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Joyce's Final Period

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Abstract

This essay is a reflection on James Joyce's work in the last months of his life: the "List of Misprints" in *Finnegans Wake*," prepared with the help of Paul León between April and August, 1940. Although a genetic approach might appear to be more pertinent, this paper pays attention to the testimonial value of the List, relating it to biographical data and staying away from close textual analysis. Prosodic elements (punctuation marks and exclamations) are discussed as part of Joyce´s testimony in his final period.

Keywords: testimony, trauma, holocaust, Agamben, prosody, *Finnegans Wake*.

We are still learning to separate James Joyce from Stephen Dedalus, to understand the difference between the man who died at almost 59 in Zurich and the young rebellious artist who set out to "forge, in the smithy of [his] soul, the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (*P* 360) and whose motto, *non serviam*, allegedly made him a lifelong enemy of the Catholic Church and the British Empire.[1] León Edel, already in 1939, understood why Joyce had to move on, why the young artist had to leave his avatar well behind in Dublin:[2]

> Of course he might have gone on writing other novels like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He might have done fifty or a hundred novels (like Mr Wells or Mr Bennett) or an endless series of plays (like Mr Shaw) in which there is constant reiteration of idea and constant revelation of the same personality. But Joyce does not seem to want to leave many pictures of his time. The process of turning out novel after novel does not excite him. (Deming II, 719)

Anne McCarthy argued some time ago that Joyce, like Mangan, Bloom, Odysseus —all of them Wandering Jews— purposed to escape from themselves: "to escape the prison of being Ahasuerus, the one who is cursed with living forever as the same person (the monotony of living for hundreds of years is called, in Mangan's translation, "the yawning monster," that is "Sameness" (231). Indeed, Joyce went on changing and writing. For years he made a living teaching private classes in Italy while waiting for fame. Soon after forty became a celebrity, and for the next two decades approximately lived in Paris surrounded by admiration, polemics and very aware that he was writing in the eyes of posterity. And then came Joyce's last months, quite different from the rest of his life, when he had to pay the price of the conflict that swept Europe and ruined the careers of thousands of artists like himself, regardless their nationalites.

By Christmas of 1939 (December 23rd), Joyce's situation was like that of millions threatened by the war.[3] He was one more refugee in Saint-Geránd-le-Puy, near Vichy, where he was making tremendous efforts to arrange the necessary paperwork to enter Switzerland. At the beginning of the same year, 1939, Antonio Machado had managed to reach Colliure, where he died on February 22nd, Ash Wednesday, of pneumonia, and after a few days in a coma. A little later they

found in his overcoat a slip of paper with the lines: "estos días azules, y este sol de la infancia" (Cano 207). Walter Benjamin's luck was no better. He had also left Paris and reached the Spanish border in Port Bou. But the Spanish "guardia civil" did not allow him to enter the country. He took an overdose of morphine on September 25th, 1940. Perhaps, like that other Jew, Rudolph Virag, he "slipped down to the foot of the bed. Verdict: overdose. Death by misadventure" (*U* 6.363-4). Benjamin left behind a suitcase with thousands of pages grouped in "convolutes" that are still being deciphered today. Joyce, Machado, Benjamin, like many others, gave testimony with their lives ―not their works― of a catastrophic historical situation.

The Joyces tried hard to escape chaos, and even entertained various possibilities. We know that Beckett informed Joyce about a free teaching position in Cape Town. For a few days he thought about this, but on hearing that there were storms (let us remember that he was terrified of storms, dogs, and losing consciousness), decided not to go. He also entertained the idea of moving to the U.S. His friend Maria Jolas insisted till the end. However, according to his biographers, his and Nora's fear of flying kept the project at bay. Perhaps a more powerful reason ―and less anecdotal― was his daughter. When they went South, Lucia stayed in occupied France, confined in a mental health institution. James Joyce would spend weeks with no information, since the postal service hardly worked. Lucia's case was one of acute schizophrenia, although Joyce's fatherly description to his friend Jacques Mercanton was tender and moving: "she is about thirty-three ―he wrote on August 13th, 1940―, speaks French fluently. Her character is gay, sweet and ironic, but she has sudden bursts of anger over nothing when she has to be confined in a straitjacket. . . . These crises are not frequent now but they are unpredictable" (*Letters III* 481). In order to get Lucia out of the occupied territory Joyce would have had to work miracles. The same letter enumerates the difficulties: he

needed coordinated permits from the German, French and Swiss governments, had to prove his economy allowed him to pay for an institution in Switzerland and Lucia was obliged to travel accompanied by two nurses. All this to be done from far away.

Today we know that Joyce had good reasons to worry about Lucia. On September 1st, 1940 Hitler had authorized the extension of his eugenics policy from sterilization to elimination. "In Kiev alone, 100.000 people identified as having hereditary illnesses were killed" and Lucia`s case was also, according to eugenicist definitions of the time, "life-unworthy-of-life" (Schloss 398-9).[4] Joyce, who had candidly prophecised in *Ulysses* the success of "kalipedia," the art of bringing up beautiful children,[5] and had provoked Nora's rage talking about Hitler (Maddox 333, Ellmann 722), now had his daughter at the mercy of these cruel measures and, because of the war, would never see her again.

Lucia's sister-in-law, Giorgio's wife, was also going through personal difficulties. According to Carol Schloss, in the last months of 1939 she could be seen in the streets of Paris walking with two cats under her arm. If we are to judge her with the standards of *Ulysses*, her case would have similarities with Mr. Breen's (*U* 8.310-14). Finally the family managed to send her to the U.S. in May. Giorgio stayed in Paris still longer, although his father ignored where exactly. Samuel Beckett was also there. Joyce knew the address, though not the phone number. And Paul Léon remained in Paris to see the entrance of the Germans. By this time he was not in the best terms with Joyce, apparently because the Léons stayed on the side of Helen Kastor when she and her husband Giorgio where about to split.

Giorgios's main problem was that "he was subject to induction into the French Army" (Schloss 386) and then "mobilizable" by the British (Schloss 405). His status was rather complex: Irish parents, British citizenship (issued by the American Embassy in Vichy), birth in Italy, current residence

in France; and, of course, no definite profession except singing (he had even tried working for the BBC, with no success).

In the meantime, the war was worsening. In April 1940 the Germans occupied Denmark, Belgium and Holland, while Norway was the next target. Joyce insisted in his letters that everything had been foreseen in *Finnegans Wake*, where the protagonist, of Finnish origin (Finn, Finnegan) was waking up, and where the brothers, Shaun and Shem, proved that all wars were brotherly. In June the German Army occupied Saint-Geránd for six days, before retiring to Vichy, capital city of the then named "free zone." Vichy was so busy that Joyce, under the protection of Valery Larbaud there, had to return to Saint-Geránd, where he stayed till his last journey to Zurich. Duly, there is a "Association *James Joyce à Saint-Gérand-le-Puy*" that celebrates Blomsday every year. When Paris fell in June the 14th, Giorgio and Beckett were already with the rest of the family. Four days later, Paul Léon showed up, and soon resumed his efficient collaboration with Joyce.

The war also brought economic difficulties for Joyce. In 1940 he had 4,300 dollars a year at his disposal (Maddox 341), coming both from Harriet Shaw Weaver's donation and royalties, from Faber and John Lane in England, and Viking and Random House in the U.S., besides a sum from Stephen Joyce's maternal grandfather, Kastor, for his grandson's studies. 4,300 dollars was a lot of money at the time. Just to get an idea close to us, a suit in Seville at the time cost 50 pesetas (around 4,6 dollars); a bullfight ticket in Barcelona 5 pesetas (50 cents).[6] The problem was that Joyce had practically no access to any of this, because the British Government only allowed a small sum to British citizens living in France. This was another reason why he wanted to move to Switzerland, but, unfortunately, 4,300 dollars was not enough either. The Swiss authorities required 7,500 dollars for a family to settle in the country.

Despite the circumstances, Joyce retained his sense of humor. When his friend George Pelorson, on his way to the

front, paid him a visit on April 14 and showed an interest in his current work, "What are you going to do? Are you writing?" Joyce answered curtly: "I am rereading and revising *Finnegans Wake* . . . 'I am adding commas'" (Ellmann 744). It is not hard to imagine that these were not good times to write, and not especially for such individual enterprises as Joyce's.

Nevertheless, he and Paul Léon undertook the task of re-reading and correcting the misprints of the first edition of *Finnegans Wake* —who would dare say, today, that a word in the *Wake* is a misprint, or that a comma is missing? They would meet at three in the afternoon, following a strict routine, most probably to fight the surrounding chaos, and worked until nine. Afterwards Joyce would visit a local restaurant and order a few Pernods; he hardly ate anything, due to —everybody agreed— his nervous state. On August 28th Maria Jolas left for the U.S. and "Joyce entrusted to her his corrections of misprints in *Finnegans Wake*" (Ellmann 747) that were incorporated in later editions of the book. This was the end of the creative process that started in 1922. Ironically, Joyce's plan for his following (and last) work have become prophetic, as he would have undoubtedly liked: "I think," he told Pelorson, "I will write something very simple and very short" (Ellmann 744)

Corrections of Misprints in

FINNEGANS WAKE

Page		
4	line 3 from top	for "Quáouauh!" read "Quaouauh!"
4	line 14 from top	for "But waz iz! Iseut! Ere were sewers!" read "But waz iz? Iseut? Ere were sewers?"
5	line 23 from top	for "bedoneen" read "bedoueen"
5	line 24 from top	for "it" read "if"
5	line 26 from top	for "Heed." read "Heed!"
6	line 5 from top	after "domecreepers" insert comma
6	line 6 from top	for "aufroos" read "aufroofs"
6	line 16 from top	after "consternation" delete comma
6	line 21 from top	for "keening," read "keening."
6	line 29 from top	for "thereis" read "there is"
7	line 27 from top	after "puddle" insert comma
7	line 28 from top	after "slaaps" insert comma
8	line 25 from top	for "argaumunt," read "argaumunt."
8	line 27 from top	for "Mac Dyke" read "MacDyke"
8	line 27 from top	for "O' Hurry." read "O'Hurry."
9	line 16 from top	for "twelve-mile" read "twelvemile"
9	lines 28/29 from top	for "onster-lists" read "ouster-lists"
10	line 1 from top	after "lipoleums" insert comma
10	line 13 from top	for "Willingdone." read "Willingdone,"
10	line 34 from top	for "pelfalittlegnarlybird." read "pelfalittle gnarlybird."
11	line 10 from top	after "peewee" delete comma
11	line 11 from top	after "beggybaggy" delete comma
11	line 11 from top	after "bickybacky" delete comma
11	line 15 from top	for "trucefor" read "truce for"
12	line 3 from top	correct second word badly printed into "run"
13	line 22 from top	for "Dyfflnarsky" read "Dyfflinarsky"
13	line 23 from top	after "are" insert comma
14	line 7 from top	indent paragraph beginning "566 a.d."
14	line 28 from top	for "tarfatch'd" read "farfatch'd"
15	line 11 from top	after "as" insert comma
15	line 34 from top	after "man" insert full stop
15	lines 35/36 from top	for "febre-wery" read "febrew-ery"
16	line 26 from top	for "af" read "at"
20	lines 8/9 from top	for "rub-rickredd" read "ru-brickredd"
20	line 15 from top	for "reading" read "readings"
21	line 36 from top	for "hilary" read "Hilary"
22	line 7 from top	for "a' forethought" read "a forethought"
23	line 9 from top	for "illiteratise" read "illiterative"
23	line 11 from top	for "titler" read "tiler"
23	line 19 from top	for "Norrõnesen" read "Norronesen"
26	line 30 from top	after "Dr." delete full stop
29	line 2 from top	for "lord-major" read "lordmajor"
29	line 18 from top	for "mapqiq" read "Mapqiq"
30	line 16 from top	after "hotel" insert comma
30	line 24 from top	for "cinnibar" read "cinnabar"
32	line 1 from top	for "road." read "road?"
32	line 2 from top	for "Kingable" read "kingable"
32	line 9 from top	after "socialights" insert comma
32	line 29 from top	after "Mr." delete full stop
32	line 32 from top	for "of problem" read "of the problem"
33	line 4 from top	after "wise" insert comma
33	line 4 from top	after "sat" insert comma
34	line 14 from top	for "as pious" read "as a pious"

2

Today the "Corrections of Misprints in *Finnegans Wake*" is a 14 page notebook attached to the first edition of the book, to be found in major libraries. It contains around 816 corrections, mainly exclamations added, especially inside parenthesis, and punctuation modified; and all incorporated to later editions. We cannot say that they provide any revealing insight in Joyce's creative process, at least to date. Joyce acted similarly in the case of *Ulysses*. He corrected, added, took away details until the last moment, to the despair of printers. Exclamations, we should remember, posited a problem in *Ulysses* too. Of the 55 exclamation marks in Telemachus, only 8 remained and Joyce had to add them again to the galley proofs. Gabler's theory was that perhaps the typist did not have that key operative in the typewriter.[7] Another, more blatant explanation is that we rarely consider these matters as belonging to the author; most "classics" are in fact "modernized," that is punctuated, by editors.

"My family is in pieces and in several places," Joyce wrote on April 17th, 1940. "As for me I cogitate therefore I exist." We almost forget that in order to write one needs a minimum of peace. As Jean Ámery, another victim, put it, "La sociedad exige que, sin dolor y con la mente clara, compile su declaración de la renta" (64). And in his cogitations, Joyce could do little more than add periods and commas.

The List of Misprints is above all testimonial, and essentially so. They are not the strokes of a master, nor the capital performance of a genius, but rather a silent reminder of all the suffering that was going on around. Antonio Machado's line "estos días azules, y este sol de la infancia," acquires all its strength when we realize that it was found in his pockets soon after his death. The relevance of the Corrections, thus, is not in their potential —and doubtful— insights for the clarification of *Finnegans Wake*, but in what they help to unveil the tragedy that was taking place outside of them. At times, what matters in a book, in an utterance, is not so much its communicative aspect as the mere fact of its existence. Behind Joyce's effort to

correct a book like *Finnegans Wake*, in a hostile context, written in such an unfathomable language, ignored by a majority of readers; behind the imperceptible relevance of the corrections, there looms the very ruin of the author ―of the possibility of authorship itself― in front of the overwhelming power of war. In the midst of oblivion and solitude, an old colonel named Buendía decided to make gold fishes. Joyce decided to add periods and commas. Testimony is effective, says Agamben, when it is placed between the sayable and the unsayable, just as the darkness in the sky testifies to former times when the stars did not shine: "This means that testimony is the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness; it means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness." (*Remnants* 39)

Once ―and if― one accepts Joyce's last corrections as testimonial, then it is possible to endow them with significance. What is the minimal expression of language, the frontier between language and non-language? Is it a positive "yes"? is it a sigh, like the final "the" of *Finnegans Wake*?[8] Looking at the List of Corrections we could argue that exclamations and periods are minimal expressions of language too. As vocatives, exclamations always point to something beyond themselves, they signal the existence of a second person, often absent. Saying "goodbye" is a variation of the same and implies an address to a "you" that eventually will not answer back. "When I say *you*, it is only a pretense, a rhetorical device. No one hears it" (3), said Beauvoir at the beginning of her *Adieux. A Farewell to Sartre*. And yet, even though the exclamation does not point to the subject, even though it addresses someone absent, it presupposes the existence of a speaking subject; that is to say, it brings into the open the bare existence of language, before and beyond its communicative purpose. It is an occurrence and as such, it provides a testimony. And that is one more way in which Joyce testifies to his own existence and becomes yet another witness to the destruction: not through

games of words and stylistic *tours de force*; just exclaiming like an ordinary, anonymous person, returning the intentionality to language, its heartbeat, as it were.[9]

Punctuation, on the other hand, has traditionally been an indication of breathing. "The marks of punctuation were analogous to the rests in a piece of music" (Watson 653). Etymologically, punctuation, *punctum*, shares its root with puncture, opening holes. When the system of punctuation was mainly rhythmical, pauses were moments for the speaker/reader to breathe. As punctuation became logical rather than rhythmical, the period marked the separation between one sentence and the next. Joyce learned soon enough that a different way of punctuation would give him the key to pierce through consciousness, for what is, technically speaking, an interior monologue if not syntax pierced by periods?

The Correction of Misprints in *Finnegans Wake* is a valuable tool to understand Joyce's final period, especially to make visible the tragic events that were taking place at the time of its elaboration, while he was trying to go on living and breathing. Some times what is said reaches us, others what remains unsaid, what remains concealed behind periods and exclamations. In this case, echoes of war resound behind them. The rest is rather sad. Paul Léon went back to Paris to be with his son. He was arrested in 1941 and killed during a march in Silesia in 1942 (Beja 123). By September of 1940 Joyce had had no news of his daughter in weeks. And the authorities only allowed very brief letters, postcards, telegrams. He would never see her again. In October his difficulties persisted. Now the Swiss authorities did not want to let him in because they thought he was a Jew, like Leopold Bloom, the ordinary (and Jewish) man (Ellmann 747). At last, on December 16th the Joyce family (except Lucia) left France. Less than a month later, January the 11th, in the middle of the night, the doctor had to be called. It was Joyce's stomach. Even though —Anne MacCarthy tells us in another context— "the Jew in his many attempts to find death runs into forest fires, is present in battles,

at the fall of Rome, tigers and lions cannot kill him" (230), "on Sunday night, January 12 . . . Nora and Giorgio were telephoned and told to come quickly, but they arrived too late. To her sorrow, Nora learned that Jim had woken and asked for them" (Maddox 343). We are all alone in our goodbyes.

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Notes

[1] Joyce, as we know used his raw lived experience as the material for his work in ways that we still have to figure out. Bakhtin's ideas in this respect are still enriching today; see his "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," in his *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1990).

[2] Lacan, in his 23rd Seminar, uses Joyce-Stephen as an ideal example of avatar: "Stephen es el Joyce que Joyce imagina. Y como Joyce no es tonto, no lo adora, está muy lejos de hacerlo" (63). . . . "Stephen es Joyce en la medida en que descifra su propio enigma. No llega lejos porque él cree en todos sus síntomas." (64)

[3] The data from Joyce's life derives from the biographies cited at the end.

[4] We are indebted to Giorgio Agamben`s trilogy *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) for his contribution to the analysis of this phenomenon.

[5] These factors, he alleged, and the revolting spectacles offered by our streets, hideous publicity posters, religious ministers of all denominations, mutilated soldiers and sailors, exposed scorbutic cardrivers, the suspended carcasses of dead animals, paranoic bachelors and unfructified duennas—these, he said, were accountable for any and every falling off in the calibre of the race. Kalipedia, he prophesied, would soon be generally adopted. (*U* 14. 1245-51)

[6] Thanks to archives from newspapers like www.lavanguardia.es or www.abc.es we can have an approximate idea. Incidentally, in 1940 the exchange rate was: one dollar= "10.74 pesetas" (http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/1976/11 /28/133.html, consulted December 8th, 2012).

[7] See *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, prepared by Hans Walter Gabler, with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Garland, 1986).

[8] "This time, I found the word which is the most slippery, the least accented, the weakest word in English, a word which is not even a word, which is scarcely sounded between the teeth, a breath, a nothing, the article *the*" (*Letters I* 725, 1941).

[9] "In Latin there are two words for 'witness.' The first word, *testis*, from which our word 'testimony' derives, etymologically signifies the person who, in a trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party (*terstis). The second word, *supertes*, designates a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from the beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it" (Agamben, *Remnants*, 17). Joyce, like other victims, would belong to the second.