

The stream-of-
consciousness
technique and style in
"a portrait of the artist
as a...



The best style is that in which the form and the content, the manner and the matter are well-balanced and supportive of each other. The style of “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” was so novel that it drew the attention of readers and critics alike when it was first published in 1914. Yet in spite of its novelty, Joyce’s subject, and the manner in which he expressed it, are fused together in one, inextricable whole. The subject of the novel IS its manner or style, and it is crucial to avoid regarding them as separate entities. It is also true that the language emerges out of the character of Stephen Dedalus, for Joyce’s major innovation in this novel is the modulation of styles throughout, using a different style in each section to underline each stage of the development of the character, and using a less mature language to match Stephen’s expression in his boyhood days. The stream-of-consciousness technique is a direct manifestation of Joyce’s general disposition towards imitation, onomatopoeia, and parody. This technique is used for the first time in English in “A Portrait of the Artist”, using a method which had already been popularized in France by Proust, and is therefore an entirely new approach to writing in England. No doubt, this technique is not yet perfected in this novel, as we find in Joyce’s second novel “Ulysses”, but it is used admirably in “A Portrait” in order to bring about a fusion between manner and matter – a purpose in which he succeeds indubitably. He had experimented with a similar technique in some of the stories of “The Dubliners”, occasionally adapting language to suit the viewpoint of a character, but in “A Portrait” this method is given full-scale treatment for the first time, and it reveals in full the great range of Joyce’s stylistic virtuosity. This fact becomes clear in the very first section of the novel, which opens with baby-talk to suit the infant, who is so young that he still

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wets his bed. This language is basically monosyllabic, with short, direct sentences. The simple vocabulary has very little use of pronouns and an excessive repetition of the conjunction “ and”, so as to evoke the simplicity of a child just learning to speak. There is, for example, the “ moocow” story in the very first line of the novel, told in a style which adults think is appropriate for children, for it is a story that Stephen’s, or “ Baby Tuckoo’s” father tells him. We also have the baby trying to lisp his favourite song, “ The wild rose blossoms / In the little green place”, thus – “ The green wothe botheth” 1. Stephen’s growth is implicit in the change of style between the first and second sections, and the development in style is just enough to suit the six-year old Stephen in Clongowes Wood College. He is still learning about the world around him, and he is from this age itself interested in words (which will later become the raw materials of his art as a writer) – their sounds and meanings, and the relationship between the two. For instance, even at this age he notices the double meaning of the word “ bell”, the relationship between the sound and meaning of the onomatopoeic words “ suck” and “ kiss”, and the relationship between “ hot” and “ cold”, even in symbolic terms. Yet, it all is encompassed in the language of a child, as in the repetition of words and sentences in his account of Wells pushing him into the square ditch. The same thing is to be seen in the pandybat episode. Before the prefect of studies enters the room, the prose imitates the idleness of Stephen’s meandering thoughts, which take a loose conversational form, emphasized by a loose kind of syntax. As soon as the prefect arrives, the style becomes brisk and abrupt, and the narrator again adopts the dramatic mode to indicate urgency and fear. This, again, is characterized by the repetition of key phrases like “ cruel and unfair”. The dramatic manner of <https://assignbuster.com/the-stream-of-consciousness-technique-and-style-in-a-portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-young-man/>

narration is best illustrated in the account of the Christmas dinner party in the first chapter, in which the reader feels something of the strained atmosphere throughout the narration. This section is probably the one which is least connected with the stream-of-consciousness method, for Stephen's mind is so shocked at the behaviour and language of grown-ups, and is so totally engaged by the fearful quarrel taking place before his eyes, that he does not have the opportunity to think for himself while the incident is in progress. The second chapter, tracing Stephen's adolescence from the first awakening of sexuality and his growing isolation from his family, has a greater fragmentation of styles than the first, and these various styles are often mixed together to show Stephen's outer and inner realities coming into contact with each other. In Chapter I Stephen came into contact with words through the reality of life in school and at home. In Chapter II the reverse happens, and he begins to apprehend reality imaginatively through words and symbols. This imaginative interpretation of external reality continues till Chapter IV, after which, in Chapter V, Stephen comes into maturity and loses this romantic personal world. In Chapter II, though the narrator escapes into the labyrinth of language, there are contrasting passages of vivid descriptions of cheerless reality, in expressions like "stale odours of the foreshore" and "foul, green puddles and clots of liquid dung", which echo the "square ditch" images of the first chapter. Joyce's stylistic perfection is best seen when, after such nauseating observations, the second chapter ends with Stephen finding an avenue of escape in romantic literature, searching for an idealized woman to match his own dreams. Till the end of Chapter IV Stephen's flight of spirit expressed in language clashes with images of external reality – as in the description of the two removal vans.

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This is also seen in the colour imagery that is used throughout the novel. Maroon and green are political colours, representing Michael Davitt and Parnell respectively. White is a cold colour, symbolizing lack of emotion and joy. Cream is a warm colour, associated with emotion and feeling. Yellow and brown are all through shown as colours associated with paralysis and decay. In Chapter II we have images of labyrinths and being lost (the connection with the labyrinth created by the mythical Dedalus cannot be accidental). Here we have Stephen's escapes into the labyrinthine streets of Dublin, and this is described in an objective, explicit style, in contrast with the earlier romantic attitude of adolescence. This chapter ends with the seductive, sensual prose style of the brothel, which is direct parody of the earlier romanticism that he expressed in the dreams of Mercedes and the Count of Monte Cristo. The embrace of the prostitute is an ironical parallel to his earlier projections of ideal love. This sensual language is continued in the beginning of Chapter III, in the coarse, fleshy descriptions of his degeneration, and full of bestial imagery. Father Arnall sermons in the Retreat section are presented in a quite different vein - in direct, dramatic speech, but clearly filtered through Stephen's own consciousness. That is why Stephen's reactions and the words of the sermon are alternated without any dividing line between the two. These sermons therefore, become a masterpiece of technique, rather than a mere example of the doctrinal and crude rhetoric of the Church. The very fact that they are couched in the typical Catholic register, and are almost a word by word transcription of Pinamonti's 17th century pamphlet bring out the satirical purpose of their use. Father Arnall's sermons are based on medieval and 17th century models, but the three sections of Chapter IV are constructed on styles

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adapted from 19th century writers. The second section, particularly, reminds us strongly of Stephen's beloved Cardinal Newman, therefore also reflecting his growing maturity in language use. The final section of Chapter IV is a direct contrast to the cool, rational, restraint of the Newman-type style, especially in the description of the culminating epiphany, where the language suddenly becomes exuberant and free, sometimes even wild, to match the triumphant realization of Stephen's soul. Repetitions and polysyndetons abound, in order to build up this feeling. Taking into account the gradual maturing of the language of Stephen Dedalus while he grows to maturity, the final chapter shows a sophisticated, literary language, in accordance with his purpose of becoming a literary artist. However, often the style becomes artificial and stilted. For example in the literary theory section and in the conversation with the Dean of Studies, the language is the cold, impersonal style of rational discourse. On the other hand, his fantasies centred on Emma echoes the romantic style that is so effectively parodied in Chapter II. The linguistic styles of Chapter V are both fragmented and diverse. Here we see not the finished artist, but one still trying to come to terms with the "nets" around him, and his function in the world around him. An inkling of the free stream-of-conscious style that is typical of the mature Joyce is found in the diary at the end – the manner of writing that will be used so effectively later in "Ulysses".

References

1) James Joyce : "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" (Penguin Books, 1992, London), p. 3.