

it, is a story, even when no words are used, as in story paintings, PANTOMINE, or silent movies. The main story genres, or types, in literature, in FICTION, POETRY, and DRAMA, are discussed under their alphabetical entries. See ALLEGORY; AUTOBIOGRAPHY; BALLAD; BIOGRAPHY; CHRONICLE; EPIC; FABLE; FOLK TALE; HISTORY AS LITERATURE; LEGEND; MYTH; NOVEL; NOVELETTE; NOVELLA; PARABLE; POPULAR LITERATURE; ROMANCE; SHORT STORY; STORY-WITHIN-A-STORY.

Using the word in a much more specialized sense, critics sometimes distinguish a *story* from a PLOT, with the story defined as the sequence

Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and  
George Perkins, The Harper Handbook to  
Literature. New York: Harper, 1985.

line that sets up the comic response.

**Stream of Consciousness.** The term first applied to the human mind by William James in *Principles of Psychology*, 1890, and useful since then in describing the subject matter and technique of literary works that emphasize the mental processes of characters. As METAPHOR, it suggests the mind's similarity to a stream: continually flowing, sometimes swift, sometimes slow, eddying in currents back upon itself, varying in depth, accessible on the surface, darker and more obscure below, carrying a mixed freight of natural and foreign objects picked up along its journey. Conveniently, it was introduced at a time when writers of fiction had already begun to shift their emphasis from plot to character and were beginning to explore, along with the infant psychology of the day, the inner workings of the mind.

As a description of subject matter, stream of consciousness may be applied to any fictional passage in which the author attempts a fluid representation of a character's consciousness, including sensory perceptions, conscious thought, unconscious associations, and memories. Typically, such passages reflect the disorder of the mind through a contrived disorder of presentation, avoiding logical progression and narrative unity and making much use of fragmentary sentences and

fractured syntax. Other characteristics are unorthodox punctuation, heavy with dashes and ellipses; unusual capitalization; frequent italics and boldface type; or sometimes a lack of punctuation or of distinguishing typefaces altogether. Some of the most famous examples are found in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, and Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* carries the subject matter further, into the subconscious levels of sleep. Poets, too, have used the material or been influenced by it: E. E. Cummings in many of his lyrics, John Berryman in his *Dream Songs*.

Stream-of-consciousness technique involves an attempt to suit the narrative style to the contents of the mind under examination. Mimetic, or imitative, devices, springing from the subject matter, are apparent in sentence structure, punctuation, and typography. Other techniques are primarily structural, involving a respect for the chronological order of presentation of a mind in flux and a careful consideration of NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE. Thus, in Molly Bloom's soliloquy at the end of *Ulysses*, the chronology requires Molly's mind to become increasingly incoherent as she drifts from consciousness toward sleep. In this and other works, the contents of the mind, flowing in apparently chaotic order through time, are dictated in part by such structural devices as the repetition of key images and motifs, or by the author's imposition of external stimuli to jar the mind back into a pattern it had lost. The unity of logical progression and coherent thought traditional to narration is replaced in stream-of-consciousness writing by a unity threaded on time and composed of IMAGERY, theme, and the close focus of a carefully controlled narrative perspective.

As a form of narrative perspective, stream-of-consciousness technique extends the possibilities of both first-person and third-person narration. For the third-person narrator, it extends the privileges of omniscience to include the most hidden recesses of the mind, including unconscious associations and private symbols that remain forever beyond the conscious understanding of the character involved. Joyce's *Ulysses* is an example. Within the conventions of first-person narration, stream of consciousness provides a method of telling a story conceived but unspoken, as conscious thoughts, memories, and repressed verbalizations mingle in the interior monologues of a work like Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. See INTERIOR MONOLOGUE.

#### References

Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978).