

Procatalepsis

Definition of Procatalepsis

Procatalepsis is a [figure of speech](#) that is also known as “prebuttal,” or a “prolepsis,” in which the [speaker](#) or writer gives response to the objection of an opponent in his speech by repeating his objection.

It could also be that he responds to his own objection, in order to strengthen his [argument](#), by using counterarguments. Once the speakers bring attention to a possible [rebuttal](#), they immediately refute or discredit it, for the fear that people may get confused.

Examples of Procatalepsis in Literature

Example #1: *The Captives* (by Hugh Walpole)

” ‘I know what you’re going to say’ ... ‘That if they look at it properly they’ll see that it wasn’t our fault. But will they look at it properly? Of course they won’t. You know what cats they are ...’
“

This example is a perfect description of procatalepsis. First, the speaker says that, if the reader looks at the matter carefully, he will realize and know the truth. Then he quickly objects to his own argument and asks a question instead.

Example #2: *Apology* (by Plato)

“Someone will say: ‘Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will

interfere with you?’ Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this ... and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living – that you are still less likely to believe. And yet what I say is true, although a thing of which it is hard for me to persuade you.”

In this example, the speaker is persuading the listeners. He knows that the other person would not believe him, and that he is unable to convince him despite the fact that he is telling the truth. Thus, the speaker is objecting to his own argument to strengthen it.

Example #3: *The Scorpio Illusion* (by Robert Ludlum)

” ‘He knows every harbor, every cove and inlet throughout the chain; he has to.’

” ‘Those are fine credentials, Geoffrey, but hardly the sort —’

” ‘Please,’ interrupted Cooke. ‘I haven’t finished. To anticipate your objection, he’s a retired officer of US Naval Intelligence. He’s relatively young, early to mid-forties, I’d say, and I’ve no real knowledge of why he left the service, but I gather the circumstances weren’t very pleasant. Still, he could be an asset on this assignment.’ “

In this excerpt, the speaker uses procatalepsis by describing the efforts and expertise of the U.S. naval officer. First, he raises a question about why he left his job, then immediately objects to his own argument, responding that, due to unpleasant circumstances, he had left the job.

Example #4: *A Modest Proposal* (by Jonathan Swift)

“I can think of no one objection that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and it was indeed the principal design in offering it to

Here, Swift brings an argument that he can't think of a single objection to his proposal; then he gives a quick argument that an objection might be raised about the decrease in the kingdom's population.

Example #5: *Amores* 1.3 (by Ovid)

“Accept (me), one who knows [how] to love you with spotless faith.
Nor is my field renewed by countless plows,
Act on my side, and Love, who gives me to you
And loyalty [which] will yield to no-one, morals without fault ...
and that I die with you grieving (for me).
Offer yourself to me as worthy material for poems: ...”

In this poem, Ovid is using procatalepsis to persuade Corinna that he loves her more than anyone; and though he is not rich, and does not have too much money, social status, or possessions, he knows that his poetry could make his beloved immortal.

Function

This rhetorical device, procatalepsis, allows a writer to remain in control of a [discourse](#) by using counterargument. It is also helpful to writers or speakers, if they do not have a complete answer to an objection, which they attain by remaining honest about reality that their arguments have problems.

This is how they show their [audience](#) that they are grounded in the reality. Since it is a very effective tactic in arguments, its benefits are twofold: the speaker replies successfully to the objection of the audience or opposing arguments, and also builds trust with his audience. Its usage is common in literary writings, advertisements, specifically in the political arena, where it serves as a playground.