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*From a paper by Bourbon for JJ QUARTERLY*

The Monsters of *Finnegans Wake*:

James Joyce and the Revelations of Art

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Monsters:

p. 1

Everything in the Wake is promissory. It is an egg we hatch through our reading. And it is an egg that births monsters: monsters from the night, from history, from our minds, and from

our language ■

P. 3

We are riddled and riddling at night; I seem to forget myself, and yet in forgetting I am the one forgotten. That riddle is voiced in the Wake in a way suggesting that the Wake is its answer: “what would that fargazer seem to seem-self to seem seeming of, dimm it all?” (FW.143.26-27). The answer: a monster.

We make monsters of what we do not understand, of what we fear, of what we cannot bear. There are different kinds of monsters:

*We lose our “self”: the ability to view me from a 3rd person vantage.*

## P. 5 of Monsters

Nonsense says nothing without our normalizing it or interpreting it back into sense. Or, if we understand Wakean nonsense not as simply a mistake or a code, then we can understand it as an analogue for a set of possible sensible sentences. We should beware of seeing the Wake as a realm of nonsense. It is not. Like all nonsense, the Wake reveals the border: the limits of sense. This border, however, reflects back by analogy into the realm of sense—each nonsense phrase and word invoking possibilities of sense. A nonsense phrase is a ruin of language (and languages) that recalls what it might have been. Nonsense can seem analogous to sense, almost like sense, but not quite.

*FW offers us a language that doesn't match our expectations. Sentences often open with a sensible pathway but quickly trip us up and dump us in a confusing tangle of incomprehensible language. Perhaps this is what our ancestors faced 100,000 years ago as human language emerged out of growls and grunts. In response upon hearing such a melange of sound an early speaker's*

*companion might be wordlessly thinking, “Man! What the fuck are you trying to tell me?”*

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When we cannot apprehend a particular word as a particular word, then what are we reading?

Finnegans Wake, of course! One learns of the Gripes, a descendant of the grapes that Aesop’s fox attempts to grab and an avatar of Shem the penman. The Gripes is also, seemingly, an elm and one bank of the river-like ALP. The Gripes has a “palpruy head” (FW 154.15),

which sounds true enough if grapes were to have heads.

“[P]alpruy” is a pun on “paltry,” “pulp-like,” and some form of “palp,” and thus is a cognate of “palpable” or even an obscure meaning of “palp” or “teat.” We might add that it puns by evocation “peppery head” and other less likely combinations of “pal” and “pruy” or “prey,” as well as the quite likely “pray” (see “pulpably” —FW 187.02). What word is “palpruy” then? It is not a new one with some particular meaning (or even the synthesis of all of these possible meanings). It is a collection of possible meanings that we can recognize and use in our interpretations of its form. (This might also be how we interpret persons relative to their words and actions.)

The Wake’s words, therefore, are not words; they have not been christened with new sense.<sup>10</sup> The words in the Wake are only analogues of words. The puns are parodies and distortions, conglomerations made into little monster words that remind us of words but whose identity and sense are never settled.

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What is the soul, as it is described, for example, in the following monstrous sentence, where evidently it can be composed of anything: “The soul of everyelsesbody rolled into its olesoleself” (FW 329.18-19). One answer is that Finnegans Wake is “the soul of everyelsesbody” : a soul constructed as a leviathan. And maybe we all are holding inside our very selves, let alone our genetics, the history of all other human beings.

*Maybe we are holding the history of words inside our very selves. Joyce provokes us to unearth those 100,000 year old faculties and creatively produce meaning out of word-like sound.*

P. 10

“Time and the river and the mountain”: who are they? The river is ALP and the mountain HCE, although these characters seem to be more than just river and mountain; one is a creative force of becoming, and the other is stuff, mostly absent amidst the flowing of ALP ???. These are cosmographic monsters, like the Intolerable and also like the White Whale against which Ahab fights.<sup>13</sup> They are monsters in what the cosmos is relative to what we are: our soul, our spirit, our minds. The Wake is a kind of inverted cosmography—a story of what exists and how it comes to exist but told through the way it is unmade and exposed in sleep.

*He seems to take language as the start of the cosmos, but that discounts 13 billion years of time.*

## P.16

Wakean sentences look like sentences, but they are like Aristotle's dead hands. I do not mean by this that the seeming sentences of the Wake are dead; rather, they are not language at all, or as Joyce says in the Wake, they are "nat language" (FW 83.12).

*I think "nat" or nature language is the sounds the Homo sapiens of 100,000 years ago made as they struggled to voice their mental products out of their mouths. Now we struggle to return Joyce's "nat" sounds back into our brain (wired computers) and produce mental products.*

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*From 'Finding a Replacement For the Soul'*

## Intro. P.2

How am I or anyone manifest in my sentences such that they can lose sense or that I can gain sense? Words can turn opaque, recall noises and grunts; we might panic at this. Words strung together, said or written, can seem to have a sense and then stop fitting and instead flopping, hat like and the or an instead now. The various ways sentences and phrases lose sense demonstrates our variable relation to our language.

## P. 3

We are akin, in some ways, to the kind of thing a sentence is. We are also a kind of thing quite unlike sentences. These two claims shadow two seemingly more simple truths. (1) Human beings are always involved in meaning, in making sense, and (2) meanings of whatever kind always involve human beings. We mean, and what we mean cannot float free from we who mean.

*We use language as a tool in our life but those uses are not always focused on human beings. Some actions do not require us to use language at all. Human beings existed for over 200,000 years WITHOUT language.*

P. G

In the final chapter, I demonstrate in what sense we are constituted by language and in what sense we are not, as the means of picturing our soul; I attempt to answer the question: Could one's humanity, in some sense yet to be determined, rest on how one writes or understands the relation between first person expressions of meaning and third person scientific descriptions of human beings and the world?

*He seems to imply that one's "humanity" requires that one DOES NOT engage in a third person description of humans and the world they inhabit. I don't know exactly what he means by the term "humanity".*

P. 8

Most literary criticism, if it is not scholarly commentary or a collection of observations, has as its central content some picture of the four philosophical domains of language, mind, aesthetics, and ethics.

*I think of "literary criticism" as a book review. But I think he has a quite different thing in mind.*

## P. 12

Thus, at some point the sense of 'meaning' will be stipulated. This stipulation, however, is itself open to further interpretations, justification, and refusal, and thus the problem has simply been displaced from the meaning and validity of meaning' to that of 'justification.'

This relationship between fictional meaning and aesthetic justification is explicit when we read modernist, experimental fiction. What *Finnegans Wake* or any sentence in the *Wake* means, for example, must be determined by explaining how it means given its distortions of sense and form. We can explain how it might mean only relative to our justification of these distortions.

## P. 15

How a life means, if it does or can, is a question that cannot be understood separate from asking what a life is. Fictions and poems (in a slightly different way) mean as what they are. What they are is unclear. A life is not a person, but persons have lives. There is no nontendentious way to extend this analogy between life and fiction along these lines. What it would mean for a person to mean is not clear, except to insist that whatever sense of "meaning" is implied here is the same, in some sense, as saying what a person is.

*He refers to "meaning" but what is he getting at? It's beyond me.*

*.....Notice the metaphors in my comment ( grasping something, "getting at", and reaching a destination, "beyond me")*

## P. 16

That our sense of ourselves can be lost or diminished prompts a strange riddle: What are we when we are not?—nothing, someone else, unconscious, dead, dreaming, confused, deluded, pretending, changed, afraid, reading, doubting, believing, shaped, denied, fictional, nonsensical. I am sometimes not myself, and that can be a way of indicating my mental state. I can be lost in anger, fear, and doubt. If I am lost in belief I

might be a fanatic, and thus different than I was. If I lose my memory, then in some sense I am no longer me. Does it make sense to say we exist in varying degrees? What are we and how do we understand ourselves if we exist within the midst of possibilities, what we might be tempted to call fictions?

*This is an excellent description of a person. For me it describes an organism, a thing that works for a time and then wears out - dies. Bourbon wants something more from this person - thing. He is looking for the soul. Notice this sentence "We are a particular something, some single thing that includes not only our body and our brain states, but also our thoughts and beliefs, our losses and failures, our words and our stories." But our brain is part of our body and our stories are part of our brain and our losses and failures are part of our "single thing". He seems to think that "single thing" is our soul, but I think it's our body.*

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It is my sense of being something that can be described as human or that can be described through words, to you and to myself, that determines how I am to understand the words 'mean' and 'human.' As a consequence every aspect of the riddle is a problem now. It seems silly to ask in what sense am I human; being human describes the kind of animal I am, but also the sense of what it means to be that kind of animal when we have no sense of being any other kind of animal.

*This comes at the end of the Introduction to the book. I understand the word "human" but I don't understand his*

*use of the word “mean”. On page 15 he asks, “How a life means, if it does or can, is a question”. I don’t know what “mean” means in that sentence. I think he is talking about the soul but I don’t connect with that.*

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The interview with Micheal Pollan NYT FRIDAY Feb 7, 2026

By By David Marchese

# **You are skeptical that A.I. can achieve consciousness. Why?**

I’m convinced by some of the researchers, including Antonio Dames and Mark Solms, who made a really compelling case that the origin of consciousness is with feelings, not thoughts. Feelings are the language in which the body talks to the brain. We forget that brains exist to keep bodies alive, and the way the body gets the brain’s attention is with feelings. So if you think feelings are at the center of consciousness, it’s very hard to imagine how a machine could rise to that level to have feelings. The other reason I think we’re not close to it is that everything that machines know, the data set on which they’re trained, is information on the internet. They don’t have friction with nature. They don’t have friction with us. Some of the most important things

we know are about person-to-person contact, about contact with nature — this friction is what really makes us human

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## Preface: x

My concerns here, however, constellate around our natural fate with language and our evolving fate within the ontological and epistemological constraints cultivated by the sciences.

We must strive to be equal to our scientifically desacralized world, even if its truths are melancholy.

*He doesn't view language as a human invention but as something sacred beyond just another "technology". He sees science as a threat to his "humanity" . I question his categorization of language as "our natural fate" while technology is not our natural fate.*

The concept of art carries with it some sense of meaning. Meaning is a normative concept that cannot be reduced to thingness, however construed. The art of poetry and fiction is not a particular kind of thing. It is an unstable overlapping of relations and concepts that mimic the complex way in which the world is both a world and a world we see and understand. A teapot does not exist because we see it, but it is a meaningful something called a teapot through our seeing it as a teapot. Sentences mean something not by themselves but because we understand them; time appears because we measure it, but it will not cease if we stop measuring or if all our watches break.

*There is usually a difference between form and content...but can we say that about FW?*

*Meaning is our interpretation of reality. We, as animals, possessed this ability before we had language. I think language is just another technology that extended our ability to interpret reality. Actually the greatest technology.*

P. 121

How Do Oracles Mean?

Unde superstiosa primum satan tastavom  
Apollo, sacred guard of earth's true core,

Whence first came frenzied, wild prophetic words.  
~ Cicero, De Divinatione, ii.115

IN THE DELIAN HYMN the infant Apollo shouts "may the harp and the bending bow be my delight, and I shall prophesy to men the unerringly will of Zeus" ("Homeric Hymn to Apollo," In 131). Lucian comically thinks that this youthful commitment to prophecy fates Apollo to a harried existence, "almost plagued to death by the continual demand for oracles." Diotima, when questioned by Socrates, seems to have offered a solution to Lucian's satiric worry, when she describes a partially divine intermediary, "the very powerful spirit" Love, "half-way between god and man," who is an envoy and interpreter that plies "between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the heavenly answers and commandments ..." (Symposium, 202e). I think the existence of such spirits unlikely. In addition, I do not

believe Apollo spoke through the mouth of the Delphic Pythia. Without that belief, or something like it, oracles would seem to become examples of religious delusion and psychological and sociological need: a subject for history.

### *A surprisingly materialistic viewpoint.*

P.132

Oracular language is described as that which I say but which I do not say meaningfully. The point is not that the words are necessarily incomprehensible nonsense, but that they are words that I am not using to say anything and to which there attaches no I. Such speech would be inspired and would seem to be like a fiction. I take fictions to be forms of language that cannot and do not count as speech acts, which thus cannot have any 'I' attached if they are to remain fictional. To call something 'oracular speech,' however, is less a description of a form of language than of a possible way we stand toward our words: as if they were not ours, as if it were a further question that we could not quite answer about whether they were expressive or not. To stand toward our words as if they were in need of interpretation, as if our relationship to our words could be determined through interpretation, would mean to take our words as kinds of things. Under this last description the expressiveness of an oracle has been reduced to the status of a natural sign (smoke for fire).

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Rather one has to look at particular cases and descriptions in which the sense of things speaking is as I have described the way language can lose its sense, its connection to us, so that we can use it to symbolize ourselves-to lure ourselves into language. Riddley Walker and Tawney figure themselves under the aspect of sentences and words that have the same ontological claim on them as things. This much is what they do. But in order for language to have the same status as things, one cannot simply decide to take words that way, to decide that words can sometimes come from gods or stones or detached heads. One might dispute this last claim since Riddley talks to Ganser's head as if the head were a person (not really Ganser's anymore, however). But what kind of person is it? How does this person know about what Riddley thinks? Ganser's head is not any kind of person we could know as human. The relation between words and the person speaking has become disjunct in Riddley's world. That such a disjunction is possible indicates how we can see ourselves through language because it is within language that we are objective: we construe ourselves as objects through symbolic means from a point of view that we do not understand as ours. These objects, however, are objects.....

Interpretations of fictions and poems are, at a minimum, allegories, where x, an element in a text, means y, when y is part of a predetermined system of meanings and relations. The difficulties in interpretation proceed from the difficulties of determining the legitimacy of the application of an adequate allegory. The legitimacy of allegories and the appropriateness of their application always require justification. Any debate about interpretations, if it is not to be confused, is primarily a debate about the forms and adequacy of these justifications. Consequently, the significance of these interpretations or allegories lies less in the system of meaning described by the allegory than in this justification.

*Justification is the act of showing an action, belief, or decision to be right, reasonable, or warranted, often acting as a defense against blame. It serves as a justification in legal contexts (validating actions like self-defense), a foundation for belief in philosophy, or, in theology, the act of God declaring a sinner righteous*

*noun: legitimacy*

*1. conformity to the law or to rules.*

*"he has undermined the legitimacy of the criminal justice system"*

*(with reference to a child) the quality of being legitimate.*

*"disputes over the legitimacy of heirs"*

*2. ability to be defended with logic or justification; validity.*

*"it is difficult to judge the legitimacy of the rumor"*

*Linguists have shown us that our sentences are most often structured out of metaphors that reflect the animal nature of our heritage. I can agree that the metaphor chosen may not reflect the reality being described and so a mistake has occurred. That is a normal outcome.*

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Finnegans WAKE is NOT A WORK OF ART, but a work of theology. By "a work of theology" I mean that the Wake demands to be read as what Pierre Hadot calls, in describing ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, a spiritual exercise (askesis). In ancient philosophy, these spiritual exercises "have as their goal the transformation of our vision of the world, and the metamorphosis of our being" (127). While Socrates remains the exemplar of such spiritual midwifery, as he calls it in the Theatetus, Philo of Alexandria gives a more formal description of what these exercises (askesis) entail: research (zetesis), investigation (skepsis), reading (anagnosis, listening (akroasis), self-attention (prosoche), self-mastery (enkrateia), and "indifference to indifferent

things" (84). Hadot demonstrates that Christian askesis develops from this philosophical askesis, which, under the increasing authority of the Bible, takes the form of exegesis. Reading oneself in relation to the words of God became the primary way in which the self-attention (prosoche) prescribed by Philo could be expressed through the disciplines of sacra doctrina. Reading, as Augustine claims at the end of his discussion of Genesis in Confessions, becomes a form of prayer: "the exercise of that joyful charity which comes of at last finding God and seeks to find him in his works" (Confessions, XI.xxiii.32). Similarly, St. John Cassian, a

1. While I follow Hadot's transcription of this list. I retranslate prosoche as self-attention to emphasize its meaning in askesis.

*He is telling us that FW is a religious work not an artwork. We shall see that Bourbon finds the challenge of FW a doorway to the soul. I think he has something there but for me it doesn't click.*

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we cannot get underneath either language of the world to view the other, nor can we think except through the grammar of our language.

What I have called Finnegans Wake's theological lesson exposes this same kind of entanglement of world, reason, and language. The Wake's theological lesson, unlike Luther's, shows how it is not Christ that we find in our language, but ourselves threatened by nonsense, sleep, and death.

How do or can we see ourselves in Finnegans Wake in this way? Or rather, how can either Augustine's kind of self-reflection or Luther's grammatical tracing of divinity in the words of the Holy Spirit be enacted without God? What kind of moral self-reflection can we construct or inhabit when the limits of the world are constructed as a conflicting set of fragments of science, technology, social prejudice, anachronistic religion, psychological fantasy, and so on? I understand Finnegans Wake as a response to the predicament motivating these questions. The predicament that would

motivate writing such a text as a work of art and the predicament that would motivate our reading this text, now, as if it mattered. What has replaced God in the Wake are particular kinds of nonsense, which may be, of course, no replacement at all. This nonsense, or rather the limit between nonsense and sense, like Luther's God, is described by language itself: it is against this limit that we are forced to reflect and see ourselves (if 'seeing' makes any sense in this context).....The first question concerns 'exercises,' concerns how we can and should read: 'What kind of meaningfulness is left if one no longer knows or understands how the words in Finnegans Wake are about something or anything?' This is a question concerning the aboutness or intentionality of language. The second question is a modern descendent of the question 'What is the soul?', and follows from the previous question: Is reading Finnegans Wake a human activity?

*Aren't we, by thinking anything, engaging in human activity? Most importantly he sees a predicament in the modern world of "conflicting set of fragments of science, technology, social prejudice, anachronistic religion, psychological fantasy, and so on" where moral self reflection such as Augustine's self-reflection cannot be achieved. He understands Finnegans Wake as a response to the predicament motivating these questions.*

*Is he right?*

P. 151

"Theoperil"

The language of Finnegans Wake where "Som's wholed, all's parted" is "Binomeans to be comprehended" (FW, 563.30; 285.27). So why read it. Not surprisingly, there is a long-standing tradition that assumes that this question can best be answered by answering the question 'What is Finnegans Wake about?' James Atherton, in Books at the Wake, suggests that this question is the fundamental question for Wake criticism (15).

In response to the demand to say what the book is about, critics often delineate some interpretative domain within which the Wake gains a subject matter, a quasi-object, which is understood to have an ontological claim on us. Thus, it is about language (Ronald Buckalew), about culture (Christine Froula), about our psychology (Margot Norris), or about the Mind (Sheldon Brivic), and so on. Such arguments, while producing interesting interpretations, cannot help but take the form of special pleading or even of an apologetics for a way of interpreting, sanctioned by the radical indeterminacy of the text.

*A question: Why is FW unique, no similar book has been published.*

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In FW the resources of English have been distorted and diminished in such a way that it lacks the resources to express the kind of intentionality that allows us to say that I believe x' or the kind of aboutness that allows language to be used to make assertions about the world even for the characters of the Wake.

Wakean language does not have any recognizable criteria of application. FW is a text in which the vocabulary through which we would express our intentional states or articulate what we mean by intention is no longer sensible, usable, or meaningful.

*He is exaggerating the issue because FW is comprised of many sentences that start with recognizable format and then go to pieces leaving the reader to their own resources to find the way forward. It appears that no one after Joyce saw any use in doing that again, once was enough.*

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A nonsensical sentence is not about anything. If we cannot determine its content or if we cannot take any sentence as expressing a legitimate thought, and if we do not understand the state of affairs about which any sentence would be making a claim separate from the sense of these sentences (we do not have our sense of the world to appeal to), then such a nonsensical sentence can provide few reasons to justify claiming that it is about anything or that it can express propositional attitudes. *This suggests that all interpretations of Finnegans Wake are not about the Wake at all. There is nothing for them to be about which the WAKE itself could be about.* They are simply about themselves as interpretations.

ALTHOUGH Finnegans Wake can be interpreted in any number of ways, I have been arguing that it cannot be read as being about anything. The nonsense of the Wake separates reading from interpretation. If we refuse to equate our interpretations with reading, with claims about what the book means, then we have to learn to ask questions different from 'what does this sentence, passage, book mean?'

*We don't seem to be following his advice but we continue to read on and interpret the murky text with undiminished enthusiasm. We don't separate*

*reading from interpretation- are we right or should we stop thinking when we are reading this book?*

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our failure to read backward into his or her life or consciousness, into a mind that we would recognize as our own, forces us to place our mind, our life, as the intentional target of the text. But this would mean that we do not understand ourselves. How could *Finnegans Wake* be our nightlife, our dreams, our absence? If we resist asking this, then why read the text? Before you answer that you will not, consider that in tempting us to stop reading so continually, Joyce forces to the surface of every sentence Conrad's claim that for anything to be art it must justify itself in every line. & What any sentence means collapses into how we justify the particularity of the sentence, that is, how we justify the nonsense of any particular sentence. Such justification means that we reflect upon ourselves (prosoche), our reading, our making sense and not making sense of the *Wake*, through the very nonsense of the text. How can one do this?

*We can do it and we find there's " Lots of fun at Finnegans Wake"*

P. 159

The content of the *Wake*, its sentences and words, its stories and characters, its patterns and allusions, at best point to the physical world or describe it by allegory. *FW* by negating the vocabulary, references, and descriptions of the physical world and by negating the language we use to talk about our ordinary conscious sense of things, produces a kind of language that seems to fill up the empty space of our being no-body: **it is a language of the soul**, if that is understood as whatever is left when the bodily, physical world is negated (as it is at night).

*Perhaps, it is the language that reaches the DN (Default Network) that Lakoff describes where the brain is forced to create new subnets.*

III. What Are We When We Are Not?

We can begin to describe how we, ourselves, might be fictional by asking again a question I asked earlier: 'What are we when we are not?' A Neoplatonist would answer 'we are what we were, but not what we seem.' Such metaphysical answers are fine if you can find the world of which they are true. As a riddle "What are we when we are not?" relies on a complex dual sense of 'we' and 'are' — whereby we are who we are, and when we lose that sense of ourselves, we are in some sense not anything anymore and in another sense we are still something, just not what we were.

I can describe retrospectively my loss of myself at night as having three aspects: (1) I am not me, rather I'm someone else, but who? This describes Alice's panic in Wonderland that she may have become one of her two friends Ada or Mabel. (2) I am not anyone, but still something. I must be something else (some other kind of thing), but what? Lion, tree, stone?' My ability to identify myself, not just as some particular person, but as anyone (not who I am but that I am) can also occur at night, and is a loss of self-consciousness that threatens my status as a human person. These two options are framed by a more extreme third-(3) 'I cease to exist at night—if my body remains, do I -am I nothing? Am I replaced by some spirit? Have I decayed into formlessness?' These last two options are judgments I cannot make about myself in good faith, but they are fears I might have about what I am and will become. They are in fact the kinds of fears and concerns we have about ourselves when we imagine ourselves dead. Within the Wake, we can find numerous versions of the riddle.

*How about - we are unconscious. As unconscious beings we become the animals of 100,000 years ago and we dream their dreams.*

The content of the Wake, its sentences and words, its stories and characters, its patterns and allusions, at best point to the physical world or describe it by allegory. FW by negating the vocabulary, references, and descriptions of the physical world and by negating the language we use to talk about our ordinary conscious sense of things, produces a kind of language that seems to fill up the empty space of our being no-body: it is a language of the soul, if that is understood as whatever is left when the bodily physical world is negated (as it is at night).

*Is he recognizing the existence of the unconscious?*

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To measure my sleep states says nothing about the content of those states to the degree that those states are what I experience or are in some sense me. Within those states I can identify nothing that is me, without contradicting myself, since I would also be the 'me' making the identification. I am not a unity by virtue of unifying all my various elements, whatever those would be, but by standing toward the content of my dreams and toward myself such that I cannot say what I am relative to those. I am the unity that is not sayable but nevertheless is. Such asymmetries show as blank limits

against and as which we figure and picture ourselves as human. FW shows both death and sleep to be such limits, and in so doing deforms language into a similar kind of limit in which we see ourselves by asking what we are when we are not.

*This comes at the end of a long interpretation of a FW passage. So the FW reader is not completely at sea without any idea of location. This reader seems to be able to navigate.*

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We are lost to ourselves at night. The nonsense of the Wake is an analogy for the way we can be something else besides our bodies. The Wake is a ghost of the sense we lose in reading it, and hence of ourselves awake. In this it pictures ourselves as what we are when we are asleep and it pictures our fantasies of ourselves when we are dead. Much of the Wake is taken up with the description of this loss of ourselves, the consequences of this loss, and the pursuit of what is left analogized as particular characters, most importantly HCE. The trace of the soul is the soul. We dream ghosts, even when we dream of ourselves and the person sleeping beside us, or when we dream of the person we were or the person who has disappeared.

***This picture of the dreaming person assumes that the lose of consciousness is equivalent to the lose of personhood. But only 2% of the brain's energy is consumed by conscious activity. The person is alive and functioning although asleep. The person has not "disappeared" and I don't think the soul (whatever that is) is lost. What is lost is the brain's ability to make connections between subnets to form conceptual networks as in the awake condition. The sleeper is in the "wake" state of the person NOT in the "awake" state. It is a case of being in Finnegans Wake.***

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The only critical question that matters about FW is why is it written in the way it is. The only sense of the Wake that can matter is the justifications we can give for how it loses sense. Justifications, however, hang in the air as much as interpretations. There is no adequate answer to the question of what would be an adequate justification. FW, therefore, prompts claims that it means nothing or that it means anything.

*Finnegans Wake places the reader in an unfamiliar landscape, forcing the person to find a way forward without a roadmap. The reader has to use their brain to construct conceptual structures that make sense out of the language fragments that Joyce has strewn about the land. Its a challenge that some people enjoy.*

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A Twitterlitter of Nonsense: Askesis at Finnegans Wake.

Nonsense cannot be about anything. What I am suggesting, therefore, is that we should read against our own interpretations of the Wake, in order to reexpose the limits between sense and nonsense that our interpretations hide. We should read FW as a way of negating ourselves as whatever we take ourselves to be, individually and as human beings. The loss of intentionality, the aboutness of our language, in Finnegans Wake precipitates a version of the same crisis that the theologian Karl Barth describes, in The Epistle to the Romans, as our standing "before an irresistible and all-embracing dissolution of the world, of time and before a penetrating and ultimate KRISIS, before the things and me, supremacy of a negation by which all existence is rolled up" (iii.21). Finnegans Wake shows that this crisis threatens less the world or our language, than our status within both. The vanishing of any intentional target for Wakean language picks us out as its target (exposing a crisis about how we constitute our world as ours), which means that what we are shown to be in reading the Wake is ourselves the shifting limit between sense and nonsense. Finnegans Wake, itself, is a description of the

human mind enacting this vanishing intentionality. The book is about us because it cannot be about anything else. The failure of intentionality is true within the fiction as well. We must either read the Wake as a work of nonfiction, on the model of the Timaeus, or we must take ourselves as fictional. The loss of sense in the Wake can matter because this loss is correlated with our loss of ourselves at night, not simply because any kind of nonsense would imitate a state of unconsciousness or of divinity, but rather because the kind of thing we are is actually correlated with the kind of thing sentences are. How we could be so correlated, how we might take ourselves as existing like a sentence will be my central concern in the next chapter.

Is reading Finnegans Wake, then, a human activity? It is certainly a question humans are prone to ask.

*I disagree with this.*

“There exists neither an intelligible sense of mind nor of person within the Wake, except ours reading.”

*Joyce litters FW with plenty of intelligible sentence **fragments** he just forces the reader to assemble the thought being expressed.*

*“Lots of fun at Finnegans Wake”.*

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I implied in the previous chapter that the Wake shows us as akin to the kinds of things sentences are. An adequate description of this analogy between persons and words will require the articulation of how we are expressed by language, of what it means for language to express us.

*I think Brett Bourbon views language as the total essence of humanity. I don't think he considers the Homo sapiens of 300,000 years ago as*

*humans. Yes we are expressed by language but we are still animals and language is only one aspect of our nature. Joyce, in this book, forces us to use language faculties that usually lay dormant in our everyday life. The FW experience may be what our forebears underwent during the birth of language 100,000 years ago.*

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Kant offers an inadvertent and partial account of how our language expresses us in the Third Critique. He claims that "A poem may be very pretty and elegant, but ... soulless" (49). He extends this observation to include soulless narratives, speeches, conversations, and even women.

This last example might seem odd, since one would assume that women are of a different kind than the various ways of writing and talking he mentions. That a woman, especially for some men, might lack a soul in the way a story might suggest that such stories would seem to be contrived artifice, failed imitations of thought, *lacking in some relation to that which has a soul*. Women, of course, would have whatever counts as a soul if such a thing were what made human beings animate.

*Why does Brett Bourbon accept this focus on the gender of the person who lacks a "soul". Perhaps Kant was a nineteenth century male chauvinist, but why should a 21st century writer simply follow his lead? A man could just as easily lack soul, it's not gender specific. Perhaps Kant lacked soul!*

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Although Kant denies that matter is animate and rejects the idea that the soul is an immaterial substance, he is not simply describing failed poetry, narratives, speeches, conversations, and women as metaphorically soulless. The metaphor is justified, however, not simply by virtue of a more or less arbitrary description of the grip, effect, or meaningfulness of a poem as like a living being. Although this is how Kant understands how metaphors work (their sense is purely contingent), there is a countermovement within the Third Critique that shows a further aspect of how to understand linguistic expressions. In his discussion of symbols in 559, Kant claims that although there is no necessary relation between a despotic state and a handmill, there is "likeness between the rules of reflection of both and their causality"(223). Both the state and a handmill are (a) bound to the causal logic of phenomenal reality; and (b) we

grasp both by means of the same “rules of reflection.” The likeness of the state and the handmill is an expression of both (a) and (b).

*I have NO idea what the above paragraph means. The very first sentence is ridiculous because it should be obvious that pure ( non-organic) matter is not animate and further that the soul IS immaterial. Does Bourbon think anyone believes pure matter is animate and does he have any reference that claims there is any material substance that is identified as the “soul”? Also what is the point of referring to rules of reflection and causality- what do they have to do with the soul? Perhaps he is simply referring to the laws of physical reality ( gravity, temperature, etc) that all physical things must obey.*

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### **The analogy between Persons and Words**

That a bad poem is clichéd and mechanical, however; does not mean that we suspect a precocious plant and not a person wrote it. Such a poem would seem not to be expressive of some fundamental quality that would make the words live. Kant's appeal to the soulfulness, the animateness of a poem would seem to be itself a way of describing the claim a poem might have on us and the attention we would give it. If we assume the human origin of a poem, then it would be odd to see some poems as not expressive of a human being. A bad poem, however; would be read as failing as a surrogate for that person or for persons in general, and thus rattling into hollow tin.

*So it's not the case that words can always stand for a person. There is more to a person than what language can always supply.*

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### **The Analogy between Persons and Words.**

without a largesse of redescription. In order to understand a word I have to be able to identify it as the word it is. In the Wake we often cannot do that. Instead we read word-like strings of letters, seeming multilingual palimpsest puns: "when is a nam nought a

nam whenas it is a"; "circumconversioning"; "domnatory of Defmut" (607.10-11; 512.16; 593.21). Similarly, within the fiction of the Wake we don't know who is who-in "this nightly quisquisquock" (L. qui, quae, quod: who, which; quiz quiz quack). Characters are so shifting, changing, and unclear in form that they "reamalgamerge" into each other. Names, particular strings of letters, signs, descriptions, and references seem to merge or dissolve into one another, or always and ultimately into either or both the feminine Anna Livia Plurabella, that which is marked by the letters A-L-P and the siglum A, and Humphrey Clinker Earwicker, that which is marked by the letters H-C-E and the siglum and these two are lost as well in or are expressive of the absent dreamer—or of history-or of time—or of whatever frame one invents. This second aspect of the Wake has the further consequence of preventing our understanding these characters in the way we understand human persons in general. Deciding who is who would mean to write some further mythic fiction using Wakean resources, while pretending that one is not doing this.

I can make no sense of any of these characters, in any of their guises, having anything like what we would credit as a mental life. This is another consequence, or rather a symptom, of the failure of the intentional resources of the Wakean aesthetic and language I discussed in the last chapter. In FW there is no 'I' stable enough to count as having responsibility for any sentence, and consequently no stable propositional attitudes (for example, 'I believe') to ascribe to any framing 'I,' any author, narrator, or character. There are, of course, statements that include the vocabulary of propositional attitudes. If, however, we do not understand what kind of thing anyone is and if we cannot ascribe any sense of person to whatever any name names, then we can

hardly take such intentional vocabulary seriously. Similarly, there are no clearly individuatable mental states described or shown within FW; whose would they be? Without a who to be in some mental state, what sense can we give to a mental state'? Even HCE's notorious but not clearly delimited guilt does not provide him with a psychological state or disposition. His guilt is relative to an action about which others speak and to which he seemingly responds, except that the lack of clarity about what this he is, when he is often marked or referred to simply by HCE, but we also have to learn what it is we are identifying.

*Bourbon is still complaining about the lack of conventional characters but he does not explain in this paragraph what conclusion we should draw from this. I think he likes FW because it forces the readers to fall back on their own resources and come up with meanings. In Bourbon's view FW forces the emergence of the soul. Do we agree with this view?*

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With these problems in hand, the question we can pursue in reading FW is no longer "How is the identification of a person like the identification of words?" The question now more centrally concerns that which is identified, and would be better rendered "How is that which a person is (who he or she is in particular) like the particular meanings and form of a word?" We can take words as symbols of persons, so that our inability to identify words can symbolize our inability to symbolize persons in FW. The motive for the question, however, lies in the close relation between language and whatever I take as myself in my particularity — specifically how I am manifest as myself, as something to others and myself. This question can have a compelling sense and claim on us under two conditions: (1) when it is no longer clear what word a word is within a particular sentence and (2) when it is no longer clear not only who persons are, but also what they are. This last happens generally in our wakeful life as a form of psychosis, sleepiness, or willful silliness, or through some derangement of the world or sentences, conversation, stories (moments of nonsense, confusion, and misunderstanding). It can happen quite easily in fictions and in dreams. FW would

seem to exemplify all of these ways of falling into confusion, all of the ways words, sentences, and persons slip into obscurity.

*How much of what Joyce put into FW arose out of his daughter's mental illness? Is FW a picture of mental illness or a picture of normal mental activity?*

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The Analogy between Persons and Words.

isomorphism between language and the world (partially the picture behind Leibniz' universal characteristic and Wittgenstein's Tractarian project, although in both cases there are numerous complications).

But there is something more at stake in this question of correctness. What does this correctness describe for Cratylus? Separate from any appeals to some magical expressiveness, the correctness describes the adequacy of the original meaning of the word to the nature of the thing picked out by that word. By virtue of that original naming, my relation to words becomes a relation to the essences of things, and thus a correct name describes the way meanings and things claim me, by describing what is real and true. If we, Adam-like, had first named the things in the world we would be fitting ourselves into the world by capturing the essence of things in words, but that fitting would also mean that our understanding of the world would fit the world to our words. No such primal act of naming ever took place: its

importance as a description of naming concerns how we describe ourselves.

How do we fit ourselves to our ways of naming ourselves with words like 'mind,' 'heart,' 'soul,' and 'person'? If we deny, as we should, the sense of Cratylus' theory, we should not deny that any failure of words might precipitate a situation in which the need to fit ourselves into things and words becomes paramount. The etymological punning of FW does not get us closer to things, but closer to this need for fitting together. We have to construct the meaning of words in a way we do not have to when we speak and understand. Etymology does not constitute the meaning of words and it is a poor indicator of word meaning (Hughes) In reading the *Wake*, however, we do have to rely on etymological possibilities; we make partial sense of any clause by trying to synthesize possible senses from the possible meanings of the parts of words. The *Wake* consists of lexicographic and semantic elements that are parasitic on other languages. We can only read these words if we fit these parts together in order to situate ourselves and the world in relation to it. The effect of *Wakean* nonsense is to induce partial suggestions and descriptions, which, since they are partial, read like ruins, mosaic pieces shuffled into repeating but incomplete senses and pictures.

Names do not pick out characters in FW in any clear or stable way.: This means that it is not clear what any name in the *Wake* is a mimesis for, nor if it refers to anything. This is true not because the putative entity does not exist, but because it is not clear in what sense a name is a name within this fiction. Do the letters HCE, especially when we extract them from some Latin tag, name him, whomever that is?

*Here, as in many cases with this author, we have many words that don't add up to much. It reminds me of FW without the rhythmic pace and grace of Joyce's art. We know this is what Bourbon thinks because he has told us this over and over," it is not clear in what sense a name is a name within this fiction". OK I get it Bourbon sees FW as a doorway to the soul.*

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The possible meanings of Wakean sentences offer us possible ways to rewrite any particular clause. These possibilities form the context in relation to which we read the variables of word, clause, character, world, and the meaning of all of these relative to our ordinary ways of understanding these. FW consists of a context of possible meanings and variables. In the Wake there is no ground of sense, no literal level within the fiction that would not be literal only by stipulation. If part of what we are to read is that FW has no clear relation to the world and us, then I think, if it is to be relevant to us, we have to ask how are we like words, both ordinary words and Wakean words. This is mysterious.

If the thing named is nothing and the name is nonsensical, then there exists at least the semblance of a necessary relation between name and thing named. If a sentence is understood as expressive of me, then that sentence is taken as surrogate or representative of me and in this it is partially personified.

*Based on the last paragraph above I think Bourbon concludes that the principal character of FW is the reader. He may be right but I myself NEVER felt that as I read the book.*

*Who is reading FW? The first time I read it I had just read Falkner's book, "The Sound and Fury" and I expected the text to become "clear" as it did in that book. At some point I gave up that expectation but continued because I came to enjoy the "sound" of the printed words. After that experience I found the FW book group at the 47th Street book store. The book group experience was enjoyable without the kind of satisfactions that Bourbon seems to be seeking. I think he is looking for a "Holy Book".*

## P. 186

The possible meanings of Wakean sentences offer us possible ways to rewrite any particular clause. These possibilities form the context in relation to which we read the variables of word, clause, character, world, and the meaning of all of these relative to our ordinary ways of understanding these. FW consists of a context of possible meanings and variables. In the Wake there is no ground of sense, no literal level within the fiction that would not be literal only by stipulation. If part of what we are to read is that FW has no clear relation to the world and us, then I think, if it is to be relevant to us, we have to ask how are we like words, both ordinary words and Wakean words. This is mysterious.

*I don't think we are like words. I think the above underlined observation describes the reader's position - converted into author by the indeterminacy of the writing. Perhaps in this process the reader's soul is invoked ( or is it Joyce's soul).v*

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To read FW is to explicate it in this way: to read it wondering if these words are ours and not knowing how to answer that question, to find ourselves the author of the letter we write to ourselves, but then not knowing if we are actually that author or that reader. We have to discover how Wakean sentences could claim us in this way. The soul is something we share and to lose it would be to lose that sharing, as well as what is shared. In that loss we have the impetus to find both again.

*I never thought of the soul as shared - I conceived of the soul as very private. Bourbon here raises the matter of confusion in FW between reader and author. Is the invocation of the soul the mechanism for addressing this?*

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We might frame ourselves with single quotation marks if we read the Wake as really our loss of sense. We might double the quotation marks if we imagine we can see what we are or what we say as someone else speaking, as if the "we cumfused" of the Wake were actually said and meant as the truth we didn't quite know (FW,156.31). In other words, the difference between (1) single quotation marks and (2) double quotation marks is that in the second case one allows the Wake to speak as God and in the first we discover that we wrote the letter we thought was from Joe to ourselves thinking we were Joe. This is no easier to make sense of than it is to do. If one thinks that the Wake

can prove or demonstrate anything sayable as a propositional claim, one is taking it as guaranteed by God. I am encouraging the other case.

These discoveries would be more like discovering mistakes, or archaic and half-incomprehensible theories of world, mind, and person. We cannot read the Wake if we cannot read the possible meanings of its words relative to our assumptions and premises about language, the world, this book and so on. And thus reading the Wake could be a means of self-critical reflection on these assumptions and premises, through having to construct its ideas as ours. We should try to read the Wake as a kind of linguistic striptease, in which we might try to find out how much of what we think, believe, cherish about language, others, and the world can be transported into this world in which someone' writes, reads, or says "Let us pry. We thought, would and did" (FW, 188.08). Reading the Wake would mean putting on these quotation marks surrounding 'someone, trying to be that someone. We might frame ourselves with single quotation marks if we read the Wake as really our loss of sense. We might double the quotation marks if we imagine we can see what we are or what we say as someone else speaking, as if the "we cumfused" of the Wake were actually said and meant as the truth we didn't quite know (FW, 15631). In other words, the difference between (1) single quotation marks and 2) double quotation marks is that in the second case one allows the Wake to speak as God and in the first we discover that we wrote the letter we thought was from Joe to ourselves thinking we were Joe. This is no easier to make sense of than it is to do. It one thinks that the Wake can prove or demonstrate anything sayable as a propositional claim, one is taking it as guaranteed by God. I am encouraging the other case.

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In some situations I am willing to take or to accept that what I express as my faith or my love or my fear or my doubts names me..... We are not the same as our expressions; but we are manifest through them and can be mistaken for them, even by ourselves. Thus, our expressions, what we say and do, how we gesture and appear can be taken as surrogates for us.

We can recognize ourselves as these gestures, as well as in them. I am left with somewhat cryptic conclusions. The deformation of sense in FW does not unfit sentences (let alone words) to the world, but requires of us a fitting that expresses the adequacy of ourselves to this language. Our relation to language is, therefore, strangely plastic. We make our names correct. Words can be taken as names and can manifest

what they mean only if they are senseless. Instead of being empty this senselessness allows us to read FW in the way we make our names correct, the way we can understand anything as a symbol or as expressive of us. Reading FW, therefore, if we can put on its words, can allow us to describe the way we invest ourselves in words as analogous to the way we invest ourselves in our names. Kant's descriptions of poetry as soulful or soulless, as animate or inanimate, are not metaphors, but describe an aspect of ourselves which we should take as our soul. We are not in our words, but we are as much our words as we are our memories.

*I definitely DO NOT understand this.*

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We certainly are not language in the sense that under certain physical descriptions a tree is matter. Our various perceptions and means of perception can show us ourselves (when we look at our hands and say, as G. E. Moore did, "these are my hands"). Through our seeing or our experiencing we sense ourselves as that which is sensing. Or at least we can describe ourselves in this way. There is a similar dual form to thought, where (1) that I can think about myself and (2) what it is I think about myself are, themselves, expressive of myself, even to myself. This last 'even to myself' is, of course, the strange part.

*It is the part that we call the "Self": the ability to step away turn around and "look" back and view the person you see as a 3rd person.*

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As an innumerable set of representations and interpretations, this emblematic not this' would enumerate the world, which is analogous to saying I am never that which I see, only that which sees. Such an enumeration would show me as that which is not given by this series of negations, and in this it looks like a self-directed negative theology. (One might discover a similar structure of negation in the "nat language" of Finnegans Wake). This generalized 'not this' emblemizes what it means that we can stand

toward the world as ours and towards ourselves as something. The Twittering Machine as a failed emblem is both an asymptotic limit (I am what is not the rest of the world') and a limit of interpretation (I can interpret myself in many ways and project myself into various pictures).

*FW forces us to encounter the process of creating meaning out of the perceived strange language in front of us. Early Homo Sapiens had to perform this task without the aid of language. We have this tool but we are not consciously aware of its primitive foundations.*

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Human beings have produced various and conflicting theories of the soul, mind, and person. Relative to whatever these theories are trying to describe we are not transparent to ourselves.

This dispersal within language is partly shown through the peculiarity of the first person reflexive stances we take toward ourselves through

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Klee's painting is nothing like us. In this sense, its failure for me marks an asymptotic limit. One stands silent before it. The emblematic force of this failure can be generalized and thus can be expressed as a series: 1 am not this a, not this 2 , ... not this n. As an innumerable set of representations and interpretations, this emblematic 'not this' would enumerate the world, which is analogous to saying I am never that which I see, only that which sees. Such an enumeration would show me as that which is not given by this series of negations, and in this it looks like a self-directed negative theology. (One might discover a similar structure of negation in the "nat language" of Finnegans Wake). This generalized 'not this' emblemizes what it means that we can stand toward the world as ours and towards ourselves as something.

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## V. Science and Art

I have been describing our dispersal in language and the beguiling inadequacy of language as a means of capturing whatever we are that can take ourselves in certain ways and be mistaken about ourselves in certain ways. Such a description should not be understood as claiming that the self lacks form or is somehow elusive or

mysterious, but only that we do not know how to ask questions about what or who we are. I have suggested that questions about what we are as human beings (as entities or creatures that can make claims about ourselves and yet in these claims get ourselves wrong and at the same time be creatures that stand to ourselves in such a way as to define ourselves by our particularity) can be reasked as questions about how we stand towards and within language. Whatever I am, even to myself, must be manifest in some way, and that manifestation is both me and not just me. The complexity of what we are relative to how we are manifest to ourselves is also a general problem for us, for giving meaning to we, human beings. Human beings have produced various and conflicting theories of the soul, mind, and person. Relative to whatever these theories are trying to describe we are not transparent to ourselves.

This dispersal within language is partly shown through the peculiarity of the first person reflexive stances we take toward ourselves through language. We are manifest through our linguistic resources but also how the content of what we say is constrained and expressive of the third person descriptions we understand as legitimate. The constraints and possibilities are dictated increasingly by the non-intentional vocabulary of science (through which intentional descriptions of nature are replaced with non-intentional ones). Thus, n

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Rationality, consciousness, and our intentional vocabulary can no longer straightforwardly define 'human being', 'soul,' and 'mind'? 'Soul' and 'mind', for example, since they lack any clear ontological instantiation that is not question-begging can be denied any real existence. 'Human being,' while it has a clearer sense, becomes an arbitrary distinction. In effect, the only ordinary sense the words 'human being, 'mind,' and 'soul' have is more similar to first person pronouns than to substantives. Thus, they function as grammatical distinctions in a way at odds with what is at stake in the distinctions they make. While I might still be able to use the word 'soul' without believing in an immaterial essence, soul has no ontological claim on me outside of that belief.

*Bourbon seems to have almost given up the fight for the existence of the soul. However he still has arguments left which the final pages of book will reveal.*

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If we, human beings-souls and minds—are the contact point between science and art, then our becoming nonsense to ourselves from within our self-descriptions shows this

contact to be nonsense. From within literature, therefore, to study this contact is to study the nonsense we are, the nonsense we might discover ourselves to be within and through the modes of meaning exemplified in language and fiction.

*I think Bourbon is falling back away from the side of the argument line where science has the advantage to the art side where the value of soul exists. Within art the soul is there conceptually, but do we really have a soul? Perhaps the soul is needed for us to remain human and not become a mere machine. It is what we “feel” we need, but - **Do we really have a soul?***

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I have described two ways we might find ourselves manifest as kinds of nonsense: (1) through first person self-reflections understood through our or my unstable relation to and with language, with an attending lack of clarity about what 'our' or 'my' means here, and (2) the third person failures of our species descriptions to carry any substantive sense, outside of their stipulated meaning within physicalist, scientific theories. Our situation is such that while we can ask what we are through our scientific thinking, we cannot discover through any science who we are. While we can ask who we are through our artistic thinking, we cannot discover through any art what we are.

*I am persuaded that Joyce was driven to FW by his exposure to his daughter's illness and its manifestation in her command of language. I need to do more research.*

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If literature is a painting of us, of anyone, then it is also a mirror, and we should read it with the recognition that we understand and express ourselves with words as if paintings and mirrors were interchangeable-as if there were no difference between

mirrored glass and canvas. If we could do this we would see that we are the means of showing ourselves to ourselves.

*Finally Bourbon yields to science and retreats into art which he declares is in a territory where science cannot reach. We are human beings with unpredictable and nonsense characteristics which are beyond the reach of scientific knowledge. FW is a product of human thought, part free association, part rhythmic blues, part deliberate masquerade, created to make us "think"!*

An interpretation of the Wake is not about the Wake, but about itself as an interpretation, which is to say about ourselves interpreting it. But what does the Wake say about ourselves, which would mean in the context of my discussion of intentionality, what kind of thing are we that can be talked about through nonsense? 'Ourselves,' in this case, means 'we human beings.' Maybe we should call this a test whereby only someone who asks if reading the Wake is a human activity is a human being. I remain agnostic about the answer to this. A question remains, however: 'What are we that we can be that which the Wake could be about?' or 'What are we that we can be targeted by the need for the kind of justification the Wake demands?'

I

### III. Picturing Two Pictures

My argument has been that to take Klee's painting as emblematic of a first person reflexive stance is nonsensical and that such a stance is necessarily part of any description of ourselves as human beings. Whatever we might imagine Klee's painting to mean it cannot be what we are. So I began by invoking a picture that I then refused to show, claiming that my refusal shows more than the painting could.

