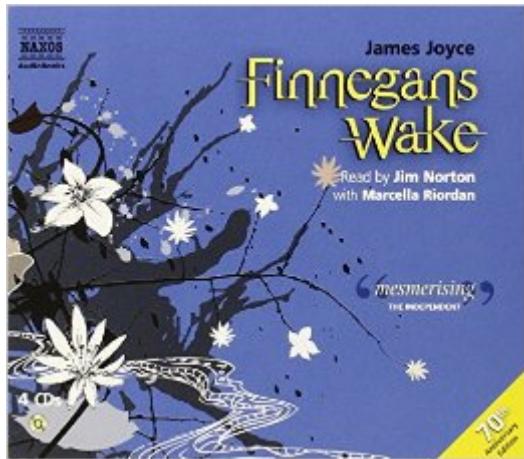


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Finnegans Wake (Modern Classics)



Synopsis

"Finnegans Wake", the greatest avant-garde novel of all time, was first published seventy years ago - and people are still trying to work out what it is about. There is Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker - aka HCE (Here Comes Everyone) - and Anna Livia Plurabelle, but also Finnegan the hod carrier (or was he a giant?), whose wake is the subject of the book. This masterly reading of the abridged version, with copious notes aiding comprehension, is republished with a new cover.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Finnegans Wake" is a novel for people who are tired of reading novels. The chapter summaries in the table of contents, and not the body of the novel itself, give evidence of a plot, which concerns the dream-consciousness of a man whose initials H.C.E. recur as an acronym at various points in the text and whose wife Anna Livia Plurabelle, sons Shem (the Penman) and Shaun (the Postman), and daughter Issy figure prominently among many other exotic and unexpected characters.

However, the presentation is so nebulous and abstract that the novel resembles nothing else in literature, although the style looks deceptively easy to imitate. Upon first looking at the pages of "Finnegans Wake," one inevitably must wonder what it's supposed to be. My explanation of it is an extension of my theory about "Ulysses," which is that "Ulysses" was Joyce's effort to write a novel that used every single existing word in the English language, or at least as many as he could. (Among its 400,000 words, "Ulysses" certainly has a much broader lexicon than any other novel of comparable length.) Having exhausted all the possibilities of English in "Ulysses," he had only one

recourse for his next project, which was to create an entirely new language as a pastiche of all the existing ones; the result is "Finnegans Wake." The language in "Finnegans Wake" is a continuum of puns, portmanteaus, disfigured words, anagrams, and rare scraps of straightforward prose. What Joyce does is exploit the way words look and sound in order to associate them with remote, unrelated ideas.

I've just reached the end ... or is it the beginning? It's taken me six months, with Anthony Burgess' 'Here Comes Everybody' providing a basic and unsatisfactory commentary on this nightmare of a book. I can't really recommend anybody to read this unless you know exactly what you're letting yourself in for ... unlike Ulysses, which I believe everybody should attempt at some point in their lives. So why have I given it 5 stars? Because it simply had to be written. Without the Wake, twentieth century fiction would have been simply an extension of the nineteenth century. This book is what sets us apart. Don't believe the people who tell you it's a joke - a genius like Joyce doesn't spend 15 years, resign himself to penury when a "Ulysses Lite" could have made him a rich man, and ultimately ruin his eyesight all for nothing more than the literary equivalent of a whoopee cushion. There are deep things here, it's just that they're buried so deep that it's mostly not worth the effort of mining them. But again, I've given it 5 stars because this book is like a nail bomb in a library (shhhhh!) - it destroyed everyone's perception of what could ever constitute literature. If the Wake can be created, anything is possible. The Wake gave the green light to everyone's wildest imaginings and bizarre method of telling it - after all, whatever you write it won't be as difficult or as slow or as mad or as painful as this work. Don't let anybody tell you that there is an easy way into this book. Whichever way you approach it, however many primers and explanations you read, nothing will prepare you for 650 pages of dense dream-imagery written in polyglottal puns through which you grasp at anything that makes the slightest sense (and I mean slightest).

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