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Edited by Tadeusz Sławek

Volume 1

Agnieszka Graff

This Timecoloured Place

The Time-Space Binarism in the Novels
of James Joyce



PETER LANG

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Contents

Preface (by Michał Głowiński)	7
List of Abbreviations	11
Acknowledgments	13
Introduction	15
1. Solid Structures and Shifting Realities:	
The Textual Dimension of Space and Time	23
2. The Space-Time Wars:	
James Joyce, “brulobrulo,” “mein goot enemy,” and the “sophology of Bitchson”	45
3. “I will see if I can see”:	
Stephen Dedalus, the Question of Identity, and the Ineluctable Modalities of Space and Time	65
4. Rearranging <i>Ulysses</i>:	
Rhythms of Space, Images of Time	91
5. Time and Space in <i>Finnegans Wake</i>	
and What is Lost in Between	123
Conclusion	
Changing Times and Fissured Landscapes: Readings and Rereadings of Joyce	143
Bibliography	153
Index	165

Preface

If you are looking for a study of time and space in the work of James Joyce, then this book will disappoint you. Had the author defined her task in such a manner, she would, in fact, have little to add to the existing body of scholarship; her work – which is both original and insightful – would necessarily repeat the findings of scholars who have examined the spatial and temporal structures of the masterpieces of twentieth-century prose. Such studies have proliferated over the last few decades and some of them are of great value; it would be difficult to contribute to this field anything truly new, anything that would take us beyond the existing classifications, analyses and interpretations. The present work, however, takes up the space-time question in modernist prose in an altogether novel way – the author's point of view is different from that of her predecessors, as are her cognitive aims.

Agnieszka Graff's *This Timecoloured Place* is an excursion into literary theory and cultural history, not a study of the temporal and spatial dimensions of Joyce's fictional world. Her interest is not in the structural parameters of time and space, nor in their position in the poetics of Joyce's prose. Her question is also more original, and arguably far more difficult, than questions of time and space considered separately, for she has undertaken to look at the relationship between the two – hence the “binarism” announced in the title. This binarism is examined on several levels: as a structural mechanism that organizes much of Joyce's narrative, as a philosophical controversy that involved many of the writer's contemporaries and needs to be understood as a cultural context that had great impact on his work, and finally as a dimension of approaches to Joyce's prose and to literary modernism in general.

The departure point is Joyce's fascination with the thought of Giordano Bruno, his vision of the coincidence of opposites. The relationship between Bruno and Joyce is, of course, not a matter of direct cause; something far more complex than “influence” is at stake here. The question is how philosophical ideas with which a writer has become familiar – ideas of various kinds, understood with more or less precision, coming from various sources – determine his way of building the fictional universe of his novels or, to speak more broadly, how they affect his worldview. Let us emphasize at this point that Graff's approach to this matter – the way she tackles the relationship between philosophy and literature – is both subtle and complex. The author does not treat fiction as a thinly veiled philosophical statement, a vehicle designed to express the author's ideas, or ones previously formulated by greater or lesser thinkers. At one point in her work she goes so far as to assert that, if one were to treat fiction as mere illustration of philosophical theories, then fiction would not be worthy of analysis, since it would, by definition, be mere secondary material. I fully support such a point of view. It is, I believe, a grave error to reduce literature to the status of explication of philosophical beliefs. Only very few works of any artistic value can serve as exceptions to this rule. In general, it is a faulty interpretation that limits itself to finding echoes of general abstract ideas in a work of fiction, or to tracing echoes of specific philosophical conceptions. I mention this because many literary historians proceed in just this manner. It is a sign of the author's methodological competence that, while dealing with a problematic for which philosophical inspirations and contexts are of paramount importance,

she nonetheless manages to steer clear of what one might call the “philosophical fallacy.” Graff quite clearly rejects the view according to which the three great works of James Joyce – *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake* – are fictional embodiments of the works of three thinkers, i.e. Bergson, Jung, and Vico, respectively. If this were so, then there would be no reason to deal with Joyce’s fiction.

One of the most interesting aspects of this study is the way it presents the role of Bergson’s philosophy in Joyce’s handling of the space-time binarism. There are many studies that examine Bergson’s impact on European literature in the early decades of the twentieth-century – his influence on intellectual and artistic life of the period was, indeed, impressive.¹ Agnieszka Graff does not, however, simply trace the references to, or uses of, Bergson’s thought in Joyce’s novels; her approach is to treat his ideas as a part of the spirit of the times. In other words, a writer such as Joyce could not have remained outside the sphere of influence of the author of *Creative Evolution*, simply because the key ideas of this celebrated work had become a sort of common good. A novelist fascinated by the relationship between time and space could not evade Bergson’s theory of *durée*.

There is, however, one point where I disagree with the author. Graff insists that anyone who hopes to linguistically express time, while understanding it in Bergsonian terms, as *durée*, is necessarily committed to a contradiction, because in Bergson’s philosophy language is a correlate of space. This claim is somewhat toned down later, but it is nonetheless an oversimplification. True, Bergson claimed that language is counter to the world’s dynamic nature, that it freezes movement and arrests flow. But it is precisely these claims that were of enormous importance to the literature of the first quarter of the twentieth century, for the writers of this period strove to overcome the stabilizing qualities of speech, to direct them in such a manner as to make language something other than the opposite of movement, expression, dynamism. Thus, we are dealing here with a coincidence of opposites very much akin to that which informs Joyce’s own work – an effort to overcome the time-space binarism. For writers who were late-comers to symbolism this was a central issue, a challenge they set themselves both in their reflection on language and in their poetic practice. That this is the case can be seen, for instance, in the work of two great writers, both associated with the late stage of symbolism, namely Paul Valéry and Bolesław Leśmian (1877-1937).

As mentioned above, Agnieszka Graff follows Joyce’s cue when she ventures into the philosophy of Giordano Bruno, but he is not the only classical thinker to be discussed in her study. Much space is also devoted to St. Augustine’s meditation on time and language, while perhaps the most significant reference point is Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the writer and art critic whose *Laocoön: Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) introduced reflection on time and space into theory of art. Lessing be-

1 Two works worth mentioning here are Roméo Arbour’s study on Bergson’s influence on French literature and Stanisław Borzym’s work on the Polish reception of his thought. The latter is a work by a historian of philosophy and focused mainly on philosophy, but it is generously inclusive of literature as well. See Roméo Arbour, *Henri Bergson et les lettres françaises* (Paris: Corti, 1956); Stanisław Borzym, *Bergson a przemiany światopoglądowe w Polsce* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1984).

lieved that art forms ought to be differentiated according to their kinship with one or the other dimension; his classical formula – *Nacheinander* and *Nebeneinander* – constitutes the leitmotif in Graff's examination of modernist literature. His time-space distinction allows her to examine with clarity the modernists' key dilemma: their effort to both juxtapose and reconcile that which is fluid, transient, ineluctable, and thus temporal, with that which is structured, holistic, stable, and spatial.

The broad scope of the juxtaposition opens the field to further contexts and implications of the whole matter. The space-time binarism – which at times became a heated controversy or even conflict – was characteristic not just of Joyce's work, but constitutes an important preoccupation of many of the period's significant figures. The author discusses a split in literary and philosophical circles, with writers identifying either as "timists" or "spatialists." It is possible that this conflict is a twentieth-century equivalent of the seventeenth-century debate between the Ancients and the Moderns, the controversy which largely determined the development of French literature of that era.

Let us now examine briefly some of the methodological assumptions of this work. One might say that the author's approach is narratological, which means that she treats space and especially time as elements of discourse, as linguistic beings. What interests her is not time as such but the temporality which emerges from language. Hence her conclusion that one should not speak of "time in the text" but rather assume that "text is time" – that the human experience of time is irrevocably narrative. Her inspirations here include Paul Ricoeur, Hayden White, and Anthony Giddens with his theory of narrative identity. I do not know to what extent this approach has universal applicability, but it certainly opens up interesting perspectives for literary studies. Viewed in this way, time ceases to be external to fiction, a reality to be represented, and becomes an aspect of narrative, something that cannot exist outside language. This brings us to the interesting matter of how time is actually spoken about, i.e. the familiar linguistic conventions and metaphors. The author reminds us that time is represented by means of spatial metaphors, that it is conceptualized in terms of space – a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of many linguists.

This way of thinking about temporality allows the author to avoid a contradiction or incommensurability between language and world, between reality and ways of speaking about reality. The world is always already a world of discourse; hence, text or discourse cannot be treated as a thing. Textuality cannot be understood as a purely spatial phenomenon, which was – according to Graff – how structuralism viewed it. This claim, however, merits further examination; in my view it is an oversimplification based on excessive generalizing. Structuralism is positioned in this work as a mere reference point, and hence, for the sake of the larger argument, had to be presented in a more or less schematized manner. It is certainly laudable that Graff does not turn structuralism into a whipping boy, as scholars of the younger generations sometimes tend to do, but her critique nonetheless provokes resistance on my part. Her charge is valid only if applied to a specific thread or tradition within the history of structuralist theory, the linguistic one, and not to the one that developed within literary studies. The text was certainly not a thing to the Prague School. From the very beginning of its formation, it viewed text as a certain kind of process, its various entanglements under

constant theoretical scrutiny. Both the study of text as communication and the study of text as existing within a network of other texts (i.e. that which later came to be known as intertextuality), had their origin within structuralism. There was, in other words, no such thing as a single structuralism, but rather various tendencies existing within the broader movement.

Nonetheless, treatment of structuralist theory is of marginal importance to this study; I take it up only because it happens to be of importance to my own thinking. Agnieszka Graff's goal – stated clearly in the book's opening pages – is to read the time-space controversy through the work of James Joyce and to read the work of Joyce through the controversy. Graff's handling of the problematic is very broad – she examines the sources of the controversy, its implications for several writers of the period, its impact on animosities of the era, and its often unacknowledged impact on the way the texts were later read. Thus, her book is not just an interpretation of the novels of the great Irish writer, but a thorough examination of one of the significant aspects of Modernism as a cultural period.

Graff's accomplishment is noteworthy from the methodological and theoretical point of view, for she manages to situate the work under scrutiny – Joyce's novels – within the general problematic of his literary and cultural context, but to do so in a way that exceeds the familiar background-foreground or text-context schema. The relationship is not one of causality or determinism. Instead, the author examines the existence of the work of art within its, so to speak, natural environment. Her study of the space-time binarism is a valuable contribution to Joyce studies, but can also be read as an examination of one of the key cultural obsessions of European modernism.

Michał Głowiński

List of abbreviations

References to texts listed below appear as abbreviations followed by page number.

- CW* Joyce, James. *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*. Edited by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann. New York: Viking, 1964.
- D* Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. New York: Penguin, 1976.
- FW* Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake*. New York: Viking, 1939. References appear as page number followed by line number.
- JJ* Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- SL* Joyce, James. *Selected Letters of James Joyce*. Edited by Richard Ellmann. London: Faber and Faber, 1975
- P* Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Penguin, 1988.
- SH* Joyce, James. *Stephen Hero*. Edited by Theodore Spencer. London: Grafton Books, 1986.
- U* Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. Edited by Hans Walter Gabler and others. New York: Random House, 1986. References appear as page number followed by line number.

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Note on prior publication. Some sections of Chapter One appeared as “Time and Space Confused: Faulkner’s Apocalypse in Language.” *American Studies* 19 (2001): 61-68; An early version of Chapter Three was originally published as “Going Beyond Irony: *The Portrait of the Artist* as Reflexive Trajectory of the Self.” In *PASE Papers in Literature, Language and Culture*, edited by E. Gussmann and B. Szymanek, 150-158. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL: 1998.

Introduction

Now is life very solid or very shifting? I am haunted
by the two contradictions.

Virginia Woolf

Few things obsessed the modernists as much as time and space. In the cultural debates of the 1920s and 1930s these two words acquired a significance verging on the mystical; they became synonyms of two disparate modes of experience, two styles of art, two schools of philosophy, and even two opposed political camps. As May Sinclair put it in 1919, “Time and Space were forms of thought – ways of thinking.”¹ In this binary framework, which served as a reference point for both artists and philosophers, *time* stood for the fluid, the fleeting, the transitory; *space* signified structure, wholeness, and permanence.

The sources of this distinction can be traced back to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, whose popularity in those times approached the status of a cult, and to the scientific theories of Albert Einstein. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Europe of those years was inhabited by hordes of experts on Bergsonian *durée*, let alone Einsteinian physics. These theories were objects of dazzled appreciation, but also the victims of many basic misunderstandings. Relativity and “pure time” became the topics of daily interest and conversation, Bergson and Einstein serving as sources of loosely applied terminology. Echoes of their ideas can be found in the writing of most major novelists of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1923 D. H. Lawrence announced with enthusiasm: “[e]verybody catches fire at the word Relativity. There must be something in the mere suggestion which we have been waiting for.”² In March 1926, after an exceptionally successful supper party, Virginia Woolf noted in her *Diary*: “I wanted, like a child, to stay and argue. True, the argument was passing my limits – how, if Einstein is true, we shall be able to foretell our own lives.”³

The idea of relativity to which “everybody was catching fire” had little in common with the original discovery of Albert Einstein. The somewhat confused interest in the physics of time and space is better understood as an effect of the technological advances of the era. This argument is made convincingly in Stephen Kern’s *Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, a study of the interface between science, art, and literature in this period. Kern examines time and space in literary texts by Joyce, Stein, Williams, Ibsen but also in works of major thinkers such as Durkheim or Freud, or artists such as Picasso. He argues that a sweeping reorientation took place in this period, one that affected not only art and literature but also everyday life and politics, resulting,

1 May Sinclair, *Mary Oliver: A Life* (London: Virago, 1980), 227.

2 David Herbert Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (London: Heinemann, 1961), 177.

3 Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), 68.

among other things in secularization and an unprecedented leveling of social hierarchies. Central to this new sensibility was a “thickened” sense of the present. “Simultaneity” was an idea with profound impact on the two major artistic experiments of the time: cubism in painting and interior monologue in narrative literature. The reasons for the shift have to do with technology, not philosophy or science. Both the everyday experience and the basic understanding of time and space (as well as direction and form) were profoundly transformed due to technological advances of the time: railroad, automobile, bicycle, telegraph, telephone, x-ray, and cinema. The introduction of Standard Time, Kern argues, set off intellectual resistance, which resulted in the enormous popularity of the concept of “private time,” with Bergson’s philosophy as its intellectual core.⁴

The version of relativity theory adopted by the culture at large amounted to an overwhelming, terrifying, and somehow thrilling sense that, as Lawrence put it, “there is nothing absolute left in the universe”⁵ or, as Max Born wrote introducing Einstein’s *Theory of Relativity* to the general public in 1924, “this space and this time are still entirely embedded in the ego, and (...) the world-picture of natural science becomes more beautiful and grander if these fundamental conceptions are subjected to relativization.”⁶

The present study does not undertake to examine time and space as physical realities described in scientific theories. Nor is it an attempt to reconstruct the times and spaces represented in fictional worlds of art and literature. My subject is the space-time binarism: space and time as categories or signs that surfaced as opposites within the cultural framework of high modernism. I examine the singular way in which these two apparently neutral and complementary terms are set *against* each other, both within the intellectual debates and literary experiments of the period and in the subsequent critical discourse about modernism. The question is also a literary-historical one. I show how “time” and “space” came to stand for opposed impulses of the human mind, how the labels “timist” and “spatialist” – exotic as they may sound to us today – turned into common intellectual currency.

The author of *Ulysses* had a keen interest in this debate. The level of his involvement in the controversy that would eventually be called “the time-space wars” sets him apart from most of his contemporaries. He played the role of an active participant in the debate, enlisted now on one, then on the other side, but he was also an avid observer, chronicler and interpreter of the time-space developments. His descriptions and contributions fuelled the controversy, which, in turn, provided the subject matter for more chronicling. It is the aim of this study to read the space-time controversy through Joyce’s fiction, and to read Joyce – as well as Joyce criticism – through the space-time controversy.

4 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. With a new Preface by Stephen Kern (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

5 Lawrence, *Fantasia*, 178.

6 Cited after Gillian Beer, “Physics, Sound and Substance: Later Woolf,” in *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground. Essays by Gillian Beer* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 117.

As Christine von Boheemen-Saaf elaborates, Joyce's experimentalism made his work the inescapable reference point to several generations of critics and philosophers, "a happy hountingground" for structuralism, reception theory, as well as a key inspiration and "test case" for poststructuralism. Studied by key figures of literary and cultural studies such as Wolfgang Iser, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Lacan or Gilles Deleuze, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* were treated with reverence, as something other than texts to which theory may be usefully "applied." Because of its ambivalence and undecidability, the Joycean text again and again "provided material to argue new approaches, to adstruct [these theorists'] views, and to gradually explore the very grounds of literary representation as well as human identity itself." Thus, especially since the 1960s the very name "Joyce" has come to function as a label, "a warrant of seriousness, or avantgarde distinction."⁷ In Chapter Four of this study, I argue that the story of *Ulysses* criticism, though seemingly torn by various revolutions in literary theory, proceeds along grooves pre-determined by two principal metaphors which correspond to two contending visions of modernist literature. One has its origin in Bergsonian flux; the other is rooted in the poetics of spatial form, as anticipated by T. S. Eliot and theorized by Joseph Frank long before structuralists began talking about the spatial nature of language.

This book is not a sustained study of the impact of theory on Joyce studies or the impact of Joyce on literary theory, but it does pay attention to the internal logic of developments within Joyce criticism. I argue that the space-time binarism as it was debated in the 1920s anticipates and underlies much of what was written about his texts in the following decades. Discussed in some detail in Chapter Two, this original debate was a conflict of sensibilities, worldviews and conceptions of aesthetic value, a conflict between proponents of synthesis and enthusiasts of contingency. What was at stake was the essential quality of modern art and modern thought: should it provide order and structure to an increasingly confusing reality, or does it simply emerge out of chance and chaos, celebrating the plurality of experience. Joyce criticism – especially *Ulysses* criticism – is dominated by two competing traditions, a split that echoes the space-time division of the 1920s. On the one side there is the school of reading Joyce marked by trust in structure and order, a belief that Joyce's work is founded on a specifically modernist desire for synthesis. On the other side there are studies that read Joyce's modernism as proto-postmodernism, and focus on his ambiguity, linguistic creativity, joyful playfulness, insisting that his work is fundamentally "open" and "productive."

According to the wholistic readings, *Ulysses* is a perfectly finished book: constructed according to an intricate plan and marked by an organic, spiritual wholeness. Though such interpretations often acknowledge gaps or inconsistencies in Joyce's work, what they are really after is completeness, order, control. These features were famously attributed to *Ulysses* by T. S. Eliot in his 1923 essay "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth," where the book's mythic structure is seen as a means of "giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary his-

7 Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf, "Joyce in Theory/Theory in Joyce," in *James Joyce*, ed. Sean Latham (Dublin and Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 154.