

The Interrelation Between the Author, Characters and the Reader in *Cloud Howe* by L.G. Gibbon

Gohar Madoyan
Yerevan State University

Abstract

One of the key features of belles-lettres style – polyphony, makes a piece of writing not only worthy literature but rather a challenge for general readers and text interpreters, in particular. The interplay of the voices of various characters in the novel requires absolute concentration and deep insight in order to be able to get the message of the story. Is this a mere technique to capture the attention of the reader or does it pursue a more important purpose? The heteroglossia in the novel entails a confusion of “voices”, but at the same time helps make the story more complete.

Cloud Howe by L.G. Gibbon is an example of a polyphonic novel which represents an intricate fusion of the voices of the author, the narrator and the characters. The linguistic analysis of the novel demonstrates the role of polyphony in the overall expressiveness of the work.

Key words: author, reader, multi-voicedness, polyphony, heteroglossia.

Introduction

Text interpretation has always been a true challenge for scholars since it requires a careful study of the constant interplay inside the famous triad – the author-the text-the reader. This gets further complicated considering the multi-voiced character of certain novels involving the physical author, narrator and numerous characters all having their own distinct personalities and affecting, this way or another, the development of the storyline. In search of the true message of the story hidden between the lines and beyond the text itself, linguists carry out an in-depth and all-out research covering every aspect of the language applied by the author. And the eternal question comes to the fore again “Who is speaking to the reader?”

Polyphony in “*Cloud Howe*”

The Scots Quair (“The Sunset Song”, “*Cloud Howe*” and “*Grey Granite*”) are truly considered the most influential works of the 20th century Scottish Literary Renaissance. The author, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, managed to create a wonderful combination of the country’s historical background, ideology of the times and the life story of a woman who has found herself lost in the vortex of her own national identity and individual strives. And all this becomes evident through the in-depth linguistic examination of the novel.

Cloud Howe is the second book of the trilogy. The book depicts the next stage of the life of the heroine, her wish and struggle to start everything anew. After the death of her first husband Chris marries a second time, this time a church minister. It seems Chris has

found some peace and harmony with herself. However, her second husband dies at the pulpit while delivering a sermon, leaving his wife a widow again. Being the key character of the novel, she is not surely the only one. In fact, due to the abundance of characters and their voices, the novel acquires polyphony and the interpretation of the novel requires a dialogue between the author, the characters and the reader.

Here multiple characters all distinct with their opinion on diverse issues and with their interpretations of life events come together in one voice thereby enhancing polyphony, in M. Bakhtin's terms (Bakhtin 1972:279). The term literally comes to stand for multi-voicedness, the existence of a multitude of voices within a single piece of writing, which are not merged into one perspective. It is the expression of not one objective consciousness, but rather a combination of different ones. The characters are granted full freedom from the author. The all mighty author gives full rein to the characters so that they could live for themselves. The idea that "in a polyphonic novel a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being placed and judged by an authoritative voice" (Lodge 1990:86) can easily be applied to the novel. Here, too, the reader never comes to feel Gibbon Mitchell – the writer. This is quite natural, owing to the fact that the author is never the dominant figure in a polyphonic novel. Rather, the main hero, in our case the heroine, occupies the central part; she is the core of the story. Hence, the reader hears Chris and shares her worries and thoughts. As a matter of fact, a polyphonic novel does not give a description of the heroine of any kind. The reader is not provided with any information as to the looks, height, or any physical description of the heroine since in that case that would mean that there is an author behind the narration. Instead, the reader comes to understand and picture the heroine herself due to her actions, inner dialogue. This mode of narration reduces the role of the author and simultaneously enhances that of the reader, since the personality of the heroine is "shaped" by the active engagement of the reader. Otherwise stated, dialogic novels reveal a dialogue between the author, the character and the reader.

Still, we cannot exclude the author from the novel altogether. In a polyphonic novel the author "has his own ideas and viewpoints, which he expresses in his work" (Bakhtin 1972:72). True enough, Mitchell Gibbon never appears in the front line of the developments in the novel. His voice is not condensed in the body of one character or another but it is carefully and evenly dispersed throughout the novel. The author exists in the texture of the work, in its language, the topics addressed and the language applied. The introductory parts of the three books are worth considering.

The presence of the author is enhanced not by the direct participation of the author, but by the introduction of his national background, the history he is part of. Quite interestingly, each of the books in the trio starts with a brief introduction to some historical facts and events that played a crucial role in the history of the Scottish people. "Cloud Howe" proves no exception. While it might seem irrelevant to the actual developments in the story, this historical information is not without any purpose. For one thing it helps set the whole story in the historical context. It introduces history into the story making it sound true and the characters - real. It brings national identity to the story. From the very begin-

ning the reader understands that this story is not just about anyone of British origin, but it is about Scotland and Scots. Moreover, this little trick with the introduction of history at the beginning of each book helps the author achieve one more thing which will be discussed later.

Scotland, the author's homeland, is made present not only directly with the help of historical overview and descriptions of certain historical towns, but indirectly as well, with the help of a subtle blend of English and Scottish vocabulary. They twine very delicately to make a most interesting combination: *yew, wynd, hippens, outby, meikle, unco, happed, blithe, kye, breek, syne, bothy, haver, gowk, lassie, claik, smiddy, toun, greip* etc. Though the Scottish words do not affect the overall impression of the novel, however, they may cause some discomfort to non-native readers.

Still, the novel may rightly be considered polyphonic with the role of the actual author diminished as much as possible. The main story-teller is one of the characters. The linguistic analysis of the novel reveals quite interesting facts in this regard. The syntax of the work is of primary significance. The compound sentences that may at times cover a whole paragraph reveal the diary-like nature of the work. This too helps make the impression that the story is really told by the main heroine. The author manages to create the impression that the developments are in fact retold by one person, the observer, who is telling a story on the spot, without much careful thought or preliminary preparations.

There, as they had planned, the four of them did, the Sheriff went hunting with the four fierce lairds, Arbuthnott, Pitarrow, Lauriston, Mathers; and they took him and bound him and carried him up Garvock, between two stones a great cauldron was hung; and they stripped him bare and threw him within, in the water that was just beginning to boil; and they watched while he slowly ceased to scraich, he howled like a wolf in the warming water, then like a bairn smored in plague, and his body bloated red as the clay, till the flesh loosed off from his seething bones; and the four lairds took their horn spoons from their belts and supped the broth that the Sheriff made, and fulfilled the words that the King had said. (p.4)

The old man had been one of the roadmender childes, he worked with old Smithie and that fool John Muir, he had come back with his wages at the end of the week and maybe he had spent a shilling on the tobacco. And soon he saw that Dite Peat would fly up and take him a belt in the face, most like, and send him to bed without any meat. (p.44)

The abundant use of repetitions in the novel comes to further enhance the idea of spontaneity since repetition is quite common in oral speech. It is often possible to avoid unnecessary repetition in writing, for the author has enough time at his/her disposal. Whereas in oral speech repetitions are quite frequent. Similarly, the heroine – Chris, uses a lot of repetitions as if she were considering the events in her mind at the moment they actually happened.

... she looked left and saw it through a smother of smoke, the smoke stilled for a minute as it waited the rain, all Segget turning to look at the rain. Then Robert was running and Chris ran as well, under the shelter of the pattering yews..... they stood and panted and watched the water, whirling in and over the drills, the potato shaws a bend in the pelt, the patter like hail and then like a shoom, like the sea on a morning heard from Kinraddle. (p.57)

In fact, speed and a sort of “breathlessness” serve as a visiting card for the Scottish saga as a whole. In this respect polysyndeton, repetitions of certain words and parallel constructions are not the only devices used in the novel. In part the speed and the rhythm of the novel intensify due to the general nature of the work, which in fact reminds of a conversation between the characters on the one hand and between the author and the reader on the other hand. The manipulation of characters, the constant dialogue with the reader and the confusion of “voices” are among the underlying features of Gibbon’s style in general. And this is achieved through a careful use of personal pronouns.

Most interestingly, the novel is narrated in the third person. This type of narration enables the narrator to stand in the place of the implied author taking on the absolute knowledge (Leech; Short 2007:212):

Segget was wakening as Chris Colquohoun came down the shingle path from manse. Here the yews stood thick, in a startling murmur, a drowsy cheep on the edge of the dawn; but down the dark, as you reached the door, you saw already lights twink here and there... (p.8)

She turned round and looked down at Segget, pricked in the paraffin lights of dawn. They were going out one by one as the east grew wanly blind in the van of the sun, behind, in the hills, a curlew shrilled... (p.9)

True, the polyphonic novel is characterized by the maximum freedom of the characters. However, in the course of the developments of the story there is the impression that the story is in fact told by the first person, or rather by the main character herself. The feeling is further enhanced by the gradual involvement of the reader in the realization of the novel thanks to the use of the generic “you”, since the personal pronoun “you” implies a speaker, an addresser, an “I” talking to the addressee, a “you”. So, the role of the “you” is carried out by the reader himself. However, the role of the “you” is also manifold in the novel. First, there is the general “you” that stands for anyone, people in general.

Here the yews stood thick, in a startling murmur, a drowsy cheep on the edge of the dawn; but down the dark, as you reached the door, you saw already lights twink here and there... (p.8)

Here the “you” does not stand for any particular person, but could easily be replaced

by indefinite pronoun “one”. Still, the “you” takes on new implications. It might mean a specific character in the novel.

You knew these things, it was daft to get angry, you could not take a maid and expect her a saint. (p.18)

And then, in the August, you were ill as could be, and they did not send you off home as most others would, to the care of your folk. (p.19)

In the first example Chris says “you” meaning no one else but herself. In the second example, however, the author’s second person singular refers to the maid. The whole story is, in fact, built upon the constant shifts of “you’s”. Quite remarkably, there are too many characters in the novel. Though they are not the leading personages, their role in the creation of the storyline cannot be overestimated. They help create the picture of the village. Each has his or her own life story and when using “you” to describe them, the author means quite different people. So, it takes much insight and experience in reading to follow the author’s maneuvers. As to the reader’s involvement in the novel, he/she perceives the “you” as an invitation to take an active part in the developments of the story and his/her role in the process of decoding the meaning of the story increases.

The confusion of voices, ideas presented that is so much typical of the stream of consciousness style is also achieved through the constant interplay of direct and indirect speech as well as free direct (FDS) and free indirect speech (FIS).

1. They sat down to breakfast, famished already. Suddenly Else coming running in – *Mem, it’s started to rain!* With her face as though it were raining ink, and thick ink forbye. So Chris had to quiet her and see Ewan ate, and Robert forbye, excited as Else. Then they heard down the road the burr of a lorry, and Else came again: *It’s Melvin from Segget.* (p.29)

2. Else Queen of the Manse had held home with Dalziel. As they gained the road he turned round and said, with a canny glance back to where folk were fighting: *Would you like to come ben the way for some tea?* Else was still in a rage, she did not know shy,, or with whom, or how it began, so she snapped: *NO, I wouldn’t, then. Do you know what hour it is?* Meiklebogs looked shy-like – she knew that he did, she could guess the soft-like look on his face, she felt half inclined to take it a clout – and said: *Oh ay, but I thought that maybe you would like to stocken up after the dancing about.* (p.81)

3. So she asked Dite in for a dram ere he started, and down he sat with his dam and his cake, and he drank down the one like a calf with its milk and ate up the cake like a famished dog. Syne he said it was over late tonight to cut up the beast out there in the ree, he’d come over the morn and see to that. Armistice Day would be a fine time to do a bit cutting about

among flesh – *Fegs, mistress, I have seen humans carved up like pigs, like bits of beef in a butcher's shop, and it fair looked fine, as I often thought, you couldn't wonder at those cannibal childe.* (p.91)

The first two passages provide examples of free direct speech when the speech of the characters is presented with no quotation marks and with no introductory reporting. In fact one of the underlying features of this type of speech presentation is the unusual speed and rhythm that it brings to the passage in general and to the utterance in particular. The third passage is a subtle mix of indirect speech (*So she asked Dite in for a dram*), free indirect speech (*Syne he said it was over late tonight to cut up the beast out there in the ree, he'd come over the morn and see to that. Armistice Day would be a fine time to do a bit cutting about among flesh*) and free direct speech (*Fegs, mistress, I have seen humans carved up like pigs, like bits of beef in a butcher's shop, and it fair looked fine, as I often thought, you couldn't wonder at those cannibal childe*).

All this still adds to the confusion of “voices” and characters portrayed on each page, thereby creating the full picture of a village with its residents, all with their own characters, outlook, problems and expectations. However, amid the different voices and all the confusion of ideas, one can trace a single voice – that of the heroine. In spite of the diverse characters and their diverse speeches, one can't help feeling that, in fact, it is Chris who is telling the story and the whole novel is presented through her own prism. The point of view of the *focaliser-character*' is manifested in the evaluative adjectives accompanied with the ironic tone when describing the characters of the novel.

...and went down to the Arms, and near the first man he met there was Bruce, old Smithie by the like a fighting cock. Bruce was a dark and *sour-like childe*, but he looked *near twice as sour in a minute, when old Smithie took him a crack in the jaw.* (p.50)

But all they would hear would be Ellen his daughter; fat as a cow at the calving time. (p.49)

He had another daughter as well as his Ellen, he had slaved to give her an education; and faith! So he had done, and made her a teacher. She lived in Dundon and never came to south. And the only thing Smithie said that he had gotten, for all his pains and his chaving for her, was one cigarette: and that wouldn't light. (p.48)

So, as might be seen from the examples, it is not merely an objective portrayal of different personalities but it is their image as perceived and evaluated by the heroine who tells a story of a village and of people who are a part of the long history. Upon finishing the novel, the reader may start re-evaluating the story by connecting the dots. The historical review presented at the beginning of the story takes on another shade and meaning. The whole novel seems to underline the natural flow of history – incessant, slow and powerful. All the people described, and the heroine herself become a part of the whole history, a small element in the flow of the almighty time. They are small and insignifi-

cant but their role is overemphasized since these small “elements” ensure the constant flow of time and history.

Conclusion

Cloud Howe is a typical example of a polyphonic novel in which the characters take on a life of their own, quite apart from the author and the narrator. The great number of characters involved in the novel promote the “smooth” development of the story at the same time further complicating it for the reader to track the actual voice speaking to him/her. The constant shift of voices is made possible by the use of different personal pronouns, namely the second person *you* which engages the reader in the novel, thereby introducing another voice. The study of the novel brings us to the conclusion that the polyphonic nature of the story is not accidental in any way. The numerous voices and the historical references at the beginning of the novel and between the lines of the work merge into one, realizing the aim of the author, that is, to introduce the life story of an ordinary Scotswoman and a Scottish society placed in the historical context.

Note:

1. Focaliser-character (*autodiegetic* narrator) uses simultaneous narration and internal focalization and his/her speech is often in reported form.

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Հեղինակ-կերպար-ընթերցող հարաբերության լեզվաբանական առանձնահատկությունները «բազմաձայն» վեպում

Գեղարվեստական ստեղծագործության առանձնահատկություններից մեկը՝ բազմաձայնությունը, էլ ավելի է քարդացնում տեքստի մեկնաբանության առանց

այդ էլ խրթին աշխատանքը: Տարբեր կերպարների «ձայների» միահյուսումը խոչընդոտում է ստեղծագործության տողերի ետևում թաքնված հաղորդագրության բացահայտումը: Արդյոք այսկերպ հեղինակը փորձում է գրավել ընթերցողի ուշադրությունը, թե՛ նա այլ նպատակ է հետապնդում:

Լ.Ջ. Գիբբոնի «Բլառդ Հոուի» ետերգը բազմաձայն ստեղծագործության հերթական օրինակ է: Այստեղ միախառնվում են հեղինակի, պատմասացի և կերպարների ձայները: Այնուամենայնիվ, ստեղծագործության լեզվական ուսումնասիրությունը հնարավորություն է տալիս բացահայտել բազմաձայնության դերը ստեղծագործության ընդհանուր արտահայտչականության գործում:

Лингвистические особенности отношения образа автора, героя и читателя в полифоническом романе

Одна из особенностей художественного произведения – полифония (многоголосие) усложняет довольно сложную работу интерпретации текста. Слияние “голосов” различных образов усложняет понимание скрытого за строками произведения смысла. Возможно автор таким образом хочет привлечь внимание читателя или может быть он преследует иную цель? Роман Л.Дж. Гиббона “Клауд Хоуи” является ярким примером полифонического произведения. Здесь соединяются голоса автора, рассказчика и героев. Тем не менее, изучение языковых особенностей произведения дает возможность раскрыть роль полифонии в анализе произведения с точки зрения его выразительности.