

## “WHO WAS GERTY?” THE DISRUPTION OF VOICES IN THE “NAUSICAA” EPISODE OF ULYSSES

M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Csaneda Caneda

According to Bakhtin’s theory on the novel as a dialogic genre, which he describes as: “multiform in style and variform in speech and voice,”<sup>1</sup> the reader of any novel becomes an investigator confronted with several heterogenous unities, often located on different linguistic levels, and subject to different stylistic controls. The language of a novel is therefore the “system of its languages”<sup>2</sup> by which means different themes are orchestrated.

This heteroglossic principle, which explains the distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and words, is precisely the fundamental feature of the stylistics of a novel such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. In Joyce’s work the novelistic whole is constantly breaking down into different stylistic unities which bring about the appearance of a diversity of individual voices.

In the “Nausicaa” episode the reader of *Ulysses* is offered for the first time a predominantly female world which is stylistically articulated through the inclusion of both indirect and direct monologue. The first part of the chapter is mostly occupied with the female protagonist’s inner thoughts presented through a third person narrator, whereas the second part consists mainly of Bloom’s interior monologue.

At first glance the chapter seems to be bipartite, with distinctly contrasting, but complementary halves. The first half is concerned with the world of dreams, and there is a characteristic “upward tendency”, as Fritz Senn has noticed,<sup>3</sup> which is the leitmotif of Gerty’s own aspirations as well as the suggestion of the imagery used: the promontory of Howth; a castle built of sand; the flying fireworks; the blessed sacrament raised in the benediction service. The language that orchestrates this motif is correspondingly exalted.

Bloom’s section presents him in his typical concerns with things reduced to their everyday dimensions. The language of his monologue resembles the previous styles of previous episodes. He recollects thoughts about past experiences and reflections, and combines them along with his interpretation of the current experience. Mimesis of

1.- M.M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel”, *The Dialogical Imagination*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.261.

2.- op. cit., p. 263.

3.- F. Senn, “Nausicaa”, in Hart and Hayman (eds.) *James Joyce’s Ulysses*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 302.

consciousness as well as referential thoughts are reunited through Bloom's main two weapons: his memory and his capacity for association.

Despite established contrasts between both parts, brightness/dullness; aloofness/baseness; dreams/instincts, the chapter cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomised structure. Similarly, from the point of view of the narrative technique, "Nausicaa" is undoubtedly a complex episode. Numerous discordant voices disturb the basic division of the episode into two parts. Gerty's half is surprising for its lack of uniformity, since it constitutes a compendium of different moods and styles —voices in the narrative discourse—, which constantly interrupt and intrude into each other's domain. This intrusion reaches not only the narrator's telling, which is affected by frequent shifts in the exposition, but also the indirect monologue attributed to the female protagonist. The tone used in the narrative part which concerns her inner thoughts keeps changing constantly. Her appearance as a character seems to be made out of a variety of brush strokes, and in the same vein, her language does not refer to a single voice, but offers different turns.

There is a clash between Gerty's illusions and her sordid reality. The dialogical interaction of both sides of her consciousness becomes a dispute of voices. One is the speech of the maiden, the virginal girl. The other, the hidden latent one, claims the expression of her repressed sexual desires. The duplicity of her consciousness is reflected in the narrative discourse by the intrusion of the voice of the subliminal, repressed part of her that keeps appearing and disappearing. The reader of "Nausicaa" is aware of these disparities, and the reading becomes a continuous adjustment to the contrasting voices, a progressive refocusing, and an endless quest to unravel the question: "Who was Gerty?"<sup>4</sup>

The episode opens with an imitation of a literary model, the romantic novel, whose sentimental and poetic language prevails from the very beginning: "The summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace" (p. 284). As Karen Lawrence has observed, "to begin the Nausicaa chapter is to feel that one has stumbled into a bad Victorian novel."<sup>5</sup> The romantic cliché is not only imitated, but parodied, and the language is abused to create the desired effect, mannerism and decor. Some characteristic poetic devices such as alliteration and an elaborated diction are emphasised as in the purest romantic style: "Far away in the West the sun was setting, and the last glow of the all-too-fleeting day lingers lovingly on sea and strand" (p. 284).

The voice of the inserted genre, the romantic novelette, pervades the first half of the chapter, but is continually interrupted by other voices which contribute, in their dialogue with the main one, to characterise the whole tone of the first pages. The idea is to design the world of the feminine as conventionally viewed, and to give voice to femininity by means of speeches that recall, or belong to the domain of women.

Sentimental language is displaced from the very beginning, however, at the same time it is completed by the appearance of the language of religion. The intrusion

4.- J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, (New York: Vintage Press, 1986), p. 285. subsequent references to this edition will be supplied in the text following the quote.

5.- K. Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1981), p. 119.

of the epithets of the litany constitute a constant motif in Gerty's part from the opening: "to her who is in her pure radiance, a beacon ever to the storm tossed heart of man, Mary, star of the sea" (p. 284).

Obedying the same heteroglossic principle, the narrator's voice mingles with other voices, namely women's voices, that are included in the discourse, but are extracted from other feminine realms different to the literary one of the novelette. These are the voices of derogatory feminine considerations—"the air which was fresh but not too chilly" (p. 284)—, of the reader of children's fashion magazines—"two little curly-headed boys, dressed in sailors' suits with caps to match" (p. 284)—, of the woman that praises the children of others—"those darling little fellows with bright, merry faces" p. 284)—, of the keen and accurate mother—"eleven months and nine days old" (p. 284)—, of the moralistic flatterer of others' virtues—"A truehearted lass never drew the breath of life" (p. 285).

In these first pages the narrator (she is bound to be a woman) reveals her own thoughts and opinions, and in this sense her voice joins with the others intruding into the discourse of the apparently detached telling. She ceases being a mediator and more or less ambiguously warns the reader—"a girl loveable in extreme" (p. 285)—, becomes emotionally involved—"But to be sure baby Boardman was as good as gold, a perfect little dote in his new fancy bib" (p. 284)— and provocatively uses euphemisms in her expressions—"His little man-o-war top and unmentionables were full of sands" (p. 285). She also gives a clue to the reader to become attentive to the presentation of the female protagonist when she asks the question: "Who was Gerty?" (p. 285).

Gerty's characterisation is conveyed by means of a narrative technique close to montage which helps the reader to observe the complexity of both the interior landscape of Gerty's mind as well as her environment. Her presentation becomes a polyphonic song in which different voices replace each other alternately, and occasionally in discordant disruption. Therefore, the tone keeps continually changing due to different stylistic uses and shifts in the exposition.

When she is first presented, the voice of a column of practical advice—"those iron jelloids she had been taking of late had done her a world of good—much better than the Widow Welch's female" (p. 286)— mingles with the sweetly romantic passage in which she is exalted in terms borrowed from artistic and religious linguistic domains. Nevertheless the narration is not a detached presentation which recalls an artistic analysis, since the normal neutral tone is interrupted with a slight but significant suggestion about Gerty's sensuality: "The waxen palor of her face was almost spiritual in its ivory-like purity **though** her rosebud mouth was a genuine Cupid's bow, Greekly perfect." (p. 286) The elevated artistic presentation later places a repeated emphasis on Gerty's highness—"queenly hauteur", "high arched instep" (p. 286)—which proceeds from the cruel intrusion of the narrator's ironic voice, cruel once the reader has the knowledge that she is lame.

In the former sentimental vein, the narration continues in the style of fairy tales addressed to girls, but the narrator's voice intrudes on the neutral exposition once more:

... had she only received the benefit of a good education, Gerty MacDowell might easily have held her own beside any lady in the land and have seen

herself exquisitely gowned with jewels on her brow and patrician suitors at her feet, vying with one another to pay *devoir* to her. (p. 286)

The girl's characterisation is completed with the inclusion of many other dialogical voices that merge together in the purest heteroglossic style. In this sense, a voice that recalls a typical male cliché about women's eyes —“Why have women such eyes of witchery?”(p.286)—fuses with Gerty's own considerations about what she read in a magazine: “It was Madame Vera Verity, directress of the Woman Beautiful Page of the Princess Novelette, who had first advised her to try eye brow line ... and she had never regretted it.” (p. 286) Similarly in the description of her hair, two disparate narrative voices converge, the one that proceeds from the domain of religion —“Gerty's crowning glory” (p. 286)—, and the one that recalls the language of a hair dresser, or a women's magazine —“It was dark brown with a natural wave in it” (p. 286).

The magazine-style speech reappears on subsequent occasions mingling with the narrator's discourse as well as with the indirect presentation of Gerty's own consciousness. It helps to characterise her physical portrait —“... laugh which had in it all the freshness of a young May morning,” (p. 287)—it contributes to present the reader with her dreamy thoughts —“The fashionable intelligence Mrs Gertrude Wylie was wearing a sumptuous confection” (p. 288)—, and gives a consistent idea of Gerty's multiple abilities —“...dredge in the fine self raising flower and always stir in the same direction, then cream the milk... “ (p. 289).

Having given account mostly of the protagonist's physical appearance, the leading voice of the narration (if one can still find one predominant presence among so many voices) concentrates on the exposition of her inner world. Gerty's quoted thoughts had already interrupted the previous discourse —“Yet he was young and per chance he might learn to love her in time,” (p. 287)—“she did it up all by herself, and what joy was hers ... smiling at the lovely reflection which the mirror gave back to her” (p. 287)—, but they now become the protagonists of the narrative discourse.

After the sweetly romantic passages of sentimental tone, the hilarious parody of magazine style, with its columns of practical advice and its advertisements, and the subtle intrusions of the narrator suggesting Gerty's controverted mind, the reader is finally offered her “straight-forward girlish thoughts”:

He would be tall with broad shoulders (she had always admired tall men for a husband) with glistening white teeth, under his carefully trimmed sweeping moustache and they would go on the continent for their honeymoon (three wonderful weeks!) ... (p. 289).

The whole of the “Nausicaa” episode requires the reader's recreative dialogical involvement to distinguish, put together, and compare the different speeches intermingling. Facing Gerty's narrated monologue, the reader is also asked to fathom Gerty's consciousness in its duplicity and therefore to answer the question “Who was Gerty?”.

Gerty's physical world has been introduced by a mixture of the voices which represent it best. Likewise her inner thoughts are offered through the disruption of voices that, more in dispute than in dialogue, characterise her controverted mind. The protagonist's bitterness about her deformity, her incipient old maidenhood, her frustra-

tion, her abstinence, and repression are manifested through the voice which claims the fulfilment of her sexual desire:

No prince charming is her beau ideal to lay a rare wondrous love at her feet but rather a manly man ... who would understand, take her in his sheltering arms strain her to him in all the strength of his deep passionate nature and comfort her with a long long kiss. (p. 288)

Gerty's inner world is a combination of contrasted feelings. This "specimen of winsome Irish girlhood" wants desperately to hold on to the inherited dreams of mysticism and romanticism, but dreams cannot fulfil her deepest real longings — "... he would embrace her gently, like a real man crushing her soft body to him, and love her ... for herself alone" (p. 294).

The language of her repressed anxieties clashes abruptly with the language of that which is conventionally associated with Irish Catholic femininity, which is deeply rooted in her. The voice of the virtuous girl finds its expression through easily recognizable religious terms which disguise but cannot hide her other level of consciousness:

He looked almost a saint and his confessionbox was so quiet and clean and dark and his hands were just like wax and if ever she became a Dominican nun in white habit perhaps he might come to the convent for the novena of Saint Dominic. (p. 294)

Her monologue becomes evasive and ambiguous at times, and her un verbalised thoughts are expressed through euphemistic expressions corresponding to the scrupulous maiden that she is — "that thing must be coming on" (p. 296). Intended ambiguity is also the characteristic of her considerations about her friend Cissy, who makes her flush, but who "was sincerity itself, one of the bravest and truest hearts heaven ever made, not one of your twofaced things, too sweet to be wholesome" (p. 290). Is Gerty subconsciously referring to herself?

Who is Gerty? Which of the voices of this discordant polyphony reveals the real consciousness of the protagonist? Gerty's personality is manifested in contradictory terms through her thoughts: the thoughts that she admits plainly and that belong to the realm of fantasy — "she had known from the very first that her daydream of a marriage had been arranged ..." (p. 289)—, the thoughts about others — "... Cissy saying an unladylike thing like that out loud, she would be ashamed of her life to say .." (p. 290), the thoughts that she does not want to have and she tries to avoid — "Her woman instinct told her that she had raised the devil in him" (p. 295)—, the thoughts that she has about herself — "she was something aloof, apart ..." (p. 297)— and also subjective occasional thoughts that momentary excitement brings to her mind — "she could almost feel him draw her face to his and the finest quick hot touch of his handsome lips" (p. 300).

Heteroglossia as it functions in the "Nausicaa" episode leads the reader to unravel the different speeches that conform to the mosaic of different voices and therefore different languages: the language of religion, particularly catholicism; the language of fashion magazines; the language addressed to calm a child; the language of

the wedding ritual; and the sugary language of the sentimental cheap fiction, among many others already mentioned.

The heteroglossic principle obliges the reader to disentangle the clues and subtle allusions and interpret also the little clouds of idioms that contaminate what seems to be the normal neutral narrative tone. It is precisely this “contamination” which originates the intertextuality that characterises the different episodes in *Ulysses*. “Nausicaa” is not an exception and the text becomes a conjunction of different texts.

Joyce’s use of the narrative technique to represent the world of consciousness in this particular episode gives an innovative meaning to the concept of heteroglossia. Since the subliminal and repressed aspects of the feminine consciousness are revealed, the dialogue of voices becomes a dispute of opposed aspects that interfere with each other.

Gerty is once more a fine example of Joyce’s conception of the feminine in strongly discrepant terms. The convergence of both virginal and whorish conditions prevails also in the presentation of the protagonist of “Nausicaa”. The Joycean dichotomy is incorporated within this episode in the mind of the female character. The conflict becomes her own mental struggle and ushers in the disruption of voices in the narrative discourse.

When the reader, already trained in understanding Bloom’s associations and parallels, reaches the second part, a new perspective is offered. Bloom’s monologue, draped over the surface of things, becomes a symbiosis of present and past thoughts and a search for justification with the known experience. His unrepressed male consciousness is allowed to express what Gerty’s could barely hide and his voice is a new contribution to the dialogue of speeches.

With the conclusion of the chapter the reader feels that s/he has been asked to be in two places—two mental worlds—at the same time and consequently, s/he has had to oscillate in her/his readings. The final acquired knowledge derives from such an oscillation. Through the commingling of different voices narrator and reader penetrate the character’s mind from different perspectives. In Gerty’s narrated monologue the mixing of discourses emphasises the ambiguous status of the speaker, an ambiguity which is accordingly transferred to the reader. The reader shares the teller’s perspective because s/he listens to the report of the character’s interior voice and disentangles also the other voices that interrupt the narrative discourse.

In the new Joycean proposal, narration is equated with breakdown, disintegration, and fragmentation of boundaries. There is not a single truth, but multiple truths and reading becomes the activity of acquiring knowledge by listening to a chronicle of disruption.<sup>6</sup>

6.- The above article was first published in the *Revista del Departamento de Filología Moderna*, at the Universidad de Castilla - La Mancha, nos. 2 + 3, 1992. BELLS acknowledges the kind permission of Ana María manzanas, Editor of the *Revista*, and the author of the article, to republish the piece here.

## REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M.M. "Discourse in the Novel" *The Dialogical Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Dillard, Annie. *Living by Fiction*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1982.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Vintage Books, 1986.
- Kenner, Hugh. *Joyce's Voices*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978.
- Kershner, R.B. *Joyce, Bakhtin and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Lawrence, Karen. *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*. Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1981.