

New Quotatoes
Joycean Exogenesis in the Digital Age

Edited by
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ABBREVIATIONS

References in the text to works by or about James Joyce employ the following abbreviations:

- D* *Dubliners*, Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism, ed. Margot Norris, text ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Walter Hettche (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, [1914] 2006). References give story and line number.
- FW* *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber; New York: Viking Press, 1939). References give page and line number.
- GJ* *Giacomo Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1968)
- JJA* *The James Joyce Archive*, ed. Michael Groden et al. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977-1979). References give volume and page number.
- JJI* Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, New and rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, [1959] 1982)
- Letters I, II, III* *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. I, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking Press, 1957; reissued with corrections 1966); vols. II and III, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1966)
- Library* Michael Patrick Gillespie with Erik Bradford Stocker, *James Joyce's Trieste Library: A Catalogue of Materials at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin* (Austin: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 1986)
- Notes and Drafts* *Joyce's Notes and Early Drafts for "Ulysses": Selections from the Buffalo Collection*, ed. Phillip F. Herring (Charlottesville: Published for the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia by the University of Virginia, 1977)
- NS* *Joyce's "Ulysses" Notesheets in the British Museum*, ed. Phillip F. Herring (Charlottesville: Published for the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia by the University Press of Virginia 1972). References to individual notesheet entries give Herring's sheet and line numbers. In a departure from Herring's notation, the colour of Joyce's crayon cancellations is indicated by superscript italics: *blue*, *green*, and *red*.
- OCPW* *James Joyce: Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- P* *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Authoritative Text,

Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism, ed. John Paul Riquelme, text ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Walter Hettche (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, [1916] 2007). References give chapter and line number.

SH *Stephen Hero*, ed. from the MS. in the Harvard College Library by Theodore Spencer. A new ed., incorporating the additional MS. pages in the Yale University Library and the Cornell University Library, edited by John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, [1944] 1963)

SL *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1975)

U *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, et al. (New York; London: Garland Publishing, [1922] 1984, 1986). References give episode and line number.

JOYCE AND THE RHYTHMS OF THE ALPHABET

SCARLETT BARON

“Has Clodd’s *Story of the Alphabet* come?” asked Joyce in a letter sent to Sylvia Beach in September 1926.¹ Although it never found a place in the catalogues of Joyce’s libraries, Edward Clodd’s history of the alphabet left numerous traces in three of the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks, as Vincent Deane and Danis Rose first revealed in a series of articles published in *A Finnegans Wake Circular* in the late 1980s.² In VI.B.15, VI.B.35, and VI.B.49b, Joyce entered 133 jottings excerpted from pp. 16 to 227 of Clodd’s book. Many of these remained unused – as is indicated by the fact that many of Joyce’s scribbles remain uncrossed – but Joyce’s notes nonetheless betray a fairly sustained and broadly linear encounter with its contents.³

The Story of the Alphabet was first published in 1900 in George Newnes’s “Library of Useful Stories”, which *The Spectator*, quoted on an advertising flyleaf at the back of the book, described as “A very useful series of small manuals on subjects of common interest”.⁴ An evolutionary anthropologist, Clodd had already authored such titles as *The Story of Primitive Man*, *Pioneers of Evolution*, and *The Story of Creation*. *The Story of the Alphabet* chronicles the stages of “the triumph of the human mind over one of the most difficult tasks to which it could apply itself”, revealing the “laws of development” by which the letters of the alphabet came into existence and into common usage.⁵ The Introduction – or “Introductory” as it is called on the page – begins with a thought-provoking sally:

‘What is ever seen is never seen’, and it may be questioned if one in ten thousand of the readers of to-day ever pauses to ask what is the history of the conventional signs called the ALPHABET, which, in their varying changes of position, make up the symbols of the hundred thousand words and more contained in a comprehensive dictionary of the English tongue.⁶

This opening, with its emphasis on the arbitrariness and conventionality of the signs that constitute our alphabet, on its paradoxical invisibility in ordinary experiences of

1. Joyce to Sylvia Beach, 2 September 1926, in *James Joyce’s Letters to Sylvia Beach 1921-1940*, ed. Melissa Banta and Oscar A. Silvermann (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70.

2. Edward Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet* (London: George Newnes, 1900). Vincent Deane, “Claybook for *Finnegans Wake*”, *A Finnegans Wake Circular*, 3.2 (Winter 1987): 21-39; Danis Rose, “Clodd One and Two: Corrigenda and Agenda”, *A Finnegans Wake Circular*, 3.3 (Spring 1988): 53-56; Rose and Deane, “Clodd in VI.B.49.b”, *A Finnegans Wake Circular*, 3.3 (Spring 1988): 57-60.

3. According to Deane, the jottings “help us clarify some tantalizing passages in the finished text of the *Wake*, the most striking being *FW* 411.06-11, which derives via VI.B.15.149 from the decipherment of a pictogram [...] describing a sea-lion hunt [...] As might have been anticipated, most of the material from Clodd was used in the composition of the first draft of the passage beginning on 018.16, which was composed in November 1926, soon after the notes were taken.” Deane, “Claybook”, 21.

4. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, endpapers.

5. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 12.

6. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 9.

reading, and on the “varying changes of position” by which all words are produced, strikes to the core of Joyce’s handling of the alphabetical sequence. Joyce’s works evince a fascination with the interplay between alphabetic seriation and alphabetic permutation, revelling in the productive divisibility of words into their constituent parts. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce’s emancipation of the letter, partly inflected by his reading of Clodd, reaches its apogee. But this essay will show that his attention to the alphabetical series and the symbolic potential of its individual units goes back to the very beginning of his writing career, and that, from the outset, he works to derail the automatism which in the act of reading irresistibly agglutinates letters into words, and words into lines, sentences, and paragraphs.

Letters and their Rhythms

The first signs of Joyce’s interest in individual letters are to be found in *Stephen Hero*, in which we read of the “fiery-hearted” (SH80) protagonist that

He sought in his verses to fix the most elusive of his moods and he put his lines together not word by word but letter by letter. He read Blake and Rimbaud on the values of letters and even permuted and combined the five vowels to construct cries for primitive emotions. (SH32)

Stephen synthesizes inchoate cries from a subset of letters, the vowels: AEIOU. Stephen’s efforts are at least partly ridiculous: exclamations such as ‘aou’, ‘aïe’, and ‘ouia’, are hardly original finds. Yet the process – which involves amalgamating individual letters to derive certain sounds rather than transliterating sounds into symbols – is at least unusual, and the literary precedents in whose name Stephen carries out his experiments are august.

Blake on the Values of Letters

The allusion to William Blake is a reference to *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804-1820), the vast national epic Blake wrote as a “monumental equivalent” to Milton’s *History of England*.⁷ In his defence of “the verse” of *Paradise Lost*, Milton explains that

The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin; rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter.

“[T]o all judicious ears”, he continues, rhyme is

trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse to another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory.

Finally, Milton invests his poetic departure with revolutionary ideological significance:

7. Alice Ostriker in William Blake, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 993.

This neglect then of rhyme is so little to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it is rather to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming.⁸

Blake's address "To the Public" at the beginning of *Jerusalem* closely echoes and responds to Milton's declaration. His concern is to assert that his choice of metrical form is everywhere prescribed by the need for appropriate rhythm:

When this Verse was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming; to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself.⁹

In the passage to which Joyce alludes in *Stephen Hero*, Blake asserts that he will go further than Milton, claiming that

I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts – the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other.¹⁰

The closeness of Blake's rewriting of Milton and his emphasis on his own, even more radical, break away from the inherited bondage of conventional rhyme, is arresting. What is also striking, in the light of Joyce's allusion in *Stephen Hero*, is the poet's insistence on the importance of the rhythm of individual letters (a consideration which to Blake, as an engraver of his own poems, was as visual as it was aural) and on the relation between these smallest constituent units of the art of writing and his vast national epic.¹¹

Joyce, like the young Stephen Daedalus, took Blake seriously, especially in the years in which *Stephen Hero* was taking shape. Stanislaus Joyce remembers Blake being one of his brother's "gods", and that "It was Yeats's edition of Blake's poems that directed my brother's attention to him".¹² Joyce's friend Constantine Curran corroborates these memories, stating that "As a seventeen-year-old student, his interest

8. John Milton, "The Verse", "Paradise Lost", in *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 119.

9. Blake, "To the Public", 637.

10. Blake, *The Complete Poems*, 637.

11. As is clear from his Trieste lecture on Blake, Joyce was fascinated by what Susan J. Wolfson terms "his tradition-defying extravagance with poetic and pictorial forms, his adamant opposition to all forms of enchaining, especially as a constraint on genius". Susan J. Wolfson, "Blake's Language in Poetic Form", in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 63 and 65.

12. Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1958), 122. Stanislaus also observed that "[h]is gods were Blake and Dante". Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, 122.

lay in Yeats and Blake and the French Symbolists".¹³ The least mediated indication of Joyce's admiration for Blake is to be found in "Realism and Idealism in English Literature", the fragmentary manuscript of a lecture he gave about the poet at the Università Popolare in Trieste in March 1912. The text expresses Joyce's admiration for "Blake's strange literary language" as that of "a great genius" and "a fearless and immortal spirit" (*OCPW* 175, 179). It lauds "the visionary anarchic heresiarch" for his "goodness of heart" and "spiritual rebellion against the powerful of this world" (*OCPW* 176). In Blake, "the ecstasy of the seer" was twinned with powerful thought: as an artist, avers Joyce, "he holds [...] a unique position because he unites intellectual sharpness with mystic sentiment" (*OCPW* 178, 180).¹⁴

Rimbaud on the Values of Letters

The allusion in *Stephen Hero* to Rimbaud – often considered in the same breath as Blake for his commitment to visionary poetry and his association with symbolism – refers to one of the poet's best-known works, a sonnet of 1871 or 1872 simply entitled "Voyelles" ("Vowels"),¹⁵ which survives in both Rimbaud's hand and Verlaine's.¹⁶ The poem ascribes all sorts of metaphorical values to individual vowels: chromatic in the first line, phonetic, olfactory, and symbolic in subsequent lines. It opens with five binary pairs:

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu: voyelles,

The poem develops the synaesthetic-mystical theory of "universal analogy" influentially encapsulated in "Correspondances", Baudelaire's equally famous sonnet of 1857 – a

13. Constantine Curran, *James Joyce Remembered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 9.

14. Kevin Barry's notes to the lecture (*OCPW* 332-34) indicate Joyce's close reliance on Edwin Ellis, *The Real Blake* (1907). As Robert N. Essick's synopsis suggests, *Finnegans Wake* shares many of *Jerusalem's* salient features at the level of, for instance, characterization, the depiction of selfhood, the treatment of time and space, intertextuality, the theme of the fall. Robert N. Essick, "Jerusalem and Blake's Final Works", in *Cambridge Companion to Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 251-71.

15. Rimbaud, "Voyelles", in *Oeuvres Complètes*, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade", ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 53. Very little research has been carried out into Joyce's reading of Rimbaud. The connections suggested by John S. Rickard, for example – "Stephen Dedalus and 'Les Chercheuses de Poux'", *James Joyce Quarterly* 28.3 (Spring 1991): 685-687 – are unconvincing. In *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), Phillip F. Herring detects intertextual traces of the same poem in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

16. Verlaine's copy is reproduced in Arthur Rimbaud, *Poésies*, "Les Manuscrits des Maîtres" (Paris: Albert Messein, 1919), 77. At the time of the book's publication, the handwriting was thought to be Rimbaud's. For a description and analysis of the relations between the two manuscript versions of the poem, see *Oeuvres Complètes*, 901-3.

poem which Joyce, according to Mary Colum, knew by heart.¹⁷ There Baudelaire had conjured a vision of 'Nature' as a "forest of symbols" in which "Smells and colours and sounds correspond".¹⁸

Rimbaud's poem, written around fourteen years later, focuses on the potential for the correspondence-loving imagination of individual letters of the alphabet.¹⁹ The sonnet has given rise to a large number of autobiographical, mystical, and synaesthetic interpretations. For a long time, the view that Rimbaud was inspired by an actual ABC (or alphabet book) held sway.²⁰ Whatever his (deliberately veiled) intentions, Rimbaud dismissed the piece, along with a number of other experiments and abandoned beliefs, two years later, in a prose poem entitled "Alchemy of the Word". Recalling what he refers to as "the story of one my follies", Rimbaud ironically chronicles his earlier attempt to forge a new poetic language of sensation²¹:

I invented the colour of the vowels: A, black; E, white; I, red; O, blue; U, green. I regulated the form and the movement of every consonant, and, with instinctive rhythms, I flattered myself that I had invented a poetic language accessible, one day or another, to every shade of meaning.²²

17. Mary Colum, *Life and the Dream* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1947), 392.

18. Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondances", in *Les Fleurs du mal* [1861], *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 11. The translations given here for lines three ("des forêts de symboles") and eight ("Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent") are mine. For an overview of Baudelaire's other writings about the theory of 'correspondance' or 'universal analogy', see *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ed. Jacques Dupont (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1991), 263-64.

19. The order of the five vowels is not quite alphabetical in Rimbaud's rendition: O comes after U, perhaps to ensure an Alpha-Omega structure to the piece.

20. Arthur Symons mentions this view in his essay on Rimbaud in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*: "Coincidence or origin, it has lately been pointed out that Rimbaud may formerly have seen an old A B C book in which the vowels are coloured for the most part as his are (A, black; E, yellow; I, red; O, blue; U green). In the little illustrative pictures around them some are oddly in keeping with the images of Rimbaud". Arthur Symons, "Arthur Rimbaud" [1898], in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, ed. Matthew Creasy (London: Carcanet, 2014), 38. The editor of the Pléiade edition of Rimbaud's works emphatically discredits this view (*Oeuvres Complètes*, 899). Indeed, Antoine Adam insists that the source of Rimbaud's analogies resides in the shape rather than the sound of the vowels: "Sa signification est d'ailleurs [...] non dans le *son*, mais dans la *forme* des voyelles. Quoi que tant de commentateurs aient pensé, il n'est donc pas question d'audition colorée ou de synesthésie. Il s'agit de la *forme* des lettres, écrites à la main par un jeune Français qui avait au surplus l'habitude d'écrire la lettre *e* comme un epsilon grec, ε". Rimbaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 900.

21. According to Antoine Adam in *La Pléiade*, "le vrai sens de cette idée, ce n'était pas la découverte de profondes vues métaphysiques, mais l'ambition de créer un langage qui produisît directement des sensations, et non plus, comme celui de la poésie antérieure, des idées et des sentiments". Rimbaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 966.

22. Rimbaud, "Alchimie du Verbe" trans. in Symons, *Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 37-8; first published in *Une Saison en Enfer* in 1873; *Oeuvres Complètes*, 106 ["l'histoire d'une de mes folies [...] J'inventai la couleur des voyelles! – A noir, E blanc, I rouge, O bleu, U vert. – Je réglai la forme et le mouvement de chaque consonne, et, avec

Rimbaud's emphasis here on "instinctive rhythms", like Blake's on measure, cadence, and numbers, appears to have played a part in Stephen's quest, through permutation and combination, to articulate the "primitive", pre-verbal cries and emotions of pre-alphabetical times.

As with Blake, there is plenty of evidence of Joyce's reading of Rimbaud. As well as remembering his interest in "Yeats and Blake and the French Symbolists", Curran also reports that by 1902 Joyce owned a copy of Verlaine's *Les Poètes Maudits* – a fact confirmed by Ellmann's catalogue of Joyce's Trieste library.²³ Verlaine's admiring essay on Rimbaud in the collection quotes "Voyelles" in full. Furthermore, Curran recalls Joyce knowing "Voyelles" by heart and being prone to repeated recitations, an honour he bestowed on few poets.²⁴ In a letter sent to his brother Stanislaus in September 1905, Joyce refers approvingly to Rimbaud's artistic "temperament" and to his own conviction of being "an artist by temperament" (*SL* 77); and looking back in 1947 on his fraught friendship with Joyce, Oliver St John Gogarty stated that as a youth Joyce modelled himself on Rimbaud.²⁵ Moreover, it is clear from a reference in a letter of September 1906 that Joyce was familiar with Arthur Symons's essay on Rimbaud in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, in which the poem is printed along with Rimbaud's retrospective denigration of the sonnet in "Alchemy of the Word".²⁶ It seems noteworthy, given Joyce's evident interest in the permutational versatility of individual letters, that Symons's book, like Clodd's, should open by drawing attention to letters as arbitrary but symbolic renderings of sound:

Without symbolism there can be no literature; indeed, not even language. What are words themselves but symbols, almost as arbitrary as the letters which compose them, mere sounds of the voice to which we have agreed to give certain significations, as we have agreed to translate these sounds by those combinations of letters?²⁷

From all of this it seems clear that Joyce's awareness of the significance of the alphabet sequence, conveyed through Stephen Daedalus's reading and onomatopoeic experiments, was intertwined with his enthusiasm for poetic mysticism and reverence for the power of the imagination.²⁸ But Joyce, as Rimbaud more explicitly did in

des rythmes instinctifs, je me flattai d'inventer un verbe poétique accessible, un jour ou l'autre, à tous les sens. Je réservais la traduction."]

23. Curran, *James Joyce Remembered*, 9. Verlaine's *Les Poètes Maudits* [1884] (Paris, 1900); listed in Curran, 9n. Joyce's initialled and dated copy ("J.A.J. 1902") is listed in Richard Ellmann, *The Consciousness of Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 131.

24. "Huysmans's symbolism of colours fitted in too, with the Rimbaud sonnet, *Voyelles* which Joyce would repeat to me." Curran, *James Joyce Remembered*, 29.

25. Oliver St John Gogarty, "James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist", *Tomorrow* 6.5 (January 1947): 22.

26. On 9 October 1906, Joyce stated in a letter to Stanislaus, that "[Hauptmann's] temperament has a little of Rimbaud in it. Like him, I suppose somebody else will be his future" (*SL* 117). The final sentence of Symons's essay on Rimbaud reads: "Even in literature he had his future; but his future was Verlaine." Symons, "Arthur Rimbaud", 40.

27. Symons, Introduction, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 5.

28. As his brother Stanislaus Joyce notes: "In early youth, my brother had been in love, like all romantic poets, with vast conceptions, and had believed in the supreme importance of the world of ideas." And later on: "The mystical Blake was 'of imagination

“Alchemy of the Word”, gradually forsook the unbounded idealism of his youth in favour of, in his brother’s phrase, “the minute life of earth”.²⁹

Yet his temporary espousal of such theories did not recede without trace: on the contrary, though he withdrew his commitment to them, his interest in mystical mythologies and systems of correspondence, and the smallest units of language, endured. Thus Joyce’s appreciation of Blake in his lecture in Trieste; thus his autograph copy of Rimbaud’s “Voyelles” in the so-called “Trieste Commonplace Book” that he used in 1919 and 1920, almost two decades later than the first onset of his Rimbaldian “hero-worship”³⁰; thus also, the extensive systems of mythological correspondence which in various ways preside over *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*.

Rhythm: “the first or formal relation of part to part”

Rhythm runs as a leitmotif throughout Joyce’s early writings.³¹ In his essay of 1902 on the poetry of James Clarence Mangan, Joyce – in a phrase later attributed to Stephen Daedalus almost verbatim – writes that

A song by Shakespeare or Verlaine, which seems as free and living and as remote from any conscious purpose as rain that falls in a garden or the lights of evening, is discovered to be the rhythmic speech of an emotion otherwise incommunicable, at least so fitly. (*OCPW54*)³²

In an entry dated 25 March 1903 in his early commonplace-book, Joyce writes that “Rhythm seems to be the first or formal relation of part to part in any whole or of a whole to its part or parts, or of any part to the whole of which it is a part”.³³ It is clear from this definition that he does not consider rhythm to be a quality restricted to sound

all compact’, and at that time the imagination was fighting hard for its rights in my brother’ soul. It stirred him deeply that in an age of self-satisfied materialism, Blake dared to assert the all-importance of the imagination and to stake his long life on its affirmation.” Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper*, 54-5; 113-4.

29. Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper*, 54-5.

30. Buffalo MS VIII.B, [3v]. The manuscript has been reproduced in black and white photo-facsimile on *JJA* 3:375-89. Luca Crispi dates the manuscript to Joyce’s sojourn in Trieste between 17 October 1919 and 3 July 1920. The James Joyce Collection, accessed 15 June 2014, library.buffalo.edu/pl/collections/jamesjoyce; Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper*, 112.

31. Laurent Milesi considers a number of the Joycean quotations given here from a different angle in “Joycean Choreo-Graphies in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*”, *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* 7.1 (2005-6), accessed 23 February 2015, hjs.ff.cuni.cz.

32. The same idea is deployed twice in similar form in *Stephen Hero*: first, when Stephen states that “the rhythmic speech of an emotion otherwise incommunicable, or at least not so fitly”, and then in more compressed form when he avers that “Song is the simple rhythmic liberation of an emotion” (*SH79*, 176).

33. Entry dated 25 March 1903 in National Library of Ireland MS 36,639/2A, [12v]. See also Joyce, *The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and the Raw Materials for “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”*, ed. Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 54.

or music. Indeed, his next entry considers the rhythm of sculpture: "Sculpture is associated with movement in as much as it is rhythmic; for a work of sculptural art must be surveyed according to its rhythm and this surveying is an imaginary movement in space".³⁴ Rhythm is posited as a structural relation, a function of the relations of parts, or units, to the greater whole of which they are a part.

From this hypothesis, Joyce deduces another, namely that: "Art is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an esthetic end".³⁵ The "Portrait of the Artist" essay of 1904 continues in this vein, shining a spotlight on the "elements" of the writer's art. Here the artist is said to seek the "liberat[ion]" of the "individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts":

Like an alchemist he bent upon his handiwork, bringing together the mysterious elements, separating the subtle from the gross. For the artist the rhythms of phrase and period, the symbols of words and allusion, were paramount things.³⁶

The reference to alchemy rings with both Blakean and Rimboldian associations, while the mention of "the symbols of words" echoes with Symons's opening question, "What are words themselves but symbols".

In *Stephen Hero*, the aspiring alchemist, his mind full of the passion for origins bathetically displayed in his quest for the cries of "primitive emotions",

doubled backwards into the past of humanity and [...] seemed almost to hear the simple cries of fear and joy and wonder which are antecedent to all song, the savage rhythms of men pulling at the oar. (*SH*33)

The protagonist of *A Portrait* will use the same image to posit the emotional origins of lyrical form:

34. Entry dated 27 March 1903, NLI MS 36,639/2A, [12v]; *The Workshop of Daedalus*, 54. Other budding modernists were thinking about rhythm in similar terms. Roger Fry who introduced Post-Impressionism to England in 1910, identified "rhythm" as the "first" of the "emotional elements" of art. Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics" [1909], in *Vision and Design* (New York: Dover, [1920] 1998), 23. In 1911 John Middleton Murry (later joined by Katherine Mansfield) became the founding editor of *Rhythm*. In the journal's first number, Murry made the quest for rhythm and its understanding central to the modernist endeavour: "The artist attains to the pure form, refining and intensifying his vision till all that is unessential dissolves away – memories and that false knowledge which would bind him down to a mere existence, untrue because it is un-lived. He must return to the moment of pure perception to see the essential forms, the essential harmonies of line and colour, the essential music of the world. Modernism is not the capricious outburst of intellectual dipsomania. It penetrates beneath the outward surface of the world, and disengages the rhythms that lie at the heart of things, rhythms strange to the eye, unaccustomed to the ear, primitive harmonies of the world that is and lives." John Middleton Murry, "Art and Philosophy", *Rhythm* 1.1 (Summer 1911): 12.

35. Entry dated 28 March, 1903, NLI MS 36,639/2A, [12v]; *The Workshop of Daedalus*, 55.

36. James Joyce, "A Portrait of the Artist" [1904], in *Poems and Shorter Writings*, ed. Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz, and John Whittier-Ferguson (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 211-218, 214.

The lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. (*PV*.1444-47)

Later on in *Stephen Hero*, Stephen extends his thoughts about the rhythm of sounds to the broader, conceptual understanding of rhythm which Joyce had set out in his notebooks:

There should be an art of gesture [...] I mean a rhythm. [...] This is it, said the youth making a graceful anapaestic gesture with each arm. That's the rhythm, do you see? (*SH* 184)³⁷

Though the narrator of "A Portrait" thinks of his art in terms of "the rhythms of phrase and period", and *Stephen Hero* expresses Joyce's longstanding interest in the rhythm of gesture, there is much to indicate that, from these early years onwards, Joyce conceives of individual letters of the alphabet as the fundamental materials of the literary artist. The writer's task, as much as to choose and order the right words, becomes the 'rhythmic' disposition of these 'indivisible units' to an aesthetic end.³⁸

Letters Literal and Liquid

Joyce's sense of the importance of attending, as per Blake's vaunt, to "every letter", in all its various rhythmical dimensions, is in evidence throughout *A Portrait*. While the scriptural dimension of alphabetical lettering (so important a visual feature of Blake's engravings, as well as – albeit more figuratively – of Rimbaud's "Voyelles") is emphasized through Stephen's thoughts about "Thoth, the god of writers, writing with a reed upon a tablet" (*P V*.1810), his interest in the phonic valences of vowels is repeatedly conveyed through the description of his aural sensations, whether these be aroused by the prosaic sound of cricket bats ("pick, pack, pock, puck" [*P I*.1212-13, 1847]) or to the minutely calibrated effects of other writers' written words. In Chapter V, for instance, Stephen feels that "the liquid letters of speech, symbols of the element of mystery, flowed forth over his brain" (*P V*.1747-48). In the next section of that final chapter, other "liquid letters" (four lines remembered from Yeats's *Countess Cathleen*) produce in Stephen a "soft liquid joy" which "flowed through the words where the soft long vowels hurtled noiselessly and fell away" (*P V*.1831, 1836-37). A little later, the "black vowels and [...] opening sound, rich and lutelike" of a partially misremembered line from Thomas Nashe again gives rise to "A trembling joy, lambent as a faint light" (*P V*.2081-82, 2079). Through these and manifold other references, *A Portrait* continues Joyce's exploration of the reverberations of individual letters in all their literal and liquid, prosaic and poetic versatility.

Ulysses and the Myriad Facets of Alphabeticity

37. The Stephen of *Ulysses* still speaks of the art of gesture: "So that gesture, not music or odour, would be a universal language, the gift of tongues rendering visible not the lay sense but the first entelechy, the structural rhythm" (*U*15.105-7).

38. "The letter is the indivisible unit of writing". Sean Braune, "From Lucretian Atomic Theory to Joycean Etymic Theory", *Journal of Modern Literature* 33.4 (Summer 2010): 172.

AEIOU

In *Ulysses*, one of the many indications of Joyce's enduring alphabetical preoccupations is the return of the vowels AEIOU. In "Scylla and Charybdis", Stephen thinks of the debt a slightly younger version of himself incurred to George Russell or 'AE', as he was better known:

You owe it.

Wait. Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound. [...]

I, I and I. I.

A.E.I.O.U. (*U9.203-12*)³⁹

This cryptic lettering consists of George Russell's pseudonym followed by the standard abbreviation of the words 'I owe you'.⁴⁰ What adds piquancy to Stephen's alphabetical play is the fact that the invocation of George Russell and his affected ligatured pseudonym again establishes a connection between the alphabet and mysticism. Russell was, according to Richard M. Kain and James O'Brien, "the luminous centre of the Irish Revival" and "a natural visionary".⁴¹ In 1894, Yeats himself referred to Russell as the "arch-visionary" of the Theosophical Household.⁴² Indeed, it was Russell's Theosophical belief that led to the adoption of his letteral *nom de plume*. In Henry Summerfield's account:

'AE' – originally 'Æ' – is the first sound in 'Æon', the mystic word which came to Russell at the beginning of his spiritual journey. In writing to *Lucifer* at the end of 1888, he substituted this name for his own, and the printer, able to read only the block capital, split the diphthong for convenience and the signature appeared as 'A.E.' When Russell began contributing verse and prose to the *Irish Theosophist*, he used the diphthong as his pseudonym, and it is as 'AE' that he became famous. He himself preferred the joined form and was annoyed that printers persistently divided it, but eventually he fell into the habit of using the separated letters for his own signature. The name 'George William Russell' came to signify for him his superficial, personal self, a transient creation of this life, while 'AE' represented the Logos incarnated in human form, his immortal self passing from body to body with its sheath of accumulated desires and experiences, and destined to be ultimately reunited with the Spirit.⁴³

39. In *Finnegans Wake*, letters become like Tom, Dick, and Harry: 'Outragedy of poet scalds! Acomedy of letters! I have them all, tame, deep and harried, in my mine's I' (*FW* 425.24-25); 'I you O you me!' (*FW* 584.33-34) and 'How me O my youhou my I youtou to IO?' (*FW* 585.04-05).

40. The *OED* dates the acronym's first use to 1618. Stephen's parading of the vowels in "Scylla and Charybdis" is a combination of onomastic play – a reference to AE's affected chosen name; acronymical play – 'I' and 'O' stand as the first letters of the two words forming the verbal collocation 'I owe'; and phonetic play – the letter 'u' sounds just like 'you'.

41. Richard M. Kain and James O'Brien, *George Russell (A.E.)* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1976), 15 and 53.

42. Kain and O'Brien, *George Russell (A.E.)*, 78. The word appears in Yeats's review of Russell's *Homeward*, which was published in *The Bookman* in 1894.

43. Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of George William Russell 'A.E.' 1867-1935* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1975), 30-1.

Indeed, AE's theosophical beliefs led him to a theory of correspondence which recalls both Baudelaire and Rimbaud:

For each vowel and consonant he sought a related concept, colour and form. Wandering the streets at night he would murmur these sounds over and over to himself trying to evoke by intuition their affinities in his mind. [...] he never obtained a complete set of correspondences.⁴⁴

AE's preoccupations with the self and with signs both seem reflected in Stephen's alphabetical aside, which as well as being a typical example of his quick-witted whimsicality, encodes his reflections about the identity of the self in time, asking, in effect, whether there is more to the self than an alphabetical letter – than an illusion instilled by semantic and syntactic convention. As Nietzsche asks in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886):

What gives me the right to speak of an 'I'? [...] | when I analyse the event expressed in the sentence 'I think', I acquire a series of rash assertions, which are difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove – for example, that it is *I* who think, that it has to be something at all which thinks, that thinking is an activity and operation on the part of an entity thought of as a cause, that an 'I' exists [...] a thought comes when 'it' wants, not when 'I' want [...] it is a *falsification* of the facts to say: the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'. *It* thinks, but that this 'it' is precisely that famous old 'I' is, to put it mildly, only an assumption, an assertion, above all not an 'immediate certainty'⁴⁵

Joyce may also have been thinking of Rimbaud, who in 1871 famously declared, in a letter known as “the Seer's letter” – that “Je est un autre”⁴⁶ – a striking parallel to Stephen's “Other I”. Joyce's formulation compounds a conceptual dichotomy with a quip about the single-letterality of the first-person pronoun in English. Stephen's interior monologue thus seems to parody the mystical propensity to endow such simple entities as letters with intrinsic profundity. And yet his thoughts leave open the possibility that, in a sense, letters are profound – magical less in what they reflect, than in what they foster (for example, the human sense of self). We are and are not the letters that symbolise us: we shaped them, and yet are also shaped by them.

As Henry Staten, commenting on this passage, nicely puts it: Stephen “slides through the agency of the first-person pronoun back into the soup of alphabeticity”.⁴⁷ But Stephen's alphabet soup paradoxically preserves distinctions: the marked punctuational separation of the five vowels linking him to AE, and of the vowel linking

44. Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man*, 15.

45. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* [1886], trans. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990) [hereafter *BGE*], #16, 46 and #17, 47.

46. Rimbaud to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871. A fragment (including “Je est un autre”) was published by *L'Écho de Paris*, on 13 November 1891 (“Voici de la prose” to “ces fruits du cerveau”). The letter was published in its entirety in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* on 1 October 1912, 570-6. A very similar letter (also stating “Je est un autre”) was sent by Rimbaud to Georges Izambard on 13 May 1871. See Arthur Rimbaud, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean-Jacques Lefrère (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 66-73 and 63-64.

47. Henry Staten, “The Decomposing Form of Joyce's *Ulysses*”, *PMLA* 112.3 (May 1997): 388.

him to his own earlier selves, occurs within an immediate context which evokes the atomistic makeup of bodies: “Molecules all change”. As Stephen’s ‘I’ is reduced to a letter, and as that pronoun is reduced to an element in a subset of the alphabet,⁴⁸ so Stephen envisages his own bodily constitution in terms of its molecular cycles of replenishment and dissolution. The passage thus succinctly encapsulates a dynamic which, as Staten points out, is in play throughout the book, on both organic and alphabetical levels: between synthesis and analysis, integration and dissolution, composition and decomposition.⁴⁹

Such dichotomies in a sense define the alphabet: a sequence made up of 26 units, it is an arbitrary but metaphorically resonant structure.⁵⁰ It can be travelled along in time, diachronically – read, recited, or chanted, as it is, cacophonously, by the pupils of ‘Saint Joseph’s National school’ that Bloom overhears in “Calypso”: “Ahbeesee defeege kelomen opecue rustyouvee doubleyou” (*U* 4. 137-39). Yet, at the same time, the alphabet is also always already, synchronically there, its elements available for selection and deployment into rhythms new and old.

Prospective and Retrospective Uses

As an ordering mechanism, a set of onomastic abbreviations, it can be put to prospective, generative use – as in Stephen’s abandoned ambition, remembered in “Proteus”, to write “alphabet books”

with letters for titles. Have you read his F? O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful. O yes, W. (*U*3.427; 139-40)

Joyce, with characteristic witty compression, slips two exclamatory ‘O’s into the imagined dialogue, muddying the distinction between ordinary writing – which also

48. “I dissolves into the alphabet”. Staten, “Decomposing Form”, 389.

49. Staten writes of the tension between “the movement of form-making and of the dissolution of form”, and of the parallel between the organic and the alphabetical in *Ulysses* in terms of an isomorphism between “two decompositional series”. Staten, “Decomposing Form”, 380. For Steve McCaffery, “If letters are to words what atoms are to bodies – heterogenous, deviant, collisional, and transmorphic – then we need earnestly to rethink what guarantees stability to verbal signs”. McCaffery, *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2001), xix.

50. As Barthes comments in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, the alphabet is “an unmotivated order (an order outside any imitation), which is not arbitrary (since everyone knows it, recognises it, and agrees upon it). The alphabet is euphoric: no more anguish of ‘schema’, no more rhetoric of ‘development’, no more twisted logic, no more dissertations!” Barthes errs here in stating that the alphabet is not arbitrary; it is. It is the conventionality of the alphabet which he seems to be intent on emphasizing in these remarks (“everyone [...] agrees upon it”). But to call something conventional is typically (and in this case) to concede its arbitrariness. For more about twentieth-century and contemporary conceptualizations of the alphabet, see Jacquelyn Ardam, “The ABCs of Conceptual Writing”, *Comparative Literature Studies* 51.1 (2014): 139-40.

sometimes uses single letters as words – and Stephen’s pretentious titles.⁵¹ Conversely, the alphabet can be put to retrospective classificatory use, as it typically is, for example, in personal and institutional libraries. Indeed, an injunction to alphabetize may lie nested in “Ithaca’s” ordering imperative, “Catalogue these books” (*U*17.1361).

In “Proteus”, Stephen’s thoughts about “Creation from nothing”, couched in a mixture of transliterated alphabetical and numerical symbols, seem to bear the traces of both generative seriality and retrospective arrangement: “Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one” (*U*. 3.35; 39-40).⁵² Such evocative formal succinctness, that is to say, seems the likely product of both alphabetical and numerical brainstorming and stylistically conscientious disposition: as “Aleph”, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, ushers in “alpha”, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, so “nought”, the first in the series of integers, leads to “one”, the second item in the same ascending sequence. By contrast, when Bloom tries his hand at such alphabetical play in the “Circe” episode (with the aid of a scroll from which he seemingly reads), setting forth from the very same Hebrew starting point, the results are not so felicitous, with order rapidly descending into associative chaos: “Aleph Beth Ghimel Daleth Hagadah Tephilim Kosher Yom Kippur Hanukah Roschaschana Beni Brith Bar Mitzvah Mazzoth Askenazim Meshuggah Talith” (*U*15.1623-25).

Codes, Acronyms, and Acrostics

Such instances highlight some the alphabet’s uses in ludic but relatively orderly fashion; but *Ulysses* more often emphasizes the alphabet’s organizational utility by wreaking havoc with its familiar rhythms. This happens, when Bloom, for example, translates Martha Clifford’s name and address into “reversed alphabetic boustrophedonic punctated quadrilinear cryptogram (vowels suppressed) N. IGS./WI. UU. OX/W. OKS. MH/Y. IM” (*U* 17.1799-1801).⁵³ It happens when Bloom lists some of the possible anagrammatic permutations of his own name in “Ithaca”:

51. That Stephen is aware of the transparent affectation of his literary dreams is clear from the following sentence: “Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria?” (*U*3.141-43). Another way in which letters are used for titles (in a kind of conceptual pun) is to be found in “Cyclops” with its extravagant lists of post-nominal letters (*U*12.927-38 and 1893-96). Here, too, letters signal vanity.

52. “Retrospective arrangement” is chosen to chime, of course, with *Ulysses*’s own allusions to the practice, which is mentioned in both “Circe” (*U* 15.443) and “Ithaca” (*U* 17.1907).

53. The *OED* defines the term ‘boustrophedon’ as follows: “(Written) alternately from right to left and from left to right, like the course of the plough in successive furrows; as in various ancient inscriptions in Greek and other languages”. Clodd, commenting on Hittite inscriptions at Hamah, explains the words by way of an etymology which recalls Stephen Dedalus’s “Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!” nicknames in *A Portrait* (*P* IV.739-40): “The inscriptions are read from right to left and *vice versa* in ‘boustrophedon’ style (*bous*, ‘an ox’, and *strehō*, ‘to turn’, therefore, as an ox ploughs), as in ancient Greek modes of writing” *The Story of the Alphabet*, 181-82. Gifford and Seidman explain Bloom’s code as follows: “The cryptogram is ‘boustrophedonic’ in that it is formed by placing the alphabet A to Z in parallel with the alphabet Z to A and then substituting letters from the reversed alphabet for the letters of the message. It is

Leopold Bloom
Ellpodbomool
Molldopeloob
Bollopedoom
Old Ollebo, M. P. (U17.405-9)

And when immediately afterwards he remembers an “acrostic upon the abbreviation of his first name” sent to his wife Molly on Valentine’s Day 1888:

*Poets oft have sung in rhyme
Of music sweet their praise divine.
Let them hymn it nine times nine.
Dearer far than song or wine.
You are mine. The world is mine. (U17.410-17)*

In similarly acronymic vein, Bloom tries to work out what AE’s real name might be:

A.E.: what does that mean? Initials perhaps. Albert Edward, Arthur Edmund, Alphonsus Eb Ed El Esquire. (U8.527-29)

Even Bloom’s sensible musings about initials (“Albert Edward, Arthur Edmund”) take him far from both AE’s real name – George Russell – and from the original pseudonym – ‘Aeon’ – from which his ligatured signature derived. Bloom’s wild guesses here in “Hades” stand in typical contrast to Stephen’s more knowing thoughts in “Scylla and Charybdis”.

Such alphabetical games are by no means confined to names. In “Nausicaa” we see Bloom pondering acronyms, such as ‘Roygbiv’, the mnemotechnic prompt for the colour spectrum taught him in school:

Roygbiv Vance taught us: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. (U13.1075-76)

The sequence returns in “Circe”, when Bloom “*performs juggler’s tricks, draws red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet silk handkerchiefs from his mouth.*” Roygbiv” (U15.1603-5). In conceptual terms, ‘Roygbiv’, in which each letter stands for a colour, stands, for all its mundane practicality and aberrant pronunciation, as an analogue to Rimbaud’s “Voyelles”.

Spelling Bees and Onomatopias

‘punctuated’ because marked by points or periods where vowels are omitted, and ‘quadrilinear’ because marked by points or periods where the vowels are omitted, and ‘quadrilinear’ because marked with four slant lines (/). Solved, it reads: ‘M RTH/DR FF LC/DLPH NS/B RN’ (Martha Clifford’s last name has been reversed as a double protection). The suppression of the vowels makes a simple code such as this harder to crack, since the patterned frequency of vowel recurrence makes the vowels relatively easy to spot.” Don Gifford with Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s “Ulysses”*, revd and expanded edn (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1989), 596.

Joyce also exploits the comedic potential of the opposite of such acronymic compression when Bloom remembers a nineteenth-century spelling conundrum in “Aeolus”, his interior monologue conveying his latest attempt at the challenge by featuring disorientating interruptions in which individual letters are either rendered in words or represented by their customary alphabetical symbols:

It is amusing to view the unpar one ar alleled embarra two ars is it? double ess ment of a harassed pedlar while gauging au the symmetry with a y. (U7.166-68)

No indication is given as to how we are to mentally pronounce these letters – whether, that is, we are to treat them as syllables, or as letters intended for individual enunciation. It shows us what we do when we read, illustrating Clodd’s point about how little we ‘see’ letters, so used are we to agglutinating them into words.

The only quasi-phonetic quality of the alphabet’s itemized sequence makes spelling complicated, but is also crucial to its imitative and creative flexibility, and, as such, makes possible Joyce’s many neologistic onomatopoeias. The best examples are famous. They include: the “fourworded wavespeech” spelt out by Stephen in “Proteus” as he analyses the sound of sea waves into separate parts or ‘words’ (“Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, oos” [U3.456-57]); the cat’s miaowing in “Calypso” (“Mkgnao! [...] Mrkgnao! [...] Mrkrgrnao!” [U4.16, 25, 32]); the sound of the printing presses in “Aeolus” (“Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention” [U7.174-77]); and the whistling rush of a passing train in ‘Penelope’: “frseeeeeeeffronnng” (U18.596).

“Everything speaks in its own way”, is Bloom’s response to the “almost human” machines at the newspaper office (U7.177). In a way, of course, they do, captured as they are by Joyce’s unusual manipulation of the letters of the alphabet. But in a way, they don’t: in writing, they all speak to *us* through those same printed letters of the alphabet – hardly the kind of ineluctably singular ‘signature’ Stephen hopes to read and render (cf. U3.2). In writing, all the signatures of the world are reduced to “Signs on a white field” (U3.415), the differences between them consisting merely in the rhythms of their permutations and combinations.

The Medium of Print

In *Ulysses* the foregrounding of these rhythms is intertwined with the book’s attention to the technological medium of print – the historical cause of the alphabet’s stabilization.⁵⁴ Repeatedly, Joyce makes us see letters as type, confronting us with, for example, the man-sized movable type of the Hely’s sandwichmen (“He read the scarlet

54. Clodd, drawing an analogy between organic and alphabetic evolution, identifies the development of print as a stabilizing force: “when a certain stage of adaptation is reached, there is, as e.g. in the case of our own alphabet, mainly through the invention of printing, arrest of development”. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 214. Moshe Gold writes about Joyce’s interest in the history of print in “Printing the Dragon’s Bite: Joyce’s Poetic History of Thoth, Cadmus, and Gutenberg in *Finnegans Wake*”, *James Joyce Quarterly* 42-43.1-4 (Fall 2004–Summer 2006): 269-96. Jesse Schotter touches on the subject, as well as on Joyce’s reading of Clodd, and other matters relating to his interest in language’s vocal and visual dimensions in “Verbivocovisuals: James Joyce and the Problem of Babel”, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 48.1 (Fall 2010): 89-109.

letters on their five tall white hats: H. E. L. Y. S. Wisdom Hely's. Y lagging behind" [*U* 8.125-7]), the back-to-front appearance of the deceased Paddy Dignam's type-set name in *The Freeman Journal's* obituary notice ("Reads it backwards first. Quickly he does it. Must require some practice that. mangiD kcirtaP." [*U*7: 205-06]), the typo blighting the appearance of Bloom's name in the paper in "Eumaeus" ("*L. Boom*" [*U*16: 1260]), or the other typo Joyce deliberately introduced in "Eumaeus" (".)eatondph 1/8 ador dorador douradora" [*U* 16.1257-58]) in a failed attempt, as Kenner has shown, to replicate 'etaoin shrldu', the commonest form of "a line of bitched type" (*U* 16.1262-63) in the linotype era.⁵⁵

Different Alphabets

Not all letters are typed and not all alphabets are Latin, however, and it is in reminding us of these facts that the alphabetical energies of *Ulysses* look forward to *Finnegans Wake*. In "Ithaca", we discover that Molly

had more than once covered a sheet of paper with signs and hieroglyphs which she stated were Greek and Irish and Hebrew characters (*U*17.676-78)

In the same episode, Bloom and Stephen's singing – in ancient Irish and ancient Hebrew respectively – is first transliterated into the letters of the Latin alphabet, then into English:

By Stephen: *suil, suil, suil arun, suil go siocair agus suil go cuin* (walk, walk, walk your way, walk in safety, walk with care).

By Bloom: *kifeloch, harimon rakatejch m'baad l'zamatejch* (thy temple amid thy hair is as a slice of pomegranate). (*U*17.727-30)

The protagonists proceed from this oral comparison to a "glyphic comparison of the phonic symbols of both languages":

Stephen wrote the Irish characters for gee, eh, dee, em, simple and modified, and Bloom in turn wrote the Hebrew characters ghimel, aleph, dalet and (in the absence of mem) a substituted qoph. (*U*17.731, 736-39)⁵⁶

But even here the foreign characters, as though to frustrate the reader's awakened curiosity, appear to us only through what onomatopoeic approximation the Latin alphabet affords. Ultimately, these scholarly curiosities dissolve into letters even more literally liquid than those conjured in *A Portrait*, as Stephen and Bloom micturate alphabetically:

The trajectories of their, first sequent, then simultaneous, urinations were dissimilar: Bloom's longer, less irruent, in the incomplete form of the bifurcated penultimate alphabetical letter [...] Stephen's higher, more sibilant, [who in the ultimate hours of the

55. Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-16; see also John Simpson, "Eatondph and douradora", *James Joyce Online Notes* 2 (March 2012), accessed 7 February 2015, www.jjon.org.

56. In "Circe", Bloom had already read the first four letters of the Hebrew alphabet: "Aleph Beth Ghimel Daleth" (*U*15.1623).

previous day had augmented by diuretic consumption an insistent vesical pressure]. (*U* 17.1192-98)

***Finnegans Wake* and Joyce's "Poetics of the Particle"**

Many prose authors writing in Flaubert's wake re-oriented their efforts from the cultivation of a nebulously defined ideal 'style' to the quest for the '*mot juste*'.⁵⁷ Joyce himself discussed *Ulysses* in such terms on at least one occasion, but he was also inspired, as this essay argues, by the alphabetical atomism of Blake and Rimbaud, and, in *Ulysses* but especially *Finnegans Wake*, he spearheads a "Poetics of the Particle", to borrow Stephen McCaffery's evocative phrase⁵⁸. This project – to bring home to the reader the scissile facture of words and the particulate semantic potential latent in individual letters – was echoed in the late 1920s and 1930s in the pages of *transition*. This was the journal, founded in Paris in 1927, which would prove the principal organ of the *Wake* serial publication – indeed, the "Opening Pages of Work in Progress" provided the first item of the journal's first issue. Its renowned manifesto, "Proclamation", of 1929, which called for no less than "the revolution of the word", asserted that: "The literary creator has the right to disintegrate the primal matter of words imposed upon him by text books and dictionaries."⁵⁹ In the special volume of exegesis Joyce's friends and acquaintances devoted to the *Wake* in the same year, the journal's editor, Eugene Jolas, wrote of "the disintegration of words, and their subsequent reconstruction on other planes" as "some of the most important acts of our epoch".⁶⁰

57. Flaubert's *mot juste* is explicitly discussed by Joyce in answer to a question put to him by Frank Budgen. See Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"* (London: Grayson and Grayson, 1934), 20.

58. Steve McCaffery, *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2001), xviii.

59. "Proclamation", *transition* 16-17 (June 1929): 13. Reproduced at The Index of Modernist Magazines, accessed 7 February 2015, sites.davidson.edu/littlemagazines/transition-manifesto. The statement is immediately followed by a quotation from Blake ("*The road of excess leads to the palace of Wisdom*"), which Stanislaus Joyce specifically remembers Joyce quoting. Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, 243. The Proclamation as a whole deploys no less than six quotations from the same poet. The only other poet whose words are quoted is Rimbaud, whose words and name are used in illustration of point 5: "The expression of these concepts can be achieved only through the rhythmic 'Hallucination of the Word'. (Rimbaud)".

60. Eugene Jolas, "The Revolution of Language and James Joyce", in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress: A Symposium*, ed. Samuel Beckett [London: Faber, 1929] (NY: New Directions 1972), 79-92, 79. Jolas goes on to describe *Work in Progress* in terms which evoke the history of Joyce's interest in the alphabet: "James Joyce gives his words odours and sounds that the conventional standard does not know. In his super-temporal and super-spatial composition, language is being born anew before our eyes. Each chapter has an internal rhythm differentiated in proportion with its contents. [...] Those who have heard Mr. Joyce read aloud from *Work in Progress* know the immense rhythmic beauty of his technique. It has a musical

This disintegration, the potential of which is intuited by Stephen in *Stephen Hero*, adumbrated in *Dubliners*,⁶¹ and discernibly underway in the alphabetically perturbed text of *Ulysses*, forms an unmistakable feature of the alphabetical chaos of *Finnegans Wake*. Indeed, what Joyce begins in *Ulysses*, he continues even more radically in the *Wake*. In *Finnegans Wake*, a book which seems written under the spell of misspelling, letters go rogue. In Jed Rasula's words, the *Wake* performs "an activation of each element of the text, starting from those presumably presignifying units, the letters".⁶² As Kenner puts it, in *Finnegans Wake*, "as never before, the single letters control".⁶³ For the reader of this text, as for Rimbaud and AE, letters take on unusual suggestive power: "Spelling words a certain way, as the *Wake* exhaustively demonstrates, bewitches the senses and disarms the mind"⁶⁴. From the first page, the first word even, the *Wake* announces itself as, in Rasula's phrase, "alphabetic substance".⁶⁵ The *Wake* has the alphabet written all over it. It is, in a neologism inspired by Clodd, "abcdminded":

(Stoop) if you are *abcdminded*, to this *claybook*, what curios of signs (please stoop), in this *allaphbed*! Can you *rede* [...] its world? (FW18.17-19; emphasis added)

"[C]laybook" features on page 156, and "alaphbet" and "abcd" feature on page 159, of notebook VI.B.15.⁶⁶ "Claybook" and (less certainly) "reed" (punningly altered to "rede" in the *Wake*) were derived from page 98 of Clodd's *The Story of the Alphabet*,⁶⁷ which in a discussion of cuneiform writing explains that:

the abundant clay of the alluvial country afforded material whose convenience and permanence brought it into general use. Upon this the characters were impressed by a reed or square-shaped stylus, the clay-books being afterwards baked or sun-dried.⁶⁸

Vincent Deane convincingly relates the 'alaphbet' jotting in Joyce's notebook to a passage in Clodd's book – in turn, a quotation from Canon Taylor's *History of the Alphabet* – which explains the origins of the word 'alphabet':

the very word ALPHABET [...] is obviously derived from the names of the two letters *alpha* and *beta*, which stand at the head of the Greek alphabet, and which are plainly identical with the names *aleph* and *beth* borne by the corresponding Semitic characters.⁶⁹

flow that flatters the ear, that has the organic structure of works of nature, that transmits painstakingly every vowel and consonant formed by his ear" (89).

61. In "The Sisters", Joyce already delights in the effects of rendering mental misconceptions (reflecting aural confusion) through psychologically plausible transliteration. Thus Eliza refers to *The Freeman's General* rather than to *The Freeman's Journal*, and speaks of "rheumatic" rather than 'pneumatic' carriage wheels (D1.234, 264).

62. Jed Rasula, "Finnegans Wake and the Character of the Letter", *James Joyce Quarterly* 34.4 *Finnegans Wake* Issue (Summer 1997): 521.

63. Hugh Kenner, *The Mechanic Muse*, 79.

64. Rasula, "Finnegans Wake and the Character of the Letter", 521.

65. Rasula, "Finnegans Wake and the Character of the Letter", 524.

66. VI.B.15 is reproduced in facsimile in *JJA* 32.

67. Joyce's notes read 'abcd', 'claybook', 'alaphbet' and 'rede' (VI.B.15.156 for the two first jottings, VI.B.15.159 for the last two).

68. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 98.

“[A]bcded” though it features among jottings excerpted from *The Story of the Alphabet* in linear order, does not seem straightforwardly traceable to Clodd’s text, and may be an instance of the integrative, associative punning processes of Joyce’s “automatic word machine” having taken hold even as he was still excerpting his materials.⁷⁰

In this dense vignette of distorted quotations – which seems also to pack in allusions to Stephen’s thoughts about Thoth “writing with a reed on a tablet” in *A Portrait* (*P* V.1810), and to his ambition to read the “[s]ignatures of all things” in “Proteus” (*U*3.2) – Joyce, like Stephen in *Stephen Hero*, invokes the earliest alphabetical times. In deploying this trio of borrowings from Clodd, he simultaneously adumbrates the origins of writing and the materials of early writing materials, implies the mind’s alphabetic structure as an “allaphbed” retroactively moulded by the very “curios” signs it has evolved, the alphabetical sequence – unmistakably conjured and equally unmistakably disrupted in “abcdeminded”, and the connections between writing and religion, via the doubling of the ‘l’ in “allaphbed”.

The *Wake* insistently foregrounds its own status as “alphybetyformed verbage” (*FW*183.13). It draws attention to the scriptural and phonic dimensions of its “vocable scriptsigns” (*FW* 118.27-30); plays on its own “verbivocovisual” presentment (*FW* 341.18); highlights its constitution as a set of units – ‘bites’ or ‘bits’ – through such coinages as “alphabites” (*FW* 263.31), “alphabeater” (553.02), “allforabit” (18.32-19.02). The text repeatedly refers to its own materials, intimating the names of letters – through puns and aberrant spellings – much as Bloom had done in the “Aeolus” episode of *Ulysses*. Thus we encounter “demivoyelles” (*FW* 116.38), “superciliouslooking crisscrossed Greek ees” (120.18), “throne open doubleyou” (120.28), “that fretful figget eff” (120.33), “disdotted aiches” (121.16), “those ars, rrrr!” (122.6), “those fourlegged ems” (123.01), “the cut and dry aks and wise” (123.2).⁷¹

Moreover, in turning its own characters into letters and its letters into characters – like ALP and HCE – *Finnegans Wake* continues to problematize the relationship between letters and character already apparent in Stephen’s “A.E.I.O.U.” and in Bloom’s “Molldopelooob”. As Rasula states, the *Wake* “enacts a reunion between the two senses of the word ‘character’, psychological and calligraphic, and this is itself doubled by a corresponding parallelism of ‘letter’ as both epistolary and alphabetical”.⁷² Derek Attridge suggests that Joyce’s inclusion in the *Wake* of pictograms – such as the sigla

69. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 135, quoting from Isaac Taylor, *The History of the Alphabet: An Account of the Origin and Development of Letters*, 2 vols (London: Edward Arnold, 1899).

70. The phrase is Jean-Michel Rabaté’s in “The Fourfold Root of Yawn’s Unreason: Chapter III.3”, in *How Joyce Wrote “Finnegans Wake”: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*, ed. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 398.

71. For discussion of these and other examples of the *Wake*’s inventively aberrant alphabeticity, see Tim Conley’s excellent discussion of “Language and languages”, in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 309-19.

72. Rasula, “*Finnegans Wake* and the Character of the Letter”, 523.

representing the “Doodles family”, to which Roland McHugh refers as a “fundamental alphabet”⁷³ – takes this further:

[PLACE ILLUSTRATION 02.01 (S) HERE]

Fig. 1. “The Doodles family”, as featured at *FW*299.F4.

Including such sigla, Joyce removes those “traces of personal identity that linger even in the use of letters, which are always open to being read as initials and therefore as no different from a proper name”.⁷⁴

That notions of alphabet and character are less logical than they seem is emphasized by the fact that A, L, and P are not just any old letters, but the three first letters of the world ‘alphabet’. What could be more orderly? Except that the alphabet is itself an arbitrarily arranged sequence. Indeed, as indicated in Clodd’s quotation from Canon Taylor, the word ‘alphabet’ itself should give us pause, as a transliteration of the first two letters – alpha and beta – of a different alphabet (the Greek), adumbrating a history of alphabetical change virtually synonymous with imperialism. Cultural conquest is in fact a frequent theme in Clodd’s book. Its penultimate chapter describes the Latin alphabet as “the most important of all alphabets”, noting that

The ultimate dominance of the Latins brought about the abolition of every other alphabet than their own, which, becoming the alphabet of the Roman empire, and then of Christendom, secured an everlasting supremacy.⁷⁵

The book’s final sentence reiterates Clodd’s view of the Roman alphabet as “the vehicle of culture of the most advancing races of mankind”.⁷⁶

In this political light, and in the light of the very many pictograms and ideograms reproduced in Clodd’s book, Joyce’s own sigla seem less a “fundamental alphabet” than the opposite of an alphabet – a sample of some of the alphabet’s many histories. The ideogrammatic symbolism of his Doodles shines a spotlight, by contrast, on the fragility and infinite permutability of the alphabet, which for Clodd represents “the triumph of the human mind”, not least because “there is no literature possible under a mere graphic system”.⁷⁷

The *Wake* puts to maximum use what Jacquelyn Ardam calls the alphabetic sequence’s intrinsic “tension between sense and nonsense, meaning and arbitrariness, order and chaos”.⁷⁸ It marks the culmination of Joyce’s dramatization of the aesthetic and philosophical ramifications of the relationship between part and whole, which the alphabet essentially represents. In his dizzying permutations of the twenty-six letters so familiar to us, his radical exploitation of the mechanisms by which a finite set of elements can produce infinite difference, Joyce drastically upsets the rhythms of words as we know them. In so doing, he instils his work with a sustained strand of

73. Roland McHugh, *The Sigla of “Finnegans Wake”* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), 136.

74. Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 55.

75. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 216-7.

76. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 227.

77. Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet*, 25, 76.

78. Ardam, “The ABCs of Conceptual Writing”, 135.

performative reflection about the materials and workings of his, and all, literary art. As well as charting Joyce's move away from his initial admiration for a mystical-symbolist tradition of letters towards a more historical-materialist interest, the alphabet's deformations and reformations in his work seem symptomatic of his mature sense of literature as an art of recombination rather than creation. Indeed Joyce's use of the alphabet as a set of elements which can give rise to infinite variations, is strongly analogous – as a microcosm to a macrocosm – to his sense of literature as an intertextual realm, in which the artist (literally a “man of letters” [SH 211]) must assume his place as a “scissors and paste man” (*Letters I*, 297)⁷⁹ – a disorderer, permuter, and combiner of other authors' writings.

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79. Joyce to George Antheil, 3 January 1931.

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