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In the Buginning Is the Woid, in the Muddle Is the Sounddance: a Look at the Letter in Finnegans Wake

Melanie Risch

“In the buginning is the woid,
in the muddle is the sounddance” :

A LOOK AT THE LETTER IN *FINNEGANS WAKE*

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"Speak– / But keep yes and no unsplit"

With *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce set out on a project that would be taken up once more in the poetics of Paul Celan, whose poem, "Sprich auch du," called for a revolution of the word:

Sprich auch du ("Speak You Also")

Sprich auch du,
sprich als letzter,
sag deinen Spruch.

Sprich -
Doch scheide das Nein nicht vom Ja.
Gib deinem Spruch auch den Sinn:
gib ihm den Schatten.

Gib ihm Schatten genug,
gib ihm so viel,
als du um dich verteilt weißt zwischen
Mittnacht und Mittag und Mittnacht.

Blicke umher:
sieh, wie's lebendig wird rings -
Beim Tode! Lebendig!
Wahr spricht, wer Schatten spricht.

Nun aber schrumpft der Ort, wo du stehst:
Wohin jetzt, Schattenentblößter, wohin?
Steige. Taste empor.
Dünner wirst du, unkenntlicher, feiner!
Feiner: ein Faden,
an dem er herabwill, der
um unten zu schwimmen, unten,
wo er sich schimmern sieht: in der Dünung
wandernder Worte.

Speak, you also,
speak as the last,
have your say.

Speak –
But keep yes and no unsplit.
And give your say this meaning:
give it the shade.

Give it shade enough,
give it as much
as you know has been dealt out between
midnight and midday and midnight.

Look around:
look how it all leaps alive -
where death is! Alive!
He speaks truly who speaks the shade.

But now shrinks the place where you stand:
Where now, stripped by shade, will you go?
Upward. Grope your way up.
Thinner you grow, less knowable, finer.
Finer: a thread by which
it wants to be lowered, the star:
to float farther down, down below
where it sees itself gleam: in the swell
of wandering words.[1]

[1] "Speak, You Also," *Paul Celan: Poems,* trans. Michael Hamburger, 1980. The original German, "Sprich Auch Du," originally appeared in a collection of poems called "Von Schwelle zu Schwelle," published in 1955.

It perhaps not purely coincidence that Celan's poems were written in the wake of the destruction wrought by World War II– the most widespread war–and perhaps the deadliest–in world history, and a nightmare whose outbreak coincided with the publication of *Finnegans Wake*, in 1939.

But whether or not Joyce and Celan's poetics developed as a response to the same things– the world's increasing globalization, or to the global scale of its conflicts, or something else entirely– they both undeniably share an interest in the complete transformation of language as we know it. As Celan's poem urges, the language of *Finnegans Wake "*Speak[s] – /
But keep[s] yes and no unsplit." It speaks, perhaps more than any other work I've read, a "language of the shade"–of the nighttime–a language that is willfully obscured, as in the language of dreams.

For if *Ulysses* traces the course of a single day in Dublin, *Finnegans Wake* undertakes a similar project–to trace the dreams dreamt by a family asleep in their home in Dublin through a language that is itself nocturnal, lunar, and dream-like. Responding to readers' complaints that his new work (at this time still known by the provisional name "Work in Progress") was too *obscure*, Joyce pointed out that "the action of *Ulysses* was chiefly in the daytime, and the action of my new work takes place chiefly at night"– as a book of the night, its obscurity is simply 'darkness' rendered verbal[2]. "It's natural things should not be so clear at night, isn't it now?" (JJ 590). *Finnegans Wake* is in some ways the representation of dreaming, the attempt to reproduce the language and logic of dreams. Just as form was revealed to be inseparable from content in Ulysses, so too does the language of *Finnegans Wake* attempt to recreate the experience of dreaming through exchanges rational, lucid logic of either/or for the logic of dreams, a logic of '*and/both.'*

[2] Bishop 4.

The text is rich with multilingual puns and portmanteaus, which not only blur the boundaries between languages, but also open up multiple meanings in every word. In this way, disparate meanings and languages "collideorscape" (143.28)–they fuse together– *and*, at the same time– contradict and resist one another. Meanings blossom on the page, never static. For this reason, any sense of transparency normally afforded by language falls away in this book, whose every passage is willfully obscured. Because of its perceived difficulty, *Finnegans Wake* has inspired multiple "translations" into "normal" English. These translations attempt to make the book more 'accessible' for readers– by untangling its multiplicities, by clarifying–and simplifying– the story of *Finnegans Wake*. And yet–that story varies dramatically from one translation to the next. Ultimately, no number of annotations or translations of the *Wake* can offer an authoritative synopsis, or a complete exegesis of Joyce's book. In fact, the attempt at either betrays the book's project–to create a language that says "two thinks at a time" (583.7), where words "collideorscape" (143.28). This language speaks, and keeps "yes and no unsplit," reconciling opposites on all levels–in words, sentences, and in the greater arc of the book itself. In this way, we have characters who "were never happier, huhu, than when they were miserable, haha" (558), or a husband who could get no closer to the truth of how he courted his wife than by simply declaring: "I waged love on her" (547)– for indeed, as Celan would have it, "[h]e speaks truly who speaks the shade"–who speaks in the nighttime shadow of non-meaning, where forms aren't differentiated from one another as by the light of rational language, where it is still possible to keep "yes and no unsplit." *Finnegans Wake*, as even its ambiguous title[3] suggests, is a book where beginnings are always concurrent with endings, where death is always present in life–a book where, as in Celan's poem, "it all leaps alive - / where death is! Alive!"

[3] Read: Fin ("end") / Again ; (funeral) wake / (a)wake ; "Finnegan's wake" / "Finnegans, awake!"

Speaking of his "Work in Progress," Joyce claimed it could "satisfy more readers than any other book" by giving them the opportunity to bring their own interests and frameworks of knowledge to the text –"to use their own ideas in the reading" (qt'd in "Portrait of Joyce" 131). He explained:

> Some readers will be interested in the exploration of words, the play of technique, the philological experiment in each poetic unit. Each word has the charm of a living thing and each living thing is plastic.
>
> (131)

The provisional name "Work in Progress" is, in this sense, entirely appropriate, given what Joyce meant to accomplish in his book. In more ways than one, *Finnegans Wake* will always remain an open text– from its circularity of its form to the ambiguities of its words, the *Wake* is always in a process of becoming. If each word has the "charm of a living thing and each living thing is plastic," this is not only to say that each living reader animates the words by bringing her own charm to the text, but that the words themselves reflect the contradictions and multiplicities inherent in life itself. For if *Finnegans Wake* has anything to teach us about the world outside its pages, it's that nothing is static and fixed in its essence, that life itself is always making and unmaking itself, always in a process of becoming:

> ...for if we look at it verbally perhaps there is no true noun in active nature where every bally being... is becoming in its owntown eyeballs. Now the long form and the strong form and reform alltogether!
>
> (523)

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To read *Finnegans Wake*, I had to learn to read in an entirely new way– to abandon the idea that there was a "right" way of interpreting a passage, or the idea that I'd ever be able to know precisely what Joyce meant in a given paragraph. This meant learning to feel comfortable with my own uncertainty, with ambiguities, with passages so obscure, I could do nothing but give into the "sounddance" of the words themselves (378.29-30). And it's perhaps for this reason that I found myself drawn to "the strangewrote anaglyptics of those shemletters" (419)–to the letter (written by ALP) that recurs again and again throughout the *Wake*. Gradually, I came to understand that this letter stands for "letters" more broadly–not just "letters" in the sense of written correspondences, but also, of the words–made up of letters–that dance on every page of Joyce's book. I was drawn to this letter, that, ultimately would reveal itself as a microcosm for the book itself–for in the end, *Finnegans Wake* reveals itself to be just that: book-length letter, from Joyce to his reader.

> ...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 endlike) meet with the acquaintance of Mister Typus, Mistress Tope and all the little typtopies. Fillstup. So you need hardly spell me how every word will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypsical readings throughout the book of Doublends Jined (may his forehead be darkened with mud who would sunder!) till Daleth, mahomahouma, who oped it closeth thereof the. Dor.
>
> (19-20)

ALP'S MAMAFESTA

Unknowingly, we catch glimpses and fragments of it in earlier chapters: on the middenheap outside the musey room, in the scene of HCE's trial, in something as seemingly banal as a "present of cakes." ALP's letter is scattered, disseminated, circulated throughout the entire book; major versions of the letter appear nine times in *Finnegans Wake*, but far more often, it enters the text quietly, unannounced– as nearly negligible words or phrases that recur just often enough to strike a familiar chord with the reader (as in the mention of a "present of cakes," the four cross-kisses, or crisscrosses–"Ex Ex Ex Ex", or "Father Michael"). These are fragments of the letter that we the readers, like the gnarley bird on the trash heap, find and assemble from this "litteringture" (570.18). As with the rest of the threads that run throughout *Finnegans Wake*, we are always "rearriving" at the letter, always encountering it in new contexts, with new understandings, as if for the first time. And for this reason, there is no single authoritative version of the letter–no original document.

It's not until the fifth chapter of Book 1 that the letter[4] is fully brought into focus–introduced, not as scraps of trash pecked by a hen on a trash heap, but rather, as a document so important as to almost be holy; as such, it demands our careful scholarly investigation and exegesis. This chapter is the response to that demand: after a quick opening prayer to ALP and a three page long catalogue of names that the "untitled mamafesta" has been known by, the rest of the chapter represents one scholar's attempt to illuminate the history, authorship, content, and appearance of this very important "mamafesta." He (for everything in the tone suggests that this scholar is masculine) pursues various efforts to determine the letter's date and place of origin. But of course, as every reader of *Finnegans Wake* already knows, any attempt at establishing

[4] We aren't officially introduced to the letter until page 111, though we've already seen much of it on page 11–that 11 is a fragment of 111 is certainly no accident, as numbers (111 in particular–the total number of ALP's children) play an important role throughout *Finnegans Wake*.

certainty will always prove unsuccessful: the scholar's efforts to elucidate and illuminate the letter only succeed in further obfuscating and obscuring this most difficult and mysterious text–a text that, at times, doesn't seem so much to be ALP's letter, but rather the book that contains it, and which the letter comes to represent.

His "elucidation of complications" (109) is ultimately a parody of scholarly analysis, which reduces the Academy to little more than a joke–"acomedy of letters!" (425.24). Under the guise of this scholar who fails to shed light on ALP's letter, Joyce not only is able to poke fun at his critics, but even beats them at their own game: the stuffy and pompous scholar's investigation is, like the rest of *Finnegans Wake*, occasionally punctuated by helpful strategies for reading the book as a whole. Throughout the chapter, we see meta-descriptions of the book's structure and organizing logic, condemnations of its language and form, as well as surprisingly lucid descriptions of readers' struggles to make sense of it.

For instance, we learn that closer inspection of the letter would reveal not only "a multiplicity of personalities inflicted on the documents or document" but also, that "[i]n fact, under the closed eyes of the inspectors the traits featuring the *chiaroscuro* coalesce, their contrarieties eliminated, in one stable somebody" (107)–a clear reference to *Finnegans Wake* itself, where "[it] is nebuless an autodidact fact of the commonest that the shape of the average human cloudyphiz...frequently altered its ego with the possing of the showers" (50-51). If it is possible for HCE to be everything from the respectable Mr. Porter, a loving husband and father, to a violent invader from the North, a pedophile, a pederast all at once– guilty of incest, adultery, domestic abuse, and yet also innocent, wrongly accused; in the end, these "contrarieties are eliminated," the *chiaroscuro* features (both light and dark, clear and obscure) coalesce into the "one stable somebody" of those three letters: HCE (107), just as the warring brothers Shaun and

Shem coalesce into Tristan, or the sister's split personalities–or even her entire heliotroop of Maggies–are ultimately just refractions of Issy. Even Issy (now known as Nuvoletta) will ultimately "make up all her myriads of drifting minds in one" and jump from the "bannistars," giving a "childy cloudy cry," before falling into "the river that had been a stream" (ALP) as "a tear, a singult tear, the loveliest of all tears" (159). She becomes a "daughterwife" (627.02), just as Tristan–a "sonhusband" (627.01) is ultimately doomed to become the father-patriarch he's trying to undo. They are truly "the family umbroglia" (284): "a so united family pateramater is not more existing on papel or off of it" (560).

> every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle anyway connected with the gobblydumped turkey was moving and changing every part of the time: the travalling inkhorn (possibly pot), the hare and turtle pen and paper, the continually more and less intermisunderstanding minds of the anticollaborators, the as time went on as it will variously inflected, differently pronounced, otherwise spelled, changeably meaning vocable scriptsigns.
>
> (118)

If the letter acts as a microcosm for the book itself, then *Finnegans Wake* "presents itself as an undelivered letter, making of that figure an image for the obscurity of literature itself, a metaphor at least as important as the...better-known metaphor of the *Wake* as a dream" (Karshan 2). In this chapter about a letter that, in the end, stands for the very book that contains it, *Finnegans Wake* is basically re-imagined as a book-length letter, ("selfpenned to one's other" (489.33-34). And in fact, the letter is the ideal metaphor for written communication between subjects, insofar as all written communication involves a certain degree of postality, of sending and receiving a message, a message whose original meaning or intention is always in danger of becoming lost or distorted. *Finnegans Wake* becomes, in this sense, a letter from Joyce, "selfpenned" to his "others"–his readers.

Right from the start, the chapter makes it clear that the letter's content and meaning are incredibly variable, depending on who's trying to decipher it: we see its infinite variety reflected in (or refracted through) the catalogue of names that the "untitled mamafesta" has been known by at "disjointed times" (104.05). The list of alternative titles is exhaustive enough that it spans three pages, each title re-interpreting ALP's letter in a new, contradictory way: understood in one light, the letter is ALP's defense of HCE ("*The Augusta Angustissimost for Old Seabeastius' Salvation*"); in another, it's an inflammatory condemnation ("*Thrust him not*"). In some titles, the wife/mother ALP is recast as a younger seductress (in the tradition of Kitty O'Shea) implicated in HCE's fall from grace ("*I Ask You to Believe I was his Mistress*"). Other titles recast HCE and ALP's relationship as the love affair of the younger generation–Tristan and Isolde ("*Amoury Treestam and Icy Siseule*"). Still others–"*Lapps for Finns This Funnycoon's Week*" (105.21)–remind us that the letter ultimately represents a miniaturized version of *Finnegans Wake* itself, where, indeed, every story has many sides. What this long list underscores is that the letter–as a written document without an author present to speak for it and explain it–is constantly undergoing processes of distortion and transformation by its readers and interpreters.

As the scholar describes this document we've never seen before (at least not in its entirety), it soon becomes clear to the reader that his account absolutely fails to paint a clear picture of it–perhaps he, too, has never set eyes on it. The scholar's second-hand account of the letter, its circumstances, and its meaning, is ultimately no more credible than the gossip of the citizens of Dublin, who in their discussion of HCE's activities in Phoenix Park, spread rumors than vary wildly from one account to another– "and dormerwindow gossip will cry it from the housetops no surelier than the writing on the wall will hue it to the mod of men that mote in the

main street" (118). Just as HCE's reputation depends entirely on the person who's giving the account of his character, so too does the meaning of the letter warp dramatically according to which approach the scholar takes in his analysis. He too, is like the gnarly hen: his job as a scholar is, in the end, to pick up and piece together "hystorical leavesdroppings" (564).

To a certain extent, the scholar does seem aware of the limitations of the academy: he firmly reminds us that we'll need a lot of patience if we want to uncover "who in hallhagal wrote the durn thing anyhow" (107-108). Caution, too, is necessary: making rash assumptions about the letter's author would be "only one more unlookedfor conclusion leaped at" (108.32-33). For example, we can't conclude from the "absence of political odia and monetary requests" that the letter isn't part of an Irish national literature, that it "cannot ever have been a penproduct of a man or woman of that period or those parts" (108.31-32), just as we shouldn't assume that "the nonpresence of inverted commas (sometimes called quotation marks)" in an author's writing (such as Joyce's) is a sign of his being "always constitutionally incapable of misappropriating the spoken words of others" (108.34-36).

And yet, despite all these precautions, the critic nevertheless seems to have faith in the purpose of his scholarly mission: while the truth of ALP's letter will always remain elusive, he still considers patience a virtue ("and remember patience is the great thing, and above all things else we must avoid anything like being or becoming out of patience" (108)), and believes that years of research, or "years upon years of delving in ditches dark" (108), like the gnarly hen in her midden heap, will ultimately reveal something worthwhile. But does it? If the scholarly investigation is designed to uncover unequivocal truths about ALP's letter, it undeniably fails. "Thus the unfacts, did we possess them, are too imprecisely few to warrant our certitude" (57). And yet, it's precisely this very failure to unearth firm facts, to establish once and for all "the

truth" about the letter, that truly reflects the project of the *Wake,* to speak a language of the dark, an ambiguous language of shadows.

We finally come to the letter itself. But, for all the anticipation that the scholar builds up around this document, the precious letter that the gnarly bird or hen recovers from the midden heap (as we see it here at least) is bound to disappoint:

> ...what she was scratching at the hour of klokking twelve looked for all this zogzag world like a goodishsized sheet of letterpaper originating by transhipt from Boston (Mass.) of the last of the first to Dear whom it proceded to mention Maggy well & allathome's health well only the hate turned the mild on the van Houtens and the general's elections with a lovely face of some born gentleman with a beautiful present of wedding cakes for dear thankyou Chriesty and with grand funferall of poor Father Michael don't forget unto life's & Muggy well how are you Maggy & hopes soon to hear well & must now close it with fondest to the twoinns with four crosskisses for holy paul holey comer holipoli whollyisland pee ess from (locust may eat all but this sign shall they never) affectionate largelooking tache of tch. The stain, and that a teastain (the overcautelousness of the masterbilker here, as usual, signing the page away), marked it off on the spout of the moment as a genuine relique of ancient Irish pleasant pottery of that lydialike languishing class known as a hurry-me-o'er-the-hazy.
>
> (111)

It is, in the end, a rather banal letter– chatty, impersonal–like a hasty postcard from a family member who's away on an unremarkable trip. And yet (though it's certainly possible this has more to do with the hype that's built up around it than the actual contents) there is also perhaps something very intimate and personal about it, as often tends to be the case with the postcards we receive from loved ones, particularly when the person who wrote it *is* absent. In the end, the letter is banal precisely because it is so universal: "All the world's in want and is writing a letters. A letters from a person to a place about a thing" (278.13-15). As banal as they may be, every letter is, in the final analysis, a response to some sort of lack or absence–something that holds true even for very words (every word is "a letters," or made up of letters) that make up our letters, our written correspondences. For in the end, every sign is a way of pointing to–of

evoking or simulating the presence of–something absent. As the book comes to a close in the final chapter, the *ricorso* or return back to the opening chapter, ALP sighs: "And watch would the letter you're wanting be coming may be" (623).

The scholar, however, wastes no time considering the possible implications of its banality–we are quickly ushered onward. Next, we receive new information about Biddy Doran, the hen who scratches the letter from the midden heap, and about the letter's signature ("We note the paper with her jotty young watermark: *Notre Dame du Bon Marché*"–Our Lady of Bargains (112), before the scholar moves in for an even closer examination of the document's physical particularities: "Drawing nearer to take our slant at it (since after all it has met with misfortune while all underground), let us see all there may remain to be seen" (113). He wants to see what else there is for him to consider in his exhaustive analysis, which will also mean understanding "what remains to be seen" in a more literal way: since the letter has "met with misfortune while all underground," has deteriorated physically, he must literally consider what even remains at all of the letter by taking into account its material qualities, *its physical remains*.

To a large degree, this will mean paying special attention to its signature, "the teatimestained terminal" (114), which we learn is

> ...a cosy little brown study all to oneself, and, whether it be thumbprint, mademark, or just a poor trait of the artless, its 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) will be best appreciated that both before and after the battles of the Boyne it was a habit not to sign letters always. Tip.
>
> (114-115)

That the letter concludes with the "teatimestained terminal" could suggest several possibilities: that it was stained during a teatime accident (perhaps one involving "bi tso fb rok engl a ssan dspl itsch ina" (124)); that the whole letter is "timestained, beginning to show signs of discoloration, or simply deteriorating with age, weathered by the trials of time. In any case, the

teastain manifests as an indexical trace of something or someone: "The stain, and that a teastain" is the letter's signature[5] ("the overcautelousness of the masterbilker here, as usual, signing the page away"), but also, it is like a thumbprint providing evidence, or indicating the identities of those who 'made their mark' at the scene of a crime. There is, of course, an on-going crime scene in *Finnegans Wake*– the site of HCE's mysterious transgression in Phoenix Park, at the Magazine Wall– but it's interesting that the rhetoric of criminal investigations is turned back onto the written document, the court document meant to deliver either a defense or denunciation of HCE in his trial.

Indeed, the physical object of the letter seems to become a crime scene in its own right, the site of yet *another* mysterious "epizzle" to solve (411.15): we learn that it was

> ...pierced butnot punctured (in the university sense of the term) by numerous stabs and foliated gashes made by a pronged instrument. These paper wounds, four in type, were gradually and correctly understood to mean stop, please stop, do please stop, and O do please stop respectively, and following up their one true clue, the circumflexuous wall of a singleminded men's asylum, accentuated by bi tso fb rok engl a ssan dspl itsch ina.
>
> (124)

This is of course a description of its punctuation marks–the periods that break up its "unbrookable script" (123)[6], which the masculine scholar "gradually and correctly" interprets as meaning "stop, please stop, do please stop, and O do please stop" (124). The reference here is to a popular sex joke from the 1920's, about a young woman being petted by a man, exclaiming "'Stop!!!! Please stop!!! Do please stop!! O do please stop! O do please!! O do!!! O!!!!"[7] Here, on one level, the sexist joke is stripped of its sexual nature: it's in one respect just a pun on "punct," (German for "period") playfuly understood as an invitation for a reader to "stop, please

[5] And indeed, in place of a signature, Joyce signs his own novel-length letter–the book itself– with "the"or "thé"–French for "tea."
[6] This should call to mind Molly Bloom's monologue in the final episode of *Ulysses.*
[7] Fweets of fin.

stop," to pause between sentences or phrases. Yet at the same time, the sexual joke's origins definitively color our reading of this penetration as bodily and sexual, leaving the question open as to whether it's in fact an enjoyable sexual act (as the sexist joke would have us think) or an act of violence/rape – as is suggested by the (bordering on police-report) description of page's "numerous stabs and foliated gashes made by a pronged instrument" (124), wherein the page is figured as a mutilated body.

But the violent reading is also highlighted by the fact that the (male) scholar "gradually and correctly understand" its meaning by way of their "one true clue": "the circumflexuous wall of a singleminded men's asylum," in other words, he is convinced of the correctness of their interpretations only through the limitations of their own rigid perspective. It's important to note that the accent circonflex (ˆ), also resembles the sigla for Shaun (who comes to stand for the professorial scholar, rigid in his ideas, and in the certitude of his own truth and objectivity). In any case, the circumflex in the passage must ultimately be identified with the "pronged instrument" responsible for the "numerous stabs and foliated gashes": the "^ fork" of a grave Brofesor, highlighting the idea that scholarly examination of a document can present its own kind of danger: literally, in the sense of accidentally inflicting "paper wounds" or puncturing through the thin, hymen-like material of the page (indeed, manuscript pages, implied by the terms "recto" and "verso" were made from parchment–the thin, carefully prepared skins of animals); or, on the other hand, by falsely interpreting the material evidence. Ultimately**,** the violence of the perforations is further enforced by the shattered image of domesticity: "bits of broken glass and split china" and by the traumatic, broken nature of its language— for "bi tso fb rok engl a ssan dspl itsch ina" suggests "bits of broken engl a ss" as much as its does "bits of broken glass."

MAMAFESTA AS SCRIPTURE:
I. THE WORD MADE FLESH

The "mamafesta" chapter proposes multiple ways of reading and interpreting the letter, none of which can ever offer us a complete picture. We see this logic throughout *Finnegans Wake*, where no single account ever divulges a 'true' portrait of a character or an event, where even the portmanteau words themselves refuse to deliver to readers a singular, stable meaning. Like the gnarly bird, readers of *Finnegans Wake* can only attempt to reconstruct a whole by piecing together these incomplete and fragmented visions. Since there's no one reading of the letter that comes closer to the truth than another, my decision to privilege certain interpretations of the letter over others places me, to a certain degree, in the position of the misguided scholar parodied in this chapter. If to follow a single trail is to lose sight of the whole contradictory picture, I misguide us consciously, then, in hopes that this particular critical lens, magnified, will reveal new ways of thinking about this letter as a text. After all, any critical analysis of *Finnegans Wake* or ALP's letter must inevitably necessitate some degree of movement between the microscopic and macroscopic: the "features palpably nearer your pecker" will be "swollen up most grossly," while the "farther back we manage to wiggle the more we need the loan of a lens to see as much as the hen saw. Tip" (112). Let us see what there is to be gained then, by considering the letter as Holy Scripture.

The mamafesta chapter opens with an invocation of ALP, set to the rhythm of the Lord's Prayer, echoing the opening lines of suras in the Quran ("In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate"):

> In the name of Annah the Allmaziful, the Everliving, the Bringer of Plurabilities, haloed be her eve, her singtime sung, her rill be run, unhemmed as it is uneven!
>
> (104.01-03)

The prayer sets us up for this reading of the chapter, signaling to the reader that the "untitled mamafesta" discussed here should be understood not simply as a letter, but as *holy scripture*–the Word of ALP. Though other sections of the book might make it unclear[8] whether the "Mosthighest" memorialized by the mamafesta is HCE or "Annah the Allmaziful" herself–the mamafesta chapter, however, (as the radically feminine name "mamafesta" would imply) definitively shifts this focus from HCE to ALP and the hen. It encourages a new, in-depth reading of the document, bringing ALP to the forefront as divine creator of this letter "memorializing the Mosthighest"–just as God is memorialized through *the Word of God,* through scripture. The scholar himself (after delivering that three page-long list of alternate titles for the protean "untitled mamafesta") confirms that this "proteiform graph itself is a polyhedron of scripture" (107.08). Most of his discussion seems to come out of the scholarly discipline of reading and analyzing medieval manuscripts–not only paying close attention to the content, but the physical evaluation of the manuscript itself. Harry Gamble asserts as much in his history of the codex:

> Whatever else a text may be or may signify, it is a physical object, and as such it can be described, deciphered, and bibliographically located. Yet the physical object is also a social artifact. Its content was composed, its vehicle selected, and the words transcribed in a particular way... By observing precisely how the text was laid out, how it was written, and what it was written on or in one has access not only to the technical means of its production but also, since these are the signs of intended and actual uses, to the social attitudes, motives, and contexts that sustained its life and shaped its meaning. From this perspective a clean distinction between textual history and the history of literature is neither possible nor desirable.
>
> (43)

When dealing with ancient documents, it is indeed often *only* through the careful analysis of its physical features that scholars are able to piece together a document's cultural context, its origin,

[8] Previous chapters tended to emphasize the primacy of HCE, the family's patriarch; there and elsewhere in the book, ALP's letter appears as quasi-juridical evidence to redeem or condemn HCE–whether it's a defense of HCE against his enemies, or a public denunciation, it nevertheless remains *about* him.

or authorship–and most importantly, what meaning that document would have held for the people who came into contact with it in its former life.

Medieval scripture is a wholly material affair, not just for the scholars who study manuscripts, but also for the scribes and tanners who produced them: the making of manuscript was a long, labor-intensive process, and grounded at every moment in the material, organic world. Pages were almost always made of parchment–animal skins (typically from a calf[9], goat, or sheep) that were carefully prepared so that they could be written upon. Each resulting blank page was as unique as the animal: any piebald markings or scars remained perceptible, while holes might be physical evidence of the process of skinning itself.[10] The scribes who were constantly confronted with these defective pages had to find ways of repairing or adapting to the imperfections: though in some cases, a small hole might be repaired while the skin was still on the parchment maker's frame, or a defective edge might be repaired with a parchment patch cut into the same shape. Usually though, the imperfections remained in the final product, and the scribes had to enter their text around the holes, sometimes even dividing words in the process. Moreover, even the most rudimentary manuscripts required costly materials (not including the costly pigments or gold leaf employed by the more elaborate and famous manuscripts, like the Book of Kells, or manuscripts commissioned by wealthy nobility); since one calf skin only provided about three and a half sheets of parchment, a codex might easily require the slaughter of 50 animals–a sacrifice that very few could afford.[11]

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[9] Parchment produced from calf skins–generally considered to be of higher quality–was also called vellum.

[10] Let us reflect back on the "paper wounds" made by the pronged instrument of the "Brofessor" at the breakfast, the delicacy of the page.

[11] For this reason, even the most modestly produced manuscript was considered a valuable object, and no page went to waste–rather than go to all the trouble of producing a new codex with fresh pages of parchment, unimportant documents were recycled and put to new use: one could "erase" an old text by carefully scraping the ink from the surface of the parchment. If the parchment wasn't torn or damaged in

Even the illumination of its pages remained a firmly material step in the process—certain pigments could be mined from the earth (ocher, lapis lazuli, malachite, cinnabar) while others were processed from organic matter (unripe buckthorn berries, the larvae of insects, oak gall). Instructions for illumination sometimes even called for personal contributions from the scribes themselves, like earwax (for reducing air bubbles in gesso) or saliva (to prevent the corroding of the quill's nub). For the makers of manuscripts, a Bible proved to be a very material thing indeed: the Word of God was made into a thing you could touch, while the tangible, natural world was transformed into the Word of God. In this sense, illuminated manuscripts occupied a unique position: they existed somewhere between the tangible and intangible, constantly translating the material world into the spiritual, and vice versa.[12] In the case of Christian bible manuscripts with more elaborate illuminations, these were often considered so precious as to be rebound with ornate, costly covers (called treasure bindings)–as in the case of the Book of Kells–or kept in book shrines (also known as *cumdachs*) or other kinds of reliquaries. Especially in Celtic Christianity, even a plain manuscript that had been in the physical possession of a saint might later be treated as a relic, and rebound with treasure bindings. Manuscripts, in other words, were precious–not just in terms of their spiritual worth, but also as material property, objects that only the church or nobility could afford to own, let alone read.

The letter "memorialising the Mosthighest" (104.04) is, like a medieval manuscript, or like the Christian relics of saints, an object to be protected and venerated: it is the most important *thing* in *Finnegans Wake*–the only thing, in fact, to recur throughout the book in ever-changing

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the process, new text could be (more or less legibly) written over the old. And yet, no much effort went into scraping away an original text before overwriting it, the new result–a palimpsest–always left a visible trace of the old.

[12] See Clemens and Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies*.

configurations (like its polymorphous people and places). If we are to "let a few arti*facts*[13] [concerning the letter] fend in their own favour" (110), we might even consider the letter as the holy grail of *Finnegans Wake.* It certainly is, according to the scholar, a "genuine relique of ancient Irish pleasant pottery" (111.22-23)–and here, "pottery" suggests not only artifacts of Irish art recovered from sods of earth or midden heaps, but also the Irish literary arts, particularly Irish *poetry* (Charlotte Brooke published *Reliques of Irish Poetry* in 1788, a book of Irish poems, odes, elegies, and songs, which she translated in English, fearing that they'd otherwise be lost in the midden heaps of history[14]). But, if the letter *is* "a genuine relique of Irish pleasant pottery," this is not just because of its potential poetical merit: it is actually transubstantiated into a chalice after the hen finds it on the dump, when "keepy Kevin" claims it as his own discovery:

> He trouved upon a strate that was called strete[15] a motive for future saintity by euchring the finding of the Ardagh chalice by another heily innocent and beachwalker.
>
> (110)

The Ardagh Chalice mentioned here is one of the great treasures of Irish Insular art: a two-handled silver cup from the eighth century. In *Ireland, Its Saints and Scholars*, J.M. Flood recounts the discovery of the chalice and another Irish artifact in 1868 (and his own uncertain history sounds much like the scholar's attempts to trace the genealogy and history of the letter in 1.5):

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[13] My emphasis.

[14] In the preface to her translations, Brooke laments the fact that "few of the compositions of those ages that were famed, in Irish annals, for the *light of song*, are now to be obtained by the most diligent research" (cxxx). In keeping with the metaphor, she frames her project as an attempt to "throw some light on the antiquities of this country, to vindicate, in part, its history... I have been induced to undertake the following work... to rescue from oblivion a few of the invaluable reliques of her ancient genius; and while I put it in the power of the public to form some idea of them, by clothing the thoughts of our Irish muse in a language with which they are familiar, at the same time that I give the originals, as vouchers for the fidelity of my translation, as far as two idioms so widely different would allow..." (cxxxi-iii).

[15] *Legalese Obsolete* strete: estreat, extract, a true copy of an original motif (Fweets of Fin).

> We do not know the name of the artist who executed either of these beautiful objects, nor the name of the king or ecclesiastic for whom they were wrought, and we owe the discovery of both to accident. A child playing on the sea-shore near Drogheda found the Tara Brooch, and a boy digging potatoes near the old Rath of Ardagh in Limerick found the Ardagh Chalice.
>
> (Flood 112)

Keepy Kevin's recovery of the letter from the midden heap reenacts this accidental discovery of the chalice by a young boy in a potato field near Reerasta, Tipperary[16] – both discoveries exemplify instances "where the possible was the improbable and the improbable the inevitable" (FW 110). But what perhaps is most significant about the chalice and letter's accidental recovery is that the same is true for that quintessential Irish artifact, the Book of Kells, an elaborately illustrated manuscript of the Four Gospels which was stolen and later found "after a lapse of some months, concealed under sods" (Sullivan 4). In all three cases, what we see is essentially a resurrection: like Jesus from his tomb, or Tim Finnegan from his grave, these symbols of Irish identity return miraculously back to life and to the world above.[17]

[16] See *Fweets of Fin*. While the name "Tipperary" comes from "Tiobraid Arainn" (Gaelic for "the well of Ara"), the name should also remind *Finnegans Wake* readers of the Musey Room's connection to the midden heap through Kate's habit of saying "Tip," another word for "trash heap." See "The letter! The litter!"

[17] I'll return to this idea of burying and resurrection in the final section of this paper.

II. THE BOOK OF KELLS

The letter, cast as a symbol of Irish identity, is as monumental as even the most famous "genuine relique of ancient Irish pleasant pottery [poetry]," the Book of Kells. But, when during the course of the scholar's examination of the letter and its contents, we come to its "cruciform postscript," genealogy is reversed: the letter *predates* and even *inspires* the Book of Kells, marking it as *the quintessential* Irish document, a text so holy, so beautiful, that even the most famous page of this most famous *Book of Kells* is merely a derivative:

> ...then (coming over to the left aisle corner down) the cruciform postscript from which three *basia* or shorter and smaller *oscula* have been overcarefully scraped away, plainly inspiring the tenebrous *Tunc* page of the Book of Kells (and then it need not be lost sight of that there are exactly three squads of candidates for the crucian rose awaiting their turn in the marginal panels of Columkiller, chugged in their three ballotboxes... and then that last labiolingual *basium* might be read as a *suavium* if whoever the embracer then was wrote with a tongue in his (or perhaps her) cheek as the case may have been then)...
>
> (121-122)

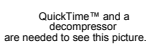

Fig. 1

Though this passage apparently refers to the end of the letter, it also happens to be a highly accurate description of the Book of Kells's most celebrated page, the *Tunc* folio, which contains the crucifixion text from the Gospel according to St. Matthew: *Tunc crucifixerant XRI cum eo duos latrones (Latin:* "Then were there two thieves crucified with him"). In the description of the

letter's "cruciform postscript," the "three *basia* or shorter and smaller *oscula*" are of course the four kisses with which ALP ends her correspondence (in Latin, *basio* is "to kiss", *basiola* are "little kisses," while *oscula* is the plural of *osculum*, "a little mouth, pretty mouth, sweet mouth" or "a kiss"[18]). But, if the letter does indeed resemble the *Tunc* page, these kisses are not physical imprints left by ALP's own lips, as the Latin might imply, but rather, abstract representations of those kisses in the form of X's, three of which have been "overcarefully scraped away" to leave just one. This final kiss is the one which manifests itself on the *Tunc* page, where we also see the "three squads of candidates for the crucian rose" awaiting their turn for the cross kiss "in the marginal panels of Columkiller"[19] (121). And yet, as the scholar points out, "if whoever the embracer then was wrote with a tongue in his (or perhaps her) cheek," that last, conceptual "labiolingual *basium,*" if it is "read as a *suavium"* (Latin for "a mouth puckered up to be kissed;" *suavis*, "pleasing, sweet," comes from the Sanskrit word for "taste," marking a transformation into the tangible, the sensory[20])– becomes literalized again as ALP's mouth (121). In the same way, the *Tunc* page of the Book of Kells renders the letters visually in a way that literalizes their meaning: the words that name the crucifixion become a literal St. Andrew's cross on the page.

This raises an interesting issue, and draws our attention to an ongoing tension in *Finnegans Wake*, particularly in 1.5, between the material and the immaterial in writing–not just the tension between immaterial signs and their referents, but also between the material medium and the immaterial content it communicates. The scholar of 1.5 pays just as much attention to the physical particularities of the letter as he does to its content and the circumstances under which it

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[18] *Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu (accessed April 17, 2012).
[19] Saint Columba was an Irish Saint, also known as Colm Cille, or Columcille. Sullivan writes that "the famous Book of Kells" was also "often called the Book of Colum Cille"' (4).
[20] *Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu (accessed April 17, 2012).

was written. In the example of the mamafesta's cruciform postscript, we see the linguistic signifier–here, the X that abstractly signifies "kiss"– becomes literalized as the lingual–the tongue itself: a visual image of that kiss, or the mouth that delivers either it or words... it is perhaps even the physical imprint left by that mouth, the physical trace of a kiss.

Because so much of the scholar's treatment of the letter in 1.5 echoes the scholarship of medieval manuscripts (in particular, as we shall see, Sir Edward Sullivan's facsimile edition of *The Book of Kells*), it makes sense that our scholar is equally concerned with the physical particularities of the letter as it is with its content, authorship, and the circumstances under which it was produced. Medieval Christian manuscripts were constantly marked by this tension between word and image, between the intangible Word and the materials used to render it: it wasn't simply the message behind the Word that mattered, but also *how* that message was rendered materially, the medium on which it was written. In fact, the bond between the material and the immaterial was so strong that the bible manuscripts were often considered to be as holy as the message they contained. Codices were in some cases understood as physical substitutes for Christ's presence: beyond simply serving as decorative displays at the front of a church, manuscripts were sometimes even placed on a throne[21]. As Claudia Rapp notes in "Holy Texts, Holy Men, and Holy Scribes. Aspects of Scriptural Holiness in Late Antiquity,"

> The Christian religion has a deep affinity with scripture, writing, and *Schriftkeit*. God made his Word manifest in the world through Christ, the incarnate Logos. The gospels and other New Testament writings contain this 'good news' in written form... readily available for ownership in the form of manuscripts. These physical depositories of the Word of God shared in the holiness of the message they contained.
>
> (196)

[21] In fact, the ritual of enthroning the gospel book was widespread enough that it even became a frequent iconographical theme. See Luijendijk 235

The Word is incarnated in Christ, and Christ, in turn, is incarnated in the Book. This is to say, "the incarnation of the word manifests itself iconographically in the mutual representation of book and body: Christ appears as a book or in a book; the book represents the embodied Christ" (Wenzel, qt'd in Luijendijk 235). The codex thus becomes the space where John 1:14 plays out literally ("And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth"): medieval bible manuscripts become the surrogates for the Word made flesh.

While the passage describing the mamafesta's cruciform script is the only one in 1.5 to explicitly make reference to the Book of Kells, this is not to say the manuscript isn't present elsewhere in the chapter. Far from it; the Book of Kells seems to haunts the letter's analysis at almost every moment, particularly when the discussion later turns into an examination of its script.

Joyce himself often acknowledged the influence that the Book of Kells had on his own work. Describing the famous manuscript in a conversation with his friend Arthur Power, he said,

> In all the places I have been to, Rome, Zurich, Trieste, I have taken it about with me, and have pored over its workmanship for hours. *It is the most purely Irish thing we have*, and some of the big initial letters which swing right across the page have the essential quality of a chapter of *Ulysses*. Indeed, you can compare much of my work to the intricate illuminations. I would like it to be possible to pick up any page of my book and know at once what book it is.[22]
>
> (Ellmann 545)

But in fact, the Irish identity that Joyce takes for granted has long been disputed. Like the mamafesta, the exact origin of the gospel manuscript is unknown–for it, too, has been the subject of obsessive scholarly research and debates attempting to reconstruct its lost history: while some speculate it was indeed the creation of monks at the Columban monastery in Kells (County Meath, Ireland), others propose that it might have been brought over to Kells from Iona

[22] Compare this to Joyce's line in *Finnegans Wake*: "So why, pray, sign anything as long as every word, letter, penstroke, paperspace is a perfect signature of its own?" (115.06-08)

(a small island in the Hebrides, in Scotland, and the site of another Columban abbey) by monks attempting to escape Viking raids.

James Joyce was so impressed by the distinctive quality of the manuscript's illuminations that he sent Harriet Shaw Weaver a copy of Sir Edward Sullivan's *The Book of Kells*–a facsimile edition of the manuscript–as a Christmas present in December 1922, shortly after he'd begun working on *Finnegans Wake*.[23] Even Sullivan himself seems to have left an impression on Joyce, for indeed, much of the scholar's effusive description of the letter's physical appearance (and particularly, the description of the letters of the alphabet) parodies the language of Sullivan's introduction to the manuscript, which opens with a description so strangely flowery as to almost seem comical:

> Its weird and commanding beauty; its subdued and goldless colouring; the baffling intricacy of its fearless designs; the clean, unwavering sweep of rounded spiral; the creeping undulations of serpentine forms that writhe in artistic profusion throughout the mazes of its decorations; the strong and legible minuscule of its text; the quaintness of its striking portraiture; the unwearied reverence and patient labour that brought it into being; all of which combined go to make up the Book of Kells, have raised this ancient Irish volume to a position of abiding preeminence amongst the illuminated manuscripts of the world.
>
> (Sullivan 1)

This is the language we see parodied throughout the scholar's description of the letter, but nowhere so much as when the discussion turns to the physical particularities of the letter's script. The full description, punctuated by semi-colon after semi-colon, in true Sullivan fashion, spans four pages (119-123), but the similarities are immediately made clear from the outset:

> For, with that farmfrow's foul flair for that flayfell foxfetor, (the calamite's columitas calling for calamitous calamitance) who that scrutinising marvels at those indignant whiplooplashes; those so prudently bolted or blocked rounds; the touching reminiscence of an incompletet trail or dropped final; a round thousand whirligig glorioles, prefaced by (alas!) now illegible airy plumeflights, all tiberiously ambiembellishing the initials majuscule of Earwicker: the meant to be baffling chrismon trilithon sign ⅏, finally called after some his hes hecitency

[23] Ellman 545.

> Hec, which, moved contrawatchwise, represents his title in sigla as the smaller △, fontly called following a certain change of state of grace of nature alp or delta, when single, stands for or tautologically stands beside the consort...
>
> (119)

Whereas Sullivan's introduction describes the physical particularities of the Book of Kells, this passage uses the same fulsome language to describe the *Wake* itself, or more specifically, the handwritten drafts that included the sigla Joyce devised as a way of keeping track of his characters. ⊓, HCE's sigla, allowed Joyce to "ambiembellis[h] the initials majuscule of Earwicker" by turning the E sideways, while also recalling the extra E of "hesitency."[24] △, on the other hand, was how he "fontly called... alp or delta." The rest of the family and their respective siglas all make an appearance in this passage, literalized on the page: while HCE's sigla can be "tak[en]... for a village inn" (119.27) and ALP's for "an upsidown bridge" (119.28), Shaun becomes "pothook for the family gibbet" (119.29); Issy, "a tea for a tryst someday" (119.30-31); while Shem, is represented by "his onesidemissing for an allblind alley leading to an Irish plot in the Champ de Mors, not?" (119.31-32). The sigla, then, also served as a way of rendering the book's characters into literal *characters* on the page. As Jed Rasula notes in his article, "*Finnegans Wake* and the Character of the Letter,"

> Joyce liked the Book of Kells, but he deviated from that precedent by miniaturizing rather than enlarging on the principle of the lively initial: not the ornamental monumentality of the codex but the modest intricacy of "a fieldmouse in a nest of coloured ribbons" as he puts it in the famous set piece on The Book of Kells.
>
> (521)

[24] Another manifestation of the "letter" in *Finnegans Wake* is in the recurring motif of "hesitency," usually associated with the stuttering HCE. In 1887, Richard Pigott forged a letter by Charles Stewart Parnell in an attempt to implicate him in the Phoenix Park murders of 1882. But, because he had the misfortune of spelling "hesitancy" as "hesitency"–switching one letter for another (E–which is also notably HCE's sigla, turned on its side) for another– his ploy was eventually revealed, and Parnell went free, only to later fall in a sex scandal (in true HCE fashion).

Rather than enlarging the alphabetic letter, as the scribes of the Book of Kells did in their *incipit* pages, Joyce engages with the letter in a similar way through miniaturization: "This miniaturization entails a spectral holography, an activation of each element of the text, starting from those presumably presignifying units, the letters." He literally brings those letters to life–the alphabetic characters become also the actual characters in *Finnegans Wake*, each represented by her or his own sigla: "Letters become subliminal personalities, "furtive irridescences"–they ultimately have just as much of a life of their own as the letters rendered in the shapes of animals or people in the Book of Kells (521).

This is not the only chapter in *Finnegans Wake* where Joyce references Sullivan's *The Book of Kells*: early on in the first chapter, when we first come across the Annals of the Four Masters (a medieval history of Ireland), we find a gap in the chronicle, "between antediluvious and annadominant," marking the point at which the scribe had apparently "fled with his scroll" (14). The passage offers several possible explanations for his disappearance ("The billy flood rose or an elk charged him or the sultrup worldwright from the excelsissimost empyrean (bolt, in sum) earthspake or the Dannamen gallous banged pan the bliddy duran") but ultimately morbidly concluding (leaving the matter wholly undecided): "[a] scribicide then" (14).

Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson argue that the passage describing the gap in "the tome of *Liber Lividus*" was inspired by Sullivan's description of the "Liber generationis" page–the opening page of Matthew's Gospel, and one of the Book of Kells's many unfinished folios (14).[25] In his description, Sullivan points out the stylistic differences between two figures: "the rudely-drawn figure standing in the lower left-hand corner" (most likely Matthew), and (what is perhaps another representation of him) "the smaller and much more naturally drawn figure at the top" (Sullivan 11). For Sullivan, the stylistic difference is conclusive enough that

[25] Campbell and Robinson.

one can assume the larger figure was added later, as a way of filling the "space left vacant when the original artist had touched the Manuscript for the last time... [W]e can almost see from the illumination itself the very place where he was hurried from his work" (Sullivan 11). The scribe did leave the illumination unfinished in certain parts of the page: the small face in the hollow to the left of the L, and, nearby, inside the L's red border; perhaps even the space surrounding the upper figure's elbow. But for Sullivan, there is a detail even more telling than these: how points out how, in the unfinished letters ER, "[t]he dark line surrounding the red E is only half completed. The interruption of so very simple a feature of the work seems to tell a tale of perhaps even tragic significance" (Sullivan 11).

Fig. 2

We encounter this sort of scholarly sentimentality again and again in the chapter on the letter. Without a history of ALP's letter, without the author herself present to explain her work and her motives, we are left with no choice but to search for the document for clues *outside* of the text, in the material object itself; we read these traces, these physical remains of a past event, as we would the signs in a text, trying to piece together a narrative.

As has already been mentioned, in my discussion and in Sullivan's, the Book of Kells has a history that is ultimately as incomplete and mysterious as that of ALP's letter–since the facts have been lost to the midden of history, scholars have been left with no alternative but to turn to

the physical particularities of the manuscript, looking for scraps of evidence out of which they've attempted to piece together its past. The date and origin remain largely uncertain ("the unfacts... are too imprecisely few to warrant our certitude" (57)); most scholars date it to the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century, and remain divided as to its place of origin– while some speculate it was the creation of monks at the Columban monastery in Kells, County Meath, others propose that it might have been brought over to Kells from Iona (a small island in the Hebrides that was also the site of another Columban abbey) by monks attempting to escape the ongoing Viking raids that began in 794.[26]

Written in Latin, and mostly in Insular Majuscule calligraphy, the Gospel text was heavily interspersed with (and sometimes even rendered as) incredibly intricate illuminations of human and mythic figures. These images were just as much a part of the text's meaning as the words themselves, acting as visual figures of interpretation–whereby a text's meaning could be emphasized, altered–even occasionally obfuscated, reduced to purely visual design, as we see in the case of the Book of Kells's *incipit* intials–pages so densely decorated that the signification of the words breaks down entirely. There, the text becomes purely visual–in some cases representing the very thing described (as in the *Tunc* page's abstract depiction of the crucifixion through the arrangement of the words in the shape of a cross), in other cases completely collapsing signification altogether, rendering those words into pure design–so intricate and impenetrable that Sir Edward Sullivan would describe them, centuries later, in his introduction to the facsimile edition of the *The Book of Kells*, as "creeping undulations of serpentine forms that writhe in artistic profusion throughout the mazes of its decorations" (Sullivan 1).

In this way, the text of the Book and Kells and of *Finnegans Wake* have much in common. We normally tend to think of language as transparent–we forget the materiality of the

[26] For more information on the history of the manuscript, see Farr, *The Book of Kells*.

signifier and focus instead on the signified concept or thing. But instead, both books bring the signifiers themselves boldly to the forefront– the authors "arabesque the page" with them (115.03). "Here form is content, content is form," Samuel Beckett wrote in "Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress"...

> You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something, it is that something itself.
>
> (Beckett, "Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce")

Moreover, as Susan Farr argues, the Book of Kells's intricate designs were more than just decoration; they served a practical function in the face of an imperial presence. During the fourth to seventh centuries, the gospel text was brought to the Celts of Ireland, Britain, Wales, and Scotland in a language wholly foreign to them–"a circumstance crucial to the development of verbal and visual interpretive forms with which they overlaid and surrounded Scripture" (13). Insular manuscript decorations were full of visual interpretive figures and signs that acted as a way to "link indigenous society with a prestigious, authoritative international system, Christianity, as well as to make Christian text and Latin language relevant to themselves and their tradition of learning." In this sense, the illuminated gospel book "served both as object of interpretation and interpretive object" (14). And, most importantly, it served as a way not only of understanding but also *translating* or *appropriating for themselves* a text written in a language that wasn't their own.

We could argue the same for the text of *Finnegans Wake*. In an early conversation about his "Work in Progress," Joyce responded to complaints about its language, saying

> I'll give them back their language. They really needn't worry and scold so much. I'll give them back their English language. I'm not destroying it for good!
>
> (*1928-1942, Vol 2* 418)

What Joyce didn't mention, though, was that this language–English, the language of Ireland's oppressors–would be unrecognizable after he was through with it. While the language of *Finnegans Wake* undeniably remains a form of English, his promise to "give them back their English language" isn't completely kept; while he isn't "destroying it for good," he is nevertheless irrevocably transforming it into something else– an English suited to Joyce's own needs and purposes– an English he could in every sense call his own. We might recall Stephen Dedalus's thoughts during his conversation with the English dean in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

> —The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.
> (*Portrait* 221)

Here, Stephen lays out the beginnings of a project to forge his own language from the borrowed English, a project that will ultimately culminate in the making of *Finnegans Wake*–"Or ledn us alones of your lungorge, parsonifier propounde of our edelweissed idol worts!" (378). Just as the Celtic scribes illuminated the Book of Kells's Latin text using their own abstract patterns and aesthetic sensibilities, so too does *Finnegans Wake* take English and transform it according to Joyce's own aesthetic vision. The borrowed language must in some ways be obliterated ("bi tso fb rok engl a ss"). It, like the phoenix that features prominently as one of the book's many symbols of regeneration, must first be reduced to ashes (or in the Christian model, ashes) before it can be renewed and reborn: in this sense, Joyce is "the mother of the book with a dustwhisk tabularasing his obliteration" (050.12).

III. Scripture, Translation, and Babel

Understanding the letter as Holy Scripture also functions as a useful tool for understanding the scholar's inability to access the original, authoritative version of the letter, as well the idea that no translation of *Finnegans Wake'*s language into normal English can ever succeed. We must ask ourselves: *why* is the scholar so obsessed by the idea of an original, authoritative version of the document– *why* does he take such pains in the attempt to trace its genealogy? And why is it that what we're ultimately left with is a multitude of contradictory versions of the letter, that we never arrive at an official or authoritative version of its contents? And similarly: why will translations of *Finnegans Wake* always contradict one another? These questions are partially addressed in Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Task of the Translator," (originally published as the preface to his own translation of Baudelaire's "Tableaux Parisiens"), and in Derrida's own interpretation–or "translation"– of that essay, "Des Tours de Babel."

Benjamin's essay, originally published in German in 1923, sought to elevate the status of translations and their translators, which were widely considered secondary to the original text and author. While translators and their translations still struggle with marginalization in the literary scene, Benjamin's essay continues to be highly influential in translation theory today. According to the essay, certain texts *demand* translation–we might call these texts masterpieces; they are, like the works of Shakespeare, Cervantes, Tolstoy, and especially, the Bible–those works of literature whose translations can never do justice to the original form, and yet *are* translated, and continue to be translated into the present day. While no translation can ever succeed in being a "true" representation of the original, translation nevertheless plays a crucial role in the original's survival, for it is the translations that ensure an afterlife for any given text. The original work is reborn and renewed through its translations. But with each translation, each

renewal, the original text doesn't remain static, unchanged: "in its afterlife… the original undergoes a change" as well (Benjamin 73).

For Benjamin, no single language can ever fully, adequately represent its intended object (otherwise put, there will always remain a divide between signs and their referents). He compares the difference between *pain* and *Brot*: both "intend" or point to the same thing, and yet each carries with it vastly different connotations in their respective languages (or "modes of intention").

> It is owing to these modes [modes of intention] that the word *Brot* means something different to a German than the word *pain* to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that, in fact, they strive to exclude each other.
>
> (Benjamin 74)

The multiple languages are, for Benjamin, like ""fragments of a vessel"–each, on its own, remaining an inadequate medium for communicating its intended meaning. A translation thus need not strive for a likeness to the original, or want to communicate its meaning perfectly–while it's true that the fragments to be glued together "must match one another in the smallest details," they nonetheless "need not be like one another" (78).

> ... a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translations recognizable as fragments of greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel. For this very reason translation must in large measure refrain from wanting to communicate something, from rendering the sense, and in this the original is important to it only insofar as it has already relieved the translator and his translation of the effort of assembling and expressing what is to be conveyed. In the realm of translation, too, the words • • • • • , •• • • • , • • • [in the beginning was the word] apply.
>
> (Benjamin 78)

The language of the translation must "let itself go"–it must give voice to the intent of the original "not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*" (79). The languages of the original and of the translations are the

shards of a greater language, supplementing one another, each offering what the other can't provide–coming together to restore what Benjamin calls "pure language." This pure language doesn't have to do with meaning or with expressing anything; it is not a pure language in the sense that it expresses its intended meaning in a pure, transparent way; on the contrary–it is language *purified* of content altogether–language that communicates nothing but its own communicability.[27]

Since a good translator strives for transparency–"does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully" (79)–by preserving some of the strangeness of the foreign tongue (its syntax, its idioms) in her own, both languages ultimately come out of this process irrevocably transformed. This is why Benjamin calls translation "the holy growth of languages"–without translators and translation, language would remain static, imprisoned: "It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of pure language he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language" (80). Translation is a constant striving to reach this "pure language"–this most elusive and ineffable of things. The contact we make with pure language will always be fleeting: it is like the infinitesimally small point where a tangent meets a circle, where a translation touches the original.

Benjamin ends his essay with a final claim: "The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation" (Benjamin 82). This point will be crucial to my argument, as it is for Derrida in his reading of Benjamin's essay. But if Derrida's "Des Tours de Babel" is a re-reading of Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"–it is also a re-reading of the

[27] "'There is no content of language.' What language first communicates is its 'communicability'" (Derrida 115)

story of the Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis. The story of Babel is, for Derrida, the archetypal example of sacred scripture because it "recounts, among other things, the origin of the confusion of tongues, the irreducible multiplicity of idioms, the necessary and impossible task of translation, its necessity *as* impossibility" (Derrida 109). Since Benjamin's ideal of translation *is* Scripture, we must begin *at* the beginning–at Babel.

As the story goes: all people of the earth shared one language and began constructing a tower, whose architectural structure, like the single Language itself, would be uniform and totalizing, governed by a single structural order.[28] Through constructing this tower that would reach the heavens, the people hoped to "give themselves a name," to gather themselves there, "in the unity of a place which is at once a tongue and a tower" (107). But, upon seeing their efforts, God confounds the universal language, so that the people no longer understand each other; the construction of the tower ends. Having divided the one language into many, God introduces further differences into this unity of place / people by scattering–or disseminating– the Semitic people all over the earth. The construction of the tower–and of the city–ceases, whereupon God "proclaims his name: Bavel, Confusion"[29]

In the story of Babel, God imposes /opposes his name over the city and its people, thereby shattering the rational transparency afforded by their single, shared language–leaving behind the shards of multiple, heterogeneous tongues and dialects which Benjamin, in "The Task of the Translator," says we must piece back together through translation. Thus, God dooms or "destines them to translation, he subjects them to the law of a translation both necessary and impossible" (111).

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[28] Indeed, according to the story, the people baked uniform bricks, rather than having to rely on mismatched stones.

[29] According, at least, to the French translation of Genesis that Derrida privileges in this essay.

This aporia–the paradox a law both necessary and impossible–is legible in the original German title of Benjamin's essay– "*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*." In German, the "*Aufgabe"* can be understood as "task," certainly, but also: a commitment, duty, debt, responsibility, a problem one is faced with– and, most significantly–a *surrender* (*aufgeben* : to give up). Just as God imposes "the law of a translation both necessary and impossible," so too is the "task of the translator" both a necessity and an impossibility– translation is a debt that can never be repaid, a task that can never be successfully completed or fulfilled. Throughout "Des Tours de Babel," Derrida highlights this debt and commitment evoked by the word *Aufgabe,* and re-imagines translation as a sort of contract between an original work and its translation, which complement, supplement–and also *permanently transform*– one another, so that the original work can grow, expand, and survive. (As Benjamin and Derrida continually stress, a "[t]ranslation is neither an image nor a copy" (Derrida 115) of an original text, but rather, an outgrowth. "If the translator neither restitutes nor copies an original, it is because the original lives on and transforms itself" (121). The translation is a moment in the original's growth, its enlargement.)

Derrida traces the "debt" of translation to God and the sacred: "The debt, in the beginning, is fashioned in the hollow of this 'thought of God'" (117). It is therefore not enough to simply say that a translation is indebted (genealogically) to the original work, or even, that the original work–by being marked by this requirement to be translated, by lacking and by pleading for translation– is in some way *also* indebted. No– as Derrida points out, by giving his name in the story of Babel, *God* also appeals to translation–not just between the multiple languages, but also of his proper name–Babel–to be translated as the common noun, "confusion."

Truth, as it concerns translations, has nothing to do with accurately representing the original or paraphrasing its content; rather, a language of the truth is "the *pure language* in which the

meaning and the letter no longer dissociate" (127), where meaning *is* the letter–a language that communicates nothing but its own communicability–language that communicates language. If the contract of translation promises a reconciliation or the mutual complementing of languages, it does so by appealing to this language of the truth–"to language itself as a Babelian event… the being-language of the language, tongue or language *as such*, that unity without any self-identity, which makes for the fact that there are languages and that they are languages" (131). This, ultimately, is the *pas de sens* (not the lack or "poverty of meaning," but rather "meaning beyond all literality") that comes to pass in the sacred text–the Babelian text–text which, like the God in the Biblical story who proclaims his name, "Babel"–simultaneously demands and forbids its translation–which communicates, like the word "Babel"–nothing but itself.

Benjamin and Derrida's conception of translation (for Derrida's–like any good translation–complements and supplement's Benjamin's) is perhaps the best way to understand the letter in a book that insists: "Every letter is a godsend" (269.17), where even our professor/mailman Shaun (disseminator of letters and meanings) confirms: "a letterman does be often thought reading between lines that do have no sense at all" (454.04-6).

If ALP's letter is a "proteiform graph" and "a polyhedron of scripture" (107.08), that's because Joyce is aware that Scripture, like the letter, is constantly undergoing translation, re-interpretation, and transformation. Though its absolute and holy nature might suggest otherwise, the Word of God is ultimately rendered in worldly language, and for this reason, it is necessarily polysemic, protean[30], ambiguous–able to be seen (like a polyhedron) from multiple sides,

[30] Proteus, god of rivers and oceanic bodies, serves as an especially useful way of thinking about the letter written by the "Allmaziful" ALP, who is at once mother and river, "babbling, bubbling, chattering to herself" (195.01-2). Let us not forget that ALP's sigla is the Greek delta △–a symbol that is at once river delta (that fertile place where river ends and becomes ocean) and the mother's pubic triangle (the source of life itself). Like the symbol used in science and mathematics to designate a difference or change in a given variable, △ indicates a "certain change of state of grace of nature alp or delta." Proteus will tell the

interpreted from many angles.[31] Like the word of God, ALP's letter simultaneously demands and forbids its translation: it is endlessly discussed and disseminated throughout the text, but at no point do we actually *see* the original document. If we are to definitively say *what* the letter is, who it was written by, what it contains, we can only arrive at something close to the truth by taking into account *all* of its many versions simultaneously–seeing them all juxtaposed, one beside the other, as one would different translations of a Biblical passage in "the interlinear version of the Scriptures" (Benjamin 82).

If we saw genealogy reversed in the case of ALP's "cruciform postscript," which "plainly inspir[ed] the tenebrous *Tunc* page of the Book of Kells" (122), that is because, as Derrida says, both texts ultimately can trace their demands for translation to that original Babelian event–the moment where God imposes/opposes his name over the city of Babel, destining them to translation, while also appealing to it– "The debt, in the beginning, is fashioned in the hollow of this 'thought of God'" (117). *Finnegans Wake* seems to suggest as much when it deftly summarizes: "In the buginning is the woid, in the muddle is the sounddance and thereinofter you're in the unbewised[32] again" (378).[33] It is out of this non-signifying "woid"[34] or void–the

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truth–but only to those who successfully capture and pin him down as he's shape-shifting–a near-impossible task. It's also perhaps noteworthy that Proteus's name comes from the Greek "πρ•τος" - protos, "first."

[31] Let us also recall here the notion of parallax (in science, the apparent difference in the position of an object when viewed from different positions; used in astronomy for measuring the distances of stars), which plays a central role in *Ulysses*. There, the chapters assume their own unique narrative identities, each presenting the story of a single day in Dublin through a different style, a different voice. But as we see, that story changes radically from one voice to the next: "objective reality" is always irrevocably transformed or diminished through language, through style, and certainly through the subjectivity of the person describing or drawing meaning from it. Joyce demonstrates that there is no such thing as a third person "omniscient" narrator–instead, seems to suggest that the closest we can ever come to reaching a sense of objectivity or "truth" is through parallax. Hence *Finnegans Wake*: "when I'm dreaming back like that I begins to see we're only all telescopes" (295).

[32] *German* "unbewusst": unconscious.

[33] We see in here also an echo of Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses,* comparing paternity ("a legal fiction") to the Christian church: "On that mystery [fatherhood]... the church is founded and founded irremovably

"hollow of this thought of God"–that the muddle, the babble, the confusion of languages emerges, and with it, the necessary/impossible task of translating between them. It is only "in the muddle" though, that we can have the "holy growth of languages"–rendered sonically on the page in *Finnegans Wake* as "the sounddance."

For indeed, the language of *Finnegans Wake* is purely that–"muddle," yes, but also "sounddance"–suggesting, in this respect, that the Fall of the Tower of Babel is in fact a *felix culpa* or "happy fall." We see the fall of the Babel on the very opening page of *Finnegans Wake*:[35]

> The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonner-
> ronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!)
> (003.15-16)

Certainly, this is the sound of Tim Finnegan, the drunk hod carrier from the Irish drinking ballad that is the book's namesake, falling from his ladder. It is also Humpty Dumpty falling from his wall; HCE's fall from grace after the scandal that occurs near the Magazine Wall in Dublin's Phoenix Park–which is, at the same time, the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden (a *felix culpa*, or "happy fall"). But, in the most basic sense, what we hear in the first hundredletter[36] thunderword is the fall of the Tower of Babel: it is hod carrier (the builder of walls and towers) stuttering from the letter as he totters from his ladder ("He stottered from the latter. 006.09-10)–and it is also the sound of a God (Thor's) wrath (thunder), as he confounds the one language, dividing it into

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because founded, like the world, macro and microcosm, upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood" (*Ulysses* 207).

[34] ...which is, at the same time, the non-signifying "word" or proper noun of God's name, "Babel," which exists at the margins of language

[35] "From its height Babel at every instant supervises and surprises my reading... of a text by Walter Benjamin" Derrida says, speaking (in more than one sense) of his essay, "Des Tours de Babel." Ideally, we too, could benefit from taking a detour to Babel before "successfully conclud[ing] our tour of bibel" (523), the scope of this essay is unfortunately not wide enough to trace all the references to Babel in *Finnegans Wake.*

[36] Later, in Shaun the Post's interview, the hundredletter word will be described as the "last word of perfect language" (424).

many. For indeed, if the hundredletter thunderword sounds like "babble" to us, that's because composed of syllables for the word "thunder" in more than 12 languages.[37]

Here, and on every single other page in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce announces the Babelian event through language itself. His language *is* that Babelian event: it resembles, at every moment, what Derrida calls the language of truth, and what Benjamin calls "pure language"; it announces, proclaims, communicates nothing but its own communicability as language: "the being-language of the language, tongue or language *as such*, that unity without any self-identity, which makes for the fact that there are languages and that they are languages" (Derrida 131). This is precisely what Beckett meant when observed that, "Here," in the *Wake*, "form is content, content is form... [Joyce's] writing is not about something, it is that something itself."

[37] See "Fweets of Fin."

POSTSCRAPT:
"The Letter! The Litter!

In many ways, it seems fitting that we've rearrived at the opening chapter of *Finnegans Wake*, just as my own essay begins to come to a close. Perhaps it's already evident what must inevitably come next: if every ascent in *Finnegans Wake* ultimately ends in a fall, if life is inextricable from death, and every beginning is tied to its ending–and if the bulk of this paper has worked to elevate the letter to the status of Holy Scripture, then surely this very same letter must experience its own fall, and return to the earth, to dust, to the unholy midden heap from which it was initially salvaged.[38]

As ALP herself says in the final monologue that culminates in her death and rebirth, as well as the end and recirculation of the book itself, "Sometime then, somewhere there, I wrote me hopes and buried the page" (624.03-04). Like the Ardagh chalice, or the Book of Kells, ALP lays her letter "to rust" under the earth, from which it will eventually, miraculously be resurrected by a hen, or a boy digging in a field of potatos, or any other similarly unlikely story. This though, only after the book has renewed and recycled itself, carrying us through time and space, "by a commodius vicus of recirculation" (003.02), back to that initial, open-ended sentence with which the book begins. In this sense, the end of my essay on the letter in *Finnegans Wake* is about endings as much as it is about beginnings.

As we progress through the first chapter for the second time, we will see the buried letter (on 11) turn up again with the gnarley bird, pecking and scratching at the rubbish on the midden heap. Then, we might ask ourselves the question (assigned as an essay topic in the

[38] Otherwise said: "lines of litters slittering up" will always culminate in "louds of latters slattering down" (114).

children's Nightlessons chapter): "What is to be found in a Dustheap"? (307). But to arrive–both at the dustheap and at the answer to the question–we must first pass through the Musey Room.

The Musey Room, also known as the Wallinstone national museum, is essentially a museum devoted to the Battle of Waterloo–and in some sense, every other destructive, fratricidal conflict.[39] Even the entrance fee is in some ways a reflection of a violent, historical conflict: "Penetrators [the British and other invaders of Ireland] are permitted into the museomound free" while the oppressed "Welsh and Paddy Patkinses" pay "one shelenk!" (8). Kate is the proprietress of the Musey Room, and essentially the reader's tour guide, pointing out all the museomound's various historical artifacts–"Tip." This "Tip" is her own personal Leitmotif, signaling her presence here in the museum and throughout the rest of the book. It might represent the sound of a pointer striking a sign in an exhibit, but it's especially significant in that "tip" is another word for rubbish heap. In every sense, then, the Musey Room–and every effort to preserve, archive, canons, ascribe value to the past–is always imaginatively linked in *Finnegans Wake* with its antithesis–waste, garbage, triviality. The history museum is all about destruction, not just in the sense that it centers on the Battle of Waterloo, but also in the sense that *all* history is collected from scraps and waste–from damage wrought by destructive and traumatic events in history–and assembled by historians in the same way that the gnarleybird finds and assembles fragments of the letter from the midden heap.

This midden heap should be understood in terms of the history and archaeology. As Michael Shanks, David Platt, William L. Rathe point out in their article, "The perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological," the archaeological is in fact just that–

[39] For in *Finnegans Wake,* every war is in the end, a conflict between two brothers–Shem and Shaun, Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and of course, the Joyces– James and Stanislaus.

> Garbage: 99 percent or more of what most archaeologists dig up, record, and analyze in obsessive detail is what past peoples threw away as worthless—broken ceramics, broken or dulled stone tools, tool-making debitage, food-making debris, food waste, broken glass, rusted metal, on and on. These are society's material dregs that even those most clever at salvage couldn't figure a way to use or sell. But ask archaeologists what archaeology focuses on and they will mention "the past" and "artifacts" and "behavior" and "attitudes and beliefs," but you will rarely, if ever, hear the words "garbage" or "refuse" or "trash" or "junk."
>
> (65)

It's not just documents like ALP's letter that end up in the middens of history–even Christian manuscripts have turned up in middens, "comprising Christian copies of Septuagint writings, and a wide array of early Christian texts, now classified as "New Testament" and "non-canonical" (Luijendijk 223). In one of the most notable cases, thousands of papyrus documents, including fragments of previously lost literary and religious texts, were excavated from the middens of Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, now largely considered among the most important archaeological sites in history.

Ultimately, the recovery of lost objects from middens, potato fields, or from under sods speaks to the miracle of their unlikely resurrection: ALP's letter might *seem* to be nothing more than a "miseffectual whyacinthinous riot of blots and blurs and bars and balls and hoops and wriggles and juxtaposed jottings linked by spurts of speed"– it's ultimately much more than this: "we ought really to rest thankful that at this deleteful hour of dungflies dawning we have even a written on with dried ink scrap of paper at all to show for ourselves, tare it or leaf it...after all that we lost and plundered of it even to the hidmost coignings of the earth and all it has gone through..." (118-119). For in the end, the midden comes to represent the world we live in– what's left, or what remains, in the wake of history's *destructive* forces.

The letter, in the final analysis, comes to stand for the alphabetic letter, for language itself: all attempts at written communication–all letters, all literature, and all the world's Scripture. *Finnegans Wake* subscribes to the idea that every language is always in flux, always

growing, changing, and adapting to external foreign forces–even incorporating, naturalizing the strangeness of the foreign within itself. This is what Benjamin proposed when called translation the "holy growth of languages."

If Shaun ultimately denounces the letter, claiming that "every dimmed letter is a copy... The last word in stolentelling!" he is not entirely off the mark–this idea of "schisthematic robblemint!" is fundamental to every language to issue out of the Fall of the Tower of Babel (424). If translation is, as Benjamin describes, a way of reassembling broken pieces to restore, however fleetingly, the larger vessel–"pure language"–then by piecing together "bits of broken engl a ss" together with the shards of other languages, *Finnegans Wake* is indeed a book of "robblemint"–robbing some, perhaps, yes– but also "minting" or fashioning something entirely new out of the rubble: a new language of the darkness and obscurity, of shadows and dreams, of language as pure transferability, as language itself. "It is told in sounds in utter that, in signs so adds to, in universal, in polyglutteral, in each auxiliary neutral idiom, sordomutics, florilingua, sheltafocal, flayflutter, a con's cubane, a pro's tutute, strassarab, ereperse, and anythongue athall" (117). This language resembles, in many respects, the "pure language" that Benjamin says translation aspires to, or what Derrida calls a "language of truth." For, as Celan says in "Sprich Du Auch,"

"He speaks truly who speaks the shade"

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CITATIONS FOR IMAGES:

Fig. 1

Tunc page of the Book of Kells, Fol. 124 R.
<http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/jmblythe/3370/TUNCBIG.jpg>

Fig. 2

Liber generationis page of the Book of Kells, Fol. 29 R.
<http://12koerbe.de/euangeleion/kells-mt.jpg>