Spring 2015
Reading, Performing, and Creating Finnegans Wake
Tuesday; Thursday: 11:00-12:15
Room #527
Office: 1 Washington Place, #417; (212) 992-7767
Office hours: T: 10-11, 2-3; Th: 10-11 (Wed by apt.)
Instructor: Gregory Erickson
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“One great part of every human existence is passed in a state which cannot be rendered sensible by the use of wideawake language, cutanddry grammar and goahead plot.”
--James Joyce

Syllabus

Course Description
Finnegans Wake is often described as the most difficult work of literature ever written; in fact, it is still debated whether the “novel” is a masterpiece or just an elaborate hoax. This class will be part interdisciplinary seminar and part arts workshop. Half of the class will be devoted to the work itself. We will read short sections of the Wake in concert with various commentaries, histories, and annotations, exploring possible “meanings” the text suggests. The other half of the class will engage with artistic pieces that have been inspired by or that incorporate elements of Finnegans Wake, including visual art, film, music, sound art, theater, and dance. Students will study these pieces as well as create and present their own creative works. Class requirements will include an analytical paper, an oral presentation, and a creative work. The course will also feature invited guest speakers and artists.

There is no way to read the whole book in seven weeks (or even seven years). In each class we will be looking at selected sections as a whole and then work closely as a group through short passages within those sections. I expect that each of you will work through the sections on your own outside of class and come prepared with some sense of what the section is about and to lead a discussion of a short excerpt (1/2 a page is plenty), one of which will likely become the basis for your analytical paper. Our reading of the Wake will take about half of the class time; the other half will be spent studying, creating, and performing works of art that are based on or influenced by the Wake.
Course Objectives

• To introduce students to James Joyce’s last and most difficult work: *Finnegans Wake*
• To think about alternate definitions of what it means to read and interpret literature
• To explore relationships between visual and performing arts and literature

Evaluation and Course Requirements
The course will be graded on the following basis:

- Analytical Essay: 30%
- Creative Project: 30%
- Participation: 20%
- Informal writing: 20%

Analytical Essay: A 4- to 6-page paper that explores a passage from the novel. The passage can be very short (one paragraph) or it can be 5-10 pages, depending on the type of close reading you want to do. It should involve a combination of research and your own personal reading. The approach and the secondary sources you use are up to you.

The Creative Project must use, interpret, or be somehow inspired by *Finnegans Wake*. It can be creative writing, music, visual art, dance, or mixed media. It can be created by you alone or in collaboration with one or two other students. In its final version, it will have three components: 1) something material (a score, dvd, script, portfolio, etc) that you can give to me; 2) a performative version that will be presented to the class during the last week; 3) a short analytical paper (2 pages) that describes what your process was in creating it and how it uses and/or interprets the novel. In the case of collaborative projects, each of you must write your own short analytical paper.

The Informal Writing will mostly consist of postings on our NYU Classes site. Whenever we have a reading assignment I will ask you to do some sort of reaction writing. These will be evaluated only on effort. Don’t worry about producing a perfect paragraph—just put some time and thought into it.

Class Participation is key to this course. While the reading may often seem almost impossible to understand in any traditional sense, you must show up for every class ready to discuss the assigned reading and willing to work collaboratively on interpretive and creative projects. I will often ask you to post a short analysis of a select passage from the reading on our NYU Classes site. *Finnegans Wake* is best read in a group. Whatever your knowledge and skill, you will have something to contribute that the rest of us will benefit from.
Course Schedule

Week One:

Thurs: 1/29  
Introductions  
Our approach  
Joyce before *Finnegans Wake*  
Fast overview of the *Wake*: plots, themes, and characters

Week Two:

Tues: 2/3  Reading:  
*FW*: first two pages  
The making of *FW*: Ellman, 543-552  
John Bishop “Introduction,” vii-xxv

Thurs: 2/5  Reading:  
*FW*: “Mamafesta,” 104-125.  
Epstein, 51-57;  
Selections from Campbell

Week Three:

Tues: 2/10  Reading: *FW* in the arts, an overview: McCarthy, Murphy, Schiff  
Topic: *FW* and film and theater: Fionnula Flanagan in *Joyce’s Women*; Mary Bale’s experimental film *Finnegans Wake*; Anthony Burgess’s *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake*  
Theater: “Nine Characters in Search of a Wake”


Week Four:

Tues: 2/17  Music of/and/in the *Wake*: Music of John Cage, Milton Babbitt, Stephen Albert, Phil Minton and DJ Spooky


Week Five

Tues: 2/24  *FW* and Dance: Merce Cunningham, Polobolus, and others,  
*FW* and Theater: Mary Manning’s “The Voice of Shem,” and others

**Week Six:**

**Tues: 3/3**  *FW* and visual art: Stephen Crow’s “Wake in Progress,” Moholy-Nagy, concrete poetry, the Book of Kells, selections from Lerm-Hays

**Thurs: 3/5**  *FW*: “The Ondt and the Gracehopper,” 414-419  

**Fri: 3/6**  Analytical essay due

**Week Seven:**

**Tues: 3/10**  Performances and Readings

**Thurs: 3/12**  Performances and Readings

**Friday: 3/13**  Creative project and write up due
Bibliography

Required Texts (available from the NYU book store)

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

Supplemental books:

We will be reading short passages from many of these texts at some point in the course. I will make these sections available to you. I will also put many of these books (and others) on reserve in the library, as you will probably want to use some of them for your analytical paper and class presentation. Another helpful guide is finwake.com.

**General guides:**

- James Atherton, *The Books at The Wake*
- Richard Ellman, *James Joyce*
- Edmund Epstein, *A Guide Through Finnegans Wake*
- Roland McHugh, *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*
- Finn Fordham, *Lots of Fun at Finnegans Wake*
- Joseph Campbell and Henry Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*
- John Gordon, *Finnegans Wake: A Plot Summary*

**Finnegans Wake in the Arts**

- Christa-Maria Lerm-Hays, *Joyce in Art: Visual Art Inspired by James Joyce*
- Sebastian Knowles, ed. *Bronze by Gold: The Music of Joyce*

**Articles:**

Each of these is available online. We will be looking at them at some point during the course.

- Patrick McCarthy, “*Finnegans Wake on Film*”
- Timothy Murphy, “Music After Joyce: The Post-Serial Avant-Garde”
- Daniel Schiff, “Synthesizing ‘The Ballad of Persse O’Reilly’”