The danger is in the neatness of identifications. The conception of Philosophy and Philology as a pair of nigger minstrels out of the Teatro dei Piccoli is soothing, like the contemplation of a carefully folded ham-sandwich. Giambattista Vico himself could not resist the attractiveness of such coincidence of gesture. He insisted on complete identification between the philosophical abstraction and the empirical illustration, thereby annulling the absolutism of each conception – hoisting the real unjustifiably clear of its dimensional limits, temporalizing that which is extratemporal. And now, here am I, with my handful of abstractions, among which notably: a mountain, the coincidence of contraries, the inevitability of cyclic evolution, a system of Poetics, and the prospect of self-extension in the world of Mr. Joyce’s ‘Work in Progress’. There is the temptation to treat every concept like ‘a bass dropt neck fust in till a bung crate’ and make a really tidy job of it. Unfortunately, such an exactitude of application would imply distortion in one of two direction. Must we wring the neck of a certain system in order to stuff it into a contemporary pigeon-hole, or modify the dimensions of that pigeon-hole for the satisfaction of the analogymongers? Literary criticism is not book-keeping

Giambattista Vico was a practical roundheaded Neapolitan. It pleases Croce to consider him as a mystic, essentially speculative, ‘disdegnoso dell’ empirismo’. It is a surprising interpretation, seeing that more than three-fifths of his Scienza Nuova is concerned with empirical investigation. Croce opposes him to the reformative materialistic school of Ugo Grozio, and absolves jim from the utilitarian preoccupations of Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Bayle and Machiavelli. All this cannot be swallowed without protest. Vico defines Providence as ‘una mente spesso diversa ed alle volte tutta contraria e sempre superior ad essi fini particolari che essi uomini si avevano proposti; dei quali fini ristretti fatti mezzi per servire a fini più ampi, gli ha sempre adoperati per conservare l’umana generazione in questa terra’. What could be more definitely utilitarianism? His treatment of the origin and functions of poetry, language and myth, as will appear later, is as far removed from the mystical as it is possible to imagine. For our immediate purpose, however, it matters little
whether we consider jim as a mystic or as a scientific investigator; but there are no two ways about considering him as an innovator. His division of the development of human society into three ages: Theocratic, Heroic, Human (civilized) with a corresponding classification of language: Hieroglyphic (sacred) Metaphorical (poetic), Philosophical (capable of abstraction and generalisation), was by no means new, although it must have appeared so to his contemporaries. He derived this convenient classification from the Egyptians, via Herodotus. At the same time it is impossible to deny the originality with which he applied and developed its implications. His exposition of the ineluctable circular progression of Society was completely new, although the germ of it was contained in Giordano Bruno’s treatment of identified contraries. But it is in Book 2., described by himself as ‘tutto il corpo... la chiave maestra... dell’opera’ that appears the unqualified originality of his mind; here he evolved a theory of the origins of poetry and language, the significance of myth, and the nature of barbaric civilization that must have appeared nothing less than an impertinent outrage against tradition. These two aspects of Vico have their reverberations, their reapplications – without however, receiving the faintest explicit illustration – in ‘Work in Progress.’

It is first necessary to condense the thesis of Vico, the scientific historian. In the beginning was the thunder: the thunder set free Religion, in its most objective and unphilosophical form – idolatrous animism: Religion produced Society, and the first social men were the cave-dwellers, taking refuge from a passionate Nature: this primitive family life receives its first impulse towards development from the arrival of terrified vagabonds: admitted, they are the first slaves: growing stronger, they exact agrarian concession, a a despotism has evolved into a primitive feudalism: the cave becomes a city, and the feudal system a democracy: then an anarchy: this is corrected by a return to monarchy: the last stage is a tendency towards interdestruction: the nations are dispersed and the phoenix of Society arises out of their ashes. To this six-termed social progression corresponds a six-termed progression of human motives: necessity, utility, convenience, pleasure, luxury, abuse of luxury: and their incarnate manifestations: Polyphemus, Achilles, Caesar and Alexander, Tiberius, Caligula and Nero. At this point Vico applies Bruno — though he takes very good care not to say so — and proceeds from rather arbitrary data to philosophical abstract ion. There is no difference, says Bruno between the smallest possible chord and the smallest possible arc, no difference between the infinite circle and the straight line. The maxima and minima of particular
contraries are one and indifferent. Minimal heat equals minimal cold. Consequently transmutations are circular. The principle (minimum) of one contrary takes its movement from the principle (maximum) of another. Therefore not only do the minima coincide with the minima, the maxima with the maxima, but the minima with the maxima in the succession of transmutations. Maximal speed is a state of rest. The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation are identical: in principle, corruption is generation. And all things are ultimately identified with God, the universal monad, Monad of monads. From these considerations Vico evolved a Science and Philosophy of History, it may be an amusing exercise to take an historical figure, such as Scipio, and label him No. 3; it is of no ultimate importance. What is of ultimate importance is the recognition that the passage from Scipio to Caesar is as inevitable as the passage from Caesar to Tiberius, since the flowers of corruption in Scipio and Caesar are the seeds of vitality in Caesar and Tiberius. Thus we have the spectacle of a human progression that depends for its movement on individuals, and which at the same time is independent of individuals in virtue of what appears to be a preordained cyclicism. It follows that History is neither to be considered as a formless structure, due exclusively to the achievements of individual agents, nor as possessing reality apart from and independent of them, accomplished behind their backs in spite of them, the work of some superior force, variously known as Fate, Chance, Fortune, God. Both these views, the materialistic and the transcendental, Vico rejects in favour of the rational. Individuality is the concretion of universality, and every individual action is at the same time superindividual. The individual and the universal cannot be considered as distinct from each other. History, then, is not the result of Fate or Chance — in both cases the individual would be separated from his product — but the result of a Necessity that is not Fate, of a Liberty that is not Chance (compare Dante’s ‘yoke of liberty’). This force he called Divine Providence, with his tongue, one feels, very much in his cheek. And it is to this Providence that we must trace the three institutions common to every society; Church, Marriage, Burial. This is not Bossuet’s Providence, transcendental and miraculous, but immanent and the stuff itself of human life, working by natural means. Humanity is its work in itself. God acts on her, but by means of her. Humanity is divine, but no man is divine. This social and historical classification is clearly adapted by Mr. Joyce as a structural convenience — or inconvenience. His position is in no way a philosophical one. It is the detached attitude of Stephen Dedalus in ‘Portrait of the Artist...’ who describes Epictetus to the Master of Studies as tr an old
gentleman who said that the soul is very like a bucketful of water. » The lamp is moreimportant than the lamp-lighter. By structural I do not only mean a bold outward division, a bare skel eton for the housing of material. I mean the endless substantial variations on these three beats, and interior intertwining of these three themes into a decoration of arabesques — decoration and more than decoration. Part I. is a mass of past shadow, corresponding therefore to Vico’s first human institution, Religion, or to his Theocratic age, or simply to an abstraction — Birth. Part 2 is the lovegame of the children, corresponding to the second institution, Marriage, or to the Heroic age, or to an abstraction — Maturity. Part. 3. is passed in sleep, corresponding to the third institution, Burial, or to the Human age, or to an abstraction — Corruption. Part 4 is the day beginning again, and corresponds to Vico’s Providence, or to the transition from the Human to the Theocratic, or to an abstraction — Generation. Mr. Joyce does not take birth for granted, as Vico seems to have done. So much for the dry bones. The consciousness that there is a great deal of the unborn infant in the lifeless octogenarian, and a great deal of both in the man at the apogee of his life’s curve, removes all the stiff interexclusiveness that is often the danger in neat construction. Corruption is not excluded from Part 1. nor maturity from Part 3. The four ‘lovedroyd curdinals’ are presented on the same plane —— ‘his element curdinal numen and his enement curdinal marrying and his epulent curdinal weisswasch and his eminent curdinal Kay o’ Kay ! ’ There are numerous references to Vico’s four human institutions — Providence counting as one! ‘A good clap, a fore wedding, a bad wake, tell hell’s well’: ‘their weatherings and their marryings and their buryings and their natural selections’: ‘the lightning look, the birding cry, awe from the grave, everflowing on our times’: ‘by four hands of forethought the first babe of reconcilement is laid in its last cradle of hume sweet hume’.

Apart from this emphasis on the tangible conveniences common to Humanity, we find frequent expressions of Vico’s insistence on the inevitable character of every progression —or retrogression: ‘The Vico road goes round and round to meet where terms begin. Still unappealed to by the cycles and onappalled by the recourser, we feel all serene, never you fret, as regards our dutyful cask .... before there was a man at all in Ireland there was a lord at Lucan. We only wish everyone was as sure of anything in this watery world as we are of everything in the newlywet fellow that’s bound to follow ..... ’ ‘The efferfreshpainted livy in beautific repose upon the silence of the dead from Pharoph the next first down to ramescheckles the last bust thing’. ‘In fact,
under the close eyes of the inspectors the traits featuring the chiaroscuro coalesce, their contrarieties eliminated, in one stable somebody similarly as by the providential warring of heartshaker with housebreaker and of dramdrinker against freethinker our social something bowls along bumpily, experiencing a jolting series of prearranged disappointments, down the long lane of (it’s as Semper as oxhousehumper) generations, more generations and still more generations’ — this last a case of Mr. Joyce’s rare subjectivism. In a word, here is all humanity circling with fatal monotony about the Providential fulcrum— the ‘convoy wheeling encircling abound the gigantig’s lifetree’. Enough has been said, or at least enough has been suggested, to show how Vico is substantially present in the *Work in Progress*. Passing to the Vico of the Poetics we hope to establish an even more striking, if less direct, relationship.

Vico rejected the three popular interpretations of the poetic spirit, which considered poetry as either an ingenious popular expression of philosophical conceptions, or an amusing social diversion, or an exact science within the reach of everyone in possession of the recipe. Poetry, he says, was born of curiosity, daughter of ignorance. The first men had to create matter by the force of their imagination, and ‘poet’ means ‘creator’`. Poetry was the first operation of the human mind, and without it thought could not exist.

Barbarians, incapable of analysis and abstraction, must use their fantasy to explain what their reason cannot comprehend. Before articulation comes song; before abstract terms, metaphors. The figurative character of the oldest poetry must be regarded, not as sophisticated confectionery, but as evidence of a poverty stricken vocabulary and of a disability to achieve abstraction. Poetry is essentially the antithesis of Metaphysics: Metaphysics purge the mind of the senses and cultivate the disembodiment of the spiritual; Poetry is all passion and feeling and animates the inanimate; Metaphysics are most perfect when most concerned with universals; Poetry, when most concerned with particulars. Poets are the sense, philosophers the intelligence of humanity. Considering the Scholastics’ axiom: ‘niente è nell’ inteleto che prima non sia nel senso’, it follows that poetry is a prime condition of philosophy and civilization. The primitive animistic movement was a manifestation of the ‘forma poetica dell spirito.’ His treatment of the origin of language proceeds along similar lines. Here again he rejected the materialistic and transcendental views: the one declaring that language was nothing but a polite and conventional symbolism; the other, in desperation, describing it as a gift
from the Gods. As before, Vico is the rationalist, aware of the natural and inevitable growth of language. In its first dumb form, language was gesture. If a man wanted to say 'sea', he pointed to the sea. With the spread of animism this gesture was replaced by the word: 'Neptune'. He directs our attention to the fact that every need of life, natural, moral and economic, has its verbal expression in one or other of the 30000 Greek divinities. This is Homer's language of the Gods'. Its evolution through poetry to a highly civilized vehicle, rich in abstract and technical terms, was as little fortuitous as the evolution of society itself. 'Words have their progressions as well as social phases. 'Forest-cabin-village-city-academy' is one rough progression. Another: 'mountain—plain—riverbank'. And every word expands with psychological inevitability. Take the Latin word: 'Lex'

1. Lex = Crop of acorns.
2. Ilex = Tree that produces acorns.
3. Legere: To gather.
4. Aquilex: He that gathers the waters.
5. Lex = Gathering together of peoples, public assembly.
7. Legere = To gather together letters into a word. to read.

The root of any word whatsoever can be traced back to some pre—lingual symbol. This early inability to abstract the general from the particular produced the Type-names. It is the child's mind over again— The child extends the names of the first familiar objects to other strange objects in which he is conscious of some analogy. The first men, unable to conceive the abstract idea of 'poet' or 'hero', named every hero after the first hero, every poet after the first poet. Recognizing this custom of designating a number of individuals by the names of their prototypes, we can explain various classical and mythological mysteries. Hermes is the prototype of the Egyptian inventor: so for Romulus, the great law—giver, and Hercules, the Greek hero; so for Homer. Thus Vico asserts the spontaneity of language and denies the dualism of poetry and language. Similarly, poetry is the foundation of writing. When
language consisted of gesture, the spoken and the written were identical. Hieroglyphics, or sacred language, as he calls it, were not the invention of philosophers for the mysterious expression of profound thought, but the common necessity of primitive peoples. Convenience only begins to assert itself at a far more advanced stage of civilization, in the form of alphabetism. Here Vico, implicitly at least, distinguishes between writing and direct expression. In such direct expression, form and content are inseparable. Examples are the medals of the Middle Ages, which bore no inscription and were a mute testimony to the feebleness of conventional alphabetic writing: and the flags of our own day. As with Poetry and Language, so with Myth. Myth, according to Vico, is neither an allegorical expression of general philosophical axioms (Conti, Bacon), nor a derivative from particular peoples, as for instance the Hebrews or Egyptians, nor yet the work of isolated poets, but an historical statement of fact, of actual contemporary phenomena, actual in the sense that they were created out of necessity by primitive minds, and firmly believed. Allegory implies a threefold intellectual operation: the construction of a message of general significance, the preparation of a fabulous form, and an exercise of considerable technical difficulty in uniting the two, an operation totally beyond the reach of the primitive mind. Moreover, if we consider the myth as being essentially allegorical, we are not obliged to accept the form in which it is cast as a statement of fact. But we know that the actual creators of these myths gave full credence to their face-value. Jove was no symbol: he was terribly real. It was precisely their superficial metaphorical character that made them intelligible to people incapable of receiving anything more abstract than the plain record of objectivity.

Such is a painful exposition of Vico’s dynamic treatment of Language, Poetry and Myth. He may still appear as a mystic to some: if so, a mystic that rejects the transcendental in every shape and form as a factor in human development. and whose Providence is not divine enough to do without the cooperation of Humanity.

On turning to the ‘Work in Progress’ we find that the mirror is not so convex. Here is direct expression — pages and pages of it. And if you don’t understand it, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other. This rapid
skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I may call a continuous process of copious intellectual salivation. The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quartary conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension. When Miss Rebecca West clears her decks for a sorrowful deprecation of the Narcissistic element in Mr. Joyce by the purchase of 3 hats, one feels that she might very well wear her bib at all her intellectual banquets, or alternatively, assert a more noteworthy control over her salivary glands than is possible for Monsieur Pavlo’s unfortunate dogs. The title of this book is a good example of a form carrying a strict inner determination. It should be proof against the usual volley of E cerebral sniggers: and it may suggest to some a dozen incredulous Joshuas prowling around the Queen’s Hall, springing their tuning—forks lightly against finger-nails that have not yet been refined out of existence. Mr. Joyce has a word to say to you on the subject: ‘Yet to concentrate solely on the literal sense or even the psychological content of any document to the sore neglect of the enveloping facts themselves circumstantiating it is just as harmful; etc.’ And another: ‘Who in his hearts doubts either that the facts of feminine clothiering are there all the time or that the feminine fiction, stranger than the facts, is there also at the same time, only a little to the rere? Or that one may be separated from the orther? Or that both may be contemplated simultaneously? Or that each may be taken up in turn and considered – apart from the other?’

Here form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read — or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself. (A fact that has been grasped by an eminent English novelist and historian whose work is in complete opposition to Mr Joyce’s). When the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep. (See the end of ‘Anna Livia’) When the sense is dancing, the words dance. Take the passage at the end of Shaun’s pastoral: ‘To stirr up love’s young fizz I tilt with this bridle’s cup champagne, dimming douce from her peepair of hideseeks tight squeezed on my snowybreasted and while my pearlies in their sparkling Wisdom are nippling her bubblets I swear (and let you swear) by the bumper round of my poor old snagletooth’s solidbowel I ne’er will prove I’m untrue to (theare!) you liking so long as my hole looks. Down.’ The language is drunk. The very words are tilted and effervescent. How can we qualify this general esthetic vigilance without which we cannot hope to snare the sense which is
for ever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself? St. Augustine puts us on the track of a word with his intendere’; Dante has: ‘Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore’, and ‘Voi che, intendendo, il terzo ciel movete’; but his ‘intendere’ suggests a strictly intellectual operation. When an Italian says today ‘Ho inteso,’ he means something between ‘Ho udito’ and ‘Ho capito’, a sensuous untidy art of intellection. Perhaps ‘apprehension’ is the most satisfactory English word. Stephen says to Lynch: ‘Temporal or spatial, the esthetic image is first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it ....... You apprehend its wholeness.’ There is one point to make clear: the Beauty of Work in Progress’ is not presented in space alone, since its adequate apprehension depends as much on its visibility as on its audibility. There is a temporal as well as a spatial unity to be apprehended. Substitute ‘and’ for ‘or’ in the quotation, and it becomes obvious why it is as inadequate to speak for ‘reading’ ‘Work in Progress’ as it would be extravagant to speak of ‘apprehending’ the work of the late Mr. Nat Gould. Mr. Joyce has desophisticated language. And it is worthwhile remarking that no language is so sophisticated as English. [tis abstracted to death. Take the word ‘doubt’: it gives us hardly any sensuous suggestion of hesitancy, of the necessity for choice, of static irresolution. —Whereas the German ‘Zweifel’ does, and, in lesser degree, the Italian ‘dubitare’. Mr. Joyce recognises how inadequate ‘doubt’ is to express a state of extreme uncertainty, and replaces it by ‘in twosome twiminds’. Nor is he by any means the first to recognize the importance of treating words as something more than mere polite symbols. Shakespeare uses fat, greasy words to express corruption: ‘Duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed that rots itself in death on Lethe wharf’. We hear the ooze squelching all through Dickens’s description of the Thames in ‘Great Expectations’. This writing that you rind so obscure is a quintessential extraction of language and painting and gesture, with all the inevitable clarity of the old inarticulation. Here is the savage economy of hieroglyphics. Here words are not the polite contortions of 20th century printer’s ink. They are alive. They elbow their way on to the page, and glow and blaze and fade and disappear. ‘Brawn is my name and broad is my nature and I’ve breit on my brow and all’s right with every feature and I’ll brune this bird or Brown Bess’s hung’s gone bandy’. This is Brawn blowing with a light gust through the trees or Brawn passing with the sunset. Because the wind in the trees means as little to you as the evening prospect from the Piazzale Michelangiolo – though you accept them both because your non-acceptance would be of no significance,
this little adventure of Brawn means nothing to you — and you do not accept it, even though here also your non-acceptance is of no significance. H. C. Earwigger, too, is not content to be mentioned like a shilling-shocker villain, and then dropped until the exigencies of the narrative require that he be again referred to. He continues to suggest himself for a couple of pages, by means of repeated permutations on his ‘normative letters ‗, as if to say: ‘This is all about me, H. C. Earwigger: don’t forget this is all about me!’ This inner elemental vitality and corruption of expression imparts a furious restlessness to the form, which is admirably suited to the purgatorial aspect of the work. There is an endless verbal germination, maturation, putrefaction, the cyclic dynamism of the intermediate. This reduction of various expressive media to their primitive economic directness, and the fusion of these primal essences into an assimilated medium for the exteriorisation of thought, is pure Vico, and Vico, applied to the problem of style. But Vico is reflected more explicitly than by a distillation of disparate poetic ingredients into a synthetical syrup. We notice that there is little or no attempt at subjectivism or abstraction, no attempt at meta physical generalisation. We are presented with a statement of the particular. It is the old myth: the girl on the dirt track, the two washerwomen on the banks of the river. And there is considerable animism: the mountain ‘abhearing’, the river puffing her old doudheen. (See the beautiful passage beginning: ‘First she let her hair fall and down it flussed’. ) We have Type-names; Isolde – any beautiful girl: Earwigger — Guinness’s Brewery, the Wellington monument, the Phoenix Park, anything that occupies an extremely comfortable position between the two stools. Anna Livia herself, mother of Dublin, but no more the only mother than Zoroaster was the only oriental stargazer. ‘Teems of times and happy returns. The same anew. Ordovico or viricordo. Anna was, Livia is, Plurabelle’s to be. Northmen’s thing made Southfolk’s place, but howmultyplurators made eachone in person. ” Basta! Vico and Bruno are here, and more substantially than would appear from this swift survey of the question. For the benefit of those who enjoy a parenthetical sneer, we would draw attention to the fact that when Mr. Joyce’s early pamphlet “The Day of Rabblemment” appeared, the local philosophers were thrown into a state of some bewilderment by a reference in the first line to “The Nolan.” They finally succeeded in identifying this mysterious individual with one of the obscurer ancient Irish kings. In the present work he appears frequently as “Browne & Nolan” the name of a very remarkable Dublin Bookseller and Stationer.
To justify our title, we must move North, ‘Sovra’l bel fiume d’Arno alla gran villa’. Between ‘colui per lo cui verso — il meonio cantor non é piu solo’ and the ” still to-day insufficiently malestimated notesnatcher, Shem the Penman “, there exists considerable circumstantial similarity. They both saw how worn out and threadbare was the conventional language of cunning literary artificers, both rejected an approximation to a universal language. If English is not yet so definitely a polite necessity as Latin was in the Middle Ages, at least one is justified in declaring that its position in relation to other European languages is to a great extent that of mediaeval Latin to the Italian dialects. Dante did not adopt the vulgar out of any kind of local jingoism nor out of any determination to assert the superiority of Tuscan to all its rivals as a form of spoken Italian. On reading his ’De Vulgari Eloquentia’ we are struck by his complete freedom from civic intolerance. He attacks the world’s Portadownians: ‘Nam guicunque tam obscenae rationis est, ut locum suae nationis delitosissimm credat esse sub sole, huic etiam prae cunctis propriam volgare licetur, idest maternam locutionem. Nos autem, cui mundus est patria… etc. When he comes to examine the dialects he finds Tuscan: ‘turpissimum… fere omnes Tusck in sua turpiloquio obtuse… non restat in dubio quin aliid sit vulgare quod querimus quam quod attingit cupulus Tuscanorum.’ His conclusion is that the corruption common to all the dialects makes it impossible to select one rather than another as an adequate literary form, and that he who would write in the vulgar must assemble the purest elements from each dialect and construct a synthetic language that would at least possess more than a circumscribed local interest: which is precisely what he did. He did not write in Florentine any more than in Neapolitan. He wrote a vulgar that could have been spoken by an ideal Italian who had assimilated what was best in all the dialects of his country, but which in fact was certainly not spoken nor ever had been. Which disposes of the capital objection that might be made against this attractive parallel between Dante and Mr. Joyce in the question of language, i.e. that at least Dante wrote what was being spoken in the streets of his own town, whereas no creature in heaven or earth ever spoke the language of ‘Work in Progress.” It is reasonable to admit that an international phenomenon might be capable of speaking it, just as in 1300 none but an inter-regional phenomenon could have spoken the language of the Divine Comedy. We are inclined to forget that Dante’s literary public was Latin, that the form of his Poem was to be judged by Latin eyes and ears, by a Latin Esthetic intolerant of innovation, and which could hardly fail to be irritated by the substitution of “Nel mezzo del cammin
di nostra vita' with its 'barbarous' directness for the suave elegance of: 

`Ultima regna canam, fluido contermina mundo,' just as English eyes and ears prefer: 'Smoking his favourite pipe in the sacred presence of ladies' to: 'Rauking his flavourite turfc in the smukking precints of lydias.' Boccaccio did not jeer at the 'piedi sozzi' of the peacock that Signora Alighieri dreamed about.

I find two well-made caps in the 'Convivio', one to fit the collective noodle of the monodialectical arcadians whose fury is precipitated by a failure to discover "inneofree" in the Concise Oxford Dictionary and who qualify as the 'ravings of a Bedlamite' the formal structure raised by Mr. Joyce after years of patient and inspired labour: 'Questi sono da chiamare pecore e non uomini; ché se una pecora se gittasse da una ripa di mille passi, tutte l’altre le andrebbono dietro; e se una pecora per alcuna ragione al passare d’una strada salta, tutte le altre saltano, eziando nulla veggendo da saltare. E io ne vidi già molte in un pozzo saltare, per una che dentro vi salto, forse credendo di saltare un muro'. And the other for Mr. Joyce, biologist in words: 'Questo (formal innovation) sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, il quale sorgerà ore l’usato tramonterà e darà luce a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscurità per lo usato sole che a loro non luce.' And, lest he should pull it down over his eyes and laugh behind the peak, I translate 'in tenebre e in oscurità' by 'bored to extinction.' (Dante makes a curious mistake speaking of the origin of language, when he rejects the authority of Genesis that Eve was the first to speak, when she addressed the Serpent. His incredulity is amusing: 'inconvenienter putatur tam egregium humani generis actum, vel prius quam a viro, foemina profluisse." But before Eve was born, 'the animals were given names by Adam, the man who 'first said goo to a goose'. Moreover it is explicitly stated that the choice of names was left entirely to Adam, so that there is not the slightest Biblical authority for the conception of language as a direct gift of God, any more than there is any intellectual authority for conceiving that we are indebted for the 'Concert' to the individual who used to buy paint for Giorgione).

We know very little about the immediate reception accorded to Dante’s mighty vindication of the ‘vulgar’, but we can form our own opinions when, two centuries later, we find Castiglione splitting more than a few hairs concerning the respective advantages of Latin and Italian, and Poliziano writing the dullest of dull Latin Elegies to justify his existence as the author of ‘Orfeo’ and
the ‘Stanze’. We may also compare, if we think it worth while, the storm of ecclesiastical abuse raised by Mr. Joyce’s work, and the treatment that the Divine Comedy must certainly have received from the same source. His Contemporary Holiness might have swallowed the crucifixion of ‘lo sommo Giove’, and all it stood for, but he could scarcely have looked with favour on the spectacle of three of his immediate predecessors plunged head foremost in the fiery stone of Malebolge, nor yet the identification of the Papacy in the mystical procession of Terrestrial Paradise with a ‘puttana sciolta’. The ‘De Monarchia’ was burnt publicly under Pope Giovanni XXII at the instigation of Cardinal Beltrando and the bones of its author would have suffered the same fate but for the interference of an influential man of letters, Pino della Tosa. Another point of comparison is the preoccupation with the significance of numbers. The death of Beatrice inspired nothing less than a highly complicated poem dealing with the importance of the number 3 in her life. Dante never ceased to be obsessed by this number. Thus the Poem is divided into three Cantiche, each composed of 33 Canti, and written in terza rima. Why, Mr. Joyce seems to say, should there be four legs to a table, and four to a horse, and four seasons and four Gospels and four Provinces in Ireland? Why twelve Tables of the Law, and twelve Apostles and twelve months and twelve Napoleonic marshals and twelve men in Florence called Ottolenghi? Why should the Armistice be celebrated at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month? He cannot tell you because he is not God Almighty, but in a thousand years he will tell you, and in the meantime must be content to know why horses have not five legs, nor three. He is conscious that things with a common numerical characteristic tend towards a very significant interrelationship. This preoccupation is freely translated in his present work: see the ‘Question and Answer’ chapter, and the Four speaking through the child’s brain. They are the four winds as much as the four Provinces, and the four Episcopal Sees as much as either.

A last word about the Purgatories. Dante’s is conical and consequently implies culmination. Mr. Joyce’s is spherical and excludes culmination. In the one there is an ascent from real vegetation — Ante-Purgatory, to ideal vegetation — Terrestrial Paradise: in the other there is no ascent and no ideal vegetation. In the one, absolute progression and a guaranteed consummation: in the other, flux — progression or retrogression, and an apparent consummation. In the one movement is unidirectional, and a step forward represents a net advance: in the other movement is non-directional — or multi — directional,
and a step forward is, by definition, a step back. Dante’s Terrestrial Paradise is the carriage entrance to a Paradise that is not terrestial: Mr. Joyce’s Terrestrial Paradise is the tradesmen’s entrance on to the sea-shore. Sin is an impediment to movement up the cone, and a condition of movement round the sphere. In what sense, then, is Mr. Joyce’s work purgatorial? In the absolute absence of the Absolute. Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. Paradise the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory a Hood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements. There is a continuous purgatorial process at work, in the sense that the vicious circle of humanity is being achieved, and this achievement depends on the recurrent predomination of one of two broad qualities. No resistance, no eruption, and it is only in Hell and Paradise that there are no eruptions, that there can be none, need be none. On this earth that is Purgatory, Vice and Virtue —— which you may take to mean any pair of large contrary human factors —— must in turn be purged down to spirits of rebelliousness. Then the dominant crust of the Vicious or Virtuous sets, resistance is provided, the explosion duly takes place and the machine proceeds. And no more than this; neither prize nor penalty; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail. And the partially purgatorial agent? The partially purged.