

Stream-of-Consciousness Novel

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Stream-of-consciousness is a technique used by most of the novelists in the 20th century. The term was coined by William James in his work Principles of Psychology (1890). It refers to the continuous flow of thought like a stream of a river. It means that the inner experiences of a person is like flow of river, which keeps flowing and never ends. The present, the past and the future, all co-exist at the same time. This concept of human thought is correlated with Henry Bergson's concept of time as a flow and duration rather than a series of events that move chronologically. These two concepts influenced most of the novels in the 20th century. The novelists stopped creating plots in which a hero needs to go through a series of circumstances in chronological order. The quality and truth about a character can be understood by readers by analysing his behaviour at any point of time. Behaviour of a character is decided by several levels of his conscious and subconscious mind. All his past and present experiences exist together and determine behaviour and personality of a character. So,

Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner used stream-of-consciousness technique most extensively in their novels. Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and

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To the Lighthouse and excellent examples of this technique. Similarly, William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury is representative of this technique. However, ~~resembling~~ resembling this technique is already seen in Sterne's Tristram Shandy in the 18th century. In this novel we find long passages of self-communication. Marcel Proust was a French novelist, who wrote a series of fifteen novels using this technique. All these novels show reproduction of a man's past life and experiences that affect his stream of consciousness. His novels explore various methods of presenting a man's past, which is contained in the present. Marcel Proust deeply influenced works of major 20th century novelists like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson and others. James Joyce in his work Ulysses (1922) has given a 40-page long interior monologue of Molly Bloom. In such a long passage, there is only one punctuation mark.

So, in stream-of-consciousness novels, we find a difference between private stream of consciousness and public value system. This difference causes problems of misinterpretation of a character's behaviour by readers. When behaviour of a character is misunderstood by the public, the problem of ~~lonel~~ loneliness arises. It is an important theme in the novels of 20th century. 20th-century

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novels present a crisis in the relation between loneliness and love. Love needs understanding between two people. But, if a person is prisoner of his own private self, he cannot communicate with others. Even if he or she communicates, it is strongly possible that his or her intention behind communication is not properly understood by others.

The finest treatment of loneliness and love is given by Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse. Mrs. Dalloway is the heroine of the novel. She gives a party to bring people together. But, she feels lonelier still in a crowd.

James Joyce's Ulysses is about an exiled artist, who ~~sees~~ recreates at a distance from society. But, he has complete knowledge of society and social life. He has escaped society in order to be objective. He presents events of one day in Dublin (16th June 1904). Joyce deals with private stream of consciousness and loss of public value-system in a quite different way. Stream-of-consciousness is an important and impactful technique used by the ~~novels~~ novelists of the 20th century. But, there are, of course other trends and techniques of novel writing adopted by other novelists.