4-10)

The imperatives here (“chip them, chap them, cut them up... leave them”) speak to the creative process. Eviscerate our printed, “rubrickredd” authoritarian literature, our “cromagnom charter[s],” the text seems to be saying, and make something new out of those eviscerations. The contrasts in these passages align with the young Joyce’s preference for “epic savagery” over “literature,” and also establish them as opposing forces within a dialectic to be worked out over the course of the *Wake* itself. The result of this process of evisceration is art, but art that requires intense reading and rereading to comprehend, “so you need hardly spell me how every word will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypical reading throughout the book of Doubleends Jined...” (20.13-16). Discovering the gaps in official narrative, using them to burst open and democratize the story, and then producing a confusing (because con-fused) text with many “toptypical” readings becomes the end of the *Wake*’s art. It produces a book of “Doubleends Jined”: a book about Ireland’s capital city (“Dublin’s”) and one whose beginning is its end and vice versa (“double-ends,”), and also “joined,” that is, stitched together (“tailored” and “retaled”)—Vico’s vision of the sons of Homer. An artist successful at this work would thus become what the ancient etymology of “Homeros” arguably connotes: s/he would become “he who fits [the song] together” (Nagy 296).

The dialectic of written and oral art works itself out through the course of *Finnegans Wake* through the deployment of several prototypical “characters.” We must place characters in quotation marks, however, because the *Wake* does not develop character in any conventional sense. The meaning of the Greek root suggests the best sense of “character” in the *Wake*: a “χαρακτήρ” is a “a mark engraved or impressed, the impress or stamp on coins and seals” (Liddell and Scott 882). Whereas a more

conventional novel might develop a sense of a fictional person's qualities by narrative description of personality traits, or allow the reader to discern those traits by reading dialogue or reading about actions taken by that person, character is developed in *Finnegans Wake* by stamping a set of related presences onto pages of otherwise apparently unrelated words.

The example of HCE can illustrate this idea more specifically: HCE is an entity developed by a variety of loosely related stamping techniques. The letters H, C and E are three letters that appear together in immediate succession only three times in the text 628-page text, and in those passages, they show no intent to name anyone (284.1, and twice at 291f1). For many good reasons, though, critics have settled upon "HCE" as a means by which to designate one of the *Wake's* "characters." At one point in the text, we are told of someone who has the "occupational agnomen" of "Harold or Humphrey Chimpden" (30.2), and at another point someone seemingly very similar is named as "H.C. Earwicker" (56.30). But "Harold or Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker" is not, in any meaningful sense, HCE's "real name." It is only one appellation among many; in fact, he is more often designated in other ways. So, for example, we may find a cluster of words starting with H, C, or E, indicating "his" presence, even if those words are not obviously "about" HCE, but something else. As we study the *Wake* more closely, we may encounter HCE not through his initials at all, but through other textual trends that become connected with those letters. For example, early on, we find HCE accompanied by a list of seven items of clothing. Later on, lists of seven items of clothing (or even the number 7), without any H's, C's or E's, may come to make us think about this same "character." We may also recognize "him" only by certain diction or syntax patterns: we

might find, for example, a cluster of words whose spellings suggest that we understand them as being spoken in a British accent, with an oblique suggestion of drunkenness, since he is often drunk.

Beyond HCE, other “characters” manifest themselves in similar ways. Even more confusingly, we may find several of the stamping techniques we associate with individual characters overlapping in long passages, short phrases or even single words. The *Wake* may only give us the most general sense that several characters are present simultaneously, like coded patterns embedded in an intricately interwoven renaissance tapestry or themes in counterpoint in a polyphonic Bach keyboard suite. We may see multiple such “characters” intersect with each other linguistically, in ways that are often suggestive but far from determined in their meaning. Despite such complexity, we can still briefly describe, for the sake of convenience, a cast of more conventional “characters” by leaning on decades of *Wake* scholarship, though always keeping in mind that the more radical sense of “character” as stamping-tool cannot be reduced to the more ordinary literary concept. HCE is a professional, conservative, coded masculine historical and normative character (in the above passage, “Mister Typus”). This normative character tends towards high-culture allusions and the King’s English. There is his “good” son Shaun, the “typ” in the “little typtopies.” There are “Mamalujo,” the four old men--the gospel authors, also historical commentators, and regions of Ireland. There is Shem, a more bohemian, “cad” son, coded-feminine and fraudulent, trickster-ish and plagiaristic, that tends more toward the “low” side of the carnivalesque inversions and makes more liberal use of non-English morphemes and phonemes (the “top” in “typtopies”). Each of these is variously tinged by, but also tinges other



characters, including the less ambiguously masculine father HCE and feminine mother ALP, and their daughter Issy (who is sometimes one daughter and sometimes 29, since she is often associated with leap-years). There is a group of twelve men who are variously jurors, disciples, or patrons at the Earwickers' pub. All of these characters and others collide repeatedly and "reamalgamate" (575.27) in new, sometimes interesting and often inscrutable combinations.

II.3, one of the work's central sections, presents a crucial instance of such a combination, and is one of the text's most intricately woven tapestry, where Joyce creates the work's single most complex contrapuntal moment, wherein all of the principal "characters" play overlapping, and yet still discernably intended roles. It is a chapter that contrasts two oral performances and thereby shows two strategies for how art might work in an age of new media technology. It also lets us gauge these two strategies' relative levels of success with audiences, and witness their aftermath. Again, leaning on earlier *Wake* readers, we can provisionally summarize II.3 as a scene set in the H.C. Earwicker family pub. While the Earwicker children (Shem, Shaun and Issy) sleep in the attic, Earwicker and his wife (HCE and ALP) work the bar, serving both the twelve patrons and the four commentators drinks. We also read a description of a radio-like device behind the bar. While working the bar, Earwicker undertakes to narrate the story of "Kersse the Tailor" (a story of another HCE), a folk tale that involves a Norwegian tailor—Kersse—searching Dublin for customers upon whom to ply his craft. As Earwicker reaches the end of this story, his listeners become steadily more disagreeable and impatient for some other entertainment. Seemingly at their behest, the radio-like device begins producing sound and perhaps video of a program featuring the broadcast

personalities “Butt” and Taff” (i.e., Shem and Shaun, “Top” and “Typ”), who tell the story of “How Buckley Shot the Russian General.” Both Earwicker’s and Butt/Taff’s stories are frequently interrupted by the patrons ordering drinks or criticizing the stories, the children upstairs playing games, and ALP doing the washing-up. Among these interruptions are five more structured interpolations, which read as news bulletins during the Butt/Taff entertainment broadcast. In one of those interpolations we encounter the “abnihilation of the etym.” As the chapter ends, the Earwickers clean up the bar at closing time, and Earwicker drinks the dregs in his patrons’ used glasses.

Vico’s and Bakhtin’s accounts of folk-authorship, polyphony and orality, allow us to read this chapter as an experimental competition between two types of oral performance. Several Bakhtinian prototypes interact to generate new experiences, among them the masculine bartender-raconteur, the drunken bar patrons, the dutiful wife, the children who won’t go to bed, and the pretentious commentators. They interact in an environment which is both thoroughly oral-performative, but also organized and interrupted by twentieth century media technology, much of which is, in confusing and ambivalent ways, textual and written. The chapter sheds light on the process whereby these two seemingly opposed forces--ancient orality and contemporary media saturation--interact to generate meaning, both counteracting the high-literary tradition in similar ways.

Joyce’s text enacts the Viconian notion of “True Homer,” revealing two competing strategies, one shown in the telling of the “Kersse” story (an old-style tale narrated primarily by the older HCE) and the other in the “Buckley” program (a new-technology production performed by the sons Shem and Shaun). Each competing story, I

will now argue, demonstrates a way that art might contest dominant political and technocratic discourses as they attempt to saturate our perceptions and colonize our minds. Joyce uses the “Kersse” tale to enact a failed retreat, the kind of nostalgic orality he had earlier decried in the Irish Cultural movement; the “Buckley” event preserves elements of oral performance but, rather than attempting to set aside the new technological aspects of the situation, revels in them. To flesh out this claim, we will first explore some ways that the oral/written literature contrast—which is central to II.3, a chapter near the midpoint of *Finnegans Wake*’s 628 pages—is anticipated in the chapters that precede it. Next, we will consider how the principal “characters” of whom stories are told in II.3—namely, “Kersse the Tailor,” “Butt,” “Taff” and “Buckley”—emerge earlier in the book. This will place us in a good position to explore II.3 much more closely.

### **A. Oral and Written Art**

The notion of an oral tradition is first invoked on the opening page of *Finnegans Wake*, where we read that “the fall... is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy” (3.15-18). “Retaled” contains at least three important senses: (1) that of a “tale,” an orally transmitted story; (2) “retail,” that is, sales conducted by a retailer-middleman, between the original producer (i.e., the wholesaler) and a customer; and (3) more obliquely, the idea of a “tailor,” someone who stitches woven fabric together into clothing, a “master joiner,” someone who joins previously “woven” stories together into an epic – a “true Homer.”

The Shem-Shaun feud, beginning in the first line’s “swerve of shore to bend of bay” takes on many different guises through the course of the *Wake*, almost all of which

touch on the tensions between the visual/written and the aural/spoken. One of the first extended versions tells the story of Mutt (Shem) and Jute (Shaun) as they “excheck [speak and sell] a few strong verbs” (16.8). At one point, we hear Jute demand “you are not jeffmute?”, and Mutt responds, “Only an utterer” (16.12-3). That Mutt is “only an utterer,” marks him as Shem, and in establishing that he is not a “jeffmute,” i.e., a deafmute, we understand him to be an essentially oral communicator. As the Mutt and Jute conflict recedes, and I.1 comes to a close, we read: “and that was the first peace of illiteratise porthery in all the flamend floody flatuous world. How kirssy the titler made a sweet uncloze to the Narwhealian captol” (23.9-11). We can fairly gloss “peace of illiteratise porthery” as “piece of illiterate poetry,” and if we understand the following sentence in apposition, we have a name for this “first” poem: “How kirssy the titler made a sweet uncloze to the Narwhealian captol.” This is the first place in the book where we find something recognizably cognate with “Kersse the Tailor:” “Kirssy” conflates “Kersse” and “Issy,” and “titler” draws in tailoring, telling a tale, retail, and also adds real estate (and book) “titling.” “Sweet uncloze” as phonetic French becomes “suite en clos,” English “suit of clothes,” and also the legal sense of suit, that is, law-suit. Involving the “Narwhealian captol,” i.e., Oslo, invokes the notion of Ireland’s Viking ancestry, a notion the young Joyce criticized as a form of mythical nationalistic purity.

In the opening chapter of the *Wake*, and we find frequent anthropological or philological vocabulary used to describe stories about storytelling. One more lucid instance, which echoes Vico’s account of how an oral Homer became a written one, tells us that it “has been *reconstructed out of oral style* into the verbal for all time with *ritual rhythmic*s, in quiritary quietude, and toosammenstucked from successive accounts of

Noah Webster in the *redaction* known as the Sayings Attributive of H. C. Earwicker...”)” (36.9-13, emphasis added). “Reconstricted out of oral style” suggests the primacy of the spoken, democratically generated “true Homer,” followed by their reconstruction/constriction (i.e., “redaction”), echoing Vico’s vision of the work done by the tyrannical “pisastrids”—ideologically motivated work that tends to restrict their range of meanings, suppress meanings and otherwise oversimplify. “Ritual rhythmic” recalls the bardic recitation and memorization strategies that Vico ascribes to the “rhapsodes.” All of this eventually coalesces around “the Ballad of Pierce [Persse] O’Reilly” (44), a musical transcription of the oral performance by a bard named Hosty.

I.3 seems to detail the reception and continued transmission of that ballad. It finishes with an unmistakably oral-poetic catalogue of “all abusive names he was called” (71.5-6). This catalogue was “compiled, while he mourned the flight of his wilde guineese, a long list (now feared in part lost) to be kept on file” (71.3-5), thus alluding to the “wild geese,” nobles who fled Ireland after the Battle of the Boyne, as well as Oscar Wilde, who also fled Ireland for other reasons. It is also said to have been “*compelled* for the rejoicement of foinne loidies ind the humors of Milltown etcetera by Joseph Brewer in the collision known as Constrastations with Inkermann” (71.6-7). “Compelled” (“compiled” pronounced with an Irish accent) associates compulsion with compilation, echoing “reconstruction” and “redaction.” This passage highlights the harshly authoritarian consequences the cooption of art might have, but also the persistence of the legends that the victims of that cooption, the exiles themselves, tend to generate.

An apparent trial of HCE for his alleged crimes (as detected in the transmitted songs and rumors) begins, during which he is “deposing for his exution with all the fluors

of sparse in the Royal Irish Vocabulary” (85-86), i.e., defending himself in heightened diction, since “Royal Irish Vocabulary” conflates diction decisions with the “vigilant policing” of the Royal Irish Constabulary. The trial seems to turn heavily on the discovery and contents of a letter, the “mamafesta” (104), a mother’s (ALP’s) manifesto. Consideration of this letter drives us back into quandaries over problems of textual interpretation. And it is here that “How Buckley Shot the Russian General” is most directly introduced for the first time in the *Wake*:

in epochs more cainozoic, who struck Buckley though nowadays as thentimes every schoolfilly of sevenscore moons or more who knows her intimologies... for every knows as yayas is yayas how it was Buckleyself (we need no bleeding paper to tell it neither) who struck and the Russian generals, da! da!, instead of Buckley who was caddishly struck by him when be herselfes (101.14-22).

As ALP introduces this important motif, she shows some frustration with the idea of writing the story down—“we need no bleeding paper to tell it neither”—because “every schoolphilly of sevenscore moons or more who knows her intimologies” already knows the story. The story is of Buckley is so old, presumably, that it can haunt the opening chapters of the book before its actual telling. And “intimology” suggests intimate etymology, a sexual-cum-linguistic study which reveals the insides of words, a more tender sort of evisceration, and another one which anticipates, however faintly, II.3’s “abnihilization of the etym.” As an examination of the letter continues, we learn that “to the hardily curiosing entomophilust then it has shown a very sexmosaic of nymphosis” (107). “Entomophilust” hits some of the same notes as “intimology,” both gesturing at etymology, but also sex whether through the intimacy of “intiminology” or

the philia and lust of an “entomophilust.” That it is a “sexmosaic” suggests its carefully embellished, intricate patterning in its depiction of something fundamentally obscene. We get another echo of Vico’s collective vision of Homeric authorship when we learn of the “importance in establishing the identities in the writer complexus (for if the hand was one, the minds of active and agitated were more than so)” (114), which happened, apparently, “before the bookflood” (118), i.e., in preliterate times.

As the history of the story’s interpretation unfolds, there are clearer references to the science of manuscript transition, like “our copyist” and “the scholiast” and “an interpolation” (121). “Interpolations” are, for Homeric critics who do not subscribe to the oral theory of Homeric composition, problems to be eliminated. Those scholars (Martin West is a fine example) who seek a perfect “ur-text” constructed through consultation with manuscripts of trustworthy provenance, work to remove such “interpolations” from the “original” text. We learn that “the original document” was written “in what is known as Hanno O’Nonhanno’s unbrookable script, that is to say, it showed no signs of punctuation of any sort” (123). This act of interpretation ends by casting the blame at that lowest of the low, the plagiaristic pseudo-oral-performance con-artist, “that odious and still today insufficiently malestimated notestatcher... Shem the Penman” (125).

Book I closes on two chapters that give us relatively clear glimpses of Shem (I.7) and ALP (I.8). When Shem, often a directly autobiographical stand-in for Joyce, is initially described, the narrator works at “putting truth and untruth together” so that “a shot may be made at what this hybrid actually was like to look at” (169.8-10). He is a “hybrid,” neither purely spoken nor purely written. If our story was originally orally

performed and then eventually “reconstructed out of oral style,” we now find the figure of Shem working in the other direction, a hybrid “mutt” who seeks out the “misses in prints” to develop a new art form. Even so, the young Shem “was in his bardic memory low” (172.28). He was unable to be an actual composition-in-performance poet because he could not do what the pre-literate “sons of Homer” had long since mastered. Theft and plagiarism therefore become crucial to his work. Just as the young Joyce preserved a notebook of epiphanic moments, “all the time [Shem] kept on treasuring with condign satisfaction each and every crumb of trektalk, covetous of his neighbour’s word” (172.29-30). He, as Joyce before him, contemplates working at “rural troubadouring” (173.4), and often is found “lisp[ing], the prattlepate parnella, to kill time” (173-10-11).

We learn that Shem was initially a better critic than artist, and so undertook to plagiarize what he could not create on his own. We find, for example, that “as often as he was called in to umpire any octagonal argument among slangwhangers, the accomplished washout always used to rub shoulders with the last speaker and clasp shakers” (174.7-9). Since he was again unable to achieve much in the way of composition, as “he was harset to mumorise more than a word a week” (180.29-30). He came to rely upon “his pelagiarist pen” (182.3), having failed repeatedly at “ineffible tries at speech unasyllabled” (183.14-15). His writing was so saturated with low-cultural smut that it was deemed “too base for printink!” (187.16-17). Echoing the young Joyce’s dissatisfaction with both the high-literary canon and the Irish cultural revival, he could make it neither as an orally performative bard, because he was not clever enough, nor as a presence in the literary establishment, because his work was “too base.”



As I.7 comes to an end, and Shem seems to despair in a final confrontation with Shaun and his “deathbone,” (193.29) “[Shem] lifts the lifewand and the dumb speak” (195.5). These being the last comprehensible words that precede I.8, it might be fair to read the close of the “Shem the Penman” chapter as a final discovery of the true means of his art: to uncover all the repressed feminine/spoken language, including the tales of “Kersse the Tailor” and “How Buckley Shot the Russian General”; somehow, however, Shem strives to do so without “reconstraining” them. Though we have been trained to find in plagiarism an unremittingly negative, even criminal undertaking, there is no plagiarism for the oral poet. Word-for-word imitation of another bard is, in an oral culture, much more a recognizable gesture of flattery than a surreptitious attempt at theft. Shaun and the literary tradition he stands in for can only see Shem as a plagiarist, but that is because Shaun is too firmly ensconced within the confines of the literary world’s “vigilant policing,” which insistently protects individual, written production from communal dissemination. For Shem, to escape that literary tradition requires acts of strategic plagiarism like those of oral poets before him, even if they must now occur in writing.

The ALP chapter opens as the angry binary of Shaun and Shem, “deathbone” and “lifewand,” perched as rivals on opposite sides of the shore, melt into two washerwomen standing by a stream, washing the children’s dirt (and ink) out of their clothes. Intimations of the ultimately oral-performative aspect of ALP’s art flow forth: “didn’t you spot her in her windaug, wubbling up on an osiery chair, with a meusic before her all cunniform letters, pretending to ribble a reed derg on a fiddle she bogans without a band on” (198.25-28). Where Shem officiated among the “slangwhanglers,”

ALP, say the washerwomen, goes about “with her mealiebag slang over her shulder” (207.18-19). Shem cannot produce, but only judge and sometimes plagiarize “slang”; ALP carries it around in a bag dispensing it at will, including catalogues of gifts dispensed across the city and countryside for several pages.

Book I closes as the water rushes in and washerwomen meld into the night. As their language erodes, one of them mutters, “I told you every telling has a taling and that’s the he and the she of it” (213.11-13). Through puns based in conjugation of the strong verb “tell,” the ablaut shifts between told/telling/taling enact a process of erosion, whereby oral “telling” becomes marketable “taling”; if we read “that’s the he and the she of it” as chiasmus, an inversion where “taling” aligns with “he” and “telling” with “she,” we find a mirror-image repetition of the opening page’s notion of “retale.” Here, as the water runs in, is where the “telling” begins. In the final lines of I.8, “Telmetale of stem of stone” (216.3) reads as “tell my tale,” that is, un-tale it, make it oral-poetic again, un-“reconstrict” it, letting its art pour forth.

The initial two chapters of book II establish a scene that elaborates upon one noted a bit earlier when we learned that HCE “owns the bulgiest bungbarrel that ever was tiptapped in the privace of the Mullingar Inn” (138.19-21). Here “tiptapped” puns on the earlier “tyttopies,” and suggests a new ground (a pub, where “tips” are given to bartenders who use “taps” draw beer), for the conflict between the “twin” forces of reading and writing. The children perform their “nightlesson” plays, upstairs in the “Inn inn! Inn inn! Where. The babbers ply the pen. The bibbers drang the den. The pappilcom, the publicam he’s turning tin for ten” (262.27.31). “Babbers ply[ing] the pen” implies performance-art writing, a kind of recombination of speaking and writing

that inverts the process of transcription. As the children study their textbook in II.2, we find them “yoking apart and oblique orations parsed to one side” (270.3-4), referencing both the literal notes on the sides of the text (conventionally associated with Shem and Shaun) as well as the sort of reading the *Wake* requires of its readers. As the footnotes (conventionally attributed to Issy) quip, “none of your cumpohlstery English here” (271 footnote 3): Issy’s comment suggests that even in this textbook-like section, we should expect nothing grammatically precise, instead a “pohl” – a dark muddy mess of standing water. We see the children, like the Homeric rhapsodists before them, emulating the processes of ALP’s art: “A scene at sight. Or dreamoneire. Which they shall memorise. By her freewritten Hopely for ear that annalykese if scares for eye that sumns” (280.1-4). They “memorise” (like the rhapsodes) what she has “freewritten” (like the original composition-in-performance bards). Before once more encountering a “scholium” (299.1), and “after all his autocratic writings” (303.17-18), we come finally to the heart of the tale in the Earwicker’s pub.

## **B. Kersse the Tailor**

Having delved into the ways the first half of *Finnegans Wake* manifests different tensions involving textual transmission, from oral to written and back again, we can range back over its pages and more fully explore its introduction of the character of “Kersse the Tailor.” As we have seen, Kersse is first clearly introduced in the context of an oral-poetic legend about him, that “first peace of illiteratise porthery in all the flamend floody flatuous world. How kirssy the titler made a sweet unclose to the Narwhealian captol” (23.9-11). In keeping with the *Wake*’s declared method of evisceration and re-joining, meaning gradually accumulates around each of the phonemes (“etym”) in

“Kersse the Tailor” long before the story is told in its entirety. Often, the writing/orality duality and the name of Kersse (or its cognates) present themselves at the same time. An important shift is made when we read the oral-turned-written musical myth of the “ballad of *Persse* O’Reilly” (44.24). “Kersse” and “Persse” are not overtly associated; at this point in the text, the former hasn’t even appeared on the page. But later on, we do learn of HCE that he has “a namesake with an initial difference” (130.32), which is suggestive in all sorts of directions.

Borrowing a bit of linguistics, we could postulate the hypothetical reconstruction “\*-rsse,” a word stem that a cluster of textually attested cognates likely share, but that is not directly attested to in extant textual evidence. Reading with this hypothetical root in mind allows us to draw many connections. On the opening page we find “an *erse* [i.e. once] solid man” (3.20), followed soon by “Kirssy” (23.9-11) [including Issy] and most prominently, at the end of I.3, “*Persse* O’Reilly,” which suggests the French for “earwicker” (44.24), and at least thirty-three more such cognates or repetitions spread out over the first half of the *Wake*.<sup>ii</sup> Some of these potential “\*-rsse” cognates are likely completely coincidental, but many arise in contexts directly relevant to the tension between oral and written. The association of “Kersse” and “parse,” for example, is a marginal case, potentially suggestive of the act of translation and storytelling or, just as likely, a false cognate. Even so, all these letter clusters presage the arrival on the scene in II.3 of the story of Kersse the Tailor. They function as a series of “Acoustic Disturbance[s]” (71.19), repeated encounters with which lend a feeling of inevitability and centrality to the story when it is properly told.

What about “the Tailor,” Kersse’s “occupational agnomen” (30.3)? We read about “Boald Tib [Shaun?]. . . watching her sewing a dream together, the tailor’s daughter [Issy?], stitch to her last” (28.5-9). We read of a haberdasher (a retailer of tailored goods): “that fishabed ghoatstory of the haardly creditable edventyres of the Haberdasher, the two Curchies and the three Enkelchums in their Bearskins ghoats!” (51.13-15), an orally transmitted “fisahbed ghoatstory” that is later transcribed by “Enkelchums” (ink-chums?) onto their “Bearskins” (parchments?). We also encounter a man “in a butcherblue blouse from One Life One Suit (A men’s wear store)” (63.16-17). We hear of HCE at his trial that he “swore like a Norewheezian tailliur” (67.13-14). When he testifies he is associated with a seemingly brand-name corduroy fabric made by Kersse himself: “the prisoner . . . appeared in dry dock, appatently ambrosaurealized, like Kersse’s Korduroy Karikature” (85.32-33). We learn that “you . . . us” are the “heirs of his tailsie” (96), a neologism maybe referring to the products of tailoring, or the stories told through the generations, or both. He is later on described as a “Habberdasherisher,” and “at a bare (O!) mention of the scaly rybald exclaimed: Puisse!” (177.11-12), a “habberdasherisher,” maybe meaning “haberdash cherisher.” We have already noted the ALP passage about telling and “taling”: “I told you every telling has a taling and that’s the he and the she of it” (213.11-13), which gives us permission to read “tailor” and its cognates as about clothing and also storytelling.

### **C. Radio and Television Technology**

Radio and television transmission is another very important motif in II.3 which is explicitly anticipated just a handful of times in the earlier parts of the book. A variety of sources confirm that Joyce was preoccupied with television as a new media form

throughout the years he was composing *Finnegans Wake*, especially in the final years, when he was working hardest on II.3 (Fordham 42). In keeping with this biographical research, early in the text of the *Wake* itself, we find, “Television kills telephony in brothers’ broil” (52.17), which is suggestive of newspaper copy or radio news-preview, with its double alliteration, its choppy lack of articles and its present tense “kills” referencing either a past or future act. It also interacts with the oral/written distinction, “television” being something one encounters primarily through the eyes, and “telephony” through the ears, and the idea that the former “kills” the latter echoes the process whereby oral poetry is supplanted by manuscript traditions.

Exploring passages about radio and television also reveal some evidence that echoes what we have earlier noted about stories originating with feminine voices. HCE becomes the more feminine-sounding “Fionnn Earwicker...,” a perhaps feminized version of “Finn,” like the earlier “Kirssy” standing for “Kersse.” “Fionnn” is further described as “the trademark of a broadcaster with wicker local jargot for an ace’s patent (Hear! Calls! Everywhair!) then as to this radiooscillating epiepistle to which, cotton, silk or samite, kohol, gall or brickdust, we must ceaselessly return” (108). This broadcast involved “local jargot” (jargon/argot), and was created by a “broadcaster” using a “radiooscillating epiepistle,” that is, simultaneously an epistle (static, written letter) and an oscillating radio transmission, one that also collects some associations with tailoring materials such as “common, slik or samite.” One of HCE’s catalogued names is “(Maxwell, clark)” (130.11), associating him with an earlier researcher in electromagnetism, the technology used to disseminate radio and television broadcasts. HCE’s tale is “temporarily wrapped in obscenity, looking through at these

accidents with the faroscope of television” (150.32-33), suggesting a method which “temporarily” transmits his story in “obscurity.” This wrapping happens perhaps to disguise it as it makes its way through “the faroscope of television,” a phrase which deploys two analogously stemmed words: Anglo-Saxon “far-” plus Greek “-oscope” = “faroscope”; and Greek “tele” and Latin “-vision” = “television.” Both of these words represent the same phenomenon: “faro-” and “tele-” both reference distance and transmission; “Scope” and “vision” both indicate sight.

The television/radio/scientific vocabulary intensifies from I.8 through II.2. Of ALP we learn that “**her calamity electrifies man**” (207.28). We soon find mention of a “Radium wedding” (222.17). Her story is transmitted “with nought a wired from the wordless either” (223.36). It is spoken “for all within crystal range” (229.12). Adding political context, something we will see much more clearly in II.3, we encounter an allusion to the Invincibles and their assassination plot in Phoenix Park: “Like things are m. ds. Is all in vincibles. Decoded. Now a run for his money! Now a dash to her dot!” (232.25-27). Apparently “the turrises of the sabiners are televisable” (265.11-12). We find “volts” ten times, a rare instance of direct, not modified repetition (285.20-25). Issy’s footnote mentions “my wavetrap” (287f1). The children study “Ambages and their Role,” (298.L) a possible pun on electrical “amperages,” and also the interestingly quantum-mechanical-sounding “superpposition” (299.8). None of the radio-technological references feel like more than low-wattage, scattershot free play, interference, “acoustical disturbances,” but they all coalesce in a more pronounced fashion in the opening pages of II.3.

II.3 centers on a radio-televisual play narrated by the characters “Butt” and “Taff,” a clear instance of sibling rivalry, a theme which is named many, many times through the *Wake*, even though “not yet “had a kidscad **butt**ended old Isaac” (3.10-11). Beyond I.1’s “Jute and Mutt” sequence, I.6 contains within its undulations a tale of “Burrus and Caseous,” during which we twice find “Schott” (161.23 and 161.33) - a nautical term for a bulkhead and also an American clothing manufacturer from 1913, (both gesturing towards Kersse) and also seemingly cognate with “Shot,” on which more below. There is also the high-profile telling of “the Mookse and the Gripes” in I.6, and later we find “a *Missa pro Messa* for Taff de Taff” (211.14-15), “Toffey Tough” (249.30) and “Bott’s trousent, hore a man uff!” (268.27-28). Later on we find “son of Butt” (302.12-13). “Staff” (306.1) is an obvious and somehow still unexpected version of “Taff.” All of these instances allow the Butt and Taff radio play to resonate in a variety of registers, but delving more fully into them would take us very far afield. At any rate, the overall presence of radio and television references in the early chapters effectively foreshadow the central role a radio-televisual device comes to occupy in II.3.

#### **E. “How Buckley Shot the Russian General”**

Finally, there is the title of the second of II.3’s stories, “How Buckley Shot the Russian General.” Relatively early, we learn that “on his way home from the second house of the Boore and Burgess Christy Menestrels... had a barkiss revolver placed to his faced with the words: you’re shot, major, by an unknowable assailant” (62.29-34). As we’ve previously noted when considering the oral/written dialectic, the story is more properly described by ALP some pages later:



in epochs more cainozoic, who struck Buckley though nowadays as the times  
every schoolfily of seven score moons or more who knows her intimologies... for  
every knows as yayas is yayas how it was Buckleyself (we need no bleeding paper  
to tell it neither) who struck and the Russian generals, da! da!, instead of Buckley  
who was caddishly struck by him when he herself (101).

The title is later inaccurately referenced, perhaps simulating the misanalysis that  
happens in translation or linguistic evolution, as “How the Buckling Shut at Rush in  
January” (105). We also hear of someone reading “from the pages of *I Was a Gemral*,  
that Showting up of Bulsklivism by ‘Schottenboum’” (116). HCE is called  
“buckshotbackshattered” (137.13-14). We learn that he was “beschotten [German past  
participle meaning “condemned”- Dutch plural noun meaning “dividers”, also sounds  
like English “shot” and perhaps also “begotten”] by a buckeley” (138.13-14). Recalling  
our introduction to the hybrid Shem, we read that “putting truth and untruth together a  
*shot* may be made at what this hybrid actually was like to look at” (169.8-10). Here  
“shot” can be read as intellectual conjecture, but also, gun-shot, a “splitting of the etym”  
that might divide the “hybrid” truth and untruth. A couple of pages later, we get another  
common sense of shot, “no likedbylike firewater or firstserved firstshot or bulletburn gin  
or honest brewbarrett beer either” (171.13-15), drawing the connection between a shot  
from a gun and a shot of whiskey or “bulletburn” gin. Of Shem we read that he narrowly  
escaped a predicament involving

at pointblank range blinking down the barrel of an irregular revolver of the  
bulldog with a purpose pattern, handled by an unknown quarreler who,  
supposedly, had been told off to shade and shoot shy Shem should the shit show

his shiny shnout out awhile to look facts in their face before being hosed and creased (uprip and jack jim!) by six or a dozen of the gayboys). (179.2-10)

Some more gun-talk involves “the return of a lot of sweetempered gunpowdered didst unto dudst but it never stphruck your mudhead’s obtunidty” (190.1-2). Shem seems to avoid the Russian General’s fate though: “slackly shirking both your bullet and your billet, you beat it backwards like Boulanger from Galway” (190.30-31). There are some more “shoot”s (198.3) and “shot[s] abroad” (198.32). There is also a “shot pinging up through the errorooth of his wisdom” (231.10-11).

As we move along to II.1, the children’s play, on the opening page we find “butt” (221.12), “Thud” (221.21), “Blunder” and “film” (221.22), and also “The interjection (Buckley!)” (221.37). More shooting comes in with “A shelling a cockshy and be donkey shot at?” (234.4). Rumor has it that “He dares not think why the grandmother of the grandmother of his grandmother’s grandmother coughed Russky” (253.2-3). Further into the play, “Am shot, says the big-guard” (260.6-7). In each of these instances, we find a story referenced, a story which seems to be so familiar, at least to ALP, that there is no sense in even bothering to tell it. So when we find it actually narrated, we feel, somehow, that we may already know it.

#### **IV. Finnegans Wake II.3**

Each of the threads we have been tracing are interwoven to form the core of the structure of II.3: HCE narrates the tale of “Kersse the Tailor,” and then Butt and Taff enact “How Buckley Shot the Russian General” in a radio-play. These are, somehow, both the same story, both laden with similar oppositions, tensions and characters. And they are somehow also both being told and are about the same characters: HCE, Shem,

Shaun, Issy and ALP. ALP and Issy also make their presences known in less apparent ways than the masculine voices, and though the women perhaps originally generated these stories, here in II.3, their stories are “retaled” in a masculine voice that is **oblivious** of their origins. The “Kersse” and “Buckley” threads intermingle as they are told in the Earwicker pub. They ultimately establish a new framework for understanding oral literature in the age of mass communication, by showing us both how one might fail (as with Shaun/HCE and “Kersse”) but also succeed (as with Shem and “Buckley”) in an oral performance which reckons effectively with electronic media. To explore this chapter in depth, we can begin with its introduction and establishment of setting (A), then turn to the failed narration of Kersse (B), the more successful Buckley broadcast (C), and then finally, the chapter’s conclusion (D).

#### **A. “Their Tolv tubular High Fidelity Daildialler”: Media Landscape as Setting**

The distinctively new element in II.3 is electronic media, a phenomenon foreshadowed, but not fully explored until II.3’s opening paragraphs. Before the device on the bookshelf is foregrounded, we learn some more ordinary details about setting. The chapter begins, relatively clearly, in a bar, a quotidian setting which emphasizes the widespread impact of media culture upon everyday life. Initially, we read “it may not or maybe a no concern of the Guinnesses but,” (309.1) a clause which in some ways repeats the earlier “Elsewhere there here no concern of the Guinnesses” (99). “It may...” brings us into the realm of speaking, the “a” in “a no concern” representing in writing a commonly spoken variant of “of” (as in, “it’s a no concern to you” for “it’s *of* no concern to you”), and in “Guinnesses,” an allusion to the Irish stout that bar patrons are drinking. We can imagine this line spoken by the barkeep himself, as he prepares to tell a

story - as in, "I don't know whether those drinks in front of you want to hear this story, but...". The final "but," brings us forward to the story about to be told, and to "Butt" himself.

We also receive reasonably clear statements of the geographical location of the bar and some of its patrons. We read that it "was now or never in Etheria Deserta as in Grander Suburbia, with Finnfannfawners, ruric or cospolite, for much or moment indispute" (309.8-10). There are a couple of oppositions here: "deserta" vs. "Suburbia," "ruric" vs. "cospolite," which suggest that the pub is neither in the middle of Dublin nor in the middle of nowhere. The patrons are "Finnfannfawners," suggesting people who fawn over and are fans of Fianna Fail. Fianna Fail is an Irish political party, "that pride that bogs the party begs the glory of a wake" (309.6), a party itself with rural and cosmopolitan tensions ("indispute") within its ranks. The next paragraph places these partisans into a more world-historical context when it asks them: "whyfor had they, it is Hiberio-Miletians and Argloe-Noremens..." (309.11-12). The patrons are not merely the rural and urban members of a political party, they are the many strands that make up Irish national and cultural heredity.

Perhaps the most crucial element of the setting of II.3 is a device which sits innocently on a shelf. That there is a radio and/or television, which "they... donated him" (309.11-12), is point of relative critical consensus, though it is not exactly a radio or a television, but instead "their tolv tubular high fidelity daildialler" (309.14). It does have some radio-like features; radios in the 1930's were driven by vacuum tubes, which partially explains "tolv tubular," though the "tolv" in suggests television, which makes this whole description recall "television kills telephony in brothers' broil"

(52.17). “Tolv” also suggests the number twelve, the jurors at a trial, which often in the *Wake* represent the general public. “Dialdialler” puns on “dial,” the device one uses to operate both radios and telephones, and “dail” the Irish house of parliament. “Dail” (Irish-phonetically “doyle”) rhymes with “broil,” which is both a conflict and a cooking technique. From “dail” we can infer that this radio-telephonic-televisual device also somehow captures and engages in national political legislative activity. This device is an all-in-one, popularly driven media machine that does the combined work of listening, speaking, arguing and legislating by synthesizing and recombining its inputs into outputs. It is an automated *avant-le-lettre* representation of Adorno’s “culture industry,” homogenizing its grist and “broiling” the “brothers” (all the opposing forces that make up political, oral literary culture) into “melegoturny marygoraumd, eclectrically filtered.” Furthermore, the opposition between sight and sound (“television” and “telephony”) suggests an innovative way that written (visual) and spoken (aural) texts interact politically with one another in the radio/television age. The visual/textual (“television”) tends to win out, and suppresses (“kills”) the oral (“telephony”). But, as we have seen earlier, such victories are always more temporary than they appear, especially if art (at least the art of the *Wake*) strives to rediscover that suppressed oral content, in “unreconstructed” fashion. How, if at all, this radical rediscovery might work in the context of this all-consuming and all-transmitting device is a fundamental question this chapter explores.

The extended description of this machine suggests a whole host of limitations and possibilities for art in the age of the mechanical reproduction. In the first place, the device has all the trappings of a brand-new piece of consumer technology: “as modern as

tomorrow afternoon an in appearance up to the minute” (309.14-15). To its proud new owners, its transmissions seem loss-less, since it is “equipped with supershielded umbrella antennas for distance” (309.17-18) and deploys “A Bellini-Tosti coupling system with a vitaltone speaker” (309.19). It features a “harmonic condenser engineium (the Mole)” (310.1), and is driven by a “magazine battery (called the Mimmim Bimbim ...)” - 310.2). “Magazine battery” means, in the first place, that the battery is clipped within it like a magazine of ammunition (it is wireless both in its power source and its radio reception), but also harkens back to the ballad of Pierce O’Reilly’s mention of the fall from the “Magazine Wall.” We see this fall further concealed in the description when we read that it “Was tuned by by twintriiodic singulvalvulous pipelines” (310.4-5). “Twintriiodic” suggests the two victims of HCE’s indiscretions and the three witnesses. Also, obscured within its description is evidence of the Vikings’ arrival in Ireland (c. 841), registered as “patent number 1132, Thorpetersen and Synds, Jomsborg, Selverbergen” (310.3-4). Of course, all media conceal and reveal, and recontextualize the messages they transmit, but here we get the visceral sense that its owners believe it to be a game-changer in this regard. This is a common reaction to new technology, one we see embedded in its “fanfawning” consumer-technological descriptions, a posture memorably described by McLuhan as “the numb stance of the technological idiot” (8).

The description of this device also suggests its workings (or those of devices like it) present their users with new possibilities in understanding the core, self-referential aspects of reality that the *Wake* often tantalizingly suggests its careful study will reveal. Its capabilities include “capturing skybuddies, harbour craft emittences, [and] key clickings” (309.19-20, emphasis added). Insofar as HCE is a voice that permeates the

whole text, the ability of this device to capture his “emittences” suggests how, in the eyes of its owners at least, it can bring the media world into a self-enclosed and self-sufficient universe. That it can capture “key clickings” harkens back to “Mister Typus, Mistress Tope and all the little typtopies” (20.10-13), implying that the final and crucial understanding of all the truths contained in the mythical ur-story can, at long last, be discovered. It can gather up “vaticum cleaners, due to woman formed mobile or man made static” (309.21-22). The “woman formed mobile” suggests the active, on-the-go oral histories we discovered earlier as the origins of the Buckley and Kersse stories; “man made static” suggests the slowed-down, manuscript-driven literary traditions that ape and silence those women’s stories.

But “man made static” also suggests something about outcome, static being the analog-radio era’s word for the white-noise sound accompanying an imperfect, “lossy” radio transmission. What, ultimately, does this device produce? “A melegoturny marygoraumd” (309.22-23). All the various inputs meld together into a richly digestible stew, one that, like the newsfeeds of contemporary social media users, “eelectrically filtered for allirish earths” (309.25). “Eelectrically” runs together “eclectic” (i.e., featuring a diverse array of inputs), and “electric,” that is, automated, non-human; that it is “filtered” suggests ways in which, finally, the transmissions are not exact, one-to-one realistic copies of original ideas. Rather than being primarily about a message, the medium, as McLuhan states, becomes the message.

Regardless of the way the device inevitably transforms the “content” of its transmissions, its users are oblivious to this, and not just because it is a new and presumably expensive device. It is also all-encompassing, transforming the essence of

the experiences its listeners have in the world. As a device it is inescapable, because “they caused [it] to be worked... with a howdrocephalous enlargement, a gain control of circumcentric megacycles” (310.2-7). It fits over one’s head as a cybernetic “enlargement” of it, from which we can infer that it alters the perceptions of at least our hearing and our sight: “they finally caused or most leastways brung it about somehows that the pip of the lin to pinnatrate inthrow an auricular forfickle” 310.81-10). Its “gain control,” that is, its volume dial, works by “circumcentric megacycles,” so that its emissions centripetally grow louder and more intrusive. It creates an effect that anticipates popular criticisms of our twenty-first-century mediascape. This device creates so-called “filter bubbles,” where media consumers become insulated from contradictory aspects of reality. Its effect is inescapable and totalizing. It transforms not only which “parts” of reality we encounter, but the very form of our perceptions, creating an all-encompassing listening-centered ontology (cf. “his otological life” 310.21) of Kantian-transcendental proportions.

This ontological transformation is of little moment to the assembled listeners in the pub; they just like the new entertainment options it affords them. They enjoy the various “concertiums of the Brythyc Symmonds Guild, the Ropemakers Reunion, the Varigated Peddlars Barringoy Bnibrthirhd...” and more, here significantly including: “reuctionary buckling, hummer, enville and cstrorrap” (310.19), a foreshadowing of the broadcast of Buckley (“buckling”) and the Russian (“hummer, enville”) General. The “daildialler’s” presence is so effective that it finally blends unobtrusively into the background of the bar patrons’ experiences. Despite all its technological impressiveness, its primary effect is “so as to lull the bygone dozed” and making it so that “they arborised



around, up his corpular friend and down” (310.18). Anticipating McLuhan’s “numb stance,” they (the listeners) become lethargic (“dozed”), turning into trees (“arborised”) that ultimately comingle with the great body of culture (“his corpular friend”, that is, HCE). They become inescapably and uncaringly bound up in it “lill the lubberendth of his otological life,” (310.21) that is, until the labyrinthine end of HCE’s life, a life which is “otological,” that is, focused on hearing, but also, just one letter away from “ontological,” consumed by the search for [its own] being. We are buried by and encased within information, in a faintly pleasurable coma, just like tipsy patrons in the local pub they frequent every night.

Even so, there are stories to tell, and though they “may not or maybe a no concern of the Guinnesses,” the barkeep continues to tell them. In the face of this seemingly inescapable “otological” condition, he begins again to escape this new audio-visual-technological incarnation of “Gutenmorg with his cromagnom [i.e., large-headed, “howdrocephalous”] charter” (20.6-7) because “the horn, the drinking, the day of dread are not now. A bone, a pebble, a ramskin; chip them, chap them, cut them up allways; leave them to terracook in the muttheringpot” (20.5-8). The barkeep begins the orally composed “old media” story of “the moddle of Kersse by jerkin his dressing but and or it was not before athwartships he buttonhaled the Norweeager’s capstan” (311.7-9). Even within this new-media environment, it is in the alternation between these contexts—and the blurring, tearing and rending of boundaries that it facilitates—that we start to discover the possibilities for an “unreconstructed” art. Fordham summarizes the tension between Shem and Shaun with respect to technology by saying that “where Shaun... *possessed* a television, Shem is embodied *as* a television” (44); this contrast between possession and

embodiment nicely captures the distinction we will develop here. Whereas the tale of “Kersse” told by HCE/Shawn is an attempt on the part of the television’s possessor to tell a tale that competes with it, the story of “Buckley” told by Shem uses the device and makes it central to his storytelling. The “Kersse” story fails as it is overwhelmed by the “daildialler,” even though the barkeeper possesses it; the “Buckley” story grows greater because of it.

### **B. “Kersse the Tailor”: A Failed Old-Media Tale in a New Media Landscape**

The setting established, both physical and media-wise, II.3 moves onto the tale of “Kersse the Tailor,” a tale that exhibits many of the qualities Vico discovers in Homer, qualities which, as we have seen support his case for “Homer” as an oral collective poetic community, rests. Vico’s argument revolves around the antiheroic nature of Homer’s characters and the amorphous nature of the place and time of the epics’ composition. As the tale of Kersse begins, we can see these traits emulated in miniature in its opening lines:

It was long after once there was a lealand in the luffing ore it was less after lives  
thor a toyler in the tawn at all ohr it was note before he drew out the moddle of  
Kersse by jerkin his dressing but and or it was not before athwarships he  
buttonhaled the Norweeger’s capstan. So he sought with the lobestir claw of his  
propencil the clue of the wickser in his ear. O, lord of the barrels, come forth  
from Anow (311.5-12).

The hero of this tale is “a toyler in the tawn,” a tailer in the town, but pronounced in a lower-class Irish accent. That he is a “moddle” of a man suggests he is more “muddle”

than “model.” Whatever “jerkin his dressing” means, it is not a dignified gesture, nor is his act of “buttonhal[ing],” or the fact that he has a “lobstir claw,” nor that he is preoccupied with “the wickser in his ear.” That he makes a prayer to the “lord of the barrels,” and that the whole tale is about “hwere can a ketch of hook alive a suit and sowterkins” (311.22), also suggests the meanness of his pursuits. His geographical and temporal vagueness—the many conflicting instances of his name—are indicated in all the “\*rsse”’s we have already seen. His tale has already been heard in many fragments in the foregoing pages, and each of those fragments suggests a different provenance. When he begins to speak, he is described as speaking “in his translatic norjankeltian” (311.21). Throughout the pages of “Kersse” story, we see Joyce playing with the word “said,” emulating the shift from old English to modern. We find, just on its first page, “sagd” (311.21), “sayd” (311.23) and “sazd” (311.30). Literarily, linguistically and historically, then, Kersse exhibits the qualities of Vico’s vision of the Homeric epics. Joyce caps the opening of this mock-epic with a mock invocation of the muse: “O, lord of the barrels, come forth from Anow.”

As the tale unfolds, nothing about its telling is clear. The story itself undulates through repetitions of similar ideas, sometimes getting stuck because the audience interrupts (“Hump! Hump! Bassed the broaders-in-laugh with a quick piddyship that we halfbit a second” -312.13-14), or sometimes because the speaker feels the need to re-clarify his message, clear his throat or have another drink, or because he loses his train of thought. As so often happens in the *Wake*, the story interprets itself: “the baffling yarn sailed in circles it was now high tide” (320.35), “yarn” referring here to the tailor/sailor, synecdoche for both his ship and his clothing. Beyond helping to characterize the boat

upon which Kersse is travelling, it also comments upon HCE's "yarn" itself (i.e., the story being told by HCE about Kersse), and as its narrative "threads" run in circles and the deep waters of a story at "high tide."

High tide is a time when waves engulf the shore. Accordingly, as we read the story of Kersse, mindful of the "dialdialler" operating in the background, we can detect a distinct source of interference beyond the pub patrons' interruptions or HCE's "hesitent" stuttering. The diction of radio technology regularly intercedes, subtly coloring both HCE's narration and our perceptions of the story. As the tale gets underway, we read:

group drinkards maaks grope thinkards or how reads *rotary*... so long plubs will be plebs but plabs *by low frequency amplication* may later agree to have another. For the people of the shed are the sure ads of all quorum. Lorimers and leathersellers, skimmers and salters, pewterers and paperstainers, parishclerks, fletcherbowyers, girdlers, mercers, cordwainers and first, and not last, the weavers. Our library he is hoping to ye public. (312-313, emphasis added)

The tale gets pulled into the homogeneity of "melegoturny" in which dissenting pub-patrons, due to "low frequency amplication, may later agree." This is partially due to the "sure ads" that emanate from the radio. The "daildialler" is at work to help establish a "quorum" for its political, economic ("lorimers and leathersellers" etc.) and cultural ("library") business. It is all "gibbous grist to our millery" (314.19): ever-expanding but incomplete material to be ground up.

Even so, the story of Kersse continues, a confused saga in which Kersse seeks a suit, sails across the North Sea, gets married, and falls through some planks. As he tells the tale, "he is consistently blown to Adams" (313.9) - that is, the story and Kersse's boat

blown apart (to atoms) but also forced to begin again (with Adam). Nearly every time the storytelling restarts, we find more technological interruptions, “with extravent intervolve coupling” (314.20) producing radio-sounds “(pip pip pip) willpip futurepip feature apip footloos pastcast with spareshins and flash substittles” (314.25). It is the story of “noirse-made earsy” (314.27). “Noirse” conflates Norse, Persse and noise; even as HCE is laboring to tell the “message” of the story of Persse, we see it changing into the “medium” (“noise”) before our eyes (and ears). Later, when we are learning about “prowed invisors” on the ship, we are interrupted by the confused radio/political jargon of “ulstravoliance and there infroraidis, striking down and landing alow, against our aerian insulation resistance” (316.2-4). The ship’s arrival is interrupted by “Ulstra” (ultra- and Ulster-) violence, and “infroraidis” (infrared/raids)—not only airborne radio interference intruding into the “aerian insulation resistance” of the rubber that coats electrical wires, but also Norwegian invaders penetrating the “insula” of “Eire” (Ireland).

In telling his tale, Earwicker gets more and more confused, and more and more frustrated in his telling, just as Kersse becomes similarly frustrated in his sea venture: “with that coldtbrundt natteldster wefting stinks from Alpyssinia, wooving nihilnulls from Memoland and wolving the ulvertones of the voice. But his spectrem onlymergeant crested from the irised sea in plight, calvitousness, loss, nngnr, gliddinyss, unwilll and snorth” (318.35). The “ulvertones” of his voice suggests inaudible sounds, only heard by wolves, and “spectrem onlymergeant” suggests radio-frequency waves, waves which “crested from the irised sea,” meaning both Irish sea and “iris-ed see,” that is, vision. “Loss” speaks to the decay of a signal over a means of transmission. And just as before, we could speak of the “loss” that happens through generations of oral

transmission of poems, so here, we can reflect on the micro-level “loss” that radio transmission brings about. In fact, the two collide in this passage, insofar as the radio transmission itself contains “manmade static” but also interrupts HCE’s orally delivered tale. However, “Time is for talerman tasting his tap. Tiptoptap, Mister Maut” (319.8-9). Though this is a story which would perhaps contain those long-sought “typtopsical” archetypes, he is continually interrupted not only by his “tasting his tap” (drinking his own supply), but also by technology— “tube” (319.13) and “chrystal holder” (319.16) and “dyode” (319.24) — along with patrons heckling, questioning, and seeking to augment the story themselves.

At this point, II.3 becomes a more direct retelling of the overall *Finnegans Wake* narrative first presented in I.1. HCE becomes a pillar of the community, and during this time, begins to bifurcate into Shem and Shaun, asking:

And, haikon or hurlin, who did you do at doyle today, my horsey dorksey  
gentreyman, Serge Mee, suit! Sazd he, tersey kersey. And when Tersse had sazd  
this Kersse stood them the whole koursse of training how the whole balzy raze  
acurraghaed, from lamkinsback to sliving board and from spark to phoenish.  
(322.16-20).

Kersse becomes “Tersse” *and* “Kersse,” and is then sacrificed upon a pyre, “and they peered him beheld on the pyre. And it was so. Behold” (322.23-24). Somehow, sight/vision is the force that kills him, “peered him beheld,” while also punning on “peer” as nobility: he is both a leader and a sacrifice. Kersse’s death, of course, doesn’t stick, and a bit of radio technology sounds like it is involved: “That’s fag for fig, metinkus, confessed, mhos for mhos, those who, would it not be for that dielectrick, were upon the

point of obsolescence” (322.29-31). “Mhos” are backwards “ohms,” which are a unit of resistance, augmenting the earlier conjoining of military and electric resistance. “Dielectrick” joins “dialectic,” “electric” and “trick,” suggesting somehow that some form of communication was preserved against the attempt made by “television” to kill “telephony.” After this resurrection, Kersse gets married, building “upon this dry call of selenium cell” (323.25). He has three children: “and they made three (fir fie!) and if hec dont love alpy then lad you annoy me” (332.3-4); and so Shem and Shaun— “Knock knock. War’s where! Which war? The Twwinns” (330.30)—continue their gradual emergence as Butt and Taff. Then HCE is accused of a crime, a trial sequence unfolds again, and we even get another quick tour of the “museyroom” first introduced in I.1: “bing your heads coming out... new uses in their mewseyfume. The jammesons is a cook in his hair. And the juinnesses is a rapin his hind. And the Bullingdong caught the wind up. Tip” (333.12-18). The barkeeper’s story circles back onto itself in a way familiar both to his audience and the reader.

As the story sputters, at last, a cheer comes up from the crowd for Buckley. The audience has wearied of the overly formulaic, now too-long tale of Kersse, especially considering that telling has been already interrupted several times by radio noises and diction, pops and whistles that have set forth bits and pieces of Buckley. “We want Bud. We want Bud Budderly. We want Bud Budderly boddily. There he is in his Borrisalooner. The man that shunned the rucks on Gereland” (337.32). Their demand for “bud boddily” speaks to a need for vision, and “there he is in his Borrisalooner” suggests that the “daildialler” might have a televisual component as well, allowing seemingly immediate access for his viewers. But then we shift back into an audio

context: “Order, order, order, order! Milster Malsen in the chair. We’ve heard it sinse sung thousandtimes. How Burghley shuck the rackushant Germanon. For Ehrn, boys, gobrawl!” (338.1-3). That they’ve “heard it sinse sung thousandtimes” suggests, as with its earlier oral origin (“though nowadays as thentimes every schoolfilly of sevenscore moons or more who knows her intimologies...” – [101.16-17]) that the audience shouts down the story of Kersse the Tailor in favor of an even more traditional, well-known and oft-repeated tale. “For Ehrn... gobrawl” invokes the political slogan “Erin go bragh” (“Ireland forever”) and “brawl” echoes “broil” and therefore “dail.” The audience wants an orally disseminated tale, but not this one. The audience’s boredom implies a sense of the rhetorical limitations of the storytelling strategy exemplified by Kersse’s long-winded account.

### C. “How Buckley Shot the Russian General”: New-Media Oral Poetry

Perhaps the story of Kersse the Tailor met with Vico’s conditions for oral performance, but it did not satisfy its audience, nor did it discover any way to overcome the interference caused by the “daildialler.” The “Buckley” episode reveals a relationship between these two problems. The teller and audience of the “Kersse” story are both affected in ways they are unaware of by the presence of the radio device. It is significant, then, that the “Buckley” story interacts with this aspect of its setting in a different way. As the new story begins, this telling will be different because of the medium through which it is experienced - it is sent forth from the “daildialler,” narrated by vaudevillians Butt and Taff and punctuated by interpolated radio news segments. As the radio-telling of Buckley supplants the publican’s narration, we sink deeper into self-reference, even beginning to revel in the self-enclosed whole of the “howdrocephalous”



device and its “otology.” But we also make an important shift from a story being told by the technologically out-of-touch father (HCE) to the technologically up-to-date pair of twins (Shem and Shaun). The “Buckley” story is both more engrossed within media culture and also better attuned to its dynamics. McLuhan describes a similar shift: when new media first arrive, artists’ first impulses are to cling to old forms (hence early films look like staged dramas, early television news looks like a radio studio, etc.). But as the new media form comes to define the environment, its full potential as a medium is discovered. Like the tale before it, the “Buckley” episode exhibits all the traits of oral performance of Vico’s “True Homer,” but now, rather than futilely holding the “dialler” at arm’s length, it incorporates it into the very fabric of the story.

In keeping with this more ambitious project, the “Buckley” episode is structurally quite complex. It reads like the script for a play, with alternating dialogue markers “BUTT:” and “TAFF:”, and italicized text that reads, at least initially, like stage directions. Beyond the dramatic aspect of this section, II.3 also features five interpolations, marked off in square brackets and italicized. The overall structure of the episode has ten sections. Labelling the Butt/Taff segments BT1, BT2, etc., and the interpolations as I1, I2, etc., we can describe the overall organization of the “Buckley” section as BT1-I1-BT2-I2-BT3-I3-BT4-I4-BT5-I5. The main storyline, at first glance anyway, would seem to be contained in the BT sections, the interpolations merely serving to interrupt that narrative. Such interpolations, as we have discussed, are understood by those committed to discovering a “pure” ur-text for the Homeric texts, for example, as distracting, inauthentic, latter-day additions. Similarly, for Earwicker’s narration of the Kersse story, radio noise was purely disruptive. But for the oral-poetical Homer scholars,

“interpolation” becomes another feature of the multitext, and for Shem and Shaun’s tale, the interpolations become new dimensions through which the tale at hand may be told. From one perspective, the interpolations distract from the story of how “Buckley Shot the Russian General,” but from another, these interpolations are integral to that story. The interpolations themselves resemble radio news segments, though as we move through them, we notice increasingly that the language of the news segments imitates the language of the Butt/Taff story, and vice versa. The boundaries between “program” and “interruption” break down, and we as readers notice stylistic and thematic similarities between the two. The final interpolation, which describes “The Abnihilization of the Etym” (353.23), serves as a climactic moment in both this episode and in *Finnegans Wake* as a whole, coinciding with Buckley’s successful shot and with a striking articulation of the method of the *Wake* itself. We encounter this moment as a clue to understanding the rest of the text, announcing, as it does, a new, atomic-age understanding of the prehistoric injunction from I.I, “to cut them up allways” (20.4), a re-visioning of the oral poetic tradition in the age of the mechanical reproduction.

BT1 introduces Butt and Taff, new incarnations of the Shem and Shaun characters figuring in several previous episodes in the *Wake*. Taff is described parenthetically as “*a smart boy, of the peat freers, thirty two eleven, looking through the roof towards a relevution of the karmalife order privious to his hoisting of an energency umberolum in byway of paraguastical solation to the rhyttel in his hed*” (338.5-8). Butt is described parenthetically as a “*mottledged youth, clerigical appealance, who, as his paid friar, is supposing to mottow the sorry dejester in tiffaff toffiness or to be diarced from ever and a day in his accounts*” (338.11-13). Butt and Taff’s dueling voices and descriptions

harken back to those of Mutt and Jute (I.1), the Mookse and the Gripes (I.6), and the left- and right-hand margin notes in II.2. Here, we find the tale of Shem and Shaun updated for the media world of the “daildialler.” Initially, “Taff” registers as Shem, an artist-trickster figure who is “smart” and also “looking... towards a relevation”; “Butt” sounds like the more conservative Shaun, especially considering his “clergical appealance” and his “tiff taff toffiness,” which harkens back to the typ-top idea of reaching final and definitive conclusions that pin down the fixed, timeless meanings of a text. So when we encounter this story of Butt and Taff, we are also re-encountering all the struggles between hybridity and purity, doubt and faith, speaking and writing, sound and sight, wood and stone, life-wand and death-bone, and many other oppositions.

Not only, though, is the “Buckley” story a tale told by Shem and Shaun, it is a story about them too. It tells of a Russian General (Shaun) in the act of defecation, getting shot from a long distance by a lower-ranking Buckley (Shem). It also contains numerous references to parricide, furthering the earlier established Shaun-HCE connection, and by implication, the contrasting connection between Shem and ALP, who is the Buckley story’s original teller. Like “Kersse,” this tale is another traditional pub story, and provides the pretense of dramatic plot for the encounter; the devices of radio help to renovate the form. This retelling of the “brothers broil” provides a forward-looking model for understanding the age-old battle between fixed and dynamic meaning, one that avails itself of the resources of new media to reanimate a feminine-coded, spoken resistance to the kind of masculine, hegemonic textualism Shaun’s discourse insists upon.

Each character's first words, which follow the stage directions quoted above, set the scene. Taff questions, "All was flashing and krashning blurty moriartsky blutcherudd? What see, buttywalch? Tell ever so often?" (338.8-10). We can imagine a scene within a battle, hence the "flashing and krashning"; "moriartsky" names a well-known archenemy (Holmes' Moriarty), but places him in an ambiguously Slavic ("-sky") context. We get the sense of a sniper looking through the sight of his gun, talking to his target ("What see, buttywalch?") That Taff's first spoken words are three questions also, which places him on the more radical, anti-authoritarian side of the Shem-Shaun binary. Butt, on the other hand, begins with statements and an exclamation: "But da. But dada, mwilshuni. Till ever so aften. Sea vaast a pool!" (338.13-14). "Da" is Russian "yes"; "dada" might also be a childish father pet name, suggesting either Butt's love for HCE or his shared identity as HCE. "Dada" places us within a context of parricide as well. "Sea vaast a pool!" (Sebastopol) firms up the notion of a Russian setting—Sebastopol endured an 11-month siege during the Crimean war—and also suggests a general surveying the field of battle.

Taff's pre-assassination mutterings express a murderous preference for dynamic oral composition over ornate written literature: "Sling stranaslang, how Malorazzias spikes her, coining a speak a spake! Not the Setanik stuff that slimed soft Siranouche! The good old gunshop monowards for manosymples" (338.22-25) invokes the notion of word/language creation ("coining a speak a spake") and a resistance to high-literary forms ("setanik stuff" - set-in-ink stuff) in favor of something more primitively satisfying: "good old gunshop monowards [mono-words] for manosymples [simple men, or singular (mono-) samples, monosyllables]." This reprises the earlier Mutt/Jute

conflict's exchange of monosyllabic "strong verbs" (26.8). Taff's task also takes on a more broadly Freudian character when he wishes "may he be too an intrepidation of our dreams which we foregot at wiking when the morn hath razed out pimpalove and the bleakfrost hilled our ravery" (338.30-32), as though this shooting attempt is also an act of wish-fulfillment, wanting this father-figure out of his way, someone he will purge from his memory. Butt's response seems to confirm this reading partially, as he was "drawling forth from his blousom wheris meditabound of his minkerstary" (338.28-29), "Minkerstary" suggesting "ink story." As Taff continues to get a stronger bead on Butt, he notes "Some garment-guy! Insects appalling" (339.23-24). This importantly connects Butt with Kersse the Tailor (surely a "garment guy") also, via "Insects," Perce O'Reilly, which, being French for earwig, draws us further back to HC Earwicker, the bartender presumably listening to the "daildialler" broadcast. Somehow Buckley/Taff's shooting will expurgate the world of this overloaded father-figure, and perhaps also the kind of interruption-laden, even constipated oral poetry we have just see in the Kersse the Tailor story.

The first interpolation (I1) initially reads like a break on the page, but is revealed to connect subtly to what comes before and after it. When we come to I1, which names "The Irish Race and World," (341.20), we encounter a radio reading of a horse race, but one with strong political and cultural overtones. Just before the interpolation begins, though, it is textually anticipated. "His snapper was shot in the Rumjar Journal" (341.6-7) seems to name another print publication, and "the mlachy way for gambling" (341.18) suggests a connection to the *The Irish Race and World*, a publication that would contain betting odds as well. I1 has the feel of an interruptive radio signal, a piece of

interference that comes and then quickly goes. Its voice is that of a newscaster coming through the audio-visual device, setting the scene for an important race and its sponsor “*an admirable verbivocovisual presentment of the worldrenouwnced Caerholme Event has been being given by The Irish Race and World*” 341.19-21). The language narrates horses rounding a track, an intermittent catalogue of names of horses forming the bulk of the passage. But we also find lurking within it “Backlegs shirked the racing kenneldar” (341.29-30), i.e., Buckley shot the Russian general, transformed into the lingo of horse race announcers. Just as the Butt/Taff play anticipated this interruption, the interruption takes on the topics of the story it interrupts. At the end of the passage, we read “*this eeridreme has been effered you by Bett and Tipp. Tipp and Bett, our swapstick quackchancers, in from Topphold to Bottom of The Irish Race and World]*” (342.30-32). When Butt and Taff transform momentarily into both “Bett” and “Tipp”, the vowel and consonant shifts suggest momentary interference, where one radio transmission supervenes on another, and then dissipates.

BT2 begins with a stage direction that acknowledges the interruption of I1 “(awary that the first sports report... has now been afterthoughtfully colliberated by a sagging spurts flash, takes the dipperend direction...” (342.33-35). Somehow Taff can hear the news blurb which just interrupted his broadcast; his words are altered by its presence. He also gestures back to the Kersse story by noticing both “scattering giant’s hail over the curseway” (343.6-7), both the giant’s (HCE’s) hailing of Curse/Persse, but also hail falling over Giant’s Causeway, and “the Galwegian caftan” (343.11), i.e., the Norwegian captain, “caftan” eliding captaincy and an item of men’s clothing made by a tailor. Butt’s reply begins by a “slinking” of “his coatsleeves” (343.14), and a muttering about the

distastefulness of Taff/Shem's artistic proclivities: "I heard his lewdbrogue reciping his cheap cheateary gospels to sintry and santry and sentry and suntry" (343.33-34). Butt does not like Taff's "lewdbrogue,"—his base, Gaelic-tinged speaking—or his "cheateary gospels," his cheating (plagiaristic) gospels. So Butt invokes the presence of the four old men, shown in the four "s-try" words. "Sintry" suggests sin; "Santry" suggests sainthood; "sentry" is a guard; "Suntry" is the authority of daylight. As Taff gets ready to shoot, he commands "weepon, weeponder, song of sorrowmon!" (344.5), suggesting both that he is drawing a "weapon" and also that his target weeps, invoking the emotions of the Song of Solomon. Butt dodges some shots ("strafe from the firetrench" [344.9]), continues in the act of defecation, sees Taff's gun being raised ("as he his lefting the gat out of the big" [344.10-11]), and becomes a bit more plaintive as he seems to sense of impending fate ("I met with whom it was too late. My fate! O hate! Fairwail!" [354.13-14]). Butt finishes defecating as "he whipedoff's his chimbley phot" (345.27), and on that note, another interpolation begins.

I2 is a pastiche of televisual and food language. It begins: "the other foregotthen abboxed in the Mullingaria are during this swishingsight teilweisioned. How the fictionable world in Fruzian Creamtartery is loading off heavy furses and affubling themselves with muckinlushes" (345.35-346.2). "Teilweisioned" suggests English "televised," that is, broadcast on or turned into television. The "spinach ruddocks are being tatoovatted up for the second comings of antigreenst" (346.3-4), where "Tatoovatted" draws an oblique connection between television and tattoos, both indelibly altering their subject matter. The section lists a string of advertising slogans or news headlines, and ends with two important lines. First, "as Burkeley's Show's a

ructiongetherall,” (346.11-12), again, modulates “Buckley Shot the Russian General” in a new direction in the context of an advertisement for “Burkeley’s Show.” When we read “Phone for Phineal toomellow aftermorn and your phumeral’s a roselixion” (346.12-13), the “phone,” in the context of a funeral (“phumeral,”), echoes its earlier tale of Tim Finnegans wake, now modulated for television and phone.

In BT3, Taff takes aim at Butt’s aesthetics, suggesting that his commitment to order and written text is just the other side of the problematic binary that generated the Kersse story’s inauthentic performance: “since you are on for versingrhetorish say your piece! How Buccleuch shocked the rosing girnirilles. A ballet of Gasty Power” (346.17-19). This makes more explicit the idea that Taff/Shem is targeting a conservative HCE figure, one here also associated with the earlier oral poetry of “Hosty” changing into “Gasty Power.” “Versingrhetorish” combines “Vercingetorix,” the Celtic leader, and “rhetoric,” suggesting that Butt’s preferred form of expression aligns with the Irish nationalist, romantic notion of resistance, rather than Taff’s hybrid alternative. Later references to “Ballygarry” (346.23) and “Shinfine” (346.26) help confirm this thought. Insofar as the “daildialler” is partially a “dail,” that is, an Irish political organ, here we see the device and HCE’s limited mode of expression working in the same direction, even if HCE would have described things differently. Butt seems to confirm this, lamenting in an aside: “how the thickens they come back to one to rust!” (348.8-9), that is, how his choices end up haunting him by reversing the order of their intended consequences.

I3 takes on a decidedly more visual character. It begins “In the heliotropical noughttime”:



following a fade of transformed Tuff, and, pending is viseversion, a metnergetic reglow of beaming Butt, the bairboard bombardment screen, if tastefully taut guranium satin, tends to telegrame and set up to the charge of a light barricade. Down the photoslope in syncopan pulses. 349.6-11)

This interpolation further confirms the notion that part of the daiddialler's functioning involves television-like elements. One of these turns out to be a vision of a priestly "figure of a fellowchap in the wohly ghastr, Pope O'Donoshough" (349.20-22), another Russian general-avatar ("the jesuneral of the russuates" [349.22]) displaying all the "seals of his orders." Following this is a seven-item catalog characteristic of HCE. This interpolation feels distinctly less interruptive, and becomes more clearly a retelling of the Buckley Shot the Russian General story than the two that preceded it. Crucially, this subverts the contest for hegemonic control the device had over the Kersse story. In contrast to HCE's vain battle with the device for control over the narrative, here we see two different sets of voices emanating from it (Butt/Taff and the interpolations) that begin to coalesce productively. The device's transmissions are overcome by the echoes of the story that the interpolation was visually interrupting on the page. And HCE begins to confess, rather than defend himself: "He blanks his oggles because he confesses to all his tellavicious nieces" (349.29-30). "Tellavicious" suggests both television and also "tellus" (Latin "land") and "tell us," which echoes ALP's introduction "tellus tellas allabout" (101.2-3). Thus the feminine-coded ALP voice begins to assert itself through the "tellavicious nieces." As HCE is confessing, "he boundles alltgotter his manucupes with his pedarrests" (349.34-35). His hands ("manu") and feed ("ped-") are bound, but also his "manuscripts" and "pedarests" are

bundled together. The manuscript tradition's self-conception of purity is thus revealed as hypocritical defense of pederasty.

Butt turns more defiant in BT4, turning the confession into a sort of non-apology apology, bragging and boasting: "I did not care three tanker's hoots, ('sham! Hem! Or chaffit!) for any feelings from my lifeprivates on their reprotoad leanings because I have Their Honours booth my respectables saeurs assistershood off Lyndhurst Terrace" (351.30-33). He does name "his urssian gemenal," bringing \*-rsse and the Russian general into collision. He then continues to move closer to admitting defeat, wistfully updating Richard III's famous lament ("my kingdom for a horse") with "My oreland for a rolvever" (352.9) and Madame De Pompadour/Louis XV's "apres moi le deluge" "after meath the dulwich" (352.12). Butt then strangely inverts the whole tale by announcing: "I shuttm, missus, like a wide sleever! Hump to dump! Tumbleheaver!" (352.14-15). Here, Butt abruptly becomes the aggressor, not the victim. Taff announces himself as a co-conspirator and "effaces himself in favour of the idiology alwise behounding his lumpy hump of homosodalism" (352.19-20). Not to be outdone, Butt exclaims: "The buckbeshottered! He'll umbozzle no more gravesnor horn nor hauder... His Cumbulent Embulence, the furstrate fourstar Russkakruscam" (352.30-31). Butt and Taff, united, murder HCE. The two then trade finger-pointing words towards their mother ("And the name of the Most Marsiful, the Aweghost, the Gragious One!" [353.2-3]) as the conspiracy falls apart and each tries to blame the other: "TAFF... "Trisseme, the mangoat!" (353.2), and "BUTT... "He deared me to it and dared me do it" [353.10-11]). Even so, the momentary unity in which Butt and Taff act together to topple HCE's hegemonic structure shatters the earlier narrative frame, creating a sense of radical break

from the other foregoing “brothers broils.” Here, unlike in the anticlimactic episodes of Mutt/Jute, Mookse/Gripes, and the dueling sidenotes of II.2, this episode ends, in the murder of their father, with a real sense of resolution.

It is in the immediate aftermath of this striking parricide that I4 intercedes with “the abnihilisation of the etym” (353.23). I4 is only eleven lines long, but warrants closer examination. In the first place, “abnihilisation” reads like “annihilation,” that is, elimination, destruction, splitting, but subtly alters its initial prefix. “Annihilation” evolved from Latin “ad” meaning towards and “nihil” meaning nothing. But “ab (away from)” and “nihil” suggests “ex [out of] nihilo,” creation out of nothing. In the moment following the radio-play’s reenactment of the murder of HCE, we read an interruption suggesting a creation that is the inversion of violent destruction. And the creation of what? The “etym.” “Etym” would appear to be a neologism--the OED lists “etymon,” and defines it as the “original” meaning of a word. “Etym” puns on “etymology,” “atom” and “Adam,” the most primary component of matter and the first man, suggesting, therefore, the most primary and original components of meaning. Somehow this radio moment of Shem/Shaun’s murder of HCE has gotten to a core moment of both destruction and creation from nothing, suggesting a break as radical for art as the splitting of the atom was for both science and geopolitics, or the creation of Adam was for the origins of humanity.

When we read further into the sentence, we find that “the abnihilisation of the etym” has been brought about “by the grisning of the grosning of the grinder of the grander of the first lord of Hurteford expolodotonates through Parsualia with an ivanmorinthorrorumble fragoromboassity” (353.23-26). If the “daildialler” creates

homogenized “melegoturny” (309.23) soup, here the opposites meet. An inverting act of creative destruction has occurred precisely “by” the grinding of the machine, as it has created the radical possibility for all meaning to be ground open into its most primitive constituent parts. In the first place, this “expolodotonates through Parsuralia,” that is, though the land of Persse, the old world of oral art. An additional effect is that “general uttermosts confussion are perceivable moletons skaping with mulicules” (353.26-27). “Uttermosts confussion” represents a contradiction, “uttermost” being “most extreme,” here, most radical, but “confussion” implies “con-fusion,” literally the fusing together of disparate elements. The visibility of the “moletons” (molecules, Molotov cocktails) are “skaping” (escaping, scraping) with “mulicules” (molecules, mulier/women?) suggests a kind of chaos that is already in the process of re-forming itself.

Perhaps linguistic entities, new discoveries and insights with short half-lives quickly re-compound themselves, which means that the opening up of a new media context provides a very brief glimpse of possibilities for radical destruction of the literary-textual order, but also that that order very quickly reestablishes itself. This impact seems to have been worldwide, as “similar scenatas are projectilised from Hullulullu, Bawlawayo, empyreal Raum and mordern Atems” (353.29-30). “Scenatas” connects “sonatas” and “scenes,” that is, products of both music and visual art. They are “projectilised” across the world, through Rome and Athens. All sorts of possibilities for artistic expression briefly reveal themselves the world over, even as authoritarian desires for order almost immediately reconstitute themselves: “they were precisely the twelves of clocks, noon minutes, none seconds. At someseat of Oldanelang’s Konguerrig, by

dawnybreak in Aira” (353.30-33). To the “empyrean” (imperial, and also “empyrean” - the outermost Ptolemaic sphere, containing the fires of creation) discourse, where this happened is irrelevant. It happened only at “someseat,” some random political jurisdiction of “Oldanelang’s Konguerrig,” that is, Old-Danish-Languages War Kingdom, i.e., somewhere in Ireland, “by dawnybreak in Aira.” But to its practitioners, this “abnihilation” has shattered established meanings and set forth radical possibilities for art in the age of seemingly overwhelming technological-hegemonic “howdrocephalism.” The grounds for a newly radicalized community of media-saturated oral performance art, unstable and dynamic in its techniques, cannot be ignored by the forces of textual hegemony, when that art comes encased within a context seemingly controlled by that very hegemonic structure.

This section of the *Wake* both represents and enacts this “abnihilation.” It represents it by narrating about Butt, Taff, Buckley and the Russian general, a rendering of the death of HCE. But it enacts it by deploying all the resources of mass culture, especially the discourse of radio, journalism, advertising, television, and film, and so the narrative events reverberate into our understanding of the prose itself. We discover thousands of “abnihilised etyms” in the form of the thousands of mashed-up neologisms contained in the book as a whole. This narrative sequence encourages us to read each of those moments as radical in its own way, and encourages a reading that explains something like a purpose behind all the apparent obscurantism. Reading this text forces one into an act of oral performance in one’s own mind, where “etyms” are repeatedly split open and then recollected into the sort of authoritarian readings that our own minds cannot help but ascribe. But in the brief gaps, we achieve a kind of readerly freedom that

approximates the sense that ancient oral bards achieved in their extemporaneous performances.

The denouement of the “Buckley” episode follows in BT5. As Butt and Taff stand over the dead body, Butt exclaims “Shurenoff! Like Faun MacGhoul!” (354.5-6). We have already made a return to standard, authoritative narrative. That the dead body before them is “like” Finn MacCool, but in a ghostly form (hence the “ghoul”), suggests that, for Butt at least, they are just reenacting a cycle that has been followed many times before, here in a quasi-Russian (“Shurenoff!”) but also reassuring (“sure enough”) context. The two shape-shift into one identity, “desprot slave wager and foeman feudal unshekkled, now one and the same person” (354.8-9). A new dialectic emerges, no longer master and slave, but now at a higher level of abstraction. One united but conflicted consciousness is “umbraged by the shadow of Old Erssia’s magisquammythical mulattomilitiaman” (354.10-11). “Umbraged” suggests shadow (Latin), and taking offense (“umbruge”). “Old Erssia” stands for HCE (by way of Persse) and Russia, “magisquammythical” meaning “more than mythical,” and “mulattomilitiaman” brings a racial connotation to the notion that the two are now “mixed.” The tale ends with a suggestion that this intertwining will persist until the story runs again: “So till butagain budly shoots thon rising germinal let bodley chow the fatt of his anger and badley bide the toil of his tubb” (354.36-38). In other words, things are back to their normal state of flux, as this telling gets stirred back into the radio-televisual “melegoturny.”

I5 confirms this return to equilibrium, which begins by noting that “the pump and pipe pingers are ideally reconstituted” (355.1). Everything is “peterpacked up”

(355.2). And it's all put back "as ad where" (355.6), that is, contained within advertisements, stored away in the recesses of low culture. All these bits of knowledge might be easily discoverable— "they might see on at hearing could they once smell of tastes from touch" (355.4-5)—if someone could sift it all out and run it back through the proper senses. The bar audience concurs, or is at least done with the broadcast: "shutmup. And bud did down well right. And if he sung dumb in his glass darkly speech lit face to face on allaround" (355.8-9). We might read this passage as: "shut it off. Buckley did right. Even if he said it a little less than creatively, is amused all of us as though he were here." Maybe the audience does not recognize the full import of what they have experienced, but it did hold their attention without the kinds of heckling interruptions, narrative stutterings and technological intrusions we saw during the earlier "Kersse" episode. Where before, the technological noises disrupted HCE's telling of the tale, now they have become thoroughly enmeshed within it. In McLuhan's language, the medium has become the message. Or, as David Foster Wallace describes it:

Television used to point beyond itself. Those of us born in like the sixties were trained to look where it pointed, usually at versions of "real life" made prettier, sweeter, better by succumbing to a product or temptation. Today's Audience is way better trained, and TV has discarded what's not needed. A dog, if you point at something, will look only at your finger. (160)

In *Finnegans Wake* II.3, Joyce shows us the mechanisms for a new kind of engrossing oral performance that eschews competition between earlier literary or performative forms, discovering a new ground for the extraction of "etymy" - truths, connections and insights revealed only in performance. These "etymy" can be used to

create formulae that generate effective oral performances out of the seemingly homogenous productions of mass culture. Joyce also provides us with a new method for the development of these performances: the relentlessly creative shattering and reconfiguration of their contents. Like oral performance in the age of the “true Homer,” this method requires great powers of memory and extemporaneous recombination, eschewing high-cultural heroism or time- or place-based consistency in favor of vulgarity of plot and character, and a space-and-time-ranging grammar and vocabulary. Now, though, it works with not only the disseminations of a speech community of bards, but all the content and form of the textual products of print culture and the broadcast transmissions of the “toltubular daidialler.” The entire “cultural industry” becomes grist for its “grisning” and “grosning.” McLuhan enigmatically notes that for Joyce, “the electric age is recovering the unity of plastic and iconic space” (205), and in some ways, we can understand the “Buckley” episode as an attempt at such a recovery, one which uses the plasticity of oral poetry to achieve its aims.

#### **D. Closing Time**

For a brief moment in the middle of II.3, a new method -- the “abhilisation of the etym” -- presents itself. Save for the *Wake*’s final chapter, most of the rest of the post-“Buckley” pages of books II and III are, in a way, aftermath. There we witness a relentless, though ultimately futile attempt by the forces of textual order, mostly under the guise of Shaun, to put the genie back in the bottle. As II.3, one of the *Wake*’s longest chapters, winds down, we read the more pretentious judgments of the twelve listeners and their four older commentators. The commentator’s judgments seem to miss the point, speaking to earlier telling of the story much more than the elaborately polyphonic and



carnavalesque tale of Buckley. As the food arrives with “soup’s on!” (356.15), the four old men, the four annalists of Irish history, flatter themselves with their expertise. One says that “I have just (let us suppraise) been reading in a (suppressed) book” (356.19-20)—presumably some version of the *Wake* itself. He then moves on to predict that “it will cocommend the widest circulation and a reputation coextensive with its merits” (356.27-28), ambivalent praise at best. These old men are preoccupied with establishing a tradition of scholarship, and therefore removing or ignoring what they do not understand. They go on to describe it as “*Culpo de Dido! Ars* we say in the classics. *Kunstful*, we others said. What ravening shadow! What dovely line! Not the kind of this age could richlier eyefest in oriellental longuardness with alternate nightjoys of a thousand kinds but one kind” (357.15-19). Assimilating this story back to traditional written texts like the Latin, literate *Aeneid*, rather than oral-poetic Greek predecessors like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, emphasizes the hidebound nature of their outlooks; and, since they have glossed it as ““Culpo de Dido” (“the fault of Dido”), it highlights their misogyny as well.

These are eighteenth-century aureate scholars responding to a low-cultural extravaganza, as out of place, *mutatis mutandis*, as NPR reviewers trying to say something about hip-hop or sports. They even begin to generate a manuscript tradition that tries to gloss the characters and their sources: “Group A. You have jest (a ham) beamed listening through (a ham pig) his halted excerpt from John Whiston’s fiveaxled production...” (359.21-23). Eventually they start re-prosecuting the never-ending trial that recurs so often in this book. The “four avunculusts” (367.14) have their say, “synopticked on the word” (367.18), because “threestory serratelling was much too

many” (367.15). On its surface, this is a joke about the gospels being synoptic, but we can also read in it their efforts to take the three-layered “threestory”—the stories of Kersse, Butt/Taff and the interpolations—and turn them into something simpler that is “synopticked.”

The oral/written tension established earlier in the chapter winds down as we read elaborated, high-rhetoric commentary alongside Earwicker’s increasingly drunken mutterings: “and thus within the tavern’s secret booth. The wisehight ones who sip the tested sooth Bestir them as the Just has bid to jab. The punch of quaram on the mug of truth” (368.24-26). The four and the twelve continue to bloviate about the alleged crimes, intermittently mentioning “off coursse the toller” (372.3) or “the bollhead that parssed our alley” (373.36), while demanding that he “stop his laysense. Ink him!” (373.19-20), again showing their frustration and anxiety with the “lay” oral performance they have just observed but cannot successfully summarize. They try to dismiss what they have heard as mere steps within an inevitable world-historical dialectic: “first you were Nomad, next you were Namar, now You’re Numah and it’s soon you’ll be Nomon” (374.24-26). Never, however, do they actually dismantle the story or its resonances, hence “the groom is in his greenhouse, gattling out his. Gun!” (377.5-6). As the chapter finally comes to a close, their demand that he “Cut it down, mates, look slippy!” (377.32) reads as part of the ongoing sailor’s tale HCE of Kersse began much earlier. It also reveals their urgently felt anxiety about an amorphous, dynamic text they would like to be edited, clear and under control. Perhaps the ultimate rebuke of all the commentators’ efforts is when HCE momentarily comes to and says “So you were saying, boys? Anyhow he what?” (380.6), revealing in a moment of drunkenness just how little

sense the soberer critics are actually making. As everyone finally leaves— “the departed honourable homergoers and other sly-grogging suburbanites, such as it was, fall and fall about” (381-382)—II.3 winds down, so that “all’s set for restart after the silence” (382). The abhilitation of the etym complete, our commentators have already “silenced” it, looking for a return to the old ways, a return which stretches through the second half of the *Wake*, only to be broken up by Book IV’s final “ricorso,” which sweeps away everything—all of Shem’s revolutionary “etym” smashing and Shaun’s reactionary counter-movement—as just so much flotsam and jetsam.

## V. After “Buckley” the Deluge

The overall effect of the parts of the *Wake* following II.3 is to emphasize the fleeting and limited nature of the sort of “abhilitation” brought about in Buckley’s techno-poetic act. It does so by envisioning on the grandiloquent authoritarian response of Shaun. The last section of Book II, continues in the voices of the four old men (Mamalujo), holding a long-winded conversation about the Earwickers having sex. For the most part, the tales of Kersse the Tailor and How Buckley Shot the Russian General are left behind, though there are a few moments that harken back to the work of the “daildialler.” In the first place, if we take them to be still sitting downstairs in the pub with the Earwickers above them and “listening in, as hard as they could” (383.23), then this phrase highlights the voyeurism of television/radio watching. As the old men’s conversation continues, by simile they are compared to “the newcasters in their old plyable of *A Royenne Devours*” (388.7), “newcasters” suggesting *newscasters*; we can read the “old plyable” as the Butt-Taff radio-play. Further in the same page the old men sound as though they’re using a telephone. A few parentheses interrupt the conversation:

(hello, Hibernia!) from sea to sea (Matt speaking!) according to the pictures postcard... (Marcus Lyons speaking!) to the oceanfuls of collegians green...

Those were the grandest gynecollege histories (Lucas calling, hold the line!) in the Janesdanes Lady Andersdaughter Universary. (388.32-37, 389.8-10)

Like the radio interruption in the Kersse story, however, these telephonic moments serve more to distract from the main narrative than to enrich it. Still, their effect lingers as they remind us that, however ancient and retrograde the older voices of II.4 or the bulk of the narrative of Book III may be, we are still in a new-media environment that alters their desires for simple textual unity. Even when one of them suggests that “Since Edem was in the boags noavy” (396.21), “Edem” brings us to “Eden” and “Etym,” suggesting both primordial unity and future-leaning mashup. No matter how much religious, Latinate diction the old men attempt to deploy— “And after that now in the future, please God, after nonpenal start, all repeating ourselves”—they are still stranded, not at the beginning but “in medios loquos” (398.7-8): that is, in the middle of *speaking*, in an inescapably oral rather than written context.

Book III is the most conventionally written section of *Finnegans Wake*, yet it still bears the inescapable mark of the transformation brought about by the “abnilisation of the etym.” In fact, we can read Book III as an extensive, though failed, attempt at “reconstruction” undertaken on the part of the four old men and Shaun, who is their most sympathetic Earwicker family member. Its first line “Hark!” (403.1) suggests a calling to order, an insistence that the coming day will restore things to their rightful place, but the second line, “Tolv two elf katern ten (it can’t be) sax” (403.2), echoes the first description of the “tolvtubular high fidelity daildialler” (309.14). Book III largely proceeds through

intentionally antiquated diction, needlessly elaborated syntax which lend the whole an arrogant tone. Nevertheless, on its first page we can see its anxiety about the time “when you and they were we” (403.20), i.e., when Butt and Taff/Buckley joined together to murder HCE/the Russian General. There is an immediate distancing though, when the narrator writes that “I heard at zero hours as ‘twere the peal of vixen’s laughter among midnight’s chimes” (403.20-21). “Zero hour” and “midnight’s chimes” gesture backward to the “etym” interpolation and its notation of time: “precisely the twelves of clocks. Noon minutes, none seconds” (353.30-31). Although the first-person narrator of Book III—Shaun as enlightened despot—would like to obscure or deny the event, and works for almost 150 pages to do so, that order in the end collapses.

As the exposition of “Shaun the Post” begins, we read that he was “dressed like an earl in just the correct wear” (404.18) and that he had an “invulnerable burlap wiskcoat” (404.26). Invoking again the nostalgic attempt to tell the story of Kersse the Tailor, we read of Shaun: “(what a pairfact crease! How amsolookly kersse!” [404.33]), “Shaun himself. What a picture primitive!” (405.2-3). It is as though, in the view of whoever is now narrating, all this polyphonic, carnivalesque and ambiguous nonsense has at last been set aside and a perfection “picture primitive” has been captured—that is, a firm basis upon which to build a Northern-European Irish-nationalist discourse of purity, “the voce of Shaun, vote of the Irish, voise from afar” (407.13-14). But this last phrase, “voise from afar,” reenacts the etymology of “telephone” (tele- = “from afar” and “phone” = sound) and reveals that even within this yearning for some primordial Celtic-Anglo-Saxon figure, there lurks a Latinate, southern, hybrid “voise.” Shaun strives for perfect gentility— “Goodbye now, Shaun replied, with a voice pure as a churchmorden,

in echo rightdainty” (409.11-12)—but again, “voice” catches his narrator in a moment of compromising hybridity, as does “Echo,” an inversion of HCE encountered many times earlier in the *Wake*.

Similar chinks in the armor, in the form of evidence implicating Shaun in the parricide, continue to appear through III.1, but Shaun plays them off. “O murder mere, how did you hear?” (411.26) ties him to the Buckley episode and the orality of “hearing,” not his preferred sensory mode. When Shem manifests in the form of the “gracehopper,” Buckley is again in the air when it speaks: “So vi et! We responded. Song! Shaun, song! Have mood! Hold forth!” (414.14-15). Here Shem adopts the *tu quoque* strategy of Lear’s fool, indicting his interlocutor though “So vi et,” which Shaun is more than willing to hear as “so be it” but which the reader can experience as “Soviet,” i.e. Russia, the scene of the General’s murder. As the narrator puts it, “the Gracehoper who, though blind as batflea, yet knew” (417.3), thus associating blindness with bardic skill and an awareness of an underlying truth that Shaun’s optically obsessed court cannot itself see.

A poem written about/by Shaun, one that it appears to be a plagiarized copy of the earlier oral tales, foreshadows the impending collapse of Shaun’s rule. Lurking within this poem is a sense of the limits of Shaun: “your genus its worldwide, your spacest sublime! But, Holy Saltmartin, why can’t you beat time?” (419.7-8). The reign of Shaun experiences itself as quite extensive over the world; Shem knows it to be finite in its age. “Greek! Hand it to me! Shaun replied... I’m as afterduck nobly Roman as pope and water could christen me” (419.20-22). Shaun allies himself with the orderly, written, literary Latin over the orally tinged Greek poetry, taking the poem and placing it in an envelope, and, as Shaun the Post, taking charge of its delivery: “Flummery is what I

Would call it if you were to ask me to *put it on a single dimension* what *pronounced* opinion I might possibly *orally* have about them gages of trash which the mother and Mr Unmentionable (O breed not his same!) has *reduced to writing*” (420.1-5, emphasis added). Notice how speaking and writing mingle uncomfortably within his language, as does HCE (“Mr Unmentionable”) and his crime. Shaun’s impulse in the face of this “flummery” is to render it into a “Single dimension” and “reduce” (that is, “reconstrict”) it to writing. This “Letter, carried of Shaun, son of Hek, written of Shem brother of Shaun, uttered for Alp, mother of Shem, for Hek, father of Shaun” makes Shaun, through repetition, central to a story he apparently has little to do with.

Shaun’s audience continues to diminish his authority by speculation about the letter— “millions of moods used up slanguage tun times as words as the penmarks used out in sinscript” (421.17-18)—and the letter’s true authorship “by your cerebrated brother--- excuse me not mentioningahem?” (421.20-21). Shaun ends up filibustering this request at great length: “He’s weird, I tell you, and middayevil down to his vegetable soul. Never mind his falls feet and his tanbark complexion... I’m not at all surprised the saint kicked him whereby the sum taken Berkeley showed the reason generously” (423.30-32). But this counter-argument by Shaun expresses his continuing insecurity about his own part in the murder, as well as his theft of the letter. He even tries dispensing a thunder-word to end the conversation, but his interlocutor, now more clearly Shem, needles him further: “The hundredlettered name again, last word of perfect language. But you could come near it, we do suppose, strong Shaun O’, we foresupposed, How?” (424.25-27). “Last word” suggests finality, but also the idea that it was not just the last word overall, but the last word “of perfect language”; this suggests

that instead of Shaun's hegemonic diction, there is a new, hybrid "abnihlised" language standing ready to replace it. Shaun tries to curse it: "Every dimmed letter in it is a copy and not a few of the silbils are wholly words I can show you in my Kindfdon of Heaven. The lowquacicty of him!" This criticism harkens back to the Shem the Penman chapter. Shem is called "low" at least a dozen times in I.7— "Talk about lowness!" (171.31). "[L]owness" and "lowquacity" combine English "low" and "loquacity," i.e., outspokenness. Shaun's repeated criticisms of Shem here reveal Shaun's vulnerability more than they impugn Shem's trustworthiness. And in so highlighting Shaun's vulnerability, these sections highlight the limitations of authoritarian discourse in responding to radical techno-poetic critique.

The layers of semantic sediment contained in Shaun's language undermine his pretensions of purity. Shaun, continuing as "Jaunty Juan" (429.1), wears "bruised brogues that were plainly made a good bit before his hosen were" (429.4-5). Continuing the clothing/language connection, here we imagine that Shaun's speech (his Irish brogue), as well as his shoes (brogues), is "bruised." As Book III continues, impurity and the frustration it causes him to become more and more prominent, highlighting the instability inherent in his/our felt desire for static, textual unity, and "all the little tytopies." While holding forth to his sisters, Juan condescending scolds them about "thy oldwolrd tales of homespinning and derringdo and dieobscure and daddyho" (431.31-32), all the while speaking in "clearance of diction and general delivery" (431.22). He seems preoccupied with the voice of the absent Shem, parenthetically paraphrasing his comments while confusing his gender: "he'd marry me any old buckling time as flying quick as he'd look at me" (432.15-16). "Buckling time" contains just a whiff of



“Buckley,” his crime, and “time,” Shem’s domain. A few pages later he also mentions “the volses of lewd Buylan, for innocence! And the phyllisophies of Bussup Bulkeley” (435.10-11). With suspicious vehemence, he professes his “innocence” in the face of someone “lewd” and reacts to the sounds contained in Bishop Berkeley’s name, transposing it into another fearful mention of Buckley.

As Shem’s presence grows, more insults begin to emerge in the monologue: for instance, “you, bilgetalking like a ditherer” (438.9) and “our local busybody, talker-go-bragk” (438.17). Shaun threatens to “burn the books that grieve you” or replace them—“perousse [please? Persse?] instate your *Weekly Standard*, our verile organ” (439.36-38)—expressing a desire for a friendlier and more consistently nationalistic (and phallic) press corps. He lets his listeners know that “the lad who brooks no breaches lifts the lass that toffs a tailor” (440.31-32), again harkening back to the Kersse story. He goes out of his way to mention that “Home we come to newsky prospect from west to wave on schedule time” (442.11-12). Here “Newsky” brings us to St Petersburg’s Nevsky Prospect, another oblique reference to the Russian general. In the voice of a domineering teacher, he implores his court: “Write me your essayes, my vocational scholars, but corsorily, dipping your nose in it... I’d write it all by mownself if I only had here of my jolly young watermen” (447.7-8). He asks them to “compost liffe in Dufblin by Pierce Egan with the baugh in Baughkley of Fino Ralli” (447.24-25)—demanding that they write the “official” account of both the tale of “Fino Rali” (obliquely connected to Kersse via a combination of Finn and Persse O’Reilly) and Buckley (Bughkley)—in the hope that their authorship will somehow control the story of his crime. He claims, “I’d never say let fly till we shot that blippup and swumped each other” (451.30-31) and implores

them to write as he wishes. He avoids mentioning the fact that “we shot that bilppip [Buckley],” all the while recognizing the impossibility of controlling their voices.

When Shaun says “Ope, Jack, and atem!” and “You can trust me that though I change thy name though not the letter” (459.29-34), he comes close to acknowledging the “abhilisation of the etym” by trying to take credit for a domesticated version of it (“atem”). Shem, interjecting, notes that Shaun “will dream telepath posts dulces on this isinglass stream (but don’t tell him or I’ll be the mort of him!)” (460.23-24): he will wish away these past events and decorate them with “ducllet” sounds. He suggests that they “dactylise him up” (468. 17)—that is, work backwards from written into pseudo-oral style by taking the dactyl (originally a metrical unit that aided in composition in performance) and using it to construct a new mythology around Shaun that has the trappings of oral style but none of the democratic and “low” content. As “poor Jaun the Boast’s last fireless words of postludium of his soapbox speech ending in’sheaven” (469.31-32) conclude, upstanding “Shaun the Post” has morphed into “poor Jaun the Boast,” a would-be oral poet who lacks the joy or creativity (he is “*post-ludium*”—after the game, also a postman, not a player), whose only real acts involve “soapbox” boasting instead of artistic composition.

Hanging on to the reins of power of the *ancien regime*, “Pure Yawn” (474.1) persists in his monologue, though in III.3 it continues to grow more and more Shem-like, i.e., hybrid and carnivalesque. Shaun loses control of the narrative, as we might say of a 21st-century politician. The crime of the murder of Buckley, and the indiscretion of HCE, both attached to Shaun by implication, continue to emerge. Alongside this emergence, we also find a gradual increase in “\*rsse\* cognates: “you have from the wrost

curst of Ireland,” (482.12-13), for example, problematizes the purity to which “pure” Shaun aspires. He tries to guide the propaganda effort: “I will let me take it upon myself to suggest to twist the penman’s tale posterwise” (483.2-3), that is, take the suppressed tale, twist it and make it into a “poster”—a piece of straightforward political art. When he tries to impugn the authenticity of this tale, however, he jokes that “there is a strong suspicion on counterfeit Kevin” (483.4-5), impugning himself (“Kevin”) more than “the penman.”

Bits and pieces of radio diction re-emerge in this section of the text as well, and contribute to Shaun’s downfall. Some gossipy voices, reading over a text note “this nonday diary, this allnights newseryreel” (489.37), provide another summary of the *Wake* itself, seeing it as a newsreel nursery rhyme—a tale emerging from the early days of newsreels, the infancy of mass-media culture. A second voice replies, “In this wireless age any owl rooster can peck up bostoons” (489.48.490.1). That it is a “wireless age” suggests a fundamental transformation at work because of radio communication, the effect of which is a kind of democratization in which “any owl rooster” (any old troublemaker) can stir up trouble that would jeopardize Shaun’s already tenuous authority. These gossips exclaim, “Pirce! Perce!” (491.26), recognizing perhaps that Shaun and the mythical Persse O’Reilly are one and the same: “Mr. Hairwigger who has just hadded twinned little curls” (491.31-32). Their discovery that “sambat papers Sunday features of a welcome aperrytiff with vallad of Rill Pearce O” (493.3-4) suggests that traces of this story show up in Sunday papers. They remark that “All ears did wag, old Eire wake as Pierce Aurell was flappergansted” (496.16-17), to which the other interlocutor replies, “Recount!” (496.18), contesting the legitimacy of Shaun’s claim to

power. Talk of the “Magazine Wall, Hosty’s and Co, Exports... Persse and Rahli” (497.26-28) and “beers o’ryely” (498.17-18) continues to bubble up, much to Shaun’s chagrin.

A dramatic moment occurs after a “SILENCE” (501.6) that echoes I.I’s “(Silent.)” (14.6), and then we realize that the gossipy conversation we’ve been reading was, in fact, a phone call: “Clear the line, priority call!” (501.13). This suggests ways that communication technology has accelerated and transformed the gossip, as “we are again in the magnetic field” (501.15). The electromagnetic diction also begins to anticipate the *Wake*’s final flood: “moisten your lips for a lightning strike and begin again” (501.17-18). Shaun continues to deny these changes by trying to control the media: “Now, just wash and brush up your memoirias a little bit” (507.31). Here he again seeks “reconstruction” that will inevitably fail; “memoirias” suggests that “memoria” (memory) and “moira” (fate) are both already determined. Trying to prop up the purity myth of the Irish as northern-European, he interjects: “naturally he was... Kerssfesstiydt. They came from all lands beyond the wave for songs of Inishfeel... No puseyporcious either” (501.33-36). Here he claims that the founding myth has nothing to do with Persse and his crime, but etymology betrays him by suggesting “Kerss fesstidty” (Kursse confessed/did it?). This does not differentiate him from “puseyporcious” (“Persse”) in the minds of his hearers. More echoes of the Buckley crime surface as well. The gossipy voices continue— “Crashedafar Corumbas! A Czardanser indeed!” (513.16—conflating Columbus (another avatar of problematic purity) with a Russian subordinate (“czardanser”).

In an important passage mentioning Homer that compresses and reviews much of what we've already discovered about the way that certain types of oral performance can threaten political powers that be, the voice of the historians interrogates an increasingly defensive Shaun. They implore him:

I want you, witness of this epic struggle, as yours so mine, to reconstruct for us, as briefly as you can, inexactly the same as a mind's eye view, how these funeral games, which have been poring over us through homer's kerryer pidgeons, massacreedoed as the holiname rally round took place." (515.22-26)

It is clear that "Homer" is named, and his "epic struggle" suggests that the speaker wants a "reconstruction," some sort of vividly accurate account, one that reveals the underlying truth. That truth is held within "homer's kerryer pidgeons" - Homer's Carrier Pigeons, that is, rhapsodes, but also Homer's Kerry-regional pidgins, that is, Homer's polyglot diction. Homer's diction has been "massacreedoed" (masqarading, but also "mass-sacred-creedoed" - believed by the masses to be sacred,"), and now known "as the "holiname rally" - the Holy Name Reilly. If he could get an answer to this question on the record that would stick, the reign of Shaun would be secure through the ages. But this cannot happen because no sober witness is available to affirm it: "Which? Sure I told you that afoul. I was drunk all lost life" (515.27).

From this point on, the voice of HCE emerges in more force— "didget think I was asleep at the wheel?" (519.18)—destroying the insulation Shaun has worked so hard to achieve from his father's indiscretions, and thereby emphasizing the ways that Shaun-style hegemony is really just a high-cultural veneer covering a deeper, sloppier low-cultural presence. These lapses include: "*butting*, charging, bracing, backing, springing,

shrinking, swaying, darting, *shooting*, *bucking* and sprinklin” (524.22-23, emphasis added). Another fatal accusation is finally levelled: “Plegiarist!... Short lives to your relatives! Y’are absexed, so y’are, with makerglosia and mickroocyphyllicks” (525.7-9). This blending of plagiarism, heredity, and sexuality now takes over the text, bringing us back from the rarified terrain of Shaun and his court, descending back into the chaos of the earlier parts of the *Wake*. And again, there is a cry for the balladeer long since left behind: “Lift it now, Hosty! Hump’s your mark!” (525.21). As something like Hosty’s ballad starts to appear in corrupted sections in the text, things become more and more polyphonic.

When HCE momentarily becomes a radio personality, we again feel the pull of the all-encompassing media torpor experienced by the bar patrons in II.3: “Calm has entered. Big big Calm, announcer. It is most ernst terooly a moresome intertartenment” (534.8) -- he then begins to protest his innocence, but no longer in such highfalutin terms. He’s got “buckely hosiered from the Royal Leg” (536.15), transforming Buckley now into a victim, not the perpetrator. He admits to some wrongdoing, but defends his “respectability,” noting that he “was parciful of my subject” (545.29). The four old men surface again, whom HCE designates as the radio-television broadcasters “Mr Televox, Mrs Taubiestimm and invisible friends!” (546.31). He moves on to a lengthy confession, which includes the sins or crimes that he bought his victim “trancepearances such as women cattle bare and pleried piled” (548.28) and that “I pierced her beak” (548.38). A cluster of radio vocabulary follows, mentioning “tolvmaans,” (549.10), “Livania’s volted ampire, from anodes to cathodes and from the topazolites of Mourne” (549.16-17). When the twelve listeners are described as “in regimentation through liberal

donation in coordination for organisation of their installation and augmentation plus some annexation and amplification without precipitation towards the culmination in latification of what was formerly their utter privation” (551.19-23), “amplification” recalls the initial description of the “daildialler.” In the final demand “Hams, circuitise!” we hear the voice of that all-powerful device commanding Shem, Shaun and HCE to accede to the inevitable dominance of its voice; thus, the “daildialler” continues to wield its influence in the face of Shaun’s conservative suppression attempts.

Despite Book III’s lengthy attempt by Shaun to escape from its clutches through neoclassicism and conservative denial, we return to the very media saturation he thought he had set aside. Like the ballad of Kersse the Tailor, the retrograde, faux-ancient oral narration that lapses into boredom and irrelevance, so too the so-called “watches of Shaun” gradually grow less effective until, ultimately, they are invaded by the impure, hybrid forces that had been excluded. III.4 represents the natural endpoint of this process, which has transformed from Shaun holding court into HCE and ALP having sex with all the other characters looking on in one way or another. Whereas at the outset of book III, the text was aureate and monophonic, in III.4 it returns to a polyglot, carnivalesque hybrid—a “fog” (555.1), as its first line has it, and a “cursorbog” (556.27). ALP, in the guise of “Kothereen,” wakes up because she thinks someone has come “to the dowanstairs dour at that howr to peirce the yare” (556.34-38), that is, to copulate with her. Yet another, more final-sounding trial gets underway: they “tried old wireless over boord in their juremembers, whereas by reverendum they found him guilty of their and those imputations of fornicolopulation” (557.16-20). Somehow now the “wireless” device itself is on trial, blamed for “fornicolopulation,” but they also thereby

convict themselves because “on everybody connected with him” falls “the curse of coagulation” (557.37-38). None escape innocent from this trial.

Something like a concrete scene is actually established: “Chamber scene. Boxed. Ordinary bedroom set. Salmonpapered walls...” (559.1). As the four old men describe four different lovemaking positions, their claims to scholarly objectivity melt away, and the whole grand sweep of history they had been setting forth is encapsulated in this most domestic, commonplace of scenes. Now we feel at home, perhaps upstairs from the pub, its daildialler still sputtering and occasionally intruding upon the couple in bed: “When you’re coaching through Lucalised, on the sulphur spa to visit, it’s safer to hit than miss it, stop at his inn!” (565.35-36). Into this advertisement intrudes speculation about Hosty, “for it’s race pound race the hostires rear all roads to ruin and layers by lifetimes laid down riches for poormen” (556.1-2). Just as the advertisement/programming boundary was earlier blurred in the “Buckley” episode, so something similar happens here. And as the four old men invoke the myth of Pierce O’Reilly, they pronounce: “he is considered to have committed, invoking *droit d’orieller*, simple infidelities with Felicia, a virgin... Honophrius, Felicia, Eugenius and Jeremias are consanguineous to the lowest degree” (572.24-26). The commentators are “consanguineous” with the main characters; “to the lowest degree,” in their minds, implies that the relationship is minimal, but to the reader it suggests that they are “low” rather than “high” of degree, i.e., in the same mess along with everyone else. Among the other ways this manifests, there is digression about the “Doyle” family, which is connected phonetically with the “dail” in “daildialler,” members of the jury, “twelve as upright judaces as ever let down their thoms” (575.38). “Judaces” blends “justices” and



“Judases,” emphasizing yet again the tendency of this homogenizing force not to render justice, but to betray whatever stands out, to resubmerge it back into the mulligatawny stew.

As they describe what they are witnessing, we read a command from the assembled crowd: “let earwigger’s wivable teach you how to dance” and also “for they met and mated and bedded and buckled” (579.26-29). Reversing the original evolution of this orally composed tale, we gain important evidence of its provenance of “Purses Relle that kneed O’Connell up out of his doss that shouldered Burke that butte O’Hara that woke the buster that grattaned his growd that bucked the jiggers to rhyme the ran... that bought the ballad that Hosty made” (580.30-38). We now know that this story originates in nothing more (or less) than HCE and ALP having sex in their bed, involving “roaring” (Big Reilly was the worst)...” (581.7) and “fine me cool’s moist opulent vinery” (581.11). While the act continues, it results in “Casting shadows to Persia’s blind. The man in the street can see the coming event” (583.13-14). Their impending climax takes on a cosmogonic dimension: “it will be known through all Urania soon. Like jealousjoy titaning fear” (583.14-15). This ordinary couple’s post-workday sex becomes the source of all the legends we have read, and a kind of creation myth.

The act is completed, and “this chamber stands abjourned” (585.27). “Chamber” associates sex and politics, also drawing the radio broadcast into one huge blurry set of events with no clear boundaries. The structure articulated after Buckley shot the Russian general and the abnihilation of the etym has now re-collapsed into the sleeping couple’s post-coital slumbers. The phrase “his reignbolt’s shot” suggests that the “reign” of Shaun is “shot,” that Buckley has killed the Russian General, and that HCE has ejaculated. All

stands ready for the day: “Finest view from horizon. Tableau final. Two me see. Male and female unmask we hem. Begum by gunne! Who now broothes oldbrawn. Dawn!” (590.24-27). Book III ends, ending right back where it worked so hard to escape: in a low-cultural morass of sex and voyeurism, finalizing the *Wake*’s enactment of the fundamental hypocrisy at the root of authoritarian, puritanical rhetoric.

In many ways, Book IV, the so-called *Ricorso*, works almost on a separate plane, recasting many of the *Wake*’s central concerns in strikingly different contexts. Even so, the themes we have been tracing here—orality, technology, and the related tales of *Kersse* and *Buckley*—do figure prominently. On IV’s first page, for example, we see “O rally, O rally, orally!” (593.3-4), invoking the memory of the ballad of Peirce O’Reilly, a ballad connected in several ways to the tale of *Kersse the Tailor*. Aligning the four old men (and Shaun) with silence and deafness is the phrase “the cowld owld sowls that are in the domnatory of Defmut” (593.20-21). Here “Defmut” also repeats I.1’s question from Jeff to Mutt, “But you are not jeffmute?” (16.14) and Mutt’s reply “Noho. Only an utterer” (16.15). That Mutt is “only an utterer” associates him with the tradition of oral composition-in-performance. Before the *Ricorso* gets fully underway, then, we begin in “the domnatory of Defmut,” the realm where written literature has damned us to a confined, interior space.

There are stray references to *Kersse*: “trespassers should be pursacoutred” - trespassers should be prosecuted but also, re-passers, those who transmit tales, should be *Kersse-acoutred*, i.e., dressed up like *Kersse the Tailor*, “if you’ve tippertaps in your head or starting kursses, tailour, you’re silenced” (594.38). As the mythical Finn comes again, in a list of epithets, we see him called “in persence of whole landslots; forebe all the

rassias” (596.12-13). Finn comes into “the kongdomain of the Alieni, an accorsaired race” (600.10-11), entering a new land with the idea that “now they’re going soever to Anglesen, free of juites, dyrt chapes” (600.26-27) and discovering a pure new landscape to govern, represent and narrate in their tales, but still “accorsaired” for their ancestral transgressions. As this invasion unfolds, the media appears, “an indepondant reporter, ‘Mike’ Portlund” (602.18), reporting “for the Durban Gazette, firstcoming issue” (602.20-21). He reports that the leader of the invasion is “exhabiting that corricatore of a harsse” (602.23-24). He “uncovers Pub History” (602.25) and documents a “Moviefigure on in scenic section” (602.27). Whatever pretensions there were to purity and unmediated contact with a new land, they are always already dashed. There are always spies about, members of “the Sigurd Sigerson Sphygmomanometer Society for bled-prusshers” (608.10-11), along with “lloydhaired mersscenary blockers” (609.3-4). The medium is already the message.

One final dramatization of the Shem-Shaun conflicts manifests in a dialogue between “Juva”- Shaun and “Muta”-Shem (609-610). Both reveal knowledge of Buckley and Kersse; Juva’s statement “Bulkily: and he is fundamentally theosphagusted over the whorse proceedings” (610.1-2) begins the conversation. Juva later asserts “he has help his crewn on the burkley buy” (610.11-12). When this exchange ends, we hear an echo of I.1’s “television kills telephony in brother’s broil” along with “velivision victor. Dubs newstage oldtime turftussle” (610.37-38). Perhaps describing a television or radio program, the statement, “Paddock and bookley chat. And here are the details” (611.2-3), gives details about that “pidgin fella Balkelly” (611.5), who was “speeching, yeh not

speeching noh” (611.10-11). A crucial passage which ties many of these ideas together follows soon after:

Our wholemole millwheeling vicocicrometer, a tetradomational gazebocroticon (the “mamma Lujah” known to every schoolbody scandaller, be he Matty, Marky, Lukey or John-a-Donk), autokinatonically preprovided with a clappercoupling smeltingworks exprogressive process, (for the farmer, his son and their homley codes, known as eggburst, egglend, eggburial and hatch-as-catch can), receives through a portal vein the dialytically separated elements of precedent decomposition for the verypurpose of subsequent recombination so that the heroticisms, catastrophes and eccentricities transmitted by the ancient legacy of the past, type by tope, letter from litter... in fact, the sameold gamebold adomic structure of our Finnius the old One, as highly charged with electrons as hophazards can effectve it, may be there for you, Cookalooralooraloomenos, when cup, platter and pot come piping hot, as sure as herself pits hen to paper and there’s scribings scrawled on eggs (614.29-615.10).

The principal sense of this passage is to describe a machine which undertakes a process of transmutation, a “vicocicrometer” in ways very suggestive of II.3’s “daildialler,” one whose results also resemble those of the “abnihilisation of the etym,” that reveal “the sameold gamebold adomic structure of or Finnius the old One” - that is, a process which reveals archetypical originals by smashing their decadent offspring open, producing the same anew. Now, instead of a “melegoturny marygoraumd” we have a “smeltingworks exprogressive process,” one that examines and recapitulates “the heroiticisms, catastrophes and eccentricies transmitted by the ancient legacy of the

past.” It transforms “tope” (topics - and the top) to “type” (written text, also types), and “letter” from “litter.” It attempts, perhaps futilely, to make order out of chaos. It attempts to solidify the raw material of culture, because, or so it believes “once you are balladproof you are unperceable to hailly, icy and missle-throes” (616.33-35). It tries to force a metallic, permanent artifact out of primordial etym-goo.

The moving final pages of ALP’s lament seem to transcend all these distinctions and dualities, making them seem small and childish. “Also your double brogues” (619.37), for example, renders the concern about language purity and hybridity into the domestic language of a man who hasn’t put his shoes away. She recalls the story of Buckley - “When you’re in the buckly shuit Rosensharonals near did for you” (620.3-4). She amusedly recalls his failures as bartender-raconteur - “you were pleased as Punch, recitating war exploits and pearse orations to them jakeen gapers. But that night after, all you were wanton!” (620.26-28). Successful assassination, failed oral-poetic narration or not, she is pleased to lend HCE comfort in the memory. Reducing the trouble of Kersse’s suit into premarital courting -- “was mayit pressing for his suit I said are you there here’s nobody here only me. But I near fell off the pile of samples” (624.31-32), she speaks to the emotional needs all these tellings may have missed. She recalls that “You’ve never forgodden batt on tarf” (625.20), rendering the Buckley radio play as a fond radio memory. She reminds him that there will always be “four that named them is always snugging in your barsalooner, saying they’re the best relicts of Conal O’Daniel and writing *Finglas since the Flood*” (625.13-15), that conservative, fixed-text delusions will always present themselves no matter what stories we tell. As the

*Wake* closes, ALP's final paene to "mememormee" (628.15) draws together the original source of all these tales - "memory," but also "me" - her - the source of all being.

## VI. Conclusion

We have good reason to believe Joyce read and thought deeply about Vico's ideas in the construction of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Part of my argument is that those texts manifest an interest not only in Vico's vision of the cyclical nature of world history, but also in his account of the creation and style of the great Homeric epics, as exemplified in the "Discover of the True Homer." Among classicists, Vico's answer to the Homeric Question was one gaining quite a bit of traction in the years Joyce was active. Though there is no evidence the two ever crossed paths, Milman Perry, a near contemporary of Joyce, who lived at worked in Paris prior to his death in 1935, became the foremost exponent of the notion that Homer was collectively and orally authored. His *The Making of Homeric Verse* explores the role that memory-aided oral composition, as opposed merely to memorized oral performance, might have played in the construction of the Homeric epics, prior to their memorization by rhapsodes, or their redaction and eventual transcription by the Pisistrads. Perry's work is based upon anthropological study of communities of Serbian illiterate bards then still in existence. In these Serbian communities, Perry documented poets who would improvise unique versions their poems with every telling, relying to some extent on memorized tropes, but also freshly recombining them to generate a singular performance each time. For Lord, "what is important is not the oral performance but rather the composition *during* oral performance" (5). Such composition-in-performance is, for Lord and Perry, primarily a response to a performative situation characterized by the expectation for a rhythmic, fast-

paced original performance. Poets orally composing uses memorized tropes to buy time, while formulating new and original (but still metrically acceptable) poetry in the backs of their minds. The audience expects a balance of new and old, respecting both parts of the craft. Lord and Perry use this notion of composition-in-performance to re-situate an entire body of rhetorical analysis of the Homeric epics: for Perry, especially, the role that epithets (half-line conventional descriptions that accompany characters' names) and "themes" (multi-line conventional stories) become an organizing principle for understanding the Homeric epics anew - as orally composed, and only later transcribed epics.

Though there is no evidence Joyce was ever exposed to then-contemporary scholarly debate about the Homeric Question, by way of his exposure to Vico, we can still understand the *Wake* as a written equivalent of oral composition-in-performance, one which responds to the time pressures created not by a waiting, live audience, but those created by the frenetic, fragmented, and oversaturated demands of an increasingly televisual, "over-texted" environment. *Finnegans Wake* melds new and old media to generate tropes that allow for endless juxtapositions and reconfigurations, forcing the modern, media-savvy reader to experience something like what an oral-poetry audience might have encountered, considering their own knowledge of the tropes of oral poetry. Though the *Wake's* author experiences no time pressure -- its writing took over 17 years -- reading it is actually a very time-sensitive process. Read too quickly and you cannot process "every word" that "will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypical readings" (20.14-15); read too slowly and you will forget the meaning you had already settled upon before you come to the end of the line, or move onto the next

sentence, paragraph, or page. And so, while reading, you are forced to do what the ancient bards did in composing: settle your mind by fixing on the identification of certain already-known tropes, creating moments of relative stability as you keep an eye out for textual innovations which will further tax your working memory (even if you are now doing so in a far less ancient, Folk-like fashion).

In tracing the evolution of the Kersse and Buckley “etym” through the course of *Finnegans Wake*, the reading presented here has followed this method, straining to invoke a kind of provisional interpretive order that the text itself continually disrupts and problematizes. The tales discovered are not only enacted through this mechanism, they are also discovered to be to some extent “about” the mechanism itself: the battle between (written) textual order and (oral) textual chaos. They are tales, which enact, through somewhat literal characterization, Vico’s notion that “letters and languages *were born twins*,” the one never fully ceding control to the other, because, as ALP laments in some of her final words, “Them boys is so contrary” (620.12). It is by their very contrariness that so much of the polyphonic energy of the “Buckley” episode is developed, and it is the lack of internally generated opposition, in the more monophonic “Kersse” narration, which leads to its failure to contest the media saturation represented by the noises of the “daildialler.”

As a final way of highlighting the contrast implied in these two tales, and what they mean for oral poetry in the technological age, as a means of reckoning with the overwhelming force of what Adorno calls “the cultural industry” in all its economic, political, literary, entertainment, scientific, technocratic manifestations, consider some of



Walter Benjamin's words from his seminal "Art in the Age of Mechanical  
Reproduction":

that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. (II)

In the tale of Kersse the Tailor, we find HCE straining to express the authentic original, to create an "aura" around its telling which only he, as the master storyteller, believes he can access. But his telling is disrupted by the "daildialler," an instrument of "mechanical reproduction" of fantastical proportions, one which duplicates, distorts and in unpredictable ways manipulates its "message." For HCE and his audience, this means "Kersse" is a failed story, in the telling of which HCE displays the inability to convey its aura. For Joyce, this failure also signifies the failure of the Irish cultural revival's myth of purity and racial unity. But the tale of Butt and Taff, like the *Wake* overall, "substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence." Rather than bemoan the loss of aura that only an "erse solid man" (3.20) could deliver, Joyce, in *Finnegans Wake*, lets stories like Butt's and Taff's freely replicate and mutate, break apart and re-agglomerate,

through radio channels, news interpolations, over wide swathes of space and through seeming ages of time.

For Benjamin, “these two processes lead to a tremendous shattering tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.” On the reading of *Finnegans Wake* II.3 presented here, Joyce’s “abnihilation of the etym” is its own kind of “shattering,” one that strives to resolve the dialectic we discovered in Joyce’s earlier work. Why could Benjamin, or Joyce for that matter, mean by trying to shatter these traditions? In his essay’s enigmatic final words, Benjamin juxtaposes fascism, and its fetishization of aura, and communism and its strategic deployment of reproducible art:

Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art. (Epilogue)

Joyce’s text, in encompassing quasi-oral, even anti-textual elements, performatively repudiates the fascism then steadily advancing its control over Western Europe with its story of an ostensibly singular, pure past. In the *Wake*, the repeated failure of its principal characters to discern the underlying “message” in the context of so many different “media” belies the authoritarianism at the root of the search for order. Somehow Joyce’s text strives to free itself from this search for authority, but still retains its quality as text. Moving forward eighty years, we might now ask how the obsessive repetitions of *Finnegans Wake* can be used to politicize art, and reinvigorate anti-authoritarian creative forms, forms which might produce radical perspectives that

counteract the all-encompassing mass media culture that so dominates our own contemporary political situation.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> At any rate, without pretending to divine Joyce's intentions in either *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*, we can still make the reasonable conjecture that many aspects of the projects of these books are, at the very least, interestingly anticipated in Vico's text from two hundred years prior, a text Joyce took to heart—as he put it, “my imagination grows when I read Vico” (Ellmann 693). Mali even goes so far as to locate Joyce's reading of Vico in 1912—immediately before serious work on *Ulysses* got underway—a claim that he suggests can help us understand the vexed questions of “what Joyce actually found in Vico and how he used it in his work” (78). This question, Mali laments, is otherwise very difficult to answer because of the “paucity of relevant evidence” (78). Owing to such lack of evidence, the question of how Vico made Joyce's “imagination grow” has been less widely discussed. As Mali points out, “no direct quotation, not even a single phrase” can be discovered in *Finnegans Wake* or any of Joyce's other works (78). What we do have is much more allusive in nature. For instance, in a phrase in the *Wake*'s first sentence, which speaks of “a commodius vicus of recirculation” (3.2), and in a dense passage describing a “vicociclotometer” (614.27) near the end of Book IV, we encounter many allusions to Vico's notion of cyclical history.

<sup>ii</sup> Here is a partial list: “O'Reilly's” (71.26); “Kersse's Kurduroy Karikature” (85.32-33), [Kersse in Corduroy]; “Loudburst” (90-91); “Nordest” (97); “Norsker Torsker” (177.4-5) [all containing Scandinavian overtones]; “He Perssed Me Here with the Ardour of a Tonnoburkes” (177.5) [anthimeria making “Persse” into a crude sexual act]; “Kersse” (137.22-23); “Perce-Oreille” (175.11-12); “Poissee” [Brooklynese] (177.11-12); “Fersee” (203.16); “Parse” (204); “Kirschie Real” (207.12); “Pierceful” (222.34); “Purssee” (224.2) [possibly blending Persse and Russia]; “Whatacurss” twice (225.13 and 14); “Durst” (234.29); “Percy” (235.30); “Erserum” (240.29); “Karssens” (241.34); “Purses” (242.14); “Sant Pursy Orelli” (243.35); “Ersebest” (253.1); “Tiercely” (253.19-20); “Pausse” (256.15-16); “Pearse” (262.6-8); “Erst” (263.1-2); “Cursowarries” (263 footnote 2); “Erse” (268L); “Parsed” (270.3-4); “Torskmester” (271.3-4); “Hearsemen” (276.29-30); “peace” (276.29-30); “Burst” (277.3); “ersed” (285.15); “Fursed” (282.22-23); “Fersee” (286.19-20); “Curses” (289.12); “Parsee” (296 footnote 1); “Prussic” (305.14-15); “Curse” (305.17-18).

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