

Waking Joyce's *Pomes*

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Through a study of Joyce's manuscripts and notebooks it is possible to highlight some remarkable and surprising connections between *Finnegans Wake* and *Pomes Penyeach*. Joyce was active on both these works simultaneously between 1922 and 1927; it also seems he decided to publish *Pomes Penyeach* in order to demonstrate he was not losing himself in the eccentricities of *Work in Progress*, as some critics then claimed.

A number of documents testify to the veiled connections between the progressing of both works: three of the twelve poems are partially or wholly drafted on the same manuscripts where Joyce was taking notes for *Finnegans Wake*. Moreover, Joyce has also experimented with the title of the collection in Buffalo notebook VI.B.18. On page 94, he wrote the word "poem" at the bottom of the page, partly isolated from the other annotations; on page 95 he sketched the title of the collection twice, in two different ways: "Pomes Penyeach" and "Pomes Pennyeach".¹ Considering their positions on the page, probably Joyce had written the titles after he had drafted the notes for *Finnegans Wake*.

This document underlines a link between the two works, at least for what concerns the title of the collection: the play on the words "penny" and "pen" somehow resembles the creation of neologisms in *Finnegans Wake*. But the relationships between the two texts are various and often more evident; I will now consider three instances I found particularly interesting, regarding the poems "Alone", "Nightpiece" and "A Prayer".

1. "Alone"

Some lines of the poem "Alone" appear in Buffalo notebook VI.B.16 (folios 65, 75, 123, 125), overwritten by notes for *Finnegans Wake*.² The fragments of the poem seem to be randomly distributed in the notebook; they are written in ink, lengthwise, on the right margin of the pages—while all the other annotations are written in pencil, crosswise.

Page 65 contains the title and one word: “Alone / the”; page 75 includes only the first letter of the title, “A”. Pages 123 and 125 show a more extensive composition of the poem: respectively, “Alone / the moon’s soft golden” and “Alone / The moon’s soft golden meshes make / All night a veil / The shorelamps”. The texts on pages 123 and 125 differ from the published version, which runs “The moon’s greygolden meshes make / All night a veil”.³

Both McHugh and Hayman suggest the notebook should be dated 1924, since it contains most of the material for the episode included in *FW* III 1-2, but the lines from “Alone” underneath the *FW* notes are undoubtedly antecedent. A. Walton Litz supposes they had been written in 1916, the year in which Joyce conceived the lyric, therefore assuming this is one of its very first drafts.⁴

As a matter of fact, the manuscripts could contain a fair copy of “Alone”, given that the writing is neat and orderly—too orderly to be one of the first sketches of the poem, as can be noticed through a comparison with “A Prayer” in Buffalo VI.B.5. Therefore, the chronological question could be more complex; in the available documentation, the adjective “greygolden” substitutes “soft golden” since 1919—the fragments could be dated somewhere between 1916 and 1919.

Besides the problem of date, some other aspects of this manuscript remain unexplained. First of all, Joyce used four pages of the notebook, but always leaving the poem incomplete. Second, it is difficult to understand why he chose to copy the lines on random pages, despite having at his disposal a whole empty notebook. Moreover, Joyce waited at least five years to use that notebook again. This implies a long lapse of time during which the randomly written and almost empty notebook was kept but not reused.

To presume deliberateness in the presence of “Alone” in the notebook would be too farfetched, yet what I would like to suggest is that Joyce could have been partially inspired by this presence in the writing of a page of *Finnegans Wake*. In fact some of the keywords of the poem occur in a passage of the very same *Finnegans Wake* episode sketched in this notebook:

I give, a king, to me, she does, **alone**, up there, yes see, I double give, till the spinney all eclosed asong with them. Isn't that lovely though? I give to me **alone** I trouble give! [...] Naturale you might lower register me as diserecordant, but I'm **athlone** in the lillabilling of killarmies. That's flat. Yet ware the wold, you! What's good for the gorse is a goad for the garden. Lethals lurk heimlocked in logans. Loathe **laburnums**.

(*FW* 450: 20-31, my emphasis)

The word “alone” is repeated three times in eight lines; the same paragraph contains the term “laburnums”, which has only one occurrence in the whole book and appears in line 4 of “Alone”, viz. “Laburnum tendrils trail”. Furthermore, McHugh observes in *FW* 450 two related references: “The word ‘delight’ is thus stressed in ‘The Moon hath raised her lamp above’”, and “eels used to be caught by men with lamps”.⁵ These observations recall two other elements of “Alone”, namely its “moon’s greygolden meshes” and “shorelamps”.

While in “Alone” the connections between the poem and the *Wake* might seem mostly chancy, parallel connections become unmistakable for what concerns the poem “Nightpiece” and its manuscripts.

2. “Nightpiece”

Manuscript “BL47480-267” consists of a large sheet containing sketches for the “Roderic O’Connor” episode on the recto and for “Tristan and Isolde” on the verso.⁶ Among the annotations on the verso of the page, Joyce transcribed the poem “Nightpiece”, as part of the *Finnegans Wake* episode. “Nightpiece” is preceded by an introduction in prose and is crossed out with a green crayon. Both the poem and the introduction are written in charcoal pencil, and are surrounded by notes for a farcical passage about a lovers’ quarrel, written with a different pencil, in a minute calligraphy and crossed out with a red crayon.

The manuscript has been dated March 1923 on the basis of two letters written by Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver:

Yesterday I wrote two pages—the first I have written since the final Yes of Ulysses. Having found a pen, with some difficulty I copied them out in a large handwriting on a double sheet of foolscap so that I could read them. (*Letters* I 202)

In spite of my eye attack I got on with another passage using a charcoal pencil (fusain) which broke every three minutes and a large sheet of paper. I have now covered various large sheets in a handwriting resembling that of the late Napoleon Bonaparte when irritated by reverses. (*Letters* III 73)

Yet Joyce speaks about “various large sheets” and not of just one large sheet of paper; some documents are potentially missing.

In my opinion, the first words of the manuscript and its sentence structure support this hypothesis: “strewing, the strikingly shining, the twittingly twinkling” seems an incomplete phrase. Indeed, the preceding manuscript does not show any continuity with this one, since it ends with the words “may even the Deity Itself”.⁷ Moreover, “strewing” is followed by a comma, therefore it could have been modified by an adverbial form similar to “strikingly” and “twittingly” to preserve the parallelism of the three forms “strewing”, “shining”, “twinkling”.

Surprisingly enough, this manuscript has almost been abandoned. No elements of the poem appear in the novel, so that its presence among the annotations for *Finnegans Wake* has also been considered accidental. In Danis Rose’s opinion, the poem is transcribed among the notes for “Tristan and Isolde” in a coincidence, and has no relationship with the text surrounding it. David Hayman discusses this assumption: “. . . the revised version of the poem is written with the same oily pencil as the main body of the extension, a medium Joyce adopted only when he began writing the sketches.”⁸

It can also be said that the handwriting leading up to the lines of “Nightpiece” appears regular, without spatial constraints: this continuity suggests that the text preceding the poem was not added when “Nightpiece” was already on the page, but rather is contemporary. Moreover, the title “Nightpiece” is omitted from the manuscript. Since this was not the first jotting of the poem, and the title was always present in the previous drafts, it is likely that its lines have been copied without a heading with the clear intention to insert them in the *Finnegans Wake* episode—the verses here could constitute the words Tristan utters to Isolde.

While “Nightpiece” does not leave any trace in the subsequent stages of composition, the jottings surrounding the lyric reached the final text only sparingly, and considerably transformed. Here I would like to propose a hypothesis on the main modifications that the text underwent throughout the writing process:

- a) First, Joyce drafted the brief introduction and the poem; both are written with the same charcoal pencil, and the size of the writing is similar, while the rest of the manuscript presents a much smaller calligraphy.
- b) Joyce crossed out “Nightpiece” with a green crayon and substituted it with the farcical scene drafted around it; these notes are written with a different pencil and the text occupies all the free space on the page, surrounding the introduction and the poem. The use of a green crayon reinforces the idea

that “Nightpiece” was meant to belong to the “Tristan and Isolde” episode: no other poem had colored markings to indicate later changes.

- c) Finally, Joyce crossed out even the presumed last stage of farcical annotations with a red crayon and partially re-elaborated them; a few words from the manuscript reappear in the printed text, but the letters composing them are written in the reverse order, e.g. “nephew” becomes “wehpen” (*FW*388:3).

The deletion of the poem and its substitution by a parody changed the whole perspective of the episode in a radical way: the elevated tone of the poem is replaced by a ‘desecrating’ and almost comic tone; the active speaking role of Tristan turns into a more passive one, for he is now a listener, as the printed version reads: “Tristan, sad hero, hear!” (*FW* 398:29). All gravity and solemnity are gone; myth is degraded and turned into a parody.

A fair copy of a text shortly preceding this scene can represent further proof that Joyce most likely meant to change Tristan’s poetic role:

She [Isolde] murmurously asked for some but not too much of the best poetry quotations. . . . He promptly then elocutioned to her a favourite lyrical bloom in decasyllabic iambic hexameter: Roll on, thou deep and darkblue ocean, roll!⁹

Here the reference to Tristan as a poet is very clear. In the published version, this part is transformed into:

. . . she murmurously, after she let a cough, gave her firm order, if he wouldn’t please mind, for a sings to one hope a dozen of the best favourite lyrical national blooms in Luvillicit. . . . (*FW* 385:22)

The uttering of verses disappears again; Isolde asks for a song, and Tristan’s role as a creator of poetry is denied.

In spite of the elision of “Nightpiece”, the “Tristan and Isolde” episode still begins and ends with poetry. The point is that the lines do not belong to Tristan anymore; his role as a poet, which he held in the first drafts, has been obscured or transformed. This change can perhaps be related to Tristan’s “sinixter dexterity” (*FW* 384:26), that is to say, the Shem and Shaun aspects of his personality. Tristan’s Shem characteristics were dominant in a first stage, while his Shaunish features prevail at a later stage.

3. “A Prayer”

A manuscript of “A Prayer”, presumably one of the very first drafts, is included among the annotations for *Finnegans Wake* in Buffalo notebook VI.B.5 on pages 11, 13, 15.¹⁰ The notebook, dated 1924, consists of ninety folios, includes copies of a few verses not belonging to Joyce (pages 83, 121, 123, 125) and some personal notes (e.g. page 57). “A Prayer” occupies three pages of the notebook; the text is extensively modified in the course of writing, mostly through additions and substitutions.

Page 11 of the notebook contains the first stanza of the poem, which at that point had no title. At the bottom of the page, in smaller writing, appear the first words of the following stanza, the words being repeated on page 13 (the successive recto). Two words, “karosse” and “karredge”, are written on the left corner with a coal pencil, and do not seem to have any relationship with the poem: they have possibly been drafted there successively. Page 13 contains the second stanza of “A Prayer”; crossings and modifications are even more frequent, and the writing seems to progressively enlarge itself. Finally, on page 15 is drafted the last stanza, again characterised by numerous corrections.

Even if no title is yet specified, after the poem, on the following page of the notebook, one of the annotations seems particularly interesting: “A Prayer = SP Breastplate”.¹¹ The connection between the title eventually chosen for the lines and this note for *Finnegans Wake* is unmistakable—either Joyce already had the title in mind when he drafted the note, or he reconsidered the note as a title for the poem after having written it.

The two phrases, “A Prayer” and “Breastplate”, both recur closely linked in another *Finnegans Wake* passage:

But, by Jove Chronides, Seed of Summ, after at he had bate his **breastplates** for, forforget, forforgetting his birdsplace, it was soon that, that he, that he rehad himself. By a **prayer**? No, that comes later. (*FW* 231: 23-7)

These lines are inserted into a context abounding in references to poetry. On the same page of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce parodies the first poem he ever wrote, “Et tu, Healy”, occasioned by the death of Parnell (*FW* 231: 5-8); the parody is immediately followed by allusions to the names of several poets, including Shelley and some minor Irish poets (*FW* 231: 12-

13). A few lines above appear the expressions “pumme” and “petty” (“got a petty?”, *FW* 231:3), which also contain ‘pome’ and ‘penny’, together with the phrase “have recourse of course to poetry” (*FW* 230:24).

While in the text of *Finnegans Wake* only the title of the poem is recognizable, in a sense “A Prayer” seems to adopt some of the stylistic and structural patterns of the book. Both works are characterised by repetitions of groups of three or four elements. In “A Prayer”, for example, “Take me, save me, soothe me, O spare me!” (line 18) closely recalls formulas such as “Harry me, marry me, bury me, bind me” (*FW* 414: 31-2)—both being associated with the three Vichian *cicli* and *ricorso*. The structure of the poem itself is tripartite: each of the three stanzas contains groups of three or four elements. The first stanza contains three imperatives, “Come”, “give”, “yield”, followed by a fourth in line 6, “cease”; the second includes three verbs, while the final stanza, apart from the three imperatives in line 18, includes three other verbal forms.

Through these few examples, I hope to have underlined some unexpected connections between *Pomes Penyeach* and *Finnegans Wake*—relations that can be evidenced only through a genetic analysis of the texts. This kind of intertextuality linking Joyce’s works reveals a complexity of connections and contributes to a fuller and more nuanced appreciation of the writings. The relationship of the much-neglected collection *Pomes Penyeach* with the whole Joycean canon turns out to be manifold and invests the poems with new meanings that have not been examined so far.

Notes

¹ *The James Joyce Archive. Finnegans Wake. A Facsimile of Buffalo Notebooks VI.B.17-VI.B.20*, Prefaced and arranged by David Hayman (New York: Garland, 1978) 94-95.

² *The James Joyce Archive. Finnegans Wake. A Facsimile of Buffalo Notebooks VI.B.13-VI.B.16*, Prefaced and arranged by David Hayman (New York: Garland, 1978) 65, 75, 123, 125.

³ See *The James Joyce Archive. Chamber Music, Pomes Penyeach & Occasional Verse. A Facsimile of Manuscripts, Typescripts & Proofs*, Prefaced and arranged by A. Walton Litz (New York: Garland, 1978).

⁴ See *The James Joyce Archive. Chamber Music, Pomes Penyeach & Occasional Verse. A Facsimile of Manuscripts, Typescripts & Proofs*, Prefaced

and arranged by A. Walton Litz (New York: Garland, 1978) xix. Cf. also Roland McHugh, "Chronology of the Buffalo Notebooks", *A Wake Newslitter* 9 (1972), 19-38.

⁵ Roland McHugh, *Annotations to "Finnegans Wake"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 450.

⁶ The manuscript appears in David Hayman, *A First-Draft Version of "Finnegans Wake"* (London: Faber, 1963) 212-13.

⁷ See Hayman, *A First-Draft Version*, 210-11.

⁸ David Hayman, "Transiting the *Wake*: A Response to Danis Rose", *James Joyce Quarterly* 29.2, 416.

⁹ See Hayman, *A First-Draft Version* (208).

¹⁰ *The James Joyce Archive. Finnegans Wake. A Facsimile of Buffalo Notebooks VI.B.5-VI.B.8*, Prefaced and arranged by David Hayman (New York: Garland, 1978) 11, 13, 15.

¹¹ "SP" stands for Saint Patrick. See *The James Joyce Archive. Finnegans Wake. A Facsimile of Buffalo Notebooks VI.B.5-VI.B.8*, Prefaced and arranged by David Hayman (New York: Garland, 1978) 10.