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Exploring the Stream of Consciousness in the Novel “Mrs. Dalloway” by Virginia Woolf

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ANNOTATION

The article discusses the narrative technique known as "stream of consciousness" and focuses on its implementation in Virginia Woolf's novel "Mrs. Dalloway." The authors of the article analyze examples where Virginia Woolf achieves her aim through the artistic usage of literary devices such as imagery, metaphors, allusions, personification, hyperbole, irony, exaggeration, and syntactical literal devices such as one-member sentences, elliptical sentences, repetitions, expressive word-order in the sentence, fragmentary presentation of thoughts, unconventional use of punctuation, interjections, semicolons, and etc. The research demonstrates that Virginia's writing style focuses more on the emotional and psychological processes within the character than the interaction with the physical world or with other characters.

KEYWORDS: stream of consciousness, narrative structure, contemplation, repetition, exploration of inner life, fragmentary presentation of thought

Depths of Consciousness is a narrative style that captures the thought process of a character realistically. It goes beyond an internal monologue by simulating the non-linear workings of our brains. This storytelling technique involves the free association of ideas, repetitions, sensory observations, unconventional use of punctuation, expressive word order, one-member sentences, elliptical sentences, and such linguistic stylistic devices as metaphors, imagery, exaggeration, irony, hyperbole, allusions, personification, satire, climax, etc. These elements work together to provide an in-depth understanding of the character's psychological state and worldview.

The term "stream of consciousness" was first introduced by the psychologist William James in his book "The Principles of Psychology" (1890). In the early 20th century, some prominent writers attempted to depict the complete flow of their characters' consciousness in their novels. Probably the most famous example is James Joyce's "Ulysses" (1922), a complex evocation of the inner states of the characters Leopold, Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus. Other notable examples include Arthur Schnitzler's Leutnant Gustl (1901), early use of stream of consciousness to recreate the atmosphere of pre-World War I Vienna; "The Sound and the Fury" (1929) by William Faulkner, which records the fragmentary, impressionistic reactions in the minds of three members of the Compson family to events experienced or remembered immediately; and Virginia Woolf's

novel "Mrs. Dalloway" (1925) which follows the thoughts, experiences, and memories of several characters on a single day in London.

The novel "Mrs. Dalloway" is often analysed through the lens of modernist literature, as it showcases Woolf's innovative narrative techniques and exploration of the inner lives of her characters. The use of stream of consciousness in "Mrs. Dalloway" allows readers to delve into the characters' thoughts and emotions, creating a rich and immersive reading experience. Additionally, the novel's focus on a single day in London provides a snapshot of post-World War I society and its impact on individuals' lives. However, it also embodies a critique of the Empire and the war, portraying the state as the embodiment of patriarchal power and the supporter of what even Richard Dalloway refers to as the "detestable social system." Richard Dalloway's remarks align with Virginia Woolf's intention, as she states that the book encompasses an abundance of ideas. She aims to depict life and death, sanity and insanity, while also criticizing the social system and presenting it in its most intense form.

In the novel "Mrs. Dalloway," Virginia Woolf goes beyond mere descriptions of what the character sees. Instead, she invites the reader to dive into the character's thoughts. Woolf employs lengthy sentences with semicolons to illustrate the gradual flow of ideas and transitions between thoughts. As the reader follows Mrs. Dalloway's mind, they witness her progression from observations of her surroundings to her general outlook on life, then to recollections of her childhood, back to the present with a taxi on the street, and ultimately to Peter, her former romantic lover.

It is remarkable that Woolf successfully captures not just the content but also the structure and thought process of Mrs. Dalloway while employing a third-person narrative style. For example, we see Clarissa Dalloway, the central character of the novel, observing cars driving past her: *"For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? Over twenty—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment in June."* In this passage, Woolf immerses the reader in Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts as she navigates the streets of London. The narrative flows seamlessly from Clarissa's reflections on the hush and solemnity she feels in Westminster to her musings on the striking of Big Ben, her contemplation of the inexplicable love for life, and her observations of the bustling city. The passage exemplifies the stream-of-consciousness technique by presenting a continuous stream of Clarissa's inner thoughts, associations, and sensory impressions, giving readers insight into her subjective experience.

The extract includes unconventional use of punctuation marks, such as dashes (—), semicolons (;), and ellipses (...). These punctuation marks are used to create pauses, interruptions, and shifts in thought. For example, the dashes and semicolons in *"Over twenty—one feels even in the midst of the traffic"* and then in *"First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable"* create breaks in the sentence structure and add emphasis to the words that follow them.

The word order in some sentences is arranged in a way that lends emphasis or rhythm to the writing. For instance, in *"Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street,"* the placement of *"she thought"* at the end of the sentence gives it prominence and conveys the character's inner thought process. Similarly, in *"For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one,"* the repetition of *"one"* and the reversal of the typical subject-verb-object structure contribute to a poetic and reflective tone.

The extract contains elliptical sentences, which are sentences with missing elements that can be inferred from the context. For example, in *"The leaden circles dissolved in the air,"* the subject is not explicitly stated but can be understood as referring to the sound or effect of the leaden circles. The elliptical structure adds a sense of brevity and evokes the imagery without explicitly describing it.

The repetition of *"in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar"* creates a rhythmic and immersive effect, emphasizing the bustling and lively nature of the city. Vivid imagery is used to depict the cityscape, including *"the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs,"* which paints a rich and detailed picture of the urban environment.

The sentence *"Out it boomed"* is an example of a one-member sentence or a sentence fragment. It consists of a single verb, *"boomed,"* without a subject. One-member sentences are often used for stylistic effects to create emphasis, convey a specific moment or action, or evoke a particular tone. In this case, *"Out it boomed"* is a concise and impactful expression used to describe the sound of Big Ben striking.

The author personifies Big Ben and an aeroplane by attributing human characteristics to them, such as warning, striking, and singing, thereby adding a sense of life and agency to the inanimate objects. The passage contains metaphors that enrich the description and deepen the meaning. For example, *"making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh"* metaphorically describes the act of perceiving and experiencing the city, at the same time personifying the city and life itself, which adds depth and emotional resonance to the portrayal of the city and life. The statement *"Such fools we are"* contains hyperbole, exaggerating the foolishness of people in their love for London. The reflective and contemplative tone of the text conveys the character's introspection and philosophical contemplation about the nature of life and the city. The irony lies in the statement *"life; London; this moment in June"* with the fact that the celebration of life and the city contrasts with the mention of the miseries sitting on doorsteps and their downfall.

In conclusion, the narrative technique of Depths of Consciousness, also known as stream of consciousness, is a powerful storytelling tool that allows authors to delve into the inner thoughts and experiences of their characters in a realistic and immersive manner. Through the use of free association of ideas, repetitions, sensory observations, unconventional punctuation, expressive word order, and various linguistic stylistic devices, authors can capture the non-linear workings of the human mind and provide readers with a deep understanding of a character's psychological state and worldview.

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