



Universalizing Languages: *Finnegans Wake* Meets Basic English

Susan Shaw Sailer
West Virginia University

In the March 1932 issue of *transition*, each of the final four pages of the eighth chapter of *Finnegans Wake* appears in the unlikely guise of "Basic English."¹ These "two languages," as C. K. Ogden terms them, include one that Joyce had devised for "Anna Livia" and one that Ogden had developed, Basic English, in which, he notes, "everything may be said."² This odd version of the fragment involved translating the "most complex language of man," in Ogden's words, into the "simplest" of languages ("Introduction" 135).

Having asserted that Basic English could express "everything," Ogden could devise no more strenuous test of that claim than to translate a passage from the *Wake* into his system. But why would Joyce have agreed to Ogden's translation? Perhaps discouraged by the well-established pattern of indifference or hostility to *Work in Progress*, Joyce sought exposure for his work in any sympathetic venue. As editor of *transition*, Eugene Jolas was certainly one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Joyce's experiments with language. While such a scenario is plausible, a more significant explanation involves a conceptual similarity between Ogden's Basic English and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*—their adherence to one of the Enlightenment's most basic tenets, the emphasis on the universality of human nature.

As Kenan Malik expresses this, "for the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment there was but a single culture or civilisation to which all humanity belonged."³ Where Ogden conceived of Basic English as a potentially universal language, so Joyce meant *Finnegans Wake* to be a potentially universal work that is reflected in its structure, myth, and language, a claim I will develop later. What makes the four pages from the "Anna Livia" chapter meet their bedfellows in Ogden's Basic English translation is that both Joyce and Ogden were caught up in the fever of the Enlightenment notion of the universality of human nature that characterizes much modernist art and thought.

Before developing that strand of my argument, I want to trace the Joyce-Ogden connection that led to the appearance of Ogden's version in the pages of *transition*. Joyce became involved with Ogden in 1929 by default after both scientist Julian Huxley and musicologist J. W. N. Sullivan declined invitations to write an introduction for the section of *Work in Progress* that Joyce had agreed to let Harry and Caresse Crosby publish in their Black Sun Press. Joyce titled the section "Tales Told of Shem and Shaun," and it included "The Mookse and the Gripes," "The Muddest Thick That Ever was Dumped," and "The Ondt and the Gracehoper." Ogden accepted Joyce's invitation to write the preface, which Joyce later, in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, pronounced "very useful" (*Letters* I 279).

In his preface to *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun*, Ogden describes Joyce's experiments with language as "this synthetic proliferate agglomeration whereby the timeless condensation of the dream is attained."⁴ Ogden names ten ways in which Joyce complicates and compacts the "symbolic texture" of his language: "Root-cultivation; Tongue-gesture; Rhyme-slang; Analogical deformation; Onomatopoeia, phonetic and kinetic; Puns, select and dialect; Spoonerisms; Condensations; Mergers; Echoes" ("Preface" ix-x). Concerning Joyce's "symbolic condensation," Ogden makes the intriguing suggestion that it "corresponds closely enough with his theory of Time—a theory incidentally responsible for the rattle of Lewis-guns which still resounds through *The Mookse and the Gripes*" ("Preface" xi).⁵ In a wonderfully non-Basic English flourish, Ogden summarizes Joyce's invented language:

The intensive, compressive, reverberative infixation; the sly, meaty, oneiric logorrhoea, polymathic, polyperverse; even the clangorous calembour, irresponsible and irrepressible, all conjure us to penetrate the night mind of man, that kaleidoscopic recamera of an hypothecated Unconscious, jolted by some logophilous Birth-trauma into chronic serial extension. ("Preface" xi-xii)

The Joyce-Ogden connection continued when, after having agreed to write the preface, Ogden asked Joyce to record those last pages of "Anna Livia" for him at the Orthological Institute in London. This recording was made in August 1929, and on its basis Ogden made decisions about his Basic English version of the "Anna Livia" pages. Where multiple possibilities for signification arose, as they did continuously, Ogden decided what the passage's "simple sense" was on the basis of the inflections that Joyce gave to his reading. But lighting at the Institute was so weak that even though the pages Joyce was to record had been written for him in half-inch letters, he still could not read them. As Richard Ellmann reports, Joyce "had therefore to be

prompted in a whisper throughout" (JJII 617).

Other prompts besides the inflections of Joyce's voice gave Ogden clues as to the simple sense of Joyce's complex prose: these were notes that Joyce must have helped Ogden to prepare, which were offered along with the phonograph recording, sales for which were "disappointing" (*Letters III* 203 n4). These notes concern the signification of various passages on the final four pages of the "Anna Livia" chapter and can be read in Roland McHugh's *Annotations*.⁶ McHugh identifies each with an asterisk and offers only the following brief explanation for the notes' origin: "C.K. Ogden [sic]: *Notes in Basic English on the Anna Livia Plurabelle Record* (J[oyce] appears to have collaborated in production of these notes)" (213).

When Ogden's Basic English translation of the last four pages of "Anna Livia" appeared in *transition* in 1932, his *Basic Vocabulary* and *Basic English* had been published for only two years.⁷ *The Meaning of Meaning* had come out in 1923,⁸ and it was from the chapter on meaning that Ogden found the germ of the idea from which he developed Basic English. *The Meaning of Meaning* stresses the importance of context in determining how to establish meaning, which Ogden considered a science:

The first stage of the Development of Symbolism as a Science is thus complete, and it is seen to be the essential preliminary to all other sciences. . . . All critical interpretations of Symbols requires [sic] an understanding of the Symbol situation, and here the main distinction is that between the condition in which reference is made possible by symbols (Word-dependence) and that for which a free choice of symbols can be made (Word-freedom). (*Meaning* 249)

Ogden conceived of Basic English as an "International Auxiliary Language, i.e., a second language (in science, commerce, and travel) for all who do not already speak English" (*Basic English* 9). Its vocabulary consists of eight hundred and fifty words "scientifically selected" to "dispense . . . with practically all phonetic ambiguities" (*Basic English* 9, 12) and is nearly verb-free, allowing only eighteen verbs and their various forms—do, be, make, keep, let, go, come, seem, put, take, give, get, have, say, see, send, may, and will. As Ogden enjoyed telling people, you could put the entire language system, including its rules and vocabulary, "on the back of an ordinary sheet of business notepaper" (*Basic English* 9). Ogden claimed that Basic English offered the "equivalent in efficiency" of five thousand words in "any previous attempt at simplification, its actual range exceeding 20,000"; while not a literary language, Basic English was "clear and precise at the level for which it is designed" (*Basic English* 10).

Joyce himself appears in several of Ogden's books. In *Basic English*,

Ogden writes, "From one standpoint, that of technology and of writers like James Joyce, the 500,000 words of the lexicologist are too few; from another, that of the occidentalizing oriental, the 10,000 words of the man in the street are too many. Perhaps, in time, both can be satisfied" (*Basic English* 13). In *The System of Basic English*, Ogden chose, as one of four demonstrations of how flexible Basic English could be in putting a wide range of readings into immediately graspable words, a passage from H. G. Wells's *The Shape of Things To Come*.⁹ Out of the thousands of passages Wells wrote that Ogden could have chosen for his demonstration, the one he selected for translation makes an invidious comparison between himself and Joyce and includes guesses at the longevity of each. The passage reads as follows:

Basic English was the invention of a man whose quick and fertile mind was trained at Cambridge in England. This C. K. Ogden (1889-1990), living long and working hard, gave all his time to the question of getting a simpler relation between language and thought, and specially to the working-out of this one system. It is an interesting fact that he was living at the same time as James Joyce (1882-1955) who, like Ogden, was responsible for the invention of a new sort of English. But while Ogden's work was based on science, Joyce was working as a man of letters for more complex forms and greater powers of suggestion. In the end, his readers, who became less in number every year, were unable to get at him at all through his knotted and twisted prose which became very like the foolish talk of a man who is off his head. He did, however, get about twenty-five words into the language which are still in use. Ogden, after working hard for a long time in the opposite direction, came through with an English of 850 words, and five or six rules for their operation. (*System* 298-99)

But though the Wells passage emphasizes the opposition between the two men's efforts, while valorizing Ogden's and disparaging Joyce's, Joyce's work in *Finnegans Wake* and Ogden's in *Basic English* share a common root, the profound modernist assumption of human universality, including both language roots and human nature.

The development of so-called universal languages in the late nineteenth century documents that tendency. Esperanto was invented in 1887 by Dr. L. L. Zamenhof, a Polish physician, and is built on "word bases common to the main European languages; it has self-evident parts of speech (all nouns end in -o, all adjectives in -a, etc.), a single and regular conjugation of verbs, a few simplified inflections."¹⁰ Another such language, Volapuk, was developed about 1879 by a German clergyman, J. M. Schleyer, as an "international auxiliary language" with vocabulary "based on roots from the major European languages and a complex morphology."¹¹ Ogden, too, used the term

"International Auxiliary Language" to name the function of his Basic English (*Basic English* 9). Those who devised the Euro-centered Esperanto, Volapuk, and Basic English, as well as other such invented languages, recognized the need for greater communicability among the world's peoples.

Ogden, for instance, developed Basic English out of the realization that, through science, commerce, and travel, the world was becoming what would later be called a global village. "Standard English may be enriched and cosmopolitanized," he writes, "as the world contracts through the expansion of modern science; and Basic may meet the universal demand for a compact and efficient technological medium. If so, English will become not only the International Auxiliary language, but the Universal language of the world" (*Basic English* 13-14).

More was involved in this universalizing tendency than underlining the imperialism still rampant during the modernist era. There was also an immense optimism assuming that if only the right conditions could obtain, world peace would be possible, certainly an appealing prospect in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when memories of World War I were still keen and many foresaw the inevitability of another world war. About this desire for peace, Ogden notes, "The so-called national barriers of today are, for the most part, ultimately language barriers. The absence of a common medium of communication is the chief obstacle to international understanding, and consequently the chief underlying cause of War" (*System* 18). Ogden was far from alone in this belief. In a speech delivered at Harvard University on 6 September 1943, Winston Churchill declared,

It would certainly be a grand convenience for us all to be able to move freely about the world—as we shall be able to do more easily than ever known before as the science of the world develops—to be able to move freely about the world, and to be able to find everywhere a medium, albeit primitive, of intercourse and understanding. Might it not also be an advantage to many races and an aid to the building up of our new structure for preserving peace? All these are great possibilities. (*System*—unnumbered page occurring between roman numeral- and arabic-numbered pages)

In examining their own era, social critics such as Jolas found everywhere signs of social decay; critiquing capitalism as well as communism, Jolas notes that, on the one hand, one sees "a capitalistic, money-drunken civilization bent on reducing man to the rank of an 'economic animal.' . . and [on the other] a nascent Communistic culture which is aping the former's economic vision, while attempting to retain a revolutionary mobility for the working out of a new civilization."¹² Announcing his journal's efforts for 1928, Jolas declares that

transition "will continue to reflect the chaos born of our age. . . . We will try to hasten the disintegration of 'spine-intrenched parloritis.'" ¹³ Jolas finds hope for reform in the work of poets and visionaries: "only the poet and visionary can save the world, if it needs saving. . . . Art is not merely the expression of the subjective being in us, but of the non-subjective, the unconscious, the universal as well. It seeks, even when apparently most abstract and synthetic, to identify itself with humanity" ("Enemy" 210).

Although he believed that painting, music, and architecture had found appropriate means of expressing the experience of life in the twentieth century, Jolas criticizes literature for being "still rooted in the ideas of the past. The reality of the *universal word* is still being neglected. . . . The new vocabulary and the new syntax must help destroy the ideology of a rotting civilization."¹⁴ Even Ogden, who was no radical critic, expresses his concern that the English of his time might be inadequate and suggests the benefits Basic English might enable:

As a psychological and educational discipline and as an international medium, Basic is admittedly a challenge to certain habits which have their roots very deep in our social behavior; but the moment is perhaps not altogether unfavorable to the demand for a new linguistic conscience in the new generation whose social experiments may otherwise be frustrated by outworn verbal formulae. (*System* v-vi)

Jolas shared Ogden's belief that a new language might be necessary for the creation of a consciousness proper to the twentieth-century; that "new type of man" would be "not a collective being, but a universal being, an harmonious being, synthesizing in himself the impulses of the spirit and the social sense of the twentieth century" ("Super-Occident" 12). Concerning "modern man," he observes that "the individual and the universal are being merged—the conscious and the subconscious" ("Super-Occident" 13), clearly identifying consciousness with the individual and subconsciousness with the universal. Discussing the artist who would foster the development of this new type of person, Jolas claims that "[t]he new artist of the word has recognized the autonomy of language and, aware of the twentieth century current towards universality, attempts to hammer out a verbal vision that destroys time and space."¹⁵

The arts of the future, Jolas writes, "must find their expression in the double reality of the natural and the supernatural. The universal man must find a mythos which is adequate to his changed outlook. Art must be an equilibrium between the eternal or immutable and the conscious. It must express the new age" ("Super-Occident" 13). Joyce,

Jolas believes (as quoted by Dougald McMillan), created such a mythos in *Finnegans Wake* through HCE, ALP, and their universal family: "The mind capable of dreaming all the many manifestations of HCE and his family has much in common with the 'transcendental I with its multiple stratifications reaching back millions of years . . . [a mind] related to the entire history of mankind, past and present.'" ¹⁶ The revolution of the word, according to Jolas, could be accomplished through experimentation with the English language: "The English language, because of its universality, seems particularly fitted for a re-birth along the lines envisaged by Mr. Joyce." ¹⁷ Those lines included these notions:

In his epic work, Mr. Joyce takes into consideration this common nature of linguistic origins. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he should try to organize this idea by the creation of a polyglot form of expression. Whirling together the various languages, Mr. Joyce, whose universal knowledge includes that of many foreign tongues, creates a verbal dreamland of abstraction that may well be the language of the future. (*Revolution* 115)

Joyce's notions about what Jolas called the common nature of linguistic origins ("Revolution" 115) derive from Marcel Jousse's and, behind him, Giambattista Vico's notion that "words are derived from gestures," as cited by McMillan (195). ¹⁸ According to Vico's *La Scienza Nuova*, as interpreted by McMillan, language evolved through three stages: in the first, language was expressed through mute actions, bodies "having natural connections" with the ideas they were communicating (at this stage communication was direct and sensual); in the second, sound gestures were accompanied by visible gestures (language was more abstract than in the first stage but still visual as well as vocal); and in the third, language became exclusively vocal and thus entirely abstract from the physical situations that called forth expression (196).

Jousse built his notions about language on Vico's theory of the development of language, and McMillan quotes Jousse's claim that "[a]t every perception of an object, our whole body reacts by a gesticulation more or less visible and strikes an attitude which imitates it. . . . Everything that we see is projected instantaneously in our musculature"; thus, we perceive experience in bodily as well as intellectual modes (196-97). After Joyce went with Mary Colum in late 1926 or early 1927 to a Jousse lecture, McMillan reports, he remarked to her that "'if you understand [Jousse's presentation], you understand the aim of *Finnegans Wake*'" (197). In the words of the *Wake*, "[i]n the beginning was the gest he joustly says" (FW 468.05).

On the basis of gesture as the ground common to all languages,

Joyce believed in the possibility of a universal language. References in the *Wake* to Esperanto and Volapuk establish his awareness of those constructed ones. Indeed, Joyce apparently believed that the language he had developed in writing *Finnegans Wake* was, on its own terms, a sort of universal language. When he declared that the *Wake* was a representation of the mind at night, he believed he was representing the "universal" mind as it operated in the various stages of sleep. This belief brought him close to the thought of Carl Jung, who also considered that sleep and dreams were the access to the universal unconscious. The notion that Joyce and Jung share differentiates their thought from Sigmund Freud's, who claimed that the unconscious was the gate to the universal in the individual waking-state mind.¹⁹

Joyce's proclivity toward "universalizing" in the *Wake* was not new in terms of his critical thought. In the essay "Drama and Life," written in 1900 when Joyce was eighteen, he observes, "Human society is the embodiment of changeless laws which the whimsicalities and circumstances of men and women involve and overwrap. . . . Drama has to do with the underlying laws first, in all their nakedness and divine severity, and only secondarily with the motley agents who bear them out" (CW 40). According to Ellmann, Joyce insisted that "the laws of life are the same always and everywhere" (JJII 73). Ellmann reflects on Joyce's views concerning the universality of human nature: "Sleep is the great democratizer: in their dreams people become one, and everything about them becomes one. Nationalities lose their borders, levels of discourse and society are no longer separable, time and space surrender their demarcations. All human activities begin to fuse into all other human activities" (JJII 716).²⁰

At least three aspects of *Finnegans Wake* build upon Joyce's assumption of the universality of human nature: its structure, myth, and language. Probably after prompting from Joyce, Samuel Beckett discusses the *Wake's* structure which, he explains, involves the following:

[There are] three institutions common to every society: Church, Marriage, Burial. . . . [And there are] endless substantial variations on these three beats, and interior intertwining of these three themes into a decoration of arabesques—decorations and more than decoration. Part 1. is a mass of past shadow, corresponding therefore to Vico's first human institution, Religion, or to his Theocratic age, or simply to an abstraction—Birth. Part 2 is the lovegame of the children, corresponding to the second institution, Marriage, or to the Heroic age, or to an abstraction—Maturity. Part 3. is passed in sleep, corresponding to the third institution, Burial, or to the Human age, or to an abstraction—Corruption. Part 4 is the day beginning again, and corresponds to Vico's Providence, or to an abstraction—Generation.²¹

Joyce himself directly fostered the notion of the *Wake's* universal myth with comments such as "[w]ith this hash of sounds I am building the great myth of everyday life"²² and his declaration to Harry Shaw Weaver that *Finnegans Wake* presented a "universal history" (JIII 544). When we consider the *Wake's* language as itself a kind of universal language, Joyce's otherwise off-the-wall statement that it could envision some little girl or boy in Tibet or Somaliland reading the "Anna Livia" section and finding her or his home river makes certain sense.²³

But what are the *Wake's* claims as a universal language? Joyce offers a beginning point with his declaration, as quoted by Laurence Milesi, that "'I'd like a language which is above all languages, a language to which all will do service. I cannot express myself in English without enclosing myself in a tradition'"; elaborating upon Joyce's statement, Milesi writes:

The only language which would be above all languages and beyond the reach of tradition must subsume all linguistic and historic nationalisms, must be a recreation of the whole universe for the artist to resist any national enclosure; such a universal language, devoid of history except personal history, is the dream which Joyce aimed at in the night of the *Wake*, which is also the night common to all mankind.²⁴

Drawing upon what Joyce does with language in the *Wake*, Milesi believes that because meaning results from "the estrangement of language from its referential field, its evacuation (in general) points the way to the recapture of the universal language in which words are things tallied and, therefore, meaning did not exist" (79). Milesi's postulation accords with Vico's and Jousse's descriptions of how language functioned when it still had a sensuous connection with the physical situations that it expressed. This, in turn, recalls Marshall McLuhan's interest in the *Wake*. McLuhan differentiates between oral, print, and electronic communications partially on the basis of how they navigated meaning.²⁵ In oral cultures, he believes, meaning was simultaneous with the experience of words. This was lost in print cultures because of the linear nature of print. But McLuhan speculates that electronic cultures would regain the experience of words having simultaneous meaning in electronic media. He was fascinated with the *Wake*, in part, because he believed that Joyce was trying to reintroduce the simultaneous meaning of words into print and thus prefiguring the electronic revolution.²⁶

Where images form basic units of most prose fiction, they do not function in such a way in *Finnegans Wake*. McMillan proposes that, for Joyce, the word is "the primary pigment equatable with our most

basic consciousness. . . . Through words experience remains forever with us ready for a kind of eternal return" (201). But Joyce did not want to create a new literary Esperanto, Robert McAlmon observes in his contribution to *Exagmination*; instead, he writes, "[Joyce] wishes to originate a flexible language that might be an esperanto of the sub-conscious and he wishes to believe that anybody reading his work gets a sensation of understanding, which is the understanding which music is allowed without too much explanation."²⁷ Commenting on Jolas's claim that the universality of such a language would be "literal," McMillan suggests what such a literalism involves: "By the use of puns, rhymes, rhythms, catalogues, etc. [Joyce] made each reference as inclusive and suggestive as he could" (199).

Fragmenting the narrative by interpolating into it elements that initially seem extraneous is one of the ways that Joyce achieves that inclusiveness and suggestiveness. The incorporation of dozens of languages into the syntax of Joyce's sentences certainly facilitates both a "literal" universality as well as posits a "universal" language for the unconscious mind in sleep. Joyce worked with foreign words and phrases in the *Wake* in at least two ways: first, by transposing them into English "by phonetic approximation" (anglicizing, phonetic distortion), and second, as Milesi notes, by translating a keyword into various foreign languages (18). Although genetic critics have observed the proliferation of foreign-language elements in late-stage revisions that Joyce made, such elements also compose parts of the *Wake* in some early drafts. Milesi, for instance, calls attention to the Esperanto passage "*Li ne dormis? S! Malbone dormas. Kia li krias nikte? Parolas infanete. S!*" (FW 565.25-28), which appeared in first-draft usage in October-November 1925. About this passage, Milesi comments that its presence is "astonishing since it would push the earliest draft usage of foreign units, unconnected with motifs, back to late 1925" (18).

Having established that Joyce and Ogden, each in his own way, believed that he was creating a language that had potential for "universal" use, I want to consider the relation between Joyce's language in *Finnegans Wake* and Ogden's translation of it into Basic English. Though Ogden himself does not use the word "translation," it is, in fact, what he performs in transferring language from one code to another. Usually this involves two different languages, but here the two codes occur in the same language. As a name for the act, we might choose "'homolinguistic' translation," the phrase that the Canadian poets Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie give to some of their cooperative experimental poems.²⁸ Cheryl B. Torsney writes that in Aristotelian rhetoric, *translatio*, "the figure of resemblance, lies at the center of all metaphor,"²⁹ so that the act of translation becomes the

finding of resemblance from one language to another.

Such resemblance, however, is not simply a transmission of information, according to Walter Benjamin, translator of Franz Kafka and Charles Baudelaire; indeed, Benjamin writes, "any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations."²⁹ Like so many other modernists, Benjamin shares universalist assumptions, one of which is that translation "ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages" (72). This relationship has as its basis, in Benjamin's opinion, the condition that all languages are "interrelated in what they want to express" (72). Where the individual elements of one language—its vocabulary, grammar, and syntax—differ from another, their "intentions" supplement each other; this supplementarity results in the creation of what Benjamin terms "pure language" (74).

Benjamin's notion of "pure language" may be closely related to what Joyce was attempting through his "universal" language of the *Wake*. We can see this through the example Benjamin offers of the difference between a language's "intended object" and its "mode of intention":

The words *Brot* and *pain* "intend" the same object, but the modes of this intention are not the same. It is owing to these modes that the word *Brot* means something different to a German than the word *pain* to a Frenchman, that these words are not interchangeable for them, that, in fact, they strive to exclude each other. As to the intended object, however, the two words mean the very same thing. (74)

For Benjamin, the translator's task involves "finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produced in it the echo of the original" (76). In this way, "the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work" (77). In a passage that reads as commentary on the *Wake*, Benjamin comments, "In this pure language—which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages—all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished" (80).

As a starting point for discussing the relation between Ogden's and Joyce's languages, it will be helpful to place them in close proximity. The following four pairs, drawn respectively from Joyce's book and Ogden's version in the March 1932 *transition*, offer a sense of how Basic English meets Wakese:

Joyce: Wait till the honeying of the lune, love! Die eve, little eve, die! (FW 215.03-04)

Ogden: Do not go till the moon is up love. She's dead, little Eve, little Eve she's dead. (261)

Joyce: Then all that was was fair. Tys Elvenland! Teems of times and happy returns. The seim anew. Ordovico or viricordo. (FW 215.22-23)

Ogden: Then all that was was good. Land that is not? A number of times, coming happily back. The same and new. Vico's order but natural, free. (262)

Joyce: He had buckgoat paps on him, soft ones for orphans. Ho, Lord! Twins of his bosom. (FW 215.27-28)

Ogden: He was kind as a she-goat, to young without mothers. O, Laws! Soft milk bags two. (262)

Joyce: Can't hear with the waters of. The chittering waters of. Flittering bats, fieldmice bawk talk. (FW 215.31-32)

Ogden: No sound but the waters of. The dancing waters of. Winged things in flight, field-rats louder than talk. (262)

Ogden is forced to combine silliness with distortion in his translation, because he sees the "simple sense" of Joyce's language as one of transmitting information. To clarify the relation between the languages of Joyce's *Wake* and Ogden's Basic English, I want to call upon the model developed by Henri Gobard, here summarized by John Johnston, consisting of four layers of language based on the different functions that languages perform:

first is the "vernacular," the mother tongue or native language, spoken simultaneously in geographically restricted areas (a village, a small community, or region); second is the urban or national "vehicular" language, the language of society, commerce and bureaucracy, the primary purpose of which is communication, as opposed to the "vernacular," the language of community in the literal sense, involving not the exchange of information but the presenting of forms of recognition; third is the "referential" language, the language of culture and tradition that assures the continuity of values through systematic reference to enshrined works of the past; and fourth, finally, is the "mythic" language, which functions as a kind of ultimate recourse, a verbal magic whose "incomprehensibility" is experienced as irrefutable proof of its sacred character (the word "amen" for example, or the Latin used in the Catholic Church).³¹

Ogden's translation of Joyce's *Wake* allows no place for three of the four language functions that Gobard identifies. That is, in Ogden's

Basic English, only vehicular language operates, whose function, according to Gobard, is to communicate information on a national—or, for Ogden, an international—scale. We do not hear the vernacular or community-building function of language nor the referential function validating cultural values nor the mythic function attesting to the sacred. In the language that Joyce created for *Finnegans Wake*, these three functions operate largely through the simultaneous multiple signifying possibilities structured into nearly every word. Occasionally all three, but more usually two, operate within a single word or phrase. What Joyce's *Wake* rarely does, however, is to operate at the vehicular or informational level. When this level appears, it is usually embedded in such an ambiguous context as to force the reader to register uncertainty about the "facts."

To see how these levels work, let us examine a few phrases from the Ogden translation of Joyce's text as it appeared in *transition*. Where Joyce writes, "He had buckgoat paps on him, soft ones for orphans," Ogden translates, "He was kind as a she-goat, to young without mothers." Believing that the simple sense of Joyce's sentence was the information that HCE was kind to young, motherless creatures, Ogden distorts what Joyce's language actually does. Joyce's sentence calls into question the nature of HCE's sexuality, suggesting that he displayed breasts. But given the context, this "fact" is unclear. If HCE had "buckgoat paps," this is no more than to say that he has male nipples, "buck" here being the name of a male goat. "Paps," in its turn, signifies both nipples and a soft, semi-liquid food suitable for babies, as well as material lacking real value, and, further, may indicate favors involving political patronage. These vernacular terms, deriving from Middle English, Old French, and the slang of Joyce's era, suggest the community-building of "mother tongues."

Regarding the referential function, let us consider this pair of quotations: Joyce pens, "Die eve, little eve, die!" Ogden translates, "She's dead, little Eve, little Eve she's dead," believing that Joyce intended to indicate that a small, female person named Eve had died. Such a reading makes no sense in the chapter; Ogden, in his translation, again disregards his own contention that context is crucial in determining meaning. In the context of the final pages of the "Anna Livia" chapter, one layer of Joyce's language suggests that as light fades from the sky, evening is becoming night. (The sentence opening the next chapter speaks of "lighting up" time—FW 219.01.) Another layer involves the conversation that the chapter's two washerwomen have with each other, "Die eve, little eve, die!" being a warning from the older, more experienced washerwoman to the younger, questioning washerwoman, to tone down her hopes and imagination as she has expressed these in the previous sentence. Ogden's translation errs in

activating cultural values that Joyce probably did not intend to be operative. That is, the sadness felt upon a child's death is simply inappropriate here. Further, Joyce's wording allows the return of another evening as the next day draws to a close, an instance of the recurring theme, "the same anew"; Ogden's "little Eve" does not contain that option.

Regarding language's mythic, sacralizing function, let us consider this final pair. Where Joyce writes, "Ho, Lord!" Ogden translates "O, Laws!" a decision that reveals as much about Ogden's secular vision as about Basic English. Joyce's phrase juxtaposes the sound of laughter with a word simultaneously designating God, Jesus, and persons bearing a variety of aristocratic titles. "Ho" inverts the word *oh*, an inversion mirrored in the juxtaposition of majesty with laughter.

While Ogden's Basic English does a quite serviceable job in translating the vehicular or informational function of language, this was the least relevant of Gobard's four layers in the night language of Joyce's *Wake*. Though Basic English may be well suited to convey information among those for whom English is a second language, it is a completely inadequate tool for translating *Finnegans Wake*. Only another living language, with all its accretions of the idiosyncrasies of vernaculars, cultural values, and a sense of the profound mysteries encompassing life—in addition to its information-bearing capacities—can do this. Fortunately, in the years since Ogden undertook his translation, the *Wake* has been translated in whole or part into at least a dozen languages.

While it is true that from the perspective of the late 1990s and the early 2000s, Joyce's, Ogden's, Jolas's, and Benjamin's efforts toward a "pure language" or a "universal language" that would be available to connect everyone on earth appear to be wonderfully—or perversely—naïve, their common pursuit reminds us that, in its universalizing tendencies, modernism may have been the Enlightenment's last gasp.

NOTES

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¹ C. K. Ogden, trans., "James Joyce's 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' in Basic English," *transition*, 21 (March 1932), 259-62. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

² Ogden, introduction to "James Joyce's 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' in Basic English" (p. 259); reprinted in Noel Riley Fitch, ed., *in transition: A Paris*

Anthology, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990), p. 135. Further references to the reprinted material will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Introduction."

³ Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1996), p. 142.

⁴ Ogden, preface to *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun. Three Fragments from "Work in Progress"* (Paris: Black Sun Press, 1929), pp. x-xi. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Preface."

⁵ At the 1994 Miami J'yce Conference, Tom Rice observed during a panel discussion that the fourth dimension, growing out of Albert Einstein's work with relativity, was important to the thought of modernist artists. Ogden's comment is one instance of this observation.

⁶ Roland McHugh, *Annotations to "Finnegans Wake,"* rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), p. 213-15. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁷ Ogden, *The Basic Vocabulary: A Statistical Analysis, with Special Reference to Substitution and Translation* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, 1930), and *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar*, 3rd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, 1932). Further references to *Basic English* will be cited parenthetically in the text as *Basic English*.

⁸ Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Company, 1923). Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *Meaning*.

⁹ Ogden, *The System of Basic English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934), pp. 298-303, and see H. G. Wells, *The Shape of Things To Come: The Ultimate Revolution* (London: Hutchinson, 1933). Further references to *The System of Basic English* will be cited parenthetically in the text as *System*.

¹⁰ Webster's *New World Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "Esperanto."

¹¹ Webster's *New World Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "Volapuk."

¹² Eugene Jolas, "The Innocuous Enemy," *transition* 16/17 (June 1929), 15, 12. Further references to this article will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Enemy."

¹³ Jolas, "A Review," *transition*, 12 (March 1928), 146-47. Jolas's connection with Joyce and with the literary experimentation that he was attempting in *transition* is examined extensively in Michael Finney, "Eugene Jolas, *transition*, and the Revolution of the Word," *TriQuarterly*, 38 (Winter 1977), 43.

¹⁴ Jolas, "Super-Occident," *transition*, 15 (February 1929), 15. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Super-Occident."

¹⁵ Jolas, "The Revolution of Language and James Joyce," *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of "Work in Progress,"* ed. Samuel Beckett et al. (London: Faber & Faber, 1929), p. 79. The quotation demonstrates the importance for modernists of Einstein's work with the relativity of time and space.

¹⁶ Dougald McMillan, "*transition*": *The History of a Literary Era 1927-1938* (New York: George Braziller, 1976), p. 199. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text. Jolas's quotation is from *transition*, 21 (p. 148).

¹⁷ Jolas, "The Revolution of Language and James Joyce," *transition*, 11

(February 1928), 112. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Revolution."

¹⁸ See Marcel Jousse, *Études de Psychologie Linguistique: Le Style Oral rythmique et mnémotechnique chez les verbo-moteurs* (Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1924), and Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova giusta l'edizione del 1744, con le varanti dell' edizione del 1730 e di due redazioni intermedo inedite e corredato di note storiche* (Bari: G. Laterza & figli, 1911).

¹⁹ I wish to thank Thomas Hardy Miles for bringing to my attention the connection between Joyce's and Carl Jung's beliefs.

²⁰ Richard Ellmann, himself a modernist, here joins the list of modernists whose paradigms about time and space have been influenced by Einstein's so-called fourth dimension.

²¹ Beckett, "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce," *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of "Work in Progress"* (pp. 7-8).

²² Joyce is quoted in Petr Skrabanek, "Finnegans Wake—Night Joyce of a Thousand Tiers," *James Joyce: The Artist and the Labyrinth*, ed. Augustine Martin (London: Ryan Publishers, 1990), p. 231.

²³ For Joyce's quotation, see Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon, *Understanding "Finnegans Wake": A Guide to the Narrative of James Joyce's Masterpiece* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1982), p. 114.

²⁴ Laurent Milesi, "The Dream of a Universal Language: A Typology of Foreign Languages in the Wake" (unpublished thesis, University of Dijon, 1983), pp. 11, 11-12. A copy of the thesis is housed in the Zurich James Joyce Foundation Library. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁵ See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1962), pp. 217, 268-69, 277-79.

²⁶ I am grateful to William H. A. Williams for this insight concerning McLuhan's interest in the *Wake*.

²⁷ Robert McAlmon, "Mr. Joyce Directs an Irish Word Ballet," *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of "Work in Progress"* (pp. 110-11).

²⁸ Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie, *The Pirates of Pen's Chance* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1981), p. 141.

²⁹ Cheryl B. Torsney, "Translation and Transubstantiation in *The American*," *Henry James Review*, 17 (Winter 1996), 49 n2.

³⁰ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 69. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³¹ Henri Gobard is quoted and interpreted in John Johnston, "Translation as Simulacrum," *Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge Publishers, 1992), p. 53.