



## *Finnegans Wake*

*Taught in memoriam to Jed Deppman, Professor of Comparative Literature, scholar of James Joyce.*

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“It took fourteen years to write; it should take fourteen years to read” - Joycean Apocrypha

### Course Description:

This course is an intensive reading of James Joyce’s final novel *Finnegans Wake*. A cyclical novel incorporating over fourteen intertwined languages, *Finnegans Wake* is widely regarded as the most difficult novel ever written. Indeed, Jacques Derrida once wrote an entire lecture on two words in the over 600-page book — he war. Nonetheless, the text is *not* impenetrable; in fact, it can be musical, whimsical, and even humorous. Working as a group, we will spend the semester working through the entire text as a class. We will not understand everything, but we will try to find our own ways into one of the most confounding texts of all time. The course is predominantly discussion-based, but we will offer a brief lecture once a week offering context and summarizing relevant literary criticism. Students will have the choice to either lightly read around 50 pages or intensively read a shorter excerpt of the text every week. In group, we will unpack the text in addition to performing a number of exercises, such as accented reading and word-analysis (which is way more fun than it sounds).

### Learning Objectives:

- Understand the historical context of *Finnegans Wake* both within European literary modernism(/postmodernism?) and Joyce’s career.

- Be able to engage *Finnegans Wake* critically.

#### Requirements:

- **Attendance is mandatory.** More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a NP grade. Please email us if you know you will miss or if you have missed, so we can go over the material.
- It is recommended that you bring to 2-3 things (words, passages) to class to discuss each week.
- Participation is crucial to small discussion-based classes like this one. Everyone is encouraged to participate frequently in class, but we understand that not everyone feels comfortable speaking in group discussions. As such, we firmly believe that active listening and attendance are equally valid forms of in-class participation. [40% of grade]
- **Evaluation I:** Show and tell! Students will take turns introducing and explaining either a portion of the text or some secondary source to help further our understanding of the text. [10% of grade]
- **Evaluation II:** A creative interpretation of either a chapter or excerpt of the text. This is to be liberally interpreted. Options include rewriting a section, making a video, a song, a performance art piece, etc. [25% of grade]
- **Evaluation III:** Make your own addition to *Finnegans Wake*. This can either expand an existing section of the text, or it can be something entirely new. [25% of grade]

#### Notes:

- We are not experts on this text, and we do not intend to “teach” students this book. In fact, the only person we have ever known to possess such a skill is, unfortunately, no longer with us. As such, we intend to solely share the experience of this text with you; to form a reading community for a text that should probably be interrogated in teams. We will offer whatever context and analysis we can find and synthesize, but every venture into *Finnegans Wake* is fundamentally one into uncharted territory. You are lovingly warned.
- While we will make every possible effort to provide content warnings when necessary, the confusing nature of this text may sometimes preclude us from being able to find all instances of disturbing material in advance. This is to say, what some might find disturbing may entirely go over the heads of others given the large amount of obfuscated meaning throughout the text. Students are free to leave class at any time and skip over any sections they find disturbing.
- The reading schedule is subject to change based on student desire. There is some wiggle-room built into this present version of the syllabus.

#### Required Reading:

- <http://fnwake.com/desktop.htm>
- This is a free online, annotated version of the text. Alternatively, you are free to follow along with a physical copy, but unfortunately, these can get quite expensive, so we have not made possession of one a requirement.

Optional Readings and Resources:

- *Joyce's Book of the Dark: Finnegans Wake*. John Bishop.
- *Annotations to Finnegans Wake, Fourth Edition*. Roland McHugh.
- *A First-draft Version of Finnegans Wake*. Edited by David Hayman.
- *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter by Chapter Genetic Guide*. Edited by Luca Crispi and Sam Slote.
- "[The Problem Of Genesis in the Texts of Joyce](#)." Jed Deppman.
- [http://www.finnegansweb.com/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://www.finnegansweb.com/wiki/index.php/Main_Page), Wikipedia like website for the text.

**Schedule:**

Week 1: Introductions and Chapter 1

- Day 1: Self introductions, background of the text.
- Day 2: Chapter 1.1 (26 pages)

Week 2:

- Chapters 1.2 and 1.3 (44 pages)

Week 3:

- Chapter 1.4 and 1.5 (50 pages)

Week 4:

- Chapter 1.6 and 1.7 (69 pages)

Week 5:

- Chapters 1.8 and 2.1 (63 pages)

Week 6:

- Chapter 2.2 (48 pages)

Week 7:

- Chapter 2.3 (73 pages)

Week 8:

- Chapters 2.4 and 3.1 (45 pages)

Week 9:

- Chapter 3.2 (44 pages)

Week 10:

- Chapter 3.3 (80 pages)

Week 11:

- Chapter 3.4 (35 pages)

Week 12:

- Chapter 4.1 (35 pages)