

**Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in
Conscious Experience. A Study in James Joyce's *A
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

Wasan Ali Hasan
Al-Iraqia University, College of Education for Women,
Department of English, Baghdad, Iraq.
wasan.hasan@aliraqia.edu.iq

Abstract

James Joyce (1882-1941) is a significant writer in Irish literature. He is a poet as well as revolutionary and visionary writer. He is the most original realistic writer of the twentieth century. His fame stems from his two great novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922) which are given special attention of the critics. His novels depict the most common features of the society both politically and socially which reflect the nature of the Irish society.

Joyce is well known of his unique style which distinguishes him from the other writers of his age. His critical abilities in literature enable him to use different modern techniques in his writings. He modifies the traditional techniques so that they can suit the spirit of the modern age. The aim of this research is to shed light on one of Joyce's modern techniques which is called stream of consciousness that he uses in his novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in which this technique reflects a special side of Joyce's personal life. **Keywords:** modernism, narrative, stream of consciousness, psychology, unity, thoughts, adolescence and autobiography.

1. Introduction

The beginning of the modernist phase in English Literature could be dated back to the outset of the World War I (1914). A period that was characterized by the severity of the experience of the war and by renovation and experiment in writing.¹ Modernism in English novels came as a response to the previous surrounded and sophisticated literary movements. Modernism in novels can be seen as a new creation and innovation that is defined by its definable and notable literary style and texts that contain especial basic modern themes and stylistic features. Modernist writers have managed to reflect human's struggles, conflicts, chaotic identity in a new realistic way depending on new stylistic experimentation and conventions (like multiple narrators, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and subjectivity) in which the readers can feel the writer's viewpoints and perspectives which was something forbidden in the previous literary writings.²

It is worthy to mention that modernism in novels did not appear all of a sudden but its rising was felt at the end of the 19th century due to urbanism, globalization, Sigmund Freud's psychological theories, and the cultural exposure on the realistic and socialist literary movement of the Russian and the French writers. Modern writers like Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence were affected by the free subjective and realistic tendency of the writing of the French and Russian novelists. So, those writers tried to reflect that modern style of writing in their works by breaking down the tradition of the earlier prose and fiction by changing the narrative style and the standard ways of representation and producing the characters. Moreover, they began to challenge and doubt the comedic ending and the courtship plot. They regarded the happy ending and poetic justice as something far away from their real-life which they wanted to translate in a realistic way in their works. Hereby, comedic resolutions were not preferred by the modernist writers as they were outmoded. On the other hand, modernist writers preferred more the tragic and open ending.³

Although James Joyce's reputation is based on four major works, he is considered to be one of the most influential modernist writers. This is because he has introduced new ways of thinking to form the novel. Joyce's novels challenge the old subject matters and literary conventions, as well as they, also show a sort of possibility to expand and enlarge the reader's perception as it is shown in his first great novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

2. James Joyce: The Man's Life and The Artist's Works

The Irish novelist, poet, literary critic, and journalist James Augustine Aloysius Joyce, was born in Ireland on February 2nd, 1882. Joyce from the beginning of his life had a delicate physique. His eyesight was so weak so he spent most of his life in a condition of almost blindness. Joyce's personality was so attractive, especially his appearance.⁴ Joyce was John Stanislaus Joyce's and Mary Jane Murray's eldest son. Joyce's parents had 9 children other than him. Joyce descended from a middle-class family and his father worked as a tax collector in the 1880's. Throughout time the family passed through financial issues and troubles due to the loss of Joyce's work. Therefore, the family was forced to encounter went a long decline as they also moved from a place to another in Dublin.⁵

Concerning education, Joyce received a proper and well-formed education, but in 1891 he was forced to leave the school because his family could not afford the cost of his education in Clongowes Wood College, a prestigious Jesuit school in country Kildare. In April 1893 and without any payment or fee, Joyce entered Christian Brother's school in the north of Richmond which became the opening setting of his most short stories and novels including *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.⁶

Talking about his adulthood, Joyce was a very religious person but his first sexual experiences with prostitutes turned his life upside down and changed his religious tendencies and took him far away from the orthodox Catholicism. In Joyce's two famous works *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, one can notice clear autobiographical elements reflected throughout the course of these two novels related to his personal life and his experience in Clongowes Wood, Belvedere and University College. Joyce graduated from university in 1902 with a degree in modern languages: English, Italian, and French.⁷

Joyce started his literary career at the age of fourteen by writing pieces of poetry and drama. Concerning poetry, Joyce wrote lyrical poems called "Moods" and a group of poems entitled "Shine and Dark". In 1907, the world of literature and poetry witnessed the publishing of Joyce's first collected poems entitled "*Chamber Music*". While in 1929, Joyce published *Pomes Pennyeach*. It is worth mentioning that Joyce wrote also prose sketches called *Silhouettes*.⁸

Joyce's personal life affected his works and his way of exploring, expanding and forming his fictional characters and their inner psyche and conflicts. One should not forget the role of women in his life. After the death of his mother in 1903, Joyce became a heavy alcoholic person. Also, his wife Nora was the source of his inspiration in *Ulysses* as he presented her character through Molly Bloom's character.

Moreover, Joyce wrote *Dubliners* (1914) which is a series of 15 collected short stories written from 1904 to 1907. After completing *Dubliners*, Joyce moved to another literary genre. He preoccupied himself with writing novels as an attempt to establish his profession as a novelist. He wrote his first autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In 1922, Joyce published *Ulysses* which is a sequel to his first novel .After publishing *Ulysses*, He started to write his last work of prose entitled *Finnegans Wake* as he published it in 1939 and died immediately after two years.⁹

3. James Joyce's and Modernity in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is largely an autobiographical work that recounts Stephen Dedalus's life during his first twenty years. Joyce manages to present his innovative experimental new style of writing through presenting Stephen Dedalus's inner thoughts, feeling, character, and his long journey to find and establish his own identity. Throughout Stephen Dedalus's character, Joyce reflects his own belief that freedom is something significant for writers and in order to feel this freedom and find their own space in the literary canon, the writers must encroach on all the religious, political, social, and economic restrictions. So, he reflects all of what he believes in through a special and notable usage of a modern narrative technique presented in this novel as stream of consciousness.

Stream of consciousness can be defined as a modern technique that is used by many modernist writers in the twentieth century to dramatize, depict and present the character's inner life, thoughts, and sensations. The psychologist William James is the first one who coined the term 'stream of consciousness' in 1890 and he defined this term in his book *Principles of Psychology* as:

"Nothing joined; it flows. A 'river' and a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. Let's look at some examples to see exactly what this means in practice. In talking of it hereafter, let's call it the stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life."¹⁰

Stream of consciousness can also be clarified as a "continuous flow of sense, perception, thoughts, feelings, and memories in the human mind, or a literary method of representation such blending of mental processes in fictional characters."¹¹ Stream of consciousness should include "every flowing movement of the mind."¹² When this technique is used in a passage narrated, then it must reflect the character's emotions, memories, past in relation to the present. In other way, it must show the character's conscious sensation and thoughts. Joyce uses this technique as a weapon in the struggle against the narration. He tries to record the flow of thoughts. He uses it to avoid the over-insistent because he feels that the previous techniques cannot cope with difficulties and the social problems of the new world. The stream of consciousness novel like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is identified by its subject matter, its techniques, purpose, and themes.

Joyce arranges his novel in five chapters to follow the protagonist's life from boyhood to manhood. The protagonist Stephen is a tenderhearted, knowledgeable and cultivated young man who grows up in colonial Ireland, a society which is characterized by culture and the prevalence of religion, i.e. Catholicism and Protestantism.¹³ Chapter one is an introduction about the different meanings of stream of consciousness, chapter two is about Stephen's childhood, chapter three deals with Stephen's adolescences, chapter four deals with Stephen's manhood then the conclusion of all of that.

"James Joyce's employment of stream of consciousness as a technique is by making narration mirrors the linguistic and intellectual development of Stephen Dedalus ... the narrative style could be said to mature along with young Stephen. As the novel progresses so as Stephen as his language develops accordingly."¹⁴

In chapter one, the stream of consciousness becomes common in literary criticism since it identifies the author's goal to achieve his artistic vision. This term is used as a synonym for the interior monologue in two ways: the psychological and literary ways. The psychological sense is the subject matter while the interior monologue is a mean to present it. In the literary sense, stream of consciousness is a special style of interior monologue, while an interior monologue always presents a character's thoughts directly.

While in Chapter two, the reader will be introduced to young Stephen's character by means of stream of consciousness which is used in an artistic way. The reader is given a faithful access to the child-like mind of Stephen and his inability to properly form a comprehended sentence. At the beginning of the novel, an interior monologue tells what to be understood as an infant-directed speech. The narrative recounts what appears to be a memory of baby Stephen where his father was telling the story of a Tucko:

"Once upon a time and very good time it was there was moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo. His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face his father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face."¹⁵

The disjointed manner of child-like fragmented thoughts continues as the narrator recounts the singing of children lullaby,

"That was his song. O, the green wothe botheth. When you wet the bed, first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell. His mother had a nicer smell than his father. She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance." (**PAYM**, 3)

Joyce successfully imitates children's incoherency as he not only demonstrates clearly that the song above is certainly of a child, but also the reader can easily recognize that the sentences are put together by a kid. For example, the use of a comma is nowhere to be found in the second sentence after 'warm.'¹⁶

Stephen's growth is also realized by his reactions, such as paying attention to the sound of the speech and the arrangement of Stephen's own ideas. Joyce's deployment of this technique is to foster Stephan's early isolation by portraying his interaction with others, which is either speechless or retains his views for himself and thus numerous mannerisms in Stephen that are the seeds of introvert character. The idea is obvious when one of the classmates named Wells asked Stephen whether he kisses his mom prior going to sleep. Reacting to Stephen's "yes, I do," Wells tells their classmates: " O , I say , here's a fellow says he kisses his mother every night before he goes to bed .The other fellows stopped their game and turned round, laughing. Stephen blushed under their eyes and said: I do not. Wells said: O, I say, here's a fellow says he doesn't kiss his mother before he goes to bed." "Stephen started to think why Wells and the others were laughing"; "he tried to think what was the right answer; was it right to kiss his mother or wrong to kiss his mother? What did that mean, to kiss? Was it right?" (**PAYM**, 14).

In the early stage of Stephan's life, Joyce uses stream of consciences excessively to disclose his personality. "He is not a whiner, despite his sensitivity. He is tough enough to go to the rector and complain of Father Dolan's unfairness" (**PAYM**, 52). Stephen is a very delicate child and his athletic incompetence makes him lack confidence, so to demonstrate this type of strength through this dialogue is covering yet another feature of his character.

Chapter three is about Stephen's adolescence. In Stephen's life, adolescence is a very complicated period because he realizes that he is physically changing. Joyce at this climacteric phase of Stephen's life tries to confirm his alienation from others. He concentrates the use of the stream of consciousness. Joyce presents Stephen as a teenager whose interest is to form a world through the operation of his imagination and senses. He awaits change and anticipates although he is not exactly sure what this change might hold. As an example of Stephen's way of thinking during this period of time is when he is a student at school. He is chosen to play the role of the comical teacher in Whitsuntide play. Stephen takes a moment for himself and goes to wander outdoors. He meets his schoolmates Wallis and Heron who tease him about a girl in the audience. Their objurgation lets off a new track of thoughts for Stephen, as he remembers an occurrence that took place during his term at Belvedere. He thinks about the girl sitting in the audience, remembering their diffident communication and his unachieved wish to kiss her:

"A shaft of momentary anger flew through Stephen's mind at these indelicate illusions in the hearing of a stranger. For him, there was nothing amusing in a girl's interest and regard. All day he had thought of nothing

but their leave taking on the steps of the train at Harold's Cross, the stream of moody emotions it had made to course through him, and the poem he had written about it. All day he had imagined a new meeting with her for he knew that she was to come to the play. The old restless moodiness had again filled his breast as it had done on the night of the party but had not found an outlet in verse." (*PAYM*, 71)

In his essay *Joyce Annotated*, Don Gifford describes Stephen as someone who, "is full of thoughts and feelings that he cannot articulate to others." Stephen does not communicate with his family and friends. Joyce illustrates Stephen's disconnection from his surrounding by making him spiritually disengaged in any sort of activity. To fill out the hollowness left by his inner estrangement, Stephen engages himself with another type of amusements. Stephen starts going to prostitutes as he becomes indifferent to being thought of as a sinner. However, the utter loss of control that he experiences made him feel entrapped where he finds himself tainted by all of the Seven Deadly Sins. He goes on his studies and his works in the society of the Blessed Virgin. Despite all of the new taste of life that he feels, he somehow finds that the joys do not fill the void that started to take even a bigger shape inside.¹⁷

In chapter four Joyce uses St. Francis as an entrance to Stephen's stage of manhood. Being raised as catholic, Stephen has a very special perception of the concept of sin. Stephen fell into the pit of guilt. He is constantly tortured with nightmares about hell and the wrath of God.

"He had sinned mortally not once but many times and he knew that, while he stood in danger of eternal damnation for the first sin alone, by every succeeding sin he multiplied his guilt and his punishment. His days and works and thoughts could make no atonement for him, the fountains of sanctifying grace having ceased to refresh his soul ... his sin, which had covered him from the sight of God, had led him nearer to the refuge of sinners." (*PAYM*, 98)

In chapter five, Joyce utilizes the stream of consciences to demonstrate Stephen's reconciliation with himself. His inner struggle with his catholic teaching and his deep longing for bodily pleasure has come to an end. In his endeavors seeking spiritual piety, Stephen goes to church to hear sermons, in a key scene in the novel where the director attempts to persuade Stephen to the calling by delineating the liability and influence of a priest. The conception certainly intrigues Stephen but it also arouses questions of Catholic doctrine as he imagines the life of a priest and how it would be," he spent his life wandering through corridors such as these, in the end, he realizes that such a life repulses him. The life of a priest would be contrary to Stephen's desire for freedom and independence. "¹⁸

The life of a priest disgusts Stephen because it would require a tremendous taming of his desires a change he is not willing to make:

"Stephen prefers another odore: the sour smell of over ripped cabbages in the path leading home. It is the world of life and living, with its mess and sheer physicality, that interest Stephen. He realizes that he will "sin" again; he accepts that he was not made to live a spotless life. Rather he will live life to the fullest and accept that part of his growth will include making great mistakes. The shrine of the Blessed Virgin is too tidy, too sterile. Stephen prefers mess and he will live his life accordingly." (*PAYM*, 145)

The apparition of a girl fording in the ocean water makes Stephen feel that divinity may paralyze the feeling of utmost ecstasy which forms a revelation to him on how to lead his life.

"He turned away from her suddenly and set off across the strand. His checks were a flame; his body was a glow; his limbs were trembling. On and on and on and on he strode, far out over the sands, singing wildly to the sea, crying to greet the advent of the life that had cried to him. Her image had passed into his soul forever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life." (*PAYM*, 147)

The transformation from Catholic devotion to an approval of the sensual as a main part of beauty is essential to this chapter. "Stephen tries to constrain the very impulses that distinguish him as an individual: sensitivity to sensation, interest in beauty. But the sensual world of real living wins."¹⁹ As Stephen pounds through his newfound sense of self, Joyce changes the tune by making it centered on the "I". He depends on emphasizing dialogue- scenes which show Stephen's growth accompanied by his isolation from society. "His obsession with Emma is more aesthetic and abstract..., but in truth, he does not know her that well. His contemplation of her is based on a very abstract idea of women. Emma exists more as Stephen's muse than as a flesh and blood woman " (*PAYM*, 201).

Stephen's idea of aesthetics becomes his newfound obsession as he searches to ground it into methodical theory:

"Though the same object may not seem beautiful to all people, all people who admire a beautiful object find in it certain relations which satisfy and coincide with the stages themselves of all aesthetic apprehension. This relations of the sensible, visible to you through one form and to me through another, must be therefore the necessary qualities of beauty." (*PAYM*, 204).

In a critical essay in "The Nineteenth Century Novel", Northrop Frye declares that "one of the most important things that had made this novel a very remarkable one is the revelation of character and incident through the searching use of the stream of consciousness technique. The author jumps into Stephen's mind to follow his stream of consciousness, and out again to describe it externally."²⁰ Thus, accordingly, Joyce jumps around in Stephen's mind, in an attempt to seek a fulfilling conclusion for his ideas concerning deliverance, liberty, and artistic impact: "The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his finger-nails" (*PAYM*, 215).

It is apparent that Joyce uses stream of consciousness as a remarkable technique to trace Stephen's life from boyhood to puberty and then to the early stage of his manliness showing his rebellion against his family, religion and society until he reaches maturity and finds himself as an artist in which he accomplishes self-awareness and self-determination.

Conclusion

James Joyce, who is born in Dublin, is a talented and well-known writer. The places where Joyce has lived, have a great impact on his life as it can be noticed obviously in most of his works. His personality and his unique style of writing make him a distinguished writer of the Irish literary works. Most of his novels deal with the aspects of his personal life. This makes him as a realistic writer especially in his novels: *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*.

The best example to show the realistic side of Joyce's personality is through his novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which is mainly the story of his life and his opinion about the Catholic Church and his journey to discover his own identity as an artist man. So he makes some interferences between his character and the hero's character. At the same time, he uses certain techniques which are unique to his own style.

One of these techniques is the stream of consciousness which is very significant and important in Joyce's style. He succeeds to use it with another aim which is to search for the passing of thoughts through the mind. The aim of this technique is to avoid over instant, because the traditional one cannot deal with the social pressure of the new world. Joyce uses it to trace the development of the protagonist from boyhood to manhood. It is also used as a synonym to the internal monologue.

Notes

¹Dorrit Cohn, *Narration-Minds Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, N.j.: Princeton University, 1984), 16.

²Timothy Sprugin, *The English Novel* (New York: The Teaching Company Limited Partnership, 2006), 3.

³Ibid.,4.

⁴Fargoli Nicolas and Patrick Micheal, *A Critical Companion to James Joyce: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (London: Library of Congress, 1995),3.

⁵Eric Bulson, *The Cambridge Introduction to James Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 1.

⁶A. Nickolas Farnolli, and M. Patrick Gillespie, *Critical Companion to James Joyce: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts On File, 2006), 3.

⁷Bulson, 3.

⁸Ibid., 4.

⁹Farnolli and Gillespie, 135-138.

¹⁰William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 239.

¹¹Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 212.

¹²Sprugin, 40.

¹³Harold Bloom, *James Joyce* (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), 41.

¹⁴Matthew Mitchell, *James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Piscataway: Research & Education Association, 1996), 3.

¹⁵James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Wallingford: Grafton Books,1977), 7. All subsequent quotations reference to the novel are taken from this edition, with the abbreviation (*PAYM*) and the page number(s).

¹⁶Brian Finney, "Suture in Literary Analysis." Literature Interpretation Theory 2.2 (2008): 131-44. Web. 16 Apr. 2015, 136.

¹⁷Bothaina A.W. Hamid, "The Use of Stream of Consciousness in Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." University of Diyala: AL- Fatih Journal . No . 35, 2008, 20.

¹⁸Ibid., 24.

¹⁹Ibid., 25.

²⁰Arnold Kettle, *The Nineteenth Century Novel: Critical Essays and Documents* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981), 35.

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