

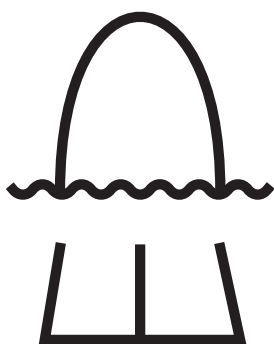
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# A WORD IN YOUR EAR

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How & Why to Read  
James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*

by Eric Rosenbloom



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## THE RAVISHT BRIDE

1132 A.D. Men like to ants or emmets wonder upon a groot hwide Whalfisk which lay in a Runnel. Blubby wares upat Ublanium.

566 A.D. On Baalfire's night of this year after deluge a crone that hadde a wickered Kish for to hale dead tunes from the bog lookit under the blay of her Kish as she ran for to sothisfeige her cowrieosity and be me sawl but she found hersell sackvulle of swart goody quickenshoon ant small illigant brogues, so rich in sweat. Blurry works at Hurdlesford.

(Silent.)

566 A.D. At this time it fell out that a brazen-lockt damsel grieved (*sobralasolas!*) because that Puppette her minion was ravisht of her by the ogre Puropeus Pious. Bloody wars in Ballyaughacleeaghally.

1132 A.D. Two sons at an hour were born until a goodman and his hag. These sons called themselves Caddy and Primas. Primas was a santryman and drilled all decent people. Caddy went to Winehouse and wrote o peace a farce. Blotty words for Dublin. [pp. 13–14]

Four entries in a chronicle of Dublin, but labelled in a confusing way, as if it moves backwards in time to a mysterious, perhaps sacred, point\* and

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\*Similar hiatuses are found on pages 334 and 501.

then forwards again. Or, as suggested by the changing names for Dublin, if A.D. stands for *ante diluvium* as well as *anno domini*, the first two entries reflect a time before some destructive event, a flood that changed everything. The second two entries are for a time since. Or rather, because the second entry clearly specifies “after deluge,” we see the reflection of such a scheme, the past reflected in the future and *vice versa*. But where is that moment, the opposite of HCE’s thunder, not spoken of or otherwise signalled except that it is

(Silent.)

The progression of dates suggests two solutions: Arithmetically, they move to and from 283 (half of 566, a quarter of 1132), the year of Finn Mac Cool’s slaying; geometrically, the turning point is 0, or rather the point between two years from which the calendars are numbered. Alternatively, the years are the same on each side of the turning point, the chroniclers moving back and forth between current events and those in the past.\* In this case, the date at the center is in 1132. Indeed, on page 387 Johnny MacDougall recalls “the year of the flood 1132.” All 4 old men—in

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\*“In looking at these [12th-century] documents we will be moving back and forth between centuries as the Irish often used sixth- or seventh-century figures or events to illustrate the problems of later centuries.” (Mary Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland*, 1989, Harper Collins).

the fourth chapter of the second part of the book, the second-to-last section that Joyce wrote, expanding one of his initial sketches, *The Kiss*—recall events of that year. Marcus Lyons calls it “the freebutter year of Notre Dame” [p. 388], Lucas Tarpey “the year of buy in disgrace” [p. 391], and Matt Gregory includes the day: “old year’s eve 1132” [p. 397].

The riverend Clarence Sterling—who examined the mysteries and provided most of the discoveries in this appendix, in papers, internet discussion lists, and personal correspondence—explains that old year’s eve in Ireland was the evening of January 31, the start of Oimeic (also known as Imbolg), one of the principal Celtic holidays and sacred to Brighid. Over two or three nights and days, people turned from winter’s stillness to look towards spring. In Christian times, Brighid became St. Bridget, also commonly called Bride, and February 1 & 2 became, respectively, St. Bridget’s feast day and Candlemas, the purification of Mary (as well as James Joyce’s birthday). In the liturgical calendar, the nearest Sunday to Candlemas marked the turn from counting days *since* Christmas to counting the days *to* Easter. In 1132, that day was January 31, the only clear date that appears in *Finnegans Wake*: “31 Jan. 1132 A.D.” (p. 420). It is the date on the letter written by Shem for his mother and carried by Shaun for his father, the letter revealed in the midden heap by Biddy the

Hen, an incarnation of Brighid, and the letter stands for the book itself. Why?

Why? One's apurr apuss a story about brid ...  
[p. 597]

Johnny mentions "Her Grace the bishop Senior" (p. 387) among a trio of powerful women; St. Bridget is said to have been a bishop in Ireland.

Johnny. ... and after that then there was the official landing of Lady Jales Casemate, in the year of the flood 1132 S.O.S., and the christening of Queen Baltersby, the Fourth Buzzersbee, according to Her Grace the bishop Senior, off the whate shape ... [p. 387]

Marcus's "freebutter year of Notre Dame" refers to Bridget as Mary of the Gaels and to the story that no one went without butter at Kildare, her monastery. Her precursor, the goddess Brighid, was embodied in the cream at the top of the morning's milking. Marcus describes a man and woman in bed together, the woman on top.

Marcus. ... and then there was the Frankish float of Noahsdobahs, from Hedalgoland, round about the freebutter year of Notre Dame 1132 P.P.O. or so, disumbunking from under Motham General Bonaboche, (noo poopery!) in his half a grey traditional hat ... [p. 388]

Lucas avoids alluding to Bridget while recalling the year 1132. He describes a lone woman holding on to some power while dressed as a man, but the king's glory eclipses her. He calls the time "the year of buy in disgrace," referring to the difficulty St. Malachy had when named bishop of Ireland in 1132 to enforce the Roman liturgy and end the hereditary succession (yes, father to son) of religious offices—he eventually had to buy the bishop's crook (*see Magic Numbers, above*). He may also be referring to bride-price, the gifts given by a man to his bride's family, which practice was replaced by its reverse, the dowry.

There may also be a lingering sense of shame that the Armagh families did sell their rights to Malachy. The phrase is also "*boy* in disgrace," acknowledging the crimes of those who have forced their will (for example, in 1132, 1169, and 1768). So often expressed as man against woman, this relates to the story about Bridget, as we shall see momentarily.

Lucas. And, O so well they could remembore  
at that time, when Carpery of the Goold Fins was  
in the kingship of Poolland, Mrs Dowager Jus-  
tice Squalchman, foorsitter, in her fullbottom wig  
and beard, (Erminia Reginia!) in or aring or  
around about the year of buy in disgrace 1132  
or 1169 or 1768 Y.W.C.A., at the Married Male  
Familyman's Auctioneer's court in Arrahnacuddle.  
[pp. 390–391]

And Matt describes an old couple settled in domestic tranquility, away from the troubled past, reading their letters, or studying old manuscripts (the *Senchus Mor* is the old Celtic body of laws, attributed to Brighid but revised by Patrick), before sleep, on “old year’s eve,” the day of reflection that we’ve already discussed.\*

Matt. ... when it so happen they were all sycamore and by the world forgot, ... and read a letter or two every night, before going to dodo sleep atrance, with their catkins coifs, in the twilight, a capitaletter, for further auspices, on their old one page codex book of old year’s eve 1132, M.M.L.J. old style, their *Senchus Mor*, by his fellow girl, the Mrs Shemans, in her summer seal houseonsample ... [p. 397]

So what happened in Bridget’s story to make the eve of her day in 1132 so central, around which memories are pained, evasive, and deceiving? In the 16th-century “*Annals of Loch Cé*” the first entry for resembles the third event chronicled on pages 13–14 (“Puppette her minion was ravisht of her by the ogre Puropeous Pious”):

The abbot’s house of Cill-Dara [Kildare] was captured by the Ui-Ceinnsealaigh [Hy Kinsella]

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\*Coincidentally, James Joyce died on a later “old year’s eve,” December 31, 1940, in the Julian calendar (corrected to January 13, 1941, in the Gregorian, the one we use today).



against the comarb [counselor] of Brighid, and burned, and a large part of the church, and a great many were slain there; and the nun herself was carried off a prisoner, and put into a man's bed.\*

So, too, the first 1132 entry in the 17th-century "Chronicon Scotorum" is:

The successor of Brigit was betrayed and carried off by Diarmait son of Murchad [Mac Murrough- and forced to submit to him and seven score killed in Cell Dara and most of it burned.†

As mentioned elsewhere in these pages, Diarmaid Mac Murrough who led this especially violent raid that included the rape of the abbess of Kildare, the embodiment of St. Bridget, herself the continuation of the goddess Brighid. His purpose was the destruction of her authority, "Her Grace," thus mocking his namesake from the Fenian cycle of stories, Diarmaid of the Love Spot, whose vow was to save women from unjust marriages (as he most famously did in running away with Grainne before her marriage to Finn. The violent act may or may not be directly related to Malachy's mission to bring the Brighidine Irish church in line with Roman rule. Diarmaid was, however, famed for his generosity to the church, and Dublin was a center

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\*Translation by William Hennessy, 1871.

†Translation by Gearóid Mac Niocaill, after William Hennessy, 1866.

of support for Roman dominance. Whatever the larger politics, Diarmaid by this manner became king of Leinster and his own kinswoman became abbess of Kildare.

Thirty-four years later, the last high king of Ireland, Rory O'Connor, took up the cause of a man whose wife was kidnapped by the same Diarmaid Mac Murrough. In exile, Diarmaid sought the help of the Normans, promising his kingship and his daughter to Strongbow, who came and conquered in 1169 (*see* History, *above*). In 1768, the Irish Catholic church added to its service a prayer for the English monarch's health.

Once Bank of Ireland's. ... Milchbroke. Wrongly spilled. ... Now Bunk of England's. [p. 420]

Ay, ay. The good go and the wicked is left over. ... Ah, well sure, that's the way. As the holymaid of Kunut said to the haryman of Koombe. ... Woman. Squash. Part. Ay, ay. By decree absolute. [p. 390]

The year 1132 began with the rape of Brigid/Bridget/Bride, the violation of Irish womanhood itself and of a vital continuation of the past. On page 500, the rape is echoed in the betrayal of Parnell, dangers facing Isolde, and the reverend Swift's "sosie sesthers" (p. 3). As the riverend Sterling asserted in more thorough and interesting argument than I have offered here, it is the seminal

(the pun is meaningful) event of *Finnegans Wake*, repeated before and since, a brutal Irish church-sanctioned version of “penisolate war” (p. 3), of Nicholas of Cusa’s *coincidentia oppositorum*.

—Slog Slagt and sluaughter! Rape the daughter! ...

—Sold! I am sold! Brinabride! My ersther!  
My sidster! Brinabride, goodbye! Brinabride!  
I sold! [p. 500]

Such a kiss has brought together opposites, but it broke a unity around which opposites flowed in a natural circle of being. After such a kiss, there is no return. From St. Bridget’s eve of that year, 31 Jan., a very different eve than the previous year’s, more like a wake for the old goddess than a feast to welcome and bless the new year, we must look both back to what was and forward to what came to be, good as well as bad, to forgive as well as forget, find love instead of more reason to hate. That is the date of the letter, which stands for the book, which is dreamed in your head where all, the odd moment of respite and grace, between acts, is  
(Silent.)