Chapter 5

Conclusion

As was mentioned in the “Preface” of this dissertation, our aim has been to study Ulysses using Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony. This chapter re-asserts the position of Ulysses as a polyphonic novel and emphasizes the polyphonic nature of fiction in general, the degree of which varies from writer to writer depending upon the use of double-voiced discourse.

The primary trait of a polyphonic novel is the presence of highly independent characters and the special non-interfering position of the author. In Ulysses we get a chance to meet the character Bloom-Ulysses only at an advanced stage of the development of the “plot.” The book actually begins with references to Buck Mulligan, Stephen and Haines. Though Bloom appears only from the central sections of the novel, his primary importance to the story is clear from the beginning itself and most of the chapters are seen to be devoted to him. Bloom is a polyphonic hero in that he is a highly independent and self-conscious character with a unique sense of moral values.
Though the character of Bloom is based on the mythical hero Ulysses, the reader may not find any resemblance between Ulysses and the hero of Joyce's novel. What we have in the novel instead is a modern "anti-hero," a far cry from the ancient hero. We do not even know why the author thought of associating Bloom with the mythical hero. Except for two or three casual references in the text to Ulysses, there is no clear indication of the relevance of this name to Joyce's novel. The title Ulysses thus is very vague and deceptive and is incapable of giving any concrete idea about the hero to the reader.

In not giving a fixed identity, status, job, residence or religion to his hero, and in deviating from all the conventional literary norms in his portrayal, Joyce leaves open a polyphonic prospect for his hero. It is true that Bloom bears certain biographical traits of Joyce, but it is equally true that Bloom never acts as a mouthpiece for his author. In fact the author gives Bloom enough independence necessary for a polyphonic hero.

The whole of Ulysses takes place on one of the "dailiest days" possible of a June in 1904 in a span of almost three-quarters of the day. Joyce thus breaks the primary myth of choosing an important date for the events of the novel. Further, this novel begins and ends at odd hours. The beginning could have been anytime early in the morning and the ending immediately after the evening or even at midnight, to follow the logic of
conventional narratives. The author seems to extend his hero’s journey deliberately to the next day only in order to destroy any sort of predictability regarding novelistic action that is normally associated with the Aristotelian tradition of novel writing. Joyce sets the action of his novel in the eighteen hours of a very casual day and extends his story to the wee hours of the subsequent day only to show that what happens tomorrow is merely a continuation of today.

The author does not give any finalizing verdict about the characters or about the storyline at the end. Instead, he introduces a narrative by a female voice through the “Penelope” episode after the last appearance of the hero. Molly-Penelope is another polyphonic character of this novel and her narration is purely polyphonic, for the author is almost totally absent here. Molly’s speech goes on and on as an implicit demonstration of one of the basic traits of a polyphonic novel, i.e. its tendency to resist “closure.”

Taking into consideration all the above characteristics one should suppose that Joyce held a different view about novels and heroes and that *Ulysses* had all the ingredients of a polyphonic novel that Bakhtin talks about. Joyce was perhaps envisioning an ideal reader for his polyphonic novel when he asked for a reader “suffering from an ideal insomnia, who would give nothing less than a lifetime to reading the works of James Joyce” (Adams 10).
In this dissertation we have examined the various types of dialogue in *Ulysses*. As a dialogic text *Ulysses* is a sequel to the earlier texts, *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* and *Dubliners*. *Ulysses* conducts a constant dialogue with these former texts. Other major works of literature with which *Ulysses* enters into dialogue are the books of the *Bible*, the *Odyssey*, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and *Hamlet*. There are several other minor or non-canonical works with which *Ulysses* conducts dialogue. There is dialogue taking place on other planes also. This can be illustrated by referring to the theme of betrayal that is inherent to *Ulysses* right from its title. For *Ulysses* is a Greek hero who wins the war for the Achaeans by means of treachery. There are constant references in the text to the betrayal of Christ by Judas and the betrayal of Parnell by his wife that run parallel to the betrayal of Bloom by Molly. The stories of betrayal are cited in the text only to dialogise the theme of adultery.

There is also a deliberate dialogue with the King’s English in parts of the novel. This is also related to the way *Ulysses* trespasses the boundaries of monologic literature by always being in dialogue with its readers. One can see the importance of the anticipated response of the reader as well as the hero in shaping the narrative in a dialogic novel. The author is acutely aware of any such queries from the side of the reader or the character and designs his discourse in such a way as to answer their doubts or to provoke
more questions from them. Dialogue also takes place with other languages, themes and ideologies in this book. In short, there is no section in the text that is free from some form of dialogicality.

A violation of all types of order is seen in carnival. Deviation from order is seen in the very structure of the novel. Joyce does not divide *Ulysses* into several chapters as is done in conventional novels. Deviation from convention takes place at the substantial level also. What is seen in the Bloom household this day is a grotesque inversion of the marital law. Bloom and Molly have been, for the past ten years, practicing a kind of involuntary abstinence. It is on this day that they try to break free from their routine life. Thus this is a carnival day in their lives. It is Molly more than Bloom who is possessed by the carnival spirit. Molly commits actual adultery with Boylan, but Bloom’s flirtations do not cross the forbidden limits. Molly is very outspoken and her language is unrefined and coarse and her talk often deals with bodily matters. Her language, in other words, contains streaks of the billingsgate. However, Bloom is always seen keeping etiquette in front of others. Molly’s monologue can be viewed as a carnivallistic way of seeing things.

The folkloric construction of Bloom as a carnival hero is noteworthy. Bloom’s position as the master of the household is tilted when he cooks for his wife and does all the household jobs in a decrowning gesture. This
"decrowning" of Bloom is typical of a carnival hero. He is "crowned" in the end when Molly asserts that he is much better than other men in understanding women and in sexually appealing her. Joyce chooses a commoner and not one from the high stratum of the society as his hero. In the modern *Odyssey*, the old Greek hero dies and is reborn as the new Bloom-Ulysses. Thus the theme of death and resurrection which is a standard theme in grotesque literature is seen in the choice of the title hero. Virtually nothing takes place inside the house of Bloom. Most of the activities take place in the streets of Dublin. Hence the importance of the marketplace and folk culture for Joyce's novel cannot be overlooked. The elements pertaining to carnival that the text abounds in is another indication of its polyphony.

The carnival spirit is also manifest in the elaborate descriptions of eating, defecation and sex that are present in the novel. Whenever we get a chance to meet the characters inside the Bloom house, they are seen near their food. All characters in the novel can be said to possess the banqueting spirit of carnival even if they do not dine together. Even the cat that comes near Bloom in the morning and Stephen who comes with Bloom in the evening joins the food in Bloom's house. *Ulysses*, which began with a breakfast ends with a demand for breakfast. The process of eating continues
and the carnival fervour lingers. Thus *Ulysses* is a truly carnivalesque text that embodies all the carnival elements in its theme and structure.

We have examined the applicability of the Bakhtinian concepts like “polyphony,” “carnival” and “dialogue” to *Ulysses* and have come to the conclusion that *Ulysses* can be called a polyphonic, dialogic and carnivalesque text at the same time. By establishing these traits in *Ulysses*, a representative novel of the twentieth century, we have come to the conclusion that the novelistic genre is characterized by polyphony, the nature of which may vary from writer to writer depending upon the use of double-voiced discourse. Accordingly, *Ulysses*, which abounds in double-voiced discourse is a highly polyphonic novel.

Finally, in modelling this study of Joyce’s novel on Bakhtin’s theory of polyphony one has perhaps gone to the extent of stylizing, parodying and, in a certain sense conducting, a dialogue with Bakhtin. This means that the dissertation itself turns out to be a working model of the theory propounded by Bakhtin. In trying to reduce the distance between Bakhtin and Joyce, this dissertation has carnivalized itself by entering into what Bakhtin calls a “free and familiar contact.”