Dissolving Temporal Sequence:

Spatial Form in James Joyce's *Ulysses* ("Nausicaa" Episode)[*]

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In his 1945 study of Djuna Barne's *Nightwood*, Joseph Frank analyzes a crucial technique of modernist literature, the substitution of spatial relationships for temporal progression as a formal metaphor of thematic development. Starting with Gustave Flaubert and recognizing his efforts to duplicate the simultaneity of action possible in drama and later in film, Frank comments that since language proceeds in time, it is possible to approach this simultaneity of perception only by breaking up temporal sequence. While Flaubert introduces this method, it does not become a dominant form until James Joyce's *Ulysses*. According to Frank, spatialization of form in this novel provides an alternative to the chronological development normal to verbal structures, which can be read only in a linear fashion through time, unlike painting and the plastic arts, which can be visually apprehended instantaneously. Applied to *Ulysses* as a whole by Joseph Frank, the conception of spatial form might as well serve as a convenient point of departure for the analysis on much smaller, let's say, "episodic" scale. In "Nausicaa" episode, Joyce dissolves temporal sequence by cutting back and forth between the various levels of action in a slowly-rising crescendo to achieve the unified impact, the sense of simultaneous activity occurring in different places. For the duration of the episode the time-flow of the narrative is halted: various levels of action are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative. Joyce, in this fragmentation of narrative structure, proceeded on the assumption that a unified spatial apprehension of not only separate episodes but his entire work would ultimately be possible.

Keywords: spatial form, spatialization, modernist novel, spatial apprehension, juxtaposition, montage

Joyce cannot be read - he can only be re-read.

Joseph Frank

A very short space of time through very short times of space. Five, six: the Nacheinander … Exactly: and that is the ineluctable modality of the audible. Open your eyes. No Jesus! If I fell over a cliff that beetles o'er his base, fell through the Nebeneinander ineluctably![1]

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (From "Proteus" Episode)

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[1] "One after another … Side by side." In his book *Laocoön* (1766), the German dramatist and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81) set out to distinguish between subjects appropriate to the visual arts and those appropriate to poetry: "In the one case the action is visible and progressive, its different parts occurring one after the other (nacheinander) in a sequence of time, and in the other the action is visible and stationary, its different parts developing in co-existence (nebeneinander) in space." (Lessing 1969, p. 77). Lessing implies that the first is the subject of poetry and asserts that the second is the subject of painting.

Introduction

The purpose of the present essay is to analyze the narrative structure of "Nausicaa" episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses* on the basis of Joseph Frank's conception of "spatial form".

Joseph Frank broke new critical ground in his 1945 study of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* entitled "Spatial Form in Modern Literature", analyzing a crucial technique of modernist literature, the substitution of spatial relationships for temporal progression as a formal metaphor of thematic development. In the first half of his essay, Frank presents his general conception of modern "spatial form". Starting with Gustav Flaubert and recognizing his efforts to duplicate the simultaneity of action possible in drama and later in film, Frank comments that "since language proceeds in time, it is impossible to approach this simultaneity of perception except by breaking up temporal sequence" (Frank, 1988, p. 87). According to Frank, "spatialization of form in the novel" provides an alternative to the chronological development normal to verbal structures, which can be read only in a linear fashion through time, unlike painting and the plastic arts, which can be visually apprehended instantaneously. Frank claims that while in poetry spatialization led to the "disappearance of coherent sequence … the novel, with its larger unit of meaning, can preserve coherent sequence within the unit of meaning and break up only the timeflow of narrative" (Frank, 1988, p. 88).

Frank argues that this method, initially introduced by Flaubert, does not become a dominant form until James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*.[2]

According to Frank, for a study of esthetic form in the modern novel, Flaubert's famous county fair scene in *Madame Bovary* is a convenient point of departure. This scene has been justly praised for its mordant caricature of bourgeois pomposity but Frank focuses on the method by which Flaubert handles the scene—a method he calls cinematographic, since this analogy comes immediately to mind. As Flaubert sets the scene, there is action going on simultaneously at three levels, and the physical position of each level is a fair index to its spiritual significance. On the lowest plane, there is the surging, jostling mob in the street, mingling with the livestock brought to the exhibition; raised slightly above the street by a platform are the speech-making officials; and on the highest level of all, from a window overlooking the spectacle, Rodolphe and Emma are watching the proceedings and carrying on their amorous conversation. "Everything should sound simultaneously", Flaubert later wrote, "one should hear the bellowing of the cattle, the whisperings of the lovers and the rhetoric of the officials all at the same time."[3]

But since language proceeds in time, Frank argues, it is impossible to approach this simultaneity of perception except by breaking up temporal sequence. And this is exactly what Flaubert does: he dissolves sequence by cutting back and forth between the various levels of action until—at the climax of the scene—Rodolphe's phrases are read at almost the same moment as the names of prize winners for raising the best pigs.

This scene illustrates, on a small scale, what Frank means by the spatialization of form in a novel. In Flaubert's scene, as in modernist novel, all levels of action are interwoven by "dialectic platitude" (Thibaude) and

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[2] One might want to compare Frank's treatment of this novel with Gerard Genette's. Genette is concerned with what he considers three main problems of narrative discourse: time, mode, and voice. He subdivides time into three parts: "the temporal order of the events that are being told and the pseudo-temporal order of the narrative"; "the duration of the events and the duration of the narrative"; and "the frequency of repetition between the events and the narrative, between history and story" (Genette, 1988, pp. 277-298).

[3] This discussion of the county-fair owes a good deal to Albert Thibaudet's *Gustave Flaubert*, probably the best critical study yet written on the subject. The quotation from Flaubert's letter is used by Thibaudet and was translated by Frank from his book.

spatially juxtaposed: both can be properly understood only when they are apprehended reflexively, in an instant of time (Frank, 1988, pp. 87-88).

Flaubert's scene, although interesting in itself, is of minor importance to his novel as a whole, and is skillfully blended back into the main narrative structure after fulfilling its satiric function. But Flaubert's method, Frank argues, was taken over by James Joyce, and applied on a gigantic scale in the composition of *Ulysses*. Joyce composed his novel of an infinite number of references and cross-references which relate to one another independently of the time-sequence of the narrative; and, before the book fits together into any meaningful pattern, these references must be connected by the reader and viewed as a whole. In other words, Joyce presents the elements of his narrative in fragments. All the factual background—so conveniently summarized for the reader in an ordinary novel—must be reconstructed from fragments, sometimes hundreds of pages apart, scattered through the book. As a result, the reader is forced to continually fit fragments together and keep allusions in mind, connecting allusions and references spatially, gradually becoming aware of the pattern of relationships. Frank concludes:

> This, it should be realized, is practically the equivalent of saying that Joyce cannot be read—he can only be re-read. A knowledge of the whole is essential to an understanding of any part; but, unless one is a Dubliner, such knowledge can be obtained only after the book has been read, when all the references are fitted into their proper place and grasped as a unity. Although the burdens placed on the reader by this method of composition may seem insuperable, the fact remains that Joyce, in his unbelievably laborious fragmentation of narrative structure, proceeded on the assumption that a unified spatial apprehension of his work would ultimately be possible. (Frank, 1988, p. 90)

Research and Publications Review

Frank's conception of spatial form has become a classical critical statement[4], one emended and developed by numerous other critics, Ivo Vidan, for instance, who makes a key distinction between earlier literary works and modern ones: the former provide the connections between events and time periods while the latter often rely on "collocation and juxtaposition" that require "the reader to construct a meaning out of seemingly loose elements" (Vidan, 1988, pp. 435-456).

This conception applied by Frank to *Ulysses* as a whole might well serve as a point of departure or conceptual framework on a much smaller scale—for the analysis of separate episodes in *Ulysses*. The choice of "Nausicaa" episode can be justified by its pivotal placement in the progression of chapters and its tightly framed bipartite cohesiveness as well as its notoriety.

This episode has remained an object of much critical scrutiny and analysis over decades—numerous critical essays by such prominent Joyce scholars as Stuart Gilbert (Gilbert, 1989, pp. 149-159), Frank Budgen (Budgen, 1989, pp. 159-167), Stanley Sultan (Sultan, 1989, pp. 167-177), Harry Blamires (Blamires, 1989, pp. 177-186), Fritz Senn (Senn, 1989, pp. 186-214) and many others have been devoted exclusively to "Nausicaa"[5] but, to the best of my knowledge, no attempt has been made so far to apply Joseph Frank's

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[4] In 1963 Professor Frank, who had spent most of his career at Princeton University, published *The Widening Gyre*, a full-length presentation of the critical conceptions contained in "Spatial Form in Modern Literature".
[5] Bernard Benstock puts all these and some other essays together in the second part of *Critical Essays on James Joyce's Ulysses* entitled *Anatomies of "Nausicaa"* (Benstock, 1989, pp. 145-238). The editor isolates "Nausicaa" episode for "a chronological tracking of critical attitudes toward it over half a century" in order to provide "an anatomical survey not only of Joyce's creation but also of the attitudes in *Ulysses* criticism over the decades". (Benstock ,1989, pp. 145).

conception of spatial form to this (or any other) episode of *Ulysses*.

Fragmented Narrative, Montage and Spatial Form

Joyce, as a matter of fact, frequently makes use of the same method as Flaubert—cutting back and forth between different actions occurring at the same time—and usually does so to obtain the same ironic effect. As in Flaubert's scene described above, in "Nausicaa" episode the action is going on simultaneously at several levels: (1) Gerty MacDowell (Nausicaa), Cissy Caffrey, and Edy Boardman are sitting on the rocks on Sandymount shore, where Stephen Dedalus walked and mused that morning; (2) Cissy's two brothers, Tommy and Jacky, twins of four years old, and little Baby Boardman are playing; (3) In the background is Howth Hill (for Leopold and Molly Bloom the place of youthful love realized) and, nearby, the parish church dedicated to Our Lady as Star of the Sea (Stella Maris). In this Roman Catholic Church of Mary (Dignam's church) a temperance retreat is in progress in the course of the episode. Gradually, as Harry Blamires points out, in this episode an important parallel is unmistakably established between Gerty MacDowell and the Virgin Mary. Each of them is "in her pure radiance a beacon ever to the storm-tossed heart of man" (Blamires, 2002, pp. 134-135).

The children are playing and fighting. Meanwhile, Gerty MacDowell sits lost in thought. The description of her, voiced in the sentimental idiom of her own thinking and dreaming, is as much a piece of self revelations as of objective picturing. The use of words and phrases like "graceful", "almost spiritual in its ivory-like purity", "veined alabaster", "queenly", and "glory" reinforces the implicit correspondence with the Virgin Mary. The reader moves in Gerty's mind aware of its absurdities, stirred simultaneously to laughter at her and sympathy for her.

In the episode Joyce parodies many ideas and styles and points of view. Against the epic Homeric background the effects of the pervasive commercial aesthetic and popular culture of Irish middleclass mores and behaviors becomes particularly evident. In the *Odyssey* Nausicaa, daughter of Alcinoes, king of Phaeacia, accompanied by her maids, comes to the beach to wash her linen. They find Ulysses there, naked, worn-out, cast up by the waves. Nausicaa takes charge, cleans Ulysses and clothes him, then leads him home. The Homeric reticence, modesty and discretion that characterizes the meeting of Nausicaa and Odysseus on the beach, the accepted codes of chastity and decorum observed by these high-born figures—in spite of the attraction each feels in the presence of the other's divine, radiant beauty—are more than missing in Joyce's scene on the strand with Gerty, her girlfriends, and Bloom. Gerty's projected image of her married self and life is perhaps the most self-deceptive, one of the most poignant examples of the betrayal of the individual for whom the illusory promises of popularized, commercial culture have become an absolute belief and basis for survival.

Meanwhile, the children keep playing and quarreling; simultaneously, in the background the reader hears singing and the organ from the church where Reverend John Hughes is conducting a men's temperance retreat. At this point a new action level is introduced by Joyce: Bloom enters the scene.

At first Leopold Bloom remains in the background as if a secondary figure, a figure of minor importance for the scene, only being mentioned randomly and accidentally by others but eventually he turns out to be domineering the scene, and the action level connected with him gradually becomes one of the dominant lines throughout the episode.

These various levels of action unfold as follows: the twins are still playing with the ball; the verbal echoes of Benediction ("spiritual vessel… honourable vessel… vessel o singular devotion") are coming through the open

window of the church. The twins are playing merrily; Gerty indulges an emotional surrender to the searching eyes of Bloom fixed upon her. She is aware of her own transparent stockings and kicking legs. The phrases of Benediction flow on pressing the correspondence between Gerty and the Virgin Mary as Gerty imagines herself as "comfortress of the afflicted" and "refuge of sinners"; the twins are quarreling again; the priests in the church are looking up at the 'Blessed Sacrament', Bloom on the shore is looking up at Gerty's legs. Conscious of Bloom's admiration and aware of the appetite she has aroused, Gerty swings her legs. The Blessed Sacrament proceeds in the church. Over the trees beside the church coloured fireworks from the Mirus bazaar shoot into the sky. Leaning backward as if to watch the fireworks, Gerty displays her legs and thighs and knickers; she exposes herself more and more as she leans back ostensibly to watch but really to be seen, they both—Gerty and Bloom—pass from arousal to orgasm.

At the climax of the scene—when the firework reaches its culmination and Bloom and Gerty achieve orgasm—all action planes, voices and emotions are virtually intermingled or blended into one unity; all voices are heard simultaneously in a quickly-rising crescendo of a rhythmic flow of language through Gertry's stream of consciousness:

> She would fain have cried to him chokingly, held out her snowy slender arms to him to come, to feel his lips laid on her white brow, the cry of a young girl's love, a little strangled cry, wrung from her, that cry that has rung through the ages. And then a rocket sprang and bang shot blind blank and O! then the Roman candle burst and it was like a sigh of O! and everyone cried O! O! in raptures and it gushed out of it a stream of rain gold hair threads and they shed and ah! They were all greeny dewy stars falling with golden, O so lovely, O, soft, sweet, soft. (Joyce, 1986, p. 300)

And then everything calms down and descends into post-orgasmic placidity: "Then all melted away dewily in the grey air: all was silent!" (Joyce, 1986, p. 300).

As we have seen, like Flaubert, as Joyce sets the scene there is action going on simultaneously at several levels but Joyce achieves greater degree of simultaneity than Flaubert; virtually all levels of action are interwoven or intermingled in Gerty's exalted consciousness in the moment of utmost pleasure. To achieve the impression of simultaneity Joyce breaks up temporal sequence of the narrative: he dissolves it by cutting back and forth between the various levels of action; for the duration of the scene the time-flow of the narrative is halted; attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the limited time area. These relationships are juxtaposed independently of the progress of the narrative, and the full significance of the scene is given only by the reflexive relations among the levels of action. Craig Barrow convincingly argues that this idea of a juxtaposition of exterior and interior images without narrative comment, or montage by attraction[6] may go a long way to explain the seeming "difficulty" of *Ulysses*, much of the difficulty of which arises from such a discontinuity in narrative technique (Barrow, 1980, p. 5).

Another problem arises from the sequential nature of the arrangement of words on a page. When Joyce wishes to convey the impression of simultaneity, say, of external scene and internal reaction, he does not have at his disposal the simultaneous montage[7] devices of the movie director. He must convey the impression

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[6] Barrow defines "montage by attraction" as the "reinforcing of the meaning of one image by association with another image not necessarily part of the same episode" (Barrow, 1980, p. 4).

[7] simultaneous montage—The simultaneous juxtaposition of images in a shot through the use of a mirror or window; or simultaneous juxtaposition set up by a superimposition of images or, still another possibility, simultaneous contrapuntal use of sound and shot (Barrow, 1980, pp. 6-7).

sequentially. The advantages of the film in this respect are particularly apparent when the same "simultaneous" impression which Joyce must present sequentially is presented simultaneously in the film version of *Ulysses*.

"Nausicaa" employs some of the most experimental montage techniques in *Ulysses*, both deriving from a character's consciousness and established by an omniscient narrator. In addition to this, "Nausicaa" uses montage deriving from the juxtaposition of styles. The episode is broken up for purpose of montage by the narrator-author who arranges the primary montage[8] of Gerty's interior monologue, the church service, and the fireworks. As Barrow puts it, the episode "is divided in two. The first half employs a syrupy omniscient narrator who describes the scene on the beach in sunny terms but who also is often close to Gerty's mind in passages resembling indirect interior monologue. Gerty's sentimental view is juxtaposed with Bloom's almost uninterrupted interior monologue of the second half of the episode. In Bloom's half of the episode there is very little objective third-person description, as Bloom watches Gerty, Cissy, Edy, and the children walk home and the fireworks continue to shoot off" (Barrow, 1980, p. 128). Bloom's interior monologue involves simultaneous and primary montage, anchored in objective description and in Bloom's memories of the scene just preceding in which he masturbated while watching Gerty. Bloom's thoughts, as he watches Gerty, Cissy, and Edy and the children walk home along the beach as the fireworks explode, continue to provoke further thoughts about women's sexuality which in turn provoke memories of Molly and Milly.

The last three paragraphs of "Nausicaa" provide a juxtaposition between the third-person narration and the sounding of the cuckoo from the clock, which finishes the narrator's sentences with a judgment on Bloom's situation. In spite of this situation, there remains the optimism of his continuing love for Molly and the possible rejuvenating implications of his dream.

The basic device of the primary montage arranged externally by the narrator in Gerty's half of "Nausicaa" is, to refer once again to Barrow's book *Montage in James Joyce's Ulysses*, "to juxtapose Gerty's virgin sexuality and its effect on Bloom with the Benediction service for the men's temperance retreat at the church nearby. Also Gerty's and Bloom's mounting desire and orgasm are juxtaposed with the shooting off of the bazaar fireworks. Also juxtaposed in the first half of the episode are Gerty's romantic imagination and Gerty's and Bloom's mounting passion with the anti-climactic scenes of Cissy and Edy taking care of the children, who are playing and fighting and (baby Boardman) throwing up on their bibs. The action involving Gerty and Bloom and the juxtaposed action in the church proceed chronologically, the points of contrast between the two being broken in sensually apt ways. The fireworks then take over as juxtaposed action, as Gerty's and Bloom's desires become warmer: as the Sacrament is placed back into the tabernacle, the fireworks begin to shoot off, Bloom ejaculates after masturbating, climaxing the montage sequence" (Barrow, 1980, p. 128).

Conclusion

This technique—this montage of shots (the church service, Gerty and Bloom, and the fireworks) —makes it possible for the reader to perceive the entire scene—various levels of action—spatially, in an instant of time, as if

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[8] primary montage—Raymond Spottiswoode calls the juxtaposition of shots primary montage and juxtaposition of sound track with shots simultaneous montage. In primary montage the sound is aligned to the content of the images; that is, the sound is taken as a realistic dimension of the images portrayed (Spottiswoode, 1965, p. 51).

it were a painting where "its parts are co-existing side by side in space" and not a literary work in which "its different parts occur one after another in a sequence of time".

Ulysses marked radical changes in the epic structure, a transformation in constructing temporal continuity of narration being one of them. Joyce's intention was to abolish the feeling of time elapsing in narration or, in other words, to transform time into space. As Manana Gelashvili puts it, "Complicated structure of such works (introducing several narrators and presenting one and the same story from different view-points, conscious faltering of the sequence of events by using flashbacks, cuttings, montage, stream-of-consciousness technique etc.) creates a new form which tends to be spatial rather than temporal" (Gelashvili, 2005, p. 91). Joyce achieved this result with the help of over-detailed analysis and description of the slightest evidence of consciousness. In the final analysis Joyce achieves that effect of timelessness which Th. Mann calls "nunc stan"; to put it more precisely, "by maintaining continuous parallel" (T. S. Eliot) with Homer's *Odyssey*, i. e. by making use of "mythical method" Joyce creates a sort of mythical dimension or, to use the term coined by Temur Kobakhidze , "mythopoeic chronotope" (Kobakhidze, 2004, p. 20) where time is abolished in favor of mythic eternity or rather, all times meet in the eternal now—the present moment of the characters' consciousness.

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