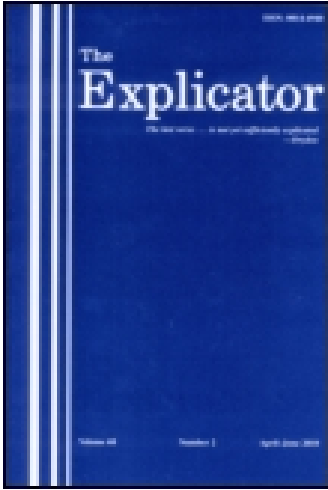


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Yeats's the Second Coming

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number of ways: “I would like a cup (or pot) of porter, please,” “I would like a cup (or pot) of Porterpiese,” “Why am I like a cup of Porterpiese?” “Why am I like two peas in a pod?” among others. I would add the following: “Why am I like an aposiopesis?”

Why assume, though, that aposiopesis is here at all? First, we know of Joyce’s playful command of rhetorical devices as evidenced from his insertion of over 115 rhetorical figures (including aposiopesis) into the “Aeolus” chapter of *Ulysses*. Second, he always urged his readers to listen to “sound sense,” the underlying acoustics of a line. Third, aposiopesis helps explain the revision of the first draft “cup of porterpease” to “poss of porterpease.” Finally, aposiopesis carries with it both thematic and self-referential functions.

The implicit answer to this version of the prankquean’s riddle (“Why am I like an aposiopesis?”) would be “I am incomplete,” or “I am an incomplete sentence.” The prankquean suffers from the same isolation that the Jarl suffers; she needs, ironically, the same completion as he does. (Note that his response “Shut!” is itself a case of aposiopesis, a truncation of “Shut up!”) A Freudian analysis might add that the prankquean desires the phallus (as the tale tells us, “one man in his armour was a fat match always for any girls under shurts”).

Finally, the identity of the prankquean as aposiopesis here entails a moment of self-referentiality. The *Wake* itself ends with an aposiopesis: Anna Livia Plurabelle’s last words as she drifts into death, her last sentence incomplete, ending with the isolated article “the” (628). And yet, the sentence is completed if one returns to the beginning lines of the novel, “riverrun, past Eve and Adams [. . .],” and moves toward the end of this now completed sentence, bringing us eventually to “Howth, Castle and Environs,” or HCE (3). On this level, then, the prankquean’s identity as aposiopesis implicitly mirrors the narrative structure of the *Wake* itself.

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Yeats’s THE SECOND COMING

A reader of “The Second Coming” is likely to miss the ironic point of the double entendre “Bethlehem” in the last line (22) if the poem is not recognized for what it is—a pendant to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “The Burden of Nineveh.” (In his *Autobiography*, Yeats records the fact that he arrived at poetic maturity in a Pre-Raphaelite milieu.)

In "The Burden of Nineveh," Rossetti reflects on "A wingèd beast from Nineveh" (10) whose statue he encountered as he was leaving the British Museum ("our Museum galleries," 1):

A human face the creature wore,
And hoofs behind and hoofs before,
And flanks with dark runes frett'd o'er.
'Twas bull, 'twas mitred Minotaur,
A dead disembowelled mystery;
The mummy of a buried faith
Stark from the charnel without scathe,
Its wings stood for the light to bathe,—
Such fossil cerements as might swathe
The very corpse of Nineveh. (11–20)

The "creature" casts a chilling shadow and is itself a shadow: "The beast's recovered shadow" (42), "shade" (44, 67), "this shadow" (65), "This shadow" (66), "thy shadow" (70). Rossetti muses that, having unearthed the statue, future generations will conclude that the "beast" was worshiped in London.

Archaeologists,
finding in this desert place
This form, shall hold us for some race
That walked not in Christ's lowly ways,
But bowed its pride and vowed its praise
Unto the God of Nineveh. (196–200)

In contrast to "Christ's lowly ways," and by way of a pun on the word "bowed," the worshipers of the "beast" use their "pride" as a bow, a weapon.

When Yeats, following Rossetti, writes, "Surely the Second Coming is at hand, / The Second Coming!" (10–11), a reader, influenced by the word "revelation" (9), may be inclined to find in the *Apocalypse* a key to the poem. But Yeats's intent is neither prophetic nor eschatological: it is satiric. The "vast image" (12) that "Troubles [his] sight" (13) is not a millennial bugbear creeping out of Sacred History; it slouches "out of *Spiritus Mundi*" (12) in the guise of a fiction created by the modern psyche. Here the phrase "*Spiritus Mundi*" is employed as an irony of inversion and is intended to signify not the authentic transcendental enterprise of rising above the ego but its travesty as figured by—and under the tutelage of—"Pride's lord and Man's" ("The Burden of Nineveh" 141). The "beast" is hubris, the generator of chaos.

When Yeats mentions "sands of the desert" (13) and "shadows of the indignant desert birds" (17), he lends immediacy to Rossetti's visionary description of London as "this desert place" ("The Burden of Nineveh" 96). Pointedly, Yeats alters Rossetti's human-faced bull to "A shape with lion body and the head of a man" (14). Here the "lion body" evokes imperial London by way of the leonine statuary guarding, as it were, the entrance to the British Museum. To Yeats, the spirit of this world (the inversion of *Spiritus Mundi*) finds its metonymic expression in the Museum lions, and the extent of its vision is sig-

naled by “A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun” (15). The “sun” symbolizes sheer consciousness, which generates only kaleidoscopic abstraction, or the pseudo-formalization of rationalism; it lacks conjunction with the Luna of esoteric alchemy, the moon of Romantic desire, the reflective orb of archetypes, the earthly glow of the Collective Unconscious whose object of directional yearning is the *Logos* (the spiritual “sun” of esoteric alchemy).

To Yeats, the Second Coming grotesquely sketched in the poem is hardly the Christian Parousia, the celebration of the universal presence of the Savior coming on clouds of glory to judge the world. It is the resurgence of the “rough beast” (21) arising from its “burial-clouds of sand” (“The Burden of Nineveh” 132), the “second” (or consequent; Latin *secundum*: “immediately after, after”) coming of “Mere anarchy” (4). The crassest misrule comes immediately after a civilization has lost touch with the *Logos*. In Rossetti’s words, “The callous wind, it seemed to me, / Swept up the [winged beast’s] shadow from the ground” (65–66). Here the word “ground” connotes the Christian belief that God is the “ground” of our morale. (In Latin, *spiritus* means “wind, breath, spirit, air.” Rossetti’s conception of the “callous wind” foreshadows Yeats’s ironic treatment of “*Spiritus Mundi*.”)

When “Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (4), the “rough beast” (21) slouches inside its mother (French *mère*, “mother”) toward the complete inversion of “Bethlehem” (22), the birthplace of Jesus and of incarnational Christian morality. It advances within the womb of its dam, Anarchy, “to be born” (22). Yeats’s satirical point is that the “beast” slouches, actually and consistently, toward the insane asylum in London once known as the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem; later, as Bedlam.

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Woolf’s MRS DALLOWAY

Much of the comic effect of *Mrs Dalloway* is costumed in the see-through rags of pre-existing literature. The understated Attic comedies of Aristophanes are prominently situated in this lapful of odds and ends as a device to outwit or chasten various characters with ridicule. Fragmentation suggests that some assembly will be required.