

## Notes toward a Reading Proposal: *WP* and *FW*

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With this apparently broad title I should like to introduce an idea in fact quite specific and exact. Rather than offer randomly sequenced observations, as the term “Notes” would imply, I should like to reflect freely on certain shared elements in the serial publication of *Work in Progress* and the definitive edition of *Finnegans Wake* in 1939. What follows, therefore, is an hypothesis based on evidence of publication and a proposal for reading *Finnegans Wake* in its full light. This reading proposal, as such, remains imperfect and inconclusive.

All Joyceans know that when the writer was asked in August of 1922 about what he would write in his next work, Joyce replied: “I think I will write a history of the world” (*JJ* 537). And when, early in the composition of *Finnegans Wake*, Suter expressed interest in the new work’s title, Joyce, according to Ellmann, responded: “I don’t know. It is like a mountain that I tunnel into from every direction, but I don’t know what I will find” (*JJ* 543). Frank Budgen’s recollection of the writer’s words on this occasion is slightly different. Budgen’s retelling, what is more, better matches the publication process of *Finnegans Wake* during the seventeen years of its gestation. Budgen recalls Joyce’s response as the following: “I feel like an engineer boring through a mountain from two sides. If my calculations are correct we shall meet in the middle.”<sup>1</sup>

If one pauses for a moment to consider the simile of the mountain and one weighs equally the serial publication of *Work in Progress* over more than fifteen years, one would assuredly agree that the “wordspiderweb” of which Joyce spoke in reference to *Finnegans Wake* describes as much the artist’s method of composition as the method’s composed result. Seen in detail, the vivid image of such a creative process is that of a spider’s web in the making.

With the fragment known as “King Roderick O’Conor” (380-382, conclusion of II.iii), which, suspiciously, the writer chose not to publish before the appearance of *Finnegans Wake* in 1939, it seems that Joyce sought to establish 10 March 1923 as the hypothetical centre of his mountain. Joyce thereafter shifts his attention to the mountain’s right side with the completion of Chapter II.iv (383-399), after which a move to the mountain’s left side results in the publication of all of Book I, although not in the order in which it would ultimately appear in 1939. If we, in addition, divide the eight chapters of Book I into two halves, we observe that, apart from a small fragment of I.ii (030-034), Joyce first publishes, almost in its entirety, the right-hand part of the mountain’s left side—that is, those chapters closest to the hypothetical centre of II.iii. Joyce, however, once again does not do so in the order appearing in the final format: the writer publishes I.v and I.viii, first and last, respectively, of the second half of Book I—those sections, as mentioned above, bordering the nuclear centre to the left—and, following these, I.vii. It would seem that, having plumbed and anchored the pillars closest to the nuclear centre, Joyce was then able to move outward from the

core and to publish, from April to June of 1927, the first four chapters of what would be *Finnegans Wake* (I.i-iv, 003-103), concluding, as a culminating flourish, with I.vi in September of this same year.<sup>2</sup>

Months later, early in 1928, Joyce appears to have carried out a new verification and consequent adjustment of his calculations. The writer composes a fragment which, falling between I.viii and the mentioned germinal passage "King Roderick O'Conor," would belong to II.ii (282-304). Joyce then moves immediately to the mountain's right side; between March 1928 and November 1929 he publishes, in logical progression from left to right, III.i, III.ii, III.iii, and III.iv. During the final phase, with both sides of his mountain complete, Joyce turns to the sequencing and structuring of the mountain's core. He writes II.i and all but fills the remaining gaps. Two passages of II.ii (260-275 and 304-308) are added, to the left and right, respectively, to the fragment previously published in February 1928 (282-304), thus concluding "Night Lessons." Finally, two fragments of II.iii (309-331 and 337-355) continue the approximation, within the nuclear centre, to the two initial pages of March 1923.<sup>3</sup>

However singular or strange such a process of composition may seem, any Joycean, given the writer's habit of leaving nothing either to chance or improvisation, ought not to be caught unawares. This process, however, indeed is singular if we compare it with what appears published in 1939 under the title *Finnegans Wake*. Until then, neither Joyce's method nor the serially published instalments in differing literary reviews come as any surprise. On the contrary, Joyce himself sought in such serial publication to reveal bit by bit the narrative thread and inhering plot of his *work in progress*. At a relatively early moment in its development, for example, the artist, having sent his patron Miss Weaver a fragment of the text, asks her to "let me know whether the 'plot' begins to emerge" (JJ 549). All this seems to suggest that, by virtue of these fragments and the sequence in which they appeared, it would be possible to glimpse with sufficient clarity the underlying order of the text: its unity, coherence, and progressive evolution. If Joyce, however, asked for such acute, penetrating vision from his friends, what sort of perplexity would be theirs upon seeing the 1939 volume structured and sequenced differently? Would the text conserve the same supposed coherence and unity?

The order of both texts—if I may be allowed to designate them text *WP* and text *FW*—is not radically opposed, although indeed appreciably different. My proposal advances the idea that *Finnegans Wake* be read as Joyce's contemporaries read it over the years, following the sequence of first publications, yet privileging their definitive versions appearing in 1939. In spite of the marked differences among both sequentialities, one can discern aspects common to each, such as the cinematographic technique of approximation, whereby the eye moves from wide-angled perspectives to close-ups. Considered so, the first three books of *Finnegans Wake* follow such a procedure: three stages exist, each corresponding to a single book, in which the material treated is seen more and more closely, all of which concludes in III.iv with the parents' room, intricately described in the foreground. Book IV as a *ricorso* adopts the same technique and concludes with a closely focused image of Anna Livia, whose voice reaches to 003.03 and is relieved by the general narrator, who begins the entire "story" with "Sir Tristram, violer d'amores" (003.04).

My reading proposal for *Work in Progress* similarly envisions three stages: the first consists of a more general consideration than the following two, and the second, of the third, this last being the closest view.<sup>4</sup> Each of these stages in turn adopts the same procedure of progressive approximation in

the presentation and treatment of material; each approximation is composed of five steps. These steps, moreover, hold corresponding parallels in the differing stages' respective designs.<sup>5</sup> According to such an internal architecture, the third step, for example, of the first stage would correspond, although with wider vision, to the third step of the second stage, whose perspective would bring the reader closer to the same object viewed.

Let us establish, then, the three large stages which result from my hypothesis: the first would include publications appearing from April 1924 to the fall/winter of 1925-26; the second, material published between April and September of 1927; the third, less sharply defined, ranging approximately from March 1928 to July 1935. In the interests of greater clarity and ease of identification, let us order these three stages and their interior steps by means of Table 1 to be found in the Appendix.

The first fragments which Joyce gave to his friends and readers—that is, those passages published before 1926—sought, if my hypothesis is correct, to establish the essential nature of the work. As the table above indicates, the first passage published, apart from that of stage 0—II.iii, which Joyce wrote in large handwriting on a double sheet of foolscap and from which the entire book emanates—is II.iv (“Mamalujo”: 1.a in Table 1). II.iv forms, as the first stage's first step, a beginning *in medias res* which relates, in the voices of The Four narrators, the courtship of Tristan and Isolde, establishing thus an overarching thematic setting for the material to follow. Immediately thereafter, in the brief fragment which comes on the heels of I.ii (first part of “Ballad”: 1.b.1 in Table 1), the second step occurs, focusing its attention on the masculine protagonist's origin and name, reflecting on the nature and name of Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, or “Here Comes Everybody” (032.18-19). All of chapter I.ii, especially the passage of interest here, centers on H. C. E. and his supposed crime at Phoenix Park, as a result of which a song is placed at the section's end.

A subsequent passage, I.v, composes the third step (“Hen”: 1.b.2 in Table 1), in which the material previously introduced acquires clearer form. A reflection on the manifesto—assigned afterward to Anna Livia and seeking to excuse the crime of the already presented masculine protagonist—becomes a discussion on the nature of writing. A fourth step, I.viii, reflects on the author of the above-mentioned manifesto—the feminine protagonist Anna Livia Plurabelle—and on the causes which gave rise to it (“Anna Livia Plurabelle”: 1.b.3 in Table 1). With I.vii, a fifth, last step reflexively explores its own material author while addressing in addition the nature of the writer and his public role (“Shem”: 1.b.4 in Table 1).

To sum up, then, the first stage consists of a five-step sequence: (1) presentation *in medias res* of the overarching thematic context; (2) presentation of the masculine protagonist of that context; (3) reflection on the excusing manifesto and on writing; (4) presentation of the feminine protagonist as the inspiring author of the manifesto; and (5) presentation of the text's material author and reflection on the nature of the writer. With its wide perspective, this first stage serves as a kind of overture which, by means of its sequence, in the form of staged zoom-ins, introduces the principal elements to follow.

In the second stage, the cycle begins anew, except that the steps composing it draw us nearer to thematic material already seen, yet not so near as we later will see. Placed parallel to II.iv, I.i (“The Wake,” “The Giant's Howe”: 2.a in Table 1), or “Opening Pages of a Work in Progress,” as it was titled when published in April 1927, forms stage two's first step. Motifs, themes, and characters appearing in II.iv reappear and receive more vivid treatment. I.ii, stage two's second step (2.b.1 in Table 1), magnifies its

corresponding material in the first stage, thereby bringing the reader closer to the now more fully-defined masculine protagonist. All that identifies him is already present here: character, crime, and ballad or song, this last as a counterpoint to the excusing “mamafesto” which appears afterward. “Goat, I.iii (2.b.2 in Table 1), parallels “Hen,” I.v, and both are seen to form the centre step in their respective stages. Visually closer to its subject, “Goat” reveals the more intricate nature of “Hen.” If the latter holds a reflection on writing and on the excusing letter, the former now brings these into direct contact with the Fall, its different versions, the trial brought against H. C. E., his defence, and his final conviction.

“Lion,” I.iv (2.b.3 in Table 1), fourth step in the second stage, represents a counterpoint to I.viii, “Anna Livia Plurabelle.” If in I.viii we found two washerwomen—doubtless Shem and Shaun—airing the gossip about the Earwickers, we find here the gossip of the telltales concerning the parents and the insistent rivalry of the two brothers. Kate, actually the old Anna Livia, is identified with the Anna Livia through the letter. And Anna Livia, changed into a Pandora distributing venomous gifts at the conclusion of I.viii, is now, as I.iv draws to a close, the great mother earth, *gaea-tellus*: “Do tell us all about. As we want to hear allabout. So tellus tellas allabout” (101.02-03; do these words not echo others, almost identical, in I.viii?).

Finally, I.vi (2.b.4 in Table 1) would form the second stage’s equivalent of I.vii, “Shem.” The theme of I.vi, however, is not that of the writer, nor of writing in general, but rather the very *Finnegans Wake*, debated throughout twelve questions and their corresponding answers, all shaped by none other than Shem. Additional elements of the two chapters coincide, such as the question-and-answer frame between the twin brothers, the clashing and consequent fusion of the two into one, and the presence of collateral stories.

The third stage—following the argument put forth here—composes the text’s foreground, its closest cinematographic approximation and consequent inspection of material revealed in stages one and two. Just as, moreover, within the sequencing of each individual stage, b draws the reader nearer than a, so b.4, b.3, and b.2, in turn, draw the reader nearer than b.1.

With the first chapter of book three (III.i: 3.a in Table 1), a second level of dreaming begins, corresponding at this point to Earwicker, whose principal and recurrent foreground motifs focus on Shaun as the young Earwicker and, by extension, also on Shem. Given that in terms of structure and plot it follows the germinal nucleus of 380-382, III.i initiates a new cycle as well. The chapter is divided into three parts, the first and last being an inquiry into and reflection on determined elements inherent to writing, above all to writing conceived as letter/literature—that is, the work of the postman, on the one hand, and of the writer, on the other. The chapter’s middle passage, the fable known as “Ondt and the Gracehoper,” constitutes a defence of the book directed against Wyndham Lewis. In another of the seemingly endless series of fraternal battles, the brothers appear vividly in the father’s dreams.

III.ii, corresponding to 3.b.1 in Table 1, continues the line of presentations of the male protagonist, here shown in the foreground to dream of himself as changed into Shaun. Shaun, in turn, is shown to be the young Earwicker, and the actions informing previous chapters—his crime, the Fall, his incestuous desires, the letter—are recalled. In sequential correspondence with 1.b.1 and 2.b.1, Shaun, appearing at III.ii’s outset as Jaun and at its end as Haun, is portrayed extensively.

The third book’s third chapter (3.b.2 in Table 1) is in direct relation to its corresponding 2.b.2 and more distantly related to 1.b.2, “Goat” and “Hen,” respectively. Yawn, understood to be the young Earwicker, is interrogated

by The Four about the family and only he, as Earwicker, can know the details concerning the crime at Phoenix Park. The father is once again brought to a trial requiring, by means of Shaun, the presence of Anna Livia. The sons serve as the trial's witnesses, and at last Earwicker's self-defence takes place.

As previously noted, the parallelisms of stage three's remaining two steps (3.b.3 and 3.b.4), are less clearly visible, or, at the very least, I have not been able to discern them with equal conviction. Regardless, there is little doubt that III.iv (3.b.3) and II.i (3.b.4) are, by virtue of their representational clarity and realism, chapters possessing a sharper and closer focus. The first consists of a detailed description, made initially by the general narrator and afterward by each of The Four, of the home, the rooms, and the actions of the now-named Porters. The second portrays the games and the play, credits included, in which the children participate at the entrance to the tavern.

Leaving behind, however, these less persuasive connections and, what is more, leaving aside the very validity of the present inconclusive hypothesis, I should like to believe that something, if not much indeed, is to be gained by reading *Finnegans Wake* in the full light of *Work in Progress's* serial publication. I should hope, in addition, that readers, equipped with a knowledge of the parameters, parallels, and techniques addressed above, will raise new questions which in turn yield more penetrating and precise understandings than we at this moment have.

#### Notes

1. Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1960) 320.

2. I refer to the first moment a chapter or fragment was published. Any student and admirer of Joyce knows all too well that the writer's first versions differ considerably from definitive ones (if indeed a definitive version ever existed for him). Nevertheless, we must consider that the first public printing of a passage, fragment, or chapter holds its own legitimate value from the very moment nuclear elements are found within it and the author sends it to be printed.

3. See my book *James Joyce y la explosión de la palabra: aproximación a la lectura de Finnegans Wake* (Sevilla: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1989), especially pages 160-61 and appendices I and II, pages 197-207.

4. Obviously, the divisions here are not imposed by the books of *Finnegans Wake*. Rather, they result from my research and rigidly follow the chronological order in which the different sections, fragments, or chapters of *Work in Progress* were published.

5. I must acknowledge, however, that the third stage remains more sketchily systematised and its resulting correspondences are, consequently, weaker.

#### Appendix

Table 1

Order	Pages	Chapter/Fragment	Date
0	380-382	(II.iii)	[March 10, 1923]

1.a	383-399	II.iv	April, 1924
1.b.1	030-034	(I.ii)	May, 1925
1.b.2	104-125	I.v	July, 1925
1.b.3	196-216	I.viii	October, 1925
1.b.4	169-195	I.vii	Fall/Winter, 1925-26

2.a	003-029	I.i	April, 1927
2.b.1	030-047	I.ii	May, 1927
2.b.2	048-074	I.iii	June, 1927
2.b.3	075-103	I.iv	July, 1927
2.b.4	126-168	I.vi	September, 1927

	282-304	(II.ii)	February, 1928
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3.a	403-428	III.i	March, 1928
3.b.1	429-473	III.ii	Summer, 1928
3.b.2	474-554	III.iii	February, 1929
3.b.3	555-590	III.iv	November, 1929
3.b.4	219-259	II.i	February, 1933
	260-275 304-308	(II.ii) (II.ii)	July, 1935 July, 1935
	309-331	(II.iii)	February, 1937

	337-355	(II.iii)	April-May, 1938
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	Stages		
Steps	1st	2nd	3rd

a	II.iv	I.i	III.i
b.1	(I.ii)	I.ii	III.ii
b.2	I.v	I.iii	III.iii
b.3	I.viii	I.iv	III.iv
b.4	I.vii	I.vi	II.i