Preface to the *Third Census*

... in his early years in Dublin Joyce lived among the believers and adepts in magic gathered round the poet Yeats. Yeats held that the borders of our minds are always shifting, tending to become part of the universal mind, and that the borders of our memory also shift and form part of the universal memory. This universal mind and memory could be evoked by symbols ... Joyce added that in his own work he never used the recognized symbols, preferring instead to use trivial and quadrivial words and local geographical allusions. The intention of magical evocation, however, remained the same.

Frank Budgen, "Further Recollections of James Joyce"

*This Census* is an interim report, for no man has yet sounded the deep structure of *Finnegans Wake* or teased out the plan of the maze Joyce made in vainglorious imitation of God and Masterbuilder Daedalus.

In *Finnegans Wake*, Everywhere is represented by a house in which plays are played by night. This house with plays inside it is a sleeping head which narrowly encloses the unlimited world of dreams. The playhouse or inn is located perhaps in Chapelizod (a Dublin environ) on the river Liffey, in or near the Phoenix Park. At this theatre, a cry of players acts in ill-conditioned scraps of history, *disjecta membra* of a corpus of drama which is disordered, debased, chewed up as if by once and future catastrophe. The broken play was and will be the comedy: *God and Everyman Manifest in History*.

The litter of divine and human comedy Joyce compares again and again to debris at an obscure archaeological dig—Schliemann’s Hisarlik, an Irish dung-heaps, a plague-grave—potsherds, palimpsests, bits of mummy, dead limbs of gibbeted gods. At any present moment of *Finnegans Wake*, the reader—archaeologist-and-augur—is here to read these signs like Stephen Dedalus when he confronts protean seawrack on Sandymount strand. Puzzling out past and future is what we do most with dreams.

The actors of *Finnegans Wake* also read the signs as best they can,
and are under the harsher necessity of then going on to interpret them on a stage, before an often unfriendly audience.

This cry of hard-pressed players is composed of the innkeeper and his family. His name is Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker and he is Everyman by way of his nickname—Here Comes Everybody; the initials HCE designate him when Particular, when Universal.

There are five members of the acting family—father, mother, twin sons, daughter—and there are two inn servants. Each plays many roles in the "casual comedy," and whether nature (the actor) imitates art (the roles) or art imitates nature, I couldn't begin to guess.

The father, HCE, is towering vitality, expansive presence. His seedy magniloquence, his preposterous aplomb recall Falstaff, Mr Micawber, Simon Dedalus—ham actors and bastards all. "An imposing everybody he always indeed looked, constantly the same as and equal to himself and magnificently well worthy of any and all such universalisation . . . ." The conscience of Everyman tells him that to know all is to forgive nothing; retribution is just around the corner—angry God, greedy sons, castrating daughter, forgiving wife. When his defenses are breached, his boasts betrayed by stutter or slip of tongue, by the hump of evil he carries like Christian on his back—why then he speaks, his voice rises, boasting, defending, counteraccusing, boasting, boasting. He is the old Adam fallen, found out, cast out, making a brave show of it, pointing his amazing moral: not to be dead is best for Man and Language, and there is no second best.

Mrs Earwicker is Mother Eve, Everywife-and-mother, Everydomestic-martyred-homemaker. She is detested by husband and children: daughter wants to replace her; husband and sons are so ungrateful for her relentless love and care that they seize every chance to frustrate her hopes, use her for their own ends, mock, ignore her, push her off on some other family, leave her for younger, gaudier women. She is preeminently the mother that Proust and Joyce knew they had to kill with gestures of dreadful farce. Forgiveness is her sweet revenge and she gives as good as she gets.

A horrid warning to martyred mothers, Mrs Earwicker is serving a sentence at hard domestic labor, for, like her husband, she has a criminal past. She is the river Liffey who makes all Dublin's mills and distilleries and washtubs go round. But once she was untamed, teeming Nature—wild Irish girl—young river Liffey up in the Wicklow hills—Eve the temptress, sweetly pretty and dangerous as hell.

When old and old, sad and old, Anna Livia will see herself as a kind of Undine or psyche-the-soul, prisoned in a man-made world. Her mother is the sky, her father the sea, her sisters are rivers—and she,
Anna Livia, is in the kitchen. "My people were not their sort . . .,"
she mourns in her swan song.

The Earwicker children are restless, mixed-up kids. Issy (the
youngest child) is temptation made flesh, and is the prize for which the
males of the family contend. She murmurs erotic nothings, has a fatal
flaw like Gerty MacDowell, like Lucia Joyce; Issy is a personality split
into two, seven, twenty-nine girls, and these girls are often out of touch
with each other. "I didn't do it. It was my sister," Issy says, combining
conviction of innocence with a nervous cough.

The sons, Shem and Shaun, are identical twins, identical opposites,
anti-selves. In womb tomb heaven purgatory hell, they jostle for place,
fight for preeminence, fight with pen and sword wars of race, religion,
national origin, national honor, personal honor, literary or scientific
pique. The jostling is not homosexual love, but it passes the love of
women because it is the way for a young male to achieve apotheosis,
swank in the radiance of pure triumph, or in the radiance of pure
abasement. Though death, dismemberment, coldness to women, at-
tend the fraternal wars, they do not menace social stability. Vico's
pious and pure wars (as of feudal barons) are safe wars because they do
not threaten the father: he can be overthrown only when youth com-
bines and comes against him. To their mother, the pious and pure war-
rriors are but little boys playing Cowboys and Indians.

Whole or maimed, the sons go on, to continue education in self-
realization by exchange of roles: each brother, from a certain time (FW
287–293) takes over his brother’s roles and plays them differently—
e.g., before the exchange, Shem plays Evil in the guise of Satan, and
Shaun plays Good in the guise of St Michael; after exchange, Shem is
Good in the guise of Christ-as-ass and Shaun is Evil in the guise of
Antichrist.

Characters of second rank include: Kate the shrewish slavey, cook
and cleaner who is that other face of the saintly housewife—a
natural-born exhibitor of dirt, the muckraking virago—Kate is also
Countess Cathleen Ni Houlihan as shrew; a manservant who is, by
times, a Black, a Moor, a Norse, and may be named Jo Behan or Ma-
han; twelve drinkers at the bar, twenty-nine leapyear girls, seven rain-
bow girls. There are also four old men—Matt Gregory, Mark Lyons,
Luke Tarpey, and Johnny MacDougal who are many a four this that
and the other (four evangelists, masters, Irish provinces, etc.) but are
primarily life-hating, law-giving Mister Hypocrisy: "And whatever
one did they said, the fourlings, that on no accounts you were not to."

Finnegans Wake does not have dramatic structure but it is a critique
of World-as-Theatre. HCE and family are like the Dublin stock com-
panies which Bernard Shaw described to Ellen Terry as being so
damnably familiar to the audience that they performed in an atmos-
phere of hate and derision.

... the stock company was a readymade cast that had to fit all plays, from
Hamlet down to the latest burlesque; and as it never fitted any of them
completely, and seldom fitted at all, the casts were more or less grotesque
misfits ... Each claimed ... the part which came nearest his or her spe-
cialty; and each played all his or her parts in exactly the same way .... At
my first visit to the theatre I saw on the same evening Tom Taylour's three-
act drama Plot and Passion followed by a complete Christmas pantomime,
with a couple of farces as hors d'oeuvre. Tom Taylour's Joan of Arc had
Massinger's New Way to Pay Old Debts as a curtain raiser.

Much of the fun of *Finnegans Wake* hangs on the Earwickers being such
very bad actors and so very familiar—who is more damnably familiar
than Adam?

They will not sink their own clamorous voices in their parts, they
repeatedly break off their lines to address the audience, rail at one
another with obsession, petulance. People from one drama straggle
into another: the Four, as Struldbrugs, leer at the thriving copulation
of Tristan and Isolde and, as Elders, the Four proposition Susanna;
Brutus and Cassius court Cleopatra and shoot Falstaff; the Flying
Dutchman marries an Irish girl and settles down to be cuckolded in
Dublin. One actor plays several parts at the same time: HCE falls as
Noah, Tim Finnegan, Finn MacCool, Old Parr, Paris, and the Master-
builder; Issy plays two Isoldes, two Esthers (Swift's Stella and Van-
essa), and parts various as Alice Liddell, Ophelia, Lorelei Lee and
Leda; and, as I have said, Shem and Shaun exchange roles in the
middle of the book—Shem's rendering of Evil as a debased (or Marie
Corellian) Satan is replaced by Shaun's Evil as Blake's "Antichrist,
Creeping Jesus/He'd have done anything to please us."

The above examples are much abbreviated and honed down; they
are slight indications (not models) of a process that is extensive, dense,
elaborately constructed and in a perpetual motion of ordered change,
like stars and atoms and subatoms and cells and galaxies. But however
simplified, this mix-multiply-shift of dramatic roles confuses and be-
fuddles the mind—WHO exactly did you say is who when . . . ?

To the professional actor, it is a commonplace mystery of his craft
that one man plays many parts in an hour, a life, a cycle of lives. But to
the laity, the mystery (one man plays many) is thought to matter
philosophically, because being one and many evokes dreams and their
sacred and profane terrors.

It should be said that terror and any extreme of emotion and truth
are not often found on the surface of the dream, but are buried at different sites and on different levels underground. Surface incident is jumpy, local, mean, fretful. Surface tone and language are lewd and facetious as if uttered at the Rural Dionysia or at the feast of that other god of low comedy—Murphy, the drunken sailor who oversets Rational Mind, every night and all.

Much needs to be found out about the 1001 cunning devices with which Joyce—sedulously aping Murphy—oversets the rational minds (I use terms coarsely here) of those who read his books.

The mix-multiply-shift-wheel of dramatic roles and historical narrative is made of words and is the machinery by which Everyman changes into every man, and vice versa; simultaneously, the machinery links, by specific instances, Adam-and-his-posterity to all things divine and human, real and fictional, individual and abstract, to all things at all times in all places in the animal, vegetable, mineral worlds. The machine is so big, it has so many parts—how did Joyce make it in only eighteen years?

_Finnegans Wake_ is a simulacrum of the machinery of God’s creation, broken and reshaped after the pattern of historical cycles proposed in Vico’s _New Science_. Joyce’s “wholemole millwheeling vicociclometer” is 628 pages long; it has mass, density and such a dreadful number and elaboration of detail that, overloaded, memory topples. Overthrow of memory is one of the 1001 silent, cunning devices by which Joyce exiles the reader from his rational mind and persuades him that _Finnegans Wake_ contains as many possibilities of design and random effect as God’s Creation. I incline to Mr Kenner’s suggestion: Joyce planned _Finnegans Wake_ to represent a non-simultaneous universe, i.e., a universe that cannot be comprehended by the writer or the reader or God in a single mental act.

Like the Creation, History is heavy with multitudinous possibilities of design, doubt, error and comedy. “The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences on every page, the men all so good for nothing and hardly any women at all.”

Men are sliddery subjects, artful dodgers, doubtful characters, and their story must always dissatisfy moral consciousness. But Joyce, an artist, liked artful tricksters. As long as he is let to tell unfettered truth about sinners like Bloom, Simon Dedalus, HCE, Joyce seems never to have been out of charity with them.

For Joyce built his house on doubt; he bet his immortal soul on the proposition that uncertainty is reality—all the reality there is; and he put his artist’s money on the dark horse Incertitude.

Historian’s History is also built on sand, writ in water, and cor-
rupted like a popular ballad. But by times, establishments like the
Communist Party or the American Confederacy or the British Empire
find it expedient to pretend that History is not a shambles but a solid,
carefully built-up, intellectually coherent edifice, which is founded on
the rock of truth. The lying, whitened sepulchre of History is fair game
and offers irresistible temptation to one of Joyce’s Fenian, Christian
temper and black comedic power—blow the damned thing up! Blow
up History, not because it is wicked, but because it does not exist! And
when it is blown up, make it all over again—the same anew.

In *Finnegans Wake*, therefore, Joyce demonstrates, as if to backward
children, the pathos and absurdity of supposing that (even with good
will) we can know truth about the blood-boltered past—none bloodier
than Ireland’s seven-hundred years of being the Belgian Congo, none
more lied about by oppressors and well-wishers. Three sections of
*Finnegans Wake* (I, ii, iii, iv) go to show Carlyle was right when he
called foolish history “the synopsis of rumor.” Joyce makes hay of
rumor, then goes on to demonstrate that rumor is as valid a source of
history as contemporary document, explication of text, fine arts,
mathematics, music, psychoanalysis, or table-turning.

Missed understanding, malice, politics, wit, learning, shifts of vow-
els, shifts of sensibility—these and a thousand other fetches combine
to distort the past out of recognition, or even transform it into a
never-melting pall of snow which cruelly smothers green impulses.

Doubt and uncertainty beat through *Finnegans Wake*: “They say
. . .,” “We are told . . .,” “The fall is retale . . .,” “the unfacts, did we
possess them, are too imprecisely few to warrant our certitude . . .”,
“that sword of certainty which would identifide the body never falls
. . .”, “the course of his story will had been having recourses . . .”, “the
fog of the cloud in which we toil and the cloud of the fog under which
we labour, bomb’s the thing to be domb about it . . .”

Richard Rowan spurns “darkness of belief” and chooses “restless
living wounding doubt” to be his bride and muse. Stephen Dedalus so
passionately distrusts “glass and crystal” and “aquacities of thought
and language” that he draws the sacred sword Necessity and shatters a
glass chandelier. And Joyce himself told Arthur Power: what is clear
and concise can’t deal with reality, for to be real is to be surrounded by
mystery—mystery is excitement—medieval is more exciting and
fruitful than classical—“Circe” is very near reality.

Human kind, it is clear, can’t stand much reality. We so fiercely hate
and fear our cloud of unknowing, that we can’t believe sincere and
unaffected, Joyce’s love of the clear dark—it has got to be a paradox, a
perversion, a joke in doubtful taste (compare the carrying about of a
pair of doll's underpants), or, as Bloom kindly supposes, an eccentricity of genius.

(I hold to my old opinion: *Finnegans Wake* is a model of a mysterious universe, made mysterious by Joyce for the purpose of striking with polished irony at the hot vanity of divine and human wishes.

*Finnegans Wake* is lots of fun things that have not been thought of by my generation of its readers—e.g., *Finnegans Wake* has some element that looks like mystery and will turn out to be a piece of architecture. May we not have our vanities pulled down like those early readers of *Ulysses*, who, by a really scandalous failure of aesthetic vigilance and nerve, praised or damned *Ulysses* for a modern chaos; whereas, Joyce's Scheme shows *Ulysses* to be over-structured as a means to comedy and burlesque of epic conventions.)

Most happily anti-crystalline are matter and language of *Finnegans Wake*: Drama of Everyman—Dreamed in Ireland—smashing and elegant interplay of History and Language which are counterpointed by weaving together and pulling apart over and over again. I am not competent to argue the matter of sound and sense in *Finnegans Wake*, but here—as in "Sirens"—variegated polyphony aims to achieve unstated and diverse subliminal effects, so that words shall put on the power of music and call up a larger and more precise vocabulary of the subconscious.

It is a web of verbal and visual quibble, many-textured, tight-woven, elaborately colored and patterned like the Turkish carpet that Joyce once dreamed he was weaving onto a framework. The carpet analogy slips away because *Finnegans Wake* does not affect to be merely a patterned plane, but to assume—Protean—many sizes shapes dimensions—e.g., *Finnegans Wake* is the globe; and *Finnegans Wake* is the Ark; and *Finnegans Wake* builds up and tunnels down, cuts up its surface with effect of palimpsests and archaeological levels—city upon city, randomly exposed. Words also have different shapes, dimensions, colors, histories, ethnic origins; some are plain, some portmanteau. Like steel filings to magnetic mountain, words are drawn without explanation, to Everyman, asleep in Ireland. They come like vagrant radio waves or Pentecostal voices, or "wayward and flickering" hosts of the dead. Come to *Finnegans Wake* from Everywhere and Erewhon, they bond to Joyce's resonant, highly wrought, synthetic version of the English language; and then by some mechanism—radio transmitter or the lips of a sleeper (English spoken)—they are liberated to the air again—"wordloosed over seven seas crowdblast in cel lul enet eut oslavzend latinsoundscript."