

Boomerang Stream of Consciousness in Nicholson Baker's *Room Temperature*: A Point of View Analysis

Arash Khoshshafa, Independent Researcher

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the use of stream of consciousness in Nicholson Baker's novella, Room Temperature, and to reveal the unique method it applies through the narrative that could lead to a different viewpoint regarding the analysis of first-person realist fiction. To do so, after Baker's use of stream consciousness in Room Temperature is studied in the light of Barry Dainton's definition of this term, emphasising the shape of a constant core emitting several different lines of thoughts in the protagonist's mind, it is suggested that Baker's distinctive narrative structure benefits from an innovative form of stream of consciousness that mostly functions like a boomerang, which gets thrown as many times as possible and returns to the static throwing spot, with the last time drawing the narrative to a close.

Key words: *stream of consciousness, Nicholson Baker, Room Temperature, boomerang, Barry Dainton*

1 Introduction

Since William James famously introduced the innovative, psychological term 'stream of consciousness' in his *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890, referring to human thought as a flowing stream, there have been many different arguments based on his viewpoint that some have either disagreed with the notion of complete continuity of human consciousness as a river or decided to expand the scope of its definition. Of these eminent critics, C. Hugh Holman points to a relatively broader perception and regards stream of consciousness as a combination of all awareness levels, produced in a flow of vocabulary, visions and ideas (1980: 429). In a slightly altered definition, Wolf Schmid asserts that stream of consciousness is mostly a technique with no diegesis retold by the narrator in the shape of a free, transitory and evanescent reflection by the character (2010: 152) or, in other words, a "dream narrativeness" (Alber and Fludernik 2010: 47). Interestingly enough, although some critics like Robert Humphrey have either preferred to claim what stream of consciousness is not rather than what it is and does not actually suggest a sheer interior monologue (1954: 13) or tend to differentiate these two as a basically psychological term and a literary technique retrospectively, G. R. Thompson regards interior monologue and stream of consciousness as one or at least similar and proclaims that they both represent the unbroken psychological flow of the character's mind (2012: 259).

Despite the fact that critics like Alisa Cox, who look at stream of consciousness as an unexplaining, impersonating junk of thoughts, feelings and memories (2005: 46) or Mieke Bal who, regarding focalisation, introduces a different form of stream of consciousness that encompasses the coincidence of the narrative's agents or even some others who do not wish to perceive stream of consciousness as a form and a content – marked by free relation and illusion of

impulsiveness (Mesiter 2005: 437) and not assuming that there is any best type of stream of consciousness – this article aims at suggesting a different model in Nicholson Baker's *Room temperature* in regards with Barry Dainton's division system. Dainton defines stream of consciousness as "a momentary cross-section of a stream, any combination of co-occurring contents within a stream", which functions as a single experience (2000: 23).

The key factor, which could be emphasised in Dainton's definition, is the existence of only one single experience, seemingly parallel to the sub-occurrence of different other dependent fleeting thoughts. According to Dainton, there should be an unceasing *willing* in order to provoke any possible flow of consciousness without which one might wonder "What would be left?" (2000: 53) What is more, although he does not necessarily intend to highlight any particular division of thought provoked by one's stream of consciousness, the importance of a co-conscious relationship caused by a unison is clearly pinpointed by him. This co-consciousness only restricts the contents and that is how it is considered permeating. In short, Dainton generally considers a pivotal basis, a single motivation for the essential cause of consciousness divisions.

Applying Barty Dainton's model of stream of consciousness, this article, hopes to provide a new literary analysis model concerning the use of the above-mentioned literary technique: "boomerang stream of consciousness". To this end, I first give a brief synopsis and required background information about *Room Temperature*, followed by a detailed explanatory section of "boomerang stream of consciousness" based on psychological patterns offered by Dainton. Although other scholars' perspectives might be used through the process; the basis of this study's proposal is primarily founded on Dainton's idea of stream of consciousness, appearing in several, different thought divisions but fed by one single, static basis.

Although *Room Temperature* is Nicholson Baker's second book in form of a novel published in 1990, it has been unkindly neglected by the canon of literary criticism ever since, and not very much has been written on its innovative form and literary techniques. Until the present time, Arthur Saltzman has been the most important figure to have written on Baker's works in his *Understanding Nicholson Baker* in 1999 in which he analyses Baker's novels that were published before 1999 in addition to a collection of his essays and some uncollected non-fiction, which are not within the scope of this article. Highlighting *Room Temperature*'s Beckettian empiricism, Saltzman mostly tends to examine its content rather than committing to a deep exploration of its form, structure or investigating the formalistic usage of its potential literary techniques (1999: 32). In fact, considering the theme of the novel, he regards *Room Temperature* as a sequel to Baker's previous work, *The Mezzanine*, which resembles Howie, the protagonist's itinerary, emphasising the way that Mike's room also feels "astir with history".

Likewise and thematically, Wendy Lesser underlines the image of father figure in Baker's work and believes that Baker has "unwisely" sacrificed historical insertion for displaying a human desire for paternal passions (Saltzman 1999: 34). In addition, Michael Dirda, also as uncertain, calls *Room Temperature* "a show-stopping coloratura aria made up of the quirks of memory and the quiddities of daily life" and, once again, compares it to *The Mezzanine* despite his acknowledgment of its delightful lightheartedness (2013) Taking a relatively different outlook towards the content, Peter Evans examines the music references in this short novel and highlights the fugue type of music, heard throughout the work in comparison with the one in *The Mezzanine*.

Apparently, apart from the thematic readings of *Room Temperature* and occasional references to its literary allusions to Robert Frost's *Education by Poetry* or William Carlos Williams's *Prologue to Kora in Hell*, Françoise Sammarcelli has been the most prominent critic to study the form and narrative structure of *Room Temperature*. Observing the special kind of discourse within the book, Sammarcelli studies the way Baker's text in this novel "branches off" into countless departing units. In fact, she has noticed the syntactical complexity of a particular textual destabilisation in *Room Temperature*, which looks almost "Proustian in its piling up of adverbial and relative subordinate clauses and appositions." Furthermore, she also mentions the narrator's ritual that seems to deepen the novel's recontextualisation through interactions with accustomed objects. Despite Sammarcelli's painstaking syntactic analysis of *Room Temperature*'s text, no other significant accounts seem to have been made regarding the use of literary techniques and also the way Baker has developed the structure of his narrative, especially in terms the innovative usage of stream of consciousness in this particular work.

2 *Room Temperature*

Room Temperature is Nicholson Baker's second work of fiction, followed by *The Mezzanine*, in 1990. Interestingly, many critics have regarded *Room Temperature* as a perfectly demure continuation to *The Mezzanine*. However, the narrative in *Room Temperature* revolves around Mike, an apparently young father, whose baby daughter, strangely called "the Bug", is resting in the crook of his arm. Meanwhile, he blows in the direction of her mobile, and as he is surprised to see its wonderful movements, his thoughts wander around, and he finds himself contemplating seemingly unrelated subjects: from admitting to his wife that he has been picking his nose and juxtaposing Debussy to various memories with Skippy peanut butter jars.

That said, considering a special value for this short novel, Arthur Saltzman regards it as a tightly-concentrated work, which "moves from the occupational – the outer world, however eccentrically pressurized its itemized contents may be in the *Mezzanine* – to the domestic" (1999: 32). Furthermore, Michael Dirda also appreciates the plot without any particular action in this work and believes it, "offered lyricized info-dumps, gardens of forking paths appealingly littered with paper clips, gel pens, and shoelaces, digressive prose poems celebrating the delicate and remarkable beauty of the seemingly unremarkable" (Dirda 2013). In addition, Françoise Sammarcelli has also acknowledged the linguistic innovative features of the text in *Room Temperature*, paying a remarkable respect to its metatextual reverences and highly-valued imagery and textual intricacies empowered by syntactic disjunctions (2013: 7). What is more, Claire Fabre points out Baker's text in *Room Temperature* has magically changed objects into metaphors, which in turn become the means for a completely new form of metaphor (2006: 119).

Thus, as reflected by the above-mentioned remarks, *Room Temperature* is very likely to have some distinctive features that could clearly make it stand out and prove distinguished from many of its similar counterparts in modern American realist fiction. Now it is the focus of this article to explore and hopefully reveal another innovatively remarkable characteristic of this work with a particular focus on stream of consciousness.

3 Dainton's Framework of Stream of Consciousness

In his *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in conscious experience*, which the main focus of this study is based upon, Barry Dainton argues that although his work, in general, counts as a phenomenological study, it could also help to explore literary pieces properly as they all hold the essence of human consciousness to some certain degree (2000: xv). However, he tends to give a relatively firm definition of stream of consciousness and remarks that this phenomenon is a collective of experiences, unified at and over time in both synchronic and diachronic modes (Ibid: 2), which essentially emphasise experience unison, leading to the unity of a single mind. To elaborate on these co-conscious cross-sections, Dainton provides three different snapshots of one's experience during a short interval:

1. As you start to manipulate the object, you have tactile sensations in your hands and fingers. These do not occur by themselves but are continuous with the rest of your bodily experience (e.g. your body-image: sitting hunched in a chair). You are also having some thoughts – “What is this damned thing?” – emotional feelings (mounting frustration), and mental images (you are trying to find an image to fit the feel). These thoughts and images do not occur in isolation from one another, but they are experienced together – they are *co-conscious* – both with one another (thought + emotional feeling + mental image) and your various bodily experiences.
2. The audience was silent at first but has now started to make its presence felt; you try not to pay attention to the racket they are making but can hear them nonetheless. So now there are auditory experiences, which are co-conscious with your thoughts, mental images, emotional feelings and bodily sensations.
3. You have just removed the blindfold, so visual experiences now enter the mix; these are co-conscious with all your other experience: what you hear and feel in your body, what you are thinking and feeling emotionally (a mixture of anger, frustration and puzzlement) (Dainton 2000: 3).

As the above example makes it clear, all our experiences seem to be co-conscious and mutually co-related. However, one should not ignore the fact that all these short intervals are typically unified over time. In other words, in Dainton's view, stream of consciousness is nothing but a progressive succession of experiences and what provides a certain unity for this succession from one moment to another is the simple fact that the succession itself is also part of the experience (2000: 4). To put it another way, Dainton's main argument is that consciousness holds an “awareness-content” construction, and that the unison of consciousness includes a variety of contents that all fall under one and only one awareness (Ibid: 42).

The following chart can plainly explain Dainton's basic idea of stream of consciousness and its functional procedure:

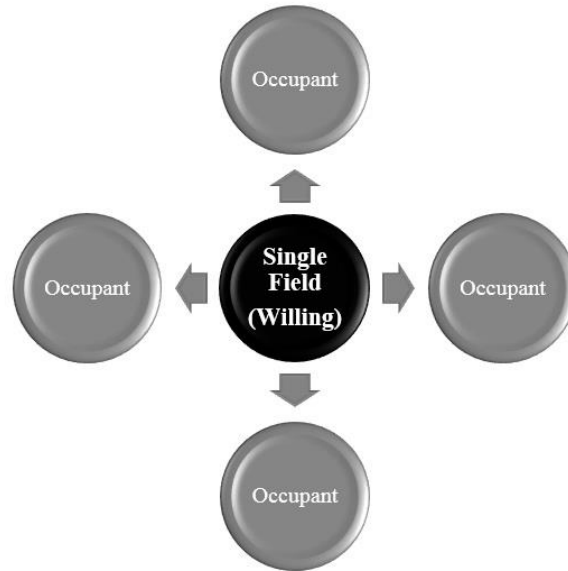


Figure 1. Dainton's One Single Momentary Experience of Stream of Consciousness

As seen in the above figure, there are four circles around a central one called “single field or willing”, and each of them represents a multitude of other circles on their own directions that would stand as different lines of the subject's thoughts. In fact, the only foundational part of each experience of human consciousness in Dainton's framework is one unique willing or single field, which could emit enumerable thought divisions that each is supposed to be an occupant carrying a distinct mental image; so no matter how many of these images are provoked in an experience, the important point to bear in mind for one is to notice the fact that they are all generated by one single feeding canon.

Apart from the epistemological study of human's stream of consciousness and exploring its indispensable essences, Dainton also highlights the question of time within this phenomenon and claims an ordinary type of stream of consciousness is believed to last for several hours (2000: 113) and what he takes as responsible for the unity of our experienced stream of consciousness is diachronic co-consciousness (Ibid: 114). However, due to the relative complexity of the concept, and since many scholars and philosophers have attempted to give a certain definition of the unfounded present, this short expanse of instant present, Dainton (1950: 399) refers to William James's attempt to hopefully clarify the notion as follows,

The practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a duration, with a bow and a stern, as it were – a rearward- and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this duration-block that the relation of succession of one end to the other is perceived. We do not first feel one end and then feel the other after it, and from the perception of the succession infer an interval of time between, but we seem to feel the interval of time as a whole, with its two ends embedded in it.

What Dainton concludes from James's argument is that, in spite of obvious dimensions that concern the temporal dynamics of stream of consciousness, one can vividly observe that regardless of the intricacy of our experience of co-consciousness, we always tend to have an instantaneous experience of what is present, a present time that is preceded by the past and is supposed to be followed by the future. Interestingly, this experienced present time is never transitory since we are obviously aware of time intervals as wholes in which resides a constant flow of content, which simply gives way to the next (2000: 117).

However, although Dainton highlights the inability of a total freeze to impinge on such a phenomenal continuity of one's mind and finally asks the important concluding question, "What connects the last phase of your pre-freeze stream of consciousness with the initial post-freeze phase?", he ostensibly presents an uncertain speculation and refers to a qualitative similarity and temporary memory (2000: 131) and does not step further to explore this single, this common feeding similarity. That is why this article intends to follow Dainton's highlights in this matter with a direct attention to literary analysis in order to suggest a relatively new model of stream of consciousness in literary studies, applying his definition regarding Nicholson Baker's *Room Temperature* and call it "boomerang stream of consciousness".

4 Analysis

Thus far having taken Dainton's model of stream of consciousness as a given that there needs to be a canonical "willing" to provoke various thought divisions as streams of uninterrupted flow of mental images, this article intends to present a close reading analysis of *Room Temperature* so as to provide sufficiently justifiable evidence to propose a new layer of literary use of stream of consciousness. To do so, each time the narrator's mind starts to stream and flow out of the actual setting of the novel (a division of thought in Dainton's term) and returns after a while is marked and closely analysed along with further complementary explanations to clarify this article's proposal the best way possible.

Conferring Dainton's presented model of stream of consciousness, I propose another model with exactly the same components but a slightly different (or perhaps additional) function in which not only the "single field" or "willing" provokes "occupants" or thought lines as a main source, but also attracts them back after just like a boomerang throwing spot with a boomerang thrown towards different directions (each holding a separately distinct sense of experience) and returning to the same field after a while as follows:

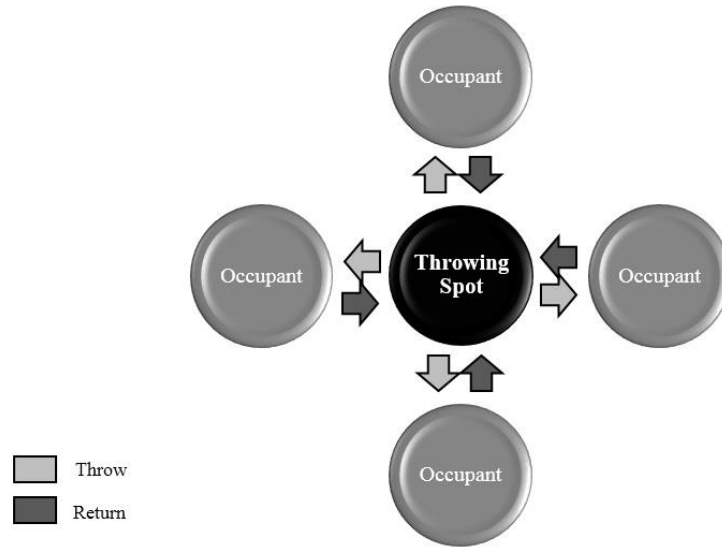


Figure 2. Boomerang Stream of Consciousness Functionality

The above figure is a simple prototype of “boomerang stream of consciousness” model with only a finite number of thought divisions that is caused by a unique, constant centre provoking “occupants” as well as attracting them back just like the way one throws a returning boomerang. In other words, this article proposes a new dimension of literary stream of consciousness as observed in Baker’s *Room Temperature* in which thought lines are thrown like a boomerang from one single “throwing spot” as far as possible (depending on the seriousness, complexity and contextual properties of the occupancy) and turn back again to the same spot, which has already generated the stream until both the boomerang and the narrative, back to the first place, cease to stream and come to a standstill. This “throwing spot” could be any possible motive that might range from a trivially insignificant mark on a table surface to an actual human being – as it is the case of this article: the Bug, Mike’s baby daughter.

In *Room Temperature*, one can identify 13 different “throwing spots”, which interestingly enough the majority of these boomerangs are thrown right at the beginning of each chapter of the book. In the following, each of the mentioned boomerangs are closely marked and their precise movement directions are studied through the key elements of Dainton’s model of stream of consciousness. The detailed result of the mentioned analysis, providing all these 13 “throwing spots” is presented in the following table:

Number	Throwing Spot	Throwing Field
1	“I was in the rocking chair giving our six-month-old Bug her late afternoon bottle” (3).	window panes fabric, stuff on the sill, unknown birds in the sky, knitting machines
2	“It was three-fifteen on a Wednesday. I had been singing “Over Hill, Over Dale” over and over to the Bug ... and I had been rocking and rocking” (9).	The princess-and-the-pea thought, riding bicycle as a boy, neighbourhood’s traffic lights mechanism and modern traffic control
3	“Across the room, above the white crib, hung a mobile that Patty had made in the early weeks of the	Inspection slips, Patty’s new habit of recording the Bug’s memoir in a notebook turned out to

	Bug's life. It turned slightly, though the air seemed still, and the sideways text of one of its pale-colored pendants came into view: ARMHOLE PRESSING NO. 11" (13).	be something more, their first air trip after becoming parents to his sister's wedding, family recollections
4	"I blew a slow, longish puff of air in the direction of the mobile of inspection slips to see whether I could make it move from where I sat, across the room from the crib or whether the impulse would die out along the way" (22).	engagement period, their first shared apartment followed by domestic ups and downs and related occurrences six years back
5	" She was going to sleep too quickly, before she had finished enough of the bottle, so I blew gently on her forehead. I had given her a bath that morning: her clean fine bang hair shifted. Her eyes, which had been half shut, opened fully and she saw me again" (34).	The anatomy of his family's noses and different kinds of noses in terms of shape, the toys they've bought for the Bug and the role she plays in his own life.
6	"Who could have predicted that the turquoise rubber aspirator she brought home from the hospital, the landmark device that made official her amphibious passage from a liquid life to a gaseous one in the first few seconds after her head emerged ..." (42).	Back to air trip again and this time pondering different types of air design including the structure of air nozzles in planes remembering his boyhood and grandmother on beach holidays.
7	"I was surprised to catch sight of some unusual movement in the Bug's mobile. Lining Press was wagging perceptibly on its thread, wanting to turn and the whole assembly seemed for a moment inclined to revolve clockwise" (50).	The nature of air streams, diaphragm structure, Boyle's experiments, his time struggling as a music student and playing Debussy, Stravinsky and Bach.
8	"The Bug herself never used pillows, except that time on the plane, when we put one of the miniature ones handed out by the flight attendant on my lap, under her knees" (57).	The feeling one gets from sleeping on pillows, recalling the time he was listening to Patty's pen writing on her diary notebook and then remembering a secondary memory of his musical education period.
9	"Even so, when Patty's handwriting paused for a moment that evening after Bug was born, and I held in my mind a tiny pen-sound that I felt sure was a comma, I didn't at first think of literary punctuation at all" (66).	The use of comma through several distinct flashbacks including a large argument with his mother in mid 1970s and referring to Boswell, De Quincey and Young's punctuation styles.
10	"But I didn't tell her about jobbing on squares of toilet paper until after the Bug was born" (88).	married life and mutual interest and love with his wife, Patty.
11	"Rocking, I was impressed by the tenuity of the vacuum (or, as members of the Royal Society once proudly called it, the <i>vacuum Boylianum</i>) that the Bug was able to create in her bottle" (99).	old college days with Patty in addition to the old days he learned about coins and stealing, saving or spending them.
12	"The vacuum in the bottle had gotten powerful enough now to be interfering with further delivery of milk, so I gently pulled its nipple from the Bug's mouth" (105).	a variety of different noises and sounds heard around him including the ones he and his baby made in sleep.
13	"In her sleep, the Bug made one last communication: a long hiccup inward breath, s sob played backward, the last remaining evidence of a burst of tearful bad temper half an hour before" (112).	mezzo-soprano in his old theory class.

Table 1. A Complete List of "throwing spots" and consequent "occupants"

Based on the above patterns, one can simply see an obvious commonality between all these thirteen different projections: the Bug. Typed in bold, the Bug in the above table serves as the only single Dainton's "willing" or "single field" that provokes quite a number of different "occupants", which this article takes as "throwing spot" and "throwing field" respectively in regard to the "boomerang model", mentioned earlier. According to "boomerang stream of consciousness" and as shown in the table above, the continuous flow of the narrator's consciousness is in constant back and forth movement between one and only one spot, his baby daughter on his arms, and various, and different mental images out of the actual setting of the narration. In addition, each throw is in an essential need of returning to a "throwing spot", which throws the boomerang towards a new field of imagination and the course of consciousness.

In fact, the above discussion is in precise accordance with Dainton's assertion that one important code of stream of consciousness is the fact that this mental state is wonderfully restricted to the adjacent "co-streamal" modes (2000: 129). Indeed, his continual flow of thoughts, graphic experience and bodily feeling, these fleeting acts of awareness or "representational anti-realisms" (Ibid: 135) are the same thought divisions in the "boomerang model" that are thrown towards the above-mentioned "anti-realisms" and back to the realism of the actual "throwing spot", where and by which the narrator comes to his/her senses before the next throw.

From another perspective, Dainton comes to an analogous conclusion in his work and maintains that all the content through stream of consciousness, made up of momentary acts, is obliged to possess a higher or lower single degree (2000: 145). Correspondingly, as presented in Table 1 above, in all the extracted excerpts the Bug plays a remarkable axial role in the entire novel as she is the one who not only initiates Mike's thought division and flow of his consciousness, but also she calls them back in a tentatively regular basis. Interestingly enough, except chapters 10 and 12 of the book in which the boomerang does not return due to the extension of the narrator's stream of consciousness, all the above thirteen throws that are extracted in this article occur at the beginning of a new chapter. However, the analysis of the reasons behind this kind of particular division and the exploration of the content of those two exceptional chapters are beyond the scope of this paper, but it certainly requires another painstaking examination – mostly from content point of view – in further researches in this field.

Furthermore, observing Table 1, one may deduce from a careful study of each row that the content of each "throwing spot" is semantically correlated to that of the "throwing field". That is, each "throwing spot", existing in its own semantic essence and value, acts as a motivator, which triggers the narrator's consciousness to begin streaming from the same conceptual notion and then develops into more diverse and even sometimes completely irrelevant signifiers. For instance, regarding the first excerpt in Table 1, which presents the beginning of chapter 1 of the novel, Mike the narrator is simply rocking on his chair with his baby girl, the Bug, on his lap and tries to give her the afternoon bottle, which is largely irrelevant to the final image on his mind: different, possible types of sounds from a knitting machine while working. However, the commencement of thought divisions has actually derived from the "throwing spot" of the same part: rocking on the chair and being exposed to a frequent view out of the window, which advances on, and one image leads to another, and we finally encounter a complicatedly unrelated, woven pile of fleeting thoughts.

Evidently, although Dainton regards stream of consciousness as something composed of a dense chain of momentary experiences that each contains an absolutely essential sign of the preceding stretch of the flow (2000: 151), this article offers a second code to this definition and proposes that in some modern and especially post-modern fictions, characters' stream of consciousness is not only displayed in a chain of successive flow that correlates to the previous stretch, but also it could always return to actual source of the flow (a real entity and part of the narrative) each time and after a certain interval in the realistic domain of the setting, it is sent away towards another direction from the same source, this time carrying a clearly different image.

It is noteworthy to pay a close attention to the reason such patterns need to be drawn and presented in studies on stream of consciousness. In Dainton's view, without a fundamental patterning, there would be no possibility for us to decipher, recognise and explore the structure of our consciousness flow (2000: 177). In other words, it is only through a patterned content that one may realise their self-awareness of the existence of this phenomenon since it provides an appropriate direction and allows us to frame a true-to-life understanding of its temporality. Accordingly, the present study not only intends to view a particular modern work of fiction with the mentioned perspective proposing a new perspective, but also attempts to present the suggested model as figuratively as possible.

In line with Dainton's justification of stream of consciousness's temporal symmetry, Mike in *Room Temperature*, presents different modes of his own flow of mental images in an overlapping way. Dainton notes that each phase of stream of consciousness overlaps the former and later phases. However, he then excludes the first and the last phase, which he believes are "co-conscious with later and earlier co-streamal phases" (2000: 218). Conversely, according to the observed and listed phases in Table 1, this article suggests that in "boomerang stream of consciousness", it is an obvious possibility for the first and the last phases to be just as independently woven as the other streams. Neither the first phase, in which the Bug's bottle provokes the first thought division, nor in the last one with the Bug's hiccups causing Mike to remember and flow through his music lesson memories, feels different from the other streams since they are all fed by a central power, the Bug, that functions as a "throwing spot", which not only marks the throw of each "boomerang stream", but also makes it return after a certain while. Therefore, I propose that these types of literary streams of consciousness could benefit from a variety of phases (with possibly infinite frequency), which are more co-dependent – on a central feeding source – rather than being "co-streamal".

One other significant distinction between Dainton's succession of thought divisions and the model proposed in this article concerns the last phase of stream of consciousness. As discussed above, Dainton asserts that even the final chain is believed to be "co-streamal" while an observation of each and every stream of consciousness in *Room Temperature* leads to the obvious fact that the final chain of flows in "boomerang model" is the one which needs to return to the feeding source or "throwing spot" and remain still until the whole narration, including the narrator's stream of consciousness, comes to a close. To elaborate more, let us have a glance at the final chain, marked in Table 1: once the Bug's continuous hiccups make Mike flow through his past memories of his mezzo-soprano theory class and ponder the mechanism of sounds and music he used to practice and play, he experiences the last stream of consciousness and the "boomerang" returns to the "throwing spot". More interestingly, both the narrator and the whole narrative

reappear at the same level including the “throwing spot”, the Bug in this novel, as if the feeding source embraces them both to encourage a restored ease having been away for a while after the commencement of the novel.

In order to explain the end of such narratives using the “throwing spot” that embraces both the “boomerang” and the whole narrative after a series of diverse flows of consciousness, it would be appropriate enough to examine the final paragraph of *Room Temperature* first:

Everything in my life was beginning to route itself through the Bug. I carried her to her crib and zipped her up in her flameretardant incunabulum: she shook her head twice when she felt the withdrawal of my hands under her, but she stayed asleep. I gazed at her idolatrously. Over her head, the inspection slips fluttered for a few seconds to mark her airborne passage and then grew still. I picked up the TLS from next to the rocking chair and tiptoed out of the room with it.

(Baker 1990: 116)

As shown above, the Bug, that has been proved to be the feeding source and the main cause or the “throwing spot” of each and every stream of consciousness in this novel, appears in the final paragraph again along with the narrator’s mind back to the actual setting of the novel, reviving the scene the reader meets at the outset with Mike sitting in the room at home with her baby girl, the Bug, on his lap. Thus, the very final part of “boomerang” narratives of stream of consciousness could be another significant distinction between Dainton’s model and similar literary patterns in modern fiction which highlights the potential possibility of numerous, infinite number of streams within a certain, finite pattern or, in other words, a finite infinity, which is clearly illustrated in the following diagram:

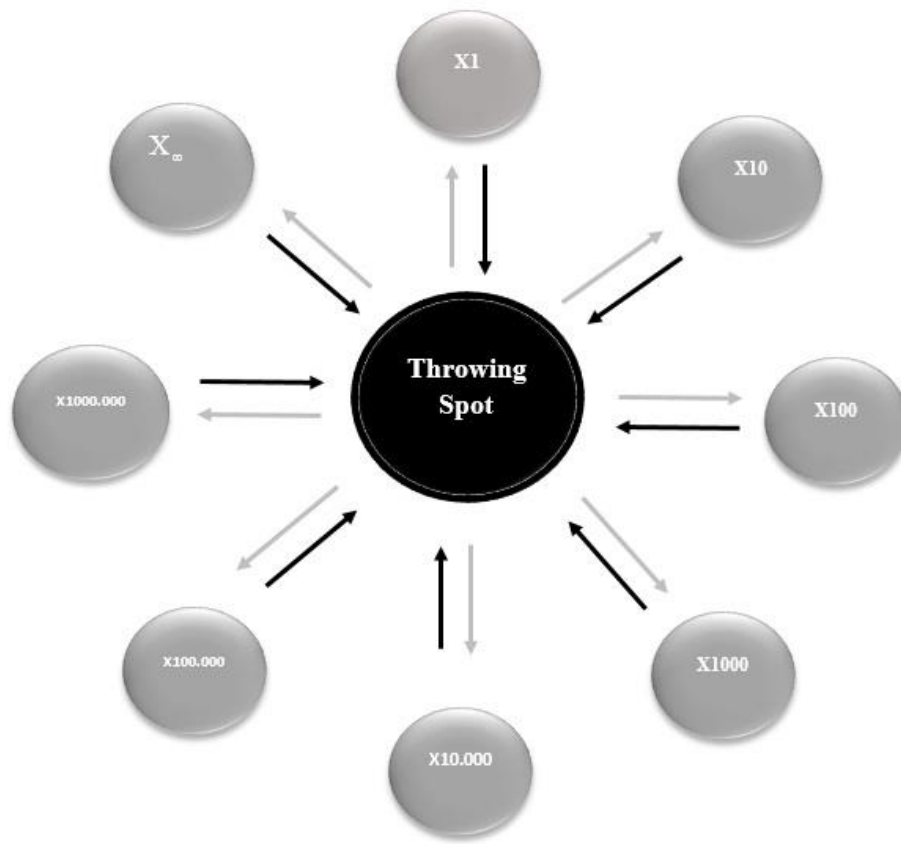


Figure 3. Boomerang Stream of Consciousness Model with Finite Infinity

As shown above, the finite infinity of thought divisions in “boomerang stream of consciousness” denotes the possibility of numerous streams of consciousness, provoked by one “throwing spot”, thrown and returned after a certain while, which are finitely bound between X_1 (the first throw or so-called stream) and X_∞ (the last one) finalising the narrative with the same setting and scene observed at the very beginning.

5 Conclusion

This article approaches Barry Dainton’s stream of consciousness model, which stresses the possibility of the existence of infinite number of thought divisions parallel to each other with the exception of the first and the last one within a certain amount of time. However, adhering to Dainton’s basic assertion, this paper involves proposing a relatively different model of the same concept in terms of literary fiction analysis in which the source responsible for thought divisions is highlighted and marked as a “throwing spot”, provoking a semi-infinite number of

consciousness streams like a boomerang that is required to return to the same source after a certain while.

Furthermore, what “boomerang stream of conscious” suggests is that not only the back and forth movements of the streams occur within a certain period, but also the whole narration comes to a close at the very starting point in the same setting of the fiction work in question through the same character. It is noteworthy that further analyses of other modern and post-modern literary fictions will certainly provide more evidence for clarifying the proposed model in this study due to the abundance of stream of consciousness use in such works within the canon of literature.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank dear Dr Omid Miraliyari, mechanical engineering lecturer at Sama technical and vocational training college of Arak in Iran, and appreciate his sincere collaboration in helping with schematic sections of this paper and making it possible to visualise the proposed “boomerang stream of consciousness” with his brilliant ideas and suggestions. Being grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this paper for all their comments and advice, I hereby admit that all the shortcomings of this study are mine only.

References

- Alber, Jan, Fludernik, Monika (eds.). 2010. *Postclassical Narratology: approaches and analyses*. Ohio: The Ohio State University.
- Baker, Nicholson. 1990. *Room Temperature*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.
- Bal, Mieke. 2017. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Cox, Alisa. 2005. *Writing Short Stories: A Routledge Writer's Guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Dainton, Barry. 2000. *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in Conscious Experience*. London: Routledge.
- Dirda, Michael. 2013. Funny, But Serious Too. Accessed July 10, 2020. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/21/funny-serious-too/>
- Fabre, C. 2006. At the Edge of Intimacy: Exhibitions of Interiority in Nicholson Baker's *Room Temperature* (1984). *Revue française d'études américaines*, 109, 113-121. <https://www.cairn-int.info/journal--2006-3-page-113.htm>.
- Holman, C. Hugh. 1980. *A Handbook to Literature*. Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill
- Humphrey, Robert. 1954. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel: A Study of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, William Faulkner and others*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- James, William. 1950. *The Principles of Psychology*. New York: Dover.
- Meister, Jan Christop. 2005. *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality, Disciplinarity*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Saltzman, Arthur. 1999. *Understanding Nicholson Baker*. South Carolina: University of South Carolina.
- Sammarcei, Françoise. 2013. “Narrative Cloggers”: Notes on Description and Subversion in Nicholson Baker's Fiction. *European Journal of American Studies*. 8-1.
- Schmid, Wolf. Trans. Alexander Starritt. 2010. *Narratology: An Introduction*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Thompson, Gary Richard. 2011. *Reading the American Novel 1865 – 1914*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Arash Khoshsafo
Unit 10, Level 10, Tower B, M Suites, 55000
Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia
E-mail: arash.khoshsafo@yahoo.com

In SKASE Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies [online]. 2024, vol. 6, no. 1 [cit. 2024-06-30].
Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JLCS12/02.pdf>. ISSN 2644-5506