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**Bakhtin Revisited:
A Stylistic Approach to Free Indirect Style**

- Violeta Sotirova, *D.H. Lawrence and Narrative Viewpoint*. London: Continuum 2011. VIII, 227 p. [Price: EUR 121,99]. ISBN: 978-1441132628.

When Charles Bally, in two contributions to the German scholarly journal *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, first described the phenomenon he termed free indirect style (*le style indirect libre*) in 1912,¹ he could hardly have anticipated that a hundred years later his insights would still be at the centre of a truly interdisciplinary debate on point of view in narrative fiction – a debate that brings together scholars working in literary and narrative theory, in stylistics, discourse analysis and literary pragmatics. The unresolved question is who speaks in free indirect discourse – should such utterances be analysed as a combination of the voice of a narrator and that of a character (dual-voice hypothesis), or is free indirect discourse a representation of a character’s consciousness that cannot be attributed to a narrator or speaker?

The latest contribution to this controversy is Violeta Sotirova’s monograph *D.H. Lawrence and Narrative Viewpoint*, which proposes to take a fresh look at the problem by performing a stylistic analysis of narrative viewpoint in selected passages from Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913). The close analysis of discourse ties such as referring expressions, sentence-initial connectives and repetitions that link different viewpoints in literary fiction, is intended to provide linguistic evidence for an argument that rethinks the Bakhtinian notion of dialogicity in the light of new research on the interactive function of discourse links in spoken dialogue.

In her first chapter, Sotirova offers a comprehensive overview of the literature on free indirect style and related phenomena. After discussing the origins of the linguistic and literary debate on narrative viewpoint, beginning with a re-reading of the seminal works of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, she traces the emergence of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogicity – the confluence of the voices of narrators and characters in literary utterances – and the development of the concept of free indirect style in the work of theorists such as Roy Pascal and Dorrit Cohn. Sotirova’s own approach is anchored in the Bakhtinian tradition. She rejects the opposing view proposed by Ann Banfield (single-voice hypothesis) and its cognitive reconceptualization by Monika Fludernik, before moving on to relevant work in discourse analysis (Susan Ehrlich) and pragmatics (Jacob Mey’s concepts of *voice mashing*, *voice trashing* and *voice clashing*). Having discussed competing approaches to free indirect style, Sotirova then hypothesizes that cohesive ties in narrative texts (e.g. referring expressions, repetition, sentence-initial conjunction) »do not necessarily sustain an established viewpoint« (49). Her aim, ultimately, is to show that the dialogic design of narrative fiction is formally encoded in the linguistic structure of narrative discourse – despite the presence of continuity markers that sustain a continuity of perspective.

The analytical part of the study gives evidence from D.H. Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913) to support this claim, an interesting choice, as it challenges the view that the dual-voice hypothesis is better suited to explain 19th century realist fiction than the representation of consciousness in modernism (it has to be said, though, that Lawrence’s novel is not radi-

cally ›modern‹ in this respect). Sotirova first focuses on a scene in which Mrs. Morel reflects on the birth of her son Paul (chapter three). The alternating use of the pronouns ›he‹ and ›it‹, both used to refer to the child, not only emphasizes the emotional attitude of the mother, who distances herself from her son (and his father) but »highlights the divergence in point of view between character and narrator and thus suggests an implicit dialogue between them« (87). While the first part of this statement is, however, clearly supported by textual evidence (and would suffice to give weight to the dual-voice hypothesis), only scholars working within a Bakhtinian terminological and conceptual framework will readily accept the idea of an implicit dialogue, and with it Sotirova's conclusion that »Bakhtin's notion of dialogicity would fully capture the effects of the pronominal alternations« (ibid.).

Apart from pronouns, sentence-initial connectives play an important role in Sotirova's argument (chapter four): using selected passages, she demonstrates how they help to disrupt perspectives instead of maintaining continuity (the main function ascribed to cohesive devices in Ehrlich's approach). Connectives, as linguistic markers of free indirect style, serve to »enhance the sense of dialogic relatedness between viewpoints and minds« (126). What is more, this appears to be an intended function – Lawrence's strategic use of connectives (like the patterning of pronouns), which can be reconstructed from the manuscripts, supports Sotirova's claim that this is a result of deliberate narrative design in a conscious attempt to enhance the effects of dialogicity. The same can be said of Lawrence's use of repetitions, analysed in chapter 5, that create resonances between narratorial comments and characters' thoughts, or between utterances ascribed to different characters. Again, a careful examination of the manuscript shows that repetitions were deliberately added in the editing process, presumably to reinforce emotional links between characters (cf. 145).

Chapter six uses a statistical and comparative approach to provide linguistic evidence of a stylistic change in Lawrence's writing that makes *Sons and Lovers* a more mature work than its two predecessors – an evaluation that is shared by the author and the majority of his critics. Narratologists, however, will disapprove of Sotirova's equation of author and narrator, which derives from the different research agendas of stylistics and narratology (»Without entering into a debate about the legitimacy of such a move, I shall assume that unless an explicit distinction is posited in the narrative, the narrator and the author are identical.« [178]).

Such criticism aside, however, one may conclude that Sotirova's eminently readable study, which keeps linguistic jargon to a minimum and offers good explanations of its key terms, is highly recommended for Lawrence scholars and narrative theorists alike. Students interested in Bakhtinian concepts such as dialogicity, social heteroglossia and linguistic hybridity will benefit from Sotirova's clear definitions, while the historical survey in chapter two is an excellent introduction to the debate. Sotirova also teaches us a lesson in methodology – her meticulous analyses, based on convincing discussions of textual evidence, set a standard for narratological close reading. It will be interesting to see how opponents of the dual-voice hypothesis will respond to Sotirova's arguments; after all, the most fundamental problems in narrative theory – and the question of who speaks in a fictional narrative certainly belongs to these – will always allow for different answers (if not solutions). Even though Sotirova may not put an end to the centennial debate on the origin of free indirect style, her work demonstrates the continued relevance of stylistic analysis for narratological studies of narrative design and its possible effects on readers.

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Notes

¹ Cf. Charles Bally, Le style indirect libre en français moderne, *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 4 (1912), 549–556 & 597–606.

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