CHAPTER EIGHT
TWO MAJOR MOTIFS

In this chapter I conclude my study of *Finnegans Wake* with a discussion of some aspects of two important motifs. The first, based on the quotation from Edgar Quinet in II.2, is a single modulating sentence of quite remarkable architectural beauty which is fully stated on six occasions and is always very clearly delineated. The second, the ‘Letter’, is, by contrast, a sprawling and somewhat formless motif-complex which, although it is only once quoted complete (615–19), recurs in literally hundreds of places in more or less fragmentary form, making its presence felt in the most widely divergent contexts.¹ I shall trace the Quinet motif through all its major occurrences in *Finnegans Wake*, but in the case of the more diffuse Letter I must content myself with a general survey of its symbolism and a brief discussion of one hitherto undiscovered source.

I: QUINET

The more repetition a book contains, the less easy it must obviously be for the writer to create motifs whose recurrence will arrest the attention of the reader. In writing a book so consistently repetitive as *Finnegans Wake* Joyce set himself the considerable technical problem of creating, for major architectonic or thematic purposes, a few outstanding motifs which would not be entirely swamped by the general flow of mutating material. His simplest solution to this difficulty was to turn aside from his normal custom of building up motifs from insignificant little phrases and to construct, or borrow, a number

¹ *See Appendix A.*
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of very long motifs which, by virtue of their unusual proportions might readily be picked out even on a casual reading—if anyone ever reads Finnegans Wake casually. The misquotation from Quinet is in some ways the most remarkable of these long motifs.

Stuart Gilbert quite correctly defined the technique of Finnegans Wake as ‘pointilliste throughout’.¹ The development of a style which involved the manipulation of ever smaller and more autonomous units eventually led Joyce to the point where, as I have suggested above, he could insert short, detached phrases in any one of a number of places in the text. Yet in spite of the unusually fragmentary nature of Joyce’s own mature literary methods, he seems never to have abandoned his youthful admiration for ‘supple periodic prose’ in the work of other writers. Even as late as 1935 he stuck to his unpopular assertion that Newman was the greatest of English prose-stylists.² This love of simplicity in others may well have been a psychological reaction against the complexity of his own writing very similar to that which induced him momentarily to lower his defences and publish Pomes Penyeach.³ In a somewhat lyrical mood he incorporated the Quinet sentence into the text of Finnegans Wake in the original French (281.04). While this is the only quotation of any length to be included in the book, it is interesting to note that Joyce has misquoted no less than six times, almost certainly due to faulty memory⁴:

‘Aujourd’hui, comme aux jours de Pline et de Columelle, la jacinthe se plait dans les Gaules, la pervenche en Illyrie, la marguerite sur les ruines de Numance; et pendant qu’autour d’elles les villes ont changé de maîtres et de nom, que plusieurs sont rentrées dans le néant, que les civilisations se sont choquées et brisées, leurs paisibles générations ont traversé les âges et se

² Letters, p. 366.
³ Cf. also the quotation from Nino Frank, above, p. 29.
⁴ See the plate between pp. 128 and 129 in Mrs. Maria Jolas’ A James Joyce Yearbook, Paris, 1949, which reproduces an even more corrupted version in Joyce’s hand; this shows clear signs of having been written out from memory.
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sont succédé l’une à l’autre jusqu’à nous, fraîches et riantes comme aux jours des batailles.’

The sentence is taken from the Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire de l’humanité, a general and attractively written essay which Joyce probably found congenial, but which he does not seem to have used in Finnegans Wake in any other way.¹ The version in Finnegans Wake reads as follows:

‘Aujourd’hui comme aux temps de Pline et de Columelle la jacinthe se plaît dans les Gaules, la pervenche en Illyrie, la marguerite sur les ruines de Numance et pendant qu’autour d’elles les villes ont changé de maîtres et de noms, que plusieurs sont entrées dans le néant, que les civilisations se sont choquées et brisées, leurs paisibles générations ont traversé les âges et sont arrivées jusqu’à nous, fraîches et riantes comme aux jours des batailles.’

Joyce’s change of jours to temps renders the echoes at the beginning and end of the sentence less exact; the changes of punctuation and the substitution of noms for nom are not serious (though nom is the more usual French), but by reading entrées for rentrées Joyce has surely thrown away much of the sentence’s power to suggest the cyclic nature of history. The final change—sont arrivées for se sont succédé l’une à l’autre—may perhaps be intentional since it considerably improves the rhythmic balance, but this is in any case just the kind of stylistic improvement we should expect Joyce to make unconsciously when quoting from memory.

There is rather more to the sentence than its simple content might suggest for it may be interpreted as a type-example of imitative form on a small scale—an idea which may never have occurred to Quinet, but of which Joyce makes full use. A brief analysis will show how well suited it is to Joyce’s purposes. Perhaps the most immediately obvious thing about the sentence is that, like Finnegans Wake, it is a closed circle. After the word Aujourd’hui with which it begins, we step immediately back into the past: comme aux temps de Pline et de Columelle. For Vico,

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whom Quinet studied and translated, the days of Pliny and Columella, when western Rome was on the way toward its destruction, represented the *ricorso* period of transition between two great historical cycles and formed the prelude to a new Theological Age. The historians presiding over the sentence are a symbolic brother-pair who, apart from the role they play in the five variations of the motif, appear twice more in *Finnegans Wake* (255.18, 319.07). They are particularly relevant to II.2 where the brother-battle is beginning to be openly expressed during the geometry and history lessons. The symbolic flowers, clearly identified throughout the book with the tempting young girls, follow hard on the heels of these illustrious 'twins'. Having rapidly established the primary male and female principles, Quinet now lets the sentence move forward again in time from late Roman days, so that it passes over what are in fact three Viconian Ages (post-Roman times, feudal Europe, Vico's own times) until it 'rearrives' (*sont arrivées*) at the next Age of dissolution and changeover which Joyce obviously equates with the twentieth century (*jusqu'à nous*). A return to the past is implied in the concluding phrase, *comme aux jours des batailles*, echoing the words *comme aux temps* [or *jours*] *de Pline et de Columelle* with which the sentence began; the cyclic pattern, the BELLUM-PAX-BELLUM (281.R1) is thus clearly established. This verbal echo further justifies Joyce's identification of the twin historians—who might otherwise seem to be no more than passive onlookers—with the eternal combatants. The continuity of the female element, the flowers, is expressed through a neat counterpoint of form and content: even in the central phrases of the sentence, where the transitory nature of the rough male City is under discussion, the rhythm is fluent and gentle.

Joyce was essentially an indoor man, a city dweller. All his books before *Finnegans Wake* are urban. Nature in the Wordsworthian sense seems to have meant little to him, and although in *Finnegans Wake* river and mountain, flower and tree are for the first time used as major recurrent symbols, they are little more than stylised icons which rarely develop into sensuous, living images. In *A Portrait* the rural setting of Clongowes Wood
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College is barely mentioned and fulfills no important function as it might have done in, say, a Lawrence, while the more recently published pages from Stephen Hero, dealing with rural Mullingar, show how out of touch Joyce felt when he attempted to write naturalistically about events in settings outside his native city. The biographies have little to say about holidays spent away from city life, and the Letters contain very little mention of the natural world (except, of course, for the frequent allusions to the Liffey, which formed an essential part of Joyce’s urban Dublin). Mr. Frank Budgen insists that Joyce detested flowers, and indeed even the graceful periwinkle, hyacinth and daisy of Quinet’s sentence are prized more for the abstractions they embody than for their sensuous qualities. Soon after Joyce begins to rework the sentence, he transforms the flowers into a giggling group of lewd schoolgirls, and then into a variety of other rapidly mutating symbols. This is not to say that the book would be better otherwise. In too many places it is already dangerously near to a sentimentality which any softening of Joyce’s hard, stylised approach to natural objects could only tend to exaggerate.

The Quinet motif is intimately bound up with the ‘change-of-sex’ theme, the ‘MUTUOMORPHOMUTATION’ (281.R1), as I shall presently demonstrate. First, however, a few comments about Joyce’s numerology are needed. All the numbers up to seven, and a few beyond that, are associated with major characters, or groups of characters. The following are the most important identifications:

0 Anna, ‘Mother Zero’; a female symbol
1 Earwicker, the ithyphallic father
2 Isolde and her ‘looking-glass’ girl; the pair of tempting girls in the Park; the washerwomen. (All of these pairs are of course equivalent.)
3 the English soldiers who apprehend Earwicker in the Phoenix Park
4 the Old Androgynes

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5 the Four, with their Ass
6 the twelve customers often seem to be made up of six
    men, each playing two parts (e.g., 'a choir of the
    O'Daley O'Doyles doublesixing the chorus', 48.13)
7 the 'Rainbow-girls', allied to the '2'
10 the Father and Mother in union (see 308, and SK 162–3)
12 the Customers
28 the 'February-girls'—an expanded form of the '7'. (The
    algebraical sum of 7 = 28.)
29 Isolde, the leap-year-girl
40 always associated with Anna; possibly her age at the
    naturalistic level
111 Anna's three children multiplied by a trick of notation;
    also the kabbalistic total of 'A–L–P' (A = 1, L = 30,
    P = 80)¹

These are the primary identifications but Joyce likes the idea
of cosmic reciprocity and hence whenever possible he balances
a numerical group of one sex with an identical group of the
opposite sex, so creating an analogy with the concept of 'anti-
particles' in modern physics.² Thus the female duo is reflected
in the Shem-Shaun partnership, while the three soldiers—who
seem to be Shem, Shaun, and a form of their father, HCE—are
balanced by a female trinity made up of Isolde, her mirror-
image, and 'their' mother, Anna Livia. In the Quintet sentence
the female duo and the male trio are made to appear in their
inverted forms, but each of these groups plays a part which is
a combination of the activities of the 'primary' '2' and the
'primary' '3'—the tempting of the sinner and his subsequent
apprehension. Thus the belligerent Pliny and Columella, whose
rather feminine-sounding names seem to have suggested to Joyce
that they were invert,³ solicit homosexually, while the three
nymphomaniac flowers peep through the shrubbery as do the
spying soldiers. Joyce makes this point in a marginal gloss: the

¹ See S. L. Mac Gregor Mathers, The Kabbalah Unveiled, London, 1887, p. 3.
² It will be noticed that '4' and '10' are the only numbers which Joyce
    makes intrinsically androgynous; 4 is the 'perfect number' (see above,
    p. 142), and the algebraical sum of 4 = 10.
³ E.g., 'medams culonelle' (351.31).
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two historians are ‘Dons Johns’—two gallants—while the three flowers are ‘Totty Askins’, that is, they are both juvenile (‘totty’) seducers who ask for the attention of the males whom they always rebuff, and also three enemy (English) soldiers. This succinct identification of the girls and the soldiers is further emphasised in the right-hand note, ‘BELLETRISTICS’, which seems to be Joyce’s coinage for Amazons with a literary bias.

Isobel writes two footnotes to Quinet, in the second of which she suggests that the flatus of his very spiritual style be transmuted into the rather more solid matter to be found on Anna Livia’s cloacal scrap of tissue:

‘Translout that gaswind into turfish, Teague, that’s a good bog and you, Thady, poliss it off, there’s a nateswipe, on your blottom pulper’.

Joyce takes Isobel’s advice and parodies the sentence in five places in Finnegans Wake, thus ‘translouting’ it into his Irish ‘turfish’ and thoroughly assimilating it into the book. (I have used the word ‘parody’ here for want of a better. Joyce is not really parodying Quinet at any point, but refashioning his sentence word by word to suit new contexts—an altogether different art for which no adequate term seems to exist. The five ‘parodies’ are more like free translations into various dialects of ‘Djoytsch’.) Stylistically, Quinet’s sentence is direct, lyrical, and simple—in short, all that Finnegans Wake is not. By the time Joyce was composing his last book he was long past the stage when he could comfortably write such simple stuff as this, however much he may have admired it. The result is that all his reworkings inevitably annihilate Quinet’s rather too self-conscious grace and delicacy. As I shall show below, Joyce has in every case considerably elaborated and extended the original material, but it is interesting to see how the necessity to compose within a more or less predetermined form has very largely curbed his habit of expansion and interpolation. The first three parodies (those on pages 14–15, 117, and 236) were incorporated relatively early in their respective chapters and although in

1 Cf. the Russian General’s cleaning himself with a sod of Irish turf (353.15).
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successive manuscript versions the surrounding passages have in each case been greatly developed and expanded, the parodies have remained almost untouched. In their earliest forms they read as follows:

'Since the high old times of Hebear and Hairyman the cornflowers have been staying at Ballymun, the duskrose has choosed out Goatstown's crossroads, twolips have pressed togatherthem by sweet Rush, townland of twinlights the white-thorn and redthorn have fairygayed the mayvalleys of Knockmaroon and though for rings round them during a hundred thousand yeargangs, the Formoreans have brittled the Tooath of the Danes and the Oxman has been pestered by the Firebugs & the Joynts have thrown up wallmutting & Little on the Green is childsfather of the city, these paxsealing buttonholes have quadrilled across the centuries and here now whiff to us, fresh & made-of-all-smiles as on the day of Killallwhoo.'

(British Museum Add. MS 47482 A, ff. 101–2. This was the first of the parodies to be written, and dates from 1926. See Letters, p. 246.)

'Since nozzy Nanette tripped palmyways with Highho Harry there's a spurtfire turf a'kind o'kindling whenoht as the souf-souff blows her petties up and a claypot wet for thee, my Sitys, and talkatalka till Tibbs have eve: and whathough billiousness has been billiousness during milliums of millenions and our mixed racings have been giving two hoots or three jeers for the grape, vine, and brew and Pieter's in Nieuw Amsteldam and Paoli's where the poules go and rum smelt his end for him and he dined off sooth american this oldworld epistola of their weatherings and their marryings and their buryings and their natural selections has combled tumbled down to us fersch and made-at-all-hours like an auld cup on tay.'

(Add. MS 47473, f. 102. This version dates from the second half of 1927, when Joyce was revising the Criterion III text of I.5 for transition 5, August 1927. See J. J. Slocum and H. Cahoon, A Bibliography of James Joyce 1882–1941, London, 1953, pp. 99, 101, sections C.64, and C. 70.)

'Since the days of Roamaloose and Rehmoose the pavanos have 189
been stridend through the struts of Chapelldiseut, the vaulses have meed and youldled through the purly ooze of Ballybough, many a mismy cloudy has tripped tauntily along that hercourt strayed reelway and the rigadoons have held ragtimed revels on the plateauplain of Grangegorman; and though since then sterlings and guineas have been replaced by brooks and lions and some progress has been made on stilths and the races have come and gone and Thyme, that chef of seasoners, has made his usual astewte use of endadjustables and whatnot willbe isnor was, those danceadeils and cancanzanies have come stum-mering down for our begayment through the bedeafdom of po’s greats, the obcocity of pa’s teapuc’s, as lithe and limb free limber as when momie played at ma.’

(Add. MS 47477, f. 21. This was the third of the parodies to be written, and dates from 1930. *See Letters*, p. 295. It is interesting to note that in all later versions the word ‘stilths’ has been corrupted to ‘stilts’.)

The fourth parody (354) is a special case, since the passage in question went through two stages of composition before it occurred to Joyce to turn it into a fresh treatment of Quinet: ‘Forfise and formicular allonall and in particular till budly shoots the rising germinal badly.’

(Add. MS 47480, f. 68.)

‘When old the wormd was a gadden opter and apter were Twummily twims and if fieforlife fells farforficular allonalls not too particular so till budly shoots the rising germinal let bodley chew the fat of his auger and budley bite the dustice of the piece.’

(Add. MS 47480, f. 67; it is possible that ‘auger’ should read ‘anger’.)

Joyce worked this up into a parody of Quinet for the *transition* text; once again the earliest version of the parody is almost identical to the final printed text:

‘When old the wormd was a gadden and Anthea first unfoiled her limbs Wanderloot was the way the wold wagged and opter and apter were samuraised twimbs. They had their mutthering ivies and their murdhering idies and their mouldhering iones in that muskat grove but there’ll be bright Plinnyflowers in
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Calomella’s cool bowers when the magpyre’s babble towers scorching and screeching from the ravenindove. If thees liked the sex of his head and mees ates the seeps of his traublers he’s dancing figgies to the spittle side and shoving outs the soord. And he’ll be buying buys and gulling gells with his carme, silk and honey while myandthys playing lancifer lucifug and what’s duff as a bettle for usses makes cosyn corallines’ moues weeter to wee. So till butagain budly budly [sic] shoots thon rising germinal let bodley chew the fatt of his anger and badley bide the toil of his tubb.’


The final parody (615) was apparently one of the last passages of Finnegans Wake to be composed, since it was not added to Book IV until after the proofs had been set up. The printed text is almost exactly the same as the MS insertion.¹ (The decision to include the quotation in French in II.2 also seems to have been made quite late.)

The original quotation and all the finished parodies are closely associated in the text with commentaries on them which rehearse the basic situation, or much of it, in fresh terms, and in some cases can almost be said to represent further minor variations on the motif. The paragraph following the quotation in II.2 discusses Quinet’s ideas with vivacity and disrespectful wit:

‘Margaritomancy! Hyacinthinous pervinciveness! Flowers. A cloud. But Bruto and Cassio are ware only of trifid tongues the whispered wilfulness, (’tis demonal!) and shadows shadows multiplicanting (il folsoletto nel falsotto col fazzolotto dal fuzzolezzo), totients quotients, they tackle their quarrel. Sickamoor’s so woful sally. Ancient’s aerger. And eachway bothwise glory signs. What if she love Sieger less though she leave Ruhm moan? That’s how our oxyggent has gotten ahold of half their world. Moving about in the free of the air and mixing with the ruck. Enten eller, either or.’

¹ British Museum Add. MS 47488, ff. 195–6.
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One can sense in the outburst of exclamation points the relief with which Joyce, for all his praise of Quinet, turned again to the freedom of his own manner. That the sentence in its original and parodied forms is an important touchstone for the whole of *Finnegans Wake* is suggested by the marginal gloss to this commentary: 'SORTES VIRGINIANAE'—for those with eyes to see, all our fates are to be found written in the Book of the Virgins, whose mystic invincibility (deriving perhaps from invincible ignorance) seems to be implicit in Joyce's translation of their names. These names once again allude to the masculine, soldierly aspect of the flowers, for Hyacinthus was a homosexual Spartan boy, 'Margaritomancy!' may be read 'Margarit, a man, see!', and Joyce seems to derive *pervinca* from *pervinco*.

In a charming prelude to the first parody (14), the basic materials of the sentence are presented in a pastoral setting. The polar principles underlying the scene of battles, death and regrowth, are to be found 'neath the stone pine' where the 'pastor lies with his crook'.\(^1\) The androgynous twins are a pair of grazing sheep—'pricket' and 'pricket's sister'—while the 'herb trinity' seem once again to be female, as on page 281: 'amaid' (14:33). The eternal scene having been set—'Thus, too, for donkey's years'—the parody of Quinet may follow: 'Since the bouts of Hebear and Hairyman . . . .'

Joyce's inevitable elaborations have allowed the flowers to increase their number to six: 'cornflowers . . . duskrose . . . twolips . . . whitethorn . . . redthorn . . . may-\(^2\)', while the garden in which they grow is now located in Ireland. The parody is pregnant with cross-references to other themes and motifs, as we should expect. The word 'riantes' of the original is rendered by 'made-of-all-smiles', which recurs in the next parody as 'made-of-all-hours' (117:29), thus suggesting both the girls' timeless qualities and their constant sensual willingness; the important figure 1000\(^2\) appears here as 'chiliad'; the

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\(^1\) The crook is Eve, made from Adam's bent rib; cf. 'Hic cubat edilis. *Apud libertinam parvulam*' (7:22).

\(^2\) See Concordance.
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round of twenty-nine words for ‘Peace’ (470–71)—which forms a complete cycle in itself, and recurs in III.3 as twenty-nine words for ‘Dead’ (499.04)—is heralded in both forms by the phrase ‘paxsealing buttonholes’, implying that the flowers both bring peace and seal up with wax the Letter of life that they help to write. (There is, as I shall show, a constant and close association of the Letter with Quinet’s sentence.) The most important of the cross-references, however, is the inclusion of the old dance to the rhythm of which the flowers are made to arrive jusqu’à nous: ‘quadrilled across the centuries’. The dance is continually used in Finnegans Wake as a symbol of communication and of cyclic progress. When they chant ‘Peace’ the leap-year girls dance widdershins around Shaun-Osiris, as if around a phallic may-pole and, even more significantly perhaps, they execute a sacred ‘trepas’\(^1\) when they change this chant to ‘Dead’, on the occasion of his *sparagmos* (499). I have already mentioned Joyce’s repeated assertion that the cyclic scheme of Finnegans Wake ‘is like a rumba round my garden’.\(^2\) Quinet’s flowers grow in the garden of the world as civilisations clash and break, so that in the ‘rumba’ of historical progress we may now perhaps hear a suggestion of the rumble of ‘toppling masonry’.

Into the commentary which follows the first parody Joyce pours all the superfluity of material that could not be squeezed into the parody itself; useful ideas apparently flowed all too fast. This is one case where the very richness of Joyce’s thinking became something of an embarrassment to him. He had already blown the sentence up to more than one and half times its original length (119 words against Quinet’s 75) and had left only the vaguest rhythmic similarity. The decoration of the classical model with a mass of baroque ornamentation had to stop before poor Quinet disappeared altogether. But, as usual, Joyce manages to turn difficulty to his own advantage, for repetition ‘in outhers wards’ is, after all, what he is looking for most of the time in Finnegans Wake; if he has too much material for any given thematic statement he simply repeats himself

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\(^1\) *Trepas* (Fr.) = death.

\(^2\) *See* above, Chapter Five, III.
until the material is exhausted. This new flow of rich and evocative symbols gives further valuable insights into the primary situation. The rhythmic superiority of Joyce's free style is at once apparent:

'The babbelers with their thangas vain have been (confusium hold them!) they were and went; thigging thugs were and houhnhymn songtoms were and comely norgels were and polly-fool fiansees. Menn have thawed, clerks have surrssurhummed, the blond has sought of the brune: Elsekiss thou may, mean Kerry piggy?: and the duncelames have countered with the hellish fellows: Who ails tongue coddeau, aspace of dumbill-silly? And they fell upong one another: and themselves they have fallen. And still nowanights and by nights of yore do all bold floras of the field to their shyfaun lovers say only: Cull me ere I wilt to thee!: and, but a little later: Pluck me whilst I blush! Well may they wilt, marry, and profusedly blush, be troth! For that saying is as old as the howitts. Lave a whale while in a whillbarrow (isn't it the truath I'm tallin ye?) to have fins and flippers that shimmy and shake. Tim Timmycan tamped hir, tampting Tam. Fleppety! Flippety! Fleapow!

Hop!'

In the second parody, on page 117, the brother-pair, who had been incarnated on page 14 as cavemen equivalents of Heber and Heremon, take on the form of a music-hall song-and-dance team: 'Since nozzy Nanette tripped palmyways with Highho Harry...'. The three flowers, on the other hand, no longer figure as individuals, but as a collective symbol, the Letter: 'this oldworld epistola'. In identifying the flower-girls with their Letter, Joyce is even more literally putting into practice Isolde's suggestion in her second footnote on page 281. It is significant that while this is the version in which the Quinet-Letter identification is made most explicit, it is also the parody which departs most from the rhythms and general organisation of the original (except for the special case on page 354); Joyce is opting for more 'turfish' and less French. It is particularly rich in allusions to other motifs and their associated symbols, the most salient of these being the cup-of-tea-and-pot still-life which
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is usually in evidence somewhere in the middle-ground whenever the Letter is under discussion. The water for the wetting of the tea and the consequent creation of a new world is heated over the fire of ‘Pat’s Purge’ (117.18)—an amusing conceit by means of which Joyce closely associates the tea symbol with the ubiquitous Phoenix-Magic-Fire theme. Bridget and Patrick enter with their constant litany of ‘taufauf’—‘mishe mishe’; ¹ modified here to ‘souffsouff’ and ‘talkatalka’, and since Bridget and Patrick are a constantly recurring brother-and-sister pair, their solemn ritual is evidently to be identified with the theatrical frivolities of ‘Nanette’ and ‘Harry’.

The survival of the Letter-posy over the ‘billiousness’ of infirm ‘mixed racings’ is developed in a very direct statement of the Viconian cyclic principle: ‘this oldworld epistola of their weatherings and their marryings and their buryings and their natural selections has combed tumbled down to us fersch and made-at-all-hours like an ould cup on tay.’

The scene of the rise and fall of masculine glory has meanwhile been shifted from Ireland (15) back to Europe—‘Pieter’s in Nieuw Amsteldam and Paoli’s where the poules go’—or perhaps even farther afield—‘he dined off sooth american’—but wherever the comedy may be played out the slow progress of history is seen to be like nothing so much as the gigantic drinking party of Finnegans Wake: ‘two hoots or three jeers for the grape vine and brew’. The whole of this parody is in fact a further stage in Joyce’s reduction of the nightmare of history to a ‘shout in the street’.

The jours des batailles, which in the first parody were metamorphosed into an Irish bloodbath on the ‘eve of Killallwho’, are now no more than a storm in ‘an ould cup on tay’.² Joyce is identifying the fighting in the field with the sexual battle which assures the continued existence of the race of flowers, and in so doing he is postulating the ultimate interdependence

¹ See Appendix A.
² See F. M. Bolderoff, Reading Finnegans Wake, New York, 1959, pp. 182 ff. for some interesting comments on the function of tea-symbolism in Finnegans Wake.

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of Quinet's opposed principles of war and peace, mortality and continuity. This is yet another example of the far-reaching ways in which *leitmotivs* work for Joyce, for without the structural correspondence 'jours des batailles'-ould cup on tay', which the motif establishes, Joyce's point would be lost.

In the brilliantly concise version of the sentence on page 236 the two Roman historians have been transformed into the traditional founders of their city—'Roamaloose and Rehmoose'—a rather less pacific couple. After having quadrilled across the centuries which separate I.1 and II.1, the flowers have been refined away until nothing remains of them but the essence of their dances—the pavans, waltzes, reels, and rigadoons—while the scene of their seductive frolics has once more been shifted back to Ireland. The alternations of Irish and overseas backgrounds to the parodies (14–15, Ireland; 117, Europe and South America; 236, Ireland; 354, Eden; 615, 'our mutter nation') parallel the many other oscillations of locality in *Finnegans Wake*—Tristan's loves in Brittany and Ireland, Shem's trips to Australia, Shaun's to the United States. Later on in the sentence, after it has moved forward in time, the older dances mentioned above are seen to have developed into the crazy modern gaiety of the Parisian cancan ("cancanzanies"), which stimulates the frustrated Earwicker to the point of *bégayement* ("begayment").

The destruction of the expendable male aspects of the world is equated with the preparation of food—"Thyme, that chef of seasoners, has made his usual astewte use of endadjustables" (236.27)—which is one of the favourite pastimes of fat-bellied Shaun to whom the 'dimb dumbelles' (236.08) pander at every turn. (The dumb-bell—the mathematical sign for infinity, ∞—is, of course, an especially suitable symbol for Joyce's immortal but empty-headed and vulgar flower-girls.) The seasoning of history's stew is just one more aspect of the 'Eating the God' theme which Joyce took over from Frazer, and, after all, says Joyce, no matter how often the Host may go a progress through the guts of a communicant, the true God remains whole, inviolate. However destructive and degenerate Shaun's
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gourmandising may seem, nothing is really destroyed in the process; the laws of conservation always hold, so that ‘whatnot willbe isnor’. History, like the kaleidoscope of *Finnegans Wake*, simply rearranges a number of ‘endadjustables’, and the sharing out of the God among the congregation, though it symbolises the continuity of life, is no more than a juggling with the distribution of the same particles of Being. Through past eons (236.30) and past epochs (236.31) the flower-dancers have continued to survive the *jours des batailles* which are no longer equated, as on page 117, with the lively and ‘fizzin’ (308) cup of tea, but with the struggles of the ageing Anna to remain fertile. Book II is the Book of the Children; Anna has been replaced, and we watch the pitiful spectacle of the already mummified woman playing at the motherhood of which she is no longer capable (236.31). The cup of tea that was once her most important fertility-symbol reappears in this parody, but only in association with the deaf, purblind, and obsessed old man of a past age, who has been supplanted just as his wife has: ‘the bedeafdom of po’s taeorns, the obcecty of pa’s teapucs’. Furthermore, as Joyce uses back-slang for the cup (‘teapucs’) we may fairly assume that it is upsidedown and hence, like Omar’s glass, empty. The word ‘teapucs’ may also contain the ‘specs’ necessary to combat pa’s approaching blindness; there seems to be at least one physical defect that Earwicker shares with his myopic secondbest son, Shem.

In the preceding paragraph Anna Livia’s *billet doux* (‘billy . . . coo’) is identified with the Missal used at the communion, but when an office from it is sung—‘and sing a missal too’—this is discovered, rather surprisingly, to be no more than the latest version of Quinet. Joyce could hardly have made greater claims for his motif.

The fourth parody is by far the most difficult of the set, and at the same time one of the most significant. The supreme importance of Quinet’s sentence in *Finnegans Wake* is emphasised by the use to which Joyce puts this version—namely to conclude the central ‘Butt and Taff’ conversation as the two speak in unison for the first and only time. The passage is so dense with
meaning that it will be as well to quote the final polished text in full:

‘When old the wormd was a gaddened and Anthea first unfoiled her limbs wanderloot was the way the wood wagged where opter and apter were samuraised twimb. They had their muttering ivies and their murdhering idies and their mouldhering iries in that muskat grove but there’ll be bright plinny-flowers in Calomella’s cool bowers when the magpyre’s babble towers scorching and screeching from the ravenindove. If thees lobed the sex of his head and mees ates the seep of his traublers he’s dancing figgies to the spittle side and shoving outs the soord. And he’ll be buying buys and go gulling gells with his flossim and jessim of carb, silk and honey while myandthys playing lancifer lucifug and what’s duff as a bettle for usses makes coy cosyn corollanes’ moues weeter to wee. So till but-again budly shoots thon rising germinal let bodley chow the fatt of his anger and badley bide the toil of his tubb.’

This is the only occasion on which Quinet’s single sentence has been broken down by Joyce into more than one—a fact which must be accounted for by the peculiar circumstances of the parody’s genesis. The flowers have been transported away from time and space and made to blossom in the Garden of Eden, the site at which so many of Joyce’s motifs are allowed to play themselves out. It will be seen that Pliny and Columella are once again present in person and that Anna Livia herself makes a third with her girls, in the guise of Aphrodite Antheia. In this passage, however, Joyce has gone far beyond Quinet, on to whose little sentence he has piled allusion after allusion to virtually every major theme in *Finnegans Wake*, including the Fall, ritual murder, blindness, Wagnerian Magic-Fire, the dance, Irish nationalism, homosexuality, simony, and micturition.

On page 615, where the last of the parodies immediately precedes the fullest and most important version of the Letter, the association of the two motifs is given its final and simplest expression. Since Book IV is the Age of Vico’s *ricorso*, in which dawn begins to disperse many mists, Joyce reverts to a rather
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closer adherence to the rhythms and content of the original sentence. Pliny and Columella reappear almost undisguised, and the three flowers flourish again in the forms which Quinet gave them. Even here, however, there are numerous complexities. Columella doubles with Columkille, thus making another link in the long chain of correspondences that Joyce is always at pains to establish between Ireland and Rome.¹ The three flowers from Gaul, Illyria, and Numancia, now show by their names that they in fact owe allegiance to more than one nation: the hyacinth from Gaul (‘all-too-ghoulish’) is also Italian (‘Giacinta’); the Illyrian periwinkle has French ancestry (‘Pervenche’); the Spanish daisy among the ruins of Numancia is half English (‘Margaret’). In the last analysis they all belong to Ireland: ‘our mutter nation’.

The most interesting change in this final parody is the inclusion for the first time of a clear symbol of male immortality. ‘Finnius the old One’ also endures through the ‘hophazzards’ of history. Though the manifestations of the masculine principle seem more transient than those of the feminine, the underlying essence of Finn the Giant is no less real or indestructible than that of Anna Livia with her twenty-nine tributaries. Finn will wake again at ‘Cockalooralooralooomenos’. (This is one of the last appearances in Finnegans Wake of the cockcrow motif which throughout the book forms a trinity with the thundervoice (Father) and the Word ‘whiskey’ (holy spirit), and shares with them the privilege of awakening the fallen hero to new life.)

The tea-table with cup, saucer, and tea-pot is now reset as the morning breakfast-table at which eggs are to be eaten: ‘there’ll be iggs for breckers come to mournhim’ (12.14). At least one version of the Letter is written on the shells of these eggs—‘there’s scribings scrawled on eggs’ (615.10)—and as they are broken open to be eaten we at last understand how it is that the ‘punctuation’ of the Letter is supplied by the fork of the Professor at the Breakfast Table (124), although the attempt to eat boiled eggs with a fork seems to brand the Professor as

¹ Cf., for example, ‘The seanad and the pobbel queue’s remainder’ (434-35).
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one of the absent-minded variety. As always, Joyce aims for a duality of function in his symbolism, so that the ‘piping hot’ morning tea-pot is made to serve also as Molly-Josephine’s orange-keyed night-utensile, the ‘Sophy-Key-Po’ of 9.34.¹ Having so firmly established the association of the Letter with the eggs on which it is written, with the generative power of tea, and with the cycle of ingoing and outgoing water, Joyce then hatches the complete text (615–19).

II: THE LETTER

Though neither so poetic as the Anna Livia motifs (215–16) nor so satisfactorily controlled as the Quinet sentence, the wonderfully rich and expressive motif-complex which makes up the Letter must rank first among the many ‘expanding symbols’ in Finnegans Wake. Significantly, it begins with the word ‘Reverend’ (615.12)—pronounced in popular Irish speech almost exactly like ‘riverrun’—and goes on to treat every theme in Finnegans Wake, so that it very quickly comes to stand for the book itself. Detailed correspondences proliferate in all directions as the Letter is developed in every conceivable context: it is a French letter which the lewd Shaun introduces into the hermaphroditic pillar-box (‘a herm, a pillarbox’, 66.26); ‘Every letter is a hard . . .' (623.33), says Anna, and she is obviously making an allusion to Earwicker’s virility as well as to the obscurity of his means of expression; it is any and every letter of the alphabet, which forms yet another cyclic microcosm; interpreted as the agent from the verb ‘to let’, it is both a charter of liberty and a source of inhibition for HCE and for all who may read it; it is the ‘leader’ and the ‘latter’—the first and the last, Genesis and Revelation; it is the sea itself, source of all: ‘The Letter! The Letter!’²

Numerous important sources for the Letter have already been discussed in published criticism and it seems likely that

¹ ‘Piping hot’ is an important motif associated with micturition in Ulysses, U 511, 526.
² See Appendix A.
others will come to light as work on *Finnegans Wake* continues. Before going on to treat some of the Letter’s symbolism, I shall mention only one more source which does not yet seem to have been noticed: namely, Sheehy-Skeffington’s *Michael Davitt.*

This includes perhaps the best-known account of the once celebrated ‘pen letter’, which was sent by Davitt to a young Fenian with the object of dissuading him from murdering a fellow member of their group. In his letter Davitt pretended to fall in with the young man’s design in order that he might gain sufficient time to prevent the crime, which in fact he succeeded in doing. The letter, ostensibly agreeing with the proposed plan to carry out a murder, proved to be Davitt’s downfall, however, for it was used as evidence against him in a trial at which he was sentenced to more than nine years of detention, some of it spent in solitary confinement; he also had to fight his ‘penisolate war’. The document came to known as the ‘pen letter’ because in it Davitt referred to the murder-weapon (a revolver) by the usual Fenian cant term, ‘pen’. Throughout *Finnegans Wake* ‘pen’ and ‘Letter’ go together, of course; it is Shem the Penman, modelled partly on Davitt himself, who writes the Letter, and it is he who brandishes a revolver under Earwicker’s nose in I.2. The word ‘pen’ is often used in contexts of fighting and bloodshed, which suggests that Joyce is using it in the Fenian sense:

‘his penname SHUT’ (182.32)
‘Is the Pen Mightier than the Sword?’ (306.18)
‘murthers . . . so apt as my pen is up to scratch’ (412.32)
‘davit . . . penals’ (464.36)
‘pennyladders’ (479.27)
‘Devitt . . . letter selfpenned’ (489.30)

As Mr. Atherton has emphasised, Joyce was always looking out for examples of forgery, mistaken identity and deception as models for *Finnegans Wake*, and this misunderstood ‘pen

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3 Atherton, p. 69.
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letter' is just such a source, though, as with so many of his sources, Joyce seems to have made direct use only of the title.¹ ‘Work in Progress' was the ambiguous letter on the evidence of which the world condemned Joyce, but, he implies, the condemnation was unwarranted and based on a misinterpretation of wholly laudable aims.

However numerous and diverse its sources, the Letter remains primarily an expression of the nature of Anna Livia, the female principle of flux and continuity. Anna is physically identified with the Letter, and hence with the whole ‘riverrun' of *Finnegans Wake*, in a quite literal way. Much has been said about Joyce's image of the giant-figure lying beneath the soil and forming the features of the landscape—his feet in the Phoenix Park and his head at Howth²—but it does not seem to have been sufficiently appreciated that the personification of the Liffey is worked out in similarly detailed geographical terms.

Before I go on to discuss the correspondences between Anna's anatomy and the text of the Letter, I think that I must offer some explanation, if not an apology, for the consistently scatological nature of the interpretations which follow. If outbursts against the obscenity of *Finnegans Wake*, like those which were provoked by *Ulysses*, have been relatively infrequent, this must be due to the difficulty of its language, for when the assiduous reader has managed to penetrate its outer crust he finds that in fact it deals with sexual and scatological matters to a point bordering on obsession. There can be no denying that Joyce found everything associated with evacuation unusually pleasurable (though such propensities were much less unusual in Joyce's Irish homeland than they were in Victorian England). But if *Finnegans Wake* is, by everyday standards of delicacy, one of the 'dirtiest' books ever to be sold on the open market, it also perhaps goes further than any other English book toward finding an acceptable way of using scatology in literature. A curious and unaccustomed beauty radiates from the imagery contained in descriptions of the genital and anal regions of the primal

¹ The letter is quoted in full in Appendix C.
² SK 35.
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Mother and Father figures—not the fresh beauty of uninhibited sensual joy in all parts of the anatomy such as is found in *The Thousand and One Nights*, with its fundamentally healthy sexual lyricism, but a beauty which is distilled by verbal alchemy from obscene scrawls on ‘the oozing wall of a urinal’ (AP 113). Perhaps the most unpleasant piece of coprophilic imagery in *Finnegans Wake* is the conclusion to Kate’s monologue on pages 141–2, but even this is saved from becoming altogether repellent by a kind of straightfaced humour coaxed from the otherwise bald text by means of brilliantly rhythmic writing:

‘And whoasait youwasit propped the pot in the yard and what-in-the-nameofsen lukeareyou rubbinthe sideofthe flureofthe lobbywith. *Shite!* will you have a plateful? Tak.’ (142.05)

Joyce eschews the modesty which induced Fletcher to avert his eyes at the last minute from some regions of his Purple Island, and prefers instead to find charm in the whole landscape without reservation. The extended description of the Phoenix Park in terms of Earwicker’s buttocks (and vice-versa) in III.4 (564–5) is not coarse in effect, as it might have been had it formed, say, a part of the ‘Cyclops’ chapter of *Ulysses*, where Joyce is at his most violent. The impression given is rather of a delicate if somewhat unstable charm:

‘Around is a little amiably tufted and man is cheered when he bewonders through the boskage how the nature in all frisko is enlivened by gentlemen’s seats... Listeneth! ’Tis a tree story. How olave, that firile, was aplantad in her liveside. How tannoboom held tonobloom... Therewithal shady rides lend themselves out to rustic cavalries. In yonder valley, too, stays mountain sprite. Any pretty dears are to be caught inside but it is a bad pities of the plain. A scarlet pimparnell now mules the mound where anciently first murders were wanted to take root.’

No doubt Joyce is laughing with one third of his Irish face, but the primary intention is clearly to please, not to shock the reader’s sensibilities. Joyce is not trying to be aggressively frank in *Finnegans Wake*; the battle to have this kind of thing accepted as raw material for art had long since been fought and won, and, in any case, between the writing of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans*
Wake his attitude to sexual matters suffered a major change, as he indicated to Frank Budgen:

"But", I said, "as I remember you in other days you always fell back upon the fact that the woman's body was desirable and provoking, whatever else was objectionable about her?"

This produced an impatient "Ma che!" and the further comment: "Perhaps I did. But now I don't care a damn about their bodies. I am only interested in their clothes."

This change of heart would seem to account for the detached ease with which Joyce was able to keep the sexual symbolism of his last book in adequate perspective.

If Joyce's mature attitude to sexuality and scatology is borne in mind, the more cloacal symbolism of the Letter may be approached with perhaps less distaste. I have pointed out above that in the context of Book III Shaun's face and buttocks are made to correspond. The same is true of Anna Livia herself, for, though the estuary of the Liffey may be called the river's 'mouth', it also represents Anna's perineal region, lying opposite to her 'head-waters' in the hills. This Fletcheresque detail is established by a number of allusions, mainly in statements of the Letter. At the end of the version on page 201, Anna speaks of 'the race of the saywint up me ambushure'. It is hardly necessary to point out that the word 'ambushure', based on the French embouchure, also contains the pubic 'bush' image which returns on the final page of the book: 'We pass through grass behush the bush to'. (The first fair copy of that line from the Letter is flat and undisguised: 'the race of the seawind up my hole'.

It is apparent that the keys which are 'Given' at 628.15 are, among many other things, those to Anna's chastity—a reading which is borne out by numerous allusions elsewhere in Finnegans Wake. At 110.01, for example, the salt brine, an obvious and well established symbol for sperm, flows up into the estuary: 'The river felt she wanted salt. That was just where Brien came in'.

2 See above, p. 142.
3 British Museum, Add, MS 47474, f. 110.
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The giant Finn and the Liffey beside him thus lie in the attitude of Bloom and Molly, mutually opposed in bed, but Joyce takes the Ulysses situation a step further and suggests that this physical disposition implies buccal copulation: ‘what oracular comepression we have had apply to them!’ (115.24); ‘Jumpst shootst throbbst into me mouth like a bogue and arrohs!’ (626.05). This, then, is the full significance of the soft ‘buss’ with which the work ends. Describing a closed circle, half male and half female, Earwicker and Anna form a human counterpart to the opposed Yeatsian gyres. A further clue to the true nature of that cloacal sealing embrace is contained in the words ‘Lps. The keys to . . .’ (628.15), for ‘Lps’ may be read ‘L.P.S.’, i.e., ‘Lord Privy Seal’.1 (This conclusion may owe a little to the celebrated and carefully engineered envoi of Sterne’s Sentimental Journey which, like Finnegans Wake, ends on a suspended sentence. The debt seems to be acknowledged at 621.01:

‘It’s Phoenix, dear. And the flame is, hear! Let’s our joonree saintomichael make it. Since the lausafire has lost and the book of the depth is. Closed.’)

It seems to have been a part of Joyce’s design to include allusions to every possible form of sexual deviation, and to use the most common perversions as primary material.2 The sin of the Father is alternately voyeurism and incest; the daughter is Lesbian; the sons consistently homosexual; onanistic and narcissistic imagery abounds, and absolutely everyone is avidly coprophilic. The ceremonial osculum ad anum diaboli of the Black Mass plays an even more important part in Finnegans Wake than it does in Ulysses. The Letter is made to end with a series of four kisses, symbolised as four Xs—four ‘crosskisses’ (111.17)—which at 280.27 are modulated to the contemptuous dismissal ‘kissists my exits’.3 The mutual nature of the

1 I am grateful to Mr. Fritz Senn for pointing out to me the meaning of ‘Lps’. Cf. in this connexion the passages about the dog (204.11, 298.01), and the undoubtedly cloacal ‘paxsealing buttonholes’ of the Quinet motif (15.09).
2 For similar comments about Ulysses, see L. Albert, Joyce and the New Psychology, Ann Arbor, 1957, Chapter Seven (on microfilm).
3 Cf. ‘K.M.A.’ (U 136).
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perversion which results in this kiss is made clear from the word 'Shlicksheruthr' (280.27), while the whole anal level of interpretation grows even more explicit in a passage from the Anna Livia chapter itself, where head and buttocks are once more united in a 'crosscomplimentary' group:

'... her singimari saffron strumans of hair, parting them and soothing her and mingling it, that was deepdark and ample like this red bog at sundown.' (203.24)

While anal-eroticism is unmistakeably present in all of Joyce's works, it was the function of micturition which held the most pleasurable associations for him. The Letter usually ends with an act of micturition, a 'pee ess' (111.18). (In one version it bears the subscribed address: 'Dubbenn, WC', 66.18). The 'P.S.' to the full statement of the Letter (619.17) was originally written 'Ps',¹ for the post-script is a flow of urine: 'amber too'. It forms a subsidiary stream proceeding from the 'main body' of water, and hence, if the six main paragraphs of the Letter are the verbal embodiment of Anna Livia, the P.S. is to be identified with her small daughter, Issy. This identification is of major importance, for it is Issy who tempts her brothers with the sound of her micturition to which, Siren-like, she bids them 'Lissom! Lissom!' (21.02, 571.24); hearing the same command —'Ps!'—which lures him on to sexual perversion, Earwicker falls from grace in the Phoenix Park. This is the primal temptation for Joyce; all of history springs from Man's first obedience.

Not content to leave matters there, at the naturalistic level, Joyce elevates urine to a very much higher place on the symbolic scale. It has already been observed that he saw in micturition not merely a temptation for the flesh, but an act of creation²; in Finnegans Wake he identifies urine with another symbol of fertility—strong Irish tea—and even with the communion wine itself. This triangular set of symbolic identifications had already figured largely in Ulysses:

'—When I makes tea I makes tea, as old mother Grogan said. And when I makes water I makes water.'

¹ British Museum, Add. MS 47488, f. 134.
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‘—By Jove, it is tea, Haines said.’
‘Buck Mulligan went on hewing and wheedling’:
‘—So I do, Mrs. Cahill, says she. Begob, ma’am, says Mrs. Cahill, God send you don’t make them in the one pot.’ (U 10; Joyce’s italics.)

—If anyone thinks that I amn’t divine
He’ll get no free drinks when I’m making the wine
But have to drink water and wish it were plain
That I make when the wine becomes water again.
(U 17; Joyce’s italics.)

In the later book Joyce turns this idea into a major correspon-
dence. The semi-private joke about Fendant’s being the ‘arch-
duchess’s urine’¹ is carried over into Finnegans Wake (171.25–27, 209.06, etc.) and in the liturgical chapter III.2 Shaun makes an unusual act of communion with his sister, who plays the part of the BVM²:
‘Give us another cup of your scald. Santos Mozos! That was a damn good cup of scald! You could trot a mouse on it. I ingoyed your pick of hissing hot luncheon fine, I did, thanks awfully, (sublime!). Tenderest bully ever I ate with boiled protestants (allinoilia allinoilia!) only for your peas again was a taste tooth psalty to carry flavour with my godown and hereby return with my best savoury condiments and a penny in the plate for the jemes’. (455.35)
In the inverted posture adopted by the archetypes at the end of the book we are evidently to see Earwicker, like Shaun, making an act of communion with the mystically transub-
stantiated urine of the goddess, Anna.

The act of baptism, symbolically allied to the transub-
stantiation of the wine, is itself discussed in terms of micturition in one of the parodies of Quinet:
‘there’s a spurtfire turf a’kind o’kindling when oft as the souff-
souff blows her peaties up and a claypot wet for thee, my Sitos, and talkatalka tell Tibbs has eve’ (117.17).

¹ Letters, pp. 126, 131.
² Cf. also 561.12 ff.
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The ‘claypot’ obviously designates one of Joyce’s ‘piping hot’ utensiles as well as the tea-pot, so that the imagery grows very complex. As Patrick baptises Bridget beside the roaring fires of his ‘Purgatory’, she sits like a goddess (‘tea’ combines with ‘thee’ to give ‘thea’) on her earthenware throne drinking, and making, tea, while her petticoats are blown up around her by gusts of flatus from the furnace in the bowels of the earth. Tea, urine, and the baptismal waters are thereby closely integrated in a single symbolic act. The goddess and her pot form an important image-group which returns in a number of witty mutations (9.35, 171.24–28, etc.). Furthermore, the tea-stain on the Letter—‘tache of tch’ (111.20)—is identical with the impurity spied out by Earwicker on the temptresses’ under-wear, whose fabric serves as high-quality stationery: ‘published combinations of silkinclaine testimonies’ (34.22).

Whether or not Joyce can be said fully to have achieved his aim of distilling universal beauty from scatology must remain a matter for personal judgment. The attempt is certainly impressive, and there can be no doubt of Joyce’s artistic sincerity—whatever his private obsessions. He has by no means convinced all his admirers, but I myself find the scatology in the main quite successful, especially when Joyce is handling his repugnant and sometimes nauseous materials in strongly mythological contexts. There the scatology is made to interlock in a pattern of symbolism of which it forms an essential and adequately subordinated part, but when the method comes nearer to naturalism, as it occasionally does, the cloacal obsession is perhaps rather too evident for comfort. Indirection is once again, as so often, the key to Joyce’s success in Finnegans Wake. When he keeps his raw materials at an adequate distance from his sensibilities he produces brilliantly integrated and balanced art-forms; only when he allows himself the proximity which he always denies to his reader does his usually firm grip seem to slacken.