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Stream of Consciousness Technique in the novels of James Joyce: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Aims: The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the use of the 'stream of consciousness' narrative in the novels of James Joyce.

Methodology and Approaches: James Joyce (2 February 1882 – 13 January 1941), an Irish novelist, literary critic, and poet, is acknowledged as a pioneer of the modern English novel. While he did not invent the stream of consciousness technique, he masterfully used it in his major works such as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922), *Exiles* (1918), and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The methodology involves analyzing how this technique, rooted in modern psychology, portrays the fragmented and spontaneous nature of human thought, shifting from logical sequences to associative ideas.

Outcome: The study highlights Joyce's ability to immerse readers into the minds of his characters by presenting their thoughts, memories, and emotions in a raw, unstructured flow. This narrative style prioritizes internal experiences over external actions, showcasing Joyce's innovative approach to modernist literature.

Conclusion and Suggestions: James Joyce's contribution to the stream of consciousness technique reshaped modern narrative forms. This paper underscores his mastery in this style and suggests further comparative studies with other modernist authors like Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner to explore the broader impact of this narrative innovation.

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James Joyce is popularly known for his innovative and complex literary creation. His novels are doubtlessly significant milestone for the readers. Stream of consciousness is a central narrative technique which is skillfully applied by James Joyce in his novels like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* and several others. Stream of consciousness is a narrative technique of writing that tries to express the natural flow of a character's extended thought process, by incorporating sensory impressions, incomplete ideas and unusual syntax. The term 'stream of consciousness' originated in psychology before literary critics started using it to describe a narrative technique that depicts how people think. Stream of consciousness is used primarily in fiction and poetry but later on, the term has been used to describe place and films that attempt to visually represent a character's thoughts.

Stream of consciousness narrative provokes readers to "listen in" on a character's thoughts. This technique involves the use of a language in an unconventional style. It is the use of a language to mimic the "streaming" nature of "consciousness" thought. Stream of consciousness can be written in the first person as well as the third person. All the writers of stream of consciousness of a use punctuation in unconventional ways by using italics, ellipses, dashes and line breaks to indicate causes and shift the character's stream of thought. Stream of consciousness also makes use of associative thought. Moreover, in this style of writing, writer's expression between ideas using loose connections that are based on a character's personal experiences and memories. The thoughts of the characters are communicated to the readers in response to sensory impressions - fragmented observations describing whatever the characters hear, smell, feel, see, imagine and so on.

The term 'stream of consciousness' was very first used by the psychologist William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). Robert Hurly believes that it was first used as a literary term, in the late 19th century. This term reveals the feelings, thoughts and actions of characters. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is an earnest example of the stream of consciousness technique. Here

James Joyce depicted the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which are in the mind of Stephen Dedalus. The narrative is not presented in a logical manner. As Stephen grows older and start questioning religion, politics and his own identity. The language becomes more philosophical and complex. The stream of consciousness technique enables Joyce to present a realistic and intimate portrayal of individual consciousness.

James Joyce started to write an autobiographical novel, during his teens. This novel is a thinly disguised biography of the author. The hero's progress is described against the rich background of his family, friends, religion and city. The family consists of only father, mother, brother and sister. The aim of the novelist is to show the development of Stephen as an artist. The family and friends of Stephen and the environment of Dublin had taken away very great space. James Joyce retained only those incidents which were directly connected with Stephen's growth as an artist. The personality of Stephen is founded on the author's personality. The novel traces his spiritual development which proceeds on the same line as the novelist's own progress. Author's childhood experiences are much similar to those of Stephen. Although all the incidents are not true to Jame's life but the spirit is same.

James Joyce himself wanted to become an artist but his fortune was not in his favor. The environment of Dublin and Ireland was not congenial to the progress of an artist. The atmosphere of his house was most uncongenial to his progress due to poverty and irresponsibility of his father. The attitude of his country (Ireland) towards men of letters and leaders was much despicable. The church wanted to make him a priest. But he was not appropriate to be a monk due to his own rigidity, order and lustful life. So he had to leave the land and go to somewhere else in order to fulfill his ambition of becoming a dedicated artist. James Joyce says, "Many writers have written about themselves. I wonder if any of them has been a candid as I have." This shows obviously that the artist whose portrait he wanted to draw was himself.

There is continuous struggle in the life of Stephen internally and externally both. From his childhood Stephen was very proud of himself. He

considered himself very useful and important person. He was unable to make harmony with other students of his class because of his own superiority complex. He also dreams of his own death. And when he dies the whole School will mourn him. This thought gives him much satisfaction. There was also conflict in his mind between his faith in the authority of his parents, aunt, senior students, teachers and his feelings of insecurity. He is shocked about someone stealing the altar wine. He is unjustly punished by Father Dolein with his Pandybat. He complaint to the Reactor about his unjust punishment. The Reactor is sympathetic and merciful, so he consoles Stephen to talk to the Father Dolein about it. This is the triumph of Justice. But when Stephen's father talked to the Rector (Father Conmee), the affair was treated like jokes. Moreover, the financial position of the family became worse. So Stephen was withdrawn from expensive Dongowes School and he was sent to Belvederer College which was less expensive. In his new college he was accused by his teacher. Due to his romantic vision he went to a prostitute in early age of sixteen years. After sometimes he realized that he was sinning way. There was conflict in his mind between the demands of the flesh and demands of religion. He could not pray because he felt that his sin was not pardonable by the Lord.

After listening the sermons of Father Arnall, his college teacher, his attitude has been totally changed. He takes a long walk alone and goes to a distant Chapel where he makes a full confession before a priest. The priest preached him that sin kills the body and the soul both. When the devil tried to tempt him again he must pray to God. The confession made him feel much better. Now he started a new holy and happy life. Now Stephen becomes saintly person. He became devoted to God. He always carried a rosary in his pocket and continually uttered the name of God. He became highly spiritual. The director told Stephen that God had chosen him to become a priest of the church. Stephen realized that priesthood would destroy his freedom as an individual. He was sure that "he was this time to learn his own wisdom apart from others". After much consideration he gave up the idea of becoming a priest and welcome his father's advice to go to the university for higher education. Stephen feels that an artist can have only one

loyalty - that to art. He obtained many ideas about truth beauty and art from Aristotle and Agunias. At last he decided that he must break the bonds of family, nation and church in order to be able to pursue his vocation of an artist in peace and freedom. Stephen says- "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul, the uncreated conscience of my race..... Old father, old artificer, stand me new and even in good stead."

Here Stephen's expressed his gradual change in a thought, behaviour, decision and lifestyle and he has become a perfect man of art. The relations are landmarks in Stephen's spiritual progress. Just as Dedalus was imprisoned in the labyrinth, Stephen was imprisoned by his family, nation and church. Like Dedalus he must fly away from the prison in order to achieve his chosen vocation of an artist.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man traces the growth of the hero, Stephen Dedalus from infancy to a complete creature, when he found himself as an artist. Stephen is a fictional counterpart of James Joyce himself. He depicted his recollections of early childhood and tells us how he got free from the bond of family, society, religion and country. He decided himself to dedicate completely to an art. Joyce's use of stream of consciousness makes *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* a story of the development of Stephen's mind. The sensations that he realizes are all jumbled together with a child's lack of attention cause and effect. Stephen's mind is more mature and he is coherently aware of his surroundings. He still has blind faith in the church. Stephen's development gives us insight into the progress of a literary genius. He transformed himself from a lustful person to a fanatical model of religious devotion and obedience. Stephen ultimately decides to embrace life and celebrate humanity after seeing a young girl wading at a beach. He considers that his community will always be a part of him. Interacts with his family and his friends, Stephen departs from the homeland in search of himself. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce pictures the life of Stephen from childhood through adolescence. Day by day Stephen achieves maturity through various family conflicts and periods of study at Jesuits schools. He begins to rebel against his own family, religion and nation. Finally, in

order to establish himself as an artist he seeks self - imposed exile in Paris. Slowly and gradually Stephen shows his own mental, physical, spiritual and intellectual development. Joyce used elaborated patterns of symbols which echo and re-echo through the text by using the stream of consciousness. Today, writers who use stream of consciousness may feel that his technique is more appropriate or "true to life" than more conventional narrative styles which force thoughts and ideas into logical and easily digestible sentences.

James Joyce's *Ulysses* is a novel known for its innovative style and complex structure. The novel revolves around three major characters namely- Leonard Bloom, Molly Bloom, and Stephan Dedalus. The novel *Ulysses* is characterized by the narrative technique of stream of consciousness which leads readers to delve deep into character's mind and experience, thoughts and perceptions. By using the stream of consciousness for Leonard Bloom's character, the novelist connects the readers with his inner thoughts and experiences. It expresses Bloom's multifaceted personality, yearnings and insecurities. The stream of consciousness technique fosters empathy in Bloom's journey. Leonard's wife, Molly Bloom also receives notable treatment in the *Ulysses* throughout the stream of consciousness technique. Molly's soliloquy is introspective and personal. Her narrative dwells upon her unabashed sexuality and challenges societal norms, giving voice to a female perspective. By using a stream of consciousness, Joyce highlights Molly's agency and her journey towards self-awareness.

Stephen Dedalus is a young artist and intellectual. Joyce present Stephen's stream of consciousness in a more philosophical and introspective manner. His thoughts delve into existential questions, his past troubles, artistic musings and his strained relationship with his family as well as his search for meaning in life. Through Stephen's stream of consciousness, readers gain insights into his identity struggles, quest for artistic self-expression and inner- conflicts. In the novel *Ulysses* James Joyce skillfully employs a stream of consciousness to provide readers with an intimate experience, thoughts, emotions and feelings of the characters like Leonard Bloom, Molly Bloom, and Stephan Dedalus.

Thus, stream of consciousness technique aims to give readers the impression of being inside the mind and the soul of the character. We can understand the mental state, motivation and complexities of the character. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which is one of the greatest modern novels, Joyce arranged the protagonist's life Stephen Dedalus from boyhood to young manhood. There is total flow of the character's consciousness, rather than limit themselves to rational thoughts. In another novel *Ulysses* James Joyce describes the wandering appointments and encounters of the middle aged Dubliner Leopold Bloom on one day of his life 16 June, 1904. Bloom is thinking and reflecting here on his younger self. "He is a young Leopold, as in a retrospective arrangement, a mirror within a mirror (hey, Presto!) he beholdeth himself." The theme of stream of consciousness is much suitable and appropriate to describe the mental status of the people in the present-scenario. This is similar to Shakespeare's use of dramatic monologue; James Joyce is unsurpassed for description of mental state of his protagonist by using the stream of consciousness technique.

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