

SOME ASPECTS OF THE TREATMENT OF SPACE AND TIME  
IN JAMES JOYCE'S FICTION

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
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In Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by  
Dennis Kozier  
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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
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## Abstract

The study to follow examines some aspects of the treatment of space and time in James Joyce's fiction. The first chapter illustrates that space and time are used to achieve realistic particularization in Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. The second chapter examines the alteration in technique which occurred during the writing of Ulysses. Chapter three examines the function of space and time in Ulysses in detail and demonstrates that the early chapters of Ulysses reveal a very traditional use of space and time but the later chapters reveal a decrease in the emphasis upon the use of space and time to achieve particularization. The final chapter briefly examines the role of space and time in Finnegans Wake.

to

Eleanor and little Christopher

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## Introduction

The study to follow will examine some aspects of space and time in James Joyce's fiction. The first chapter will discuss Joyce's use of space and time for the purpose of achieving realism in his early fiction. The first chapter will demonstrate that Joyce's use of space and time in his early fiction corresponds with the function of space and time in the work of the early English novelists. It will be shown that in Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, space and time are used to achieve realistic particularization, to locate the events of the narrative in a particularized space and time setting.

The second chapter will examine the alteration in technique which occurred during the writing of Ulysses as documented by Walton Litz. The contemporaneity of Joyce's change in method with the popularization of Einstein's Theory of Relativity will be noted, and several implications of Einstein's theory which might have affected Joyce's treatment of space and time will be discussed.

Chapter three will examine the function of space and time in Ulysses in detail. It will demonstrate that the early chapters reveal a very traditional use of space and time, corresponding with the use of space and time in Joyce's earlier work. The chapter will then examine the decrease in the importance of the function of space and time as Ulysses developed and will demonstrate that in the later chapters of Ulysses,

written after the popularization of Einstein's theory, Joyce appears to have become less and less concerned with the use of space and time to achieve realistic particularization, and thus became free of the limitations of the traditional use of space and time to achieve realistic particularization.

The fourth chapter will examine the evidence of an Einsteinian influence upon Joyce in Finnegans Wake as documented in Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, and will then consider some aspects of the relativistic treatment of space and time in Finnegans Wake.



## Chapter I

The present study will examine some aspects of Joyce's use of space and time in his novels. There has been a good deal of confusion over whether James Joyce should be described as a realist or a symbolist.<sup>1</sup> In his early work Joyce displayed a passion for naturalistic detail, yet some critics claim that his aim was to transcend everyday reality through the technique of the epiphany.<sup>2</sup> The stream of consciousness technique in Ulysses has received much attention, but the detailed study of the external reality of the novel has been neglected. Joyce's last novel, Finnegans Wake, defies description as a realistic novel. It is to be hoped that this study will help to shed some light on the difficult and, at times, paradoxical problem of evaluating the realism of Joyce's fiction.

A study of Joyce's use of space and time in his novels may provide a greater understanding of the realism of Joyce's fiction. The creation of realism in any novel involves a conception of space and time. Man experiences the world around him in three dimensions of physical space, and he has a sense of the past, present and future. It is natural that a novelist should involve space and time in his attempt to portray reality in his novel. Thus at the base of the realism of a novel is a spatial-temporal orientation to reality, one which the reader generally accepts as factual.

This is not to say that an awareness of space and time constitutes a complete awareness of reality. Man's experience encompasses much more than perceptions of space and time; for example, man experiences emotions and feelings. But the most basic orientation to reality involves an awareness of position in space and time. This orientation to physical reality, involving the awareness of space and time, will be dealt with in detail in the following pages.

To establish some background on the role of space and time in creating realism in the novel, it is useful to examine the early eighteenth-century era in English literature and the emergence of realism in the work of those who first created the novel. Ian Watt states that the emergence of realism in early eighteenth-century prose writing was a manifestation of the

vast transformation of Western civilization since the Renaissance which has replaced the unified world picture of the Middle Ages with another very different one - one which presents us, essentially, with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places.<sup>3</sup>

To develop a perspective for understanding this great change in man's view of reality Ian Watt examines the development of modern philosophical realism, which had its origins in Descartes and Locke.<sup>4</sup> Medieval philosophers had held to the view that it was "universals, classes or abstractions, and not the particular, concrete objects of sense perception, which were the true 'realities'."<sup>5</sup> Descartes upset medieval

philosophy by asserting the primacy of individual experience. He did this by adopting as his basic premise, "I think, therefore I am," (cogito, ergo sum). The pursuit of truth became an individual matter, independent of the pattern of past thought. This pursuit was further assisted when Descartes applied his method to produce the Cartesian co-ordinate system. By marking off an area of observation in dimensional units Descartes made it conceptually possible for man to observe the world systematically as an individual observer.

Following in the footsteps of Descartes, John Locke advocated empiricism as the basis of man's knowledge. He stated that at birth the mind of a man is like a blank sheet of paper, which acquires ideas through sensations; all knowledge was derived from experience. He described this concept in his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" which became the most widely read philosophical book of its generation. Locke thought that since ideas became general by separating from them the circumstances of space and time, so they became particular only when both these circumstances were specified.<sup>6</sup> Locke felt that the individuality of an object (or person) could be defined in terms of its existence at a particular point in space and time. An experience could only become an individual experience if set in a background of particularized space and time. Thus Locke had evolved the important concept of defining the individuality of existence through the specifying of space and time. In his discussion Ian Watt desig-

nates this new use of space and time to define the individuality of existence as the "realistic particularization of space and time."<sup>7</sup>

Descartes' faith in individual observation and John Locke's concern with particularization of space and time set the stage for a scientific study of motion, for any description of a moving object must involve space and time. Motion came to be considered as a series of particular positions through a duration of time. Thus a method was produced whereby man could observe the events of the world individually, systematically and logically. The success of individual observation in the sciences further reinforced the acceptance of the new view of reality described by Watt in the quotation above on page two. Isaac Newton had formulated his Laws of Motion as statements of what he had observed. Newton had stated the following principle:

Mechanical laws which are valid in one place are equally valid in any other place which moves uniformly relative to the first.<sup>8</sup>

This was of the greatest significance because it meant that all bodies moving at constant speed in the universe were subject to the same universal laws. A man could take a yardstick and a clock and measure any position or time in the universe in relation to his own position on the earth.

Newton wondered whether a point of observation which was unmoving might exist in the universe, in relation to which All motion in the universe might be measured. Before Newton,

Descartes had argued "that the mere separation of bodies by distance proved the existence of a medium between them."<sup>9</sup> Newton felt that space itself might serve as a fixed frame of reference, compared with which all motion could be related, and that the same universal pace of time existed throughout the universe. Newton concluded that all events in the universe occurred within a single, uniform, sequential, Absolute frame of reference. In doing this Newton extended the validity of individual perception to any point in the universe. As further scientific work supported Newton's conclusion, Newton's conception of the physical universe continued to be accepted.

It is difficult to be certain whether the new philosophy of realism and the new scientific method were a contributing cause of realism in the novel. Ian Watt suggests that there was likely some influence through Locke.<sup>10</sup> Newton's discoveries also likely had some influence because they illustrated the discovery of truth which could result from an individualist orientation to reality. In any event the same movement towards particularization of space and time which characterized philosophical realism and the new scientific method was also to be found in the work of the early novelists.

The novel became the form of literature which most reflected the individualist philosophical orientation of Descartes and Locke.<sup>11</sup> The early novelists became concerned with the realistic presentation of a concrete physical reality, achieved through the detailed particularization of space

and time. Under the influence of the new individualized view of reality the early novelists rejected formal classical conventions and traditional plots. Ian Watt states:

Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend or previous literature. In this they differ from Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, for instance, who, like the writers of Greece and Rome, habitually used traditional plots.<sup>12</sup>

Instead Defoe, Richardson and Fielding invented their own plots, often based in part on a contemporary incident.<sup>13</sup>

The early novelists moved toward realism, toward the individualization of characters and the detailed presentation of their environment.

The detailed presentation of environment was accomplished through what Ian Watt has called the realistic particularization of space and time. Space became particularized in the work of Defoe:

Defoe would seem to be the first of our writers who visualized the whole of his narrative as though it occurred in an exact physical environment.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Richardson, one example of how space became particularized in his novels is through the considerable attention paid to interiors:

Pamela's residences in Lincolnshire and Bedfordshire are real enough prisons; we are given a highly detailed description of Grandison Hall;... the Harlowe mansion becomes a terrifyingly real physical and moral environment.<sup>15</sup>

Fielding also particularized space:

Many of the place names on Tom Jones's route to London are given by name, and the exact location of the others is implied by various other kinds of evidence.<sup>16</sup>

Thus the particularization of space played a central role in the realistic presentation of environment in the work of the early novelists.

The particularization of time was perhaps even more central to the development of the novel. Critics such as E.M. Forster and Northrop Frye have seen the new function of time as a defining characteristic of the novel.<sup>17</sup> The classical world had viewed reality as "subsisting in timeless universals."<sup>18</sup> In the medieval conception of history, the wheel of fortune turned out the same eternally applicable exempla.<sup>19</sup> However, in the work of the early novelists, "characters are felt by the reader to be rooted in the temporal dimension."<sup>20</sup> The particularization of time is noticeable in Defoe:

At his best, he convinces us completely that his narrative is occurring at a particular place and at a particular time, and our memory of his novels consists largely of these vividly realized moments in the lives of his characters.<sup>21</sup>

Richardson achieved the particularization of time more completely:

He was very careful to locate all his events of his narrative in an unprecedentedly detailed time-scene: the superscription of each letter gives us the day of the week, and often the time of the day; and this in turn acts as an objective framework for the even greater temporal detail of the letters themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Fielding also adopted a technique for the particularization of time:

Fielding seems to have used an almanac:... with slight exceptions, nearly all the events of his

novel are chronologically consistent, not only in relation to each other, and to the time that each stage of the journey of the various characters from the West Country to London would actually have taken, but also in relation to such external considerations as the proper phases of the moon and the time-table of the Jacobite rebellion in 1745, the supposed year of the action.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore it would appear that the particularization of time played a central role in the achieving of realism in the novel.

From the above discussion it would seem that the use of a realistic method in a novel must involve the use of space and time for the purpose of achieving particularization within external reality. The foregoing discussion has shown that the particularization of space and time played a significant role in the development of realism in the English novel in the early eighteenth century. This suggests that it may be possible to consider the realism of a novel in terms of the use of space and time for the purpose stated above. The discussion above would therefore seem to suggest the possible merit of a detailed examination of the function of space and time in James Joyce's fiction.

An examination of the stories of Dubliners, Joyce's first fictional work, reveals that Joyce did use space and time to achieve particularization within external reality. To a surprising extent, Joyce is concerned with the particularization of space and time. In the first story of Dubliners, "The Sisters," casual references throughout the story keep the



reader conscious of time. We are told that it is vacation time, and each evening the boy passes the priest's window. He arrives home and at supper is told of the priest's death. The next day after breakfast the boy goes to the house and reads the message on the crepe bouquet tied to the door-knocker. The approximate time of each event has been carefully noted.

Details of the physical setting are also carefully specified. The house of the priest is described in detail:

It was an unassuming shop, registered under the vague name of "Drapery." The drapery consisted mainly of children's bootees and umbrellas; and on ordinary days a notice used to hang in the window saying: "Umbrellas Re-covered." No notice was visible now for the shutters were up.<sup>24</sup>

In the evening when the boy's aunt takes him to view the body, even small details such as the light in the room are carefully described:

The room through the lace end of the blind was suffused with dusky golden light amid which the candles looked like pale thin flames. He had been confined.<sup>25</sup>

These passages clearly display Joyce's intention of precisely capturing the physical reality of the setting in space and time. In fact, in "The Sisters," Joyce's focus upon the physical setting in space and time contributes substantially to the precision of realistic detail which makes the story effective. That this focus upon the physical reality of the story was a primary concern can be seen by comparing the two versions of this first story of Dubliners.

"The Sisters" was originally published as "Our Weekly Story" in the Irish Homestead on August 13, 1904, and Hugh Kenner compares that first version with the version later published in Dubliners.<sup>26</sup> The earlier version describes the visit to the corpse thus:

Nannie gave the lead and we three knelt down at the foot of the bed. There was no sound in the room for some minutes except the sound of Nannie's muttering, for she prayed noisily. The fancy came to me that the old priest was smiling as he lay there in his coffin.<sup>27</sup>

The later version reads:

Nannie gave the lead and we three knelt down at the foot of the bed. I pretended to pray but I could not gather my thoughts because the old woman's mutterings distracted me. I noticed how the heels of her cloth boots were trodden down all to one side. The fancy came to me that the old priest was smiling as he lay there in his coffin.<sup>28</sup>

The revision displays less narrative flow but a more intense picture of the shabbily-dressed woman. Through an intense focus on the physical reality of the story, Joyce creates in the reader the feeling of confinement, stagnation and paralysis, which is his goal throughout Dubliners. The story is effective in creating a feeling of moral decay because Joyce has made use of realistic details in the physical setting of the story which provide an illustration of that decay.

Joyce's attention to the particularization of space and time is especially effective in creating an environment of moral decay in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." The physical setting, the dark, dismal committee room, is carefully de-

scribed:

The old man left the hearth, and after stumbling about the room returned with two candlesticks which he thrust one after the other into the fire and carried to the table. A denuded room came into view and the fire lost all its cheerful colour. The walls of the room were bare except for a copy of an election address. In the middle of the room was a small table on which papers were heaped.<sup>29</sup>

This description of the physical setting helps to create an atmosphere of stagnation and desolation. The time is also exactly specified:

Mr. O'Connor had been engaged by Tierney's agent to canvass one part of the ward but, as the weather was inclement and his boots let in the wet, he spent a great part of the day sitting by the fire in the Committee Room in Wicklow Street with Jack, the old caretaker. They had been sitting thus since the short day had grown dark. It was the sixth of October, dismal and cold out of doors.

Mr. O'Connor tore a strip off the card and, lighting it, lit his cigarette. As he did so, the flame lit up a leaf of dark glossy ivy in the lapel of his coat.<sup>30</sup>

The date has already been implied in the title, is stated, and is again implied in the reference to the ivy worn by the man, commemorating the death of Parnell. The time references relate the setting of the story to the collapse of the Irish independence movement as a result of the moral improprieties of Parnell and thus suggest an atmosphere of political and moral decay. The ending of the story brings a final realization of the personal isolation, constriction and the self-seeking of these representatives of Dublin's public life. This is achieved because Joyce has so effectively captured the evidence of desolation, constriction and stagnation in

his physical description of the setting in space and time. The examples discussed above lead to the conclusion that Joyce was concerned with the use of space and time to achieve particularization of external reality.

Joyce's realistic method may have been influenced by the nineteenth-century French realist, Gustave Flaubert.<sup>31</sup> Frank Budgen has stated that "of all the great nineteenth century masters of fiction, Joyce held Flaubert in highest esteem,"<sup>32</sup> and "knew by heart whole pages of Flaubert."<sup>33</sup> Richard Cross states that Joyce had "read every line of his (Flaubert's) works."<sup>34</sup> In Flaubert's work realism became impartial and objective,<sup>35</sup> and everyday occurrences were accurately set in a definite period of contemporary history.<sup>36</sup> Thus Flaubert made use of a particularized place and time setting to establish realism in his novels.

Flaubert was a man who worked extremely consciously and possessed a critical comprehension of his art.<sup>37</sup> His realism was characterized by "a self-forgetful absorption in the subjects of reality which transformed them and permitted them to develop to mature expression."<sup>38</sup> Flaubert displayed a rigorous, almost scientific objectivity in his work. He relied on exact physical realism, achieved through the precise particularization of space and time and conveyed effectively in exact language:

His opinion of his characters and events remains unspoken; and when the characters express themselves it is never in such a manner that the writer

identifies himself with it. We hear the writer speak; but he expresses no opinion and makes no comment. His role is limited to selecting the events and translating them into language; and this is done in the conviction that every event, if one is able to express it purely and completely, interprets itself and the persons involved in it far better than any opinion or judgement appended to it could do.<sup>39</sup>

Flaubert's work displayed a faith in the power of realism which was admired and imitated by Joyce. In Joyce's work, as in Flaubert's, space and time bear the burden of creating a physical reality capable of revealing its own significance.

Like Flaubert, James Joyce believed that the writer's comment or opinion should be kept out of his work, that the most successful literary artist "presents his image in immediate relation to others."<sup>40</sup> Joyce explained this in detail in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:

The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic, like that of material creation, is accomplished. 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 fingernails.<sup>41</sup>

Also Joyce's art was written with a definite purpose. Joyce had stated to his brother Stanislaus:

I am trying... to give people some kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own.<sup>42</sup> for their mental, moral, and spiritual uplift.

In this statement Joyce emphasizes that his goal is to give

"a permanent artistic life of its own" to everyday reality. Thus Joyce did not intend to transcend reality. His purpose was to reveal that reality artistically.

Joyce used the term 'epiphany' to describe his purpose and explained the term in the manuscript Stephen Hero:

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.<sup>43</sup>

A great deal of confusion has arisen over the use of the term 'epiphany', because it sometimes has been interpreted as the achievement of some sort of transcendence of reality, as something above or beyond the real experience which is described in the story. Also, the epiphany has been described as Joyce's 'method' and as his 'technique' in Dubliners. This confusion can be somewhat resolved if it is recognized that Joyce's purpose was to reveal the significance of reality, but his method was realistic. The epiphany was an end, not a means to an end; it was a goal, not a technique.

Joyce explains the moment of epiphany clearly in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man as Stephen discusses Aquinas's idea of 'claritas' with Lynch:

- The connotation of the word, Stephen said, is rather vague. Aquinas uses a term which seems to be inexact. It baffled me for a long time. It would lead you to believe that he had in mind symbolism or idealism, the supreme quality of beauty being a light from some other world, the idea of which it is but the symbol. I thought he might mean that 'claritas' is the artistic dis-