

**SCRIPTURAL POETICS IN JOYCE'S**  
*FINNEGANS WAKE*

Gian Balsamo

Studies in Irish Literature  
Volume 7

The Edwin Mellen Press  
Lewiston•Queenston•Lampeter

## Contents

Acknowledgment	i
Abbreviations	iii
Preface by William Franke	v

### *PART ONE. Repetition and Revision in Scriptural Poetics*

1. Type and Repetition, History and Presence	3
2. Type, Memory, and the Presence of the Present	7
3. Type and Repetition in Scripture	13
4. What is Scriptural Typology?	19
5. Joyce's Repetition and Revision of Biblical Types	29
6. Cultural Politics of Joyce's Scriptural Poetics	41

### *PART TWO. Scriptural Poetics and Ulysses*

1. Scriptural Poetics	47
2. Scriptural Poetics and Biblical Canonization	51
3. Paradigms of Scriptural Poetics	59
4. Joyce and Scriptural Poetics	65
5. Servitude and Filial Succession in "Telemachus"	73
6. Filiation and Coleridge's Christ-Type in <i>Ulysses</i>	87

**PART THREE. Scriptural Poetics in *Finnegans Wake***

1. Typology, Typography, and Character Amalgamation	97
2. The Primal Scene of Sodomy in <i>Finnegans Wake</i>	105
3. The Bark of His Tale: After the Flood	111
4. The Museyroom: Willingdone and the Three Lipoleums	115
5. The Gateway to Phoenix Park	121
6. An Unknowable Assailant and Obelisk Man	127
7. The Substance of the Tale	131
8. Typology and Interpretation	137
9. Stratigraphy of Type	145
Appendix: Typology and Deconstruction	149
Closing Remarks	159
Bibliography	169
Index of Names	179
Index of Biblical Names	181
Index of Joycean Names	183

**Acknowledgment**

Andrew Blom has bequeathed me, when we parted ways after reading the *Wake* together, a wealth of annotations and commentaries worthy of a more diligent legatee. Tom Altizer has allowed me to consult the first drafts of his astounding work in progress, *Godhead and the Nothing*. William Franke has been prodigal of support during my composition of this book and of its companion volume as well, *Rituals of Literature* (Bucknell University Press, forthcoming). Armanda Balsamo has given me permission to reproduce her painting, *Wrestling with the Angel*, on the front cover. I completed this book in the course of a sabbatical leave granted me by the Introduction to the Humanities Program (IHUM) of Stanford University.

Gian Balsamo  
Stanford University  
Palo Alto, October 2001

## Preface

Literature as Liturgy and the Interpretive Revolution of Literary Criticism

by William Franke

Professor of Comparative Literature and Religious Studies  
Vanderbilt University

A new age for literary criticism is at work affirming itself in Gian Balsamo's book on the theological poetics, or more precisely the Scriptural types, of James Joyce. To fully appreciate this book's significance, we need to begin by meditating on the revolution in the method and conception of literary-critical interpretation that the work embodies and contributes to developing. Since roughly the 1960's literary criticism has advanced audacious claims to being the growing tip of philosophy in the broadest sense. The most effective means of penetrating the increasingly complex intellectual problems of the day began to be considered in certain quarters to be no longer speculative thinking and analysis of facts and concepts but rather reading and textual interpretation as they emerged within the ambit of "theory." Enhanced and empowered by new techniques of reading and a new ethos and self-understanding, criticism began to invade and revolutionize the whole spectrum of humanistic disciplines by re-theorizing their means, media, and materials in literary and textual terms. Even in philosophy, previously in various ways the methodological master discipline of the humanities, as well as of social and natural sciences, some of the most challenging thinking could be construed no longer, according to the model of either perception or contemplation, as gazing upon an object from a distance and then analyzing it into parts but rather, according to the models offered by reading and discourse, as a

mutually interactive and involved process without impermeable lines of demarcation and domination between the subject and the object of the inquiry. What comes to light with apocalyptic *éclat* through Balsamo's thoroughgoing integration of the biblical and Joycean imaginative visions is how one of the most illuminating paradigms for this sort of reciprocity and transformativity, which have become pervasive epistemological postulates across all fields of intellectual endeavor, can be found convincingly in Scriptural typology.

It is because perception of individual character is ineradicably typical that Biblical typology turns out to be so revealing for the process of understanding in all literature and in fact in all significant representation of character and event. We always read, inevitably, in terms of types; our very perceptions and intuitions are themselves constituted by repetitions and projections of types that are familiar but also only definable in terms of their recurrences and as referred to repeatable paradigms, hence to realizations past and/or potential. The past, in turn, really and actually exists only in its potential to be realized again. In this sense, every present of consciousness is always necessarily inhabited by traces of past and future. Thus consciousness is never purely present to itself but always contaminated and conditioned by something other than itself, some heritage or destiny. How and why this happens, and what it implies for the sort of knowledge we can attain through literature and through any other medium relying on letters, or really on any kind of sign, can be understood paradigmatically with reference to Scripture.

Scriptural typology, distinguished by Balsamo from dogmatic typological systems that he calls "Christian typology," brings with it an incomparable depth and richness of reflection and theory about typification or the functioning of literary types and figures in tradition and history. The study of typicality in the Bible and in the literature it spawns thus opens an inexhaustible field for theorization of the fundamental facts of creation of culture and particularly of the literary and its powers for en-

gendering the worlds of historical significance in which human beings live and create their cultures and, not least importantly, their religions. The dynamics of typology emerge from within this perspective as preeminently revelatory of the basic nature of reading and textual significance and thereby of general human and historical understanding.

The typological method of interpretation was developed originally by rabbis and Church fathers in order to read Scripture, but it was adapted also as a technique of symbolic representation by secular literature, most especially by the Christian epic tradition—which Balsamo treats as a unified and distinct genre in his forthcoming *Rituals of Literature*. For Balsamo, as already for Thomas Altizer before him, the legacy, or the spirit, of Scriptural typology and hermeneutics was pursued most faithfully and creatively by a secular literature of Christian epics by writers including Dante, Malory, Tasso, Spenser, Milton, Blake, Goethe, and finally Joyce. This is the tradition within which Joyce and his enormous significance as a religious, and particularly a Eucharistic writer become newly and startlingly readable. This whole tradition is made only in and by its own undoing; it pivots on the dynamics of typology as typology evolves from Old and New Testaments through the Christian epics, and is therefore based throughout its whole extent on the sort of ceaseless, radical revisionism that the ancient and modern poles of the Bible and Joyce throw into powerful relief. In this way, the full import of Scriptural typology comes into its own with maximum relief far outside the compass of Scripture proper, in Christian epic tradition and ultimately in the writings of Joyce. The aspects of Scripture that open it to typological, which means to prospective and retrospective, creations of significance are placed most vividly into relief by an author at the far end of the historical parabola of the tradition of Christian epic, in what remains one of its most challengingly modern incarnations. Our way of reading Scripture stands to be impacted as powerfully as our reading of Joyce is illuminated by the conjunction of

the two around their common investment in typology. This is what Balsamo's book brings out in exquisitely detailed and carefully argued ways.

Balsamo begins his argument from a critique of presence as never simple and only itself but rather always borrowed from and contaminated by non-presence, by a remembered past and/or an anticipated future. This is conspicuously the case in Scriptural typology, where each character or event intrinsically refers to others and has its "own" being only outside itself in these relations. Furthermore, this predicament actually illuminates a general condition of whatever beings we encounter in reading and perception and indeed in any type of experience whatever. The intrinsic iterability of literary existence is paradigmatic for any experience of being. Balsamo's critique of presence thus catalyzes a reassessment of the relation between types and their antitypes, making it no longer a one-way street from origin to fulfillment but rather a process of ongoing retrospective revision by which filiation is reversed and the chronological progenitor (the Biblical type) is produced in the sense of being radically redefined by the chronological successor (the Joycean reprise and re-elaboration of the Biblical type). This is actually the dynamic of Scriptural typology as the church fathers and medieval theologians, quoted extensively by Balsamo discovered it.

Biblical typology, as practiced and as re-elaborated constantly throughout subsequent ages of interpretation, is indeed remarkable for the way it resurrects typical characters and features of tradition in order to re-animate them in new historical contexts. This relation of reinterpretation and revitalization characterizes already, paradigmatically, the New Testament as a recasting of the Old. The New Testament had radically displaced the authority of the Old. It was an interpretive revolution that revealed the true meaning of Moses and of every Old Testament motif in Jesus and therefore as outside the Hebrew canon altogether. Thus Scriptural typology itself provides the basis of a revolutionary relation between type and antitype, reversing chronological relations of filiation. This

revolutionary potential is obscured and betrayed only by certain tendencies to doctrinal narrowing which, for Balsamo and presumably already for Joyce himself, are represented emblematically by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas's codification of typological hermeneutics into the famous system of the four-fold senses built on the literal, historical sense misrecognizes the interpretive, totally revisionary essence of the process itself, with no static sense that can remain fixed and intact outside it. Something analogous happens in Aquinas's theology of the Eucharist, which, as Balsamo shows in *Rituals of Literature*, loses the sense of full actualization of the event of ritualistic sacrifice in its liturgical interpretation.

What is so specially revealing in Joyce, especially the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*, is the way language openly displays the amalgamations and accretions and permutations by which it is temporally constituted in constant negotiations between its reservoirs of crystallized meaning and its projections and promises of possibilities of sense. Language viewed and exposed thus is an archeology that is also a teleology, showing the potentialities that were inherent in linguistic elements all along but only in terms of their distant progeny and prospects born openly to the light of day in language centuries and ages later. This progeny itself then actually filiates its own ancestry by the new twists and turns—which can include radical shifts and reversals—that it gives to its heritage as a whole. Through hints at the micro-linguistic level, Joyce's Ham becomes the pivot-point for re-reading the Biblical Ham as well as Shakespeare's Hamlet in a startling new light, specifically the lurid light cast by the scene of primal incest that remains so largely latent and implicit in the precedents, particularly in the Genesis story of Noah and his sons, but is worked out in excruciating detail—that is, with reference also to the primal sacrifice of the Crucifixion—in its later Joycean incarnation. Joyce's rendering in fact becomes an unreserved revelation or apocalypse of this Scriptural type, to use and abuse, that is, to mutate and recreate another category typical of Scripture itself and key to Balsamo's reconstruction of "Scriptural poetics."

Joyce's appropriations, disappropriations and reelaborations or re-inventions of Biblical types are not only anachronistic, making thereby the child the father of the man. They are also anarchic. Typological engendering is a mutual process for both the type or prefiguration and its anti-type or fulfillment without any element that is any more origin than destination, more beginning or "arché" than mediation. There can thus be no fixed doctrinal or even semantic paradigm that delimits *a priori* the range of significances that these types bear or can take on. Joyce's linguistic procedures of amalgamation, accretion and abbreviation, substitution and emendation work in unrestrained ways to bring novel significance and latent, unsuspected relations out of each and every type everywhere related to one another. Joyce exploits especially etymological sedimentations, as well as proleptic suggestions of homophonies, very often crossing between and among various different languages, in the words that name and describe his types in order to release them into this ambit of unrestricted connectedness.

These techniques simply extend and enhance the operations of language already inherent and at work in the Bible itself, together with its adherent tradition of interpretation. This is an anarchy in which time no longer binds things into unilateral relations of domination and derivation. Time rather operates flexibly as a medium for freely ranging backwards and forwards, revising and revisioning past types which are only whatever they can become in being reinvented. This essentially is the legacy of Scriptural typology, when it is unbounded from imposed dogmatic superstructures, and it finds its fulfillment and in a manner its apotheosis in the writings of James Joyce. Such is the revelation of the process of reading and interpretation as it works on the basis of typological transformation that Balsamo enables us to discern with acute clairvoyance in the tradition that links the Bible together with Joyce.

Balsamo's richly elaborated arguments help us estimate more accurately just how profoundly the reciprocity of text and interpretation has

fundamentally changed the stature of literary criticism in recent decades. Literary works are shown to be fully realized—and thus in a significant sense to be actually "made" ("poïeta")—by their interpretations. The literary critic is no longer confined to a role of producing commentary on a static text and canon but assumes responsibility as an agent in performing the texts and producing the visions of literature and thus in catalyzing the formation (and destruction) of literary canons. The Bible and Joyce, connected via a (dis)continuous tradition, as excavated by Balsamo, form an axis that is peculiarly revealing and in some ways normative for the sort of revisionary, projective and retrospective, dynamic that has in just this sense revolutionized criticism in relation to literature. The Bible, as the archetypal literary text and model for all canons, is placed in a relation of being anachronistically engendered by the ultra-modernist project of James Joyce. This is how the tradition and canon have to live, if they are going to go on living, and it is in fact how they always have lived throughout the historical past. To this extent, the fracturing and demise of an invulnerable, intact canon is shown to be present in the core and origin of this canon itself, as inseparable from the canon's very own possibility.

Curiously, the assertion of autonomy by literary criticism as a speculative discipline rivaling or even absorbing philosophy, theology, and the whole spectrum of anthropologies turns out to be the most convincing testimony to the authority of literature in the contemporary world and in the midst of its crisis. Precisely literature's lack of intellectual foundations, duplicated by the criticism that translates it into intellectual discourse, sets it free to be the sort unqualified, untrammelled inquiry into the undelimited field of all that concerns human beings. These concerns are in some way leveraged from the ultimate concerns traditionally treated in the field of religion. For literature, understood as Balsamo understands it in this book—and in the more deliberately theological and anthropological pages of his complementary study, *Rituals of Literature*—is transfigured as liturgy, as liturgical reenactment of primordial rites of sacrifice,

such as it can be discovered and even be re-experienced through the assistance of literary criticism. Literary criticism mediates (and thereby, in a sense, creates) this very possibility of non-originary, of revisionary, origin. To this extent, criticism becomes not only a universal hermeneutic of history and culture but the realization of primordial human being at the level of its originating ground in archaic sacrifice. And hence the sense that criticism has graduated from the status of a service discipline to being, or at least mediating, an originary occurrence of thought and being.

This revolution in the practice of literary criticism, which seems to lead to a chaos of "anything goes," leads in Balsamo's work to what seems a paradoxical result. Literary criticism, un-disciplined in this way, makes the extraordinary discovery of poetry's theological vocation, that is, of literature as liturgy. The complete freedom and autonomy of criticism leads back, though this is also a movement forward, to a theological vision. The un-mastering of the disciplines by undelimited theoretical criticism actually brings back a unifying, synthetic vision leveraged from the perspective of the most traditional and most authoritative of all disciplines, namely, theology, which more than any other discipline, and in open strife with philosophy as the breeding ground of free-thinking, historically has most often laid claim to exercise constraints upon the free development of culture. But here this authority is set free from all doctrinal, just as much as from all disciplinary, constraints and is only itself, simply the authority of the disclosure inherent in literature read forwards and backwards revealing all, all that it can reveal without claiming to be anything more than this disclosure itself.

Balsamo's book, paired with his forthcoming *Rituals of Literature*, deserves to be heralded as a breakthrough for criticism and culture, for it achieves the wholeness of trans-disciplinary thought—a wholeness in which theological vision, apparently lost to modern culture, emerges suddenly again into prominence and even dominance, given its unrestricted scope and freedom. Only very privileged moments in the history of

culture have afforded through this full range of freedom. It is the element of literary-critical interpretation that enables different disciplines and modalities of human experience to communicate with each other and so to lend and borrow, and share together, a common language. All that happens in culture, from the original sacrifices with which human culture begins, happens in an element of inter-pretation (cognate or at least homologous with French *préter* and Italian *prestare*). Literary interpretation becomes the performing of literary texts and thereby the actualization of the liturgies that lie deeply submerged in these texts. It rises thereby to the height of untrammelled celebration of all that is. Such is the ground on which poetry and theology meet.

In the end, Balsamo's book is intent on showing how tradition is produced by a process of rereading and revision in which there is no true origin nor any final end, for the process itself is absolute. The endless, reciprocal, self-redefining circulation constantly in act between Logos and Telos is itself the only foundation tradition has. Its endlessly reproductive possibilities are the seeded out of which tradition springs. The poles of the Bible and Joyce set off most strikingly exactly how this process works at its most dramatic and in its most radically revisionary potentialities.

We read types that are anchored to no full and total presence either in the Logos of their origin or in the Telos of their fulfillment. It is the mediation they undergo in the text as literature and in the process of reading that defines them absolutely. This process itself is their infinite significance, which assumes thereby the openness of an ongoing event. Such is religious revelation and apocalypse as they take place and are actualized in literature. Joyce's epic texts are emblematic of this transfiguring of religious revelation as literary mediation that has become the hallmark of a dynamic new and emergent critical outlook embodied exemplarily in *Scriptural Poetics in Joyce's Finnegans Wake*.

William Franke