

Some Problems in the Formal Definition of Interior Monologue.

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Many recent discussions of the 'stream of consciousness' begin by deploring the lack of agreement about the way in which the term should be used. However, there is a growing consensus that 'stream of consciousness' as a literary term should be used to describe the subject-matter of certain works, or a genre of writing, rather than to designate a technique. Its use in this way will be impressionistic, and there will be debateable cases. One of the major techniques used in this stream of consciousness genre is interior monologue. When we come to discuss a technique it should be possible to move away from impressionism; we should be able to give a formal descriptions. Derek Bickerton's article 'Modes of Interior Monologue, A Formal Definition'^① gives a clear description of some 'pure' examples of interior monologue, and it forms a good starting point for a discussion of the problem. Bickerton defines the four modes of interior monologue in the following way. Inner speech rendered direct speech is *soliloquy*, in indirect speech is *omniscient description*, in free indirect speech is *indirect interior monologue*, and in free direct speech is *direct interior monologue*. (These four modes correspond to those outlined in Robert Humphrey's *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*,^② in which he names the first two 'conventional modes'). Perhaps it would be useful to test his categories by looking at some problematical and mixed examples.

Soliloquy

The typical features of this mode are first person verbs in the present tense, possibly an introductory reporting clause, and inverted commas. Bickerton examines a passage from Scott's *Fortunes of Nigel* and finds that it is closer to written oration than to speech. He goes on to say that "If the soliloquy had abandoned such elaborations and adopted instead the turns of colloquial speech, it might have enjoyed a longer life as a method of inner-speech presentation; but its stiltedness and the fact that, as a borrowed stage convention, it is basically antifictional combined to make it virtually extinct by the beginning of the twentieth century." If we are to have a fairer idea of the possibilities of this mode, I think that we need to look at a wider range of examples. Bickerton does not explain why a borrowed stage convention is necessarily 'antifictional', and so we can set this comment aside. 'Stiltedness', again, raises some problems—in a stilted fictional world the

stilted becomes the norm. There is a similar problem with his use of 'colloquial', as we shall see later. Robert Humphrey's discussion is helpful here. He recognises that we must take into account two fine novels written almost entirely in soliloquies, Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, and William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. His account of the advantages of this mode acts as a useful counterweight to Bickerton's assertion of its limitations. Both critics deal with what they regard as typical features. But their 'pure' examples need to be seen in relation to exceptions and borderline cases, and it might be useful to look more closely at some of the problems involved in this mode.

Browning's monologues are frequently cited as precursors of twentieth-century experiments with interior monologue. Andre Gide had this in mind when he commented, in his book on Dostoevsky: "Browning and Dostoevsky seem to me to bring the monologue straightway to perfection, in all the diversity and subtlety to which this literary form lends itself." C. D. King, expressing an opposing view, says that "anything written in poetic form lacks the essential naturalism of inner monologue". But we need to ask here what 'poetic form' is. Should we exclude prose poetry (I will be discussing an example of this later), or *The Waves*, for example? And is inner monologue necessarily naturalistic? Browning himself regarded 'Caliban Upon Setebos' as one of his most representative dramatic poems, and for this and other reason, I would like to look at it in more detail. To begin with, the major part of the poem is simply soliloquy, not inner speech. But the first and last sections, bracketed off from the rest of the poem are inner monologue. As the brackets and the introductory phrase about his 'rank tongue blossoming into speech' are the only features which differentiate what Caliban says aloud (to himself) and his unspoken thoughts, we need to consider whether the total formal segregation of 'spoken', 'unspoken', and even 'written' soliloquy (e. g. the journal or notebook), is always important, or even, in some cases, possible. (I will be considering an interesting borderline case later). In 'Caliban Upon Setebos' both inner and spoken soliloquies are in the third person, and so this is a 'third person soliloquy', which seems at first sight to be a contradiction in terms. (The switches from the third to the first person which occur from time to time in the poem were at one time thought to be simply mistakes on Browning's part, but E. K. Brown and others have pointed out that Caliban's moves into the first person have an expressive function.^⑥ Fear of Setebos leads Caliban to hide behind the third person for the major part of his speculation, but at certain points he 'dares' to use the first person.) Another deviation from the norm of soliloquy is the deletion of the personal pronoun, an omission, according to Bickerton, which normally helps us to differentiate between soliloquy and direct interior monologue. This feature, like similar omissions in other poems by Browning, has the effect, as Park Honan suggests, of taking some of the dead weight from any long poem.^⑦ In this poem,

it also has the function of placing the monologue in a sort of middle ground between 'I' and 'he'. Recent criticism warns us against taking the poem simply as a satire against anthropomorphism, but this confusion of 'I' and 'he' does help to establish a kind of moon-calf equivalent of an anthropomorphic view of the universe. But this must be distinguished from the mere confusion for the reader which would follow if we could not distinguish between 'He' (Setebos) and 'he' (Caliban). The change to the upper case at the beginning of lines and sentences could cause undesirable confusion here, which is avoided by frequently omitting the personal pronoun when the latter 'he' is referring to himself. But we cannot ignore the incidental effect of this omission—to bring us closer to Caliban (it is for this reason that the omission of the personal pronoun is a typical feature, not of soliloquy, but of direct interior monologue, as we shall see later.)

One of the problems involved in extended soliloquy is that it is often difficult to express a situation or action in the first person and retain credibility. The difficulty can be seen, for example, in Dujardin's *Les Lauriers Sont Coupés*. Declarations of this sort seem a little odd: "Il faut relever un peu les pointes de mes moustaches, ainsi." It is implausible that anyone would articulate such an action so clearly to himself. (This difficulty can also be seen in all extended soliloquy and direct interior monologue. In Molly's famous reverie at the end of *Ulysses* it is significant that she is for the most part lying still in a darkened room in a state between waking and sleep, and so the need for her to record the feminine equivalent of 'twirling his moustache' is therefore largely obviated). Robert Humphrey rather glosses over this problem when he says: "these novels using soliloquy represent a successful combination of interior stream of consciousness with exterior action." In a novel written almost entirely in soliloquies, such as *The Waves* (which is one of the novels Humphrey has in mind here) this difficulty becomes especially acute, as we can see when one character says "I sob, I sob". We can understand from such an example why Bickerton uses the term 'stilted' to describe this mode, though it might be argued that because it is not at odds with the 'stiltedness' of the rest of the novel, perhaps the term 'stylised' might be more appropriate.

In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf retains a homogeneous style and differentiates the soliloquies by a simple introductory reporting clause 'said Rhoda', 'said Bernard', etc., and by the use of repeated images which are peculiar to each of the characters. An alternative, chosen by Faulkner, is to head each soliloquy with the name of the character whose thoughts are being presented. *As I Lay Dying* does contain soliloquies which, in Bickerton's words employ "the turns of colloquial speech", and so has given to soliloquy the longer life which he says it "might have enjoyed". Michael Hamburger's 'Zombie's Notebook', a prose poem, has a form mid-way between *The Waves* and *As I Lay Dying*.²⁰ We can see in it a mixture of literary and colloquial diction:

September evening. Street after street the station of a long undoing. Whose house? Whose lighted room? And all those books The thousands that 'I' read? Those pictures above the bookshelves: do 'I' know the painters' names? Those bits of furniture collected over the years, the mementoes, the relics, the ornaments-were they 'mine'? Will someone walk in now, smoking the pipe 'I' smoked? Or wearing the dress 'I' bought for her? Does my latchkey fit the doorlock?

'I' carry one book in 'my' head: the book of the dead. And see the hearse draw up, then the junk merchant's van. The life 'I' furnished is disposed of. Walk on, walk on cry the voices, the known and the unknown, into the other half-lit streets, past other houses. Your key fits no doorlock now. Chuck it into the gutter.

-All right, then. But where do I sleep? They're such damnable perfectionists, the dead.

The disparity between "the station of a long undoing" (highly literary) and "chuck it into the gutter" (colloquial) perhaps indicates a deliberate attempt to give the impression of the disintegration of personality. But the switch to the third person in the last sentence is merely confusing. Unlike Caliban's moves into the first person in 'Caliban Upon Setebos', there seems to be no justification for it. This lack of control indicates the difficulty, which Robert Humphrey underestimates, of blending the inner and outer in this mode. Browning solves this problem in 'Caliban' partly by assuming in his audience a knowledge of *The Tempest*, and so he can plunge us directly into Caliban's 'private' speculation without any loss of intelligibility. The journal, or here, 'notebook' is a common method of presenting soliloquy. I can see no reason for excluding this form from our definition of inner speech-it is often quite clearly a method of presenting this. It can contain rhetorical, or in Bickerton's terms 'stilted' or 'antifictional' language without becoming implausible.

Internal Description.

Derek Bickerton calls this mode 'omniscient description' and Robert Humphrey 'description by omniscient author'. It is, as the latter says, a 'conventional mode'. But perhaps we might include here the first person, as well as the third person past tense description of a character's thoughts, and rename the mode 'Internal Description'. The only unusual thing about this mode, as Humphrey points out is "the subject of the description, which, of course, in the stream-of-consciousness novel is the consciousness or psychic life of the characters".

Indirect Interior Monologue.

This mode has attracted a great deal of critical attention. It is past tense, third person narration, often with questions, exclamations, and interjections. There may be colloquial phrasing, but it is often highly patterned, with lexical and syntactic repetition, structural parallels and echo phrases. We might elaborate on this list by mentioning such typical features as the use of demonstrative pronouns, of 'now' together with the past tense, the direct speech elements 'yes' and 'no',

and strings of synonyms.

We can see the way in which the use of the past tense can indicate that we are seeing things from an interior point of view in the following passage, from a short story by Henry James :

...in fact, coming in one day to look over his collection of students' manuals, and drawing it out, as so many did, for the evident sake of his conversation, she had appealed to him that very first time by her apparently pronounced intellectual side-goodness knew she didn't even then by the physical !—which she had artfully kept in view till she had entangled him past undoing.

The 'goodness knew' (rather than 'goodness knows') together with the exclamation mark indicates that this is indirect interior monologue rather than authorial comment. The past tense alone can show this, as we can see in the similar use of 'heaven knew' in this passage from one of Derek Bickerton's own novels :[©]

Dinner was laid in the room that was just too small for the climate, trapping the heat in thick layers that struck him, fresh from the cold of an English winter, with a near nausea, so that the mere thought of food sickened; that was all the more stifling for the debris of possessions that cluttered it, the piano no one could play, the fat morris chairs, the wedding photos in which they all looked whiter than life, the huge radiogram that had cost heaven knew how many dollars.

'Heaven knows' rather than 'heaven knew' would be authorial comment. Verbs can be changed to the past tense to give this interior effect, but the shift from the first person of soliloquy to the third person of indirect interior monologue can cause problems. An expression like 'my eye' cannot, without absurdity, become 'his eye'. In this case the writer must modulate from indirect interior monologue (there is no question of this forming a climax here—although, as Bickerton rightly says, that is often the purpose of this move) :

He had scoffed at her claim, at her threat, at her thinking she could hustle and bully him—'Such a way, my eye, to call back to life a dead love !'—yet his instinct was ever, prudentially but helplessly, for gaining time, even if time only more woefully to quake, and he gained it now by not absolutely giving for his ultimatum that he wouldn't think of coming round.

(Henry James, *The Bench of Desolation*).

The 'colloquial phrasing' which Bickerton sees as a feature of indirect interior monologue raises a few problems. In the following passage, from his own novel, we have, by his definition, a fairly pure example of this indirect interior mode, with its highly patterned lexical and syntactic repetition :

His mind filled with bitterness as he thought of it. Garfield had betrayed him. Garfield his friend had dangled before him visions of revenge and easy money, only to shatter them through his own cowardice. Garfield was both traitor and coward. Garfield his friend. The thought revolved and revolved in his mind as he lay there. There was no one you could trust. All men betrayed you. There was no one you could trust but yourself.

(Derek Bickerton, *Tropicana*)

This seems to be a straightforward example of indirect interior monologue. Isolated, in this way, the passage is neither colloquial nor markedly uncolloquial.

But if we compare it with this character's speech in the novel, we can see that this apparently 'neutral' style is decidedly uncolloquial. The passage therefore deviates from one of the norms—colloquial phrasing—which Bickerton suggests for indirect interior monologue. Like 'stiltedness', this is a relative matter. Jackman's indirect interior monologue (given above) contains no hint that he speaks in a very broad dialect: " 'Dat girl-baby screelin' dere younder an' 'nobody to care for she,' Jackman said indignantly. 'Lose hol' they pots an' tek it, woman. An' tell Wilma fetch a tot from de store. I thirsty.' " Incidentally, by using indirect interior monologue uncoloured by Jackman's dialect, Bickerton gives a sense of distance from his character, presumably at the very point at which he wishes us to experience the intensity of his feelings. We feel, paradoxically, closer to Jackman when he is speaking aloud than when he is ruminating to himself—surely a technical flaw. But the important point here is that 'colloquial' is a relative description.

Virginia Woolf's use of the 'indirect style' was noted by earlier critics and reviewers, but she also achieves subtle effects by moving from indirect interior monologue to a kind of modified soliloquy and back again. In the following excerpts from *To the Lighthouse* we can examine this skilful modulation. I have isolated, from a section of the novel covering some six pages, one strand of Mrs Ramsay's reverie:

- (1) Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience (she accomplished here something dexterous with her needles), but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life.....
- (2) Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light for example. And it would lift up on it some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind like that—"Children don't forget, children don't forget"—which she would repeat and begin adding to it, It will end, It will end, she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, We are in the hand of the Lord.

But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said it? not she: she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean. She looked up over her knitting and met the third stroke and it seemed to her like her own eyes meeting her own eyes, searching as she alone could search into her mind and her heart, purifying out of existence that lie, any lie.....

- (3) What brought her to say that: "We are in the hands of the Lord?" she wondered. The insincerity slipping in among the truths roused her, annoyed her. She returned to her knitting again.
- (4)With some irony in her interrogation, for when one woke at all, one's relations changed, she looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much her, yet so little her, which had her at its beck and call (she woke in the night and saw it bent across their bed, stroking the floor), but for all that she thought, watching it with fascination, hypnotised, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, she had known happiness, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of

pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough ! It is enough !

This sample is rich in those features which I mentioned earlier as typical of indirect interior monologue. It is basically past tense, third person narrative. The question "who had said it ?" in (2) is typical, and the language throughout is highly patterned, with lexical and syntactic repetitions. The demonstrative pronoun in "that light for example" (2) is again typical, as are the strings of synonyms, for example "the fret, the hurry, the stir". But the real mastery of these interior modes is shown not so much by the presence of these typical features, but, as I hope to show, by a subtle interweaving of indirect interior monologue and modified soliloquy which is unique to Virginia Woolf.

A number of critics have noted Virginia Woolf's use of 'one', the indefinite pronoun. As James Naremore points out, its use blurs the boundary between the author and her characters. It allows an interior point of view, and yet retains that sense of 'impersonality' which Virginia Woolf said she wished to achieve (and which she found lacking in Dorothy Richardson and Joyce). The example given above, in (4), is interesting because it is a description of, precisely, Mrs Ramsay's gradual 'losing of herself' in her meditation. The use of 'one' is here particularly appropriate and expressive.

One of the problems for a writer who wishes to introduce a soliloquy is the necessity of finding a variety of expressions for 'he thought to himself' or 'he said to himself'. In the example given above, Virginia Woolf solves this brilliantly. At first, Mrs Ramsay is thinking to herself, and she may possibly be talking aloud to herself. The phrase "there rose to her lips" is typical of the author's indirect method. We have the sense of a thought which is possibly spoken, or which perhaps reaches the point just before articulation. It also conveys a sense of Mrs Ramsay's passivity. A little later, it is the *light* which "lifts up on it some little phrase"; Mrs Ramsay is again passive. She "repeats" the phrases "Children don't forget, children don't forget". Punctuation is used subtly in this passage, and it is significant that subsequent repeated phrases in the next lines, and the climactic phrase (We are in the hands of the Lord) are without inverted commas. Mrs Ramsay then takes up this phrase, and it is now placed in inverted commas, because she is 'quoting' herself. We are told that she had *said* "We are in the Lord". Mrs Ramsay having moved towards a deeper level of contemplation is looking back on her earlier thoughts, and their comparative superficiality is indicated by the use of the verb 'to say' (rather than 'to think', for example). In section (4) she has moved away from words related to speech, and we are told "she thought". But the climax of the reverie, a repeated phrase which clearly parallels those in (2), without inverted commas, but otherwise in direct speech form, is introduced by "she felt". Virginia Woolf successfully presents Mrs Ramsay's progression from a relatively superficial acceptance of

a rhetorical pattern which seems to correspond to her mood, to the expression of a feeling which is experienced at a deeper level than speech. She *says* (perhaps 'to herself') "We are in the hands of the Lord" but she *feels*, "It is enough, It is enough". The ending is the climax of a reverie or contemplation which had begun some six pages earlier. And so in the novel itself there is a complexity which has been partly lost in these passages, which I have necessarily extracted for the purpose of this analysis. But, in compensation, I hope that this approach brings out more clearly the way in which Virginia Woolf blends indirect interior monologue and a modified soliloquy in order to portray Mrs Ramsay's movement away from thought which is on the borders of speech ("there rose to her lips") towards an emotion which is *felt*.

Direct Interior Monologue.

Like soliloquy, this is first person narration with present tense verbs. However, the personal pronoun is often deleted, and there are deviations from the norms of written language. There are often apparent irrelevancies. We can see from the following brief example from *Ulysses* that it can be successfully combined with authorial description and direct speech :

Mr Bloom put his head out of the window.

—The grand canal, he said.

Gasworks. Whooping cough they say it cures. Good job Milly never got it. Poor Children !

The simple word 'gasworks' in direct interior monologue presents more directly the total experience of 'being aware of the gasworks' (including the smell, as the next sentence indicates), than any of the other three modes. This next sentence ("Whooping cough they say it cures"), with its inversion of the usual written order is syntactically speech-like. And the next, with its colloquial 'good job' is also near to speech. Because a character does not need to explain many things to himself which the reader needs to know, there is the possibility or confusion in this mode. But this can be overcome by the use of authorial description to set the scene, or, as in the example given, to describe actions which a character would not comment upon to himself. This is the problem with pure soliloquy—Bloom would have to say something like "I have now put my head out of the window".

We saw earlier that Virginia Woolf's use of the indefinite pronoun 'one' is entirely appropriate for the indirect and 'impersonal' effect at which she aimed. *Finnegans Wake* in its very different way is an attempt to present an 'impersonal' interior monologue, to present 'everybody's' dreamlike stream, which runs at a profounder level than that of the individual mind. It is a "steady monologuery of the interiors" and is near to direct interior monologue, but it is not really in the first person—it is a "prepronominal funferal".

The categories described by Bickerton and Robert Humphrey are useful, but we need to bear in mind that writers often gain their finest effects by the modification and blending together of these modes. Bickerton's treatment of soliloquy is inadequate. Borrowed stage techniques are not necessarily 'antifictional', and *As I Lay Dying* shows that the colloquial soliloquy is still a possible mode. The whole question of stiltedness is a relative one, and must be seen in the context of the work itself. His use of 'colloquial' in his discussion of indirect interior monologue can be criticised on similar grounds (as the example from his own novel shows). With these qualifications, the definition of these four modes, soliloquy, internal description, indirect interior monologue, and direct interior monologue, should help to clarify our discussion of the presentation of inner speech in fiction.

Notes.

1. Derek Bickerton, 'Modes of Interior Monologue, A Formal Definition,' *Modern Language Quarterly*, 28 (1967), 229-39.
2. Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*, (1954), 1965.
3. E.K. Brown, 'The First Person in 'Caliban Upon Setebos'', *Modern Language Notes*, 66 (1951), 392-5.
4. Park Honan, *Browning's Characters*, 1961.
5. Michael Hamburger, *Travelling*, 1969.
6. Derek Bickerton, *Tropicana*, 1963.