

Joyce's Comic Relief: Comics and Popular Magazines in *Finnegans Wake**

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It is well-known that “the spirit of John Stanislaus Joyce, with all his fun and impossibility and outrageousness” haunts James Joyce’s last work, *Finnegans Wake* (Jackson & Costello 381). James Joyce’s father, John Stanislaus Joyce, was a hilarious person, usually equipped with humorous stories and anecdotes, much of which are believed to be woven into Joyce’s work. In “Grace,” a *Dubliners* story focusing on religion, Mr. Cunningham, for example, tells a comic version of Dublin Metropolitan Police drilling. Although the exact source is unknown, Joyce may have heard of this kind of joke on DMP from his father. The sources of such episodes as “How Buckley Shot the Russian General,” “Kersse the Tailor and the Norwegian Sailor,” etc. are known to come from Joyce’s father. Joyce’s comic sense is largely influenced by his father’s sense of humor, but it is worth noticing that he deploys comic characters originating from a broader sphere of popular culture like a lot of conventional daily newspapers and periodicals throughout *Finnegans Wake*. Whether from his father or from his own experience during

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childhood, Joyce's work is populated with a constellation of humorous episodes. It is true that *Finnegans Wake* witnesses the emergence of new media such as radio, television, and film, just as Thomas Jackson Rice arguably insists that "Joyce's composition of *Finnegans Wake*, from early 1923 through late 1938, not only closely coincides with the introduction and worldwide growth of radio broadcasting, but . . . his experience of the wireless deeply influences his experiment with 'a new way of communication' via 'a kind of language that imitate[s] so many of [the] audial characteristics' of radio" (137). Donald F Theall even insists that the hero in the *Wake*, HCE can be identified as "a communication machine, 'This harmonic condenser engine (the Mole)' (*FW* 310.1)" (13). Although he embraces new forms of communication resulting from new technological developments, Joyce never jettisons old ways of communication, thus rather indulging in the more basic way of communication—human body and its physicality, which I will discuss later in connection with popular performances and popular magazines. The fact that Joyce's last work refers to various traditional periodicals as well as emergent media shows that by shifting attention from comic periodicals to new-fangled mass media in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce encompasses a variety of popular discourses on communication inclusively. In this paper I will focus on how Joyce's "jocoserious" attitude toward life is relevant to his inclusion of comic periodicals in *Finnegans Wake*.

It is apparent that Joyce bombards his work with intentional errors by even making Bloom's name corrupted in the newspaper report of Dignam's funeral in *Ulysses*. So the reader must be careful of the scattered mines of errors, since we do not know exactly whether those errors are intentional or not. In *Ulysses*, Joyce prepares a protective device for his own genius when Stephen Dedalus is saying:

- The world believes Shakespeare made a mistake, he said, and got out of it as quickly and as best he could.
- Bosh! Stephen said rudely. A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery. (*U* 9.226-29)

It is more problematic when we read *Finnegans Wake*, since Joyce deforms language *radically* in the both senses of the word. For example, Joyce recombines and puts in disorder spellings and syllables: “ingperwhis” (*FW* 121.12) or “bi tso fb rok engl a ssan dspl itch ina” (*FW* 124.7-8). There cannot be the “copy text” of *Finnegans Wake*, from which the ensuing prints have only to be just copied. We had better focus on Joyce's use of errors and its effects.

One of the best recommended ways to understand *Finnegans Wake* is to read it *aloud*, which presumes its acoustic quality. But we have to notice that Joyce's sense of humor is derived from the effects of acoustic *errors* or blunders such as stuttering.

all the errears and erroriboose of combarative embottled history (*FW* 140.32-33)

“Errears” is a word resulting from stuttering, which means simultaneously “errors” and “arrears,” thus both combining to be “a series of errors in hearing”; “erroriboose” is simultaneously the plural Latin noun “erroribus” (follies) and a reference to “booze” or alcohol. Considering that Ireland is “Errorland” (*FW* 62.25), Joyce is aware of alcoholic addiction and its resulting follies replete in Irish domestic life. This reflects “the fragmentation of Irish history in the neural trauma of alcoholic sleep” (Hofheinz 121). In addition, Joyce connects the bottling (fighting) at a pub with a combat in history. The eponymous ballad, “Finnegan's Wake” is also relevant to the wake in which Finnegan rises again with a help of whiskey. Joyce shows that errors in history could be more fatal, as in the case of the charge of the light brigade. Even the Wakean paternal character, HCE, is also invoked as “human, erring and condonable” (*FW* 58.18-19), which is derived from Alexander Pope's famous proverb, “To err is human, to forgive, divine.”

My starting point in discussing Joyce's comic relief lies in the ending lines in “the Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggies.”

Loud, heap miseries upon us yet entwine our arts with laughters low!

Ha he hi ho hu.

Mummum. (*FW* 259.9-10)

Here Joyce alters the prayer from the Book of Common Prayer: "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law" (Epstein 125). From this short quotation I derive the implication of the title of my paper, since the term 'comic relief' is usually used in referring to comic elements in a tragedy. It is true that Joyce uses "Freud's theory of humor as psychic relief from repression" (Janus 147). Joyce is aware that our lives are full of miseries, heaped upon us, so he wants to give us his *Finnegans Wake*, full of "laughters low." As James Fairhall points out, such categories as history and story as well as the world and the word merges in Joyce's palimpsest, *Finnegans Wake* (241). So I will show how Joyce tries to give us a comic relief in this miserable human situation.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce already uses the English vowels in order to show Stephen's sense of humor: "A. E. I. O. U." (*U* 9.214). But here he adds the consonant 'h' to the scale of the vowels, thus insinuating the acoustic variations of laughter. Another variation can be found as "Fa Fe Fi Fo Fum!" (*FW* 532.3). This is a reminder of the fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk," whose pantomime version was famous in the late Victorian society. There is another variation: "Maomi, Mamie, My Mo Mum!" (*FW* 491.29). So the final word, "Mummum" combines a dumb show with a mother, and in addition, the prayer ends with a sleepy mumbled "Amen" (Epstein 125). It is an effect of acoustic errors, that is, stammering. Joyce's work shows that the miseries heaped upon our life are entwined with low laughters, which are associated with popular or vulgar stage performances. The play at "Feenichts Playhouse" (*FW* 219.2) is the mime, although identified either as "a serious and cruel business" or as "only a children's game" (Kitcher 145). Joyce's use of the mime is meaningful in two senses: the mime is based on physical movements without sounds, and the mime can be extended to another Victorian popular performance, pantomime. Joyce's interest in the Victorian pantomimes can be easily found in references to "Aladdin," "Sinbad the Sailor," and "Turko the

Terrible.” So “the Mime of Mick, Mack, and the Maggies” is related to the popular performances in the late Victorian age. But the word “Feenichts” is also associated with the historic assassination that occurred at Phoenix Park in 1882, the year of Joyce’s birth. So Joyce always keeps the readers alert to historical tragedies while making them laughing.

As Willam York Tindall points out, gaiety and density are employed in *Finnegans Wake*. He adds to emphasize on Joyce’s use of three tactics such as “monthage” (*FW* 223.8), “portmanteau” (*FW* 240.36), “Calembaurnus” (*FW* 240.21) (155). First, the word “monthage” refers to temporal relativity (month/age) as well as to spatial relativity through the film technique, montage, is associated with the Russian director, Sergei Eisenstein, who was affected by Japanese pictorial art (Burkdall 54). In other words, montage is an effect of pictorial superimposition, that is, an effect of layered images. Its effect is equivalent to Picasso’s cubist picture, in which the front view and the profile are combined on a two-dimensional plane. So the blurred pictures produce an unexpected combination of two images or meanings. To Joyce, who attempted to establish a movie theater Volta in Dublin, montage must have drawn his aesthetic attention. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce deploys this technique verbally by combining two different words or even languages, which is a portmanteau word.

Second, portmanteau words are introduced by Lewis Carroll, whose stuttering is well-known, thus being often referred to in *Finnegans Wake*.

To tell how your mead of, mard, is made of. All old Dadgerson’s dodges one conning one’s copying and that’s what wonderland’s wanderlad’ll flaunt to the fair. (*FW* 374.1-3)

As James S. Atherton explains, one of the most important verbal borrowings that Joyce did from Lewis Carroll is the portmanteau word (126). Joyce deploys literary and biographical sources from Lewis Carroll—his original name, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, his relationship with Alice Liddell, and furthermore, Carroll’s character, Humpty Dumpty, which provides Joyce with a prototype of the Fall, extending

from Adam's fall to Finnegans's fall. The reason why Joyce often refers to Lewis Carroll is that he is associated with both stuttering and the use of portmanteau words. Whether the aetiology of stuttering is psychological or physical, Joyce pays attention to its semiotic effects. Lewis's stammer, which is described as a "hesitancy" of speech, is also associated with Vico's God of the thundering sky. It is needless to say that the word 'hesitancy' is related to Richard Pigott's forgery of Parnell's letter. Finally, he debunks rumors about Lewis's sexual abuse: "Lewd's carol!" (*FW* 501.34). The remarkable strategy used in *Finnegans Wake* is an overlaying compilation of these associated stories in a "nutsnolleges" (*FW* 623.32) version. *Finnegans Wake* is full of portmanteau words—to name a few, "chaosmos," "laughtears," and "as a matter of fict." In another place, Joyce remarks the word itself: "Not true what chronicles is bringing his portemanteau priamed full potatowards" (*FW* 240.35-241.1). Here Joyce associates Lewis Carroll, King of Troy Priam, the Bible with the Irish potato in a composite image.

The last tactic is the use of calembour, which is a variation of pun in French, "calembour." For example, Joyce combines two different languages to produce the remarkable example of the pun, such as "The Ballad of Persse O'Reilly" (*FW* 44.24). Noticing that the French word *perse-oreille* means an earwig, Joyce debunks the significance of Immaculate Conception by identifying a natural phenomenon—an earwig penetrating a human eardrum to lay eggs, thus reifying the miracle to a plausible event, and, in addition, Persse O'Reilly is a composite figure of Irish heroes who led Easter Rising in 1921: Patrick Pearse and O'Rahilly. Furthermore, the figure also refers to John Boyle O'Reilly, who was a member of Irish Republican Brotherhood, a former organization of the Irish Republican Army (McHugh 44), and also to Percy O'Reilly, a famous All Ireland polo player from West Meath in 1905 (Ellmann 570). And the concept of "immaculate conception," the cornerstone of the arch of Catholicism, is verbally transformed into "immaculate contraceptives for the populace" (*FW* 45.16). By parodying the Catholic creeds that prohibit contraception, abortion, and divorce, and in turn force the lay populace to use a way of having no sex (immaculate contraceptive), Joyce criticizes the control

of human desire by religious authority. It is not surprising that Joyce seems to call himself an "Illstarred punster" (*FW* 467.29), which means an unfortunate trickster of puns. His literary rival, Shakespeare, is also invoked: "As Great Shapessphere puns it" (*FW* 295.3-4).

Finnegans Wake is a comic book, full of "punns and reedles" (*FW* 239.35-36), thus making readers being on pins and needles to solve puns and riddles. Even if we take at a face value Joyce's demand—"The demand I make of my reader is that he [*sic*] should devote his[*sic*] whole life to reading my works" (Ellmann 703)—a lifetime effort would be not sufficient to unravel all the puns and riddles of *Finnegans Wake*, because it is "the hardest crux ever" (*FW* 623.33-34), which makes his "ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia" (*FW* 120.13-14). The working title, "Work in Progress," finally gave way to the justifiable one, adopted and adapted from the Irish ballad, "Finnegan's Wake," based on a story about the drunkard hod carrier, Tim Finnegan, who fell from the roof, died, and woke up again thanks to the Irish whiskey spilt in a brawl. It must be noted that the ballad was the 19th century "stage Irish" version of American vaudeville, not an Irish traditional one. It means that Joyce must have been aware of the comic sentiments produced by vaudeville performances as he refers to "the boudeville song" (*FW* 298.18). To Joyce, a funeral or wake becomes a "funferall" (*FW* 13.15) in the Wakean world. One of the underlying themes in *Finnegans Wake* is the Fall, whose variants range from Adam's fall through Humpty Dumpty's to Finnegan's.

I will argue that Joyce's comic sense must have been affected by his contemporary (and Victorian) popular magazines, full of cartoon characters. Randal Harrison emphasizes on the critical function of a cartoon: "[t]he cartoon is a *form*, which does not *conform*, but rather *deforms*; and in doing so, it *informs*" (Harrison 67). In this sense, Joyce's comic strategy is to deform the words themselves, thus formulating a remarkable effect on the production of meanings. So *Finnegans Wake* may be his "comic strip" (*FW* 537.33) as follows:

Such wear a frillick for my comic strip, Mons Meg's Monthly, comes out aich Fanagan's Week, to bray at by clownsillies in Donkeybrook Fair. (*FW* 537.33-35)

Here Joyce combines serious things—Mons Meg, a big cannon on parapet of Edinburgh Castle (monthly) and Dublin funeral establishment of William Finnegan (weekly)—with frolic things such as a comic strip, silly clowns, and Donnybrook Fair.

By focusing on some cartoons and comic strips mentioned in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*—*Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday*, *Punch and Judy*, and *Jeff and Mutt*, I will be trying to explain why Joyce refers to these popular comic icons and how relevant they are to Joyce's aesthetic strategy. It seems to me that Joyce got more interested in comic magazines, full of cartoon characters equipped with critical perspectives, because Joyce worriedly anticipates that comic cartoons are fictions' rivals in many respects. As Jesse Schotter emphasizes, Joyce must have been interested in "pictorial and gestural languages—film, photograph, dance, comic books, advertisements, hieroglyphics, illuminated manuscripts" (90). These media have a more powerful influence on the public imagination with vivid graphic presentation or with subtle bodily expressions than fictions can do.

One of the comic magazines frequently mentioned in *Finnegans Wake* is *Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday*. In *Ulysses*, just one character of the pair in this comic cartoon series is mentioned as a typical Jew: Ike Moses. In *Finnegans Wake*, we can find its variant form, the *Ikish Tames* (*FW* 424.3): a composite of Ike Moses and the *Irish Times*. Although it is an odd combination, it probably gives an alternative perspective from the Jewish sensibility, just as Joyce does through Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*. But Joyce deploys Ally Sloper, the eponymous character of the magazine throughout *Finnegans Wake* more frequently. *Ally-Sloper's Half-Holiday* is a weekly magazine, and originates from a comic strip getting its debut in *Judy* in 1867. But by 1884 this comic strip gained such popularity only to be established as a regular magazine. This magazine is believed to have been indulged in 19th-century English popular culture, in that the 19th

century witnessed the rise of a variety of popular forms of leisure culture, such as music hall performances, illustrated periodicals, tourism, horseracing, etc. The title of *Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday* insinuates the emergence of leisure culture, a newly formed social phenomenon that represents accumulative wealth and increased idle time. The Victorian period is characterized by abundance, the outcome of industrial prosperity. As a result, the late Victorians' demand on popular discourses increased, thus necessitating the prosperity of reading materials such as novels and popular magazines. In addition, Saturday as a half-holiday gained its dominant impetus toward the increase of leisure, which enabled workers to have more opportunities to enjoy consumer goods and entertainment services: "Leisure is the new utopia and other sites are ceded or evacuated" (Bailey 75). The characteristics of the titular hero, Ally Sloper, became an equivalent of modern cartoon characters, and furthermore is qualified as "a prototype for much of the cultural product of modern consumer capitalism" (Bailey 77). Joyce depicts his features as in the expression, "O little oily head, sloper's brow and prickled ears!" (*FW* 291.26-27). Ally Sloper as a comic figure showed a conflation of high and low life, heralding the new age of democratized leisure. But this magazine "did not exorcise all the anxieties it sought to allay" (Bailey 77), just as Joyce implies: "Have you got me, Ally Sloper?" (*FW* 248.10). Joyce associates Ally Sloper with alcoholic addiction in a reference to Allsopp's ale: "Allsap's ale halliday" (*FW* 264.3-4), just as the following cartoon [picture 1] shows.



picture 1

Another comic magazine frequently mentioned in *Finnegans Wake* is *Punch and Judy*. Actually, *Punch* [picture 2] has a longer publication history than *Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday*, since 1841 marked the first edition of *Punch* to be published, and, *Judy, the London Serio-Comic Journal*, was founded in 1867 and later merged into *Punch and Judy*. The magazine, the most influential in the 1840s and 1850s, also contributed to the term, “cartoon.” So Joyce discreetly uses these two comic magazines à la carte (as in such a sentence as “You were pleased as Punch” [FW 620.23-24]) and tandem (as in such a phrase as “paunch and judex” [FW 133.23]). In other places, Joyce uses this pair: “The punch to Gaelicize it” (FW 514.33) and “Punch may be pottleproud but his Judy’s a wife’s wit better” (FW 255.16). The Shem/Shawn conflict is based on cartoon pairs such as Punch and Judy, which are the popularized form of vaudeville pairs: “We’re the musichall pair” (FW 408.26-27). *Finnegans Wake* is full of the music hall pair like Mutt and Jeff, Shem and Shaun, etc. This means that Joyce must have been much influenced by the musichall performances when he was a child.



picture 2

In the first chapter of the *Wake*, the dialogue between Mutt and Jute, respectively “representing the indigenous Irishman and the conquering foreigner” (Spurr 131), reverberates with variables throughout *Finnegans Wake*. The pair is transformed into Juva and Muta in IV.1. Other variations can be found in “The Mookse and The Gripes” (*FW* I.6), “The Ondt and the Gracehoper” (*FW* III.1), etc. So Begnal’s insistence rings true that *Finnegans Wake* is “a novel of talk” (40). I argue that these pairs are derived from the cartoon pair, Mutt and Jeff. Bud Fisher created a character, A. Mutt, as a gambling addict, especially in horseracing. In 1908, Mutt’s adventures took a new turn, when “he was thrown into an insane asylum where he met an inmate who believed he was Jim Jeffries, the recently retired world champion heavyweight boxer” (Holtz 11). Since Mutt called the little fellow Jeff for short, they became a pair for seventy-five years. By incorporating the current issues and critical comments into his cartoon, Fisher transgressed the traditional comic strip boundaries to make the readers follow the continuities of the story line (Holtz 12).

In a dialogue between Jute and Mutt, Joyce brings up altogether the problem of communication between the deaf and the mute in addition to stuttering:

Jute. –Are you jeff?

Mutt. –Somehards.

Jute. –But you are not jeffmute?

Mutt. –Noho. Only an utterer.

Jute. –Whoa? Whoat is the mutter with you?

Mutt. –I became a stun a stummer.

Jute. –What a hauhauhauaudible thing, to be cause! How, Mutt?

(*FW* 16.12-19)

This is a typical dialogue of the comic characters Jeff and Mutt. But Joyce problematizes the possibility of communication between the deaf and the mute. Stuttering causes another difficulty or misunderstanding—a horrible thing—in audibility. In another variation, “the deff, after some clever play in the mud” (*FW*

517.2-3), Joyce recoups Stephen Dedalus's remark on "more mud" in *A Portrait*. He also extends this pair variably throughout *Finnegans Wake*.

To add gay touches. For hugh and guy and goy and jew. To dimpled and pimples and simples wimples. A peak in a poke and a pig in a pew. She wins them by wons, a haul hectoendecate, for mangay mumbo jumbjubes tak mutts and jeffs muchas bracelonettes gracies barcelonas. (*FW* 273.13-19, main text)

Here Joyce uses alliterations, rhymes, and puns, which is entirely characteristic of *Finnegans Wake*. Among the seemingly mambo jumbo, the variation of Mutt and Jeff, "mutts and jeffs," appears as an example of racial contrast between goy (a slang for gentile) and jew. For what? Joyce seems to answer—"To add gay touches."

In addition to these comics, Joyce refers to other American comic cartoons like "comic cuts" (*FW* 286.8) and *Tilly the Toiler*—"Tilly the Tailor" (*FW* 385.33) or "Tarry the Tailor" (*FW* 43.17). The latter is an American comic cartoon, whose main character is Popeye the Sailor. Joyce's interest in comic characters and narratives is embodied in his aesthetics of comprehensive inclusiveness.

I think Joyce's "jocoserious" attitude toward human life is exemplified in his scrupulous use of cartoons and comic magazines to present the dualistic features of the Victorian leisure culture. Joyce seems to call himself "the tragic jester" (*FW* 171.15), shedding his "laughtears" (*FW* 15.9). In *Finneans Wake*, Joyce often employs popular images, exemplified by the nickname of HCE, "Here Comes Everybody" (*FW* 32.18-19), which does not imply just the universality of human life, but which delineates the body feature of the real person's walking habit with his big belly protruding. Joyce is keenly aware of the empowerment of graphic media such as cartoons and movies. It is not surprising that Joyce actually participated in establishing a movie theater Volta in Dublin.

Although claimed as being written in the dream language, so many and various Victorian entertainments populates the night world of *Finnegans Wake* that it is impossible to locate Joyce's last work in a historical vacuum, even though it is

difficult to pinpoint the historical context. Joyce's interest in the Fall is so explicitly interwoven with the problem of the original sin that *Finnegans Wake* anchors at the serious side of human life, that is, death, serious as Milton does in *Paradise Lost*. But as the ballad of Finnegan's wake reveals, a way to solve the inevitability of death in human life is to receive a funeral as "funferall." This is the strategy of Joyce's comic relief in *Finnegans Wake*. When he was working on "The Work in Progress," he must have been more inclusively encompassing all leftovers and remnants from his previous works. by "Putting Allspace in a Notshall" (*FW* 455.29). Joyce calls an ordinary person as "Homo Vulgaris" (*FW* 418.25), whose double meaning is suggested here: common and low. So we could hear Joyce's "low laughter" among the heaped miseries of human life and history in *Finnegans Wake*. In a sense, the *Wake* is more Falstaff than King Lear, when HCE says, "Fall stuff" (*FW* 366.30) (Fordham 226). In a conversation with Jacques Mercanton, James Joyce said, "I am only an Irish clown, a great joker at the universe" (Potts 229).

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Abstract

Joyce's Comic Relief:
Comics and Popular Magazines in *Finnegans Wake*

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James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is engaged in a new era of communication made possible by new-fangled mass media such as radio, film, and television. But he never jettisons old forms of communication like letters, newspapers, and magazines, thus rather encompassing a variety of forms of communication in order to attest the problematics of human communication. Joyce's interest in acoustic errors is deployed in his pervasive uses of stuttering.

Joyce's extensive use of errors produces an effect of humor among the miseries of human life. There are three tactics frequently used throughout *Finnegans Wake*: montage, portmanteau word, and pun. The first tactic is derived from emergent film industry, in which Joyce must have been interested, since he visited Dublin in order to open a movie theater, Volta. Joyce's admiration for Sergei Eisenstein is sufficient for his use of the film technique. Second, Joyce refers to Lewis Carroll, whose biographical sources are woven into the *Wake*—such as his stuttering, relationship with Alice Liddell, and frequent use of portmanteau words. Lastly, *Finnegans Wake* is filled with a lot of puns.

I argue that Joyce embraces not only new forms of communication and technologies, but also never jettisons old forms of communication like conventional periodicals. Joyce's interest in comic cartoons and their imaginative capability is shown when he deploys the music hall pairs and cartoon characters such as Mutt and Jeff. Above all, a Victorian popular magazine, *Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday*, witnesses the emergent discourse of entertainment and consumerism. So *Finnegans Wake* is not limited to acoustic qualities, but rather extended so as to encompass

a variety of forms of communication. Joyce's inclusion of Victorian periodicals is derived from his aesthetic strategy, which makes possible the incessant production of new meanings.

■ Key words : James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, Popular Culture, Mass Media, Comics
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