“Nausicaa”: Monologue as Monologic

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As I approach the “Nausicaa” episode as a male feminist, I realize that I may not get much further than Leopold Bloom does as he bumbles along the strand trying to assess his encounter with Gerty MacDowell. For—despite his marginalization, feminization, and victimization, and despite the way he deconstructs traditional male power—he is both passively implicated and actively complicit in shaping the social discourses as well as the narrative frame in which the women in Ulysses, especially Gerty, must negotiate. My goal, therefore, is twofold: to develop a viable male feminist strategy, and to illuminate the complex narrative power relations in “Nausicaa.” I will attempt to do this by foregrounding my problematic position, especially as I draw the threads of my argument together, and then by placing it within the theoretical context of positionality.

I want to start with the issue of “male feminisms,” not just because this is the topic of this section but because of my self-consciousness as one of three males assuming and potentially appropriating the position of feminists, and, moreover, who are addressing readers—who may be, for the most part, women—about the episode that, as Marilyn French points out, takes us from “a world entirely male in its occupants and concerns” into “one exclusively female” (156). Although I believe that both men and women can bring our different, even gendered, resources to bear on understanding the forms and effects of patriarchy and changing social structures, I know that men speak from the historically constructed position that subordinates or appropriates women’s voices and subjectivities. I also know that the term male feminist may be a contradiction, or as a colleague of mine says, an oxymoron. Indeed, men’s relation to feminism may, as Stephen Heath says, be impossible.
My problem is partly personal, for until Wheaton went coed in 1988 I had been teaching for twenty-four years in one of the oldest women's colleges, and, during the last ten of those years, most of the faculty had been successfully engaged in integrating scholarship on women into the curriculum. Moreover, I'm the father of two daughters who grew up, attended Wheaton, and who, along with my wife, contributed to my education during the years when the college was most heavily involved in interdisciplinary feminist workshops and in learning feminist pedagogy. When Wheaton went coed I was anxious to teach what I had learned to young men, but I soon came to a new and troubling self-consciousness. I became aware that, while I had been learning for so long together with predominantly female colleagues, I had been identifying with them and taking their position, as much as a male could. Not that this was bad; there was plenty of work to be done, and a male perspective could certainly add a dimension. But I had been taking this perspective without being sufficiently self-conscious. Indeed, as I began to address men as well as women, I gained a new awareness of myself as a male feminist, or one of a variety of male feminists who, besides having different perspectives and resources to offer, are situated in different positions from those of women but who have built into our positions—as well as our voices, bodies, postures, and movements—a history of domination.

The inescapability of my position was driven home to me at the 1990 MLA convention as I took part in a dialogue with Pamela Caughie on questions of authority and gender in teaching Virginia Woolf. We had developed our dialogue in an exchange of letters over the previous year but had overlooked what became obvious as we read our paper. Caughie had just distinguished her problems in the classroom as different from mine because of our genders. I began to respond with, "Your view of yourself as a female feminist teacher is even more complicated than you describe." Oh, oh. I realized at this point in our presentation, as did everyone else—and we all started laughing—that here I was, a male feminist, telling a female feminist what to think of her situation. As I gesticulated helplessly, hoping somehow to draw myself out of the abyss, someone called out, "Dick, stop shaking your fist at her." Whereupon I put my hand in my pocket—only to realize that there was no escape from the authority of a male-constructed body.¹

The "Nausicaa" episode is important because it gives equal space to a man and a woman, because it explores male and female subjectivity, and because Bloom has been challenging the construction of male subjectivity as well as male ideology. But it is also important because it foregrounds the problems of gendered narrative and narrative dominance, and it invites us to compare the gendered positions of narrator and critic.

Philip Weinstein has shown that Bloom as well as Gerty has been constructed by the discourses of his society—and, more important, how Bloom's monologue has been naturalized, or seen as an unmediated and hence privileged
form of expression. Certainly we see Bloom's weaknesses as well as his strengths. But we have accepted his views and judgments, if not his facts, partly because we have accepted the interior monologue as a direct representation of a character's inner thoughts. Of course we know that inner thoughts cannot be captured in logical sentences, but we read through the broken syntax. We know that inner thoughts are largely unconscious, emerging as disguised or displaced images, but we restore them to consciousness by working with image patterns and psychological models. What we have failed to recognize is that—while Joyce exposes the variety of social discourses mediating and shaping his characters' thoughts and identities in his playful use of free indirect discourse, or what Hugh Kenner calls the "Uncle Charles Principle"—he constructs interior monologue, at least of the male characters, as if it were direct discourse. It might be hard to follow Stephen's erudite and self-indulgent thoughts, but we feel that with some homework we can get to know the "real" young man thinking about the ineluctable modality of the visible. And it might be hard to follow Molly's thoughts but only, we confirm, because, being a woman, she is so illogical or confused or earthy or semiotic, or, like Gerty, so taken up with narcissism or so taken in by popular, commercial culture.

The contributors to Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on "Penelope" and Cultural Studies (which I edited) show that Molly's monologue is indeed mediated and that she negotiates the dominant discourses of her society through mockery, parody, mimicry, and appropriation. But they can do this because it has been easier to see Molly's thoughts as mediated than to see Bloom's that way. Molly's thoughts are easily related to ideas and products generated by the media of the day—newspapers, magazines, music halls, and the church. Moreover, the medium of Molly's unpunctuated interior monologue is far more visible than Bloom's. It is also gendered. Derek Attridge has shown that Molly's monologue is less erratic and more syntactically correct than Bloom's. But the visual image of unpunctuated, run-on, flowing, excessive thoughts is nonetheless coded as feminine. And it appears to be more mediated by images of popular culture than Bloom's or Stephen's, partly because the medium calls attention to itself and partly because popular culture is identified with women. (Tania Modleski takes Baudrillard to task for building on just this point [30–34].)

So it is only direct male thoughts that seem unmediated. And here I would like to bring in an analogy to voice-over narration in film. Kaja Silverman convincingly argues that in Hollywood cinema voice is "privileged to the degree that it transcends the body" (49). At one extreme is the disembodied voice-over of the male hero in film noir, which tells of his seduction and loss of innocence in a corrupt and irrational world. That voice issues from beyond the frame and is empowered by its distance in space and time. At the other extreme is the embodied voice-over of the transgressive and soon-to-be-repentant heroine in "women's films" of the forties, which issues from the figure of a woman on the screen, often addressing a male doctor or other male lis-
tenter—and which “loses its power and authority with every corporeal encroachment, from a regional accent or idiosyncratic ‘grain’ to definitive localization, the point of full and complete embodiment” (49).

Applying Silverman’s model to *Ulysses*, we can distinguish Molly’s and Gerty’s monologues from Stephen’s and Bloom’s. First, the men are barely located as they meander along the strand in “Nestor” and on the streets in “Ithaca,” while Molly is lying in bed or sitting on the pot and Gerty is sitting on a rock. Second, though Stephen closes and opens his eyes, urinates or masturbates, and picks his nose, and though Bloom unsticks himself, these are exceptional moments. Stephen’s monologue is almost entirely abstract, and Bloom’s almost never calls attention to his body. And, third, though we can distinguish Bloom’s from Stephen’s monologue by their rhythms and subject matter, the language is literate, whereas Molly’s is marked by its “idiosyncratic ‘grain’”—bad grammar and spelling as well as malapropisms—and is embodied in its run-on sentences. Of course, Gerty’s voice issues from a body made more corporeal by her layers of clothing and her defect and is heavily accented by the style of women’s romance.

Since Bloom’s interior monologue is set against Gerty’s, its power is monologic and controlling. Moreover, I will argue that our view of Gerty is largely shaped, indeed constructed, by the discourses in which Bloom thinks—even though his thoughts come after hers. But first let me introduce a complication.

Once we realize that interior monologue, like free indirect discourse (or narrated monologue), is not transparent but opaque, we can also think of it as a mirror. The discourses that mediate both Gerty’s and Bloom’s thoughts are mirrors that throw back false images of the self as whole (to put it in Lacan’s terms). But Bloom sees himself and is reflected to us not only in the mirror of his interior monologue. He also sees himself and is reflected to us in the mirror of Gerty MacDowell. To slightly revise Garry Leonard, Gerty and Bloom mirror “reality for each other in their mutual masquerade”—Gerty composing herself as a “lovely seaside girl,” and Bloom composing himself as her consumer (58). The positions of these two mirrors, however, are not homologous; the male gaze defines “the lovely seaside girl” and limits her position to that of an object.

Early in his monologue, Bloom fantasizes “a dream of well-filled hose . . . Mutoscope pictures in Capel street: for men only” (*U-GP* 13:793–94). Bloom has been physically and mentally gazing at women all day. He is a voyeur who takes pleasure in looking at women from a distance and therefore establishes himself as active subject and the woman as passive object. But Bloom’s voyeurism is not simply a personal inclination; it is a position and posture constructed for men in general, in theaters, music halls, museums, shop windows, the streets, and popular songs—as well as the books, magazines, and newspapers Bloom reads. Bloom takes pleasure in the pornographic books he brings Molly, which in Victorian times were the mirror image of women’s romance.
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(like Gerty's Lamplighter). Each provided a model for feminine display and masculine pleasure. He must also take pleasure in reading Molly's Gentlewoman, which, with a shift in class, is not that different from Gerty's Lady's Pictorial. And its pictures, as Garry Leonard points out, are different in degree but not in kind from those at the mutoscope (40). Of course, Bloom not only reads but composes and fantasizes newspaper ads, the most telling of which is "a transparent showcart with two smart girls sitting inside writing letters . . . catch the eye at once" (U-GP 8:132).

Moreover, Bloom writes, at least in his imagination, stories for Titbits. He thinks of following the nobleman who passes by but, identifying with him, reflects, "that would make him awkward like those newsboys me today . . . See ourselves as others see us" (U-GP 13:105). Then he imagines himself writing a Titbit story, "The Mystery Man on the Beach." Given his identification with the nobleman, we could say that he imagines himself as the mysterious hero-lover, a "manly man with a strong quiet face who had not found his ideal, perhaps his hair slightly flecked with grey, and who would understand, who would take [Gerty] in his sheltering arms, strain her to him in all the strength of his deep passionate nature and comfort her with a long kiss" (U-GP 13:210-14).

But of course these are Gerty's lines. I have appropriated them to flesh out the implication of Bloom identifying with the mystery man on the beach—that is, to dramatize Bloom's thoughts as mediated by the discourse or mirror of women's romance, which he is complicit in constructing. I have also appropriated them to illuminate the logic of romance, like the mutoscope in Capel Street, which positions the woman as the passive object of male desire. And, I want to show how this logic turns her into a passive object—even after we give Gerty back her own lines and see them as her own assertion of imaginative desire. Most important, I have fleshed out Bloom's thoughts with Gerty's words to show how he implicitly authorizes Gerty's image of herself.

Let me recapitulate my argument so far. When we first read Gerty's section of "Nausicaa," not knowing that her mystery man on the beach is Bloom, we see her as a young woman imagining the object of her desire in the language—or mirror—of women's magazines and romance. We discover that the mystery man is Bloom exactly at the moment that Gerty's voice and view shift to Bloom's. Our image of Gerty changes, though we forget this on rereading the novel. While Bloom sees himself as the mystery man in the mirror of Gerty's image, he also helps construct that mirror—and not only historically, by the way women's romance evolved out of a patriarchal society, but through the power of his position in the narrative. Prudent, sensitive, trustworthy, and empowered by the Homeric parallel, no matter how parodic, Bloom has become the focal character in a male narrative. He has also been gazing at women, physically and mentally, since the beginning of the day. The mutoscope in Capel Street is a model for the discourses that dominate both Gerty's
and Bloom's thoughts. And his monologue has the power of author-izing and
limiting the image of Gerty—even though it comes after hers.

For, while the "namby pamby marmalady drawery" style of her section
might cause us to doubt Gerty's image of herself, Bloom establishes not only
what we see but what we have seen: "Tight boots? No. She's lame!" (U-GP
13:771). Gerty, always seeing herself in and composing herself for the eyes
of an ideal man, is always already lame—a defective product. But, despite the
hint about her "one shortcoming," we don't realize this until we see her re-
flected in Bloom's eyes. The impulse behind advertising as well as stories for
women has always been to construct women as defective, in need of improve-
ment—through soaps, cosmetics, perfumes, clothing, a husband, a lover, a
male gaze—and, as Garry Leonard puts it, to define them as products for male
consumption. Bloom has been complicit in constructing the mirror of adver-
tising as well as romance and pornography. That is, he has been complicit in
constructing the mirror in which Gerty sees herself and we see Gerty. And
this mirror has the power to reflect Bloom himself, not only whole but, in the
words of Virginia Woolf, "deliciously magnified" (35).

Which is not to say that Gerty doesn't look at Bloom as an object of her
desire, no matter how mediated that desire is by male discourse. Nor do I
mean to ignore Bloom's ability to think of women individually and em-
pathetically. He sees that Gerty has been "left on the shelf" (U-GP 13:773)
just as he has been "the last sardine of summer" (U-GP 11:1220–21), and he
can empathize with Mrs. Duggan, with her "husband rolling in drunk, stink
of pub off him like a pole cat" (U-GP 13:964), and he can feel for widows like
Mrs. Dignam. Though his monologue has coercive, or monologic, power, it is
also dialogic. It reflects a self beyond the self he sees through the eyes of the
woman he's constructed to be his mirror. Indeed, it shifts from the position of
the male gaze to that of the feminized empathetic look. It also shifts to the po-
sition of the feminized gazed-at object, for he knows that Gerty has seen him
and, moreover, has taken pleasure in seeing him. He is even reflected as the
self-effacing object: "she must have been thinking of someone else all the
time" (U-GP 13:884–85), as, we will learn, Molly did during the most mem-
orable kiss of their lives. Moreover, prefiguring Hélène Cixous's "Laugh of the
Medusa," he worries about the woman who gazes back: "See ourselves as oth-
ers see us. So long as women don't mock what matter" (U-GP 13:1058–59).

And I should call attention to the shift in perspective at the end, when he
writes a message for Gerty—or finally positions himself as the vulnerable ob-
ject of her gaze—"I. AM. A." Indeed, as he effaces "the letters with his slow
boot," he unconsciously identifies (or is identified) with Gerty's limp, ac-
knowledging (or implying) that he too is a defective product. And finally he
flings away "his wooden pen," which, ironically, sticks in the sand erect (U-

But I have to end with the questions of why, as a male feminist, I would pre-
fer to argue that Bloom's monologue is dialogic rather than monologic, why I am disappointed by the negative image I have constructed of Bloom—in the chapter where he appears most pathetic—why I would like to vindicate Bloom, or celebrate the new womanly man, or show how he transcends the double mirrors he helped construct, or argue that he has negotiated as best he could the dominant discourses that make not only women but colonized Irishmen and wandering Jews defective.

The problem is that negotiation is only a step from navigation. And to take this step would bring him back into the Homeric paradigm, revised for middle-class consumption. It would relate him to Odysseus, traveling home to claim his paternity, his wife, his city, and his history. It would perpetuate the dualism of the male-female positions in the story of heroic romance. It would also ignore the fact that Gerty, who has played such an important role, is an absence, largely owing to his complicity in shaping the discourses that obscure her and to his perspective—disguised as natural and neutral—which dominates the episode. And it would ignore the fact that the wooden pen sticking up in the sand may be ironic, even parodic, but it is nonetheless the kind of humor that asserts phallic power.

I would like to think, though, that the mirrored mirrors of "Nausicaa" do not force us to choose either a happy ending that affirms Bloom or an ending that denies him, and that they may even take us beyond Fritz Senn's balanced acceptance of Bloom. The mirrored mirrors may force us to acknowledge and interrogate our gendered positions as readers. I can acknowledge that I want Bloom to transvalue the values of manliness (and provide an alternative to Iron John). But I have to acknowledge that this desire—given the Homeric superstructure of the novel and the present power structure of society—is a way of perpetuating male authority. This may be as far as I can go. But this may also be what a male feminist reader can do: see himself positioned dialogically in the mirrored mirror of the text.

I would like to end by generalizing, or theorizing, about what I have done in my reading of "Nausicaa"—which is to foreground not just my position as one male feminist, but the very notion of positionality. Linda Alcoff argues that positionality is the logical step for feminists to take after cultural feminism and poststructuralism. Cultural feminism celebrates, appropriates, and transvalues the devalued values of women's culture, so that passivity becomes a form of peacefulness, subjectivism and narcissism become ways of being in touch with oneself, and sentimentality becomes caring and nurturing. But cultural feminism tends towards essentialism, identifies women with their bodies, and perpetuates biological determinism. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, exposes "essence" and "femininity" as social and linguistic constructs. But in showing these constructs to be overdetermined by a wide range of social institutions and forces, it denies women agency, choice, and the possibility of change—and it renders gender invisible.
Teresa de Lauretis shows us a way out of the bind between cultural feminism and poststructural determinism by arguing that we are constructed through a continuous and ongoing interaction with the practices, discourses, and institutions that shape value, meaning, and feeling. Alcoff extends this to the notion of positionality. The self, rather than having an essence or being overdetermined, is a constellation of positions, formed by changing historical and personal relations. And agency is a matter of choosing to take this or that position or negotiating among them.

I would also like to argue that the notion of positionality opens the possibilities for male feminism beyond those discussed in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith's pessimistic *Men in Feminism*, which Stephen Heath opens by announcing, "Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one" (1). It is related to the ideas that for good reasons are more enacted than theorized in the diversity of Joseph Boone and Michael Cadden's *Engendering Men*. Male feminism may be a contradiction in terms or an oxymoron. But I would like to describe the conflict between "male" and "feminism" in terms of opposing positions within the same constellation. The position of the male feminist is not the same, but, as Joseph Boone says, is "an ever-present relation of contiguity with the originating politics of feminism" (23). It is potentially threatening, given the historical hegemony of male power and its propensity for cooptation. But that is only one in the constellation of positions, some of which have been chosen to deconstruct and destroy the hegemony, and some of which may be intersubjectively related to female positions. And we should recognize the multiplicity of male feminist positions that form along the axes of race, class, sexual preference, age, wellness, and so on.

Of course this is where I want my argument to end. But I also know that I have a stake in a happy ending, in proving that men can overcome the force of their historical positions. So I would include in my framing of positionality the need to foreground the problems, or to recognize that one does not choose a single position but a smaller constellation of positions, which includes some that need to be problematized and interrogated. This leaves the argument with an open end, but it does not preclude taking a stance.

NOTES


2. We should consider the Gerty section as an interior monologue even though it is heavily mediated by free indirect discourse—or what Dorrit Cohn calls narrated monologue. In the first book on the stream of consciousness, Melvin Friedman recognized the section as a hybrid and called it an indirect interior monologue (236).
WORKS CITED


