

FW 321.34 – 322.15

KERSSE'S ANTILOGIES

by
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Disclaimer

These are tentative annotations, liable to be adjusted, modified or discarded. Many of them are highly questionable, definitely far-fetched and a few on the verge of insanity. So use them at your own risk.

My aim is trying to put together controversial data in order to build a possible system. The results may not be satisfactory, but I am convinced that the strategy is the right one. McHugh's Annotations and Fweet should be always at hand.

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321.34: Reenter Ashe Junior. Peiwei toptip, nankeen pontdelounges.

321.35: Gives fair day. Cheroot. Cheevio!

321.36: Off.

Once picked up the gauntlet the two/three clients have thrown him, Porter replies to their provocations in quite a subtle way. Having “*exited*” the Captain, he assumes the role of Kersse, who, so it seems, has been wise enough to delay his entrance until the threatening sailor has left the stage.

He re-enters as “**Ashe Junior**”, the “*close chap successor to Ashe and Whitehead*” of **311.24**. When he left the inn he had assured the others that he would have been able to adjust and give shape to the Captain's suit; and in fact he re-enters attired in such an elaborate exotic apparel that he looks like a Chinese, perhaps like the cousin “**cudgin**” we met in **320.15**.

The Chinese touch unleashes “*pidgin*” together with quite a lot of other patched up languages. We should not forget that the Chinese pidgin is the same used by him and the ship's husband in the course of the first encounter (**311.26-27**):

**“chunk pulley muchy chink topside
numpa one sellafella, fake an capstan make and shoot!”**

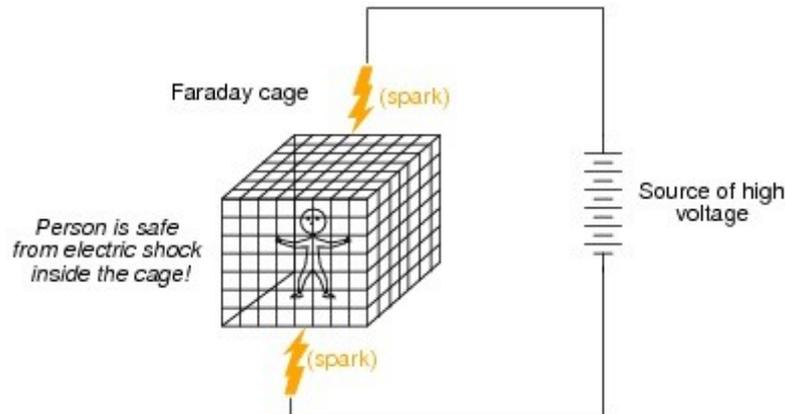
Kersse enters wearing a “**Peiwei toptip**” which probably alludes to a tiny and childish (*pee wee*) conical pointed (**tip**) hat (**top**); and strange “*pantaloons*”.



“**pontdelounges**” might hint at French “*pont*” (bridge) and “*long / longue / de long*” (m. long / f. long / of length); thus “*long bridges/breeches*”. But it also hints at “*point de louange*” (no praise → ordinary). So, if we read “**nankeen**” (Chinese cotton) as “*non keen* → not particularly fine” we get some “*not particularly fine and most ordinary long breeches*”, anticipating the sarcastic *longjohns* (**loungeon**) of **322.02**.



Nonetheless Kersse makes his entrance in total safety, since the Captain's offences didn't have any effect on him; not only because he had thought best not to show up, but because he was inside a symbolic “*Faraday cage*” (**fair day**),



which, as we know, is a secure shelter from electrical shocks: the Captain's bolts!

So he gives his greetings (**Gives fair day**), his “*cheerios*” (**Cheroot. Cheevio!**), and, smoking his cheap cigar (**Cheroot**), like the one he smoked when he first met the Captain (the “**mouthbrand**” of **311.31**), he is happy to show his audience that he is still “*alive*” (**Cheevio!**), since in that term we pick the Russian “*жив / живой – zhiv / zhivòij*” and the Italian “*io*” (I). And since it seems that “*zhivio!*” is also Serbo-Croatian “*prosit!*”, that's Kersse's triumphing toast to his own good health. Then he takes his hat off as an ironic homage to his audience, waiting for the effect of his theatrical entrance;



and in the meantime expecting from the audience that they take off their hats as their own “serious” homage to him. Not even aware that inside that queer attire he looks indeed like a pathetic clown. Not a melancholy Pierrot, though,



but the peacock-styled Shakespearean “*poor player / that struts and frets his hour upon the stage / and then is heard no more.*”

The ensuing comments (322.1-15) to his bombastic entrance is quite explicit. But, before giving a good peek at them, we must try to solve an intriguing problem. Since there are “three” comments, one might argue that they come from the “*hostile trio*” facing Porter. But that's hardly sustainable, since they are only Porter's audience, ignorant of the facts the innkeeper is narrating and of the relative settings. So I am of the opinion that it is Porter who “reports” the acid comments of the customers who were present in the “mythical pub” at the time the recounted scene took place. Although it's possible that each comment is provocatively addressed by Porter to each member of the trio. I am convinced that Joyce made use here of a subtle stylistic procedure which he keeps playing upon throughout all Kersse's monologue. Whereas, reporting the sailor's speech, he acted like a boasting *Capitano* of *The Commedia dell'Arte*;



in performing Kersse's tirade he makes “*a caricature of a caricature*”, underscoring thus the tailor's grotesque and clownish features.



But, since Kersse is a “*native Irish*”, Porter, the descendant of Norse invaders, is cruelly making fun of the representative of the three “*aboriginal*” enemies who sit in front of him.

There is though another, even more subtle point of view, which I'll expound upon once the clients' cannonades are over. Just wait till then.

322.1: -- Take off thatch whitehat (lo, Kersse come in back bespoking
322.2: of loungeon off the Boildawl stuumplecheats for rushirishis Irush-
322.3: Irish, dangieling his old Conan over his top gallant shouldier so
322.4: was, lao yiu shao, he's like more look a novicer on the nevay).

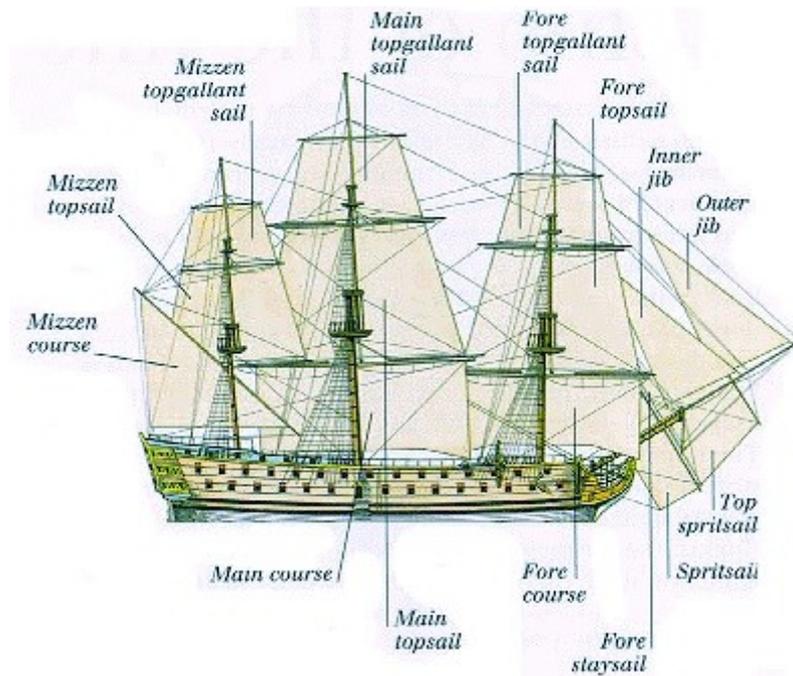
All the comments are variants of the famous Moore and Burgess Minstrels's catch-phrase "*Take off that white hat!*", an overt invitation to "*climb down*", thus underlining Kersse's pathetic clownish behaviour. The "hat" is in fact a menial "**thatch**", a palm frond used for roofing sheds. "**lao yiu shao**" could be pidgin for "*lower your show*" or a possible "*Lower your shoe*", if "shoe" is "*cothurnus*" (buskin),



high, thick-soled boots worn by ancient "tragic" actors . Then there is a sentence within round brackets which describes Kersse's aspect and countenance. He is shown as he enters clothed in his "*bespoke longjohns*" (**loungeon**), drunk as a "*bald owl*" (**Boildawl**), stumbling against "*cheaty*" obstacles as a rushing horse in a steeplechase (**stuumplecheats**), proclaiming aloud, to the four winds, his four-fold "*Irish-ness*" (**rushirishis Irush- Irish**); with his cloak à la Sherlock Holmes (Conan & Boildawl → Conan Doyle)



on his soldiery shoulder (**shouldier**), its flaps swinging to and fro (**dangieling**) like the wings of an “*angel*” (**d-angieling**) and like sails on a topgallant mast (**over his top gallant**)



all that forming an unbelievable (**so was** → German “*Fancy!*”) and ghostly vision (**so was** → *save us!*) of a “*Morlock*” (**more look** → **Morlocks** : albino ape-like humanoid creatures of H.G. Wells's novel “*The Time Machine*”),



with a uniform totally unsuitable for a Navy Officer (**novicer on the nevay**), more appropriate to an unskilled mariner (**novicer**) than a Captain sailing

icelandic snowy seas (**nevay** → “*Norway*” and Italian “*neve*” : snow).

Besides all this we should also mark Kersse's confused, stuttering and stammering speech (**bespoking** → bespeak → be-speech → *bis speech*) that makes him take a “*lounge*” (**loungeon**) for an “*outhouse*”, since his “**loungeon**” is a “*longjohn*” and under-wears are quite “*privy*”. But “**loungeon**” is his “*luncheon*”, his “*stew*” (**stuu-mplecheats**) in “*boiled oil*” (**Boildawl**) which morphs into “*Baldoyle*” with its “*rushing horse races*” which become mumbled “**rushirishis**”, his “*walking cane*” a “*cannon*” or the sword of Conan's, dangling on his warrior's shoulder (**over his top gallant shouldier**), in a proud show (**lao yiu shao** → pidgin “*Let me show you!*”) of bravery. Not knowing, though, that the Fianna “*Conan Mac Morna*, or *Conan the Bald*” was never a good warrior, but a fat and ugly creature renowned for his cowardice and constant complains; and often made fun of by the brave Fianna warriors. But of course Kersse might refer to Robert E. Howards's “*Conan the Barbarian*”,



which would justify his confused and barbarous language.

322.5: -- Tick off that whilehot, you scum of a botch, (of Kersse who,
322.6: as he turned out, alas, hwen ching hwan chang, had been mocking
322.7: his hollaballoon a sample of the costume of the country).

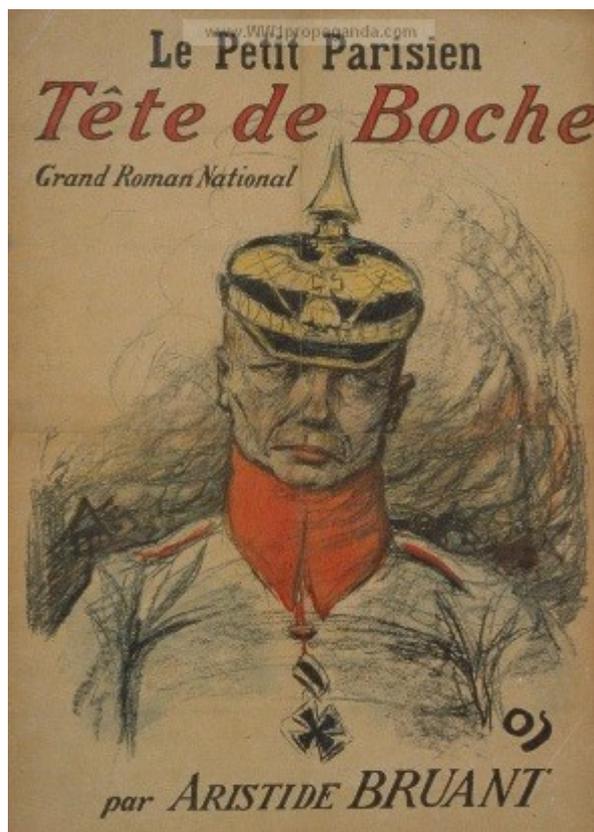
The Minstrels's catch-phrase is here loaded with a lot of allusions. The “white hat → whilehot) recalls the idiomatic “*Strike while the iron is hot*”, thus inviting Kersse to “climb down” immediately, lest he make the clients angry and annoyed (Tick off). “scum of a botch” is the obvious “*son of a bitch*”; but “**botch**” is a slang for tailor,



A BOTCH TAILOR.

You cross-legged sinner, you botchy old beat,
All that you care for's to cozen and cheat,
Your cloth is all shoddy, and your sewing is such
That the clothes come to pieces almost at a touch ;
The buttons fall off, the colors all fade,
And only fools, more than once, with you would trade.

and also a hint at “*Boche*”



the disparaging term applied to German soldiers, namely “*Huns*”, with a direct Chinese link. Further on, “*botch*” is Italian “*abborracciare*”, in which we find “*borraccia*” (canteen), with a double hint at Chinese “*Canton*” and at a drunken “*Botch*” soldier.

The sentence within round brackets poses some problems, especially for what concerns “*hwen ching hwan chang*”. Having no knowledge of Chinese I leave the elucidations to those who speak that fascinating language and I limit myself to the “*Macaoronic*” sounds which I may catch. At any rate I have the impression that the round bracketed sentence deals with the seduction scene described in page 318. “*hollaballoon*” recalls “*Allapalla*”, the holy (chaste) moon (ball); figuratively the tailor's daughter giving her virginity to the sailor who exercises thus his “*ius primae noctis*”, with a reference to Beaumont's and Fletcher's play “*The custom of the country*” and possibly to the 1913 Edith Warton's novel having the same title. Now if we read “*ching / chang*” as “*Yin/Yang*”, namely the female and male principles,



in “**hwen ching hwan chang**” we look at the moment when (**hwen**) the female (**ching**) went (**hwan**) to the male (**chang**) and the “two” became “one (**hwan**) flesh”, mocking thus (**had been mocking**) the tailor who makes in vain a fuss (**hollaballoon** → *hullaballoo*) about his lost honour.

322.8: -- Tape oaf that saw foull and sew wrong, welsher, you suck of
322.9: a thick, stock and the udder, and confiteor yourself

The last catch-phrase seems to miss something, namely the “*white hat*”. Instead of it, if we stick to the logic construction, we have a “**saw foull and sew wrong**” which can hardly be seen as a white hat. We find instead an “*awful sawing*” (**saw foull**), so foul as a “*bad sewing*” (**sew wrong**). In fact, instead of “*sewing*” it seems that Kersse used a “*saw*”: not a tailor but a “*sawyer*”. Quite an “**oaf**” indeed in his clumsiness; “**Tape**” recalling the “**botch**” of **322.5**. He did in fact “*botch up*”, stamping on it with his feet (**foull** → Latin “*follare*” : pressing with feet woollen textiles in order to make them firm and compact), something looking more like a “*sarong*”



(**sew wrong** → sarong: a garment consisting of a length of printed cloth wrapped about the waist) than a *suitable* suit.

Nonetheless, unleashing rabid hound-dogs, we might find the apparently missing “*white hat*”. But we are going to walk along insidious quicksands, so if you dare follow me, it is at your own risk.

“*Saw*” and “*sew*” hint at “sawing” and at Italian “*sega*” (saw), vulgar “*jerk off*”, recalling the just mentioned “**scum of a botch**” and, not so obliquely, the “white” *scum/cum*. Masturbation points to “*phallus*”, thus the “**saw fould oaf**” we are talking about is nothing but a “*dick-head*”, who does not “sew”, but “saw”; and he “sows” the wrong place, like a “jerk off” does. In conclusion: “*Climb down, you onanistic dick-head!*”

The saucy comments keep going on. “**welsher**” is one who fails to fulfil an obligation, and Kersse certainly failed with his “**sew wrong**”. Then there is an elaborated “*son of a bitch*” which needs an elucidation, since “**you suck of a thick, stock and the udder**” is not so easy to justify (although the reference to “Tom, Dick and Harry” could be an oblique tongue stuck out at the three clients). “**udder**” poses no problems; “**stock**” being near “**udder**” may hint at “*livestock*”, from which we may pick up a “*cow*” and a “*sow*”. In Italian “*vacca*” and “*troia*”, two vulgar terms meaning “*whore*”. Since a whore is a “bitch”, we have a “**suck-ling**” of a fat (**thick**) sow, a real “son of a bitch”, who should indeed make a general confession of his sins (**confiteor**).

322.9: (for bekersse

322.10: he had cuttered up and misfutthered in the most multiplest

322.11: manner for that poor old bridge's masthard slouch a shook of

322.12: cloakses the wise, hou he pouly hung hoang tseu, his own fither

322.13: couldn't nose him).

The sense is clear: the suit is of such an awful shape that anyone wearing it wouldn't be recognized, not even by his own father. “**bekersse**” is “*because*”, but also a double cursed Kersse gone “*berserk*”. So that he has “*botched up*” (**cuttered up**) and “*fathered*” an abortion (**misfutthered**), in such an inept (**slouch**) way that cannot be accounted for (**in the most multiplest manner**). Not even a “*finished*” suit, but separate parts (**shook**) loosely stitched up, that could not replace the poor old breeches (**poor old bridge's**) of that sailor (**masthard**), no matter how bastard (**masthard**) and son of an old bitch (**old bridge**) he was.

Here again we deal with a Chinese pidgin which is out of my reach, although, if McHugh's suggestion that “**hoang tseu**” (*shop sign*) is reliable, I might render the sentence as: “*How (hou) could he (he pouly) hang (hung) a shop sign (hoang tseu) [on the front of his house]?*” How dared he? “**pouly**” may in fact hint at Triestine “*pol*” (can). Or: “*How poorly hangs the shop sign*” (What a bad reputation he has!). Or it might even vaguely sound as “*He should hang himself!*”, if “**tseu**” is read as Italian “*Sé*” (himself). But, as with other Chinese sentences, I leave the field to experts and limit myself to noting that “attired like that”, the sailor's own father (**fitt-her**) wouldn't recognize him; he wouldn't even know, or smell (**couldn't nose**) whether inside that cloth is hidden a male (**him**) or a female (**fitt-her**).

322.14: Chorus: With his coate so graye. And his pounds that he

322.15: pawned from the burning.

The three separate voices unite in a sarcastic chorus, parodying the song of “*John Peel*”, whose “*grey coat*” becomes a “*grave*” one (**graye**), quite heavy, as an ancient mail “**coate**”, or a “*coat of arms*” expressing Kersse's gloomy countenance. Banknotes (**pounds**) “**burning**” in an *oast house*. Recounting the story of the money he expected as payment for the coat he gave (**pawned**) to the Captain; a coat the “*foxy*” villain threw in the furnace.

Now, as I said above, there is, though, another quite unexpected interpretation of this whole passage, which shows Joyce's extraordinary ability in expressing, at the same time, two conflicting views, using the same exact words and sentences; which, filtered through specific semantic sieves, give shape to totally different scenes. In this he seems to follow strictly the teaching of the sophist Protagoras, who maintained that “*two contrary arguments may be given about everything*”, his theory of “*antilogies*”.

What is the “*antilogy*” in our specific case? We may interpret the three comments as Kersse's three separate curses against the “just gone” Captain. Three “*shouts*”, like the three famous yells of “godlike Achilles”:

*Three times godlike Achilles yelled
across that ditch. Three times Trojans and their allies
were thrown into confusion.*

Three shouts addressed to the “*absent*” Captain, commanding him to “climb down”. The “**thatch**” of 322.1 might also hint at “*Edward Thatch*”, or Teach, the famous pirate “*Blackbeard*”.



The “round bracketed sentence” maintains its validity in describing the grotesque entrance of the heated, boiling, stuttering drunken tailor, brandishing his Herculean club, like Conan the Cimmerian, and chasing the Norwegian would-be “*officer*”, in fact a pathetic “*novice*”.

In the second shout Kersse calls the sailor a “*botched up son of a bitch*” and scorns both him and his would-be “*wenching*” (**hwen ching**), his “*Hollandish baloney*” (**mocking his hollaballoon**).

In the third one he calls him an “*onanist dick-head*” (who knows, may be: a *C-Onan*, an *Onan of the sea*), a “**welsher**” who does not pay his debts, a son of a bitch who should be ashamed of himself; and he curses him twice, since he tore to pieces and abused in every way he could the breeches and cloak he sewed for him, that bastard “**slouch**”. A suit so special that his

own father would hardly have recognized him in such a splendid attire.

I repeat, an extraordinary example of Joyce's literary technique, used abundantly and smilingly all the Wake through.

Here was a Caesar!



when comes such another?

