

18. On this subject, see the argument which opposes Jacques Derrida ('Cogito and the History of Madness', in *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978)) and Michel Foucault ('My Body, This Paper, This Fire', *Oxford Literary Review* 4.1 (Autumn, 1979), 9–28.
19. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (*Standard Edition*, vol. 17), p. 249.

8 Two words for Joyce

JACQUES DERRIDA

It is very late, it is always too late with Joyce, I shall say only two words.¹

I do not yet know in what language, I do not know in how many languages.

How many languages can be lodged in two words by Joyce, lodged or inscribed, kept or burned, celebrated or violated?

I shall say two words, supposing that words in *Finnegans Wake* can be counted. One of Joyce's great bursts of laughter resounds through this challenge: just try to count the words and the languages I consume! I shall no doubt return to Joyce's laughter, and to his last signature. As for the languages, Jean-Michel Rabaté tells me that the experts have counted about forty.

Two words then, simply to put back into play what Hélène Cixous has just been saying: the primal scene, the complete father, the law, *jouissance* through the ear (*by the ear*, more literally, by the word ear, in the ear-mode,² in English, for example, and supposing that coming [*jour*] by the ear is, for the most part, feminine . . .).

What are these two English words? They are only half English, if you will, if you will hear them, that is, do a little more than hear them: read them. I lift them from *Finnegans Wake* (258.12):

HE WAR

I spell them out: H E W A R, and sketch a first translation: HE WARS – he wages war, he declares or makes war, he is war, which can also be pronounced by babelizing a bit (it is in a particularly Babelian scene of the book that these words rise up), by Germanizing, then, in Anglo-Saxon, He war: he was – he who was ('I am he who is or who am', says YAHWE). Where it was, he was, declaring war, and it is *true*. Pushing things a bit, taking the time to draw on the vowel and to lend an ear, it will have been true, *wahr*, that's what can be kept [*garder*] or looked at [*regarder*] in truth.

He, is 'He', the 'him', the one who says I in the masculine, 'He', war declared, he who was war declared, declaring war, by declaring war, was he who was, and he who was true, the truth, he who by declaring war verified the truth that he was, he verified himself, he verified the truth of his truth by

war declared, by the act of declaring, and declaring is an act of war, he declared war in language and on language and by language, which gave languages, that's the truth of Babel when YAHWE pronounced its vocable, difficult to say if it was a name. . .

I stop here provisionally, through lack of time; other transformations are possible, a great number, about which I'll say another two words later.

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Coming here, I said to myself that there are perhaps only two manners, or rather two greatnesses, in this madness of writing by which whoever writes effaces himself, leaving, only to abandon it, the archive of his own effacement. These last two words speak madness itself.

Perhaps that's an over-extreme simplification (there are certainly other 'greatnesses'), but I take the risk of saying it so as to say something of my feeling about Joyce.

I do indeed say 'my feeling': that – major – affect which, beyond all our analyses, evaluations, interpretations, controls the scene of our relationship with whoever writes. One can admire the power of a work and have, as they say, a 'bad relationship' with its signatory, at least the signatory as one projects, reconstructs, or dreams him, or when one allows oneself to be haunted by him – or by her. Our admiration for Joyce ought to have no limit, no more than should the debt owed to the singular *event* of his work (I prefer to talk here of an event rather than a work or a subject or an author). And yet I'm not sure I like Joyce. Or more exactly: I'm not sure he's liked. Except when he laughs – and you'll tell me that he's always laughing. That's true, I'll come back to it, but then everything is played out between the different tonalities of laughter, in the subtle difference which passes between several qualities of laughter. Knowing whether one likes Joyce, is that the right question? In any case, one can attempt to account for these affects, and I'm not sure that the matter is a secondary one.

I'm not sure of liking Joyce, of liking him all the time. And it's to explain this possibility that I talked of two greatnesses to measure that act of writing by which whoever writes pretends to efface himself, leaving us caught in his archive as in a spider's web.

Let us simplify outrageously. There is first of all the greatness of s/he who writes in order to give, in giving, and therefore in order to give to forget the gift and the given, what is given and the act of giving, which is the only way of giving, the only possible – and impossible – way. Even before any restitution, symbolic or real, before any gratitude, the simple memory, in truth merely the awareness of the gift, on the part of giver or receiver, annuls the very essence of the gift. The gift must be without return, without a sketch, even a symbolic one, of gratitude. Beyond any 'consciousness', of course,

but also beyond any symbolic structure of the unconscious. Once the gift is received, the work having worked to the extent of changing you through and through, the scene is other and you have forgotten the gift and the giver. Then the work is loveable, and if the 'author' is not forgotten, we have for him a paradoxical gratitude, which is however the only gratitude worth its name if it is possible, a simple gratitude without ambivalence. This is what's called love, I'm not saying that it happens, perhaps it never *presents itself*, and the gift I'm describing can doubtless never make a present. One can at least dream of this possibility, and it is the idea of a writing which gives.

As for the other greatness, I shall say, with some injustice perhaps, that for me it's like Joyce's greatness, or rather that of Joyce's writing. Here the event is of such plot and scope that henceforth you have only one way out: *being in memory of him*. You're not only overcome by him, whether you know it or not, but obliged by him, and constrained to measure yourself against this overcoming. Being *in memory of him*: not necessarily to remember him, no, but to be in his memory, to inhabit his memory, which is henceforth greater than all your finite memory can, in a single instant or a single vocable, gather up of cultures, languages, mythologies, religions, philosophies, sciences, history of mind and of literatures. I don't know if you can like that, without resentment and jealousy. Can one pardon this hypermnesia which *a priori* indebts you, and in advance inscribes you in the book you are reading? One can pardon this Babelian act of war only if it happens already, from all time, with each event of writing, and if one knows it. One can pardon it only if one remembers too that Joyce himself must have endured this situation. He was its patient, and what's more that's his theme, or, as I prefer to say here, his scheme. He talks about it often enough for there to be no simple confusion between him and a sadistic demiurge, setting up a hypermnesiac machine, there in advance, decades in advance, to compute you, control you, forbid you the slightest inaugural syllable because you can say nothing that is not programmed on this 1000th generation computer – *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake* – beside which the current technology of our computers and our micro-computerified archives and our translating machines remains a *bricolage* of a prehistoric child's toys. And above all its mechanisms are of a slowness incommensurable with the quasi-infinite speed of the movements on Joyce's cables. How could you calculate the speed with which a mark, a marked piece of information, is placed in contact with another in the same word or from one end of the book to the other? For example, at what speed is the Babelian theme or the word 'Babel', in each of their components (but how could you count them?), co-ordinated with *all* the phonemes, semes, mythemes, etc. of *Finnegans Wake*? Counting these connections, calculating the speed of these communications, would be impossible, at least *de facto*, so long as we have not constructed the

machine capable of integrating all the variables, all the quantitative or qualitative factors. This won't happen tomorrow, and in any case this machine would only be the double or the simulation of the event 'Joyce', the name of Joyce, the signed work, the Joyce software today, joyceware.

It is with this sentiment, or one should say this resentment, that I must have been reading Joyce for a long time. And no doubt I'm not the only one. Ellmann has recently quoted the avowals of so many writers, critics, artists, all admirers or friends of Joyce, who expressed something of this malaise. But I'm not sure that one can say 'reading Joyce' as I just have. Of course, one can do nothing but that, whether one knows it or not. But the utterances 'I am reading Joyce', 'read Joyce', 'have you read Joyce?' produce an irresistible effect of naivety, irresistibly comical. What exactly do you mean by 'read Joyce'? Who can pride himself on having 'read' Joyce?

With this admiring resentment, you stay on the edge of reading Joyce for me this has been going on for twenty-five or thirty years — and the endless plunge throws you back onto the river-bank, on the brink of another possible immersion, *ad infinitum*. Is this true to the same extent of all works? In any case, I have the feeling that I haven't yet begun to read Joyce, and this 'not having begun to read' is sometimes the most singular and active relationship I have with this work.

That is why I've never dared to write *on* Joyce. At most I've tried to mark (you were kind enough to recall this a while ago) in what I wrote of Joyce's scores [*portées*], Joyce's *reaches* [*portées*].³ Beyond the musical measure that can be recognized in this word *portée*, which speaks too of the proliferating generous multitude of the animal [*portée* as 'litter'], you can also hear this in it: such and such a text *carries* [*porte*] in truth the signature of Joyce, it *carries* Joyce and lets itself be carried by him, or even carried off [*déporter*] in advance. Paradoxical logic of this relationship between two texts, two programmes or two literary 'softwares': whatever the difference between them, even if, as in the present case, it is immense and even incommensurable, the 'second' text, the one which, fatally, refers to the other, quotes it, exploits it, parasites it and deciphers it, is no doubt the minute parcel *detached* from the other, the metonymic dwarf, the jester of the great anterior text which would have declared war on it in languages; and yet it is also another set, quite other, bigger and more powerful than the all-powerful which it drags off and reinscribes elsewhere in order to defy its ascendancy. Each writing is at once the detached fragment of a software and a software more powerful than the other, a part larger than the whole of which it is a part.

This is already what *Finnegans Wake* represents with respect to all the culture, all the history and all the languages it condenses, puts in fusion and fission by each of its forgeries, at the heart of each lexical or syntactic unit, according to each phrase that it forges, stamping invention there. In the

simulacrum of this forgery, in the ruse of the invented word, the greatest possible memory is stamped and smelted. *Finnegans Wake* is a little, a little what?, a little son, a little grandson of Western culture in its circular, encyclopedic, Ulyssean and more than Ulyssean totality. And then it is, simultaneously, much bigger than even this odyssey, it comprehends it, and this prevents it, dragging it outside itself in an entirely singular adventure, from closing in on itself and on this event. The future is reserved in it. The 'situation' of *Finnegans Wake* is also, because of this, our own situation with respect to this immense text. In this war of languages, everything we can say after it looks in advance like a minute self-commentary with which this work accompanies itself. It is already comprehended by it. And yet the new marks carry off, enlarge and project elsewhere — one never knows where in advance — a programme which appeared to constrain them. This is our only chance, minuscule and completely open.

So, yes (I'm replying to your suggestion), every time I write, and even in the most academic pieces of work, Joyce's ghost is always coming on board. Twenty years ago, in the *Introduction to 'The Origin of Geometry'*,⁴ at the very centre of the book, I compared the strategies of Husserl and of Joyce: two great models, two paradigms with respect to thought, but also with respect to a certain 'operation' of the relationship between language and history. Both try to grasp a pure historicity. To do this, Husserl proposes to render language as transparent as possible, univocal, limited to that which, by being transmittable or able to be placed in tradition, thereby constitutes the only condition of a possible historicity; and from this point of view, it is necessary that some minimal readability, an element of univocity or an analysable equivocality, resist the Joycean overload and condensation for there to be a reading, and the work's legacy; something of the meaning of *He war* must cross the threshold of intelligibility, through the thousand and one meanings of the expression, for a history to take place, if at least it is to take place, and at least the history of the work. The other great paradigm would be the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*. He repeats and mobilizes and babelizes the (asymptotic) totality of the equivocal, he makes this his theme and his operation, he tries to make outcrop, with the greatest possible synchrony, at great speed, the greatest power of the meanings buried in each syllabic fragment, subjecting each atom of writing to fission in order to overload the unconscious with the whole memory of man: mythologies, religion, philosophies, sciences, psychoanalysis, literatures. This generalized equivocality of writing does not translate one language into another on the basis of common nuclei of meaning (*Introduction to 'The Origin of Geometry'*, pp. 103ff); it talks several languages at once, parasiting them as in the example *He war* to which I shall turn in a moment. For there will remain the question of knowing what one should think of the possibility of writing several languages at once.

A few years later, I had the feeling that without too much difficulty one could have presented *La Pharmacie de Platon*⁵ as a sort of indirect reading of *Finnegans Wake*, which mimes, between Shem and Shaun, between the penman and the postman, down to the finest and most finely ironized detail, the whole scene of the pharmakos, the pharmakon, the various functions of Thoth, th'other, etc. I cannot here reconstitute the extreme complexity of this network. I had to be content with playing, in a single note (*Dissemination*, p. 88), at recalling that, of course, 'as will quickly have been understood', the whole of *La Pharmacie de Platon* was only 'a reading of *Finnegans Wake*'. This double genitive implied that this modest essay was read in advance by *Finnegans Wake*, in its wake or its lineage, at the very moment that *La Pharmacie de Platon* was itself presenting itself as a reading head or principle of decipherment (in short another software) for a possible understanding of *Finnegans Wake*. There again there is a paradoxical metonymy: the most modest, the most miserable descendant of a corpus, its sample in another language, can appear to be *more capacious* than what it allows to be read.

I pass quickly over *Scribble*,⁶ the title of my introduction to the *Essai sur les hiéroglyphes*, a partial translation of Warburton's essay, where, beyond even the title and the quotations, I constantly refer to *Scribbledehobble: The Ur-Workbook for Finnegans Wake* (1961). And I pass quickly over *Glas* which is also a sort of wake.

Above all, ten years later, *La Carte postale*⁸ is haunted by Joyce, whose funerary statue stands at the centre of the *Envois* (the visit to the cemetery in Zurich). This haunting invades the book, a shadow on every page, whence the resentment, sincere and acted, always mimed, of the signatory. He sometimes confides his impatience in his addressee, whom, in the first words of the book, two years earlier, he had conceded was right ('Yes, you were right . . .'):

. . . You are also right about Joyce, once is enough. It's so strong that in the end nothing can resist it, whence the feeling of facility, however deceitful it may be. One wonders what he ended up doing, that guy, and what made him tick. After him, don't start again, draw the veil and let everything happen behind the curtains of language which can't do anything about it. But there's a coincidence; for this seminar on translation I followed all the babelian indications in *Finnegans Wake* and yesterday I wanted to take the plane to Zurich and read out loud sitting on his knees, from the beginning (Babel, the fall, and the finno-phoenician motif, 'The fall (bababadalgh [. . .]. The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegans [. . .] Phall if you but will, rise you must: and none so soon either shall the pharce for the nunc come to a setdown secular phoenish [. . .]') up to the passage on Gigglotte's Hill and Babbyl Market near the end, passing through 'The babblers with their thangas vain have been (confusium hold them!) [. . .] Who ails tongue coddeau, aspace of dumbillsilly? And they fell upong one another: and themselves they have fallen . . . ' and through 'This battering babel allowe the door and sideposts . . . ' and the whole page up to 'Filons, filoosh! *Cherchons la flamme!* Fammfamm!

Fammfamm!', through this passage which you know better than anyone (*FW* 164) and in which I suddenly find 'the babbling pumpt of platinism', through this other passage about 'the turrace of Babel', the whole Anna Livia Plurabelle passage, where you will find absolutely amazing things; and then everything that comes around 'A and aa ab ad abu abiad. A babbel men dub gulch of tears.', or 'And shall not Babel be with Lebab? And he war. And he shall open his mouth and answer: I hear, O Ismael . . . And he deed . . .', up to 'O Loud . . . Loud . . . Ha he hi ho hu. Mummum.' I run through the text, as they say of actors, at least up until '*Usque! Usque! Usque!* Lignum in . . . Is the strays world moving mound or what static babel is this, tell us?' (*La Carte postale*, pp. 257–8)

Elsewhere, in front of Joyce's funerary monument: 'He's read us all – and pillaged us, that guy. I imagined him looking at himself posed there – by his zealous descendants, I suppose' (*La Carte postale*, p. 161). Read and pillaged in advance, then. The whole (scriptural and postal) scenography of *Finnegans Wake* is put back into play, starting with the couple Shem/Shاون, the penman/the postman, up to the war over the invention of the postage stamp and the penny post which is to be found deposited in Joyce's book (*La Carte postale*, pp. 151, 155). With a whole family of James, Jacques, Giacomo, the *Giacomo Joyce* scans all the *Envois* which are sealed, near the end, by the *Envoy* of G. C.: 'Envoy: love me love my umbrella.' '11 August 1979 (. . .) James (the two, the three), Jacques, Giacomo Joyce – your counterfeit works wonders, this pendant to the invoice: "Envoy: love me love my umbrella." (. . .) I was forgetting, Giacomo also has seven letters. Love my shadow, it – not me. "Do you love me?" And you, say "me" ' (*La Carte postale*, p. 255).⁹

But I repeat, it is above all the Babelian motif which obsesses the *Envois*, and this is where we get back to the *He war* to which I should like to return in conclusion. If you will permit, I shall read first a fragment of the card which quotes the 'he war':

no my love that's my wake. The day when I was talking about all these pp (private *picture postcard* and *penny post*), I was first struck by this: prepayment institutes a general equivalent which regulates the tax according to the size and weight of the *support* and not the number, tenor or quality of the 'marks', even less on what they call the meaning. It's unjust and stupid, it's barbarous, even, but immensely important [*d'une immense portée*]. Whether you put one word or one hundred in a letter, a hundred-letter word or one hundred seven-letter words, it's the same price; it's incomprehensible, but this principle is capable of accounting for everything. Let's leave it there. Writing *pennypost*, I had also the premonition in my memory that Jean the postman (Shaun, John the *postman*) was not very far away, and nor was his twin brother Shem the *penman*. Another pp fraternal couple at war with each other, the *penman* and the *postman*. The writer, Shem, is the legatee of H.C.E., Here Comes Everybody, which I translate into my idiom as 'Here comes whoever will have loved me in my body'. So I looked for two hours for the *penny post* and here it is, at least one you could link to an all-powerful 'he war' (YHWH declaring war by decreeing dishemination, deconstructing the tower, saying to those who wanted to make a name for themselves, the shemites, and to impose their particular language as a universal

language, saying to them 'Babel', I call myself and I impose my father-name, which you understand confusedly as 'Confusion', try, I beg of you, to translate but I hope you won't be able to, it's my double bind), passing through 'his *penisolate war*' and the 'sosie sesters' of the first page. Here then, on page 307 of *Finnegans Wake*: 'Visit to Guinness' Brewery, Clubs, Advantages of the Penny Post, When is a Pun not a Pun?'. Across, in the margin in italics, the names, you know. Here: 'Noah. Plato. Horace. Isaac. Tiresias'. On the preceding page, I pull out only this, for later: 'A Place for Everything and Everything in its Place, Is the Pen mightier than the Sword?' which pulls the following thread for example (p. 211): 'a sunless map of the month, including the sword and stamps, for Shemus O'Shaun the Post . . .'. Read the sequel round about 'Elletrouvetout' and 'Where-is-he?; whatever you like . . .' etc. Look at them, Sword/Pen.

I've just phoned you, it was impossible, you understood, you have to be naked on the phone. But at the same time it's enough for you to undress for me to see myself naked. Our story is also a twin progeny, a procession of Sosie/sosie, Atrée/Thyeste, Shem/Shawn, S/p, p/p, (*penman/postman*) and more and more I metempsychose myself of you, I am with others as you are with me (for better but also, I see clearly, for the worst, I play the same tricks on them). Never have I imitated anyone so irresistibly. I'm trying to shake myself out of it because if I love you infinitely I don't love the whole of you I mean these inhabitants of you with their little hats
the
uniquely each time I love: beyond all that is, you are the one — and therefore the other.
(*La Carte postale*, pp. 154–5)

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'He war', then. How to read these two words? Are there two of them? More or less? How to hear them? How to pronounce them and pronounce on their subject? The question 'how to hear them' multiplies itself, moreover, and echoes in the whole passage from which I extract these two words with the unjustifiable violence which the situation imposes on us, the little time at our disposal. How to hear them? Everything around speaks to the ear and of the ear: what speaking means but first what *listening* means: lending one's ear (*e ar, he ar*) and obeying the father who raises his voice, the lord who talks loud. What rises so high is laud. This audiophonic dimension of the divine law and its sublime height is announced in the English syllabification of *he (w)ar*, is doubled in the *w* and disseminates, for the seme and the form, on the whole page.¹⁰ The rhythm of Biblical writing is mimed by the 'And . . .' of 'And he war . . .'. I read very aloud:

And let Nek Nekulon extol Mak Makal and let him say unto him: Immi ammi Semmi. And shall not Babel be with Lebab? And he war. And he shall open his mouth and answer: I hear, O Ismael, how they laud is only as my loud is one. If Nekulon shall be havonfalled surely Makal haven heavens. Go to, let us extell Makal, yea, let us exceedingly extell. Though you have lien among your posspots my excellency is over Ismael. Great is him whom is over Ismael and he shall mekanek of Mak Nakulon. And he deed.

Uplouderamainagain!

For the Clearer of the Air from on high has spoken in tumbuldum tambaldam to

his tembledim tombaldoom worrild and, moguphonoised by that phonemanon, the unhappitents of the earth have terrerrumbled from fimament unto fundament and from tweedledeedumms down to twiddledeedees.

Loud, hear us!

Loud, graciously hear us!

Now have thy children entered into their habitations. And nationglad, camp meeting over, to shin it, Gov be thanked! Thou hast closed the portals of the habitations of thy children and thou hast set thy guards thereby, even Garda Didymus and Garda Domas, that thy children may read in the book of the opening of the mind to light and err not in the darkness which is the afterthought of thy nomatter by the guardiance of those guards which are thy bodemen, the cheeryboyum chirryboth with the kerrybommers in their krubeems, Pray-your-Prayers Timothy and Back-to-Bunk Tom.

Till tree from tree, tree among trees, tree over tree become stone to stone, stone between stones, stone under stone for ever.

O Loud, hear the wee beseech of thees of each of these they unlitten ones! Grant sleep in hour's time, O Loud!

That they take no chill. That they do ming no merder. That they shall not gomeet madhowiatrees.

Loud, heap miseries upon us yet entwine our arts with laughters low!

Ha he hi ho hu.

Mummum.

(258.11–259.10)

Let us leave to one side, given the lack of time, numerous intersecting motifs, accumulated or condensed in the immediate context of 'he war' (Fall – 'Byfall'; the curtain drops, applause – 'Uploud!', 'Uplouderamainagain!' – after the *Götterdämmerung* – 'gttrdmmrng'; the double: Garda Didymus and Garda Domas, the two policemen; Vico's ghost everywhere, the children's prayer . . . (257–8)), and let us limit ourselves, if one can say this, to all that passes through the voice and the phenomenon, the phenomenon as phoneme: at the centre of the sequence, hear the 'phonemanon'.

It reflects, in a state of extreme concentration, the whole Babelian adventure of the book, or rather its Babelian underside: 'And shall not babel be with Lebab'. This palindrome which overturns the tower of Babel also speaks of the book, and Philippe Laverigne recalls the two Irish words *leaba*, the bed, and *leabhar*, the book.

A few examples among others: 'The babblers with their thangas vain have been (confusium hold them!) they were and went; thigging thugs were and hounhymn songtoms were and comely norgels were and pollyfool fiansees. [. . .] And they fell upong one another: and themselves they have fallen' (15.12–19); or again: 'and we list, as she bibs us, by the waters of babalong' (103.10–11), 'the babbling pumpt of platinism' (164.11), 'the turrace of Babel' (199.31), 'Is the strays world moving mound or what static babel is this, tell us?' (499.33–4), 'to my reputation on Babbyl Maltet for daughters-in-trade being lightly clad' (532.24–6), etc. . . .

In the landscape immediately surrounding the 'he war', we are, if such a present is possible, and this place, at Babel: at the moment when YAHWEH

declares war, HE WAR (exchange of the final R and the central H in the anagram's throat), and punishes the Shem, those who, according to Genesis, declare their intention of building the tower in order to make a name for themselves. Now they bear the name 'name' (Shem). And the Lord, the Most High, be he blessed (*Lord, loud, laud* . . .), declares war on them by interrupting the construction of the tower, he deconstructs by speaking the vocable of his choice, the name of confusion, which in the hearing, could be confused with a word indeed signifying 'confusion'. Once this war is declared, he was it (*war*) by being himself this act of war which consisted in declaring, as he did, that he was the one he was (*war*). The God of fire assigns to the Shem the necessary, fatal and impossible translation of his name, of the vocable with which he signs his act of war, of himself. The palindrome ('And shall not Babel be with Lebab? And he war . . .') overthrows the tower but plays too with the meaning and the letter, the meaning of being and the letters of being, of 'being',¹¹ BE,EB (baBEL/IEBab), as it does with the meaning and the letter of the name of God, EL,LE. The names of the father (*Dad, Bab*) are moreover dispersed on the same page, along with those of the Lord and of an Anglo-Saxon god (*Go to* – twice, *Gov*) which can spread out elsewhere into governor and scapegoat.

This act of war is not necessarily anything other than an election, an act of love. We would have to reread here the prodigious pages around this 'paleoparisien schola of tinkers and spanglers who say I'm wrong *parcequeue* . . .' (151.9–10), where we would find the following: ' . . . for aught I care for the contrary, the all is *where* in love as war and the plane where . . .' (151.36–152.1). And as in Ponge's *Le Soleil placé en abîme*, the redhead whore is not far from the father, in his very bed she becomes one with him: '*In my Lord's Bed by One Whore* . . .' (105.34). This is in the great catalogue introduced by 'Thus we hear of . . .' (104.5). But I break off this reconstruction here.

So what happens when one tries to translate this 'he war'? 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. 'He War' calls for translation, both orders and forbids transposition into the other language. Change me (into yourself) and above all do not touch me, read and do not read, say and do not say otherwise what I have said and which will have been: in two words *which was*. For the 'he war' also tells of the irreplaceability of the event that it is, which is that it is, and which is also unchangeable because it has already been, a past without appeal which, before being, was. So that's war declared: before being, that is being a present, it was: was *he*, the late god of fire.¹² And the call to translate rejects you: thou shalt not translate me. Which will also perhaps be translated in the banning of translation (as 'representation', 'image', 'statue', 'imitation', so many inadequate translations of 'temunah')¹³ which immediately follows the moment at

which YHWH names himself ('Me, YHWH, your Elohim . . .'). The law enounced in the performative dimension is thus also the ban on the very principle of translation, the ban *in* the very principle of translation, inter-translation as one and the same experience of language: of the one language as one God. And transgression (just as impossible) consists, among other things, in translating that, and, already, in perverting into a description or a constatation (*he war*) a first-person performative, the performative of the first person or rather of the first word.

So what happens – I repeat the same question – when one attempts to translate this 'he war'? Nothing, everything. Beyond immense difficulties, a limit remains essential. The difficulties: is it possible to make heard (*hear*) *all* the semantic, phonic, graphic virtualities which communicate with the *he war* in the totality of the book and elsewhere? The essential limit (a repetition of Babel's act of war declared – and not declared! – which Joyce reprints here) pertains to the graft (and without any possible rejection) of one language onto the body of another. In two words of which each is the head, the capital or, if you prefer, the principal member. Imagine the most powerful and refined translation-machines, the most able translation teams. Their very success cannot but take the form of a failure. Even if, in an improbable hypothesis, they had translated *everything*, they would by that very fact fail to translate the multiplicity of languages. They would erase the following simple fact: a multiplicity of idioms, not only of meanings but of idioms, must have structured this event of writing which henceforth stands as law, and will have laid down the law *about itself*. It *was* written *simultaneously* in both English and German. Two words in one (*war*), and thus a double noun, a double verb, a noun and a verb which are divided in the beginning. *War* is a noun in English, a verb in German, it resembles an adjective (*wahr*) in that same language, and the truth of this multiplicity returns, from the attributes (the verb is also an attribute), towards the subject, *he*, who is divided by it right from the origin. In the beginning, difference, that's what happens, that's what has already taken place, that's what was when language was act, and the tongue [*la langue*] writing. Where it was, *He* was.¹⁴

The German *war* will only have been true in declaring war on English, and in making war on it in English. The *fact* of the multiplicity of languages, what *was done* as confusion of languages can no longer let itself be translated into *one* language, nor even (I'll come to this in a moment) into *language* [*la langue*]. To translate 'he war' into the system of a single language – as has just been tried in French ('Et il en fut ainsi') – is to erase the event of the mark, not only what is said in it but its very saying and writing, the mark of its law and the law of its mark. The current concept of translation is still regulated according to the *twice one*, the operation of passing from one language into another, each of them forming an organism or a system the

rigorous integrity of which remains at the level of supposition, like that of a body proper. The translation of a Babelism involving at least two languages would demand an equivalent which would restore not only all the semantic and formal potentialities of the hapax 'he war', but also the multiplicity of languages in it, the *coition* of that event, in truth its very number, its numerous essence. You can always try. It is not only *Finnegans Wake* which here resembles a too-powerful, outsize calculator incommensurable with any translating machine conceivable today, but already the event which the book translates or mimes, before which it, *Finnegans Wake*, will have presented itself.

For a little while, I've been speaking out loud. In proffering 'he war', I entrust myself to this truth, so often recalled: in this book, in this event worked on by the confusion of languages, multiplicity remains controlled by a dominant language, English. Now despite the need to 'phonetize', despite this book's appeal for reading out loud, for song and for timbre, something essential in it passes the understanding as well as the hearing:¹⁵ a graphic or literal dimension, a muteness which one should never pass over in silence. You can't economize on it, and this book could not be read without it. For the Babelian confusion between the English *war* and the German *war* cannot fail to disappear – in becoming determined – when listened to. It is erased when pronounced. One is constrained to *say* it either in English *or else* in German, it cannot therefore be received as such by the ear. But it can be read. The homography retains the effect of confusion, it shelters the Babelism which here, then, plays between speech and writing. This Anglo-Saxon commerce, these exchanges of a piece of merchandise (*ware*) in two languages, must pass through acts of writing. The event is linked to the spacing of its archive and would not take place without it, without being put into letters and pages. Erase the typeface, mute the graphic percussion, subordinate the spacing, that is, the divisibility of the letter, and you would again reappropriate *Finnegans Wake* into a monolingualism, or at least subjugate it to the hegemony of a single language. Of course this hegemony remains indisputable, but its law only appears *as such* in the course of a *war* through which English tries to erase the other language or languages, to colonize them, to domesticate them, to present them for reading from only one angle. But one must also read the resistance to this commonwealth, not only pronounce oneself but also write oneself against it. Against Him. And this is indeed what happens. Between islands of language, across each island. Ireland and England would only be emblems of this. What matters is the contamination of the language of the master by the language he claims to subjugate, on which he has declared war. In doing so he locks himself in a double bind from which YHWH himself will not have escaped. If it is impossible to sing in German and English at one and the same time, the written form retains polyglossia by placing the tongue at risk.

He war, God's signature. As quotation replays the whole of the world's memory, in *Finnegans Wake*, one can only quote – 'mention', the speech-act theorists would say, rather than 'use' – the 'I' which thenceforth becomes 'he', Him, or the 'he', a pronoun cited rather than a 'real' subject, aimed at by some direct reference. 'He' and not 'she', he who was he in declaring war. He resounds, he gives himself to be heard, he articulates himself and makes himself heard right up to the end: in opposition to the 'Mummum', to the last murmur which closes the sequence, a maternal inarticulated syllabification which falls as close as can be to the 'hush' [*chut*] or the fall [*chute*] after the last vocalization, the series of expiring vowels, voices out of breath:

Ha he hi ho hu
Mummum.

These are the last 'words', the last word of the sequence. In the series of vowels, the 'he' reappears, a simple second place in the sequence of a general hubbub. And if the page is turned, after a broad blank there is the beginning of Book II, Chapter 2 (I content myself here with letting read and resound):

As we there are where are we are we there
from tomtittot to teetootomtotalitarian. Tea
tea too oo.

UNDE ET UBI

(260.01–03)

The final 'Mummum', maternal syllable right near the end, could, if one so wished, be made to resound with the feminine 'yes' in the last line of *Ulysses*, the 'yes' of Mrs Bloom, of ALP, or of any 'wee' girl, as has been noted, Eve, Mary, Isis, etc. The Great Mother on the side of the creation and the fall. In William York Tindall's book on *Finnegans Wake* I came across the following sentence where the word 'hill' plays more or less innocently with the French personal pronoun 'il', to say nothing of the 'île': 'As he [HCE] is the hill in Joyce's familial geography, so she is the river [. . .]. This "wee" (or *oui*) girl is Eve, Mary, Isis, any woman you can think of, and a *poule* – at once a riverpool, a whore, and a little hen.'¹⁶

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'I'm not sure I like Joyce . . . I'm not sure he is liked . . . except when he laughs . . . he's always laughing . . . everything is played out in the difference between several tonalities of laughter': that is what I suggested as I started. The question would be this: why does laughter here traverse the whole of the experience which refers us to *Finnegans Wake*, thus not letting itself be reduced to any of the other modalities, apprehensions, affections, whatever their richness, their heterogeneity, their overdetermination? And what does this writing teach us of the essence of laughter if it recalls that laughter to the limits of the calculable and the incalculable, when the whole of the calculable

is outplayed by a writing about which it is no longer possible to decide if it still calculates, calculates better and more, or if it transcends the very order of calculable economy, or even of an incalculable or an undecidable which would still be homogeneous with the world of calculation? A certain quality of laughter would supply something like the affect (but this word itself remains to be determined) to this beyond of calculation, and of all calculable literature.

It is perhaps (perhaps) this quality of laughter, and none other, which resounds, very loud or very soft, I don't know, through the prayer which immediately precedes the 'Ha he hi ho hu. Mummum.' at the end:

Loud, heap miseries upon us yet entwine our arts with laughters low!¹⁷

Laugh down low of the signature, calm the crazy laughter and the anguish of the proper name in the murmured prayer, forgive God by asking him to let us perform the gesture of giving according to art, and the art of laughter.

At the beginning I spoke of resentment. Always possible with respect to Joyce's signature. But it was a way of considering, on a small scale, Joyce's revenge with respect to the God of Babel. But the God of Babel had already tortured his own signature; he was this torment: resentment *a priori* with respect to any possible translator. I order you and forbid you to translate me, to interfere with my name, to give a body of writing to its vocalization. And through this double command he signs. The signature does not come after the law, it is the divided act of the law: revenge, resentment, reprisal, revendication *as* signature. But also as gift and gift of languages. And God lets himself be prayed to, he condescends, he leans over (Loud/low), prayer and laughter absolve perhaps the pain of signature, the act of war with which everything will have begun. This is art, Joyce's art, the space given for his signature made into the work. *He war*, it's a counter-signature, it confirms and contradicts, effaces by subscribing. It says 'we' and 'yes' in the end to the Father or to the Lord who speaks loud, there is scarcely anyone but Him, but it leaves the last word to the woman who in her turn will have said 'we' and 'yes'. Countersigned God, God who countersigneth thyself, God who signeth thyself in us, let us laugh, amen.

(Translated by Geoff Bennington)

Notes

1. What follows is a transcription of a more or less extemporary talk given at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in November 1982. Jacques Derrida has preferred to mark the circumstantial nature of the talk by retaining in this printed version references to a talk given by Hélène Cixous on the same occasion [Tr.].

2. The French text plays here on the homophony of 'le mode oreille' and 'le mot d'oreille' [Tr.].
3. Derrida plays here and in the following sentence on three senses of the word 'portée': (1) range, reach, or scope; (2) musical staff or stave; (3) litter in the veterinary sense [Tr.].
4. *Introduction to 'The Origin of Geometry'*, tr. Edward Leavey (Hassocks: Harvester, 1978), pp. 103ff.
5. 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, tr. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 61–171.
6. 'Scribble (writing-power)', *Yale French Studies*, 58 (1979), 116–47.
7. *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974).
8. *La Carte postale de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1980).
9. 'Et toi, dis moi': the absence of the hyphen between 'dis' and 'moi' dictates the translation, but also calls up, by graphic difference, the possibility: 'And you, tell me' [Tr.].
10. Along with the sense of 'war', the signalling of the recourse to German, etc., this audiophonic dimension of *he war* is one of the very numerous things which must go by the board in the nonetheless very commendable translation of *Finnegans Wake* by Philippe Lavergne (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), which I did not know when I gave this talk. 'And he war' is 'rendered' by 'Et il en fut ainsi' (p. 278). But let us never malign translations, especially this one. . .
11. 'joue aussi avec le sens et la lettre, le sens de l'être et les lettres de l'être, de "être"': playing on the homophony 'lettre(s)'/l'être' [Tr.].
12. 'feu le dieu de feu': 'feu' placed before the noun means 'late' in the sense of 'deceased' [Tr.].
13. See Michal Govrine, 'Jewish Ritual as a Genre of Sacred Theatre', *Conservative Judaism*, 36.3 (1983).
14. 'Là où c'était, il fut': troping against Freud's famous 'Wo es war, soll Ich werden' [Tr.].
15. 'quelque chose d'essentiel y passe l'entendement aussi bien que l'écoute': the connotation of hearing (*entendre*) in 'entendement' (understanding) is carried over in the translation to cover 'écoute' (listening) too [Tr.].
16. William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to 'Finnegans Wake'* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 4.
17. I do not know if 'laughters low' can be translated, as Lavergne does, by 'sourire discret'. But how to translate — for example the opposition of the first and last word of the prayer, 'Loud'/'low'? And must one translate? On what criteria will one rely to decide that here one must translate, or at least try, and here not? For example: should one, or should one not, translate 'Ha he hi ho hu', where the 'he' is also the homophone of a 'real' word in the language? But again, does not the question 'must one translate' arrive too late, always too late? It cannot be the object of a deliberate decision. Translation has begun with the first reading, and even — this is the thesis of these two words — before reading. There is scarcely anything but writing in translation, as Genesis tells us. And Babel is also the difference of pitch [*hauteur*] in the voice (loud/low) as well as in space. The erection of the tower is interrupted by the *He War*: 'Let's go! Let's get down! Let's confuse their lips there, man will no longer hear his neighbour's lip' (Genesis 11: 7–8; translated from André Chouraqui's French translation).