



The Gilded Age

Stream of Consciousness

&

“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge”

by Ambrose Bierce

Stream of Consciousness



- ▶ *An Introduction to Fiction* defines stream of consciousness as “the presentation of thoughts and sense impressions in a lifelike fashion—not in a sequence arranged by logic, but mingled randomly.”
- ▶ Psychologist William James first coined the term “stream of consciousness” in his book *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the way humans respond to daily life through thought and emotion.

Stream of Consciousness



- ▶ The technique was a bold innovation that allowed readers to experience emotional, moral, and intellectual thought from inside a character's head.
- ▶ It opened up new possibilities for point of view beyond traditional first or third person narration.

Interior Monologue

- ▶ Direct interior monologue -- the presentation of a character's thoughts as if he or she were speaking aloud.
- ▶ Creates the illusion that the reader is privy to sensations and uncensored thoughts within a character's mind.
- ▶ Lays bare the character's private ideas and feelings.
- ▶ The way a character thinks—scattered and disorganized or logical and orderly—provides clues to the character's mental condition, intellect, and emotional stability.
 - ▶ Unreliable narrator?

Characteristics

- ▶ Point of View – interior monologue
- ▶ Time – often non-linear
- ▶ Detail – emotions and sensations
- ▶ Punctuation – unconventional or missing
- ▶ Syntax – long sentences, multiple clauses strung together

Examples

▶ William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930)

“Nonsense you look like a girl you are lots younger than Candace color in your cheeks like a girl A face reproachful tearful an odor of camphor and of tears a voice weeping steadily and softly beyond the twilit door the twilight-colored smell of honey suckle. Bringing empty trunks down the attic stairs they sounded like coffins.

Examples

▶ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it always seemed to me when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which I can hear now, I burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as I then was) solemn, feeling as I did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen.

Examples

▶ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1918-1920)

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