"Ithaca" represents the climax of the book’s movement away from "literature," a movement initiated in the subliterary headings of "Aeolus." The narrative of the chapter dons the antiliterary mask of science. Its technical, denotative language, like the prose advocated by Thomas Sprat’s Royal Society, represents science’s "answer" to metaphor and fine writing. But Joyce’s use of this kind of language in a book that began as a novel is subversive to literature in a more profound way: no other modern novel works quite as hard to dispense with most of the beauties of style. Joyce called "Ithaca" the "ugly duckling" of *Ulysses*,¹ but in a book that he called his "damned monster-novel,"² the ugly duckling is likely to be the favorite child. In reading "Ithaca," one senses that a page has been turned in literary history. From now on, it would seem, the most interesting creative project for the modern writer is to create ugly ducklings rather than swans. If the style of scrupulous meanness was Joyce’s early answer to the fine writing and purple prose of his contemporaries, the language of "Ithaca" mounts a far more radical attack on the idea of literary style.

The chapter that deliberately dispenses with the beauties of style dispenses with other niceties of novel writing as

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well. In it, Joyce plays with our conceptions of narrative as well as style. “Ithaca” is an anatomy of a chapter: it offers us an outline of events. Instead of the suspense of a linear plot, it advances direct questions and answers; instead of the human voice of a narrative persona, it offers a catalogue of cold, hard facts. The book seems to interrogate itself in the catechism, implicitly promising to fill in the blanks by telling us the present and past perceptions, actions, and feelings of the characters. Joyce wrote to Budgen that in the “mathematical catechism” of “Ithaca,” all events would be “resolved into their cosmic, physical, psychical etc. equivalents,” so that the reader would “know everything and know it in the baldest and coldest way.”

Both the coldness and the mechanical cataloguing in “Ithaca” are anticipated in “Wandering Rocks.” The mind represented in the narrative of “Ithaca” resembles the alienated, “lateral” imagination found in the earlier chapter: it meticulously strings together facts without establishing any sense of priority among them. This narrative mind amasses facts with no regard for normal conventions of significance and relevance. In an exaggerated form of inductive observation, the lateral imagination of “Ithaca” peruses the world, exhaustively cataloguing its contents, whether they are objects in a drawer, books on a bookshelf, or thoughts in someone’s mind. In “Wandering Rocks,” characters are treated as physical objects moving in space; in “Ithaca,” the equation of people and objects is evidence of a general tonal and emotional leveling that surpasses anything in the early

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5 Letter to Frank Budgen, end February 1921, in Letters of James Joyce, Vol. 1, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), pp. 159-160. Critics have argued about whether the source of the catechism is the Christian catechism that Joyce recited as a child or the secular catechisms that he read in school, such as Mangnall’s Historical and Miscellaneous Questions. They have argued persuasively for each of these catechisms as the “source” of the form of “Ithaca.” See A. Walton Litz, “Ithaca,” in James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 385-405, and Harry C. Staley, “Joyce’s Catechisms,” James Joyce Quarterly 6 (Winter 1968): 137-153.
chapters. The real strangeness of the writing is described beautifully by Frank Budgen: "It is the coldest episode in an unemotional book. . . . The skeleton of each fact is stripped of its emotional covering. One fact stands by the other like the skeletons of man and woman, ape and tiger in an anatomical museum at twilight, all their differences of contour made secondary by their sameness of material, function and mechanism."  

There is a curious sense of displacement about the writing, as if one story were being written, while another, more important story were taking place. Instead of human feelings, we are given a scientific record of phenomena. For example, Bloom's awareness of Stephen's potential significance as an adopted son and Stephen's awareness of Bloom's potential meaning as an adopted father are recorded in terms of auditory and visual sensations: "He heard in a profound ancient male unfamiliar melody the accumulation of the past" and "He saw in a quick young male familiar form the predestination of a future" (p. 689). One has only to compare some of these passages with earlier passages in the book to see how the emotions and situations of the characters are now transcribed in the language of mathematics and statistics: "Reduce Bloom by cross multiplication of reverses of fortune, from which these supports protected him, and by elimination of all positive values to a negligible negative irrational unreal quantity" (p. 725). We strain for signs of human characters and are told of physical objects; we try to understand the relationship among characters and encounter mathematical tangents and algebraic equations.

There seems to be a mechanism of avoidance in the narrative that resembles Bloom's sudden scrutiny of his fingernails at the mention of Blazes Boylan in "Hades." In that chapter, Bloom psychologically displaces his anxieties onto a physical object; in "Ithaca," it is as if the story were displaced onto objects, as if the mechanisms of avoidance char-

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characterized the behavior of the text. This narrative displacement, in fact, sometimes dovetails with Bloom’s own mechanism of avoidance, as in the answer to the question “By what reflections did he, a conscious reactor against the void incertitude, justify to himself his sentiments?” (p. 734). The answer includes a disquisition on everything from the “frangibility of the hymen” to the “apathy of the stars.” A. Walton Litz has observed, rightly I believe, that this answer “is a reflection of Bloom’s thought as he strives for equanimity by sinking his own anxieties in the processes of nature.” Bloom’s strategy for dealing with his domestic situation merges with the narrative strategy. The rational organization of the catechetical form seems to shade into Bloom’s habit of rationalizing. The contiguous relationships catalogued throughout the narrative seem like psychological sidling, a way of not reaching a destination or climax, a means of avoiding a final realization.

I would like to be as clear as possible about the “minds” represented by the writing in “Ithaca.” On one level, it is Joyce, of course, who deliberately “resolves” the events into their physical equivalents. One can imagine Joyce delighting in the creation of this obstacle to his writing—to fashion the end of the plot in this language and form is itself a tour de force. Joyce thus sets the task for himself of sabotaging the climax (as he did in “Eumaeus”), and yet, in his own way, of creating the “right” ending for the book. To abandon the arsenal of literature’s weapons, like dramatic climax, tone, style, and linear narration, and still to tell the story is the kind of challenge Joyce enjoyed. The “lateral imagination” is the psyche represented in the text. Although I occasionally use the term “narrator” for ease of reference, I prefer the concept of the consciousness or mind of the text, since Joyce does everything possible in “Ithaca” to destroy

5 Litz, “Ithaca,” p. 397. Litz goes on to say, however, that in “Ithaca” “Joyce did not renounce his interest in ‘the romantic heart of things,’ but simply found new means for expressing it.” This view of what occurs in “Ithaca” is itself a romanticizing of the text. I will discuss this in more detail shortly.
our sense of a narrating, human voice. To say that the text avoids or displaces is not to psychoanalyze Joyce but to describe the behavior of the text. One of the conventions of this particular stylistic mask in "Ithaca" is that we are told too much and not enough; the book performs a gesture of disclosure and withholding. Lastly, the habit of mind represented in "Ithaca" resembles the mind of Leopold Bloom in its displacement: at certain specific points in the text when the narrative catalogues objects or focuses on nature, it is paraphrasing the thoughts of Leopold Bloom.

Empirical reality is not totally obscured in this process—what actually happens in the chapter can be determined. As Budgen maintains, it is the emotional drama of the characters that is obscured by the writing. Yet, paradoxically, one of the effects of the disparity between the emotion we expect and the intellectualization that we find is that the chapter is touching in its own way.\(^6\) It is through the intellectualizing and the coldness in "Ithaca" that Joyce is able to communicate the loneliness of Leopold Bloom, just as it is through cliché in "Eumaeus" that he is able to convey the sense of Bloom and Stephen's relationship. Somehow its coldness and its ostensible lack of interest in the emotional drama of the characters allows the narrative to be moving in certain places without immediately turning parodic, as it does in the "Cyclops" chapter, for example.

So, in the midst of the fussy, almost scholastic description of "What rendered problematic for Bloom the realisation of these mutually selfexcluding propositions," two short pairs of questions and answers appear. The preceding lengthy passage has described Bloom's experience with the "clown in quest of paternity" and his gesture of marking a florin to see if it would be returned. Now we come upon the

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\(^6\) In *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), Northrop Frye describes the disparity as part of the "novel-anatomy combination": "In the novel-anatomy combination, too, found in the 'Ithaca' chapter, the sense of lurking antagonism between the personal and intellectual aspects of the scene accounts for much of its pathos" (p. 314).
following: “Was the clown Bloom’s son? No. Had Bloom’s coin returned? Never” (p. 696). The simplicity of these questions and answers is striking—the contrast in the writing brings the reader up short. He feels that he is confronting an important passage in the text. The starkness of the statement, telling us of the frustration of Bloom’s desire, elicits our understanding of the depths of Bloom’s loneliness. The complete avoidance of sentimentality here allows for the entrance of the reader’s sympathy.

Even within one sentence, the punctilious, denotative style will suddenly give way to a short, fragile phrase of beauty. The question is asked, “Alone, what did Bloom feel?” The answer is: “The cold of interstellar space, thousands of degrees below freezing point or the absolute zero of Fahrenheit, Centigrade or Réamur: the incipient intimations of proximate dawn” (p. 704). The soft, Latinate sounds of the final phrase surprise us after the preceding barrage of facts. In “Ithaca,” lyrical passages of the type parodied in other chapters of Ulysses are left to stand without becoming parodic. In the midst of the scientific jargon, we come upon the following line in one of the answers: “The heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit” (p. 698). The one statement we can make about this line is that no matter what it is supposed to mean, we know from the sounds, the verbal compression, the images, and the allusion to The Divine Comedy that this is poetry. The line is not, however, a parody of lyricism, although one can imagine something like it on the lips of one of the “eloquent” speakers parodied during the course of Ulysses.7 Somehow, it is as

7 What significance we are supposed to attribute to this line is another matter. The two main characters have just moved out of obscurity in the direction of light—the Dantesque stars seem to offer resonance and meaning as a symbol. And yet, to call this line symbolic would be to act as if it were in another context. It is more like an allusion to symbol than a functioning symbol in the text. Because the narrative immediately returns to the language of mathematical calculation, the symbol (“the heaventree”) seems to be only one type of “translation” among many possible translations, a way of perceiving that is quickly replaced by another, as it has itself replaced “the apathy of the
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if the coldness and ugliness of the rest of the narration have earned the narrative the right to this lyricism without parody, as, in a different way, the scrupulous meaness of the early Joyce allowed the lyricism at the end of "The Dead" to exist. No prior context of stylistic hyperbole undermines the significance of these isolated lines as it does in "Cyclops" and "Nausicaa," no surrounding sentimentality turns this line "namby-pamby." The coldness of the narration in "Ithaca" functions to clear the air of phrases like "Love loves to love love." The writing represents a way to tell the story using the English language without parody.

But the disparity between the human story and the writing in the narrative leads to comedy as well as pathos and has important philosophical implications for the reading of the text as well. The reader finds himself bombarded with a wealth of data. If, as Joyce said in his letter, the reader is told everything, it seems as if he is told everything that he does not really need to know. The text's implicit promise to supply all the details of the plot is overzealously fulfilled. The most exhaustive answers respond to the simplest of questions. What constitutes an answer becomes problematic, even in the case of the simplest questions of plot. For example, the question "What did Bloom do at the range?" receives the following response: "He removed the saucepan to the left hob, rose and carried the iron kettle to the sink in order to tap the current by turning the faucet to let it flow" (p. 670). The process of making tea is anatomized into a series of smaller actions, as details of information are given in the text that one would normally assume rather than state. The carrying of the kettle to the sink and

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8 An element of comedy is added here if one compares these questions and answers to those in the Christian catechism: the long, convoluted answers to simple questions in "Ithaca" are funny if one remembers the "simple," rotelike answers in the catechism to questions like "What is sin?"

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the motive for this action ("in order to tap the current . . . to let it flow") are details that are usually taken for granted. It is not only the wealth of detail that makes this answer so strange and unexpected but also the type of information included. A similar description of Bloom's domestic ritual in "Calypso," for example, is almost as detailed: "He scalded and rinsed out the teapot and put in four full spoons of tea, tilting the kettle then to let water flow in" (p. 62). But this description is unified by the aura of domesticity that surrounds Bloom; the details of the description mirror Bloom's delight in the trappings of his domestic activity. The later description suggests instead that the narrator and the reader are unfamiliar with the act of making tea.

Similarly, the description of certain common events like a handshake, a sunrise, and a bump on the head, are documented with such precision that they are almost unrecognizable. The action of Bloom and Stephen shaking hands is not named as such; rather, their geometric relationship is described. They are described as "standing perpendicular at the same door and on different sides of its base, the lines of their valedictory arms, meeting at any point and forming any angle less than the sum of two right angles" (pp. 703-704). This is, of course, another example of the resolution of the characters into their mathematical equivalents, but to analyze a common action so scrupulously is to make the narrative very strange. Like Zeno Cosini in Italo Svevo's Confessions of Zeno, who thinks of the twenty-six movements necessary to the action of walking, the narrator does not take anything for granted, even the relative position of two people shaking hands. Like the narrator in "Wandering Rocks," he amasses an abundance of facts without classifying them in the conceptual categories on which both literary and nonliterary discourse generally rely. He plows through a mass of facts laboriously, as if a name were a labor-saving device of which he had never heard.

The laboriousness of this kind of description is comic; as in "Cyclops" and in the final paragraphs of "Wandering
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Rocks," the writing becomes an obvious performance, an exhibition of excess. The particular comic quality of much of the narration in "Ithaca" derives from a sense of the extravagance of the writing (this is different, of course, from actual *stylistic* hyperbole). Here Freud's analysis of the comedy of the clown is applicable, for he says that we laugh at a clown because his actions "seem to us extravagant and inexpedient. We are laughing at an expenditure that is too large." The term "burlesque" applies to the excessive expenditure of energy in the writing, not only in its meaning as a literary technique that employs a grand style to describe a trivial matter but in its associations with physical comedy. For if one reads the description of the handshake between Stephen and Bloom, the description itself begins to seem like a Rube Goldberg invention—a ludicrously elaborate mechanism with pretensions to efficiency and accuracy, a dogged, meticulous effort with small results. The description comically perverts the fundamental law of science, which is economy, and offers a comic translation of the epic impulse to go the long way around.

In its overprecision, the narration engages in what Stephen Heath has called a transgression of "the threshold of functional relevance below which things are taken for granted," a threshold that "divides the narratable from the non-narratable." This transgression is a form of what the Russian formalists have called the "defamiliarization" or

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making strange of the text (the type of thing we saw in “Wandering Rocks”). This kind of overprecision can serve varied functions in a literary text. For instance, in Gulliver’s Travels, the purpose of the microscopic perspective is primarily satiric; it throws into relief the absurdity of human society. But this is not the purpose of the defamiliarization in “Ithaca.” Rather, the overprecision shows what the stream-of-consciousness suggested in the early chapters: that reality is infinitely expansible by being infinitely divisible. A clue to this view of reality is found in one of the answers of the catechism. The response to the question “Were there obverse meditations of involution increasingly less vast?” ends with a tongue-twisting disquisition on the infinite number of microscopic organisms

of the universe of human serum constellated with red and white bodies, themselves universes of void space constellated with other bodies, each, in continuity, its universe of divisible component bodies of which each was again divisible in divisions of redivisible component bodies, dividends and divisors ever diminishing without actual division till, if the progress were carried far enough, nought nowhere was never reached. (P. 699)

This examination of the Chinese box of the world represents another point in the chapter where Bloom’s obsessive calculations merge with the overprecision of the narrative. But it describes also the divisibility of reality that is implied in the narrative. The narrative promise to fill in the gaps of the plot is fulfilled surprisingly in a microscopic notation of reality that threatens to continue forever.

This demonstration of the infinite divisibility of reality tells us something about the relationship between writing and the reality it represents. The “threshold of functional relevance,” transgressed in the answers of “Ithaca,” pertains to the conventions of discourse. As Heath says, it refers to the narrative choices made in the text. The microscopic notation in “Ithaca” transforms even the smallest detail of
reality into a “narratable” fact. But it is the breakdown of
the plot into discrete questions and answers that is the pri-
mary model of the infinite divisibility of experience and the
expansibility of writing. Ironically, no answer is definitive
because it has the potential to generate another, more spe-
cific question, which leads to another answer, and so on.

The narrative of “Ithaca” also demonstrates that events
are infinitely expansible into larger sequences of which they
are a part. Again, the precision of the writing leads to an
expanding answer. (And again, a specific answer in the
catechism represents this expansibility. See Bloom’s “med-
itations of evolution increasingly vaster” [p. 698].) For ex-
ample, the running of tap water is “explained” by tracing
the water back to its source; the action of turning on the
water is seen as a stage in a physical process that begins
with the reservoir. Similarly, in a parody of the scientific
investigation of causes and effects, the boiling of water is
traced back to the coal that heats it, to the “decidua” of the
forest that became the coal, to the energy of the sun that
formed the coal (pp. 673-674). The details of the plot move
outward from the actions of the characters, as the narrative
spins a web of actions and reactions, antecedents and causes.

The narrative traces the antecedents of cognitive as well
as physical events. Perceptions have a “history” that can be
traced in the text. Bloom’s perception of the gaslight spawns
a description of a prior identical perception. Similarly, the
sight of Bloom lighting the fire leads to a list of the previous
actions of this sort that Stephen remembers. It is as if the
stream-of-consciousness of the early chapters were turned
inside out, as “remembrances of things past,” both the char-
acters’ and the book’s, are inventoried. Each event narrated
can be seen as a point in a chain of events; each event has
a potential relationship with another. “Really, universally,
relations stop nowhere,” says Henry James in his Preface
to Roderick Hudson, “and the exquisite problem of the artist
is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle
within which they shall happily appear to do so."12 "Ithaca" is a demonstration that "relations stop nowhere" and a refusal to limit the representation of experience in a personal "geometry." The lateral imagination sweeps backwards and forwards both in time and in space.

In "Ithaca," as in the last passages of "Wandering Rocks," plot and digression are almost synonymous, as the conventions of relevance are undermined. The "facts" included in the answers seem increasingly arbitrary: the answer to the question "Did it [the water] flow?" (p. 671) includes the record of steps taken by one Mr Spencer Harty to prevent a worsening drought as well as Mr Harty's hypothetical solution, recorded parenthetically, to the contingent possibility of the drought's becoming severe.13 Logically, of course, the details of Mr Harty's plans are less relevant to the plot than the actions of Stephen and Bloom. But the idea of plot, based on the concepts of relevance and closure, are parodied, as the surplus of data makes the separation of the relevant from the irrelevant more problematical. Our progress towards the book's end is impeded as the narrative goes off in all directions; we are overwhelmed by the excess of information and are unable to organize the data into patterns of significance. Joyce plays with our desire to organize the material of the book—the parentheses in the above answer seem to be a wink from the author: What can a parenthetical thought be in a sentence so full of random associations?14

13 "The borough surveyor and waterworks engineer, Mr Spencer Harty, C. E., on the instructions of the waterworks committee, had prohibited the use of municipal water for purposes other than those of consumption (envisaging the possibility of recourse being had to the impotable water of the Grand and Royal canals in 1893) particularly as the South Dublin Guardians, notwithstanding their ration of 15 gallons per day per pauper . . . had been convicted of a wastage of 20,000 gallons per night" (p. 671).
14 It is difficult to assign these irrelevant details either empirical or thematic significance, that is, to regard them as salient details of the plot or the theme.
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Just as we are hoping for the resolution of the plot, then, the narrative opens up to include almost everything imagi
nable. In addition to the exhaustive tracing of the causes
and effects of events in the plot, the narrative increasingly
speculates on potential causes and effects of hypothetical
events. Joyce expands the realm of relevant "fact" by in-
cluding the conditional tense as well as the past and present;
conjecture and hypothesis enter the narration. Early in the
chapter the narrator asks, "For what personal purpose could
Bloom have applied the water so boiled?" and the answer
"To shave himself" generates other questions related to the
desirability of shaving at night. In the midst of its "pro-
gress" to limit indeterminacy, the narrative begins to entcr
tain (and I stress this word) various kinds of possibilities
and potentialities: "If he had smiled why would he have
smiled?" "What various advantages would or might have
resulted from a prolongation of such extemporisation?"
"Why might these several provisional contingencies be-
tween a guest and a hostess not necessarily preclude or be
precluded by a permanent eventualty of reconciliatory
union between a schoolfellow and a jew's daughter?" (p.
695).

In certain passages, Bloom's daydreams occasion the nar-
native journey into the hypothetical. The prime example of
this convergence is the three-page description of Bloom's

The detail is a red herring that leads nowhere in particular; we have no ready
method for interpreting it. Roland Barthes, in an essay called "L'effet de réel,"
has called this kind of detail a sign of "the real"—it exists, he says, for purely
referential purposes, to give a sense of facticity to the narrative (see Commu-
nications, no. 11 [1968], pp. 84-89). It seems to me that the mimetic status
of these details is less important than their irrelevance to established categories;
they represent both the literary "fact" that resists "recuperation" by our systems
of literary criticism and the contingent "fact" that refuses to be assimilated to
literary purposes.

15 That is, "What advantages attended shaving by night?" "Why did absence
of light disturb him less than presence of noise?" (p. 674).
suburban dream house. Bloom's obsessiveness and the obsessiveness of the narrative come together to produce the most detailed of descriptions of a nonexistent place. Bloom's psychic energy and the narrator's descriptive energy are lavished on this dream house—again, one has the sense of an extravagant expenditure of energy. The specificity of the description is funny: "What additional attractions might the grounds contain?" "What improvements might be subsequently introduced?" "What facilities of transit were desirable?" (p. 713), asks the narrator, offering us one of the most exhaustive anatomies of desire in literature.

Not only do the questions investigate the real and hypothetical details of plot, but they also conduct a search for the relationship between events or objects. Especially in the first half of the chapter, many of the questions seek to organize the world of facts into a series of relationships. This demand for comparison in the catechism is the second major means by which Joyce shows us that "relations stop nowhere." Throughout the catechism, the questions of the inquirer induce the respondent to make comparisons (this is not to suggest that they are two different personae, but to differentiate between functions). Almost every question includes words of comparison. In some, these comparative words are applied in heaping portions. The comparative question that begins the chapter, "What parallel course

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16 One is reminded of a statement James Boswell was reported to have made, that there are many people who build castles in the air but that he was the first to attempt to move into one.

17 The passages on Bloom's dream house are reminiscent of Bouvard and Pécuchet's exhaustive efforts to improve their lot, to live out the Utopian bourgeois dream. At some point in reading the three-page description of the dream house, I felt that the obsessiveness of Bloom and the narrator were supplemented by Joyce's own desire to be able to use the quaint, faintly archaic vocabulary associated with the English country house, that is, to actually include words like "tumbling rake," "dovecote," "grindstone," et cetera, in the narrative. It is as if in a particularly palpable way, Bloom's desire for a house and Joyce's desire to write these pages were both being expressed.
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...?" is followed by many others, which inquire about "common facts of similarity between reactions," "common study," "points of contact," "previous intimations," and "glyphic comparisons," to name a few. The major comparisons requested in the questions pertain to the relationship of Stephen and Bloom. The leading questions of the catechism promise to structure a final sorting out of their relationship.

And so, the various points of contact are outlined according to the principle of identity and difference. The ways in which Stephen and Bloom are similar and dissimilar are catalogued: their opinions, their ages, their temperaments, their ancestors’ languages, their drinking speed, the trajectory of their urination. They are substituted linguistically for one another ("Substituting Stephen for Bloom, Stoom ..."), charted geometrically ("Standing perpendicular ..."), their thoughts are "reduced to their simplest reciprocal form." The inquirer conducts a search for their common denominator.18

Again, the "lateral imagination" of the narrator is apparent, as he ranges over a set of facts, drawing connections. The most unlikely analogies are made: it seems that everything can potentially be compared to everything else (for example, Milly Bloom and the cat). Conversely, two entities (like Stephen and Bloom) can be compared and contrasted in a number of ways: every detail of the characters' biography and behavior can be potentially assimilated to the comparison. The questions encourage an analytical exercise in constructing binary oppositions. They seem more like theoretical constructs imposed than natural congruences discovered. The binarism of the narrator allows anything to be classified, and the comedy of the comparisons, in many cases, derives from their sheer irrelevance. As Hugh Kenner

18 Bloom and Stephen are, to use a line from Finnegans Wake, “traded by their comedy nominator, to the loaferst terms for their aloquent parts” (p. 283). (In fact, the catechism and the "resolution" of the characters into their physical and mathematical equivalents in "Ithaca" anticipate Book II, Chapter 2 of Finnegans Wake.)
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observes of the mind of the narrator, it “loses nothing, penetrates nothing, and has a category for everything.”

Kenner discusses the analytic enterprise of the chapter as a kind of parody of “metaphysical intuition, or of allied aesthetic modes of knowledge.” “Ithaca” does indeed parody the attempt to find an intelligible pattern, religious or secular. In The Order of Things, Michel Foucault has written brilliantly of Don Quixote’s attempt to transform his own world into the Renaissance world of resemblance and similitude—it seems to me that the same kind of semiotic hope is parodied in “Ithaca.” In attempting to connect the dots, the narrator becomes a kind of comic Thomas Browne, searching high and low for quincunxes. The desire for an intelligible pattern overwhelms the search.

What the catechism of “Ithaca” parodies is not the idea of relationship but the idea of a system that purports to halt the play of potential relationships. All sorts of relationships do exist in unexpected places—coincidences, repetitions, puns—but these “facts” cannot be reduced to a schema. Critics have had difficulty in agreeing on the particular system parodied in “Ithaca” (for example, the Christian catechism, nineteenth-century books of knowledge, or nineteenth-century science) because it is the idea of a taxonomic system itself, not any particular system, that is parodied. Science, logic, mathematics, theology, and literary criticism are all implicated in the parody, for they are all systems of ordering and containing knowledge. In fact, almost any kind of criticism that has been revered at one time or another (“new,” old, structural, exegetical) is in some way represented or anticipated in the parody in “Ithaca.” For example, the binary divisions classifying Milly Bloom and the cat (pp. 693-694) can be thought of as a perfect parody of structuralist criticism. It is, perhaps, particularly ironic to think of the Christian catechism behind the form of the

chapter: the book adopts the mask of dogma and belief in order to reveal a radical skepticism of order and authority.\textsuperscript{20}

The questions and answers of the catechism offer various suggestions for ordering the world of facts—by similitude, by hypothesis, by causality, and so on. Facts are classified into categories, categories dispersed, new categories formed. Despite the prominence of the catechetical form, the underlying impulse for the movement of the chapter is rhetorical. In “Ithaca,” Joyce employs the rhetorical topoi of “inventio,” the first part of classical rhetoric. The narrative proceeds by ingenious “arguments” from analogy, difference, contraries, cause and effect, example.\textsuperscript{21} Some examples of topoi used in “Ithaca” are: “If he had smiled why would he have smiled?” (hypothesis, p. 731); “What past consecutive causes . . . did Bloom . . . recapitulate?” (causes and effects, p. 728); “Prove that he loved rectitude . . .” (proof by example, p. 716). Analogy and difference are found, of course, throughout.\textsuperscript{22} The performance of the catechism is really a school performance in the rhetorical classification of facts. For the Ciceronian orator, these rhetorical topoi represented the machinery for an investigation of a subject—they were the means of generating true statements about something. Using these topoi for comic purposes, Joyce plays with the idea of the human wish to arrive at truth. Like the system of nineteenth-century positivism, the system of rhetoric was originally a testimony to man’s belief in his capacity for wisdom. However, in “Ithaca,” the topoi

\textsuperscript{20} Justifiably, one could point to the various structural schemas that Joyce was so fond of dispensing as evidence of his belief in structural organizations. To me, however, the “Ithaca” chapter represents Joyce's basic skepticism about order and schemes of order. It is possible that as a critic of his book he desired to be able to reduce it to the kind of schema he subverted within the writing. But in this case, I would prefer to trust Joyce the fiction writer rather than Joyce the letter writer and critic.

\textsuperscript{21} I am indebted to Betsy Seifter for pointing this out to me.

ordinarily used in the service of investigation do not include or prove anything. If each of the book’s last chapters is an experiment in ordering experience, “Ithaca” is the climax and the microcosm of this enterprise. It shows the arbitrariness of any system of classification, either of the book or, by implication, of the world. Instead of “truth” about his subject, Joyce offers us an exercise in the many ways in which the subject can be discussed.

The real subversion of the comprehensive classification of knowledge is implied, then, in the questions themselves. The series of comparative questions reveals that a line can be drawn between any two points, but it is impossible to connect all the dots. Each pair of questions and answers carves up a segment of reality but tells us nothing about the whole of the universe of the book. If “reality” and the meaning of it are investigated in each pair of questions and answers, there is always another question to be asked, another comparison to be explored. One can imagine an infinite series of questions and answers. René Girard, in discussing the “conversion” at the end of certain novels, says that “the conclusion must be considered as a successful effort to overcome the inability to conclude.”

“Ithaca” is a parody of such closure; the book’s “inability to conclude” is emphasized rather than overcome. If, as Hugh Kenner suggests, the catechism is like a huge filing system, it is a system that has no necessary final entry.

In fact, by the end of the chapter, the connections made by the narrative mind become looser and looser. Instead of forging connections between characters, the respondent sinks into a spasm of verbal association, in a realm of imagination that fuses the child’s world with the mythic. The answer to the question of the identity of Bloom’s companions is “Sinbad the Sailor.” The answer generates, however, a


24 See Kenner, *Dublin’s Joyce*, p. 167.
series of alliterative names that rhyme with Sinbad (Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer), and finally, the principle of alliteration itself gives way to the final reply "Xinbad the Phthailer," as the association becomes freer (p. 737). This kind of language looks back to the "moo-cow" story that begins A Portrait and forward to the language of Finnegans Wake. Although the final answer is a paraphrase of Bloom's response to Molly, its implication is that the book has now embarked on a course of generating all sorts of linguistic connections from this fertile medium of dream language. The mind that peruses the world, cataloguing and making connections, could conceivably continue in its effort forever, in a language even more unlikely to encourage a halt in the play of connections than that of the rest of the chapter. The chapter stops, as if the mind went to sleep or the power of the machine were cut off, but it doesn't really end.

In "Ithaca," we see that the wealth of possible connections can never be catalogued completely. There is no system that can include or account for them all. Among other things, "Ithaca" is about ordering: the way characters order their world, the way authors order their texts, the way readers order their interpretations, and the way people order the world they live in. The chapter incorporates Joyce's ideas about making sense of the world and about making sense of a literary text. Just as the wealth of life exceeds the book's representation of it, so the surplus of meanings in the book exceeds the reader's interpretation of it.

The "roles" of interrogator and respondent in the catechism represent both the characters trying to make their way through the world and the reader trying to make his way through the book. In playing "twenty questions" with itself, the chapter makes explicit the questions and answers usually embedded in the linear narrative. During the course of the chapter, these narrative questions and answers have converged at certain points with Leopold Bloom's attempt to solve his personal problems. The questions that they ask
and answer are questions that Bloom asks himself (indeed, the language of logic is used to underline this problem-solving activity). At the end of the chapter, it is Bloom’s dialogue with Molly that now converges with the narrative, and the narrator’s role as a kind of substitute or surrogate for the characters is explicitly noted. Molly’s questions to Bloom are actually referred to by the narrator as “the catechetical interrogation,” Bloom is called the “narrator” and Molly the “listener,” who sometimes interrupts to ask questions. The slackening pace of the narration is observed in the narrative itself, as the interrogator asks “What limitations of activity and inhibitions of conjugal rights were perceived by listener and narrator concerning themselves during the course of this intermittent and increasingly more laconic narration?” (pp. 735-736). The dialogue of the characters and the dialogue of the chapter become one.

But the reader too is represented in the catechism, for the interrogation in the text parodies the kind of activity we ourselves usually perform. Both the characters and the reader go through the book trying to solve enigmas. It is the central irony of the chapter that despite the exhaustiveness of the interrogation process, fundamental questions remain unanswered, both for the characters and for the reader. Just as Bloom reminds himself of all his unfinished business and the “unsolved enigmas” (p. 729), we too recognize that everything has not been resolved in the chapter. The pedagogical “mask” of the chapter, in fact, has interesting implications for the notion of the “ideal reader,” who, like the ideal student, tries to arrive at a vision of truth. What we understand from this final simulated educational exercise in “Ithaca” is that there are no ideal readers for the text, no perfect students who can arrive at a definitive reading of the book. It is not surprising that the conception of the ideal reader has a religious source: it originated in St. Augustine’s “On Christian Doctrine” and applied to the Christian who had the “preunderstanding” necessary to read and interpret scriptures. The notion of this “ideal reader”
and the student of the Christian catechism dovetail in "Ithaca": the "mysteries" of the text cannot be taught or learned in any absolute way; there is no privileged position from which to arrive at "truth" or knowledge.\textsuperscript{25} That the book is about writing and reading fiction as well as the characters in Dublin is something I have tried to demonstrate throughout—but "Ithaca" shows us that the play of the text will always exceed the reader's attempt to grasp it.

The multiple possibilities of meaning in \textit{Ulysses} and a parody of the attempt to arrive at a \textit{conclusive} reading are comically presented in an hermeneutic metaphor within the chapter. The narrator's question "What in water did Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier returning to the range, admire?" (p. 672) is answered in a Rabelaisian catalogue of Bloom's thoughts on the meaning of water: "Its universality: its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level... its infallibility as paradigm and paragon." In one sense, the catalogue of Bloom's thoughts on the "potency of water as a symbol" can be seen as a projection of his desire to mean something to somebody. But the catalogue also represents a "reading" of water—the book, in this instance, like Stephen in "Proteus," attempts to read a "signature" in the material world. We recognize in this kind of reading a parody of the basic activity of symbol making and deciphering, the kind of activities engaged in by everyone, but by writers and readers especially. Indeed, one has only to think of Joyce's statement to Budgen that Odysseus is "the complete man" (representing son, father, husband, and warrior)\textsuperscript{26} to realize how writers, as well as characters and readers, are represented in this disquisition. On the one hand, the passage is a parody of the

\textsuperscript{25} The attractiveness of a final understanding of the text's mysteries can be seen in an essay as recent as M.J.C. Hodgart's "Aeolus," in \textit{James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays}, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974): "The whole of \textit{Ulysses} is a parable, for him who heareth the word and understandeth it; he indeed beareth fruit" (p. 119).

\textsuperscript{26} See Budgen, \textit{James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses}, pp. 15-17.)
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writer's attempt to create symbolism and the reader's attempt to exhaust the significance of what he reads. The passage parodies the desire for epiphany, as it catalogues the "whatness" of the object. Any one of these interpretations of water, serving as the basis of a metaphor in a poem, for example, would not be comic; it is the completeness and ingenuity of these multiple readings that parody the search for significance and the creation of symbolism.

But on the other hand, the passage offers a range of potential meaning, that is, a surplus of meanings, and this is, in fact, what Ulysses itself offers to the reader. The meditation on water, to quote William Gass, an expert meditator, shows how things "become concepts": somewhere between the perceiver and the object, significance resides.27 For after all, water, like Homer's Odysseus, is a perfect paradigm. If the passage parodies the desire for the exhaustion of meaning, for a final, conclusive interpretation, it reveals a surplus rather than a dearth of meanings.

Despite the representation of events in what Joyce called "the coldest, baldest way," a sense of possibility mitigates the alienation of the cosmic perspective. The abstract record of events somehow confirms the richness of the story. The leveling of experience that derives from the form and style of "Ithaca" ultimately does not feel like an aggressive cancellation of possibilities or a ruthless satire of belief but imparts instead a sense of the various possibilities that exist in life. Ulysses is full of meaning, but this is not to say that its final meaning is the affirmation of life. It is a book that is beyond what we generally mean by affirmation or negation; it shows us all kinds of truths about life but doesn't sum it up in any one statement of meaning. The overabundance of details and styles invites the reader to pare away the excess until he arrives at some kind of interpretation. The history of Joyce criticism reveals how personal

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this winnowing process is. As Arnold Goldman pointed out in *The Joyce Paradox*, *Ulysses* allows us to see the progression of the style toward the computerlike abstractions of "Ithaca" as life denying, the triumph of mechanism (as Kenner does in *Dublin's Joyce*), or we can see the characters' survival in spite of the stylistic progression as ultimately life affirming (as does S. L. Goldberg, for example).28

My own feeling is that while *Ulysses* is skeptical about meaning and belief, it is not “pyrrhonic” (to use Hugh Kenner’s recent term for it29): anyone as concerned with life as Joyce is in *Ulysses* cannot be as much of an eternal pessimist as Kenner makes him sound in his brilliant but ultimately too dark readings of the book. Neither, however, is *Ulysses* a “self-consuming artifact” by which the reader is led to a vision of truth.