

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE “STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS” TECHNIQUE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes the emergence and gradual development of the “stream of consciousness” technique in English literature. It demonstrates that between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this technique was shaped as an artistic and aesthetic method, as exemplified in the works of J. Joyce, V. Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and W. Faulkner. The direct connection of the “stream of consciousness” with psychologism, interior monologue, subjective perception, and the relative interpretation of time is scientifically substantiated.

**Keywords:** stream of consciousness, modernism, English literature, interior monologue, psychologism, J. Joyce, V. Woolf

### Introduction

Before discussing genesis of the *stream of consciousness* technique, let's define the literary term “Artistic psychologism”. Artistic psychologism is the **depiction of human psychology through art**, especially in fiction. It allows readers to understand **not only what a character does, but why** they act in a certain way, by revealing their internal experiences, mental processes, and emotional states. Artistic psychologism in Victorian literature was a reflection of the period's engagement with philosophical questions surrounding identity, morality, and human nature. The complexity of human experience – marked by contradictions, desires, unresolved conflicts – became a central theme for many authors of the time. This was a departure from previous literary traditions that often favored external action or grand narratives over introspective character studies.<sup>[6]</sup> In the literary process of the twentieth century, the *stream of consciousness* technique, aimed at directly depicting the human mind, developed as a distinctive stylistic direction. During this period, writers sought to illuminate the workings of human psychology and thought more deeply. As a result, traditional narrative methods based on plot and external description gradually gave way to new expressive forms such as interior monologue, subjective perception, and the relative interpretation of time and space. The *stream of consciousness* technique emerged from these aesthetic explorations, aiming to represent the flow of thoughts, emotions, and subconscious processes as naturally and continuously as possible [1].

This technique initiated a new stage in the study of human psychology in literature. Whereas earlier novels revealed characters' psychology mainly through external events and the author's commentary, the *stream of consciousness* method placed the inner world, imagination, and emotions of the protagonist at the center of the narrative. This brought the reader closer to the character's internal world and provided a fuller understanding of the complex nature of human consciousness. Within twentieth-century modernism, this technique significantly contributed to the renewal of artistic and aesthetic thinking. Writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner employed the *stream of consciousness* method to such

an extent that it became a hallmark of world literature and a distinct artistic school. Thus, this technique can be regarded as one of the major achievements of English modernism and twentieth-century psychological realism.

The term *stream of consciousness* was first introduced by the American philosopher and psychologist William James in his influential work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) [2]. He described consciousness as a continuous process, emphasizing that human thought occurs as an unbroken flow. According to James, ideas, perceptions, memories, and emotions arise in the mind not in strict logical order but as a spontaneous stream. Hence, the concept initially appeared as a psychological and philosophical category, later gaining wide application in literary studies as an artistic and aesthetic device.

The emergence of this technique in literature is directly linked with the modernist movement of the early twentieth century. Modernist writers, dissatisfied with traditional realism, strove to portray human consciousness more deeply and naturally. The *stream of consciousness* method allowed them to depict subjective perception and randomness in thought rather than objective sequences of events. This method revitalized the novel genre both in form and content, enabling a more profound psychological analysis of characters.

When it comes to the theoretical foundation of the *stream of consciousness* technique, it lies not only in psychology but also in philosophy. For example, Henri Bergson's ideas about time and consciousness had a significant influence on the method's formation. His notion of *durée* (inner duration) demonstrated how subjective perception distorts objective time. These theories provided a methodological basis for representing relative time, retrospection, and subconscious experience in literature.

Thus, the *stream of consciousness* technique formed at the intersection of psychology, philosophy, and literary theory, functioning as a method of artistic expression that conveys the flow of thoughts, impressions, and feelings in the protagonist's mind independently of a fixed plot through interior monologue. It rests not only on aesthetic grounds but also on psychologically and philosophically substantiated principles.

In English literature, the technique developed gradually from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, establishing its artistic and aesthetic foundations. This process may be viewed in three stages.

If we discuss initial stage, it corresponds to the mid-nineteenth century. Although realism and naturalism dominated the novel genre, some writers demonstrated an increasing interest in depicting the inner life of their characters. Authors such as Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James paid attention to the psychological depth of their protagonists. Although their works did not yet display the full *stream of consciousness* technique, elements of interior monologue, subjective perception, and mental reflection laid the groundwork for its future development.

The next stage is second stage, and it falls in the early twentieth century, the formative period of English modernism, when the technique fully emerged. The works of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf exemplify the method at its finest. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is recognized as a classic of the *stream of consciousness* style, depicting the unstructured flow of thoughts, random associations, and internal monologues of its characters while almost rejecting traditional plot and external narrative. Virginia Woolf, in turn, employed the technique with subtlety and grace. In her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the inner lives, memories, and subjective perception of time take precedence. In her art, the representation of "inner time" surpasses the external flow of time.

Last stage is the third stage, and it marks the refinement of the *stream of consciousness* technique in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in American fiction. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is a complex and multifaceted example of the method. The novel presents characters' inner monologues from multiple perspectives, radically breaking the continuity of time and space. In Faulkner's approach, the *stream of consciousness* becomes not only a means of portraying individual consciousness but also a powerful tool for reflecting social and philosophical issues.

## Conclusion

In summary, the development of the *stream of consciousness* technique in English literature evolved gradually—from the psychological portrayals in Victorian realism to the innovations of modernism and later literary movements. In the works of Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner, this method achieved artistic perfection and became a defining feature of twentieth-century world literature.

Thus, the evolutionary formation of the *stream of consciousness* technique represents a distinctive achievement of English literature. Closely connected with the modernist era, it also traces its roots to earlier psychological explorations in Victorian fiction. By abandoning conventional narrative structure and focusing on the continuous flow of thoughts, subjective time, and perception, the technique opened new aesthetic possibilities in literature. It remains a relevant subject of scholarly inquiry even today.

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