

From *Finnegans Wake*
to *Passages from Finnegans Wake*:
The James Joyce that Mary Ellen Bute Read

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1. Introduction

Before we begin the study of this film, we must express our profound gratitude to Cecile Starr, the longstanding director of the Women's Independent Film Exchange,¹ and at the same time the sole person in charge of preserving and promoting the ingenious film creation of Mary Ellen Bute, director of *Passages from Finnegans Wake* (1965). In fact, as Lillian Schiff acknowledges in an article dedicated to Mary Ellen Bute's work, Cecile Starr's labor was, from the very beginning, essential, firstly, in zealously guarding both work and criticism, and secondly, in promoting her work and making it accessible to the various cultural milieus back in the early days:

Few film students have heard of her work or seen it in their classes. Film historians have given her little or no attention. Neglect has been righted somewhat and the perpetuation of wrong titles and dates and incorrect facts corrected in an excellent, informative essay on Bute as animator by Cecile Starr . . . In the last few years Ms. Starr has also been instrumental in reintroducing Bute's work in such places as the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Carleton College, Montreal Festival of New Cinema, National Film Board of Canada, Museum of Modern Art and Port Washington Public Library. At these screenings the filmmaker herself participated with characteristic enthusiasm and energy; she was warmly received . . . She had a long list of what she still wanted to talk about: her devotion to the American Pioneer Women Film Directors Project, her gratitude to Cecile Starr. . . .²

After this most deserved note of gratitude, it is time to proceed to the study of the most relevant features of this versatile director and her extraordinarily unusual filmmaking style.

2. A few brief notes on the director, Mary Ellen Bute

Mary Ellen Bute, born in Houston in 1910,³ was, more than anything else, a tireless experimenter and creator of new forms and styles in filmmaking. Her beginnings were undoubtedly crucial in defining her unique way of handling, and directing, the camera. In an interview granted to the American Film Institute she talked about her beginnings as a painter: "I started as a painter but then I gradually came to understand that something static that hangs on a wall isn't quite expressive enough."⁴

However, her extraordinary creative genius would carry her still further, to investigate light and sound, and to start out in filmmaking with curious, startling movies dealing with abstract picture animation, in her particular filmmaking style, which she called *seeing sound*:

How did I become a filmmaker? Well, for a long time I thought film was too commercial, but something was probably pushing me in that direction. I eventually arrived at a particular kind of abstract film with music, which was called "seeing sound." What I saw in my mind, as I listened to music, became sketches, then designs for animation.⁵

This, no doubt, led to the filming of her first startling movie, which, although abstract, as Lillian Schiff noted, was not without poetic and even humorous ingredients:

She recalled beginning this phase of her career with *Escape*, a tale in color of a triangle imprisoned behind a grid of horizontal and vertical lines, and struggling to be free. The elements of this film, abstract as they are, and illustrative of Bute's wish to make her visuals like music—rhythmic, mathematical, moving forward in time—also reveal poetic and humorous qualities.⁶

Lillian Schiff explains in the same article the unusual and curious procedures used by the director in what she herself considered her first work in cinematography: *Abstronics*. At the same time she displayed masterful virtuosity in the montage by using electronically generated images:

In *Abstronics*, her first film to use the new medium, probably the first ever to include video technique, light forms dance against painted backdrops to the western music of Aaron Copland's "How Down" and Don Gillis' "Ranch House Party." This is how it was done: at the controls of her instrument Bute created light forms. Wheels within wheels, lively ghosts, combinations of curves, lariats, ovals, disks, parabolas. She moved the forms electronically in a series of whirlings, twirlings, vortexings, zoomings, pinwheelings, splittings, somersaultings, all in counterpoint to backgrounds of endless roadways, a sunset, a diamond. As she directed the light forms onto the fluorescent screen of the cathode ray tube, their action was photographed.⁷

These were her first steps in movie making. In time she would produce a highly personal and most peculiar list of titles, out of which she would derive all the necessary experience and the knowledge to master the cathode ray, finding a wide range of many possibilities in its application: "From now on, I will treat the cathode ray as a paper and pen."⁸

Indeed, as Lillian Schiff declared, Mary Ellen Bute must be credited both with being the first person ever to film a movie based on Joyce's work and with the creation of totally new styles of filmmaking.

This very small, thin, youthful person with honey-colored hair and a Houston accent, this lady with most considerate manners, was one of the first Americans and probably the first woman to make abstract animated films, the first in the world to use electronically generated images in film, and the first to make a film based on a James Joyce novel.⁹

In another interview granted to the Los Angeles Film Institute, the director explained her special interest in animation, as a means of keeping close control over her work:

I particularly love animation because you have such control of what you are doing. It's the nearest thing to painting on canvas, especially if you do your own camerawork which I did, why then anything you don't like you can redo.¹⁰

In the same interview she admitted she had a special ability in being able to visualize sounds:

I used to entertain myself by visualizing sounds. The visual aspects of sound would occur to me without my realizing it, and so I started putting it on film really to entertain myself.¹¹

She did not create many animated films, however, due to, as she herself confessed, her strong individualism:

I've worked at my own speed, on my own, and have not done too many films, only about twelve animated films, all of them in 35 mm. . . . with animation, especially if you're not dancing to anyone else's tune, you have your little stand off in some odd inexpensive corner and just shoot away.¹²

After her wholehearted dedication to making films based on abstract animation, and cathode ray tube, electronically generated images, it may seem hard to imagine Mary Ellen Bute filming a movie with live characters. In an interview with the American Film Institute, in relation to this question, the director referred to her film *The Boy Who Saw Through*, filmed immediately before *Passages from Finnegans Wake*, to explain the actual transition from one milieu to another in her own experience:

Some years back a critic, Marie Hamilton, looked at all of my work on the moviola and she said, "I think you have great dramatic flair. Have you ever tried live people?" I was horrified at the thought, but her idea evidently took root and I found myself in love with a story to do with live actors. It was a short feature called *The Boy Who Saw Through*, about a boy just entering adolescence who starts seeing through walls because of his curiosity about life. The film won first prize at Brussels. Then I had a compulsion to do Joyce's *Passages from Finnegans Wake*.¹³

Passages from Finnegans Wake was her second film with live characters, and it still shows many montage effects and other elements and devices that carry Mary Ellen Bute's unmistakable signature, her very personal way of understanding cinematography. It was also her last film.

With her death, which took place on 17 October 1983,¹⁴ world cinematography lost one of its first and most unique women film directors and producers ever, a definite pioneer in experimentation with novel techniques that opened the way to new possibilities in the genre, and, of course, the very first person who dared to carry a Joycean text over to film.

3. The film: general aspects

Passages from Finnegans Wake was the first successful attempt at carrying a James Joyce work over to film. But this is not only the first movie based on a work by Joyce, it is also the first film in English to include English subtitles:

Mary Ellen Bute's production of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* will become the first talking film in English to be shown in this country with English subtitles. The reason given for the English subtitles was to translate the Joyce language into understandable English.¹⁵

Presentation of the film took place in 1965 at the International Cannes Film Festival, where it was awarded first prize for best characterization done by a director: "In 1965 at the Cannes Film Festival it won a prize for the best first feature by a director."¹⁶ This was the only occasion that the film could be seen without its subtitles: "The movie was shown at the Cannes Film Festival, but the subtitles weren't added until a subsequent screening in Dublin."¹⁷ The subtitles were added after the film's initial presentation at Cannes, in order, as Kit Basquin affirmed, to provide viewers with a link between what they heard and what they saw:

After winning the Cannes prize, she added subtitles to her film to reinforce Joyce's focus on language and to emphasize the word play that interwove the audible with the visible.¹⁸

Mary Ellen Bute herself, in an interview with Gretchen Weinberg (immediately prior to the Cannes presentation) had recognized the need to provide viewers with some sort of guideline or libretto that would contain the dialogue and a synopsis of the story. This libretto was only used in the presentation of the film at Cannes, since it was to be replaced by the subtitles included in later screenings:

We will supply the audience with a libretto, including the dialogue and a synopsis of the story. We hope it will affect them as an opera would: after seeing it once and reading the libretto, you go back again to study it.¹⁹

The subtitled version, which, as it turned out, received unanimous acclaim by both literary and cinema critics, became the definitive one:

Subtitles are used. Nearly every word that the actors speak is flashed on the screen. First, the composite words are impossible to understand through the ear alone. Second, these Joycean words are wonderful visual objects, enriching the picture visually, like objects in surrealist art.²⁰

The film, called *Passages from Finnegans Wake*, in what Stanley Kauffman considered an authentic demonstration of humility on the part of the director (well aware of the extraordinary difficulty in faithfully carrying over Joyce's text to images), uses, as the basis for its script, playwright Mary Manning's dramatization of Joyce's work:

Mary Ellen Bute's film is called *Passages from Finnegans Wake*, and with this modest claim, it succeeds surprisingly well. Miss Bute had to deal with less story as such than there is in *Ulysses*, but she also had to decide on all settings and in many cases to select the speakers. She based her film script on Mary Manning's dramatization.²¹

Mary Ellen Bute herself, in the aforementioned interview with Gretchen Weinberg, expressed her enthusiasm over the play of the same name written by Mary Manning,²² as well as the powerful influence that watching this play had on her final decision to film *Finnegans Wake*:

I went to see it at Barnard College, the play by Mary Manning, *Passages from Finnegans Wake*, performed by the Barnard girls. It was marvelous—witty and moving. It was also a great success in Paris . . . so I applied for the film rights for Mary Manning's play and the book and they came through.²³

The director, conscious of the quasi-impossibility of filming Joyce's text in one single movie, even considered the possibility of filming several movies and thus being able to represent with greater fidelity and detail the literary text's various features:

I may not ever do another Joyce work but I would like to make several films on different aspects of *Finnegans Wake*, as Dino de Laurentis is doing with the Bible. Several people have already prepared treatments which could easily be adapted for this.²⁴

This was to remain one of the director's wishes that would never come true:

Gradually I was drawn into doing the film. Joyce's special kind of reality is irresistible. It is not a form of knowledge but a form of being. On completing my two films now in progress, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," on Walt Whitman; the other as yet without a working title, it will probably be "Us Then, Finn Gain."²⁵

The work, based on the play of the same name by Mary Manning, gave the director plenty of trouble, for she had to wait no less than three years to get the film rights from the Society of Authors:

Inspired by Mary Manning's play based on *Finnegans Wake*, Bute got the playwright to co-script the film with her, then spent over three years persuading the Society of Authors, Joyce's executors, to let her have the rights.²⁶

In contrast to the negative attitude displayed by the Society of Authors throughout this period, Mary Ellen Bute enjoyed the unconditional and invaluable support of the elite in the Joyce Society, as she revealed to Gretchen Weinberg:

CW: I understand the film was produced in cooperation with the Joyce Society. Did they give any other assistance?

MEB: They were our advisory committee and they and their President, Padraic Colum, were a great help. Another person who was a valuable help was Maria Jolas, who proofread the original book manuscript, and Harriet Shaw Weaver, Joyce's patron and publisher, who approved the screenplay and urged me to start filming.²⁷

Decisive in the making of the movie was her husband Ted Nemeth, a professional film photographer, and the extensive collaboration of the whole Nemeth family, who divided among each other the different tasks involved. The importance of this family's collaboration in getting the film produced cannot be underestimated:

With Miss Bute doubling as producer and director and her husband, Ted Nemeth, as associate producer and director of photography. Their elder son, Ted Jr., helped on the shooting script and their younger son, Jim, served as still photographer.²⁸

The film, with a small, all Irish cast prepared *ad hoc* for the occasion, was shot at very few locations, including Dublin, the old TWA terminal at Kennedy airport, a night sports court in New York City, and the Ted Nemeth studios in the same city, which brought costs down spectacularly, so much so that they did not surpass the \$250,000 figure:

With a cast of Irish actors who had just finished a run in Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*, in New York, the movie was shot in Dublin, at the old TWA terminal at Kennedy Airport, a New York City night Court, and the Ted Nemeth Studios in New York City, for \$250,000.²⁹

Kit Basquin reproduces a very curious piece of information advanced by the noted Joycean scholar Zack Bowern, who remarked that the actors were willing to work for reduced fees just to be able to learn from Bute's filmmaking techniques:

The Irish actors were already in New York at the time of the filming, performing on Broadway in Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*. These young actors and actresses, wanting credit for working on a Joyce film, performed for a small fee. Bowen added that Bernard students were also willing to work for low rates in exchange for learning about filmmaking from Bute, a conscientious albeit demanding teacher whom the students loved.³⁰

Also contributing to keeping costs to a minimum was the fact that Elliot Kaplan, who composed and made the arrangements for the film's musical score, managed to record the orchestral part with only nineteen musicians in a record five hours, with no discernible loss in quality. Interestingly, he used some unusual instruments in the recording, such as an accordion and a honky-tonk piano.

4. *Finnegans Wake*, from literary text to film

In the analysis of such an unusual film as the present one it is almost impossible to break the whole film down into sequences, considering the frenetic rhythm its montage conferred on it, with images superimposed, flashbacks, multiple-angled shots, slow motion, constant cuts, fast motion, stills, and shots filmed in the negative, just to list a few of the most common techniques used. As one specialized critic commented back in 1967:

Just as Joyce's writing is as incommunicable as any literary work extant, so the film will try your patience with its complexities, its jumble of scenes and images that give no suggestion of plot or sequence.³¹

We should also bear in mind that this film, in contrast to most standard

commercial movies, concentrates on dimensionality but lacks direction to such an extent that the film is so overloaded with dimensionality that it overpowers the theme. Having said this, what we want to point out is the fact that its story line (in the case we can say it really has a story line) is rather hard to identify. In that sense, this film does not have the traditional goal-oriented story line, that is to say that it does not fix the traditional beginning, middle, and end of the story lines of most films. It definitely has a clear beginning and a perfect end; but the problem is to find the middle and identify those constant references and allusions to the beginning and end that are overpresent in the middle of its story line. On account of this, and on the basis of a clearer understanding of it, the whole of our present analysis is dedicated to the study of those parts of the film, the beginning and the end, that are fully distinct from the sort of chaotic and erratic structure of the rest of the movie.

Therefore we must keep in mind that even if the film-text does not follow exactly the plot and narrative line of its literary referent, as the director herself affirmed: "The film is not a translation of the book but a reaction to it."³² It does in fact complete the Viconian cycle of the eternal return that exists in Joyce's text. The director decided to name her film *Passages from Finnegans Wake* in an authentic display of "humility," as Stanley Kauffman would say: "Mary Ellen Bute's film is called *Passages from Finnegans Wake*, and with this modest claim it succeeds surprisingly well."³³

Let us recall the effect of this Viconian structure on Joyce's novel, in the words of professor William York Tindall:

Vico concluded that man's history, created by man under the laws of divine providence, proceeds cyclically through three ages, the divine, heroic, and human. After a *ricorso* or period of reflux, the cycle begins again, *saecula saeculorum* . . . Neither a philosopher of history nor a convert to Vico, this family man from Dublin took from Vico what seemed agreeable to his design. Adapting his philosopher, Joyce gave more emphasis than Vico had to thunder and giants; and, giving more than Viconian importance to the *ricorso*, made four ages of Vico's three.³⁴

With a beginning and an end that are quite faithful to the novel, the film also completes the aforementioned cycle, in very much the same way that Richard Ellmann felt it in Joyce's text:

He meant that the book ended where it began, like a wheel, that it had four books or parts, like the four sides of a square, and that *Finnegans Wake* contained the *double entendres* of *Wake* (funeral) and *Wake* (awakening or resurrection), as well as of *Fin* (end) and *again* (recurrence). (*JJI* 597)

However, the director herself acknowledged that the film not only arrives back at the point of eternal return, but in fact truly completes it:

The film ends, not with the last words of the book, "Finn again," but as it was designed to be read, from end to the beginning again: "Finn—again the riverrun past Eve and Adam," the opening line of the book. This will be spoken by his wife, Anna Livia Plurabelle, as she goes back to the ocean and, as Finnegans' soul goes back to Finnegans, she'll say: "Carry me along taddy like you done through the toy fair," and we'll go right back to the beginning of the film again, and the film will have completed a full circle—the first of its kind in the movies.³⁵

Therefore, and using these initial considerations as a point of departure, the method to follow will consist in evaluating and analyzing whether the various subjects and themes of the literary referent are present or absent in the film, as well as the treatment given them. It will also be extremely interesting to study the unusual techniques and montage effects that appear throughout the film. It is not our purpose, consequently, to provide a thematic outline, but rather to make a thorough comparative description of the differences and similarities that appear in each text, for, as Professor García Tortosa is quite right in pointing out, a thematic outline would contribute to the "mutilation" of the richness of the literary work, which in our case would mean the film: "Cualquier esquema temático supone, como mínimo, una simplificación, y mutila seriamente la riqueza casi inconmensurable de este sueño universal."³⁶

The structural and thematic complexity of the novel is also present throughout the whole film, whose extraordinary difficulty in being understood led Mary Ellen Bute to admit, *a priori*, as we have stated above, the need for a libretto to accompany the film (later replaced by the subtitles) as a guide, so that the public would be able to understand it:

GW: This leads to my asking again a recurring and persistent question: Do you think Joyce's language will be intelligible to an audience which has not read him?

MEB: I think the libretto will help and I think it will develop into a great game between film and audience.³⁷

In this sense, and in order to provide a general overview of the film's content and make it easier to understand, it becomes practically inevitable to present a brief summary of the film.³⁸ The whole plot scheme occurs in one night of chaotic and therapeutic dreaming on the part of the protagonist (Finnegans), where the sleeping man's unconscious reveals itself in a struggle between its most essential components. He goes through a cycle of frights and disintegrations that transport him to the origins of history, myth, and symbolism, so that he may prepare for a final quest: that of a glorious waking up in a resurrection apotheosis. In the film, as in the novel, the hero is Finnegans, also known as Here Comes Everybody in several phases of the film. He has two sons, Shem and Shaun, and a

daughter, Iseult, and a youthful manifestation of his wife, Anna Livia Plurabelle, who is at the same time his own soul, and the river Liffey.

Within the dream, surrounded by the arms of his wife and his soul, Finnegan splits into his two sons, Shem and Shaun, the poet and the politician respectively, who are perpetual adversaries. Finnegan experiences Finn McCool's wake (deathwatch), whose friends wake up from his coffin after some whisky is spilled over the coffin in a toast, and his fatal fall into chaos. The protagonist sees his crime of indecency, committed in Phoenix Park, and how his election campaign and his political image are ruined. He becomes King Mark, in *Oedipus Rex*, then a bartender, and even his own commentator. We see the other central characters going through these transformations as well: Shem and Shaun into Jute and Mutt, Iseult into "Icy-la-belle," Shem and Iseult into Tristram and Isolde, etc. With the arrival of dawn, we see, as in a vision, all white and in slow motion, a pillow fight in the children's bedroom, who seem to be the infantile manifestation of the children from the married couple that Finnegan and Anna Livia Plurabelle represent, and where the internal drama starts all over again. Finnegan, dressed all in white, transforms his death wake into a luminous resurrection. The protagonist, reunited with his own self in a sort of rebirth, comes out to see the world again. The film begins with a fade-in, with the camera pointing toward the great luminosity of a sunset in the background of the frame, while in the foreground, the last rays of the sun are being reflected on the tranquil waters of river Liffey.

This placid beginning of the film is highlighted by the film narrator's voice-over, repeating the literary text's initial words, while the camera proceeds to display various scenes, such as Anna Livia Plurabelle and Finnegan's bedroom, showing the married couple in restful sleep, and a beautiful long-shot of the bay; these images are accompanied by the narrator's voice-over reciting the literary text's first lines. Notations for the text-film are worth highlighting³⁹:

(Music, view of setting sun, river, then close up of flowing water)

COMMENTATOR (V.O.): river run past Eve and Adam's (ALP and FINN are asleep in bed) from swerve of shore (view of Bay and Shore) to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs (view of ALP and FINN sleeping). And low stole o'er the stillness the heartbeats of sleep (view of water and sun, view of FINN and ALP. FINN is restless).

A sudden leap at the end of this delivery by the narrator's voice-over can be observed, in the last sentence: "And low stole o'er the stillness the heartbeats of sleep." The place where these words appear in the literary referent is chapter one, part three; thus, a considerable leap has taken place in the text-film in relation to the literary narrative. Jumps in the film narrative, such as this four hundred page one, are frequent throughout the

film. The director herself justified these changes as their being a way of representing her own point of view: "It represents my point of view, naturally, but it's as much a James Joyce film, I hope, as a Mary Ellen Bute film."⁴⁰ It becomes evident that Mary Ellen Bute has her own particular, free manner of interpreting Joyce's text, for which she cannot be accused of deforming the literary referent, all the more if we consider valid some very sensible conclusions regarding Joyce, such as Sarah Smith's, who considers (as many Joycean critics and admirers do) that the novel can very well be read without following the traditional start-to-end order:

Finnegans Wake is not necessarily to be read like most ordinary novels, from cover to back cover. A paragraph like the one quoted above may send the reader on to the next paragraph, but it might also send him to a passage several pages away, behind or before it, to the dictionary, or to his own cultural or personal experience. The very constitution of the words breaks down "consecutivity": one word develops in two or three directions.⁴¹

This is exactly what Mary Ellen Bute does in the film, for, in spite of the constant leaps from one area to another of the literary referent, it so happens, as Dilys Power affirms, that upon viewing the film, the lasting impression that one gets is not so much that the novel has been altered, but rather that certain "adaptations" have been made to it:

Surely, I said peevishly as I came out of the cinema, Mrs Bute has altered the piece a good deal? No, I was told, only trimming, no alterations. It is the film itself, which varies, which turns to you first one face, then another; which today is all geniality and tomorrow a reflection on the human condition.⁴²

To return to the story-line at the beginning of the film, Kit Basquin believes that it is presented through "synthesizing, encompassing, and simplifying words" which, in one way or another, come to reinforce the idea of the eternal Viconian cycle underlining it:

Her film begins with summarizing words that roll silently in front of the viewer, combining text and circulatory movement into a metaphor reflective of film rolling from reel to reel in a projector. Reinforcing this visual trope, the next image of the river Liffey is accompanied by a voice-over quoting the opening lines of *Finnegans Wake*: "river run, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore. . . ."⁴³

And this "Viconian eternal return" of all things closes at the end of the film in a masterful manner, in the very last scene of the movie, just as it does in its literary referent. This closing scene is one of the most crucial, transcendent scenes in the whole film.

Very significant is Finnegan's exit, surrounded by an almost unbearable luminosity under a blinding sun behind him. The close-up of his smiling

face, radiant with joy, appears to be as luminous as the shining sun. This is the film's last image, after which the camera angles up to close in a blinding, resplendent sky. It is no wonder that Kit Basquin should find in this scene a great similarity between Finnegan and the figure of Jesus Christ, greeting a new day: "Glowing in light and treading an ambiguous space, HCE appears at the end of the film as the risen Christ greeting a new day."⁴⁴ Evidently, the almost blinding sunrise must have been enhanced through the use of special filters to achieve such great luminosity. Simultaneously, Anna Livia Plurabelle's voice-over never stops speaking, and neither does the voice coming out of the hero's innermost recesses. In this way the film has managed, not only to complete the full Viconian eternal return cycle, as stated repeatedly above, but also to usher in Anna Livia's voice reciting the end of her letter, what Joyceans of the likes of Anthony Burgess term "the book's magnificent coda"; a coda which, in fact, can also be seen as the film's final coda: "And then we hand over to ALP, great mother, for the magnificent coda of the book. We read her letter at last in fall, and then hear her voice."⁴⁵ This circumstance was admitted by the director as well, who also detected that the film brings the complete Viconian eternal return cycle to a close, full-circle, as it were, whereas in the book it remains open-ended.⁴⁶ One important item must be mentioned, in what may be considered a slip or lapse in the film, and which, interestingly, seems to have escaped critics: the fact that the very last word pronounced in the film is *a* (an undeniable misquotation of the book), but which is translated correctly in the subtitles, where it reads *the* just as it appears in its literary referent.

Recalling some statements from Ted Nemeth (Bute's husband and the film's still photographer), the movie, the same as Joyce's novel, is the story of mankind; and this fact can clearly be perceived throughout the film:

If one had met Joyce in a pub and summoned up the courage to wave a few pages of his then unpublished manuscript in front of him and to ask him what it was all about, he might have pointed to the drinking and singing people around him. For in a very real sense, the story is an intellectually tipsy celebration of the folly, the courage, and the wisdom of the story of mankind. And more than that, it is a celebration of the intellect and emotions of man. All men. Ahmen.⁴⁷

In the light of this, words of praise for the film such as Zack Bowen's, prestigious James Joyce scholar, are in no way exaggerated:

The opening [of the film] may very well mark a new milestone in bringing the greatest and most difficult writer of modern times a little closer to general understanding and acceptance . . . That an attempt was made to make any sort of a picture on *Finnegans Wake* is astounding; that the picture is a genuinely successful work of art is, though perhaps unbelievable, wholly true.⁴⁸

It is a well known fact that it took James Joyce seventeen years to complete his "Wake"; in this sense, a film would require a similar length of time to capture faithfully the creation of its literary referent. Within the limited confines of its ninety-six minutes, as we have been able to ascertain, more than a good share of details bring it in close contact with Joyce's text; and especially significant are those elements and resources, similar to the ones employed in the book, that are used to suggest the Victorian eternal return of all things. In this sense, the film begins with the last half of a sentence and concludes with its first half, thereby leaving the words as if they were "floating in the air." In conclusion, the film is, as the director allowed, a bona fide "reaction to the novel" on her part. Indeed, we must not forget that all the voices that we hear at any given moment of the film are the same voices that we hear in the original novel, those which, always, speak of, and for, Joyce.

Notes

1. Organization dedicated to the advancement and research of women in all disciplines related to film creation, a subsidiary of the Yale University Film Study Center of New Haven, Connecticut.

2. Lillian Schiff, "The Education of Mary Ellen Bute," *Film Library Quarterly* 17 (1984): 60.

3. A large portion of the biographical information on the director was obtained from articles and documents included in the above mentioned Women's Independent Film Exchange, supplied by Cecile Starr. From here on, all references to this institution will appear as Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange. Regrettably, most of these articles lack some information regarding author, date, or periodical source.

4. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: *AFI Report*, Summer 1974.

5. Schiff 54.

6. Schiff 55.

7. Schiff 57.

8. Schiff 57.

9. Schiff 53.

10. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: "Mary Ellen Bute," *AFI Report*, Summer 1974: 40.

11. Schiff 40.

12. Schiff 40.

13. Schiff 42.

14. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange.

15. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: *Variety*, 18 August 1965: 15.

16. Kit Basquin, "Mary Ellen Bute's Film Adaptation of *Finnegans Wake*," *James Joyce's Finnegans Wake: A Casebook*, ed. John Harty, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, vol. 1003 (New York: Garland, 1991) 177.

17. Basquin 177.
18. Basquin 177.
19. Gretchen Weinberg, "An Interview with Mary Ellen Bute on the Filming of *Finnegans Wake*," Harty 28.
20. Stanley Kauffmann, "Passages from *Finnegans Wake*," *New American Review*, 2 January 1968.
21. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: Stanley Kauffman, *Variety*, 8 August 1965.
22. Despite our continuous insistence and efforts to obtain some document, fragment, or section alluding to the script of Mary Manning's original play, all our attempts have been in vain. Likewise, all my inquiries into the Yale University Film Study Center in this respect have been met with the most absolute silence.
23. Weinberg 26.
24. Weinberg 26.
25. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: "An Evening with Mary Ellen Bute," *Cineprobe*, The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film, New York, 15th season, 1982-83: 2-3.
26. Schiff 57.
27. Weinberg 26.
28. Allan Wallach, "'Twas a Tough Birth for her *Wake*," *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 January 1968.
29. Schiff 57-58.
30. Basquin 179.
31. Frances Herridge, "*Finnegans Wake* on the Screen," *New York Post*, 10 October 1967: 38.
32. Weinberg 27; it must be remembered, as we mentioned in the previous section, that the director decided to name her film *Passages from Finnegans Wake*, on account, perhaps, of the tremendous thematic restrictions of the film in relation to the literary work.
33. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: Stanley Kauffman, *Variety*, August 8th, 1965.
34. William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to Finnegans Wake* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1996) 8-9.
35. Weinberg 28.
36. Francisco García Tortosa, Introduction, *Anna Livia Plurabelle: Finnegans Wake*, I.viii, ed. Francisco García Tortosa, trans. Francisco García Tortosa, Ricardo Navarrete Franco, and José María Tejedor Cabrera (Madrid: Cátedra, 1992) 50.
37. Weinberg 27.
38. We present this recapitulation in the form of a succinct plot summary in which we follow the "eternal return" cycle as described in the film.
39. It is extraordinary that, quite unlike most films, in this film the image-film maintains an absolute fidelity to the text-film, which, besides helping us understand the text-film, it shows that, for its director, text-film and image-film are but one and the same body in the film discourse.
40. Weinberg 27.
41. Sarah W. R. Smith, "The Word made Celluloid: On Adapting Joyce's *Wake*," *The English Novel and the Movies*, ed. Michael Klein and William Parker (New York: Frederic Ungar, 1981) 305.
42. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: Dilys Powell, "Come to the *Wake*," *The Sunday Times*.

43. Basquin 177.
44. Basquin 181.
45. Anthony Burgess, *A Shorter Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber, 1992) 259.
46. Weinberg 28.
47. Cecile Starr, The Women's Independent Film Exchange: "An Evening with Mary Ellen Bute," *Cineprobe*, The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film, New York, season 1982-83, 4 April.
48. Basquin 184.