

## STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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**Annotation:** This article aims to explain the stream of consciousness in English literature and demonstrate it through several examples.

**Annotatsiya:** Bu maqola ingliz adabiyotida ong oqimini izohlash va uni bir necha misollar orqali dallillashni maqsad qilgan.

**Key words:** stream of consciousness, narrative device, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, modernist novelists

In literary criticism, stream of consciousness is a narrative mode or method that attempts "to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind" of a narrator. The term was coined by Daniel Oliver in 1840 in *First Lines of Physiology: Designed for the Use of Students of Medicine*, when he wrote,

If we separate from this mingled and moving stream of consciousness, our sensations and volitions, which are constantly giving it a new direction, and suffer it to pursue its own spontaneous course, it will appear, upon examination, that this, instead of being wholly fortuitous and uncertain, is determined by certain fixed laws of thought, which are collectively termed the association of ideas.

Better known, perhaps, is the 1855 usage by Alexander Bain in the first edition of *The Senses and the Intellect*, when he wrote, "The concurrence of Sensations in one common stream of consciousness—on the same cerebral highway—enables those of different senses to be associated as readily as the sensations of the same sense". But it is commonly credited to William James who used it in 1890 in his *The Principles of Psychology*. In 1918, the novelist May Sinclair (1863–1946) first applied the term stream of consciousness, in a literary context, when discussing Dorothy Richardson's novels. *Pointed Roofs* (1915), the first work in Richardson's series of 13 semi-autobiographical novels titled *Pilgrimage*, is the first complete stream-of-consciousness novel published in English. However, in 1934, Richardson comments that "Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and D.R. ... were all using 'the new method', though very differently, simultaneously". There were, however, many earlier precursors and the technique is still used by contemporary writers.

Stream of consciousness is a narrative device that attempts to give the written equivalent of the character's thought processes, either in a loose interior monologue (see below), or in connection to their actions. Stream-of-consciousness writing is

usually regarded as a special form of interior monologue and is characterized by associative leaps in thought and lack of some or all punctuation. Stream of consciousness and interior monologue are distinguished from dramatic monologue and soliloquy, where the speaker is addressing an audience or a third person, which are chiefly used in poetry or drama. In stream-of-consciousness, the speaker's thought processes are more often depicted as overheard in the mind (or addressed to oneself); it is primarily a fictional device.

An early use of the term is found in philosopher and psychologist William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890): "consciousness, then, does not appear to itself as chopped up in bits ... it is nothing joined; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let's call it the stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life"

In the following example of stream of consciousness from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Molly seeks sleep:

a quarter after what an unearthly hour I suppose theyre just getting up in China now combing out their pigtails for the day well soon have the nuns ringing the angelus theyve nobody coming in to spoil their sleep except an odd priest or two for his night office the alarmclock next door at cockshout clattering the brains out of itself let me see if I can doze off 1 2 3 4 5 what kind of flowers are those they invented like the stars the wallpaper in Lombard street was much nicer the apron he gave me was like that something only I only wore it twice better lower this lamp and try again so that I can get up early<sup>l</sup>

While the use of the narrative technique of stream of consciousness is usually associated with modernist novelists in the first part of the twentieth century, several precursors have been suggested, including Laurence Sterne's psychological novel *Tristram Shandy* (1757). John Neal in his novel *Seventy-Six* (1823) also used an early form of this writing style, characterized by long sentences with multiple qualifiers and expressions of anxiety from the narrator.

It has also been suggested that Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) foreshadows this literary technique in the nineteenth century. Poe's story is a first person narrative, told by an unnamed narrator who endeavours to convince the reader of his sanity while describing a murder he committed, and it is often read as a dramatic monologue. George R. Clay notes that Leo Tolstoy, "when the occasion requires it ... applies Modernist stream of consciousness technique" in both *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1878).

The short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890), by another American author, Ambrose Bierce, also abandons strict linear time to record the internal consciousness of the protagonist. Because of his renunciation of chronology in

favor of free association, Édouard Dujardin's *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1887) is also an important precursor. Indeed, James Joyce "picked up a copy of Dujardin's novel ... in Paris in 1903" and "acknowledged a certain borrowing from it".

Some point to Anton Chekhov's short stories and plays (1881–1904) and Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* (1890), and *Mysteries* (1892) as offering glimpses of the use of stream of consciousness as a narrative technique at the end of the nineteenth century. While *Hunger* is widely seen as a classic of world literature and a groundbreaking modernist novel, *Mysteries* is also considered a pioneer work. It has been claimed that Hamsun was way ahead of his time with the use of stream of consciousness in two chapters in particular of this novel. British author Robert Ferguson said: "There's a lot of dreamlike aspects of *Mysteries*. In that book ... it is ... two chapters, where he invents stream of consciousness writing, in the early 1890s. This was long before Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce". Henry James has also been suggested as a significant precursor, in a work as early as *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). It has been suggested that he influenced later stream-of-consciousness writers, including Virginia Woolf, who not only read some of his novels but also wrote essays about them.

However, it has also been argued that Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931), in his short story "Leutnant Gustl" ("None but the Brave", 1900), was the first to make full use of the stream of consciousness technique.

### Resources

1. J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 660–1).
2. Philadelphia: Hooker, 1840, p. 156
3. ^ London: J. W. Parker, 1855, p.359.
4. ^ May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson', *The Egoist*, Vol. 5, No. 4, (April 1908), pp. 57–58.
5. ^ Joanne Winning (2000). *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*. Univ of Wisconsin Press. ISBN 978-0-299-17034-9.
6. ^ In a letter to the bookseller and publisher Sylvia Beach *Windows of Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson*, ed. Gloria G. Fromm Athens, Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 1995, 282.
7. ^ For example, both Beckett and Joyce omitted full stops and paragraph breaks, but while Joyce also omitted apostrophes, Beckett left them in.
8. ^ (I, pp.239–43) quoted in Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction*. (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1992), p. 39.
9. ^ Joyce p. 642 (Bodley Head edition (1960), p. 930).
10. ^ ed. Chris Baldick, Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2009, p. 212.

11. ^ "interior monologue." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 24 Sep. 2012.
12. ^ J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 661; see also Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (1954). University of California Press, 1972, fn. 13, p. 127.
13. ^ Bain, Robert (1971). "Introduction". In Bain, Robert (ed.). *Seventy-Six. Bainbridge, New York: York Mail—Print, Inc. p. xxxiv. OCLC 40318310. Facsimile reproduction of 1823 Baltimore edition by John Neal, two volumes in one.*
14. ^ "The Tell-Tale Heart – story by Poe".