

NARRATIVE DISCOURSE: HYBRID CONSTRUCTION AND DOUBLED VOICE IN EUDORA WELTY'S *THE OPTIMIST'S DAUGHTER*

I.M. Hendrarti

Diponegoro University, Semarang

Abstract

This paper deals with Bakhtinian concept of hybrid construction in The Optimist's Daughter, a seriocomic novel written by Eudora Welty (1973). According to Bakhtin, literary language is stratified and "heteroglot." The heteroglosia refers to the multiplicity of social voices in the discourse of the novel. In other words, Bakhtin says that the novel is an orchestration of the diversity of social speech, which is sometimes also the diversity of languages, and "the diversity of individual voices is artistically organized. The diversity of voices manifests in the pseudo-objective motivation and the double voice.

1. Introduction

Narrative has existed for quite a long time. During the prehistoric age, people knew narrative in the form of paintings on stones or in caves. The narrative had also been popular among tribal communities as the people commonly listened to stories told during the tribal ceremonies. In everyday life, people were also accustomed to narratives. Since the day a person is able to understand speech, s/he has got used to some different forms of narratives such as tales, bedtime stories, or news and television programs. It is from narratives that people can learn about history, the present day events or the probable future. People need to be able to understand narrative, whether it is simple or complicated, in order that they can make sense of their surrounding world.

Narrative originally derived from the Latin word *narre* 'which means to make known, to convey information', to provide individuals with a tool for learning and teaching others about the world. Gradually, researchers used narratives as meta-language that enables them both to describe their research and to approach their object of study as a narrative discourse (Tomascikova 2009).

Many researchers from various disciplines of humanities have addressed narratology. It is no longer the exclusive domain of literary study since there have been many other disciplines of humanities that concern with narratology. To mention but a few, they are history, sociology, psychology, religion, ethnography, linguistics, communications and media studies (Tomascikova 2009). Since different researchers studied narratology from different perspectives, there are various different approaches as well. Therefore, some research regards the approach to narratology as somewhat similar to a procedure of investigation, or social practices, or politics and strategies. In literary studies, it is Aristotle, who first introduced the theory of narratology. He maintained that the works of arts are imitation of reality. He later defined the imitation of reality as "the content or chain of events." Later, he defined it as actions and happenings, see Aristotle (1942<1958:343).

The element of narrative, according to Chatman, includes what he called "existents", which are characters and items of setting. The second element of the narrative is "discourse" which he defined as "the expression, the means by which the content (story) is communicated." In other words, the story is the "what" and the discourse is the "how". He further explained that the discourse of the narrative is also the expression plane. Chatman defined the expression plane as the set of narrative statements. Each narrative statement manifests itself in a certain posture of a ballet dancer, in a single paragraph or a single word in a novel (1980:146). Thus, as represented by Chatman, the structuralists maintain that narrative is a form of communication. In this case, the real author communicates not only the story, the formal content of narrative by discourse but also the formal expressive element (Tomascikova 2009:286).

Almost similar to Chatman, Genette also maintains that narrative discourse depends on the action of telling. According to Genette, the analysis of narrative discourse will be the study of the relationships, on one hand the study covers the discourse and the event that it recounts. On the other hand, the study will involve "the relationship between the same discourse and the act that produces it" (Genette1980: 26-27). In other words, analysis of narrative discourse will be a study of the relationships between narrative and story, and between narrative and narrating.

The concept of discourse analysis proposed by Chatman and Genette do not provide necessary tools to explore the discourse of the novel. In 1980s, Bakhtin defined more intricate concept of narrative

discourse. He focused his attention on various forms and degrees of dialogic orientation in discourse, and on the special potential for a distinctive prose-art. According to Bakhtin, literary language - spoken or written - is stratified and "heteroglot" in its aspect as an expressive system. The term heteroglot derives from 'hetero' and 'glossa',¹ which refers to the multiplicity of social voices found in the discourse of the novel. In other words, heteroglossia denotes the different layers (social, professional, dialects, jargons etc) in the same language. Thus, heteroglossia is opposed to unitary language. In his article, "Discourse in the novel," Bakhtin wrote that the novel is an orchestration of the diversity of social speech, which is sometimes also the diversity of languages, and "the diversity of individual voices artistically organized." (1975<1994:262). In other words, the whole novel is a construction of 'multi-voiced', 'multi styled' and 'multi languaged' elements.

Bakhtin further explained that every concrete utterance of speaking subject is a site of the meeting point between "the centripetal" and "the centrifugal" forces of language. The centripetal forces of language are the process of unitary language. It is the inclination of discourse to be verbally ideological, centralized, canonized and unified. On the other hand, the centrifugal forces of language are the uninterrupted process of decentralization and dis-unification. In other words, every utterance participates in the process of centripetal forces and tendencies, but at the same time, it also involves the centrifugal forces and tendencies, which are represented in the social and historical heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1975<1994:271-2).

The centripetal and centrifugal forces of language in the novel are represented in what Bakhtin termed as "hybrid construction." What he means by the concept of "hybrid construction" is as follows: "What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems" (Bakhtin 1975<1994:304).

"The hybrid construction" may be apparent in two different ways. The first is the hybrid construction that is visible in "pseudo-objective motivation", which is one characteristic of novel styles. It is the style to conceal another's speech in hybrid construction. In conceptual terms, "pseudo-objective motivation" is a literary style or technique that an author uses for representing the "common view" or "current opinion" in a narrative. What appears to be the authorial voice is actually the representation of the current opinion of the collective people at a given time (cf. Bodner 2005:1). On the surface, pseudo-objective motivation may look like the narrator's views or opinion, but it is the opposite. It is actually the viewpoint of the given society's opinion. Bakhtin explained that the common view is embodied in the "common language"; Pseudo-objective motivation is usually "the average norm of spoken and written language for a given social group" which is taken by the author as the common view, the verbal approach to people, the going point of view and the going value (1994:301).

Bakhtin wrote that pseudo-objective motivation of the novel style is the way in which the author distances him/herself from the common language. It is the style of the author to appear as if he/she steps back and objectifies the common view but at the same time it allows the author to refract and diffuse his/her intentions through the medium of the common view. In this case, the relationship between the author and the common view is not static. The author may sometimes exaggerate the common view strongly, and sometimes weakly.

The second manifestation of hybrid construction is what Bakhtin called "double voice". As stated by Bakhtin, double voice is the heteroglossia in the novel. It is "another's speech in another's language" to express authorial intentions in a refracted way. It means that there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. The two voices are dialogically interrelated. It is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. See a quotation below:

another's speech in another's language..... It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse, there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they--as it were--know about each other (just as two exchanges in dialogue know each other and are structured in this mutual

¹ The term "heteroglot" should be related to "heteroglossia." The term derives from *hetero* + *glossa*. In Greek, "glossa" means tongue or language. Thus, heteroglossia means different tongue or language. Bakhtin then defines heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (1975<1994:264)

knowledge of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. Double voiced discourse is always internally dialogized (Bakhtin 1994:324).

In prose, the double voice is represented in socio-linguistic speech diversity. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions, that is the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author. That is why the words used in double voice do not have a single unitary meaning. They are dialogically ambiguous.

To exercise Bakhtin's concept on pseudo-objective motivation and double voiced discourse, I will analyze *The Optimist's Daughter*, a novel written by Eudora Welty. The novel itself has won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973. The story line of *The Optimist's Daughter* is simple but the mode of telling is not. The story focuses on Laurel McKelva who leaves her job as a textile designer in Chicago to go back home to the South to attend her father who is sick. The book opens with Judge McKelva visiting a doctor with both his daughter and his second wife Fay (Laurel's stepmother). The Judge is seeing Dr. Courtland, an eye specialist, because he has problem with his vision. The doctor recommends that he have an operation to fix his retina. Laura and the Judge agree and think that this is the best solution, while Fay objects. The operation itself is a success, but the Judge has to spend weeks in bed with his eyes covered. By the end of part I, Fay, the Judge's second wife, who always thinks of herself, feels upset. She drags the Judge to get up and give attention to her. To realize Fay's frustration, the Judge feels extremely distressed and suddenly dies. Then part II is about Laurel and Fay's trip back home with the Judge's body for the funeral. As the town's people gather to mourn the Judge, Fay's family, whom she denied, turn up. Part III is about Laurel, who is recalling her past.

The discourse of *The Optimist's Daughter* depicts Laurel McKelva's account on her family's history. The discourse is rich of multiple dialogical communications between the narrator and each character, and between the character and her/his consciousness. The narrator's discourse, that seems to be monologue, contains dialogical meaning through the character's utterance. Therefore, Bakhtinian concept of narrative discourse will probably be functional to understand the dialogical factors in the novel. In order to explain the multiple voices in the discourse of the novel under study, I will discuss first the Bakhtinian concept of narrative discourse, namely pseudo-objective motivation. Then, equipped with the notion of double voice depicted in the novel, I will explain the double voice, namely: the refracted voice of the character and that of the narrator.

2. Pseudo Objective Motivation

The Optimist's Daughter is a novel based on the traditional belief system of the (American) South. It is rich of religious beliefs, referring to Christian expressions inherent in the character's and the narrator's voice. The story is also casted against the patriotic Southern belles. Therefore, common views and ideological expressions influence the narrator's and the character's voice.

The novel begins with the narrator's description of Judge McKelva's family when they visit a doctor. The author introduces Judge McKelva as an old person with nationalism ideology. To express the nationalism of the people in the South, the narrator reports the Judge's dialogue with Dr Courtland when he is talking about the date of his illness:

"I date this little disturbance from George Washington's Birthday," Judge McKelva said. Dr. Courtland nodded, as though that were a good day for it (Welty 1969<1978: 10-11, emphasize added).

"Because George Washington's Birthday is the time-honored day to prune roses back home," said the Doctor's amicable voice (Welty 1969<1978: 12, emphasize added).

The author uses the character's voice to expose the ideological views of the society that George Washington's Birthday is a special date. In that utterance, the author steps back and lets the character voice the common ideology. In this pseudo-objective motivation, the author uses the character's voice to objectify the ideological view. By that technique, the author refracts and diffuses her intentions through the medium of the common view. The ironic expression of the importance of George Washington's Birthday is expressed by the narrator's voice when the narrator explains Dr. Courtland's agreement gesture: "Dr. Courtland nodded, as though that were a good day for it."

The second quotation shows how the narrator uses Dr. Courtland's voice as a medium to objectify the common view. Dr. Courtland's statement to inform Fay that George Washington's Birthday is really an important date for the society. On one hand, by saying, "...the time-honored day to prune roses back home," Dr. Courtland wants to convince his interlocutor, in this context Fay, that the day is perfect for a kind of activities such as "pruning roses." On the other hand, the author uses Dr. Courtland statement to exaggerate the common belief. She wants to say that the date is so important that it is the best time "to prune roses." The author does not make Dr. Courtland say that, "summer (or spring) is the best time for

pruning roses.” Instead, she lets the character associate George Washington’s birthday with the activities of pruning roses. The phrases “time-honored” which is correlated with “to prune roses” shows ironical sense of the statement to refract the author’s objection against the common view.

To show the ironical sense of the statement, let us apply the paradigmatic relation of the phrase, “to prune roses”. I will invite you, readers, to alternate the phrase “to prune roses” in the sentence in the following box with any other reasonably ‘similar’ phrases provided in the same column.

George Washington’s birthday is the time-honored day	to prune roses. (1) to celebrate independence. (2) to visit relatives. (3) to have a party. (4)
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The verb phrases number 2, 3, and 4 (to celebrate independence, to visit relatives, and to have a party) show several activities that are more relevant to George Washington’s birthday than simply “to prune roses.” Thus, when the author lets the character give special meaning to an activity of pruning roses on the honored day, she steps back in order to ridicule the belief system or the common view.

To expose the common belief system of the Southern American, the author also adopts several Christian aphorisms. The following quotations show how the author takes some religious views expressed by the characters so that she can refract her intention. The dialogue happens when Fay requires Dr Courtland to explain the result of the Judge’s eye operation:

“Before I even let you try, I think I ought to know how good he’ll see,” said Fay. “Now, that depends first on where the tear comes,” said Dr. Courtland. “And after that on how good a mender the surgeon is, and then on how well Judge Mac will agree to take our orders, and then on the Lord’s will. This girl remembers.” He nodded toward Laurel (Welty 1969<1978:15, emphasize added).

The author uses Christian aphorism “on the Lord’s will” to expose the Southern American religious belief. Dr. Courtland’s statement is a response to Fay’s strong objection when she says, “Before I even let you try, I think I ought to know how good he’ll see.” To respond to Fay’s question, Dr. Courtland mentions some of the possibilities, and the last resource is “on the Lord’s will.” When Dr. Courtland utters that statement, the narrator agrees and lets Dr. Courtland produce another statement: “This girl remembers.”

Another example of pseudo-objective motivation is from the quotation below:

In Mount Salus nobody ever tried to contradict Miss Verna Longmeier. If even a crooked piece of stitching were pointed out to her, she was apt to return: “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” (Welty 1969<1978:89, emphasize added)

For a Christian reader, the statement “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” is not foreign. This is Jesus’ statement when some Parisian required Him to punish a woman found guilty of adultery. The character’s statement, “let him who is without sin cast the first stone” is not originally the author’s voice. It is the voice adopted from the Bible. Therefore, what appears to be the authorial voice is actually the representation of what is originally the opinion of the collective people.

3. Doubled Voice

The most notable characteristic of Afro-American works of art is the representation of non-standard English, or Black English Vernacular (BEV).² However, the author of *The Optimist’s Daughter* does not maximize the use of BEV. Most of the time, the narrator speaks to the reader in Standard English. She would use BEV in a character’s speech in order to show the social class of the character. The following quotation shows the use of BEV, which may represent the double voiced style in this novel:

The nurse, without stopping her chochet hook, spoke from the chair. “Don’t go near that eye, hon! Don’t nobody touch him or monkey with that eye of his, and don’t even touch the bed he’s on, till Dr. Courland says touch, or somebody’ll be mighty sorry. And Dr. Courtland will skin me alive.”(Welty 1969<1978:24)

The quotation above shows that the narrator retains her identity as a literate persona by using Standard English. In order to show the speech of the character, however, the author uses BEV. It involves the use of double negative as in “Don’t nobody touch him.” The two styles of speech indicate the application of double voiced discourse in this novel. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses

² The characteristics of Black dialect are not only on the accent but also on the syntactic construction. One distinctive characteristic is the use of double negative. (McCrum 1987)

simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking (to warn the other characters) and the refracted intention of the author (to show the identity of the speaking character). Therefore, in that utterance there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions.

In the transcript of conversation, features of non-fluency (such as hesitation, pause and interruption) are usually overlooked.³ In a fictional conversation, however, the features of non-fluency will give a special realistic effect.⁴ In order to portray the authenticity and the immediacy of speech act, an author of literary work often uses punctuation and other signals: for example, dashes to indicate pauses and brackets to indicate material uttered simultaneously. The following quotation shows the representation of features of non-fluency.

“I’d come in. I’d done a little rose pruning—I’ve retired, you know. And I stood at the end of my front porch there, with an eye on the street—Fay had slipped out somewhere,” said Judge MacKelva, and bent on her his benign smile that looked so much like a scowl. (Welty 1969<1978:11)

The quotation above contains one hesitation and one pause. The dash sign (—) appears twice. The first dash, (—), indicates that the character hesitates after saying, “I’d done a little rose pruning.” As he says that he has done a little rose pruning, he is conscious that an activity of rose pruning needs extra time. It is usually the activity of unemployed person or person with a lot of leisure time. Therefore, he pauses in order to add that he has retired to give complete information.

The second dash (—) shows that the character switches the subject matter of the conversation. It is not an information of his activities, but the switch is intended to insinuate other character’s where about. Further, the dash also suggests that the speaker not only talk with the interlocutor but also insinuate the bystander. The statement, “Fay had slipped out somewhere,” refers to the third person who happens to listen to that conversation. Judge McKelva, the speaker, informs Dr. Courtland, the interlocutor, about the incident. However, at the same time Judge McKelva also insinuates Fay, his second wife, who, in the context of the conversation, plays a role as the bystander. Therefore, the speech serves two voices, two meanings and two expressions.

Conclusion

We can conclude that *The Optimist’s Daughter* presents essential features put forward by Bakhtin in his theoretical framework of the discourse of the novel. As we have seen from the discussion above, some features in *The Optimist’s Daughter* are rich of various stylistic components within the speech of a certain persona. The Bakhtin’s approach to the novel makes it possible for us to see the textual elements as both linguistic and meta-linguistic in characteristics. For example, the imperative and informative sentences are both syntactic units and components of hidden polemic and hidden dialogic. The pseudo-objective motivation in the novel reflects the author’s close relationship with the common-view. Welty uses the pseudo-objective motivation to imply her objection to the common view and ideology. Besides, the author frequently uses double voice to expose her criticism towards the life style of the public. In this technique, she hides and refracts the character’s intention and her own intention.

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³ Geoffrey N Leech and Michael H. Short (1981: 160) wrote that the transcriptions of realistic spoken discourse are usually ‘messy’ and ‘formless.’ That is why it is usually intolerable in written communication.

⁴ Geoffrey N Leech and Michael H. Short (1981:160) wrote that realism of conversation “is the standard by which we judge a writer’s ear for conversation, that is, his ability to render in writing the characteristics of spoken conversational language”.

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