

“O Fronces”: Frances Boldereff’s Readings of Joyce and *Finnegans Wake*

ダレン・ダグラス・モートソン
Darrin Douglas Mortson

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Since the 1999 publication of *Charles Olson and Frances Boldereff: A Modern Correspondence*, edited by Ralph Maud and Sharon Thesen, there has been an increased academic interest in the life and work of Frances Boldereff, and particularly in her relationship with and influence on Charles Olson and his poetry. This interest has only expanded as the second Thesen and Maud edition of Olson/Boldereff correspondence was released in 2014. Far less attention, however, has been given to what could justifiably be called Boldereff’s life work: her intense study of the works of James Joyce and especially of *Finnegans Wake*. From 1959 to 1985, Boldereff, at times using various aliases, published six books on Joyce, all but one of these focusing on *Finnegans Wake*.

The reception of these books by Joyce scholars and enthusiasts has been decidedly mixed. While Boldereff’s deep appreciation and even devotion to Joyce has always been acknowledged, Boldereff has been firmly criticized for her intentionally non-academic studies, which have been accused of containing both factual errors and unfounded interpretations. Perhaps because of this impression of Boldereff as a somewhat marginal or marginalized figure with Joyce scholarship, a comprehensive and sympathetic study of her ideas and readings of Joyce and *Finnegans Wake* has not been undertaken. Yet through examination of Boldereff’s published works on Joyce, as well commentary on these provided to Olson in correspondence, a picture emerges of a consistent and holistic interpretation of Joyce and *Finnegans Wake* that is both creative and quite often inspired. Non-academic, overly enthusiastic and mistaken at times it may be, but Boldereff’s work possesses its own rigour and achieves a sort of grand and overarching vision of *Finnegans Wake* that may in fact

come close to the master's own.

1.

It is worthwhile to give a sample of the criticism Boldereff received during the nearly thirty years in which she published her works on Joyce. In Clive Hart's *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* (1962), Boldereff is mentioned by *non-mention*, as it were. In his preface, while expressing his indebtedness to prior works of *Finnegans Wake* criticism, he exclaims that he had been "able to make very little use" of a recently published book—adding parenthetically that it was written by an American—which he calls "disturbingly ill-considered, inaccurate, and repetitive" (Hart 18). There seems to be little doubt that he is referring to Boldereff's *Reading Finnegans Wake*, first published in 1959, although it is mentioned in Hart's index and is referenced once in the text (195). It is quite likely, however, that Hart makes more use of Boldereff than he implies here, as will be shown subsequently. Nevertheless, this is not the first or the last time that Boldereff's contribution has been ignored and/or chastised.

In a September 1959 letter to Adaline Glasheen, writer Thornton Wilder remarks that *Reading Finnegans Wake* would be better entitled "Some Allusions to Irish History in F.W.," and complains of its confusing two-part pagination, its lack of index, its "amateurish...repetitions" and its strangely organized "idioglossary" (Burns and Gaylord 239). Wilder's rather dismissive view of Boldereff and her work remained apparently unchanged throughout his long correspondence with Glasheen. In a 1962 letter he quips that *Reading Finnegans Wake* surely has "the craziest index ever made" (366). Later, in a 1966 letter to Glasheen, he notes that his reaction to Boldereff's thesis of a Joyce and Blake connection in *A Blakean Translation of Joyce's Circe* (1965), is "to swing his gavel like a judge and cry NOT PROVEN" (537). Nor does Glasheen appear to dissent from Wilder's near ridicule of Boldereff. In a March 1975 letter to Wilder, Glasheen asks him to recall when he sent her "crazy Miss Boldereff's book about F.W.." She then informs him of gossip that Olson scholars had just discovered that Boldereff was a "longtime secret sweetheart and correspondent of Olson's," that they were presently trying to locate Boldereff and her letters, and that "maybe Olson wrote one or both of her crazy FW books" (581-2).

In a 1966 review of *A Blakean Translation of Joyce's Circe*, Joyce scholar Bernard Benstock provides his own indictment of Boldereff's work. Benstock claims that the lack of critical attention *Reading Finnegans Wake* received is "a conspiracy of silence testifying to

its general inadequacy" in everything aside from it being a guide to Irish references in the *Wake*. Boldereff's *Circe*, however, can help readers remember the variety of errors in her previous work (Benstock 160). Benstock complains of the book's lack of index, bibliography and footnotes, its "melange of typography," and its "massive chockblocks of quotations." He mocks her excessive adulation of Joyce and he dismisses her thesis of Blake's pivotal influence on the author of *Ulysses* (160-1). Benstock includes a sample of apparent factual errors in the text and snidely suggests that hunting for yet more such errors might "become the intellectual parlor game of year" (162).

A far more balanced assessment of Boldereff and her work, is found in a 1987 review of Boldereff's *Let Me Be Los* (published under the pen name Frances Phipps) by John Bishop. Bishop suggests that, though not the work of a conventional literary scholar, the book itself is a work of art. He praises it for being "handsomely produced and lavishly illustrated" and comments that "this eccentric and engagingly weird book" can reveal to a reader the many possible things a book can be (Bishop 456). Bishop argues that Boldereff's several books published on Joyce makes clear her "commitment to the idea of the Imagination in its most brashest and most florid Blakean sense" (456). Bishop emphasizes that while her books are not particularly influential in a scholarly sense they should not be "summarily dismissed" as they may easily intrigue "anyone interested in the types of excess that the greater excesses that the *Wake* (and Blake) can inspire" (456). This ability of Boldereff to be inspired, even excessively so, and to open one up to inspired readings of Joyce, Blake and other authors, alone makes her work valuable.

Bishop argues that while Boldereff's non-academic shortcomings—such as not identifying quotations, occasional disorganization, collage-like sampling of diverse texts and images—are off-putting, that her presentation of and arguments about Blake's theories of the Imagination, Egyptian mythology, etc., are worthwhile and at times excellent (457). Bishop cautions that the book's biggest problem is its drive to find within *Finnegans Wake* what Boldereff terms "codes" that promise to make the *Wake* fully decipherable and finally clear. Bishop claims that by attempting this, Boldereff is often required "to resort to forms of fact-bending and over-reading," imposing "codes" instead of uncovering them in the text (457). A central example of this practice is her perhaps dubious insistence that the statement "let me be Los" in *Finnegans Wake* is Joyce referring to himself (457-8). Unlike other Boldereff critics, however, Bishop is not repulsed or daunted by these excesses. Instead he affirms that Boldereff's work is best evaluated on its own terms. To illustrate this he cites a

passage from Blake concerning an anecdote in the life of Ezekiel. The prophet is asked why he eats dung and often just lays about on his side. To this, Ezekiel responds that he does these things out of “the desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite” (quoted in Bishop 459). Bishop concludes that though Joyce scholars may likewise disapprove of the literary practices and productions of Boldereff, with their loose and at times inaccurate unconventionality, they nonetheless exercise “something of this extravagantly expansive function” (Bishop 459).

2.

Bishop’s suggestion to let Boldereff’s work be assessed on its own terms is the method of the present essay. By doing so in regard to the first three of her six books, yet keeping in mind the limitations underscored by her critics, it may just be possible to glimpse “a perception of the infinite” in her interpretations of *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake* and the works of those authors that have helped to shape them. In 1954, Charles Olson wrote Boldereff a letter responding to her essay on the poet Arthur Rimbaud. Olson replied that it was his “old cry” that she must say more, and say it more clearly, and “make it wholly your own speech, leaving out all these literary characters!” (Maud and Thesen 2014 104). This, in turn, provides one of the keys or “codes” to understanding and reading Frances Boldereff.

Throughout her books and letters, Boldereff speaks of an uncommon affinity, nearing a mystical identity, with her literary heroes. She designates Joyce, Blake and Rimbaud as her “particular trio” to Olson and writes of them speaking directly to her (Maud and Thesen 1999 10). Sharon Thesen states that Boldereff’s study of these figures “supplied the authority of history, myth, vitalist élan, and gnostic philosophy for whatever in her was irrepressible and ‘fiery’” (Maud and Thesen 2014 9). As for her own work, Boldereff is content to present herself as “‘designer,’ ‘compiler,’ ‘guide,’ and ‘reader’” instead of any sort of writer or author (7). The latter titles she reserves for those who have inspired her, envisioning her own role merely as one who reads and interprets the words of the great.

Boldereff’s passionate study of Joyce, and the sources he has been influenced by, began while working at the New York Public Library soon after graduating from university. Despite attaining an honours degree in philosophy and English, therefore, Boldereff has largely researched independently, outside of the academy. Her independence in this regard deepened as she took employment as a typesetter and learned all of the necessary skills to design and publish books (Maud and Thesen 1999 ix-x). By the time she met Charles Olson,

contacting him after reading his newly published *Call Me Ishmael* (1947), her long course of private study and freethinking led her to conclude that Olson was "one of the ones we so urgently need" and one of the few "who can read" (1). Thesen explains that as their relationship developed, Boldereff influenced Olson to "theorize poetic form as a force of nature," while Olson provided "impetus and support" for Boldereff's studies of Joyce, Blake and Rimbaud (xii). Boldereff came to reveal to Olson that she was actively seeking, in Thesen's words, alternative "art forms and traditions that were 'western' yet not part of the Hebrew-Greek-Roman vortex" (xi). In Joyce, and in *Finnegans Wake* in particular, Boldereff began to discover the traces of such a counter-tradition, or counter-vortex; one that was largely free of the stifling moral dicta and the privileging of reason over the imagination present in the orthodox or dominant currents of western thought and society. Throughout her books one can plot out this alternative stream.

A somewhat tenuous but discernible line, in this sense, can be drawn from archaic Mother Goddess worship, to ancient Egyptian religion, to the Minoan culture and religion of Crete, to the Irish Druids, to vestiges or a revival of these archaic and ancient sources in Hermeticism and Neoplatonism, to Irish monastic centres of learning like Armagh and Durrow which greatly aided to preserve classical thought in Europe during its Dark Ages, to the Irish theologian and Neoplatonist Johannes Scotus Eriugena, to the Italian Renaissance, to Giordano Bruno, to George Berkeley, to William Blake, to Arthur Rimbaud, to the Romantics, to artist John Butler Yeats and his poet son William Butler Yeats, and finally to Joyce and his Modernist contemporaries. This is the alternative "tradition" that Boldereff draws inspiration from, that she considers Olson and herself members of, and that gives her words and insights the power that they quite often possess.

3.

The first of Boldereff's published books on Joyce, *Reading Finngans Wake*, presents her initial tap into this tradition and records her first foray into the deep structure of *Finnegans Wake* in the light of it. Boldereff contends that there are "three separate time elements, going onward simultaneously, often within the same sentence," within *Finnegans Wake*. At one level there is the "hum-drum story of the life of an individual typical man and his family" (Boldereff 1959 Part 1 80). This is the day and night time antics of—by various names—HCE, his wife ALP and their three children, operating an inn in Chapelizod. There is also the medium level presentation "of the actual history of Ireland" which she claims is the "overwhelming purpose" of *Finnegans Wake*, and is certainly the primary focus of *Reading*

Finnegans Wake (80). Her book is split into two parts, with separate pagination, and the second part consists entirely of an “idioglossary” of Irish terms and references within the *Wake*. Boldereff asserts that there is more of Ireland in *Finnegans Wake* than there is Greece in Homer, or Italy in Dante, or Spain in Cervantes (79). But it is the final level (the first in Boldereff’s listing) which would take on the most significance for Boldereff as her study of the *Wake* both deepened and widened its scope:

There is the world of the symbolic structure of the universe, where Blake and Yeats yield us understanding and this includes not only a symbolic skeletal structure, but symbolic figures as part of this structure. (80)

Accordingly, the importance of this element or layer of “symbolic structure” grew in her work until it began to subsume both the individual and the national/cultural levels; the two remaining but increasingly viewed as primarily providing symbols for the former. It is, therefore, this “symbolic structure” layer that will be the focus of the present study.

In Chapter 4 of the first part of *Reading Finnegans Wake*, appropriately called “The Structure,” Boldereff uncovers the structural influences from W.B. Yeats and William Blake. The specific influences are from Yeats’s *A Vision*, as well as from his earlier Michael Robartes stories, and from Blake’s “The Mental Traveller” as well as other important contributions from his later prophetic poetry.

It is here that we should return to Clive Hart’s apparent dismissal of Boldereff’s work—although he neglected to name it directly—and his insistence that he made “very little use” of it (Hart 18). It is puzzling in this regard that Hart latter on mentions that Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* employs the “structural counterpoint” of opposing cycles moving in contrary directions which Joyce has “taken over virtually unchanged from Yeats and Blake—from *A Vision* and ‘The Mental Traveller’ in particular” (66). Hart then goes on to describe the operation of these cycles in some detail with continual reference to Blake and Yeats. Now it is quite certain that Hart would have read—as would have Boldereff—James Atherton’s statements on Joyce’s abundant use of *A Vision* in especially section 2.2 of the *Wake* (Atherton 113), and Hart might have also known of Yeats’s linking of his own work with “The Mental Traveller,” but it is also true that Hart does not cite Boldereff in this section as a prior explicator of these structural components of *Finnegans Wake*. Hart’s research in this section is admittedly quite different to that of Boldereffs, but it is at least odd that he did

not include her as a reference.

However, this apparent neglect to acknowledge Boldereff's contribution in this area extends beyond Hart. In Alistair Cormack's *Yeats and Joyce: Cyclical History and the Reprobate Tradition*, published in 2008, there is reference to Hart's ideas on Joyce's structural use of *A Vision*, but there is no mention of Boldereff at all. This is especially unfortunate as Boldereff is certainly tracing a parallel "reprobate tradition." I myself have unwittingly participated in this "conspiracy of silence" against Boldereff. In two articles on *Finnegans Wake* and *A Vision*, I failed to include Boldereff's pioneering efforts in *Reading Finnegans Wake* (Mortson 2018/2019). Mostly this was because, following the research of Hart, Cormack and others, I was unaware of Boldereff and her study of *A Vision* and Joyce at the time of my writing. My motivation for conducting the present study is partly to rectify this past omission.

As with Hart's later work, Boldereff describes Yeats's *A Vision* as unfolding a complex system of two opposed movements or cycles operating in contrary directions:

He [Yeats] sees the world as the vast gyrations of two opposing realities, the Primary and the Antithetical, which resemble two gyres tunneling into one another, the one constantly decreasing as the other constantly gains, until completion is reached and the reverse movement starts. (Boldereff Part 1 1959 63).

The Primary force—or "*tincture*" in Yeats's terminology—is solar, mass democratic and scientific, representing general abstraction and the laws of mechanism, necessity and morality; while the Antithetical tincture embodies a kind of aristocratic and individual freedom. The antithetical is marked by the lunar, by the artistic and the intuitive, by the particular over the general, by conflict over inauthentic peace, and by multiplicity over unity. Boldereff, and perhaps Joyce, realized that Yeats's system indicated that modern civilization was approaching the apex of the primary turn of the cycle and that the antithetical was on the rise. Boldereff quotes *A Vision* extensively concerning precisely this crossover point:

At the birth of Christ took place, and at the coming *antithetical* influx will take place, a change equivalent to the *interchange of the tinctures*. (Yeats 262)

Yeats goes on to describe the shape of the cone at this moment of interchange as being like an "ace of diamonds" (262). Boldereff connects this shape or symbol of the "interchange

of the tinctures” with the diagram on page 293 of *Finnegans Wake*. This diagram, appearing towards the centre of the *Wake*, shows the two overlapping circles of a vesica piscis with two triangles in diamond formation inside the overlap. In the pages just before and after this diagram references to Yeats and *A Vision* are most thickly clustered. “Gyre O, gyre O, gyrotundo!” (*FW* 295.23-4).

Boldereff is convinced, with good reason, that *Finnegans Wake* is a mapping of the interchange from primary to antithetical that is taking place during the present era. She writes that *Finnegans Wake* “is not a story, nor a novel, but an elaborate symbol, based on *A Vision* of William Butler Yeats” (Boldereff 1959 Part 1 63). Just as the two halves of the book crossover at the diagram on page 293, the “characters” of the book likewise represent primary and antithetical qualities which also interchange at various points. Shem and Shaun are respectively antithetical and primary, as are the Irish mythical/historical figures Finn MacCool and St. Patrick that also feature in the *Wake* (66).

Boldereff additionally connects this linking of *A Vision* and *Finnegans Wake* with the symbolism of Blake’s “The Mental Traveller,” which she reproduces in full in her text. In another complication to Yeats’s system, each of the gyres consists of a cross of four quarterly points—called Mask, Will, Body of Fate and Creative Mind—which rotate along with it. These four, Boldereff identifies with the two figures of Blake’s poem: “the woman representing Mask and Body of Fate, man representing Will and Creative Mind” (69). In Blake’s poem the female and male figures grow and diminish, in age and size, in an opposite course to one another similar to Yeats’s tinctures or gyres. Boldereff goes on to further identify these two with ALP and HCE of *Finnegans Wake* (69).

Boldereff observes the affinity Joyce has for Blake, noting that early on in his career Joyce gave a lecture series on Blake while living in Trieste. Boldereff writes that William Blake is “Joyce’s closest alliance to another human being” and that Joyce has not deviated from Blake’s beliefs “in any major particular” (73). At the same time, Boldereff explains that Yeats believed that “the entire scheme or outline of the nature of life on this earth” elaborated in *A Vision*, and Blake’s visionary knowledge “have a common and identical source” (75). This unknown source is also Joyce’s in *Finnegans Wake* and elsewhere. Boldereff explains that the crucial diagram on page 293 “represents all that Joyce has learned” and is “very closely related” to Blake’s own diagram in the Second Book of his epic *Milton*, “and also summarises the symbolism which Yeats has employed in *A Vision*” (139).

For Boldereff, then, the three writers are very much articulating different aspects of the same symbolic system. Of the three, however, Joyce has accomplished in *Finnegans Wake* something particularly unique. The words and phrases of *Finnegans Wake*, unlike any other book, change "shape and meaning and derivation and associative power while we are in the very act of reading it, thus giving the immediacy of life" (196). The writings of Yeats and even Blake might depict and describe the cyclic movements of the vital gyres, but *Finnegans Wake* enacts and embodies their motion. The genius of Joyce is to have created a living book, one that has "for the first time broken down that heavy barrier between reality and the representation of reality" and "has caught life in her very flowing" (196). For Boldereff, waxing to peak enthusiasm, this represents a historic turning point, "the most godlike achievement of man thus far in the history of this earth" (196).

4.

In her second book on the work of Joyce, *A Blakean Translation of Joyce's Circe*, Boldereff attempts just what she announces in the title. The "Circe" episode of *Ulysses* is "translated" into, revealed in the light of, the words, ideas and poetic symbolism of William Blake. As the main focus of the present study is Boldereff's readings of *Finnegans Wake* in particular, it will be unnecessary to explore *Circe* in all of its details. Yet there is much in this book that adds to our understanding of Boldereff's overarching view of Joyce and the tradition that she considered he was an essential voice within. And as the "Circe" episode unfolds as a rambling, dream-like, night-time Walpurgisnacht, it is the episode in *Ulysses* most akin to the *Wake*.

Boldereff begins by stating that when Joyce and his father visited London (in May of 1900), Joyce encountered in a bookshop the three volume edition of *The Works of William Blake* (1893), edited and interpreted by Edwin J. Ellis and W.B. Yeats. Specifically, Yeats's long section on the poetic symbolism of Blake made a lasting impact on Joyce and "served as a powerful catalyst to Joyce's mind" (Boldereff 1965 ix). Through his study of the Ellis and Yeats interpretation of Blake, and through his own immediate study of the poet, he saturated all of his work with Blakean ideas and symbolism. In a March 1950 letter to Olson, Boldereff writes that she has made a long list of Blake quotes or references in Joyce's work from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* on to the *Wake*. "And I am sure the key to *Finnegans*' [sic] *Wake* is in the organization and form and basic symbolism of Blake's *Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*" (Maud and Thesen 1999 235). Likewise, in *Circe* she writes that within *Ulysses*

there are passages “utterly devoid of any meaning whatever until one has penetrated the symbolism” (Boldereff 1965 x). And this symbolism likewise derives from Blake.

Alongside drawing on Blake, however, Joyce in *Ulysses* has “nearly epitomized Yeats’ entire thought” as expressed in *A Vision*. Leopold Bloom, standing for the average mass man, represents the present apex of the scientific and democratic, primary gyre; while Stephen Dedalus, standing for individual genius, represents the ascending artistic and aristocratic, antithetical gyre (43). *Ulysses* can be read as the encounter, and perhaps crossover, of these two persons/temperaments/types. The “Circe” episode in *Ulysses*, and the book’s longest, is also regarded as its climax. It is the account of Stephen and Bloom’s often surreal misadventures in “Nighttown,” Dublin’s red light district at the time. In Boldereff’s interpretation of this episode Stephen represents the Soul, while Bloom is Christ who becomes Stephen’s guide. Nighttown itself represents the treacherous “dark night of the soul,” which is at once the dark night of the individual soul and the soul of the age which, as in *A Vision*, is just now passing from the darkness into light.

It is nighttime because during the night was when the soul was, as it were, in the womb.... It is nighttime because in Blake’s symbolism the night is the triumph of the feminine powers. It is a time when morality and reason triumph over imagination, flesh over spirit. (50)

By “feminine powers” here, Boldereff is referring to Blake’s belief that after the Fall the sexes became separated and “feminine” Nature—including the laws of nature and science itself—began to be revered as a thing independent of the mind and the imagination. This fallen existence in which we all presently dwell is termed Ulro, and its true ruler is Urizen or Satan. It is “the reign of Night—the time of error, during which Antichrist reigns” (75). This is the meaning of Nighttown, and commanding over it is the whore-mother, Bella. In Blake’s singular mythology Bella would be identified with Rahab, the female counterpart to Satan, and “her object, whether with morality or reason, is always the same, to destroy Imagination, the Divine Humanity” (124).

And for Boldereff “this reign of Night” is synonymous with modern western society. She exclaims that “the earth will not tolerate forever...the clock-serving, embittering aridity of the glass and steel factory the Western world has turned into.” She further damns it as “perhaps the bleakest, least joyful and most boring civilization this earth has yet come up with” (133).

These statements illustrate the scope of Boldereff's wider project and vision. She reads Blake, Yeats, Joyce and other writers as if they they were the prophets of the coming antithetical age in which humanity will finally awaken from its long slumber. They are, in other words, communicating directly to the present moment.

The culminating scene in the "Circe" episode, and arguably in all of *Ulysses*, occurs within Bella's brothel as Stephen, haunted by a horrifying vision of his dead mother, strikes out at the wraith with his staff.

(He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes the chandelier. Time's livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry.) (Joyce 1961 583)

Boldereff explains that by "striking out the illusory reality of the light in Rahab's world" with his "poet's wand," Stephen as the individual artistic soul has declared his freedom from Urizen's prison, Reason's "dead hampering constrictive reality." The artist has made the final assertion "that for the creative man of the imagination, time and space have been annihilated" (Boldereff 1965 165). For Blake this had already been the case; the illusion of abstract time and space had long ceased to be defining boundaries of his reality. Long durations of time are far less meaningful than flashes of inspiration lasting mere seconds. And as far as the immensity of interstellar space goes, Blake shrugs this off and states that once "at the end of a dark lane" he "had touched the heavens with his stick" (165). With his act of creative destruction, Stephen (and perhaps Bloom) has attained Blake's understanding. In her subsequent books, Boldereff's analysis of the rejection of abstract and absolute time and space deepens as she returns to *Finnegans Wake*.

5.

With *Hermes to His Son Thoth: Being Joyce's Use of Giordano Bruno in Finnegans Wake* (1968), Boldereff delves further into her exploration of the layer of "symbolic structure" that she had identified in *Reading Finnegans Wake*. A deeper strata, as it were, than Yeats and Blake is the philosophy of Giordano Bruno, and deeper still is the movement from Bruno to the older sources of Hermeticism and the religion of Ancient Egypt. Blake and Yeats still enter into this book, but Yeats especially is eclipsed by the clearer, and closer to the source, wisdom of Bruno. Boldereff writes:

From a close study of every translation of Bruno available, it is quite apparent that the scheme which reached Yeats through diverse esoteric sources, arose at the time of the Proto-Renaissance and found its highest expression in Bruno, as Frances Yates has proven. (Boldereff 1968 111).

Boldereff goes on to say that the ideas which are explained in very difficult terms in *A Vision*, are expressed very clearly and succinctly by Bruno. Boldereff “now considers Yeats’ *Vision* as a clouded elaboration of Bruno’s concepts,” although she doubts if there is direct connection between Yeats and Bruno (111). Bruno’s ideas, which Joyce learned from reading the Italian philosopher directly, passed by some indistinct route through Blake to Yeats (175).

Joyce wrote a review of J. Lewis McIntyre’s *Giordano Bruno* as far back as 1903, in which he called Bruno “the god-intoxicated man” and praised his affirmation of the material universe (Joyce 1989 134). Boldereff also points to a passage in *Stephen Hero* which states that aside from Stephen (who is perhaps Joyce), “no one else in the college studied Italian,” and that once his instructor reproved him “for an admiring allusion to the author of *The Triumphant Beast*.” His Italian teacher warned him that Bruno was a terrible heretic and Stephen replied that “he was terribly burned” (Joyce 1986 152-3). In any case, these references indicate that Joyce studied Bruno at a very early stage in his career. Certainly in *Finnegans Wake* allusions to the Italian philosopher are abundant.

Boldereff recalls that Joyce had also long identified himself with Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing. In the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a set of texts which influenced both Bruno and Joyce, Thoth is referred to as the son and student of Hermes. According to Boldereff, as Bruno identified himself with Hermes, the father-son/teacher-student relationship between Bruno and Joyce becomes obvious (Boldereff 1968 30-1). In *Finnegans Wake*, there are brief Bruno quotes which are also directly derived from the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Boldereff exclaims that these are at once “too modern” and at the same time “resound in Blake long after they had thundered in the works of Bruno” (31). It is evident that just as Boldereff determined that Blake, Yeats and Joyce are exponents of the same symbolic system in earlier works, she now views Bruno as a vital precursor.

As with Blake and Yeats, Bruno’s philosophy is centred around the notion of the coincidence of opposites. In *Finnegans Wake* this is expressed as “the coincidence of their contraries reamalgamerge in that indentity of undiscernibles” and in many other passages

(*FW* 49. 36-50.1). Boldereff quotes from Bruno's *Cause, Principle, and Unity* in which he presents his understanding of the coincidence of opposites. Bruno argues that in essence sets of apparent opposites, like corruption and generation, hate and love, amity and discord, antidote and poison, etc., are always of a single principle.

Love of one thing is hate of another. In substance and root, then, love and hate, amity and discord, are one and the same thing... Now, where do you believe this comes from if not from the fact that, as the principle of being is one, so is the principle of conceiving the two contrary objects—and that, as the contraries are relative to a single substratum, so are they apprehended by one and the same sense? (quoted in Boldereff 1968 46)

In Bruno's philosophy all contraries coincide together in the ever-fluctuating oneness of matter. In one contrary is always found the other. His thought is modern in the sense that it rejects the Aristotelian cosmos of orbs, fixed stars, the *primum mobile* and the ultimate sphere, but it would also entirely reject the modern scientific banishment of the soul and spirit from matter. There are infinite worlds, for Bruno, but "the motion of all of them proceedeth from the impulse of the inward soul" (quoted in Boldereff 1968 81). Bruno claims elsewhere that "spirit exists permanently together with matter" and therefore "it is impossible at any point that anything should be corrupted or perish" in terms of ultimate substance (quoted in Boldereff 1968 92). All matter, animate or inanimate is imbued with spirit, and when a living thing dies its soul is recycled along with its matter. Nothing is ever lost.

Boldereff explains that matter in fact exists on two levels for Bruno. The first level is a state of absolute potential which includes the forms of all things as a whole, and the second is matter in an actualized sense "where every object or being partakes of the essence of the whole, yet can express or reflect only an imperfect or specific aspect" (Boldereff 1968 77). Thus things are continually dissolving back into the first level and then emerging again in new forms, yet their inner nature remains identical. The mind of God, for Bruno, permeates everything, but it is more perfectly encountered on this first level.

Finnegans Wake, according to Boldereff, encapsulates this movement within a book. Yet it does not only do this, but it functions as a memory system as well. Bruno believed and practiced that the imagination and the memory could be used to contact these greater

potentialities. Bruno devised various memory wheels composed of 36 images, linked to various stars and constellations, which function as “shadows of ideas.” These, Boldereff explains, are “the archetypal images in the heavens which are closer to the ideas in the divine mind than things here below” (70). These images were then corresponded, wheels within wheels, to animals, plants, metals, stones, elements etc., including the images of one hundred and fifty great human inventors. “The possessor of this system rose above time and reflected the whole universe in his mind” (70). Boldereff claims that Joyce “in the perversity of his genius” refashioned this memory system into the “living letter of an injured lady” that is *Finnegans Wake*.

At this stage of Boldereff’s analysis, the two other layers of the *Wake* which she identified in *Reading Finnegans Wake*—that of the family of HCE and the history of Ireland—become dissolved into the symbolic structural layer. Every object, place, “character” or event within the *Wake* becomes an image within the memory system. And Boldereff concludes it is at the diagram on page 293, at the exact point where the contraries cross, where this system has its core.

He [Joyce] is bringing off a miracle, stating in his unobvious manner the deepest, most complicated, most dense reality, in terms of the diagram he chose from all others as being most compact and most representative in a philosophical mathesis, as taught by his master Bruno. (160)

Joyce has, in *Finnegans Wake*, enacted the philosophy of Giordano Bruno just as he has with the poetic systems of Blake and Yeats, all stemming from a single source. He has created a machine which mirrors the cosmos: “Our wholemole millwheeling vicociclotometer, a tetradomational gazeboctroticon” (*FW*, 614.27-8).

6.

Three other books by Boldereff on *Finnegans Wake* remain to be explored, but I am not yet free, as is William Blake and possibly James Joyce, of the constraints of time and space. These three texts were all published under different names than Frances Boldereff. *Time as Joyce Tells It*, which provides no publishing date, is penned under the name of Reighard Motz. It explores the sense of time in *Finnegans Wake* in regard to the thought of Dora Marsden, P.D. Ouspensky, George Berkeley, Samuel Butler and several others. *Verbi-Voco-Visual*, published in 1981, is authored by Thomasine Rose (a pseudonym). It focuses more

tightly on the ubiquitous presence of the ideas of Irish philosopher George Berkeley in *Finnegans Wake*, most notably on his idealism, on his advocacy for the particular, and on his colour theory. Boldereff's final book, mentioned previously, is *Let Me Be Los: Codebook for Finnegans Wake*, published in 1985 by Frances Phipps (Boldereff's marriage name), which is an attempt to decode the *Wake* using the mythologies of Ancient Egypt and William Blake. All of these texts are continuations of her previous work and a future second part of this study will take up the thread running through them.

What remains to be discussed is a return to Frances Boldereff's wider project. In letting her speak in her own terms, as Bishop suggests, it is not to imply that she deviates essentially from Joyce's own worldview. While she has been caught by more pedantic critics with being careless with factual material, the errors that she makes would not likely concern Joyce all that much. Boldereff sincerely accepts *Finnegans Wake* as a work of prophecy and it is unlikely that Joyce, however ironic his stance, would object to this. There is certainly a strain of the prophetic in Joyce, as Atherton and others have noted (Atherton 15). And Joyce, like Boldereff, was certainly attuned to such strains in Blake, Yeats, Bruno and others. It is not that far of a stretch to consider, as does Boldereff, that Joyce himself was conscious of creating a parallel symbolic structure or system attuned to like creations of these earlier poets.

The memory system of Bruno has resonances, as Boldereff notes, with the "great memory" that Joyce mentions in an essay on the Irish poet, James Clarence Mangan, which he wrote as early as 1902.

In those vast courses which enfold us and in that great memory which is is greater and more generous than our memory, no life, no moment of exaltation is ever lost. (Joyce 1989 83).

The fact, as editor Richard Ellmann speculates (83 note 5), that Joyce may have learned this concept from Yeats makes Boldereff's case of a common source or tradition for Bruno and Yeats all the more probable. Boldereff also argues that Joyce revealed the practice of Brunian memory system techniques in *Stephen Hero*. In the novel Stephen is walking alone at night intoning phrases from Yeats's stories, *The Tables of the Law* and *The Adoration of the Magi*, which apparently he knew by heart (Joyce 1986 160). Boldereff also observes that in *Stephen Hero* there is a passage which muses about Stephen striving "to draw out a line of order,

to reduce the abysses of the past to order by a diagram” (34). Boldereff asserts that the diagram that Stephen/Joyce sought, inspired by Bruno to do so, eventually became the central diagram on page 293 of *Finnegans Wake*, already discussed here at length (Boldereff 1968 97-8).

For Boldereff, then, these two references are fundamentally linked. Both concern employing the art of memory to consciously aid in the shift of the ages. Boldereff reproduces the whole of Yeats’s *The Adoration of the Magi*, which Joyce had apparently memorized in total, at the end of *Hermes to His Son Thoth*. This story fundamentally involves the birth of a new Christ figure for the arriving antithetical aeon. It is purely a prophetic text and Yeats later ties it very closely with his system in *A Vision*. One of the magi-witnesses to this birth becomes possessed, crows loudly like a cock, and announces that he is Hermes heralding the new Incarnation (quoted in Boldereff 1968 247-8). This cockcrow Boldereff identifies with the many cockcrows in the final sections of both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, crows proclaiming the rising of the sun, but also of our emergence from the darkness of history. This is Yeats’s “multiform antithetical influx” that is equivalent, though polarized to, the birth of Christ (Yeats 263).

Boldereff does not view this as being essentially anti-Christian, and she includes a Blake quote in *Let Me Be Los* to let the poet remind us that he knows “of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination” (quoted in Phipps 135). It is also this paganized, antithetical Christianity of the Imagination that Frances Boldereff would consider herself as a prophet of. At the very close of *Reading Finnegans Wake*, in a section called “About the Reader,” Boldereff traces this prophetic lineage explicitly:

I trace my ancestry as follows: my original ancestor is the Minoan *Lady of Wild Things*; her daughter was Athene, whose son was Euripides, whose son was Michelangelo, whose son was William Blake, whose son was James Joyce, whose daughter am I. Arthur Rimbaud is intimately related to all of us. (Boldereff 1959 Part 2 283)

She exclaims that her father Joyce, who is also the son of Hermes/Bruno, wrote her a letter found in *Finnegans Wake*—or perhaps it is the letter of the entire *Wake*—which addresses her as “O Frances...” (FW 527.17). And on the final page, Boldereff concludes that she has attempted to not express her own meaning of her various readings “but to make paths laid out by their author apparent, just by repeating them all at a time” (284). This has

become, as well, the method of this study of Frances Boldereff.

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