



Virgins go mad in the end: the aesthetics of narrative techniques in 'Nausicaa'

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The changing style is considered as an unavoidable topic in analyzing *Ulysses*. Charles Peake states that 'no great claims can be made for *Ulysses* as a novel unless the stylistic and technical innovations can be shown to be functional, and necessary to the articulation of some new and important vision of life.'¹ As an episode whose first half is largely presented by the style of women's magazine, 'Nausicaa' has attracted a great deal of critical concern because of its parodic language. However, Andrew Gibson argues that 'to suggest that stylistic parody is central to 'Nausicaa' is to minimize the significance of the style as a composite entity.'² He sees the narrative of Gerty as 'a hybrid mix of disparate or incongruous materials' and relates it to the conflict between 'Irish-women's aspirations and rising expectations, and their chronically limited real-life prospects.'³ By associating the narrative style with a historical concern, Gibson claims that Gerty is 'representative of Irish girlhood on the threshold of modern consciousness [...] her significance is more progressive than parodic.'⁴ Although Gibson points out the necessity of considering the importance and complexity of the narrative style in 'Nausicaa', his focus on Gerty MacDowell means he does not discuss the aesthetics of the narrative construction of the whole episode. Accordingly, to expand Gibson's argument from a narratological perspective, I will examine the narrative modes of 'Nausicaa' as 'a composite entity'. In doing so I will delineate the fictional world that is aesthetically constructed in this chapter by attending to the three hierarchical layers of narration that are associated with different characters: Cissy Caffrey and other children, which is depicted through third-person omniscient narration; Gerty MacDowell, which is rendered using free indirect discourse; and Leopold Bloom, which is conveyed via interior monologue.

Before the analysis, I will first illustrate how narrative modes divide the fictional world of 'Nausicaa' into three hierarchical layers. Patrick McGee says that 'Nausicaa' is 'only a question

¹ Peake, Charles. *James Joyce, the citizen and the artist*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1977), p.171

² Gibson, Andrew. *Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Ulysses*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), p. 139.

³ Gibson, pp. 139, 142.

⁴ Gibson, p.142

of two relatively stable narrative techniques.⁵ However, I argue that there is actually one more narrative mode employed in 'Nausicaa' besides Gerty's free indirect style and Bloom's interior monologue, that is, third-person omniscient narration of Cissy Caffrey and other children in the beginning of the episode. Ontologically, the three narrative modes are distant from readers in sequence because of their different narrative aims: third-person omniscient narration directly contributes to readers' conceptualization of the fictional world; free indirect discourse represents the mental activity of fictional characters via the voice of third-person narrator; interior monologue is the direct portrait of characters' minds. Accordingly, readers tend to trust the third-person narration which is ontologically closest to them and suspect Bloom's monologue because of its uncertainty. As a result, the three different narrative modes, addressing to three fictional layers, contribute to readers' construction of the fictional world of 'Nausicaa' by aesthetically creating a hierarchy of ontological status. In this essay, I will first discuss these three layers of narration with a specific focus on readerly experience. I will then argue that these three layers are designed to correspond with the symbol 'virgin' in Gilbert's schema and contribute to an overall theme, that is, using Mr. Bloom's words, 'Virgins go mad in the end.'⁶

Frank Budgen said that 'Nausicaa' is 'essentially pictorial' but there are actually 'very few' pictorial descriptions in the episode.⁷ It is possible to say that these very few pictorial descriptions are largely rendered in the third-person omniscient narration. The beginning paragraph of the chapter not only provides a detailed and romantic description of Sandymount shore but also associates it with the symbol 'virgin' by depicting 'Mary, star of the sea' and its representation the 'quiet church'.⁸ Since both the detailed pictorial description and the omniscient narrator which is ontologically close are trust-worthy, their credibility can lead readers to construct a fictional world in their mind and see this world of seashore as the 'stage' of the whole episode. Moreover, depicting 'Mary, star of the sea' in the very beginning has the

⁵ McGee, Patrick. 'Joyce's Nausea: Style and Representation in "Nausicaa"', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 1987, vol. 24, No. 3, p.305

⁶ Gilbert, Stuart, *James Joyce's 'Ulysses': A Study* (London: Faber, 1930), p.272; Joyce, James, and Watts, Cedric. *Ulysses with an introduction by Cedric Watts*. (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2010), p.333

⁷ Budgen, Frank. *James Joyce and the making of 'Ulysses', and other writings*. (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.218

⁸ Joyce and Watts, p.312

possibility of letting readers take the symbol 'virgin' as their discourse level knowledge. To be more specific, readers have the tendency of realizing the symbol 'virgin' and comparing it with characters' actions or mental activities throughout their reading process, in other words, this is readers' epiphany. In the layer of Cissy and other children, this epiphany can be triggered by the narration of characters. The limited omniscient narration of Tommy and Jacky Caffrey provides a specific description of their actions but is restricted from going into their minds. It is possible to say that this limited point of view is an ingenious design for presenting childishness: the childish happiness of these two boys can be clearly revealed through the description of their frolics; the lack of mental representation can be interpreted as the hint of the purity of children's mind. Accordingly, readers' conceptualization of happiness and purity, which can also be seen as the characteristics of 'Mary, star of the sea', takes them back to the symbol 'virgin'. Cissy Caffrey, on the other hand, while her thoughts are also neglected, she is portrayed as a mother-like character in the narration: she is 'awfully fond of children' and has 'a persuasive power'.⁹ McGee claims that Gerty 'represents the virginity of the symbol.'¹⁰ However, I argue that Cissy is more like a 'Mary' figure since her motherhood corresponds to the status of Virgin Mary as the mother of Christ. Being aware of the similarity between Cissy and 'Mary', readers thus can again reflect on the symbol 'virgin'. Consequently, the third-person omniscient narration not only establishes a solid stage for Gerty's free indirect discourse and Bloom's interior monologue, but also helps readers to conceptualize the symbol 'virgin' in their own minds and triggers their epiphany in the narration of Cissy Caffrey and other children.

In Michael Seidel's explanation of different levels of narrations in *Ulysses*, 'Fourth-estate narration' is one of these narrative modes that 'is militantly exterior.'¹¹ According to Seidel, fourth-estate narration is 'a kind of amalgam of commenting voices' which is 'almost as if another layer of narration runs parallel to the ones that advance the action.'¹² Eric Bulson also states that fourth-estate narration makes readers 'aware that there is someone else controlling the narration.'¹³ In 'Nausicaa', fourth-estate narration plays a very important role in triggering

⁹ Joyce and Watts, p.313

¹⁰ McGee, p.211

¹¹ Seidel, Michael. *James Joyce a Short Introduction*. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), p.88

¹² Seidel, pp.88-9

¹³ Bulson, Eric. *The Cambridge Introduction to James Joyce*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006),

the transitions between layers. The switch from the layer of Cissy Caffrey to the layer of Gerty MacDowell's free indirect discourse is largely triggered by two girls teasing Jackey about 'who is your sweetheart?' and the fourth-estate narration 'But who was Gerty?'¹⁴ While the narrator mentions 'three girl friends were seated on the rocks' in the beginning of the chapter, Gerty MacDowell's name does not show up until here, in other words, the information of Gerty is intentionally first neglected and then added to the fictional world.¹⁵ As a result, readers have to reconsider their previous mental construction and, using a stylistic terminology, to 'repair' their fictional world.¹⁶ Apart from this, since the fourth-estate narrator directly communicates with readers from an exterior position, its ontological status is even closer to readers than that of the omniscient narrator. Fourth-estate narration thus has the possibility of taking readers out of the previous fictional world. Because of these two issues, readers are aware of the lack of information in their mental construction and are ready to re-enter and repair it by adding a new layer to the fictional world, that is, Gerty MacDowell's free indirect discourse.

The free indirect discourse of Gerty MacDowell is described by Karen Lawrence as 'the indirect monologue of Gerty MacDowell, translated into a language appropriate to her.'¹⁷ In narratological terms, free indirect discourse is the third-person narration focalizing on the character Gerty, especially on her mental activity. Accordingly, the layer of Gerty partly shares the ontological status of the first layer because of the same narrator but is less trust-worthy since the focalization on Gerty's mind determines that the narration of this layer is completely from Gerty's perspective. Unlike the omniscient narration of the first layer in which characters act within the fictional world of seashore, Gerty's free indirect discourse leaves this fictional world and triggers the switches to various types of worlds by modal verbs and different kinds of deictic words such as personal names. However, since Gerty's free indirect discourse is largely represented using the style of women's magazine and novelette, the worlds she enters in her magazine-talk may not be accessible to readers since they require a specific kind of knowledge. To be more specific, for those readers who have acquired the knowledge of

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¹⁴ Joyce and Watts, p.314

¹⁵ Joyce and Watts, p.312

¹⁶ Gavins, Joanna. *Text World Theory*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.141

¹⁷ Lawrence, Karen. *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.120

twentieth century Irish women's magazine and novelettes, Gerty's thoughts as well as her style are not difficult to understand and may provoke their empathy. For those who lack such a kind of knowledge, however, Gerty's quick switches between different worlds are not easy to keep track of. The portrait of this Irish girl's mind thus remains unclear and unfamiliar to these readers. Partly because of the high requirement of reading, the free indirect discourse of Gerty is always seen as, using Sean Latham's words, 'a condescending parody' of both the character and her language.¹⁸ McGee also claims that Joyce is 'reproducing the literary man's nausea' in writing Gerty's free indirect discourse.¹⁹ Nevertheless, I argue that Joyce's writing is more proper to be seen as a design of depicting an Irish adolescence girl in her most vivid look rather than an attempt of parodying. This is actually not difficult to understand: a girl who belongs to a specific social group of a specific historical moment can only be elucidated within that historical circumstance, whether the style is Joyce's nausea or not. In this sense, the free indirect discourse employed in the layer of Gerty is rather innovative since the narrative style itself largely corresponds and contributes to the depiction of the character's ideology.

While Gerty MacDowell's free indirect discourse lingers out of the fictional world of Sandymount shore, the layer is still related to the fictional world because of both the description of the church and Gerty's opinions of herself and Cissy Caffrey. Although is never directly presented, the church exists in all the layers of 'Nausicaa' via the narration of sound. In the layer of Gerty's free indirect discourse, Gerty hears the sound of the 'temperance retreat conducted by the missionary' and 'the old familiar words, holy Mary, holy virgin of virgins.'²⁰ Although Gerty is not properly representative of 'Mary', she is the one that is most sensitive to the symbol 'virgin' in this episode. The sound of church is 'sad to poor Gerty's ears' and reminds her of her family, her resentment at her father, and her rather unclear domestic identity that 'like a second mother' but is still 'a sterling good daughter.'²¹ Also, Gerty's sensitivity to virginity reflects on her opinion about both herself and Cissy Caffrey. She thinks herself is 'womanly wise' and comments on Cissy's playing words that it is 'an unladylike thing.'²² The sensitivity

¹⁸ Latham, Sean. 'interruption: "Cyclops" and "Nausicaa"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ulysses*, ed. by Sean Latham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.146

¹⁹ McGee, p.309

²⁰ Joyce and Watts, p.320

²¹ Joyce and Watts, pp.320-21

²² Joyce and Watts, pp.318-19

of virginity does not make Gerty a 'Mary' figure; on the contrary, Gerty considers herself more as a female whose task is to supply a man with the 'feeling of hominess.'²³ Gibson states that 'the ideology of personal fitness [...] underlies her effort to improve her appearance and thus (she supposes) her chances in the marriage market.'²⁴ Consequently, it is this ideology that persuades Gerty to answer yes to her question of Bloom's eyes 'could you trust them?' and show Mr. Bloom her underwear.²⁵ Her seduction, on the other hand, also triggers the transition from her free indirect discourse to Leopold Bloom's interior monologue.

Similar to the first transition of layers, Gerty's seduction, alongside with the fourth-estate narration 'Leopold Bloom (for it is he)', adds the information of Mr. Bloom who is described in the previous part of 'Nausicaa' as a 'gentleman' to readers' construction of the fictional world and triggers the switch from the layer of Gerty to the layer of Bloom.²⁶ The interior monologue of Mr. Bloom is the direct portrait of his very active and complex mental activity. That is to say, Bloom is both the narrator and the focaliser of this layer. Knowing this narrative technique in the previous chapters, it is not difficult for readers to notice the change of narrator and consider this layer as the representation of Bloom's unreliable consciousness. Consequently, the ontological distance between this layer and readers is the furthest. The narration of this layer, also, is very likely to be suspected. Indeed, Leopold Bloom himself shows the limitation and unreliability of his point of view by personally repairing the fictional world. Watching Gerty 'walked with a certain quiet dignity characteristic of her but with care and very slowly', Mr. Bloom finally realizes that Gerty is lame: 'Tight boots? No. She's lame! O!'²⁷ This sudden realization not only begins Mr. Bloom's reconsideration of the girl, but also triggers readers' process of repairing the fictional worlds in which Gerty MacDowell occupies, in other words, Leopold Bloom's mental activity works in a similar way with readers' process of reading. As a result, Bloom's ontological status suddenly overlaps with that of the fourth-estate narrator or even readers. Partly because of this, his consciousness is argued that covering the whole fictional world of 'Nausicaa'. This is to say, using Joyce's own words, 'Nothing happened

²³ Joyce and Watts, p.318

²⁴ Gibson, p.134

²⁵ Joyce and Watts, p.323

²⁶ Joyce and Watts, pp.314, 332

²⁷ Joyce and Watts, p.332

between them [...] it all took place in Bloom's imagination.'²⁸ McGee claims that readers 'could infer from this statement that Gerty is the masturbatory fantasy of Leopold Bloom [...] I am not sure that it solves the problems raised by this episode any better than the more traditional approaches.'²⁹ Apart from this, I argue that Bloom's reader-like perspective actually shows that he is an alienated character in the fictional world of 'Nausicaa' – just like Odysseus on the island of Scheria. His realization of Gerty's lame leg and his readerly reconsideration of the girl indicate that Leopold Bloom is not able to access the fictional world of Gerty MacDowell and those children. To state it metaphorically, as a character who cannot enter the fictional world which is character-accessible, Leopold Bloom is imprisoned on the other side of the ontological boundary between characters and readers in 'Nausicaa'. His interaction with Gerty – the seduction via eyes – is indeed 'nothing' at all.

Different from Cissy Caffrey and Gerty MacDowell who are directly associated with the symbol 'virgin', Mr. Bloom himself has nothing to do with virginity. Instead, his interior monologue contributes to this symbol by jumping between several topics. While Gerty MacDowell is the protagonist of 'Nausicaa', Mr. Bloom's thoughts on this girl are not many and rather weird. He describes her simply as one of 'those lovely seaside girls' but resonates with her name because of his foreigner identity: 'Gerty they called her. Might be false name however like my and the address Dolphin's barn a blind.'³⁰ What Mr. Bloom sees in Gerty is actually a possibility of escaping, from both his unsuccessful marriage and his identity. Charles Peake says 'Gerty's escapism represents a temptation to which Bloom is vulnerable, as Nausicaa was a temptation to Ulysses to abandon the long struggle homeward.'³¹ Bloom almost surrenders to this temptation – he tries to express his identity to Gerty but eventually fails: 'I. | AM. A. | No room. Let it go.'³² Instead, he says farewell in his most mature way: 'Goodbye, dear. Thanks. Made me feel so young.'³³ Despite the sporadic and romantic description of Gerty, most of Bloom's interior monologue is about his wife Molly. He imagines the marriage: 'Pretty girls and ugly men marrying. Beauty and beast. Besides I can't be so if Molly'; he thinks

²⁸ Power, Arthur. *Conversations with James Joyce*, ed. Clive Hart (London: Millington, 1974), p. 32

²⁹ McGee, p.306

³⁰ Joyce and Watts, pp. 336-7

³¹ Peake, p.245

³² Joyce and Watts, p.345

³³ Joyce and Watts, p.345

about virginity: 'Molly, lieutenant Mulvey that kissed her under the Moorish wall beside the gardens. Fifteen she told me. But her breasts were developed. Fell asleep then'; he also remembers Molly's reason for marrying him: 'Why me? Because you were so foreign from the others.'³⁴ It is possible to say that virginity is lost in the layer of Leopold Bloom's interior monologue – like he says in his mind, 'Virgins go mad in the end.' What is left is nothing more than the repeating sound of madness 'Cuckoo'.³⁵ As Peake comments, 'everything inconclusively fades away' at the end of 'Nausicaa'.³⁶

The detailed fictional world constructed on the basis of the omniscient narration finally ends up with only the repeating sounds of 'cuckoo'. Readers' mental construction thus is forced to be destroyed by themselves. Being disillusioned by this ending, readers have the tendency of reviewing their reading process and thus are able to consider the aesthetics of the three layers of narration in terms of the symbol 'virgin' which might have been their discourse level knowledge. Instead of presenting a continuous process of 'Virgins go mad', I argue that the three layers as well as the three characters are actually representative of three separated statuses: virgin and purity, adolescence and sexuality, and maturity and madness. These three statuses not only reveal the overall theme of 'Nausicaa', but also correspond to the characteristics of the three different narrative modes as well as the hierarchy of ontological status the narrative modes establish. Peter Stockwell relates the aesthetics of literary experience to the readerly feeling of 'resonance' and describes 'resonance' as 'a tone, an atmosphere in the mind that seems to persist long after the pages have been put down.'³⁷ By realizing the well-designed correspondences between the theme, narrative modes and ontological distance, readers finally have an opportunity of seeing the three layers of 'Nausicaa' as a 'composite entity', in other words, the episode 'Nausicaa' as a hierarchical literary architecture can aesthetically trigger readers' resonance and persist in their mind.

In this essay, I delineate the three layers of narrative modes in 'Nausicaa' and illustrates their themes in terms of the overall symbol 'virgin': the layer of the third-person omniscient

³⁴ Joyce and Watts, pp.334, 335,344

³⁵ Joyce and Watts, p.346

³⁶ Peake, p.248

³⁷ Stockwell, Peter. *Texture: a cognitive aesthetics of reading*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.17

narration of Cissy Caffrey and other children represents purity; the layer of Gerty MacDowell's free indirect discourse is representative of sexuality; the layer of Leopold Bloom's interior monologue stands for madness. With regards to the different characteristics of the narrative techniques, I explain how the three layers establish a hierarchy of ontological status and provoke readers' aesthetical feelings. By this analysis, I expand Andrew Gibson's argument of seeing the narrative style of 'Nausicaa' as 'a composite entity' from a narratological perspective and relate it to the stylistic concern of resonance. However, it has to be admitted that since the readerly experience of reading largely depends on readers' own experience and knowledge of the actual world, what the analysis of this essay presents is a simulation of a possible way of reading. It is proper to say that the possibility of reading is one of the most important issues to be aware of in reading *Ulysses* because what Joyce aimed to present is indeed a composite of the possibilities of writing: 'The task I set myself technically in writing a book from eighteen different points of view and in as many different styles, all apparently unknown or undiscovered by my fellow tradesmen.'³⁸ Conjoining actuality and fictional states of affair, the process of reading *Ulysses* is, using Daniel Schwarz's words, 'readers' odyssey'.³⁹

³⁸ Joyce, James. *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. I, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking, 1966), p. 167

³⁹ Schwarz, Daniel R. *Reading Joyce's Ulysses*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p.3.

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