

تيار الوعي كظاهرة جديدة
في رواية القرن العشرين: رواية يوليسيس لجيمس جويس كدراسة حالة

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Stream of Consciousness as a New Phenomenon in the Twentieth-Century Novel: James Joyce's Ulysses as a Case Study

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المخلص

تبحث هذه الورقة تيار الوعي كتقنية سردية في رواية القرن العشرين، متتبعة جذوره الفلسفية عند ويليام جيمس وهنري برغسون، وظهوره كأسلوب أدبي. وتجادل بأن *عوليس* (1922) لجيمس جويس لا يستخدم تيار الوعي كأداة أسلوبية فحسب، بل يحوله إلى إطار أوسع للمعرفة والفهم، وبذلك يغير أنطولوجيا سرد الرواية. ومن خلال قراءات مقاربة لحلقات "بروتئوس" و"لاستريغونيانز" و"بينيلوبي"، تُبين الورقة كيف تبني هذه التقنية الذاتية والزمن والوعي، وكيف تختبر قابلية القراءة والتمثيل.

Abstract

This paper examines stream of consciousness as a narrative technique of the twentieth-century novel, tracing its philosophical roots in William James and Henri Bergson and its emergence as a literary method. It argues that James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) does not merely use stream of consciousness as a stylistic device but transforms it into a broader framework for knowledge and understanding, thereby changing the ontology of narrating fiction. Through close readings of 'Proteus,' 'Lestrygonians,' and 'Penelope,' the paper shows how the technique constructs subjectivity, time, and consciousness, and how it tests both readability and representation.

1.Introduction: The Novel and the Problem of Interiority

The nineteenth-century novel was very realistic in its narration. It depicted social life, historical changes and morals in the best way, but still the novelists faced problems and had their own limits. The famous novelists of the nineteenth century were Dickens, Eliot, Tolstoy, and Flaubert. They all had an almost similar way of writing, focusing more on action, society and narrator control rather than the character's inner thoughts. The narrator's voice serves as a mediator between the reader and the character; the narrator turns messy thoughts into an organized story (Schwarz 3).

As the nineteenth century wraps up and a new century begins holding a shift opposing traditional narrations, a group of writers and thinkers started questioning the validity of traditional narrations. These writers believed that if it is the work of literature to represent real life of a character and society, then how is it possible to exclude the inner thoughts of a character. The popularity of stream of consciousness in the twentieth century is seen as a great change regarding time, identity, and society (Humphrey 2-3).

In *Ulysses*, James Joyce employs the strongest, most systematic and complicated use of stream of consciousness. The entire book's publication was in 1922. The whole story happens in Dublin on a sunny day. The story is told in 18 different episodes. The character spends one single day in Dublin. The use of this technique by Joyce led to a shift in how we write and see thought. It is worth mentioning that the reader in *Ulysses* can see what happens inside the mind of each character. Readers know what Bloom, Stephen and Molly think. Furthermore, readers can see characters' dreams, memories and even feelings. Joyce, based on his experience, bravely uses stream of consciousness to organize the thoughts of characters (Kenner 33-35).





This study dives deep into the psychological and philosophical background which led stream of consciousness ultimately to be seen as a literary technique, and extra focus will be put on the contributions of William James and Henri Bergson. There is a brief history in section three describing the use of this technique in literature before Joyce, taking into account big names like Edouard Dujardin, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf. This study discusses the broad use of stream of consciousness in Ulysses and for that it examines three important episodes. This study takes into consideration the implications of this technique both formally and epistemologically. Finally, this study examines the continuing impact of Joyce's Ulysses on twentieth-century literature.

2.Philosophical and Psychological Foundations

2.1 William James and the Metaphor of the Stream

The psychologist William James used the term "stream of consciousness" in his famous book *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890. Based on this one can argue that this term has a psychological root, not a literary criticism. In his book James dedicates an entire chapter to this topic and called it 'The Stream of Thought.' Before James, psychologists who were familiar with psychology suggested that our thoughts are separate or disconnected links in a chain. James refutes this view and he believes our consciousness "does not appear to itself chopped up in bits"; he continues to claim our thought is like a river or a stream flows, and no boundaries ever exist between one thought and the next thought (James 239).

James in his book lists several characteristics of this stream. First, every thought is entirely personal. It means every single thought belongs to a specific person. Second, it never stays the same; it keeps changing: this means thoughts do not happen exactly the same way the second time. Third, it is unbreakable: even factors like sleep or daydreaming do not stop our thoughts. Fourth, consciousness always has a purpose; it aims to deal with things around it rather than itself. Fifth, choice is a big part of consciousness: it always selects and refuses like a filter, therefore preferring some experience and dismissing others (James 243-46).

The term stream or river changed everything in literature; in fact, it had a huge impact on narrative technique in literature. Paying attention to perfect grammar and logical sentences does not match with what we actually think. Following that pattern of writing may create a false picture of the human brain. James suggests that to sound more realistic writers should show that the human mind is a mess; it jumps from a current feeling to a sudden memory or an emotion, it is a mixture of all of them (Humphrey 3).

2.2 Henri Bergson and the Philosophy of Duration

The philosopher Henri Bergson, holder of a philosophical analysis of time and experience, his philosophical analysis of time goes well with James's psychological account, changed the way people saw time. Bergson in his works such as *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *Matter and Memory* (1896) advances his analysis of time. To Bergson there is a real distinction between time measured by seconds and minutes, which is known as 'clock time,' with the actual time which we feel; he calls it "duration" (*duree*). He suggests that time is not a straight line but instead it is a flow where past memories and future hopes all mix in the present (Bergson, *Time* 100-02).

Reading Bergson's philosophy can help sharpen our understanding of stream of consciousness narrative and the way we view it. Therefore, actual time or duration serves as a real representation of inner life or thought because it is characterized by disorder, different from clock time in which there is no chronological narration. Bergson's analysis suggests that literature needs to have some layers of time to collide; it is best to show multiple times occurring at once. One single incident might evoke a past memory and build a future dream (Bergson, *Matter* 67). Joyce is a mastermind of this technique in *Ulysses*. In *Ulysses* this Bergsonian understanding of time is vividly seen and realized. In *Ulysses* Bloom lives in present time but frequently his mind is occupied with old memories and future concerns (Schwarz 97).

3. Stream of Consciousness Before Joyce

It is true that *Ulysses* by Joyce is the best example of stream of consciousness, but Joyce is not the one who created it. There were great authors and writers before Joyce who had experience with this technique. To find and understand Joyce's work better and how amazingly he used this technique we should look at his predecessors (Humphrey 5).

Edouard Dujardin is a French writer. He is the one who is honored for his use of interior monologue in his novella *Les Lauriers sont coupes*. It is one simple form of stream of consciousness. On multiple occasions Joyce admits Dujardin had an influence on him. Dujardin later on released his description of the technique *Le Monologue interieur* (1931). Compared to Joyce, it is notable that simplicity occupies Dujardin's use of his interior monologue. In Joyce's use of stream of consciousness, grammar correction is not as important as order. In Joyce's technique there is a deep meaning and a cultural reference which makes his style so familiar. Prior to the publication of *Ulysses*, an English author called Dorothy Richardson wrote a series of multi-volume novels called *Pilgrimage*, as it was a great contribution to English literature at that time. Richardson's





series began with *Pointed Roofs* in 1915. The publication of *Pointed Roofs* was vital for experiencing stream of consciousness and diving deep into inside a character's mind before *Ulysses*. In her work multi-volume novel Dorothy Richardson spends years following the inner world of her major character Miriam Henderson; Richardson uses a different technique to show her character's inner thoughts. Even though this technique was clearly designed for female rhythms and interests, and for this unique technique she was praised by Virginia Woolf, who herself worked closely in similar writing methods (Woolf, "Romance" 189). It is worth mentioning that Woolf came from the same school of modernist pursuit and this is noticeable in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Obviously, Woolf's use of stream of consciousness is more poetic, deeply interested in mood, emotions and self-impression, and she seeks to show the pretty side of the brain. Unlike Woolf, Joyce leans towards writing comedy, mess and dirty body habits.

The only difference that sets Joyce apart from writers before him is that Joyce's project was so big and highly organized. In fact, writers like Dujardin, Richardson, and Woolf all experienced the use of stream of consciousness but their experience remained mostly within traditional boundaries. Whereas in *Ulysses* Joyce builds his sections completely on unique rules — each episode has a different style of writing, each episode had a different layout, different storyline approach, therefore we constantly see pressure put on stream of consciousness itself as well as shift and twist (Kenner 91).

4.Stream of Consciousness in Ulysses: Close Readings

4.1 The 'Proteus' Episode: Stephen Dedalus and the Phenomenology of Perception

Joyce names his third chapter in *Ulysses* 'Proteus'. This chapter is the most difficult chapter in *Ulysses* both philosophically and technically in the use of stream of consciousness. As the chapter opens, describing Stephen Dedalus walking on the beach alone. Joyce in his narration dives deep into Dedalus's mind with little description of the outside world. These opening lines of this chapter are recognized as the most famous and celebrated lines in modern literature.

Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot. Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs (Joyce 37).

The above sentences not only give readers a description of Dedalus's mind but show his mind in work. He takes his first phrase which tells us how we should see the things around us, 'Ineluctable modality of the



visible,' from great thinkers like Aristotle and Berkeley. He employs this phrase to secure his insights. As Stephen tries to explain his perception using his abstract philosophical language, he gets disrupted by concrete objects on the beach like seaspawn, seawrack, a rusty boot. This shows that the mind is constantly on the move between abstraction and sensation and this exactly fits with what James and Bergson described about the flow of thought (James 243).

For Joyce it was important that his prose not only represent its content but rather imitate the structure of consciousness. In terms of sentence structure, the text is damaged, ambiguous, and short; and when it comes to grammar, there is a constant shift between full sentences, broken, and direct sensory imagery. No use of quotation marks. It is obvious that Joyce intentionally abandoned using them in *Ulysses*; Joyce carefully eliminates these traditional signals that separate a character's thoughts from the real world. This removal helps clean boundaries between how Stephen thinks and what the narrator notices. Here Joyce omits any space to let readers feel Dedalus's actual senses. This removal makes readers directly experience Dedalus's feelings exactly how he lives them (Schwarz 55).

4.2 The 'Lestrygonians' Episode: Leopold Bloom and the Embodied Mind
In the previous chapter 'Proteus' Joyce depicts Dedalus's deep and smart inner world. In this chapter Joyce wisely introduces a new character Leopold Bloom who walks the streets of central Dublin. Here Joyce represents to his readers a different mind. He carefully shows a practical mind of Bloom, an associative mind which brilliantly creates links between ideas and holds kindness to others, and Bloom's mind concentrates on concerns of the body such as hunger and worry (Kenner 76).

In fact Joyce in 'Lestrygonians' portrays the uniqueness of Bloom's stream of consciousness for its scale and rapid association. Amazingly just walking by a poster of a famous evangelist preacher named John Alexander Dowie, his mind quickly creates a network of associations with that poster such as United States of America, evangelism and religious people whom he knows. His mind is busy associating all of this when suddenly disrupted by a smell coming from the river Liffey and by passing a friend. Just after short sentences Bloom's mind starts jumping between multiple topics; he starts by thinking about food, and then he thinks about his wife Molly, whether she is cheating on him or not, and then he moves into digestion and how it works, and he asks if eating fish is good for the brain or not. Bloom's mind does not follow a logical



sequence; instead it is triggered by what he sees, by emotional association and old pressured memories (James 246; Joyce 151-54).

This associative quality is central to Joyce's conception of Bloom as a character. Where Stephen's mind tends to move through philosophical abstraction toward aesthetic insight, Bloom's mind inhabits the sensory world more immediately and comfortably — yet it is no less rich and no less interior. The Jamesian insight that consciousness is selective is evident in the way Bloom's stream returns again and again to the fact of Molly's impending afternoon assignation with Blazes Boylan, circling it obsessively without ever quite confronting it directly, registering it through evasion, displacement, and sudden changes of subject (Kenner 78).

4.3 The 'Penelope' Episode: Molly Bloom and the Dissolution of Syntax

The last episode is called 'Penelope'; Joyce writes the most fundamental writing experiment in *Ulysses*. The final episode of *Ulysses*. The episode opens in a room where Bloom's wife Molly rests in bed. Molly's stream of consciousness is presented in eight long lines without any punctuation. The last line is too long, and it probably extends into thousands of words in which her inner world, feelings, memories, and dreams all mix up; using this technique Joyce eliminates conventional grammar or any logical walls to imitate raw human thoughts (Joyce 723-82).

The lack of punctuation in this episode carries an implication that it is not just a characteristic of writing but in fact it is a proof of Molly's stream of consciousness and it is a true reality of boundaries of traditional language. In writing, punctuation is a system of rules which works to enforce a well-organized hierarchy on language; this system defines limits between sentences, clauses, texts and paragraphs, and it builds connection between subordination and coordination. By ignoring punctuation, Joyce intends to build a unique form of consciousness in which these strict lines do not exist. According to this form, thoughts do not follow one another in lines; instead they flood together, mix and join and this echoes exactly the concept of time "duration" of Henri Bergson (Bergson, *Time* 104; Schwarz 201).

Molly's thoughts are important because they openly represent a true picture of women's body, sexual desires and deep memories. Early readers of *Ulysses* were shocked by what they were presented in *Ulysses* and called it scandalous; in contrast modern readers or critics celebrate this as a big achievement in representing women's interiority. Molly finalizes her statements by repeating the word 'yes'; her 'yes' does not end the story beautifully but honors human consciousness and its connection

to the world. It also suggests that existing means 'yes' to the universe and happily accepting your individual experience (Kenner 148).

5. Formal and Epistemological Implications

Using the technique of stream of consciousness by Joyce brings to awareness the important relationship between form and content, between narrative and knowledge. There are three important implications that required close attention.

First, this style of writing by Joyce poses a challenge to the superiority of the old narration style, 'third-person omniscient narrator'. In omniscient third-person narrator which was a common nineteenth-century type of narration, the narrator has full knowledge about the character, knows what a character does, thinks, feels and what he expresses in words, then the narrator puts this information into a clear, understandable and ordered narrative (Humphrey 7). Joyce's technique rips this power into pieces and instead presents the inside world of the character directly, with no need for any chronological facilitation. Providing that deep detail with messiness is only in the capacity of this technique and no omniscient technique can ever do. This technique leads to a conclusion that every thought is fairly treated; boring, crazy, shocking, all get the same amount of care as important philosophical ideas as well as high standard moral values.

Second, this form of narration in *Ulysses* was born to reverse the traditional old form of narration between story and discourse, between what to narrate and how to narrate. Old narrative used discourse to help its story; style works to deliver major elements of the story like plot, character, theme as clearly as possible (Schwarz 11). In contrast, in *Ulysses*, the old narrative is torn apart and what draws readers' attention mostly is the diverse style through which consciousness is presented; therefore it is fair to say that readers never detach the question of what consciousness is from how consciousness is portrayed. This technique of writing goes hand in hand with its content.

Third, the use of this technique provokes a serious question regarding our private inner world's communicability. Is it possible to interpret our private inner thoughts to the outside world? It is a question even the book itself leaves unanswered. Stream of consciousness builds that assumption that one person can enter another person's mind and see clearly a character's thoughts. This technique allows the reader to see what it is like to be one of the three characters imagining their inner world. It is obvious what stands in achieving that goal is that the text is mainly vague, symbolic, and broken grammar, and it frequently tells the reader that obviousness is a made-up story, but thoughts are extremely opposite.



Knowing to read a mind requires not direct access to mind but it is performed through interpreting their behavior (Kenner 17).

6. Legacy and Influence

Joyce's *Ulysses* left a big impact on the authors who came after him and it reflected in their writing. Samuel Beckett, who worked for Joyce as his secretary and out of his intelligence, applied this technique in his writing professionally. He took stream of consciousness even further as it is notable in *Trilogy* (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*). Joyce in *Ulysses* tries to not separate his character's thoughts from real places or physical bodies, whereas Samuel goes further and tries to cut off his speakers from any real places, no bodies, and he even makes them appear like ghosts. It reaches a level where his speakers doubt if they really exist (Humphrey 130).

The American writer William Faulkner was among the earliest writers to use stream of consciousness in his work *The Sound and the Fury*, seen as a response to this new challenging narrative in writing introduced by Joyce. Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury* uses diverse streams of consciousness, starts with extreme opening lines in which Benjy Compson, who is mentally sick, narrates them; the narrator's mind jumps from one time to another without having any consideration for chronological order. Faulkner builds a narrative of a broken Southern family that would be difficult to achieve through traditional narrative methods alone. *The Sound and the Fury* is a proof that like Joyce, Faulkner was very ambitious regarding the structure of his book; therefore he intentionally makes his book hard for readers to understand so he could absolutely show the inner world experience (Humphrey 131). The effect of stream of consciousness goes far beyond English literature. Writers like Juan Rulfo and Carlos Fuentes are among Latin writers whose works reflected the use of this technique. This impact was felt in broader literature of other nations like European literature, and Japanese literature. In each of these literatures stream of consciousness exists not to copy the technique but to transform. Stream of consciousness is reorganized, redesigned, adapted to local literatures according to the political and social environment writers were writing in or belonged to. While some critics have objected that stream of consciousness is overwhelming or overly personal, the technique's widespread adoption across literatures suggests that its formal innovations answered a genuine need in modern narrative.

7. Conclusion

In the twentieth century writers experienced a new technique which was completely different from the previous narrative technique. Readers saw the birth of a new technique as an answer to the psychological and philosophical calls in which they consider nineteenth-century narrative method was incomplete especially in capturing real individual experience (James 239). Writers in the twentieth century were influenced by ideas of both William James, who defined consciousness as a flowing and continuous stream, and Henri Bergson, who has his philosophy of lived time (duration). Dujardin and Woolf are among the writers who used stream of consciousness of their own and they tried to show the beauty of the inner world honestly no other traditional technique could depict (Bergson, Time 90).

Joyce is one of the famous writers whose stream of consciousness reaches its peak and achieves its literary goal. Joyce shows the inner world of each of his characters in *Ulysses* on a sunny day in Dublin (Kenner 33). Joyce tried every aspect of stream of consciousness including interior monologue, free indirect discourse, and syntactic disruption; his focus was to make consciousness the official and philosophical heart of his novel. Joyce's effort is the creation of a work which not only changed the old narrative technique but it challenged the reading practices to the same extent. He encourages readers to dive deep into the human mind and experience for themselves the individual inner world (Schwarz 199).

It is worth mentioning that *Ulysses* still holds a big impact on both literary practice and literary theory. Interestingly the novel seeks to answer questions about how human language relates to consciousness, and what relationship exists between a novel's narrative structure and direct or first-hand experience, the relationship between human thoughts and social reality, and these questions are still considered as the most important and disputed topics in modern literary scholarship (Kenner 17). To understand truly *Ulysses* and the stream of consciousness you have to engage with nothing except thinking about the question of what it means to represent a human thought and what it means to own one.

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