

Finnegans is the *Tolstoy* of the Uitoto

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Finnegans É O Tolstoy dos Uitoto

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Reflection article

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ABSTRACT

The Word, as the creative principle of life, is a concept found in many cultures, from the Hebraic to the Uitotos (or Murui) of the Colombian Amazon. The author finds parallels between the immersion of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* in the Word as the key to unlocking different but interrelated dimensions of reality, and the cosmo-vision of the Murui. *Finnegans Wake* presents a panoptic view of practically the whole of life and history in the form of the dream world of a Dublin tavern owner. It deploys a complex use of word play, hidden meanings and mutations of language to depict both the conscious and subconscious perceptions of our primal humanity. Similarly, virtually every word of the Murui myths has multiple meanings and they embody a manual of correct thought and behavior ranging from spirituality to the practicalities of daily life. Their premier shamanic plants, *mambe* and *ambil*, derivatives of coca and tobacco, respectively, are the inspiration for the nightly colloquiums in their *malocas* (longhouses) where the meanings of their myths are teased out by the participants, guided by their medicine man, in a free-ranging conversation that, while it seems to be digressive, adheres, as does Joyce, to the inner logic of the Word. The author ends with some reflections on his own struggles, as a writer to grapple with the Word, which, as it communicates, also mystifies. For the Murui, this urge towards omniscience may have arisen because their survival depended on articulating all of the interrelated nuances of their environment.

Keywords: *Finnegans Wake*, Murui, Amazonian cosmovisions, medicine plants, language analysis, mythology.

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RESUMEN

La Palabra, como principio creador de vida, es un concepto presente en muchas culturas, desde la hebraica hasta la uitotos (o murui) de la Amazonía colombiana. El autor encuentra paralelismos entre la inmersión de *Finnegans Wake* de Joyce en la Palabra como la clave para desbloquear dimensiones diferentes pero interrelacionadas de la realidad, y la cosmovisión de los Murui. *Finnegans Wake* presenta una visión panóptica de prácticamente toda la vida y la historia en forma del mundo onírico del dueño de una taberna de Dublín. Despliega un uso complejo de juegos de palabras, significados ocultos y mutaciones del lenguaje para representar las percepciones conscientes y subconscientes de nuestra humanidad primordial. De manera similar, prácticamente todas las palabras de los mitos de Murui tienen múltiples significados y representan un manual de pensamiento y comportamiento correctos que van desde la espiritualidad hasta los aspectos prácticos de la vida diaria. Sus principales plantas chamánicas, mambe y ambil, derivados de la coca y el tabaco, respectivamente, son la inspiración de los coloquios nocturnos en sus malocas donde los significados de sus mitos son desentrañados por los participantes, guiados por su curandero, en una conversación libre que, si bien parece digresiva, se adhiere, como Joyce, a la lógica interna de la Palabra. El autor termina con algunas reflexiones sobre sus propias luchas, como escritor para lidiar con la Palabra, que, como comunica, también mistifica. Para los Murui, este impulso hacia la omnisciencia puede haber surgido porque su supervivencia dependía de articular todos los matices interrelacionados de su entorno.

Palabras clave: *Finnegans Wake*; Murui; cosmovisiones amazónicas; plantas medicinales; análisis del lenguaje; mitología.

RESUMO

A Palavra, como princípio criador da vida, é um conceito presente em muitas culturas, desde a hebraica até a dos Uitotos (ou Murui) da Amazônia colombiana. O autor encontra paralelos entre a imersão de *Finnegans Wake* de Joyce na Palavra como a chave para desvendar dimensões diferentes, mas inter-relacionadas da realidade, e a cosmovisão dos Murui. *Finnegans Wake* apresenta uma visão panóptica de praticamente toda a vida e história na forma do mundo dos sonhos de um dono de taverna de Dublin. Ele emprega um uso complexo de jogos de palavras, significados ocultos e mutações de linguagem para retratar as percepções conscientes e subconscientes de nossa humanidade primordial. Da mesma forma, praticamente todas as palavras dos mitos Murui têm múltiplos significados e incorporam um manual de pensamento e comportamento corretos que vão desde a espiritualidade até os aspectos práticos da vida diária. Suas principais plantas xamânicas, mambe e ambil, derivados da coca e do tabaco, respectivamente, servem de inspiração para os colóquios noturnos em suas malocas, onde os significados de seus mitos são desvendados pelos participantes, guiados por seu pajé, em uma conversa desenfreada que, embora pareça digressiva, adere, como Joyce, à lógica interna da Palavra. O autor termina com algumas reflexões sobre suas próprias lutas, como escritor, para lidar com a Palavra, que, ao comunicar, também mistifica. Para os Murui, esse impulso em direção à onisciência pode ter surgido porque sua sobrevivência dependia da articulação de todas as nuances inter-relacionadas de seu ambiente.

Palavras-chave: *Finnegans Wake*; Murui; cosmovisões amazônicas; plantas medicinais; mitologia.

To elaborate on Saul Bellow's challenge to name the Tolstoy of the Zulus¹, the Uitotos don't need a James Joyce because they already have a *Finnegans* in the form of their myths. As an intro to the connection between the two (and some of the Uitotos' plant medicines), pray consider the following:

"It is psychedelic – there is no stable point of view. . . You never know who is speaking . . . identities are not fixed . . . it dissolves boundaries... time is not linear . . . it is like collage or dada . . . there is dislocation, disorientation of characters . . . it condenses experience, all space-time in a nutshell . . . it works with associative trees of connection . . . it is about the union of spirit and matter". (Mckennaism 2020)

If I tell you that the author is Terence McKenna, you are bound to say that he is talking about ayahuasca. In fact, Terence's lecture on YouTube is about *Finnegans Wake*². Who better to interpret the writing of one loony (I say with that affection and respect) than another! And what better way to explore the relationship of a "sacred plant" to the creativity of a writer. Not that Joyce needed one: he had ayahuasca on the brain, as it were. Nor do I refer to ayahuasca but another indigenous medicine I will discuss below, which may likewise throw light on the magic of words. And never has their sorcery been so awesome (and so unfathomable) as in *Finnegans*, written by a man who had an unparalleled command of his own language, a sponge-like capacity to absorb others, a vast (if miscellaneous) store of exotic knowledge, an eidetic recall of all the places where he had lived and people he had known, and a determination to turn the novel into an encyclopedia of life past, present, and future. But if that left him with a channel to the voice of God, why didn't that Master Scribbler make it neater? Yet, as McKenna notes, with a skeleton key, heaps of patience and a heroic "close reading" of the text, a recognizable pattern emerges. Herewith, some (paraphrased) snatches:

Ground zero is the utterly mundane life of ordinary Irish people but the novel reaches back to other lives, as their gene strings reach back to Africa.

It recounts all previous history in a circular design with no beginning or end.

It works with a juxtaposition of time periods, simultaneous multiple meaning in every line and interlocking significances. And likewise, with fractals, which tell the whole thing in the first word, then tell it again in a second word over and over again.

That is, what the lazy reader finds formless is structured. (McKenna 2020)

Withal, there are good grounds for saying that *Finnegans* is a hallucination, but one has to be careful about equating that with the work of a madman and likewise, confuse the madman with what he creates. If *Finnegans* is gobbledygook, then you would have to say the same of the Victorian painter Richard Dadd, the genius of schizophrenic art. If we provisionally grant that the imagination of a transported artist may as meticulous as that of rational one, we must go on to the sorcery which makes *Finnegans* what it is. Now for the hard question: is *Finnegans* made from the words which Joyce heard in a trance or did he choose the words, post hoc, to convey the trance he was in? For decades, the critics have sweated to explain how *Finnegans* should be *read* rather than how it was *written* and resorted to metaphors like the uncertainty principle or palimpsest or pointed to the simultaneity of different meanings in a word or sentence. Useful, I grant but it still doesn't explain how Joyce fused the randomness of free association with the tedious labor of assembling a meta-crossword puzzle. Nevertheless, *Finnegans* may give us an insight into the power of words, as such, regardless of how and to whom they come. To cite Aldous Huxley, certain external aids, some plant-based, others made in a

laboratory -- “drugs”, if you will, but not in the derogatory sense of narcotics -- may open the doors of perception: a mere crack, but just knowing that there is a magical fount of the Word may encourage a writer to shed his Eurocentric inhibitions about exploring supra-rational channels of self-expression.

In my experience, ayahuasca is one, but with the limitations discussed in a previous essay in this journal. In this specific case, however, I refer to *jiibie* (or *mambe*, as it is more generally called in Colombia), a substance made from toasted coca leaves mixed with the ash of the burnt leaves of the *yarumo* tree. When slowly absorbed through the mucus lining of the mouth – not swallowed – it produces wakefulness, a slight numbness in the gums and a damping of appetite. The nutty/sweet *mambe* is complemented by a bitter, black tobacco paste, *yera* (more generally known as *ambil* in **Colombia**) which also contains vegetal salts. Like other forms of tobacco (wrongly maligned when it is natural), *ambil* sharpens one’s concentration and short-term memory and intensifies the most notable property of *mambe*, a subtle “high”.

For the indigenous communities who prepare *mambe*, principally the Uitotos of the Amazon, (whose correct name, the Murui, I will use from here on), coca is a sacred plant, generally used in a ritual context with the aim of clarifying awareness in order to harmonize man with man and man with Nature and the cosmos. In contrast with ayahuasca, the effect is meditative and gentle, while that of *ambil* is harsh, as is its nauseating taste. Years of consuming those substances when I write has, I believe, given me an insight into the mysterious interrelationship between the writer and his excavation of words. At the heart of the matter is the *sacredness* of the Word, both in the Judeo-Christian and certain indigenous cultures. It is not only the Old Testament which marks the Word as the beginning, the cosmogony of the Murui revolves around a similar concept. Further, my comparison of it with the mindset of Joyce is not that arbitrary. At times, the discourse of the *mambe* sage takes a baffling turn to free association as he wanders off course, contradicts himself or utters nonsensical sayings. You could liken it to a kōan meant to break the logjam of habitual thought.

I am still puzzling over the meaning of a remark made by one such sage during a ritual, when an earnest feminist asked him, “what is woman?” “a volcano!”, he answered in a flash. The answer must lie with the healer himself, who says that “All I do is to wake them up, it is easy.” This points to the distinctiveness of the indigenous cosmovision, which is panoptic, so you can go into and leave the roundel of knowledge at any point and then reenter at another instead of following a straight line of logic. Hence, the kinship I see with the kaleidoscopic, hall of mirrors, pack-it-all-in method of *Finnegans*. To support that claim, I quote a description³ of a Murui *maloca* (longhouse, or *anáneko* in the Murui language:

“In a vertical sense, the *maloca* represents the different worlds of their cosmogony: the area between the floor and the upper border of the surrounding wall of posts represents the middle world, inhabited by men, animals, trees, rivers, fish, etc. This is the tangible, corporeal, material world. From the point where the surrounding wall joins the roof and along the roof, separated by the crosspieces, there are a succession of different heavens, inhabited by the spirits of the mythological heroes, ancestors, lords of the animals and other elements of nature. . . During such rituals, the space of the *maloca* merges with the space of the heavenly *malocas*. Men and their creators meet, recognize each other and renew their links”. (Ramírez, s/f)

In *Finnegans*, as in the *maloca*, every part of the building is what it is and, at the same time, a synonym for something else, which, in turn, points to another and another until the whole folds into itself. When you compare *Genesis* and the cosmo-vision of the Murui, there is an intriguing concordance about the Word. Let us look at it, first, from the viewpoint of two Western experts:

(A) “For the indigenous people, it is very natural to conceive of words as something that is autonomous . . . In the beginning the word originated the Father, later, through the word, he created the water which he took out of himself . . . [this refers to] the ontological and epistemological status of the word” (Londoño 2012).

(B) “For the thought of the Uitotos, the word has the foundation force (essence) of things . . . it has, in itself, an ontic density which enables it to undertake symbolic actions like killing, burning, punishing . . . the word is the foundation of their speech, acts, knowledge, duty, wishes, thought and power: in short, it is the reflection of the mission, vision and organization of the world they inhabit” (Echeverri, 2022).

And second, from that of a Murui ethno-linguist:

(C) “In the Murui tradition, the word is related to power, since these two words are synonymous. It was granted to man by the Father Creator. The word is also related to thought, since with it, when you concentrate, you communicate with the Father Creator, which brings about a union between thought and the implementation of the act of speech. Likewise, the word is related to the use of coca and *ambil*, plants from which the word sprouts” (p.23)

Respect for the Word is not our characteristic mania for explaining ourselves to ourselves (and others). Rather, it is the understanding that we are the servants of the Word, which will only serve us in turn if we employ it in a purposeful manner, with the right thought and right intention that lead to right action. To cite the Murui expert again, who explains that *rafue*, which is apparently their word for the word,

“Does not refer to a ‘word’ or a ‘thing’: it is the activity through which words are transformed into things. When the activity of *rafue* barely begins, it manifests itself as a word which names what is sought, a word with ‘power’ . . . *rafue* manifests itself as food, hunting, creatures, etc.” (Candre-Kinerai y Echeverri 1996)

Nevertheless, to moralize about the “sacredness” of the Word would be to succumb to our guilt-ridden Judeo-Christian tradition and thus distort theirs. Insofar as the Murui have a church, it is their ceremonial dance, and any sermon comes from the two plants which animate the ceremony. By contrast, in our culture, it is not so much that we are not allowed time to think (clearly and with disinterest) as that we are not given the occasion to do so. Moreover, the genius (like Joyce) or radical/original thinker (like McKenna) is entitled to break the commandments. Both were intoxicated by the possibility that if they went all out, their respective passion would lead them to ultimate truths. Paradoxically, the field Joyce chose (word games) may be more hermetical than McKenna’s (sacred plants). Anyone with a modicum of sensitivity can engage with the familiars of the three I discuss and then assess the value of their illuminations, whereas only another giant of literature would have the authority to judge whether or not Joyce, in *Finnegans*, penetrated the primal power of the Word. Where the two join perhaps is that there are no magical shortcuts for a writer. If *mambe* were really that miraculous, literature would be full of Joyces. And if *ayahuasca* had the power of redemption some attribute to it, the world would be full of saints. The Murui language seems to be made up units or roots (with simple, concrete meaning), which can be then be combined to spawn more elaborate ideas, or so I deduce from the following (from one of the abovementioned Western investigators⁴):

“The true structure of the human being is that of a tree. There are centers of energy similar to the chakras of Hindu tradition. In *Uitoto* they are called *uieko* (faces). The first is +*dach*+*ka*+,⁵ that is, toes, long and slender, from +*note*⁶= to thank, to fulfill; *da* is oneness, referring to the big toe of the foot.

The second is the calf. There are found the brothers *m*+*koj*+, from *mii* (human referent)=brothers; *ko* from *koko*=both of us; and *j*+ = to accept, that is, the brothers accept being together. Usually, what happens to one twin also happens to the other.” (Ramirez)

The knee, or *kaiñiki* = to be awake, from, *kaade*=to be alive; *ñ*+ , from to accept; and *k*+ = the realm of knowledge: I am alive, awake, accepting the realm of knowledge. It is of fundamental importance. In women it is the womb, associated with the ovary. The synovial fluid is, in turn, water, blood, semen, etc. The genital, the testicles: most illnesses are concentrated there. It has two names: *teroj*+, which means ‘to plant while seeing’, ‘to plant knowledge’

The wording has to do with the coca leaf, in the case of a man, or with tobacco or *yuca* (cassava) in the case of a woman. The second name is *jiñ*+*j*+ : this has more to do with the sexual aspect. *Ji* = to concentrate, accept, entrap all which circulates in your body; *ñ*+ =to accept; *j*+ = to plant that energy again. The purpose of the shadow prayer is to protect this center. Its meaning would be: ‘I concentrate and again plant this energy which circulates through my body, accepting the energy’.”

By way of comparison, let us now look at a partial deconstruction of the first sentence of *Finnegans*, based on several “skeleton keys” to the book.

“Riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs”.

“Riverrun”: flux and flow;

the Liffey “past Eve and Adam’s,”: focus on the night; the temptress; Adam and Eves Church in Dublin; atoms; Fallen Adam = *Finnegan’s Fall*;

“from swerve of shore to bend of bay,”: swerve = Swords, a Dublin suburb; *The Bending of the Bow* (play by George Moore);

Dublin Bay “brings us by a commodious vicus of recirculation”: comode/circular flow of water; Giambattista Vico; Vico Road in Dalkey; vice/sin; narrative follows Vico’s theory of cyclical time.

“back to Howth Castle and Environs”: H.C.E. = Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (the protagonist of the story)/Here Comes Everybody; landmark of Fingal County;

Howth: on Howth Head Peninsula/body symbolism; Environs = Dublin.

At other times, Joyce’s composites have more to do with sound than meaning:

“bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrh
ounawnskawntoohooohoordeenenthur-nuk!

It represents the symbolic thunderclap associated with the fall of Adam and Eve, but, as in other instances of Joyce’s word play, it is not arbitrary but an anagram of the word for thunder in a number of languages.

On the other hand, there are many passages where the word play is easy to decipher (at least at first sight) but nevertheless (on a closer scrutiny) reveal a deeper meanings, like:

“In the ignorance that implies the impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality.” (James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*)

In my view, at least, the key here is the “nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts”, which might be regarded as a summary of the whole, roughly glossed as the nameform –the word –which sharpens the intelligence which finds (or deliberately establishes) unexpected contacts (meanings) between the words, just as Murui does.

Now let us return to the word games the Murui play, quoting Ramirez, who notes that the maestro in the mambeadero he describes brings about a:

“Mutation of language . . . His voice is a discourse charged with the language and culture of the Uitotos. When it is literally transcribed into Spanish, the meanings in the latter language appear as a surprising semantic flow. At times the word halts, creating veritable associative ‘sparks’ in the suffixes, prefixes and morphemes, which, when they arise, are perceived as ‘bouquets’ of comprehension, and then disappear in the act, completely overflowing the context in which they were spoken. . . the Uitoto language. . . consists of an endless associative flood. [The maestro’s] word flows along outside of the context of meaning and when we think we understand it, that meaning moves back and forth in our understanding in an ungraspable way, acquiring its maximum strength when it vanishes and becomes multi-referential” (Ramirez s/f).

At first reading, they are like many other ancient ones in that, in large measure, they are saturated in murder, revenge, cannibalism incest, rape, black magic and so forth, but their intention is to edify -- to purge the listener of his deepest anxieties and fears.

When a Murui tale-teller gets going, he will hold you for hours as he improvises around the main theme, zig-zags here and there, returns, continues and interjects the odd commentary or explanation. For that and the complexity of the tales, it is difficult to summarize them.

What makes it even more frustrating for an outsider is that unless he is thoroughly familiar with the beliefs and customs of the Murui, he will no more grasp the full meaning of the story than a person who leafs through *Finnegans* for the first time.

To elucidate this, we may resort to a well-known myth, originally recorded and translated into Spanish by Konrad Theodor Preuss, the German ethnologist who, in 1914, undertook the first exhaustive study, in situ, of the Uitoto (his term) culture.

The culture hero of this myth is Nonueteima⁷, his antagonist is an evil witch called Nofiniyeiki and to complete the triangular structure which characterizes many of these tales, there is his daughter, Ofaniño, who acts as the bait for her cannibal father. Nofiniyeiki invites any young man who visits them to sleep with her, without their knowing that he has placed scorpions and serpents in her vagina, so that they will die and he can eat them.

Not Nonueteima, though, whose magical powers enable him to detect and undo the danger, sleep with, and marry her and leave the old man’s home unscathed. Later, he returns with the couple’s two young children, whereupon, in accordance with the Murui custom, he has to work for him.

Nofiniyeiki then sets Nonueteima several tasks, like chopping down trees to clear the land for a chagra and burning them, but it is really a pretext to kill him with black magic with a series of apparent accidents. To start with,

Nonueteima counters the attempts with his own magic, but he is finally lured into a fish trap and drowns. However, he lives on in the supernatural world as an embodiment of the Higher Word.

This becomes evident when his two children, who were too young when he was killed to remember him, come across the head of their father, who tells them the whole story. Finally, with a deceit of their own –which has to do with healing the old man of chiggers and also relies on magic –they push him into the fire in the maloca and he is burnt to death.

Now, as the commentator of Finnegans does, we decipher some of the connotations the myth, with the commentaries of Dr Ramirez, who worked under the guidance of the Murui sage, Óscar Román:

“Nofiniyeiki = devourer of stones. The names of the two children = the Uitoto equivalent of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. When Nonueteima chopped down the trees for the clearing, he was ordered to first burn those on the periphery and finally, those in the center and he was surrounded by flames: a warning that the opposite is the correct procedure. To escape, he turned himself into a lizard, *kuema*: *kue*=I; *ma*=power; I am the power. The trap refers, among other things, to the bread made from cassava starch the old man always held in his hand.

The starch is *jaiyiki*: one of whose roots is “to trap”The trap is also the narrow canyon of the river Araracuara. The chiggers the old man had, *oroyi*: *o*=you, *ro*=should sing, *yi*=the round pineapple which teaches you to sing

and it is also used to heal the complaint, that is, the children “blew” (chanted) over the fruit to aggravate his itching instead.

Then they sang the same magical chant which their grandfather used to put Nature to sleep, meanwhile rocking him in his hammock and so defenseless, he was thrown into the fire. What they were doing, says the gloss, was to return him to childhood, so that that illness would not continue to disturb mankind”.

The story as such ends there, but its different lessons are echoed in other myths, for example, ones which instruct the Murui in the art of conscious dreaming. Thus, the idea of the (fish) trap is related to the organs of sense which are the lords of sleep and enable us “catch” sweet dreams, as the commentator explains: “*komeki* = heart; *kome* = people; *k* = egg, half sphere; but the heart is sweet, that is why its etymological origin is *k + ifo* = honey. *K + ide* also means that when I discover something, I catch it and understand it, my heart softens.

Conclusions

You cannot conclude anything about life because the interlocking of its parts is too complex. You cannot “trap it”, as the West tries to do, with straightforward logical reasoning. However, for most, whether that reduction is in the form of religious commandments, wise sayings, scientific formulae, computer codes and all the rest, it *does work*, albeit on a bare functional level.

For a few, nevertheless, it rankles, and they defy it with art, mysticism, speculation and, yes, madness. For the Murui, this urge towards omniscience may have arisen because their survival depended on articulating all of the interrelated nuances of their environment. Nevertheless, we should be wary of going to the other extreme of romanticizing the “oneness with Nature” of the pre-literate mentality. In many respects, the analytical approach has made our lives more hygienic, abundant and comfortable “*Las palabras son de aire, y van al aire*”: yes! But words are all we writers have and if we are not content with them, it is because we sense that the word may be more than a tool to persuade, instruct, condole, etc. but the power to penetrate the core of life.

“We are trapped in meaning, which is a powerful annihilator of the true communication that is the game of self-discovery” (from the commentator of the Murui myth). A writer doesn’t know what he means till he writes it and when he reads what he writes he is not sure that that is what he means. Or in the case of Joyce, that it does not convey *everything* which he wants to say.

If we were to take a Platonic view of words, they would be like the shadows on the wall of a cave cast by the true reality outside. The pretension of *Finnegans* is that if you force words to their limit, you can reverse the process and they will lead you back into the light of the real. Obscure as it is, *Finnegans* is a *heroic folly*.

“Why is there no word tender enough to be your name?” (From Joyce’s play *Exiles*). Is it because words are never enough, that there are never enough words for the writer? Is it any coincidence that a writer who begins with the above ends in “bababadalghara-ghtakamminarron-nkonnbronnto-nnerronntuo-nnthunntrovarr-hounawnsk-awntoohoocho-ordenenthurnuk” (Joyce’s abovementioned “thunder-word” cobbled together from ten languages, including Hindustani). In the end Joyce doesn’t multiply words so much as restore their potency.

The entangled wills of the writer and his substances are irrelevant to the main consideration: that words have a dominion of their own. Whether the writer enters it with the aid of stimulants or, like Joyce, by a natural fever in the mind, the challenge is to learn the language (of language) and turn it to his own ends. But how, when the permutations are infinite?

Bless him or curse him, Joyce wasn't afraid to yield to the madness of the enterprise, knowing, as he did, that words are only signs which denote sounds, but when we assign meanings to them, we forget that words are in a dominion of their own and once brought into use, the meanings may take on a life of their own, especially in their relations with one another. What Joyce grasped were deeper structures in these relations which defied the very logic we think we use words for, ones which pointed to supra-verbal truths, secrets which the words keep to themselves and that nearly everyone else regard as gibberish. Precisely because magical plants disorient the writer so much, they offer an insight into that wilful realm of malleable meanings. But to benefit from it, he would have to be as bold, talented and obsessive as Joyce. Still, we lesser men can learn from him and . . . the Murui.

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Notes

¹ In the 1980s, Saul Bellow asked James Atlas, who was working on a *New York Times Magazine* profile of Allan Bloom, "Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I'd be glad to read him." See: <https://medium.com/the-shadow/tolstoy-the-zulus-and-the-crimea-a8bee601b955>

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzcxRU6e-K0&ab_channel=Mckennaism

³ Dr. Fabio Ramírez, *Ambil* (tobacco), *humanitas* and *daimon*, from the standpoint of ethno-medicine. unpublished book. The author can be contacted at: drfabioramirez@gmail.com

⁴ Dr. Fabio Ramírez. Op. cit.

⁵ Probably *idachikai* (Editor's note)

⁶ 'to believe', 'to fecundate' (Editor's note)

⁷ The full text of this and other texts may be consulted at Preuss (1944: vol 2 pp 423 ss)

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