From Catechism to Catachresis: 
Aspects of Joycean Pedagogy in 
_Ulysses_ and _Finnegans Wake_ 
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...there is nothing more wonderful than a list, instrument of wondrous hypotyposis.
—Eco, _The Name of the Rose_

Catachresis, catafalque, cataglottism: tropes of the Fall in Derrida’s _Glas_, signs of the inevitability of the author, of authority, and of the interrogation of sign and signature which the text both provokes and inscribes.

_Catachresis_. . . n. 1. Trope wherein a word is diverted from its proper sense and is taken up in common language to designate another thing with some analogy to the object initially expressed; for example, a tongue [langue], since the tongue is the chief organ of spoken language; a looking glass... a leaf of paper... It is also a catachresis to say: ironclad with gold; to ride a hobbyhorse... 2. Musical term. Harsh and unfamiliar dissonance.

E. Κατάχρησις, abuse, from κατά, against, χρῆσις, usage. (2)

Cataglottism, the “use of abstruse words,” becomes catafalque, bearer of the corpse of language and authorial _imprimatur_, becomes catachresis, the transformation of language through the trope of cataglottism enshrined through the agency of death upon a catafalque (author, book, reader, arche-text, writing) which is the Fall, tomb (_tombe_) and tome of the catachretic text. Thus Derrida encodes not only the cycle of _Finnegans Wake_ from Tim Finnegan’s fall to M’s rise but of the “phall” (FW 4.15) of language across the Joyce system from catachresis to catechism, from syllogism to epiphany, by way of the glassy medium of the medieval _speculum_, a dream with a death-knell built into it. _Glas_.

If _Portrait, Ulysses_, and _Finnegans Wake_—the major components of the Joyce system—constitute a _speculat_ive text (a text, in other words, which operates according to the textual program characteristic of the medieval _speculum_ or “mirror” form), those glyphic devices...
or sigla, which serve in the *Wake* as metonymic operators of marked data, may be found in varying forms elsewhere within the system, functioning in similar ways. Thus where a reader like S. L. Goldberg in *The Classical Temper* sees the Joyce system as an essentially Realist one moving toward glyphic disintegration, we may also see a predominantly speculative pedagogy which teaches readerly modes of programmed iteration as a strategy of world-building in and for itself; a "Gothic pedagogy" with what Kenneth Burke refers to in *The Rhetoric of Religion* as the "god-term" disseminated among the semes and sigla of the work, from SD and LB to M and Δ, among others; a learning system which segments its materials sequentially into questions and answers, and simultaneously into epiphanies, puns, and riddles. Throughout, the diachronic serves as vehicle for the synchronic which is its goal: ironically, a *Tunc* strategy, "then" and "now" always having the significance of macrocosmic statement, in the *Book of Kells* with its optical interlacing (to use Vinaver's term) as in the *speculum* and the liturgy with their topoi and rituals of declension and gesture.

This paper takes three of Joyce's system's major technics—syllogism, catechism, and the kernel trope of catachresis—and provides a necessarily brief account of some of their interactions and functions. My intention here is primarily to suggest some of these semiotic operations in terms of *Ulysses* as focal text rather than to demonstrate their workings across the whole system. Readers uncomfortable with the assumptions and lexicon of Eco-ian semiotics and information theory may find that *Ulysses* disappears in the process. My point, however, is precisely that *Ulysses* is programmed process—in other words, that the text encodes specific processual moves—and that we encounter the "'finished' text merging with its own development," as Michael Groden puts it (157–58), not only when we work with the Gabler edition of the text but whenever we take up *Ulysses* in whichever edition we use.

1. **Syllogism**

In the midst of a catechetically structured recital of the ills to which life is subject, "Ithaca"'s narrator asks, Did Stephen participate in his dejection?

He affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and a macrocosm
ineluctably construed upon the incertitude of the void. (U-G 1535)

The unknown macrocosm, the void, is a place, a locus on a memory
chain, a destination attainable through the exercise of the syllogism.
A vehicle of parallax and of parallactic enactment of the text, SD’s
syllogism is grounded in the act of reading as root paradigm. “Sign-
atures of all things I am here to read” says SD (U-G 75). Like LB,
he erodes any distinction between animate and inanimate in his quest
for understanding of the substance, the mode of operation and being
of all creation. “[S]easpawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty
boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs…”: like the Ballast
office clock, already catalogued, significant, waiting to “be epiphan-
ized,” followed by a “dog’s bark” (U-G 93) and a dead dog, by
SD’s lips which “lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to
her moomb. Oomb, allwomboing tomb” (U-G 97).

Death woven into the possibility of life creates the end-term:
infinity, the end of the catalogue, no supplement possible; the
defining term of the Joycean syllogism in Ulysses. “See now. There
all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end” (U
75), the doxology with its end-term suppressed (“Amain” as Finn-
egans Wake gives it—FW 81.08). The end is the book itself,
graphically represented in Ithaca by the transcoding of LB through
the language of sleep and into punctuation:

Going to dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor
roc’s awk’s egg in the right of the bed of all the awks of the
ros of Darkinbad the Brightdayler”
Where? (U-G 1633)

Thus the middle term is suppressed within the system, leaving the
first and last terms, SD and MB, Telemachia and Nostos, in balance.

In this transsignifying, syllogistic process, SD is the reagent, LB
the field of enactment, and MB the occasion of transsignification. If,
at the referential mimetic level, incertitude is what is being enacted
throughout 16 June 1904, at the processual mimetic one it is the
point of parallactic infinity, the naming of all the parts of this “world
without end.” At the end of “Circe,” the ghostly Rudy is bound in
speculary reading paradigmatic of the transience of performance as
well as of text and reader, and of their illusory nature. Later, in the
“Ithaca” chapter, LB arrives at a similar point from a different
trajectory:

Was this affirmation apprehended by Bloom?
—not understanding, not cognition but *apprehension* and apprehension which moves a stage beyond LB’s inaudible speaking of Rudy’s name during the vision. Here there are no words: apprehension has reached its ultimate form as substance. The very stuff of being, the wholeness and particularity of SD’s statement, is consumed in this Joussean eating of the book. So LB models the reception of the performance-text in his role as “conscious reactor against the void of incertitude” (U-G 1625). But, in contrast to SD’s emphasis on the void, LB’s on incertitude characterizes the reader’s primary analytic task in the Joyce system: to submit to textual programming, thereby reducing the incertitude occasioned by the bias of referential mimesis toward kerygmatic reading. Beginning to move beyond the surfaces of plot and character (to the extent that these devices are used in *Portrait, Ulysses*, and the *Wake*) as a means of reader orientation, the apprentice reader approaches the different surfaces of the system’s processual mimetic techné. In other words, the referential microstructure serves the primary purpose of situating the competent reader within the textual syllogism which requires the response demanded by all performative discourse: enactment of the weaving of the macrostructure according to textual program. When our sense of readerly balance falters and what Kenneth Burke refers to in *Language as Symbolic Action* as the “terministic screen” (44) of the microstructure dominates our reading, the system contains us within a complexity of semiosis for which the referential cannot begin to account.

Motivation, then, or the intratextual factoring of the text by such elements as parallax (in the Formalist sense of motif: a recurrent unit acquiring meaning beyond its basic semantic value as a result of repetition across the text or any portion of it)—or “looking back... in a retrospective kind of arrangement” (U-G 1423)—mimes the semiotic operations of the system as a whole. Through the co-occurrence of units comprising the motif, the system finds one agent of synchrony or the achievement of, as it were, the strengthening of its paradigmatic axis. This operation is what “Oxen of the Sun” refers to as “retrogressive metamorphosis” (U-G 849) since such readerly cognitive processing must always be the consequence of rereading, reflection, analysis. “Da capo,” as the instruction puts it in “Sirens” (U-G 627). In this mnemonic exercise, “Ithaca” provides rhythmo-catechetical training, the response paradigms generated by its techné (that is, by
its encoded performative directives) hypostatizing what Michel Beaujour has referred to as "topo-logy," the logic and logospecificity of topos and place, troping the performative discourse of the text and modeling its most basic semiotic operations.

2. Catechism

In the course of his study of the Gospels as "a narrative semiotics," Louis Marin reflects on the meaning of locus, "place," in the context of the discovery of Christ's empty tomb:

The fact that this place (locus) is a tomb and that the absence is that of a disappeared cadavre introduces into the semantic dimension of history the transformation of topography into topos, of locus of space into locus of speech (parole).6

Marcel Jousse's concept of the "rhythmico-catechizing" process encoded within the Gospels here intersects with Marin's theory at the point where catechism takes over from event for with the disappearance of the body comes the disappearance of authority. As the medieval cliché puts it, there can be no auctoritas without the divine auctor whose presence suffuses the text with meaning.7 Thus the necessarily parallactic enactment of the catechetical techne mimes not the recovery of the author but the recovery of the topoi in the process of readerly enactment of the performance-text. Like the holistic gestural enactment of the Gospels in the liturgy, the processing of Joycean performative discourse requires a training process in the recognition of what "is epiphanised" (SH 211) within the text at the motivic level as well as at other levels of patterning across each component of the system. Thus the parallactic "topo-logy" of "Ithaca" with its catechetical response paradigms becomes a massive review exercise and we are put through our dramatic paces.

Central to that catechistic process is an accommodation of typography to topography epitomized in the rhetorical figure of topographia,8 a semantic correlative of what modern physics epitomizes as spacetime. Joycean topographia is, however, very different from Marin's understanding of the topographic transformation from "locus of space into locus of speech" since the Joyce system rejects the reification of "speech/parole" as powerfully as it does that of "space," and teaches us only itself.

What we learn in "Ithaca"—as in the rest of Ulysses—is neither scientific nor encyclopedic but speculative, which is to say modeled upon the medieval speculum with its hyperbole of systems and
elaboration of components bound not by referential or scientific
codes of origination—as, say, the Britannica is—but only by the logic
of their own composition and semiotic relation to other systems.
Compare the status of the encyclopedia with its relentless struggle
to "keep abreast of the latest knowledge," as the cliche has it; a
struggle which evidences the drive toward the fullness of sequentiality,
of "fact," in the face of the equally relentless incursion of mystery.
As Vincent Descombes puts it:

On the one hand, the name of Encyclopedia excludes the
supplement, for this title announces that the book is meant to
have a comprehensive coverage of its subject from A to Z. On
the other hand, in order to be what it claims to be, the
Encyclopedia must allow the possibility of a supplement, an
exposition beyond Z...." (56)

"Beyond Z" is that condition which Gilles Deleuze refers to as the
"rhizome" and Umberto Eco as the "inconceivable globality" (Se-
miotics and the Philosophy of Language 83), a global plenitude of
knowledge which is beyond the rational powers of the human brain.

The encyclopedia, in other words, is grounded—in sheer vi-
olation of its apparent epistemology—in the possibility of finally
writing Truth, of inscribing the Logos and thereby, for a moment,
suppressing mystery. The medieval speculum, in contrast, is free of
this burden precisely because what Bernes refers to in Sade/Fourier/
Loyola (3) as the logosetic ambition is denied to it. The perfecton
of the god-term is precisely what it may not inscribe except in the
sense that catalogues grounded in the rhetorical strategy of elaboratio
are ultimately acts of homage to the creator of such frequently
enumerated groups as, to quote Michel Beaujour's list (32), "the
nine heavenly spheres, the nine angelic orders, the four elements,
the four humours of the body and the soul, the four ages of the
world, the seven ages of man, the seven virtues and the seven deadly
sins." If we allow for the performative nature of both liturgy and
Joyce system, we are not far here from the world of Plumtree—
"Peatmoat. Trumplee. Moupant. Plamtreo" (U-G 1501) or "Old
Ollebo, M.P." (U-G 1487) or any of the response paradigms across
the system. In performance, in enunciation, the text becomes what
it is. As Eco puts it in The Aesthetics of Chaosmos (7), "If you
take away the transcendent God from the symbolic world of the
Middle Ages, you have the world of Joyce," a "world" or system
to which Kennerh Burke's strategy of "logologizing" is applicable.
"If we defined 'theology' as 'words about God,'" Burke writes in The Rhetoric of Religion (1), "then, by 'logology' we should mean 'words about words.'" In contrast to Eco's procedure of subtraction, logology is a strategy of conservation and has the great advantage of enabling us to consider that theological statements about the nature of 'God'... [may] be adapted mutatis mutandis for use as purely secular observations on the nature of words." This is a crucial maneuver since, for Burke, "men's thoughts on the Divine embody the principles of verbalization" (1). Logologically speaking, then, the speculum directs its inquiry toward the celebration of language in itself, a goal which can be achieved only through the "rhythmo-catechizing" of response paradigms whose ever-increasing complexity inscribes the polysemy of language itself.

In the Joyce system, these response paradigms are mnemonic events in part because neither component of the catechetical paradigm is necessarily predictable within the sequence of which it is a part. Precisely because so much of what we learn through this mode will strike us as being—rather like the nine angelic orders—non/sense outside the system, the catechetical act is grounded in strict, paradigmatic order and syntagmatic processing. Its sense, in other words, is defined by and within the system. Not referential value but mnemonic placing within the topography of the whole is the criterion for Joycean inscription of data. Consider LB's catechized conclusion about the nature of the heavens:

That it was not a heaventree, not a heavengrot, not a heavenbeast, not a heavenman. That it was a Utopia, there being no known method from the known to the unknown.... (U-G 1545)

—a statement which we know to be only part of the paradigm since, two pages later, LB adapts SD's syllogistic procedure in the sacramental elucidation of MB as "invisible attractive person... denoted by a visible splendid sign" (U-G 1547). All of which leads us to the traditional, coincidentally opposite conclusion that MB is either a Utopian being who enables the movement from known to unknown or that she is the missing term of an incomplete syllogism. More likely, she is—like Δ in the Wake—aligned with the celestial sphere, given "Ithaca"'s earlier assertion of "The heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit" (U-G 1537) as the "spectacle" which confronts SD and LB as they emerge into the garden to urinate in tandem. If the association of MB with urine seems unlikely, we have only to think of the various chamber pot references in Ulysses and
of the extension of this topos in *Finnegans Wake*, "Fanny Urinia" (*FW* 171.28), to confirm the outlines of this response paradigm within the Joycean *speculum*.9

If tree, grot, beast, man, and water make neither a heaven nor a Utopia, it is clear that they are at least elements of a knowable, cataloguable system, a *speculum mundi* which inevitably includes both love and hate as well. They are terms on LB’s memory wheel: “Hate. Love. Those are names. Rudy. Soon I am old” (*U-G* 615). Fulfilling Emile Benveniste’s principle that “an utterance is performative insofar as it names the act performed...The utterance is the act; the utterer performs the act by naming it” (274), this present-tense naming performs the act it utters but the performance is a complex one for we can respond adequately to such dramaticistic demands only to the extent that we have acquired performance-competence.10 Catachresis serves to assist our achievement of that pedagogical goal.

3. Catachresis

However ekphrastic the moment, however recapitulative the motivational, the textual performance must end.11 And that end must be inscribed within the system as well, inscribed so fully that the moment of semantic infinity—the moment when parallax at last accepts the intersection of its lines—will also be part of the gestural repertoire. This is the function of the pun, a form of catachresis or “misuse” which epitomizes the Joyce system’s defiance of the ontological primacy of sequentiality in the act of reading. Where catechism is structurally dialogical, catachresis in its punning form is syllogistic, its middle term dispersed from the immediate occasion across the system. A device of segregation and dissociation in Joyce, catachresis mimes the Babel of all language, temporarily hazarding a creative aphasia. But used within a system characterized by a high degree of redundancy and motivic patterning, and itself inscribed within the text’s motivational, catachresis has the effect of ictus, a term whose neurological meaning is as useful here as its poetic one. ictus refers to that brief pause which comes before the beginning of another kind of epileptic seizure, a pause which stands in double relation to the ensuing event for it is both warning of a time of heightened awareness before interlanguage of poetics, ictus
denotes the stress falling on the long syllable of a metrical foot but, as the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics reminds us, the term was also used by Horace and Quintilian “to describe the movement of the foot or the hand in keeping time with the rhythm of a verse,” (362) a kinesic gesture associated with Joussean rhythmocathecizing.

In a system characterized by processual mimesis, ictus mimes the moment of death or semantic infinity within the “double gesture” (to use Derrida’s term from “The Double Session”) of catachresis. Like epiphany, catachresis serves to clear an opening in language, to interrupt the relentlessness of inscription and enact the absence of name. As a single event, catachresis attempts to subvert the memory system built up through enactment of catechetical performativ e discourse while retaining the place of mnemonics within the semiosis of the system. Attempting to sustain the instant of transsignification by intensifying the polyvalence of that operation, catachresis refuses to accede to the semantic demands of conversion and remains grounded in the iterability of the word and in its status within the logothetic economy of performative utterance. Analogous to Freudian dreamwork, catachresis synthesizes question and response, past and future, manifest and latent, catalyzing dichotomies into polyvalent units within the memory system. But this analogy is a partial one at best for Joycean catachresis, as a strategy of the speculatived mode, works in triumphant rejection of mystery—or, in terms of Freud’s ontotheology, of the “unconscious” with its claims to encyclopedic rather than speculatived operation.12 Like parody, catachresis functions in this context as a device of programmed enunciation and sometimes of homage, rather than of kerygmatic proclamation. And like epiphany, catachresis epitomizes the system’s defiance of the ontological primacy of sequentiality in the act of reading, attempting through the dissemination and re/collection of its terms to test the memory system built up in the course of its own enactment in performance.

While “Ithaca” provides an extended initiation into the catechetical mode and a rigorous exercising of dialogical procedures present in elementary form since the beginning of the Portrait,13 Finnegans Wake develops catachresis by way of Vico’s “Mental Dictionary” in The New Science (par. 482) and his concepts of poetic geography and poetic etymology (par. 527). To those concepts both geometry and hieroglyphics are essential in the Science Nuova and in the Wake where in II.ii the catechetical exercise of schoolboy
lessons is repeatedly fractured, first by Λ’s interjections which mime the effect of catachresis, and later by the geomater diagram or catachresis in Euclidean glyphic form. Elsewhere I have argued that it is the Vichian principle of morphogenesis—that is, of textual decomposition, deconstruction and code-generation—which governs the performative discourse of the *Wake*. In the case of the geomater diagram, the “keys to” (*FW* 628.15) this process are not only given but displayed topographically through a double gesture conjoining catechism and catachresis across that anatomically discursive space which has been particularly involved in the production of what Vico refers to as “interpattratio” (par. 448), the father’s interpretation.

In the *Wake*, then, catachresis is concerned with “scribings scrawled on eggs” (*FW* 615.10): the inscription of language through the body, in terms of it, and upon it, whether the flesh in question be Δ’s, Σ’s, or the “hides and hints and misses in prints” (*FW* 20.11) of the “mamafesta.” Logically considered, sacramental transformation is syllogistic transsignification (in becoming word, flesh decays into process). The result: “silents selfloud” (*FW* 267.17), the *Wake*’s resolution of catachresis into Vico’s highest form of language: the silence of the gods before the first thunderword provoking human experience of fear, marriage, warfare, organized religion, and the modern state. Taking Vico’s catalogue as one basis for its *speculative* history, the *Wake* inscribes the moment of ictus—of that instant of suspended comprehension which is the syllogistic moment of catachresis as trope—at the center of the system. In doing so, the system moves constantly toward its own closure in response, its own opening in surprise and silence.

NOTES

1. Cf. Roland McHugh’s use of this term in *The Sigla of Finnegans Wake* to signify a mode of “personality condensation” (10 ff.). I extend the use of the term here to the other components of the Joyce system, an application for which Joycean precedent may be found in, for example, Buffalo Notebook VI.C.7 in *The James Joyce Archive*, vol. 27.

2. I owe this phrase to my colleague Patricia Merivale who uses it in a very different sense in her article, “Learning the Hard Way: Gothic Pedagogy in the Modern Romantic Quest.”

3. This paper is a portion of a book on the poetics of the Joyce system. I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding in support of this project and for a grant in aid of my participation in the Tenth International James Joyce Symposium in Copenhagen, June 1986.
4. With the semiotic concept of process used here, compare John Paul Riquelme’s phenomenological approach to the "oscillating perspective" of the reader, and Wolfgang Iser’s of the shifting "pictures" presented by the narrative.

5. On Jousse’s concepts of rhythmico-catechizing and mnemonic gesture, see Weir, "The Choreography of Gesture: Marcel Jousse and Finnegans Wake."


7. See A.J. Minnis (10 ff.) on auctor and auctoritas.


9. Among the many studies of this element, see Solomon, 77–80.


12. For a development of this argument, see Weir, "Performing the Dreamwork: Vichian Morphogenesis in Finnegans Wake," forthcoming.

13. A detailed discussion of this part of the system will be found in Weir, "Barthes' Loyola / Joyce's Portrait (Taxonomy and Paradigm)."

WORKS CITED


