

## Stream-of-Consciousness in Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*

Wangru

Foreign Languages School Jiangxi Normal University Jiangxi Province, China

### Abstract

Katherine Anne Porter is not only an essayist, commentator, translator, but also an outstanding novelist. Most of Porter's works were completed in the first half of the 20th century. With superb writing skills and a unique literary style, she has become a recognized literary stylist in American literary circles. This paper takes Porter's famous novelette *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* as the research object, discusses the feature of Stream-of-Consciousness, and strives to enrich readers' understanding of Porter's works.

**Keywords:** Katherine Anne Porter; Stream-of-consciousness; Pale horse; Pale rider.



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### 1. Introduction

In the 1900s, writers of modern novels pay great attention to the consciousness of characters, and regard consciousness as the mental state of flowing. The term "stream-of-consciousness" was actually borrowed from psychology. It was first advocated by American psychologist and philosopher James William in his famous book, *The Principles of Psychology*:

Consciousness will not be shredded. The word "chain" or "train" does not properly describe it in the first example...it does not have any linkage; it flows. "River" or "stream" is a better metaphor for the most natural description. In later conversations, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or subjective life. (James, 1950).

James believes that consciousness is a purely subjective thing that is not restricted to objective facts. Consciousness is the feeling of "self", the manifestation of "self" and even the equivalent of "self." Conscious activity has two features: liquidity and super temporality. Consciousness is not bound by the time which always flows and keeps in touch with now, past and future. James also believes that a great part of consciousness is irrational and non-logic. At the same time, the concept of "stream-of-consciousness" relied on the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Carl Gustav Jung to obtain new developments and changes.

Subsequently, the British novelist May Sinclair (1879-1946) first introduced the term "stream of consciousness" into literary criticism. According to Shiv K. Kumar, Sinclair wrote comment article about the novel *Life History* by British writer Doris Richardson in *The Individualist* and first introduced the concept of stream of consciousness to the literary world. She affirmed "Richardson is a 'feminist realist' proposed in the preface to his novel and called his novel as 'stream of consciousness novel'" (Stevenson, 1988).

Then, "stream-of-consciousness" has been fully demonstrated and illustrated by writers such as Proust, Joyce and Faulkner. Proust's *Remembrance of Ages*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Waves* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* finally made "stream of Consciousness" novel become the focus of controversy in the Western literary world and a bright spot for writers to imitate and learn from.

Porter not only made good contact with Woolf, but also praised Joyce. Under the influence of these two great streams of consciousness writers, Porter was bound to try to apply stream of consciousness techniques in her works. It is one of the most important artistic techniques in modernism literature. It is also one of the most prominent artistic features in Katherine Anne Porter's works. In the novelette cycle analyzed in this essay, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* is the best example of Porter's use the stream-of-consciousness technique. Next, the author will specifically analyze the text, from two aspects of stream of consciousness skill: free association and interior monologue, so the readers can further understand Porter's features of modernism embodied in the works.

### 2. Free Association in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*

The main technique used to control the flow of consciousness in the novel is to use the principle of free association. It is impossible for people in the process of consciousness to focus their attention on one point for a long time. The line that affects the activity of consciousness is the free association.

Modernism literature focuses on the introspection and the innermost activities of the characters, so the authors want to know the true thoughts of the characters through all levels of description of the consciousness, paying attention to subconsciousness and unconsciousness, two of which are mostly abstract and irrational.

The instantaneous impression of a person in the novel against an object emanates from various ideas that interrupt the narration. Free association is usually confusing and not easy to understand for the readers. Some free associations are obviously illogical and chaotic. In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Miranda is easily motivated by the idea of a free association by a nearby person or a simple object, all of which reveal the innermost true thoughts about the war and life. The novel portrays that when with Adam watched the drama at the theater and midfield rested, Miranda

listened to a speech by a free bond salesman, then her consciousness began to flow through salesman's few words: atrocities, innocent babes hoisted on Boche bayonets your child and my child...the war, the war, the WAR to end WAR, war for Democracy,...was that it? Did you mention Adam? If you didn't I'm not interested. What about Adam, you little pig? And what are we going to sing this time, "Tipperary" or "There's a Long, Long Trail"? Oh, please do let the show go on and get over with. I must write a piece about it before I can go dancing with Adam and we have no time. Coal, oil, iron, gold, international finance, why don't you tell us about them, you little liar? (Porter, 1979).

The hero Miranda's free association is caused by the discourse of Bond salesman. Although the consciousness is fluent, there is no logic. The awareness of Miranda will come back from the speech's keyword "war" to the song they should sing after the sales, then to the literary commentary she wrote for the drama on and last to the cause of outbreak of war. There are two reasons why Miranda's thought is chaotic. First, she has been tired of listening to the speech of patriotic tone, no interests in this topic; second, Miranda has seen the hypocritical nature of Propaganda so she refused to listen to such a speech subconsciously, only to catch words related to her life, like the war, the Boche. These words made Miranda think of Adam who is not only related to the war, but also is her most caring people in this indifferent world. Miranda's thoughts flowed around Adam, knowing that Adam might lose his life during the war. She cursed the speaker because he was trying to cover up the dirty side of the war and wasted her time with Adam. This vicious words like "pig", "liar" should not have come from a lady Miranda's mouth, but Porter is clever to use free association showing the character's heart. In this way, Porter not only expresses Miranda's distaste for the hypocritical salesman, her hatred of the war, but also manifests her deep love for Adam.

### 3. Interior Monologue in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*

In addition to using free association in the embodiment of the stream-of-consciousness skill, the interior monologue is also a major manifestation. Twentieth-century writers want to seize the flow of inner consciousness in fictional characters, commonly applied to this technique to show a series of thoughts and emotions of characters. Robert Humphrey ever gave an accurate definition of interior monologue in his *Stream-of-Consciousness in the Modern Novel*:

Interior monologue is the technique of expressing psychological content and character process in a novel, with partial or complete absence of sound, just as these processes existed in various conscious control levels prior to the formulation of intentional speech (Robert, 1955).

Interior monologue has two types, direct interior monologue and indirect interior monologue. Direct interior monologue refers to a soliloquy in which monologue has neither the author nor the hypothetical listener to present the consciousness directly to the readers and without the author as an intermediary to explain. That is to say, the author makes some introductory phrases like "he said," "he thinks," are almost disappeared between the lines. It is worth emphasizing that the direct interior monologue does not have the listeners, in a scene, where the characters do not speak to anyone (including the readers). Completely open the characters' heart, as if there is no readers. The ultimate goal is to present the original consciousness in front of readers. Indirect interior monologue is that the author uses the third person to narrate and adds his own comments or instructions to the narrative. Direct interior monologue is applied in most of the texts analyzed in this dissertation, and the effect of direct interior monologue is analyzed in detail based on the novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

In the novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Porter makes a skillful and organic use of the interior monologue to express the heroine Miranda's dislike of the war. Two direct interior monologues were conducted around the issue of war bonds:

I owe--let me see, I wish I had pencil and paper--well, suppose I did pay five dollars now on a Liberty Bond. Or maybe. Eighteen dollars a week...I suppose I should be worried. I am worried. Twenty seven cents. That's not so bad (Porter, 1979).

Suppose I were not a coward, but said what I really thought? Suppose I said to hell with this filthy war? why aren't you rotting in Belleau Wood? (Porter, 1979).

From the interior monologues above, Miranda strongly disagrees with the purchase of free bond, because this method has no relations to win the war but it's just a way to oppress people. The war has already made people's living conditions less stringent, but the government has called on people to buy free bond, which is even more increasing the pressure of life. Enveloped in the anxiety of the war, people worried about the problem of unemployment. Free bond is like a huge lock, which Miranda was trapped in, without a bit of joy, and also highlights the merciless side of the war. Those who chase people to buy free bond, are hypocritical extremely. Their ugly faces make Miranda such a modern woman, who can do nothing but use the interior monologue to show her innermost true thoughts to readers.

Since Miranda's life is already in the dirty war, for her, this is a torture. she should have thought there was a intimate lover. Everything has the vigor because of Adam's existence, but in the end, Miranda can only bear the pain of losing Adam, alone. Adam died of epidemic unfortunately because of taking care of her. Then Miranda's thinking of Adam and her inner grief, Porter did not write with plain words directly, but by Miranda's own inner monologue with Adam to have a dialogue, as if the readers would have the same sense as Miranda, the pain of losing beloved lover. "Adam, now you need not die again, but still I wish you were here; I wish you had come back, what do you think I came back for, Adam" (Porter, 1979). This interior monologue, like Miranda's illusion, imagined that Adam was still beside her. Miranda confronted his soul and finally said out the affections to Adam rooted in her heart, but both the readers and she knew that all this was just futile. " 'I believe,' she said aloud. 'Oh, let me see you once more.' The room was silent, empty;...struck away by the sudden violence of her rising and speaking aloud" (Porter,

1979). what can be answered to Miranda is just an empty room. After she was awake, Adam would not appear again, leaving her only deep despair and heartache.

In this novelette, Porter uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to show the hero Miranda's hostility to the war and highlights the impact of the war on people's lives and the sense of desperation in modern urban life by means of free association and interior monologue. The flu makes the beloved couple separate and further expresses Miranda's thoughts of love on Adam.

#### 4. Miranda's Dreams in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*

In the beginning of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Porter created a nightmare full of death. The heroine Miranda in the dream saw the house and the bed carrying too many joys and sorrows of the world, which is obviously the whole miniature and symbolic image of human society:

In sleep she knew she was in her bed, but not the bed she had lain down in a few hours since, and the room was not the same but it was a room she had known somewhere. Her heart was a stone lying upon her breast outside of her; her pulses lagged and paused, and the streaks of light were dark blue and the whole house was snoring in its sleep. Too many people have been born here, and have wept too much here, and have laughed too much, and have been too angry and outrageous with each other here. Too many have died in this bed already, there are far too many ancestral bones propped up on the mantelpieces, there have been too damned many antimacassars in this house, she said loudly, and oh, what accumulation of storied dust never allowed to settle in peace for one moment (Porter, 1979).

Miranda's dreams convey her inner anxiety and pain, and this unease and sufferings constitute the sad and hopeless tone of the whole novel. When Miranda woke up, the real world she faced was precisely the refraction of her dream. The brutal World War I has exploded, stirring up the dust of history accumulated in the entire world. As a reporter, Miranda has no choice but to be involved in this World War. She is often called upon to work overtime, working from midnight to nine o'clock in the evening and covering news about the war. In addition, there are "all Patriots" (Porter, 1979), which require Miranda to deduct a portion of her small salary to buy free bonds. The reason for these people is simple: "do you know there's a war, or do not you" (Porter, 1979)? "Anybody can raise fifty dollars to help beat the Boche" (Porter, 1979). The war made meager people like Miranda, whose life become more embarrassing. "The war, the war, the WAR to end WAR, war for Democracy, for humanity, a safe world forever and ever—and to prove our faith in Democracy to each other, and to the world, let everybody get together and buy Liberty Bonds" (Porter, 1979). For those "patriots", foreign war has become a great opportunity for them to make a fortune, just as one said to Miranda "Everybody was suffering, naturally. Everybody had to do his share. But as to that, a Liberty Bond was the safest investment you could make. Of course, The government was back of it and where better could you invest" (Porter, 1979)? World War I becomes a commercial investment in the eyes of these people. Porter, who had experienced the war and witnessed the social sabotage of the war, used ironic tone here to unveil the truth behind the "patriotic behaviors" of some people and implicitly point to the U.S. government.

The dream scene in Miranda's trance has a very close relationship with death. The recurring words in dream are "danger" and "war". These two words make the readers easily think of the war, and Miranda to be screened for fear of war and death, which gives her a strong precarious sense of crisis, so that both her consciousness and unconsciousness are occupied by death and war. Miranda fears the existent of death, and she blindly wants to escape from it, but in this era of war, death is inevitable.

#### 5. Conclusion

In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Porter applies the stream-of-consciousness and technique to portray Miranda's fear of death through war and epidemic images. Death is not abstract, but rather to the cruel war and terrible diseases, which are the psychological factors to Miranda's fearing death. Interior monologue and free association in the novel show Miranda's true thoughts to the readers. From her interior monologue, after the death of Adam she has not been sluggish and overwhelmed by the fear of death. Instead, she courageously chose to envisage the death, walk out of the shadow of death, and move toward a new life. Miranda finally understands that death cannot be avoided, which coincides with the concept of death philosophy in the modernism ideology.

Through the analysis on the feature of stream-of-consciousness in Katherine Anne Porter's novelette, this paper enriches the scholars' comprehension of her stylistic style and deepens the readers' understanding of her works. Porter is very talented in literary creation, combining her writing techniques with her own writing style. There are the themes of the alienation between man and man, man and society, of the paradox of good and evil, law and morality, and of the fearing and envisaging death that many people in modern life would care about. These also present Porter's perception and concern for the complex life of modern people.

#### Acknowledgement

This paper is supported by the grant of the National Social Science Foundation [15BWW036]

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