

Finnegans Wake at the Rosenbach

“nat language at any sinse of the world” (*FW* 83.12)

How does one write a work of literature addressed to the whole world? *Finnegans Wake* is a book of dream and nightmare, incorporating traces of 40 different languages and different historical times, from the early prehistory to the future. What does this temporally and spatially expansive set of references do to a book’s readability, and how might it change the way in which readers read? What happens if we approach it as an anticipation (and memory) of world war? When asked about how to appreciate poetry, Ezra Pound advised that it be read aloud, preferably in a language the reader does not know. Can *Finnegans Wake* work as this kind of linguistic “music” (or “nat language”:-not language? Language for gnats?) Finally, can a language of “babble” restore to readers the curiosity (and attendant lack of anxiety) characteristic of young children?

In this seminar, we will approach global modernism in relation to global war and the possibilities of global cooperation. To do that, we will learn to read cooperatively rather than individually (and competitively), with a greater appreciation for what there is yet to learn than for what we already know. We will accompany our reading of the text with various contexts: we will listen to the drinking song, “Tim Finnegan’s Wake,” talk about the ancient Irish hero, Finn MacCool, explore the mating habits of salmon (a different kind of fin), and Mark Twain’s *Huck Finn*. We will turn to Freud’s discussion on condensation and displacement as characteristics of dream language; think about Ibsen’s play about rise and fall (*The Masterbuilder*), and we will watch a film adaptation of the book. We will think about manuscript illumination as a model for writing, and study the water cycle. We will learn about the geographical layout of Dublin and its environs, contemplate the relevance of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, and dabble in the theories of Giambattista Vico and Giordano Bruno. We will study letters, contemplate snippets of Swift’s letters to Stella, and think about Lewis Carroll on nonsense. And of course, we will also (every week) read selected episodes of *Finnegans Wake* itself.

Any edition of *Finnegans Wake* is acceptable, although you might want to choose one with big margins! Essential also is Roland McHugh’s *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*. You can buy the fourth edition on Amazon (expensive but convenient), or search for a pdf of an earlier edition on google. Finally, a good “plot summary” (based on the early manuscripts), is that of Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon, *Understanding Finnegans Wake*.

Oct 15, Introduction:

Listen to “Tim Finnegan’s Wake.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRXWWZ74Qe8>

Watch Mary Ellen Bute’s 1966 film, *Finnegans Wake*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8V9USPiXXK8>

The characters. The method. The effect.

Finn MacCool and the other Finns

The coincidence of contraries

Nov 12: Prankquean episode, 21.5-23.15

Grace O'Malley, pirate and pseudonym for Ireland
The Letter, 104-126
The Book of Kells and letters

Dec 10: the Mookse and the Gripes, *FW* 152.15-159.18
See Aesop, The Fox and the Grapes

Jan 21, Shem the Penman, 169-195
Jim the Penman, forgery

Feb 18, Anna Livia Plurabelle, 196-216
Dirt and washing, writing and publication. Gossip and banshees.

Mar 17, Tristan and Isolde, *FW* 383-299.
The story of T and I (or the opera!). Tree-stone.

Apr 21, The Ondt and the Gracehoper, *FW* 414.15-419.10
Aesop, The Ant and the Grasshopper

May 19, The Non-nativity, narrated by Mamalujo *FW*, 558-590
The Christian synoptic gospels (!)

Jun 9. Ricorso, *FW* 614.19-628 (the non-end)
ALP's farewell