

Why does Jacques Lacan Highlight James Joyce's Expression "The letter! The litter!"?

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Joyce's Disruption of Literary Convention

Prior to its first appearance in print, "The letter! The litter!" was an absolutely unthinkable expression in the domain of literature. When it did appear, in 1939, as part of James Joyce's novel *Finnegans Wake*, it at once constituted a radical departure from established literary convention, a jarring distortion of what the readers of canonical literature were used to finding in a literary work, and a shocking parody, or a savage mockery, of the diction employed in literary classics until then. Let me illustrate this with the help of three brief examples.

In chapter 14 of Honoré de Balzac's 1841 novel *Ursula*, the old Doctor Minoret is about to die. As his relations and associates despicably fight among themselves over inheritance, the dying old man gives a key to his favourite godchild Ursula and asks her to fetch from his study a sealed letter addressed to her concerning her marriage to Savinien. As Ursula waits to ensure that *La Bougival* has properly applied the poultice to her dying godfather, the old man cries out impatiently: "*The letter! the letter!*" He instructs her to obey him at once, adding that he *must* see her with the letter in her hand. So intense is his desperation that *La Bougival* thinks that any delay in bringing the letter might result in his death. Unknown to them but known to the readers, even before Ursula had kissed the dying man's forehead and left the room, the post master, who had overheard a part of the conversation, had stolen the letter. When Ursula hurriedly returns

only a moment after her departure in response to a cry from *La Bougival*, the old man eagerly looks at her empty hands, rises in his bed, tries to speak, and dies with a horrible gasp.

Again, in chapter 13 of Gustave Flaubert's 1856 novel *Madame Bovary*, Emma is devastated by Rodolphe's letter in which the latter had politely declared his decision to terminate their love affair. She immediately thinks of killing herself by jumping out of the window but stops as she hears Charles calling her. That night Emma faints when she sees Rodolphe's carriage driving out of town, and falls seriously ill thereafter. Later, when the doctor who had come to see Emma speaks to Bovary and Charles about the sensitivity of Emma's nervous system, and was about to refer to a newspaper article in support of his claim, Emma, who was asleep in the same room, suddenly awakens and cries out, "The letter! the letter!" And yet again, in Marcel Proust's 1920 novel *The Guermantes Way*, Robert, greatly tormented by the silence of his estranged mistress who had parted from him following a quarrel between them, speculates, among other things, that perhaps she would be glad to make it up, that she was waiting for a word from him, and that others could be taking advantage of their estrangement due to which it would soon be too late to get her back. The frenzy of grief created by his mistress's sustained silence makes him wonder whether she might not be in hiding at *doncières*, or

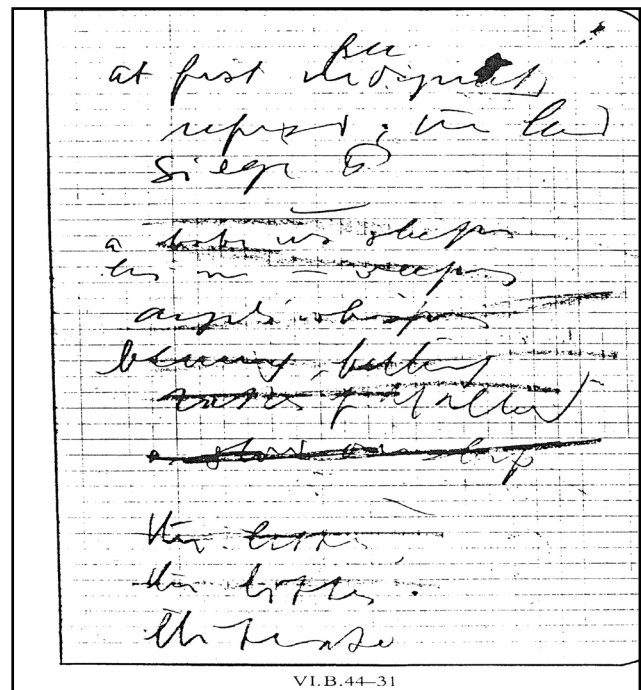
have sailed for the indies. The force of her terribly cruel silence, which was impenetrable and imprisoning, magnifies his anxiety, jealousy and remorse. It shows him not one but a thousand absent love, and he feels tortured thinking that she hates him and will continue to hate him for ever. At times, however, in a sudden moment of relaxation, Robert imagines that this period of silence is about to come to an end in terms of the arrival of the long-awaited letter from her that is on its way. Imagining its arrival, he starts at every sound and murmurs: "the letter! the letter!"

In other words, in a state of heightened emotional sensitivity, literary constructs in European fiction are shown to exclaim: "The letter! the letter!", where the repetitive and exclamatory nature of the expression is expected to convey the speaker's extreme urgency to the other characters and the reader, as well as to heighten the latter's anxiety. Joyce could not have been unaware of any of these masterpieces of French literature. To exclaim "The letter! the litter!" instead, is tantamount to a shocking literary sacrilege unheard of before Joyce. In fact, even though distorting languages and disrupting conventions came naturally to him, this particular instance of distortion of language and of literary convention through it is so acutely radical in nature that it hadn't occurred even to Joyce in course of the first 15 years of his work on *Finnegans Wake*. Going by volume VI.B.44, page 31, of his notebook, the expression "The letter! The litter!" first crossed Joyce's mind as late as in 1937, merely two years before the publication of the novel. (Joyce: 1977-79, 295) At the bottom of the page, Joyce writes, "the letter the litter the texte," implying in a shorthand form that the "texte," which is the French word for written work or writing, will emerge from the "litter" into which the "letter" has been converted. In a word, the extremely remarkable form of departure from established literary convention is sufficient to make Joyce's expression "The letter! the litter!" worthy of a closer look.

Meaning of "The letter! The litter!" in *Finnegans Wake*

The relation between writing and rubbish is an old one in Joyce. For instance, in his short story "The Encounter" written in 1905, when Father Butler says, "What is this rubbish?", he was referring to a collection of stories called *The Halfpenny Marvel* found in Leo Dillon's possession. By the term "rubbish" he meant the "wretched stuff" that the boys of the college should

not be reading. Here "rubbish" stands for only one kind of writing, namely, a kind of juvenile writing based on



sensationalism that was meant for school boys. (Joyce: 1914/1996, 20) Taking the relation further ahead in his novels, Joyce describes all the junk of everyday life in minute detail so as to preserve them vividly. In *Ulysses*, the characters talk, gossip, debate, think, recall, read, walk, eat, drink, sleep, defecate, urinate, etc., and all these particulars are described with an intense acuteness. In this sense, Joyce preserves the detritus and ephemera of life and glorifies rubbish. No wonder then that, Stephen Dedalus compares the rubbish-strewn heavy sands of Sandymount Strand to the "language tide [...] wind have silted here." (Joyce: 1922/1960, 50) Thus, the rubbish-heap seems to be Joyce's desired site for the erection of his letter or fiction. In his last novel, Joyce took the connection between writing and rubbish far deeper by converting literary writing itself into a form of litter.

In some of his letters written at the time of the composition of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce often describes the early drafts of the novel as a disordered rubbish-heap. In one such letter, written on 18 February 1931 to Harriet Shaw Weaver, to which Joyce had attached a few chapters of the *Work in Progress*, he writes: "I enclose some rubbish found in a sack, that lay in the house that Joyce leaves." (Joyce: 1957/1966, 301)

So, what does the expression "The letter! The litter!" mean in *Finnegans Wake*? Joyce uses the expression "litter" and coinages based on it 25 times across *Finnegans Wake*, almost always with reference to writing, usually literary writing. Of these, the 22 relatively less pertinent instances from our point of view are the following, in their chronological order of appearance: "clittering up" (5.3); "Countlessness of livestories have netherfallen by this plage, flick as flowflakes, litters from aloft" (17.27-29); "the hour of the twattering of bards in the twitterlitter" (37.17); "litterish fragments lurk dormant in the paunch" (66.25-26); "a cloudletlitter" (73.29); "lines of litters slittering up and louds of latters slettering down" (114.17-18); "ayes and neins to a litter" (202.2); "illitterettes" (284.15); "Concoct an equoangular trillitter" (286.21-22); "jetsam litterage of convolvuli" (292.16); "glitteraglatteraglutt" (349.12); "skittered his litters" (370.6); "Honour thy farmer and my litters" (413.16-17); "The Reverest Adam Foundlitter" (420.35); "laying out his litterery bed" (422.35); "artis litterarumque patrona" (495.34-35); "an absquelitteris puttagonnianne" (512.17-18); "a litterydistributer in Saint Patrick's Lavatory" (530.10-11); "outcast mastiff littered in blood currish" (534.34); and "litteringture of kidlings" (570.18-19). Leaving these aside, let us concentrate on the 3 relatively more sustained, direct and pertinent instances in which the relation between the letter and litter is described.

The first one of these is the following: "But by writing thithaways end to end and turning, turning and end to end hithaways writing and with lines of litters slittering up and louds of ladders slettering down." (114.16-18) The first two clauses in the sentence move in opposite directions: "by writing thithaways end to end and turning" and "turning and end to end hithaways writing," indicating a crossed writing or a crossed letter. This very idea of a crossed-out writing is ratified by the up and down movement in last part of the sentence: "lines of litters slittering up and louds of ladders slettering down."

The idea of crossed writing here is in fact in continuation with the same idea expressed a few lines earlier. At 114.2-5, Joyce writes, "One cannot help noticing that rather more than half of the lines run

north-south [...] while the others go west-east." As John Gordon notes, a part of Joyce's reference is to the type of letters that are written horizontally and over which the receiver writes the reply vertically before mailing it back. Moreover, a crossed letter has a checkerboard pattern, which is indicated by the expression "a pretty checker" in a passage at 114.7-11 wherein the movement and stumbling of words are described. (Gordon: 2020, 225).

Three pages earlier, at 111.7, Joyce uses the expression "zogzag," meaning "zigzag," to point to a writing that moves back and forth. Gordon states that "zogzag" moreover refers to a brand of extremely thin cigarette paper named "Zig-Zag" found in Joyce's time. Due to the thinness of the paper, if it is written on, the ink would seep and cross over to the reverse side and thus enact yet another kind of crossed writing. (Ibid, 217) "Crossing" or the "cross" also refers to Christ, as does the letter "Chi" designated by the symbol "X" in the Greek alphabet, as "Chi" or "X" is the first letter in the Greek word for Christ. But the letter "X" is also indicative of a crossing out. As if to overdetermine the crossing out effect of the "X" from yet another perspective in the novel, while some of the letters are signed "X.X.X.X." (458.1-3), or "Ex. Ex. Ex. Ex." (424.12-3), by Shaun, on top of all the references to letters being signed by "X"s, such as, "your Jermyn cousin signs hers with exes" (625.2), the last 1468 words in *Finnegans Wake*, as Gordon points out, do not have the letter "X" in them. (Gordon: 2020, 218) Thus, the effect of crossing out the signature or the name of the writer of the letter is produced by *performing* the crossing out. The effect is overdetermined by the fact that the "X" that crosses everything is itself crossed or effaced.¹

The lines also contain a reference to the crossing out movement seen in the game of snake and ladder, but in the reverse order, so as to doubly reinforce the very idea of crossing. The participants rise up owing to the ladder or fall down thanks to the snake in that game. Reversed by Joyce, this becomes, "lines of litters slittering up," or litters slithering up, like a snake, while "louds of ladders slettering down," or letters sliding down the ladder. Thus, by reversing the conventional rules of the game, Joyce proposes

1 Notably, the sentence "lines of litters slittering up and louds of ladders slettering down" is somewhat similar to the sentence, "larrons o'toolers clittering up and tombles a'buckets clottering down." (5.3-4) Gordon rightly informs us that this is a reference to the assault of Laurence O'Toole and Thomas à Becket in front of the main altar of Canterbury Cathedral. While O'Toole managed to survive, Becket did not. (Gordon: 2020, 8) The rise of one person and the fall of another designate yet another form of crossing. It moreover reminds us of the crucifixion, on the cross, and the resurrection of Christ.

that the litter rises as the letter falls. In a word, the first excerpt is about crossing a letter to convert it into litter.

A brief version of the second description is: "the heroticisms, catastrophes and eccentricities transmitted by the ancient legacy of the past; type by tope, letter from litter, word at ward, with sendence of sundance." (614.35 to 615.2) A more complete version of it is the following:

Our wholemole millwheeling vicociclotometer, [...] preprovided with a [...] exprogressive process, (for the farmer, his son and their homely codes, known as eggburst, eggblend, eggburial and hatch-as-hatch can) receives through a portal vein the dialytically separated elements of precedent decomposition for the verypetpurpose of subsequent recombination so that the heroticisms, catastrophes and eccentricities transmitted by the ancient legacy of the past; type by tope, letter from litter, word at ward, with sendence of sundance... [...] as sure as herself pits hen to paper and there's scribings scrawled on eggs. (614.27-615.10)

According to this passage, the letter is recycled litter. Here "millwheeling vicociclotometer" denotes the transmission of the past through Vico's cycles, planetary revolutions and political revolutions. Here, letter from litter is not only about cycles but more pertinently about recycling, or literary writing as a kind of recycling of what has been already written, or, in Joyce's parlance a "precedent decomposition," meaning, an earlier composition, which is "preprovided," is taken up for use in a "subsequent recombination." Thus, literary recycling is the theme of the sentence "preprovided with a [...] exprogressive process, [...] receives [...] the dialytically separated elements of precedent decomposition for the verypetpurpose of subsequent recombination." Such literary recycling is carried out "type by tope," meaning 'type for type' and 'trope for trope', "word at ward," meaning 'word for word', and "sendence of sundance," meaning 'sentence for sentence', and 'semblance of substance' or resemblance to the original. Among the literary themes chosen for recycling, Joyce identifies "heroticisms," meaning heroism and eroticism, "catastrophes" and "eccentricities" that have been "transmitted by the ancient legacy of the past." A broader implication of the passage is that

Finnegans Wake is born when all the elements of history are collected, then broken down, as in "dialytically separated [all the] elements," that is to say, that which is received in the form of the letter is fragmented or degraded into a kind of litter, and finally all these distorted and decomposed elements are recombined or reconstructed to give rise to a new literary writing, a new letter.

The cycle of life concerns rebirth following death. While "Fin" and "Wake" are related to the end and death respectively, "negan" sounds like "again." "Finnegans" as "Finn, again!" (628.14) therefore stands for 'finish and again'. In this sense, the title is indicative of a re-beginning following the end, or of a rebirth following death and the *Wake*. This very idea is also captured by the expression "Finnlatter" in ALP's letter, as well as by the "postscript" to that letter which, by definition, is akin to a resumption after the end. In fact, this letter itself is resurrected by the hen from the dung-heap where it was dumped. That apart, in the Irish-American ballad of unknown authorship named "Finnegan's *Wake*" that was published in 1864 in New York, the alcoholic protagonist Tim Finnegan who fell from a ladder, broke his skull and is considered dead, returns to life once when the mourners at his *Wake* accidentally spill whiskey over his corpse. Not only that, while *Wake* represents death and the end, litter represents birth and new life. Moreover, following an initial reference to ALP's letter in the novel, the narrator answers his or her own question, "What was it?" with the expression "A.....! ?..... O!" (94.21-22), meaning that the letter spans from Alpha to Omega, that is, it covers everything from the beginning to the end, from birth to death. Furthermore, Clive Hart notes in his 1962 *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake* that litter and letter stand for leader and latter, or the first and the last, or Genesis and Revelation respectively. (Hart: 1962, 200) Above all, since the first sentence of *Finnegans Wake* continues from and completes the last sentence of the novel, the beginning and the end of the novel are conflated, their distinction erased, and the beginning is effectively converted into a re-beginning.

In the context of the narrative of *Finnegans Wake*, the last clause in the passage, "as sure as herself pits hen to paper and there's scribings" is about Anna Livia Plurabelle or ALP resuming or re-beginning a letter in which she was narrating the doings of her husband, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicke or HCE, who represents everyman insofar as HCE also stands for "Here Comes Everybody" (32.18-19). This letter,

which is a kind of recycling "the ancient legacy" of her husband's "past" in writing, will eventually become a kind of litter to be dug out by a hen—a letter that is supposed to be *Finnegans Wake* itself. One of the earliest literal indications that ALP's letter represents the novel itself is that, while the letter begins with the word "Reverend" (615.12), the novel begins with the homonymous word "riverrun." (3.1)

The multiple references to egg in the passage have several connotations. Egg is related to the hen, or here the pen, that is responsible for the birth of new life, as well as for the birth of the new novel called *Finnegans Wake*. A hen or a pen is responsible for laying or uncovering it. Not only that, the relation between one of the protagonists of the novel, HCE, and egg is an overdetermined one in the novel. In *Finnegans Wake*, egg is an item in HCE's breakfast: "there'll be iggs for brekkers come to mournhim." (12.14) HCE's egg-breakfast finds special mention in the fourth book, which is also about Easter. In fact, HCE lives largely on eggs, boiled, cooked or poached: "brooled and cocked and potched." (184.17) Thus, eggs form HCE's bodily material. That apart, HCE resembles an egg insofar as he always seems to be enclosed within a shell. Furthermore, HCE, variously referred to as "cwympty dwympty" (314.16), "Humpsea dumpsea" (317.24), and "humbly dumbly" (628.11), is Humpty Dumpty who resemble eggs. And above all, while the initials HCE also stands for "Haroun Childeric Eggeberth" (4.32), they are often scrambled in the novel, in the form of ECH, for instance.

So, how is egg related to the letter as recycled litter? Well, first of all, HCE's body is recycled eggs, and he is transcribed by ALP through her letter about him that will become litter. Secondly, insofar as the letter is presented in its totality almost immediately after the line, "herself pits hen to paper and there's scribings scrawled on eggs," one draft of the letter must have been inscribed on an eggshell, and the final version of the letter recycled out of it, before they are thrown away as waste. Since the letter is moreover scratched out of the pile of rubbish by a "hen," the letter has an integral connection with eggs. And finally, the cosmic egg, often golden, that finds mention in creation myths all over the world— such as, Greece, Egypt, Persia, India, Japan, and so on— is supposed to contain everything that the universe shall gradually become. The first verse of the 19th section of chapter 3 of the *Chandogya Upanishad*,

an ancient Hindu philosophical text, for instance, states: "This universe was at first non-existent, being without names and forms. Slowly it manifested itself, as a shoot comes out of a seed. Next it developed into an egg and remained for a whole year like that. It then split in two, one half becoming silver and the other half becoming gold." (*Chandogya Upanishad*: 2017, 3.19.1) The book then goes on to mention that heaven emerged from the gold half and the earth from the silver half. In other words, the universe is gradually created as a writing, as a novel, as letters, by littering the primal egg. And insofar as this egg already contains in a nascent form everything that shall one day come into being, the creation of the universe itself is a kind of recycling of material already in existence.

The third and arguably the most important depiction of the relation between letter and litter may be found in the following sentences: "And so it all ended. Artha kama dharma moksa. Ask Kavya for the kay. And so everybody heard their plaint and all listened to their plause. The letter! The litter! And the soother the bitther!" (93.22-24)

In other words, it all ended with the four purposes or objectives of human life, called the four "*purushārthas*" in the Vedas and other sacred Hindu texts. These are, "Dharma" or righteousness as a moral value; "Artha" or prosperity as an economic value; "Kama" or sensual pleasure as a psychological value; and "Moksha" or the soul's liberation as a spiritual value. While according to some scholars, these four, in this particular order, ought to be the four goals of every human being, according to others, the first three goals are prescribed for ordinary human beings and the last goal for spiritually-oriented ones who are capable of extraordinary degrees of renunciation and detachment. In either case, the order of the goals is important, for, while moksha is the ultimate goal, prosperity and pleasure, the former more important than the latter, ought to be sought in a righteous manner. By turning the sacred letter into the literary litter, Joyce changes the order of the four goals, and notably, places prosperity and sensual pleasure before righteousness, implying thereby that pleasure and prosperity need not necessarily be attained in a righteous manner.

"Kavya" means poetry in Sanskrit. The Vedas and other sacred texts of Hinduism where these four goals are mentioned are all written in verse, usually in the form of hymns. Therefore, "Ask Kavya for the kay" means— look up these verses for the "key" to life, as

the word "key" is at times pronounced like "kay" by the Irish. "Kay" also denotes the letter "K" with which the word "Kavya" is spelt. It is moreover the initial for "Kate," ALP's incarnation, who has the "passkey" (8.8) and the "Key" (421.4), before ALP herself has "The keys" (628.15).

And so everybody heard their "plaint," meaning lamentation or complaint, and everybody listened to their "plause," variously meaning "applause" in English, "flattery" from "plausy" or "plás" in Anglo-Irish, and "play" from the French "plausier." It is not by chance that the acronym for "everybody heard their [com]plaint" is EHC, a variation of HCE, while the acronym for "all listened to their plause" is ALP.

"The letter! The litter!" stands for the letters of the alphabet, such as ALP, which are also the first three letters of the word "alphabet," as well as the epistles that she and others in the novel composed. The Irish word "litir" that sounds somewhat like the English word "litter" means the "letter" in both these senses of the word. That apart, as Roland McHugh points out in his 1980 book *Annotations to Finnegans Wake*, "The letter! The litter!" is reminiscent of the Greek expression "Thalatta! Thalatta!" meaning "The Sea! The Sea!" (McHugh: 1980, 93) which is what the river flows into and loses itself in at the end of its journey. In Joyce's novel, Anna Livia Plurabelle represents the river, the river Liffey in particular, and through it the "riverrun" of *Finnegans Wake* in its totality.

Most pertinently, Anna Livia Plurabelle's letter, one that is described as "Her untitled mamafesta," (104.4) and references to which recur throughout novel, can be and has been seen as a microcosm of the entire novel inscribed at its centre, like a self-reflexive embedding. The letter which is torn, stained by tea—in Joyce's words "tache of tch" (111.20)—and found in a rubbish heap is therefore literally a piece of trash. This letter describing the crucial story of HCE, the two young women, and the three soldiers is referred or alluded to in bits and pieces throughout the novel—the novel is well and truly littered by fragments of this letter—and it is divulged in its entirety for the first and only time towards the very end of the novel, to be precise between pages 615 and 619 in the 628-page work. It is a letter in which ALP defends her husband, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, though it may or may not exonerate him. This letter is written for her by Shem and its delivery attempted by Shaun. Shem the penman and Shaun the postman, the two sons of ALP and HCE, thus represent the two forms of the "letter," alphabets or

writing and epistle, as well as the integral relation between them. No wonder, Shaun describes Shem as "my shemblable! My freer!" (489.28) This very letter at the heart of the novel, one that is scratched out of a dung or rubbish heap—that is to say "litter" in both senses of the term—by Biddy the Hen, is, above all, *Finnegans Wake* itself! Therefore, ALP's crucial letter brings out how *Finnegans Wake* is the moment of the letter turning into litter in the field of literature.

Thus, the key lies in the letter, whether sacred or mundane, and especially in the letter's inextricable link with litter. "And the soother the bitter!" The sooner this is realised the better it is. Even though this realisation, which is "sooth" or true, will soothe her and bite her at the same time, for it is at once sweeter and bitter. The turn of the letter into litter at the novel's centre is thus its fundamental motif or its chief theme. The effect of this turn may be seen in the language of the novel from one end to the other. "The letter! The litter!" is therefore not a random play on words in a novel replete with wordplay. Rather, the expression is constitutive of, and therefore has a foundational place in, the narrative of *Finnegans Wake*.

Significance of "The letter! The litter!" in Joyce

Having examined the meaning of the expression "The letter! The litter!" in *Finnegans Wake*, let us now turn to its significance in Joyce's writing. What have the Joyce scholars had to say about the importance of this expression in Joyce? Looking at it from a purely literary point of view, did they consider it special and worthy of being singled out and highlighted, as Jacques Lacan had done while examining it from a predominantly psychoanalytic point of view? Well, what is remarkable about the literary commentary on Joyce's expression is that it is quite sparse, even though the handful of Joyce scholars who have commented on the expression considered it central to *Finnegans Wake*, if not to literature, history, or the course of life itself.

William York Tindall explains the significance of the expression "The letter! The litter!" in his 1959 *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce* by bringing out how the three most important strands of the plot of *Finnegans Wake* are in fact woven around the motif of the letter and the litter. He rightly states that the most important strand of the plot of the novel concerns Tim Finnegan's death in terms of his fall from the ladder, and his rise again, or Finnagain, at his *Wake*. Equating the ladder with "latter," he writes, "From latter comes

'litter' and from the litter the letter." (Tindall: 1959, 257) Referring to the character of the Dublin grocer "Adam Findlater," Tindall further states that "Findlater involves Finnleader, Finnlater (or Finnagain), as well as ladder, litter, and letter." (Ibid., 285)

Moving on to the second most important strand of the novel's plot, ALP's letter, which contains a microcosmic version of the whole of *Finnegans Wake*, Tindall correctly points out that all the members of the Earwicker family, who are also the protagonists of the novel, are inextricably linked to this letter: It is uttered by ALP, uttered for HCE, written by Shem, and its delivery to HCE unsuccessfully attempted by Shaun. This letter, its contents, its loss and rediscovery, and the repeated unsuccessful attempt to deliver it not only constitutes an important strand of the novel's plot but is the basis of the bulk of its narrative. More pertinently, this letter is also a litter. Tindall clarifies that this letter found by the hen in a dump is the "Essence of dump," as well as a "chaosmos" bearing in a condensed form "all the muddled affairs of Earwicker's family, from alpha to omega, in a page." (Ibid, 257)

Another extremely important strand of the novel's plot is Kate's conducted tour of "the magazine" transformed into "the museum." The conducted tour sheds light on the battle of Waterloo in terms of the battle between the members of the Earwicker family, especially the one between the mother and the father. A large number of other battles are then referred to in order to widen the perception of the family conflict. At the end of these battles, a bird, representing ALP, picks up the pieces so as to recreate with them. Through this process of conflict and renewal, Joyce intended to depict "all history from 1132 A. D. to 566 and then from 566 A. D. to 1132." (Ibid., 266)² In this context, Tindall points out that "the museum is a dump"; that ALP picks up the litter

at the end of the battles; and that "From the litter of battle comes the hen's letter." (Ibid., 266) Although not pointed out by Tindall, though it must have been present on Joyce mind, "Waterloo" could easily be a euphemism for a toilet.

Elaborating on some of these points, Tindall states in his 1969 *Readers Guide to Finnegans Wake* that the hen's act of digging out the letter from a pile of dung is Joyce's way of foregrounding the truth about literature that it is the essence of trash: "From the litter comes the letter as from the dump come letters. Literature, including the *Wake*, is the essence of dump [...]." (Tindall: 1969, 39) He argues that, in terms of what is littered on it and buried in or dug out of it, *Finnegans Wake*, like the earth itself, is a dump of letters as well as a letter written out of dumped letters (Ibid, 45), and for this very reason, "*Finnegans Wake* leads naturally to museum, dump, and letter." (Ibid, 90)

After noting that the hen digs out the letter in order to "renew life and art," (Ibid, 90) and that the letter "K," which is the beginning of the name of Kate, the older self of ALP, is the 11th letter of the alphabet and as such suggestive of a "renewal," (Ibid, 91) Tindall points to the following crucial pattern of the novel, as indeed of life itself: "Dump, litter, letter, letters, and *Wake* are depositories and vestiges of our living and dying — and part of their rhythm." (Ibid, 90–91) Following on from this, Tindall thinks that "The letter promises renewal of litter by letters," because "the word of the beginning is the word of the end, and all, first or last, proceeds from the word." (Ibid, 306) Therefore, Tindall concludes that "a major concern of the [...] book — is time, process, the fall and rise of man, conflict and its litter, and the creation from litter of children, cities, and books." (Ibid, 29)

To Tindall's list may be added the two fresh observations that John Gordon made in his 1986

2 The number 1132, which occurs throughout *Finnegans Wake* has various meanings in the novel. First, 11 denotes the beginning of a new cycle of numbers. Second, citing the words of ALP in the novel, Hart points out that *Finnegans Wake* begins at 11:32 am: "The whole book, says Anna in her Letter, begins at the magical hour of 11.32 a.m.: 'Femelles will bespreadaminant as from twentyeight to twelve' (617.23)." (Hart: 1962, 71) Hart moreover thinks that Book II of the novel ends 12 hours after the start of the novel, at 11:32 pm. (Ibid, 17) However, John Bishop's argument throughout his book, *Joyce's Book of the Dark: Finnegans Wake*, is that the novel begins at 11.32 pm and spans a single dark night. (Bishop: 1986, 3–385) Third, St Laurence O'Toole, the patron saint of Dublin, was born in 1132 A.D. Fourth, in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the death of Finn MacCool is dated to 283 A.D. Now 283 multiplied by 4 is 1132. Fifth, Chapter 11 verse 32 of Romans, which is a highly pertinent verse in the context of the novel, states: "For God has consigned all men to disobedience that he may show his mercy to all." And sixth, after getting Ireland's abbey of Kildare burned and the abbess raped in 1132, Diarmait Mac Murchada became king of the province of Leinster and appointed Malachy the Archbishop of Armagh in Ireland, with instructions to impose the Roman liturgy on the independent Church of Ireland. 566 is half of 1132. With reference to 566 A.D., Joyce mentions that on Baalfiress night following the deluge, a crone, or ALP, came with a wicker basket and collected a bunch of shoes and other litter. He further mentions with reference to the same year that Issy, a brass-haired damsel, grieved because her doll had been ravished by an ogre. (13.36–14.10)

book *Finnegans Wake: A Plot Summary*. First of all, HCE's relationship with his wife, in terms of the letter that she wrote for him, and in terms of their children, "brings forth those two Shakespearean antidotes to mortality, literature (the letter) and children (the litter)." (Gordon: 1986, 143) And second, of the many seven-stage sequences throughout the novel, one sequence at the end of Part I of the novel concludes by following "flood, rainbow, forgiveness, re-beginning," with "the chattering of the washer-women." (Ibid, 152) Here Gordon's reference is to the two washerwomen situated on the two sides of the Liffey – which represents ALP – who, while washing clothes, gossip about matters like, ALP's letter written in response to the allegations levelled against her husband HCE, believing that ALP had indicated in it that she was tired of her husband; ALP's sexual encounters in her youth; her revenge on her husband's enemies; and HCE's guilt published in the newspaper. According to Gordon, the chatter, ALP's letter, the newspaper, and above all, the act of washing soiled clothes bring out, "the redemptive power of litter-ature." (Ibid, 152) In a somewhat similar vein, Kimberly J. Devlin equates "ALP's multiple possible letters" to "her litter of multiple children (her "superflowvius heirs" [FW 526.25-26])," as well as to "her multiple gifts, catalogued by the washerwomen in 1.8." (Devlin: 2016, 215)

In her 1980 book *Alchemy and Finnegans Wake*, Barbara DiBernard argues that "*Finnegans Wake* is a rubbish heap yet a work of art [...]" (DiBernard: 1980, 26), or, a litter and yet a letter. She is aware that "*The Wake* manifests the idea that the origins of art lie in the dump of this world in many ways," and that this idea is cemented in the novel by the correlation between the following two facts: "The hen digs up the letter from a dung-heap in *Finnegans Wake*, and the alphabet comes from a similar heap [...]" (Ibid, 14) She knows, as Joyce himself sates in the novel, that "he dumptied the wholeborrow of rubbages on to soil here." (17.4-5) The central thesis of her book, nevertheless, is that "*Finnegans Wake* also represents the very antithesis of a garbage dump, an ordered work of art." (Ibid, 13) Pointing to how Joyce, like an alchemist, produced literature by converting litter into letter, she sums up her position thus: "Litter, the letter, letters, and literature move through continuous cycles of transformation. [...] The garbage heap of *Finnegans Wake*, then, is transformed into art, just as the alchemists transformed the vilest substance into the highest

goal, the Philosopher's Stone. Or, to be more exact, *Finnegans Wake* is both rubbish and gold." (Ibid, 16) In other words, the literature produced by Joyce is marked by an irrevocable duality. It is at once precious and trash, neither of the two statuses being strong enough to neutralise the other.

Explaining the relation between the letter and litter in his 1997 *The Role of Thunder in Finnegans Wake* from a completely different perspective, Eric McLuhan states that, insofar as the letter is employed to produce manuscripts that are subsequently reduced to trash or litter, and insofar as the published letter is derived from this very trash, the acts of writing and publication necessarily involve turning the letter to litter and the litter to the letter in a new form. He adds that literature, created in this manner out of the littering of letters and the lettering of litter, is then "dump[ed] onto the market as goods." (McLuhan: 1997, 123)

Arguably, the most astute literary commentary on Joyce's expression "The letter! The litter!" has come from Vincent Cheng. Cheng explains the relation between the letter and the litter in a number of overlapping ways in his 1979 book *Shakespeare and Joyce*. To begin with, he explains the connection between the letter and the litter, or between literature and excreta, by stating that a defecator, a father, a poet, and God are all equivalent, "because they each create, or produce, something." (Cheng: 1979/1984, 17) He describes both Joyce and his predecessor, Shakespeare, as "fellow creator-defecator-poet." (Ibid., 17) From this point of view, both letter and litter are creations of the defecator-poet.

Commenting upon the effect of the assonance between the letter and the litter on literary creations, Cheng writes that insofar as the Latin word for "letter", "*litterae*", which stands for letters of the alphabet, epistolary letters, and belles-lettres, corresponds with the word "litter" that stands for shit and birth, poetic creations in general "are at once bilabial speech, biological offspring, and biodegradable waste. Each implies the others [...]" (Ibid, 17)

Cheng moreover explains "The letter! The litter!" in terms of the rise and fall of literature and of literary reputation. He states that, just as literature or letters has its rise and falls, "its litters (as in births and risings) slittering up and its latters (later in life, and falling ladders) slettering down," so can literary reputation rise and fall. (Ibid, 109)

Turning to the hen's act of digging out the letter from the litter, Cheng states that this crucial act

symbolically represents littering the letter in a number of ways, such as: that *Finnegans Wake* is "a creatio ex shitpile," a "letter from litter" (Ibid, 17); that attempts are made to dig out the truth (letter) from the midden heap of possibilities (litter) (Ibid, 29); that the digging and mis-readings involved in scholarship and historical investigation never end (Ibid, 27); that some scratching scholar-hen will one day rescue *Finnegans Wake* from the midden pile and truly appreciate it (Ibid, 17); that it represents Joyce's own question as to whether he should "dig [...] into the graveyard of past literature and history for his style and his subject matter" (Ibid, 29); and that all new scholarly works on *Finnegans Wake* (letter) are retellings of the old works, or new plagiarised versions (litter) of Shakespeare and Joyce. (Ibid, 106)

Expanding on the last point, Cheng then argues that "The letter! The litter!" denotes that literature as such is forgery, or a recycling of earlier literature, or plagiarism. Like the letter from the litter heap, or, in a word, like "literature," "the new cycle is the same as the old [...]," including "the *Wake* and all of Joyce's works" that are no more than "reworkings of other people's odysseys and dramas." (Ibid, 106) Cheng shows us how, according to *Finnegans Wake*, Shem, Joyce, authors who recycle Shakespeare, and Shakespeare himself are all guilty of this offence: "Every dimmed letter in it is a copy." (424.32)

Thus, Cheng points to Shaun's direct accusation against Shem that the latter was "a forger and a plagiarist" because he had plagiarised ALP's letter from him: "Shaun here claims the letter as his own. [...] Shaun finally makes a clear and direct charge that Shem stole the letter from him." (Ibid, 168) In other words, ALP's crucial letter that contains *Finnegans Wake* and is supposed to have been penned by Shem, is, according to Shaun, stolen from him by Shem.

More significantly, Cheng points out that, in a passage in Book I, chapter 5 of the novel, Joyce "equate[s] his works (the letter is the *Wake* as well as all literature) with Shakespeare's." (Ibid, 98) In other words, *Finnegans Wake* as well as all literature written after Shakespeare are forged from the works of the latter. Shaun ratifies in this passage that, "Shem-Joyce's tales are forged" from the plays of Shakespeare. (Ibid, 98) Moreover, in the same passage, Shaun mentions some of the "Shakespearean forgers and imitators," such as, Theobald (117.19); and, after analysing the "Shakespearean manuscripts," (123.01) he concludes that his act resembles grave-digging

of the past, only to uncover stale and second-hand chestnuts (121.32), for behind Shakespeare's manuscript lay *The Odyssey* of Homer (123.16). (Ibid, 98)

Cheng rightly states that Shaun describes Joyce's *Ulysses*, referred to as "theodicy" (419.30) or *The Odyssey*, as perfectly awful trash: "Puffedly offal tosh!" (419.32), and that he moreover accuses Shem-Joyce of "plagiarism and forgery": "Thaw! The last word in stolentelling! And what's more right-down lowbrown schisthematic robblemint! (424.36-37)." (Ibid, 100) Shaun's accusations against Shem-Joyce are moreover couched "amid references to Shakespearean claimants and forgers," (Ibid, 100) like "[Lewis] Theobald, Bacon, Delia Bacon, [...] James Macpherson." (Ibid, 242) Cheng thinks that Shaun consistently intertwines Shem-Joyce's forgery and Shakespeare's forgery because they are similar. On the latter, Cheng further states: "Shakespeare has also often been accused of fakery, either by plagiarizing other authors (according to Greene) or by not actually authoring the plays, which were supposedly written instead by Francis Bacon or others." (Ibid., 101) According to Cheng, Joyce thinks that even Shakespeare, the author of the original letter, is accused of borrowing: "Joyce is saying that the letter, symbol for the *Wake* and for all literature, was originally written (or begun) by Shakespeare, who was himself accused of "borrowing" from others." (Ibid., 263)

Finally, Cheng thinks that "[a]ll literature and history are Viconian cycles," and therefore, even though there is a seeming "renewal" in the form of "a new dawn" that brings "a new HCE, a new lifetree, a new Shakespeare-father-creator," none of that is really new, for "the new cycle is really the same as the old: the old HCE is reincarnated as the new HCE, and all new works of scholarship and literature are only retellings, recombinations, and reworkings of the same forged letter [...]" (Ibid, 243) In support of his argument, Cheng cites Jennifer Schiffer Levine's 1979 article, "Originality and Repetition in *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses*," in which Levine thus argues that, like all literary works, *Finnegans Wake* too is characterised by theft, recycling and repetition, which makes the letter smell like dung:

[W]e may see writing as pious transcription or as deception and theft: total originality, given the shared nature of language, is impossible What looks like change is only, perhaps, recycling, and we are bound to a wheel of repetition Total

newness, total originality, is impossible, and so the writer's guilt becomes that of the thief and the conman. No wonder then that the letter smells like dung: it is recycled language (Ibid., 262)

Lacan's Reading of "The letter! The litter!"

Of all the *littérateurs* and literary works commented on by Lacan, James Joyce and *Finnegans Wake* engaged him for the longest period of time, enabling him to produce his most elaborate psychoanalytic discourse in relation to a work of literature. Lacan mentions Joyce or his works in passing in the following eight texts: The 1956 essay, "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'"; the 1971 essay, "Lituraterre"; the 1972–1973 Seminar "On Feminine Sexuality"; the 1973 interview, "Television"; the 1975 lecture, "Geneva Lecture on the Symptom"; the 1975 "Yale University: Kanzer Seminar"; the 1975 "Yale University: Interview with Students"; and the 1977 lecture at Brussels, "Remarks on Hysteria." However, Lacan's more sustained discussions on Joyce and his writings figure in Sessions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 of his 1975–1976 Seminar on "*The Sinthome*", and in three separate lectures, namely, the June 1975 lectures at the fifth International Joyce Symposium in Paris, entitled "Joyce the Symptom" and "Joyce the Symptom II" respectively, and the 1976 lecture at Nice, "On James Joyce as Symptom." In his commentary on Joyce spanning more than two decades, the one expression by the Irish author that Lacan had singled out for special attention is "The letter! The litter!" As we have already seen, there is nothing arbitrary, excessive or erroneous about paying special attention to this expression, for it not only constitutes the bedrock of *Finnegans Wake* but holds a very special place in Joycean aesthetics and indeed in European literature itself. In the concluding section of the essay, let us try to understand how Lacan read this expression in Joyce's writing from a psychoanalyst's point of view.

Lacan's first comment on Joyce is in terms of this very expression. It figures in "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" in *Écrits*. Lacan had not made this comment in his 1954–1955 Seminar on "The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis", where he spoke on Poe's story for the first time, but added it a little later, as a passing mention, while writing the essay in 1956:

"A letter, a litter"³: in Joyce's circle, they played on the homophony of the two words in English." (Lacan: 1956/2006, 18) Here, Lacan's description of the relation between a letter and a litter in Joyce is entirely restricted to the phonetic similarity between the two words, to the play on words that this similarity enabled Joyce to engage in, and to the playing with sounds of words in general that Joyce's lead encouraged among his followers. He makes no attempt to engage with the meanings of the words. The expression "Joyce's circle" refers to the group of writers and scholars, including Samuel Beckett, Stuart Gilbert, William Carlos Williams and several others, who produced the 1929 volume on Joyce's *Work in Progress*, entitled *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, as Lacan mentions in a footnote. (Ibid, 47, fn. 11) The essays in the volume extensively discuss Joyce's wordplay, often with the help of a play on words, as the very title of the volume testifies. From this volume, Lacan must have particularly had in mind the "letter" of protest dated February 9, 1929, addressed to Joyce by the America-based Russian reader, Vladimir Dixon, who described his own letter as "a litter." (Beckett, et al: 1929/1961, 89) By doing so, Dixon, Joyce's reader, had played on this very homophony eight years before Joyce himself. The detail that it was not Joyce alone but a circle of people, "they", who played on this homophony implies that at first there was the one, named Joyce, and then there were many, a "circle." The playing was thus not the effort of a single swallow but an indication of the arrival of summer, as Lacan would go on to say about his own teaching in 1970, following the publication of the first two books on it by Anthony Wilden and Anika Lemaire. In any case, this is a limited commentary on Joyce's expression compared to what Lacan shall go on to state on it later, in the 1970s.

Lacan's second reference to Joyce, made 15 years later in "Lituraterre", too, begins in terms of this very expression of Joyce, albeit with a difference. In order to explain the title "Lituraterre", meaning writing erasure on land, Lacan evokes the misspelling of the Latin word "*littera*" as "*litera*" mentioned by Ernout & Meillet in their French *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*, and then relates the misspelling

3 In English in the original.

to: "the equivocation with which Joyce [...] slides from a *letter*⁴ to a *litter*,⁵ from a *letter* (I am translating) to a piece of rubbish [*à une ordure*]." (Lacan: 1971/2013, 327) The word *littera* denotes letter, writing, grammar, and literature. Lacan correlates the misspelling of *littera* as *litera* to the "equivoque" by which Joyce slips from a letter to a litter. While *littera* stands for the letter, the meaningless word "*litera*" is a kind of rubbish or litter. As a form of manipulation of language, "equivocation" could well be described as a kind of play on words, though it is a kind of word-play that is far more complex than mere homophony. Lacan uses the word "equivocation" here because he thinks that "letter" and "litter" denote the two forms of the letter itself: "The letter!", or the letter as meaning and semblance; and "The litter!", or the letter as trash or excreta. In the broader context of "Lituraterre", however, letter and litter represent two types of writing: the literal, or a writing with the help of letters that has a meaning, and the littoral, or a writing with the help of litter that marks the boundary between meaning and jouissance. In course of playing with the assonance of letter and litter, Joyce slipped from one type to the other. His slippage represents literature's crucial turn from the letter to litter, and through it, from the literal to the littoral. Lacan would go on to shed vital light on Joyce's slippage from a letter to a litter in "Lituraterre" and other subsequent works. Let us examine some of that.

Lacan briefly wonders in "Lituraterre" whether Joyce's writing as "litter" could have a relation to Saint Thomas Aquinas's writing as "chaff": "In making litter of the letter, is it Saint Thomas he is thinking of again, as the work bears witness to from beginning to end?" (Lacan: 1971/2013, 327) While Joyce's aesthetic theory is majorly and avowedly Thomistic in nature, Aquinas himself described his *Summa Theologica* as "*sicut palea*," or chaff, while explaining why he stopped writing the book after having spent eight years on it, referring to his mystical experience of December 1273 which impelled him to terminate his work on the book: "All the things I have written are like chaff (*sicut palea*) to me, compared with what I have seen and what has been revealed to me." (Quoted in Nobus: 2013, 328) However, since chaff and litter are not identical matters, and since the composition and publication of *Finnegans Wake* are vastly different from the writing

and abortion of *Summa Theologica*, Lacan is not sure whether Aquinas had indeed informed Joyce's slippage, which is why his remark on Joyce qua Aquinas is in the interrogative mode.

Lacan then states in the same essay that Joyce at once contained and spilled the literature of litter. He contends that Joyce's work introduced the literary dustbin that consigned polluted literature to it, which made him Saint Joyce in Lacan's eyes because, unlike Aquinas, who considered the saint's business to be *caritas*, or charity, Lacan considered the saint's business to be *trashitas*, or to act as trash, which is why he remarked in *Television*: "A saint's business, to put it clearly, is not *caritas*. Rather, he acts as trash [*déchet*]; his business being *trashitas* [*il décharite*]." (Lacan: 1974/1990, 15) And at the same time, Joyce allowed a spillover and recirculation of the contents of the dustbin, which made him a heretic. Such re-circulation of litter was in fact enabled not only by the publication of Joyce's later literary works, especially *Finnegans Wake*, as Lacan indicates, but also by the posthumous publication— or, better still, "*poubellification*", or publication as trash, as Lacan says in his 1968–69 Seminar on "From an Other to the other" and elsewhere— of Joyce's private correspondence with Nora called "the dirty letters" that was not meant for publication.

Since "litter" denotes both rubbish and excreta in Joyce, it invokes both the dustbin and the sewerage respectively as functions to keep them contained and controlled, thereby opening up the possibility of leakages from them as well. Joyce is the placeholder of the sewerage in literature. He inaugurated and embodied that place before others joined him. As the holder of this place, Joyce both contained excreta and leaked it out, which ought to be understood precisely in terms of the anal drive in psychoanalysis. The anal drive urges the subject to control and contain its excreta until a proper place to be relieved is found, which is due to its toilet training in terms of a series of demands of the big Other, usually the mother, as the trainer. Since the anal drive is thus a matter of compliance or non-compliance with the Other's demand, the subject at times wants to frustrate rather than fulfill it, which it does by expressing its own anal desire, usually by relieving itself at what the Other would consider a wrong place. Leakage or relieving oneself at a wrong

4 In English in the original.

5 In English in the original.

place is thus a form of assertion of one's own desire that is also a subversion of the demand of the Other. In his 1960–1961 Seminar on "Transference", Lacan explains that children generally comply with but occasionally revolt against the demand of the Other so as to express their own desire through deliberate defecation or urination at the wrong place.

Joyce made litter of the letter by describing the anal drive of his characters, such as of Bloom in *Ulysses*. At the end of the "Calypso" chapter in *Ulysses*, Bloom takes a dump in the outhouse and then checks the back of his trousers to make sure they are clean, that there is no stain caused by any leakage. Throughout "Sirens", Bloom feels the need to defecate but holds back the urge. He keeps reminding himself that he really must do Sandow's Exercises. The chapter closes with Bloom letting out a noisy fart, but concealing it under the noise of a passing tram. Apart from the word "farting" itself, derivatives of the word "fart"—such as "farther," "fartoomany-ness," "farth," "fartas," "pienofarte," "Grandfarthring," "farthing," "breakfarts," "farthingales," "farthernoiser," "farthest," "farth," "fartykkt" and "Afartodays"—occur throughout *Finnegans Wake*. Therefore, in the final analysis, Joyce was paradoxically protecting and damaging literature by containing and leaking out polluted literature at once.

An important aspect of Joyce's slippage from the letter to litter is that its magnitude kept on increasing as he progressed from one work to the next. Offering an explanation for this in Session 7 of the Seminar on "The *Sinthome*", Lacan says that Joyce's torturing of speech sounds more and more in his writings that ended in breaking or dissolving language itself in his last work, *Finnegans Wake*, where phonatory identity is almost lost and gone, is really his response to a certain relation to speech that the place of his lacking father was increasingly imposing on him. Lacan wonders whether by decomposing speech in this manner Joyce was able to free himself from speech or whether, paradoxically, he had exposed himself to a greater invasion of speech by thereby empowering its polyphony:

In his efforts dating back to his first critical essays, then in *A Portrait of the Artist*, and ultimately in *Ulysses* and ending in *Finnegans Wake*, in what is in some sense the continuous progress that his art constituted, it is hard not to see how a certain relationship with speech is increas-

ingly imposed upon him – namely, this speech that comes to be written while being broken apart, pulled to pieces – to the point that he ends up dissolving language itself [...]. He ends up imposing on language itself a sort of fracturing, a sort of decomposition, which makes it so that there is no longer any phonatory identity.

There is undoubtedly a reflection here at the level of writing. It is through the intermediary of writing that speech is decomposed by imposing itself as such. This occurs through a warping, and it is ambiguous as to whether this warping lets him free himself from the parasite of speech I was speaking about earlier, or whether it leaves him on the contrary open to invasion from the essentially phonemic properties of speech, from the polyphony of speech. (Lacan: 2005/2016a, 79)

One of Lacan's most original observations on Joyce's slippage from the letter to litter in terms of the writing of *Finnegans Wake* is that it provided Joyce *jouissance*. Lacan repeatedly states that we do not know what *Finnegans Wake* means, in so far as it is an unreadable and unanalysable work, but we can clearly sense as readers that Joyce enjoyed writing every word in it. Lacan believes that this enjoyment was Joyce's whole purpose of writing *Finnegans Wake*; that Joyce is, as his name suggests, joy, enjoyment, "joysance." This would explain why Lacan considers *jouissance* to be situated beyond meaning, where the ridge between the two is marked by the letter functioning as an edge that Lacan calls the littoral in "Lituraterre."

Lacan mentions another detail while making this very point in "Joyce the Symptom": "[...] this *jouissance*, is the sole thing in his text on which we can get a purchase. There lies the symptom. The symptom – in so far as nothing ties it to what makes for *lalangua* [*lalangua*] itself." (Lacan: 1982/2016b, 146) In other words, that Joyce enjoyed writing *Finnegans Wake* is the only thing that we can understand as readers of the novel. Lacan relates this to Joyce's unanalysable symptom. Going a step further, Lacan adds that this very *jouissance* of Joyce is what enables the readers to go through this otherwise unreadable novel without understanding anything of it at all: "Read a few pages of *Finnegans Wake* without striving to understand it. It's quite readable [...] because one can sense the presence of the *jouissance* of he that wrote it." (Ibid,

144) The novel is Joyce's symptom because we are unable to understand anything of it other than fact that Joyce enjoyed writing it. We are unable to understand anything more than that because, the language of the novel that is generated by littering the letter represents Joyce's *lalangue*.

Mentioned for the first time in his lecture on *The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst* dated November 4, 1971, the term *lalangue*, or "thelanguage" as a single word, is a coinage by Lacan that contains an allusion to Pierre André Lalande, author of a dictionary of critical and philosophical terms in French, and stands for the nonsensical articulation or absurd babble indicative of an elementary phenomenon that often characterises the language of the psychotic subject. Although *lalangue* is not a structure like language, it is nonetheless capable of producing the polysemic, homophonic and equivocal effects of the latter. It is a kind of phonation that predates language, meaningful speech and subjectivity itself. While language captures the unconscious's meaning effect, *lalangue* captures its jouissance effect. Joyce's meaningless littering in *Finnegans Wake* thus constitutes a unique instance of the creation of literature with the help of *lalangue*. *Finnegans Wake* is a symptom according to Lacan because no meaning connects to the *lalangue* in terms of which it is composed. In this context, the letter stands for language and meaning, while litter stands for *lalangue* and jouissance.

Lacan moreover implies that, Joyce's slippage is indicative of a deliberate attempt on his part to irreparably deform the English language and English literature to the point of converting it into litter so as to avenge the English for invading and colonising his country, oppressing his countrymen, and annulling his own language, Gaelic. The composition and, more importantly, the publication of *Finnegans Wake* that mark Joyce's slippage, enabled him to do so. Lacan states in "Joyce the Symptom": "he [Joyce] did use one particular tongue among others, one that is not his own – for his own is precisely a tongue that had been wiped off the map, to wit, Gaelic, of which he had a smattering, enough to get by, but hardly much more – not his own, then, but the tongue of the invaders, the oppressors." (Ibid, 146) However, Joyce himself claimed, "I have put the [English] language to sleep" (Ellmann: 1959/1982, 546), whose

meaning is best understood in terms of what he had said to Max Eastman later: "When morning comes of course everything will be clear again.... I'll give them back their English language. I'm not destroying it for good." (Eastman: 1931, 101) At a broader level, not mentioned by Joyce or Lacan, by littering 52 languages in all, major and minor, Joyce was trying to write a literature of litter on an unthinkable scale,⁶ as well as trying to write the last word in literature with the help of a work that would destroy all existing notions of literature itself. His aim was thus to disrupt or redefine almost all languages and all literature.

Above all, Lacan's most important observation on Joyce's slippage is that the sinful act of writing *Finnegans Wake* made it possible for Joyce to construct his *sinthome*, even though he is converted into a *synthomme* or a synthetic, as in artificially constructed, man in the process. Lacan thinks that Joyce's slippage in terms of the writing of *Finnegans Wake* must be primarily understood as the result of an attempt on his part to make a name for himself, with the help of the academics, so as to compensate for the absence of a stable Name-of-the-Father caused by paternal lack— an attempt which ultimately led to the creation of his *sinthome*. Lacan specifies in Session 8 of his Seminar on "The *Sinthome*" that Joyce had constructed an unanalysable *sinthome* for himself through his act of writing *Finnegans Wake* in particular. In this, Lacan was radically different from Jung. Whereas Jung, who had analysed Joyce's daughter Lucia, was extremely keen to also psychoanalyse Joyce, Lacan thinks Joyce would have gained nothing from a psychoanalysis, for he had already managed to achieve, all by himself, the best one could expect from psychoanalysis at its end. (Lacan: 1971/2013, 327)⁷ Unlike the end of analysis in the neuroses that is marked by an extreme sense of emptiness and destitution in the loci of the subject and the big Other, and thus by the realisation that life is a waste, a scrap in the real, the end of analysis in Joyce's case is related to his construction of and identification with a *sinthome* as a supplementary fourth ring so as to hold together and thus prevent the disintegration of his R.S.I., a three-ring Borromean knot. In a word, Joyce managed to create a *sinthome* for himself and stabilise his R.S.I. with its help by turning the letter into litter through his writing.

6 For the details, see Sandulescu 2012, 6–8.

7 For further details, see my essay "A Literary Introduction to 'Lituraterre.'" (Biswas: 2012, 176–177)

That brings us to the crucial question, what exactly was Joyce's method of converting the letter into litter? Lacan answered it from several perspectives of which let us focus on the three most important ones. Lacan's first response to the question, in his Seminar "On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge", is that, Joyce converted the letter into litter in *Finnegans Wake* by making his signifiers stuff the signified. This means, Joyce's signifiers are like slips of the tongue that can be read in an infinite number of ways. Notably, Joyce had not only read Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, a book that he owned, but also declared in *Ulysses*, somewhat like Freud, that "errors [...] are the portals of discovery." (Joyce: 1922/1960, 190) Lacan adds that, since the signifiers thereby tend to produce an enigmatic meaning, they are difficult to read, difficult to read in any one way, difficult not to read away, and difficult to decide to read:

What happens in Joyce's work? The signifier stuffs (*vient truffer*) the signified. It is because the signifiers fit together, combine, and concertina – read *Finnegans Wake* – that something is produced by way of meaning (*comme signifié*) that may seem enigmatic, but is clearly what is closest to what we analysts, thanks to analytic discourse, have to read – slips of the tongue (*lapsus*). It is as slips that they signify something, in other words, that they can be read in an infinite number of different ways. But it is precisely for that reason that they are difficult to read, are read away, or not read at all. (Lacan: 1975/1999, 37)

Illustrating one of the many ways in which the signified is stuffed by the signifier, Lacan states in "Joyce the Symptom" that in *Finnegans Wake* there is a very peculiar kind of a pun in which three or four words flash in a single word, such as the word "*pourspère*," which is fascinating even though meaning tends to get lost in the absence of an anchoring point. (Lacan: 1982/2016b, 144) *Pourspère* is a coinage of Lacan that sounds like a cluster of words in French

that mean "to spoil/rot in hoping/waiting" (*pourrir espérer*), "for father" (*pour père*), "prosper" (*prospère*), "imitator" (*pasticheur*), "pastiche" (*pasticher*), and "rottenness" (*pourriture*). Owing to an excess of meaning, the meaning of such words is always hard to determine and therefore they are always difficult to read satisfactorily.⁸

In this context Lacan further clarifies that this very peculiar kind of punning brings out Joyce's "cancellation of subscription to the unconscious." (Ibid, 146, emphasis in original) The expression has at least three meanings. First, Joyce did not prescribe any one meaning in the unconscious. Second, Joyce's writing neither endorses the view that the unconscious is structured like a language— for he delinks language from the unconscious and meaning— nor subscribes to an unconscious structured like English, as Lacan points out in this essay: "I've said that the unconscious is structured like a language. It's odd that I'm also able to speak in terms of a *cancellation of subscription to the unconscious* for someone who plays strictly on language, though he did use one particular tongue among others, one that is not his own [...]" (Ibid, 146) And third, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* is that kind of a symptom which does not tell the readers anything at all, as it does not allow anything in it to hook on to something in the unconscious of its readers: "It is the symptom inasmuch as it stands no chance what soever of hooking anything of your unconscious." (Ibid, 145) Therefore, as Lacan states in the same essay, Joyce the symptom is Joyce's singular symptom, for it does not concern anyone else and is completely unanalysable, due to which, literature itself is forever altered by it: "Joyce lifts the symptom to the power of language, without for all that any of it being analysable. This is what strikes you, and literally renders you [...] *speechless*. [...] That is what makes for the substance of what Joyce brings us, whereby, in a certain way, literature after him can no longer be what it was before." (Ibid, 146)

Lacan's second response to the question figures in "Joyce the Symptom", where he explains with the help of an example as to how Joyce was able to convert the letter into litter by making use of the pecu-

8 Hart makes a similar though not identical point when he states that, "The essential value of the pun or portmanteau-word in *Finnegans Wake* lies [...] in its capacity to compress much meaning into little space. [...] A good example is the word 'paltipsypote' (337.24) from the 'Scene in the Public', which neatly integrates 'pal', 'tipsy' and 'pote' into the idea of 'participating' in a round of Guinness." (Hart: 1962, 32-33) Even though both Hart and Lacan talk about packing a lot into a single word or coinage, the examples that they gave indicate that whereas Hart was thinking of coinages that resulted from the simple combination of a number of complete regular words, Lacan was thinking of coinages that resulted from the complex overlap of different speech sounds, or fragments of speech sounds, evoking different expressions.

liarity of English orthography that tends to support translinguistic homophony in a special way:

Now, were it not for this very special kind of spelling [letter-litter] that is specific to the English language, a good three quarters of the effects of *Finnegans Wake* would be lost. The most extreme case, I can tell you, and I owe this to Jacques Aubert, is – *Who ails tongue coddeau, aspace of dumbillsilly?* Had I come across this piece of writing on my own, would I have perceived or not – *Où est ton cadeau, espèce d'imbécile?* Where's your present, you imbecile? What is unprecedented in this is that the homophony, translinguistic homophony on this occasion, is sustained only by letters that conform to English-language spelling. (Ibid, 145)

Another example, pointed out by Hart, is that "Sevastopol", the name of the Crimean city implied in the "Butt and Taff" episode though not explicitly mentioned therein, also denotes "see a vast pool" and through it "the horrors of the Flood," the "apple" as the cause of the "original Fall", as well as "the name of Siva, the destroyer-god [in Hinduism]." (Hart: 1962, 33) In other words, Joyce littered the letter on the way to composing *Finnegans Wake* essentially in terms of a prodigious exploitation of the accidents of history, such as, of the translingual homophony that the orthography and phonetics of the English language could accommodate.

In the form of his third response, which may be found in the "Additional Session" to Session 4 of the Seminar on "The *Sinthome*", Lacan mentions how from *Ulysses* onward Joyce turned the letter into litter by subtly breaking up the sentences so as to give language another, usually unconventional, use:

Joyce writes English with these peculiar refinements that mean that he disarticulates the 8sion. Don't imagine that this only begins with *Finnegans Wake*. Long before, notably in *Ulysses*, he had a way of chopping up sentences [*les phrases*] that already inclined that way. It is truly a process that is exerted in the direction of finding another use for the language in which

he writes, in any case, a use that is far from ordinary. This is part and parcel of his *savoir-faire*. (Lacan: 2005/2016a, 59)

Lacan's expression "*les phrases*" stands for both "sentences" and "phrases," and his remark is valid for both these levels of Joyce's language. At the level of the phrase, for instance, Joyce distorts the expression "tongue-tied" into "Tung-Toyod" (123.20) so as to allude to "Jung-Freud" as two doctors whose "tongues toyed" with their patients and with each other, as well as to point to the "split" between them with reference to the context of "Schizophrenesis" (123.18-19), or "schizophrenia", in which the expression is used. All of the instances are highly unusual uses of the original expression.⁹ While at the level of the sentence, for instance, we find the following broken sentences in the penultimate line of the novel: "Lps. The keys to. Given! A way." (628.15) Here "Lps" is "lips", "The keys" also stands for "the kiss", and the set of fragmented sentences together mean, "The kiss given away [by ALP's lips]." Gordon rightly states, "ALP's letter always ends with kisses; this is the last one." (Gordon: 2020, 119) Moreover, as Tindall explains, "The keys to" refers to "the keys of me heart" (626.30-31); "The keys to. Given!" also means "the keys to heaven"; and "Given. A way" stands for both "the given away" and "the given or whatever is", the latter reaffirming ALP's earlier remark, "What will be is. Is is." (620.32) (Tindall: 1969, 328) Such "chopping up" of sentences makes unconventional uses of language possible by introducing a charged impulse for reintegration or recombination at different levels among the fragments, and creating thereby the possibility of textual intertwinings and the production of multiple novel meanings.

Lacan considers *Finnegans Wake* unreadable, unanalysable, completely meaningless, and the destroyer of the English language and literature. For these very reasons, however, he thinks that the novel paradoxically exemplifies a kind of perfection of language. He says in the Seminar "On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge" that language attains such perfection when it is enabled to litter writing properly: "You must sit down and read a little work by writers, not of your era [...] but you

9 Joyce's previous observation that Jung and Freud are "different," which he had expressed in a letter to Weaver dated June 24, 1921, by stating that "Doctor Jung (the Swiss Tweedledum who is not to be confused with the Viennese Tweedledee, Dr. Freud)," (Joyce: 1957/1966,166) culminates here in his allusion to the "split" between them. Moreover, since Jung had diagnosed Joyce's daughter Lucia as schizophrenic, much to Joyce's dismay, he seems to be making the suggestion here: physicians, heal thy selves.

could read Joyce, for example. You will see therein how language is perfected when it knows how to play with writing." (Lacan: 1975/1999, 36) Here, "perfection" stands for perfection in converting the letter into litter and perfection in creating a new letter out of that litter, without ever departing from the fundamental rules of language and writing. Language is perfected in the process of such play with writing in terms of speech sounds because, it is thus enabled to expand and incorporate what was missing in it until then. Therefore, Joyce represents that moment in history when literature and the English language were perfected in terms of the conversion of littering into writing with an extraordinary subtlety and finesse.

Finally, Joyce's expression "The letter! The litter!" in particular and his works in general were of special importance to Lacan because they empowered him to express his own views on literature and psychoanalytic readings of literature more emphatically. To begin with, Joyce's act of littering the letter helped Lacan ratify his own definition of literature as a form of "leftovers" ("*des restes*"). Lacan writes in "Lituraterre" that, insofar as literature "is a matter of collocating in written form [*l'écrit*] what would first be chant, spoken myth, dramatic procession," it "involves cooking up leftovers." (Lacan: 1971/2013, 328) In other words, insofar as literature is marked by a transition from the oral to the written, from the whole to its fragments, and from the great many to the few surviving, that is, from the letter to the litter, it is, properly speaking, a matter of satisfying oneself with the crumbs left behind.

Joyce's writing subscribes to a part of this definition insofar as it is a collation of fragments. Joyce wrote partly by putting together fragments of conversations, writings, languages, literary works and scraps and pieces of miscellaneous other things, always picked up and recycled in a disjointed or distorted form, very much like a rag picker stitching together his collection to form a dress. Hart writes: "Joyce has been variously praised and reviled for filling his later books with literary rubbish—catch-phrases, clichés, journalese, popular songs, and the worst kind of gush from girls' weeklies. It is undeniable that he found considerable delight in such trash, and a delight that was not always critical." (Hart: 1962, 31) As a matter of fact, Joyce's very method of collecting material for *Finnegans Wake* was a deliberately non-systematic

one. Dirk Van Hulle captured this creative haphazardness of Joyce's method with the remark: "a note from a newspaper can end up next to a note from, say, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, without any distinction. This obliteration of the original context creates opportunities for new associations." (Van Hulle: 2008, 89) In this, Joyce's collection functioned like the unconscious in which all kinds of scraps of writings can easily coexist without any conflict or contradiction. Van Hulle rightly adds that Joyce "decomposed" external material while composing *Finnegans Wake*. (Ibid) Correspondingly, Shem's house in *Finnegans Wake* is littered with a bizarre catalogue of things that contribute to his art. His house is described as "persianly literated with burst loveletters, tell-tale stories, stickyback snaps, doubtful eggshells, bouchers, flints, borers, puffers, amygdaloid almonds, rindless raisins, alphybettyformed verbage, vivlical viasses, ompiter dictas, visus umbique, ahems and ahahs [...]"; the list goes on. (183.10-14) Since no one was better aware of his method of writing than Joyce himself, his demonstration of the letter turning to litter and emerging as a new letter through his writing was his way of avowing this very truth about literature, namely, that it is a collation of scraps of leftovers.

This is the reason that Lacan, who himself viewed literature as a form of leftovers, did not feel the need to look beyond Joyce's equivocation on the letter and the litter to emphasise the weight of the word "*literature*" itself, as he states in "Joyce the Symptom": "And to underscore the weightiness of the word literature, I shall utter the equivoque that Joyce often plays on—*letter, litter*.¹⁰ The letter is litter." (Lacan: 1982/2016b, 145) In short, Lacan thinks that literature itself, which has always been a kind of leftovers, must be viewed in relation to the littering of the letter following the publication of the later works of Joyce.

Lacan's engagement with Joyce moreover helped him realise a matter of great significance for the interdisciplinary domain of "Literature/Art and Psychoanalysis." He says in his "Yale University: Interview with Students" on November 24, 1975: "Explaining art through the unconscious seems to me to be highly suspect, though this is what analysts do. Explaining art through the symptom seems more serious to me." (Lacan: 2022b, 67) Explaining art through the unconscious is "highly suspect" because, the unconscious being a somewhat general concept

10 In English in the original.

that can moreover be conceived entirely theoretically, an approach through it to art neither demands precision in interpretation nor requires the interpreter to have grasped psychoanalysis well enough, and tends to slip into the university discourse far too easily. Explaining art through the symptom, by contrast, is a "serious" exercise because it compels the reader to be precise, it requires the reader to have a fairly good command over clinical psychoanalysis, including the ability to make a distinction between the symptom and the *sinthome* in practise, and it tends to bring the work closer to the psychoanalyst's discourse.

While Lacan must have had Freud's works on art and literature on his mind when he spoke of how "analysts" usually approach these fields, since in his "Yale University: Kanzer Seminar", delivered earlier on the same day, he had explicitly stated with reference to Freud's psychoanalytic works on literature and art, and especially to the latter's essay on Jensen's *Gradiva* that "Freud tried [...] to see in art a kind of testimony of the unconscious" (Lacan: 2022a, 51), the plural form, "analysts," used by Lacan indicates that he may well have been thinking of the works of Freudians like Ernest Jones, Marie Bonaparte, Otto Rank and others on literature in addition to those of Freud. However, since Lacan himself explained "The Purloined Letter" in 1955, *Hamlet* in 1958–1959, *Antigone* in 1960, and Paul Claudel's *Coûfontaine Trilogy* in 1960–1961 through the unconscious,, the need to approach literature and art through the symptom rather than through the unconscious must have been a new realisation of his, one that had dawned on him only after he had practised both types of reading of art sufficiently. The fact that Lacan was able to state this only a few months after explaining Joyce's art through the symptom in two papers on "Joyce the Symptom", and only a few days after the first session of his public seminar on Joyce's

sinthome in Paris, unmistakably indicates that this realisation was facilitated by his engagement with the works of Joyce. More pertinently, since the letter has turned to litter, the literal has turned to the littoral, literary language has turned to *lalangue*, meaning has been replaced by *jouissance*, and literature that has turned to "litteringture" (570.18) is tending to turn to *liture*, all predominantly thanks to Joyce, psychoanalytic literary criticism ought to correspondingly change from being unconscious-centric to becoming symptom or *sinthome* centric in order to match the advancement made in the field of literature. It is a change in this interdisciplinary area that Joyce had rendered obligatory, and a change that no one before Lacan was equipped to identify or introduce.

To conclude, Lacan chose to highlight the expression "The letter! The litter!" in *Finnegans Wake* because, as an extraordinarily discerning reader of Joyce, he was able, unlike many Joyce scholars, to fathom the absolute centrality and unsurpassable value of this expression not only in Joyce's philosophy of composition in general, and in the text of *Finnegans Wake* as evidence of the former, but in the progression of European literature itself. Lacan's engagement with the works of Joyce at once enabled him to offer a fresh direction to the psychoanalytic readers of literature and art; to make momentous contributions to the field of psychoanalysis by offering a deep insight into a large number of crucial concepts of psychoanalysis, such as, semblance, littoral, lacking Name-of-the-Father, psychoses, symptom, *sinthome*, *jouissance*, *lalangue*, and so on; and to make a singularly path-breaking contribution to the field of Joyce studies by shedding valuable light on the cause, the effect and the very process of littering the letter from a remarkably original perspective.

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