
Book Section:
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"Now listen, Mr Leer!": Joyce's Lear

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In Richard Ellmann's copy of Beckett's Murphy is pasted a limerick written by Joyce dated 30th April 1939:

> There's a mauvusmarked maggot called Murphy
> Who would fain be thought thunder-and-turfy.
> When he's out to be chic he
> Sticks on his gum dicky
> And worms off for a breeze by the surfy[1]

Murphy suffered from a naevus, not maevus, on his buttocks, a growth and birthmark which entrances Celia: it is what solders their relations for Murphy, for she alone has touched the mark. Joyce jostles the letters slightly to create 'maevusmarked': therefore marked by the power of Maeve or Medb, the Irish queen of Connacht, so subject to the seductions of Irish tradition and Revival-fuelled legend; or, marked at birth as subject to unassuageable Irish desire; or, subject to thirst, for 'Maeve' means 'intoxicated' (apt for the drunken Murphy). The vision of Murphy in his dicky bow by the sea raises the ghost of Dedalus, and bawdy haunts the verse (the gum dicky worm on the prowl). Joyce is acknowledging the comic common ground between the young

[1] Poems and Shorter Writings, ed. Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz & John Whittier-Ferguson (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 151.

acolyte and the old Joyce, Beckett/Murphy seeking to be thought of as older than his years, a hundred and thirty, as well as properly godlike-Joycean-Irish (like the thunderword god that drives Finnegans Wake along, turfy as a peat bog). The teasing works partly because the form is reputedly Irish – limericks, after all, were said to come from Limerick, though there is no evidence of the use of the title 'limerick' as associated with the form before late nineteenth century.[2] The anapestic rhythm, the silly rhyming, the low humour of the form binds Joyce and Beckett as though 'Limericked' together, in the language of the Wake (67.18). Yet the very use of the limerick in Joyce's occasional verse repertoire is indebted to the Englishman Edward Lear whose work started the craze for the form in the 19th century and whose nonsense kept it alive into the 20th. Something of the turn from the 'young' innocence of the limerick as deployed by Lear to the 'old' nonsense of the Irish modernists is traceable in Joyce's tribute to Murphy: for something has occurred to return the limerick to its older and repressed obscene roots, from Lear's nose (upon which the birds of the air repose) to the gum dicky worm. In this chapter, I will be looking at the connections between language play and animal comedy in Lear and Joyce, and thinking about limericks in terms of modernist post-Freudian jokes: both consciously post-Victorian through Joyce's deliberately provocative innuendo, as well as more subtly staging continuities between Lear's radical language playground and modernist exploration of taboo.

Parody and comic poetry pepper Joyce's letters, as though he saw a relation between the intimate language of correspondence and the joshing, racy camaraderie of parody and light verse. A letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver in June 1925, for instance, details his most recent health difficulties; then moves on to news about early drafts of

[2] C. Grant Loomis, 'American Limerick Traditions', Western Folklore Vol. 22, No. 3 (Jul., 1963), 153-157 (p. 153).

the Wake, and finally to the fact the painter Patrick Tuohy is coming to paint him. It is this that triggers the comedy, for Joyce falls into a strange muddle syntactically: 'He certainly wants me to pose myself and he certainly wants himself to pose me for himself and certainly he does now be wanting to paint me posed by himself, himself for myself. (With apologies to Miss Gertrude Stein)'.[3] The tangle confuses the posing affectation and self-love of the painter with Joyce's self-involvements as grand old man to be admired and preserved for posterity: the Irishness of the debunking raillery ('do be wanting') kick-starts the comedy as Joyce amuses Shaw Weaver with the parody of Stein (he follows quickly with jokey versions of Pound and McAlmon). The Stein sentence emerges from his own news, and foregrounds his own relationship to Shaw Weaver as patron (also as future editor of his letters) insofar as he understood the need to remain cheerful[4] to amuse the gaze of the other who gives and enables representation to the world (Tuohy and Weaver). It also acts as an instance of the comedy of the Wake itself, its giant parodic machinery, its rhythms and fusional identities (Wyndham Lewis had provocatively accused Joyce of being in the Stein clan of time-servers).[5] The letter is an act of self-representation, and the jokes play with the patron's gaze, hinting at the same 'ape of god' appropriation of the artist for which the Stein parody mocks Tuohy. Affection may be governing the ground rules of the letter, yet its surface brio goes Irish on Shaw Weaver as though demarcating difference from the English money, as from the Catholic Nationalist Tuohy, as from Stein's American modernism. The apologies to Stein give a measure of the limits of

[3] Letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 13 June 1925, Letters of James Joyce, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), 227-29 (p. 228).

[4] A letter to Shaw Weaver says precisely this on 27 June 1924 (Letters, p. 217).

[5] Time and Western Man has chapters on both Joyce and Stein. Wyndham Lewis, Time and Western Man (1927) (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993)

portraiture in an age of aping hype, whilst finding energy and comic relief in a special kind of nonsense, the nonsense of a radical comedy of the word. The locutions of Irish ('himself' and 'certainly') blossom into a crazy foolishness that undoes the self, removes surety, makes a fool of the self-fashioning poseur's desires and greedy ontological manoeuvres: 'he certainly wants himself to pose me for himself'. The satire here is indebted, however, to a very Irish solidarity with the fellow artist at another level: Tuohy, he told Shaw Weaver in an earlier letter, 'as you may have seen from his eyes […] is very malicious'.[6]

It is this complex sensing of the cash nexus, fame's spinning of public reputation around secret motivations, art's language-game weave of representations which Joyce's comic verse in his letters stage again and again; as though poking fun is always a dramatizing of the act of self-presentation, which is the matter of precarious and radical art. Nevertheless, critically, the dramatization has to be light-hearted, play with a folk slapstick even, properly to capture the specifically Irish (self-) mocking, rhizomatic creativity that observes the observing self under observation. And the limericks in the letters stand out as perfect exemplars of this. A postcard to Claud Sykes in 1917, for instance, carried this little limerick about patron John Quinn:

There's a donor of lavish largesse
Who once bought a play in MS
    He found out what it all meant
    By the final instalment
But poor Scriptor was left in a mess.

(Poems and Shorter Writings, p. 117)

[6] Letter to Shaw Weaver, 27 June 1924, Letters 215-17 (p. 217).

Quinn had bought the manuscript of Exiles and Joyce is here unpacking the little trap he felt locked up in as a result: being beholden to donors and suffering the importunities of a largesse which masks philistine incomprehension of the art project, whilst all the time remaining subject to the poverty and chaotic days of Grub Street. The limerick form is wry, however, about the predicament, pitching it in such a way so as to poke mild-mannered fun at the language medium of the art: note the poker-faced cod clumsiness of the extra-syllabic stutter and accentual disaster of 'He found 'out what it 'all 'meant / By the 'final inst'al'ment'. The very act of scripting plays for money and the indignity of hawking them around eats away comically at the language, leaving a mess of style.

One might speculate that Joyce learnt this from Lear. Lear's letters are also full of parody, self-mockery, a sensing of the artist's peculiarities within a world of mercantile representations. A letter to Chichester Fortescue in July 1859 from Rome parodies Clough's Amours de Voyage, thereby occupying the point of view of Claude's aimless loveless misanthropy in Italy, as well as adopting the anapestic hexameter:

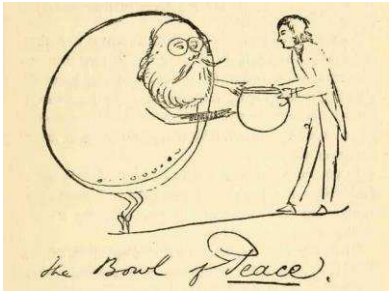
> Bother all painting! I wish I'd 200 per annum!
> Wouldn't I sell all my colours and brushes and damnable messes!
> Over the world I should rove, North, South, East and West, I would
> Marrying a black girl at last, and slowly preparing to walk into Paradise![7]

[7] Letters of Edward Lear to Chichester Fortescue, Lord Carlingford and Frances Countess Waldegrave, edited Lady Strachey (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), p.

The rhymes have the ghost of limerick rhythm haunting them; one could almost parse one from the lines by judicial cuts at the line-endings, and internal rhymes support this, almost:

> Bother all painting! I wish!
> Wouldn't I sell all my colours and brushes!
> Over the world I should rove,
> North, South, East and West,
> Marrying a black girl at last! (Lear, Letters, p. 143)

The artful abandonment of art, the roving wanderer figure, the exotic transgressive love life abroad: this is the Byron of Beppo, caught up in the money trap of the indigent scholar-gypsy, and reproducing family folly (his brother Charles reputedly married a West African woman, Adjouah, as a missionary). The self-deprecation, his art as 'damnable messes', the hint of melancholy in the idea of a future waiting for death, all this is turned on its head by the high-ball parodic glee; the curse at painting and of the neediness of the patronised is itself resisted with a sketch that immediately follows these lines:



(Lear, Letters, p. 143)

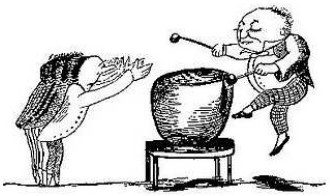
Lear's self-portrait as 'this Globular foolish Topographer' ridicules his own rotundity, and his own begging bowl relations to the patrons of art. At the same time it rounds

on the younger receiver of the gift, the bowl resembling the egglike self as though Lear was aware that this letter itself were a little part of him being given. Beneath the sketch he tells Fortescue he will try to find time 'to make a queer Alphabet, / All with the letters beversed and be-aided with pictures, / Which I shall give – (but don't tell him just yet) to Charles Braham's little one' (Letters, p. 143). The sketch might be one of those pictures, for the letter B, the giant letter split into two pieces, the circles of Lear and bowl. Lear balloons up on tiptoe, his head an owl, the whole a B-owl become bowl become globe, a whole world of verse and pictures being offered as gift to Fortescue, just as these letters, with their topography, wit and sketch, offer globular Lear as peace offering to the world. It is telling that that gift is compared to the alphabet book gift to a very young child, a flourishing of the double art out of the stuff of language ('letters beversed and be-aided with pictures'). Lear gives of himself as a globe of language-art designed for the child mind, queer Alphabetical 'perfectly spherical' orb of the lettered-picturesque.

It is Lear's limericks which fashion an awkward identity for the artist and present that awkwardness as beautifully pitched between startled apprehension of the ways of the world and comically vital and lively imaging of the self's eccentricities. The artist is figured as songster, as musician, as dancer, as keen observer of nature, and always disguised as childish creature subject to prejudicial ire and satire. The Old Man with a gong, for instance, bumps it all day long, Lear acknowledging the awkward amateurishness that dogged his own sense of his artistic self; the art receives only derision and violent disdain: 'But they called out, "O law! / You're a horrid old bore!" / So they smashed that Old Man with a gong.'[8] The illustration which

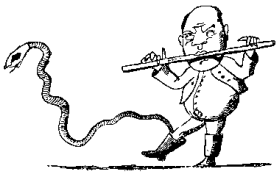
[8] Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense, edited Vivien Noakes (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 160.

accompanies it reveals the artist floating in the air as he bounces with his bumps, eyes closed, self-absorbed, rising in ecstasy as he dances up and up; and his audience seem to be applauding but are in fact reaching for the gong and aiming their gong-tormented wills (eyelines along their outstretched arms) at the Old Man's large head.



The Old Man has Lear's rotundity, and the Bowl of Peace is here the gong of his art, the egg-rich medium for a childish playful creativity that binds together the sound-music of the poet and a Romantic painter's greedily kinetic making: the two drum mallets signifying the double art. It is greedy because it initiates ecstatic feeding of the body: gongs were becoming popular to summon Victorians to their food.

Similarly, the 'Old Man with a flute' attracts a snake to his boot with his music, as though art were dangerously Orphic; yet the same art can exorcise the sin, snake shooed from boot, as we see when the flautist plays 'day and night': 'the "sarpint" took flight / And avoided that man with a flute' (p. 162).



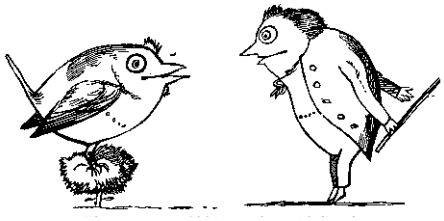
Note how Lear connects the flute to the 'sarpint' in the sketch, the snake a fluid version of the double flute, like a line of music. Why the boot, however? The strange dream indecency and magic of this is repressed and exorcised by the art's comic light-headedness which turns the threat to language game ('took flight' crossing 'take fright' with 'take to one's heels') and sketch-joke (the visual rhyme of flute and

snake) imaging Lear's double medium. The double flute figures both pen and brush, and the sounds from the breath, there on the page as words, snake their way into squiggly line drawing too.

For Lear, the eccentricity of the artist figure is correlative partly to a post-Romantic marginalizing of the bardic child of nature in the new culture of the 19th century, and partly to the felt proximity of the intensity of an artist's acts of attention to the morbidity and passionate fixations of the mad. We can see this in the limerick work that construes the darker affect of the isolate mind as the sleep of reason, as mental nonsense: the shallow comedy of the limerick form somehow holds these darknesses at bay or nestles them in comforting cottonwool, enabling a play with the illogic. There are limericks that attend to fixations with the natural world taken to absurd extremes, in a post-Romantic downward spiral into unreason. There are the bird fetish limericks, for instance, mockingly matching Lear's own ornithological art, such as the Old Man with the beard full of nesting birds, and the young Lady with the bonnet which birds sit upon.[9] The eccentrics' heads are full of birds, one is invited to reason, because they resemble Romantic poets identifying so strongly with their nightingales and skylarks, singers in nature like they are, their heads become nests. Some of Lear's people become flying creatures due to the intensity of their association with the world of flight: they climb trees to become like flocking birds, in ways that transgress and need to be redressed (the Old Man in a tree being horribly bored by the gigantic bee; the Old Man of Dundee who frequents 'the top of a tree'

[9] The relation between Lear and birds has been brilliantly explored by Matthew Bevis in his Chatterton lecture, 'Edward Lear's Lines of Flight', Journal of the British Academy, 1 (2013), pp. 31–69 – available here: http://www.britac.ac.uk/journal/1/bevis.cfm

until the crows disturb his birdlike peace; the Old Person of Jodd squeaking her whistle on the thistle-tree, the Old Person of Crowle screaming in the nest of owls).[10] The Old Man who said 'Hush!' is the most iconic: his gaze on the bird in the bush is so intense it both magnifies the bird and turns his own body into the bird:



(Nonsense Omnibus, p. 173)

Again, the comedy of the language and of the artwork redeems any surreal darkness, such as the play on the proverbial 'bird in the bush', or the eye-rhyme between the bird's wings and the man's tails and arms, and between the bird's tail and the man's stick (as pen or brush?). The fixations that transform the observer/artist persona can also switch into nightmare, as when the Old Man of Quebec suffers the giant beetle running over his neck (p. 85), or the Old Person in Black with the huge grasshopper on his back (p. 333). Or they can become innocently benign – the eccentrics who resemble birds (the Old Person of Nice 'Whose associates were usually Geese' [p. 360], or the Old Man of Dunblane 'Who greatly resembled a crane' [p. 362]),[11] or those who care for their animals with excessive love, like the Young Lady of Bute who plays jigs for her uncle's white pigs on her flute, the Old Lady of France teaching ducklings how to dance, the Old Man of Whitehaven dancing the quadrille with the raven, the Old Person of Hove studying his books 'With the Wrens and the Rooks', the Old Man of Dumbree teaching owls to drink tea, the Old Person of Cannes

[10] The Complete Verse, pp. 161, 100, 355, 369.

[11]

fanning fowls with a fan, the Old Person in Gray feeding her parrots carrots, or the Old Person of Skye waltzing with the bluebottle Fly (pp. 73, 346, 172, 352, 354, 364, 368, 377). Either way, Lear seems to be exploring the relations of anima to animal, as though the beast fable of the animal limericks fables the beasting of the observer, a discovery of the weird logic underpinning Romantic ideology. The Romantic artist details the natural world, just as Lear's 'serious' paintings tracked birds and landscapes, because, the limericks surmise, the natural world releases the animal in men and women as creative core and as morbid isolating unconscious. The creative unconscious is animal, these limericks say in cryptic sketch and trivializing rhyme.

Joyce's beast fables in the Wake play, activated by the same surreal energy, with the relations of language to the anima-animal borderline. We have a Lear-like fascination with bird identities: Anna Livia as Isis bird of paradise, 'she comes, a peacefugle, a parody's bird', dressed in the feathery guise of parody;[12] Hosty as the wren, the wren, the king of all birds ('for he's the mann to rhyme the rann, the rann, the rann, the king of all ranns' [44.16-17]); bards becoming birds in the sleep of reason at the twilight border ('the hour of the twattering bards in the twitterlitter between Druidia and the Deepsleep Sea' [37.17-18]); the text of the Wake itself discovered by the hen Biddy Doran ('a lookmelittle likemelong hen' [111.33]); and 'Muster Mark', the 'rummest old rooster ever flopped out of Noah's ark' (383.9). Birds are a key motif in the book, with references ranging from play with the myth of mad King Sweeney nesting in trees, or with the 'Who Killed Cock Robin?' nursery rhyme, to the dense bird textures of the Tristan and Isolde legend, the birds eerie witnesses to the Oedipal triangle of the two lovers and King Mark (who themselves

[12] Finnegans Wake (London: Faber & Faber, 1939) p. 11, line 9 – henceforth in following format (11.09).

turn into bird creatures), gazing down from the topmast tree of the ship: 'Overhoved, shrillgleescreaming. That song sang seaswans. The winging ones. Seahawk, seagull, curlew and plover, kestrel and capercallzie. All the birds of the sea they trolled out rightbold when they smacked the big kuss of Trustan with Usolde' (38315-18). As with Lear's limericks, the turn to language game hushes the strangeness of the transformations in the Wake too. The bird in the bush staring at the man who said 'hush!' has its counterpart in Finnegans Wake, with a similar querying of the marginality of those prone to mental flights of fancy: 'Bide in your hush! Bide in your hush, do! The law does not aloud you to shout' (305.24-6).

But what differentiates Joyce from Lear is of course the unrepressed bawdy that Joyce's nighttime modernist frankness has released from censorship. The alliance of human and animal involved in the beast fabling of limerick and Wake nonsense may tally with Lear's sense of the animal as unconscious, but it is the sexual unconscious for Joyce. 'Is the Co-Education of Animus and Anima Wholly Desirable?' (307.3-4), the children are asked in the study room; the question addresses the risk of mixing genders, but also of mixing anima and animal, as Izzy's footnote reminds us. She takes the mixing to mean boy and girl, so thinks of fairy tales used in teaching, and jokes that co-education is like putting Jack of Jack and the Beanstalk together with Red Riding Hood. What she writes, though, is 'Jests and the Beastalk with a little rude hiding rod' (307, note 1). The tales meant for children, under the pressure of bawdy jesting, release the animal unconscious into the language (beast talk) and its sexual focus is discovered as repressed phallic reality (rod, beast-stalk). It is as though Lear's snake escaping from the flautist's boot were to turn and speak its names, little rude hiding rod, beast-stalk, desirable animus/anima. Lear's nonsense has grown up and the beast encounters turn nasty, turn into evidence of how adults feed off children, how we psychoanalyse fairytale and children's story and

discover adult sexuality there ('we grisly old Sykos who have done our unsmiling bit on 'alices, when they were yung and easily freudened' [115.21-23]). In the post-Freudian dream world, Wonderland (or the land where the Jumblies live) becomes the zone where the psychoanalytic encounter of analyst and analysand (psychoanalysis as 'Sykos […] on 'alices') mirrors the paedophiliac/incestuous Carroll-Alice relationship it is discovering in the dreams of the child. The child is vulnerable (young and easily frightened) in this new way, for Joyce: the beasts encountered in dreams turn into figureheads for the phallic grisly Sykos trained in Jung and Freud. The nightscape of the unconscious, which Lear with some trepidation cast light on with his nonsense, becomes the dark shadowy sexual arena of the psychoanalytic setting: 'in the penumbra of the procuring room' (115.24).

Such is the power of this transferential transformation of dream and child by psychoanalysis that it is clear that the nonsense of Lear has also fallen under the penumbra of a Carroll-like procuring of the verse. The darker limericks stage suicidal impulse that veers towards the repressed zones discovered by Freud. The Old Man whose despair makes him purchase a Hare, for instance, runs 'wholly away' on its back, the illustration featuring a grimly dreaming face whilst a hand holds the phallic tail of the hare behind as they rush towards oblivion.[13] The 'Old Man at a Junction' has his feeling 'wrung with compunction' and, although the train is gone (trailing dark smoke at the horizon in the sketch), he remains wailing his melancholy on the rails, awaiting annihilation (Nonsense Omnibus, p. 146). 'Compunction' has a double sense: either remorse for one's own sins, or sorrows for the suffering of others, and its

[13] Thomas Dilworth notes that the man's other hand stretches down between his legs as though in masturbatory pose. Cf. 'Edward Lear's Suicide Limerick', Review of English Studies (1995) XLVI (184): 535-538

etymology points to a pricking sensation, a puncturing. The Old Man is being pointed at in the sketch, just as the lines of the rails pass through his body, it seems, before ruling their way to the vanishing point of death. How his feelings are wrung is visible in the scrunched up form as though his own 'railtrain' has been torn from his body.

The Young Lady in White inhabits a Goya-esque world, the illustration mimicking the etching 'El sueño de la razón produce monstruos' ('From the sleep of reason monsters come') from Caprichos:

(*Nonsense Omnibus*, p. 344)

(Wikipedia – public domain)

The Young Lady looks out 'at the depths of the Night' but the 'birds of the air' that so fascinate the mind of Lear's eccentrics have a more baleful purpose at Night, for they fill 'her heart with despair' and oppress the Young Lady in White. The white/night opposition so central to the black and white sketches of the limerick art begins to blur and smudge, the birds ill-defined, smeary and grey, the night a wash of darkness. The Lady tapers off in her eerie flying posture, her arms holding her steady as though at a sill or wall, but curved and hooked as though turning into bird. The transfixed gaze at the owl with ghostly ghastly human features is odd too, the eyes swiveling up slightly whilst a dark scarf chokes her at the neck. The art matches the quiet melancholy of the limerick: the 'white'-'night' rhyme seeps into the rest of the language, through half-rhyme connections with 'looked out' and 'heart' and the 'e-s-t' phonemes in

'oppressed', like the blurry wash of the sketch. The rhyming sustains an eerie mirroring of 'birds of the air' with 'heart with despair', as though the heart were the birds. From the sleep of reason birds of the air come, the predatory death-owls of the unconscious: the Lady in White rises as from her bed as dream self in contact with the night-creatures of her heart's depths. What has been repressed now oppresses, pressing into the daytime of the book and page with the ink of another world.

The scene is, of course, uncanny, but it also uncannily anticipates one of Freud's dreams, the dream of the Bird-Beaked Figures. Freud remembers a childhood nightmare where he witnesses 'my beloved mother, with a peculiarly calm, sleeping countenance, carried into the room and laid on the bed by two (or three) persons with *birds'* beaks. I awoke crying and screaming, and disturbed my parents' sleep'.[14] As Ronald Thomas has argued, the dream brings his mother into his room out of the room where she had been sleeping:

> It is difficult to imagine a more explicitly expressed wish for the mother than this picture of her being brought into the room of the dreamer and 'laid upon the bed'. The vacillation in the dream account between the numbers 'two' and 'three' expresses the dynamic of the oedipal triangle, especially since the father is not mentioned in the scene.[15]

[14] Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, transl. A. A. Brill (1900) (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1997) p. 419.

[15] Ronald R. Thomas, Dreams of Authority: Freud and the Fictions of the Unconscious (Cornell UP, 1990), p. 44.

The beaked figures reference the Egyptian falcon-god Horus and his attachment to his mother Isis – Freud had a statuette of Isis suckling Horus on his desk. The dream stages the death of the mother, as well as the sexual wish, and as a nightmare its horror lies as much in the boy's fear of the bird creatures who lethally control the mother's body. Freud also has something to say about birds in dreams and delusions when analyzing Schreber's paranoid belief that the magical rays sent by God were creating birds to shout and torment him from the outside if and when he managed to calm the nerve-voices in his mind's ear:

> as soon as the 'inner voices' are thus silenced, the rays must approach again and I hear words as from the talking birds impinging on my ears from outside. What they say is naturally immaterial to me; one will readily understand that – having got used to it through the years – I am no longer hurt when the birds shout at me (or more correctly lisp at me) 'Are you ashamed' (in front of your wife)? and suchlike. All this exemplifies the truth of the saying that every nonsense carried to extremes destroys itself in the end – a truth which the lower God (Ariman) repeatedly affirmed in the phrase 'All nonsense cancels itself out.'[16]

For Freud, these talking birds figured young girls carping at the inadequate, shameful male using rote language:[17] and indeed, Schreber states that he gave girls' names to

[16] Daniel Paul Schreber, Memoirs of My Nervous Illness, transl. Ida Macalpine (1903) (New York: New York Review of Books, 2000), p. 273.

[17] Freud, Standard Edition of the Complete Works, ed. Strachey, J. (1958) Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works. (London: Vintage Classics, 2001), p. 36.

the bird-souls because they were like little girls ‘in their curiosity, their inclination to voluptuousness, etc.’ (Memoirs, p. 195). But the matter goes deeper, for, for Schreber, the words chirruped by the birds are heavy with putrescent deadness, Leichengift, the poison of corpses, since the birds carry the souls of the dead. Lear’s Lady in White is being oppressed by death-birds that speak with the language of the dead, close to signifying the girlhood of the dying/dead mother, but come from the other world to speak of shame in the maddening discourse of nonsense. The chirruping chatter of the soul-birds is the darker nonsense of madness as deranged language, which only training in higher forms of nonsense can undo. At the same time, the suicidal impulse of a mind that welcomes the destruction of the unconscious is audible in the accents of ‘All nonsense cancels itself out.’

It is Freudian material such as this—Freud’s dreams, Schreber’s delusions—that creates the penumbra, turning all children’s verse and its double art of lettered pictures into family romance beast fable. Finnegans Wake is in many ways a simple demonstration of the unavoidably erotic nature of language post-Freud, but which also creaks open the doors of the sexual unconscious to overhear the self-cancelling nonsense that chatters at night to the mind’s ear. And it is the limerick which, among many other popular genres and sub-genres, returns to its obscene roots in folk bawdy in the Wake, where Joyce deconstructs the language, the ‘nonsery reams’ (619.18), issuing from the signifying unconscious. The Wake returns to the obscene limerick as to the real ‘phallic’ root of the form, yet encodes it within a fog of words that muffle and disguise the song and its potential picture-thinking. As Raphael Slepon and his invaluable FWEET website shows, a celebrated bawdy limerick is hidden away on

page 534.[18] The passage is about HCE's libeller, forger and accuser, one of Shem's shameful personae:

> **the best begrudged man in Belgradia who doth not belease to our paviour**) to my nonesuch, that highest personage at moments holding down the throne. So to speak of beauty scouts in elegant pursuit of flowers, searchers for tabernacles and the celluloid art! Happen seen sore eynes belived? The caca cad! **He walked *by North Strand with his Thom's towel in hand***. Snakeeye! Strangler of soffiacated green parrots! I protest it that he is, by my wipehalf. He was leaving out of my double inns while he was all teppling over my single ixits. **So was keshaned on for his recent behaviour**. Sherlook is lorking for him. (Bold italics mine indicating limerick; 534.22-31)

The underlying, limerick being bowlderized here is given by Slepon as 'There was a young man from Belgravia / Who believed not in God nor in Saviour / He walked down the Strand / With his balls in his hand / And was had up for indecent behavior.' The dream-rewrite Europeanizes and Irishizes the young man (he lives in Belgrade and/or Dublin where the North Strand replaces London's Strand), just as it turns the limerick back from Lear's innocent nonsense to the male sexual madness of the bar-room, tool in hand. And yet the return to bawdy is itself subject to other forms of censorship: for the limerick is hidden away in HCE's defence against the 'caca cad'; it muffles the overt indecency of its original: 'his balls' becomes 'his Thom's towel' (for tool), and even the word 'indecent' is veered away from as 'recent'. HCE uses

[18] Finnegans Wake Extensible Elucidation Treasury (FWEET) website: http://fweet.org/ [Accessed 11.02.2015].

libel to defend himself against his accuser, but the protest stresses the cad's drunkenness, and buries the limerick bawdy within its amorphous prose. Joyce shows sexual nonsense rising to the surface of the language, but catches the ego-defences in the act of repressing the evidence, enacting dream censorship, sublimation, condensation, lapses and translations.

The limerick, for Joyce, because of the new psychology and its revelations, must return to bawdy; but it must also turn Lear into one of the Sykos guiltily ogling little girls, like Carroll with Alice, Schreber with his soul-birds, Freud with his Dora. In the opening section accusing HCE of sexual misdemeanours in Phoenix Park, the narrator speaks with the voice of the accuser: 'Now listen, Mr Leer! And stow that sweatyfunnyadams Simper! Take an old geeser who calls on his skirt' (65.4-6). Lear has become the leering 'old geeser' rather than the innocent Old Man of the limericks. The limerick expands and becomes sickening innuendo-marked prose:

> He vows her to be his own honeylamb, swears they will be papa pals, by Sam, and share good times way down west in a guaranteed happy lovenest when May moon she shines and they twit twinkle all the night, combing the comet's tail up right and shooting popguns at the stars. Creampuffs all to dime! (65.7-14)

This can be set with a ghost of a limerick shape and rhythm, though with a massively bloated last line:

> He vows her to be his own honeylamb,
> swears they will be papa pals, by Sam,
> and share good times way down west
> in a guaranteed happy lovenest

when May moon she shines and they twit twinkle all the night,

combing the comet's tail up right and shooting popguns at the stars.

Creampuffs all to dime!

The limerick is saturated with a parodic impulse that has deviated from the unconscious depths of language and become merely social, dead-textual, cynically clichéd. The soul-birds speak the rote language not of the dead but of deadened discourse. The theme of the parody-deranged nonsense here is a low-down Americanized idiom modernizing the romance of Lear's gaze on couples in his nonsense, turning it trashy. And the couple turns quickly within the paragraph into a threesome, with the grandpa dreaming of canoodling two girls not one (like Noah dreaming of women coming two by two like the animals). They occupy the little boat of romance, like Lear's owl and pussycat, but again sexualized, cheap and tacky, cliché-ridden like a dime romance:

> he would like to canoodle her too some part of the time for he is downright fond of his number one but O he's fair mashed on peaches number two so that if he could only canoodle the two, chivee chivoo, all three would feel genuinely happy, it's as simple as A. B. C., the two mixers, we mean, with their cherrybum chappy (for he is simply shamming dippy) if they all were afloat in a dreamlifeboat, hugging two by two in his zoo-doo-you-doo, a tofftoff for thee, missymissy for me and howcameyou-e'enso for Farber, in his tippy, upindown dippy, tiptoptippy canoodle, can you? Finny. (65.26-33)

The rhymes arrange the prose into ghost limerick rhyme-scheme but doubled up, like the girl, from five lines to ten – effectively abandoning the limerick's ship for the dreamlifeboat of unctuous romance and popular song:

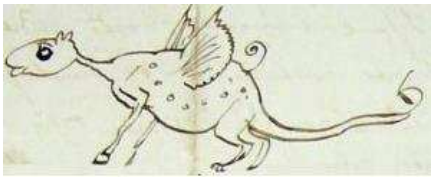
> he would like to canoodle her too […]
> O he's fair mashed on peaches number two
> so that if he could only canoodle the two,
> chivee chivoo,
> all three would feel genuinely happy,
> it's as simple as A. B. C.,
> the two mixers, we mean, with their cherrybum chappy
> (for he is simply shamming dippy)
> if they all were afloat in a dreamlifeboat, hugging two by two in his zoo-doo-you-doo,
> a tofftoff for thee, missymissy for me and howcameyou-e'enso f
> or Farber, in his tippy, upindown dippy,
> tiptoptippy canoodle, can you?

The limerick, doubling all the time, may reveal the sexual wish fulfilment hidden away in the form; yet at the same time it obscures and censors, through bloated parody, the depths of darkness that Lear's limerick art gives as gift.

Equally, however, as the nonsense self-destructs according to the logic of the innuendo machine, the doubling effect Joyce indulges here has a curiously Learlike energy at the local level of the sentence sound. The repetitions of 'toff', 'missy' and 'tippy' in the final line of the double limerick enact the 'two by two' doubling that is the textual materialisation of the Ark motif. But what makes the ark of the Wake sentence a 'dreamlifeboat' is its local release of a different kind of nonsense, a lingual

dreamy delighting in phonemic flourishing, whereby letters become graphemic objects with zany metabolic energy all of their own. With 'his tippy, upindown dippy, tiptoptippy canoodle', Joyce is replicating Lear's way with words, a slanginess that breeds a playfulness of high rhyme and jesting sound-reduplications for their own damn sake. A comparable patch of Learese might be his letter of 18th November 1858:

> O mi! how giddy I is! – Perhaps it is along of the cliff of Ain Giddi: perhaps of the glass of sherry & water close by – only I ain't drank it yet.
>
> I wen tup two the Zoological Gardings, & drew a lot of Vulchers: also I saw the eagles & seagles & beagles & squeegles: likewise the big bears & all the other vegetables.



> also the little dragging, who is the Beast of Revialations. (Lear, Letters, p. 117)

Lear's boyish lunacy allows the words to reproduce, following a phonemic logic that laughs at the need for semantic sense – 'eagles' duplicates, triplicates, quadruplicates till it hits nonsense with 'squeegles'; the 'ea' of 'eagles' hops across into 'bears', whilst 'tup two' 'Vulchers' and 'beagles' generates 'vegetables' for cross-species fun. We leave the Zoo into nonsense fantasy with the 'dragging', the 'Beast' issuing both from the animal topic, but also from the phoneme-pool ('tup two … seagles & beagles & squeegles'). The whole phonemic 'Jinglish Janglage' ((FW 275, fn) begins with the

words Joyce uses (‘tiptoptippy’) to create the tiptop-heavy ‘doubling’ rhyming environment, yet its Revialations have no hint of a violating indecency, despite the naked camel of a dragon in the sketch and its arrow-like tail.

Joyce’s wordgames are coloured, in contrast, by a release of libidinal energies, the canoe of the sentence-sound turning into a canoodling of jingling jangling phonemes into patterns designed to be sexily playful. The ‘tiptoptippy’ word play draws its energy from the unconscious of language, the seething pool of phrase (tip of the tongue, tipping a wink, tipping the boat), slang (tiptop), and polysemy (tip as top of something, as shared secret information, as gratuity, as phallic head, etc.) which the mind plays around with. And Joyce’s sense of the language unconscious is that it too is libidinous, and not innocently Learlike and childlike.

The word-objects generated by sheer play in Lear, like the nutcrackers, sugar-tongs, broom, shovel, poker of the nonsense verse, are animate with animal high spirits. The words are jumbled up with tumbling, rumbling nonsensical energy that has to be expressed, like the Old Man of Spithead having to open his window to utter: ‘“Fil-jomble, fil-jumble, / Fil-rumble-come-tumble!”’ (p. 353) The very words here speak to their own curious crazy anarchy: they act like brimfully quixotic, random, mixed-up things that tumble out of the ‘inside’ mind. No trace of sexuality is explicitly here, despite the fact that both ‘jumble’ and ‘tumble’ have been used to mean sex. This is not to countermand the possibility of sexuality within Lear’s nonsense world: it is just that Joyce’s bawdy registers the discretion and relative innocence of the texts.

In Joyce’s Wake, the objects are verbal too, yet act like highly sexualized part-objects in the inner world of the dreamer ‘child’. Shem’s house of Shame, for instance, is crammed full of things that dare (not) tell their names, which include, from a much longer list:

> fallen lucifers, vestas which had served, showered ornaments, borrowed brogues, reversibles jackets, blackeye lenses, family jars, falsehair shirts, Godforsaken scapulars, neverworn breeches, cutthroat ties, counterfeit franks, best intentions, curried notes, upset latten tintacks, unused mill and stumpling stones, twisted quills, painful digests, magnifying wineglasses, solid objects cast at goblins, once current puns, quashed quotatoes, messes of mot-tage, unquestionable issue papers, seedy ejaculations, limerick damns (183.16-24)

The eye examines the array of things with both fervour and dreamy squalid suspicion, noting the evidence of damnation (scattered matches signalling 'fallen lucifers'), evil family complexes ('cutthroat ties' implies a murderous cutting away of familial bonds), bad habits ('magnifying wineglasses' meaning something like this eye spies alcoholism through its Sherlockian magnifying glass), bad style (the 'messes of mottage' gives Joyce-as-Shem-as-Cain away). The list turns nasty as it proceeds from style to sex, the masturbatory core of Shem's shamebred art visible in the mess of his room ('unquestionable issue papers, seedy ejaculations'), ending here with Shem's most shameful genre, the damned bawdy limerick. Objects inhabit this 'room' as 'once current puns, quashed quotatoes' (that is, as language recycled according to the dictates of wit), but retain a thing-like energy that explodes two ways, as dream object ('quashed quotatoes' as mashed potatoes) and as witty giveaway (the potatoes somehow signal Shem's destructive way with tradition, perhaps because the mess of the room always already 'means', in the world of dream interpretation, transgressive drives and dark will). Like all such signs in the Wake, the post-Freudian shamebred

music of language issues from the part-object word-things that hiss dark secrets of the family romance. Objects in the room speak the language of the unconscious, the room's furniture fetishized through both introjection and projective identification, revealing the haunting and tormenting of self by dark double:

> self exiled in upon
> his ego, a nightlong a shaking betwixtween white or reddr haw-
> rors, noondayterrorised to skin and bone by an ineluctable phan-
> tom (may the Shaper have mercery on him!) writing the mystery
> of himsel in furniture (184.6-10)

This is the space of self-destructive nonsense that yet speaks as language-unconscious: it issues from Lear's papers, yet as open secret, as damned limerick, as quashed quotation; it damns itself whilst joking its way out of the mess of its disharmonies.

The oddballs in Lear's limericks have benign and suicidal sides to them, and Joyce may have been right to identify the sexlessness of 19th century nonsense as being shameful in its absolute self-censorship. There are other kinds of limerick creature, however, that are more dangerous – neither innocent eccentrics nor deathwish dreamers. They are the angry and furious and violent, the gargantuan consumers, hungry wolfish eaters of the world. They include the Old Person of Newry, with the manners all 'tinctured with fury': 'He tore all the Rugs, / And broke all the Jugs, / Within twenty miles' distance of Newry' (244). The Old Person of Bangor, with the face 'distorted with anger!': 'He tore off his boots, / And subsisted on roots, / That irascible Person of Bangor' (109). And there is the Old Man of Peru, tearing off his hair because he 'never knew what he should do' (247). The great eaters

include the Old Man of Calcutta perpetually eating bread and butter, choking on a muffin; the Old Man of the South with the 'immoderate mouth', swallowing a dish full of fish and also choking to death. The tearing and the swallowing act as varieties of the same assault on the world, an overpowering and disintegration of its objects by the subject's will. They resemble the sadistic acts of infants as observed by Melanie Klein, enactments of the superego imagos within. For Klein, the tearing actions of the children are manifestations of the devouring death-instinct that the internalized parental figures can represent: 'since devouring implies from the beginning the internalization of the devoured object, the ego is felt to contain devoured and devouring objects. […] These cruel and dangerous internal figures [mother and father] become the representatives of the death instinct.'[19] The old men, devouring and tearing up the world, resemble insanely angry children in the illustrations, their frustration manifesting as aggression. Yet it is an aggression which has its source in lack of knowledge (the Old Man of Peru 'never knew what he should do'), close to Klein's theory of the epistemophilic impulse, an uncontrollable desire to appropriate that is triggered by the 'early feeling of not knowing'.[20] These angry figures resemble, then, the persecuting parent-tyrants acted out by the child's own (guilty, therefore self-destructive) sadistic play-identity. The 'immoderate mouth' and tearing hands of these creatures issue from fear of death itself.

Working in parallel with Lear and his staging of these superego monsters, Joyce's limerick work, also, brings to the fore destructive parental imagos. In the

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[19] 'On the Theory of Anxiety and Guilt' (1948), in Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963 (New York: Random House, 1997), 25-42 (p. 30).

[20] 'Early Stages of the Oedipus Complex' (1928), Selected Melanie Klein edited by Juliet Mitchell (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 69-83 (p. 72).

nursery study, Shem begins a limerick (in the lefthand marginal note) about his sister: 'There was a sweet hopeful culled Cis' (267). Opposite in capitals, Shaun intellectualizes the implications of his brother beginning a limerick about Issy: 'URGES AND WIDERURGES IN A PRIMITIVE SEPT', implying that the incest taboo is being broached in the family (or 'sept'). The text between the limerick opening and the anthropological interpretation invokes the daughter figure as subject to the family complex through time, caught between parents ('brace congeners') from Genesis on ('Adamman, Emhe'). Issy's own footnotes resist the imagos with magical charm that scrambles the names of mama and papa, 'Anama Anamaba Anamabapa', and a violent angry aggression, if only in thought not deed, against their influence on her: 'Only for he's fathering law I could skewer that old one and slosh her out many's the time but I thinks more of my pottles and ketts'. Intimations of the life and death struggle haunt the text (Cis is '*culled'*; she dreams of skewering and sloshing her parents in abreaction). The limerick triggers this scening of the imago-as-violent deathwish, with at its heart a struggle over Oedipal meanings in Lear's nursery. At all levels of Joyce's Limericked art, there are filiations to the frenzy and clarity of Lear's way with the language of the barely repressed unconscious. If Freud marks the difference between the two writers' handling of the nighttime imagination in limerick form, it is also as true that Finnegans Wake marshals evidence of that difference in a manner that pays tribute to Lear's explorations, daring and unprecedented, of the primitive urges of the family and its Oedipal eccentrics young and old.