

Eco, Derrida, Joyce, Borges:
Interpretation and Hallucination

“... a hallucinatory response on the part of the addressee.” - Eco [1990, p. 21]

“...there is ‘unlimited semosis’, where the author is written by, rather than the writer of, the language.” - Seamus Deane, introduction to Joyce’s ‘Finnegans Wake’ [1992, ix]

“To move, yieldingly, towards it, to draw close to it fictively. The violent truth of ‘reading’”
– Derrida, ‘On Living’ [1972, p. 152]

1. Eco’s Dream

With a background in medieval studies, Christian-Latin text analysis, scholastic philosophy – and of course in heavily symbologist-psychological semiotics – Umberto Eco’s reading tactics and sphere of interest will naturally be coloured by the respective ontologies, epistemologies and linguistics present in medieval-Renaissance texts (both orthodox and heterodox). So, when asked to define, characterise, delineate and criticize a 20th century movement of literary criticism (specifically Deconstruction), it comes as no surprise that he will look for antecedents in the history that he knows best, namely Renaissance texts (specifically Hermeticism). The question for now, though, becomes: How effective, appropriate and ‘commonsensical’ is his method of reading Derrida?

Eco’s position, at least as far he belabours it in ‘The Limits of Interpretation’ (1990), can be seen as a blowback to, or a retraction of, some of the more radical and “reader-oriented” readings of his own work by eager scholars (somewhat encouraged by Young Eco). According to him, such reader-centrism was exacerbated during the years following the release of ‘Opera Aperta’ (1962) by the growing influence and importance of “deconstructive” and “poststructuralist” literary theory. It is indeed a blessing, and a curse, for great scholars like Eco to be able to leave behind them a series of influential books many of which have shaped and prefigured the established academic discourse of

the last couple of decades. Eco can safely shoulder upon himself both the honorary position of an intellectual forebear and the more dubious mantle of having thus acted as a radicalizing causative agent for 'subjectivist' and 'reader-oriented' interpretations of literary works. Eco's new position regarding his earlier works thereby becomes one of "I should have known better" and "I may have overstated my case in the past". There is nothing wrong with self-corrective practice, and with the practice of confession as a method for self-improvement, but to use the moment of self-absolution (from sin) as an opportunity to wield a bludgeon against other sinners is a method only available to self-appointed Masters whose power to revoke the very laws given to their populace in the past is seen not as a crux of self-contradiction but as a moment of retroactive revelation: "I proclaim it has always been thus". This paradox was best put by George Orwell in his '1984': "*Oceania has always been at war with Eurasia*" – the meaning of which is the exact opposite of what is stated.

Eco, in both denouncing his own past shortcomings *and* the present shortcomings of his contemporaries seems to be acting out the role of an Angry & Fickle God or perhaps the role of the zealous convert powered by the light of his new faith. Whether his new reliance on Common Sense and Textual Faithfulness is anything more than an *ad hoc* rhetorical device and a temporary phase is irrelevant. He defends his position by an all-out attack on heretics. This, of course, is common to both Enlightenment warriors and 'Jihadists' of Religion. This particular book of his, if anything, should be read as a defence of 'Orthodoxy' – a new orthodoxy of secularized caution and rational orderliness. The empowering-delimiting role of Orthodoxy (Christian-Scholastic in form if not in spirit) in Eco's work is a constant source of enlightenment and joy, but also a Pandora's Box of confusion and despair. Such a project, certainly admirable in its aims if not its consequences, derives from the multiple strands of Science, Humanism, Rationalism, Enlightenment, Logic, Scholasticism, Linguistics, Analytical Philosophy and – perhaps most importantly for the present purposes – 'Common Sense', that common trope of, dare I say, 'decent people everywhere'.

Quite clearly Eco takes a realist-commonsensist position when he says that "*if it is very difficult to decide whether a given interpretation is a good one, it is, however, always possible to decide whether it is a bad one*" [1990, p. 42], and when later on he restates that "*it is possible to reach an agreement, if not about the meanings that a text encourages, at least about those that a text discourages*" [ibid., p. 44]. The discouragement is seen as an urging or a calling of/by the text rather than of/by the (present) author. Eco's distancing of himself from his own speech act, his own act of discouragement, can be seen as either a noble defence of trans-personal, social construction of meaning (of 'Common Sense'), or alternatively as a weak and cowardly hiding behind the various

authorities of Tradition, Authorship, Social Customs, Accepted Orthodoxy, Academic Standards etc... Again, I will state my scepticism regarding Eco's idea of socially palatable 'agreement' or 'decision' as a sufficient (although perhaps necessary) standard for either Truth or Accuracy.

In his reading of Peirce's notion of "unlimited semiosis", he (somewhat unexpectedly) comes to regard Peirce as a moderating influence on what he considers the excesses of over-eager and violently transgressive interpretation tactics throughout the ages. His treatment of language and of sentences as propositions borrows its content, if not its style, from 20th century analytical philosophy. It is open to question whether Peirce can be imported into such a milieu without great violence on the very part of Eco's interpretative act. Not only is his identification of Peirce with a quasi-commonsensual, quasi-positivist epistemological position only partially accurate, even more at fault is his attempt to explain Deconstruction(ism) as a continuation of what he calls "Hermetic" thought. To be fair, Eco analyzes Renaissance Hermeticism and Modern Deconstruction as two strands of a higher-order methodology of reading, a category for all sorts of "*theories of drift*" [p. 27]. However, his choice of words is crucial, since he does not shy away from qualifying even deconstruction as a case in "*Hermetic drift*" [p. 24], i.e. as a soul-mate of Kabbalah, Gnosticism, Alchemy and Magic. The principles of hermetic drift, such as "*universal analogy and sympathy*" [ibid.], "*uncontrolled ability to shift from meaning to meaning*" [p. 26] and "*perennial shift and deferral or any possible meaning*" [p. 27] are, according to Eco's idiosyncratic and intriguing explanation, highly apt characteristics of modern deconstructive criticism as well. Here we may do well to compare Eco's criticism of deconstructive-magical excesses with the disapproving description of certain kinds of readers, certain kinds of people, by the narrator in Borges' allegorical 'The Library of Babel': "*I know of an uncouth region whose librarians repudiate the vain and superstitious custom of finding a meaning in books and equate it with that of finding a meaning in dreams or in the chaotic lines of one's palm...*"¹ The identification here of textual zealots (finding meaning in the absence of meaning) with dream interpreters and palm readers (finding causative meaning in the presence of associative parallelism) is akin to Eco's identification of deconstructive critics with hermetic magi. He takes the mantle of the sceptical scientist, realist, commonsensist. However, the double irony should not be missed: By criticizing the allegedly '(excessively) liberating' and '(all-too-)realist' position of the deconstructionists as in fact pseudo-scientific and phantasmagorical, one faces the danger (namely Eco does) of being accused of some form of anti-realist (or perhaps hyper-realist), pseudo-metaphysical Nominalism or Scholasticism, themselves

¹ Unfortunately the online edition of The Library of Babel comes with no page numbers, so all references to the story henceforth will simply omit any mention thereof. One is advised to consult the original which, luckily, is a short text.

targets of positivist and anti-pseudo-scientific critique. Eco's attempt to extract knowledge from Hermetic-Medieval texts may seem to many (laymen and scientists) to be a highly suspect and irrational practice. Both Eco and Derrida seem to be standing, seem to be *stuck*, at the opposite ends of an axis of interpretative discourse, the very opposite poles of which will seem to many an *analytical philosopher*, many a *commonsensist* and many a *scientist* as two sides of the same murky coin of academic obscurantism. Practices of meaning-extraction and exegesis reside in dreamland.

One is well advised to remember that Eco knows how to play the game of polemics; he knows how to take a solid but overstated stance, to posit paradoxes and riddles, to anger and arouse the reader, to confront prejudices and accepted truths. Sometimes he overstates his case purposefully, often to a humorous extent. Take, for example, his comment in a short essay he wrote for New York Review of Books (June 22, 1995), titled 'Ur-Fascism'; in it, he states about 'New Age' bookshops that "*combining Saint Augustine and Stonehenge – that is a symptom of Ur-Fascism*" [p. 6]. Really? This blatantly provocative and polemical statement, while grounded in a genuine desire to expose the roots of fascist fantasies and mythology, is a clear example of overinterpretation – and mischief.

So, to recapitulate, his position on over-interpretation and deconstruction, while no doubt genuine, to my mind has aspects of 1) 'confessional reform' (i.e. self-criticism turned against others), 2) authorial-authoritarian commonsensism, 3) polemical exaggeration and 4) hermetic obscurantism.

After all, is not Eco's analysis - based on a perceived identification of interpretative traditions separated by centuries and even epochs - tainted by the overzealousness of his anachronistic reading? After all, while Analogy and Sympathy are well-recognized principles of late-Medieval and Renaissance thought, phrases even *close* to "Deferral of Meaning" are not to be found before the advent of the latter half of the 20th century. In his eagerness to justify a certain "analogy and sympathy" between Hermeticism and Deconstruction, we can see that Eco's interpretative procedure has aspects of the very 'over-interpretative' act he claims to be criticizing – indeed to the point of madness, mania, delirium and *deconstructive violence*.

2. The Coil of Deconstruction

“*And thus we see ... another hymen.*” – Derrida, ‘Living On’ [1972, p. 169]

“... *should not the framing up of such figments in the evidential order bring the true truth to light as fortuitously as a dim seer’s setting of star chart might (heaven helping it!) uncover the nakedness of an unknown body in the fields of blue[?]*” – Joyce, ‘Finnegans Wake’ [p. 96]

Eco, in an uncharacteristic admission of Derrida’s greatness, states the following: “*I do not agree with Searle when he says that ‘Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false’ (1977:203). On the contrary, Derrida has a fascinating penchant for saying things that are nonobviously true, or true in a nonobvious way.*” [1990, p.36] Further on he goes on to argue that it is in fact the ‘disciples’, not the Master, who have erred: “*Derrida takes many [--] obvious truths for granted – while frequently some of his followers do not.*” [ibid.] Obvious truths... The rhetorical truth of what Eco has said here cannot be disputed. However, why then does Eco himself ‘*not take for granted*’ that deconstructive criticism, after and beside Derrida, operates on the level of ‘*taking obvious truths for granted?*’ In other words, why does Eco have the need to remind us about such commonsensical truths that many of us, including deconstructionists, would surely not have a problem with but have simply ‘*moved beyond?*’ In the words of Derrida, why does Eco ‘*arrest/stop*’ (*arrête*) the flow of the text at the critical point of moving-beyond-the-obvious?

But let us now take a look at deconstructive practice, at work in ‘lit crit’. Who, then, are Derrida’s ‘followers’ who, according to Eco, have misinterpreted their Master so badly? Undoubtedly Eco had in mind some (or all) of the following, all contributors to the wonderful 1972 collection of somewhat ‘devotional’ and defensive essays titled ‘Deconstruction & Criticism’: Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. Of this crowd, “*Bloom and Hartman are barely deconstructionists*” [1972, preface ix], as Hartman himself ironically enough states in his own preface to the collection. That leaves us with de Man, Derrida and Miller. Of these, Derrida is surely a separate case altogether, *the Deconstructionist*. De Man, on the other hand, is about as often criticized for his alleged Nazi sympathies as for the quality of his work, into which debate I have no desire of entering. And so we are left with Miller, whose essay ‘The Critic as Host’ is truly a phenomenal text, if not of literary criticism, at least of philosophy and social discourse. But what do I mean by ‘if not of lit crit’? What does it say about Deconstruction as applied to literary studies that its impact is so philosophical and philological as to be negligently ‘historical’

and 'literary'? If deconstruction is 'applied philosophy' (a tricky concept and a trickier endeavour), then does it work as literary criticism? At any rate, Miller's text shall be taken under scrutiny here, *not* as a valid interpretative model for Shelley's 'Triumph of Life', but as a truly exciting interpretation of the very process of reading, criticism, interpretation, analysis and exegesis.

In a thoroughly Peircean mode of justification (if not apology), Miller states the case, a bit obvious and not far from tautologous, for deconstruction, which is simultaneously a case for pragmatism in epistemology: "*The ultimate justification for this mode of criticism, as of any conceivable mode, is that it works.*" [1972, p. 252] This attempt by deconstruction to **reveal** "*hitherto unidentified meanings and ways of having meaning*" [ibid.] Miller opposes to the canonical assumption that there exists "*organically unified*" [ibid.] structure in literature. Contrast this with Eco's statement, typical of 'traditional' criticism: "*a text is an organism*" [1990, p.148]. In other words, Miller's case, and the case made by deconstruction, is for the 'unnatural', incomplete, marginal, neglected, repressed, downplayed, glossed over and forgotten. The pragmatic justification for deconstruction as a method is that only this method (this non-unified non-method) is able to decode, disarm and problematize certain received and accepted habits and modalities of interpretation. Mighty claims, but how seriously should we take them? After all, in the same breath, he is willing to assert that "*[Deconstruction] does not claim [its findings] as universal explanatory structures, neither for the text in question nor for literature in general.*" [1972, p. 252] Not universal, yet still obsessively omnipresent and always worthy of lengthy analysis? It seems that the primacy of absence (what Derrida, by his effacement of the primacy of the 'metaphysics of presence', made 'visible') indeed beckons a certain obsessive madness of interpretation. In this reading, the danger of it leading to (errant, phantasmagoric, ungrounded) 'over-interpretation' is always present. But, *contra* Eco, this is not "*a hallucinatory response on the part of the addressee*" [1990, p.21]. Indeed, Miller effectively claims (echoing Derrida) that 'the text itself **is** its deconstruction': "*Take, for example, Shelley's The Triumph of Life. It is inhabited, as its critics have shown, by a long chain of parasitical presences – echoes, allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts. These are present within the domicile of the poem in that curious phantasmal way, affirmed, negated, sublimated, twisted, straightened-out, travestied...*" [ibid., p. 225] Throughout his essay, Miller employs the wonderful method of exploring the themes and tropes of 'guest', 'host', 'ghost' etc in order to explore also the role of the critic (specifically the deconstructive critic) and the 'critique of criticism' (e.g. Eco's critique of deconstruction), and the constant 'coiling' of deconstruction as a 'parasite' to the text, but one which always-already is present (absent) in the structure of the text itself.

Miller would object to Eco's 'commonsensism' by pointing out that the leakages, slippages, gaps and discontinuities in any text can only be denied via a violent act of omission or appropriation of meaning: "*the parasite* [read: deconstructive critic] *is outside the door but also always already within, uncanniest of guests*" [ibid., p. 253]. Here Miller is echoing Heidegger and Freud. If Eco's criticism is based on over-assertiveness and false certainty, Miller's playful style relies largely on ambiguous and unfalsifiable statements, many of which certainly classify as *general* philosophical arguments but are not very useful as literary arguments about a *specific* text. Again, I would say that Miller's text is a wonderful philosophical treatise, but a somewhat faltering and unproductive piece of lit crit. Still, and for the same reason, Eco's criticism seems naïve in comparison.

Derrida's own text is situated within the essay collection in a revealing way: Firstly, it is the longest of the five essays: just about 100 pages, or 40% of the book's length. One could say the 'weight' of the book is disproportionately affected by Derrida's presence (the presence of his absence?). Secondly, it is the 'central' text both metaphorically and literally: It is actually preceded by two texts and also followed by two texts, thus occupying the function of 'the one that stands in the middle', like the 'arbiter' or 'judge' of old. Thirdly, it is the only text to have 'double presence', namely as a main text ('Living On') and simultaneously as/with a stream of footnoted commentary ('Border Lines'), effectively dividing the text into two narrative lines, mutually reinforcing *but* also antagonistic: ripping the text apart. Fourthly, and partially because of this aforementioned double annotation, it is personally the only text that I didn't really get 'the point' of; it is a text I simply didn't follow or understand in any linear or obvious sense. The first three points reveal the central role of Derrida in the *movement* known as 'Western' or 'Yale' deconstruction, here reflected or refracted metonymically in the physical *structure* of the book on deconstruction; *as above, so below*. Metaphors reflect physical structures, and physical structures embody metaphors. Similar 'sympathetic' correspondence also exists within the structure of Derrida's text, since his double annotation is a self-doubling of the text into 'above' and 'below', a self-division of the One.

The aforementioned point about interpretative difficulties is a 'confession' on my part, but one with universal appeal I think. It is a common enough criticism of Derrida to say that his work is 'impenetrable' or 'nonsensical' or even, as Searle had it, 'clearly false'. I think that partially it is an issue of translation, or rather the impossibility of translation. Whatever the language barrier, clearly Derrida's text is a typically demanding work of *art*, as well as being a work of criticism. If Shelley's 'Triumph of Life' is seen as the unifying topos shared by all the essays in that book, then Derrida's text is the one that takes the most liberties from this 'mission' or 'shared project', most

sidetracks and most risks – and indeed *makes the least sense*. I think Derrida would be perfectly content with this judgement, since it exemplifies the trap-lure of total deconstruction on the one hand balanced out by the trap-lure of commonsensist traditional readings on the other hand. According to Derrida's logic, any text *of* criticism is simultaneously a text *about* criticism. Thus the very process of interpretation is interpreted in the margins of text production. The double narrative structure of his essay is thus an exemplary deconstructive effort, albeit one with a strongly opaque surface and almost zero 'reader-friendliness'. If indeed Derrida is a 'reader-oriented' critic, one should note that his 'reader' is not just 'any reader', but Derrida-the-philosopher and theoretician.

For me, Miller's text, not Derrida's, is an exemplary case of 'deconstructive literary criticism' – even with its faults and weaknesses. I take Derrida to be too much of a philosopher to (be able to) produce literary criticism *at all*. Yale indeed is a keyword in the unfolding of this saga, and the active propagandizing 'discipleship', in the 70's and the 80's, by young professors of Western literary and philosophy departments becomes the cornerstone of what Eco deplorably called the 'reader-oriented' turn in hermeneutics. The influences here include not only Derrida but Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva etc., further fuelled by Paul de Man, Susan Sontag, Richard Rorty and others. To criticize this turn in (American) Western university is to criticize a reception, an interpretation, a *reading* of Derrida – a result of mistranslation and retranslation, as well as both under- and over-interpretation, surely. People, to put it bluntly, got a bit too excited. However, this process is not a defeat of deconstruction, but rather an exemplary case of it – *and* a good (hi)story.

3. Dreaming Joyce in the Library of Borges

“Many readers of the Wake prefer to believe that it is so saturated in its preoccupations, so dominated by its own techniques of presentation and explanation, that the whole is contained within every part. That may be the case; but it is also possible that there are moments in the Wake where the text, so to speak, goes into free fall, where there is ‘unlimited semiosis’, where the author is written by, rather than the writer of, the language.” – S.Deane, introd. to 'Finnegans Wake' [p. ix]

I hark back to these words, this time in their full scope and context, in order to elucidate the nexus of what has been problematized by Eco, Derrida and Miller in their own separate ways regarding 'authorship' and 'readership', with 'unlimited semiosis' as the mediating principle and force, interpreted either 'liberally' (Derrida, Miller, Deane) or 'conservatively' (Eco).

Fiction, as the condensation of facts into an allegorical or symbolic structure, is simultaneously both true and false, both necessary and unnecessary, both logical and incoherent. Seamus Deane argues that ‘unlimited semiosis’ is something *more* or *different* than being “*saturated in its preoccupations*” [ibid.]. In this I would agree, and I would hold Eco’s accounts of Joyce (treated below) as mostly too mechanistic and Aristotelean-Scholastic; Eco glimpses only a partial truth by focusing on Joyce’s “*taste for lists and inventories*” [1990, p.147] as reflected in his statement that “*Finnegans Wake is a representation (even if in an artistic rather than theoretical form) of an encyclopaedia in action*” [ibid.]. That said, I do find ways of utilizing Eco’s models and metaphors, with the help of Borges, in literary ontology and reader epistemology, as tools for analyzing not only Joyce but any piece of transgressive or poetic – in a word, Hermetic – text.

Eco devotes an entire chapter to Joyce in his ‘The Limits of Interpretation’ [pp. 137-151], largely in a reverent tone. Already much earlier in the book he quotes Joyce while making an important caveat, a self-confession, about the limitations of the present line of reasoning whereby everything is reduced to ‘the lowest common denominator’: “*I understand that the reading of Finnegans Wake can help us to cast doubt on even the supposed commonsensicality of [the examples provided in order to demonstrate the unequivocality of meaning]*” [ibid. p.6] However, unflinchingly, he proceeds to demonstrate the virtues of commonsensicality as a method of analysis – at least for ‘straightforward’ (whatever that might be) message-oriented or narrative texts. He has rhetorical stakes in the book for exploring *that side* of hermeneutical work, that ‘pedestrian’ but life-affirming side of rational Wakefulness in the land of Dreams, Fantasies and Hallucinations. However, in his chapter on Joyce, he presents the most ‘open-ended’ reading allowed for in the present volume, in a short but fascinating case-study of ‘Finnegans Wake’ largely based on his earlier writings on ‘Ulysses’ and ‘Finnegans Wake’ [1962, 1979]. For example, he presents an analysis of the semantic chart of interconnections (between nodes representing concepts/ideas/objects *both* real and linguistic) in the narrative structure of Finnegans Wake based on the single idea of ‘Neanderthal’, a concept as such *absent* from the text (deconstructionist readers ahoy!), yet alluded to, constructed and presented by the presence of phonetic-encyclopaedic ‘kin’ components and constructs such as ‘meandertale’, ‘meandertalthale’, ‘meander’, ‘tal’ and ‘tale’. It is a matter of each component partaking in the meaning-formation of the whole, so that a continuum of semantic holism is present in the mapping of the universe (what Eco calls ‘encyclopaedia’) of Joyce’s making.

The nodal network of semantic-semiotic connections is given a pictorial form [Fig. 9.2, p. 141] to elucidate the nature of the inter-connectivity of the ‘overlapping monads’ (if that is not a

contradiction in terms) in this world. Somewhat similar charts, albeit more detailed and thorough as well as more geographically oriented (i.e. employing visual metaphors and pointers), are given by the Joyce scholar John Bishop in his book 'Joyce's Book of the Dark – Finnegans Wake' (see charts: pp. 34-5, 162-3, 266-7, *passim*). The title of Bishop's book, referring to FW as the 'Book of the Dark', and thus a book of Night and Dreams, derives from a common enough reading of FW as a kind of *complement* to Ulysses, which in turn is often considered to be the 'Book of the Day' (namely, one June 16 in Dublin, later dedicated to Joyce's memory and christened 'Bloomsday') and of Light and Ego and Love and Wakefulness. Approvingly, Eco quotes that famous line from Finnegans Wake, often taken to be a guideline for prospective readers of the book: "*ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia*" [FW, p. 120 – quoted by Eco, 1990, on p. 146]. (I would like to point that, always and wherever, excising and picking out of context a single line from a book in this manner is a highly fanciful and arbitrary moment of appropriation, but there *does* seem to exist a consensus that these words are indeed self-reflective and 'addressed to the reader'.) Eco approves of this command, but also resists: "*To develop an ideal insomnia, the ideal Joyce Reader has to keep semiotically awake*" [1990, p. 151] He is offering and prescribing jolts of reason to guide and direct the otherwise uncontrollable and chaotic '(Hermetic) drift of semiosis'. But his act of interpretation does great violence to Joyce; the reader, in keeping himself awake, threatens to wake up the dreamer, the sleep walker. This is a cruel thing to even risk, and indeed carries the potential for catastrophe. At the very least, that act of *arrête* is a violent '*non*', the antithesis of Joycean 'yesyesyes!' as expressed in both of his major works. The 'ideal insomnia' required from the reader is not Eco's proposed heroic 'resistance to Night', but rather a truly free '*becoming-Night-of-Day*', i.e. a *slipping-into-entrancement*. Eco seems to be utilizing tools made for understanding 'Ulysses' (e.g. Wakefulness, Reason, Logic, Encyclopaedia) on the wrong book, namely 'Finnegans Wake'.

Derrida, too, makes constant references to Joyce throughout his writings. He claims to have based the structure of one of his major essays on Finnegans Wake – namely 'Plato's Pharmacy', "*the whole of that essay being itself nothing but a reading of Finnegans Wake*"². Elsewhere, in an essay on Joyce, Derrida recounts an anecdote about an encounter with an American tourist in a bookshop in Tokyo: "*So many books! What is the definitive one? Is there any?*" *It was an extremely small book shop, a news agency. I almost replied, "Yes, there are two of them, Ulysses and Finnegans Wake"*³. Borges, like many others, was prone to praise 'Ulysses' but disliked 'Finnegans Wake'; the latter was considered by him (and many others) to be an excessive and unreadable devolution of the

² Quoted from memory from a Finnish translation of the essay, unfortunately unavailable at the time of writing.

³ From the essay 'Ulysses Gramophone', printed in 'Acts of Knowledge', p.265. See bibliography for details.

narrative beauty of 'Ulysses'. Ironically, it can now be seen that 'The Library of Babel' is perhaps the best ontological-chartological depiction, contemporary at that, of the dimensions and nature of an 'open work' of literature, something 'Finnegans Wake' truly is (according to Eco himself). Borges provides a philosophical-allegorical exploration of text-space. In this fascinating short story – interestingly enough published only two years after *Finnegans Wake*, in 1941 – Borges writes about “[t]he universe (which others call the Library)”. These opening lines of the story are a direct invitation to an allegorical reading of the text – not of the universe as a library but of the library as a/the universe. Fiction often approaches an allegory and treats that allegory as *itself an allegory* of something else; this is a good example of semiotic shifting & deferral.

Eco offers 'a key' to Borges' short stories in the form of an archetypal or symbolic appropriation of the concept of Library as a semantic world-map: “*One is never confronted by chance, or by Fate; one is always inside a plot (cosmic or situational) developed by some other Mind according to a fantastic logic that is the logic of the Library*” [1990, p.161] But the rules of this Library, a place after all of the essence of Babel, are “*paradoxical rules*” [ibid.]. For Eco, everything is model for a semantic-semiotic mapping of the universe; thus, other narrative-ontological metaphors for psychological-semiotic charting of the world employed by Eco include 'the prison' (based on another Borges short story), 'detective work' (cf. Arthur Conan Doyle), 'computer', 'network', 'encyclopaedia' – and even 'a box of marbles', as in this quotation discussing the interconnected world of Joycean semiosis: “*We can imagine all the cultural units as an enormous number of marbles contained in a box; by shaking that box we can form different connections and affinities amongst the marbles. [--] But we should think of magnetized marbles which establish a system of attraction and repulsion, so that some are drawn to one another and others are not.*” [ibid, p.144] The logic of the Library is the logic of the nodal network of the Universal Computer. The very same logic, furthermore – and consequently – is also the logic of a text's 'Model Reader', since Eco, referring to Spinoza [pp. 156-160], equates the operation of the laws of the universe ('ordo et connexion rerum') with operation of the 'laws' of the mind ('ordo et connexion idearum'). The connection between things is a Ground for correct interpretation. Certain equivalence, harmony, connection, continuity, coherence, even some physical-psychological contact, should restrict the flights of fancy of the Dreamer-Interpreter and direct one's attention and thought towards Truth: correspondence – sympathy – interconnection. This is kind of hyper-realist Hermeticism.

4. Conclusions and Concord

“...an uneasy joy of interpretation.” – Miller, ‘Critic as Host’ [p. 253]

“We say. Trust us. Our game.” – Joyce, ‘Finnegans Wake’ [p. 460]

Eco’s deconstruction of Derrida, in the end, may be less of a *coup de grâce* and more of a kiss of life. I will not pass judgement on either Derrida or Eco, since the former I know to be only kidding anyway, while the latter is prone to rhetorical-polemical grandstanding and tactical manoeuvres in order to keep on shocking his readers and followers. Derrida’s work can appear infuriating in spite of its innocent nature, while Eco’s work often comes out innocent and fun despite its infuriating quality. Yet, to paraphrase what I stated before about the axis of ‘obscurantist interpretation’, Eco and Derrida are much closer to one another than either (or at least ‘Eco circa 1990’) would admit. Eco will continue to baffle us with his studies of Hermeticism under the appearance of Rationalism while Derrida until his death continued to study and deconstruct the history of Rationalism under the appearance of Hermeticism. But the amalgamation, fusion and dialogue between these two traditions (‘Rationalism’ and ‘Hermeticism’), always-already at work and in contact, is much furthered and enriched by the work of both of these scholars. Outside the academia, Borges provides us with the proper metaphor (the Library) and Joyce the proper map (the Chaosmos) to navigate and *feel* our way in this historical-textual framework of nodal interconnectedness. The hallucinatory quality of perception and interpretation is shared and fuelled by the hallucinatory quality of matter, property and life themselves. Reason is the pedestal, Hermeticism the ladder. As Eco himself writes, “The New Paradigm” [1990, pp.18-20] of Renaissance Humanism was an admixture, both holy and unholy, of the intermingling drives of Mercury and Prometheus.

...

Bibliography:

Bishop, James: “*Joyce’s Book of the Dark - Finnegans Wake*”, 1986, U. of Wisconsin Press
Bloom, Derrida, Miller et al: “*Deconstruction & Criticism*”, 1972, Continuum, New York

Borges, Jorge Luis: “*The Library of Babel*”, 1941, James Irby’s translation (available online at http://jubal.westnet.com/hyperdiscordia/library_of_babel.html)

Eco, Umberto: “*The Limits of Interpretation*”, 1990, Indiana University Press, USA

Eco, Umberto: “*Ur-Fascism*”, 1995, in NY Review of Books (June 22 issue)

Joyce, James: “*Finnegans Wake*”, 1939 (1992), Penguin Books, U.K.

+ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Joyce for Derrida anecdote citing "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce" (in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge [New York: Routledge, 1992], pp. 253-309)