

The Wake of Indra

—*Finnegans Wake* and Buddhism—

ダレン・ダグラス・モートソン
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Introduction

This paper will attempt to trace the possible influence of Buddhism on the work of James Joyce, and especially on his last book, *Finnegans Wake*. The first section reviews and broadens the research of Eishiro Ito and other scholars on Joyce's connection to the Theosophical Society and his early reading of *A Buddhist Catechism* by Henry Steel Olcott. This section argues that while Joyce was initially influenced by the Theosophical Society, his interest in esotericism soon compelled him to explore the original sources beyond the Theosophical writings. The second section also follows Ito in examining the influence of A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. Sinnett's esoteric system is contrasted here with standard Buddhism, and possible allusions to Sinnett's work are located in *Finnegans Wake*. The third section looks at references to Buddhism in *Finnegans Wake* within the scholarship of James Atherton, Adaline Glasheen, Roland McHugh and others. Again, it is shown that while Joyce did have a basic understanding of Buddhism, his main objective was to fashion it for his own artistic purposes. In the last and longest section, comparisons of concepts in Mahāyāna Buddhism, notably dependent origination, emptiness and Indra's Net, are made to structural ideas in *Finnegans Wake*. It is found that while the two can be fruitfully compared, many of the similar ideas in *Finnegans Wake* are better traced back to Renaissance philosophers like Giordano Bruno and Nicholas of Cusa than Buddhism.

1. Joyce's Theosophical Buddhism

James Joyce's initial understanding of Buddhism was likely arrived at through the somewhat distorted lens of Theosophy. The Theosophical Society, founded in New York City by Helen Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott and others in 1875, was itself highly instrumental in the development of what is now called western Buddhism. In 1880, both Blavatsky and Olcott publicly converted to Buddhism — a couple of the first westerners to do so — in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Olcott went on to become a very serious and influential proponent of the Sinhalese Buddhist Revival. Olcott's book *A Buddhist Catechism* (1881), became a defining text of the Revival and, because of its clear and rationalist exposition of Buddhist principles, came to greatly influence emergent western Buddhism. James Joyce was of one many artists and intellectuals of the early 20th century to have gained much of his initial knowledge of Buddhism from Olcott's text.

Richard Ellmann, in his biography *James Joyce*, indicates Joyce's fascination with both the occult and Olcott's book on Buddhism:

He also joined the rest of intellectual Dublin in taking an interest in occultism; his copy of H. S. Olcott's *A Buddhist Catechism* is dated May 7, 1901. His brother Stanislaus thought James was looking for a substitute religion, but it is probable that he, like Yeats and unlike George Russell, was attracted more by the symbology than by the pious generalization of Theosophy. (Ellmann 1966, 79)

Ellmann later adds in his Appendix to *The Consciousness of Joyce*, "Joyce's Library in 1920" (Ellmann 1977, 122), that Joyce's copy of Olcott's book was signed, "Jas A Joyce May. 7. 1901." A book which Joyce received and signed in 1901, presumably acquiring it in Dublin, and one that he still had in his possession in Trieste during 1920 was undoubtedly an important text for the author. As Eishiro Ito documents in two essays on Joyce and Buddhism, "Mediterranean Joyce Meditates on Buddha" (Ito 2003) and "How Did Buddhism Influence James Joyce and Kenji Miyazawa?" (Ito 2004), Joyce's interest in Theosophy and from this Buddhism began very early. Ito writes:

[Joyce] might have visited the Dublin Lodge of the Theosophical Society on the introduction of William Butler Yeats or George Russell around 1902.

Joyce owned five books by Theosophical authors: the two books by Annie Besant were acquired by Joyce in Trieste. He came to know about the Buddha and Buddhism. It is likely that he saw the reclining Buddha statue at the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare Street, Dublin at the turn of the century. (Ito 2003, 53)

The influence of Yeats and Russell (the poet, AE) on the young Joyce was certainly immense, and the involvement of the two older poets in the Theosophical Society is well established. Both men were personal acquaintances of Madame Blavatsky and for a time they were open members of Theosophical lodges. And while Joyce's later writing on theosophy is certainly mocking in tone (as seen especially in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses*), in his earlier writing he displays a more measured, even respectful, attitude toward the esoteric in general, with Buddhism included in this broad category.

Ito cites an important passage in *Stephen Hero* in which Stephen partly compares the Buddha to Jesus Christ. This type of comparison or overlapping of religious figures features throughout *Finnegans Wake*, where all such personalities become meshed and assimilated into the "more mob than man" (FW 261) of HCE.

The woman in the black straw hat has never heard of the name of Buddha but Buddha's character seems to have been superior to that of Jesus with respect to unaffected sanctity. I wonder how she would like that story of Yasodhara's kissing Buddha after his illumination and penance. Renan's Jesus is a trifle Buddhistic but the fierce eaters and drinkers of the western world would never worship such a figure. Blood will have blood. (qtd. in Ito, 53-54)

In this passage Joyce, through Stephen, portrays the Buddha, and by extension Buddhism, as a more peaceful and enlightened alternative to Christ and the frequently aggressive Christianity that had developed from his teaching. Joyce at this time had mostly rejected the Catholicism of his childhood and early youth and was exploring more inclusive and universal modes of spirituality. The entirely universalist aims of the Theosophical Society — to establish a universal brotherhood of humanity, to bring together science, philosophy and religion into a unified whole — were most definitely shared by Joyce. And, if anything, these values took on even deeper significance for Joyce as his writing career progressed — the

universalist emphasis of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* is unquestioned — while at the same time his published cynicism toward the occasionally fraudulent sensationalism, credulity and pop superficiality of the later Theosophical Society only increased in its acrimony. This distinction is vital as it makes clear the fact that Joyce did not reject all esotericism in his ridicule of the often comical excesses of the Theosophical Society and its fellow travelers. The Society's universalist roots in the loosely-defined western esoteric tradition were also Joyce's roots. Joyce, at an early stage, may have arrived at his understanding of the "tradition" through the Theosophical Society — via Yeats and Russell — but he was much too precocious and prodigious to become enmeshed in its quirks, schisms, scandals and dogmas.

In addition to the few aforementioned Theosophical texts by Annie Besant, Olcott's *Catechism*, etc. in Joyce's Trieste library of 1920, by consulting the list of books in Ellmann's "Appendix" (Ellmann 1977, 98-134) it is evident that Joyce's interest in esoteric thought ran well beyond the standard texts of theosophy. Joyce's library (by and large containing a wide range of literature with a smattering of anarchist works and other assorted miscellanea) contained books by and about Giordano Bruno, books by Jacob Boehme, Thommaso Campanella, Emmanuel Swedenborg, William Blake, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rudolf Steiner and of course Yeats. All of these authors are also favourites of the Theosophical Society, but their presence in Joyce's library indicates that he was not content to settle for Theosophical interpretations, and possibly distortions, of the works of these leading lights of western esotericism. Joyce preferred to go directly to the source, not infrequently reading these texts in their original languages. Several scholars have written about the influence of other branches of esoteric thought on Joyce's work, and especially on *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. These include alchemy (DiBernard), Hermeticism (Tindall), the Kabbalah (Coggrave), James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (Vickery), etc. It is difficult to determine precisely the appeal that this "tradition" had for Joyce, as he rarely wrote about it directly, but it is clear that this thread runs right through his entire corpus, culminating massively in *Finnegans Wake*. One gets the sense, though, that it is the emphasis, shared by the Theosophical Society, on universal values and the unity of all thought, on the essential commonality of the human imagination regardless of creed or culture, that most attracted Joyce. His attraction to, or at least interest in, Buddhism — with its own overriding concern with universal suffering and the liberation of all beings — perhaps stems from the same place.

2. A.P. Sinnett and *Esoteric Buddhism*

Another major source for Joyce's understanding of "Buddhism," and one not listed among the books known to be in either his Trieste or Paris libraries, is A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, first published in 1883. Sinnett, another early member of the inner circle of the Theosophical Society, was already living in India when he was visited by Blavatsky and Olcott in 1880, and later became Blavatsky's biographer and the head of the London Lodge. His *Esoteric Buddhism* was one of the first Theosophical texts to be published and was to provide a concise summary of the society's core esoteric doctrines. Ito notes that it was Stuart Gilbert, in *James Joyce's Ulysses*, who first brought scholarly attention to Joyce's interest in Buddhism and specifically the "esoteric Buddhism" of Sinnett (Ito 2003, 55). In his preface, Gilbert recalls a conversation on this subject with Joyce:

On another occasion, when we chanced to be discussing Eliphas Levi's theories of magic and Mme Blavatsky's entertaining *Isis Unveiled*, he asked me if I had read any of Sinnett's work... Naturally I took the hint and procured his *Esoteric Buddhism* and *Growth of the Soul*, well-written books from which Joyce certainly derived some of his material. He was conversant also with spiritualist literature, I think, but I noticed that, while ready enough to talk about theosophy and occultism, he — perhaps because of his Catholic upbringing — shied off this subject. (Gilbert, vii-viii)

Gilbert continues to point out several allusions to Sinnett's text in *Ulysses* (Gilbert, 35, 42, 53). This certainly demonstrates Joyce's familiarity with Sinnett and the esoteric doctrines of the Theosophical Society, but what did he know of actual Buddhism? Sinnett's text does not claim to be presenting, unlike Olcott's *Catechism*, a standard view of Buddhism for any recognized sect. Instead, it is a curious exposition of the secret teachings *behind* Buddhism and other religions and spiritual systems. The first edition of Sinnett's work was entitled *Esoteric Budhism*, although later editions used the standard spelling. "Budhism" is spelled here with one "d" in order to be differentiated from, as it is in Blavatsky's later *Secret Doctrine* (1888), orthodox Buddhism. The two should not be confused. Sinnett precisely explains this early in his book:

This secret knowledge, in reality, long antedated the passage through earth-life of Gautama Buddha. Brahmanical philosophy, in ages before

Buddha, embodied the identical doctrine which may now be described as Esoteric Buddhism. Its outlines had indeed been blurred; its scientific form partially confused; but the general body of knowledge was already in possession of a select few before Buddha came to deal with it. Buddha, however, undertook the task of revising and refreshing the esoteric science of the inner circle of initiates, as well as the morality of the outer world. (Sinnott, 2-3)

It is this “esoteric science” which Sinnott also intends to reveal and to explicate to the world. His book in general maps out the evolution of the soul, and the races embodying the soul, from the most primitive biological forms to the fully awakened Buddhas and Mahatmas of the far future. This process, occurring over many aeons, involves vast time cycles of planets, races, sub-races and individual souls. It is worthwhile to quote Sinnott at length in order to get a taste of his esoteric system, which would go on to have a great influence on Yeats and other writers:

The process for each spiritual monad is not merely a passage from planet to planet. Within the limits of each planet, each time it arrives there, it has a complicated process of evolution to perform. It is many times incarnated in successive races of men before it passes onward, and it even has many incarnations in each great race. (Sinnott, 38)

Sinnott goes on to tell exactly where the present human “sub-race” is in its collective spiritual evolution. He quotes his “Mahatma teacher” on this crucial matter:

The latter end of a very important cycle. Each round, each race, as every sub-race, has its great and its smaller cycles on every planet that mankind passes through. Our fourth-round humanity has its one great cycle, and so have its races and sub-races. (Sinnott, 52)

In conformity with the numerology of other esoteric systems of thought, this spiritual evolution to final collective “Nirvana” occurs in vast cycles and sub-cycles of *seven*.

In periods of sevens the evolution of the races of man may be traced, and the actual number of the objective worlds which constitute our system, and of

which our earth is one, is seven also. Remember, the occult scientists know this as a fact, just as the physical scientists know for a fact that the spectrum consists of seven colours, and the musical scale of seven tones. (Sinnett, 43)

The number seven is also ubiquitous throughout *Finnegans Wake*, most notably in its rainbow imagery, but in passages like the following — although as always in *Finnegans Wake* several things are being said at once — Joyce appears to be mocking or drawing attention to the sevens within the cycles of Sinnett:

Gammer and gaffer we're all their gangsters. Hadn't he seven dams to wive him? And every dam had her seven crutches. And every crutch had her seven hues. And each hue had a differing cry. (FW, 215)

But beyond such obscure possible references to Sinnett's work in *Finnegans Wake*, and mentions of "esoteric Buddhist" terms like *metempsychosis* or *karma* or the vast cyclic *manvantara* in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, we might ask if the system revealed in *Esoteric Buddhism* can be rightly called Buddhism at all?

A pivotal doctrine to all schools of Buddhism, and precisely what most distinguishes it from Hindu philosophy, is that of *anātman* (Sanskrit) or *anattā* (Pali) which is the teaching of "no self" — that there is no permanently abiding personal soul. Sinnett, in contrast, appears to be writing of the journey, throughout countless ages and cycles, of exactly this type of transcendent and eternal soul or self. Sinnett seems to be sensitive to this line of criticism and in his defense he quotes from the appendix of Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism*:

The denial of "soul" by Buddha (see "Sanyutto Nikaya," the Sutta Pitaka) points to the prevalent delusive belief in an independent transmissible personality; an entity that could move from birth to birth unchanged, or go to a place or state where, as such perfect entity, it could eternally enjoy or suffer. And what he shows is that the "I am I" consciousness is, as regards permanency, logically impossible, since its elementary constituents constantly change, and the "I" of one birth differs from the "I" of every other birth. But everything that I have found in Buddhism accords with the theory of a gradual evolution of the perfect man - viz. a Buddha through

numberless natal experiences. (Olcott, qtd. in Sinnett, 61)

This last sentence would be a somewhat controversial point within present-day Buddhism, but it must be borne in mind that Olcott, being a Theosophist, also held an “esoteric” view of Buddhism. Despite his vast influence he is hardly an authoritative source. And with such sources as Olcott and Sinnett, one wonders how clearly or deeply Joyce conceived of actual Buddhism. Ito notes that Joyce “presumably could not distinguish Theravada Buddhism from Mahayana, nor did he know that Ceylon’s Buddhism belongs to Theravada and Thibet’s to Mahayana Buddhism” (Ito 2003, 56). Buddhism, like numerous other religious and philosophical systems, was simply one strand in Joyce’s creative loom, stripped and sheared for terms, images, themes and structures that he could brilliantly weave into his incredibly elaborate tapestry.

3. *Finnegans Wake* scholarship and Buddhism

James Atherton, an early scholar of Joyce’s literary sources in *Finnegans Wake*, argues in *The Books at the Wake*, that the figure of the Buddha was used by Joyce in this way to represent just another facet of his central “character,” HCE:

In *Finnegans Wake* he treats Buddhism with no more respect than he accords to any other religion. Buddha becomes — like all other male gods — a father-figure. He is simply one aspect of H.C.E., and in that aspect he is one of the “gods, *human*, erring and condonable” (58:18), with the initials pointing out his name as a complete being. (Atherton, 225)

Adaline Glasheen concurs with this assessment in her *Third Census of Finnegans Wake*, adding that as the Buddha left his wife and son to seek enlightenment that he belonged to that set of non-procreative men, most notably the brother Shaun, in *Finnegans Wake* that are sexually distant from women. In the entry for the Buddha in her *Census*, she writes:

A rich young man, he gave up wife and child to seek light... This makes him one of the cold-to-women sainted youths played by Shaun... A vital, physical being who renounces women, pleading a higher morality, Buddha is in FW the viable but non-productive penis — Irish *bod*, pronounced “bud.” (Glasheen, 43)

The Buddha, in this manner, becomes corresponded with the first term in a pair of opposites: sterility vs. fertility, a dichotomy that was also a major theme of *Ulysses*. Shaun, more closely resembling his father, HCE, takes on the former role — “He points the deathbone and the quick are still” (FW, 193) — and Shem, associated more with his mother, ALP, is an agent of the procreative — “He lifts the lifewand and the dumb speak” (FW, 195). Shaun, like the Buddha, forsakes the flesh for supposed truth. In a note to *A First-Draft Version of Finnegans Wake*, editor David Hayman writes that Joyce “from the start envisaged four watches for Shaun, paralleling the four watches of Buddha” (Joyce 1963, 220). Already we are moving well beyond the “Buddhism” of Olcott and Sinnett, although Atherton argues that the spelling of Buddhist terms in *Finnegans Wake* — with “Joycean deviations” (Atherton, 225) — are noticeably derived from Olcott. Certainly, though, Joyce’s often ironic interest in Theosophical speculation is still very keen in *Finnegans Wake*. In Len Platt’s article “References to Madame Blavatsky and Her Ideas in the Wake — An Annotated List,” the number of references to Blavatsky and her work is extensive. The problem, as Platt explains, is in determining where theosophy ends and where *Finnegans Wake* begins. The two are almost inseparable to the point where the famous “letter” of *Finnegans Wake* — often taken to be the book itself — might also be a representation of Blavatsky’s rambling tomes, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. Platt writes:

Like the *Wake* itself, theosophy — especially in Blavatsky’s versions — is assimilative and appropriative on a truly massive scale. It is hardly surprising, then, that both should share many points of reference. The standard Blavatsky texts are steeped in comparative religion, mythology, and hermetics. A great deal of the fabric that goes up to make the *Wake* — ancient Egypt, Giordano Bruno, Zoroastrianism, Sanskrit, Hinduism, Hermes Trismegistus, and so on — also informs Blavatsky’s version of theosophy. The difficulty, then, is in distinguishing between the direct *Wake* reference and what are broader areas of common interest. (Platt, 285)

Once again, however, the textual evidence supports the idea that the Theosophical Society, despite Joyce’s continued fascination in it for perhaps ironic reasons, was only a launching pad for his broader and deeper interest in the esoteric systems of the world. Buddhism, for Joyce, was but one large facet in the gaudy and glittering jewel of global esoterica. It seems certain that Joyce consulted several other non-Theosophical texts on Buddhism to arrive at the detailed knowledge of the religion made evident in *Finnegans*

Wake. Roland McHugh's *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* notes numerous allusions to Buddhism in *Finnegans Wake* clustered together, as is Joyce's pattern with such associated references, in about three main sections of the book. McHugh's annotations indicate that a valuable source for bibliographic material on the Buddha is *La vie du Bouddha* by A. Ferdinand Herold. This book was published in Paris in 1923 while Joyce was living in the city. Joyce's use of Herold's book is typically idiosyncratic, crafted to conform to Joyce's own associative logic. He draws connections, for example, between Maya the mother of the Buddha and Mary the mother of Christ, as well as Siddartha's horse, Kantaka, and Mohammed's horse, Katchanka (McHugh, 389, 24).

4. Comparing Buddhism and *Finnegans Wake*

One of the first and yet most significant allusions to Buddhism in *Finnegans Wake* is not a reference to an episode of the Buddha's life, but is instead an almost direct adaption of one, and arguably *the* central, teaching of the Buddha's whole *dharma*. This is the doctrine of the twelve-spoked wheel of "dependent origination" or "dependent co-arising," *pratīyasamutpāda* in Sanskrit. There are several versions of this doctrine within Buddhist scripture, in both the Pali and Sanskrit languages. It is presented in clear terms by the Buddha in the *Patīcasamūppada-vibhanga Sutta*:

And what is dependent co-arising? From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness.... comes name-&-form. From name-&-form... come the six sense media. From the six sense media.... comes contact. From contact... comes feeling. From feeling... comes craving. From craving... comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance... comes becoming. From becoming... comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging & death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress & suffering. (Thanissaro 1997)

Joyce's version in *Finnegans Wake*, both concise and lucid, displays a definite understanding of this profound concept:

In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the

nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality. (FW, 18)

The fact that this “twelfefold causal nexus” (Snellgrove, 14) appears in *Finnegans Wake* instantly places it into numerical correspondence with every other set of twelve in the book: the twelve months, the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve disciples of Jesus, the twelve jurors of HCE’s trial, the twelve customers of the pub at Chapelizod, a dozen eggs, etc. Twelve, like seven, is a structural number of *Finnegans Wake*. Beyond these correspondences, however, is the suggestion that Joyce’s knowledge of and interest in Buddhism are not limited to biographic details or Theosophical speculation. As the Buddha repeatedly explained, however, correct understanding of dependent origination is the equivalent to correct understanding of the *dharma* (Loy 1992, 230). Arguably, most of the latter developments of Buddhist philosophy were essentially meditations on this essential doctrine. The second century Indian Madhyamaka (the “Middle Way” school of Mahāyāna Buddhism) philosopher, Nāgārjuna, used the doctrine of dependent origination in his highly influential *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (often abbreviated as the *MMK*) to demonstrate the *śūnyatā* (emptiness) of all forms and all metaphysical speculation. In his commentary to Nāgārjuna’s chapter on dependent origination in the *MMK*, Jay Garfield writes of the interconnection of the doctrines of dependent origination, emptiness, suffering and liberation from suffering:

Human existence and experience are indeed governed by the twelve links of dependent origination. But since they are essentially dependent, they are essentially empty and, hence, are impermanent and subject to change. The twelve links provide an anatomy and an etiology of suffering. But by understanding their impermanence and dependency, we also see the cure for that condition. (Garfield, 341)

This cure comes precisely in *accepting* that all things are impermanent, co-dependent and subject to constant change. Suffering, for the most part, arises when we attempt to fix things and even people in time and space. We want the good things in life to remain just as they are. We attempt to ground ourselves, to give our lives *meaning*, with some unchanging essence or principle. The Buddha, and Nāgārjuna after him, realized the delusionary and harmful nature of this sort of thinking. Instead, proper understanding and observation reveals that all things are *empty* in and of themselves. While Joyce seems unfamiliar with

this core Mahāyāna concept of *śūnyatā* (although it is also found in earlier Buddhist texts), in *Finnegans Wake* he displays a sort of intuitive grasp of this notion. This could have developed from his study of Asian-influenced philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, or it may have naturally arisen from insights already gained from the doctrine of dependent origination. In addition, however, Joyce may have obtained his understanding through similar ideas found in various expressions of western esotericism. An awareness of emptiness is embedded into the very structure of *Finnegans Wake*. Each sentence, and nearly each word, is always already enmeshed in a web of interconnected multilinguistic puns. These puns, in a fashion that is much more self-aware and abundant than in ordinary language, only take on meaning of a sort — or rather whole galaxies of meaning — when they are combined in relation to the whole. Every word and sentence is entirely co-dependent, entirely empty. This evident textual self-awareness is also incredibly surreal, dream-like. And it is in dreams where we come closest to an experience of the identity-blurring nature of emptiness.

The *Wake* must have been constructed according to the logic of a dream, where the identities of people are confused and exchanged, and a single idea, or the memory of a single fact, takes shape in a series of strangely connected symbols. The same thing happens to the words, which are merged in the most free and unexpected way, in order to suggest a series of disparate ideas with a single expression. (Eco, 62)

As Umberto Eco reiterates, Joyce intended *Finnegans Wake* to be his book of the night just as *Ulysses* was his book of the day. Nighttime is the time of the dream, and dreams are unique in that they allow us, upon waking reflection, a memory or an experience where the categories of being are not fixed. Change, metamorphosis, the melting of boundaries and the merging of forms are common in dreams. For Mahāyāna Buddhists, dream reality only makes evident the nature of *actual* reality. The emptiness of dreams only shines an obscure light on the emptiness of waking life. Joyce is implying something very similar. According to Nāgārjuna:

Form, sound, taste, touch,
Smell, and concepts of things: These six
Should be seen as only like a city of the Gandharvas and
Like a mirage or a dream. (Garfield, 64)

What really breaks down here is the distinction or opposition, as with all other binary categories, of dreaming and waking entirely. Finnegans's wake is also Finnegans's dream. It is a space or a realm in which, as all points or nodes are incomplete or empty in and of themselves, all ideas, places and persons are interconnected in the most complex, nearly inconceivable, manner.

...every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle anyway connected with the gobblydumped turkery was moving and changing every part of the time. (FW, 118)

This passage, like every other passage in *Finnegans Wake*, is referring to many things at once. It is simultaneously describing the early medieval Irish illuminated manuscript *The Book of Kells*, the infamous "letter," possibly Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, and *Finnegans Wake* itself. As Samuel Beckett now famously declared about Joyce and *Finnegans Wake*; "His writing is not about something; *it is that something itself*" (Beckett, 14) Every passage in *Finnegans Wake* is also a passage *about Finnegans Wake*. It is aware of itself at every point. "Alle" meaning "all" in English, could also mean "the universe" in German, or "other" in Greek. It could also be connected to "ale." It is at once the whole self and absolute other, as well as utter intoxication, a blurring and slurring of the two. Likewise, "chaosmos" is both "cosmos," the ordered universe, and "chaos," the absolute abandonment of order. This entirely self-contradictory pun or portmanteau perhaps comes closest in one word to describe what *Finnegans Wake* really is.

In Buddhist terms, what this all resembles most is another image that emerges out of the Mahāyāna texts, this time from the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* or *Flower Garland Sūtra*: the now popular image of Indra's Net. According to this text, in the heaven of Indra the god has had fashioned a vast jeweled net that extends out infinitely in every direction. At every point or node or "eye," where the strands of the net intersect, a jewel has been set.

If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring. (qtd. in Loy 1993, 481)

Each jewel is infinitely interconnected, and is infinitely interpenetrated by all other jewels. Each part contains the whole and, like a hologram, all information is present at every point. There is no centre and there is no beginning or end to the Net. David Loy makes the case that this image is really a logical extension of the doctrine of emptiness as explained by Nāgārjuna. While Loy notes that “Nāgārjuna would not accept such an onto-theological trope” (Loy 1992, 236), the Indian philosopher would have to agree that as all things are empty of their own being they are in effect, like the jewels in Indra’s Net, both interconnected to and interpenetrated by all other things.

This also perfectly describes the narrative structure of *Finnegans Wake*. As is well known, the last sentence of *Finnegans Wake* is only completed when it is joined to the very first sentence of the book. “A way a lone a last a loved a long the/ riverrun...” (FW, 628, 3), the “Doublends Jined” (FW, 20). This means that there is really no start, no end and no middle to the book. One can begin reading it at any point, and as a circle it is never-ending, infinite. Similarly, as explained above, every part of the book, referring to itself, in a sense contains the whole book. The same themes recur, repeat and modulate in every section. As the connections between these points are nearly endless, the number of possible interpretations is as well. As Eco explains,

Obviously, the reader cannot pursue all of the references in the course of a single reading. One is compelled to choose among possible interpretive paths and to disambiguate various levels of sense. (Eco, 66)

Again, with every reading the text, and/or our understanding of what we are reading, is “moving and changing every part of the time.” *Finnegans Wake*, like the river (ALP), is never the same twice. This is likely the case for all books, as our minds and bodies certainly change from one reading to the next and we bring new experiences, ideas and memories along with us, but *Finnegans Wake* has been consciously designed to change and transform itself at every reading. The following is another metaphoric equivalent to Indra’s Net in *Finnegans Wake*:

Now, to be on anew and basking again in the panaroma of all flores of speech, if a human being duly fatigued by his dayety in the sooty, having plenxty off time on his gouty hands and vacants of space at his sleepish feet and as hapless behind the dreams of accuracy as any camelot prince of

dinmurk, were at this auctual futule preteriting unstant, in the states of suspensive exanimation, accorded, throughout the eye of a noodle, with an ear-sighted view of old hopeinhaven... what roserude and oragious grows gelb and greem, blue out the ind of it! Violet's dyed! then what would that fargazer seem to seemself to seem seeming of, dimm it all?

Answer: A collideorscape! (FW, 143)

Here is described a rainbow coloured kaleidoscope, synesthetically blending all senses ("ear-sighted") into one; churning all history, literature and personal experience at this "auctual futule preteriting unstant," this very moment which is both here and not here. And it is a choice to *collide* or to *escape*, the fight or flight course of all evolution and the choice to merge or to separate. Yet this is only one metaphor of many that *Finnegans Wake* uses to describe itself and the "chaosmos" at large. Eco provides a list of such metaphors or machines, gleaned from the pages of *Finnegans Wake*: "...vicocyclometer, collideorscape, proteiform graph, polyhedron of scripture, meanderthale and, finally, a work of doublecrossing twofold truths and devising tail-words" (Eco, 66). It is also, in Eco's own term, an "open work," a text that actively resists any possibility of closure or summation, leaving itself open to chance and to reader interpretation or misinterpretation. *The Avatamsaka Sūtra* also contains many metaphors that convey the same sense of fantastic and interpenetrating grandeur as Indra's Net, but there is little indication that Joyce had any knowledge of this text or of its best known image.

Yet could he have known *something* of Indra's Net? There is a possibility of this. One of the earliest references to Indra's Net in English is in *Ideals of the East: The Spirit of Japanese Art* by Kakuzo Okakura. In this book, published in 1903, is written:

For art, like the diamond net of Indra, reflects the whole chain in every link. It exists at no period in any final mould. It is always a growth, defying the dissecting knife of the chronologist. (Okakura, 4)

While Joyce may or may not have received knowledge of Indra's Net from this source (see Togo on Okakura's broad literary influence), Okakura was the student and friend of the art historian, Ernest Fenollosa, who also practiced Mahāyāna Buddhism in Japan. Joyce's friend and onetime editor, Ezra Pound, edited Fenollosa's papers, and *'Noh' or Accomplishment*, a book on Japanese Noh plays written by Fenollosa and Pound, was in Joyce's Trieste library

(Ellmann 1977, 124). None of this, of course, proves that Joyce had any knowledge of Indra's Net, but it does reveal that he could have at least heard of the metaphor from within his circle of literary colleagues. The fact, however, that there is not even a vague hint of Indra's Net in *Finnegans Wake* — and certainly an image this powerfully relevant to his project would deserve mention by Joyce — seems to indicate that Joyce was unaware of it. Through Eco we see that much of what appears to be a knowledge of Mahāyāna Buddhism in *Finnegans Wake*, can be more appropriately sourced in figures held with respect in the western esoteric tradition, including by the Theosophical Society, and figures that Joyce very often and openly alludes to in *Finnegans Wake*: Giordano Bruno, Giambattista Vico and Nicholas of Cusa. From Bruno, among many other notions, is extracted the ideas of the identity of contraries and the infinity of worlds. From Vico, Joyce derives or embellishes the concept of recurring cycles of history. And from Nicholas of Cusa comes the notion of macro and microcosmic correspondence.

At the aesthetic level, this operation actualizes the Cusanian doctrine of the *complicatio*: in each thing is realized everything and everything is in each thing. Each thing finally appears as a perspective on the universe and a microcosmic model of it. Although everything is the reduction of the whole, no thing can be equal to another, for each conserves an irreducible singularity that permits it to reflect the cosmos in an unexpected and individual manner. (Eco, 73)

Of these three masters of Joyce, Nicholas of Cusa comes closest with this doctrine to the perspective of Indra's Net, although all three have notions that resonate with themes within Mahāyāna Buddhism. And while Indra's Net is not explicitly or definitively alluded to in *Finnegans Wake*, there are several mentions of webs, nets and lacework that are suggestive of deeper layers of meaning. In the midst of a sermon of advice delivered to his sister and her friends, Shaun (presently as "Jaunty Jaun") has this to say about lacey feminine attire:

Sure, what is it on the whole only holes tied together, the merest and transparent washing-tones to make Languid Lola's lingers longer? Scenta Clauthes stiffstuffs your hose and heartsies full of temptiness. (FW, 434)

Intended or not, what could be a better description of Indra's Net than "on the whole only holes tied together?" A whole of holes describes a universal structure paradoxically composed

of emptiness, an emptiness that is also a “temptiness,” both veiling and revealing. In this case, as in the Middle Way teaching of Nāgārjuna, both the desiring subject and the object of desire are empty, both simultaneously and not. Each is dependent upon the other to the point where neither exists in isolation.

Thus desire and the desirous one
 Cannot be established as simultaneous or not simultaneous.
 So, like desire, nothing whatever
 Can be established either as simultaneous or
 nonsimultaneous. (Garfield, 158)

The net or veil, therefore, is a metaphor of both liberation and seduction. In addition to being, as in a *network*, a structure used to connect divergent nodes or individuals together, a net is more generally, as in a fishing net or a butterfly net, a tool used to trap and confine. This sense of the net is also evident in *Finnegans Wake*. In a passage in Part Three, the Four Old Men or the Four Evangelists (Matthew Gregory, Mark Lyons, Luke Tarpey and Johnny MacDougal) are casting their fishing nets over the massive and moaning body of Shaun (now “Yawn”), who has been transformed into a giant mound of earth.

For it was in the back of their mind’s ear, temptive lissomer, how they would be spreading in quadrilateral their azurespotted fine attractable nets, their nansen nets, from Matt Senior to the thurrible mystagogue after him and from thence to the neighbour and that way to the puisny donkeyman and his crucifer’s cauda. (FW, 477)

These four, “from all their cardinal parts” (FW, 474), are both fishermen and inquisitors. Their aim is to discover the final secrets of HCE, who in turn represents *Finnegans Wake* itself. At this point, Shaun, according to Edmund Epstein, is “coterminous with the universe,” being the primordial Adam Kadmon of the Kabbalah (Epstein, 189). The context for this occult inquiry is once again theosophical:

Yawn/Adam Kadmon here also contains the Akashic records of theosophy. As these are the repository of all history, human and nonhuman, Adam Kadmon contains within himself complete knowledge of everything that has ever happened. (Epstein, 190)

The nets of the Four Old Men are thus, like Indra's Net, cast over the entire cosmos and their purpose is to both capture and enlighten. The ambiguity in evidence here may seem to be quite distinct from the positive, even rapturous vision of Indra's Net in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, but when examined through the lens of the wider Indian tradition the difference between the two significantly narrows. As Richard Onians points out in *The Origins of European Thought*, the mystical bond of the gods, both in the Greek and Indian traditions, could also be a violent and terrible binding or net. He cites a passage from the *Atharva-veda* (second millennium BCE), which presents a far more ancient version of Indra's Net than is found in Buddhism. In Maurice Bloomfield's translation:

The atmosphere was the net, the great regions (of space) the (supporting) poles of the net: with these Sakra (mighty Indra) did surround and scatter the army of the Dasyus... Great is the net of thee, great Indra, hero, that art equal to a thousand, and hast hundredfold might. With that (net) Sakra slew a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, a hundred million foes, having surrounded them with (his) army.

This great world was the net of great Sakra: with this net of Indra I in fold all those (enemies) yonder in darkness. (Bloomfield, 118)

There appears to be a great contrast between these two nets of Indra, and the actual textual linkage is unclear, but within Mahāyāna Buddhism the opposed images can be reconciled. Arguably the most famous, yet still startling, claim in Nāgārjuna's *MMK* is that of the identity of *nirvāṇa* with *saṃsāra*, the identity of ultimate reality with conventional reality. Garfield explains that this "identification of what in earlier Buddhism were regarded as wholly different from one another" was "central to the development of a distinctively Mahāyāna outlook" (Garfield, 250).

There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence and nirvāṇa.
There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvāṇa and cyclic existence. (*MMK* 24:19, Garfield, 331)

As Garfield explains, "nirvāṇa is only saṃsāra experienced as a buddha experiences it" (Garfield, 333). It is simply cyclic existence "seen without reification, without attachment,

without delusion” (Garfield, 331). From this heightened perspective the two nets of Indra are already one. The confining violence and confusion of the one become the liberating bejeweled net of interconnection and interpenetration of the other. And whether or not Joyce was aware of this aspect of Mahāyāna philosophy, or whether he arrived at his insights through study of western esotericism, *Finnegans Wake* incorporates this identification of conventional and ultimate reality into its very structure. Unlike Sinnet’s “esoteric Buddhism,” there is no necessity in *Finnegans Wake* to progress through vast cycles of spiritual evolution. These vast cycles are there of course — Vico being a major source — but all points of the cycle appear at once. As in *Ulysses*, where through *metempsychosis* a Jewish ad salesman in Dublin becomes the hero Odysseus for a day, so in *Finnegans Wake* the universal becomes particular. All times and places assemble at every point.

Saṃsāra is not explicitly mentioned in the *Wake*, but the related concept of *māyā* — reality as illusion — is found in a number of passages each emphasizing the transitory, illusory and whirling nature of existence:

...a flash from a future of maybe mahamayability through the windr of a
wondr in a wildr is a weltr as a wirbl of a warbl is a world. (FW, 597)

And through the type of coincidence of language that Joyce loved, *Māyā* or *Mahāmāyā* was also the mother of the Buddha. From the viewpoint of the *collideorscape* of *Finnegans Wake*, awakening has emerged from and is eternally coupled with illusion, cyclic existence with ultimate liberation:

The untireties of livesliving being the one substance of a streamsbecoming.
Totalled in toldteld and teldtold in tittle-tell tattle. Why? Because, graced be
Gad and all giddy gadgets, in whose words were the beginnings, there are
two signs to tum to, the yest and the ist, the wright side and the wronged
side, feeling aslip and wauking up, so an, so farth. (FW, 597)

If “the one substance of a streamsbecoming” is quite a good description of what saṃsāra is, then nirvāṇa is even more directly referred to in *Finnegans Wake*. In an early passage, replete with fairly explicit references to female genitalia, HCE is described as being “nearvanashed” (FW, 61). HCE, as a form of the Buddha, has nearly vanished into the nirvāṇa which is also the samsaric and riverine world of generation and fertility that Joyce always

connects with ALP. This constellated polarity of sterility and fertility, waking and dreaming, being and becoming, man and woman, Mountain and River is the axis on which the wheel of *Finnegans Wake* turns.

HCE, as noted above, is the Buddha, the Christ, Mohammed, and the Creator God of all religions. His consort, ALP, corresponds to the Great Goddess figure found in cultures throughout history. If HCE is the creator/builder of all things then ALP is that timeless substance of creation that he fashions and crafts into the cosmos. Yet what HCE forgets or chooses to ignore is that ALP exists prior to everything that he creates, and that he himself is of the substance of her body. This ignorance and/or arrogance is what, in a very Gnostic sense, caused the first Fall: the Creator God failed to respect the Mother of creation. Redemption comes with full recognition of the “chaosmos.” From a Buddhist perspective, this “Fall” represents the suffering caused by our own attempts to control and fix our world without realizing that there is nothing to control or fix. We, like HCE, try to be the “masterbilker”/masterbuilder of our own realities, and like HCE or Finnegan or even Siddhartha before his awakening, we fall flat on our faces every time. Joyce recognized that he also was this type of creator god figure — all the more so because he aimed to reproduce the whole universe within a book. HCE, most notably, is Joyce himself and he is found throughout *Finnegans Wake*. Yet Joyce also deeply realized that *Finnegans Wake* is ALP, the very embodiment of the “riverrun.” Joyce once remarked that it was not he who was writing *Finnegans Wake*, but the people that he observed at the pub or on the street. His own experiences, including the seventeen year experience of writing the book, were inextricably bound up with the experiences of others. In a sense the book was writing itself. “His producers are they not his consumers?” (FW, 497). We, the readers of *Finnegans Wake*, are also those that are writing it anew. Author, book and readers of the book all melt, as do its “characters,” into a single ever-transforming, multi-faceted continuum: “...the coincidence of their contraries reamalgamerge in that indentity of undiscernibles” (FW, 49-50). As in especially Mahāyāna Buddhism, all is without self, without own-being, impermanent and groundless.

Joyce’s “Buddhism,” evident in *Finnegans Wake* and present in his earlier writing, is nothing that could be termed orthodox, be it Mahāyāna or otherwise. And while it also has very little connection with the “esoteric Buddhism” of Sinnett or even Olcott, in its syncretic and eccentric combination with other diverse spiritual and philosophical traditions it does highly resemble the universalist perspective of the Theosophical Society. Beyond this,

however, and deepening his knowledge of these subjects in general, is Joyce's extensive study of the western esoteric tradition, and especially in the Renaissance philosophies of Giordano Bruno and Nicholas of Cusa. The similarities of themes and structures of *Finnegans Wake* and Buddhism mirror similarities of both to the western esoteric tradition. Our understanding of all three can greatly increase with careful comparison.

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* : About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate.

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