

Bely, Joyce, and Doblin: Peripatetics in the City Novel (Florida James Joyce)

Peter I. Barta

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Peter Barta offers a new perspective on the narrative apparatus in three prominent modernist European city novels. He argues that the narrative combination of rambling, thinking, observing, and talking creates a "peripatetic" perspective, a manner of facing oneself and the world.

The book examines Andrei Bely's Petersburg, James Joyce's Dublin, and Alfred Döblin's Berlin with special attention to the juxtaposition of details of the city with details of the characters' mental wanderings. Barta sees that the city forces upon its characters psychic displacement, tensions, and oppositions--the fragmentation characterizing much of contemporary fiction. None of the three works resolves the conflicts responsible for the restless narrative peregrinations. The city text (a maze without a center) dispossesses its characters, though they retain the desire to come to terms with their environment.

In showing how three novels--Bely's Petersburg, Joyce's Ulysses, and Döblin's Berlin Alexanderplatz-illustrate idiosyncratic features of the modernist European city, Peter Barta adds a fresh dimension to our reading of urban fiction, its characters, types, and general themes.



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