I. CURRENT DAY HUMANITIES AND MEDICINE REFERRING TO VICO

On Vico, Joyce, and Beckett

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Abstract

When Joyce was writing Work in Progress, installments of which were appearing in transition and were to become Finnegans Wake, he repeatedly suggested to friends wishing to understand it that they read Vico's Scienza nuova in the original, or, if that was not possible, in Michelet's French translation. No English translation existed at that time. Joyce's interest in Vico likely began through his contact with the Jesuit Father Charles Ghezzi, lecturer in Italian at University College, Dublin, from whom Joyce learned Italian. At that time Joyce also discovered his other philosopher, Giordano Bruno. As Joyce bases Ulysses on the ports of call of Homer's Odyssey, he bases Finnegans Wake on the cycles of history and conception of language of Vico's Scienza nuova. Joycean scholarship has yet fully to pursue the sense in which Vico is at the center of Joyce's imagination. The place to start is Beckett's Our Exagmination essay of 1929.

A personal remark

In planning what was to become a week-long international conference on Vico and Joyce, held in Venice, Italy at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in June 1985, I wrote to Samuel Beckett to inquire whether he might participate.[1] To amplify my request I enclosed with my letter a postcard purchased in Dublin, Georgia, with a composite picture of several churches and the in-

[1] A selection of the papers presented at this conference appears in Donald Phillip Verene, ed., *Vico and Joyce* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

scription, "Home of Beautiful Churches." It was one of several postcards of Dublin for sale there in a drugstore with a storefront sign: *Strange Drug Co.*, reflecting the proprietor, H. J. Strange, R.Ph. The postcards were of sufficient age that the sender was instructed to "Place one cent stamp here."

Vico appears on the first page of *Finnegans Wake* ("by a commodius vicus of recirculation") as does Dublin, Laurens County, Georgia, located on the Oconee River, founded by a Dubliner, Peter Sawyer ("topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselse to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time"). In 1926 Joyce sent to his benefactor, Harriet Weaver, a draft of the first lines of what was to become *Finnegans Wake*, including a key to its references; in it he claimed that the motto of Dublin, Georgia is "Doublin all the time."[2] Joyce had asked an American visitor, Julien Levy, to look up Dublin, Georgia for him; he was anxious to know if it lay on a river.[3] Thus Joyce was able to double Dublin on the first page of the *Wake*, the old world in the new. I am happy to report that the visitor who may go by "the choicest and the cheapest from Atlanta to Oconee" (FW 140.35)[4] will discover that Dublin has upheld the motto Joyce assigned it, as its gorgios have doubled their number (their mumper) such that there now stands next to Dublin, across the Oconee River, an East Dublin.

Beckett sent a very brief but gracious reply from Paris, thanking me for the invitation and enclosed card but saying that to his regret he could not accept. The letter is in the hands of the Beckett Project at Emory University, which is editing and publishing Beckett's correspondence.[5] Beckett was in-

[2] Letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 15 November 1926, in *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking, 1957), 247–48.

[3] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 583n.

[4] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939). Here and hereinafter I have used the standard citation by page and line. I have consulted the new, critically emended edition of *Finnegans Wake*, ed. Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon (Dublin: Houyhnhnm Press, 2010), the pagination of which differs from the 1939 standard edition, but I have retained the page and line of the 1939 edition and its reprintings, since at present that edition is more accessible to most readers than FW_2.

[5] Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck, eds., *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: Volume I: 1929–1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Beckett's first letter in this volume, dated "23/3/29" concerns his essay for *Our Exagmination*. I would like to thank Lois Overbeck for kindly reading a draft of this essay.

troduced to Joyce when he arrived in Paris in November 1928. In December Joyce suggested he write an essay, and the topic to write it on, for *Our Exagmination*.[6] In June the essay appeared in *transition*, at Joyce's urging, set from the proofs of *Our Exagmination*. Beckett had just turned twenty-three. It was his first published essay.

It would have been interesting to know of any reflections Beckett might have had on the essay or its topic, more than fifty years later. In those years Beckett became a major literary figure in his own right, receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 and having his own works become a subject of interpretation. Putting aside the obvious reason not to accept my invitation—of making the trip to Venice to speak in the stuffy, artificial atmosphere of an academic conference—my guess is that Beckett preferred the views of his essay simply to stand. It is a classic of Joyce interpretation that has yet to be fully absorbed, as I wish to show.

In the remarks that follow I would like first to say something of my views of Vico's presence in *Finnegans Wake* and then, as an *appassionato* of Vico as well as of Joyce, to attempt to draw out some aspects of Beckett's essay that I think are well worth attention in the study of Vico's connection to Joyce. In so doing I wish to presuppose what I have worked out much more fully in my *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's New Science and "Finnegans Wake"*. It is, to my knowledge, the only single-authored book-length study of the topic of Vico and Joyce.[7]

Vico and Joyce

Adaline Glasheen, in *Third Census of "Finnegans Wake"*, in identifying Vico as one of the citizens of the *Wake*, cites Joyce's comment that Vico's views gradually forced themselves on him through the circumstances of his own life. She then states: "Unfortunately, knowledge of this work has not forced itself on Joyceans, who by and large read it in an abridgement which omits much

[6] *Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination of Work In Progress* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1929). Beckett's essay is pp. 1–22.

[7] Donald Phillip Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's New Science and "Finnegans Wake"* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003). The only other work which comes to mind is the curious small volume of juxtaposed quotations from Vico, Joyce, and others by Norman O. Brown, *Closing Time* (New York: Random House, 1973).

that matters in *FW*; and I find it generally supposed that *The New Science* is little more than an almost invisible scaffolding which encloses *FW* and is unnecessary to an understanding of *F*W. I don't agree and direct the reader (for starters) to Samuel Beckett's essay in *Our Exagmination*."[8]

Joyce's well-known remark about Vico, made to his friend Padraic Colum: "I use his cycles as a trellis," is often quoted as an obvious explanation of Joyce's connection to Vico. It is in fact a subtle and precise remark. A trellis is a scaffold of latticework for support of climbing plants. But it is also possible to speak of "a trellis of interlacing streams"—one is reminded of the many rivers of the *Wake*. Etymologically, "trellis" is a fabric of coarse weave but specifically, *trilicius* (Vulgar Latin) is "woven with triple thread." "Trellis" as such has within it the sense of three (*tres*)—Vico's three ages of gods, heroes, and men, and his three principles (beginnings) of humanity—religion, marriage, and burial.

James Atherton's well-known *The Books at the Wake* acknowledges the *New Science* as one of the books but gives it no pride of place. Things have not become better among professional Joyceans; they have become worse. *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, edited by Derek Attridge, has only the slightest mention of Vico.[9] The professors and critics (whom Joyce predicted his work would keep busy for a long time)[10] populating the Joyce industry in departments of English throughout the Anglo-

[8] Adaline Glasheen, *Third Census of "Finnegans Wake": An Index of the Characters and Their Roles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 298. The abridgement of which Glasheen speaks is *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, revised and abridged translation by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (New York: Doubleday, 1961); reissued by Cornell University Press, 1970. Vico is also discussed in Stuart Gilbert's essay, "Prolegomena to Work in Progress" in *Our Exagmination*, 51–56, but in a more conventional way than Beckett's.

[9] Derek Attridge, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). An exception to interpretations of Joyce that ignore Vico is John Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark: Finnegans Wake* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), chap. 7. In this regard, see also Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987; 1956), chap. 18. William York Tindall's *A Reader's Guide to Finnegans Wake* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1969) also consistently calls the reader's attention to the places Vico appears in the *Wake*.

[10] Joyce said he wrote *Finnegans Wake* in the way he did, "To keep the critics busy for three hundred years." See Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 703.

American world publish works that approach Joyce from every conceivable angle except through his connections to Vico. One impediment is that barely any of them can approach Vico in the original Italian, as Joyce did and as Beckett did, although today they might consider reading the excellent full English translation of the *New Science* of Bergin and Fisch. It is, however, a difficult book, which I would rank alongside Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel*'s Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Joyce's other philosopher is Giordano Bruno, "the Nolan" of Nola (near Naples). Beckett claims that when Joyce used the expression "the Nolan" in his early "The Day of the Rabblement," the local philosophers were unable to understand it, concluding finally that it was a reference to one of the more obscure Irish kings. Joyce links Vico and Bruno, as in the Latin passage of the classbook section of the *Wake*, where he writes "Jordani et Jambaptistae" (FW 287.24), recirculating the first letters of his own name, JJ (using the *I* of Latin in its elongated form). Both Bruno and Vico are philosophers of contraries.

In *Lo spaccio della bestia trionfante* (*The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*), Bruno writes: "the beginning, the middle, and the end, the birth, the growth, and the perfection of all that we see, come from contraries, through contraries, into contraries, to contraries."[11] In the *Wake* Bruno's title appears as "Trionfante di bestia!" (FW 305.15). This doctrine of the coincidence of opposites in Bruno is influenced by Nicholas of Cusa, who is presented in the *Wake* in terms of both Vichian *corso* and *ricorso* and Brunian contraries: "Now let the centuple celves of my egourge as Micholas de Cusack calls them, —of all of whose I in my hereinafter of course by recourse demission me—by the coincidance of their contraries reamalgamerge in that indentity of undiscernibles" (FW 49.33–50.1).

We find also "the learned ignorants of the Cusanus philosophism" (FW 163.16–17), a reference to Cusanus's *De docta ignorantia*. Joyce's principle of contraries appears on the first page of the *Wake* as "twone." Cusanus's doctrines of God as *maximum absolutum* and metaphysics of *coincidentia oppositorum* is the key source for Bruno's metaphysics, as Bruno

[11] Giordano Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, trans. Arthur D. Imerti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 90–91.

himself makes clear, saying "the Cusan speaketh divinely."[12] But an understanding of Bruno or Cusanus has not even fared as well among the Joyceans as an understanding of Vico. Glasheen remarks in her census: "To my knowledge, no Joycean has yet read Nicholas of Cusa."[13] In the essays of the *Cambridge Companion* there is no mention of Cusa, and attention to Bruno is confined to a page and a half characterizing his career and addressing why he likely appealed to Joyce.[14]

To devise interpretations of Joyce and especially *Finnegans Wake* without knowing the languages in which Joyce was fluent, those of the countries of continental Europe in which he lived and wrote, Italy, Switzerland, and France, is to go on a fool's errand. Italian, German, French, and ability in Latin are required as a basis for Joyce interpretation.[15] The *Wake* constantly plays on these languages, as well as others. "Are we speachin d'anglas landadge or are you sprakin sea Djoytsch?" (FW 485.12–13). Also, to produce interpretations of the *Wake* that are not based on a real comprehension of the central sources to which Joyce himself pointed is to miss the lesson Beckett's essay teaches, and is additionally foolish. Vico describes the conceit of scholars as taking the unfamiliar and putting it into terms familiar to themselves. His remedy for this is his axiom that "doctrines should take their beginning

[12] Giordano Bruno, *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, trans. Dorothea Waley Singer in *Giordano Bruno: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schuman, 1950), 307. On the influence of Cusanus on Bruno, see J. Lewis McIntyre, *Giordano Bruno* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 140–48.

[13] Glasheen, 206.

[14] Attridge, ed., 57–59. In *How Joyce Wrote "Finnegans Wake": A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*, ed. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), no mention is made of Nicholas of Cusa, although there are a few pages that mention *coincidentia oppositorum* and Bruno. Vico is mentioned a number of times, but largely in passing.

[15] In addition to these major languages, Joyce spoke Danish. He had ability in Modern Greek (but not ancient Greek), partly due to his early residence in Trieste. In a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, Joyce wrote, "I speak four or five languages fluently enough" (Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 512). Roland McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), delineates use or plays on words or phrases in sixty-two languages or dialects (xiv–xv), but Italian, German, French, and Latin dominate.

from that of the matters of which they treat" (NS par. 314).[16]

Vico in Finnegans Wake

I would like to call attention to four aspects of Vico that are present in *Finnegans Wake*. The second and third of these are treated in Beckett's essay; the first and fourth do not appear in it as such. Vico is present in many ways within the *Wake*; the more one seeks these out, the more one finds those previously missed. These four are: Vico and H.C.E. are the same person; Bruno's contraries become Vico's cycles; Vico's "common mental language" is Joyce's language; and Vico's claim that "memory is the same as imagination" is Joyce's guiding principle.

Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker or H.C.E., "Here Comes Everybody" is both the modern family man and all of us that have ever been, are now, or ever will be. But in a very prominent and particular way, he is Vico. If *Finnegans Wake* is a rewriting of Vico's *Scienza nuova*, it is also a rewriting of Vico's *autobiografia*. Finnegan's fall and rise on the first page of the *Wake* is parallel to Vico's fall headfirst from a ladder and miraculous survival, described on the first page of his autobiography. Vico's fable of himself, his autobiography, is a series of seven falls and rises that comprise a providential pattern.[17]

Vico is the protagonist of *Finnegans Wake*. He is Earwicker. "Wick" is a row of houses, or village, and is derived from the Latin *vicus*, Vico's name. Vico is also the vicar, both in the sense of the custodian of divine knowledge and as the representative of the divine on earth—the agent of providence, the vicar of history. Vico is "the producer (Mr. John Baptister Vickar)" (FW 255.27). G. B. Vico is H. C. Earwicker. The initials of Earwicker can be derived from Vico's initials by cycling one letter forward in

[16] *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984). Here and hereinafter cited by the paragraph enumeration common to this English translation and most contemporary Italian editions, such as Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, 2 vols., ed. Andrea Battistini (Milan: Mondadori, 1990). Regarding the defects of the translation of the *New Science* by David Marsh (New York; Penguin, 1999), see Donald Phillip Verene, "On Translating Vico: The Penguin Classics Edition of the *New Science*," *New Vico Studies* 17 (1999): 85–107.

[17] Donald Phillip Verene, *The New Art of Autobiography: An Essay on the "Life of Giambattista Vico Written by Himself"* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), esp. chap. 1.

the alphabet, thus: G. → H. and B. → C. Vico is vic or "old vic" (FW 62.6) → wick. "W" is a double "v." The "v" is pronounced as "w" in classical Latin (*vicus*, pronounced "weekus"). Earwicker is Vico's name in English. We can hear Vico in "Earwicker."

In part 3, Joyce merges the identities of Vico and H.C.E. Vico becomes H.C.E.'s middle name:

> *— Hail him heathen, heal him holystone!*
> *Courser, Recourser, Changechild* . . . . . .
> *Eld as endall, earth* . . . . . (FW 481.1–3).

Vico is the courser and recourser, the child of change. He is also the changeling, the child of circumstances left by fairies in the cycles of history. Joyce continues, "I have your tristich now; it recurs in three times the same differently" (FW 481. 10–11). Each of the three lines of this tristich (group of three lines of verse) begins with one of the initials of H.C.E., which also recalls each of Vico's three ages: "*—Hail him heathen*" is the appearance of Jove to the giants of Vico's first age; the middle is Vico, as if he were a heroic figure of the second age; *Eld* is old age (Norwegian), the decline of the third age. In the recourse each age recurs "the same differently."

Earvico is the one who hears the thunder, who hears the presence of providentiality in history. Vico has the ear for it, "for you cannot wake a silken nouse out of a hoarse oar" (FW 154.9–10); "there's no-one Noel like him here to hear" (FW 588.27–28); "the old hayheaded philosopher . . . old Earwicker" (FW 47.01–15) in the Ballad of Persse O'Reilly; "the ear of Fionn Earwicker" (FW 108.21–22); "Ear! Ear! Weakear!" (FW 568.26); "Earwicker, that patternmind, that paradigmatic ear, receptoretentive as his if Dionysius" (FW 70.35–36). Vico has the mind that finds the providential patterns and the paradigmatic ear to hear them. Like "Dionysius's ear," the chamber in Dionysius's palace in Sicily through which he could overhear what his enemies were saying, Vico can hear the murmurings in history that others cannot. Vico can hear and see what others cannot. Vico is "earsighted" (FW 143.9–10).

Bruno's *coincidentia oppositorum*, as taken from the ontology of Cusanus, is the principle that the absolute maximum and the absolute minimum coincide. Cusanus approaches this idea through a number of mathematical examples. The one most quickly grasped is that, if a curved line is extended

to form the widest curve possible, at its maximum its difference from a straight line is an absolute minimum. These contraries, then, coincide. If such absolute contraries coincide, then any set of contraries that are less than absolute coincide, each in its own way. Change is the mutation of opposites.[18] If we conceive this mutation in moral terms, as Bruno describes in *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, "we see that man, changing nature and modifying his affects, from a good man becomes wicked, from a temperate man, intemperate; and, on the other hand, that from one who seemed to be a beast, he ends up by seeming to be another better or worse. . . ."[19]

In the dream of the night world of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce replaces cause in human affairs with coincidence, even with "cocoincidences" (FW 597.01). Although dreams can be causally analyzed, as in Freudian psychology, in the dream itself causality often plays little or no role. Coincidence and mutation of contraries reign.[20] In Joyce's "dreamoneire" (FW 280.01) of *Finnegans Wake*, all is connected by the transformation and juxtaposition of opposites, but the result is not chaos. The result is "every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle" (FW 118.21). It is a kind of cosmos because a narrative is possible. The whole can be spoken through its parts, its particulars. In the dream of the *Wake*, any sense of scientific causality or historical progression is irrelevant and in fact impossible.

Louis Gillet wrote: "Of course, it is no longer a question of Time and Space in this indivisible duration where the absolute reigns. These two comrades, who did their cooking for so long on the scrap-iron stove of Kantian categories, find their pot knocked over by a kick from James Joyce. Their soup is spilled out—chronology disappears and all the centuries are contemporary."[21] In *Ulysses*, Stephen remarks: "Maeterlinck says: *If Socrates leave his house today*

[18] See the mathematical examples in Nicholas Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, trans. Germain Heron (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), Latin and English opposed texts. Cf. Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity*, trans. Robert de Lucca (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1998), 5th Dialogue, esp. 97–101.

[19] Bruno, *Expulsion*, 78.

[20] Donald Phillip Verene, "Coincidence, Historical Repetition, and Self-Knowledge: Jung, Vico, and Joyce," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 47 (2002): 461–80.

[21] Louis Gillet, *Claybook for James Joyce*, trans. Georges Markow-Totevy (London and New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1958), 66.

he will find the sage seated on his doostep. If Judas go forth tonight it is to Judas his steps will tend. Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves."[22] We may add, from *Finnegans Wake*, "As who has come returns" (FW 382.28).

When Bruno's coincidence of contraries is joined with Vico's cycles, the *corso* and *ricorso*, the three ages—gods, heroes, and men—of his *storia ideal eterna* (ideal eternal history), change becomes not only a metaphysical and moral transformation back and forth between opposites, but a process of historical repetition. History, in the Vichian and Joycean sense, however, is not the past providing a basis for and leading into the present, with the present looking toward the novelty of the future. History is memory. As the Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini puts it: "All that which has been in the past and is at present will be again in the future. But both the names and the faces of things change, so that he who does not have a good eye will not recognize them."[23] Memory, Mnemosyne, is the mother of the Muses, and the Muses sing of what was, is, and is to come. And as Hesiod says, in so doing, they can sing both true and false songs: "Singalingalying. Storiella as she is syung" (FW 267.07–08). Or as in *Ulysses*: "Fabled by the daughters of memory. And yet it was in some way if not as memory fabled it."[24] Or as Joyce invites us, early in the *Wake*: "This the way to the museyroom. Mind your hats goan in! . . . This way the museyroom. Mind your boots goan out" (FW 08.09–10.22–23).

Finnegans Wake, like all books of wisdom, is a complete speech. It contains all that there is, and anything that it does not say does not lie outside it, because whatever is not explicitly in it can be reached through it. When Bruno's somewhat stable exchange of contraries is taken up in Vico's "wholemole millwheeling vicociclometer," everything is connected: "the dialytically separated elements of precedent decomposition for the verypetpurpose of subsequent recombination so that the heroticisms, catastrophes and eccentricities transmitted by the ancient legacy of the past, type by tope,

[22] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1993), 175.1042–46.
[23] Francesco Guicciardini, *Ricordi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1977), 131. My trans.
[24] Joyce, *Ulysses*, 20.7–8.

letter from litter, word at ward, with sendence of sundance . . .” (FW 614.27–615.02). Then, “Of cause, so! And in effect, as?” (FW 615.11). Such is Joyce’s literary metaphysics.

In several places in the *New Science*, Vico speaks of a “common mental language” (*lingua mentale comune*), a mental vocabulary (*vocabolario mentale comune*), or a “mental dictionary” (*dizionario mentale*) (NS pars. 145, 445, 527, 542), but he gives little description of it. His most informative statement regarding it is in axiom twenty-two: “There must in the nature of human things be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects” (NS par. 161; see also 32, 335, 482). He claims further that “This common mental language is proper to our Science, by whose light linguistic scholars will be enabled to construct a mental vocabulary common to all the various articulate languages living and dead. . . . As far as our small erudition will permit, we shall make use of this vocabulary in all the matters we discuss” (NS par. 162).

Since this is a mental language, it can never be spoken or written as such; it can never be a *characteristica universalis*. Yet such a mental language must exist or we could not identify any particular language as language. Since human nature is constant from nation to nation, there must exist in the human mind an order of meanings such that any particular language may be regarded as an attempt to draw these meanings forth in its own way, much as an orator draws forth his speech from topics or places, and the same places can be used to draw forth other speeches. If we work backward from the myriad of articulate languages, we should be able to reach commonalities that would most nearly represent this original mental language from which the world is made by the human mind.

Original speech, for Vico as it is to a great extent for Joyce, is onomatopoetic. Vico gives a powerful example of such in connection with the primordial experience of thunder: “When wonder [*maraviglia*] had been awakened in men by the first thunderbolts, these interjections of Jove should give birth to one produced by the human voice: *pa*!; and that this should then be doubled: *pape*! From this interjection of wonder was subsequently derived Jove’s title of father of men and gods” (NS par. 448). The third paragraph of the first page

of the *Wake* begins with "the fall," followed by Joyce's first hundred-letter thunderword. In it, along with many thunderwords from various languages, is the combination of thunder in Italian and English: "tuonnthunn" (*tuono*, Italian; "thunder," English)—the two languages combined in the title, "Finnegans" (*fine* with its *n* doubled, and "again").

As we shall see, the language of *Finnegans Wake*, that Beckett so expertly describes, in answering Rebecca West in his essay, is as close as we can come to grasping the common mental language as a language expressing the particular universals of humanity.[25] Vico points the way to this conception of language; Joyce enacts it. If we wish to know what Vico's common mental language is, we have only to immerse ourselves in the language of the *Wake*; when we do, language will never be the same for us. After any great literary production, the language in which it is written is never the same. After Joyce, language itself can never be the same.

Richard Ellmann reports that "Joyce accepted Vico's idea that the phantasmal faculty was essentially a function of memory: 'Imagination is nothing but the working over of what is remembered,'" and Joyce remarked to his friend Frank Budgen that "imagination is memory."[26] In his discussion of the true Homer, Vico states: *"la memoria è la stessa che la fantasia* [memory is the same as imagination]" (NS par. 819). In claiming this, Vico is glossing Aristotle's line in his little treatise *On Memory*: "if asked, of which among the parts of the soul memory is a function, we reply: manifestly of that part to which imagination [*phantasia*] also appertains; and all objects of which there is imagination are in themselves objects of memory" (450a 17–19). Vico defines memory as a threefold function of the mind: "Memory thus has three different aspects: memory [*memoria*] when it remembers things, imagination [*fantasia*] when it alters or imitates them, and ingenuity [*ingegno*] when it gives them a new turn or puts them into proper

[25] In addition to Beckett's remarks to the criticisms made by the novelist and literary critic Rebecca West, see William Carlos Williams, "A Point for American Criticism," in *Our Exagmination*, 173–85. See also the reprinting of West's 1930 article from the *New York Herald Tribune Books* in *James Joyce: A Literary Reference*, ed. A. Nicholas Fargnoli (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 326–29.

[26] Richard Ellmann, *The Consciousness of Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 3 and 135.

arrangement and relationship" (NS par. 819).

Finnegans Wake is the theatre of memory of humanity. Joyce forces the reader, as he forced himself, to employ all three of these aspects at once. He forces us to recall all of ourselves and all of history, and as we recall this totality, his language alters and imitates what is recalled. Furthermore, everything is given a new turn such that we see the similarities in the dissimilar and a proper arrangement emerges. What otherwise seemed disconnected and discrete becomes part of the whole. Among Joyce's last words in *Finnegans Wake* is memory: "Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee!" (FW 628.13–14). But softly. Remember me.

There is a modern view that the object of imagination is novelty—that its purpose is to create the novel. Vico and Joyce have demonstrated otherwise. An admirer of Joyce, and a man of letters in his own right, is Jorges Luis Borges. Borges is the other major literary figure besides Joyce to employ Vico in a text. (In this respect, however, one might also mention the use of Vichian themes in the novels of Carlos Fuentes, such as *Christopher Unborn*.) Borges has incorporated Vico and his discovery of the true Homer in "The Immortal." The protagonist says: "In 1729 or thereabouts, I discussed the origin of that poem [the *Iliad*] with a professor of rhetoric whose name, I believe, was Giambattista; his arguments struck me as irrefutable."[27]

The essay is introduced through an epigraph from Bacon's essay, "Of Vicissitude of Things." "Solomon saith: *There is no new thing upon the earth*. So that as Plato had an imagination, *that all knowledge was but remembrance*; so Solomon giveth his sentence, *that all novelty is but oblivion*."[28] The wisdom the immortals know is "that over an infinitely long span in time, all things happen to all men. . . . No one is someone; a single immortal man is all men."[29] Novelty is an impossibility. It is only a name for something that we have not remembered or it is nothing at all because it did not enter memory. Memory is the heart of culture. We can agree with the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, who tells us with complete clarity, *"Tutto, tutto,*

[27] Jorge Luis Borges, "The Immortal," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998), 193.

[28] See Francis Bacon, *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 451.

[29] Borges, 191.

tutto è memoria [Everything, everything, everything is memory]."[30]

Commentary on Beckett's Essay

I wish to conclude with some comments on Beckett's essay, made from a Vichian perspective. In such a short space I make no attempt to summarize the essay itself. Beckett had at his disposal the extracts from Joyce's work, whereas we readers today have the full, final text of *Finnegans Wake* that appeared a decade later.

1. Joyce said, of the twelve authors of the essays of *Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination Of Work In Progress*: "I did stand behind those twelve Marshals more or less directing them what lines of research to follow."[31] The title is from a line in Joyce's work (FW 497.02–03). "Exagmination" is examination merged with Latin *agmen* (a mass of persons in movement, an army on the march, a stream). "Incamination" contains a play on the Italian verb *incamminare*—"to put on the right road" (the Vico road), also "round" (the Vico road "goes round and round"), and *factum* (what is made, Vico's famous principle of *verum esse ipsum factum*, "the true is the made." Beckett speaks for himself but we can assume that he also speaks for Joyce.

2. Beckett's title is "Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce" with no dot or period after Joyce. Beckett discusses each of these four figures but gives no explanation in the essay of the structure of the title or its significance. As a reader, I have two thoughts on it; one is chronological; the other is linguistic. If one recalls the birth dates of Dante (1265) and Bruno (1548), a span of approximately three centuries intervenes; between Bruno and Vico (1668) a span of a century is involved; between Vico and Joyce (1882), two centuries. The reader is reminded of the sequence of these figures in history, with Joyce just now taking his place.

Linguistically, the title contains two sentences. The first contains the ellipsis between Dante and Bruno. What is omitted is how we comprehend the movement from Dante, the "Tuscan Homer," as Vico calls him, the summar-

[30] Giuseppe Ungaretti, in a lecture on Vico in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1937. See *Vita d'un uomo: Saggi e interventi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 345.

[31] *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, 283.

izer of medieval Thomism, to Bruno, the philosopher-heretic who, as Joyce says through Stephen Dedalus, "was terribly burned."[32] The second sentence is incomplete because what Joyce is and how we are to understand him is not yet finished. The ellipsis between Vico and Joyce is only partial because the gap between Vico and Joyce is not great. Vico is recycled in Joyce.

The first sentence and the second "sentence" can be juxtaposed or "recoursed." Vico is the poetic-philosopher who carefully asserts that his views are for the greater glory of "our Christian religion," but his cyclic conception of history is wholly pagan, presided over by a providence that does not lead to a final day of Resurrection. Joyce is not a heretic but a permanently lapsed Catholic whose world, in *Finnegans Wake*, as Beckett explains, corresponds to Purgatory. The four figures reflect Joyce's tetralogical manner of thinking and his interest in the square and the circle. As he once remarked, instead of squaring the circle, he circled the square.

3. Beckett begins by calling attention to how Vico has folded philosophy and philology into each other as a single method. Vico says "philosophy undertakes to examine philology" (NS par. 7). Philosophy fails by half in directing its efforts toward the true (*il vero*) as the universal in human nature, and philology fails by half in directing its efforts toward the certain (*il certo*) that is composed of those particular acts, done by choice.

4. Beckett opposes Croce's view of Vico: "It pleases Croce to consider him as a mystic, essentially speculative, '*disdegnoso dell'empirismo*.'"[33] Croce's *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico* (1911) was the standard comprehensive interpretation of Vico's philosophy of the day.[34] The sentence in full is "Ora, l'ispirazione del Vico era genuinamente ed esclusivamente teoretica, punto pratica o riformistica; altamente speculativo il suo metodo a

[32] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Seamus Deane (New York: Penguin, 1993), 271; cf. *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions, 1944), 170.

[33] *Our Exagmination*, 4.

[34] Benedetto Croce, *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico* (Bari: Laterza, 1965). Beckett could also have consulted Robert Flint, *Vico* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1884) that appeared as a volume of the series "Philosophical Classics for English Readers." The interpretation in it would have been more to Beckett's liking; perhaps he did not know of it. Joyce likely knew it at some point, as we find, in the *Wake*: "A chip off the old Flint" (FW 83.10).

disdegnoso dell'empirismo; idealistico, e perciò antimaterialistico e anti-utilitaristico, il suo spirito [Now, Vico's inspiration was genuinely and exclusively theoretical, not at all practical or reformulatory, his method was deeply speculative and distaining of empiricism; his spirit was idealistic and thus antimaterialistic and antiutilitarian]."[35]

For Croce to claim Vico is "deeply speculative" is not the same as to claim that he is a mystic. Croce was a Hegelian and thus by "speculative" he is likely referring to Hegel's "*spekulativer Satz*" or "speculative sentence," upon which Hegel claims his manner of thinking is based, and he definitely has in mind Hegel's overriding contrast between speculation that is the thought of reason (*Vernunft*) and thought based on reflection or understanding (*Verstand*).[36] By saying that Vico disdained empiricism, Croce means that Vico's method rejects the philosophical doctrine that all thought derives from sense impressions, as is to be found in Locke or Hume. In claiming this, Croce is not claiming that Vico disdains the empirical in human existence. For Croce, Vico was the Italian Hegel, having a philosophy of objective idealism, a view that led Croce to write a fictional account in which Hegel, at the end of his career, is introduced to the writings of Vico and endorses them as like his own.[37]

Where Beckett's understanding of Vico really divides from Croce's is in Beckett's grasp of the fundamental importance of Vico's conception of poetic characters or imaginative universals (*caratteri poetici o universali fantastici*). Beckett loosely cites Vico's line declaring that the discovery of this original form of language is *la chiave maestra* or master key to his Science that cost him a good twenty years to accomplish (NS par. 34). As Vico says: "the first science to be learned should be mythology or interpretation of fables" (NS par. 51).

5. Beckett characterizes Vico as "a practical roundheaded Neapolitan." This is a statement taken directly from Joyce. In *A Portrait* Stephen refers to

[35] Croce, *La filosofia*, 77. My trans.

[36] See Hegel's *Vorrede* in *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister, 6th ed. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952). On the difference between speculation and reflection, see Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Absolute: An Introduction to Reading the "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), chap. 1.

[37] Benedetto Croce, "An Unknown Page from the Last Months of Hegel's Life," trans. James W. Hillesheim and Ernesto Caserta, *New Vico Studies* 26 (2008): 143–65.

his Italian teacher Father Ghezzi as "little roundhead rogue'seye Ghezzi."[38] Padraic Colum, the Irish poet and playwright, reported that on one of their walks in Paris in about 1927, discussing *Work in Progress*, Joyce referred to Vico in a similar fashion: "'He was one of those round-headed Neapolitan men,' Joyce told me. I forget whom he mentioned as another of them."[39]

The other was quite likely Bruno of Nola, since Nola is part of the comune of Naples. In the *Wake*, at the beginning of the classbook section, in which all of Vico's terminology is glossed in its marginalia, is "Old Vico Roundpoint" (FW 260.15). "Roundhead" is not a term known to me, nor to the *O.E.D.*, except in its Cromwellian associations, which do not seem to fit, given Cromwell's treatment of the Irish. The Vico road goes round and round, but to derive "roundheaded" from this seems trite or at least not especially clever. In Beckett's context of criticizing what he takes to be Croce's view of Vico, the term seems to mean "hardheaded," empirically minded, thinking in relation to facts, and probably a bit stubborn. In a novel about academic life, *Matricide at St. Martin's* (1995), by the Dublin-born Ruth Dudley Edwards, appears the comment: "'You need the whistle-blowers and the people who don't mind being unpopular and the people with tunnel vision." 'But not too many of them,' said the Bursar. 'They're almost all Roundheads.'"[40]

6. The term Beckett settles on, for Vico, is "Vico, the scientific historian."[41] A case can be made for this as a precise designation for Vico. Broadly speaking, Vico can be called a philosopher or a philosopher of history, but he is most correctly an advocate of his own "new science," which is made up of both philosophical reasoning and philological analysis. Beckett rightly insists that Vico's unique conception of Providence is fundamental to this science. Vico uses the word "Providence" in 120 lines in

[38] Joyce, *A Portrait*, 271.

[39] Mary and Padraic Colum, *Our Friend James Joyce* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968; 1958), 82. Andrea Battistini, "Beckett e Vico," *Bollettino del Centro di Studi Vichiani* 5 (1975), regards "roundheaded" as *coined* by Joyce: "Riecheggiando persino degli stilemi tipicamente joyciani per i loro fantastici accostamenti—si pensi soltano alla definizione del Vico come 'una specie di "testa tonda," di puritano partenopeo,' del tutto identica a quella coniata da Joyce," 79.

[40] Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Matricide at St. Martha's* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 167.

[41] *Our Exagmination*, 5.

the *New Science* that are spread throughout the text of the work.[42]

The definition Beckett quotes in Italian is quoted by Croce in *La filosofia* from the last few paragraphs of the *New Science*.[43] Vico does not use "Providence" in this passage, but it is to the mind of Providence that he is referring. He says that the world of nations has been made by men themselves but that this world has issued from "a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men had proposed for themselves; which narrow ends, made means to serve wider ends, it has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth" (NS par. 1108; cf. pars. 342, 344). Croce, in the conclusion to *La filosofia*, claims that Vico's Providence, as the objective, logical order of history, is what Hegel formulated as the "cunning of reason" (*List der Vernunft*).[44] This claim is symptomatic of Croce's Hegelianizing of Vico.

Beckett is quite clear that Joyce adds a fourth age to the three ages—gods, heroes, and men—of Vico's *corso* and *ricorso* of ideal eternal history, that of Providence.[45] This point is missed by some Joyce scholars who, not having read Vico, speak of Vico's four ages, presuming that Joyce's cycle is taken over directly from Vico. They have not only missed what Vico said, they have also missed what Beckett said. As Beckett states: "Part 4 is the day beginning again, and corresponds to Vico's Providence, or to the transition from the Human to the Theocratic, or to an abstraction—Generation. Mr. Joyce does not take birth for granted, as Vico seems to have done."[46] Joyce's "Providentiality" is what holds together Vico's *corso* and *ricorso*.

Regarding the course and later recourse a nation undergoes, Beckett grasps Vico's sense of decline, which includes "a six-termed progression of

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[42] See *Principj di Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla Comune Natura delle Nazioni: Corcordanze e indici di frequenza dell'edizione Napoli 1744*, ed. Marco Veneziani (Florence: Olschki, 1997), 629–30.

[43] Croce, *La filosofia*, 113.

[44] Ibid., 223.

[45] Beckett claims (p. 4) that Vico derived his three ages from the report of Herodotus that the Egyptians had three kinds of writing (*Hist*. 2.36). Vico mentions this but is clear that his principal source is Varro's view of three ages, found in the odd little book of Censorinus, *De die natali*, sec. 21 (NS par. 52).

[46] *Our Exagmination*, 8.

motives: necessity, utility, convenience, pleasure, luxury, abuse of luxury."[47] Beckett is paraphrasing Vico's axiom sixty-six: "Men first feel necessity, then look for utility, next attend to comfort, still later amuse themselves with pleasure, thence grow dissolute in luxury, and finally go mad and waste their substance [*finalmente impazzano in istrapazzar le sostanze*]" (NS par. 241). Beckett says: "At this point Vico applies Bruno—though he takes very good care not to say so."[48] Change, for Vico and for Bruno, is a transformation of opposites. Vico cannot mention Bruno by name because Bruno is a heretic and the Inquisition was unofficially present in Naples.

Vico does mention Bruno indirectly but prominently in describing the proof that governs his science, claiming that the matters of his science "have been established by divine providence, the course of the things of the nations had to be, must now be, and will have to be [*dovettero, debbono e dovranno*] such as our Science demonstrates, even if infinite worlds were born from time to time through eternity, which is certainly not the case" (NS par. 348). This is likely an endorsement of Bruno's doctrine, such as can be found in his *De l'infinito universo et mondi* (*On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*), emphasized by declaring that such is "certainly not the case."

7. A fundamental aspect of Joyce's language on which Beckett does not remark is its intention to be humorous, to produce laughter. Joyce once told Jacques Mercanton: "I am nothing but an Irish clown, a great joker at the universe,"[49] and to a drinking companion he once corrected "*In vino veritas*" to "*In risu veritas*."[50] As the ballad of Tim Finnegan says: "Lots of fun at Finnegan's wake." Joyce speaks of Dante as "the divine comic Denti Alligator" (FW 44.06). The sense of the humorous pun guides the language of the "Litter" that concludes *Our Exagmination*. Since part of the purpose of the volume was to answer the critics of *Work in Progress* Beckett may have deliberately avoided mention of the humor of Joyce's work lest it become grounds for not taking seriously the greatness of Joyce's talent.

[47] Ibid., 5.
[48] Ibid., 5–6.
[49] Jacques Mercanton, "The Hours of James Joyce," in *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*, ed. Willard Potts (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 229.
[50] Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 703.

In responding to Rebecca West's criticisms of Joyce, Beckett instructs her and thus the reader in how to approach Joyce's use of language. We must put aside the distinction between form and content. In Joyce's speech the words used to speak about a thing become the thing itself. Joyce's speech is a series of what today philosophically can be called "performative utterances," in which what is said does not refer to some separate act but is the act itself. The words become what the words themselves are about. Beckett points out that such semiotics are not unknown in literature. They can be found, for example, in passages of Shakespeare and in Dicken's *Great Expectations*. Although there are precedents for this language use, what we should realize, I think, is that Joyce does not, in *Work in Progress* or in *Finnegans Wake*, *sometimes* use words in this hieroglyphic way—*he uses words in nothing but this way*. Thus his work requires a new science of reading and a new kind of reader.

Beckett draws a parallel between the Italian that Dante created in order to write the *Divina Commedia* and the English Joyce created in order to write *Work in Progress*. It is commonly said that Dante wrote in Florentine dialect, but Beckett points out that the Tuscan in which Dante writes was spoken by no one: "He did not write in Florentine anymore than Neapolitan. He wrote a vulgar that *could* have been spoken by an ideal Italian who had assimilated what was best in all the dialects of his country, but which was certainly not spoken nor ever had been."[51] Beckett adds, however, that whereas Dante's language derived from what was spoken, "no creature in heaven or earth ever spoke the language of '*Work in Progress*.'" But he adds: "It is reasonable to admit that an international phenomenon might be capable of speaking it."[52]

I find it difficult to imagine what this "international phenomenon" would be. What would it be like to be "sprakin sea Djoytsch?" What kind of "landadge" would it be? We would be communicating directly by means of Vico's *lingua comune mentale* within the theatre of memory that surrounds us, without the security of our categories and most especially with that of causality replaced by coincidence and cocoincidences.

[51] *Our Exagmination*, 18.
[52] Ibid., 18-19.