We are still learning to be
James Joyce's contemporaries,
to understand our interpreter.
(first words of
Richard Ellmann's
biography of Joyce,
1959, revised 1982)

James Joyce from 1922 to 1941
January 31, 1922: makes last revisions to Ulysses
February 2, 1922: Ulysses published (also Joyce's 40th birthday)
March 10, 1923: announces first new pages of writing
1923-early 1939: writes Work in Progress, mostly in Paris
April 1924: first fragment of Work in Progress published
1930-1934: frequent trips to Zurich to consult with eye doctor
May 1931: Joyce and Nora married
December 1931: death of father John Stanislaus Joyce
February 15, 1932: grandson Stephen James Joyce born
March 1932: Lucia's nervous breakdown, schizophrenia diagnosed
late 1933: Ulysses ruled not pornographic in US; published 1934
1936: Ulysses published in UK
May 4, 1939: Finnegans Wake published
late 1940: fall of France, Joyce and family to Zurich
January 13, 1941: death in Zurich after abdominal operation

Gilbert & Sullivan's
Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride (1881)
Reginald Bunthorne's aria
"Am I alone, and unobserved?"
sung by Martyn Green
with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company
(1951)
lyrics rewritten as
"Running Out of Patience, or Punthorne's Pride"
by Sebastian Knowles (2003)
[from James Joyce Quarterly 46:1 (Fall 2008): 97-111]

Bunthorne / Sebastian Knowles aria 1
Am I alone? And unobserved? I am.
Then let me own, I'm an academic sham.
My reading of the Wake's a fake.
Up to about page nine, I'm fine.
But the idea of reading every word's absurd.
Let me confess.
A languid love of Livia does not blight me,
Acronyms of HCE do not delight me,
I do not care for "thunderwords" or "Wellingturds,"
Everything one sees is in Chinese.
Even my attempts at the marginalia end in abject failure,
In short, my reading of the Wake's an affectation,
Born of a morbid love of reputation!

Bunthorne / Sebastian Knowles aria 2
If you're anxious for to shine in the high Joycean line
As a man of tenure rare,
You must get up all the germs of the neologic terms,
And plant them everywhere.
You must lie about the phrases scattered through the text like daisies
For no clear reason why
Though they mean exactly zero you will always be a hero
If you can make them signify!
And everyone will say
As you walk your mystic way,
"If this young man can read Finnegans Wake,
Which is much too deep for me,
Why, what a very singularly deep young man
this deep young man must be!"
Finnegans Wake

"Finnegans Wake" is not about something; it is that something itself."  

"Within a year of the publication of Ulysses, T.S. Eliot pronounced the novel a work 'from which none of us can escape'; yet Finnegans Wake seems to escape us still."  
(Tim Conley, "Finnegans Wake: Some Assembly Required," 2009)

We are still learning to be James Joyce's contemporaries, to understand our interpreter.  
(Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, 1959, revised 1982)

Finnegans Wake 1

1) book of the night - dream  
Freud: condensation and displacement  
"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."  
(Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, November 24, 1926)

but: dream without identifiable dreamer

Finnegans Wake

"Finnegans Wake, in conception as well as in execution, is one of the boldest books ever written. . . . In the wonderful closing pages, Joyce has put over all he means with poetry of an originality, a purity, and an emotional power, such as to raise Finnegans Wake, for all its excesses, to the rank of a great work of literature."  
(Edmund Wilson, review, 1939)

We have novels that give us greatly a three-dimensional world: here is a narrative that gives a new dimension.  
(Padraic Colum, review, May 7, 1939)

Finnegans Wake is a prodigious, multifaceted monomyth, not only the cauchemar [nightmare] of a Dublin citizen but the dreamlike saga of guilt-stained, evolving humanity.  
(Joseph Campbell, A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake, 1944)
2) structure:
—Giambattista Vico's *The New Science* (1725, 1744)
—four cycles:
   a) age of gods  
   b) age of heroes  
   c) age of humans  
   d) ricorso

Book I: eight chapters (two groups of four)
Book II: four chapters
Book III: four chapters
Book IV: one chapter

3) recurring story-line
"The Ballad of Tim Finnegan"
(performe by The Clancy Brothers with Tommy Makem)
"Ballad of Tim Finnegan" 4

Then Maggy O'Connor took up the job,
"Biddy," says she, "you're wrong, I'm sure,"
But Biddy gave her a belt in the gob,
And she left her sprawling on the floor;
Then the war did soon engage,
'Twas woman to woman and man to man,
Shillelagh law was all the rage,
And a row and a ruction soon began.

Then Micky Maloney raised his head,
When a noggin of whiskey flew at him,
It missed and falling on the bed,
The liquor scattered over Tim;
Begod he revives, see how he rises,
Timothy rising from the bed,
Says, "Whirl your liquor round like blazes,
Thanam o'n dhoul, do ye think I'm dead?"
[Irish, "Soul to the devil . . ."]

Finnegans Wake 4

4) storytelling and gossip
"characters": "who is who when everybody is somebody else" (Adaline Glasheen)

Finnegans Wake 5

5) storytelling and gossip
"characters": "who is who when everybody is somebody else"

Finnegans Wake 6

6) language: puns, "portmanteau words" (Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, chapter 6)

Finnegans Wake 7

6) Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, chapter 6
"...and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents - "
"Certainly," said Alice.
"And only one for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!"
"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.
Humphry Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't - till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.
"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."
"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."
"portmanteau words" and "puns" (1)

Phall if you but will, rise you must. (4:15-16)
Wring out the clothes! Wring in the dew! (213.19-20)
Lord help you, Maria, full of grease, the load is with me! (214.18-19)
his uslessly unreadable Blue Book of Eccles (179.24-27)
his farced epistol to the hibruws (228.33-34)
Great Shapesphere (295.4)
we grisly old Sykos who have done our unsmiling bit on 'alices, when they were yung and easily freudened (115.21-23)
Three quarks for Muster Mark! (383.1)

"portmanteau words" and "puns" (2)
The last word in stolentelling? (424.35)
What a meanderthalltale to unfurl. (19.25-26)
this is not language at any sinse of the world. (83.12)
here keen again and begin again to make soundsense and sensesound kin again (121.14-16)
Ho, Lord! Twins of his bosom. Lord save us! (215.28-29)
Ho, talk save us! (215.34)
Every talk has his stay. (597.19)
How good you are in exposition! (419.11)
Wipe your glosses with what you know. (304 fn3)

"portmanteau words" and "puns" (3)
the book of Doubleds Jined (20.16)
beginning:
  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. (3.1-3)
ending:
  Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thousendsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the (628.14-16)
title: Finnegans Wake (NOTE: no apostrophe)

Finnegans Wake 8

excerpts:
1) Book I, Chapter 1 - "riverrun, past" (3:1) to "the world to see." (6:12)
2) Book I, Chapter 2 - "A baser meaning" (33:14) to "fibfib fabrications" (36:34)
3) Book I, Chapter 8 - "Well, you know" (213:11) to "waters of. Night!" (216:5)
4) Book IV - "But you're changing, acoolsha" (626:35) to "a long the" (628:16)

Joyce recorded excerpt 3

Finnegans Wake 9

"lots of fun at Finnegans Wake"

... and at the Grad Club