

## Italy set to Wake up to Joyce opus

Pavel Barter

AN ITALIAN translation of James Joyce's most challenging novel is a step closer to completion, 35 years after it began. This week sees the launch of an Italian volume of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's 1939 tome renowned for its stream-of-consciousness style and incomprehensible language.

Luigi Schenoni started translating the novel in 1982, completing half of it before his death in 2008. The latest volume consists of a further two chapters and includes annotations on the text and explanations about the translation process.

John McCourt, a Joyce scholar at the University of Roma Tre in Italy, described the volume as a landmark work that picked up where Schenoni left off.

"There are whole passages and sections in *Finnegans Wake* that even trained Joyce scholars struggle to figure out. There's a group that have been



Joyce: a Rubik's Cube of linguistic complexity  
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reading *Finnegans Wake* for 20 years in Zurich. If it takes that long to read it, how in the name of God can you translate it?

"It's a very significant achievement to render this into some kind of Italian."

Joyce's book has been described as a Rubik's Cube of linguistic complexity due to its

puns, allusions and invented words. "There can be no literal translation of *Finnegans Wake*," said Alan Titley, the translator of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's 1949 Irish novel *Cré na Cille*. "Somebody has to approach it in an entirely different mindset."

Joyce's novel is broken down into 17 chapters, split

between four books. Enrico Terrinoni and Fabio Pedone began translating the first two chapters of Book III in 2014, individually working on sections of the text.

"When we finish each part, we work on each other's versions," said Terrinoni. "Then we meet and negotiate every single passage. The most difficult aspects are not when Joyce writes in his own invented English. When he writes 'noisance' instead of nuisance, blending noise and nuisance, we can blend cagnara and rogne, to come up with cagnarogne. The problem is when he . . . incorporates other languages into his invented English."

Terrinoni previously translated *Ulysses* into Italian for a 2012 publication, but that was a "piece of cake in comparison, because there are only limited parts of *Ulysses* where Joyce plays freely with language in terms of inventing new words. In the *Wake*, that's the rule".

Thirty-five years is not an exceptional period in translating a book that took its author 17 years to write. The French version, for example, was re-

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portedly 30 years in the making. A Polish version, published in 2012, took a modest decade. Fuat Sevimay, a former resident translator at Trinity College, has been working on a Turkish version since 2014.

Dai Congrong, a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, spent eight years translating the first eight chapters into Chinese. She often considered quitting. "It is a kind of torture," said Dai after its publication in 2013. "My body suffered from the work."

Dai's work was an unexpected success, selling out its initial run of 8,000 copies within a month. Terrinoni's *Ulysses* has undergone over 20 reprints since its release. The new volume of *Finnegans Wake* is published through Mondadori, Italy's largest publishing company, and Joyce's Italian connection could encourage readers, noted McCourt. The author lived in Trieste for over 15 years from 1904, and co-translated a chapter from *Finnegans Wake* into Italian.

"In Italy he absorbed everything and was fluent in Ital-



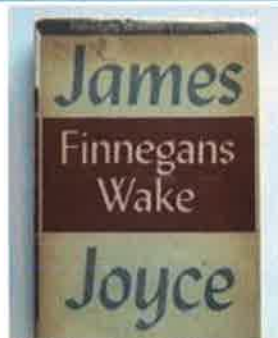
The wordplay and inventive language used by Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* has proved a trial for Italian translator Enrico Terrinoni

ian," said McCourt. "There's a huge amount of Italian in *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce famously said writing in English was the most ingenious form of torture ever invented."

Since the expiration of the novel's 75-year copyright period in 2012, foreign language publishers have been keen to tackle the work. Translators provide a crucial role in contemporary fiction, according to Catherine Dunne, an Irish

author whose novels top Italian bestseller lists.

"The role of the translator is extremely important; it's an art, rather than a skill. A bad translation can have a severe impact on a writer's career. I speak from experience. The translation of one of my novels, into a language that shall remain nameless, was so lifeless and literal I've never sold another book in that country. And that's 20 years ago."



Challenging: *Finnegans Wake*

Translators are often underpaid, she added. "In Italy, it's only in recent years the translator's name appears alongside the author's on works they painstakingly translated. Good translations are a reimagining of a work of literature. That needs to be recognised."

Terrinoni and Pedone launch the third volume of the Italian *Finnegans Wake* at the Italian Cultural Institute in Dublin on Friday. Mondadori plans to print the final volume in 2019, to chime with the 80th anniversary of the book. ■