Polyphony of Language and Style: A Study of *Ulysses* Through Bakhtinian Optic

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Abstract

Ulysses proceeds, alters the mind, and, in turn, changes the reader. Joyce's use of language can produce multiple meanings at once. The resulting tangle of styles and voices generates meaning in multiple dimensions simultaneously. Readers tend to concentrate on one level of meaning and direction at a time to attain coherence. This concentration still needs to be more robust; it shifts rapidly from one thing to another and from one level to another. However, these tiers are embedded in a more extensive critical reflection on language. As a result, Bakhtin's theories of language, especially his study of polyphony, heteroglossia, and dialogism, provide a valuable framework for discussing the myriad and intricate ways language can be used. Within the context of Bakhtin's philosophy of language, this paper explores the many modernist linguistic practices, Joyce's embrace of them, and his stylistic use of them in Ulysses.

Keywords

Bakhtin, Dialogism, Joyce, Style, Ulysses.

In his novel Remembrance of Things Past, Marcel Proust states: 'Style for the writer just as color for the painter is a question not of technique but of vision.' Language for the verbal artist is more than craft style is something more than polish and posture. Created along certain principles, it is an articulated vision of the world as the artist sees it and simultaneously a vision of the world he creates through the style.As Arnold Goldman describes *Ulysses*as an encyclopedia of styles. Ulysses presents Joyce's awareness of the visions of the style (Goldman 96). Joyce deliberately devises a new style per chapter and offers a sense of justifications for these styles, usually relying on the Homeric parallels. He had recast and adopted language to fit

his expression and particular conception. Thus ''Aeolus'' runs through a vast repertoire of rhetorical figures. "Sirens" reproduces hundreds of musical forms, and the linguistic gigantism of "Cyclops" parodies a sense of tests ranging from the Bible and Celtic epic to a child's reading book.

Ulysses is a work that deliberately changes, develops, and transforms itself. One can describe Ulysses as a book that changes the mind as it progresses and forces a corresponding change in the reader. Joyce's language creates any number of meanings simultaneously. Because of the complex mixture of styles and voices, meaning is generated on many levels and in many directions simultaneously. To achieve coherence, readers tend to focus on a given time on one level and one direction of meaning. Still, this focus tends to be highly unstable and frequently changes direction or slides from one level to another. But these levels exist within an overarching reflexive commentary on language.Thus, Bakhtin's theories of language, particularly his discussion of polyphony, heteroglossia, and dialogism, provide a beneficial framework for discussing language's multiple and complex uses. This paper attempts to discuss various modernist language practices, their adoption, and stylistic use by Joyce in Ulysses in the frame of Bakhtin's theory of language.

Bakhtin's notion of dialogism and heteroglossia is crucially concerned with the phenomena occurring in meeting different social and cultural forces. Bakhtin attempts to establish historical poetics, centrally informed by a strong recognition that all language uses are inevitably colored by textual traces from the Past. In particular, for Bakhtin, all language has been used before and continues to carry the resonances of former use so that any utterance involves a dialogic mixture of meanings and intentions.In Bakhtin's view, a novel strives for generic, encyclopedic comprehensiveness, including the heavy use of inserted genres, which serves the primary purpose of introducing heteroglossia into the novel, of presenting an era's many and diverse languages. It embodies the view that the novel must be a complete and comprehensive reflection of its age; only the novel must represent all the social and ideological voices of its era, that is, all the era's languages that have any claim to being significance must be a microcosm of heteroglossia. In Bakhtin's words:

"The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, using the social diversity of speech types and the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of the narrator's inserted genres, and the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unites with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization – thus in the primary distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel" (263).

In Ulysses, by presenting possibilities of meaning, Joyce has incorporated the notion of Bakhtinian linguistics well. The authoritative narrative voice that tells the story in the early chapter (beginning the novel with the words "stately plump Buck Mulligan came from stairhead..." (01) is largely replaced by a series of stylistic masks. This style movement reflects a change in the idea of style as the writer's signature to one of style as a memory, a cultural inheritance. This citation quality, opacity, and language history dominate the narrative's second half. Somewhere in the middle of Ulysses's style goes public, as the memory of its prior use floods language. The rhetorical masks that Joyce created in Ulysses lead us to doubt the authority of any particular style. As the narrative norm is abandoned during the book and replaced by a series of styles, we see the arbitrariness of all styles.

The breakdown of the authority of style is accompanied by a parallel destruction of the conventions of relevance and significance of detail in creatinga plot and theme. As the styles and forms of the chapters proliferate, so do the facts included in the narrative move further to unleash a plethora of facts. In the words of Karen Lawrence, "The book becomes an encyclopedia of possibilities of plot as well as style; deliberately breaking the convention of selectivity and relevance upon which most novels are based" (10). Ulysses's surplus of facts and styles makes the text exceptionally resistant to critical attempts to force it into a statement of meaning. Instead

of the plot as we know it, the text gives us an overwhelming number of facts instead of narrative authority if it provides us with styles that interpret reality differently.

Another way to express this would be to say that the different modes of ordering experience are other modes of ordering a novel. Partway through Ulysses, we witness the breakdown of the novel as a form and the creation of an encyclopedia of narrative choices. The resources of sub-literature (Journalism, magazine fiction, melodrama) and non-literature (science) are plumbed by Joyce and used for his purposes. And the resources of this book's first half are pillaged and reused in the second half in the process of style, plot, narrator, and genre are all, in one way or another, revealed as fiction employed in the creation of the novel.

Stylistically, there is a distinct difference between the two halves of Ulysses; the first preparatory section is written in a simple expository manner for most of its length. There are few technical innovations and few stylistic difficulties. Joyce uses a mixture of two basic styles interior monologue, imitation,and interiority –and simple objective third-person prose. In the second section, however, Joyce begins earnestlywith a series of technical and stylistic developments, most of which are parodies of other writers, conventions, and literary modes. Joyce expands on his material's significance in this part of the book. He relates his central themes to increasingtime, space, and imagination contexts. Chapters with the most radical stylistic experiments are "Aeolus," Sirens," "Cyclops," "Oxen of the Sun," "Circe," "Eumaeus,"and"Ithaca."

The opening three chapters of Ulysses are a tribute to Joyce's own literary canon and the classic novel form. The similarities between "A Portrait" and "Telemachiad" are striking. Here's a passage from "Telemachus" that, critics say, has the same signature Joycean quality as "A Portrait," only amplified in Ulysses:"Two shafts of soft daylight fell across the flagged floor from the high barbicans: and at the meeting of their rays a cloud of coal smoke and fume of fried grease floated turning" (2).

Third-person narration, conversation, and dramaticization of a scene are the novel's pillars, giving the reader confidence when they begin Ulysses. Joyce also employs the stream-of-consciousness method alongside the third-person narration. Joyce's use of this strategy grew

increasingly prevalent until chapter three (Proteus), at which point it almost took over the story entirely. The novel is written in the third person; however, the narrator only appears in the first three chapters. Language begins to quote itself, a feature of the novel's second half, but only after Joyce has turned the novelistic convention into a novelistic cliche (style has lost its originality) in its first chapter. There is a recognizable and reasonably regular manner of narration throughout the first eleven chapters of Ulysses, and the narrative has a propensity to borrow the speed and diction of the character language, both of which are narrative tropes established in the first few chapters.

In the following three chapters of Ulysses, devoted to Leopold Bloom, this interest in character is still paramount. In these chapters, the reader finds the exact texture of narration as in the "Telmachiad": a combination of third-person narration, dialogue, free indirect discourse, and the character's stream-of-consciousness.In "Aeolus," the reader finds a form of double writing; the narration of the story continues, but is now interspersed with unexpected, boldfaced sentences. These expressions serve to label and categorize the various parts of the narration, much like the subheads and subtitles in a newspaper. For example: In The Heart of Hibernian Metropolis, The Wearer of The Crown, Gentlemen of The Press, etc.

However, The headings are more disconcerting than helpful to the reader, for the spirit that motivates their creation seems arbitrary and capricious. In "Aeolus," the book begins to advertise its artifice, and in doing so, it calls attention to the process of reading and writing. The headings not only provide a puzzle to the reader but are also a sign of a new kind of writing in the book that modernizes the norms established in the first six categories. The discontinuity created by the headings thus has important implications for the reading of the novel; it destroys the illusion of a stable narrative voice, the notion of a coherent narrating self. Instead, we can say that the headings represent a discourse generated in the text that advertises that it is written anonymously and publicly removed from any single originating consciousness.

The language of the headings is the borrowed language of that legacy of collective authorship, the press. The language of the headings belongs to no particular character. This change represents an important step in the evolution of the technique of free indirect discourse.

In a rather conventional way, the narrative beneath the headings develops the plot and characters of the early chapters. In any novel, one would expect that the two main characters introduced separately at the beginning would come together as the plot develops. The formal symmetry of the triads of chapters with which Ulysses begins creates firm expectations for the convergence of the plot lines and characters in the Seventh Chapter, and these expectations are fulfilled in "Aeolus," as Stephen Dedalus' and Leopold Bloom's paths cross.

"Scylla and Charybdis" shows a kind of literary self-consciousness, namely Stephen's public display of his theory of Shakespeare, like the headings, which call into question the idea of the origin of the writing, Stephen's theory deals with the relationship between creating consciousness and creation. The critical distinction, however, is that the primary vehicle for the literary criticism in "Scylla and Charybdis" is character rather than narrative.

From the highly charged psychological dramas of Stephen Dedalus and William Shakespeare in "Scylla and Charybdis," we move to the dispassionate, almost deadpan narration in "Wandering Rocks." Jackson Cope has called the narration of this chapter "meticulous." He observes that the drastic shift in stylistic technique in "Sirens" is all the more marked for coming upon the heels of the meticulous narration of "Wandering Rocks." (218).

The masses of facts accumulate in the text with either arbitrary conceptual links or no links provided by the lateral imagination of the narrative. This strange cataloging activity is reflected in the syntax of the prose itself. Sometimes the prose is paratactic and choppy:

> "Lawyers of the past, haughty, pleading, beheld pass from the consolidated taking office to Nisi Prius court Riche Goulding carrying the costbag of Goulding, Collis, and Ward and heard resulting from the admirable division of king's bench to the court of appeal an elderly female with false teeth smiling incredulously and a black silk skirt of great amplitude." (315)

In the 'Sirens' chapter, Ulysses abandons even the pretense of being a traditional novel. Here conventional units of narration are fractured short lines of non-sequitur to replace the sentence. In turning the page from the lengthy paragraphs that conclude "Wandering Rocks," the

reader comes upon a kind of shorthand on code in which Joyce seems to be playing linguistic games of notation. The most exciting experiments in this chapter are the more local verbal games played in the sentences of the narrative. A style breakdown occurs that mirrors the structure's anatomy, for neither the narrative nor the preceding chapters seem to be directed and reassembled. Phrases are repeated, rearranged, and slightly distorted.

> "Jingle JingleJuanted Jingling
>
> Coin rang, cloak clacked
>
> Avowal Sonnez, I could Rebound of garter Not leave thee
>
> Smack La Cloche! Thigh Smack Avowal! Warm
>
> Sweetheart, goodbye?
>
> Jingle Bloo" (329)

Perhaps one of the most precise developments of polyphonic discourse in Ulysses occurs in "Sirens," as the people in the Ormond bar listen to songs. Music breaks down language's logical continuity and replaces it with a sequence of immediate impressions. As a result, a character's thought tends to mix two tracks of discordant discourse at once and interrupt each other. For example, here is Bloom listening to Richie Goulding whistling:

> Richie cocked his lips out. A low incipient note Sweet Banshee murmured all. A thrush ... is lost. Rich Sound. Two notes in one their Blackbird I heard in the Lawthom valley. Taking my motives, he twined and turned them. Most, two new callsare lost in all. Echo. How sweet the answer is. How is that done? All lost row (351).

The narrative voice at the beginning of "Cyclops" gradually fades away. A narrative identity and a succession of parodies interrupt the narrator's vocal monologue to take the place of the standard. Each caricature represents a different aspect of Irish national consciousness, such as the collective voice of the modern newspaper (as in "Aeolus") or the collective voice of the epic

(also present). Parodies in "Cyclops" have "two levels," as described by Karen Lawrence. They make fun of our culture by mocking the language we use to discuss it. In "Cyclops," Joyce Parodies the voice of culture – the style used to tell Irish stories, past and present (103). "Cyclops" is a chapter in which conventions and norms are flouted, and parodies lead to the expansion of the text. The destruction of order seems to represent Joyce's skepticism about the ordering of experience in language.

In "Nausicaa,"the prose is more exaggerated and parodic. The chapter gives an excellent example of a Victorian novel: The summer evening had begun to fold the world in its mysterious embrace" (456). Joyce's selection of models allows him to play with the intrusive, philosophical explanatory voice that characterizes the essay form.

The stylistic metamorphosis used by Joyce in this chapter of Ulysses does not merely illustrate a shift in subject or narration only. Rather flexibility of the styles, with its odd traverses and Sudden bounds, reflects the disparity at the level of the character's consciousness and the form within which the novel is set. Remarks Fritz Senn,"The constant re-focussing obliges the reader to sharpen his sense of the disparities (some inherently conical) and the perpetual clashes between illusory disguises and chilly reality. Each new attitude opts to invalidate the previous one. But even within one given stylistic level, the metaphors often jostle each other incongruously ..." (308)

Perhaps Joyce's most explicit statement concerning the historicity of language occurs in the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter. Here, Joyce constructs a collage of prose styles that roughly trace the historical development of English prose from its early Anglo-Sason origins through the early twentieth century. Hugh Kenner opines, "The Oxen of the Sun is a museum of Styles" (49). This chapter thus nicely illustrates Joyce's appropriation of the styles and languages of others for his purposes, moreover, by casting the series of classesin terms of a historical progression. Joyce demonstrates his profound understanding of the historicity of kind.

In "Oxen of the Sun," Joyce initiates fertilization by making pregnancy the developing material of his narrative voice. From the Anglo-Saxon to the modern eras, the idea of embryonic

development is mirrored in a series of frequently great parodies of the English prose style. As he explains to Budgen in a letter:

> Bloom dull dreamy heard: in held hat stony staring) then by way of Mandeville. [...] and so on through Defoe-Swift and Steele-Addison-Sterne and Landor-Pater-Newman until it ends in a frightful jumble of PidginEnglish, nigger English. Cockney. Irish, Bowery slang, and broken doggerel. This progression is also linked back at each part subtly with some preceding episode of the day and, besides this, with the natural stages of development in the embryo and the periods of faunal evolution in general (251-252).

Thus, the styles of 'Oxen' are scrupulous imitations of the manners of Malory, Buryan, Swift, Sterne, Dickens, and others. And yet most of the classesare taken from their original contexts and defamiliarised by their new surroundings in Ulysses. The typical style in one era, the chapter clearly shows, will be different from one another.

The entire chapter 'Of Circe' is, in a radical sense, figurative: its fantastic scenes and dialogues function as dramatized conceit and metaphors for the characters' suppressed desires, fears, and guilt. To a greater degree, the chapter is concerned with expressing emotions through speech and gesture. The rhetorical devices within individual lessons are part of a larger rhetorical strategy in the chapter.

In 'Circe,' nearly accidental psychoanalysis occurs under the pressure of unfamiliar surroundings releasing the day's accumulated strains. The opening description conveys that what we know and what is there are somewhat different. Long sections, of course, are described as hallucinations or at least as fantasies. Observes Hugh Kenner, 'We now have a formula for the vitality of the 'circle' episode. Old pieces appear in new and surprising patterns, with an episodic vividness that strikes the attention. We are likely to gather the impression that absolutely everyone and everything in the book turns up here somewhere, animated by a new and phantasmagoric life [...] And as the vivid visions proceed, old details spawn new detail, defined and etched by the sharp specifying language that gives transient wisps of feeling". He further

writes, "And as Ulysses is the Odyssey transposed and rearranged, 'Circe' is Ulysses transposed and rearranged." (382-383)

The language of "Eameaus" is pretentious, verbose, and cliched. It displays a love of elegant variation,convoluted phrases, and latinate diction: "Possibly perceiving an expression of curiosity on their faces, the globetrotter went on adhering to his adventures (773). Language in the chapter glances off its object. A succession of phrases is offered more, which captures meaningfully. The cumulative effect of all these cliches is to make "Eameaus" into an encyclopedia of received phrases. Observes Karen Lawrence, "If the language of "Eamusus" is enervated, it is not merely to reflect the fatigue of the characters or a narrator but to reveal that language is tired and old, used and reused so many times it runs in grooves. The language of "Eameans" is the public anonymous 'voice of culture' first heard in the headings of "Aeolus," a transpersonal repository of received ideas (169).

On the other hand, 'Ithaca' deliberately dispenses with the beauties of style and other niceties of novel writing. Instead of the suspense of a linear plot, it advances the direction of questions and answers. In this chapter, the emotions and situations of the characters are 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 (909). 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.

Upon first encounter, "Penelope" seems very unconventional: the absence of third-person narration, the unpunctuated, unbroken sentences, and the representation of thought as if continuous speech distinguish it from the earlier chapters of interior monologue. "Penelope"presents an autonomous monologue, where Bloom answers Molly's question about the day. The technical reversal contributes to our sense of return and closure. Perhaps it makes sense to say that in "Penelope," Joyce provides a powerful ending for one story in Ulysses.

To quote Karen Lawrence once again, "Ulysses is a set of fictions that reveals the inconclusiveness of all fictions, a compendium of schemes of order that implies that there is the

absolute way to order experience, either in life or literature." (208) The elaborate schematization in Ulysses does not represent an absolute and closed symbolic order.

In abandoning the norm with which the book begins and substituting instead a succession of stylistic experiments, Joyce reveals how style is always an interpretation of reality and choice among many possibilities. The exercises of style are not extrinsic to a central meaning; instead, they create the meanings in the book.

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