

Introduction

The *Wake*'s imperative "to beat the bounds by here at such a point of time" (*FW* 586.21–22) refers to an old religious ritual designed to reinforce boundaries. While, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) points out, the phrase "to beat the bounds" means "to trace out the boundaries of a parish" (I 186), in the context of *Finnegans Wake* (hereafter the *Wake*) it also implies an undoing of the restrictions of boundaries insofar as the verb "to beat" also means "to mitigate or offset the effects of" (*Random House Dictionary* 183, hereafter *RHD*). In addition, in the context of the article on "Beating the Bounds" in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which characterizes the ritual as "a formal perambulation of the parish boundaries" (IV 324), the phrase in the *Wake* suggests what Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn describe as "a simultaneous perambulation and transgression of boundaries" (5). This idea is further elaborated in the *Wake*'s description of a "true terminus of straxstraightcuts and corkscrewn perambulaups" (*FW* 576.19–20), where the orderly boundary ("L. *terminus*, boundary" [Skeat 548]) of a straight line is juxtaposed with a disorderly perambulation that traces a "corkscrew" pattern that moves "in a spiral or zigzag course" (*RHD* 451).

Joyce's ambivalent attitude toward boundaries is analyzed in Fritz Senn's seminal essay "Joycean Provections." On the one hand, there is an incessant drive to "go beyond the boundaries" (Senn 56); on the other, "dynamic drives have to be balanced by static checks" (Senn 53). The *Wake* describes this sequence in the phrase "swift to mate errthors, stern to checkself" (*FW* 36.35). An example of the latter tendency appears in the *Wake*'s description of "the bounds whereinbourne our solied bodies all attomed attain arrest" (*FW* 367.29–30), which associates the word "bounds" (*FW* 367.29) and the neologism "whereinbourne" (*FW* 367.29) (bourn: "a boundary" [Skeat 58]) with the cessation of motion (arrest: "to stop" [Skeat 26]). While McHugh notes that the passage is one of the *Wake*'s many renderings of the

“Viconian cycle” (367), Vico claims that “it was necessary to set up boundaries to the fields in order to put a stop to the infamous promiscuity of things in the bestial state” (363). On the other hand, the *Wake*’s claim that “No mum has the rod to pud a stub to the lurch of amotion” (*FW* 365.26–27) adapts Parnell’s declaration that “No man has a right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation” (McHugh 365) to assert that no one has the right to “pud a stub” (*FW* 365.27) (“put a stop” [McHugh 365]) to the lurching motion (lurch: “to move suddenly, unsteadily, and without purpose in any direction” [*OED* I 1680]), which can’t be contained within boundaries. Along the same lines, the *Wake*’s phrase “Promiscuous Omebound” (*FW* 560.1)—a reference to Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* (McHugh 560)—associates the unbinding of Prometheus with the liberation of an “infamous promiscuity” (Vico 363), and the phrase “the unparishable sow” (*FW* 130.5) suggests a bestial force that can’t be contained by “a formal perambulation of the parish boundaries” (*EB11* IV 324).

The Joycean conflict between bounded restraint and propective excess was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche’s analysis in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (a book in Joyce’s library) of the conflict between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. While the former is characterized by “the delimiting of the boundaries of the individual, *measure* in the Hellenic sense” (Nietzsche 46), the latter forgets “the precepts of Apollo” and declares that “*excess* revealed itself as truth” (Nietzsche 46). On the one hand, the *Wake* can be called Dionysian insofar as it is characterized by an “exuberance or excess, an insistent drive out of—beyond—confines” (Senn 35); on the other hand, Senn also observes “that provection can turn into revection” (49)—a need to reestablish boundaries—as Joyce attempted to strike a balance “between luxuriating urges and a need for control” (53–54). Just as the imposition of boundaries meets its nemesis of propective excess, excess meets its nemesis of repective circumscription. In terms of the former, the *Wake*’s imperative “encircle him circuly. Evovae!” (*FW* 505.13) begins with a command to draw an encompassing bounding line and ends with a variation on the exclamation “Evoe!” which was “a cry of the Bacchantes” (McHugh 505). In terms of the latter, the *Wake*’s description of “Dionysius, longsuffering although whitening under restraint” (*FW* 70.36–71.1) presents what Nietzsche calls “Dionysian *suffering*” (73) as the god of excess is reduced to an Apollonian “individual, with all his restraint” (46). While Nietzsche’s description of a “Dionysian Festival” with its “*excess* in pleasure, grief, and knowledge” (46) is comparable to the *Wake*’s ungrammatical intention to “be what will of excess his exaltation” (*FW* 558.11),

Stephen questions the wisdom of Blake's aphorism that "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" (35) when he hears the "thud of Blake's wings of excess" (*U* 2.8–9).

The critical reception of Joyce's work often took the form of a confrontation between Apollonian critic and Dionysian writer. While Nietzsche describes how "the individual, with all his restraint and proportion, succumbed to the self-oblivion of the Dionysian state" (46), Edward Garnett condemned the latter tendency in Joyce's writings when he criticized *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (hereafter *A Portrait*) for being "without restraint or proportion" (Senn 37). Two of Joyce's most Apollonian critics were Wyndham Lewis during his lifetime and S. L. Goldberg after his death. While, as Nietzsche puts it, "Apollo wants to grant repose to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them" (Nietzsche 72), Lewis, in *Time and Western Man*, complained that the time-philosophies that valorize "the naïveté of the romantic nature-poet" caused the reader to "lose . . . the clearness of outline of your own individuality" (171) and created a shifting world in which "things and species lost their boundaries" (195). Along the same lines, Goldberg, in *The Classical Temper*, criticized Joyce for "losing a sense of sane proportion" and lapsing into "romantic infinities" (Senn 36) (infinite: "boundless, unlimited, endless" [*OED* I 1429]). Goldberg's title is taken from *Stephen Hero* where Stephen contrasts "the romantic temper," which tends "to disregard certain limitations," with "the classical temper," which is "ever mindful of limitations" (Goldberg 13). His argument is that the valuable portions of Joyce's works belong to the latter school.

Questions of value aside, Joyce's deeply ingrained Apollonian tendencies can't be denied; as he once said, he learned from his Jesuit education how "to arrange things in such a way that they become easy to survey and to judge" (Ellmann 27) (survey: to "ascertain . . . the boundaries . . . of an estate"; "to construct a map" [*OED* II 3177]). On the other hand, Goldberg claims that the *Wake* marks "a shift in Joyce's attitudes" insofar as it displays "a hunger for the absolute" (16) (absolute: "free from all external restraint or interference; unrestricted, unlimited" [*OED* I 10]). While this hunger is evident in such phrases as "By decree absolute" (*FW* 390.33) and Shem's marginal aside referring to the "*Superlative absolute of Porterstown*" (*FW* 276.L5), the *Wake* also displays a countertendency of restraint as when the twins in the lessons chapter attempt to "circumscribe a cyclone" (*FW* 294.10), performing an act of limitation (circumscribe: "to form the boundary of, to bound" [*OED* I 419]) in order to contain a potentially dangerous

energy (cyclone: a “tornado of limited diameter and destructive violence” [OED I 635]). As Heidegger puts it, “circumscribing gives bounds to the thing” (*Basic* 291). While, in “Cyclops,” Bloom’s most propective moment, his apotheosis, is “accompanied by a violent atmospheric perturbation of cyclonic character” (*U* 12.1870–71), in “Ithaca,” he suffers the ill effects of circumscription, which include “a limitation of activity, mental and corporal” (*U* 17.2284–85) because his “corporal liberty of action had been circumscribed” (*U* 17.2291–92) by lack of intercourse with Molly and the awakening sexuality of Milly.

While the Apollonian position is that Joyce’s primary fault was a tendency to be “*e-normous*”—that is” to go “*outside* of some implied norm” (Senn 37), Nietzsche characterized the Dionysian as the “boundless and cruel longing to exceed all norms” (10). The *Wake* expresses some of this cruelty in its description of HCE “as a great white caterpillar capable of any and every enormity” (*FW* 33.23)—a reference to the fact that “Lady Campbell said Oscar Wilde was like a great white caterpillar” (McHugh 33) (enormity: “divergence from a normal standard or type” [OED I 871]). While Wilde had a vivid sense of the proportion and restraint of the classical temper, he was also tormented by the knowledge that he had transgressed this ideal through romantic excess. In his poem “Héllas!,” for example, he deplors losing “Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control” because he had tasted “the honey of romance” (Wilde 709). As Julie-Ann Tapper puts it, “to step beyond the boundary of temperance meant excess, and this, I believe, is closer to Wilde’s conception of sin than any Christian model” (36). The same indulgence in sin and excess was exhibited by many of his characters; for example, Dorian Gray’s “mask of beauty enables an exploration of sensual pleasure based on the violation of limit and the denial of self-control” (Tapper 37). In the *Wake*, the description of how Shem “waned chagreenold and doriangrayer” (*FW* 186.8) juxtaposes Wilde’s character with “Balzac’s *Le Peau de chagrin*” (McHugh 186), which has a similar theme of transgressive enormity. As Catherine Lanone puts it, Balzac’s title “sounds like the skin of sorrow, stressing the horror of nightmarish imprisonment beyond the boundaries of ordinary human life” (“Gothic” 79). In both novels, the violation of boundaries is met with revenge of Nemesis. In Irving Babbitt’s words, the “inordinate reaching out beyond bounds is, as the great Greek poets saw with such clearness, an invitation to Nemesis” (266). Finally, insofar as the phrase “waned chagreenold and doriangrayer” (*FW* 186.8) describes two stages of blindness—while “green Starr” refers to “green blindness, or glaucoma; grey Starr” refers to “cataract” (Ellmann 606)—it

suggests that Joyce believed that the deterioration of his eyesight was a punishment for his excesses.

The *Wake's* drive to oppose Apollo's dictum "nothing in excess" (Nietzsche 46) is expressed, as previously mentioned, through an "exuberance or excess, an insistent drive out of—beyond—confines" (Senn 35)—or, as a voice in the *Wake* puts it, there is an "escape after its confinement" (FW 150.25). In the words of Roxana, one of Alexander the Great's two wives in Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* who appears in the *Wake* as "Roxana Rohan" (FW 212.11) and "their rival queens" (FW 132.10), "My soul is pent, and has not elbow room; / 'Tis swelled with this last slight beyond all bounds" (68). In this context, the name "Rohan" (FW 212.11) also suggests a reference to Richard Rowan of *Exiles* who, as Sheldon Brivic observes, aspires to live "outside the bounds of established moral categories" (96) and is "sympathetic to the forces which oppose control" (99). ALP displays a similar impatience with confinement when, after she is pent in by HCE the "circumvallator" (FW 139.18) (circumvallate: "to surround with a rampart or entrenchment" [OED I 419]), she urges her sons to "burst bounds agin" (FW 139.26–27). Just as "being *carried away* determines a large part of Joyce" (Senn 37), the *Wake* declares, "We're been carried away. Beyond bournes and bowers" (FW 379.35) (a "bourn" is "a boundary" (Skeat 58), and a "bower" is "a place closed in" [OED I 258]). On the other hand, the countertendency to impose and submit to boundaries is expressed in the *Wake's* imperative "Be of the housed" (FW 355.15) and in HCE's marriage, which changes him from a roving adventurer into a "shop's housebound" (FW 317.6). In a comparable passage, Othello declares, "But that I love the gentle Desdemona, / I would not my unhoused free condition / Put into circumscription and confine / For the sea's worth" (I.ii 25–28) (Shakespeare 1246).

In "Oxen of the Sun," the excess that bursts constraining boundaries appears as a drought-relieving rain when "stormclouds, heavy with preponderant excess of moisture" (U 14.1384–85) release their pent-up waters in a "cloudburst" that "pours its torrent" (U 14.1388–89). The John Ruskin-like narrator then compares the sudden "flash" of lightning that comes from the cloud to "the utterance of the word" (U 14.1387–90) or, as the *Wake's* more compressed version puts it, "flash becomes word" (FW 267.16). Along the same lines, in another version of the "Viconian cycle" (McHugh 614), the *Wake* describes the thunder that initiates Vico's age of religion as an "eggburst" (FW 614.32). On the other hand, excess of moisture can also lead to arrest and limitation as when the rambling and raving "sailor" in

“Eumaeus” is described as “rather bunged up from excessive use of booze” (U 16.376) (bung: “to stop, close; to shut up” [OED I 295]). Just as, later in the chapter, he falls “to woolgathering on the enormous dimensions of the water about the globe” (U 16.625–26), a voice in the *Wake* describes HCE losing his boundaries in ALP’s ocean and finding “the crumbends of his enormoussness in the areyou lookingfor Pearlfar sea” (FW 102.6–7). While the phrase “burst in systems” (FW 429.12) suggests that the bursting of boundaries produces a circumscribing counterreaction as “dynamic drives” are “caught by systematization” (Senn 54), Joyce even got carried away with his attempts to impose order and worried that he “may have oversystematized *Ulysses*” (Ellmann 702). This, in turn, produced a counterreaction that the *Wake* describes as a “systomy dystomy” (FW 597.21); as Senn puts it, “dystomy” is “the *ex-cess*, whatever transgresses the current system” (54).

Just as Bloom begins his return to earth after arriving at “the extreme boundary of space” (U 17.2015), after HCE expands to fill “the extremity of the world” (FW 360.32–33), he finds that “The enormanous his” has contracted to “our littlest little” (FW 360.33). The opposite trajectory appears in *Ulysses* when after locating events whose “epicentre” is within the bounded locations of “Inn’s Quay ward and parish of Saint Michan,” which cover a limited “surface of fortyone acres, two roods and one square pole or perch” (U 12.1863–65), there is “observed an incandescent object of enormous proportions” (U 12.1879–80). This last phrase is an oxymoron insofar as the common way of establishing proportion is “to measure” (OED II 2329) and the enormous is what exceeds measurement. The object in question is the parodic apotheosis of Bloom as he exceeds the boundaries of his human self and becomes deified. As Senn puts it, insofar as “one of the Latin meanings of *provehere* is to ‘promote in rank,’” Bloom’s “apotheosis is the highest conceivable promotion” (Senn 45) and, more generally, “the impulse from the microcosmic particle to the universal application is the most central of all provections that characterize the reading of Joyce” (45). The opposite trajectory of revection is illustrated by Shaun, who first exults in his “most spacious immensity” (FW 150.36) (immense: from “*L. immensus*, immeasurable” [Skeat 255]) and then shrinks to his “microbemost cosm” (FW 151.1)—a bounded microcosm as small as a microbe. In a comparable contraction, the *Wake*’s phrase “Putting Allspace in a Notshall” (FW 455.29) refers to Hamlet’s declaration that “I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams” (II.ii 260–62) (Shakespeare 1162).