Spring 2024

Mutuomorphomutation: On Language as a Game in Joyce and Wittgenstein

William Owen Morrissey
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024

Part of the Comparative Philosophy Commons, and the Philosophy of Language Commons

Recommended Citation

Mutuomorphomutation: On Language as a Game in Joyce and Wittgenstein

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Social Studies

Of Bard College

by

Owen Morrissey

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024

Acknowledgements

The majority of my gratitude belongs to Professor Ruth Zisman, without whom the process of writing this project would have been impossible.

I am also indebted to Professor Éric Trudel who, along with Ruth, helped edit the two chapters of this project.

Thanks are also owed to Professor Gregory Moynahan, who held an incredibly informative class on *Finnegans Wake* in the spring of 2022.

Finally, thank you to Johannes Furtwängler for helping me write the conclusion.

Table of Contents

Introduction

> "There are no magic words. To say the words is magical enough."

> —William H. Gass

Looking at the world of letters of the early 20ᵗʰ century, no two names stand out more in terms of idiosyncrasy in their biographies and in their work than James Joyce and Ludwig Wittgenstein. One an ex-patriated Irishman who meticulously composed some of the most complex and perverted literature to date, the other a poorly tempered Austrian who, despite publishing only a single slim volume in his lifetime, helped spawn an entire philosophical school of thought.

Joyce and Wittgenstein couldn't be more different authors. While they both worked in a modernist zeitgeist and shared concerns about language, I will make no argument that they share an outlook, mood, attitude, method, or anything else of this nature. I'm tempted to say that Wittgenstein is himself a modernist, but the material needed to properly argue this could comprise an entire book[1]. I will also make no argument that the reading of one author enhances the reading of the other or that the tools one author supplies can be used to analyze the other. I see an affinity between them in terms of how they are concerned with language and its functioning. They both see it as a limit because it determines how speakers of a language see their world and come to knowledge of it, but as much as it is a limit, it is also a *game*. It's something which encourages creative play within its bounds, as well as the pushing of these

---

[1] In fact, it comprises at least three! For more on Wittgenstein's relationship to modernism, please see Karen Zumhagen-Yekplé's *Wittgenstein and Modernism* (2016), and *A Different Order of Difficulty* (2020), as well as Marjorie Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder* (1996). Although I don't directly cite the last two books on this list, I'm naturally indebted to them both for spurring much of the thinking in this project.

bounds into new territory. There are only certain outcomes in games—their ends are determined from the beginning—but the means by which we achieve these ends are themselves limitless.

Wittgenstein has a reputation as a logic-chopper, but his concept of the language-game bristles against this reputation. He introduces language-games to emphasise that even though language has certain rules that determine its use, there comes a point where rules fail to explain the use of language. Just as tennis doesn't have a rule that dictates how high the ball can go above the court, we can't develop rules that describe all of the uses for a single word. We have to play the game of language according to its rules but also with the awareness that some moves in the game don't logically follow from the rules. This naturally creates problems: how can we communicate effectively if there is nothing which tells us how to do so? Precise knowledge about words being impossible creates difficulties, but it also generates new possibilities within language: Joyce *is* communicating effectively through a language that isn't precise in the slightest.

Joyce's play with language is more direct and isn't explicitly concerned with its use, but its sense and history. The natural history of language is embedded in its etymology, its sound, and its meaning. Joyce acts like a speculative archaeologist; his neologisms are alien fossils belonging to the history of language, as they could have been. We see in *Finnegans Wake* language playfully pushed to its limits in order to reveal that a word's sense is inherently wrapped up in its history and vice versa. The rules of language can be bent not just to reveal different uses, but also to reveal how a word's normal use is not as simple as it appears, and that quite a lot of meaning lies in its sound, its relationship with other words, and what it used to mean in long dead paradigms of language.

I'm interested in this characterization of language as a game because it brushes against two common sentiments about language: 1. that when we speak, we express an internal, mental reality, and 2. that language restricts this expression by shaping the expression of our thoughts. Neither of these sentiments are wrong per se, but at the same time I see them repeated so often by laymen, philosophers, and novelists alike that I wonder if we rely on them too much as grounds for our discussions about language. To see language as a game emphasizes the social and collaborative aspects of language. It can be seen not as a faulty medium through which you express your interiority, but instead as an exteriority which you enter into and make positive contributions towards its future use. But now we're allowed to turn our thinking around: instead of language being a limit of experience, it can be a fundamental part of experience, and developing one's own unique skills to confront the limitations language imposes on your expression is itself part of the game. A good craftsman never blames his tools, and one should smell a rat when one sees a writer of all people complain that language is an imperfect medium for communicating ideas. It's in fact *the only medium* for communicating ideas, and perhaps what creates ideas in the first place. The ideas being communicated do not need to belong alone to a speaker's interior world, and our philosophical poise is less graceful if we begin by clinging hard and fast to the opposite assumptions.

Quite a lot of work has been produced which consists of a philosophical reading of a work of literature, but it's much less common to see someone devote a reading of a philosophical work through the lens of a work of literature. The original structure of this project was to have two chapters argumentatively independent of the other, one would be a reading of Joyce through Wittgenstein's philosophy, and the other would be a reading of Wittgenstein through Joyce's ideas. In the process of writing this exact structure didn't end up emerging, but I believe that I

put both authors into an even-handed and balanced conversation. The hope behind writing this way was that neither author would pull the short stick (especially Joyce—I didn't want to simply perform a philosophical reading of *Finnegans Wake*, but then by the same token, I didn't want to simply read *Philosophical Investigations* as a work of literature), and I believe I've fulfilled this hope. I borrow ideas from Wittgenstein in order to discuss certain patterns, functions, and uses of language while using passages from Joyce as examples or case studies of such features of language. Neither author has too strong of a bearing on how I end up reading the other.

The first chapter makes heavy use of Umberto Eco's characterization of *Finnegans Wake* as an open work. I argue that this reading emphasizes that the meaning of *Finnegans Wake* is not to be retrieved from the work itself but created by a community of its readers publicly and socially. I then go on to argue that Wittgenstein's private language argument has something very similar to say about language itself, namely that the meaning of words can't be retrieved from an individual speaker's private intent behind an utterance, but that it's created publicly and socially among a community of language speakers. The second chapter makes use of an essay that Samuel Beckett wrote about *Finnegans Wake*, in which he makes the curious claim that the form and content of the work are the same. I detected here a similarity between this claim from Beckett and Wittgenstein's argument that "[f]or a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word 'meaning'—though not for *all*—this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language," (25). I understand the main argument of *Philosophical Investigations* to be a refutation of referential theories of language which hold that the meaning of most words can be explained by their reference to classes of objects in the world. As much as I think Beckett is correct, I'm troubled by the ambiguity of his claim and I believe that his thought can be clarified by Wittgenstein's. Joyce's text can instead be seen as an example of language

which isn't representational, not necessarily as a work which collapses the distinction between form and content. Both chapters grapple with the philosophical implications of the meaning of language being independent of a speaker's private intent.

My goal with this project ultimately is not to demonstrate a connection between Joyce and Wittgenstein but to recast their pictures of language in relation to one another. There is much to be learned from each author on their own, but putting them together ought to yield new insights. The experience of reading either of these authors is one of exploring one's relationship with language, and the exploration can reach new territories if the two are put into conversation.

Chapter 1: The Meaning of Man is Temporarily Wrapped in Obscenity

One of the essential concerns of literary modernism is language. How can language be *used*, rearranged, cut up, analyzed, and made new in order to create new potentials for written art? James Joyce offers radical answers to these questions through the obscure prose of *Finnegans Wake*. Ludwig Wittgenstein explores these questions through innovative breaks with the philosophical traditions preceding him in the *Philosophical Investigations*—not offering radical answers so much as offering completely new ways to think about them, including thinking about them as totally irrelevant. Both authors express this modernist concern in their own way—Joyce through his reinvention of the English language and Wittgenstein through a meticulous analysis of language's use—but both authors offer the same insight, namely that the creation of meaning in language is a public enterprise undertaken by speakers of any language.

Umberto Eco reads *Finnegans Wake* as an "open work": a piece of art which is characterized by the fact that it can be approached from any angle, allowing the reader to spontaneously adopt their own reading. The meaning of the work is created through an interplay between the reader and the text instead of the meaning coming from some kind of authorial intent that the reader is expected to retrieve from the text. In this way, the work is public since the act of its interpretation occurs in the open by the text's readers. Eco's reading favors one idea through which to read *Finnegans Wake*, so his reading at times limits how we read the book. This is a problem for a work as boundless and resistant to readings along a single line of thought, but my hope for reading the book through Eco is to bring out a latent quality of the text: we have trouble understanding the text, but its individual words somehow still make sense. The sense of the words is hazy and imprecise, yet it's received from the text nonetheless, and the book tasks the reader with interpreting this sense beyond its haziness in order to make sense of the whole of

their aesthetic experience with the book. The language in *Finnegans Wake* is obscure, but because the text's meaning lies in the reader's experience reading the text instead of somewhere hidden where it's intended by the author to be retrieved by the reader, the reader has special access to meaning in the text.

This apparent paradox of access to meaning in Joyce—that even though the language is obscure, that there is no one locus of meaning—is an important facet of how language is conceived in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. This is made especially apparent in what's known as his "private language argument", where he argues that a language which refers only to what its speaker knows (i.e., a private language) can't exist. When we use words in order to talk about private sensations, we aren't actually referring to a private, interior process. We don't point to a "something" inside of us with these words, but rather their meaning comes from their use, which is developed publicly, in the open, by speakers of a language.

Without Wittgenstein's philosophical handling of language, we wouldn't see that our experience of reading *Finnegans Wake* is similar to our experience of using language in general, but without Joyce's radical reconstruction of language, we wouldn't see that our use of language is public. Wittgenstein argues that a private language, a language one person creates to describe her immediate experiences, which only she can know, is an incoherent idea. Joyce, through his creation of an open work in *Finnegans Wake* (and I will argue later that it's appropriate to call it a public work as well as an open one), modifies this argument and magnifies one conclusion that can be drawn from Wittgenstein's work: if a private language is incoherent, then language must be public, and language's meaning must be created publicly by every speaker of a language, regardless of how obscure that meaning appears.

What makes a piece of literature an "open work"? Umberto Eco develops this idea out of innovations made in avant-garde musical compositions by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Henri Pousseur, and Pierre Boulez. Each of the pieces he cites makes use of irregular musical notation so that the piece's performer has to decide how the piece is performed and in what order certain units of the piece are played. A composer traditionally "posits an assemblage of sound units which the composer arranged in a closed, well-defined manner before presenting it to the listener," (Eco, *The Open Work* 2-3). As in traditional music, the performer is "free to follow the composer's instruction following his own discretion", but he must also "impose his judgement on the *form of the piece*, as when he decides how long to hold a note or in what order to group the sounds: all this amounts to an act of improvised creation," (Eco, *The Open Work* 1, emphasis mine). A composer of an open work of music does not lay out the music in a predetermined sequence. Instead, it's up to the performer to organize the piece as they see fit. The performer modifies the piece with his own "particular and individual perspective" (Eco, *The Open Work* 3), making them as much of an author of the piece as the composer. Very similar processes occur during the performance of any traditional piece of music, but the difference with an open piece of music is that both content and form must be determined by the performer. In other words, the performer must develop his own reading of the music in order to play it, and by doing this, he necessarily leaves his own mark on the piece. These pieces are "are brought to the conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane" (Eco, *The Open Work* 3), so by marking the piece with his own perspective, the piece reacts to the performer, marking him in return by causing him to reflect on his aesthetic experience while simultaneously bearing this experience. This is a point that Eco doesn't develop but which I will later: by performing an open work (and even reading an open work can be seen as an act of

performance), the performer must organize their own aesthetic experience during the heat of that experience, and they gain knowledge of the *form* of their experience and thus of themselves as well.

This doesn't quite answer our question: how does such a quality of "openness" operate in a piece of literature? The answer doesn't necessarily lie in the text itself. Eco makes use of a medieval theory of interpretation: one can read the Bible and by extension, literature and poetry, either literally, morally, allegorically, or anagogically. Eco argues that this method of reading is influenced by an Aristotelian vision of the world in which reality is organized along a hierarchical chain of being. Every object in the world is strictly regimented into clearly defined strata, and so the aesthetic experiences which accompany literature must also obey this metaphysical and scientific organization. Accordingly, there are only four ways of approaching a text, especially one as important and fundamental to our understanding of reality as the Bible. It should be noted that this medieval hermeneutic is not necessarily impoverished in Eco's view, but only that it is informed by a specific, historically determined view of the world. In the modern era, by contrast, innovations from scientists like Einstein and metaphysicians like Whitehead have revealed that we don't need to view the world as a strictly organized and closed system; a finite list of hierarchically structured layers can't describe how complicated the world actually ended up being. These modern innovations are exactly the vision of the world which potentiates the writing and reading of a work like *Finnegans Wake*, where the reader has to develop her own method of reading in order to make sense out of a warped and disorganized aesthetic experience. The task of interpretation is not a matter of filtering your ideas through a hermeneutic conceived before the act of reading but one of discovering various dimensions of the text which can only be perceived by an individual reader. The individual crafts the text

alongside the author by noticing features only she herself could notice as a unique individual. It might seem as if we, as readers and as people who must understand our experiences within a specific metaphysical and scientific paradigm, are unfortunately tasked with making sense out of chaos, but this is exactly the kind of idea that Eco wants to avoid with his development of the open work. Instead, we are faced with the task of making sense *through* an open system. We're now charged with freedom as readers and beings with aesthetic experiences because our reality and our experiences aren't organized systematically anymore. To read is as creative a task as writing, and a reader is put on the same plane as an author.

But how is reading an open work any different from reading any other sort of text? Isn't the fundamental experience of literature to gain self-knowledge through your own individual and open-ended experience of reading? Especially if the nature of the open work lies as much in its composition as in the metaphysical and scientific paradigms it was created under, then every work of art must be seen as an open work since a contemporary reader is reading under such an open paradigm. But this would mean privileging the reader over the author in a certain sense by placing the entire burden of making meaning on the reader and the paradigm she's reading under. Authors also work under a specific paradigm after all, and their work is a product of their times as much as the reader's experience with the text is. However, the idea that such paradigms are central to both an author's creation of a text and the reader's experience of it leaves quite a lot to be desired. These paradigms are broken as soon as one experiences the text individually since it is brought into contact with the reader's individuality, something which cannot be totally determined by the systems of knowledge surrounding the reader. Indeed, Eco's reading of *Finnegans Wake* perhaps doesn't go far enough. He frequently claims that *Finnegans Wake* is an

attempt to represent in language the strange universe which we find ourselves in after the disorienting scientific discoveries of the 20th century:

> In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce establishes the possibility of defining our universe in the 'transcendental' form of language. He provides a laboratory in which to formulate a model of reality and, in so doing, withdraws from *things* to *language*. To understand the nature of reality itself, rather than the cultural models of reality, is a task that belongs neither to science nor to literature but to metaphysics, and the crisis of metaphysics arises from its inadequacy to this task. (Eco, *Aesthetics of Chaosmos* 84-5)

In this light, it seems as if Joyce intended the book to be a linguistic cosmos of nebulous meaning that is intricately weaved together by substantial associations between its puns and wordplays. This reading of the book isn't necessarily wrong, but it is deeply impoverished, and it seems to be dominated by the significance he places on Joyce's neologism "chaosmos" (118). The book is itself a chaotic, chasmic cosmos, and we could say the same thing about the non-hierarchical universe of the modern era, but that is to view the book and the universe from too lofty a perspective. The idea that the form of language is transcendental to reality also creates problems for Eco: the book does not stand beyond our experience of language, and the particular experience of language revealed in *Finnegans Wake* appears immanent. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the poetics of *Finnegans Wake* attempt to appeal not only to a conceptual mind through the interplay of different signs and their relative semantic meaning but also to the body through an insistence on language's sound. If we decide to use a single neologism as a critical key for unlocking the most important meaning behind *Finnegans Wake*, I would choose instead "gyrogyrorondo" (Joyce 239) over "chaosmos": the book is circular in its structure, and by extension, its meaning. The reader can go around the book as many times as they'd like, and they

can begin or end from any point in the book. The process of making meaning out of *Finnegans Wake* never ends; it does not unfold in a closed space such as a laboratory, but it spirals out infinitely.

Joyce parodies this exact sort of reading which is too eager to privilege a certain experience as transcendental. In the middle of the book, Joyce pauses to give an explanation (albeit one that's still obscure) of his book and identifies the character of Shaun, a stand-in for Joyce's brother Stanislaus, who, as it so happens, represents themes of light, civility, and everything orderly, including science. The question is asked who he is, and then a long and overwrought academic speech follows which aims "to conclusively confute this begging question" (Joyce 149). However, the text is so unstable that a conclusive answer proves impossible to supply. Less scientific and more poetic language intrudes on the speech, undermining an airtight reading of the chapter. We're subjected to a refutation of "Professor Loewy-Brueller" and "his talked off confession which recently met with such a leonine uproar on its escape after its confinement" titled "*Why am I not born like a Gentilemen and why am I now so speakable about my own eatables*" (Joyce 150). The title of this "confession" (as well as the characterization of this apparently scientific article as a confession) makes an occasion for an unexpected existential reflection: why am I born into a specific race, class, and nationality? How is it that I'm able to talk about my experience of the world? The rhyme between "speakable" and "eatable" undermines the potential gravity of the phrase, marking it at its end as cutesy instead of serious. Theological language also makes an appearance when Loewy-Brueller is cited as saying that "'by Allswill' the inception and the descent and the endswell of Man is *temporarily* wrapped in obscenity" (Joyce 150). A religious pun like "Allswill" (Allah's will, the will of all, i.e., God) is put side by side with a reference to evolutionary science like "the descent and the endswell of

Man" (Darwin's *The Descent of Man*). At every turn, the text undermines itself, introducing a new tone or perspective with every neologism.

The text is, admittedly, something of a linguistic laboratory since Joyce is quite literally experimenting with words, but there's much more at play here than just experimentation. This speech doesn't reflect the "chaosmos" of the scientific paradigm of the 20th century, if anything it mocks the haughty air surrounding academics who treat their findings as the final word. The text is too unstable to call it a linguistic laboratory, a chaosmos, or a closed narrative. To see it as a complex system of interrelated signs that stand in reserve for the critic's analysis is to miss the forest for the trees and emphasize the ambiguous meaning of individual words over the book's obvious unity. Eco's interpretation of *Finnegans Wake* remains authoritarian even if I take his idea of the open work to be an authoritative lens through which to read Joyce's work.

It's not that the open work places the location of all meaning-making on the reader, nor that it stands as a modern innovation in literature aided by scientific discovery, but that the author has made a work that can be read openly. Open works are distinct from other works in how they are written and how they are meant to be grasped by the reader. Eco exemplifies this in a comparative reading of lines from Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. The example from Dante is a tercet about the nature of the Trinity: "O Light Eternal, who alone abides in Thyself, / alone knowest Thyself, and known to Thyself / and knowing, lovest and smilest on Thyself!" (qtd. in *The Open Work* 40) Eco expects Dante to accept "one and only one interpretation" (*The Open Work* 40) of the tercet: these lines are about the Trinity, and the reader's experience of the poem can't go beyond contemplation of this concept. Bound by orthodox modes of speculation and Catholic aesthetic sensibilities, the meaning of the three lines remains "univocal". This isn't to discount the aesthetic value of the tercet; quite the opposite: "at

every new reading of the tercet, the idea of the Trinity expands with new emotion and new

suggestions, and its meaning, though univocal, gets deeper and richer," (*The Open Work* 40-1).

Dante is still a skilled poet, and he provides the reader with an experience which expands in

meaning as the reader sits with it. On the other hand, the example from Joyce actually seems

much simpler conceptually; it's just a few sentences about a letter which nobody can make sense

of: "From quiqui quinet to michemiche chalet and a jambebatiste to a brulobrulo! It is told in

sounds in utter that, in signs so adds to, in universal, in polygluttural, in each ausiliary neutral

idiom, sordomutics, florilingua, sheltafocal, flayflutter, a con's cubane, a pro's tutute, strassarab,

ereperse and anythongue athall," (qtd. in Eco, *The Open Work* 41). Despite the fact that a

complex concept is not trying to be communicated as it is in Dante, the form of expression is

obscure, and can only be defined "in terms of its substantial ambiguity," (Eco, *The Open Work*

41). While the sentence is filled with coded allusions to Joyce's philosophical and historical

inspirations as well as strange and obscure neologisms, it's impossible for there to be one correct

interpretation of what this sentence actually means because Joyce warps his language beyond

recognition. The sentence can still be enjoyed, and the reader can still make some sense out of it

even if they don't know that Joyce was inspired by the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico

("jambebatiste") or fascinated by secret languages like Shelta spoken by Irish Travellers

("sheltafocal"). There may be a private intent cooked into the sentence, but it can remain

irrelevant in the reader's experience of the text. The sentence is left formless, in wait for the

reader to impose her own form and unlock the meaning of her ambiguous aesthetic experience. If

Dante's tercet is univocal, then Joyce's sentence is polyvocal. The reader can understand what's

going on in literal terms (i.e., Joyce describes a letter), but they are also left with a mixed heap of

associations and allusions that merely appear to be present in the text itself. The experience of

reading Joyce doesn't so much expand in a linear direction as the reader better grasps the idea Joyce was trying to express; rather, the reader notices new details and associations while their way of reading the text gains new dimensions.

Dante wants the reader to make one interpretation of his text but allows the reader to let that univocal interpretation grow richer. Joyce offers a text that defies literal understanding and gives the reader the freedom to expand their interpretation in any direction, not just towards a greater understanding of one idea. Dante's relationship to his text and his reader is thus comparatively less ambiguous than Joyce's. Dante means to write a poem about the nature of the Trinity, and he means for the reader to meditate on this concept through his poem. Joyce doesn't appear to mean anything so simple, and much of the reader's task is to figure out exactly what is meaningful in the text for her. Joyce simply presents a mass of text with a manifold of different meanings which can only become meaningful once the reader picks up the work and parses these meanings for herself. Dante, on the other hand, has a private intent with writing his tercet. If Joyce has a similar intent, then it is totally obscured in his writing. The meaning of the text does come from the words on the page, but the creation of meaning does not come from Joyce in the way that it does from Dante, who strictly limits how the reader is to take his poem. The task of making meaning lies with Joyce's audience.

This unique relationship with his audience is why I think it's necessary to append a second adjective to Eco's term "open work" in relation to *Finnegans Wake*: it's an open, *public* work. The actual creative work, the creative work that needs to occur in order for this open work to make sense, takes place out in the open, in public. Joyce did meticulously compose *Finnegans Wake*, presumably in private, presumably with a certain idea in mind which the work was supposed to express, and presumably he even felt that some readers would correctly guess the

"real" meaning behind some allusions, neologisms, and multilingual puns, but these hidden ideas and meanings are not the ultimate content of the text. The ultimate content of the text is the experience the reader has while reading it. Any reader leaves an indelible mark on the text and its legacy by noticing something which only they, as a unique individual, could notice. Joyce's work is a mass of interconnected text, produced "nicthemerically" (185), and as an author, Joyce couldn't have known all the different associations and meanings which he ended up writing; in a way, the text itself is obscure even to its author. This is to say that nobody has the final say on what it means. It exists publicly, and everyone is welcome to leave their mark on it, although by doing so the book leaves a mark on the reader in return.

As it so happens, the functioning of the open, public work is quite similar to how Wittgenstein believes language functions. It's something necessarily public, and every individual speaker of the language, in their own way, determines what it means, but in so doing, they also determine what something in themselves means. Language is one of our only tools for making meaning out of ourselves, but in order to make meaning out of ourselves, we need to make meaning out of language. Like the open, public work, language is made meaningful through a speaker's experience of it, through the moments in which it is used to communicate, but the speaker is also suddenly made meaningful through their attempts to communicate. In order to bring this point out more clearly, I will have to turn now to what's known as the private language argument found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

Wittgenstein's private language argument starts off with a thought experiment: imagine a person who developed a language "in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences" (95). We can imagine this being done in typical public language—we have words that refer to sense data, feelings, and other private phenomena—but this is not what Wittgenstein

is talking about. This language instead refers "to what only the speaker can know—to his immediate private sensations," (Wittgenstein 95). This sort of language cannot exist because a language is given meaning through the rules of its use, and these rules of use cannot be developed privately. Even if someone were to develop a language which refers "to what only the speaker can know", she would have to develop rules for the use of words in this language, which already assumes a criterion for what makes a certain use appropriate or not. Wittgenstein uses an example of a genius child who creates a word for "toothache" because his language doesn't have a term for this sensation. We can say that he gave a name to his sensation, but then naming a sensation is only made meaningful through conventions for naming something, and these conventions can't come from a private language: "much must be prepared in the language for mere naming to make sense. And if we speak of someone's giving a name to a pain, the grammar of the word 'pain' is what has been prepared here; it indicates the post where the new word is stationed," (Wittgenstein 98). The child can't give the sensation of a toothache a private name because they would need to either construct a private linguistic apparatus which makes naming meaningful in the first place or borrow one from the language they already speak and thus invent a new word that every speaker of the language can use. The former case is problematic because the creation of such an apparatus is carried out together by the speakers of a language in public. The child would have to borrow the conventions of naming a sensation from their native language in order to give a private name to their toothache. Therefore, in both cases, the child is simply inventing a neologism instead of giving a private name to their sensation.

But let's say the child's native language doesn't include any naming conventions, and this child is such a genius that they can invent naming conventions for themselves. Then, can they properly make a private name for their toothache? The answer must still be no because an

objective criterion for referring private words correctly to private sensations can't be obtained: "whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct'," (Wittgenstein 99). If the child does succeed in making a private name for a toothache, then they can apply the name "toothache" to basically whatever sensation they like and then believe that they believe that that sensation is a toothache (Wittgenstein 99). There is nothing in the private language that the child can point towards in order to say, "See? I'm using this word correctly" other than their own judgement, which isn't beholden to any "criterion of correctness" except for the very judgement itself that the use is correct. This "criterion of correctness" is decided upon in the open, publicly, by the speakers of the language, and every speaker of a language is beholden to this public institution.

These "rules of use" come with their own problems for Wittgenstein. How can you pin down a specific rule and say: "The word 'toothache' can only be used in *these* circumstances"? Part of the problem for Wittgenstein is that you actually can't: you can easily imagine a perfectly appropriate yet extremely abstract use of the word "toothache" in a poem which nobody could anticipate if they listed all the correct rules of use of the word. We can't make a finite list of rules for using a word such as "toothache" because we can simply invent new rules for its use or imagine new circumstances in which a new use of a word would be called for.

To complicate things even further, Wittgenstein identifies a problem with even saying that a use of a word is correct: "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule. The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it," (87). Even within a public language, there is still a problem of validating certain rules because there is an apparent gulf between rules and the "courses of

action" which are supposed to accompany them. We might be tempted to say that a certain course of action either conflicts or accords with a rule by means of a mental process going on inside the person using a word, but the problems with this idea are exactly what Wittgenstein means to highlight: the person using the word may be using it according to the correct rule in their head, or they may be using it incorrectly, but it appears correct by accident. In the course of their training in a language, a series of mistakes might have occurred, which then caused them to develop incorrect rules of use which happen to appear correct in context. What goes on inside a person's head is unknowable until they communicate in language what's going on, but by that point, the question of validating a rule of use has already cropped up, and the mental process has become a chimera.

This argument seems rather limited to certain problems in the philosophy of language, but in fact, its implications are far-reaching. It undermines a belief commonly held by both philosophers and those not formally trained in philosophy that words such as "happiness", "pain", or "red" refer to internal ideas or mental states known only to the speaker of the word and when somebody uses one of these words in a sentence, she is "translating" a sensation which is only known to her into her language. This can't be the case for Wittgenstein, or at least it appears incoherent. A speaker of a language begins using words which describe such sensations as a child before they can even ask themselves what the best word is for expressing a certain sensation or if their words actually express their sensations in the first place. They have already been inducted into the grammar of a language, and the nature of their own mental processes becomes chimerical because they must come to an understanding of their mental processes through language. Private sensations are possible, but Wittgenstein doesn't deny this. However, talking about them is a very different matter because we must use the public medium of language in

order to think about their meaning. It appears then that the case is actually the opposite of the commonly held view of "translating" sensations: instead of language speakers making sense of their sensations with language, language itself has a hand in making the meaning of these sensations. Ideas like "happiness", "pain", or "red" are all sensations which can't be known only to the person who talks about them; rather, their meaning must come from the workings of the language in which they are found.

When we talk about private sensations, we don't refer to them with our words. When I say, "I have a pain in my side," the word "pain" doesn't point to an internal process going on within me. There's no way for others to know my pain as I know it, and when I use the word "pain", there's no way for others to know that I'm referring to the same thing they refer to in their use of the word "pain". This is the heart of Wittgenstein's famous "beetle in the box" analogy. If we all have boxes with something inside of them which we call a "beetle" (just as we all have bodies with something that happens to them which we call a "pain"), then there's no way for me to know if my beetle is the same as everyone else's beetle. Yet we can still talk meaningfully about these beetles just as we can still talk meaningfully about pains. The word "beetle" doesn't function "as the name of a thing. The thing in the box doesn't belong to the language-game at all; not even as a *Something*: for the box might even be empty. […] the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant," (Wittgenstein 106-7). The meaning of the word "beetle" or "pain" originates from our use of the word in a given language-game, not from the object which we want the word to refer to. It's not the meaning that we want to convey which determines the use of certain words, but the context (or language-game) in which the conversation occurs; making meaning is a matter of making appropriate and inventive "moves" within a language-game.

We see exactly this (the context of communication instead of what speakers intend to convey determining what is said) occurring in the dialogue between Jute and Mutt in the first chapter of *Finnegans Wake*. Mutt is a Celt living in the British Isles during the Viking invasions, and Jute is a member of the Jutes, a Germanic tribe which invaded and then settled in southern Britain. Neither of them speak the same language, but over the course of the dialogue, they appear to reach mutual understanding, but only after a series of mistakes and misunderstandings guides them there. The meaning of their words isn't tied to the thoughts which they intend to convey but to the continuously evolving context of conversation in which they find themselves. Indeed, if we want to make an effective reading of this passage, we would do well to "break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or whatever," (Wittgenstein 109).

The dialogue begins with one of these misunderstandings: "Jute.—Are you jeff? Mutt.—Somehards. Jute.—But you are not jeffmute? Mutt.—Noho. Only an utterer. Jute.—Whoa? Whoat is the mutter with you? Mutt.—I became a stun a stummer. Jute.—What a hauhauhauhaudibble thing, to be cause!" (Joyce 16). Jute begins by asking for Mutt's name or nationality, "jeff" or "jeffmute". Mutt misunderstands and believes he's being asked whether he's mute and responds that he's "Only an utterer." It's not completely clear how Jute interprets this—expecting a nationality in response, maybe he mistakes "utterer" to mean a nationality, or maybe he understands the word in its archaic legal sense to mean "someone who circulates counterfeit money". When Mutt later calls himself a "stummer", Jute, someone who natively speaks a Germanic language, mistakes him for meaning that he's mute ("Stummer" is the word for a mute person in German).

To understand this dialogue by means of deciphering what each character means by what he says, to uncover what it is that Jute or Mutt has in his head when he utters or stammers a word, is to blindly make assumptions about what's going on in the text[2]. We have no way of knowing that Jute takes "utterer" to mean "one who circulates counterfeit money" or that he's referring to a nationality when he says "jeff" or "jeffmute". Mutt, as his interlocutor, is in the same position we are and can only guess what Jute means by certain words—but this is somewhat pointless because Jute doesn't necessarily "mean" anything by his words. The two characters are involved in an evolving language-game in which they communicate by experimental moves. Sometimes the moves are appropriate, sometimes not, and so the communication continues in fits and starts. It's also clear that Jute is having a hard time understanding Mutt: "Jute.—You that side your voise are almost inedible to me. Become a bitskin more wiseable, as if I were you," (Joyce 16). The phrase "as if I were you" reads less like a threat and more like a supplication. It emphasizes the reciprocal dynamic between the two speakers. Mutt is already like Jute—he can't understand the other person—but, perhaps because of this lack of understanding, Jute doesn't realize this.

Communication takes place not through a mutual understanding of what both interlocutors mean or have in mind when they utter a phrase but through how their conversation develops as they speak. One person speaks, and the other, under the customary pressure of holding a conversation, has to react to words they don't properly understand. This process becomes so sophisticated that Mutt tries to give Jute a history of the island he's invading, dramatically telling him that

---

[2] I'm aware that a lot of scholarship on *Finnegans Wake* is strictly exegetical—and I don't mean to claim that this is bad scholarship—but exegesis is not the goal of this project and largely goes against its spirit as well.

Mearmerge two races, swete and brack. Morthering rue. Hither, craching eastuards, they

are in surgence: hence, cool at ebb, they requiesce. Countlessness of livestories have

netherfallen by this plage, flick as flowflakes, litters from aloft, like a waast wizard all of

whirlworlds. Now are all tombed to the mound, isges to isges, erde from erde. Pride, O

pride, thy prize! (Joyce 17)

and then comes Jute's reply: "'Stench!" (Joyce 17). We get the sense that there is understanding

here because the conversation continues despite Jute's blunt response, and Mutt expands on his

historical discourse. As Wittgenstein observes, this is because "In the sense in which there are

processes (including mental processes) which are characteristic of understanding, understanding

is not a mental process," (67).

Wittgenstein takes a pragmatic approach to the grammar of the word "understand": the

criteria we use to evaluate whether or not someone understands something doesn't involve

evaluating a mental process, and so we shouldn't necessarily think of understanding as a mental

process. The criteria for understanding are actually external and physical instead of internal and

mental; if you behave in the proper way according to a command, it can be said that you've

understood the command if you produce an insightful essay about a poem by William Blake, it

can be said that you understand Blake's work. What understanding means in the context of a

conversation like the one between Jute and Mutt is much harder to pin down. At each step, Mutt

and Jute have something to say in response to the other speaker, which gives at least the

appearance of "understanding". This reflects Wittgenstein's pragmatic observations about

language: in practice, there's no way to evaluate a person's words by measuring them against an

internal process or intention. Communication is a reciprocal interpretive practice, and the only

thing there is to interpret is the words in conversation. This point from Wittgenstein itself reflects

what I have argued about Joyce's work above: there's no need to locate a meaning "beyond" the text in the idea the author wanted to express because the meaning comes from a relationship between the text and its reader. Most communication confronts us in the same way that *Finnegans Wake* confronts us: we must establish meaning not by delving into the head of our interlocutor but by developing our own individual reading of our interlocutor's words.

As I said at the start of this chapter, Joyce and Wittgenstein are concerned with language, but perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that they are concerned with how we communicate with language and, in turn, how language itself communicates. For Wittgenstein, communication is perilous territory. Rules of use for a word are created socially by all the speakers of a language, but these rules can't be pinned down exactly, and it can't be known for certain if everyone has the same set of rules in their head. This situation is made even more complicated when he rebuffs through his private language argument a common model of language which holds that when we say something, we're trying to express an inner, mental feeling. For Wittgenstein, sometimes language does this, but otherwise the words we say are really expressing social customs. Despite what I've argued earlier, it does seem at times like Joyce has something he wants to express through his obscure language, like when he talks about the composition of *Ulysses*: "pious Eneas, conformant to the fulminant firman which enjoins on the tremylose terrain that, when the call comes, he shall produce nichthemerically from his unheavenly body a no uncertain quantity of obscene matter not protected by copriright in the United States of Ourania" (185), or even more clearly when he calls *Finnegans Wake* an attempt to reflect "from his own individual person life unlivable, transaccidentated through the slow fires of consciousness into a dividual chaos, perilous, potent, common to allflesh, human only, mortal" (186). But given that these personal admissions come within the structure of *Finnegans Wake*,

the "real" or "hidden" meaning of these lines can remain irrelevant to an individual reader's experience of the text, even if Joyce meant for such a reader to retrieve this meaning. Just as Wittgenstein doesn't necessarily rule out one model of language (although he critiques certain models, he admits that they are accurate in certain circumstances), I don't want to rule out a reading of *Finnegans Wake* which advocates for a meaning Joyce was trying to express in his book, only that the book works on such a level that the individual reader can make meaning out of it on their own without having to concern themselves with what Joyce "meant". This particular level of meaning of *Finnegans Wake* is a good model for Wittgenstein's views on communication. We can't access another person's mind, and so intent, what someone meant, becomes irrelevant. Like readers of *Finnegans Wake*, in order to communicate, we must come up with our own individual understanding of others. We can't determine exactly what rule of use governs a particular word, nor can we be sure that we've properly learned one, so we simply must make them up as we go along.

Chapter 2: The Splitting of the Etym

In 1929, among negative reception of sections of *Finnegans Wake* which were published in Parisian literary journals, some of Joyce's supporters publish a collection of exegetical and critical essays of his work titled *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*. One of these supporters is the young Samuel Beckett, who writes an essay titled "Dante… Bruno. Vico.. Joyce". The innovation that Beckett identifies in Joyce's writing is that, in *Finnegans Wake*, "form *is* content, content *is* form," and that more "decadent" readers who can't see this read literature in such a way that "form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other" (14). Beckett is very perceptive to how unique Joyce's book is in both its presentation and meaning: "It is not written at all. It is not to be read—or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*," (14). Despite how insightful Beckett's claims are initially, questions arise when compared with philosophical insights from Wittgenstein: what is the form and content of language? Does language always have a form and content?[3] Certainly, there are parts of the book where form and content are neatly distinguished from one another, such as the quiz chapter where Joyce explains the contents of the book in the form of his obscure English. Beckett is not able to resolve these issues in his essay because he is still thinking about language according to a restricted picture of language. This is basically to say that he is lacking the insights which Wittgenstein will develop later in the century. Despite his observation that Joyce's book is not a book which can only be

---

[3] After writing the majority of this chapter, Éric Trudel notified me that Beckett's talk of form and content here is responding to a tradition originating in the late 19th century with writers like Paul Valéry. His distinction belongs to a critical literary tradition, not to a tradition in the philosophy of language. Nonetheless, Beckett works with certain philosophical assumptions about language which Wittgenstein would jump on. If I make a strawman out of him, it's only to bring out Wittgenstein's points in contrast to Beckett's.

read because of its multilayered handling of language, there are points in this essay in which Beckett adheres to a picture of language which holds that words refer to things, whether they're physical, mental, abstract, a process, etc. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, identifies philosophical issues with claiming that this is the only way that language functions and then develops alternative pictures of language. Wittgenstein doesn't necessarily develop a picture of language whose form and content are the same, but he does philosophically help us understand what this language could look like. He can also help us understand what Joyce is doing in moments where Beckett's claims don't seem to map onto the text of *Finnegans Wake* itself. Beckett isn't wrong to say that Joyce is marrying content and form in his writing (at least sometimes), but what Joyce is doing more broadly is developing a non-representational language. While Beckett doesn't have a properly developed philosophical structure to explain his claims, Wittgenstein does, and his philosophy can also illuminate the significance of a non-representational language.

Before developing this idea of a non-representational language, we should first try to understand Beckett's claims that the form and content of *Finnegans Wake* are the same, as well as understand the limits of these claims. These claims are insightful because, as Eco emphasizes (perhaps over-emphasizes), *Finnegans Wake* operates as a linguistic system: the words of *Finnegans Wake* reference other words instead of states of affairs beyond the book. There is nothing outside of the book which we can point to in order to explain what it means; we can only resort to the text. This is true for all sorts of literature, not just Joyce's, but for a work like Dante's *Inferno*, we can at least point to an idea Dante wants to write about or draw a picture of the vistas of hell that Dante describes. These could be considered the content of the work, which Dante wants to enhance aesthetically through the form his expression adopts. So then, what does it mean for the content and form of a piece of language to be married? While Beckett does

supply a convincing account of language functioning in this way, he is held back sometimes by his own assumptions about the functioning of language. As I will argue later, Wittgenstein has developed the proper tools and has properly interrogated these assumptions to provide a more satisfying investigation of such a language.

We can first look at the text of *Finnegans Wake* to evaluate Beckett's claims on their face. There is one passage where Joyce talks directly about composing *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. *Ulysses* was received as obscenity when chapters were published serially in the United States, and the reception of sections out of *Finnegans Wake* (one of them being the Anna Livia Plurabelle chapter—now seen as a high point in the book) was so confused that this book in which Beckett's essay appears had to be commissioned. The processes of composing *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* weren't particularly happy, and considering that the American legal system deemed his art to be smut, it wasn't a clean one either. Perhaps as a parody of his critics, perhaps as a playful characterization of his creative process, Joyce says that he mixed his own "obscene matter", the products of "the bowels of his misery" (FW 185), his excrement and urine together in order to make the ink he wrote his books with. Instead of writing in his obscure English, Joyce begins writing in Latin, as if he were a medieval theologian who only wanted his controversial thoughts to be read by religious scholars who were educated enough to even-handedly interpret them:

> *Primum opifex, altus prosator, ad terram viviparam et cunctipotentem sine ullo pudore nec venia, suscepto pluviali atque discinctis perizomatis, natibus nudis uti nati fuissent, sese adpropinquans, flens et gemens in manum suam evacuavit* (highly prosy, crap in his hand, sorry!), *postea, animale nigro exonerates, classicum pulsans stercus proprium, quod appellavit deiectiones suas, in vas olim honorabile tristitiae posuit, eodem sub*

invocation fratrorum geminorum Medardi et Godardi laete ac melliflue minxit psalmum

qui incipit: Lingua mea calamus scribae velociter scribentis: magna voce cantitans (did a

piss, says he was dejected, asks to be exonerated), *demum ex stercore turpi cum divi*

Orionis iucunditate mixto, cocto, frigorique exposito, encaustum sibi fecit indelibile (fake

O'Ryan's, the indelible ink). (Joyce 185)[4]

As soon as Joyce has something private to share, the language itself becomes private, readable

only to those who know Latin. Beckett's statement that form and content are married in this

writing still seems a bit doubtful. There is still a clearly delineated form and content here: the

content is a secret, and the form is a secret language, more secret than the rest of *Finnegans*

Wake's "Nichtian glossery" (Joyce 83). It's not that the two have become the same, but that they

reflect one another more truthfully: in a heated and angry moment, the words themselves become

a flurry, in an intimate moment the words soften and quiet down, and here in a secret moment

they literally become unintelligible to everyone except for those that Joyce wants to

communicate to. There is still an issue here, especially if we understand Beckett to be contrasting

Joyce's language with normal, everyday language. Above, I took words from *Finnegans Wake* in

order to talk about human waste because I was too embarrassed to use the words "shit and piss"

in an academic setting, even though these are the words I would naturally use. As soon as I bring

up something embarrassing, the words themselves become embarrassed and unsure of

---

[4] Here is a translation of this passage from Roland McHugh's *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*: "First the artist, the eminent writer, without any shame or apology, pulled up his raincoat & undid his trousers & then drew himself close to the lifegiving & allpowerful earth, with his buttocks bare as they were born. Weeping & groaning he relieved himself into his own hands. Then, unburdened of the black beast, & sounding a trumpet, he put his own dung which he called his 'downcastings' into an urn once used as an honoured mark of mourning. With an invocation to the twin brethren Medard & Godard he then passed water into it happily & mellifluously, while chanting in a loud voice the psalm which begins 'My tongue is the pen of a scribe writing swiftly'. Finally, from the foul dung mixed with the 'sweetness of divine Orion' & baked & then exposed to the cold, he made himself an indelible ink," (185). A translation of this passage is not supplied in the book itself, and any reader who can't read Latin would not be able to make sense of this passage outside of recognizing a few cognates shared with languages they can read.

themselves. This is an example of normal language, so are we able to say form and content are the same here even though my language doesn't resemble Joyce's? It's rather that Joyce's language is not necessarily exceptional in this manner: form and content can reflect one another in ordinary language without having to become hyperliterary.

In order to understand this, we have to look at the picture of language in which Beckett is operating. At certain points he actually appears to talk about language in such a way that makes it impossible for its content and form to be united. For instance, he says that "[t]he root of any word whatsoever can be traced back to some pre-lingual symbol," (11) after giving this etymology of the Latin word "Lex":

1. Lex = Crop of acorns.

2. Ilex = Tree that produces acorns.

3. Legere = To gather.

4. Aquilex = He that gathers the waters.

5. Lex = Gathering together of peoples, public assembly.

6. Lex = Law.

7. Legere = To gather together letters into a word, to read. (11)

Words, so Beckett says, can be traced back to "pre-lingual symbols", but they also shift around and change, gaining new meanings as their use is extended over new semantic territory. We can trace a word back either to some kind of pre-lingual object (e.g., "Lex = Crop of acorns." A crop of acorns can stand on its own without a name, thus making it pre-lingual), or we can trace it back to another word which itself can be traced back to something pre-lingual (e.g., "Lex = Law" doesn't appear to be a relationship between a word and something pre-lingual, since laws are a body of writing, but then we can trace it back to this relationship "Lex = Gathering together of

peoples, public assembly."). The issue we run into here is defining the term "pre-lingual" well. In the fifth relationship, Beckett lists "Lex = Gathering together of peoples, public assembly," but how would we have a pre-lingual concept of "gathering" or "together"? By the same token, in the first relationship, "Lex = Crop of acorns," how would we have a pre-lingual concept of a "crop" or collection of acorns? Ideas like "gathering" or "crop" could very well be made possible by language; they didn't spring out of immediate perception.

Beckett doesn't deal with this process of naming; we're left to assume that primitive peoples saw things in the world, had a need to talk to others about them, and then somehow developed a collective name for these things. So, a primitive Latinate person saw a collection of acorns on the ground, pointed them out to others, and said the word "Lex". As life became more and more complex, and people needed words to refer to more complex phenomena, members of the same people pointed to oak trees and said the word "Ilex" or pointed to someone gathering sticks and said "Legere", etc. This is just one rudimentary way of imagining the process by which names were applied to objects. This account is faulty first because it probably isn't how things historically played out (Proto-Indo-European peoples already spoke a language equal in complexity to Latin before proto-Latin was developed) but also because it assumes that someone without language can develop names for things spontaneously.

This is an idea that bothers Wittgenstein for a good portion of *Philosophical Investigations*. When we teach children a language, we may point to some object and say its name. We might not be teaching the child the definitions of these words but instead instructing them that there is "an associative connection between word and thing," (Wittgenstein 7). In the first place, the relationship between word and thing is not so simple and immediate but needs to be developed in the minds of language speakers. But the problem goes even further: to point to a

crop of acorns and say, "this is a crop of acorns", to point to something and explain that you have a name for it is itself a language-game embedded in the fabric of language, not the beginning of language itself: "we are brought up, trained, to ask 'What is that called?'—upon which the name is given. And there is also a language-game of inventing a name for something, that is, of saying 'That is called…' and then using the new name," (Wittgenstein 17). In order to understand that the person pointing to a tree and saying "Ilex" means to say that this kind of tree is called "Ilex", we already need to have an ostensive training in language. We can only make sense out of such demonstrations "if the role the word is supposed to play in the language is already clear," (Wittgenstein 18) but of course the word wouldn't have a role in the language if the language wasn't there in the first place.

Indeed, we have to question the entire term "pre-lingual symbols" from the start. How can a *symbol* come before language? It seems simple enough to us, as linguistic creatures with ostensive training in language, that this tree's seed is different from this one, that this collection of seeds on the ground is different from this section of the forest floor. For Wittgenstein, language makes all sorts of phenomena possible: "I am tempted to say that the right expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, though it is not any proposition *in* language, is the existence of language itself," (Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics" 11). In order to have any idea of pre-lingual symbols in the first place, in order for there to be distinct objects which we can name, communicate, and hold discussions about, we need a division between the lingual and the pre-lingual, which is created by the existence of language. We are all already wrapped up in linguistic phenomena as speakers of language, and when talking about language, its relationship to the world, and its relationship to itself, we have to be very careful to be aware

of how these phenomena are affecting the very way we speak about these relationships, that we disentangle the assumptions that language imposes on us naturally as speakers of a language.

One of these most basic assumptions is that words always refer to objects in the world; words correspond with real states of affairs. This is an assumption that Beckett doesn't investigate but that Wittgenstein does. *Philosophical Investigations* begins with Wittgenstein questioning a picture of language developed by St. Augustine in which "[e]very word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands," (5). In Beckett's idiom, words have pre-lingual symbols which they can be traced back to. They can be traced back to the object for which they stand, or an etymology can reveal an original meaning which has since been changed by the word's extensions over different objects. For example, the word "acorn" can be traced back to the nut of an oak tree, but a word such as "loyal", as Beckett's etymology shows, can be traced back either to the quality of being faithful or to the Latin word for acorn. This is fine for Wittgenstein. Whenever he critiques a certain picture of language, he doesn't say that this one in particular is wrong or that language never functions in such-and-such a way, but that it isn't the only picture of language. Language *may* be used in such a way that the words in a language stand in for objects in the world. This is what would make Wittgenstein bristle: "*any word whatsoever* can be traced back to some pre-lingual symbol," (Beckett 11, emphasis mine). Any word whatsoever? What about prepositions like "of", "towards", or "along", conjunctions like "yet", "although", or "unless", or even just slightly abstract words like "another", "same", or "thing"? This is too restricted a model of language already. When Beckett says this, he probably has nouns in mind as well as some verbs that are easily defined by demonstrating the actions they refer to. Their pre-lingual symbols are easily pointed to, but there are many words which cannot be defined so easily. Words which can be

defined easily, like nouns, are not always used just to refer to their pre-lingual symbols, and this is the important point for Wittgenstein. He describes a language composed entirely of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", and "beam". Speakers of the language call these words out so that other speakers bring them the corresponding building materials. In this language, the words don't stand in for objects; rather, they act as commands. Any sentence in this language is spoken in order to get a certain reaction out of other speakers of the language (Wittgenstein 6). We can easily see this kind of language working within our own: a surgeon saying "Scalpel!" to their assistant in order to have a scalpel placed in their hand.

We can see the beginnings of a picture of language which has married form and content within this language-game of calling out the names of building materials in order to receive them from another worker. Typical form and content aren't present here: is the desire for a certain building material the content, and the word for the material the form it takes? Not exactly. It's more that talk about form and content is bypassed entirely by this language-game. It's a perfectly utilitarian game; all that matters is how these commands are used. It can be compared to a dog barking at the sound of a doorbell: we can't talk coherently about the meaning, reference, or intent which is expressed in the form of the dog's barking, only the effect that it has on those that hear it.

This explains a bit what a language which is its own form and content could be, but this example doesn't explain a highly literary use of language like Joyce's. Let's turn now to an example that Beckett selects for a neologism which is supposed to put form and content on a new footing with one another:

Mr. Joyce has desophisticated language. And it is worth while remarking that no language is so sophisticated as English. It is abstracted to death. Take the word 'doubt': it gives us

hardly any sensuous suggestion of hesitancy, of the necessity for choice, of static

irresolution. Whereas the German 'Zweifel' does, and, in lesser degree, the Italian

'dubitare'. Mr. Joyce recognises how inadequate 'doubt' is to express a state of extreme

uncertainty, and replaces it by 'in twosome twiminds'. (15)

It appears that Beckett still holds that there should be some kind of content that words in

language express. We're all familiar with the meaning (i.e., content, what the word is meant to

express) of the word "doubt", but its form doesn't suggest this meaning. (By form here I mean its

sound, or even its meaning relative to its etymological cousins in the language. Beckett places

importance on the "sensuous suggestion" of a word's meaning—that is, its sensuous form, its

sound, suggesting its actual meaning. For instance, the German "Zweifel" echoes "verzweifeln"

and "Verzweiflung", which mean "to despair" and "despair", respectively. The idea of "despair"

becomes a modification of "doubt" in the German language—as it is in English, but only in idea

and not in the sound of the related words.) Beckett doesn't make clear why he finds the English

language so sophisticated, but it seems to me that he feels the language lacks these interrelations

between words which German and Romance languages abound in. English's vocabulary is a mix

of Romance, Germanic, and Greek words. I understand Beckett to be saying that as a result of

the composition of English vocabulary, we've been deracinated from these etymological origins,

and we have trouble seeing the very unsophisticated manner in which a Romance word like

"deracinate" in its etymology literally means "remove from one's roots". Our words for

"remove", "from", and "root" don't resemble any of the morphemes of "deracinate", so in order

for an English speaker to discover its meaning, they would have to look at a definition and its use

in context. Distorting things further, Romance words, despite often having simple meanings, can

give the sense of high culture because, for the most part, they entered the English language

through the language of the Anglo-Normans, who became the aristocracy of England after the Norman conquest.

Joyce attempts to return the form to its content by coining "in twosome twiminds", but in Beckett's account of this neologism, he isn't going beyond this representational model of language. He's simply swapping out his neologism for the English "doubt". The example of the German "Zweifel" doesn't clarify much about Joyce's language: "Zweifel" is a common word in ordinary German. Are its form and content supposed to be closely tied because its sense suggests its meaning? How is this different from Joyce's neologism, which doesn't appear in ordinary English? As I've argued above, it's debatable whether or not a word like "doubt" can be traced back to a pre-lingual symbol: depending on the use of the word, it might not be referencing anything pre-lingual. A phrase like "twosome twiminds" can be traced back to certain lingual symbols (i.e., "two", "some", "twin", "minds") abstracted from their normal context and reformulated in the neologism, or it can be traced back to the word it's supposed to replace (i.e., "doubt"). If we consider the second example, we see Joyce "retracing" the word "doubt" towards its original sense, one which suggests its meaning. So, at least in this example, Joyce isn't bringing form back to content but instead dredging up the original sense of the word "doubt" and placing it in a newly coined phrase whose sense now points to its meaning more faithfully than the original word it stands for. The point of the neologism isn't to replace the English word "doubt" with a word that repairs its flaws as a "sophisticated" word, but to coin a new word that refers to the old one. "[T]he object for which the word stands," (Wittgenstein 5) is not an object at all but a word. The neologism "in twosome twiminds" suggests a doubt only because its referent is itself the word "doubt".

What Joyce is doing through a neologism like this is writing about writing. The wordplay throughout *Finnegans Wake* does not refer to states of affairs in the world but to other words and the established paradigms of meaning they operate within. Writing such as this does not represent anything but other writing, and even then, it doesn't represent discrete objects within language such as sentences, names, words, or books. It's an attempt to represent language itself, in its relative meanings between words, in its history, and in its mysterious logic. It is not a representational use of language; since it is a representation of language made through language, it is necessarily a representation of itself. Joyce has developed a non-representational use of language.

To illustrate this, I would like to look at the Anna Livia Plurabelle chapter of *Finnegans Wake*. I chose this chapter as an example of non-representational language because it's a good example of when Joyce's language edges into the representational. This chapter's namesake is a character who is often associated with change and fluidity, and these themes are physically represented by rivers. Joyce encodes the prose of this chapter with the names of hundreds of different rivers in the world—and names play an important role for Wittgenstein in representational uses of language. Despite this, the names take on novel meanings, referring to the rivers themselves on one semantic level but gaining a different use on another. It's clear from how Joyce encodes these names that they aren't supposed to function simply as references to real rivers—there are literally hundreds of river names throughout this chapter which Joyce has worked fluidly into the prose so that at no point in the chapter does it appear that he's simply listing names of rivers. At times they do break onto the page as their unchanged names: "That marchantman he suivied their scutties right over the wash, his cameleer's burnous breezing up on him, till with his runagate bowmpriss he roade and borst her bar. Pilcomayo! Suchcaughtawan!

And the whale's away with the grayling!" (Joyce 197). Pilcomayo is the name of a river in Paraguay, and it appears here unmodified, but the role the name plays in this sentence is not simply to refer to the river. Instead, it's an exclamation of disbelief at the "marchantman's" behavior with a woman and her laundry. With the exclamation of "Suchcaughtawan!" the case has an extra layer of semantic complication: the word makes reference to the Saskatchewan River, but it's also something of a wordplay since it sounds aurally like the phrase "such caught a one". Earlier on the same page, we see the same thing happening in phrases like "How elster is he a called at all? Qu'appelle? Huges Caput Earlyfouler," or "New Hunshire, Concord on the Merrimake?" (Joyce 197). In both cases, Joyce is simultaneously using the name to refer to a river (the Qu'Appelle, Concord, and Merrimack rivers), but he's also punning on them, pulling in a semantic meaning beyond their names: turning "Qu'Appelle" into a question echoes the French "qui appelle?" meaning "who calls?", and the word "Merrimake" suggests both the Merrimack River and the action of making merry.

The names of the rivers stand for the rivers themselves, but Joyce brings out another dimension of meaning to each name. *Finnegans Wake* is a very complex book, and as I've argued earlier, to privilege one kind of reading over another is to ignore the book's insistence on being a "gyrogyrorondo" (Joyce 239), which the reader can make infinite meaning out of by going around the circular text as many times as they want, but insofar as we can say that the book has any project at all, one possibility is to make novel writing and reading an aural practice. We see this project carried out strongly here: when Joyce chooses to insert the names of the Qu'Appelle and Pilcomayo rivers unmodified, he employs them in such a way that calls attention to their sound as words. As sounds, they can be more than names. They can suggest a question or an exclamation because their sound is adjacent to such phrases, while their meaning is something

different. This is close to what Beckett means when he says that Joyce's "writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*," (14). The river names are not *about* anything; they aren't in the text as references to rivers but as sounds which can suggest both a reference to a river or something else, such as a question or exclamation. The language here is not representational or referential because its principal use is not to represent or reference but to have a certain sound which can, through its ambiguity as pure sound without semantic meaning, adopt these uses.

Despite the fact that Beckett's thought has its limits, it's nonetheless quite useful for studying *Finnegans Wake*, especially when compared with the thought of Wittgenstein. Because Beckett is unable to think outside of representational theories of language, at times, he falls short of interpreting the text, but he is nonetheless able to supply a bountiful conceptual structure with which to read it. When his thought is clarified by Wittgenstein, a new critical insight is gained: that form and content, seen as analogous to word and referent in Wittgenstein, appear to be married in Joyce only because Joyce is developing a non-representational use of language in *Finnegans Wake*. This isn't an especially innovative development: as Wittgenstein argues, non-representational uses of language abound throughout very ordinary and commonplace uses of language. This use of non-representational language is special in that it reveals one non-representational use of language which underpins all use of language: its aural quality. Through the sound of a word, all sorts of connections can be made which do not lie in its original semantic meaning. I've bastardized Beckett's distinction between form and content here and there in this essay in order to make certain points about language, but now it's time for me to bastardize one of Wittgenstein's terms: through emphasizing the aural quality of language, Joyce has instated *sense* as the monarch of language. Language has an effect foremost on the ear, and

text an effect on the eye. Seen from this vantage point, it is something that isn't to be understood

first but to be felt.

Conclusion

Beckett, Joyce's aberrant accomplice, a believer in the beatific but a betrayer of Beatitudes, a setter of crooked tales about crooked minds contained in crooked bodies, a devil of a dictator, a gaunt Irishman, in the noon of his 23rd year writes that "no creature in heaven or earth ever spoke the language of [*Finnegans Wake*]. It is reasonable to admit that an international phenomenon might be capable of speaking it, just as in 1300 none but an inter-regional phenomenon could have spoken the language of the Divine Comedy," (19). Indeed, the internationality of our contemporary period (one has the choice of calling it modernity, postmodernity, pre-globality, or the present face of things) propels one to close her eyes, to let the mind depart on an inner psychic journey towards an idea, which chooses as its target the essence of what this international phenomenon would look like, what her name would be, and if she would become a source of boredom in the long run. At the closing of this project I would presently like to sketch an outline of such a Joycean language, one which exhibits such a quality of futurity. A member of the future, a subject not belonging to modernity, but one which escapes it, both in time, beneath a new cultural aegis, but also in consciousness, a subject which, while nonetheless relating to objects as we all do as our necessary and sufficient duty, overcomes such an impoverished dichotomy between subject and object, sinking into some other third thing obviously, the substance beneath the two, would speak a language such as this.

What would such a language look like? Communication without precision: this is the subject of my present discourse. But first it might be expedient—which is to say, arriving at the goal of our intellectual inquiry in the fastest manner possible, which is in turn to say without detour, and which in further turn assumes that thinking slowly is not preferable to thinking very quickly—to pose the question first to ourselves: what is a discourse? In the first place it is

something which must be held in language, in the second place, it is something which has something to say (which is the same as saying the first), and in the third place, it is something which, whether it fulfills its own stated goals or not, ultimately reveals a truth through language. The language of a discourse is wholly its own, just as if one were to collect every utterance an individual makes throughout her lifetime it would comprise a language wholly its own, shaped by circumstances, victimized by leisure, expressed by force. If we survey a discourse as a whole we might not see a scientific inquiry successfully completed, but we do see a fragment of the totality of language, something which one *could* say. In doing this, in differentiating a part from the whole of language, in turning the subject of thought into its own object, a truth is formed by virtue of the fact that this has truly been said, that the dividend and the divisor have had a little talk.

Having that question timely answered, we can then move onto moving towards completing the sketch which was, from the very outset, the ends of this closing chapter, that is, the means. Here is my previsionary sketch: At first an Apfel awhich fell aquite very far off the fellingfall tree. Butt better to bet on betwood, beta. Cold candoings and crecious couldtidings, the prior pronomens willunt cantinue. Dropsy drew a thirsty who to the watering hole but the dirting pile was too high and bloated out the every sun, unfortsoothly the who who knew went off to where knows when under the nowbrowning shit, but the bones yet last. Everysone is the ektah matter of elaine and ephraime. Fatter fajeaux sent me a fictious fettering at a pathetic pfarty. Good Germans drink dirty teeth, great guys grant gals grand gathering gallous gilpricks and gizzles for only one guzzle. Huh? It is… —. Ji- jeh- jah- juh- jump dzdz dzzz in manies— jiminies, I faint I lost my joyce, onin a momint—mmmeh meh mih mensis sistictis, memenorenisis, orm memesticemory jojojoy yes, oh yes, yes, Jiminy Grace, the Jacehoper.

Kwite Kookoo, but keep it. Like a secret, ok? Memormee? Oh, well everyone now, you do know now. Preskeptor und persaeptor is the persenamme of the perblious planck, plighted put plummy is pre to the pit. Quoo, quat, quen, quair, and quy, qnow? Runtsucker, I and we ruther thee, raise peque to the ray thunderum, wee knowest thee cannst yet knock. Stray dog, fear the Jade-O-Star, so thus do stray her, though not as straight as far as the straightosphear, the stray does fear. Therapyheads tea thusly: the boungdaries of a goodwon mustn't ne'er deviort from mine own, trust me thistley: one must love (sss) me, sojourn hup thrust me, have it and that and kamboom. Venisoon and verycult; virgin dia and verging trance; varying versions, wait, no, night, villienne. Woah is the word—what else would it be, wotan for winstance? Exeunt forthcoming, sargenon. Yes for ever, you all for some, but you for now, yes you for now you are it. Zzzzz. Or, in other words: purple bullfinches are found in heliotrope bushes.

  Having properly set our sketch, we can then move onto a new set of queries, relating back to our original topic, which could be variously restated as: Who could say it so thrifty? Or, if this and that came a bit too late to the talking party, then what was so upsetting to the attendees about there and here? Or, when did we decide we ought to go from A then to B instead of from B then to A or maybe even starting and ending with B or was it just a matter of the manifold we find ourselves meshed in? Or, where did we get the gumption? Or, why did we decide a bunch of acorns ought to be a crop? Or, how was I going to say it? As you may, or may not, or have yet to, or have not yet to see, the questions which I have posed, in light of my own confusion, in order to elucidate the subject of our concluding chapter are not so simple nor so single as to have an answer which I could proffer plainly like an applemonger in response to the command "Five red ones please." Though instead of arriving quickly at a straightforward solution for our knotted stones of thought, we can adopt a circular methodology whose movement is characterized by a

going-around sort of thinking. Cyclically arguing, we will have to drive our words towards forming a whole instead of an end, and in doing so, my hope is for my reader to reinterrogate their hard and fast assumptions about linearity of expression. So, from the outset, it ought to be said, that my goal is not necessarily to convey to you a meaning rightly, that is, scientifically, expressed, but for you to think about your own affects, your own affects which I have lent to you myself.

Then why couldn't you go it alone? Why did you need me? These are good questions for me not to answer. I will go round them like a river through a mountain; you were the mountain, and I was the river. What's more, at the height of day, you wonder where you will be in your sleep at the break of night; you were the day, and I was the night. You needed a difference to make the difference.

Well, seeing as how our method has us sticking strictly to a certain circular sentiment, it seems appropriate to have this particular freewheeling query end itself with a question. Possibly for you, but more so for me; of course, who else was all *this* for, but me? Ignore that question. In trying to disclose my intentions, in trying to display the depth of my knowledge, in trying to discomfort you by pointing a finger at the fourth wall, in trying to discuss my priors, I by mistake placed a question before the real one, which, on task at last, is: Who or how did the musk of ell, all calling, redispresessence a tile of the everling's multiest faceding, insomuchas the preterididitification of the evading lies allthemoast come for toastedly belang and sooch within the ken of posse billy trees?

Works Cited

Beckett, Samuel. "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce." Our Exagmination Round His Factification for

    Incamination of Work in Progress, Faber and Faber, London, 1961, pp. 3–22.

Eco, Umberto. The Aesthetics of Chaosmos. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Eco, Umberto. The Open Work. Harvard University Press, 1989.

Joyce, James. Finnegans Wake. Penguin Books, 2000.

McHugh, Roland. Annotations to Finnegans Wake. 4th ed., Johns Hopkins University Press,

    2016.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "I: A Lecture on Ethics." The Philosophical Review, vol. 74, no. 1, 1965,

    pp. 3–12. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2183526. Accessed 1 May 2024.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Philosophical Investigations. 4th ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.