

# Surfing on *Finnegans Wake*

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*Finnegans Wake* is the last and most ambitious — and most puzzling — work of the Irish writer James Joyce, who, of course, wrote *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. If *Ulysses* is the algebra of literature, then *Finnegans Wake* is the partial differential equation. Most of us break down at algebra; few of us aspire to go on to the partial linear differential equation. In some ways, it can be argued that this is the quintessential work of art, or at least work of literature, of the 20th century; and Joyce intended it that way. Joseph Campbell called it “a staggering allegory of the fall and redemption of mankind.” Equally respected critics have called it a surrender to the crossword puzzle portion of the human mind. So, the main thing about it is that it is linguistically dense. It is dense on every level. It has over 63,000 individual words in it. That’s more words than most fictional manuscripts have words, period. It has over 5,000 characters in it.

*Ulysses* was designed as a kind of daybook. It follows the peregrinations of an ordinary Dubliner — this is Ulysses — through the vicissitudes of his day, his struggles to buy some kidneys to fry for breakfast, his chance meeting with his wife’s lover, so forth and so on. It’s a fairly straightforward exposition of the techniques of literature that have been perfected in the 20th century: stream of consciousness, slice of life, etc. *Finnegans Wake* was designed to be the nightbook to that daybook. It was conceived of as a dream, and one of the questions that undergraduates are asked to shed ink over is whose dream is it, and what is this book about? I mean, when you first pick it up it’s absolutely daunting. There doesn’t seem to be a way into it. It seems to be barely in English and the notion that one could, by spending time with this, tease out characters, plot, literary tension, resolution, this sort of thing seems fairly unlikely. Actually, it’s one of the few things that really repays pouring effort into it. The first 25 pages are incredibly dense and most people are eliminated somewhere in those first 25 pages. It’s a language, and you have to gain a facility with it; and you have to cheat, that’s the other thing. There’s lots of help cheating, because it has spawned a great exegetical literature; there

are all kinds of pale scholars eager to give you the Celtic word lists of *Finnegans Wake* or a discussion of the doctrine of the transubstantiation in *Finnegans Wake*; hundreds of these kinds of doctoral theses in Comp Lit have been ground out over the decades.

The reason I'm interested in it, I suppose I should fess up, is because it's two things, clearly: *Finnegans Wake* is psychedelic and it is apocalyptic/eschatological. What I mean by "psychedelic" is that there is no stable point of view. There is no character, per se; you never know who is speaking. You have to read into each speech to discover: is this King Mark, Anna Livia Plurabelle, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, Shem the Penman, Shaun — who is it? Identities are not fixed. Those of you who have followed my rap over the years, I'm always raving about how psychedelics dissolve boundaries. Well, *Finnegans Wake* is as if you had taken the entirety of the last thousand years of human history and dissolved all the boundaries. So Queen Mab becomes Mae West, all the personages of pop culture, politics, art, Church history, Irish legend, Irish internecine politics are all swirling, changing, merging — time is not linear. You will find yourself at a recent political rally, then returned to the court of this or that Abyssinian emperor or pharaoh. It's like a trip, and the great technique of the 20th century is collage or pastiche. It was originally developed by the Dadaists in Zurich in 1919. Right now it's having a huge resurgence in the form of sampling in pop music, and Joyce was the supreme sampler. He draws his material from technical catalogs, menus, legal briefs, treaty language, mythologies, dreams, doctor/patient conversations — everything is grist for this enormous distillery; and yet what comes out of this, once you learn the codes and once you learn to play the game, is a Joycean story that all graduates of *Ulysses* will recognize.

What Joyce was about was an incredible sympathy with common people and an awareness of the dilemma of being a Jew in Irish Ireland, being a devotee of scholasticism in the 20th century, of dislocation and disorientation: of being the cuckolded husband, of being the failed divinity student. All of these characters and themes are familiar. It's quite an amazing accomplishment. There's nothing else like it in literature; it had very little anticipation. The only real anticipator of Joyce in English, I think, is Thomas Nashe, who most people have never heard of. Thomas Nashe was a contemporary of Shakespeare and wrote a famous novel called *The Unfortunate Traveler*. Anyway, Nashe had this megalomaniac richness of language, this attitude that it's better to put it in than take it out, and that's certainly what you get with Joyce. I mean, Joyce is so dense with technical terms, brand names, pop references, localisms; the way to conceive of *Finnegans Wake* is like a midden, a garbage dump — and there is, in fact, a garbage dump in the *Wake* that figures very prominently. What you, as the reader, have to do is go in there with nutpick and toothbrush and essentially remove one level after another level after another level, and sink down and down.

The theme is always the same: the delivery of the Word, the misinterpretation of the Word, and the redemption of the Word on every level, at all times and places. The reason I've now gone some distance toward explaining why I think of it as psychedelic, the reason why I think of it as eschatological and

apocalyptic is because — it's hard to tell how much of this material he took seriously and how much of it was grist for his literary mill — Joyce was perfectly conversant with Renaissance theories of magic. The entire book is based on *La Scienza Nuova* of Giambattista Vico, who was a Renaissance sociologist and systems theorist, and Joyce once, in a famous interview, said that if the whole universe were to be destroyed and only *Finnegans Wake* survived, that the goal had been that then the entire universe could be reconstructed out of this. This is a very Talmudic idea, that somehow a book is the primary reality. The idea in some schools of Hasidism is that all of the future is already contained in the Torah. Then when you ask them, “Well, if it's contained there, then isn't it predestined?” the answer is no, because the letters are scrambled and only the movement of the present moment through the text correctly unscrambles and arranges the letters. This is Joyce-thinking for sure, and it's very close to a central theme in Joyce — and a central theme in the Western religious tradition — which is the coming into being of the manifestation of the Word, the declension of the Word into matter.

In a sense, what Joyce was trying to do, he was in that great tradition of literary alchemy whose earlier practitioners were people like Robert Fludd, Athanasius Kircher, Paracelsus; these are not familiar names, but in the late flowering of alchemy, when the rosy glow of modern science could already be seen, the alchemists turned toward literary allegory, in the 16th and early 17th century. Joyce is essentially in that tradition. This is an effort to condense the entirety of experience, as Joyce says in the *Wake*, “Allspace in a Notshall,” is what we're searching for here, a kind of philosopher's stone of literary associations from which the entire universe can be made to blossom forth. The way it's done is through pun and tricks of language, and double and triple and quadruple entendre. No word is opaque, every word is transparent and you see through it to older meanings, stranger associations, and as your mind tries to follow these associative trees of connection you eventually get the feeling, which is the unique feeling that the *Wake* gives you. It's about as close to LSD on the page as you can get, because you are simultaneously many points of view, many *dramatis loci*, many places in the plot, and the whole thing is riddled with resonance; a man doing a task on one level is on another level a Greek god completing a task, and on another level some other figure of some more obscure mythology, so *Finnegans Wake* is like a dipstick for your own intelligence. What you bring to it is going to determine what you get out, and if you have read the books which Joyce was familiar with, or if you have armed yourself with such simple things as a Fodor's guide to Ireland, or a good map of Ireland or a good work of Irish mythology, then it immediately begins to betray its secrets to you. It's so rich that it's easy to make original discoveries, it's easy to see and understand things which probably have not been seen or understood since James Joyce put it there, because he had this kind of all-inclusive intelligence.

Maybe I didn't make clear enough why, to my mind, this is an eschatological phenomenon, this production of the philosopher's stone. It's because it's about the union of spirit and matter, that's what the philosopher's stone is about, and writing a book which aspires to be the seed for a living world is about

the union of spirit and matter as well. The Christian scenario of redemption at the end of profane history is another scenario of transubstantiate union, union of spirit and matter. This seems to be, in fact, the overarching theme of *Finnegans Wake* and of the 20th century. In terms of the temporal context for this book, it was finished a few months before 1939, and Joyce died early in 1939. In a sense, he died in one of the most science fiction movements of the 20th century, because the Third Reich was going strong; it had not yet been pegged down a notch, schemes of eugenics and thousand year racially purified super civilizations, all of that crazy early '40s stuff was happening. The book is surprisingly modern: television appears, psychedelic drugs appear, all of these things appear presciently. He was some kind of a prophet, and also he understood the 20th century sufficiently that the part he hadn't yet lived through was as transparent to him as the part that he had. He could see what was coming.

Well, that's by way of my introduction. I want to read you what some other people have said about this, because I don't think I can say enough on my own. This is the indispensable book if you're serious about this: *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*. It takes the view that we don't know what this thing is, so we we have to go through it, literally, line by line, and he tells you the entire story in the one page version, in the ten page version and in the 200 page version. Even in the 200 page version there are sections where Campbell simply reports, "The next five pages are extremely obscure." Mark it! This is just a short section, and one of the things about working with the *Wake* is that at first this language is so impenetrable and bizarre, but it ends up infecting you and you become unable to write or talk any other way. So I'll read you some of Campbell's introduction and I think you will see that it's like the *Wake* itself except in baby steps.

Introduction to a strange subject. Running riddle and fluid answer, *Finnegans Wake* is a mighty allegory of the fall and resurrection of mankind. It is a strange book, a compound of fable, symphony and nightmare, a monstrous enigma beckoning imperiously from the shadowy pits of sleep. Its mechanics resemble those of a dream, a dream which has freed the author from the necessities of common logic and has enabled him to compress all periods of history, all phases of individual and racial development into a circular design of which every part is beginning, middle and end. In a gigantic, wheeling rebus, dim effigies rumble past, disappear into foggy horizons and are replaced by other images, vague but half-consciously familiar. On this revolving stage, mythological heroes and events of remotest antiquity occupy the same spatial and temporal planes as modern personages and contemporary happenings. All time occurs simultaneously. Tristram and the Duke of Wellington, Father Adam and Humpty Dumpty merge in a single precept. Multiple meanings are present in every line. Interlocking allusions to key words and phrases are woven like fugal themes into the pattern of the work.

*Finnegans Wake* is a prodigious, multifaceted monolith, not only the cauchemar of a Dublin citizen but the dreamlike saga of guilt-stained, evolving humanity. The vast scope and intricate structure of *Finnegans Wake* give the book a forbidding aspect of impenetrability. It appears to be a dense and baffling jungle, trackless and overgrown with wanton perversities of form and language. Clearly, such a book is not meant to be idly fingered. It tasks the imagination, exacts discipline and tenacity from those who would march with it, yet some of the difficulties disappear as soon as the well-disposed reader picks up a few compass clues and gets his bearings; then the enormous map of *Finnegans Wake* begins slowly to unfold: characters and motifs emerge, themes become recognizable and Joyce's vocabulary falls more and more familiarly on the accustomed ear. Complete understanding is not to be snatched at greedily in one sitting, or in fifty, I might add. Nevertheless, the ultimate state of the intelligent reader is certainly not bewilderment. Rather, it is an admiration for the unifying insight, economy of means and more than Rabelaisian humor which have miraculously quickened the stupendous mass of material. One acknowledges at last that James Joyce's overwhelming micromacrocosm could not have been fired to life in any sorcerer's furnace less black, less heavy, less murky than this, his incredible book. He had to smelt the modern dictionary back to protean plasma and reenact the genesis and mutation of language in order to deliver his message, but the final wonder is that such a message could be delivered at all.

Every book has to be about something; so, what is this book about? Well, as far as anybody can tell, it appears to be about someone named — they have hundreds of names, actually, but for economy's sake — Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, abbreviated H. C. E. Humphrey Earwicker runs a pub in Chapelizod, which is a suburb or district of Dublin, and he has, as it says, a “lickle wiffey,” who is Anna Livia Plurabelle. Now, these two people, this barkeep and his wife and their two children, Jerry and Kevin or Shem and Shaun — they also have hundreds of names, because they occur on hundreds and hundreds of levels — every brother struggle in history is enacted by the two boys, Jerry and Kevin. They are Shem the Penman and Shaun the other one, and they dichotomize certain parts of the process. So here is, in one paragraph, this is the *Cliff's Notes* version of what *Finnegans Wake* is all about. If you commit this to memory, you will never be caught wanting at a New York cocktail party.

As the tale unfolds, we discover that Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker is a citizen of Dublin, a stuttering tavern keeper with a bull-like hump on the back of his neck. He emerges as a well-defined and sympathetic character, the sorely harrowed victim of a relentless fate, which is stronger than yet identical with himself. Joyce refers to him under various names, such as Here Comes Everybody and Haveth Childers Everywhere. Indications of his universality and his role as the great progenitor: the hero has wandered vastly, leaving

families — that is, deposits of civilization — at every pause along the way from Troy in Asia Minor (he is frequently called the Turk) up through the turbulent lands of the Goths, the Franks, the Norsemen and overseas to the Green Isles of Britain and Éire. His chief Germanic manifestations are Wotan and Thor. His chief Celtic, Manannán mac Lir. Again, he is Saint Patrick carrying the new faith. Again, Strongbow leading the Anglo-Norman conquest. Again, Cromwell conquering with a bloody hand. Most specifically, he is our Anglican tavern keeper H. C. E. in the Dublin suburb of Chapelizod.

Like *Ulysses*, the ground zero here is the utterly mundane — middle-class, tormented Irish people embedded in the detritus of the 20th century; but there's an effort to never lose the cosmic perspective, never lose the sense that we are not individuals lost in time but the front ends of gene streams that reach back to Africa, that we somehow have all these ancestors and conflicts swarming and storming within us. It's a glorious, psychedelic, heartfelt, Irish view of what it is to be embedded in the mystery of existence. Well, enough arm waving, now let's cut the cake here:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.

Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had top-sawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuart-peatruck: not yet, though venissoon after, had a kidskad buttended a bland old isaac: not yet, though all's fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arlight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.

The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonnerronntuon-  
nntunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooorderenturnuk!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy. The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan, erse solid man, that the humptyhillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes: and their upturnpike-pointandplace is at the knock out in the park where oranges have been laid to rust upon the green since devlinsfirst loved livvy.

Now, granted that the first pages are dense — and it isn't all this dense, because even though the concept of fractals lay years in the future, the effort here is to tell the whole damn thing in the first word. To tell it again in the next two words, then to tell it again in the next three words, and so on. So here in these first three paragraphs, a huge amount of information is being passed along. First

of all, we're given a location, if we're smart enough to know it. "Riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs." Well, if you know the geography of Dublin, you know that's where you are, and notice that Howth Castle and Environs is H. C. E. These initials recur thousands of times in this book, always bringing you back to remind you that this has something to do with Humphrey Earwicker.

What this first sentence says is: *riverrun*. It's the river Lethe, which we will meet in a thousand reincarnations, because Anna Livia Plurabelle is the personification of the goddess River. The river runs past Eve and Adam's, and there is a church there on the shore, named Adam and Eve in Dublin. From swerve of shore to bend of bay, then this strange phrase, "brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation." This announces the great architectonic plan of the *Wake*, that it is, in fact, going to be based on the sociological ruminations of Giambattista Vico's *La Scienza Nuova*. The *vicus* mode of recirculation — because, as I'm sure you all know, Vico's theory of the fall and redemption of mankind was that there were four ages — I can remember gold, silver, iron and clay — and so this idea of the recirculation of the connectedness of the cyclicity; as he says, the same again, again and again. Finnegan and again; the same again. This is one of his great, great themes, the *recurso*. Everything comes again, nothing is unannounced. Every love affair, every dynastic intrigue, every minor political disgrace — and a minor political disgrace figures very prominently in this book, because, as the carrier of Adam's sin, the great dilemma for Humphrey Earwicker is that he is running for a minor political post, alderman, but apparently one night, rather juiced — there's many versions and you hear them all, and they're all given in dreams and mock trials in an accusatory fantasy. He either innocently took a leak in the park or he fondled himself in some way in the presence of Maggie and her sister, in such a way that his reputation is now at great risk and it all depends on the testimony of a cad, a soldier, or perhaps three soldiers. It's never clear, it's constantly shifting, and this question of what happened when, "by the mund of the magazine wall, where our maggy seen all, with her sisterin shawl," haunts the book because on it turns the question of whether H. C. E. is a stalwart pillar of the community or in fact a backsliding masturbator and a monster — as one always is if one is trapped in a James Joyce novel.

Then this puzzling list in the second paragraph is simply a list of things which haven't happened yet. Sir Tristram, lover of music, *violer d'amores*, "fr'over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war." Now, this word "penisolate" is typical Joyce punning. *Peninsulate* war, because obviously it's being launched from Brittany. *Penisolate* war, because Sir Tristram is the great archetype of the lover, and so his war is *penisolate*. So that's the first thing that has not yet happened, it's telling you. Sir Tristram has not yet come to Ireland, to put it simply. "Nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time." Now, this is further obscurity. There is a stream in

Georgia, and “topsawyer” is a reference to Tom Sawyer, because Tom Sawyer was Huck Finn’s friend. Huck Finn is Finn in America. There is a huge amount of Mark Twain that has been poured into these books because of the *Huckleberry Finn* connection; Finn in the New World. “Topsawyer’s rocks” is a reference, possibly, to testicles, and so forth and so on. Every single word, you can just take a word and go into this until you exhaust yourself, and then the next thing that has not yet happened: “Nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tauftauf thuartpeatruck.” “Tauftauf” is Celtic for, “Thou art baptized,” so Saint Patrick has not yet baptized in Ireland.

“Not yet, though venissoon after,” and the “venissoon” is a pun on venison and very soon, “had a kidscad buttended a bland old isaac.” It’s a reference to the Isaac-Esau tale in the Bible. It’s also a reference to Isaac Butt, who was a figure in the politics of the Irish Rebellion. “Not yet, though all’s fair in vanessy, were sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe.” That’s, at this point, a very obscure reference, but there is a great incest and sister theme in *Finnegans Wake*, and the twin mistresses of Jonathan Swift become carriers of a huge amount of energy in here, as do the mistresses of Laurence Sterne, because it’s better to be swift than stern. Then the last of these things which haven’t happened yet, “Rot a peck of pa’s malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arlight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.” That seems pretty obscure to me. According to Joseph Campbell, it’s simply a reference to God moving over the waters in the first lines of Genesis, “ringsome on the aquaface.” Then this phrase, the fall and the multisyllabic word, *bababadal . . .*, that word. These are the Viconian thunders and they announce the beginning of each Viconian age, and when the thunder speaks, you know then that you’re into a transition.

Then it actually launches in the last paragraph into a fairly straightforward evocation of at least the mythological Finnegan. As you all probably know, there is an Irish drinking ballad of great antiquity called the *Ballad of Tim Finnegan*, or the *Ballad of Finnegan’s Wake*, and it tells the story of Tim Finnegan, who was a hod carrier, a bricklayer’s assistant, and he was given to hitting the poitín rather hard, and he fell from his ladder. It’s the Humpty Dumpty story. He fell from his ladder and he broke his back, and his friends waked him in the grand Irish fashion, and at the height of the wake they became so carried away and intoxicated that they upended a bucket of Guinness over his head and he revived and joined the dance.

Tim Finnegan lived in Walkin Street, a gentle Irishman mighty odd  
He had a brogue both rich and sweet, an’ to rise in the world he  
carried a hod  
You see he’d a sort of a tippler’s way, with the love for the liquor  
poor Tim was born  
To help him on his way each day, he’d a drop of the craythur every  
morn  
Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner, around the flure yer  
trotters shake

Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake  
 One morning Tim got rather full, his head felt heavy which made  
 him shake  
 Fell from a ladder and he broke his skull, and they carried him home  
 his corpse to wake  
 Rolled him up in a nice clean sheet, and laid him out upon the bed  
 A bottle of whiskey at his feet and a barrel of porter at his head  
 Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner, around the flure yer  
 trotters shake  
 Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake  
 His friends assembled at the wake, and Mrs. Finnegan called for  
 lunch  
 First she brought in tay and cake, then pipes, tobacco and whiskey  
 punch  
 Biddy O'Brien began to cry, "Such a nice clean corpse did you ever  
 see?"  
 "Tim mavourneen, why did you die?" "Will ye hould your gob?"  
 said Paddy McGee  
 Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner, around the flure yer  
 trotters shake  
 Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake  
 Then Maggie O'Connor took up the job, "Biddy," says she, "you're  
 wrong, I'm sure,"  
 Biddy gave her a belt in the gob and left her sprawling on the floor  
 Then the war did soon engage, t'was woman to woman and man to  
 man  
 Shillelagh law was all the rage and a row and a ruction soon began  
 Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner, around the flure yer  
 trotters shake  
 Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake  
 Mickey Maloney ducked his head when a bucket of whiskey flew at  
 him  
 It missed, and falling on the bed, the liquor scattered over Tim  
 Bedad he revives, see how he rises, Timothy rising from the bed  
 Saying, "Whittle your whiskey around like blazes, Thanam 'on dhoul,  
 do ye think I'm dead?"  
 Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner, around the flure yer  
 trotters shake  
 Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake

This is the resurrection. Tim Finnegan is very clearly for Joyce a Christ figure,  
 and here is, then, the first evocation of Tim Finnegan. The fall, then the  
 Viconian thunder, "of a once wallstrait oldparr," which is just an old person, "is  
 retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy." "The  
 great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of Finnegan."  
 Now, this word p-f-t-j-s-c-h-u-t-e, *pftjschute*, is Norwegian, I'm informed, and

it refers to the act of falling from a hill. “Finnegan, erse solid man, that the humptyhillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes: and their upturnpikepointandplace is at the knock out in the park where oranges have been laid to rust upon the green since devlinsfirst loved livvy.” This is fairly transparent if you’re Irish or a citizen of Dublin because what it’s talking about is Dublin, imagined to be situated in the belly of an enormous giant person, who is Finnegan. Finnegan lies like a giant reclining figure along the Liffey there. Husband and wife, river and mountain, and then the focus has changed and now we’re talking about the geography. He was a solid man, “erse solid man,” but then somehow he turned into something where, “the humptyhillhead of humself promptly sends an unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes.” If you have a map of Dublin laid out, you can actually see this enormous man in the landscape; there are many enormous men and women in the landscape of this planet. Joyce maps the Dublin geography over all of them. Some of you may know Iztaccihuatl, the magical mountain in Mexico. Iztaccihuatl means “the sleeping woman” in Toltec, and many mountains are imagined to be sleeping people. So here he introduces his theme, and this is one paragraph. This is the invocation of Finnegan as hod carrier:

Bygmester Finnegan, of the Stuttering Hand, freemen’s murer, lived in the broadest way immarginable in his rushlit toofarback for messuages before joshuan judges had given us numbers or Helviticus committed deuteronomy (one yeastyday he sternely struxk his tete in a tub for to watsch the future of his fates but ere he swiftly stook it out again, by the might of mozes, the very water was eviparated and all the guenneses had met their exodus so that ought to show you what a pentschanjeuchy chap he was!) and during mighty odd years this man of hod, cement and edifices in Toper’s Thorp piled bildung supra bildung pon the banks for the livers by the Soangso. He addle liddle phifie Annie ugged the little craythur. Wither hayre in honds tuck up your part inher. Oftwhile balbulous, mithre ahead, with goodly trowel in grasp and ivoroiled overalls which he habitacularly fondseed, like Haroun Childeric Eggeberth he would caligulate by multiplicables the alltitude and malltitude until he seesaw by neatlight of the liquor wheretwin ’twas born, his roundhead staple of other days to rise in undress maisonry upstanded (joygrantit!), a waalworth of a skyerscape of most eyeful hoyth entowerly, erigenating from next to nothing and celescalating the himals and all, hierarchitectitiptitoploftical, with a burning bush abob off its baubletop and with larrons o’toolers clittering up and tombles a’buckets clottering down.

What this paragraph says is that he was a great builder, and I think if you think back through your impression of hearing it read, you knew that. You know, these words that are associated, words like: “a waalworth of a skyerscape of most eyeful hoyth entowerly,” these are skyscraper words. He can do this;

he can build up a pastiche of surfaces, of impressions. Now, you might say, why is there no economy? Well, there is no economy because economy is an aesthetic criterion for shoemakers, not for artists. Economy is the curse of the Bauhaus babblers from hell. Joyce was very concerned to refute all of that. If you have to place this in a context, it's in the context of the most hallucinatory of the Baroque, this is Arcimboldo land. This is a work that would have been welcome at the Rudolfian court in Prague. It's a work of magical complexity and enfolded self-reference.

Now, we've just been through these first four paragraphs. Now I'll read you what Joseph Campbell has to say on it — by no means all of what he has to say on it:

The first four paragraphs are the suspended tick of time between a cycle just past and one about to begin. They are, in effect, an overture resonant with all the themes of *Finnegans Wake*. The dominant motif is the polylingual thunderclap of paragraph three, *bababadal...*, which the voice of God makes audible through the noise of Finnegans' fall. Narrative movement begins with the life, fall and wake of hod carrier Finnegans, pages four to seven; the wake scene fades into the landscape of Dublin and environs.

We've just heard how he fell from the ladder. Now we move into a description of the wake, and there's a certain voice that appears at certain times. It's where there are a lot of words ending in -ation, *continuation* of the *celebration* until the *examination* of the *extermination*. These are the twelve judges. Each character, when they appear, has a certain tempo to their character, so when that tempo enters the text, you know the character is present even though there may be no trace. For example, Anna Livia Plurabelle's tempo is the tempo of the hen: *herealittle, therealittle, goalittle, seealittle, doalittle* — the hen is scratching. This is the nervous, birdlike — that's Anna Livia's signature. Here's just one paragraph from the wake scene, which builds and has quite a minor amount of humor associated with it.

Shize? I should shee! Macool, Macool, orra whyi deed ye diie? of a trying thirstay mournin? Sobs they sighdid at Fillagain's chris-sormiss wake, all the hoolivans of the nation, prostrated in their consternation and their duodisimally profusive plethora of ululation. There was plumbs and grumes and cheriffs and citherers and raiders and cinemen too. And the all gianed in with the shoutmost shoviality. Agog and magog and the round of them agrog. To the continuation of that celebration until Hanandhunigan's extermination! Some in kinkin corass, more, kankan keening. Belling him up and filling him down. He's stiff but he's steady is Priam Olim! 'Twas he was the dacent gaylabouring youth. Sharpen his pillowscone, tap up his bier! E'erawhere in this whorl would ye hear sich a din again? With their deepbrow fundigs and the dusty fidelios. They laid him brawdawn alonglast bed. With a bockalips of finisky fore his feet.

And a barrowload of guenesis hoer his head. Tee the tootal of the fluid hang the twoddle of the fuddled, O!

It's a drunken Irish wake, that seems clear, but there are a lot of things going on. "E'erawhere in this whorl would ye hear sich a din again?" and, "He's stiff but he's steady is Priam Olim," all this Dionysian and sexual imagery is fully explicit.

In some ways more realized as a character, or more loveable, is Anna Livia Plurabelle. Anna Livia Plurabelle is Molly Bloom on acid, basically. Molly Bloom, we don't lose her outlines. We understand Molly because Molly doesn't offer us that much of her own mind. She stands for the eternal feminine, but only in the final soliloquy in *Ulysses* do we really contact her. Anna Livia, it's her book. It may in fact be her dream, and the whole thing is permeated with her tensions and her cares. As it says, "Grampupus is fallen down," meaning the great father God is at wake. "Grampupus is fallen down but grinny sprids the boord," meaning Anna Livia is always there. She's always there. In the *Wake*, you could almost say that Molly Bloom's soliloquy has been expanded to three or four hundred pages and the whole thing is a meditation on the river. The river is the feminine, and the first image in the book and the last image are the image of the river. The river dissolves everything and carries it out to sea. Let me read this description of Anna Livia Plurabelle and then we'll go back to the synopsis:

How bootifull and how truetowife of her, when strengly forbidden, to steal our historic presents from the past postpropheticals so as to will make us all lordy heirs and ladymaideses of a pretty nice kettle of fruit. She is livving in our midst of debt and laffing through all plores for us (her birth is uncontrollable), with a naperon for her mask and her sabboes kickin arias (so sair! so solly!) if yous ask me and I saack you. Hou! Hou! Gricks may rise and Troysirs fall (there being two sights for ever a picture) for in the byways of high improvidence that's what makes lifework leaving and the world's a cell for citters to cit in. Let young wimman run away with the story and let young min talk smooth behind the butteler's back. She knows her knight's duty while Luntum sleeps. Did ye save any tin? says he. Did I what? with a grin says she. And we all like a marriedann because she is mercenary. Though the length of the land lies under liquidation (floote!) and there's nare a hairbrow nor an eyebush on this glaubrous phace of Herrschuft Whatarwelter she'll loan a vesta and hire some peat and sarch the shores her cockles to heat and she'll do all a turfwoman can to piff the business on. Paff. To puff the blaziness on. Poffpoff. And even if Humpty shell fall frumpy times as awkward again in the beardsboosoloom of all our grand remonstrancers there'll be iggs for the brekkers come to mournhim, sunny side up with care. So true is it that therewhere's a turnover the tay is wet too and when you think you ketch sight of a hind make sure but you're cocked by a hin.

Well, Nora felt that Jimmy would have been much better as a singer; she so stated, that she had great hopes for his voice. She was a very practical woman, Nora Barnacle. There wasn't a literary bone in her body — I think that's what Joyce loved about her, that she was the real thing. All these women — Molly, Anna Livia — they are all Nora Joyce, for sure.

He died shortly after it was published, although it had been known in manuscript for over ten years to the literati of his circle. It was called *Work in Progress*, and people didn't even know if he was serious or not. It was very hard to find a publisher; it was a typographical nightmare. Joyce was going blind and so, trying to keep track of the spelling, there's hardly a standard spelling in there. There's hardly a word that is not somehow fiddled with and changed around. If you pay attention to what you're calling "life as it is," you will discover that it's not a simple thing at all, that it's like this.

I used to say, "When you're vacuuming your apartment, Rome falls nine times an hour, and your job is to notice." You always do notice but you never tell yourself that you're noticing. In the course of a day, you and I live, to some degree, the entirety of global civilization. Rome falls, algebra is discovered, the Turks are beating at the gates of Vienna and it isn't even 11 a.m. yet. So there is this sense of the copresence of history. We're imprisoned inside the linear assumption that I'm a person in a place, in a time, I'm alive, most people aren't — but, in fact, when you deconstruct all that, that is fiction, and the truth is more this onrushing magma of literary association. In *Ulysses* you get an enormous amount of half-baked science. Leopold Bloom is always looking at things and explaining to himself how they work, using very crackpotted notions of hydraulics and electricity and this sort of thing. People say the psychedelic experience is hard to remember, dreams are hard to remember, but harder to remember than either of those is simply ordinary experience. You lie in the baths and you close your eyes for three seconds and empires fall, dynastic families unfold themselves, power changes hands, princes are beheaded, a pope disgraced, and then somebody drops something and you wake up, and 15 seconds have passed. That's the reality of life, but we suppress this chaotic, irrational side.

The genius of Joyce and to some degree, although in a more controlled form, Proust — and there were other practitioners, Faulkner certainly — what they called "stream of consciousness" was an ability to really listen to the associating mind without trimming, pruning, judging, denying. One of the great puzzles to me is the great antagonism between Jung and Joyce, because you would have thought that they would have been comrades in arms, but Joyce loathed psychoanalysis. He thought that to use all this material to elucidate imagined pathologies was a very uncreative use of it, and that it should all be fabricated into literature. It's very hard to surpass. Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis, these people — everybody genuflects to Joyce but very few people plow in the way he did. Thomas Pynchon is considered a difficult, hallucinatory writer and there aren't twenty pages in *Gravity's Rainbow* as obscure as a randomly chosen page here.

I can understand the impulse to want to get the universe into a book because

it hints at something that we've talked about in some of these circles, which is that the character of life is like a work of literature. We are told that you're supposed to fit your experience into the model which science gives you, which is probabilistic, statistical, predictable; and yet the felt datum of experience is much more literary than that. We fall in love, we make and lose fortunes, we inherit houses in Scotland, we lose everything, we get terrible diseases, we're cured of them or we die of them — but it all has this *sturm und drang* aspect to it which physics is not supposed to have, but which literature always has. I don't know if it's true, but I think what Joyce believed, and what I'm willing to entertain at some depth, is the idea that salvation is somehow an act of encompassing comprehension; that salvation is an actual act of apprehension, of understanding, and that this act of apprehension involves everything.

This is why, before James Joyce and this kind of literature, the only place where you got these kind of constructs was in alchemy and magic. The idea that through an act of magic the universe could be condensed to yield a fractal microcosm of itself; what Joyce is saying is that the novel, which was unknown in the alchemical era — the novel comes later, in the 19th century — the novel is the alchemical retort into which these theories of how things work can be cast. I think the great modern exponent of this, although now dead, and certainly one who owed an enormous debt to Joyce, was Vladimir Nabokov, especially in *Ada*. *Ada* is his paean of praise to *Finnegans Wake*, basically, and the idea tagged in there is the idea of causality and of ordinary casuistry. See, what all these people are saying, and what the psychedelic experience argues for as well, is that we are somehow prisoners of language, and that the key which will set us loose is somehow also made of language. What else could fit the lock? Somehow an act of poetic legerdemain is necessary, and Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* — he didn't live to argue the case or to work it out, he died shortly after — this comes about as close as anybody ever came to actually pushing the entire contents of the universe down into about fourteen cubic inches.

Joyce and Proust had one meeting and supposedly Joyce said to Proust, "I'm too young for you to teach me anything." Are you all familiar with *Remembrance of Things Past*? Well, it could hardly be a more different work of literature. I mean, it is stately and cinematic, and you always know where you are, and the characters are defined. It's an old-style novel, but there are places in it where he just takes flight and prefigures the kind of writing that Faulkner and Joyce were able to do. As far as psychedelic influences, I don't know that there are arguably any. Joyce lived in Trieste for a while and taught English. He may have been, as a *habitué* of Paris, familiar with hashish. He probably had some familiarity with absinthe, but I doubt that it was a lifestyle for him.

I think that the whole of the 20th century is informed by this hyperdimensional understanding and that Jung tapped into it in the 1920s, the Dadaists in 1919 in Zurich, the surrealists, even earlier the Collège de 'Pataphysique, Lautréamont, Jarry. What it's about, the 20th century, McLuhan's phrase comes to mind from *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: "The spectrum of effects created by print." The classes, the conceits, the industries, the products, the attitudes, the garments, all of the things created by print. We are living in a terminal

civilization. I don't want to say dying, because civilizations aren't animals, but we are living in an age of great self-summation. What we look back at is an unbroken working-out of certain themes since the fall of Rome — scholasticism, the Aristotelian and Platonic corpuses, Christianity — always presented as somehow a rival to science, but which in fact paved the way for science. There would have been no science had there not been William of Occam, who was a 14th century nominalist theologian. Western civilization has had a thousand years to work its magic and now there is a summation underway, and I certainly don't presume to judge it. How do you place a value on an entire civilization?

In the same way that when a person dies, their entire life passes before them in review, when a civilization dies, it hypnagogically cycles the detritus of centuries and centuries of struggle to understand, and someone like Joyce just brings that to an excruciating climax, because it's all there. It's all there, from the smile that tugs at the lips of the woman in the Arnolfini wedding, to quantum physics, to what Molière said to his niece in the 15th letter, and so forth and so on. The task is to hold it in your mind. I think it was William James who said, "If we don't read the books with which we carefully line our apartments, then we are no better than our dogs and cats," and too often this is lost sight of. It's not simply that we are aesthetes, *littérateurs*, and that here in the twilight of the gods we should sit around reading James Joyce — that isn't the point. The point is that this is the distillation of our experience of what it is to be human, and it's out of these kinds of distilling processes that we can launch some kind of new dispensation for the human enterprise because we have played it out. It's now a set piece, all of it.

When I listen to rock 'n roll now, it's interesting to me but it has the completeness of polyphony. It's a done deal somehow, and we're looking backward and we're anticipating. The purpose of literature, I think, is to illuminate the past and to give a certain guidance as we move into the future, and this book, by being at first so opaque and so challenging to aesthetic canons and social values, eventually emerges as a very prescient insight into our circumstances. The *Ballad of Finnegans Wake* has hundreds of verses; in an Irish pub it can keep people going all night long. It's a celebration of complexity and the human journey, and Joyce doesn't judge. I mean, it says somewhere in *Finnegans Wake*, "Here in Moicane," which is the red light district of Dublin, "Here in Moicane we flop on the seamy side, but up n'ent, prospector, you sprout all your worth and woof your wings, so if you want to be phoenixed, come and be parked." That's that passage about death. It was a very optimistic, transformative sort of vision. Somehow complexity is the ocean we have to learn to surf; that's the river, and that's the psychedelic side of it. Imagine that you can get 63,000 different words in here, tell a story and have all the common articles and modifiers operating normally anyway, and then it's very optimistic. I mean, Molly Bloom's speech is probably the single most optimistic outpouring in all of 20th century literature, not that there was much competition. Yes, yes, the final affirmation, yes.

Sam Beckett, Nobel Prize winner, genius in his own right, but secretary to James Joyce for many, many years and passionately in love with Joyce's

tragically schizophrenic daughter. You want an unhappy story, you'll find out why Sam Beckett is not exactly laughing all the time, because of a very complex relationship to Joyce's schizophrenic child. Joyce's family life was not very happy. I think he had a wonderfully sensuous life with Nora, but I don't know what it would be like to be the guy who wrote this book and live with a woman who thought you would be better off as a saloon singer. Not exactly a saloon singer, but still. . .

Shall I try to find a passage?

Let us now, weather, health, dangers, public orders and other circumstances permitting, of perfectly convenient, if you please, after you, policepolice, pardoning mein, ich beam so frisch, bey? drop this jiggyrumpokery and talk straight turkey meet to mate, for while the ear, be we mikealls or nicholists, may sometimes be inclined to believe others the eye, whether browned or nolensed, find it devilish hard now and again even to believe itself. *Habes aures et num videbis? Habes oculos ac mannepalpabuat?* Tip! Drawing nearer to take our slant at it (since after all it has met with misfortune while all underground), let us see all there may remain to be seen.

I am a worker, a tombstone mason, anxious to please averyburies and jully glad when Christmas comes his once ayear. You are a poorjoist, unctuous to polise nopebobbies and tunnibelly souilly when 'tis thime took o'er home, gin. We cannot say aye to aye. We cannot smile noes from noes. Still. One cannot help noticing that rather more than half of the lines run north-south in the Nemzes and Bukarahast directions while the others go west-east in search from Maliziies with Bulgarad for, tiny tot though it looks when schtschupnistling alongside other incunabula, it has its cardinal points for all that.

Tip. Now, this word "tip," which keeps occurring throughout the text, no one is clear what it means, but Joseph Campbell's guess is that it's a tree branch which is tapping against the window, and whoever is dreaming this huge, hallucinatory gizmo of dream, every once in a while the tap of the branch breaks through.