A Wakean Whodunit

Death and Authority in Finnegans Wake

GABRIEL RENGGLI

Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are! However, somebody *killed* something:
that's clear, at any rate—

—Lewis Carroll[1]

[A]ny true detection should prove that we are the guilty party.

—Umberto Eco[2]

The recent publication of the corrected edition of *Finnegans Wake* prepared by Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon—the first to significantly deviate from seventy-year-old conventions in printing the book—has given new urgency to a number of questions posed by Joyce's final work. One of the most palpable of these is the question that concerns our encounter with the text's material and linguistic form—that is to say: How does the *Wake* present itself to its readers as a book and as a text, and how do the two relate to each other? It is a question that interrogates the expectations and strategies with which we confront Joyce's idiosyncratic literary creation even before we begin to interpret it, and, by extension, it is also a question that asks whether it is possible, in this context, to conceptualize such a "before."

The present article will develop what could be described as a line of inquiry leading up to these problems, as well as to their consequences for reading an altered edition of *Finnegans Wake*. However, I do not propose to review the Rose/O'Hanlon edition, nor is it my aim to theorize questions of textual editing, whether generally or in Joyce. Instead, I will propose a close reading of a single sentence, in the course of which I reflect

on a number of ways in which we can describe how a text validates interpretation. What I hope to suggest is that these descriptions can and should be updated in view of the challenge posed by the publication of a new edition of the *Wake*. In order to make this suggestion in the manner that the sentence in question requires (namely in the manner of a detective's investigation), my article must take a circuitous route. My starting point is a sentence from Book 3, Chapter 3 of *Finnegans Wake*, which I first quote in its original form.

"The author, in fact, was mardred" (*FW* 517.11). What happens when we read this sentence? It is all too easy, with the *Wake*, to get ahead of oneself. But in this case, even more than usual, great care is advisable. Death is here. A murder has taken place, hence the reader should proceed with suitable gravity. In reading this sentence (though "reading," as will presently become apparent, is not quite the word), we should, at least for now, proceed in the manner of a murder investigation: deliberately and methodically.

How do we know that a murder has taken place? Here, already, the first fatal mistake might happen—we do not in fact know it. It does *not* say so on the page: what is on the page, the constellation of letters that form "mardred," is not a word, at least not in any readily recognizable language. It is easy to forget this, for the reading, or rectification, or deduction, that produces "murdered" from "mardred" seems obvious and even natural, though it is, of course, neither. A great number of discussions of the *Wake* touch upon this quality of its language; in place of many other examples I could cite here, let me introduce just one from Jacques Derrida. To read this non-word, "mardred," to render it readable, to venture a hypothesis as to what word or words could be offered as a translation of it, is a temptation altogether too strong to resist. "It is impossible not to want to do it, to want violently—and reading itself consists, from its very first movement, in sketching out translation."[3] But any venture into reading—translating—this mark must also fall short of the impossible demand made by the text which bids you read this mark as *this* mark and not as another, bids you read it, but not in translation: "I order you and forbid you to translate me" (158).

Death is here, then, the reader can unquestionably *make it out* on the page before her or him, but only as a blur, as a scarring of the text, in the form of a word that is not a word. At the very beginning of this murder mystery, the reader, which is to say the detective, has already stepped into the picture and begun to spin elaborate hypotheses that are in excess of

the available evidence and only sustain themselves by virtue of their internal coherence (and often enough, in the case of detective stories, their aesthetic appeal). It is this stepping into the picture that I am interested in here. For the path that leads from "mardred" to "murdered," from the linguistic disturbance to the sudden appearance of death, is reminiscent of another, physical, path also leading up to a picture, and also revealing a blurred mark to signify death. (Here, I must somewhat abruptly introduce an example, the relevance of which, however, should shortly become evident.) The spectator who, in the National Gallery in London, encounters Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, finds that there is a certain distance he or she has to go between seeing the whole of the picture, and seeing the skull which, at first merely a blur or smear on the canvas, is brought into perspective only by looking at the painting from its lower-left corner.

Two points are important to keep in mind here. First, the effect of Holbein's work as I describe it depends a great deal on the presence of either the original painting or a near life-size copy. An encounter with one of these means that there are a good five to ten paces you have to walk between the position that allows you to contemplate the painting frontally, as you usually would, and the position that reveals to you the shapeless blot in the middle as the presence of death, as a skull hovering between the two young noblemen, not quite a part of the material reality of the depicted scene, but not quite outside of it either (impossibly, it throws a shadow on the carpet in front of the two men). In order to be aware of both aspects, in order for the unnerving meaning of the mysterious blot to become apparent, you need to walk, which is to say, you need to *change your own position*.[4] No contemplation of the image in print (where a book may simply be tilted to either side in order to achieve the required change in perspective) can reproduce this analogy to Gestalt psychology, whereby the figure separates itself from the ground precisely at the point at which you reorient yourself and reconstitute the ordering categories you impose on the world that your senses report.

Secondly, even though the painting is known well enough for the hidden meaning of the blur to seem painfully obvious, there is for each spectator a thrilling moment when he or she for the first time becomes aware of the skull, which was right in front of him or her, but which he or she did not up to that point see as a skull. Once you know how Holbein's painting "works," you tend to collapse the two perspectives into one, and it becomes difficult to reconnect with the state of mind in

which you initially encounter the disturbance in the canvas's lower half. In that state of mind, you are unaware—even if you have been told about it—of the palpable presence that is ready to jump out at you from the distorted blur. Although at a later stage you will find it practically impossible to look past the skull, this earlier state of mind is real, and between this state and the condition of being initiated into the painting's secret, you have to go the distance.

Let us therefore read "murdered" for "mardred," aware that by doing so we already go a distance, and that unlike with *The Ambassadors*, where our reorientation can confront us only with one finding, which has been determined for us, here, we potentially implicate ourselves in the death we mean to examine (the situation is comparable to the classic twist in detective tales whereby the murderer is the detective, investigating a situation he has brought about himself). What happens when we read the sentence again in this manner? Who died, in fact? "The author" is what the text answers, but this answer only complicates matters, for it brings into our investigation the disturbing echo of another famous meditation on death—Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author." This is first of all a very peculiar death, for the death in question is not in fact a death at all. It does not belong to the realm of limitation, finality, and closure. Instead, it proclaims the openness and open-endedness of the critical mode that Barthes's essay envisions. Barthes argues that "[t]o give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing,"[5] and that to remove this author is to open up the text to on-going exegesis. It is hence the very entity whose *removal* the essay proposes that is rhetorically aligned with manifestations of metaphorical death (limit, *telos*, completion). Consequently, the death of the author, announced in the essay's title, becomes the death of death itself: It is the origin, and the symbol, of the properly deathless text.

In view of such topical reverberations, any detective will be simultaneously exhilarated and embarrassed by the emergence of this particular textual echo, for it represents a solution too good to be true. Joyce's sentence does not—cannot—refer to Barthes's article published twenty-six years after Joyce's death. Any number of explanations come to mind: The similarity in the wording is coincidental, and Joyce is not in fact, as we hastily took him to be, commenting on the relation between author and reader. Or else an influence, however indirect, could theoretically be traced from Joyce to Barthes. Or Joyce's sentence and Barthes's title, without directly depending on each other, give voice to ideas belonging to one

overarching discourse that reaches far beyond these two authors. Undoubtedly, each of these approaches is sufficient to demystify the occurrence of the echo, and in my opinion, the third one is probably the truest rendition of what has taken place. But it is not the whole truth.

As with the skull in Holbein's painting, once the distance has been traveled, once both perspectives have been registered, and Barthes, like Joyce, has been detected as the source of the words in question—not of words *like* them, but of *these* words, which is precisely to say once this sentence has been understood as a *reference* to Barthes's title—it is difficult to return to a state of looking at one level (the ambassadors, Joyce's sentence) without being minimally aware of the other (Barthes's essay, the skull). I would hold that this effect is not fortuitous. In Joyce's text, there is a mechanism at work that perversely activates a form of reverse heritage. This is to say that we are not simply taking from Barthes the impetus that once we remove the limit constituted by the censuring presence of the author, the *Wake* is at liberty to signify well beyond the confines of Joyce's possible intentions, and may find itself in dialogue with a text that Joyce could not have known. It is easy enough to bring about some agreement between, on the one hand, Joyce's agglutinative, over-determined writing and, on the other hand, Barthes's idea of the text as "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" ("Death" 146) rather than as a performance controlled by a single, masterful figure. But this would still only mean to apply Barthes's theory to Joyce's text. It would stop short of the notion that Joyce's sentence already contains a reference to Barthes's essay, though not where our initial considerations might have led us to look for it.

There is another avenue open to our investigation. The impetus to remove the author, and thus remove the interpretative limits that an author implies, does not have to come from Barthes. Joyce is already making this self-effacing gesture; it resides in the blot or disturbance that is the non-word "mardred," and which not only enables us, but *forces* us to go a certain distance towards the text, even to step into the text and make our presence felt there by detecting a murder in the non-word "mardred." To think of Barthes when reading the words "The author, in fact, was mardred" is not only to trail the associative connection provided by the translation "the author, in fact, was murdered," it is also to follow to the logical conclusion that very act of translating, the act of detection made necessary by the mark "mardred." This mark requires, on the part of the reader who wishes to read it at all, a degree of interpretative

effort—a readiness to travel a distance—which we have since come to associate with, amongst other things, the proposal developed in Barthes's essay. I would go so far as to claim that in the wake of this essay's reception, a reading of the sentence "The author, in fact, was mardred" can no longer tap into the intrinsic potential of that blot or blur, "mardred," without making reference to certain ideas of which "The Death of the Author" is still one emblematic expression. In this sense, "The Death of the Author" has become, at least for now, part of the context of "The author, in fact, was mardred," and in this sense, Joyce's sentence is also a citation of Barthes's title: a partly fortuitous citation, but nevertheless one meaningfully understood as a citation, since without the text conjured up by that title the sentence is not—or no longer—fully contextualized.

Perhaps it is Joyce, then, who has been murdered—effaced by the radical gesture of that blot, replaced by a more recent authority on the subject of dead authors. But our investigation must not stop here. For one thing, we cannot easily escape the contradiction that occurs when even as we speculate, quite reasonably, that Joyce himself might be the mardred author in question, we simultaneously establish that what leads us to this hypothesis is a gesture through which Joyce communicates with us over the abyss of what we assumed to be his own effacement. In fact, he produces himself in this effacement, like a magician receiving the most attention (but what is the object of that attention?) at the exact moment of his disappearance. It is of course not the empirical author that I am speaking of here, the historical individual James Joyce whose existence, in the most pragmatic sense, is limited to the facts and events that comprised his life. Rather, I am referring to the author purely as he manifests himself in the text, that is, the author in the function that Barthes calls the *scriptor* and which according to him "is born simultaneously with the text" ("Death" 145), which is to say, newly with each reading.

Regarding this author as scriptor, what is the meaning of a sentence that informs us that the author is dead, murdered, if this gesture of self-effacement is already structured in such a way as to contain the germ of the author's future re-entrance onto the stage of the text? And what is the status of the text, in view of the author's recurrent re-entrances by means of which the text indefinitely reserves for itself the right to introduce new effects, and identify them as effects *planned by the author*? With regard to this unruly liveliness of the text, Derek Attridge raises similar questions when he asks about our critical endeavors: "What if the body at the wake,

splashed by some hermeneutic whiskey, should wake, to the embarrassment of the mourners? What if the critical text should find itself addressed by the writing on which it comments?"[6] Embarrassment is indeed the word for our reaction at finding the text, which we had already reassured ourselves was dead and passively awaiting our investigation, wake, stir, even talk back to us. Not to mention the embarrassment of the detectives who suddenly find themselves addressed by the victim whose murder they were trying to solve. In this view, it is certainly a strange notion to speak of death (of the author, of the murder victim, of the text) in the context of a book in which one of the main characters comes back to life after having already been buried: "There was a minute silence before memory's fire's rekindling and then. Heart alive!" (*FW* 83.4–5). Joyce—or perhaps, as we shall see, the ghost of Joyce—appears to be interfering with our work of detection, as if, through some form of un-deadness, the text gained the ability to talk back to its readers, and thus to reverse chronology.

What, therefore, happens when we read the words: "The author, in fact, was mardred"? Amongst other things, we are also implicating ourselves in an editorial decision. For if we now turn to another edition of *Finnegans Wake*, the one edited by Rose and O'Hanlon, we find in the corresponding place the statement: "The aurthor, in fact, was mordred."[7] The body of the text, it would seem, has stirred, and in this case it has stirred in a very material manner, which is arguably the manner that the critical community is most keen to exclude. Hence, paradoxically, the zeal with which ever new, ever more definite editions of literary works are produced. Immediately, the possible readings are multiplied. The author (who was murdered) is "mordred," which is to say Mordred, but also, there is now a possible identity between the murdered "aurthor" and Arthur. Our newest count of murder victims must hence include King Arthur and his son Sir Mordred, who, according to legend, fatally wounded each other in battle. Behind the veil of Joyce's non-words, violent death is once more present, this time death dealt by father to son and by son to father. Here is Sir Thomas Malory's version of the events:

> And when Sir Mordred saw King Arthur, he ran unto him with his sword drawn in his hand; and there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield with a foin of his spear, throughout the body, more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death's wound, he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the bur

> of King Arthur's spear; and right so he smote his father, King Arthur, with his sword holding in both his hands, upon the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the tay of the brain. And therewith Mordred dashed down stark dead to the earth. And noble King Arthur fell in a swoon to the earth, and there he swooned oftentimes.[8]

This is by no means a fantastic element to introduce into our investigation. To begin with, it provides us with two things we did not previously have: a suspect (two suspects, actually) and a possible motive: craving for power, resulting in usurpation. Let us further widen the ring of associations. The mardred author, I have noted, is a murdered author; she or he is effaced in a Barthesian removal of authority. If we want to impose a narrative on this part, then maybe we should imagine some form of political assassination (political because of Arthur's presence, but also because authority itself implies an existence extended into the public realm), possibly quite a gruesome one, since in "mardred," to bring back this first form, there may be found traces of "Marter," an archaic German word for torture. Yet if our author is "mordred"—assassinated, disempowered, usurped—she is also a usurper herself. She kills a legendary and powerful ancestor in order to replace him (subsequently, like Sir Mordred, suffering the same violent end, but that we already know). One way to relate the two readings to each other and apply them again to the field of literature is now to say that the "mardred"/"mordred" author, murdered and murderer, usurper and usurped, is an author who breaks away from one tradition, only to create another which in turn will be attacked by those coming after him (with an option, we might add, for him to be "martyred" further down the line, that is, to be rehabilitated in a revival of a movement unsuccessful in its own time). A "mardred"/"mordred" author, in short, is an author caught in the ebb and flow of literary and critical fashions. On the one hand, he or she is subject to the anxiety of influence, to borrow Harold Bloom's phrase,[9] and to the imperative to be different from the past. On the other hand, he or she is the object of future critical struggles for the right to appropriate the past and impose interpretations on it.

What does all of this have to do with Joyce's ghost and a reversal of chronology? In answering this question, I should first of all point out that it might have been hasty to bring our initial hypothesis—that a murder has taken place—to this second version of Joyce's sentence: "The aurthor,

in fact, was mordred." Quite aside from the question of which version represents the correct one (a problem to which I will return), we should also be concerned to do justice to the words—or rather non-words—at hand. It would hence be more cautious to simply read this new version as "Arthur, in fact, was Mordred." *Identity* is what is primarily at stake, then, not death, and if someone is effaced, it is as a result of replacement, not murder. We should not forget that this sentence occurs in the context of a ritualistic exchange during which Shaun acts in the role of a medium who channels the voices of many other characters and answers (or evades) four interrogators. By the time the game of question and answer reaches the sentence we are concerned with, the merging of identities into one another is established as one of the dialogue's central motifs, and more explicitly so than elsewhere in the *Wake*. Thus we read for instance: "did it ever occur to you, *qua* you, prior to this, [. . .] that you might, bar accidens, be very largely substituted in potential secession from your next life by a complementary character, voices apart?" (*FW* 486.35–487.4, *Restored* 378.4–7, Joyce's italics). The father can be the son and the son can be the father, which does indeed throw a new light on the problem of heritage. The short-sighted view would be to say that if chronology is potentially nothing but a game of musical chairs, with Mordred sometimes ending up in the place of Arthur, and *vice versa*, then the respective positions of Joyce and his readers may as easily become inverted. But this is not specific enough an argument, neither in the sense of being sufficiently differentiated, nor in the sense of being particular to Joyce.

Heritage is never a question of the past simply dictating the future. This brings me back to Derrida, who analyzes the possibility to usurp chronology in great detail in *The Post Card*. The eponymous postcard, which Derrida spots in the Bodleian Library, reproduces an illumination by Matthew Paris (taken from a thirteenth-century manuscript held by the same library). It shows Plato and Socrates, but it depicts them in what appears to be a reversal of their received representative positions. Socrates is portrayed as "the one who writes—seated, bent over, a scribe or docile copyist," appearing like "Plato's secretary," while Plato, his finger raised, "looks like he is indicating something, designating, showing the way or giving an order—or dictating, authoritarian, masterly, imperious".[10] In Derrida's interpretation, this picture becomes the paradoxical illustration of the fact that we know Socrates's philosophy chiefly from the writings of his pupil Plato, which means precisely that Plato is *not* the scribe, but the one who dictates. He *ventriloquizes* his mentor, he "has made him

[Socrates] write whatever he [Plato] wanted while pretending to receive it from him'' (12). Posterity means that we claim for our readings the authority of the father-figures. Yet by the same token, posterity also means that the authority we claim remains just that: *their* authority. The act of ventriloquism only works if it remains concealed.

The point here is not that the Socrates we know from Plato's writings might be partially fictional (this, though conceivable, would have to be argued differently, more carefully), but that the method through which we can envision Plato inscribing himself and his teacher into our philosophical tradition, that this imagined and perhaps imaginary method can serve as a hermeneutical model for many other forms of (actual) interaction with the past. Plato, we say, fixes in written form whatever he wants; but he can only do so because, nominally, he receives it from Socrates. In this process, identities are destabilized on *both* sides. Plato's Socratic dialogues allow him to define Socrates's legacy and bind it to his own. He thus effaces and replaces his teacher to some degree. But in order to achieve this, Plato must in turn accept, as Derrida puts it, ''to be somewhat eclipsed by his character'' (49). He must accept to be supplanted by the figure whose voice we hear in the dialogues, by the fiction that he can only convincingly create if at all points he insists on having, on the contrary, been created by it. Thus the ventriloquist's identity, too, becomes partly dependent on a fiction, on a *character* (I will return to these expressions). A would-be defeater of the concept of heritage, not unlike mardred Sir Mordred, Derrida's Plato always partly succeeds and partly fails in his endeavor to seize power. In the logic of this reading, to *come after*, chronologically, is metaphorically to be or *stand behind*, in the position of those who dictate. And yet the past is a stubborn specter that will not readily surrender its nimbus of authority—certainly not without a battle that will potentially cost sons as well as fathers part of their identity (if not quite their lives). Heritage, then, is never just a question of the future dictating the past either.

That the specter of the past is difficult to escape is particularly true of Joyce, as Derrida also argues. ''*La Carte postale* is haunted by Joyce,''[11] he says, and to be haunted by is to be in the presence of. If Joyce is present, however, this means he is already competing with his readers in the struggle in which we are all engaged: the struggle to get *behind* the other and dictate to him or her. This is confirmed—aptly enough in the context of hauntings and ghosts—by a visit of Derrida's to Joyce's grave in the Fluntern cemetery, Zurich, described in that same haunted book, *The Post Card*:

> Above the tomb, in a museum of the most costly horrors, a life-size Joyce, in other words colossal in this place, seated, with his cane, a cigarette in hand it seems to me, and a book in the other hand. *He has read all of us—and plundered us, that one*.[12]

Joyce has read us, not necessarily in the metaphorical sense of having intuited us, contemplated us, predicted us, but perhaps more literally in the sense of having arrived after us, scanned us, and then quickly gotten behind us—the reversal of the reversal of chronology. Of course, this description can only ever be another metaphor. Again Derrida: "There is a James Joyce who can be heard laughing at this omnipotence [. . .]. For omnipotence remains phantasmatic."[13] Omnipotence and omnipresence are textual effects; they arise from the relation of frameworks to each other, are created by interpretative processes, depend on the reader's investment, and so on. They are not measurable quantities contained within the structure of the text. (The relevance to our case of Umberto Eco's conclusion to his *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, which I cite at the beginning of this article, should thus have become clear. It is only through the intervention of the reader, through the contact and the detection work that activates what is on the page, that a text ever produces meaning or, in extreme cases, proves murderous.) Still, some minimal doubt remains: For how phantasmatic can a presence be which, although it is not all-powerful, is real and powerful enough to make its metaphorical laughter heard?

We may be able to get behind Joyce in a manner, able to preface our readings of his texts with new questions that assert the capacity to supersede Joyce's intentions, render them irrelevant next to our interpretative concerns. But when we arrive there, behind Joyce, in a position from which we thought to dictate to him, we will only ever find that Joyce or Joyce's ghost is already there, waiting for us and saying to us: "I have already effaced myself, and in this effacement, I have made a lasting gesture, which will forever proclaim that it was *me* who effaced myself." This may be no more than a textual effect, but it is one impossible to avoid in any encounter with the *Wake*. If death is the name we give to an ultimate limit and an ultimate absence, if death is an unassailable command saying: Do not go beyond this point, be not present beyond this point, do not *speak* beyond this point, then *Finnegans Wake*—and through *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce—is laughing at this name and at this command.

No death has occurred, then, at least not here. *Finnegans Wake* is a book whose non-words laugh at the idea of an absolute limit such as death, and therefore it is also a book that laughs at the idea of a murder investigation such as the one we tried to conduct here. With the victim being alive and well, even being potentially present in the voice that is called upon as a witness, and with the identities of the suspect (or suspects) and the victim (or victims) constantly exchanging places, it might be better for the detectives to admit defeat. For similar reasons, *Finnegans Wake* also laughs at the concept of deciding between two versions of the same sentence. The notion of the un-deadness of the text, the notion of a text that stirs and talks back to its critics, is precisely the framework in which it makes sense to relate our detective work to the problem of textual editing.

I hasten to add that there are, of course, a number of editorial procedures that can tell us, if we can formulate the question in the right way, whether Joyce wrote "The author, in fact, was mardred" or "The aurthor, in fact, was mordred." For the sake of clarity, I should also add that I am far from suggesting that these procedures are somehow not applicable to *Finnegans Wake*. We can, for instance, trace the expansion of the passage that concerns us here across the alterations—reproduced in *The James Joyce Archive*—which lead from its appearance in *transition* to its publication in the *Wake*. Apart from miscellaneous notes, there are two major stages in this process. The first comprises the revisions Joyce executed directly on the pages of *transition*. Of this stage, there are two witnesses, which come from the first (*JJA* 61.77) and third (*JJA* 61.472–3) set of corrected *transition* pages because the second set of revisions for this section is missing. The second stage are the galley proofs for *Finnegans Wake*, of which we have the first (*JJA* 62.152–3) and second (*JJA* 62.402–3) set. The second set of galley proofs is the last witness available for this passage because the third set of galleys for this section, as well as any page proofs that may have existed, are also missing. If we compare these different versions to each other, we find that Joyce introduces the sentence that has launched our investigation in a single addition toward the end of the revision process, as a handwritten insertion on the second set of galleys. It is written on the back of the preceding page (*JJA* 62.402) in a clear hand that unambiguously spells out the version that is reproduced in the Rose/O'Hanlon edition.

There is hence, based on the textual evidence available to us, an unequivocal answer to the question of which rendering of the sentence

represents the original one (short of the hypothesis that Joyce made, or actively or passively authorized, a change at a later stage—an argument that would, however, be extremely difficult to maintain without the missing page proofs). Yet, in a way that has more serious consequences for our readings than we perhaps care to acknowledge, the question is also immaterial. The nature of Joyce's non-words, of blots like "mordred," is such that even once we prove conclusively which non-word is the original one, the echo of the other one, of the one whose memory we are supposed to erase from our minds, is still present in the original, authoritative, remaining one. That is to say, although the genetic approach can confidently privilege the sequence "mordred" over the sequence "mardred," it cannot easily apply the same kind of judgment to the interpretations that readers will venture as translations of the new non-word—not without risking the effacement of the very difference between non-words and words. Thus, even though the incorrect non-word's status as objectively incorrect is more than likely to affect the priorities of our readings, this non-word will resist complete erasure. Each form will continue to contain memories of other forms that will call on us to interpret them—not least because there will be readings comparing the different versions to each other, commenting on the significance of the change.[14]

Perhaps, the mode that is most appropriate to a work like *Finnegans Wake* is therefore the addition of all these non-words and their interpretations to each other, the building of an archive that records the volatile plurality of versions. This archive cannot be a finite collection, like the resources compiled in the relevant volumes of *The James Joyce Archive* or in any other publication documenting the *Wake*'s genesis. Nor could it be some hypothetical but equally limited compendium of past readings, a gallery of mordred critics, if you will, recording the passing of critical fashions. Rather, it would have to be a boundless and protean archive accommodating the deathless logic of *mordring* itself, which remains active for as long as the text is read. That is, it would have to be an archive structured with a view to expansion—the kind of archive Derrida describes in *Archive Fever*, where he argues "that the interpretation of the archive [. . .] can only illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, namely a given inheritance, by inscribing itself into it; that is to say by opening it and by enriching it enough to have a rightful place in it. There is no meta-archive."[15] There is, in other words, no position from which the archive's contents can be replaced or governed; any interpretative activity can only *add* to them. Interpretations are activated and erased by

a potentially unending series of mordred critics, none of whom can ever succeed in entirely overwriting the past or entirely programming the future. Such an archive would acknowledge the truly exceptional status of Joyce's text as not being a text at all, but a non-text that, as Derrida puts it, orders and forbids its own translation. For in that archive, translations always prove provisional, and yet translations are all we have to work with. It is always possible that the text will wake and stir, that we have to change our own position and change the ordering categories we impose on the text, or that by stepping into the text we cause some change in it. Just as it is always possible that Joyce's ghost will come our way and laugh at our efforts to keep up with the transformations of his book—and rightly so, for these efforts can never even begin to meet the challenge raised by Joyce's non-words.

The very presence on the pages of *Finnegans Wake* of these blots is an intolerable distortion that demands rectification, and yet invalidates any correction we suggest. This is the concept I cited at the beginning of this article: the idea that the desire to translate Joyce's non-words is irrepressible, and that the inevitable failure to do so makes the process open-ended. By way of a preliminary conclusion, we can now add that this inevitable failure, and the resulting questionable nature of all translations, also make it exceedingly difficult to formulate rules for telling valid from invalid interpretations of this text (which is not the same as saying that all interpretations of it are valid, or invalid). It is in view of this difficulty that I propose another description of the *Wake*'s textual mechanism. Let us say that Joyce's non-words, and the indefinite succession of readings they provoke, are *haunted* by his presence as a presence-in-effacement—with the strange result that where we try to contain its meaning, *Finnegans Wake* is a text capable of talking back to us in a most authoritative voice.

In order to better grasp this effect of Joyce's self-effacement, it will prove helpful to make the transition from the image of Joyce's specter, reading us in the book he is holding, to the scene, in the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses*, of Bloom's encounter with another ghost who is reading: the apparition of Rudy. This ghost, like Joyce's statue in the Fluntern cemetery, is "*holding a book in his hand*" (*U* 15.4958–9). Or, in context:

> *Against the dark wall a figure appears slowly, a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet, holding a book in his hand. He reads from right to left inaudibly, smiling, kissing the page.* (*U* 15.4956–60)

That this ghost is arguably closer to a hallucination than to a supernatural presence (as are the other ghosts in the chapter) should not concern us here; in either form, a ghost is essentially the symptom of an incomplete closure of the past. A ghost who in addition carries a book is not only the spiritual or psychological remnant of an individual, but also the specter of a tradition (Rudy's prayer book, for instance, is a manifestation of Bloom's Jewish heritage). A reading ghost is, among other things, a reminder that tradition is the living past—the un-dead past, if you will, the past still in dialogue with our present, haunting our discourses as readily as it haunts our dreams, nightmares, and hallucinations.

Insofar as tradition, cultural heritage, archives, texts, and so on enable dead authors to exert an influence on present-day discourses, all books, not just *Finnegans Wake*, potentially transcend death. It is part of their purpose to outlive their authors and to bestow on them the un-deadness of what I call the stubborn specter of the past. Implicated in culture as we are, we continually interact with the initiators of the concepts we use. But what is the nature of this interaction? Reading a book amounts to a consultation of its author or authors (often long dead): an interview that may well be, as we have seen, but the veiled attempt at usurpation. And such usurpation takes the form of ventriloquism. It relies on the knowledge that the consulted authors will be powerless to comment on the ventriloquist's practice: that they, although their ghostly presences persevere and patiently claim their ideas for themselves, are passive entities. As interlocutors in the here and now, they have no presence beyond what our imagination projects onto them, and though they may say their lines and announce their arguments, they will not knowingly address *us*, at least not beyond the extent to which we ourselves invest them with a voice.

These qualities make them rather like the phantom of Rudy, who reads "inaudibly," does not answer Bloom, and is later on described as "*unseeing*" (*U* 15.4964). But there is an important difference. Appearing at the very end of "Circe," a chapter full of noise and uproar which affords a voice to numerous other apparitions—including the ghosts of Bloom's father and grandfather, of Paddy Dignam, and of Stephen's mother—the ghost of Rudy is unlike these others in that his presence leaves Bloom "*wonderstruck*" (*U* 15.4962) and incapable of doing anything as impious as giving the child an imaginary voice. I propose that what defeats Bloom here is precisely the extent to which any re-opening of the past, including reading, conflates remembrance with ventriloquism.

The project of a reading that aims to remain wonderstruck, that aims not to add anything, not to ventriloquize, not to stray in the slightest measure from what can be found within the text itself, will quickly find that it is not a reading at all. It cannot go beyond mechanically repeating what the text already spells out; strictly speaking, it cannot even do this because even a word-for-word reproduction (no matter how carefully it refrains from any attempt to *comprehend* the text), would replace the original context of the words with a new one, and would thus already risk stepping into the text and changing its meaning. This approach can therefore never isolate the text's own voice, but will on the contrary only succeed in plunging the text into muteness.

On the other hand, a reading that makes no attempt at all to structure itself according to some logic found within the text to be read (a logic that would consequently be present in the commentary as well) is not a reading either. As it does not stand in any discernible relation to the text, it will once again render it mute, in this case by supplanting it.

Actual reading, I would argue, takes its course between these two hypothetical extremes. It gives the text a voice—one among many possible voices—that will neither be solely the voice of the author (the first of the preceding cases), nor solely the voice of the reader (the second case), but that will oscillate between the two positions. And in this oscillating movement, it will at each point preserve some of the qualities of the position from which it is not speaking. In other words, the voice produced by the reading will be a ventriloquized voice: a voice that is and is not proper to the text, a voice that is, as it were, speaking *in character*, and which makes certain concessions to that character, in order to allow for our suspension of disbelief vis-à-vis the impossible act of letting the absent author speak.

In a text that reflects on the subject of speaking about Barthes after his death, Derrida addresses some points that allow us to further explore the crucial interrelations of reading, ventriloquism, and memory. Derrida, in his own textual performance in memory of Barthes, differentiates two ways of remembering the absent author by speaking of him, and identifies both of them as inherently flawed. The first option is

> to be content with just quoting, with just accompanying that which more or less directly comes back or returns to the other, to let him speak, to efface oneself in front of and to follow his speech, and to

> do so right in front of him. But this excess of fidelity would end up saying and exchanging nothing. It returns to death.[16]

The alternative is equally problematic, for

> by avoiding all quotation, all identification, all rapprochement even, so that what is addressed to or said of Roland Barthes truly comes from the other, from the living friend, one risks making him disappear again, as if one could add more death to death and thus indecently pluralize it. (275)

Only if we find a mode of speaking that neither duplicates nor abandons Barthes's words can we be said to speak *of* him, rather than speak his words, can we be said to speak of *him*, rather than of us: "We are left then with having to do and not do both at once, with having to correct one infidelity by the other" (275).

These modes of speaking and remembering are also the different modes of reading that I describe above. If to remember Barthes solely by his own speech, as it is inscribed in his texts, can only serve to confirm his absence, it is because such an act *interprets* nothing, and hence produces nothing, no echo, no memory, no palpable presence. In short, it is not a reading in the sense of a productive encounter with the past. Similarly, a remembrance that is too concerned with the words those remembering have to offer loses sight of Barthes yet again, because yet again it fails to read him. It is only between these absences, in restless oscillation between them, that we find the presence of the remembered person—not their real, historical presence, but a presence created in the act of remembering, that is to say, the presence of a *scriptor*.[17]

In the light of these considerations, let us now return to what I have called the un-deadness of *Finnegans Wake*, and to the particularity of Joyce's presence-in-effacement. If an oscillation between a remembrance that creates and a creation that remembers is the predicament of reading in general, then reading in general entails the formation of a hybrid voice that effaces any clear-cut division between the inside of the text, where the author (and only the author) speaks, and the outside of the text, where the author necessarily remains silent. Reading as a form of *dialogue* with an absent author is therefore not particular to our interaction with Joyce. What sets Joyce's text apart is that whereas the typical author-ghost is essentially passive, Joyce's presence-in-effacement is irrepressibly active.

His presence, first of all, is a seeing one: In the book he is holding, he has read *us*; he knows us, for he knows that *Finnegans Wake* creates readers who are forced by the text's non-words to ventriloquize him, and he thus anticipates being ventriloquized. And his presence is a speaking one: He *addresses* us; his text, which anticipates being ventriloquized, resists and transforms the anticipated act by the devastatingly effective ploy of announcing it. This announcement takes the form of an implicit challenge aimed at the reader in the act of usurpation: "Here is a word which is not a word, which will have to be turned into a word; try, if you can, to do this in a manner which will not reveal that word's nature, which will not reveal *my* choice to give it that nature." This, then, is the radically bilateral dialogue with the author's ghost, which we do not find outside the un-deadness of the *Wake*: Joyce's non-words address the fact that reading is accompanied by an undercurrent of translation and that consultation necessarily borders on usurpation, and they make it plain that Joyce is actively manipulating these interpretative tools. The non-words thus waver between inviting and prohibiting the act of ventriloquism they anticipate. As a result, any interpretation of this text or non-text is steeped in ambiguity with regard to notions of origin, authority, and authenticity.

The non-text of *Finnegans Wake* echoes with a multitude of voices, of which it is impossible even for us, the ventriloquists, to tell with any definitive certainty whether they belong to us or to Joyce. That this should be so was, of course, Joyce's decision (though in declaring it I am usurping his authority—but not completely, not without a remainder of Joyce's own voice coming through and reclaiming the statement for himself). To put it differently, we might say that whatever interpretation we develop, there is always the possibility (though by no means the certainty) that in one or several non-words, some echo or ambiguity will occur whose relation to a category like "Joyce's intention" we are not in a position to measure. Through such occurrences, the non-text reminds us that, whenever such a relation cannot be measured, whenever we cannot determine whether a certain step or a certain manipulation is ours or Joyce's, it is Joyce who, by default, has the last word. For it is Joyce who, by effacing himself, has forced the interpretation into existence, thus actively contributing to it—though, again, to a degree we are incapable of measuring.

As if to prove this point, the very sentence we have been interrogating seems to express Joyce's anticipation of our attempted usurpation of his authority—and his triumph over that attempt. The sentence, after all, is "The aurthor, *in fact*, was mordred" (my emphasis). What is described is

thus not an equilateral exchange, or a leveling where "Arthur = Mordred" and "Mordred = Arthur," but rather a transformation, or a process of recognition, that has a distinct direction to it. If Joyce can be heard speaking to his readers through this sentence, perhaps the best rendition of what he is saying would have to be one that states that the person who was taken to be Arthur, is actually, *in fact*, Mordred. That is, the person who for a period of time was taken for the father, the originator, is actually the son, the inheritor. The voice that was taken for the author (that we, the critics, wanted to be taken for the author) is actually the mordred author: an author usurped by posterity, an author ventriloquized by us, who are claiming for ourselves the authority of the one we are dictating to. And yet, this usurpation fails, for Joyce has seen right through us. His sentence exposes us as the usurpers we are: "You see, the one you thought was the king: it is actually the regicide Mordred." Joyce has effaced himself—the previous sentence is blatantly ventriloquizing him—and yet Joyce has the last word.

Having said this, I would like to point out that I do not believe that Joyce actually anticipated *all* our interpretations, or that the *Wake* has the power of predicting the future. Joyce's presence in the processes of signification which I describe is, as I say, spectral. It is a textual effect, the result of our inability—carefully induced by Joyce—to decide whether he is present in or absent from a given interpretation. Nevertheless, this effect has a very real consequence. It renders Joyce's non-words more prolifically productive of interpretations than standard words could ever hope to be. Thus, I would posit that Joyce's spectral presence in his non-words is not a forbidding one, like the presence of a censuring Barthesian authority whose role is "to impose a limit" ("Death" 147) and who might gravely announce that whatever reading we may find has already been either predicted or prohibited. If anything, Joyce's is a jesting presence (this is a *laughing* ghost, after all);[18] it is Joyce addressing to us a mischievous invitation to explore the space of meaning, which, in an unprecedented act of literary creativity, he has opened up for us, and whose vastness we—or he, for that matter—can never exhaust.

Some would argue that without death, there can be no enlightenment, that as long as we are stuck in an archive which is un-dead—a form of immortality that takes place in the mortal world—we are excluded from the insights of the next world, where the perspectives of finitude and mere temporality fall away. In a manner of speaking, this objection applies to

Finnegans Wake. Any total vision of its inexhaustible vastness must disappear behind the horizon of our perception, for it leads to the statement that the *Wake* is about everything, which is tantamount to saying that it is about nothing. Only partial views are intelligible and can be of assistance to our exploration of the text's shifting meaning. Therefore, if our choice to use one particular edition already implicates us in such a partial view, this does not have to be a shortcoming of our approach. It is part of the un-deadness of a text that it cannot be fully identified with any material production of it (even if it were the only one in existence). If anything, a text can only be identified with the archive that exists outside such material manifestations—not behind or beyond or above them, an unchanging Platonic idea creating these lesser impressions, but on the contrary an archive created *by* them, perpetually changing and open to negotiation.

Thus, a corrected edition of the text must be a welcome addition to the archive that is *Finnegans Wake* (and the arguments put forward in this article should not fool us into believing that there is no difference or no hierarchy between incorrect and correct textual renderings). Still, the addition cannot be but a partial one, for nothing ever dies for good in this text. In *Finnegans Wake*, the (textual, historical, hypothetical) past, like the title-hero, refuses to fade away, and engaging with it becomes a properly dialogical activity for which there are no absolute ends and no absolute limits. Therefore, no murder has taken place or could ever take place in this book. But this positively frightful lack of death is not the prohibition of our interpretative work; it is its beginning. Has our investigation exhausted the possibilities inherent in that sentence/those sentences with this conclusion? Yes and no: With Joyce, perhaps the only thing that cannot happen is that nothing can happen anymore.

NOTES

1. Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Martin Gardner (London: Penguin, 2001), 156.

2. Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 81.

3. Jacques Derrida, "Two words for Joyce," trans. Geoff Bennington, *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, ed. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 154. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

4. For a related psychoanalytical interpretation of *The Ambassadors*, compare Jacques Lacan's description of the painting in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977). Insofar as I emphasize the role that the spectator has to play in activating the painting's meaning, my description differs from Lacan's, who stresses the painting's manipulation of the viewer. Lacan formulates the effect of the skull as "to catch, I would almost say, *to catch in its trap*, the observer"—its function, in other words, is to make it clear to us that "we are literally called into the picture, and are represented here as caught" (92). What I take from Lacan's approach is the idea that the relation between painting and viewer goes beyond a neutral act of observation and implies (or traps) the viewer *inside* the painting.

5. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 147. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Death."

6. Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 23.

7. James Joyce, *The Restored Finnegans Wake*, ed. Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon (London: Penguin, 2012), 402.5. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *Restored*.

8. Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript*, ed. Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 513. This corresponds to book XXI, Chapter 4 in William Caxton's division of the text.

9. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5–16.

10. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 9–10. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

11. Derrida, "Two words for Joyce," 150.

12. Derrida, *The Post Card*, 148, my emphasis.

13. Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," trans. Tina Kendall and Shari Benstock, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 292–3.

14. For instance, one could explore the fact that whereas "mardred" more closely resembles the pronunciation of the word "murdered" as it might perhaps be found in Cork or Galway, "mordred" approximates more closely a Dublin pronunciation. The correction of the first edition's mistake would thus shift the non-word's geographical resonances from the south or west of Ireland to Dublin, Joyce's favorite synecdoche. One consequence of this operation would be that the phrase's application to Joyce himself would (in view of his exile from that city) obtain an altogether different significance. I am grateful to Sam Slote for the suggestion that this non-word's anomalous spelling may be interpreted as phonetic orthography in this manner.

15. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 67.

16. Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 275. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

17. Derrida further explores the idea that we can only encounter the past in a form that partly depends on ourselves in *Specters of Marx*, where he argues that "everyone reads, acts, writes with *his or her* ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other" (Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [London: Routledge, 1994], 174). However, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes" more directly frames the problem of memory as intertwined with questions of speaking and ventriloquism.

18. For Derrida, "everything is played out between the different tonalities of laughter" (Derrida, "Two words for Joyce," 146)—tonalities that include a cheerful and friendly register as well as a mocking one. As Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote have it in their recent publication on Joyce and Derrida: "Joyce's laughter is the sneering laughter of total mastery and dominance and/or the welcoming laughter of release, a laughter that laughs beyond the project of totalization, at the naïveté of it" (Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote, "Derrida and Joyce: On Totality and Equivocation," *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013], 3). Part of what keeps the reading process of *Finnegans Wake* going is arguably the reader's attempt to simultaneously respond to these two different aspects of the text: the challenge it poses and the invitation it articulates.