Language and Reality in 'A Portrait of the Artist': Joyce and Bishop Berkeley

LLOYD FERNANDO

By the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen has more or less 'killed off' everybody else, and finds himself in sole possession of his universe. At this point he shows clear symptoms of linguistic deracination, a consequence towards which he had been heading steadily since birth; and he has come to this pass owing to a characteristic mode of perception on his part, one closely associated with the theories of perception advanced by the Anglo-Irish philosopher and famous Trinity College man, Bishop Berkeley. As Adaline Glasheen's *A Second Census of Finnegan's Wake* (1963) demonstrates, there are ample enough references to Berkeley in *Finnegan's Wake* to justify our resort to him for help in understanding aspects of Joyce's work. And Joyce's workbook for this novel, which he called *Scribbledehobble*, gives warrant for referring to his final work at some length to illustrate the problem posed here. Now handsomely edited, the *Scribbledehobble* amply documents the continuity of Joyce's work; indeed that continuity is even more thoroughgoing than is generally recognized. As Thomas E. Connolly says, in his edition of *James Joyce's Scribbledehobble* (1961), its construction shows that Joyce conceived *Finnegan's Wake* as 'an extension not only of *Ulysses*, but of all his previous works'.

I

An examination of a passage of *Finnegan's Wake* will supply an explanation of the theory of perception with which Joyce was concerned:

> Bymeby, bullocky vampas tappany bobs topside joss pidgin fella Balkelly, archdruid of islish chinchinjoss in the his heptachromatic sevenhued septicoloured roranyellgreenlindigan mantle finish he show

along the his mister guest Patholic . . . speeching yeh not speeching noh man liberty is, he drink up words, scilicet, tomorrow till recover will not, all too many much illusiones through photoprismic velamina of hueful panepiphanal world spectacurum of Lord Joss, the of which zoantholitic furniture, from mineral through vegetal to animal, not appear to full up together fallen man than under but one photoreflection of the several iridals gradationes of solar light, that one which that part of it (furnit of heupanepi world) had shown itself (part of fur of huepanwor) unable to absorbere, whereas for numpa one puraduxed seer in seventh degree of wisdom of Entis-Onton he savvy inside true inwardness of reality, the Ding hvad in idself id est, all objects (of panepiwor) allside showed themselves in trues coloribus resplendent with sextuple gloria of light actually retained, untisintus, inside them (obs of epiwo). (p. 611, ll. 4–7, 10–24)

At least one critic, Professor William York Tindall, has declared in his *Reader's Guide to Finnegan's Wake* (1969), that this passage is 'as obscure as anything in the *Wake*', and avoided any useful reference to Berkeley himself. We need to attend more closely to the extract for two reasons. Firstly Joyce himself emphasized its importance, albeit in typically cryptic terms. He told Frank Budgen, in a letter of 20 August 1939, that

> Much more is intended in the colloquy between Berkeley the arch druid and his pidgin English and Patrick the [?] and his Nippon English. It is also the defence and indictment of the book itself, Berkeley's theory of colours and Patrick's practical solution of the problem. Hence the phrase in the preceding Mutt and Jeff banter 'Dies is Dorminus master' Deus est Dominus noster plus the day is Lord over sleep, i.e. when it days. (*Letters of James Joyce*, ed. S. Gilbert, 1957, p. 406)

Secondly, it was among the earliest passages drafted for *Finnegan's Wake*, having been written during July and August 1923, although it was placed eventually almost at the very end — possibly, either to cover up traces, or because of its climactic importance. Joyce's use of crucial ideas of Berkeley enables us to see Stephen, the artist, preparing to rival scientific discoverers. Stephen's flight is not 'escape', as it is commonly taken to be, but a soaring adventure in which, flying to the sun like his namesake, he is defeated and becomes vaporized only by the stupendousness of his goal.

James S. Atherton quotes one of the earliest drafts of the above passage in his *The Books at the Wake* (1962). While he is not quite

accurate in asserting (p. 98) that this version bears 'little resemblance' to Berkeley's theory of perception, he seems to be the only scholar who recognizes that 'Bishop Berkeley's work is of considerable importance in *Finnegan's Wake*'. There are, in fact, two other manuscript versions in Joyce's hand, and at least one further typescript version (made by Miss Harriet Shaw Weaver) which need to be taken into account.[1] For example, by referring to all four versions we see that the word 'roranyellgreenlindigan' was at an earlier stage 'roranyellgreeblindigo' which compresses all the colours of the spectrum except violet into one word.

Having consulted all four draft versions carefully I would like to offer the following tentative paraphrase in order to illustrate how much closer the passage is to the implications of Berkeley's philosophy than is believed (the explanatory matter within brackets may be ignored in a first reading):

By and by the superficially Christian ['topside joss'] pidgin fellow Berkeley, Archbishop of the Anglo-Irish Church in Jesus, who presented as new a patchwork theory made of old materials as if it were a Papal Bull ['bullocky vampas'], in his sevencoloured red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo mantle finish [i.e. in the terms of his theory of perception via sense-data] explained to Patrick . . . that since no man is free [also: Noman] he swallows up words, to wit ['scilicet'], the innumerable illusions caused by the rainbow-coloured veneer [*velamen*: outer covering or membrane of the aerial roots of orchids] of the panepiphanal universal spectrum of Lord Jesus. The whole of this spectrum will not be perceived until the after life ['tomorrow']. The primal furniture of earth [*zoanthus*: name of genus whose elemental constituents are arranged in sixes], mineral, vegetable, and animal, do not offer a full picture of fallen man. One part of the eternal photo-reflection of the several rainbow ['iridal'] gradations of solar light cannot be perceived in this life. Only an outstanding puraduxed [paradoxical?] seer possessing wisdom of the Einsteinian–Newtonian kind to the seventh degree will sense inwardly [Joyce used the phrase 'beholding interiorly' in BM Add. MS. 47488, f. 100, before he deleted it] the true reality, its *quidditas*, the thing which in itself it is; only to such a one would all objects show themselves unstintingly resplendent in the sixfold panoply of light, obscured from the epiphanal world. [In this paraphrase NED (1928) meanings for the following words

[1] These are British Museum Add MS. 47488, f. 99, 100, 101 (these three in Joyce's hand), 102–3 (the unrevised typescript made by Miss Weaver). The version in f. 99 is reproduced in *A First Draft Version of Finnegan's Wake*, ed. David Hayman, 1963.

have been drawn upon: *bullock, bullocky, vamp, scilicet, velamen, zoanthus, iridal.*]

Every reader of *Finnegan's Wake* knows better than to claim that even the most concentrated exegesis will ever wholly resolve the abiding ambiguity of Joyce's syntax, let alone his ever-shifting allusions, and worse, his 'point of view'. Still the general drift is clear. Only an outstanding seer will perceive the reality not exhausted by the external world of sense-data, in the same way that an outstanding thinker like Einstein developed his Theory of Relativity from the pioneering work of Newton about the nature and colours of light. Since Newton's day (and Berkeley was a younger contemporary of his) the rainbow has been conventionally regarded as having seven principal colours, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Newton invested the seventh colour with mysterious qualities, and early twentieth-century investigations of light which revealed a host of 'colours' not visible to the naked eye like ultra-violet, infra-red, gamma rays and so on, have justified his instinctive reservations about a closed definition of light. Einstein's analysis of the nature of light was in a way metaphorical, but it 'worked'. It led him to formulate his Special, General, and Unified Theories of Relativity, which gave an unprecedented picture of the nature of the universe. (The non-scientist will find that Lincoln Barnett in *The Universe and Dr Einstein*, gives a useful introduction to these formulations.) These historic formulations, the first in 1905, were given to the world within Joyce's lifetime, and it is as if Joyce wished to discover a literary realm of parallel, or even surpassing magnitude. By analogy, Joyce through Berkeley is saying, one with exceptional powers of inward perception can also see into the heart of life. Joyce plays rather deftly with the numbers six and seven. Having said 'sevencoloured' he advances a compounded word which gives only six colours tailing off with '-an' (and) to suggest the mystery of the seventh. Similarly he employs alternative words like 'prism', 'spectrum', and 'iridal' to keep the image of the seven-coloured rainbow dominant while implying that the picture is incomplete. He alludes to a genus whose constituents are arranged in sixes ('zoantholitic' from *zoanthus*) implying that we do not perceive a seventh unknown part of the material universe. His seer must have not the sixth but the seventh degree

of wisdom, too, to be able to grasp the mystery of the rainbow's 'mysterious' seventh colour, hence light's unknown dimensions. And yet the seer of the *quidditas* of reality beholds objects in a 'sextuple gloria of light'. The seer is not a scientist: he beholds 'interiorly' even as Berkeley did, which leads one to think that the seer's perception is wider than, subsumes within it even, the Einsteinian–Newtonian kind; and light here is not the light of physics alone but of understanding — obtained, one guesses, through the five senses plus the mysterious sixth sense transcending these. The sixth sense is not exclusively a divine prerogative but reputedly available to some human beings. Joyce may have thus meant to insinuate that his seer might be able to emulate God in grasping the total picture.

We may truly say that Berkeley's central philosophy is at sixes and sevens in this passage: Joyce very probably meant it to be so. In Berkeley's *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* occurs his most famous dictum '*Esse* is *percipi*' — to be is to be perceived. In the theory of perception there described, the word colour necessarily implies something seen, sound something heard, shape something seen or touched, and therefore according to this view, it is illogical to think of objects as existing prior to, or independent of the mind (Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision and Other Writings*, 1969, p. 113). And in the *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* Berkeley declared that to posit a reality beyond what was so apprehended is to contend for 'an unknown somewhat (if indeed it may be termed *somewhat*) which is quite stripped of all sensible qualities, and can neither be perceived by sense nor apprehended by the mind' (Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision*, Everyman Library edition, p. 300).

Berkeley was much assailed in his own day by critics who understood him to say that he denied the existence of the material world except as sense-data received by the mind, and later readers have laboured under similar misconceptions. Berkeley was very sensibly seeking to limit the realm of discourse to what could be discoursed about: in brief, there is a theory of language implied in his philosophy. He repeatedly pleaded for commonsense, urging the observer to 'sound your own thoughts'. 'Be not deceived by words,' Philonous advises Hylas in their Third Dialogue, or one would be led to definitions 'entirely made up of

negatives'. In other words, language should be restricted to describing a completely perceivable reality, and has no role beyond this.

There is too fine a difference between this interpretation by Berkeley of external reality and outright solipsism, for us not to confound the two fairly frequently. Actually, later phenomenalists extended the theory of perception opened up by Berkeley, adding hypothetical propositions to categorical ones. They talked not only of actual sensations but of possible ones *if* an observer were present, hoping thereby to provide a more exhaustive description of reality. In either version our knowledge of each object is a bundle of sensations or ideas about it, gathered piecemeal through experience or compounded by the mind in its own ways.

Berkeley's empiricist successors went on to the bitter logical end, excluding metaphysical discussions altogether, but that was not his own way. He reconciled his religion with his theory (shades of Joyce's 'patchwork') by declaring it self-evident that the reality unperceived by human observers was perceived by a cosmic mind anyhow, and therefore, though not known to them, existed:

> Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind, that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, to wit, that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth [cf. Joyce's 'furnit of huepanepi world'], in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their *being* (*esse*) is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other *created spirit*, they must have no existence at all, *or else subsist in the mind of some external spirit*. (*A New Theory of Vision*, pp. 115–16, author's italics)

Expressed in this way the theory has a certain undeniable consistency, but of course it is not a wholly defensible account, as later philosophers were to show. The question needs deeper examination, not only in respect of Berkeley but of Locke, Hume, and Kant as well, if only because the modern rationalist tradition which originated with these thinkers and has been distinguished by a series of *fiats* limiting the scope and quality of linguistic expressiveness, clearly engaged Joyce's attention.

But what is asserted in the passage from *Finnegan's Wake* is that, Berkeley notwithstanding, a seer may obtain the full picture of

reality in this life, and not wait for the after life to do so. Typically, Joyce both uses Berkeleian ideas of perception even as he rejects their human limitations. The underlying image is of a camera film absorbing impressions. 'Beleave filmly', is how Juva conveys the essentials of Berkeley's thought to Muta (*Finnegan's Wake*, p. 610, l. 5); Berkeley himself said that ideas are 'imprinted' on the senses. Crucial impressions are missing because human beings cannot absorb the total picture ('one photoreflection') seen by God. Now standing Berkeley on his head, that is another way of saying that we haven't yet got the words for it. If we have the word for a thing it exists. We have the words for the corporeal reality around us because we have sense-data about it. We *perceive*, therefore it *is*. In this sense it is true to say that in absorbing sense-data we are, like Berkeley's Noman, 'drinking up words', taking the impressions of the epiphanal world into our consciousness. Language and reality do not simply mirror each other in one-to-one correspondence, they are, uncannily, almost one.

It follows equally that the cosmic mind has its store of words for the total and eternal reality (corporeal and metaphysical) which it alone perceives — the one photoreflection of all the gradations of solar light. Since this perception is also accessible to an outstanding seer, such a one has therefore a vocabulary augmented beyond the human. Or rather, in much the same manner as ideas, following Berkeley, are compounded with others or subdivided in different ways to contribute to fuller perception (Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision*, p. 113), so the seer has the instinctive capacity to make endlessly new units or compounds from the existing human store of words — not only from the English language but from all languages — to represent the total reality. In Book II section ii of *Finnegan's Wake*, for example, Shem-'barekely' teaches Shaun about the world and its laws of time and space by 'chanching letters for them vice o'verse to bronze mottes and blending tschemes for em in tropadores and doublecressing twofold thruths and devising tingling tailwords too' (p. 288, ll. 1–3). A rudimentary instance of the outcome of this process is the series 'hueful panepiphanal world', 'heupanepi world', 'huepanwor', panepiwor', 'epiwo'.

The materials on which Joyce drew were truly prodigious. In the field of language alone, M. J. C. Hodgart, who referred

to BM Add. MS. 47488, f. 180, found that Joyce compiled a list of forty languages which were used in *Finnegan's Wake*. The list includes the main artificial languages which held out temporary hope, at the turn of the century, for a single medium of international communication, Volapük, Esperanto, and Novial ('Artificial Languages', *A Wake Digest*, ed. Clive Hart and Fritz Senn, 1968, pp. 56–8). It is possible momentarily to entertain the idea that by conflating all the languages of the world we might arrive at a unified picture of reality — to rival Einstein's Unified Theory of Relativity. But in that case language becomes deracinated, metamorphosing into a kind of pidgin: hence 'pidgin fella Balkelly'. While the mighty linguistic experiment of *Finnegan's Wake* may be, in passing, a commentary on the movement for a single universal language, in Joyce's coinage the artist-seer who would use it seeks not merely international communication but to lay bare the secrets of the heavens. More than we ever suspected, he would indeed be like God. 'I tried to love God,' Stephen Dedalus, the artist, says. 'It seems now I failed. It is very difficult. I tried to unite my will with the will of God instant by instant. In that I did not always fail. I could perhaps do that still . . .' (*A Portrait of the Artist*, 1952, p. 274). Strictly speaking, Stephen is Lucifer. His sin is pride.

II

It is not less than the very nature of language in reality into whose astral heights Stephen Dedalus flies. At the very least, a mind-boggling fate. For much of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen is a phenomenalist in the Berkeleian manner. Much of his growth consists of his progress in attempting to formulate the 'right' word or phrase, and in rejecting the 'wrong' one in the light of the sense-data he receives or the compounds of them which he unceasingly makes. To put it in another way, only when he has found the right word for something is he satisfied that he has comprehended the part of reality it implies. It is difficult to say whether he acts solely on Berkeley's dictum 'To be is to be perceived' (crudely, 'If it exists, there is a word for it') or, equally frequently, on its obverse 'To be perceived is to be'

(again crudely, 'If we have a word for it, it exists') — probably a confusing combination of the two.[1]

Resolving the problem of the relation between language and reality in this way is a programme involving strenuous discipline, and it is not surprising that his mind gives up this 'rigour' from time to time to freewheel, as it were, between 'the word and the vision' (*A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 102), when his best efforts of perception leave him deeply dissatisfied. His struggle is a recurrent dialectic between the two, word and vision, as if he were trying desperately to make them coincide, trying to heal the fracture between language and reality, which Berkeley succeeded in doing only by invoking God. What complicates Stephen's efforts is that the vision is only guessed at; it is not a completely known thing for he has not yet found the language in which to express it. This, he gradually comes to apprehend, must be the artist's central concern. The drama of *A Portrait of the Artist* deals with the early stages of this quest: with the artist's efforts to escape the twin hazards of solipsism and materialism at every turn, and the pain of knowing that while the quest is absolutely necessary, full success must result in his fading out of existence 'like a film in the sun' (p. 105).

The young boy's instinctive faculty for seeking precise linguistic aptness between word and thing is assailed early by a premonition of the outer reaches of his quest. Having located himself in Clongowes Wood College, Sallins, County Kildare, Ireland, The World, The Universe, he realizes that it is 'very big to think about everything and everywhere' (p. 17); and in his first attempt to contemplate 'what a big thought must be' he thinks of God in a passage which remarkably forecasts what will be the obsessive interests of his later life:

> God was God's name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God's name too; and when any one prayed to God and said *Dieu* then God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the

[1] For an introduction to modern theories of meaning and perception see *The Philosophy of Perception*, ed. G. J. Warnock (Oxford, 1967) and *The Theory of Meaning*, ed. S. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford, 1968).

people who prayed said in their different languages, still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God.

It made him very tired to think that way. (pp. 17–18)

Thenceforth his perceptions are governed by a brooding undercurrent of doubt concerning his very medium, language, as much as the 'facts', the sense-data.

Four of the principal protagonists in the quarrel over Parnell during the Christmas dinner on Stephen's return from school curiously 'clinch' their arguments with comments on the kind of language used. Mrs Riordan, quoting from the Scriptures about 'the man by whom scandal cometh', concludes righteously, 'That is the language of the Holy Ghost', to which Mr Dedalus coolly replies, 'And very bad language if you ask me' (p. 36). Mr Casey refers to 'the language with which the priests and the priests' pawns broke Parnell's heart and hounded him into his grave', while Dante can only exclaim with bitter scorn, 'The blackest Protestant in the land would not speak the language I have heard this evening' (pp. 38–9). Stephen's reaction, ironically enough, is to go away and work out an equivalence between Eileen's long white hands and golden hair on the one hand, and 'Tower of Ivory', 'House of Gold' on the other. 'By thinking of things you could understand them' (p. 48). Apparently as a direct consequence of the family altercation, sample religious epithets are tested for their revelatory power, and are found simply to represent tangible sensations. The boy's progress is metalinguistic to a greater degree than an ordinary child's. 'Words he did not understand he said over and over to himself and through them he had glimpses of the real world about him' (p. 70).

But Stephen is not satisfied with the world so revealed. He has become convinced that its corporeal nature, revealed to the Berkeleian senses of sight, touch and smell, is at best an incomplete picture of reality, its language debased by the uses to which it is put by his elders. Berkeley's God's perception of the total picture is what he has become aware of, however inarticulately:

He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld. He did not know where to seek it or how, but a premonition which led him on told him that this image would, without any overt act of his, encounter him. They would meet quietly as if they had known each other and had made their tryst, perhaps at

one of the gates or in some more secret place. They would be alone, surrounded by darkness and silence: and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured. He would fade into something impalpable under her eyes and then in a moment he would be transfigured. (p. 73)

At that imagined point of conjunction, language itself would fade — or apotheosize in the true reality. His real battle to escape the 'nets' of ordinary language now begins, as he matches its capacity to help to maintain sanity in a workaday world against the looming prospect of its severe inadequacy for anything beyond that. He has already begun to distrust 'the constant voices of his father and of his masters . . . happy only when he was far away from them, beyond their call, alone or in the company of phantasmal comrades' (pp. 94–5).

His adolescent sexual desires temporarily deflect him from his purpose, but it is noteworthy that in his agony and its resolution, words arise provocatively, and are enlisted or discarded with dramatic force. Initially it is the word '*Foetus*' which crystallizes his restlessness. 'The sudden legend startled his blood.' The battle between 'the word and the vision' (i.e. the vision of former students — therefore, in an incipient way, of the 'nightmare of history'), set out on pages 101 and 102, shows the dramatic interlocking of external and internal worlds, before 'his monstrous reveries' become predominant. 'They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words'. He relies in true phenomenalist fashion upon sense-data to give him a hold upon external reality:

— I am Stephen Dedalus. I am walking beside my father whose name is Simon Dedalus. We are in Cork, in Ireland. Cork is a city. Our room is in the Victoria Hotel. Victoria and Stephen and Simon. Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names. (p. 105)

Now this may be therapeutic in terms of his sexual confusion, but the inadequacy of this piecemeal series of categorical propositions may be seen by what follows: 'The memory of his childhood suddenly grew dim. He tried to recall forth some of its vivid moments but could not. He recalled only names. Dante, Parnell, Clane, Clongowes.' The naive reliance upon material sense-data alone reveals no composing principle. In this extremity, with a kind of Aristotelian inevitability, Stephen temporarily surrenders his inarticulate desire to fashion a truer language, and

gratefully submits to the conventional hell-fire-and-damnation language of the sermon. Yet perversely, it is the keynote of that sermon, Lucifer's slogan, *non serviam* (p. 133) which he later adopts as the motto of his quest. And in the director's office, that quest for a truer language to represent reality reasserts itself. He feels 'a regret and a pity as though he were passing out of an accustomed world and were hearing its language for the last time' (p. 178).

Soon afterwards, he draws forth 'a phrase from his treasure' — 'a day of dappled seaborne clouds' — not particularly effective, perhaps, but in context it somehow comprehends both 'the faint sour stink of rotted vegetables' which he gets as he walks up the lane leading to his house (p. 185), and the frequently quoted vision of the girl on the beach (p. 195):

> — A day of dappled seaborne clouds.
>
> The phrase and the day and the scene harmonized in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold, the russet and green of apple orchards, azure of waves, the greyfringed fleece of clouds. No, it was not their colours: it was the poise and balance of the period itself. Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that, being as weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language manycoloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose? (pp. 189–90)

This is certainly a richer response, in a young man's slightly florid prose, than a straightforward phenomenalist's, looking forward to 'pidgin fella' Berkeley's 'heptachromatic, seven-hued septicoloured' universe. Yet embedded in it are the three major alternatives facing any would-be writer. In the first instance, Stephen is teased by the thought that language and reality appear to be so nearly one, that to pursue language for its own sake could be deeply satisfying; presumably all reality would necessarily be implied by it. Second, he ponders whether language, 'richly storied', shall deal with the sensible world. And thirdly, whether language shall deal solely with himself, the artist. One sees how Joyce the author produced works in response to each alternative in turn: *Finnegan's Wake*, *Ulysses*, and *A Portrait* itself,

respectively. The major challenges for any artist are here in outline, however blurred the alternatives are, and however much they merge into each other, as of course they do.

For Stephen, the vision has come tantalizingly closer. The clouds, he observes, had come out from Europe which:

> lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races. He heard a confused music within him as of memories and names which he was almost conscious of but could not capture even for an instant; then the music seemed to recede, to recede, to recede . . . (p. 191)

The first real symptoms of linguistic deracination begin here, if anywhere, in his career as an artist, an inevitable process in view of the metaphysical scope of his programme. He has wrestled with the languages of politics and of religion and rejected them as too puny and limiting for his purposes: in introspection he finds himself walking 'in a lane among heaps of dead language' (p. 203). Now he dreams of fashioning a more comprehensive, all-embracing one — the second sentence in the above passage is the moment of conception of *Finnegan's Wake*, heralding its deracinated language — or linguistic innovation, if you prefer it.

Little details in Stephen's career at this moment underline his keener ear for inventiveness in language which could indicate ways of representing reality more aptly. His brothers and sisters who have been phantasmal figures in his consciousness, glow briefly when one of them, in answer to his question where his father and mother were, answers in the kind of artificial language children are fond of concocting: 'Goneboro toboro lookboro atboro aboro houseboro' (p. 186). The word 'ivy' is subjected to a kind of declension: '*Ivory, ivoire, avorio, ebur*' (p. 203) reminding him of the Latin sentence '*India mittit ebur*'. He has moved from English to French to Italian to Latin, and thence leaped to India. His own name melts and half merges with its classical associations: 'Stephanos Dedalos! Stephanomenos! Bous Stephanoforos!'[1] Strange indeed, he finds, is the power of language resourcefully exploited.

[1] For a commentary on this play with his name see Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, 'Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', *The Explicator*, XVIII, January 1960.

But this impetus receives a check which contradictorily marks a further stage in his quest: the very language he is using is someone else's. His conversation with the dean, with its courteously veiled hostility, concerning whether a funnel is a funnel or a tundish (pp. 214–15) — 'It's called a tundish in Lower Drumcondra', Stephen insists — makes him realize that the English language itself is but one more language game:

> The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master,* on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (p. 215)

Thus is the Irish nationalist political argument masterfully subsumed by the philosophical question whether the English language — or any language — is the right medium for his disquisitions. This occurs at the beginning of the exposition of his much discussed aesthetic theory — another language game — and mines it at the very base.[1]

We find the dilemma which he deliberately embraces summed up unobtrusively in a brief exchange between himself and Davin: 'I shall *express* myself as I am' to which Davin replies, 'Try to *be* one of us' (p. 230, present author's italics). The essence of Stephen's approach to his art also points to the crucial fallacy, the logical absurdity towards which he is heading with such extraordinary rigour. What language itself — what racial or national language, if you want to put it that way — shall he use? None of them, it appears, has any particular claim to complete aptitude. It is not surprising at all that before leaving Ireland the only thing he finds himself 'armed' with besides exile and cunning is — *silence* (p. 281). Then in one of his diary entries at the end, he records that an argument of his — about Bruno — with one of his fellows 'began in Italian and ended in pidgin English' (p. 283). The process of deracination is complete.

III

In *A Portrait of the Artist* the young man questions the very basis of his art, and proposes instead to make that basis eternal, no less — even if it means that he will be considered a casualty by

[1] See S. L. Goldberg, *The Classical Temper*, 1961, pp. 41–65.

conventional devotees. Not for nothing did Joyce originally plan to give the name of Stephen Hero to his protagonist. There is something foolhardy about Stephen's aim even as there is something truly heroic as well. It is difficult to agree that it is the 'lifeless formality' of Yeats's Byzantium which Stephen mistakenly pursues, if only because that would put Joyce's own originality in question.[1] In fact, Joyce added a further turn of the screw in examining the foundations of literary creation, taking literature itself beyond itself into metalinguistic domains. Stephen's artistic fallacy is one intimately connected with the nature of language itself, and the relation of language to reality. The questions he asks are the questions every artist must ask (and every critic, too) if only in order that we may come back chastened by the realization of how utterly insignificant literary creation, as we conventionally use the term, can be seen to be.

What is so absolutely amazing is that like Shaw, who produced a Revolutionist's Handbook for John Tanner in *Man and Superman,* Joyce too showed, in *Finnegan's Wake*, how seriously and how far Stephen's quest could be taken, for what rewards, and at what cost. Joyce saw deeply into the artistic fallacy of believing that language — any one of our human languages today — is capable of giving the completest account of reality. Equally he perceived the fallacy of hopes that an artificial language deliberately invented would be equal to the task. There is no doubt that he was also profoundly attracted to the artistic representation of this problem for the lessons it could embody for literature, as much as for the entertainment it could provide. Indeed, he made the exploration of it his life's work. It is known that after *Finnegan's Wake* he was planning a book about the Sea, and one doesn't know whether to be glad or sorry it wasn't written.

What is certain is that in inventing an artificial language specifically to depict that reality, he has shown the cardinal absurdity and equally the impossibility of seeking to put the fullest understanding of human life between the covers of a book — or in human speech at all, for that matter. That is his major triumph, along with the demonstration of just how far one could expect to succeed in such an aim. Joyce remains absolutely in

[1] F. Parvin Sharpless, 'Irony in Joyce's *Portrait*: The Stasis of Pity', *James Joyce Quarterly*, IV (Summer 1967), 320–30.

control of his artist-protagonist; he maintains the most exquisite aesthetic 'distance' between them. The 'real' author of *Finnegan's Wake* is Stephen Dedalus, but as he forecast he has refined himself out of existence by flying too close to the eternal light in his attempt to produce that full picture of reality, the 'photoreflection' seen by Berkeley's God alone. Like Lucifer, he was 'not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake, and perhaps as long as eternity, too' (*Portrait*, p. 281). Lucifer was banished for eternity, too. On the technical level, one sees here the beginning of an infinite series of 'disappearing' authors. Stephen 'wrote' *Finnegan's Wake* and has disappeared; Joyce in creating Stephen has also vanished. The cosmos is returned to its pristine impersonality — or so it would seem. Flaubert never bargained for 'impersonality' on such a scale.

At the end of *A Portrait of the Artist* we have only a third of this story, though it is enough to show that to judge Stephen as a prig, pedant and so on is beside the point. It is equally marginal, if not actually wrong, to see him as someone in need of the healing influence of a 'reality' which too many seem to interpret as merely the everyday kind. Stephen saw clearly the three alternatives before him, he made his choice deliberately, and he explored each in turn. If we regard *Finnegan's Wake* as 'his' book he has justified his programme to an astonishing degree. He has given us the one 'photoreflection' seen by God alone. On such a scale identities change, blend, vanish, or reappear even as Einsteinian endeavours in the analysis of light in the remotest heavens found infinitely receding, impalpable matter. Scientists could not even agree about what it was their equations referred to, particles or waves. It was a Joycean kind of inspiration which led one scientist to suggest, playfully, that perhaps they were dealing with 'wavicles'. Scientists carried abstraction to the point where they couldn't agree among themselves what it was they were studying. And there were few left to understand them, anyway. Stephen's endeavours culminate in a similar ineluctable crux: language, artificially ordered to comprehend and explain the *whole* reality is by definition not understandable by common mortals. It is intelligible only to God, or to a 'numpa one puraduxed seer in seventh degree of wisdom'. And besides the seer, one supposes, the critics.