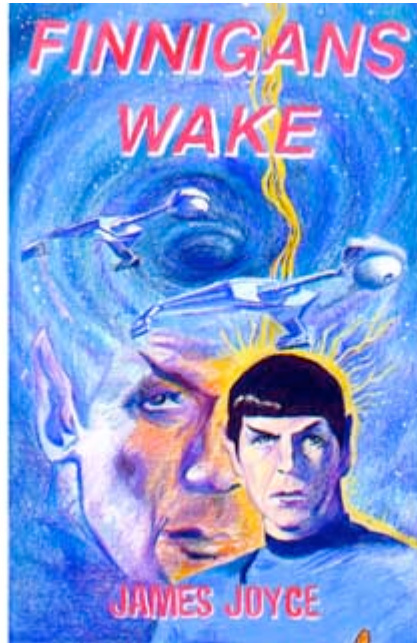


Finn Again Awakes every three minutes

BY KEVIN GRIFFIN, VANCOUVER SUN MAY 13, 2009



Cover of Aaron Carpenter's comic novel *Finnigans Wake*.

Photograph by: Handout, Files

Years ago, I went on a James Joyce tear. I started with *Dubliners*, worked my way through *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and then *Ulysses*. The last challenge was *Finnegans Wake*. Full of puns, verbal wordplay and made-up words, Joyce's last book has a reputation as a notoriously difficult book to read. Undaunted, I read on. Or, at least, I tried. Again and again, after a few pages, I was completely lost, unable to figure out what I'd just read.

I'd heard that reading it out loud helped. So I tried that, too. I tried speaking the words outdoors and indoors. I even tried it aloud while sitting in the bathtub.

Nothing worked. I hated to admit it, but I couldn't finish *Finnegans Wake*.

My unfulfilled relationship with Joyce remained on hold until I received an e-mail the other day. It referred to Aaron Carpenter and *Finnegan Swake*. This caught my attention for several reasons, but especially because of that name: *Finnegan Swake*.

Finnegan Swake, *Ffinnigans Wwake* and *Phinigins Wyake* are among the multiple spellings of Carpenter's art project, *Finnigans Wake*. He's done that in homage to Joyce and his liquid nouns, words that change their spellings for various literary reasons each time they're used. It's among the many reasons why the novel is so impenetrable.

Carpenter's take on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* includes a one-minute video that will be shown starting Friday on the outdoor screens at the corner of Robson and Granville streets. What Carpenter has done is display the first page of the 628-page novel in the same rolling-text format as the beginning *Star Wars* (the original film, now called *Episode IV: A New Hope*).

The video starts with Joyce's words describing the Liffey River running through Dublin: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay ." The words scroll against a starry background and recede into the distance, just as in *Star Wars*.

Carpenter's cheeky approach both respects and makes fun of the aura around *Finnegans Wake*. On one level, he's turned Joyce's static words on a page into moving images. On another, he's taken a text revered by high culture and packaged it in a format used and recognized by popular culture. Given Joyce's own irreverence, he would probably approve.

Carpenter's *Phiniggins Wyake* runs every three minutes for 10 days, from Friday to Sunday, May 24.

Other works by Carpenter are part of the exhibition *Literally*, at Artspeak in Gastown. All the works in the exhibition explore words and books as art.

At Artspeak are Carpenter's book covers inspired by Joyce's novel. Several of the paper works explicitly refer to *Star Trek*. In one, the image he's drawn includes several recognizable science fiction signs, such as a wormhole, Klingon-style spaceships and two portraits of Spock, the half-human, half-Vulcan character.

In addition, Carpenter has made a pair of Joyce reading glasses. One lens is covered in black felt, which mimics Joyce's eyepatch. The other is a multifaceted prism.

When I put them on, the exhibition area was fractured into rainbow colours and cubist shapes. Like Joyce's own complex vision, the glasses give the wearer multiple views of the world.

Joel Herman's works are meticulous drawings of the title pages of books. They're grouped in pairs, based on similarities in the titles of books on completely different subjects. *Meaning and Expression: Toward a Sociology of Art*, by Hanna Deinhard, is paired with *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, by John R. Searle.

Roula Partheniou has painted book covers in acrylic on canvas. They're grouped in various ways - for example, a group of book paintings with the word "man" in the title, such as *Between Man & Man*, by Martin Buber.

They look like books, but they aren't. They're so realistic that one painting is hidden in plain sight among the books for sale at the back of the exhibition area.

Herman's drawings and Partheniou's paintings aren't just realistic depictions; they're ready-made copies.

Literally continues at Artspeak, 233 Carrall, until Saturday, June 6.

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At a Glance

Phiniggins Wyake

Outdoor screens at Robson and Granville

Every three minutes

Friday, to May 24

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