CHAPTER TWO
CYCLIC FORM

I

Imagine a given point in space as the primordial one; then with compasses draw a circle around this point; where the beginning and the end unite together, emanation and reabsorption meet. The circle itself is composed of innumerable smaller circles, like the rings of a bracelet...’ (Isis Unveiled, vol. I, p. 348)

‘And to find a locus for an alp get a howlth on her bayrings as a prisme O and for a second O unbox your compasses... With Olaf as centrum and Olaf’s lambtail for his spokesman circumscrip a cyclone.’ (287–94)

Joyce was always an arranger rather than a creator, for, like a mediaeval artist, he seems superstitiously to have feared the presumption of human attempts at creation. The mediaeval notion that the artist may organise but cannot under any circumstances create something really new is, of course, capable of universal application but it is more than usually relevant to Joyce. Mr. Atherton has shown how basic to Finnegans Wake is Joyce’s heretical view that the Creation itself was the true original sin,¹ and, as I have suggested above, we are gradually becoming aware that every situation, description, and scrap of dialogue in his works was remembered, rather than imaginatively ‘created’. Organising was certainly Joyce’s strong point. Although he would not venture into the unknown, he was supremely confident in the reshaping of the known; correspondence, pattern, closely controlled form—these were the only means by which Joyce knew how to give significance to the

¹ Atherton, pp. 30–1.
Cyclic Form

diverse unconsidered trifles which he spent so much of his life snapping up. And it is important to realise that the end-product is always fusion rather than fragmentation; *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are studies not in universal break-up but in universal reconstitution.

Like so many works of late middle age, *Finnegans Wake* is given more elbow-room in which to develop than are the books which preceded it, but while this means that detail is rather less rigidly held in place than it is in *Ulysses*, 'pattern' in the broadest sense pervades the later book even more than the earlier. Literally dozens of formal patterns are superimposed upon one another and closely interwoven in the texture; some of these are immediately obvious, like the vast triptych which sprawls across the entire book and is centered on I.1, II.3, and IV, while others, like the *via crucis* around which 'Shem the Penman' is built, require close scrutiny before their shapes begin to stand out against the background. By far the most important of all the patterns in *Finnegans Wake* are those underlying the mystical systems of cyclic growth, decay, and regrowth, which have always had such a strong hold on man's imagination and which Joyce has used to keep the material of his book in an almost constant state of dynamic urgency—wheels spinning ever faster within wheels as the whole major cycle turns, about no particular centre, from the first page to the last and back again to the beginning.

There is considerable variation in the extent to which each individual chapter of *Finnegans Wake* is organised according to an internal cyclic scheme, and in general it is true to say that those chapters which were written or revised last tend to show the greatest concern with cyclic development. Such a late chapter may be subdivided again and again until complete cycles are to be found in short sentences or even in single words. It is interesting to note how even the title, with which Joyce said he was making 'experiments',\(^1\) reflects the cyclic structure of the book: three syllables in a group are followed by a fourth, the 'Wake', just as the three long Books forming the cycle proper

\(^1\) *Letters*, p. 252.
of *Finnegans Wake* are followed by the coda of Book IV, the Book of Waking. Similarly, the title may be read ‘*Finn negans Wake*’, thus revealing possibilities of cyclic endlessness. Joyce defiantly explains his method at 115.06: ‘why, pray, sign anything as long as every word, letter, penstroke, paperspace is a perfect signature of its own?’; in his source-study Mr. Atherton has some interesting things to say about these signatures.¹

Although Joyce decided quite early that *Finnegans Wake* was to be cyclic as a whole—the last sentence running into the first—it was not until some years after he had begun writing it, and after much of it had been crystallised into something approaching the published form, that the book’s present structure was decided on. In 1926 Joyce was still speculating about what would go into it²:

‘I will do a few more pieces, perhaps — picture-history from the family album and parts of O discussing . . . *A Painful Case* and the [IT-Δ] household etc.’

and as late as 1927 Book I was to consist of six rather than the present eight chapters.³ This initial uncertainty in respect of the overall design undoubtedly accounts for the more detailed organisation of the material in the later chapters, the most spectacular example of which is ‘Shaun a’. (III.1)⁴

It is by now thoroughly well known that in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce made use of the cyclic theories of history set out in Giambattista Vico’s *La Scienza Nuova*.⁵ Joyce made frequent mention of Vico both in letters and in conversation, and had Samuel Beckett write an article for *Our Exagmination* largely about the relevance of Viconian theory to the structure and philosophy of ‘Work in Progress’.⁶ Since the publication of Beckett’s article almost every commentator on *Finnegans Wake* has, as a matter of course, discussed the Viconian theories and

¹ Atherton, pp. 35, 53, etc.
³ A consecutive draft of chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 is in a notebook in the British Museum, Add. MS 47471 B.
⁴ For a detailed analysis, see below, pp. 57–61.
shown how they apply in general to the book. Convenient summaries of this information are to be found in the Skeleton Key, in A. M. Klein's 'A Shout in the Street',¹ in W. Y. Tindall's James Joyce² and, of course, in Beckett's somewhat skittish article. The briefest of summaries must suffice here: Vico saw the history of the Gentiles as proceeding painfully onward, and to some extent upward, in broad spirals of social and cultural development. Each complete historical cycle consisted of an uninterrupted succession of three great 'Ages'—the Divine, the Heroic, and the Human—followed by a very brief fourth Age which brought that cycle to an end and ushered in the next. The cyclic progress began with a thunderclap which frightened primitive, inarticulate man out of his bestial fornication under the open skies, caused him to conceive of the existence of a wrathful, watchful God, to utter his first terrified words—'Pa! Pa!'—and to retire modestly to the shelter of caves to initiate the history of the family and of society. The main characteristics of the three cultural Ages which subsequently developed are set out in Table IV. Following the third Age, toward the end of which man’s governing power vanished in a general dissolution and neo-chaos, all fell once again into the hands of Divine providence. During this brief interregnum, usually called a ricorso,³ the skittles of the Heavenly game were set up afresh so that God might blast them with another terrifying thunderbolt to start a new cycle rolling. Many major and minor developmental cycles in Finnegans Wake follow the Viconian scheme quite closely, but, apart from the example analysed below (III.1) and my discussion of the sequence of dream-levels (Chapter Three), I shall not pursue the Viconian structure in any detail.

Vico's Scienza Nuova was in fact only one of several sources for the cyclic philosophy in Finnegans Wake. Very little attention has been given to the others because Joyce, with his notorious habit of uttering half-truths about his books, mentioned only

¹ New Directions XIII, 1951, pp. 327–45.
² London, 1950, pp. 70 ff.
³ See Concordance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age of Gods</th>
<th>Age of Heroes</th>
<th>Age of Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature</strong></td>
<td>Poetic or creative; animistic</td>
<td>Heroic</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customs</strong></td>
<td>Religion and Piety</td>
<td>Choleric; punctilious</td>
<td>Enjoining duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural Law</strong></td>
<td>Divine; men thought all property depended on the gods</td>
<td>The law of force; controlled by religion</td>
<td>The law of human reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government</strong></td>
<td>Theocratic; the age of oracles</td>
<td>Aristocratic</td>
<td>Human; democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>A divine mental language; expression through the religious act</td>
<td>Heroic blazonings</td>
<td>Articulate speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written Characters</strong></td>
<td>Hieroglyphics</td>
<td>Heroic characters; imaginative genera</td>
<td>Vulgar writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jurisprudence</strong></td>
<td>Divine wisdom</td>
<td>Heroic; ‘taking precautions by the use of certain proper words’</td>
<td>Human; deals with the truth of the facts themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authority</strong></td>
<td>Divine</td>
<td>Heroic</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reason</strong></td>
<td>Divine; understood only by God</td>
<td>Reason of the State</td>
<td>Human, individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Judgments</strong></td>
<td>Divine</td>
<td>Ordinary; ‘observed with an extreme verbal scrupulousness’; <em>religio verborum</em></td>
<td>Human; all ‘extraordinary’; depending on the truth of the facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristic Institution</strong></td>
<td>Birth; baptism</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Death; burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance of Tenses (as interpreted by SK)</strong></td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cyclic Form

Vico as his source. Chief among the non-Viconian cycles which help to mould the lines of *Finnegans Wake* are the world-ages of Indian philosophy and the opposed gyres of Yeats' *A Vision* and Blake's 'The Mental Traveller'.\(^1\) Joyce's interest in eastern philosophy seems to have been aroused during his association with the colourful Dublin theosophists, with whom he mixed for a time in his youth. His brother Stanislaus wrote that theosophy was the only one of Joyce's early enthusiasms which he later considered to be a complete waste of time\(^2\) but, although Joyce may well have regretted not spending his time to better advantage, these despised pursuits provided him with the raw material for a good deal of rich satire in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* and had a profound influence on the form of the latter.

Joyce's literary sources for the bulk of the theosophical allusions in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* seem to have been the turgid outpourings of H. P. Blavatsky. While Stuart Gilbert was writing his study of *Ulysses* Joyce suggested to him that he read in particular *Isis Unveiled*, on which Stephen muses scornfully (U 180). Joyce had no doubt read her other works—and especially, perhaps, *The Mahatma Letters*\(^3\)—but *Isis Unveiled* appears to have been the book he knew best.\(^4\) An immense and bewildering grab-bag of fag-ends of philosophy, written in a naively thrilling and pugnacious tone which must have pleased Joyce's insatiable taste for the strident and absurd, it is of course hopelessly inaccurate and misleading in its pronouncements about the Indian philosophical systems. Odd contradictions and irreconcilable points of view, developed through 1400 large and rambling pages, are all represented as manifestations of the great theosophical Truth. The accuracy or ultimate value of the book were, however, as irrelevant for Joyce as they are for this study, and he might well have said of *Isis Unveiled* as he did of the *Scienza Nuova*: 'I would not pay overmuch attention to

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3 Atherton, p. 236.
these theories, beyond using them for all they are worth . . . ."1

There is one vital point of structure distinguishing the Viconian cycles from almost all the cyclic patterns which obsessed Blavatsky, for whereas Vico’s theories are based on a tripartite formula, with a short interconnecting link between cycles, nearly every Indian system uses a primarily four-part cycle, with or without a short additional fifth Age.2 Since in some respects a four-part cycle suits Joyce’s purposes better than does a three-part, he extends Vico’s fourth age, on the analogy of the Indian cycles, and gives it a great deal more detailed attention than it receives in the Scienza Nuova. He still adheres to the general Viconian progress—Birth, Marriage, Death, and Reconstitution—but the ricorso, which in Vico is little more than a transitional flux, is given as much prominence as the other Ages and is even elevated to the supreme moment of the cycle. The new emphasis reflects both Joyce’s temperament and his perception of the world in which he lived. In the twentieth century the ‘abnihilisation of the etym’ (353.22) had become a fact in both senses, and Joyce’s environment, already highly fragmented, was made to appear even more so by Joyce himself. Not content with the insecurity of the crumbled Europe in which he had chosen to dwell, he masochistically added to his insecurity by constant restless movement; not content with the naturally accelerating flux of the English language as he found it, he helped it to crumble yet faster. But when Joyce destroyed it was always in order to rebuild, for the process of reconstitution fascinated him. He was remarkably uninterested in achievements—either his own personal and artistic achievements, or the socio-political achievements of Europe—but the flux of the moment never failed to hold his attention. In art as in life it was process rather than result that appealed to him most—how a thing comes to be, rather than what it is. Physical and spiritual gestation of all kinds delighted him. Nora’s pregnancies, which to her were simple human conditions, became for him mystical events worthy of the deepest study.3 He spent a thousand hours,

2 *See* below, p. 52.
3 Ellmann, pp. 196, 306.
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according to his own reckoning, trying to reproduce the physical process linguistically in the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode of *Ulysses*,\(^1\) and even contrived to make the whole of another book, *A Portrait*, reflect in some detail the stages of development of the human foetus.\(^2\) This interest in the process of creation is yet more pronounced in *Finnegans Wake*, in which everything, as has frequently been said, is in a constant state of becoming. Joyce once said rather testily to his brother Stanislaus that style was the only thing in which he was interested,\(^3\) but 'style' is here to be understood in the widest possible sense. For the mature Joyce 'style' denoted more than a way of writing; it had become a way of life, or at least a way of interpreting life, which, for a man as temperamentally passive as Joyce, amounts to virtually the same thing. In *Ulysses* his surrogate, Stephen, mused on the world-book of signatures which he was 'here to read' (U 33); many years later the skill with which he had interpreted these signatures was put to the test in *Finnegans Wake*, to write which Joyce needed a thorough analytical grasp of the syntax, grammar, and prosody of the universe, for he had taken on no less a task than that of demonstrating cosmic 'style' in action. As Joyce was primarily concerned with the dynamic functioning of the universe, the business of germination in the muck-heap after the nadir of the cycle had been reached necessarily became the most important moment of all. Though the fourth Age is sometimes described in *Finnegans Wake* as a disintegration—‘O’c’stle, n’wc’stle, tr’c’stle, crumbling!’ (18.06)—it is no less frequently interpreted as a vital reorganisation of scattered forces, a resurrection which is positive rather than potential: 'hatch-as-hatch can' (614.33). Earwicker mysteriously rises from the dead in I.4, departs, and is tried in absentia; Anna Livia babbles in lively fashion in I.8; Tristan and Iseult embrace in II.4; the new generation is carefully nurtured in the cradles of III.4. Joyce has extended the fourth Age in each case by allowing it not only to prepare for, but to some extent also

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1 *Letters*, p. 141.
Cyclic Form
to recapitulate, in dream-like anticipation, the first Age of the
cycle.\(^1\) As he says, 'The old order changeth and lasts like the
first' (486.10). Earwicker's resurrection in I.4 is identical with
the moment of Finnegan's rise in I.1 and the subsequent birth
of the new hero; Anna reappears in I.8 in the same Allmaziful
personification as in I.5; Tristan and Iseult repeat with more
success the frustrated love-play of II.1; the old couple in bed
in III.4 reconstitute the tableau of page 403.

All the diverse cycles find a common culmination in Book IV,
whose single chapter is one of the most interesting and success-
ful in Finnegans Wake. Vico was a far-seeing but rather hard-
headed Christian historian; although he was sometimes bizarre
there was little of the mystic in him and the impulse which he
postulated for the start of a new cycle was a Divine Act requiring
little discussion. For the theosophists, however, the moment of
change from one major cycle to the next was filled with a
mystical significance which Joyce seems to have found attrac-
tive. This brief interpolated Age was called a 'sandhi', a
twilight period of junction and moment of great calm. Blavatsky
sees it as the most important moment of all in the resurrection
process—a period of silence and unearthliness corresponding
to the stay of the departed soul in the Heaven-Tree before
reincarnation. She describes a symbolic representation of the
sandhi-period in a wall-painting depicting the cycles of the
world:\(^2\):

'There is a certain distance marked between each of the spheres,
purposely marked; for, after the accomplishment of the circles
through various transmigrations, the soul is allowed a time of
temporary nirvana, during which space of time the atma loses
all remembrance of past sorrows. The intermediate space is
filled with strange beings.'

Book IV accords with this. It is immediately identified as a
'sandhi' by the triple incantation with which it begins: 'Sand-
hyas! Sandhyas! Sandhyas!' (593.01).\(^3\) The mystical 'Dark

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\(^1\) See below, Chapter Three.
\(^3\) See SK 277–8.
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hawks' of the Heaven-Tree (215.36) return as the 'bird' of 593.04, while the succeeding pages are indeed 'filled with strange beings':

'horned ... Cur ... beast ... Dane the Great ... snout ... byelegs ... chuckal ... cur ... noxe ... Gallus ... ducksrun ... gazelle ...'

and so on (594–5); animal imagery abounds throughout. (At 221.14 the sandhi is dubbed 'the pawses'.) The characters of Book IV prattle odd languages, wear exotic dress, and perform curious ritualistic acts which stand out even against the general bizarrerie of the rest of Finnegans Wake. But, above all, this is the chapter that brings forgetfulness; Anna, as she passes out to her cold, mad father, is losing all remembrance of her past joys and sorrows. Joyce, so Mr. Budgen assures me, prized memory above all other human faculties, and the inevitable dissolution of memory into the formless sea is much the most bitter part of Anna's 'bitter ending' (627.35), for if she could be brought back to meet her lover among the rhododendrons of Howth Castle and Environ with her memories intact, she might avoid the Fall and so escape from the eternal circle in which she is condemned to run. As things stand, however, she must eventually revert to the same old way of life, like the girl in the superb little story 'Eveline', the closing scene of which is closely paralleled by the last pages of Finnegans Wake.

(As this important parallel with 'Eveline' does not seem to have been noticed before, I shall digress for a moment to discuss it briefly. Eveline is standing at the 'North Wall'—that is, on a wharf at the mouth of the Liffey—preparing to leave for Buenos Aires with her sailor friend. She sees the 'black mass' of the boat, bearing the same diabolical overtones as those 'terrible prongs' which rise from the sea before the helpless Anna. In its personification as the sailor, the sea calls to Eveline, but she holds back and allows love to be overcome by fear of annihilation in the unknown: 'All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her'. In the following quotation from the last page of 'Eveline', on the left, I have italicised the words and phrases echoed in
Cyclic Form

Finnegans Wake 627.13 ff. The corresponding echoes are placed on the right:

She answered nothing. She felt her cheek pale and cold and, out of a maze of distress, she prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty. The boat blew a long mournful whistle into the mist. If she went, tomorrow she would be on the sea with Frank, steaming towards Buenos Ayres. Their passage had been booked. Could she still draw back after all he had done for her? Her distress awoke a nausea in her body and she kept moving her lips in silent fervent prayer.

A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand:

'Come!'

All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.

'Come!'

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish.

'Eveline! Evvy!'

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on, but he still called to her. She set her dumbly (628.11)
my cold father (628.01);
Amazia (627.28); our cries (627.32)
I done me best (627.13)
Whish! (628.13)
if I go all goes (627.14)
seasilt (628.04)

passing out (627.34)

seasilt saltsick (628.04)

Lps (628.15); humbly dumbly, only to washup (628.11)
Ho hang! Hang ho! (627.31)
seize (627.29)
Coming, far! (628.13)
moyles and moyles of it... seasilt... dumbly (628.03–11)

Coming, far! (628.13)
No! (627.26)

mad feary (628.02)
seasilt (628.04); our cries (627.32)
Avelaval (628.06)
I rush (628.04)
Far calls. (628.13)

Far calls. (628.13)
Cyclic Form

white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition. (D 44)

whitespread wings (628.10) A way a lone a last a loved a long the (628.15)

Eveline is yet another victim of Irish paralysis; her spiritual cycle will henceforth be bounded by the appalling routine life entailed by her refusal to become a new person. Although Anna's ultimate return to drudgery may be no less certain, she submits instead to cosmic paralysis in the sea, giving herself half involuntarily, and with a tragi-comic resignation that is characteristic of the more mature book, to the spiritual annihilation which must precede rebirth.)

The period of temporary nirvana is coming to an end for Anna Livia as Book IV concludes with a new and much more successful portrait of her ('Norvena's over', 619.29). Here is no uncertainty of tone, no falsification of emotion, no embarrassingly undigested lyricism. This is the closest thing to 'interior monologue' in Finnegans Wake and is its most convincing piece of extended characterisation. From the stream of almost unmodified Dublin speech there emerges a moving image of guilt-ridden, neglected old age. Anna now carries an even heavier spiritual burden than she did in I.8 where, a universal sewer, she cleansed Dublin and all cities of their sins. In these last moments of consciousness she must bear the sorrow of her own guilt as well for, however brilliantly she may have vindicated her husband in her splendid Letter (615–19), she is fated to return as Eve (3.01), first to fall herself and then to undo all her good work for Earwicker by causing him to sin again as Adam.

In the lesser cycles the sandhi often appears as 'silence', an important single-word motif running through the whole book and always appearing at the end of a chapter.¹ As the Skeleton Key points out,² this silent pause also represents the 'Yawning Gap' of the Eddas, whose function is analogous to that of the Indian sandhi. Joyce evidently wants us to imagine that something of the nature of the purging events in Book IV occurs

¹ See below, Chapter Three, II.
² SK 45.
between every pair of major events or cycles in *Finnegans Wake* which are separated by the ‘silence’ motif. Following each of these motif-statements there is a rejuvenation of style and tone; the symbolic content is simplified and informed by a youthful energy.

A further detail of Joyce’s pattern of cycles was almost certainly derived from theosophy, and probably from Blavatsky in particular. This is the important number-motif, ‘432’. The *Skeleton Key* appears to attribute it to Joyce’s reading of the Eddas,¹ but a much obvious source for the figure is to be found in the temporal calculations associated with the eastern world-cycles, and especially those of the Hindus. Blavatsky attaches great importance to the figure, and in the first chapter of *Isis Unveiled* discusses in considerable detail the system of cycles which is based on it. The imposing Grand Period, or ‘Kalpa’, as explained by her, may be summarised as follows²:

**1st-order cycle—**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st (Kṛta-)Yuga</td>
<td>1,728,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd (Trètya-)Yuga</td>
<td>1,296,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd (Dvapara-)Yuga</td>
<td>864,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th (Kali-)Yuga</td>
<td>432,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
4,320,000 \text{ yrs} = \text{one Maha-Yuga}
\]

**2nd-order cycle—**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71 Maha-Yugas</td>
<td>306,720,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ one sandhi</td>
<td>1,728,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
308,448,000 \text{ yrs} = \text{one Manvantara}
\]

**3rd-order cycle—**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 Manvantaras</td>
<td>4,318,272,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ one sandhi</td>
<td>1,728,000 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
4,320,000,000 \text{ yrs} = \text{one Kalpa, or Mahamanvantara}
\]

¹ SK 45.
Cyclic Form

We are at present said to be in the Kali-Yuga of the twenty-eighth Maha-Yuga of the seventh Manvantara. A talking clock parodies this piece of information and tells us what point we have reached in the ‘Grand Period’ of *Finnegans Wake* by the beginning of Book IV:

‘Upon the thuds trokes truck, chim, it will be exactly so fewer hours by so many minutes of the ope of the diurn of the sennight of the maaned of the yere of the age of the madamanvantora.’

(598.30)

There are passing allusions to the Yugas in the Sanskrit-saturated context of the opening of Book IV, while the Manvantara and Mahamanvantara turn up at 20.17 and 297.30. The figures 432 or 4320 appear at least nine times\(^1\) and are always associated with the pattern of the cycles. In II.2 Joyce permutes and combines them in a long series of heady calculations which mock at Blavatsky\(^2\):

‘They are never erring, perpetually recurring numbers, unveiling to him who studies the secrets of Nature, a truly divine system, an *intelligent* plan in cosmogony, which results in natural cosmic divisions of times, seasons, invisible influences, astronomical phenomena, with their action and reaction on terrestrial and even moral nature; on birth, death, and growth, on health and disease.’

At this point it would be as well to demonstrate how Joyce puts some of the above cyclic ideas to work in organising an individual chapter. The following is an analysis of III.1, the first and most immediately accessible of Shaun’s ‘four watches of the night’. Its structure, mainly Viconian but incorporating a silent sandhi, is the prototype for many other chapters.

Prelude

The opening paragraphs form a short prelude which recalls the four-paragraph overture at the beginning of *Finnegans Wake*.

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1 See Concordance.
Cyclical Form

CYCLE I

Age i (403.18–405.03): Description of Shaun as ‘a picture primitive’; he does not speak (first Viconian Age).

Age ii (405.04–407.09): Shaun has become a Hero—‘Bel of Beaus Walk’; there is an allusion to the heroic slaying of the Jabberwock and an entertaining Rabelaisian description of Shaun’s heroic eating habits.

Age iii (407.10–414.14): Introduced by ‘Overture and beginners’; this is the beginning of the Human Age, in which the gods can appear only in dramatic representation on a stage; Shaun has become a popular representative—‘vote of the Irish’; the word ‘Amen’ brings to an end the group of three Ages forming the main part of this first Viconian cycle.

Age iv (414.14–414.18): A short ricorso brings us back to the theocratic Age with the introduction to the Fable.

THUNDER (414.19)

CYCLE II

Age i (414.22–419.10): ‘The Ondt and the Gracheoper’ (Fable is a characteristic of Vico’s first Age); theocracy is well to the fore since a large number of Greek and Egyptian gods preside over this section; it concludes with ‘Allmen’.

Age ii (419.11–421.14): The question ‘Now?’ leads us into a fresh ‘explosion’, this time of the ‘Letter’, which is an excellent
Cyclic Form

example of 'extreme verbal scrupulousness' and of 'taking precautions by the use of certain proper words'; the section ends at 'Stop'.

Age iii (421.15–424.13): Vico's 'vulgar speech'—the 'slanguage' of Shem—is both used and discussed; the section ends with 'Ex. Ex. Ex. Ex.'

Age iv (424.14–424.20): A ricorso raises the question of why Shaun reviles Shem. As this is one of the most basic questions in the book, a discussion of it must entail a rehearsal of the whole cycle, beginning with the thunderbolt.

Thunder (424.20)

Cycle III

Age i (424.23–425.03): Shaun holds forth from his 'Kingdom of Heaven'.

Age ii (425.04–426.04): Begins with 'Still'; Shaun descends from Heaven, is incarnated—'muttermelk of his blood donor beginning to work'—and then speaks as a prophet (Mohammed with 'immuensoes').

Age iii (426.05–427.08): Begins with a transition of Shaun from prophet to common man—'pugiliser . . . broke down . . . overpowered by himself with love of the tear silver . . . slob of the world . . . loads of feeling in him . . . fresh fallen calef'; the section ends as Shaun vanishes in death: 'vanished . . . Ah, mean!'

Age iv (427.09–427.14): Ricorso as quiet interlude or nocturne, leading into the Silence (427.15–16)
Cyclic Form

The silent pause which opens Cycle IV is particularly interesting:
'And the lamp went out as it couldn't glow on burning, yep the Lamp wnt out for it couldn't stay alight'.
Shaun's 'belted lamp', which lights him through the obscurities of the midnight dream, is extinguished as he 'dies'. (This important symbolic lamp seems to owe something to the lights said to be used by spirits to guide them on their way back to their old homes.) Joyce amusingly illustrates the extinguishing of the light in the 'silencing' of the words 'lamp' and 'went' (by the excision of their vowels). The rhythm of the sentence is based on that of the song 'Casey Jones', which has already appeared in Finnegans Wake, toward the end of the television episode (349.35); it is significant that this earlier occurrence of the song is in the immediate vicinity of an amusing passage describing the momentary black-out of the television screen, when Joyce uses the same device of excising the vowels (349.26). The residual word 'Lmp' has a further and more profound significance in this context, however, for 'LMP' is the commonly accepted gynaecological abbreviation for 'last menstrual period'. Thus the transition from the old age to the new is shifted from the level of words and mechanics to that of humanity—a 'cycle' is over, a birth is to come. This intimate feminine touch is a forewarning of the last sad occasion on which Anna Livia will flow out to sea, prior to the rebirth of the god.

CYCLE IV, PROPER (427.17–428.27)

After the Silence with which it began, Cycle IV brings III.1 to a conclusion with a prayer, apparently said secreto, to Shaun the god-figure, who is to be resurrected in the next chapter. A

3 For some comments on the use of synaesthesia in Finnegans Wake, see below, p. 151.
number of phrases in this *ricorso* serve to tie together the beginning and end of the chapter: Shaun, passing from nirvana to rebirth, is identified as the spectre we saw in the Prelude—‘Spickspookspokesman of our specturesque silentousness’—and there is an allusion to the opening litany of bells—‘twelve o’clock scholars’. A long series of further correspondences between this beautiful passage and Book IV gear the minor cycle of the chapter even more closely to the great cycle of *Finnegans Wake*. Some of these correspondences are set out below:

### III.1

thou art passing hence... 
loth to leave

soo ooft
afflictedly fond Fuinn feels
we miss your smile

Sireland calls you
yougander, only once more

Moylendsea
the rain for fresh remittances

### IV

they are becoming lothed to me...
I’m loothing them that’s here and all I lothe...
I am passing out

(627.17–34)

So oft (620.15)

First we feel. Then we fall

(627.11)

They’ll never see. Nor know.
Nor miss me (627.35)

Far calls (628.13)

Onetwo moremens more...
Finn, again! (628.05, 14)

moyles and moyles of it (628.03)
let her rain for my time is come

(627.12)

On an earlier occasion Anna Livia was seen to wear ‘tram-tokens in her hair’ (194.31), and Shaun also, we now learn, is covered in ‘trampthickets’. It is apparent that Joyce is establishing a general correspondence not only between Book IV and the end of III.1 but more particularly between Shaun himself and Anna, who represent the opposed principles of youth and age, male and female, extrovert and introvert: ‘when the natural morning of your nocturne blankmerges into the national morning of golden sunup’.
Cyclic Form

II: COUNTERPOINT (482.34)

Blavatsky is careful to point out in *Isis Unveiled* that no one system of cycles is necessarily held to embrace all of mankind at the same time and that several cycles of differing length and character may be functioning contemporaneously in divergent cultures.¹ The kind of cyclic counterpoint here implied is basic to the structure of *Finnegans Wake*. It has already been noticed that within the three Viconian Ages of Books I, II, and III, Joyce allows four four-chapter cycles to develop.² A detail which does not yet seem to have been noticed, however, is the implicit identification of these four cycles with the four classical elements:

**MAJOR VICIONIAN CYCLES**

1. I.1–4: Male cycle; HCE; earth
2. I.5–8: Female cycle; ALP; water
3. II—Male and female; battles; fire
4. III—Male cycle; Shaun as Earwicker’s spirit; air

Together with the sandhi of Book IV, the Lesser Cycles clearly make up a four-plus-one quasi-Indian progress which Joyce has counterpointed against the three-plus-one Viconian scheme. By squeezing four cycles into three Joyce is, so to speak, superimposing a square on a triangle and so constructing Aristotle’s symbol for the body and soul unified in a single being. The implication seems to be that in *Finnegans Wake* we may find a complete and balanced cosmos in which spirit informs and

¹ *Isis Unveiled*, vol. I, pp. 6, 294.
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enhances the gross matter represented by the four elements; Joyce could hardly have made a more ambitious symbolic claim for his book.

Throughout Finnegans Wake, in fact, it is very often possible to group a series of symbols, phrases, or people into either a three-part or a four-part configuration, depending on our point of view. There are three children, but Isolde has a double, making a fourth; the four evangelists each have a house, but one of them is invisible since it is no more than a point in space (367.27). Nobody ever appears 'to have the same time of beard' (77.12), which is to say that every man's cycle is his own. While speaking of the relationship between the Four and Yawn, in a later chapter, Joyce points out that in their case 'the meet of their noght was worth two of his morning' (475.21). Because of this constant mobility of forms and times the search for an absolute is in everybody's mind throughout the book and is the special concern of the ubiquitous Old Men who are involved in trying to find a common denominator for their four different points of view; but the only absolute they ever discover is the absolute uncertainty from which they began, the wholly relative nature of all the cycles. Blavatsky reminds us that it was the practice of the priests of virtually all the mystic creeds over which she enthuses to reserve for themselves alone the facts concerning the true and secret cycle functioning within, or parallel to, the more obvious cycles of which vulgar minds were allowed to have knowledge.¹ This Secret Cycle always differed from the others in subtle details of great mystical significance.

Returning to the magical number '432', she writes²:

'[a previous commentator] justly believed that the cycle of the Indian system, of 432,000, is the true key to the Secret Cycle. But his failure in trying to decipher it was made apparent, for as it pertained to the mystery of the creation, this cycle was the most inviolable of all'.

Joyce embeds some highly disguised information about such a Secret Cycle in the very mathematically oriented tenth chapter

Cyclic Form

(II.2). He parodies Blavatsky’s ‘432’ and leads from there on to the world of modern physics:

‘... by ribbon development, from contact bridge to lease lapse, only two millium two humbered and eighty thausig nine humbered and sixty radiolumin lines to the wustworts of a Finntown’s generous poet’s office.’ (265.24)

That is to say, from thunderclap to sandhi a cycle of 2,280,960 units. The mystery (the key to the Secret Cycle) lies in the nature of the quasi-scientific units; no one could be expected to derive the significance of the figure unaided, but fortunately the manuscripts provide the necessary clue. In British Museum Add. MS 47488, f. 246 we read:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
5,280 \\
3 \\
15,840 \\
12 \\
190,080 \\
12 \\
2,280,960
\end{array}
\]

Now \(3 \times 12 \times 12 = 432\), and \(5,280 = \) feet in a mile. The nature of the cycle is thus revealed: it is a space-time unit, a four-dimensional cycle of 432 mile-years, measuring a non-Euclidian world of four-dimensional events. The importance of this at first apparently peripheral piece of symbolism lies in the space-time concept. The Four, whose geometrical positions outline the frame which encloses the book,\(^1\) are themselves the ‘fourdimmansions’—the synoptic gospellers corresponding to the three space dimensions, and Johnny, always late, to time (367.20 ff.). With Einstein and Minkowski at his back Joyce was able to surpass even the ancient mystics in complexity and tortuousness. Like the mathematical world-model of Minkowski, the great cycle of Finnegans Wake cannot be properly

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\(^1\) Joyce represented Finnegans Wake itself by the symbol \(\square\); see Letters, p. 252.
understood unless the distance between ‘events’ is measured in terms of both space and time. ‘What subtler timeplace of the weald... than then when ructions ended, than here where race began.’ (80.12)

It is by such up-to-date methods rather than by means of the sterile aesthetics of Stephen Dedalus that Joyce finally managed to place himself above and behind his handiwork, scanning an artificial universe free of time’s arrow, able to apprehend time spatially.¹

Parallel cycles represent the first of two different types of structural counterpoint in Finnegans Wake—a simple syncopation of movement in the same general direction. Clearly the use of this kind of counterpoint makes for great flexibility of design and might even with some justice be called an excuse for looseness, but in fact a certain random element of unpredictability was necessary to Finnegans Wake if it was adequately to reflect the new world of physics of which Joyce was trying to build up a faithful verbal analogue. Throughout his career Joyce usually solved the technical problems of imitative form by the most literal application of its principles, as every reader of Ulysses is aware. In Finnegans Wake he was particularly concerned to reproduce relativity and the uncertainty principle. The latter functions in the book exactly as it does in the physical world. The large cyclic blocks of the constituent material are both clearly defined and predictable, but the smaller the structural units we consider, the more difficult it is to know how they will function. When adding brief new motifs Joyce sometimes went so far as to relinquish all control over their position in the text, and hence over the details of their effects²; the old determinism of Ulysses has been replaced by a scale of probability.

The theory of relativity is even more suited to Joyce’s purposes than is the useful uncertainty principle. That values and points of view should be entirely relative within the world of a book was nothing new by 1939, nor even by 1900, but in Finnegans Wake Joyce has pushed relativity to the extreme and

¹ The nature of Wake-time is discussed in the next section of this chapter.
² See below, p. 179.
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made it a basic aesthetic and structural law. Everything differs as 'clocks from keys', as Joyce says (77.11), alluding, I think, to the 'clocks and measuring-rods' so beloved of expositors of Einsteiniarian theory. There is in fact no absolute position whatever in Finnegans Wake and if we choose to consider it mainly from the naturalistic frame of reference it can only be because in so doing we get the most familiar picture; from whichever standpoint we may examine the Joycean phenomena, all other possible frames of reference, no matter how irreconcilable or unpalatable, must be taken into account as valid alternatives. Opposed points of view do not cancel out but are made to coexist in equilibrium, for Joyce meant Finnegans Wake to be as congenial to the Shauns of this world as to the Shems. If, as saint, modern man has grown puny like Kevin, he has achieved a compensatory greatness as artist and sage; if, as artist or sage, his mind is grubby, as bourgeois his body is clean. Just as those theoretical trains hurtling along at half the speed of light have differing lengths and masses according to the standpoints from which one measures them, so Shem and Shaun and all their paired correlatives, spiralling around their orbits, find that each seems puny to the other yet mighty to himself.

The second type of counterpoint is much more difficult to bring off but altogether richer in possibilities. This involves the use of opposing cycles centred, so to speak, in the same substance, but moving in contrary directions, always preserving an overall balance of motion. This other type of structural counterpoint is no more original in Joyce than is the first. Indeed he has taken it over virtually unchanged from Yeats and Blake—from A Vision and 'The Mental Traveller' in particular1:

'a being racing into the future passes a being racing into the past, two foot-prints perpetually obliterating one another, toe to heel, heel to toe.'

Around a central section, Book II, Joyce builds two opposing

1 A Vision, p. 210; Joyce read A Vision in both the first and second (revised) editions, published in 1926 and 1937 respectively. See Ellmann, p. 608; T. E. Connolly, The Personal Library of James Joyce, 2nd edn., Buffalo, 1957, p. 42; cf. also Joyce's comment to Eugene Jolas, regretting that 'Yeats did not put all this into a creative work', Givens, p. 15.
cycles consisting of Books I and III. In these two Books there is established a pattern of correspondences of the major events of each, those in Book III occurring in reverse order and having inverse characteristics.\(^1\) Whereas Book I begins with a rather obvious birth (28–9) and ends with a symbolic death (215–16), Book III begins with death (403) and ends with a birth (590); 'roads'\(^2\) and the meeting with the King (I.2) reappear in III.4, the trial of I.3–4 in III.3, the Letter of I.5 in III.1, and the fables of I.6 earlier in III.1. In his correspondence Joyce implicitly referred to this pattern\(^3\):

'I wanted it [I.6.11] as ballast and the whole piece [I.6] is to balance \(\wedge abcd [\text{Book III}]\) more accurately . . . \(\wedge \text{doctor}\) is a bit husky beside the more melodious Shaun of the third part . . .'

'I had a rather strange dream the other night. I was looking at a Turk seated in a bazaar. He had a framework on his knees and on one side he had a jumble of all shades of red and yellow skeins and on the other a jumble of greens and blues of all shades. He was picking from right and left very calmly and weaving away. It is evidently a split rainbow and also Parts I and III.'

To Frank Budgen he described the process of composing *Finnegans Wake*\(^4\):

'I am boring through a mountain from two sides. The question is, how to meet in the middle.'

This inverse relationship explains what Joyce meant by his statement that Book III is 'a description of a postman travelling backwards in the night through the events already narrated'.\(^5\) The dream-visions of Book III are a mirror-image of the legends of Book I, while both dreams and legends are rationalised in the underlying naturalism of Book II, on to which they converge. On this ground-plan Joyce builds up a dynamic set of relationships between youth and age which reproduce the outline of the 'Mental Traveller' situation. The pattern is


\(^{2}\) *Letters*, p. 232.

\(^{3}\) *Letters*, pp. 258, 261.

\(^{4}\) Givens, p. 24.

\(^{5}\) *Letters*, p. 214.
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clearest toward the end of Book IV but pervades the whole of Finnegans Wake as a general line of development. Shaun is being rejuvenated; during Book III he moves toward the dawn of creation, and his final appearance in Book IV as the ‘child Kevin’ concludes a long and complicated process by which he retreats through clouds of glory to the moment of his own birth and the conception which preceded it: ‘wurming along gradually for our savings backtowards motherwaters’ (84.30). Contemporaneous with Shaun’s hopeful rejuvenation is Anna’s despairing progress towards her old crone’s Liebestod at the end of Finnegans Wake. She, the passive element, moves with time’s arrow (with which, as the principle of flux, she is in any case to be identified); Shaun, the active, moves against it. As an inverted form of that ‘youth who daily farther from the East/Must travel’ (suggested by Wordsworthian echoes at 429.17), he literally grows younger as Book III progresses. In III.1 his twin brother Shem is old enough to be ‘CelebrAted’ (421.21); in III.2 Shaun has become the young lover, Jaun; in III.3 he is likened to ‘some chubby boybold of an angel’ (474.15); during III.4 he appears most of the time as an infant in the nursery. It does not seem to have been noticed that at the end of III.4 we have worked, ‘through the grand tryomphal arch’, right back to the birth, which is described with many details at 589–90. We are, in fact, ‘eskipping the clockback’ (579.05).\(^1\) At 472.16 the Ass alludes directly to Shaun’s journey backward to annihilation: ‘we follow reeding on your photophoric pilgrimage to your antipodes in the past’. Immediately after his reappearance for a moment in Book IV as the newborn baby,\(^2\) he retires via the vagina—‘amiddle of meeting waters’, which is to say inter urinas et faeces—into the womb—‘the ventrifugal principality’ (605.17)—surrounds himself with amniotic fluid in ever-decreasing volumes and crouches like a foetus until, a diminishing embryo, he disappears with a flash and an exclamation—‘Yee! . . . extinguish’; a moment later he re-enters as the two simple seeds from which he was composed,

\(^1\) Cf. also 585.31.

\(^2\) At this point Shaun is also playing the part of Christ immediately after the Resurrection; see Chapter Four.
represented by that opposed yet amalgamating couple, Berkeley and Patrick. The paragraph following the ‘Kevin’ episode is tinged with suitably copulatory imagery.

This is all primarily applied Blake, and the analogy with ‘The Mental Traveller’ also holds with respect to the other characters in *Finnegans Wake*. Earwicker, approaching the end his useful career in II.i, enters at the conclusion of that chapter as:

*An aged Shadow . . .
Wand’ring round an Earthly Cot*

and subsequently reappears (II.3) as the Host, who:

* . . .feeds the Beggar & the Poor
And the wayfaring Traveller*

The loves of Blake’s ‘Female Babe’ who springs from the hearth (Issy) and the ‘Man she loves’ (Tristan, II.4), ‘drive out the aged Host’ who tries to win a Maiden (his incestuous love for his daughter), and though from this love of old man and maid all social and physical disaster springs, it is, in *Finnegans Wake* as in ‘The Mental Traveller’, the only means whereby Earwickers may be rejuvenated as Shauns. Joyce’s Babe, Kevin—‘The child, a natural child’—is kidnapped (595.34), as is Blake’s Babe, and must then be nailed down upon the Rock of the Church by the Prankquean ‘with the nail of a top’ (22.15) as the seven-times circumscribed Saint so that Anna, the ‘weeping woman old’, may turn full circle back to her youth as a rainbow-girl. Closely allied to this use of Blake is Joyce’s special application of Yeats’ description of the soul’s post mortem progress through an inverted form of dream-life (the *Dreaming Back, Return and Shiftings*), but as this concerns the complex dream-structure of the book I have delayed a discussion of it until the next chapter.

**III: WHAT IS THE TI . . .?** (501.05)

From the initiating spermatic flood of creation, ‘riverrun’, to the soft syllable ‘the’—the most common in the English
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language—on which it comes to its whimpering end, the great mass of *Finnegans Wake* represents eternity; at the opposite extreme it seems to represent the fleeting, infinitesimal moment during which it used to be thought that even the longest dream took place:

‘be it a day or a year or even supposing, it should eventually turn out to be a serial number of goodness gracious alone knows how many days or years.’ (118.08; and cf. 194.06 ff)

Within these macro- and microcosmic limits *Finnegans Wake* functions at a number of symbolic levels, each based on its own particular time-period. As the main temporal cycles have not hitherto been properly understood, I shall sketch them in here, as briefly as possible, before going on to analyse the related dream-cycles. At the naturalistic level, corresponding to ‘Bloomsday’, *Finnegans Wake* is the detailed account of a single day’s activities; at the next remove it depicts a typical week of human existence; and, next in importance to the archetypal daily cycle, the book runs through a full liturgical year. There are many other time-schemes, of course, but these three are the most important.

The naturalistic plot, such as it is, is concerned with events at a public house near Dublin on one day fairly early in this century, while at the second level the individual incidents of this single day are divided up by Joyce and distributed in order throughout an entire week, thus expanding a daily into a weekly cycle. A morning event, for example, takes place on a Wednesday, an evening event on a Friday, and so on. Confusion resulting from the failure of the critics to appreciate this technique of time-expansion and compression has led to a misunderstanding about the day of the week on which the whole twenty-four hour cycle takes place. This is a Friday, not, as Mr. Edmund Wilson has it, a Saturday (5.24, 184.32, 399.21, 433.12). That the day of the Wake could not in any case be a Saturday is indicated by the fact that Dublin public-houses in Joyce’s day closed at

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10 p.m. on Saturday nights, whereas, as I point out below, Earwicker’s establishment closes at 11 p.m. (370), which was the normal closing time for Monday–Friday.¹ Joyce had not forgotten about Dublin’s Saturday night early-closing, since he alludes to it at 390.06.

At this point it is usual to say that Finnegans Wake is a night-piece, balancing Joyce’s day-book, Ulysses. Finnegans Wake is indeed a night-book in that it is supposed to be taking place in the mind of a sleeper, while Ulysses is a day-book in that it narrates the events of the waking-hours, but otherwise the dichotomy is not so complete. At least half of Ulysses, and that the more important, takes place after dark, while well over a third of Finnegans Wake is concerned with day-time activities. Almost the whole of Book I takes place in daylight; Book II represents the hours between dusk and midnight; Book III lasts from midnight to dawn; Book IV is the moment of sunrise. The plot of the novel can be understood only if this temporal pattern is kept clearly in mind. As with the general cyclic organisation, Joyce seems to have arrived at a clear conception of the time-scheme only after most of Book I had been completed. Books II, III, and IV therefore show much greater detail of temporal organisation, but, with this reservation, the overall scheme is fairly clear.

Book I opens with the morning’s drinking in the public house (6.14). The whole book, says Anna in her Letter, begins at the magical hour of 11.32 a.m.: ‘Femelles will be predaimant as from twentyeight to twelve’ (617.23), which seems to mean that Eve will precede Adam as from 11.32 a.m. This she does in the first line of Finnegans Wake: ‘riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s...’ At the end of Book I night falls as the six o’clock angelus is ringing (213.18–216.06). The cycle of daily activity is over and the two night cycles are to come.

Book II begins at about 8.30 p.m. with the pantomime, but a certain amount of working-back is necessary in order to establish this. The second chapter of the Book ends as the

¹ I am indebted to Mr. Desmond Kennedy, Assistant Librarian of the National Library of Ireland, for this information.
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children are sent to bed on the stroke of 10 p.m. (308); it has lasted just one hour, since at the end of II.1 they were heard praying for 'sleep in hour's time' (259.04). This first chapter therefore ends at 9 p.m. and, since the 'Mime' is called a 'thirty minutes war' (246.03), the dramatic action must begin (222.22) at 8.30 p.m., a normal hour for the start of a theatrical performance. The long chapter II.3 begins at 10 p.m. and lasts 'for one watthour' (310.25) until 'time jings pleas' at 11 p.m., when all the customers are sent home scowling. Earwicker falls drunk on the floor and, between 11 p.m. and midnight, is subject to the hallucinations of delirium tremens, in which he sees his bar-room transformed into the bridal-ship of Tristan and Isolde. By midnight he is safe in bed and about to fall asleep (403) so that some time must elapse between the end of II.4 and the beginning of III.1 to allow him to go upstairs to the bedroom (in the manner described at 556–7), change, and drowse off. It is therefore highly likely that Book II is to be considered as ending at 11.32 p.m., just half way round the twenty-four hour cycle.

Book III begins with the chimes of midnight, and the hour is stated at intervals throughout the Book until it ends, apparently at 4.32 a.m. Shaun hears the clock strike 2 a.m. at 449.25; 'the first quaint skreek of the gloaming' is seen at 474.21; at 586.23 the time is more precisely stated than anywhere else in Finnegans Wake:

'at such a point of time as this is... (half back from three gangs multiplussed on a twentylot add allto a fiver with the deuce or roamer's numbers ell a fee and do little ones).'

That is to say: '3.30, plus 20 minutes, plus 5 minutes, plus 2 minutes—the minute-hand being therefore two minutes past the Roman XI (elf, in German) on the clockface: 3.57 a.m.' (Messrs. Roamers are well known watchmakers. That 3.30 should be defined as 'half back from three' is attributable to the general reversibility of time in this Book.) The '57' may be arrived at by means of two other calculations which are hidden in the text to provide a further example of the principle that
any given fact in *Finnegans Wake* may be approached in a variety of ways:

\[2.5 \times 20 + 5 + 2 = 57\]

And, in Roman:

\[L + V + II = LVII\]

A dozen lines later three more minutes have elapsed and four o’clock rings out through a pair of bell-like spondees\(^1\): ‘Faurore! Fearhoure!’ The dawn, a fearful hour for the spirits of Book III, is breaking through the mists of sleep. We are still four pages from the end of the chapter and hence we may assume that the cycle of Book III finishes at the crucial hour of 4:32 a.m. (The chimes heard at 590.11 are very likely those of 4:30 a.m.)

Once again there is a pause between Books. Book IV begins and ends at 6 a.m. It is a timeless moment which yet contains all the seeds of the book. In the yearly frame of reference *Finnegans Wake* begins and ends at the vernal equinox, so that in Book IV the sun rises at 6 a.m. exactly. The sun is in fact rising as Book IV opens (593–4) and is still rising as it ends. All the substance of the chapter is in a state of momentary change-over from one cycle to the next and is here ‘frozen’ in the act. Book IV is indeed the most important of a number of ‘stills’ in ‘this allnights newseryreel’ (489.35). The sun-god, Earwicker, is drowsily stepping out of bed on the first page, but his wife has not yet coaxed him awake by 619.25; he is just peeping over the horizon at 594.21 ff., sending a beam of light through the druids’ circle and on to the altar; at 597.25 ff. he is still in the same position, while the dawn angelus (6 a.m.) is expected at any moment at 604.10. There is an amusing forewarning some fifty pages earlier, in III.4, that Book IV will end at exactly six o’clock. The court of twelve corrupt jurymen condemn Earwicker to ‘three months’ (558)—that is, to the three months of life which are represented by ‘his’ cycle (I.1–4; see below). This sentence, they say, is to be carried out ‘at six

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\(^1\) Throughout *Finnegans Wake* the spondee is associated with Shaun, the trochee with Anna or Issy, and, significantly, the pyrrhic with effete Shem; *see* note in British Museum Add. MS 47473, f. 137.
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O'clock shark'. A very literal-minded pun is intended here, for the particular 'sentence' that is 'carried out' is in fact the last sentence of Finnegans Wake, borne out to sea with Anna Livia and leading back into Book I to begin Earwicker's cycle. The better to establish the link between this judgment passage and the description of Anna's flowing out into the bay, Joyce includes a little marine imagery: 'shark', 'yeastwind'.

The 'week of the wakes' (608.30) is worked out in less detail, but a skeleton framework is laid down. The Temptation (the meeting with the 'Cad' or 'Assailant') takes place on a Wednesday (58.29, 62.28, 376.11, 565.05); this leads to the Fall on Thursday (5.13, 6.14, 491.27, 514.22) and to the Friday Wake for the dead (the twenty-four hour cycle that I have outlined above, where the whole of this weekly cycle is repeated in miniature); the spiritual Resurrection takes place on Sunday (593.01 ff.) and the body is buried, a little late, on the following Tuesday (617.20). After this everything is cleared away, by eight o'clock (617.27), ready for the cycle to begin over again on Wednesday morning.

The important yearly cycle is the simplest of all. Finnegans Wake begins at Easter, at 'about the first equinarch in the cholonder' (347.02); it ends at dawn on the following Easter Day, just before the Resurrection. Each of the four cycles in Books I–III apparently lasts for three months: I.1–4 represents Spring; the fertile I.5–8 in which Anna rises 'hire in her aisne aestimation' (204.02) is Summer, ending at 'milkidmass' (215.21), the autumnal equinox; II is Autumn, ending at Christmas (at 380.29 it is Thanksgiving Day); III is Winter ('white fogbow', 403.06), beginning with the entry of the Son and ending with the Good Friday death (590). Book IV is the moment of transition from Holy Saturday to Easter Morning. The four poles of Joyce's liturgical year are thus the equinoxes and the solstices, as they were in ancient times.\footnote{Cf. the four cycles on pp. 13–14.} The constant allusions to the twenty-nine February-girls suggest that the particular year in question is a leap-year, but I have not been able to determine which date Joyce had in mind if, as we may
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suppose, he gave *Finnegans Wake* a year to correspond with the 1904 of *Ulysses*.

All the complex time-schemes of *Finnegans Wake* are ultimately resolved in a mystical ‘Eternal Now’. The Eternal Now, the *nunc stans*, is a very old idea involving the mysterious simultaneity, in the eyes of the Absolute, of all that in ordinary experience is called past, present and future. The idea in one form or another was very much in the air in Joyce’s lifetime, after the rediscovery at about the turn of the century of the importance of time and its problems. Such passages as the following were not uncommon in the literature:

‘All parts of time are parts of an eternal “now”, and . . . we cannot fix any limits to the present or exclude from it any part of what we wrongly call “the past” and “the future”’.

There have been many variants of this basic concept, but all involve the proposition that events which seem to be ‘spaced’ in a temporal succession are present simultaneously—or, rather, out of time altogether—in the Eternal Now. That the historical cycles of *Finnegans Wake* are to be considered as evolved from the unhistorical Timeless is suggested many times: ‘one continuous present . . . history’ (185.36); ‘If there is a future in every past that is present . . . ’ (496.35)

Of the several symbols which have been used in attempts to render the concept intelligible, the most familiar must be that developed by T. S. Eliot in ‘Burnt Norton’ and the other Quartets: the revolving wheel or sphere with its central ‘dancing’ point, a point which, since it is a point, cannot be said to spin, and yet from which the whole circular movement emanates. The movement of the wheel represents, of course, common Time, while the tantalising mid-point serves as symbol for the Timeless. Joyce uses the same symbol but, always more given to literal interpretation, he provides within *Finnegans Wake* itself—that ‘gigantic wheeling rebus’, as the *Skeleton Key* calls it—a passage corresponding with the central point. Towards this point of eternity the rest of the book’s content is constantly

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Cyclic Form

impelled by the centripetal forces of death, dissolution and atonement. The central passage is, of course, Book IV: ‘There’s now with now’s then in tense continuant’ (598.28); ‘in a more or less settled state of equonomic ecolube equalobe equilab equilibbrium’. (599.17)

Figure I

‘through landsvague and vain, after many mandelays’ (577.23)

The timeless nature of Book IV is perhaps most clearly expressed in the St. Kevin episode. At Glendalough Kevin retires:
‘centripetally . . . midway across the subject lake surface to its supreem epicentric lake Ysle, whereof its lake is the ventrifugal principality.’ (605.15)
Cyclic Form

St. Kevin’s hermitage, as described by Joyce in these pages, is a very effective symbol of renunciation and spiritual stillness. At the mid-point of the universe—the ‘no placelike no timelike absolent’ (609.02)—Kevin, at one with Brahman, gives himself over to memoryless meditation: ‘memory extempore’ (606.08)—ex tempore since no memory of the past can exist in an Eternal Now.

The symbol of the circular universe with its timeless centre is also found in the figure of the Buddhist mandala which is of such importance to Jung.¹ This is the symbol ⊕ which, in the MSS, Joyce gave the highly important ninth question in I.6. His use of it to designate a passage dealing with the structure of Finnegans Wake suggests that in one structural sense the whole of the book forms a mandala, as in Figure 1, opposite, in which the four four-part cycles make the Wheel of Fortune, while Book IV lies at the ‘hub’.

A consequence of cosmic simultaneity is the potential immanence of eternity in any one point of time, and hence the seeds of any part of history may be present in any ‘event’. Cause and effect must also vanish with the disappearance of temporal sequence, and so here we find further rationalisation for the monadal principle underlying Joyce’s World Ages and for the frequent scattering of the book’s impulsive forces in an apparently arbitrary disarray. These structural principles are discussed at greater length in Chapters Six and Seven.

¹ See, for example, C. G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, New York, 1933, p. 188. See also Chapter Five, below.