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CHAPTER I

*Introduction: language(s) with a difference**Laurent Milesi*

There is a delicate empiricism which so intimately involves itself with the object that it becomes true theory.

(Goethe)

JOYCE'S LINGUISTIC POETICS/POLITICS

Joyce's attempts to harness the effects of language and, increasingly with time, languages, may arguably be selected as the feature of his writing which mostly conditioned its technical transformations. Indeed, it is hard for a newcomer to the ever-expanding world of Joyce studies to miss the several time-worn pronouncements made by Joyce himself or, vicariously, by friends and fictional alter egos about his felt need to transcend the barriers of expressiveness set by the systems of existing languages.¹ Though such neat polemical slogans have too often been taken as programmatic, to the detriment of the elements of chance and fluidity that Joyce was increasingly willing to admit into the mechanics of literary composition, there is no denying that Joyce's *oeuvre* is best seen as constantly trying to inform an evolutive linguistic poetics – one which, I wish to contend, conditions, and therefore should remain central to, whatever interpretive avenue we choose to explore.

(R)evolutions

Although Joyce seemed to embark with each new work on a radically different experiment in literary language, it is more helpful to see the whole Joycean output as a discrete continuum in which apparently new departures in fact redeployed earlier narrative-linguistic habits in a different guise. Just as the structure of Joyce's various literary productions is more or less explicitly circular,² the 'technical' evolutions that they each enacted within an ongoing creative process must equally be seen as *revolutions*, in the

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

etymological sense of coming round full circle – and not merely as an acclaim *à la Jolas* of Joyce's linguistic breakthroughs. To give a succinct, yet convenient, illustration: the early selective epiphanic treatment of linguistic material and plot, which had presided over the composition of *Dubliners* and the reworking of the verbose *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait*, was extended to the beginnings of *Ulysses*, still haunted by the joint classical principles of economy and intensity. Yet, as Joyce's 'stylistic odyssey' wrote more of itself, the discarded plenitude slowly found its way back, metamorphosed as the all-inclusive technique of composition that would likewise prevail in *Finnegans Wake*, where accretions, prompted by earlier lexical cues, dilate a narrative sequence to the extreme and shape dense thematic networks through narrative and linguistic recyclings. One may even still register something of the former epiphany in the multi-layered portmanteau word or syntactico-rhythmic modulations of the *Wake's* nonce-idiom, and what was once inconspicuous lexical sophistication 'simply' gave way to the more extroverted verbal eccentricities of 'Wakese', with the discreetly apophantic turning into the more overtly performative.³

Similarly, Joyce's 'Blue Book of Eccles' (*FW* 179.27) turned, past its half-way mark, from a sequel to *A Portrait* mixing stream of consciousness with third-person narration, into an increasingly self-reflexive work in which the narrative technique ascribed to each chapter is foregrounded as subject through linguistic, metadiscursive strategies. In *A Portrait*, the narrator's language, which gradually becomes more articulate and analytic as Stephen's intellect and capacities for abstraction develop, still serves as a focal point for the reader's access to the hero's maturation at choice moments. With *Ulysses*, however, Joyce felt the need to supplant the homely 'initial style', with its relatively (if deceptively) more conventional narrative agencies and unobtrusive stylistic devices, by a versatile style so as to render the protagonist's circuitous wanderings away from home in a single day poised between myth and realism (see *SL* 242: letter dated 6 August 1919). This in turn caused Joyce to recast and amplify most of the earlier episodes towards the end of his own Ulyssean peregrinations through forms and styles, as fiction writing shifted into a more metafictional gear, exploring new expressive forms for their own sake. Matching the Bloomian yearnings for Ithaca, the dialectic of such a (re)composition is best seen in the *Nostos* episodes, corresponding to the *Telemachia* in narrative modes but filtered through 'decharacterized' language and climaxing with the 'pure' enunciation of Molly Bloom's infinitely revolving thoughts. This evolution is thus inseparable from an increasing dissolution or, at least, problematization of neat entities like character and voice, as well as the boundaries between them, and, consequently, from the emergence of more polyphonic voices

Cambridge University Press

0521623375 - James Joyce and the Difference of Language

Edited by Laurent Milesi

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: language(s) with a difference*

3

which, in the ‘pollylogue’ (FW 470.9) or ‘drama parapolylogic’ (FW 474.5) of *Finnegans Wake*, will ultimately combine with shifting enunciative poles and a pliable linguistic medium to create erring discursive effects ascribable to a ‘side’ or ‘role’ in a many-faceted ‘character complex’.⁴

If the growing tendency in *Ulysses* was to parody and perform operations on itself, or to satirize previous stylistic poses in some of its sections as the novel’s composition progressed, the most encompassing gesture of this kind was to come with Joyce’s ultimate creation. It has been repeatedly pointed out, on the basis of the headings in the *Scribbledehobble* or VI. A notebook matching chapter divisions in Joyce’s previous works, that the *Wake*’s first design possibly included a thorough parodic reworking of the major stylistic attitudes struck so far, although more recent studies have challenged this canonical view of what Connolly’s early transcription subtitled *The Ur-Workbook for ‘Finnegans Wake’* by questioning its chronological priority.⁵ With no first-step narrative guideline such as the *Odyssey* to follow, and thus no definite idea of what structure and thematic principles should frame his new project, Joyce picked from rough lexical jottings and embryonic story elements compiled in the now familiar notebooks, often exploring anew old concerns from various narrative approaches, and composed disconnected sketches, later to become the work’s anchoring points, scattered evenly throughout the book in order to ensure its cohesiveness. Whereas the Homeric wanderings of Joyce’s Ulyssean heroes had made possible a fairly sequential mode of writing, the architectural problems that necessarily arose from the elaboration of random episodes entailed a less linear approach to composition and may have played a part in suggesting a cyclical structure for the new work as well as a novel linguistic system capable of informing it.⁶ In its panoramic one-day trip taken through discourses, idioms, techniques and styles available in the history of English language and literature up to the early 1920s, *Ulysses* had already featured a dozen foreign languages, mainly used to enhance motifs or for purposes of characterization. As a deepening continuation of the closing nocturnal mood of *Ulysses*, the linguistic babel of *Finnegans Wake* will extend the diachronic dissection of literary Englishes performed in ‘Oxen of the Sun’ to the much broader spectrum of seventy-plus of the world’s idioms.

The linguistic politics of Hiberno-English

Don’t talk to me about politics. I’m only interested in style.⁷

Yet Joyce’s desire to fashion a language that would transcend all languages, beyond the reach of tradition and subduing all linguistic and historic

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[More information](#)

nationalisms and ideologies, cannot simply be seen as a purely aesthetic gesture proffered from the top of a lofty ivory tower by an elitist modernist 'self exiled in upon his ego' (*FW* 184.6–7). The cross between a highly particularized literary idiolect and polyglottal strands could only modulate into a politicized pluridialectal 'idioglossary' (*FW* 423.9) with a universalist, translanguistic as well as transcultural, slant – ultimately receiving the form of a xenolalic Dublin family microcosm in *Finnegans Wake*. The Irish capital as the particular city from which the essential universal could be extracted *a posteriori* provided the literal anchoring for the peculiar Joycean blend of 'nationalism' (if the linguistic politics of his Irishness can still be so called) and supposedly more typical modernist *cosmo-polit-anism* in his 'IMAGINABLE ITINERARY THROUGH THE PARTICULAR UNIVERSAL' (*FW* 260.R3).⁸ The fictional 'programme' of narrating the nation as a 'nonation' (*FW* 36.22), of reconstructing 'Irishness' down to its regional, local inflections⁹ within a literary practice redefining Realism, should be clearly set against a 'merely' parochial patriotism reared on the myth of an originary nativeness and cultural supremacy to be restored. Indeed it is Joyce's 'regional internationalism' – manifest in his interest in dialects or obscure idiosyncratic cants as much as forgotten or still dominant national languages – which enabled his imagined recreations of the detailed lineaments of a distanced nation to be shaped by a healthy spirit of localism, rather than lapsing into provincialism. Already in *A Portrait*, Stephen's *non serviam* was aimed at the nation's inability to extricate itself from reproducing the complicitous logic and structure of religious (or mythological), political oppression, and replacing external colonization by the internal tyranny of an artificial 'Celtic revival'. As Joyce himself put it to Arthur Power in 1921, in a typical aphoristic outburst indicative of his customary sense of literary grandeur but which could also summarize his own trajectory: '[The great writers] were national first [...] and it was the intensity of their own nationalism which made them international in the end [...]. For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal' (quoted in *JF* 505).

The crucial moments in Joyce's search for a transnational literary language, at once prising open the complicity between the national and the natural and countering it through defamiliarization and babelization, have long been well documented, but some may be worth recapitulating here for the sake of our argument. Quite early in his novelistic career, Joyce the *poète manqué* opened up the language of narrative to the poetic effects of the foreignization or 'alienation' of English, from the latent lexical

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0521623375 - James Joyce and the Difference of Language

Edited by Laurent Milesi

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: language(s) with a difference*

5

defamiliarization in *Dubliners*, growing to an overt questioning of the 'so familiar and so foreign' tongue of tradition and subjection in the famous 'tundish' scene with the Dean of Studies in *A Portrait* (*P* 188–9), to a systematic attempt at depleting styles, idioms and idiolects, which will culminate in the carnival of linguistic vivisection and mimesis pitted against the foetus' growth in 'Oxen of the Sun'.

The opening story of *Dubliners* has been said to diffuse its trinity of 'paralysis', 'gnomon' and 'simony', with their diverse degrees of uncanny foreignness consensually noted by critics, to the structure of the whole collection, and its symptomatic attention to the sonority of the signifier can be traced down to such barely noticeable elements as the boy-narrator's fascination with the arcane terms of distillery, 'faints and worms' (*D* 10; see Tadié's essay). Throughout *Dubliners*, seen as an ordered collection of short stories, Joyce's 'poetic' writing channels the 'remainder'¹⁰ of/within language and foregrounds linguistic material at once on an individual, anagoristic level – even in the soft irony of the detached narrator's etymological pun on 'generous' and 'general' as a possible undercut of the tragic moment of Gabriel's self-epiphany towards the end of 'The Dead' – or as a ritualistic stage in a curbing process of socialization. All the more subversive since it wreaks its effects more subtly than in the later verbal eccentricities of *Ulysses* and the 'nat language' (night+not language) of *Finnegans Wake*, the ephemeral (etymological, phonetic, etc.) pun or linguistic slippage provides the aesthetic counterforce to this symbolic process of individual and collective formation or repression, whether in the dramatized, deflationary confusion of the diseased rheumatic with a desanctified pneumatic in 'The Sisters', the uncontrolled venal undertones of the preacher in 'Grace', or the cork's monosyllabic debunking in 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room'. Similarly, the famous *incipit* of *A Portrait*, with its resistant infantile *babble* and heightening of the sensuality of language as acoustic material, further analysed by Attridge and Docherty here, or the subversive dominance of presemantic sounds ('slop'; 'pick, pack, pock, puck' (*P* 41): earlier avatars of similar rhythmic tags in *Finnegans Wake*), are distant predecessors of the more complex *babel* of voices and tongues from which the 'purer' strains of a more demotic parlance can be extracted in the *Wake*.

This joint poeticization and foreignization of normative English cannot be seen outside a 'political' awareness of the coerciveness of the 'native' tongue, and exposing its own repressed foreign dimension through etymological recalls or syntactical manipulations conveying the idiosyncratic rhythms of *Dubliners*' speech was Joyce's way of devising a middle course of literary action between the imposed rigours of an English tradition and the

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0521623375 - James Joyce and the Difference of Language

Edited by Laurent Milesi

Excerpt

[More information](#)

artificially revived nationalist orthodoxies of Irish Gaelic (cf. *Letters II* 187). As Joyce's texts incorporated a growing number of foreign tongues or emphasized the quaintly alien nature of defamiliarized English *within* English itself and not only through the miscegenation with foreign idioms, a synthetic idiom, questioning the analogy between the national and the natural, emerged whose only 'model' could be the linguistic compromise or 'middle voice' of Hiberno-English as well as various forms of creolization of English (see below): linguistic decolonization could be satisfactorily achieved only through hybridity.¹¹

Thus, by *Finnegans Wake*, 'purity' has paradoxically become a matter of *mediation*, with its political, ethical and even critical extensions. Joyce's implementation of a linguistic desire to exile the (familiar) language both from within and without and turn the familiar 'in-law' of language into a barbaric 'outlex' (*FW* 169.3), ultimately paved the way for a middle ground between aesthetics and ethics, poetics and politics. Far from the earlier conception of an idealized aestheticism *à la* Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's mature literary idiom took on a more fully rounded Bloomian generosity and acceptance, a more enlightened, anti-Cyclopean 'half and half' (*U* 12.1052–5), gradually reconciling itself with the joint poetics and politics of the vernacular in order to become a 'universalised Hiberno-English' in *Finnegans Wake*.¹²

The 'critical literary' in Joyce

Joyce's exposition of the limitations of literary-critical beliefs in organicity (the analogy between biological (Darwinian) and linguistic evolution), character, representation and mimesis, context and *exemplarity* (see Elam's essay) in several chapters of *Ulysses* and throughout *Finnegans Wake* should be viewed alongside his all-round linguistic relativism and undermining of theories by subversive literary counterpractices. Although he was firmly entrenched in historical linguistics and, from his student days, 'read Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary* by the hour' like his fictional counterpart (*SH* 26), the way he ransacked and ironically thematized a whole array of linguistic theories¹³ or his more conservative readings,¹⁴ as much as his more structurally important 'trellis' like Vico and Jousse, shows an awareness of the theoretical naivety of unqualified adherence to explanatory, analogical systems, historical etymologism as a foundation of linguistic truth, classifications into families, and the lure of taxonomies.¹⁵

Perhaps the common denominator under most of Joyce's tropic turns of creativity is a desire for 'signifying practices' that would lay bare the

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0521623375 - James Joyce and the Difference of Language

Edited by Laurent Milesi

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: language(s) with a difference*

7

weaknesses of linguistic categorizations for a truly innovative literary praxis, overreach Modernism's critique of the representational inadequacies of 'Realism' in order to venture into new stylistic territories – from the faithfulness of a rigorous mimeticism/mimesis to the antics of mimicry (e.g. Bloom's worn hat ironically masquerading as a 'high grade ha'; *U passim*) – and would ultimately lead to growing incomprehension from fellow modernists and former admirers like Pound. Rather than grope for the style(s) that would best capture a mood and be attuned to a theme in a restricted context, Joyce's fluid literary language allowed itself to become more and more freely magnetized by the subject matter, both at micro and macro levels (cf. e.g. the floral environment and tea motif surrounding Leopold Bloom as Henry Flower in 'Lotus Eaters'; the ubiquity of river names in the fluvial atmosphere of the 'Anna Livia' episode, etc.), and to operate in between literary practices and languages' taxonomic territories. It is arguably the cultivation of such a critical mood within an increasingly 'porous' literary idiolect that urged the necessity of a shift (back) to the aesthetics of expansion mentioned above – and eventually took Joyce beyond the modernist project of challenging the realist novel's traditional assumptions about/claim to verisimilitude and faithfulness through the 'scrupulous meanness' of the carefully crafted Dublin microcosm which his realist critics later froze into a kind of literary hyperrealism *avant la lettre*.

One major form that the critical within Joyce's literary experiments took was the exploitation, to the point of explosion, of a given 'programme' in order to probe the limits of its viability as a literary technique or as an interpretive framework. For instance, Joyce's deft parodic treatment of the catalogue, distended until its purposeful exemplariness collapses under the strain of overblown nominalization ('Cyclops', the titles of the 'mamafesta' in *FW* I.5, etc.), explores the breaking point past which a digressive technique engulfs the mainstream body of the text, and normative patterns of readerly recognizability and expectations cease to operate critically.¹⁶ Or else, still in *Finnegans Wake*, the implicit boundaries of any critical hermeneutics are questioned within the larger economy and signifying practices of the Wakean portmanteau idiom. In particular, the possibility of arresting the number of languages used in the 'final' text, from manuscript (notebook) evidence as well as a reconstruction of intentions from several conflicting echoes scattered throughout the *Wake*, must be set in a constant 'dialectical' tension with the work's irrepressible drive to exceed any such assignable bounds, its programmatic tendency towards encyclopaedic all-inclusiveness, and the untameable slipperiness of

Cambridge University Press

0521623375 - James Joyce and the Difference of Language

Edited by Laurent Milesi

Excerpt

[More information](#)

its portmanteau idiom. More generally, it is our literary-critical preconceptions of acceptable stylistic, syntactical, lexical norms, as well as our critical choices – and their underlying cultural ideologies – that Joyce's out-and-out war on (literary) language and the strictures of its academic interpretations came to attack frontally, forcing us to ceaselessly discard 'institutionalized' theses and instead fashion a critically inventive *démarche* and idiom.

JOYCE'S CRITICAL IDIOMS AND THE CRITICS' JOYCEAN IDIOMS

Joyce's foresights: his critics' afterthoughts

One of the most original, 'self-reflexive' traits in Joyce's last novel is its ability to pre-empt – or, as Derrida aptly argued of Joyce more generally, hypermnestically pre-program¹⁷ – the interested speculativeness of our various interpretive biases and the ideologies that underpin them. In particular, *Finnegans Wake*, and more specifically its metafictional 'mamafesta' chapter (*FW* I.5), tantalizingly offers a foretaste of some of its future critical receptions and commentaries from historical (Marxist), psychoanalytic (Freudian/Jungian), philosophical-aesthetic and textual-bibliographical (or, now, genetic) perspectives, dispatching any one argument and its contraries under the fictionalized law of *coincidentia oppositorum* and satirizing their respective critical jargons and biases in choice prismatic distortions. (Particularly emblematic of the critical desire of Joyce's postulated 'ideal readers' is the 'Brotfressor's' compulsion to recuperate the four pricks inflicted by his fork on the precious manuscript at his breakfast table, which compromise the integrity of the letter to be analysed as they tamper with an originally unique signature; *FW* 123.29ff.)

In that respect, it is tempting to chart the evolutions of critical attitudes and adjustments to Joyce's linguistic/literary innovativeness as so many uncanny afterthoughts elaborating his own 'historical' itinerary recalled above. Such a course would go from a more traditional conception of fiction and literature, literary language (e.g. the role of punning and the hybridization of 'English'), and literary criticism (whose staunch, 'authorized' exponents were Gilbert and Budgen), to more recent views of literary language as a mixed medium of self-ironic, self-reflexive and self-critical *expressiveness*; from, for example, the confident conception of a presencing mimesis to the relativistic distrust of it as distant mimicry and ironic performance at the service of 'style'.¹⁸ Thus generations of Joyce scholars and readers have gradually shifted from an earlier focus on the mimetic powers and programme

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0521623375 - James Joyce and the Difference of Language

Edited by Laurent Milesi

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: language(s) with a difference*

9

off/in Joyce's fictional language – as supposedly embedded in the writer's several (sometimes conflicting) schemata – to an awareness of the assumptions underlying such a naive belief in language's illusory mimetic and organic ability, including the ability to be the spearhead of fictional experimentation. At stake here is the latter-day realization that, within the inbuilt critical dimension of Joyce's texts, representation 'itself' – a felicitous word which can be made to acquire aesthetic as well as political overtones – comes under scrutiny and is exposed, beyond its canonizable techniques and resources, to a reflexion on representability and representativity alike. Product (*signification*, *oeuvre*) therefore has given way to production or process (*signifiante*, 'text' or *écriture*) – including in the sense of the fascination of Joyce's 'embodied' language for the materiality of bodily productions; the mirror traditionally held up to nature has revealed the tain that enables its (self-)reflexions. Joyce's own itinerary would have thus uncannily anticipated the overall drift of (Joycean) literary criticism towards (self-reflexivity and productivity in) 'theory', and revealed the essentially historical constitution of our joint processes of reading and writing.

More fundamentally perhaps, another similarly metacritical retrospective could assess, in an equally, uncannily mimetic measure, the impact of the increasing problematization of self-reflexiveness in Joyce's compositional techniques and 'finished' works on writers and thinkers alike influenced by the 'critical' opening up within his literary idiom: for example, the self-conscious rewriting of *Stephen Hero*, the self-recyclings of Ulyssean prose in the novel's 'second half', the *Scribbledehobble* Notebook and the *Ur*-project of reworking earlier texts as well as their critical receptions for *Finnegans Wake*. Especially (though not exclusively) in the formative phases of their critical or creative careers, Derrida, Kristeva, Cixous and, belatedly, Lacan (to name but these) have turned their attention to the teasing complexities of Joyce's prose and have built on the subversive, self-conscious resourcefulness of the pliable Joycean text to elaborate new invigorating modes of discourse. To start with one inevitable example: the radical ambiguity and polyvalence of the liberating pun deployed in a versatile syntax dramatizes the 'pre-critical' moment of the interpretive choice in ways that have empowered Cixous's early feminist writings (mainly via *Finnegans Wake*), Lacan's own 'theoretical style' reflecting (on) *jouissance*, and strategies in Derrida's deconstructive practices.¹⁹ Or else, Joyce's constant probings into the mechanics of authority and ideology (national, domestic, etc.) and especially the fiction of paternity could be construed as having empowered his subsequent readers to read against the tradition of literary filiation,

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[More information](#)

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LAURENT MILESI

including that within the Joycean corpus (from later to earlier text, from Joyce back to the Homeric source, etc.), patriarchy (feminism), political oppression (postcolonialism), etc. What the multi-faceted resilience of Joyce's fabrications has made possible – and why his novels have long been a privileged testing ground for new theoretical agendas and thus themselves stood the test of time – is his readers' (self-)empowerment through the very medium and fabric of his works, beyond the mere academic mapping of different theoretical grids onto his fiction. Joyce's linguistic dramatization of issues impacts the reader's own (pre)conceptions of them in ceaselessly renewed, dynamic fashion, forcing him/her each time to renegotiate how Joyce's idiom operates but also what the aesthetic and ethical implications of their critical positions are: what has best been described by two of the contributors to the present volume as 'Joyce the Verb' (Senn) and 'Joyce Effects' (Attridge; see Works Cited).

Thus there arises for us readers, poised half-way between Joyce's narrative foresights and our critical afterthoughts,²⁰ between production and consumption (cf. *FW* 497.1–2), the necessity to set up a dialogue or 'translation' between Joyce's writing and our reading practices, a 'middle voice' plying between Joyce's 'critical idiom' and our own Joyceanized idioms – of the kind that would prolong Senn's established practice of reading-as-translation (which does not merely elucidate the 'original' through a recourse to the lapses in existing translations).²¹ In such a strategic middle course of action, the limited gains from the showcasing of Joyce's texts for the stereotyped application or sounding out of the latest theories, soon to become new-fangled critical orthodoxies, would be profitably offset by the rewards from paying heed to the specifically Joycean *exempla*, which not only 'oblige' us to devise methodological tools from the Irish writer's own verbal arsenal (rather than the stock-in-trade of academic '-isms') but also empower us to do just that to creative and critical ends for theory 'itself', in ways that overreach the usual osmotic moulding of one's critical language on the chosen writer. Only on these conditions can literature bounce back on/against 'theory' – as is evidenced here by Garnier's and Slote's performative redeployments of (respectively) Deleuzian and, to a smaller extent, Derridean verbal strategies shot through with Joyceanisms – and can one be, critically as much as creatively, *in memory of* James Joyce.²²

In Joyce's wake: critical idioms beyond themselves

It is not surprising, in the light of Joyce's constant ironic tilt at the metalinguistic and metafictional dimension of writing, that his texts have fostered