

**Returning the NIGHTLETTER to Sender:
Joyce’s ‘Youlldied’ Card and its Postal Errors**

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This essay will provide a study of the “Nightletter” text which appears at the very end of Book II Chapter 2 of *Finnegans Wake*. It has a near-universally accepted final “form” and it can be found on page 308 of the *Faber and Faber* edition. There is, however, a second version available to readers that looks considerably different and can be located in 2010’s *Restored Finnegans Wake*. It has its origins deep within the *James Joyce Archive* and was lost over a period of time in part because of editorial difficulties that Joyce faced during the final year of preparing *Finnegans Wake* for publication. This essay will primarily focus on this relatively unknown “Nightletter” which I classify as “version 1”. I will study how it was created, how it evolved, and finally how it came to be replaced by “version 2”, my name for the “Nightletter” in the Faber and Faber edition of *Finnegans Wake*. My study will investigate in particular the impressive, single paged design of version 1 and how its layout interacts with the Nightletter’s text, enriching it on many aesthetic levels. It is my contention that Joyce replicated accurately the real-life image model of a “night letter” telegram in the II.2 drafts of *Finnegans Wake*. A night letter is a letter sent, logically, at night that is intended for a delivery the next day. They are inexpensive in comparison to their day-time counterparts and are immediately identifiable by their large and capitalised titles reading: “NIGHT LETTER”.² This research determines that Joyce’s original artistic vision for his own night letter was regrettably spoiled due to an editorial mistake in the galley proofs of II.2, an error that was never corrected. I shall conclude by giving an overview of the position of Joyce’s original night letter in terms of its readership and the possibilities of it emerging as a version that could in the future become more accepted and legitimised as the “true” design for the telegram from the Earwicker siblings to their parents at “youlldied” (FW 308.17).

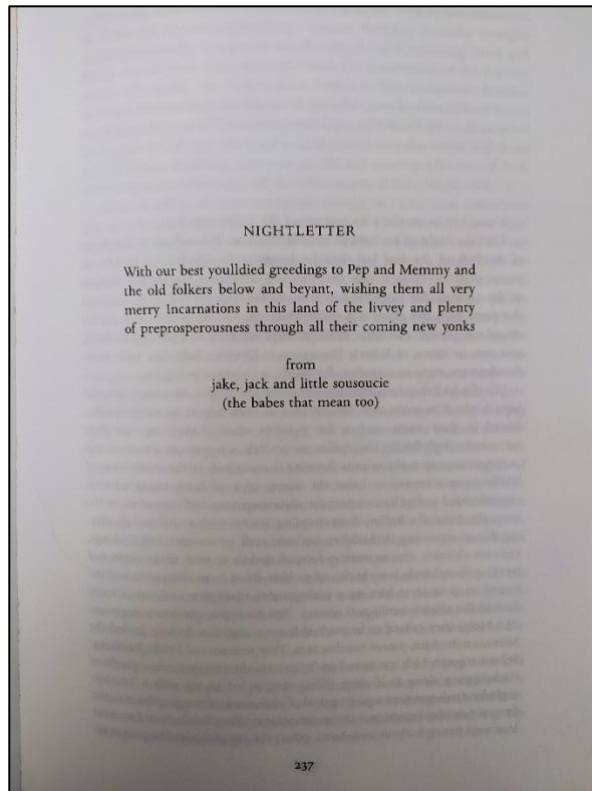
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² Joyce’s night letter, however, conflates the two words as “NIGHTLETTER”. I will keep to Joyce’s spelling when referring to his text throughout this essay. I will additionally refer to it in lower case as “Nightletter”.

The Nightletter's Two Versions and the II.2 Section 9 Drafts:

The following two scans are of the two versions of the Nightletter, to be followed by a detailed genetic study. The first is taken from the *Restored* edition and the second is from the 1939 Faber version of *Finnegans Wake*: To date, the *Restored* edition is the only commercially released edition of *Finnegans Wake* that considers the initial version found in Joyce's II.2 drafts as the actual "NIGHTLETTER". The Faber and Faber version, like the Viking edition and all others in circulation uses "version 2" as its nightletter.

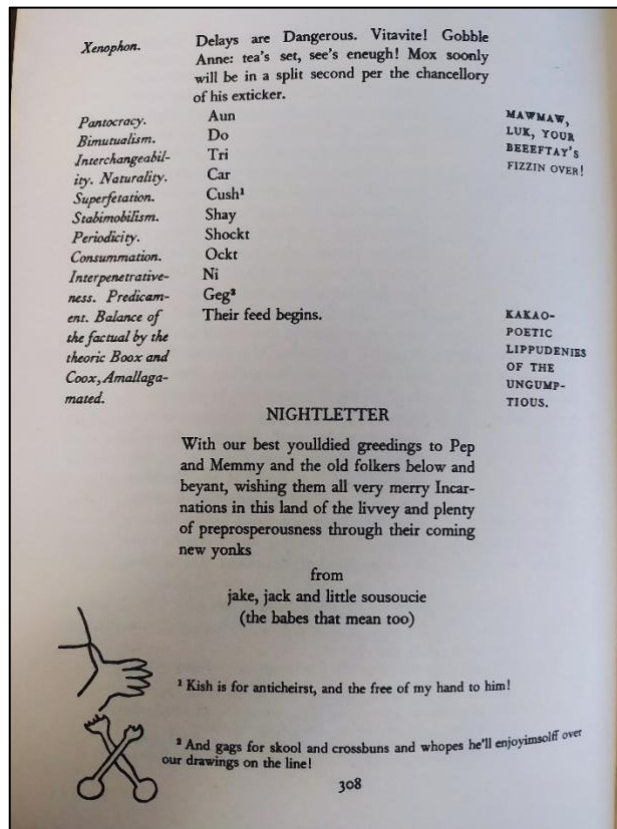
"Nightletter" version 1³



(Joyce 2010: 237; Buffalo VI.G.4 – 27; JJA 53:303)

³ "NL v.1 – C" is the abbreviated title I have appointed to this draft of version 1, which is third in a series of three.

“Nightletter” version 2



(FW 308)

“Nightletter” Composition Within Section Nine of II.2’s Final Part (FW 304.5-308)

In the following table I show where the Nightletter appears in the drafts of II.2. “Section nine” is the cataloguing term which Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon use in the *James Joyce Archive* to categorise the draft work for the conclusion of II.2 (FW 304.5-308). These are taken from the years 1934 through to the novel’s completion. For a complete listing of the section 9 drafts see pages 265 and 305 in *JJA* vol. 53. The creation of what I title “version 1” or “NL v.1” involved a three-stage process illustrated in the tables below. I label them consecutively with the letters A, B and C:

<i>JJA</i> Draft title	<i>JJA</i> Draft Information	Nightletter Appearance Information
9.*4	Faircopy (ink) 1934	First appearance of NL v.1 – A. (47478-178; <i>JJA</i> 53: 280)
9.5	Typescript late 1934	NL v.1 – B (47478-207); <i>JJA</i> 53: 288).

9.Σ6	Missing typescript of proofs for <i>transition 23</i> . Probably April-June 1935.	(Speculative first appearance of NL v.1 – C)
<i>transition 23</i>	July 1935.	NL v.1 – C
9.Σ8	Missing marked copy of <i>transition 23</i> for <i>Storiella As She is Syung</i> . (Probably summer 1937)	NL v.1 – C
9.10	Page proofs for the second part of <i>Storiella</i> . September-October 1937. (N.B/ 9.10 is “unrevised and identical with the published version [<i>transition 23</i>]” (JJA 53: 265).)	NL v.1 – C (Buffalo VI.G.4-27; JJA 53:303)
9.12	Galley proofs for <i>Finnegans Wake</i> . February 1938.	NL v.2 (47478-355; JJA 53:334)
9.12+	Galley proofs with marginalia	NL v.2 (47478-390; JJA 53: 400)
<i>Finnegans Wake</i>	February 1939.	NL v.2 FW 308.

The locations of the three drafts of version 1 are laid out with more clarity in this separate table:

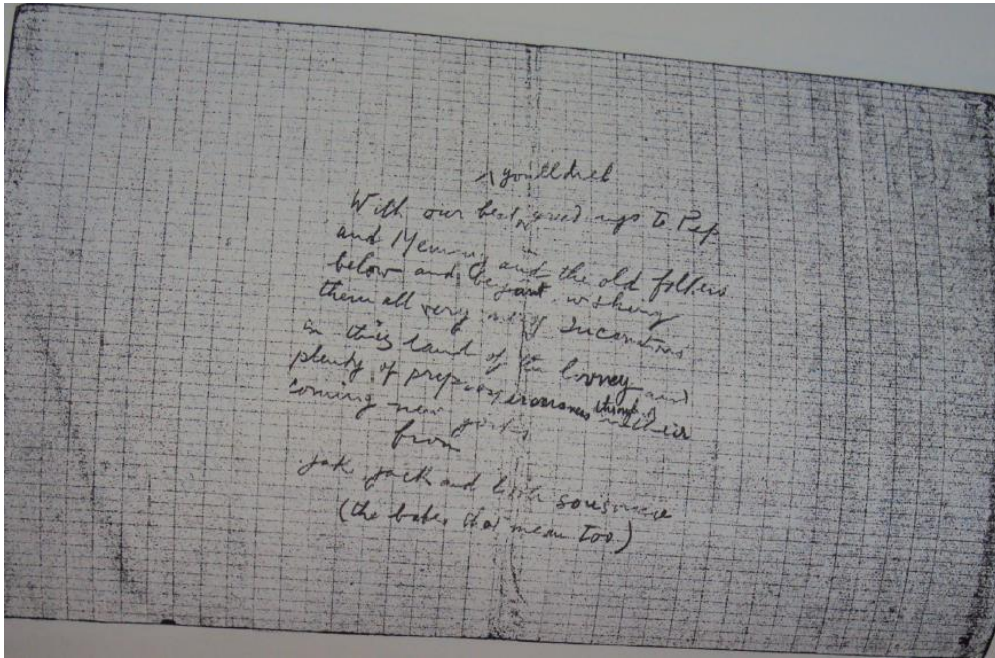
“NIGHTLETTER” version 1 draft title	Location in the <i>James Joyce Archive</i>	Location in “Section 9” drafts
NL v.1 – A	47478-178; JJA 53: 280	9.*4
NL v.1 – B	47478-207; JJA 53: 288	9.5
NL v.1 – C	Buffalo VI.G.4-27; JJA 53: 303	9.10, but possibly composed within the missing draft: 9.Σ6

The immediate effect of all of the NL v.1 drafts is one of visual independence from the conclusion of II.2.⁴ by and large, the A, B and C drafts of NL v.1, share identical textual content with their differences being solely morpheme alterations and, of course, the introduction of the capitalised “NIGHTLETTER” heading in NL v.1 – C. The three ‘drafts’ are on a visual level quite similar in that they all have a ‘justified’ text design, but the first two drafts differ significantly from NL v.1 – C since they both use a landscape” page layout.

NL v.1 – A:

NL v.1 – A is a faircopy text written neatly in ink and it is positioned in the centre of its own page. The absence of extensive accretions to its content (no more than three) informs us that it was conceived and/or worked on within a previous, and now lost, draft. If this was not the case it was quite possibly created independently as a short “idea” or sketch before being added at this point within the main *Storiella* narrative. Its creation could therefore have taken place over a time period spanning multiple section nine drafts which could have been months in total. This dating speculation aside, it is clear that by the time that Joyce reached draft 9.*4 he had a fixed place reserved for NL v.1 – A. Firstly, it is its *own* page following the end of II.2, which is, to put it one way, page 309 in today’s published *Finnegans Wake*. This currently marks the beginning of II.3. NL v.1 – A resembles a centralised block of text surrounded by striking blank borders and there are no marginalia or footnotes. This makes its content look isolated and stylistically jarring with the remainder of II.2’s narrative or indeed any other part of *Finnegans Wake* in general.

⁴ It is not independent in terms of *overall* content in II.2 since the characters named in the text are clearly the Earwicker children from the preceding *Storiela as She is Syung* section. *Storiela* is the collective title for the introductory and concluding parts of II.2. They were split apart during Joyce’s arrangements of the galley proofs in 1938.



“With our best ^youlldied^ greedings to Pep

and Memmy and the old folkers

below and ~~beyent~~ ^beyant^, wishing

them all very merry Incarnations

in this land of the livvey and

plenty of preprosperousness ^through^ their

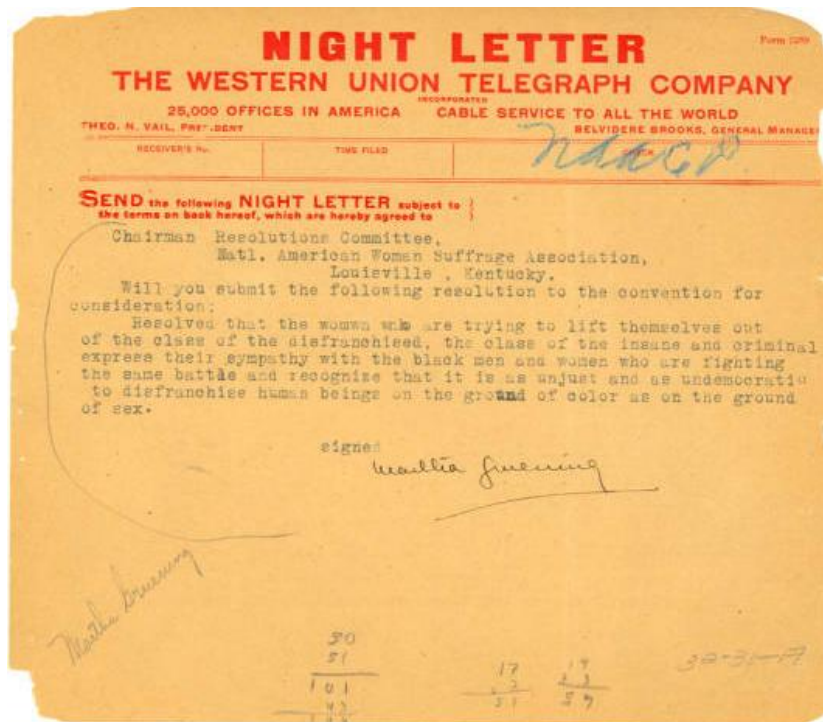
coming new yorks

from

jake, jack and little sousoucie

(the babes that mean too)” (BL 47478-178; JJA 53: 280)

As stated in the introduction, NL v.1 – A is essentially a real-life night letter in terms of its design verisimilitude. It is a signed telegram whose main body of text is centralised on a horizontal piece of paper. The only design trait missing is the “NIGHTLETTER” title which Joyce added later. A night letter from 1911 which matches up with Joyce’s version for the most part is pictured below:



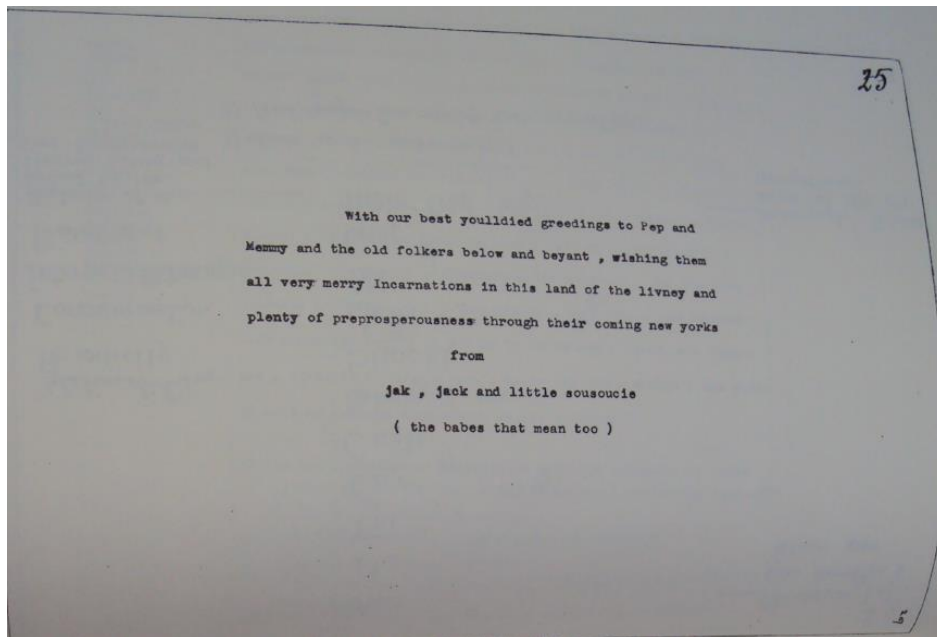
1911, August. Martha Gruening Night Letter (Telegram)⁵

NL v.1 – A replicates the positioning of the message itself and the landscape format of the page. Otherwise, Joyce greatly simplifies the design by omitting the administration associated with the mailing company and other very detailed text housed within tables. Later he chooses to only include the “NIGHT LETTER” title (introduced in NL v.1 –C) but this proves to be an economical solution to bring about verisimilitude without excessive linguistic clutter.

NL v.1 – B:

NL v.1 – B is essentially a typescript version of NL v.1 – A as it omits a “NIGHTLETTER” heading and all of the latter’s accretions are integrated. (It has no accretions of its own but it does have a typo on the word “livney” which should read “livvy”). NL v.1 – B clarifies Joyce’s intentions in terms of layout for the text of NL v.1 – A, viz. that it is to be positioned in the centre of a page which uses a landscape orientation. This is unusual since it requires one to turn the book on its *side* to read it. The necessity to turn *Finnegans Wake* in a circular manner makes both NL v.1 – A and NL v.1 – B feel particularly disconnected from the rest of the novel and perhaps this was deemed excessively so. In NL v.1 – C Joyce would remove this ‘feature’ and relocate the text within the book’s conventional portrait pagination format.

⁵ This image is located at the following link: <https://www.desselstudio.net/portfolios/1227/works/51226>.



“With our best youlldied greadings to Pep and
Memmy and the old folkers below and beyant, wishing
them
all very merry Incarnations in this land of the livney and
plenty of preprosperousness through their coming new
yorks

from

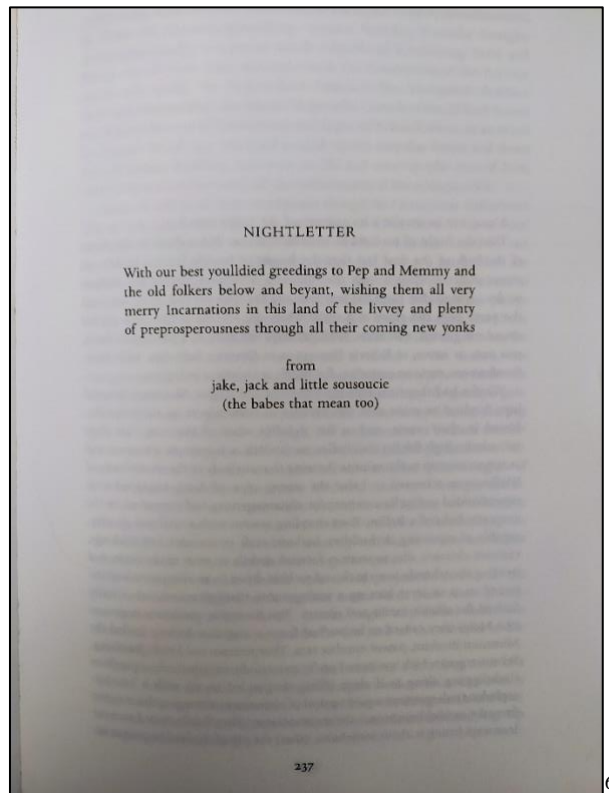
jak, jack and little sousoucie

(the babes that mean too)” (47478-207; JJA 53: 288).

NL v.1 – C:

NL v.1 – C, the final version 1 draft and the only one published during Joyce’s lifetime (in *transition* 23), is essentially the same as NL v.1 – B but with two striking differences. The first and most obvious change is that the heading “NIGHTLETTER” is integrated and visually dominates the entire page. Additionally, the main text is compressed more than in NL v.1 – A and B and it is more obviously “boxed in”. The second major change is that the format of the page has been readjusted so that it now has a portrait rather than landscape layout. This is

significant for multiple reasons concerning how verisimilitude functions within Joyce's nightletter.



(Buffalo VI. G.4-27; JJA 53:303).

Firstly, Joyce “breaks” the accuracy of his visual representation of night letters by repositioning his text within the confines of a portrait pagination layout. Night letters are identical to postcards in that their content is always presented in a landscape orientation. As surmised earlier, Joyce was most likely forced to make this decision so that the narrative flow of II’s conclusion would not be interrupted by a disruptive turning of the book sideways. However, there was an unexpected benefit which resulted from this change. The portrait design of the page allowed for the overall image to be interpreted as if it were a festive greetings (or “greedings”) card and not solely a night letter. This is because greetings cards adopt a portrait page design in the majority of cases and if they were designed to celebrate, say, yuletide (or even “youlldied”) they would normally include a short and centralised written passage (in prose or poetry) which would then be signed. All of these features can be linked to Joyce’s night letter almost to the point where it would seem as if it was always meant to be so. It is serendipitously full of festive content as it

⁶ This is the version which the *Restored* Edition uses as its nightletter (Joyce 2010: 237).

references yuletide, the new year (“new yonks”) and it even incorporates the clichéd Christmas adjective “merry”.

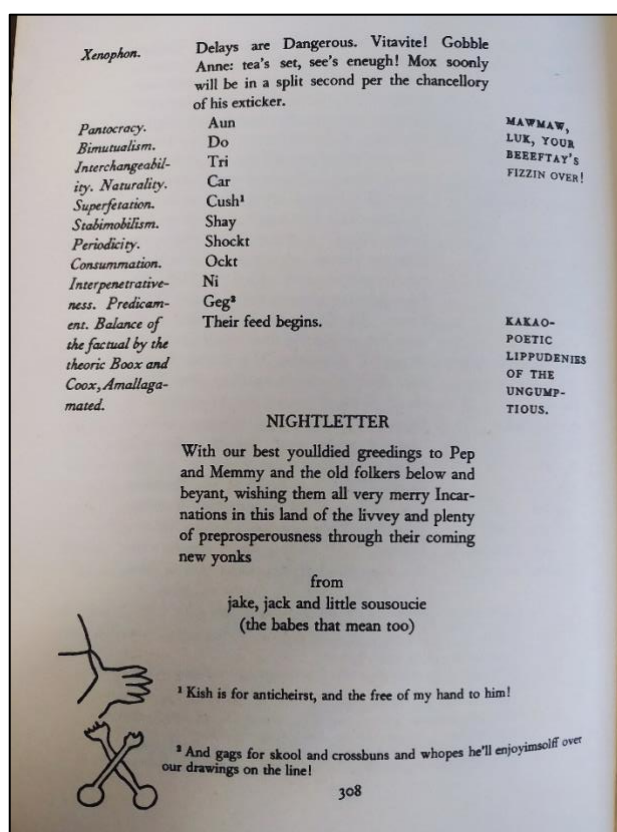
To reiterate: the Nightletter in its NL v.1 – C form has a festive character unique to *Finnegans Wake* but it also has a thematic kinship with Christmas and new year scenes in “The Dead” and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Its nocturnal title carries Wakean symbols of darkness and death coupled with a reference to the important narratological structure of communication through letters. However, on a more immediate level it sets a timestamp on the Nightletter as being written at the darkest time of the year which is at the winter solstice when the shortest day and longest night occur. Generally the winter solstice occurs just before Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere on December 21st or 22nd which in Wakean terms is the most intense period of darkness. This makes any communication written during this time certainly well-suited to the title of “Nightletter”. The positioning of the NL v.1 – C at the physical centre of *Finnegans Wake*, halfway through, imbues it with the metaphorical power of absolute darkness with its being in the figurative “dead of night” and murkiest part of the novel. However, the Nightletter itself, with grim humour, is a warm, familial piece of writing. It is a collaborative composition by the three siblings, “jake, jack and little sousoucie”, whose names are signed in childish lower case forms, and it is addressed cosily to their parents HCE and ALP, here called “Pep” and “Memmy”. Surprisingly, the trio also send festive cheer to the “old folkers below and beyant” who are wished “very merry Incarnations in this land of the livvey”. The siblings give attention to these spirits and ghosts, “below” in Hell or “beyant” or “beyond” elsewhere in the afterlife. This is arguable because it is during the winter solstice that a gateway temporarily opens between the worlds of the living and the dead and it is at this time that apparitions and lost souls are said to “walk” the earth, protected as it were by the intense darkness.

The Nightletter Version 2 and its “Accidental Creation”:

It is tempting to call the Nightletter version 2 (NL v.2) an editorial botch and a total mess in general. To create a clear comparison, there is sound stylistic reasoning and incredible artistic care and attention underpinning the development of the “first” version of the Nightletter. This is not the case with version 2 and it is arguably only our overfamiliarity with this badly positioned and cluttered text that makes us accept that this is what Joyce actually intended us to read. It was “created” between October 1937 and February 1938 and it appears for the first time in the JJA in draft 9.12.⁷ 9. However, it is more apt to say that NL v.2 was *accidentally*

⁷ See JJA 53: 305 for the chronological details.

“created” rather than “written” since it was the result of a typesetting blunder involving a missed page break. NL v.2 is, first of all, identical to NL v.2 – C in terms of textual content (and how the sentences are ordered). However, unlike NL v.1 – C it does not occupy a page of its own but it is positioned on the page which was originally *preceding* the Nightletter. To be precise, NL v.2 is installed above 2 “Issy” footnotes. There is no longer any room underneath the Nightletter unlike within NL v.1 – C which had half a page of space free underneath.



(FW 308)

In general, Joyce's editors made *many* serious mistakes in the II.2's galley proofs: the Nightletter was only one of dozens of parts in the text which were figuratively “damaged” by streams of continual errors.⁸ The ALP diagram, for instance, on page 293 and the majority of the Shaun/Shem marginalia would regrettably end up entirely in the wrong place despite Joyce's frustrated efforts to correct every mistake.⁹ The accuracy of the positioning of the

⁸ It is for these reasons that it is arguably better to read II.2 exclusively using the *Restored* edition since it corrects most of the textual blunders that litter the Faber edition.

⁹ In draft 9.12+ for instance, Joyce uses arrows to correctly show where he wanted his marginalia to line up together with the main body of text. On multiple pages he instructs the editors to move individual marginalia “half a line up”, for instance (See BL 47478 - 362 JJA 53: 345). The returned typed versions of 9.12+ do not correct the majority of these mistakes. This is evident in Joyce's edifications in later drafts (for example on BL 47478 – 364; JJA 53: 349).

marginalia remains poor in the final version of *Finnegans Wake* compared to what Joyce probably intended. The ALP diagram was eventually positioned awkwardly inside a paragraph, being stuck between lines FW 293.11-12. Joyce's original artistic vision originates in draft 8AC.*0 (BL 47482a – 67; JJA 53: 4) which was written in 1926.

NL v.2 and Why it Remains in *Finnegans Wake*:

Establishing that a tradition of serious editorial errors in the II.2 drafts is important if we wish to properly understand how NL v.1 – C became NL v.2 and, more interestingly, why it was never changed *back*. This is a difficult question to answer since no evidence exists in letters or otherwise why the original version was essentially scrapped in favour of a new design that was created most likely by editorial “chance”. Joyce could have treated this “mistake”, after all, as a happy accident that he chose to retain for the next set of galley proofs (BL 47478-390; JJA 53: 400) and final version of *Finnegans Wake*.¹⁰ However, this doesn't quite make sense once we take into account how long Joyce had worked on version 1 of the Nightletter and that he was satisfied enough with it to publish it in *transition 23*, two and a half years before. For Joyce to so effortlessly and casually change the Nightletter because of someone else's mistake seems out of character. Additionally, NL v.2 has very cramped positioning on its page because it is located on top of two footnotes, is inserted under a large amount of text, is enclosed by marginalia, *and* is next to two drawings. Therefore, it does not seem likely that Joyce would trade in NL v.2 for the aesthetically striking and crisp design of NL v.1 – C with its night letter or greetings card verisimilitude. As a result, it can be argued that a diminishment in artistic quality occurs with its repositioning at the bottom of the page and it would itself be a lapse in artistic judgement if Joyce deemed NL v.2 a superior creation to NL v.1.

Regrettably, we must take into consideration that Joyce may have made a rare artistic compromise during the II.2 galley proofs and he allowed NL v.2 to be published despite the fact that an editorial error was responsible for its “creation”. The reasoning for Joyce's decision to accept that he would not see the Nightletter as he originally intended (as NL v.1 – C) is then extreme fatigue. Danis Rose, in the *James Joyce Digital Archive*, notes that during the page proofs for II.2 (drafts 9.13, 9.13¹ and 9.13+ for the FW 308 material) “Everyone involved, including Joyce, was overwrought and sick and tired of the whole business, wishing it was over” (Rose and O'Hanlon “II.2: Book II Chapter 2”). Joyce was not an individual who folded

¹⁰ In Joyce's final corrections for II.2 there is no mention about correcting the Nightletter's positioning (VI.H,4 b-19; JJA 53: 420), although perhaps it was too late for such a drastic re-positioning of text at this point.

easily under work-related pressure but the final editing of *Finnegans Wake* pushed him to a limit that even he could not surmount. Therefore, we can argue that had circumstances been less stressful during the II.2 galley proof compiling stage, Joyce would not have allowed his original version of the Nightletter to have been altered. For example, NL v.2 could have had its first *and last* appearance in draft 9.12 and been corrected in 9.12+. It would be today, therefore, a mere curiosity for genetic scholars to know about and a text that would rarely, if ever, receive critical attention.

The NL v.1 – C in the *Restored Finnegans Wake* and Conclusion:

NL v.2, of course, remains the convention for all Nightletters read today largely because the Faber and Faber edition of *Finnegans Wake* remains the sole version read by Joyceans. The uniformity of its line and page numbers assists us in our reading of this challenging work since we can communicate easily to one another concerning word locations. (It is of course thoroughly difficult to conduct a *Finnegans Wake* reading group if participants are using a mixture of Faber and Faber, Viking and digital editions). However, this convenience, as essential as it may be, has all but eliminated the chance of NL v.1 becoming well known, let alone being viewed as the “definitive version” by *Wake* readers. It wasn’t until 2010 in fact, in Rose and O’Hanlon’s *Restored* edition, that the NL v.1 was incorporated into a *full* edition of *Finnegans Wake*, 75 years after its publication in *transition* 23. Arguably, this should be enough to justify it being substituted for NL.1 in future editions of the novel, following suit with the *Restored* edition. Editorial purists may, of course, state that Joyce did not in the end decide to remove it and it is for this reason that it should never be altered. However, *had* Joyce been under less pressure it is arguable that he would have made the change and that it was extreme circumstances that dictated his actions rather than artistic desire. Additionally, it seems to be a glaring omission that NL v.1 striking inclusion into the *Restored* edition has not entered into the discussions about its editorial changes. In actuality though the edition’s rare usage in *Wake* reading groups will hinder the exposure of NL v.1 to the wider public most of all. It would, therefore, be most effective for the NL v.1 to be included within the appendices for future annotated editions of *Finnegans Wake*. This is so that modern readers could become aware that an alternative Nightletter exists and that it has a rich textual history that justifies being valued as a standalone and highly polished conclusion to II.2. It is, in other words, not merely a curiosity that comprises a mere three pages within the *James Joyce Archive* that, in all honesty, is only noticeable if one happens upon it by mistake.

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