

Translating *Finnegans Wake*

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My translation of *Finnegans Wake* was published at the end of June in 2004. We had already had a version by Naoki YANASE. It is a marvelous work, but it is too difficult for the average reader. He seeks to represent the plural meanings of Joyce's language by creating new Japanese words, which he does mainly by various combinations of kanji, the originally Chinese characters used, along with the phonetic syllabaries, hiragana and katakana, in writing Japanese. Each of kanji has its own intrinsic meaning or meanings, and he makes use of these, but he often employs those which are obsolete and unknown nowadays in Japan. My publisher wanted a more readable translation. It was my own wish. I didn't want *Finnegans Wake* to be dismissed as a work incomprehensible to Japanese readers.

Ideally, of course, one should translate the whole book, but I thought it might be just as good, or even better, to choose and translate its important sections or paragraphs, and give an explication for each (for the intentions of Joyce's sentences are often difficult to understand, and I hoped to give some suggestions to the

reader) and explain the context. If I put them in one volume, I felt, readers might be able to grasp a whole picture and the structure of the work the more easily. In the end I translated about a half of the text.

Incidentally, the number of the last page of my translation in my book (that is, excluding those final pages consisting of my article titled "Language of *Finnegans Wake*," Bibliography, the afterworlds and so on) is 628. This coincides with the number of the last page of the text, which might have pleased Joyce who enjoyed this sort of coincidences. I felt as if my choice of passages to translate and the lengths of my explanations had been justified.

In order to make my translation readable, I made it a fundamental rule to use existing, ordinary (or almost ordinary) Japanese words and not to create new words. There are some exceptions, but even then I tried to create them in such a way that readers can conjecture the meanings.

To convey the plural meanings of Joyce's words, I resorted to notes. As a rule, I translated one or at most two meanings of each word and left the others to notes (in most cases footnotes, though, for want of space, I sometimes had to relegate them to the end of chapters. This was especially the case with the first Chapter, where more matters need explanation than in the others, for one of his principles of writing *Finnegans Wake* is repetition, and with the tenth chapter because of its peculiar structure). Another means I took to express the plurality is to make use of rubi, the Japanized word for ruby, a small size of printing type. Rubi are primarily used, by putting alongside kanji to show how they are to be read (pronounced). I made use of them not only to indicate the pronunciation but also to show particular connotations of Joyce's words.

Inevitably, many connotations had to be omitted from the notes, owing again to the limited space. It would require many volumes to suggest everything Joyce might have intended. The job of this translation compels one to give up many things, leaving one frustrated, not to say incompetent or guilty.

My basic idea of choosing and translating one or two of the plural meanings of individual words has something common with, or at least could be supported by,

what Michel Butor writes in his preface to Andre du Bouchet's French translation of "Anna Livia Plurabelle" chapter, published in 1962. He says, in short, that, when reading, the reader consciously or unconsciously makes one choice from among a mass of meanings of words and phrases. It is his (the readers) own portrait, Butor says, which is left in the wake of his reading. And he implies that the same can be said of translation, especially of a work like *Finnegans Wake*. The job is inevitably one of choosing and discarding. Umberto Eco expresses much the same notion in *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos*. "Obviously," he says, "the reader cannot pursue all of the references in the course of a single reading. One is obliged to choose among possible interpretive paths and to disambiguate various levels of sense," adding that, all the while, "one must be alert to the existence of the others."

To read and understand *Finnegans Wake* is not an easy task. There are several factors to impede a smooth reading. The most conspicuous is of course those ambiguous words which have plural meanings and which are made of fragments of words from various languages. Joyce's disregard of existing grammatical and syntactical laws is another. The latter was defended in the *Manifesto*, "Revolution of the Word," issued by Eugene Jolas and his circle. Features common with (I will not for the present say 'inspired by') Dadaism, Surrealism, Nonsense literature, techniques of montage found in Eisenstein's movies, etc., are other factors which stand in the way of our reading, as does the proliferation of details upon details. *Finnegans Wake*—this chaosmos, to use the word of Joyce's own making—impresses one more as chaos than as cosmos or order. And one cannot deny that it is precisely these elements which make *Finnegans Wake* what it is.

However, when one reads it closely, one senses there is a continuous flow, though loose and almost invisible, under the chaotic surface. When it assumes a Dadaistic or Surrealistic aspect, it never stays so indefinitely, but it soon goes back to a more or less rational description. It is never radically avant-garde. It makes one feel a logical sequence underneath, a kind of substructure. Beneath its avant-garde aspect, there seems always to be a return to the tradition. *Finnegans Wake* which at first looks so disorderly reveals its cosmos, its orderly whole, in the end.

It was this phase which I depended upon in making this translation. It was my wish to show *Finnegans Wake* as an organic whole, to bring to relief this slender but surely existing flow of narrative.

The sound and rhythm was another matter which occupied me. I wished to reflect the musicality of Joyce's book on my translation. This does not mean I used any special poetic devices. I was simply obedient to my own internal rhythms. One critic said he felt he could hear the flow of a river. That was exactly what I had wished to convey.

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