

Architectures of Justice: Sightlines of the Johnsonian Isocolon and the Walpolean Hypallage

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Abstract: Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole are near cadences to the societal association of architecture and human faculty in the eighteenth century, often concerned with the same question that haunts narratives within texts: what is the place of a transgressor? By examining two highly stylized writers who ground their arguments in setting, I argue that rhetoric constructs sightlines subterraneous to the architecture of justice within their works: Johnson's isocolon challenges the imbalance of the debtors' prison as an institution in *The Idler* essay no. 22 (1758), Walpole's hypallage restlessly shifts the agency of human actors and punitive instruments in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

The eighteenth-century interest in architecture as an instrument of justice is chronologically suspended between the ritual symbolism of Julius Caesar's Capitol in early modern theatre and the utter practicality of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon in modern utilitarian philosophy. A discussion that had commenced with Vitruvian ideas of the ideal body and the influence of the space it inhabits (and therein prizing perfection within parameters of strength, utility and beauty) had, in this sliver of time, been expanded by John Locke and Joseph Addison into the associationist aesthetics of "conceptualizing architecture, the imagination, and the relationship between them" (Townshend 45). England witnessed developments and revivals of architectural forms that gained political and social meaning built upon the values these forms were historically associated with. A society following such ties between architecture and human faculties is often concerned with the same questions that haunt a narrative of retribution: how is justice sustainably enforced

and what is the place of a transgressor? The literature of this period echoes the changing conceptions of habitation and architectural identity in its sprawling castles and disquieting prisons.

Samuel Johnson's essay on debtors' prisons in *The Idler* and Horace Walpole's story *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1758 and 1764 respectively, are both texts that ground their arguments for justice in their settings. Johnson investigates the debtors' prison as a synecdoche for a society that "exposes the liberty of one to the passions of another" and engages in logical argument (Johnson 69). Walpole deals in fiction and goes so far as to embody retributive justice in the eponymous *Castle of Otranto*. Engaging with two highly stylized works, I aim to offer a rhetorical analysis of the construction of justice within their respective narratives. I argue that the architecture of justice in both works is exercised subterranean to the narrative: while Johnson's isocolon challenges the imbalance of the debtors' prison as an institution in *The Idler* essay no. 22, Walpole's hypallage restlessly shifts the agency of human actors and punitive instruments in *The Castle of Otranto*.

The Johnsonian isocolon is a figure of parallelism: it is a rhetorical device in which "similarly structured elements hav[e] the same length" ("isocolon"). In Johnson's works, arguments of contrasting nature gain rhetorical pitch and the isocolon manifests as balanced clauses. The pattern of isocolon also seeps into smaller divisions of the clause, wherein a second transitive object is parallel to the first. For instance, Johnson states that confinement in a prison is "a loss to the nation" and "no gain to the creditor" (Johnson 69). Here, both objects attributed to "confinement" as a noun and the irregular transitive verb "to be" are parallel in their number of words and word choice. The comparable tool in Walpole's rhetoric, the hypallage, is rooted in transference. Discussed by Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria* circa 95 CE and by George Puttenham in his lexicon of rhetoric *The Art of English Poesy* (1589), hypallage has come to be defined as "[s]hifting the application of words" and "[m]ixing the order of which words correspond with which others" ("hypallage").

In Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the hypallage is a figure of deflection. It appears most often in episodes of confusion and heightened emotional states such as when Hippolita assumes that her husband Manfred, introduced as the prince of Otranto, "dreads the shock of [her] grief" (Walpole 23). The verb "dreads" that ought to apply to the noun indicating her grief, in common parlance, is transferred to "the shock" of her grief, changing an interpersonal causal relationship to one that emphasizes and animates mood. Thus, Johnson and Walpole wield rhetoric to determine the evidence presented before an audience, to direct the reader's gaze. Here, rhetoric is sightline.

Architectural vocabulary lends itself to discussions of justice and governance in the eighteenth century, as was the case in public and press debates. Reflecting the poet Samuel Daniel's use of architectural elements in clear allegory to the immaterial English constitution in 1602, writers in the eighteenth century press persistently associated a nostalgia for old institutions with old halls and pillars, disdainful of the tumults in contemporaneous architecture (Buchanan 43). The societal concern for a nexus of architectural sites that delivered and enforced justice was keen and lasting. Almost a century after Johnson's essay no. 22 appeared in *The Idler*, the historian William Hepworth Dixon provided an account of London's prisons with meticulous detail and emotional prompts. The particulars of Dixon's historical account render Johnson's architecture of premises and arguments in his essay in striking relief. Dixon describes Newgate prison as "massive, dark, and solemn" (Dixon 191), records that the gaoler of Newgate received "a salary of 200l. a-year" circa 1774 and that the fees for debtors was "11s. 4d.," and he recounts also the contagious disease in "[Newgate's] yards and cells" that had threatened the entire city (206). Alongside such harrowing circumstances of the prison, Dixon's account describes the architecture, from the "imposing aspect" of Newgate (191) to its "granite walls, strong enough to resist artillery, unbroken by door or casement" (192).

Johnson, however, does not exchange disquieting visual conditions in a prison for the humanity of his readers. A writ-

er who demonstrates great architectural detail in works like *Rasselas* and *The Vision of Theodore*, Johnson here chooses to resist visual detail. In fact, Johnson's argument begins in the absence of a sightline: "As I was passing lately under one of the gates of this city, I was struck with horror by a rueful cry, which summoned me 'to remember the poor debtors'" (Johnson 69). Johnson's vision being barred at the gates becomes an indictment of this carceral institution within the essay; the cry becomes a cue for reflection. Beyond this, the poor debtor never once enters Johnson's field of vision or that of the reader. This chilling mimesis leads to the central isocolon of the argument against the disproportionality of debtors' prisons: it exposes "the liberty of one" to "the passions of another" (69). Johnson withdraws the debtor from his text as his immediate society does its transgressors from its privileges.

The isocolon is the vehicle of Johnson's demand for justice. As Johnson assumes more than one voice and considers more than one rebuttal over the course of the essay, the isocolon identifies the opposing concepts and counters injustice with symmetry. Particularly in the recognition that civil regulation ought to secure "private happiness" from "private malignity," the isocolon functions as a proto-idealistic dialectic (70). Thus Johnson's sightline extends in both directions. Johnson recognizes that injustice does not originate from the granite-walled architecture of a debtors' prison but from the machinations of such an institution, and hence, constructs his text in remedial symmetry. Johnson criticizes the society where "the distinction between guilt and unhappiness, between casualty and design, is intrusted to eyes blind with interest" (70), and the reference to blind eyes recalls the archetype of personified and impartial Justice, portrayed as a woman with her eyes covered and bearing scales in balance. Yet, Johnson's allusion is also a gesture towards that which is permissible only in the absence of attention and contemplation, in the absence of affected sightlines. The Johnsonian isocolon, then, operates with a sense of justice that a society has not extended to its debtors.

Johnson presents the carceral institution of the debtors' prison as an architecture of visibility, one that removes its victims from public view and necessitates a cry emerging from the cells calling upon passersby "to remember the poor debtors" (69). In a short text of three pages, Johnson persuasively argues that this institution as it exists is ineffectual. Yet Johnson provides a nuanced model of treating debt, or rather the poverty that drives debt, "with the same lenity as other crimes," considering what must happen if a debtor owns property and what must happen if the debtor is experiencing poverty and so on (70). Johnson imitates impartial justice himself, binding his argument to economics of state expense and public policy.

Johnson's closing remark in this essay, however, is an isocolon. This isocolon opens a rigid form to possibility: "We have now learned, that rashness and imprudence will not be deterred from taking credit; let us try whether fraud and avarice may be more easily restrained from giving it" (71). The isocolon is built upon the plain contradiction of taking credit and giving it, and the statement following the semicolon is meant to remedy the statement preceding it. The remedy pivots on a dialectic of failed method and experiment; the remedy is learning. The sightline of this isocolon extends farther than those of others, because Johnson places his challenge upon history and time yet to come. The essay is bound by a second incomplete isocolon: Johnson does not return to the opening image of the individual transgressor. The subtle balance of the argument is skilfully disturbed to indicate that the position of the transgressor as determined by the system of debt is not one that can be resolved at the level of an individual transgressor.

Justice and other resolutions at an individual level demand an imagination of larger and more potent figures. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* identifies itself in the title page as a "Gothic" story that is concerned with lineage and usurpation, and therefore, justice. Manfred has usurped the eponymous castle and styled himself a prince of Otranto. Following the death of his son Conrad in the opening epi-

sode, Manfred is left without an heir, and with a threat of deposition and justice looming over his reign. *The Castle of Otranto* establishes itself as a prophecy narrative, and like any prophecy narrative, risks revealing its climactic turn. The architecture of the text operates with the aim of preventing the fate Manfred dreads for himself, the dread of being identified as a transgressor. Walpole's hypallage repeatedly shifts the agency and animation of the actors internal to the narrative. The promise of justice made explicit by the narrative is fulfilled only at the very end, after the rhetoric has exposed the reader to multiple points of vantage.

The hypallage is often likened to the transferred epithet or an adjective that ought to apply to a noun transferring to another. Walpole overwhelms this expectation with extensive use of noun clauses and compound nouns that change the object, or the subject, of the transitive verb. Following the opening spectacle in the story—the death of Conrad—the narrative description says of Manfred, “the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened ... took away the prince’s speech” (Walpole 18). Manfred’s speechlessness may be attributed to the misfortune of Conrad’s death, because this brings doom to his claim over the Castle, yet it is not. Instead, his speechlessness is attributed to the ignorance surrounding the cause, which is expressed as a noun clause. The action of taking speech away is expressed as a transitive verb that applies to the contorted noun clause of the subject. Here, Manfred’s confusion is emphasized over his malice, thus offering a glimpse of Manfred’s vulnerability that might commute the reader’s judgement of his usurpation, his betrayal of his wife Hippolita, his pursuit of the princess Isabella entrusted to his care, and the deaths that occur in the wake of these events.

Walpole constructs the manipulative hypallage alongside the architecture of the Castle with great care. The physical distance and separation of Manfred’s chamber from that of Hippolita gives rise to montages of dramatic irony: Manfred’s cruel designs to secure an heir, his pursuit of the young princess Isabella who is entrusted to his care, and his schemes to abandon his wife Hippolita are followed

closely by Hippolita's naïve concern for Manfred. The previously discussed hypallage of Hippolita's conjecture that Manfred "dreads the shock of [her] grief" is a striking textual juxtaposition to the dramatic irony (23). The Castle is foregrounded as an active participant in the enforcement of justice in the text. Gothic architecture may then be associated with "a transgressive or oppositional status" (Buchanan 42). As architectural historians have suggested, the Gothic form as an architectural style stands for "chaos" when Classical forms, associated with Greek and Roman artistic exemplars, stand to "express legitimacy" but retains its oppositional nature; when Classical form is defined as "foreign" in this period, the Gothic is its "converse" (43). *The Castle of Otranto*, as a Gothic edifice, is therefore oppositional in the narrative. With Manfred the usurper in its midst, the Castle enforces its own justice and complicates the position of the transgressor. So long as the transgressor is present within its walls, the Castle foils his attempts to secure a claim over the rule of Otranto.

Studies of construction and historical accounts note that the Gothic, the aesthetic that is associated with the inaccessible depth of human experience, is codified by "interlocuters" and their "mediations," far outweighing the form of the Gothic, to conclude that the Gothic is also a "rhetoric" (Murray 1). The scene in the secret passage, where princess Isabella flees Manfred's violation of her person, is an exemplum of Walpolean hypallage operating alongside the Castle. In this scene, Isabella's lamp is extinguished by the wind and a ray of moonshine guides her to the lock of the trapdoor in careful play on visibility and architecture (Walpole 28). Following the darkness of an extinguished lamp, the narrative offers the sightline of hypallage: "Words cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation" (27). The object of the inexpressibility of words, or that which words "cannot paint," is the horror of the situation. The situation is material, brought about by chance and architecture. The aesthetic emphasis is on horror, thus providing a swift sightline that meets interiority. Having laid its morality before its audience, *The Castle of Otranto* is an imaginative exercise

with very few stakes. The only justice this architecture inclines towards is a retributive one. Thus, glimpses of emotional interiority make the subtle case that the sympathies of the text lie also with the depth of human experience that is beyond the accessible or moral.

Where, then, do these texts place the transgressor? Johnson and Walpole differ in the way they approach this question. Johnson's attempt at justice is based on inclusion: for Johnson, "[t]he prosperity of a people is proportionate to the number of hands and minds usefully employed" (Johnson 69). Thus, Johnson proposes a change in who is determined as a transgressor, with the aim of lenity and including the largest possible workforce, or energy as currency, within society. Walpole's themes concerning lineage and tradition, on the other hand, provide a simpler answer: the transgressor ought to be expelled from the position usurped. However, both texts arrive at a nexus that emphasizes visibility. The sightlines of rhetoric determine that the transgressor must not be removed from societal sight and concern. Alongside the poignant societal instruction, the rhetorical sightlines bring to light an important literary argument: the story of the transgressor is also a story worth relating.

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