

Psychological novel in english literature | essay



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“ A psychological novel, also called psychological realism, is a work of prose fiction which places more than the usual amount of emphasis on interior characterization, and on the motives, circumstances, and internal action which springs from, and develops, external action. The psychological novel is not content to state what happens but goes on to explain the motivation of this action. In this type of writing character and characterization are more than usually important, and they often delve deeper into the mind of a character than novels of other genres. The psychological novel can be called a novel of the “ inner man”, so to say. In some cases, the stream of consciousness technique, as well as interior monologues, may be employed to better illustrate the inner workings of the human mind at work. Flashbacks may also be featured.” (en. wikipedia. org/wiki/Psychological_novel)

The period (1900-1950) witnessed a great change in the novel and a variety of many and different kinds of novels emerged within this period. Before the rise of the psychological novel, there used to be the traditional novel in which the writer “ told his stories for their own sake, keeping himself and his ideas out of them, and drawing his characters mainly from the outside, clearly seen figures in a clearly observed world.” (133) However, writers like Richardson and Fielding involved their own philosophy of life to their novels. Dickens started using the novel as a tool for the reform of “ social evils” in his society.

Psychoanalysis began to appear with the late Victorian writers. With the late Victorian period, “ psychological analysis” began to appear in novels like that of Henry James. James focused on the motives and psychology of his characters rather than their actions. This depended on the reader’s part in

the novel; the reader not reads the novel, but also analyses the characters.
(132, 133)

Both the French and Russian Novels influenced the English novel to a great extent. There was and an attack on the traditional English novel. By the nineties, George Moore and Someres Maugham were greatly influenced by the French novel. As Collins puts it, “ French influence meant in part an aggressively frank realism... but more importantly it meant greater attention to structure and expression.” (137)

The Russian novel, however, had a much more and deeper impact on the traditional English novel after the publication of the translations of great writers such Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

The Russian novel stressed the importance of the inner self and the subconscious. As Collins mentions in his book,

By the work of the Russian masters it was possible to realize
How much more deeply one could penetrate into the human soul
than English novelists had so far attempted. Many felt that in
comparison with such work the English novel appeared
provincial and soulless, half-blinded to the psychological
wonders of human personality. The influence of the Russian
novel came to a head in time to join the forces with the
psychology of the subconscious mind...The time was ripe for an
attempt to revolutionise the English novel. (137)

The stream of consciousness is one of the distinguishing features of a Psychological Novel. It is an important aspect of a Psychological Novel. The
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term “ stream of consciousness” was coined by the American philosopher and psychologist, William James. It was used for the first time in the review that the novelist/philosopher, May Sinclair, in 1915, about the first volume of Samuel Richardson’s Pilgrimage. The stream of consciousness refer[s] to a method of presenting, as if directly and without meditation, the flowing or jagged sequence of thoughts, perceptions, preconscious associations, memories, half-realized impressions, and so on, of one or more characters-the attempt, in fiction, to imitate the complete mental life as it manifests itself in the ongoing present. (233)

The stream of consciousness technique has been widely used by many famous 20th century English and American novelists. It is used by James Joyce in his novel Ulysses. It is employed in nearly all of Virginia Woolf’s novels, namely; To the lighthouse, Mrs. Dalloway, The Waves, Jacob’s Room and Between the Acts. It is also used in William Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying and Absalom! Absalom!. Moreover, Samuel Beckett’s trilogy: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable as well as D. H. Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers and Women in Love are good examples of such a technique. However, the origin of the stream of consciousness technique is believed to go back to the eighteenth-century fiction.

William Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury (1929), which is the main subject of this paper, is rich in the stream of consciousness technique, particularly the first three sections. In the first section, Benjy’s section, Faulkner uses the stream of consciousness to reflect the flow of thoughts inside Benjy’s mind. There is no chronological order in anything Benjy mentions. Rather, there are

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rapid time shifts for he relates a certain event and then goes on to speak about an entirely different event. Then he moves back to complete the first event or he might not. (revise the novel and provide example using quotation).

Another aspect that is related to the stream of consciousness technique and is obvious in this section is the association of images or the “preconscious associations” as Kawin so describes it. For example, the sound of the word “caddie” reminds Benjy of his sister Caddy. This shows that the reader is not only reading the novel and following its events, but the reader is also making deductions. Benjy is not saying that “caddie” reminds him of his sister Caddy, but it is the reader who deduces this idea. This is the role of the reader and this is what makes a psychological novel unique and different; the reader has a role in the novel. The characters do not say that they are using the stream of consciousness technique, but it is the reader who finds out this. In this respect, Kawin points out that

Benjy is not aware that X reminds him of Y and that he has an attitude toward the difference between X and Y (he does not say to himself that he misses Caddy, for instance). But the reader deduces the meaning of the juxtaposition of X and Y, which is his ‘thought,’ and his occasional bellowing can be taken as further evidence (that he misses the Caddy he “thought of” when he heard ‘caddie,’ though he cannot say this). (253)

Although the style of Benjy’s section is very simple and so is the vocabulary, this section is considered the most difficult in the whole novel. This is due to

the fact that Benjy is an idiot with the mind of an infant. In addition, the present and the past are one thing for Benjy; he has no sense of time.

Faulkner again employs the stream of consciousness technique in the second section of this novel, which is Quentin's section. Quentin's section is easier to read than Benjy's. One can follow with what he is saying whether italics are used or not to indicate his moving to relate a memory from the past. Unlike Benjy, Quentin completes every event that he relates to the very end. However, and like Benjy's section, Quentin's section is characterized by an extreme flow of thoughts when remembering certain memories during his last day before committing suicide.

Quentin, for example, describes his confrontation with Herbert, Caddy's suitor, telling him to leave town and never try to see Caddy again:

I came to tell you to leave town

he broke a piece of bark deliberately dropped it carefully

into the water watched it float away

I said you must leave town

he looked at me

did she send you to me

I say you must go not my father not anybody I say it

listen save this for a while I want to know if shes all right

have they been bothering her up there

thats something you dont need to trouble yourself about

then I heard myself saying Ill give you until sundown to

leave town (159)

This is a typical example of the stream of consciousness technique, where there is no punctuation, no capitalization, and no full stops. This helps Quentin to reflect his thoughts without any kind of interruption. In addition, Quentin uses a past stream of consciousness in relating certain episodes in his life. This is due to the fact that the day in which he is speaking is the last day before his death. Quentin will commit suicide shortly after the last page of this section. This day is the only present for Quentin; everything else is past for him.

Quentin's section is clearly different from Benjy's and in explaining this difference, Chase claims in *The American Novel and its Tradition*:

In the Quentin section of *The Sound and the Fury* [the reader] find[s] some of the same evocativeness of the Benjy section.

Events...assume new dimensions, because now they are called forth in a fairly complicated and sophisticated mind. Quentin's mind like Benjy's, in this respect, is obsessive and returns again and again to a few images and ideas; and this gives a necessary consistency to what might otherwise be an inchoate flow of reminiscence and perception. (228)

The stream of consciousness technique is not used in the third section, Jason's section, as much as it is used in Benjy's and Quentin's. Jason is not really obsessed with the past as Benjy and Quentin are. He is rather obsessed with his present financial situation; he only thinks of money and how to gain larger amounts of money. He is even ready to steal others if this is the only way for him and this is what he does with his niece, Quentin. He takes most of the money sent by her mother, Caddy, and leaves her very few

pennies. Dilsey better describes Jason when she tells him, “ You’s a cold man, Jason, if man you is” (207).

An example of the stream of consciousness technique in this section is when Jason remembers a series of past events such as having an idiot brother and a second brother who is a Harvard student who committed suicide. He also remembers his sister who committed promiscuity and since then it was ordered that her name should not be mentioned anymore in the house:

Like a man would naturally think, one of them is crazy
And another one drowned himself and the other one was
turned out into the street by her husband, what’s the rea-
son the rest of them are not crazy too. All the time I could
see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to
say Well I’m not surprised I expected it all the time the
whole family’s crazy. Selling land to send him to Harvard...
(233)

As for the fourth and last section, Dilsey’s section, it focuses on Dilsey, the negro servant in the Compson house and mentioning any missing details in the previous three sections. Although this section is devoted to Dilsey, after whom this section is named, it is narrated in the third person point of view unlike the other three sections of the three brothers. The stream of consciousness technique is not employed in this section. On the other hand, [t]he final section offers us the first straightforward narrative.

Here Faulkner adjusts his style to fit the character of Dilsey. We have a quiet, dignified style; the reader is presented the events of the fourth section without any comment or without any

complicated sentence structure. And in the light of the other three sections narrated by a Compson, this final section has a strong sense of control and order.

Faulkner uses the stream of consciousness technique in the first three sections and this narrative technique indeed distinguishes these sections. However, when Faulkner dispenses with it in the last section, he is still able to give Dilsey's section an air of uniqueness. Of all the characters in *The Sound and the Fury*, Dilsey 'appeals' much to the readers. This is something intended by Faulkner in his novel. Dilsey accepts things as they really are; she lives in the real world. As a result, when all the other characters are at loss, Dilsey is "morally active".

Another important feature of a Psychological Novel that is employed by William Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury*, particularly the first three sections is the interior monologue. The interior monologue is "[a] technique of recording the continuum of impressions, thoughts and impulses either prompted by conscious experience or arising from the well of the subconscious." The interior monologue is the inner voice of the character. It does not only reveal the psychology of each character, but also how each character differs in their reaction toward certain people or events. The interior monologue shows that not all the characters think the same way.

William Faulkner has used the interior monologue narrative technique with Benjy, Quentin and Jason to uncover the attitude and feelings of each towards their sister, Caddy. In the first section, Caddy is portrayed as the caring and loving sister. She is a source of joy and comfort for Benjy. She is

always looking after him and that is why he loves her more than any of his two brothers. When reading the first section, one can realize that nearly all of Benjy's memories are associated with Caddy. She is the one whose picture is still present intensively in his mind because she has played the greater role in his life.

In the second section, Quentin's inner voice makes the reader find out that he truly loves his sister, Caddy. Even when he knows about her promiscuity, he tries to help her and stand by her side rather than pose difficulties upon her; he confesses to his father that he has committed incest with his sister in order to make it appear that it is his own fault.

In the third section, the interior monologue reveals how much Jason hates his sister, Caddy. He greatly supports the idea that her name should not be mentioned anymore in the house in order to forget the shame she has brought the family. However, he takes from the money she sends her daughter and he leaves his niece very few amounts of what her mother sends her.

Thus the sound and the fury is a good example of a psychological novel in exemplifying through the stream of consciousness technique.