

Caged in America's Oligarchic Contradictions.

Edward Curtin

By [Edward Curtin](#)

Global Research, July 19, 2024

Theme: [History](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name (only available in desktop version).

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

[Spread the Truth, Refer a Friend to Global Research](#)

A contronym is a word having two definitions that contradict each other. Two examples are the word bolt, which can mean to lock with a bolt and to flee, and clip, which means to attach and to detach.

There are many such words and **there is also a system of thought based on them**. It has no name except for the one I give it here, admittedly an awkward one: **The Contronymal Circus**. Like words that are their own antonyms, this system of thought confuses and traps, as it is meant to do.

Language is of course slippery and equivocal, with words often connoting multiple meanings. But language is also conditioned by history; even my phrasing it that way is an example of using words in a loose and sloppy way, for "history" doesn't exist and can't do anything, people make history, use and shape words for their own designs, even as language then uses them as well.

To say I am making a moot point is an example of my point: Is it arguable or irrelevant to consider? Is that clear?



Image [source](#)

The American oligarchic political system that is endlessly debated and fixates people's attention is a contronymal system that contains positive and negative poles that cancel each other out while keeping the believer frozen and frustrated. Once you are in it, you are trapped because there are no outside references, the simulated system of thought is your cage. Biden vs. **Trump is an example of this cage.**

The great Irish writer James Joyce was born in 1882 in Ireland that was historically subjected to colonial domination by Great Britain. He realized early on that the English language bequeathed to him was not neutrally aesthetic but through usage was politically charged and that words meant one thing to the colonizers and another to the colonized. In *The Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man*, his autobiographical novel, he has Stephen Dedalus say about his conversation with his condescending Jesuit English-born dean of studies:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted his words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.

For language constitutes "reality" as much as describes it. It is political. Therefore, all cultures of resistance need to reclaim language, which includes not just individual words and their meaning, but phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and narrative structures. When ruling elites can impose language usage on the ruled, they can control their thinking, their sense of "reality," and their belief in what is possible.

This is why poets are so central to the resistance of oppressed people, and by oppressed people I include residents of the United States who may not describe themselves with that term. For when language is corrupted and thought twisted in sinister ways, all efforts to resist the colonizers of the mind are self-defeating. Double-binds are not reserved for personal relationships but pertain equally to politics and culture. There is a reason why public discourse about politics (and most everything) in the U.S.A. is so circular in nature, so self-defeating, always ending in a dead-end as the system of oligarchic rule rolls along and even strengthens. Think Bush vs. Gore, Obama vs. McCain, Hillary Clinton vs. Trump, Biden vs. Trump, Trump vs. someone. Think of what has happened to reading, writing, and speaking skills throughout the society at every level. Functional illiteracy is widespread. Ignorance may not be bliss even when it's folly to be wise, for the inability to grasp the

contradictory nature of the story you are thinking in has no happy ending.

In the words of the Palestinian writer Edward Said:

“As one critic has suggested, nations themselves *are* narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.”

The French thinker, Jean Baudrillard, cast this language conundrum in terms of simulacra and simulation, simulacra between copies of copies that have no originals. He said:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of the territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – that engenders the territory....

Like a narrative structure that is a contronym – self-contradicting – there is no dialectical tension because the system has swallowed it. There is no critical negativity, no place to stand outside to rebel because the simulacrum encompasses the positive and negative in a circulatory process that makes everything equivalent but the “positivity” of the simulacrum itself. You are inside the whale: “The virtual space of the global is the space of the screen and the network, of immanence and the digital, of a dimensionless space-time.”

What I am trying to say is difficult to grasp because it is so twisted. To use language to untwist this example of what the poet William Blake called the “mind-forged manacles” that is the essence of explicit or implicit propaganda is hard, because it involves uncovering the words used and the narratives we imbibe to understand our worlds. It involves grasping the presuppositions of a counterfeit system. It is much harder by the day because language has been radically reduced to slogans and words to images of images. Artificial Intelligence is further reducing all reality to illusions. We are caged in a system of contradictions, a narrative of contronyms through which we must see.

At the end of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce, the great wordsmith and experimenter with form who would go on to write *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake*, has Stephen Dedalus declare that he will leave Ireland to go and “forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”

It is time for us to leave as well, to abandon a way of thinking that offers us the false choice of the evil of two lessers in a corrupt system. We have been sold a counterfeit bill of goods, one forged in the devious minds of deans of deception who make Stephen’s interlocuter look like an obnoxious amateur.

*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above or below. Follow us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

This article was originally published on the author’s blog site, [Behind the Curtain](#).

Edward Curtin is a prominent author, researcher and sociologist based in Western

Massachusetts. He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

Featured image [source](#)

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Edward Curtin](#), Global Research, 2024

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Edward Curtin](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.
For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca