

Swerving Shores, Bendings Abeyed

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What, if anything, does genetic criticism offer for a reading of *Finnegans Wake*? Can criticism empower itself by having recourse to the archive of a text's past? In 1963 Jack Dalton pleaded that critics turn to the drafts as a means of verifying the presence of arcane languages in the *Wake*.¹ More recently Laurent Milesi has claimed that the "body of manuscripts furnishes a sufficiently precise bench-mark for evaluating the total number of languages effectively used by Joyce."² Genetic research thus can afford a critic a much needed *delimitation*—not necessarily limited to linguistic researches—of the shameless divagations of sense and sensibility at play in *Finnegans Wake* by providing *witnesses* to testify on behalf of interpretations. This would be the approach advocated and practiced by what R. J. Schork calls the "circumscribed school of genetic criticism."³ Here, pre-textual matter figures as *evidence* for a reading. These witnesses would testify to certain states of the *Wake*, and also to the statements that can be made about it.

We take, as a straightforward illustration of this economy of witnessing and verification, an example from Roland McHugh's *The Finnegans Wake Experience*.⁴ The trail McHugh follows starts with a letter in which Joyce claims that he is including a reference to Emanuel Swedenborg, among others, in the current draft of II.1 (*Letters I* 302). The final text bears no apparent reference to Swedenborg, but through the intervention of this note from B.33—"new teeth grow/at 81 in ES" (VI.B.33: 187)—and its source in Swedenborg's biography⁵ which explains that he did indeed grow a new set of teeth at the age of eighty-one, the following line duly appears as the sought-after reference: "got a daarlingt babyboy bucktooth, the thick of a gobstick, coming on ever so nerses nursely, gracies to goodness, at 81" (*FW* 242.08-10). The notebook entry and its source thus corroborate the testimony of the letter that there is indeed a Swedenborg reference in the final text which would otherwise be missed by all but the most Swedenborgian of readers. Indeed, McHugh notes that he initially thought this passage to refer to Kierkegaard's William Afham; but once sprung, Swedenborg's newly grown teeth have circumscribed McHugh's reading. Subsequent to McHugh, Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon have catalogued further references to Swedenborg from the biography via the commodious B.33 index.⁶

The general economy of the testimony of genetic fragments is not necessarily as straightforward as implied by Swedenborg's bite. Each textual witness *participates within* the project of writing whereof it testifies. No witness in a textual hierarchy can provide a definitive testimony since each witness itself rests within the testimonies of other witnesses. This admission of a nonbounded intertextual circulation shifts us to what Schork pejoratively calls the "expansive view" of genetic criticism.⁷ We will try to demonstrate that any operation of textual verifiability is *expansive*. Jean-Michel Rabaté provides a precise elaboration of the implications of such a claim: "The examination of the pretext uncovers the same mechanism as the

final text, but it also reveals a method and a final philosophy . . . an infinitization of language results equally from the protocols of decipherment and genetic exegesis."⁸

The circumscribed view also contends with this potential infinitization of referential play. Already in the Swedenborg example there is a codependency between the textual and the pretextual matter: Joyce's letter leads to the notebook which depends upon a prior source. Furthermore one could include the draft stage in which the reference first appeared in order to corroborate the link between the notebook entry and the final text.⁹ In other words, although this methodology tends towards, as Schork states, *circumscribing* the possibilities of reading, its potential for interpretive adjudication rests within a mobile and expansive circulation of textual witnessing. Witnessing moves up and down, pellmell through the genetic chain.

We would now like to turn to Jacques Aubert's treatment of the problems of reading and articulating the ostensive first word of *Finnegans Wake* because he also raises, perhaps inadvertently, some of these same problems concerning the circulation of testimony.¹⁰ The problems Aubert identifies in reading *riverrun* are also problems of geneticism and witnessing.

Aubert begins by arguing that the articulation of "riverrun" (FW 003.01) depends not upon any meaning of the word itself, but rather upon economies of differentiation registered by both the word and its context. Alone, the word suggests several incongruous possibilities. The word has an excess of possible signification because it belongs to multiple grammatical genres: noun and verb combined (*river run* with an elided pause); solitary substantive (with an elided article *o riverrun*); literary allusion;¹¹ (Aubert 69-70). Already this solitary word is excessively expansive.

Of course, many critics over the years have proposed their own readings of the possible meanings of this one infamous word. Aubert's initial and provisional solution to this inscrutable effluvia of possible signification lies in reading the entire sentence in order to determine the syntactic rôle of "riverrun." Paring away the subordinate clauses, Aubert arrives at the syntagm's verb: "brings." The verb thus partially circumscribes "riverrun" as a substantive. This delimitation can also be justified by a *downstream* examination of this sentence's archive: in the first draft there is the germ of the first fragment, albeit without the infamous substantive: "brings us to Howth Castle & Environs!" (FDV: 46; JJA 44:3; *LettersI* 247).¹² In essence Aubert has proposed a reading that begins with the syntagm's being pared down to its initial formation. Aubert has gone downstream within the syntagm's syntax to arrive at the verb, and through the archive we have réarrived at the same conclusion.

Through such a reading, *riverrun* appears in the place of a subject (Aubert 70-71). A noun is *actualized* through its articulation by a verb. However Aubert points out that the recourse to syntactic norms yields an anacoluthic sentence in that the substantive "riverrun" lacks some kind of article. The word still exceeds its circumscription by the verb. A *definite* article is available by the aposiopesis on the last page of the book: "A way a lone a last a loved a long the" (FW 628.15-6). The break—the unenjoined article—is supposedly to be read as a jointure between the first and last sententious fragments.¹³ But this fracture between fragments might not yield a simple jointure. We will return to this problem of fractured articulation in our conclusion. Aubert does claim a continuity predicated upon this circular discontinuity:

In the final analysis, the point is this: *the interplay is out of place*, that is, it does not occur between “river” and “run,” but in front of the first of these two words. In the beginning, there was play on play, and there lies the real impertinence of the text. And within this initial play the potential for articulation and nominalization alike is contained: they will spring out of the space between the two poles represented by “the” and “riverrun.” (Aubert 72)

Aubert thus demonstrates how a grammatical indetermination (of the silent pause between the first and last words) surrenders to determination. “Riverrun” is determined by neither its expansive semantic overtones nor its delimiting syntactic rôle, but rather its articulation arises from a circulation or interplay between the expansive modalities and the circumscribing contexts. Aubert has thus provided us with a paradigm for genetic criticism by insisting upon a *mobile adjudication between contested possibilities of reading* which could be opened along the axes of a text’s archive.

An individual witness can circumscribe a reading, but a cluster of witnesses necessarily tends towards an expansion of the modalities of reading. The interplay between circumscribing testimonies is expansive; and no one reads just one word in the *Wake*. Indeed, when “riverrun” was first added, it appeared as two words: “river” and “run” (JJA 44: 105). The words remain separate in the next draft level, the first typescript (JJA 44: 145), although there is an indication that the words should be joined. In the duplicate typescript Joyce indicated that this word is to be capitalized, although this orthography was not retained (JJA 44: 174). The proofs for *transition 1* contain the word as we know it today (JJA 44: 204).¹⁴

This excursion through the genetic archive testifies on behalf of the first apparent reading of “riverrun” as a subject and a verb: a reading noted by Aubert and countless others. But different archival tributaries testify to some of the other possibilities registered by Aubert. Looking for the genetic *derivation* (which means, from the Latin, to change the course of a river¹⁵) of “riverrun” seems to be not unlike searching for the origin of the Nile.¹⁶

The confluence between Aubert’s syntactic and our genetic readings is lost if we wade further down one tributary of the archival stream—back to B.15, the principle notebook for I.1—in order to locate a potential first element of the sentence. In B.15 we find “Howth Castle and Environs” (VI.B.15: 33). The apparent genetic source of ALP’s reàrriving riverrun is the destination naming HCE. This recalls John Bishop’s reading that the first paragraph “teems with forms of ‘the zeroic’ couplet HCE and ALP, which Joyce modulates in the course of the book.”¹⁷

Along another tributary, in B.9—which was composed in the first half of 1925, slightly over a year before Joyce began work on the first chapter—one finds two likely antecedents to the word “riverrun”: “riverrain” (VI.B.9: 45) and “riverend a” (VI.B.9: 148). The latter made its way into I.8 (FW 203.18); it was added to the manuscript in September 1925.¹⁸ Although B.9 was not primarily used for the composition of I.1, there are at least two entries near “riverrain” which were added into the drafts of I.1 during the same period as the insertion of “riverrun,” but into different draft stages.¹⁹ Therefore this is still not enough evidence to definitively convict riverrain into service as a direct ancestor for “riverrun.” Indeed, the bulk of the material surrounding the entry “riverrain” appears in I.8.²⁰ “Riverrain” is an indifferent witness to the *Wake*’s first word. Another likely antecedent would be “riverren” from B.12 (VI.B.12: 117), a notebook composed in the summer of 1926 and contains many preparatory notes for I.1.²¹

No one of these antecedents to “riverrun” seems to be a definitive

singular source, indeed they all serve as a plurality of witnesses. Without knowing of the corroborating B.9 evidence Aubert signals *riveraine* as one possible overtone to “riverrun.” This lexical overtone of *riveraine* connects the opening word to the washerwomen of I.8 because

the “*riveraines*” in the book are the washerwomen positioned on the banks of the river, a symmetrical pair of witnesses and commentators on events, on the flow of events. If this value remains scarcely perceptible of a first reading, by a second one this fact is known . . . This reactivation is based on the interplay between “river” and “*riveraine*,” the interplay of stable and fluid, of witness and event; there are several options: witness viewing event, *and* event viewing the witness, and so on. (Aubert 76)

Aubert thus claims that the specific interplay between “river” and “*riveraine*” is a modulation of the general interplay between expansiveness and circumscription. Returning to our genetic inquiries, we will now claim that notebook entries—in the sense that they are draft witnesses—are *riveraines*: witnesses standing on an unstable border between stability and flux or ground and water. And like the washerwomen, these textual *riveraines* are unstable and labile witnesses from swerving shores to bendings abeyed.

In conclusion, we will now return to the question concerning the articulation of “riverrun.” The final *the* articulates *riverrun* but only indefinitely; for indeed such articulation renders the end of the book *indefinite*, if only to *fin again*. Aubert does not radicalize his argument concerning the “true *genealogy of the noun*” (Aubert 72) by admitting that the interplay of the diverse effects flowing from “riverrun” are themselves pronominal. These divagations between presence and absence take the place of a name. In other words, the *Wake* is perhaps not unlike the reverend letter in that it is a “prepronominal *funferal*” (FW 120.09-10). The disarticulation performed by the word itself falls within a disarticulation of syntactic placement.

The game of enjoining article to word is not a *definite (re)articulation* of a sentence cleaved in twain at opposite ends of a book. On the one hand there is an additional interruption, a witness to the time and place of writing, found at the bottom of the last page:

PARIS,
1922-1939.

The book *Finnegans Wake* thus folds around a *witness* of the completion of the *work in progress*: its dating. This *signature* interrupts the rejoining of the first and final fragments. Indeed the date, unlike the last sentence, ends with a period.²² The date thus imposes a finality and a closure which remain unproffered by the last sentence. The possibility of the noun's articulation out of a differentiation proffered by disjoined articles is itself differentiated by a testimony to the process of writing, a testimony which is apparently rendered *terminal* by virtue of the period. The “*commodus vicus of recirculation*” cannot be neatly *folded* upon itself in a *definitely articulated* or perfectly circular act of bookish rejoining and completion because of a witness to this task of writing.

One could read a complete, unfractured sentence here, “A way a lone a last a loved a long the riverrun past Eve and Adam's . . .”; but there is the interruption of the book itself, or rather an interruption of the book's exteriority, an interruption suspended by the covers and binding of the

volume itself. The “commodius vicus of recirculation” is *pre-dicated* upon an interrupted interruption of the book's very *pre-position*: the pre-positioning of riverrun found in the last word and the pre-position of the *Wake*, its imbricated pretexts. The *commodiousness* of the Vichian recirculation remains “usylesly unreadable” (FW 179.26). “Riverrun” is thus a disjointed resumption of a perpetual fragmentary redeñunciation. The notebooks, like the *Wake* itself are expansive witnesses to the *in progress working* of this project of fragmentary redeñunciation.

Notes

1. Jack P. Dalton, “Re `Kiswahili words in *Finnegans Wake*’ by Philipp Wolff,” *A Wake Newslitter* (old series), 12 (1963): 6-10. See also Roland McHugh, *The Finnegans Wake Experience* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981) 71-72.

2. Laurent Milesi, “L’idiome babelien de *Finnegans Wake*,” *Genèse de Babel*, ed. Claude Jacquet (Paris: CNRS, 1985) 171. Our translation. Although Milesi’s argument in this essay — that a *linguistic pentecost* is endlessly deferred through the miscegenations of babelized *Wakean* language (191)—is what Schork would call “expansive,” his methodology is clearly allied to the philological rigor of a “circumscribed” reading (see below for an elaboration of Schork’s terminology).

3. See R. J. Schork, “By Jingo: Genetic Criticism of *Finnegans Wake*,” *Joyce Studies Annual* 1994, 104-27 for an account of this methodology, esp. 108-11.

4. McHugh 85-86.

5. George Tobridge, *A Life of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 2nd. ed. (London: Warne, 1912).

6. Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon, “Constructing *Finnegans Wake*: Three Indexes,” *A Wake Newslitter* (new series), 18.1 (1980): 3-15. See 8-11 for the Swedenborg references. Although dated before McHugh’s book, the article must have appeared after as McHugh’s *The Finnegans Wake Experience* is cited as a published book; apparently one must apply genetic skills to works of genetic criticism as well. In the current edition of the *Annotations*, McHugh notes some of these additional references to Swedenborg.

7. Schork 108-109.

8. Jean-Michel Rabaté, “Pour une cryptogénétiq̄ue de l’idiolecte joycien,” Jacquet 49-89, esp. 88. Our translation.

9. Indeed looking at the drafts produces a different constellation of evidence. The Swedenborg references from B.33 appear in the first draft of the II.1 passage (*JJA* 51: 93; see also *A First-Draft Version of Finnegans Wake*, ed. David Hayman [Austin: U of Texas P, 1963] 136; herewith abbreviated as *FDV*). In the letter to Weaver dated March 4, 1931 Joyce claims that the allusions to Swedenborg are for the “present fragment” (*LettersI* 302), implying that it was written at around that time. However both Hayman and Rose give a probable date for the drafting at January 1931 (*JJA* 51: 91; *FDV*: 305). If the references from B.33 are indeed those alluded to by Joyce in the letter then the draft date should be revised accordingly. Therefore the notebook entries, along with the letter, testify not just to Swedenborg’s presence in the text but also to the rough date of his inclusion.

10. Jacques Aubert, “Riverrun,” trans. Patrick O’Donovan, *Post-Structuralist Joyce*, eds. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 69-77. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

11. The allusion Aubert identifies is to Coleridge’s *Kubla Kahn*: “Where Alph, the sacred river, ran” (Aubert 76).

12. The word “back” was added in the second draft (*JJA* 44: 45), one draft level prior to the initial appearance of “riverrun.”

13. Joyce announced the fracture between first and last sentences to Weaver in November 1926 (*LettersI* 246) when he was drafting the first chapter. He did not write the final syntagm until 1938, shortly after he had finished the final revisions for I.1. The first draft of the last syntagm differs from the final version: “A bit beside the bush and then a walk along the” (*FDV*: 285; *JJA* 63: 210). The *the* is there, but in a different sentence. The final sentences were first added in the holograph corrections to the first typescript later that year (*JJA* 63: 231).

14. These are dated by the printer February 1, 1927. Interestingly in this draft stage, Joyce also added the indefinite article to the title "Opening Pages of [A] Work in Progress." The subordinate clauses "commodious vicus of recirculation" and "past Eve and Adam's" were both added much later, in 1936 (JJA 44: 253).

15. This philological confluence is pilfered from Laurent Milesi, "Metaphors of the Quest in *Finnegans Wake*," *European Joyce Studies* 2 (1990): 79.

16. We draw the reader's attention to Milesi's study concerning the investigation of genesis: "Detailed genetic analysis, of the 'Letter' motif for instance, has helped to show indirectly how the creation of *Work in Progress* shows a marked tendency to combine paradigmatic selection with syntagmatic combination, thus reshuffling and blurring conceptual demarcations. Similarly, in the narrative, each metaphoric derivation of the quest is in turn a *symbolic* (synecdochic or metonymic) thread of it and the reader-questor going upriver, if he hopes to gain access to the essence of Metaphor and Quest in *Wake* an creation, must trace back every single one of these derivations *and* reconcile them all in order to approach the horizon of the book's production and consumption, when the Metaphor of the Quest cyclically becomes the Metaphor of his endless Quest for the Metaphor in language" (Milesi, "Metaphors" 103-104).

17. John Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1986) 367.

18. It was added to the page proofs for *Le Navire d'argent* (JJA 48: 164). The context "the riverend name" of Michael Arlow, a gentleman associated with ALP, seems to bely the notebook association of ALP riverend.

19. These are "rill" (VI.B.9: 50) which appears in the first draft of the second half of the chapter (JJA 44: 99; FW 023.17); and "wurrum," an addition to the same draft stage (JJA 44: 85; FW 019.12). This draft stage was also late November 1926. In a letter to Weaver (May 13, 1927), annotating a brief passage from I.1, Joyce explicitly associated rill with a (SL 321), thereby corroborating a conceptual association between the I.1 entries in B.9 and ALP.

20. These include a diagram of a river detour (VI.B.9: 53) and a diagram of a river branching off into tributaries adjacent to the ALP sigla a (VI.B.9: 57).

21. VIB 12 contains extensive material for I.1, but only as random notes scattered throughout. A small majority relates to the Pranquean episode (VIB 12: 128, 130, 140); there is a reference in anticipation of the "100 lettered name" (VIB 12: 140). The density of references to Belgium towards the end of this notebook (VIB 12: 163-65, 181, 184) suggest that it immediately preceded VIB 15. This agrees with David Hayman's dating of this notebook at mid 1926 (JJA 31: xvii). We are grateful to both David Hayman and Geert Lernout for their transcriptions and annotations to VIB 12.

22. Indeed one could even examine the archive of this date, the archive of dating the work in progress. Not surprisingly the first draft of the end of book 4 had the terminal date as 1938 (FDV: 285; JJA 63: 210). Also in the early drafts the inscription of place and date was all on one line which immediately followed the end of the text. In the corrections to the galley proofs, dated by the printer November 29, 1938, Joyce put the inscription on two lines, indicated that it should be placed lower upon the page and changed the terminal date to 1939. He also indicated parenthetically that this inscription should be set "small" (JJA 63: 329). It is also interesting that every time Joyce wrote this out by hand he did not add a period, yet at every stage in which it was typed or printed a period was added and uncorrected by Joyce.