

FW p. 305
Right Margin Note

DOLPH'S MENTAL PICTURE
OF
ISSY'S SEXUAL FANTASIES

by

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COME SI
COMPITA
CUNCTITI-
TITILATIO?
CONKERY
CUNK,
THIGH-
THIGHT-
TICKELLY-
THIGH, LIG-
GERILAG,
TITTERITOT,
LEG IN A TEE,
LUG IN A
LAW, TWO
AT A TIE,
THRICKY
TILL OHIO
OHIO
IOIOMISS.

Dolph's right margin note is quite difficult to disentangle, since it seems to be willingly misleading, tricky and confusing enough to bring the reader into semantic quicksands.

Joyce was certainly aware of the fun (in fact quite roguish)

which could come out of it and I think he was self-ironic enough to make fun of himself. In composing this note he probably was thinking of what Cicero said in a passage of his alleged *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4,18):

Artistic Composition consists in an arrangement of words which gives uniform finish to the discourse in every part. To ensure this virtue we shall avoid the frequent collision of vowels, which makes the style harsh and gaping, as the following: "Bacae aeneae amoenissime inpendebant." We shall also avoid the excessive recurrence of the same letter and this blemish the following verse will illustrate -- for at this juncture, in considering faults, nothing forbids me to use examples from others:

'O Tite, tute, Tati, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti.'

(Thyself to thyself, Titus Tatius the tyrant, thou tookest those terrible troubles and this blemish).

I am of the opinion that the repeated "Tees" of CUNC-TI-TI-TI-TI-LATIO allude precisely to this famous verse of Ennio's.

This said as a general prologue let's try – insofar as our ability allows us – to work some coherent sense out of it.

COME SI COMPITA, as we know, is Italian for "How does one spell?". So the first question is: why Italian? It's true that at the end of the preceding page there is a possible reference to Italy and to the fascist war cry "Eja, Eja, Alalà" coined by the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, called "l'Immaginifico" (someone with a great imaginative power). And since our marginal note is an example of hyperbolic imagination this might justify the choice of Italian. But I am not much convinced. Another possibility I have come to think about is kind of ribald and honestly I don't know how valid. The word that should be spelled is "CUNCTITITILATIO", with explicit hints at female masturbation. The Italian vulgar term for it is "ditale / ditalino" (thimble / little thimble), with an "ital" inside it which could justify the choice. In fact we find also "Latium", the Italian region (Lazio), Latin "Latium", in which the city of Rome was founded. There is a third guess, more autobiographical, hinting at Joyce's forbidden fantasies on his "Italian" daughter Lucia. But,

I repeat, those are vague suggestions to be taken *cum grano salis*.

At any rate, leaving this question pending, we must admit that what comes after “CUNCTITITITILATIO” is not a real spelling, not the spelling of individual letters, but of “letter blocks”.

CUNC is represented by CONKERY CUNK,
TITI-TITI by THIGH-THIGHT-TICKELLY-THIGH
LA by LIGGERILAG,
T by TITTERITOT,
IO by OHIO OHIO IOIOMISS.

There are though LEG IN A TEE, LUG IN A LAW, TWO AT A TIE, THRICKY TILL which could be pleonastic “Ls” and “Ts”. But it seems to me that all this does not make much sense, not for what concerns its meaning and its internal structure. So we should put aside the most obvious meaning of “spelling” and look at it from another angle.

Italian “*compitare*” comes from “*computare*”, that is “to count”; and it is mostly referred to children who are learning to read, who compute each letter one at a time and with some difficulty. Thus “*compitare*” is a difficult and “*hesitant*” reading. It is the “*hesitancy*” of Latin “**cunctatio**”, with the four stuttering “**TI**”s. So we are told in advance that the note is somewhat difficult to read. “*Come si compita*” (how does one spell) seems to be addressed to the general public; but in fact there is a linguistic trick which could turn the sentence into “*Come Issy compita?*” (How does Issy spell?), since the pronunciation is almost the same. So it is Issy who should go through the difficult reading of the proposed words. And perhaps it is not a coincidence that “*còmposito*” means “school homework” as well.

And it is not a coincidence that “*spell*” is very similar to Italian “*spellare*” (to skin, to peel), so that Issy's spelling is in fact a “*peeling*”, getting rid of the exterior husk to reach the end of the matter. But there is another trick: “*compita*” as “*spelling*” has the accent on “o”, thus “*còmposito*”; but if the accent falls on “i” we get “*compìta*”, meaning “*well behaved*” (feminine). Thus we have Dolph's fantasy of a well behaved young lady in the act of discovering the “naked” (peeled) truth.

The word to peel is “CUNCTITITITILATIO”, which, apart from the already mentioned “*cunctatio*” (hesitancy) has obvious allusions

to “*cunt*” and “*titillatio*” (tickle). “**Cunc**” has also some homophony with Latin “*conca*” (shell), underlining the “pussy” hint. In conclusion we see in it a reference to a hesitantly masturbating well behaved (supposed) young lady.

But this is just the prologue of a more serious and definite sexual act, namely her deflowering (be it real or just imagined), exposed in the sequence of the ensuing terms.

CONKERY CUNK,

Conkers is a traditional children's game in Britain and Ireland, played using the seeds of Horse Chestnut trees. Thus we have a play with “*nuts*” (testicles).

In “**cunk**” we find a “**cun**” and a “**k**”. “*Cun/con*” is “to learn to know, to know” from OE “*cunnan*”; which can be the biblical “knowing” and allude also to Latin “*cunus*” (vulva), French “*con*” (cunt). “**k**” is “*key*”, which is Italian “*chiave*” hinting at vulgar “*chiavare*” (to fuck). And of course “**conkery**” may allude to “conquer”, thus we have a “*fucking conquering cunt*” and the “*cocorico*” (**CONKERY CUNK**) of the cock, the “*pussy fucking conqueror*”.

THIGH-THIGHT-TICKELLY-THIGH,

Here we find a **THIGHT-TICKELLY** – the regular (*tick*) tickling of a “*tight thigh*” (sturdy phallus) – between two **THIGHs**.

LIGGERILAG,

Danish “*ligge*” means “to lie in horizontal position”; “**lag**” is “to slow down, to move slowly, to linger”; “**liggeri**” may hint at Italian “*leggeri*”, plural of “*leggero*” (light, mild, agile). It doesn't take much imagination to see in all this the picture of a tender coupling.

TITTERITOT,

We hear the giggling, the **tittering** and twittering of a nice little “**tot**”, with her little “**tits**” (pedophilia around the corner, but the incest theme is a main motif throughout **FW**)

LEG IN A TEE,

Where the “**leg**” is the vertical shaft of the letter “**T**”, Tristan's phallic symbol; with a further crass image if we read “tee” as “thee”, thus alluding to a violent penetration

LUG IN A LAW,

“**lug**” is a “screw” and “law” is “low”, so a “screw” in the “lower part”

TWO AT A TIE,

does not pose particular problems since it is quite an explicit reference to “knotted” coupling bodies

THRICKY TILL OHIO OHIO IOIOMISS

This is instead much more obscure. **OHIO** is of course the US State (its capital “Columbus” hinting at “dove”, Italian “where”) and the Ohio river; but it is also the Italian “ohio” (ouch!). And “**IO**” is Italian “I”. Now the Ohio river is the largest tributary, by volume, of the Mississippi River; which, combined with the “trickily trickle” may hint at “Miss Issy pee”. Issy who keeps saying she is a “**miss**”, a maid, a virgin (**io io miss**) on the verge of missing something.

In fact the “three” (symbolic male number) which was mild and tender, becomes “tricky” (**THRICKY**), the giggles turn into “moans” (both of pain “ohio/ouch” and of pleasure “oh Dio, oh Dio! / O God, O God!”) while Issy, like Richard the Third, is ready to take Buckingham's (bucking ham!) advice:

“Play the maid's part: still answer 'nay' – and take it!”
(III.vii.51)

What comes after that must not be described, in accord to what the “**OMISS**”, hinting at “*omissis*” (in legal documents “something which need not – or must not – be mentioned”), asserts. And here Dolph seems to leave Issy to her destiny, as “**TILATIO**” seems to suggest, since its English pronunciation : “*tee-lush-show*” sounds like Italian “*Ti lascio*” (*I leave you*).