APOLLONIUS RHODIUS AS "INVENTOR"
OF THE INTERIOR MONOLOGUE

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I

In their pre-narratological summa of western narrative techniques, *The Nature of Narrative*, Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg affirm that the merit of inventing the interior monologue belongs to Apollonius Rhodius, who is, in their opinion, a narrative artist far from having the reputation he deserves.¹ In Scholes and Kellogg's definition, interior monologue is more a topos than a narrative device, and they single out six features transmitted by Apollonius to the western tradition. It always depicts: (1) a woman; (2) who is in love; (3) who passes through a crisis; (4) who is divided between moral justice and erotic desire; (5) who has no one she can confide in; (6) who commits (or tries to commit) suicide. In fact one can find a series of constants from Virgil's Dido to certain heroines in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, from the Greek novel to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. However, it is perhaps unwarranted to ascribe to Apollonius the actual invention of such a formal device, since the basic stock of narrative techniques comes to him (and to the entire western canon) directly from the Homeric epic. His creativity lies, rather, in the areas of re-motivation, amplification, and symbolic connotation. If we speak in terms of abstract forms, the interior monologue is merely a very specific case of one of the three basic techniques that can be used by a narrator to report a character's speech: according to Gérard Genette's typology it would come under the heading of "referred discourse" (*discours rapporté*), in which the narrator directly quotes the character's words.² This is the most mimetic technique, which has characterized the epic as a mixed form of dramatic and narrative elements ever since Plato's time. Or, if we turn to the more specific typology proposed by Dorrit Cohn, which

is limited to the presentation of consciousness in narrative, interior monologue is seen as a specific case of “quoted monologue”, that is a “character’s mental discourse”, a technique which is widely used in every kind of narrative, from Homer to the modern novel, in order to communicate to the reader the thoughts, emotions and inner life of the characters.

It is well known that literary criticism usually ascribes to the interior monologue another date of birth, 1887, when the French symbolist writer Eduard Dujardin published Les lauriers sont coupés, a short novel consisting exclusively of a monologue in which the main character reveals his thoughts and emotions. It was notably James Joyce who recognised Dujardin as the inventor of this technique, which is widely used in many parts of Ulysses, especially in Molly Bloom’s long final monologue. Joyce thus preferred to take an obscure novelist as a model, rather than to attempt other, riskier solutions such as might be suggested by the relatively new science of psychoanalysis, of which he was rather suspicious. Responding to Joyce’s declarations and the suggestions of the prominent French critic and writer Valéry Larbaud, Dujardin wrote, in 1931, an essay entitled Le monologue intérieur, which gives the following definition:

Le monologue intérieur est, dans l’ordre de la poésie, le discours sans auditeur et non prononcé, par lequel un personnage exprime sa pensée la plus intime, la plus proche de l’inconscient, antérieurement à toute organisation logique, c’est-à-dire en son état naissant, par le moyen de phrases directes réduites au minimum syntaxial, de façon à donner l’impression ‘tout venant’.

Even in this case, from an abstract and typological point of view, we do not have a new form, but a simple variation. Genette calls it “immediate discourse” (discours immédiat) because of its basic lack of any narrative mediation. The challenge involved in using such a device lies in trying to communicate to the reader the pre-speech level in its magmatic and alogical configuration.

The two very different dates of birth attributed to the interior monologue correspond of course to two different narrative traditions. The type “invented” by Apollonius is always tragic and sublime. It is entirely

5 Cohn (1978) 11–15, esp. 12.