

THE INFLUENCE OF NORA’S WRITING STYLE ON JOYCE’S CONSTRUCTION OF MOLLY’S MONOLOGUE

1. Object of research and its aims

My aim is to present a comparative stylistic analysis of the Letters of Nora Joyce and the interior monologue of Molly Bloom. By inspecting the similarities the two texts share at the graphological and morpho-syntactic level of discourse, I wish to argue that in his construction of Molly’s monologue, Joyce may have been influenced by some of the features of Nora’s writing practice.

My idea to read “Penelope” adopting a stylistic approach has been partly encouraged by the observation that little attention has so far been paid to a detailed linguistic analysis of the episode. Moreover, no critic seems to have cast sufficient light on the linguistic correspondence existing between Nora’s letters and Molly’s monologue: in a few cases they have remarked on the similarities without, however, devoting a productive analysis to them.(1)

I will quote extracts from the letters of Nora contained in the volumes of Joyce’s Letters edited by S. Gilbert and R. Ellmann, and from those present in The *Cornell* Joyce Collection. I will compare them with passages taken from “Penelope”.(2)

2. Punctuation

The main striking similarity between the letters of the young Nora and Molly’s interior monologue is the absence of punctuation.(3) Following Halliday’s classification of the functions of graphic markers, I intend to draw attention to the “use” of punctuation as: 1) “boundary marker” (signing the boundaries between sentences or their constituents), 2) “status marker” (indicating the speech function of the sentence) and 3) “relation marker” (a minor function of punctuation that includes use of hyphen, dash, parenthesis, apostrophe).(4)

2.1. Effects of the absence of punctuation as boundary-marking in text-construction

The absence of punctuation determines ambiguity in the location of syntactic boundaries, especially when adverbs and adverbials occur as constituents of the sentence. The result is a difficulty in the semantic interpretation of the text in the course of the reading-process. For reasons of space I will select just one of the numerous cases of syntactic ambiguity occurring both in the letters and in the monologue. In September 1904 Nora writes to Joyce: “I felt last night as if I had not seen you at all in consequence of you having to leave me so early *when I came in* I thought I could get to retire and not think of you so much” (*Ellmann II*, 57, my emphasis). As a result of the omission of boundary markers, the adverbial clause (“when I came in”) may be interpreted either as occurring in rhematic position in the first clause or in thematic position in the next clause.

A similar perplexity in the identification of the syntactic boundaries arises in the interior monologue: “... yes because theyre so weak and puling *when theyre sick* they want a woman to get well...” (my emphasis).(5) Also in this case, in fact, the adverbial clause “when theyre sick” may be interpreted either as a restriction on the validity of the previous assertion “theyre so weak and puling” or as a restriction on the validity of the following assertion “they want a woman to get well”.

2.1.1. Use of “transitional elements” as pause markers in the text

In several cases the two texts compensate for the lack of punctuation through the use of transitional elements, such as “yes”, “well”, “then”, “now”. These items either indicate pauses before the

occurrence of a shift of topic or introduce an elaboration of previous subject-matter. I will focus on the item “well” which is very frequent in both Nora’s letters and in “Penelope”. In July 1912 Nora writes to Joyce:

I am dreadfully lonely for you I am quite tired of Ireland already (1) well I arrived in Dublin on Monday ...I feel very strange here but the time wont be long slipping round till I am going back to you again (2) well Jim I am sure you would like to know something about your publisher (3) well on Tuesday your Father Charley and myself went in and just pinned that charming gentleman (4) well I asked what he meant by treating you in such a manner...(5) well Jim dear I hope you are minding yourself ... (Ellmann II, 296-297, my emphasis).

In the first, third and fourth case, “well” introduces an elaboration of the topic previously mentioned through detailed accounts. In the second and fifth case, “well” signals a shift of topic, thus performing the same function of a full-stop.

Let us now consider some of the twenty-four occurrences of “well” in Molly’s monologue: “... his father made his money over selling the horses for the cavalry well he could buy me a nice present up in Belfast...” (U, 886, my emphasis). As happens in example two and five in the letter, “well” is here used as introducer of a new topic: from how Boylan’s father became rich to the idea that his son can buy her a nice present. In other cases, “well” introduces additional information to elaborate the previous topic (as happens in the remaining occurrences of “well” in Nora’s letter): “...I told her over and over again not to leave the knives crossed like that because she has nobody to command her as she said herself well if he doesn’t correct her faith I will...” (U, 912).

The absence of punctuation and the use of the discourse marker “well” prove the extent to which features of the spoken mode are employed in the two types of written text. In this sense, the immediacy with which Nora translates her inner spoken discourse into written medium may well be regarded as a noteworthy source of inspiration for Joyce’s experimental rendering of a woman’s stream of thought.

2.1.2. Particular use of indentation and spacing

Another similarity between the letters and the monologue regards the use of indentation and spacing. (6) In Molly’s monologue, the indented new paragraph in which the first word begins with lower case letter is the only structuring device of the whole episode and appears to the reader as the only graphic marker of pause in the heroine’s cogitation. This kind of text-organization is the same as that which Nora uses in her letters.(7) Also Nora tends to represent pause through the use of blank spacing. One only need take a look at the graphic organisation of the two texts to see their similarity in paragraph-construction. Compare Nora’s letter with an extract from Molly’s monologue:

**... I am afraid it will be a job to get any definite answer on my way back I will call again I hope Charley will be able to do something
well Jim dear I hope you are minding yourself and how is poor little Georgie I hope is well dear ... (Ellmann II, 297).**

... O she didnt care if that was her nature what could she do besides theyre not brute enough to go and hang a woman are they theyre all so different Boylan talking about the shape of my foot he noticed at once even before he was introduced ... (U, 880).

Even Nora’s use of the lower-case letter after the indentation has not been ignored by Joyce in “Penelope”. Compare “well Jim dear” with “theyre all so different.”

2.2. Omissions of status markers

As far as the status-marking function of punctuation is concerned, question marks are also disregarded in the two texts. As a result the interrogatives can be identified only by means of the syntactic subject-auxiliary inversion. Compare the occurrences of interrogative sentences in Nora's letters: "was Miss Mordo at the house what did she say..." (*Cornell*, n.758), "how long do you think we ought to stay here..." (*Cornell*, n. 755) with analogous cases in the monologue: "... would you do this that and the other with the coalman yes with the bishop yes ..." (*U*, 874); "...Hynes kept me who did I meet ah yes I met do you remember Menton..." (*U*, 873).

The disregard for punctuation is also responsible for the lack of colon and quotation marks which should signal the introduction of direct reported speech. Compare the case in Nora's letter: "... they say to me O you are getting a show you are so fat..." (*Ellmann II*, 302) with the following one in "Penelope": "...I know my chest was out... when he said Im extremely sorry and Im sure you were..." (*U*, 891).

2.3. Omission of relation markers: orthographic anomalies

My next concern is the omission of the apostrophe in the construction of subject - auxiliary verb, auxiliary verb - negation. Both Nora's letters and Molly's monologue are characterised by the occurrence of the non-standard contracted forms "Ill", "Im", "dont", "havent", "cant", "wouldnt". Among the examples in Nora's letter we find: "... I am delighted to sleep the night away when I *cant* be thinking of you so much..." (*Ellmann II*, 54, my emphasis) or "... she [Lucy] wont go to Gina... you need not bother sending me pocket money and I *dont* intend to stay any longer than Monday" (*Cornell*, n.752, my emphasis).

In Molly's monologue Joyce recovers Nora's idiosyncratic use of the contracted form, and through its systematization, turns it into one of the peculiarities of Molly's mental speech: "... because they *cant* get on without us ... I *dont* like my foot so much ... why *cant* you kiss a man without going and marrying him first ... he [Bloom] *wont* let you enjoy anything naturally ... well I suppose he [Stephen] *wont* find many like me"(8)

3. Cohesion

Punctuation is not the only similarity the two texts share. The linguistic comparison reveals other interesting correspondences in Nora's and Molly's use of cohesive strategies. The comparison shows how links of subordination turn out to be more frequent than links of coordination both in Nora's letters and in "Penelope".(9)

I start my inquiry by considering an example from Nora's letter:

Dearest Jim ... (1) I felt last night (2) *as if* I had not seen you at all (3) *in consequence of* you having to leave me so early (4) *when* I came in (5) I thought (6) I could get to retire (7) *and* [ellipsis] not think of you so much (8) *but* there was a great spree here (9) *and* I need not tell you (10) I did not like going amongst people (11) *whom* I did not care for ... (*Ellmann II*, 57, my emphasis).

The extract presents three cases of coordinating conjunctions (two additive "and" and one adversative "but"), while there are four occurrences of subordinating markers ("as if", "in consequence of", "whom", "when") and two occurrences of objective clauses with that-deletion. Subordinating ties are therefore more frequent than coordinating ones (six to three), and the text reveals a rather intricate clause-construction. The sample also indicates how lexical items contribute to textual cohesion through lexical repetition: "I" (twelve times), "you" (six), "leave" (two), "think" (three), "come" (two), "get" (two) and lexical choice (i.e. sets of words which establish lexical chains): "come" - "get" - "leave" - "go"; "like" - "care" - "long".

Let us now turn to Molly's inner speech:

Yes *because* he never did a thing like *that* before *as* ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs *since* the City Arms hotel *when* he used to be pretending *to be laid up* with a sick voice *doing* his highness *to make* himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs Riordan *that* he though he had a great leg of *and* she never left us a farthing... (U, 871, my emphasis).

As happens in Nora's letters, here too, the syntactic ties between sentences compensate for the total lack of punctuation by structuring the information for the reader. Subordinating constructions are again more frequent than coordinating ones. While there is just one occurrence of the additive conjunction "and", there are five cases of subordinating markers: "because", "as", "since", "when", "that", one case of that-deletion and two cases of non-finite subordinate clauses. As Steinberg claims, "Joyce's idea of linking the elements of the passage together with subordination rather than stringing them together with coordination is in tune with his attempt at highlighting the fluidity of Molly's discourse."⁽¹⁰⁾ Lexical cohesion is guaranteed by the occurrences of words belonging to the same semantic field: "breakfast" – "bed" – "eggs"; "masses" – "soul" – "spirit", while the use of proforms determines cataphoric and anaphoric ties. The comparison suggests that the clausal elaboration characterising Nora's writing practice may have been a possible source of inspiration for Joyce's complex text-elaboration in "Penelope".

4. Syntactic and grammatical peculiarities

4.1. Use of the third person pronoun

My first observation concerns the occurrence of the third person pronoun in one of Nora's letters, where the syntactic ambiguity in the identification of the referent anticipates analogous cases in the monologue: "well I am sure Jim you would like to know something about your publisher well on Thursday your Father Charley and myself went in and just pinned that charming gentleman ... Charley [Joyce's brother] will do all he can he says he will watch him [referring to the editor Roberts] everyday then *he* will write to you..." (Ellmann II, 297, my emphasis). While the first three occurrences of "he" may all be easily disambiguated through anaphoric reference (the referent being Charley), the last "*he*" may syntactically refer either to the previous subject pronoun "he" (denoting Charley) or to the complement pronoun "him" (indicating the editor). Only common sense helps readers in the process of disambiguation, leading them to identify Charley (a member of the family) as the one who will presumably undertake the task of writing to his brother.

This kind of syntactic ambiguity in the use of the third person pronoun is stretched to the limit in Molly's monologue. Let us consider one of the numerous occurrences in "Penelope": the night *he* kissed my heart at Dolphins barn... because *he* never knew how to embrace well like Gardner I hope *hell* come on Monday" (U, 884, my emphasis). In the example the first two pronouns refer to Bloom and the second one to Boylan, but the identification of the referent and its subsequent shift cannot be accounted for on a syntactic basis: it is only the previously acquired knowledge of characters and events which allows the attentive reader to solve the ambiguity. A similar kind of referential instability occurs in the following passage where the *he*-pronoun shifts from Stephen to Bloom, then back to Stephen and finally back to Bloom again:

...*he* [Stephen] could do his writing and studies at the table for all the scribbling *he* [Bloom] does at it and if *he* [Stephen] wants to read in bed in the morning like me as *hes* [Bloom] making the breakfast for 1 he can make it for 2 ...(U, 928)

4.2. Suspension of complex clause structure

Both in the letters and in the monologue there are occurrences of complex clause structures which are suspended and only later completed.

The suspension between the first and the second part of the clause cluster is another feature of the spoken mode. Its occurrence suggests that Nora's written production is an automatic rendering of her spontaneous mental speech in much the same way as Molly's discourse is a written transcription of her inner spoken discourse.

Let us consider the case of suspension of the if-clause in Nora's letter:

...if you like to telephone me tomorrow Monday as casa Danzi is next door to us and I know the girl that lives there she eats here in the Pension now I have got the telephone number is 33 telephone hour is from 8 to 12 if you phone me tomorrow I shall wait at the telephone at Eleven...(Ellmann II, 403, my emphasis).

The sentences which separate the two parts of the hypothetical construction constitute a sort of digression in which the information given is important to the point that the writer seems to forget the main idea. The first part of the hypothetical construction is extended and elaborated through relations of embedding (as), coordination (and) and juxtaposition. A similar tendency to split complex clause structures, because of the development of new thoughts in the subject's mind, is carried still further in Molly's monologue:

...love its not or hed be off his feed thinking of her so either it was one of those night women if it was down there he was really and the hotel story he made a pack of lies to hide it planning it Hynes kept me who did I meet ah yes I met do you remember Menton and who else who let me see that big babbyface I saw him and he not long married flirting with a young girl at Pooles Myriorama and turned my back on him when he slinked out looking quite conscious what harm...only for I hate having a long quarrel in bed or else if its not that its some little bitch or other he got in with somewhere ...(U, 872-873, my emphasis).

The two correlative clauses: "either it was one of those night women" and "or else if its not that its some little bitch" are interrupted by a very long digression which helps to reveal the functioning of Molly's stream of thought. As happens in the letter, the first part of the correlative construction (either-clause) is extended through embedded subordinate clauses (if, when), coordination (and) and juxtaposition.

5. Use of intensifiers

My last concern is the frequent use that Nora and Molly make of intensifiers. Swacker suggests that such occurrences are typical of the female language, in that women more than men tend to favour the use of emphatic stress and the emotive intensifiers like "so" and "such".(11)

Let us consider at first Nora's use of intensifiers in one of her letters. In August 1912 she writes to Eileen Joyce: "...I am also delighted to hear that you are getting on *so* well ... we would enjoy it more if we had not *such* bad weather ... they say to me O you are getting a show you are *so* fat ... the only one I thought it was not looking *so* well is Charley ..." (Ellmann, II, 302, my emphasis).

Such occurrences are also remarkably frequent in the monologue: "yes because theyre *so* weak and puling when theyre sick ... still he hasn't *such* a tremendous amount of spunk in him ... of course a woman is *so* sensitive about everything ... she didn't like it *so* much ... it wouldn't have been *so* bad ... his father *such* a criticiser... (U, 878-913, passim).

Normatively, the intensifiers "so" and "such" are combined with the complementizer "that" ("so... that"; "such... that"). In Nora's and Molly's discourse structure, however, "so" and "such" are used without "that". The result is a 'broken' construction which, John Russell argues, is typical of women's language.(12) In light of this, it is curious to notice that in the nineteen pages dedicated to Bloom's interior monologue in "Nausicaa" the intensifier "such" occurs just once and in the

character's parodic rendering of a typical female exclamation (usually uttered in the period of menstruation): "I have such a bad headache" (*U*, 479).

Joyce's use of the so called "feminine intensives" in "Penelope" seems indicative of his intention to render an authentic female discourse, where stereotypes of women's language coexist with the idiosyncratic expressive behaviour of the character. The way in which Nora combines stereotypes of the female language with properties of her personal style proves the extent to which Joyce may have been influenced by her writing-style.

Conclusion

Although discourse construction in "Penelope" is the result of an intensive work of technical experimentation in the stream of consciousness field, the above linguistic analysis has intended to show that some of the peculiarities of Molly's monologue may well be re-considered in light of their similarities with features of Nora's writing practice.⁽¹³⁾

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1 See Philip Herring, "The Bedsteadfastness of Molly Bloom," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 15 (1969), pp. 49-61 and Anthony Burgess, *Joysprick*, (London: André Deutsch, 1973).

2 *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), I; *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), II-III; The *Cornell Joyce Collection*: given to Cornell University Press by William G. Mennen, 1957. From now on the volume edited by Gilbert will be quoted: Gilbert, 1957: p.; The volumes edited by Ellmann: Ellmann, vol., p.; the letters contained in *The Cornell Joyce Collection: Cornell*, n.

3 Not all the letters Nora wrote are completely empty of punctuation. Some of them, in particular those she wrote after 1909, present here and there a timid and not always proper attempt at inserting graphic markers of pause.

4 M.A.K. Halliday, *Spoken and Written Language*, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989).

5 J. Joyce, *Ulysses: Annotated Students' Edition*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992) p. 872. All quotations are taken from this edition.

6 Following Geoffrey Nunberg, *The Linguistics of Punctuation* (USA: Centre for the Study of Language, 1990), I have included the use of indentation and spacing in the category of punctuation as boundary marking. As the linguist suggests: "from the point of view of function, punctuation must be considered together with a variety of other graphical features of the text, including front and face alternations, capitalization, indentation and spacing, all of which can be used to the same sort of purposes" (p. 17).

7 The letters I am referring to are those contained in the three volumes of *The Letters of James Joyce* edited by Gilbert and Ellmann. My argument is based on the assumption that they faithfully preserve the graphic organization of the original manuscripts.

8 The comparison between the fair copy of the Rosenbach Manuscript, where "Penelope" presents contractions with the apostrophe, and the first edition of *Ulysses* (Paris, Shakespeare and Company, 1922), where apostrophes are completely removed, provides evidence of a tendency to clear the text which may be hypothetically traced back to Joyce's experience of Nora's writing habits.

9 It has in fact been proved that the assumption according to which spoken language is less structured and highly organised than the written, is not true: recent analyses have revealed that it only has a different kind of elaboration. Halliday defines the complexity of spoken language in terms of *grammatical intricacy* (this implies complex-clause constructions) and that of written language in terms of *lexical density*. See M.A.K. Halliday, *Spoken and Written Language*, p. 61.

10 Erwin R. Steinberg, *The Stream of Consciousness and Beyond in Ulysses*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1973), p. 114.

11 M. Swacker, "The sex of the speaker as sociolinguistic variable," in *Language and Sex*, ed. B. Thorne and N. Henley (Rowley Mass: Newbury House, 1975).

12 John Russell, "James Joyce's Sentences (Dubliners)," *Style*, No 3 (1972), p. 280.

13 It could be of some interest to compare Nora's letters with the ones Joyce received from his brother or friends. Although they are all informal personal letters, the degree of contamination of the written mode with features of the spoken discourse is considerably higher in Nora's writing. In this sense, it may be reasonably hypothesised that Nora's pervasive mixture of oral and written features may have inspired Joyce's rendering of a female inner spoken discourse into the written mode.