

Stream of Consciousness technique and Childhood Influence in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*

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Abstract

This research paper talks about the Stream of Consciousness technique and its intersection with childhood influence in Anita Desai's novels *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*. Through a close textual analysis, the study delves into how Desai employs stream of consciousness to depict the inner workings of her characters' minds, particularly in relation to their childhood experiences. By examining narrative strategies and thematic elements, the paper aims to elucidate the profound impact of childhood on the psyche and behaviour of Desai's protagonists, illuminating the intricate portrayal of human consciousness and the lasting imprint of early life experiences in her literary works.

Keywords: Stream of Consciousness, Woolf, childhood, interior monologue, behaviour

Introduction

The Stream of Consciousness technique is a literary style that aims to depict the continuous flow of thoughts and feelings in the mind of a character without the constraints of grammar, structure, or punctuation. This narrative technique seeks to capture the raw, unfiltered stream of thoughts as they occur, offering a glimpse into the character's innermost workings.

Stream of Consciousness is often used to provide readers with a more intimate and immersive experience, allowing them to witness the constant, often fragmented, flow of a character's thoughts. This technique can create a sense of immediacy and spontaneity in storytelling, offering a unique perspective on the character's perceptions and emotions.

Notable literary figures associated with Stream of Consciousness technique include James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner. Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* are classic examples of works that employ this narrative style.

Stream of Consciousness writing can be challenging to read due to its lack of conventional structure, but it can offer profound insights into the complexities of human consciousness and provide a more authentic representation of a character's inner world.

History

The Stream of Consciousness technique emerged as a literary device in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, coinciding with the development of modernist literature. It is challenging to pinpoint a single origin or a specific individual responsible for its inception, but several writers played crucial roles in popularising and refining the technique.

Often considered a precursor to the Stream of Consciousness technique, William James (1842-1910), an American philosopher and psychologist, explored the concept of the “stream of consciousness” in his work on psychology. His ideas on the continuous flow of thoughts and experiences influenced later literary experimentation.

Édouard Dujardin (1861-1949), a French writer, is credited with an early use of the Stream of Consciousness technique in his novel *Les Lauriers sont coupés* (1888). In this work, he employed a first-person narrative that attempted to capture the protagonist’s immediate thoughts and sensations.

An English author, Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957) is often regarded as one of the pioneers of the Stream of Consciousness technique. Her semi- autobiographical novel sequence, *Pilgrimage* (1915-1938), utilised the technique to explore the inner thoughts and experiences of the protagonist, Miriam Henderson.

James Joyce (1882-1941) is perhaps the most influential figure associated with the Stream of Consciousness technique. In his groundbreaking novel *Ulysses* (1922), he used a complex and experimental narrative style that delved into the minds of characters, revealing their innermost thoughts in a way that had not been done before.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), another key figure in the development of Stream of Consciousness, employed the technique in works such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Her narrative style often delved into the interior monologues of characters, providing insights into their consciousness.

Although not always categorised under the Stream of Consciousness label, Marcel Proust’s monumental work *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927) extensively explored the intricacies of memory and consciousness, influencing the development of the technique.

These writers, along with others, collectively contributed to the evolution of the Stream of Consciousness technique during a time when literature was undergoing significant changes and experimentation. The technique became a hallmark of modernist literature, challenging traditional narrative forms and providing a deeper exploration of the subjective experiences of characters.

Features

The Stream of Consciousness technique is characterised by several distinctive features that set it apart from traditional narrative styles.

The primary characteristic of Stream of Consciousness technique is the attempt to mimic the continuous and unbroken flow of a character’s thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. It seeks to capture the natural and spontaneous progression of the mind without conventional breaks or transitions.

Stream of Consciousness technique often employs an inner monologue or internal dialogue, providing direct access to a character’s thoughts without the filter of a third-person narrator. Readers experience the narrative as if they are inside the character’s mind, witnessing thoughts as they occur.

The technique embraces fragmentation, reflecting the way thoughts naturally jump from one idea to another without a linear or organised structure. Sentences, phrases, and images may be disjointed, mirroring the unpredictability of human thought processes.

Stream of Consciousness technique can present multiple perspectives or streams of consciousness within a single narrative. This may involve shifting between different characters’ thoughts or capturing the collective consciousness of a group.

The technique aims to create an intimate connection between the reader and the character by delving into the subjective experiences and perceptions of the character. It allows readers to empathise with the inner struggles, joys, and uncertainties of the character.

Time is often portrayed as fluid in Stream of Consciousness technique narratives, with the past, present, and future mingling seamlessly. This reflects the way memories, anticipations, and immediate experiences co-exist in the mind.

Stream of Consciousness technique tends to focus more on internal experiences and thoughts, minimising external descriptions of the physical world. The emphasis is on the subjective reality of the characters rather than providing an objective portrayal of the external environment.

Writers employing Stream of Consciousness technique often experiment with language and style, using unconventional punctuation, syntax, and word choices to convey the immediacy and uniqueness of the character's mental processes.

The primary goal of Stream of Consciousness technique is to explore and depict the complexities of consciousness. It delves into the inner workings of the mind, exposing the character's inner conflicts, desires, and uncertainties.

Stream of Consciousness technique is influenced by psychological theories, especially those related to the stream of consciousness concept. Writers may draw inspiration from psychological concepts to create more authentic and nuanced portrayals of mental processes.

Anita Desai

Anita Desai is a renowned Indian author known for her insightful exploration of human relationships and the complex interplay between tradition and modernity. While Desai's writing often delves into the psychological depth of her characters, she is not typically associated with Stream of Consciousness technique in the same way as some of the early 20th-century modernist writers. However, there are instances in her works where elements of Stream of Consciousness technique or a stream-of-consciousness-like narrative style can be observed.

In Desai's novels, the narrative often provides a close examination of the characters' thoughts and emotions, giving readers access to their inner lives. The narrative may follow a character's internal monologue, offering insights into their reflections, memories, and perceptions. While Desai's use of this technique might not be as overt or experimental as that of modernist writers like James Joyce or Virginia Woolf, it serves the purpose of creating a deep and intimate connection between the reader and the characters.

One of Anita Desai's notable works, *Clear Light of Day* (1980), showcases her skill in portraying characters' internal struggles and reflections. In this novel, Desai employs a nuanced and introspective narrative style, allowing readers to explore the psychological complexities of the characters.

It is important to note that Desai's writing style is diverse, and she may utilise different narrative techniques across her various works. While Stream of Consciousness is not a dominant or defining feature of her writing, the psychological depth and introspective nature of her narratives contribute to a rich and immersive reading experience.

Cry, the Peacock

Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) is one of her early novels and is often noted for its exploration of psychological themes and the inner workings of the protagonist's mind. In this novel, Desai employs a narrative style that incorporates elements of the Stream of Consciousness technique, allowing readers to delve into the protagonist's thoughts and emotions.

The novel follows the character Maya, a young woman who grapples with intense inner turmoil, fear, and a sense of impending doom. Desai uses a subjective and introspective narrative approach to portray Maya's psychological state. The narrative delves into Maya's consciousness, presenting her thoughts and feelings in a way that reflects the stream of her inner life.

The narrative often presents Maya's thoughts and reflections in a direct and unfiltered manner, offering readers a glimpse into her immediate, unstructured mental processes.

Desai explores the depths of Maya's psyche, emphasizing her fears, anxieties, and obsessions. The narrative style intensifies the psychological aspects of the story, allowing readers to empathise with Maya's emotional struggles.

There are instances where time is portrayed in a fluid manner, reflecting Maya's subjective experience of the past, present, and future. This contributes to the overall atmospheric and introspective nature of the novel.

The narrative is focused on the exploration of Maya's consciousness, providing insight into her internal conflicts and the factors that contribute to her psychological distress.

While Desai's usage of the Stream of Consciousness technique in *Cry, the Peacock* may not be as elaborate or experimental as seen in the works of some modernist writers, it serves the novel's thematic

exploration of the protagonist's emotional turmoil and contributes to the overall psychological depth of the narrative. Desai's ability to capture the intricacies of her characters' inner lives is a notable aspect of her writing, and *Cry, the Peacock* is an early example of her skill in portraying the complexities of human psychology.

Clear Light of Day

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980) is a novel that delves into the lives of the Das family and explores themes of memory, identity, and the impact of the past on the present. While Desai's writing in this novel is characterised by a deep psychological insight into her characters, it may not exhibit a strict adherence to the Stream of Consciousness technique as traditionally defined.

In this novel, Desai employs a narrative style that often provides a close examination of the characters' thoughts and emotions, giving readers access to their inner lives. However, unlike some classic examples of Stream of

Consciousness Technique, Desai's narrative is generally more structured and does not completely abandon traditional grammatical and syntactical conventions.

Desai allows readers to enter the characters' minds, providing glimpses of their internal monologues and reflections. This technique contributes to a nuanced understanding of the characters' inner lives.

The narrative is filtered through the characters' perspectives, offering a subjective view of their experiences and memories. This subjective lens allows

Desai to explore the characters' emotional landscapes.

The novel explores the interplay between past and present, with memories and recollections influencing the characters' current experiences. This temporal fluidity is a common feature in Stream of Consciousness Technique, allowing for a non-linear narrative structure.

Desai delves into the psychological complexities of her characters, particularly focusing on how past traumas and familial relationships shape their present selves. This depth contributes to a rich and layered narrative.

While Desai's narrative style in *Clear Light of Day* may share some characteristics with the Stream of Consciousness technique, it is essential to recognise that her writing is unique and multifaceted. Desai combines psychological depth with a more conventional narrative structure, creating a novel that captures the complexities of human relationships and the enduring impact of the past.

Influence of Childhood

In Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), the influence of the protagonist Maya's childhood plays a significant role in shaping her psychological and emotional landscape. The novel explores the impact of past experiences, especially those from childhood, on Maya's present mental state and behaviours.

Maya's childhood is marked by the presence of overbearing and dominating parents who shape her upbringing. Her father, in particular, is a strict disciplinarian, and the controlling nature of her parents contributes to the development of Maya's personality and her struggle for autonomy.

Maya's childhood is characterized by a lack of emotional warmth and nurturing. The absence of a supportive and understanding environment contributes to her feelings of isolation and emotional vulnerability.

Maya experiences the loss of her younger brother at an early age, which becomes a traumatic event that haunts her throughout her life. This loss becomes a source of unresolved grief and contributes to Maya's emotional instability.

Maya's childhood is marked by a sense of isolation. Her parents' expectations and societal norms isolate her from forming meaningful connections with others. This loneliness becomes a recurring theme in her adult life, influencing her relationships and emotional well-being.

Maya's childhood is shaped by societal expectations and norms, particularly related to gender roles. The pressure to conform to these expectations creates internal conflicts and contributes to her feelings of frustration and repression.

As a child, Maya finds solace in escapism and fantasy. She creates a world of imagination as a coping mechanism to deal with the harsh realities of her life. This tendency to retreat into a world of her own imagination continues into her adulthood, influencing her perceptions of reality.

Maya's childhood experiences, characterised by a lack of emotional support and understanding, impact her adult relationships. Her struggles with intimacy and the fear of losing control are rooted in the emotional patterns established during her formative years.

In *Cry, the Peacock*, the exploration of Maya's childhood provides readers with insights into the sources of her emotional distress and psychological struggles. The novel portrays the lasting impact of early experiences on an individual's psyche and emphasizes the importance of understanding the complexities of one's past in order to comprehend the present. Maya's character becomes a poignant study of how childhood trauma and emotional neglect can shape the trajectory of an individual's life.

In Anita Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980), the influence of the characters' childhood plays a central role in shaping their identities and relationships. The novel revolves around the Das family, primarily focusing on the siblings—Raja, Tara, and Bimla—and explores how their childhood experiences continue to reverberate into their adult lives.

The childhood experiences of the Das siblings are deeply entwined with the dynamics of their family. The novel delves into the relationships between the siblings and their interactions with their parents. The family setting, with its joys, conflicts, and traumas, significantly shapes the characters' development.

The novel is set against the backdrop of post-Partition India, and the siblings' childhood is marked by the trauma and disruptions caused by political and societal changes. The memories of Partition, particularly for Raja, influence the characters' perspectives on the world and contribute to a sense of loss and dislocation.

Memory is a recurring theme in the novel, and the characters' recollections of their childhood shape their present-day perceptions. The memories of shared experiences, both positive and painful, impact how the characters relate to one another and the world around them.

The novel explores the siblings' educational experiences, particularly

Raja's association with the nationalist movement and Tara's academic pursuits. These experiences during their formative years contribute to their individual identities and worldviews.

The complex relationships among the Das siblings are deeply rooted in their shared childhood. The novel examines the dynamics of sibling rivalry, loyalty, and the emotional bonds that persist despite the passage of time.

The characters' childhood experiences reflect the cultural and social expectations of the time. The roles assigned to the siblings based on gender and societal norms influence their choices and aspirations as adults.

The novel portrays how the characters' childhood experiences continue to shape their adult lives. Bimla's sense of responsibility and sacrifice, Tara's longing for a lost love, and Raja's struggles with his past actions all find their roots in the characters' formative years.

Through a nuanced exploration of the characters' childhoods, Desai illuminates the ways in which early experiences mould individuals and influence their perceptions, relationships, and choices. *Clear Light of Day* emphasises the enduring impact of the past on the present and underscores the complexity of familial bonds and personal identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of Anita Desai's novels *Cry, the Peacock*, and *Clear Light of Day* through the lens of Stream of Consciousness technique and the influence of childhood underscores the profound intricacies of human psyche and behaviour. It has been observed that how Desai masterfully employs stream of consciousness technique to offer readers a glimpse into the innermost thoughts and emotions of her characters, unravelling the complexities of their personalities and motivations.

Furthermore, our exploration has revealed the significant role that childhood experiences play in shaping the trajectories of Desai's protagonists. From the haunting spectres of past traumas to the

enduring impact of familial dynamics, childhood emerges as a pivotal force driving the actions and perceptions of the characters throughout their lives. Desai's nuanced portrayal highlights the ways in which early life experiences can linger in the subconscious, influencing relationships, decisions, and overall mental well-being. By delving into the interplay between stream of consciousness and childhood influence, this research has illuminated the richness of Desai's narrative techniques and thematic concerns. Through her evocative prose and penetrating insights, Desai invites readers to contemplate the enduring legacy of childhood on the human psyche, prompting introspection and empathy for her characters' struggles and triumphs.

In essence, this study underscores the enduring relevance and literary significance of Anita Desai's exploration of stream of consciousness and childhood influence in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day*. Through her profound understanding of human nature and keen observational skills, Desai offers readers a profound and thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of the human experience.

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