Sztranyiczki Zsófia: Spatio-temporality in narrative fiction: Humboldt's Gift by Saul Bellow
Argumentum, 2 (2006), 1-16
Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó (Debrecen)

Tanulmány

Sztranyiczki Zsófia

Spatio-temporality in narrative fiction: *Humboldt's Gift by Saul Bellow*

Abstract

The present study permits us to demonstrate the construction of the deictic center (DC), the text features that signal the deictic center as well as the shifting of time and space and the linguistic devices that affect the shifts in *Humboldt's Gift* by Saul Bellow. The temporal and spatial structures of the novel are analyzed, taking into consideration the deictic centering of each component, DC shifts, linguistic devices that influence shifting, patterns in temporal shifts (direction and distance involved in the shifts), patterns in spatial scale, spatial transitions (from planned and moderate movement to erratic unplanned motion) and a chapter-by-chapter record of the temporal and spatial structure of the novel (table 1. and 2.). The treatment of each structure of the narrative adopts some of the parameters suggested by Talmy (2001[2000]).

1 Space and time parameters in narratives

Earlier attempts to define space and spatial structures in narratives (Bakhtin 1992 [1981]; Zoran 1984) focus on structural and functional properties of space as brought about by the verbal continuum of the text. Text viewed as a Saussurean system of signs endowed with autonomy, capable of establishing *an internal field of reference* (Zoran 1984) and of projecting different 'textual levels', also establishes a triadic structure of space, *the textual level, the chronotopic level and the topographical level*. These interact in a dynamic process that leads up to the construction of the *complex of space* (the explicit elements of space in the text), complemented with *the total space* (presupposed, deduced elements, the 'domain of missing information' [cf. Zoran 1984]). Since spatial structure is bound by time, by the temporal arrangement of its structure along the linearity of the text, structuralists see a dividing line between the *spatial dimension of the reconstructed world* (the space of the fictional world) and the *spatial pattern* (its linear arrangement in the text), tantamount to the fabula–sjuzhet (story vs. discourse) distinction[1].

[1] The distinction between story and discourse (or fabula and sjuzhet, in the Russian formalist tradition) has been made by many narrative theorists (Benveniste 1966; Cohn 1978; Chatman 1989 [1978]; Genette 1980, 1983; Eco 1979; Banfield 1982; Rimmon-Kenan 1983; Stanzel 1984). However, not all agree on the scope of these two terms. Benveniste (1966: 237–250) discusses the French temporal system as a set of separate realms, the *discours* and the *histoire*. *Discours* is marked by the presence of a speaker and an addressee and employs the present tense system as the default tense for communication. This system does not allow for the introduction of an aorist, the *passé simple.* Since fictional narratives employ the past simple as the default tense, they are part of *histoire*. Benveniste's distinction between *histoire* and *discours* was criticized by Genette (1983) who includes fictional narrative in the category of *discours*: "whether fiction or history, nar-

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Time is analyzed by structuralists in terms of a deep level temporality (fabula) vs. surface-level temporality (sjuzhet), and the fabula is prior to sjuzhet: interpretation is seen as a reconstruction of the chronological order of events. Seen more as a reflection of Platonist ideas of a prior, ideal, higher order (Herrstein-Smith 1981 [1980]), we "remain caught in the labyrinthine chronology of the told story" (Ricoeur 1981 [1980]), and surface-structure chronological distortions (*anachronies* – Genette 1980). This reflects what Sternberg (1992: 471) calls *methodological, axiological and ideological preconceptions*: the temporal form of deviance (anachrony) is elevated to an artistic level on the assumption that perfect correspondence, chronological narratives simply do not exist. Consequently, narrative is inherently a *distortion*: "either anachrony or no (good) narrative" (ibid. 471). Genette adds a third dimension to the analysis of fictional narratives, the level of *narration* (1980), the process of telling or writing, also adopted by Bal (1992 [1985]), Rimmon-Kenan (1983) and Toolan (2001 [1988]). Fabula and sjuzhet in this framework is negotiated through a narrator (the narrating instance) who is communicating/transmitting fictional facts.

Discrepancies between *text-time* (spatial, linear dimension of the text, reading time) and *story-time* (chronological sequence of events as having duration measurable in temporal units) are usually analyzed in terms of order (flashbacks – *analepses*; flashforwards – *prolepses*); duration (story duration and textual length; 4 types of duration or speed: ellipsis, summary, scene, pause); and frequency (temporal iteration, repetition of events), under the major category of *tense* (Genette 1980). The temporality of fiction is thus seen as the temporal order of events projected/reconstructed by the text, as a combination of sequentiality, duration and frequency, since "we are all tempted to see time as an objective, measurable and unambiguous category that can be pictured as a dotted line progressing from past to future" (Fludernik 2003: 119). This is regarded as an *extension* of an *empirical time concept* (ibid. 119; Ronen 1994): physical time as we experience it imposes its own logics onto the fictional world, and therefore we are caught in the trap of assimilating fictional time to objective time, i.e. time as we experience/know it in the real world. Fiction as the "linguistic correlative to the system of reality" (Hamburger 1993 [1973]: 51), and obeying the spatio-temporal laws/coordinates of reality, has an "as-reality" structure (ibid. 59) that contributes to the illusion, the semblance of reality.

The present study adopts a different concept of spatio-temporality in fictional narratives. Fictional worlds are seen as *autonomous* systems constituting independent *modal structures* (cf. Ronen 1994); i.e. the domains constituting the fictional world (characters and objects, events, time and space) obey modes of organization that are unique to the given fiction.[2] As such, the fictional world constructs its own world of referents, an *intensional* world (Ronen 1994; Ryan 1991 a, b; Doležel 1998), ontologically independent of the real (actual world)[3].

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rative is a discourse; with language, one can produce only discourse" (1983: 101). Genette's distinction is based on a communicational model of fictional narrative. Story vs. discourse is also seen as the level of linguistic units combined together as the text unfolds (discourse, sjuzhet) vs. the narrative content (fabula, story).

[2] There are many literary theorist who rely on modal concepts in their account of fictionality: Eco (1984 [1979]); Doležel (1998); Pavel (1986); Currie (1990); Ryan (1991a, b); Ronen (1994).

[3] See segregationist-extensionalist theories of fiction (Russell, Frege) which propose 'a robust realism' in which the referential domain of fiction is solely the actual world (see Pavel 1986; Doležel 1998). Other "one-world model frames of fiction" (Doležel 1998) include the Saussurean no-reference views on fiction and Riffaterre's (1990) semantics of fictionality who relies on the *self-referentiality* of texts. In his account fictional truth/reference is a linguistic phenomenon based on text grammar: "readers need not be familiar with the reality that the text is about in order to believe it true. The only reference against which they need to test the

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The discourse (the text) projects a universe (a sum of worlds) in which some states of affairs are actual, others are hypothetical or impossible. The world of the story, the so-called "S-world" (Currie 1990: 62) is "a possible world in the sense of modal semantics": it is created in the human mind. The reader, as a "traveller" discovers not only a "new actual world" – the world of the story – but a variety of alternative possible worlds revolving around it: worlds of belief, memory, prediction (Ryan 1991a: 22) and so on.

The delineation of the discourse (level of linguistic units combined together as the text unfolds) from story (the text projecting a story world) is important in understanding how readers comprehend a certain narrative.[4] The separation of these two planes in narratives triggers the postulation of different *deictic fields*, which offer a clear-cut approach of how narratives are comprehended. The deictic coordinate system, the here–now–I paradigm of a speaker in an everyday conversation is transposed/shifted to a moment of a character's consciousness within the story world. The sentences of narration 'project' and create the reality of the *story world*, the representation of a given narrative directed by the syntax and semantics of the text, without which a given narrative cannot be comprehended.[5] *Story worlds* are set up on the basis of explicit textual cues as well as implicit inferences. The conceptual space of the narrative, the *story world* (w1) contains other, more localized spatio-temporal points (w2, w3, t2, t3, etc.). The entities of the story world and the subset worlds of the story contribute to the reader's world-building process of the story.

Fictional time, therefore, exists through *deictic windows*, through deictic centers that readers shift to in order to comprehend the narrative, the world of the fiction. Temporal chronological structure is indeed a basic parameter of the *story world*; however, not everything that makes up the temporal structure of the story is tantamount to what actually occurs in the story. The primary conception of fiction as a separate ontology having its own logico-

narrative's truth is language. All they have to verify is that the text is derived grammatically." (1990: 8). The self-referentiality or non-referentiality of texts, seen as free from referential constraints, was propagated by Russian formalists and their structuralist followers (Bal 1992 [1985]; Rimmon-Kenan 1983; Chatman 1989 [1978]). Doležel rightly questions the validity of such approaches: "but how does the concept of fictionality fare in a semantics without reference?" (1998: 5).

4 Following Galbraith (1995) and Segal (1995a, b) I distinguish between the linguistic units of discourse which map onto units of the story. The story as the totality of events and experiences is embedded in a *story world* which surrounds the events of the story. Story worlds are mental representations of readers, inhabited by existents (participants and objects) and events (see also Pavel 1986). Story worlds comprise *the actual story world* (explicit text, what is perceived as objective and implicit assumptions, linguistic, encyclopedic, etc. inferences) and *possible story worlds* (dreams, predictions, belief, etc.). In reconstructing the *story world*, readers operate with what Ryan calls *the law of minimal departure*: "we reconstrue the alternative possible worlds of nonfactual statements as conforming as far as possible to our representation of the actual world. We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text" (Ryan 1991a: 51).

5 Fabula is not thought of as an abstract, logically prior concept derived from the artifice of the narrative medium (the sjuzhet). The Benvenistean *histoire–discours* is here seen as not denoting the structuralist misapplication of the dualist chronology vs. anachrony. The deictic coordinate system of I-You of everyday communication is shifted to the deictic field of the story: the subjective (hence modal) notion of the deictic center permits 'access' (as a sort of unobtrusive, direct viewing) to the world of the story (Banfield's notion of subject of consciousness > representation of consciousness), and allows shifts that affect not only the characters, but objects, places and times as well, as the deictic center is continuously moved and relocated. Objectivity in *histoire* is seen as the self-constituting universe of the fictional world, unmediated by an a priori narrating instance (Banfield's concept of objective narration > representation of story world). Discourse in narrative is thus *a means of representation* that maps upon *the represented world* (cf. Titzmann 2003), the mental construct of the story world.

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semantic rules grants fictional spatio-temporality its own autonomy: it exists within the confines of the fictional system. Hence, the perception of time in fiction is triggered by the sequential arrangement of materials in the text and the linguistic notions of tense, aspect, temporal connectives; nonetheless, temporal indicators/concepts signify *modal* differentiations that might flout the rules of tense usage. Thus, modality is superimposed upon temporal relations and markings: temporality obeys the constraints imposed by the *deictic center*, the conceptual locus where the reader is cognitively situated and views the unfolding of the story. Chronology, in this view, is subjected to the *modal structure* of the fictional universe: "chronology and causal sequence are themselves best thought of as ultimately perspectival issues" (Walsh 2001: 599) that both authors and readers are aware of whilst being deictically situated in the world of the narrative. The deictic center, with its temporal, spatial and personal parameters thus forms a *focalizing perspective* from which the reader views the unfolding of the story events.

The mental construct of the story world requires a mental model of space – readers reconstruct the *story world* not only chronologically, but spatio-temporally: the construction of cognitive maps or mental maps (Ryan 2003), path-traces or transpositions from on location to another (Talmy 2001 [2000]) are paramount in narrative comprehension. Movements of characters (Zoran's *chronotopic space*) along path-traces contribute to the global representation of space (Zoran's *topographic space*). This process is usually thought of as a bottom-up process (starting from locations, character movements, linking one piece of spatial information to the next, gradually building up the mental space of the narrative). However, as Ryan (2003) argues, the configuration of the space of a given narrative is not constructed "like the pieces of a puzzle, for this would mean that comprehensive images of textual space cannot be fully formed before the end of the text" (ibid. 236). Therefore, one must assume that "readers work from the very beginning with a global, but very schematic, vision of the spatial configuration of the textual world" (ibid. 236). This emphasizes the dynamicity of spatial structures which interact closely with temporal structures (change in time often co-occurs with change in space). The spatial framework, as in the case of temporality, anchors in the deictic center's here-and-now (the focalizing WHO's location at the present moment of the narrative action): it is conceived as the deictic center's locations, movements, paths of motion, always updated as the plot unfolds in time and space.

2 Space and time in *Humboldt's Gift*

2.1 The Temporal Structure of Humboldt's Gift

Humboldt's Gift is a retrospective first-person narrative, a blending of *dissonant* and *consonant* first-person narration (Cohn 1978). Cohn distinguishes between dissonant first-person narration, which presents a distance (a dissonance) between the enunciating-narrating 'I' and the experiencing 'I'. Consonant first-person narration, on the other hand, shows a tight relationship between the narrating 'I' and the experiencing 'I': the narrating 'I' merges with his earlier embodiments, and the information, opinion, judgments are presented without analysis or generalization (without referring to the epistemic knowledge of the narrating 'I'). The first-person narrator in the novel shares a function both on the narrational and the story plane. The novel exhibits a variety of narrative forms, among which mimetic direct discourse (dialogues)

and different monologue techniques: quoted monologues, unsignalled quoted monologues (quoting of past thoughts unmarked by typographical means) and narrated monologues.[6]

The 'present' of the novel is in fact only five months: from December 1973 to April 1974. The retrospective remembrances of Charlie Citrine, the homodiegetic-intradiegetic narrator (Genette 1980), both a protagonist and a witness narrator (Rimmon-Kenan 1983), a well-known writer, thinker and distinguished professor go back to the early twenties, through the forties and fifties, culminating with Humboldt's death in 1968 and the narrative present, December 1973–April 1974. Almost all of Charlie's recollections connect – in one way or another – to Humboldt von Fleisher, from their first encounter, their peculiar 'blood-brother' relationship, estrangement and Humboldt's death to Humboldt's gift, the 'legacy' into which Citrine comes.

Humboldt's Gift's temporal structure exhibits a discrepancy between *story world time* and *narrative time*. Narrative time progresses forward as the reader attends to the work (as s/he progresses through the narrative), but the narrative does not refer to the story world time in the sequence in which the events take place. The narrative takes us backward or forward in story world time causing temporal shifts of the DC which may, as a result, trigger spatial shifts of the DC.

The narrative present[7], as mentioned previously, comprises five months: from December 1973 to April 1974. However, the temporal structure of the novel contains events that take us back to the twenties (Charlie's childhood), thirties (meeting Humboldt) and forties (Charlie's family life, Humboldt's decay). Multiple past events are evoked through the exercise of unbidden or voluntarily recalled memories, but not in the order in which they occurred in the *story world*.

- Charlie's memories provide access to the key events of the story. They are as follows:
- 1930's: Humboldt's book comes out (*Harlequin Ballads*) and is an immediate success
- 1940's: Humboldt at the peak of his career, teaching at Princeton
- beginning of the fifties: Charlie and Humboldt's covenant (the blood-brother check) Demmie Vonghel's death (1952)
- Charlie's Broadway hit (1953)
- 1960's: Humboldt's death (1968)

2.1.1 Direction of Temporal Shifts

The focalizing WHO, Charlie, remembers past events from an *embedded now-point*: a point in time in the narrative present (December 1973–April 1974) serves as trigger of the projection of a past event. This point in time serves as a *focalizing* WHEN, a current time frame in the story from which the narrator recollects/imagines a past/future event. Take the following example:

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[6] This typology follows Cohn's classification (1978) of retrospective techniques in first-person narration.

[7] The narrative present as first posited by Reinhart (cf. Ronen 1994) constitutes the core of narrativity: it is the primary ontological level of narratives, the "immediately presented and actually occurring narrative events" or "events which are expected, talked about, hypothesized" (Ronen 1994: 212). *Narrative now-point* (or current Now) is the present moment within a narrative-line (a stretch of narrative) which allows the combination of the temporal deictic *now* with a past sentence to be grammatical in a narrative context (Almeida 1995: 170).

(1a) These meditations were supposed to make you tranquil. To look behind the appearances you had to cultivate an absolute calm. And I didn't feel very calm ***now.*** The heavy shadow of a jet from Midway airport crossed the room, reminding me of the death of Demmie Vonghel. Just before Christmas in the year of my success she and Daddy Vonghel died in a plane crash in South America. Demmie was carrying my Broadway scrapbook. Perhaps she had just begun to show it to him when the crash occurred. No one ever knew quite where this was – somewhere in the vicinity of the Orinoco River. I spent several months in the jungle looking for her. It was at this time that Humboldt put through the blood-brother check I had given him. Six thousand seven hundred and sixty-three dollars and fifty-eight cents was a smashing sum. But it wasn't the money that mattered much. What I felt was that Humboldt should have respected my grief. *I thought, What a time he chose to make his move! How could he do that! To hell with the money. But he reads the papers. He knows she's gone!* (p. 162).

In this passage, the focalizing WHEN of the current now (Charlie, in his room in Chicago in December 1973) serves as an embedding point for a series of focalized WHENs relating to past events, triggered by present stimulus (the sound and the shadow of a jet). The first focalized WHEN is the circumstance in which his girlfriend, Demmie Vonghel died (in another recollection this is pinpointed as the year of 1952) and then the time of Demmie's death is paralleled to Humboldt's cashing the blank check that Charlie had put out for him. The DC of the narrator (overtly marked by "now") shifts to the DC of the event time in the last 5 sentences (marked in italics).

At other times recollection of past events is done voluntarily: for instance, when Roger, Renata's son goes down with the flu Charlie recalls the Christmas of 1924 (his childhood) spent in a TB sanatorium:

(2a) I recalled that I had spent the Christmas of 1924 in the TB sanatorium. The nurses gave me a thick-striped peppermint candy cane and a red openwork Christmas stocking filled with chocolate coins wrapped in gilt, but it was depressing joy and I longed for Papa and Mama and for my wicked stout brother, Julius, even. *Now* I had survived this quaking and heartsickness and was an elderly fugitive, the prey of Equity, sitting in Madrid, cutting and pasting with sighs (p. 398).

or the recollection of a Sunday in September 1952:

(2b) So **from the present** I **see** two odd dolls in the front seat of the roaring, grinding four-holer. This Buick was all over mud and looked like a staff car from Flanders Field. [...] Through the thin sunlight of early autumn Humboldt drove fast, taking advantage of the Sunday emptiness of the streets. [..] Steering, he was humped huge over the wheel, he had small-boy tremors of the hands and feet, and he kept the cigarette holder between his teeth. He was agitated, talking away, entertaining, provoking, informing and snowing me. he hadn't slept **last night** (p. 20).

The current now point (overtly marked in the first sentence by "from the present I see') embeds the description of Humboldt's driving his Buick on a Sunday in the past, the DC also shifts (italicized sentences indicate the shifted DC to event time), overtly marked by detailed descriptions and the temporal deictic "last night" which ties to the day before Sunday.

Forward-movements in time are very rare and all relate to the narrator's contemplation of the immediate future: for instance, the circumstances and consequences of his future marriage to Renata (chapter 33). However, in the actual *story world* this does not happen, since Renata marries Flonzaley, the undertaker:

(3) The knot could be tied at the American Embassy by the military attaché, perhaps, or even a notary public for all I knew. I would go to the antique shops (I loved the Madrid antique shops) to look for two wedding bands and I could throw a champagne supper at the Ritz...after we have sent the Senora back to Chicago, the three of us might move to Segovia [...] we could live there en famille in one of the old back

streets [...] Roger could attend nursery school and eventually my little girls might join us, because when Denise won her case and collected her money she'd want to get rid of them immediately (p. 400–401).

At times the DC seems to shift back and forth within the same passage:

(4a) **Eight or nine years ago**, reading the poem, I thought, Poor Humboldt, these shock treatment doctors have lobotomized him, they've ruined the guy. **But now,** I saw this as a communication, not as a poem. The imagination must not pine away – that was Humboldt's message. [..] This was what Humboldt **now** appeared to me to be saying. If that was so, Humboldt was never more sane and brave than at the end of his life. And I **had run** away from him on Forty-Sixth Street just when he had most to tell me. I **had spent that** morning, as I have mentioned, grandly dressed up and revolving elliptically over the City of New York in that Coast Guard helicopter, with the two US Senators and the Mayor and officials from Washington and Albany and crack journalists, all belted up in puffy life jackets, each jacket with its sheath knife. (**I've never gotten over those knives). And then**, after the luncheon in Central Park (**I am compelled to repeat**), I **walked** out and **saw** Humboldt, a dying man eating a pretzel stick at the curb, the dirt of the grave already sprinkled on his face. **Then** I rushed away (p. 108).

In this passage "eight or nine years ago" establishes the current WHEN which is maintained by "but now" and "now" in the following sentences. The use of the past perfect and the back-shifting "that" and the additional comments in brackets referring to speech time indicate that the DC is still the narrator's current time frame. The preposed temporal adverbial "then" seems to switch the DC to the event time, maintained by the tense chaining device (two simple past tenses) and the detailed description of the scene ("eating a pretzel at the curb, the dirt of the grave already sprinkled on his face").

2.1.2 Distance in Temporal Shifts

The distance in temporal shifts in the novel comprises years, from the 1920's to the 1960's. The narrator's present (spanning from December 1973 to April 1974) is – in all parts of the novel (41 altogether) – alluded to, sometimes very discretely, at other times overtly (see passage 4 above), few chapters are entirely in the narrative present, with no flashbacks (e.g. chapters 38– 40). The key events mentioned above are presented achronologically: the reader has to reconstruct the event pattern of the story from one piece of information to the other, tying events together and eventually learning the overall pattern of the story. The shifts in the focalized WHEN of the narrator's thoughts or memories relate to the key events of the story (mentioned previously). Several shifts relate to the same key event (but every time providing new information), other temporal shifts "land" before or after the key events.

The duration in narrative time of the key events is rather brief (though is visited several times); we find more dense descriptions of characters (focalized WHOs) and Charlie's introspective philosophical thinking (for instance, on boredom and the immortal spirit). The time span (scale) of events covered ranges back to the twenties, some events are presented in great detail – for instance, Charlie's seeing Humboldt two months prior to his death – others are sketchily presented and very briefly mentioned. One particularity of the novel is that the author is economical about dates: we know the exact time of some events (for instance, meeting Humboldt in 1938, Charlie's Broadway success in 1953), but the reader has to reconstruct the majority of the dates. For instance, the year of Humboldt's death is only alluded at, in reference to narrative present or to some other point in time (e.g. "three decades after *Harlequin Ballads* made him famous he died of a heart attack"; Humboldt, who had been dead for six or seven years, re-entered my life").

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Table 1. shows the main events in the *story world* set up in time frames (twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties and seventies) and their chronological order of appearance (from chapter 1 to 41). The events of each chapter are presented in Table 2. The shifts in the WHEN are marked accordingly, if there are more shifts, then there are indications in number (e.g. DC1, DC2, etc.). Sometimes the DC is maintained within the current time frame (for instance, December 1973, Charlie's meditations on the sofa; e.g. chapters 8 and 9) and the WHEN does not shift to the event time. This is indicated by M (memory), where the event is only focalized on, it does not emerge as the origin of the WHEN.

Table 1. Temporal Structure of *Humboldt's Gift*

1920's	1930's	1940's	1950's	1960's		Dec. 1973	1974 (Jan.–Apr.)	Chapter
DC3	DC2					DC1		1
	DC3		DC4	DC2		DC1, D		2
		DC4	DC5	DC2	DC3	DC1		3
					DC2	DC1		4
			M1, DC2			DC1		5
			DC2	M1	DC3	DC1		6
	M1	M2			M3	DC1		7
	M2	DC2			M1	DC1		8
					M1	DC1		9
					M1	DC1		10
				M2,DC2	M1	DC1		11
				M1		DC1		12
			DC2			DC1		13
			DC2			DC1		14
			DC2	DC3		DC1		15
			DC2			DC1		16
			DC2,3			DC1		17
					M1	DC1		18
					M1	DC1		19
					DC2,3,4	DC1		20
					M1	DC1		21
					M1	DC1		22
			M1, M2			DC1,2,3,4		23
					M1	DC1,2		24
					M1/DC2	DC1		25
					M1/DC3	DC1,2		26
M1						DC1,2		27
	M1			M2		DC1		28
					M1,2	DC1,2,3		29
			M1,2			DC1		30
M2,3					M1	DC1,2,3,4		31
						DC1		32
M1					M2	DC1,2,3,4,5, P		33
					M1	DC1		34
						DC1		35
			M1		M2		DC1	36
			M1				DC1	37
							DC1	38
							DC1	39
							DC1	40
					M1		DC1	41

Note: Time line of events in the story world is on the horizontal, time line of events in the narrative line is on the vertical. DC = deictic center; M= memory; P = future plan; D = dream. For the events in each chapter, see Table 2.

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2.2 Spatial Structure in Humboldt's Gift

2.2.1 Locations

The novel encompasses different geographical spaces – from large scale places (Africa, New York, Chicago, Madrid, Coney Island) through medium scale places (the Russian Bath and the Hancock buildings in Chicago, Humboldt and Kathleen's cottage home in rural New Jersey, the Plaza Hotel in New York, the Ritz Hotel and the Pensión La Roca in Madrid) to small scale places (for instance, Charlie's sofa, serving as the DC from where Charlie's meditations arise).

The central location of the story is Charlie's Chicago home (a "grand house in Kenwood on the South Side", p. 110). His meditations on "the broccoli plush green sofa" take us back to different events at different times (from the twenties to the sixties). However, the narrator's reminiscences tend to be spatially sparse: we are told about the events that occur in those locations, but not about the locations themselves. Nevertheless, when the narrator's memories focus more upon the space itself than on the event, then the descriptions are denser. For instance, Chicago of the twenties and thirties is vividly evoked (as Charlie experienced it as a teenager) and is contrasted to modern-age Chicago of the sixties and seventies. Modern Chicago clearly brings out repulsion and frustration in Charlie, his going to Europe – at the end of the novel – can be interpreted as an escape from the suffocating environment of the city.

2.2.2 Shifts in the WHERE

The shifting of locations in the first part of the novel is realized from a small scale place (Charlie's sofa) to medium and large scale places incorporating the narrator's *mental space*: several locations are visited through Charlie's reminiscences. The locations, when described, are focalized from Charlie's point of view (heavily charged with negative or positive affect) and as he saw it then, when a certain event is presented in the background of a particular space. For instance, the exterior description of Humboldt and Kathleen's cottage house on a Sunday in September 1952:

> (1) The crossroads had eaten into the small bluff the cottage sat on, and it was beginning to tip. [..] The neighbours raised poultry on this slummy land. Burdocks, thistles, dwarf oaks, cottonweed, chalky holes, and whitish puddles everywhere. It was all pauperized. The very bushes might have been on welfare. Across the way, the chickens were throaty – they sounded like immigrant women – and the small trees, oaks sumacs ailanthus, were underprivileged, dusty, orphaned-looking. The autumn leaves were pulverized and the fragrance of leaf-decay was pleasant. The air was empty but good. As the sun went down the landscape was like the still frame of an old movie on sepia film (p. 22–23).

In *Humboldt's Gift*, shifts in time affect shifts in space: when Charlie recalls events in the past, shifts occur in location. However, not all shifts involve deictic shifts in the WHERE of the DC (see table 2). Shifts in story world time to earlier events – in this particular narrative – do not affect the WHERE or (sometimes) the WHEN of the DC. The deictic center is linked to Charlie's current spatio-temporality (focalizing WHEN and WHERE) from which he recalls – through the exercise of memory – different past events connected to his and Humboldt's experiences. In the following passage, there is no deictic shift in the WHEN or the WHERE, although there is shift to two earlier events (focalized WHEN) and locations (focalized WHERE) in the story world time:

> (2) Ulick put on a shirt of flame–blue Italian silk, a beautiful garment. It seemed to hunger for an ideal body. He drew it over his chest. On my last visit Ulick was slender and wore magnificent hip-huggers,

> melon-striped and ornamented on the seams with Mexican silver pesos. He had achieved this new figure in a crash diet. But even then the floor of his Cadillac was covered with peanut shells, and now he was fat again. I saw the fat old body which I had always known and which was completely familiar to me – the belly, the freckles on his undisciplined upper arms, and his elegant hands. I still saw in him the obese, choked looking-boy, the lustful conniving kid whose eyes continually pleaded not guilty. I knew him inside-out, even physically, remembering how he gashed open his thigh on a broken bottle in a Wisconsin creek fifty years ago and that I stared at the yellow fat, layers and layers of fat through which the blood had to well. I knew the mole on the back of his wrist, his nose broken and reset, his fierce false look of innocence, his snorts and his smells. Wearing an orange football jersey, breathing through the mouth (before we could afford the nose-job), he held me on his shoulders so that I could watch the GAR parade on Michigan Boulevard. The year must have been 1923 (p. 373).

Charlie is at his brother's house (current time and space) and, watching him dress, recalls two childhood experiences: when he gashed open his thigh on a broken bottle 50 years before and the GAR parade on Michigan Boulevard. The detailed description of the second event ("wearing an orange football jersey, breathing through the mouth") seems to move the DC to the event time and space, but Charlie's epistemic limitation (marked by "must have been") maintains the current DC and shift only occurs in story world time.

2.2.3 Space Structures

An overall pattern of space structure that emerges from the novel is *nesting* (cf. Talmy 2003): medium and small scale locations are embedded into large scale places yielding a contraction effect, i.e. an initial larger WHERE contracts into smaller subcomponents. In the fragment below, Chicago contracts to smaller places printed in bold. The reader relies on the explicit text to 'figure out' what the medium scale locations mentioned are:

> (1) Humboldt knew Chicago, too. In the days of Hack Wilson and Woody English the Fleishers had a box at **Wrigley Field**. They drove to the game in a Pierce-Arrow or a Hispano-Suiza (Humboldt was car-crazy). And there were lovely John Held, Jr., girls, beautiful, who wore step-ins. And whisky and gangsters and the pillared doom-dark **La Salle Street banks** with railroad money and pork and reaper money locked in steel vaults. Of this Chicago I was completely ignorant when I arrived from Appleton. I played Piggie-move-up with Polish kids under the **El tracks**. Humboldt ate devil's food coconut-marshmallow layer cake at **Henrici's**. I never saw the inside of Henrici's (p. 4).

Wrigley Field must be a location where games were held, the La Salle Street banks – place where gangsters 'washed their money' during the Prohibition, Henrici's was a place frequented by the rich, the El tracks supposedly was a place (district/area) where the poor lived.

Many a time, however, the reader has to be familiar with the smaller subcomponents of the larger WHERE, i.e. s/he must initiate background knowledge about the places mentioned, otherwise s/he feels 'left out' of the experiences of the narrator.[8] For instance, Chicago (1a) and New York (1b), the larger WHERE, focus upon medium scale subcomponents which do not mean anything to the 'uninitiated', to those not familiar with the city. The smaller subcomponents are typed in bold:

> (2a) I had come back [to Chicago] to see my father [...] I took Humboldt on the **El** to the stockyards. He saw the **Loop** (p. 69).

[8] The initiation of background knowledge about real world places requires an *accessibility* relation between the actual world and the story world. As such, elements from the actual world migrate into the world of the story: in the present case, we are dealing with what Ryan calls *identity of properties and identity of inventory* (Ryan 1991b: 558). The actual world and the story world are furnished by the same objects (e.g. places in Chicago or New York), having the same properties.

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(2b) I went east in May to have a look at him [Humboldt]... Having written Humboldt a long fan letter, I was invited to **Greenwich Village** to discuss literature and ideas. He lived on **Bedford Street,** near **Chumley's** (p. 1).

Another pattern characteristic of *Humboldt's Gift* – which helps to create the illusion of a spatial universe – is the link of current scenes to previous scenes: *path-traces* (cf. Talmy 2001) establish connections between scenes. Major scenes (locations) – temporarily reconstructed – yield the following 'itinerary':

- Madison, Wisconsin (mental location, no DC): Charlie as a student in the twenties
- New York (mental location, DC): first meeting Humboldt (in the thirties), Charlie's play on Broadway (the fifties), Humboldt's decay and death (the sixties), Humboldt's reburial (April 1974)
- Rural New Jersey (DC): Kathleen and Humboldt's home in the forties
- Chicago (mental location, DC): Chicago in the twenties and thirties (Charlie's memories), Chicago in the narrative present (December 1973)
- Coney Island (DC): Charlie visiting Waldemar, Humboldt's uncle
- Texas (DC): Charlie visiting his brother, Julius, about to be operated
- Madrid (DC): Madrid in the narrative present (Christmas 1973, January–February 1974).

Movement from one large-scale location to the other in the narrative present (Chicago→New York→Coney Island→Texas→Madrid) is planned and moderate, but Charlie's memories exhibit rapid, unplanned and erratic motions (achronological, associative, jumping from one event to the other). As the story unfolds, Charlie's sofa becomes an important deictic center – a place from where he recollects events related to his and Humboldt's experiences. When he leaves Chicago and goes to New York to inquire about Humboldt's will, his meditations on earlier events (from the twenties to the sixties) gradually cease and the narrator's actual movements precipitate.

Table 2. indicates the spatial structure of *Humboldt's Gift.* The table includes a chapter-by-chapter description and the locations (medium scale and large sale, mental location or DC).

Spatial Structure of *Humboldt's Gift*

Chapter Text	**Location/location***
1. Charlie meets Humboldt for the first time; description of Chicago in the 20's, the circumstances of Humboldt's death, Chicago in the present	Madison, Wisconsin* New York*, New York (DC2) Chicago*, Chicago (DC1)
2. The circumstances of Humboldt's death, an incident prior to his death, the evening of Charlie's success (1953)	New York*, New York (DC2) Chicago (DC1)
3. Humboldt's death; Charlie visits Humboldt's uncle and Humboldt and Kathleen's rural house	New York*, Coney Island*, rural New Jersey (DC2),Chicago (DC1)
4. Charlie learns that his Mercedes is bashed	Chicago (DC1)
5. Charlie makes some phonecalls, takes some yoga exercises	Chicago, his room (DC1), New York*
6. Charlie talks to Cantabile, remembers Denise and thinks about the Russian Bath where he has to meet Cantabile for the payoff; remembers the poker game (held in South Chicago)	Chicago (DC1), New York*, New York (DC2), Russian Bath (Chicago)* South Chicago kitchen (DC3)

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	Chapter Text	**Location/location***
7.	Charlie drives to the Downtown Club to speak to Langobardi; remembers Cantabile's and his background and paddle balling with Langobardi	Chicago (DC1), Chicago*****
8.	Charlie leaves his car at the Mercedes shop, flags a taxi, arrives at the meeting place earlier; tells the driver to go west; remembers Naomi Lutz, goes back to the Russian Bath; finally meets Cantabile and has an unpleasant incident in the toilet; Cantabile forces him into his car and drive eastward	Chicago (DC1, DC2), Chicago*****
9.	Charlie recalls his visit to Appleton, Wisconsin, where he was born	Chicago (DC1), Appleton*****
10.	Cantabile and Charlie stop at the Playboy Club, talk and drink; then drive to the Hancock Building, talk to an old gentleman (underworld figure); Charlie tries to make amends publicly; go on to a skyscraper under construction; climb up, Charlie gives him the money, Cantabile lets them go; drive to a restaurant, Cantabile tells Charlie about his wife	Chicago (DC1), Chicago*****
11.	The next morning Charlie meditates on the green sofa (seeing Humboldt prior to his death in New York, coming back to Chicago on the same day and having a talk with his wife, Denise in the evening)	Chicago (DC1), New York***,** Chicago (DC2)
12.	Still on the green sofa, meditating (about Humboldt's death)	Chicago (DC1), New York*****
13.	On the sofa, meditating (meeting in Sewell's office, Princeton, 1952; Broadway hit, 1953; Humboldt's taking 6, 763 $ from his account)	Chicago (DC1), Princeton (DC2), New York*****
14.	Meditation on the sofa (meeting Ricketts, 1952)	Chicago (DC1), Princeton (DC2)
15.	Charlie recalls Humboldt's meeting with Longstaff (president of the Belisha Foundation), then his encounter with Longstaff in the helicopter years later and Humboldt's fall (having been fired, he tries to run Kathleen down with his car)	Chicago (DC1), New York (DC2, DC3)
16.	Charlie dials Renata, sinks into meditation again (circumstances in which Humboldt ran Kathleen down in March 1953)	Chicago (DC1), Princeton (DC2)
17.	Charlie recalls his last meeting with Humboldt as blood-brothers (May 1953), the preparations for the Broadway show (summer 1953), Kathleen's escaping to Nevada, Humboldt being taken away and locked up, Demmie's death and Humboldt's money withdrawal (September–Christmas 1953)	Chicago (DC1), cottage on the Connecticut shore (DC2), New York (DC3), New York*****
18.	Charlie is visited by Cantabile and Polly, Cantabile asks Charlie to help Lucy in writing her thesis about Humboldt	Chicago (DC1)
19.	Renata arrives, takes Charlie to the county building (during the drive, He thinks about Renata and her mother, the poker game and his friend, George Swiebel)	Chicago (DC1), Chicago*****
20.	They arrive at the county building (place where Charlie and Renata met for the first time, through the good offices of Alec Szathmar); Charlie remembers their first date in a bar, their running into Naomi Lutz and his father, and the unsuccessful date (in a hotel room).	Chicago, county building (DC1) Russian Bath*****, county building*****, Alec Szathmar's office (DC2), bar of the county building (DC3), hotel room (DC4)
21.	Outside Judge Urbanovich's courtroom, Charlie talks to his lawyer and to Denise (who is suing him for money), she gives her a letter from Kathleen	Chicago, outside the courtroom (DC1)
22.	Charlie discusses his divorce with Judge Urbanovich (remembers a trip taken with his daughters).	Urbanovich's courtroom (DC1), Far West Camping*****
23.	In the men's room, Charlie reads Kathleen's letter; goes back to the courtroom where he is informed that Thaxter wants to meet him in front of the Art Institute; outside the Institute, run into Cantabile and Polly who take them to Stronson's office on La Salle Street; Cantabile threatens Stronson, introduces Charlie as his hitman; the police arrive and arrest all (remembers a discussion with Dr. Scheldt and his visit to Thaxter's house in California).	County building, men's room (DC1) Art Institute (DC2), Stronson's office (DC3), Chicago Police Station (DC4), Prof. Dr. Scheldt's Parlor*****, California*****
24.	Charlie's last days in Chicago: visits his accountant, Murra and Dr. Scheldt, takes his daughters to a Christmas pageant in the theater and then calls on Naomi.	Chicago theater (DC1), Naomi Lutz's house (DC2), Charlie's talk to Murra (Mura's office)***** and Scheldt (his office)*

	Chapter Text	**Location/location***
25.	Renata and Charlie take off to New York (remembers a talk he had with George about Renata).	727 jet (DC1), George Swiebel's place (DC2)
26.	Renata and Charlie check in the Plaza Hotel, talk in the hotel room and goes to the Kootz Gallery to meet Huggins, Humboldt's executor; remembers meeting Huggins in Atlantic City (in the 40's) and at Long Island (in the 50's).	New York, hotel room (DC1), Kootz Gallery (DC2), Atlantic City*, Montauk, Long Island*
27.	Renata and Charlie visit Waldemar, Humboldt's uncle in Coney Island (remembers Chicago of the twenties, when he was growing up)	Coney Island boardwalk (DC1), nursing home (DC2), Chicago*
28.	On the way back to New York, Charlie reads Humboldt's letter (reminisces about the successful and fallen Humboldt)	Subway (DC1), New York*
29.	Charlie and Renata lunch at Oak Room, talks to Alec Szathmar on the phone; in the hotel room he talks to his brother, Julius; Thaxter calls him and they meet at Palm Court; Thaxter proposes a deal to him. His remembrances take him to Julius and Renata.	Oak Room (DC1), hotel room (DC2), Palm Court (DC3);
30.	Kathleen arrives and they go to a bar on the 56th Street; talk about Humboldt's letter and gift; they realize that they both have the same documents; Kathleen sold one of the scripts and wants to split the money with Charlie; his reminiscenses take him back to Kathleen and Humboldt's rural life in New Jersey and Humboldt chasing Demmie's friend, Ginnie to her apartment	Bar (DC1), country cottage*, Ginnie's apartment*
31.	Charlie bids farewell to Renata at the Kennedy airport; Renata takes off to Milan, Charlie goes to Texas; in Corpus Christi he remembers Wisconsin of the 20's and his father's funeral. They take a short trip to visit Julius's enterprises and a tropical fruit farm. They go back to the house.	Kennedy airport (DC1), Julius's house (DC2); Cadillac (DC3); tropical fruit farm (DC4) Wisconsin* cemetery*
32.	Hortense, Julius's wife calls him to tell that the operation went well; visits Julius in the hospital	Motel room (DC1), Ulick's room at the hospital (DC2)
33.	Charlie takes off to Spain, remembers the phone conversation with Renata; checks in the Ritz Hotel, goes to his room, but Renata is not there; Renata's mother arrives with Roger, all have breakfast; the next day he reads Roger fairytales (Christmas Day), goes to the barber shop, posts a telegram to Milan; has dinner with the Senora; the following day buys an expensive coat for Renata; on returning, he finds the Senora gone, the boy is left with him; he can't afford to leave in the Ritz, so he moves into a pensión with Roger. (reminiscenses about his youth in the TB sanatorium, reveals his future plans)	747 jet (DC1) motel room* hotel room (DC2), barber shop (DC3) dining room in the Ritz (DC3), pension La Roca (DC4), shop in Madrid (DC5) TB sanatorium*
34.	Charlie spends his days at the pension; learns from Renata's letter that she and Flonzaley got married in Milan; remembers how he was once locked out by Renata and had to sleep at George Swiebel's.	Pension La Roca (DC) George Swiebel's apartment*
35.	Charlie's talk to Rebecca Volsted, lodger at the pension.	Pension La Roca (DC)
36.	Charlie spends January and February at the pensión; has long walks and meditates intensely (about Demmie Vonghel and Miss Scheldt).	Pension La Roca (DC)
37.	Charlie reads George Swiebel's letter from Africa.	Pension La Roca (DC)
38.	Charlie has a visitor, Cantabile, who has important news for him: Humboldt's and his movie scenario was made into a film; wants Charlie to go with him to Paris to see the movie.	Pension la Roca (DC)
39.	On the Champs Elysees, Paris, at a movie theater they see the film the next day, meet with some lawyers (Barbash, Furet, Harvard Business Graduates) to prove that they scenario was stolen; the lawyers are convinced, Charlie offers to sell the other scenario as well.	Movie theater, Paris (DC1) Barbash's office (DC2)
40.	At the Paris hotel he writes to Thaxter's publisher; flows back to Madrid; has frequent talks with Cantabile on the phone; Kathleen arrives, talk; Stewart writes him back about Thaxter; talks to his lawyer (Barbash) on the phone, who ended up with 80, 000 $ for the stolen scenario	hotel room, Paris (DC1), Pension La Roca (DC2)
41.	On a warm April, Charlie and Waldemar rebury Humboldt; Charlie splits the money with Waldemar.	Valhalla Cemetery (DC)

Note: ***** indicates a mental location (memory). When there is deictic shift to the location depicted by the flashback, this is indicated in the brackets. Sometimes the memory is related to a person (see chapter 36) and the WHERE is completely voided in favor of the WHO.

3 Conclusions

Section 2. of the paper – the temporal and spatial strata of *Humboldt's Gift* – have provided a detailed analysis of the structure of the novel, which interact in a way as to comprise and 'convey' the overall theme of the novel. The theme of the novel is coping with dismemberment crushed under personal and public unfulfillment and disillusion with contemporary society, echoing the *weltschmertz* of Byron's age and the *angst* of literary existentialists. In the first part of the novel, the narrator–protagonist is 'not coping', is stationary: sits on the sofa and meditates on past events. Time also seems at a standstill, narrative present does not move forward. When the narrator decides to move on with his life, moving in space and time to solve his problems, time progresses forward rapidly and space is densely populated with motions. Charlie's 'escapes' to memories have proved to be not only recollections of events and experiences, but at the same time a kind of 'exorcism', since he ultimately chooses to live in the present. Charlie returns to the present, chooses to act, and rapid shifts emerge in space and time. This, in fact suggests a positive outcome of the story: Charlie's choice, the present (in fact, life itself) provides a relief not for the protagonist but for us, readers as well.

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